DAUGHTERS of the DREAMING

Diane Bell

Thesis submitted for a degree of Doctor of Philosophy of the Australian National University. October 1980
In Aboriginal society certain religious beliefs and practices are not discussed in public. In this thesis I have deliberately avoided including material which is secret or restricted to one sex. Except where otherwise acknowledged in this text, this thesis represents my own original work.

Diane Bell
This thesis advances a new look and hopefully a new understanding of a complex of issues often glossed 'the problem of women'. My ethnographic focus is the ritual life of Aboriginal women in Central Australia during the late 1970's, while my analysis raises the conceptual issue of how we should evaluate and characterize women's role and status in a sex segregated society.

I argue that Central Australian woman's perception of her role as an independent and autonomous member of her society is based on her direct access to the *jukurrpa*, the dreamtime power. In ritual women celebrate their spiritual heritage with its principal interlocking themes of land, health and love; in ritual women nurture the relationship of living people to the country of their ancestors.

In order to understand the disjunction between, on the one hand, women's self perceptions and, on the other, their strife torn lives today at places such as Warrabri, I argue that we need to explore the dynamic interaction between sexual politics and social change. During the past century in the shift from a hunter-gatherer mode of subsistence to a sedentary life style, woman's nurturance role has been undermined and her autonomy eroded. Whereas her separation once ensured her independence, today she has no such assurance.

Chapter one outlines the nature of the 'problem of women' and in the following two chapters I turn to an analysis of the way in which anthropologists have represented women's worlds. To proceed beyond male oriented research models which, I argue, have obscured our understanding of Aboriginal women's contribution to her society, I advocate an approach which combines an historical perspective with a social analysis of male-female in a sex segregated society. Applying this perspective to a changing society, I probe the complex nature of
Aboriginal woman's role and status and suggest that male dominance is not an enduring, timeless model of male-female relations. In exploring the past, the present and the *jukurrpa*, three dimensions of the social fabric from which women weave ritual representations of their world, I suggest that over the years the relationship between the sexes has become less fluid and more rigidly ordered.

In Chapters five to nine I examine woman's ritual contribution to her society. I begin in Chapter five with an outline of woman's power base, her rights and responsibilities in land and move in Chapters six and seven to an analysis of the closely related themes of health and emotional management. Women, I contend, seek to maintain social harmony, but today emphasize different issues from those of a century ago. In Chapters eight and nine I consider the role of each sex at the rituals of the other and suggest that women and men are actively engaged in the business of maintaining their society.

This thesis argues for the need to ask new questions and to search for new models which can accommodate the answers which do emerge when we allow women to speak of their lives in our analyses.
FOREWORD

Through a study of Aboriginal women's ritual activity I hoped to answer questions which had nagged me since I began anthropology as an undergraduate in 1972. In some studies of Aboriginal religion I had read that women were deemed to be of lesser cultural importance than men although their economic contribution to their society was noted (Warner 1937; Stanner 1966). In other studies I read that women had a separate and secret ritual life (Kaberry 1939; Berndt 1950; Ellis 1970). How I wondered did women perceive their role? Did they endorse a derogatory self image or did they nurture a more sustaining one? Did they merely submit to male authority or did they have an authority base of their own? Were men the only guardians of the religious law or did women too share in that body of culturally valued knowledge? To some of these questions I found answers but more questions emerged as my work continued.

After living in and revisiting a desert community since 1976 I am convinced that we have misunderstood the nature of women's ritual life. Unfortunately, in the process, we have also skewed our understanding of Aboriginal society. For me the search for understanding Aboriginal women's place in her society has remained alive and exciting. Each time I revisit Central Australia, each time I reread and ponder my notes, each time I pour over my photographs and listen to my tapes, I am struck afresh by new questions and, as with Rosaldo and Lamphere (1974:2), I find that 'new questions demanded new kinds of answers'.

In framing questions and finding answers I have been fortunate to meet many great women whose dignity, clear vision, humour, determination and friendship taught me as much about myself as it has about the society in which I chose to work. This thesis concerns my friends and teachers, their rituals and their models of social reality. Because
women live as members of a wider society this thesis also explores women's relation to men; my bias though is defiantly gynecentric. My approach to fieldwork and subsequent analysis began with women's opinions, values and beliefs and only later, but still from the perspective of an Aboriginal woman, did I turn to an examination of the wider society in which women live. I began by looking down, as it were, on the other end of the ethnographic telescope. By focussing on one aspect of the total culture, that is, on women's rituals, I gained new insights into the more general problem of the role and status of women in Aboriginal society and into the nature of that society itself. In a sense then this thesis is a documentation of the questions I posed and the answers received.

Although my analysis and understanding of women's rituals is based on my own fieldwork and research, I owe W.E.H. Stanner a debt, which because it may not be as obvious to the reader as it is to me, I wish to fully acknowledge here. It was his Boyer lectures, *After the Dreaming* (Stanner 1968) which set me thinking about the nature of changes in Aboriginal society; his monograph *On Religion* (Stanner 1966) which directed my attention to the beauty, complexity and sheer poetry of Aboriginal belief systems; his portrait of 'Durmugam: a Nangiomeri' (Stanner 1979) which brought to the arid wastelands of anthropological theory the intimacy and immediacy of the lives of the people who become the bases of our studies. For reasons discussed in Chapter two, I have chosen to locate my analysis within the framework of feminist thought rather than in terms of a discussion of the nature of religious systems in general or of Aboriginal religion in particular. Obviously my analysis of women's rituals in Central Australia has ramifications for such studies but the major issues raised in this thesis are not those which Stanner confronts in his study of religion.
Many people have helped in the search for answers to my questions. Sally White, who was my teacher while I was an undergraduate at Monash University, first roused my curiosity in the problem of evaluating the status of Aboriginal women and the work of Annette Hamilton sustained my interest. A postgraduate scholarship to the Department of Prehistory and Anthropology, School of General Studies, Australian National University, allowed me to pursue my interest and I am grateful to Nic Peterson for his support of my project; to Anthony Forge and John Mulvaney for their forbearance during the four years I have been a student in their Department; to the Australian Institute of Aboriginal Studies for fieldwork funds which provided for the eighteen months of fieldwork (September 1976 to January 1978 and December-January 1979-1980) with my two children at Warrabri in the Northern Territory, and the Department of Law, Research School of Social Sciences, which kindly gave me lodgings during the last stages of writing up.

My work as consultant anthropologist to the Aboriginal Land Commissioner, John Toohey, has permitted me extra time in the field (October 1978, October 1979, February and March 1980) and my discussions with him regarding women's rights and responsibilities in land have been very helpful. Similarly, my work as consultant to Central Land Council has also provided further fieldwork opportunities in July 1978 and July 1979. From September 1979 till February 1980 I took a suspension of scholarship to work on a project with a lawyer, Pam Ditton, on Aboriginal women's role in customary law. The resultant report (Bell & Ditton 1980) and the fieldwork on which it was based allowed me more time to clarify and test ideas of women's status and role in Central Australia.

Housing and finance are essential prerequisites to research but my deepest gratitude goes to the women who sat with me in the field
and patiently explained their lives, values and beliefs to a raw southerner; to the women in Canberra and Alice Springs who have always believed in this project; and to my children who have never known their mother as anything other than a student. It is the warmth and care which these people have given me which is the greatest debt I have incurred over the last decade of being a student (secondary, undergraduate and post-graduate). I hope this thesis in some way vindicates their support.

In the field Topsy Napurrula, Mollie Nungarrayi, Mona Nungarrayi, Diana Nakamarra, Myrtle Napanangka Kennedy, Bunny and Annie Napurrula, Rosie Nakamarra, Hilda Napurrula, Alice Napurrula Nelson, Rita Napurrula Limbiari, Elsie Kamarra Rex, Sallie Kamarra Cartwright, Pam Ditton, Pet Wafer, Barb Wigley, Meredith Rowell and Mary Laughren were all part of my everyday survival as a person. Out of the field many of these women have continued to be part of my daily life and along with Diane Barwick, Sue Bennett, Gloria Brennan, Marcia Langton, Francesca Merlan, Shelley Schreiner, Nancy Williams, have kept me working. Lest it appear that women hold up a hundred per cent of the world, I also acknowledge a debt to some men who have not only discussed my thesis topic but have also been prepared to mind children, make coffee and collate papers. In the field Rod Hagen, Bob Kamarra Liddle, David Nash, Geoff Stead, Jim Wafer, Neil Westbury, Julian Wigley and Gary Jakamarra/Pitjarra Williams, and out of the field Barney Cohn, Roger Keesing and Jack Waterford, have all provided such assistance.

All theses require skills beyond that of the author and in preparing mine for submission I thank Doug Jervis for assistance with photographic work and Margaret Lanigan for her skilled typing.

Throughout I have used the Warlpiri (Walbiri) practical orthography of the Yuendumu (Northern Territory) bilingual programme
(see Hale 1974:18). This is the orthography of literate Warlpiri of the future and although not always entirely satisfactory for my material, I have done my best to be consistent. Any errors of transcription are mine. I am not a linguist. All Aboriginal words appear in italics except section and subsection terms and local Aboriginal place names, all of which I have treated as proper nouns.

Theses demand careful reading and I am grateful to my supervisors for their patient criticism. Maria Brandl, who read the final draft, has been enormously helpful in getting this thesis out. Last but not least I thank Caroline Ifeka who has always believed in my thesis, who has led me through labyrinths (many of my own making), who was never too tired nor dispirited to read yet another draft, to discuss yet another possible line of analysis and who is the best teacher and supervisor I could possibly have had.
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Chapter One

THE NATURE OF THE BEAST

INTRODUCTION

Over the past forty years since Phyllis Kaberry's (1939) pioneering work with Aboriginal women, few anthropologists other than Catherine Berndt (1950, 1965, 1970, 1979) and Jane Goodale (1971), have lifted their voices in protest at the characterization of the Aboriginal women of Northern and Central Australia as the dominated, the pawns in male games and the uninitiated of the society. In the late sixties and seventies feminists have looked anew at 'the case of the Australian Aborigine' and found evidence for dramatically divergent analyses (Leacock 1978; Hamilton 1978b; Cowlishaw 1979). Although many have felt confident to categorize Aboriginal woman's contribution to her society (Meggitt 1962; Maddock 1972; Munn 1973), few have examined her life as she perceives it, or, having documented her values, perceptions and activities, they are left in a quandary as to the status of their 'findings' (White 1970). Many questions remain to be asked and answered.

I do not claim to fully understand all there is to know of women's lives; I was not socialized within that culture but rather came to learn as an adult woman from another culture, that of post World War Two working class, white Australia. I do however think I came to appreciate what it means to be a woman of my age and perceived status in an Aboriginal community in the late 1970's. Because my teachers were patient and dedicated to teaching me 'straight', I learned to see much through the eyes of Aboriginal women. What I saw was a strong, articulate and knowledgeable group of women who were substantially independent of their menfolk in economic and ritual terms.
Their lives were not ones of drudgery, deprivation, humiliation and exploitation because of their lack of penis and attendant phallic culture, nor was their self image and identity bound up solely with their child bearing and rearing functions. Instead I found the women to be extremely serious in the upholding, observance and transmission of their dreamtime heritage. Religion permeated every aspect of their lives - lives which were none the less full of good humour and a sense of fun. Why then have Aboriginal women so often been cast as second class citizens? Was the problem located at the level of ethnography or of anthropological model making? Were these women deluding themselves? Was my vision in some way impaired?

In seeking to understand women's lives, their rituals and their models of social reality, I found my work proceeding on two fronts. Firstly I set out to understand and to document women's self perceptions. This was essentially an ethnographic problem in that one must be accepted as a person worthy of trust before attempting to participate and record. For reasons outlined here, I sought this understanding in the realm of ritual. On the second front I sought to relate the image women projected of an autonomous and independent sex with evidence for male claims to control of women. This was essentially a conceptual problem for I needed a way in which I could analyse and compare male and female assessments of their own worth in a language which was free of pejorative overtones. I turned to theoretical frameworks within which other anthropologists, both inside and outside Australia, have tackled 'the problem of women'. Of course ethnographic and conceptual levels do not exist as separate planes of understanding but are interwoven in both the fieldwork situation and the analysis of 'raw data'. Beyond achieving a coherent synthesis of these levels I felt it necessary also to explore the possible disjunction between, on the one hand, women's ritual representations of their role and status as
women and on the other, their role within Aboriginal society, the
wider society of Northern Australia and their place within the
anthropological models constructed to represent these levels of
experience. It was within feminist critiques of women's role and
status and gender relations that I found the means for constructing a
framework to accommodate these levels of enquiry.

In the following chapters of this thesis I have created something
of an artificial distinction in order to examine aspects of the levels
which I consider important to my data and mode of analysis of the
lives of Aboriginal women in Central Australia. In this introductory
chapter, I sketch the themes, methodology and analytical framework of
this thesis before undertaking a more detailed examination of
Aboriginal women's role and status in the chapters which follow.

WHY RITUAL?

My decision to focus on ritual was tentative before I entered
the field but quickly confirmed by the women of Warrabri, a government
settlement three hundred and seventy-five kilometres north of Alice
Springs where I engaged in intensive fieldwork from September 1976
until January 1978 and revisited in July and October 1978, May, July
and October 1979 and January 1980. I was able to work with women of
all the four language groups of Warrabri - Kaititj, Alyawarra, Warlpiri
and Warramunga - all of whom acknowledge ritual as an important
component in formation of their self image and identity as women.
Kaititj constituted only about ten per cent of the total Aboriginal
population of seven hundred, but because Warrabri is in the heart of
Kaititj country, their rich ritual life is well integrated into their
everyday life on the settlement. For them the land is still alive with
meaning and life sustaining power. It was from the Kaititj women that
I learnt most directly and poignantly of what it means to be an
Aboriginal woman living on a government settlement in the late 1970's, of the way in which the past and present are interwoven.

In ritual I found that women emphasized their role as nurturers of people, land and relationships. Through their yawalyu (land based ceremonies) they nurture land, through their health and curing rituals they resolve conflict and restore social harmony and through yilpinji (love rituals) they manage emotions. Thus in women's rituals these major themes of love, land and health fuse in the nurturance motif which encapsulates the 'growing up' of people and land and the maintenance of harmonious relationships between people and country. This wide ranging and broadly based concept is modelled on the dream-time experience, itself one all creative force. For Aboriginal women, as the living descendants of this time, the physical acts of giving birth and lactation are important but are considered to be one individual moment in a much larger and total design. To understand this concept of nurturance, which is so different from that of western culture, we must look to Aboriginal religious beliefs and practices.

Variously discussed in terms of the dreamtime, or dreaming, Aboriginal religion for desert people is the moral code which informs and unites all life under one law, the jukurrpa. It was in the dreamtime that the code was made known by the ancestral beings whose tracks criss-cross the land. The ancestral activity gave form and meaning to the land for the maintenance of which living men and women as the descendants of the jukurrpa are responsible. The body of knowledge and beliefs about the ancestral travels are jointly shared as a sacred trust by men and women each of whom has distinct responsibilities for the ritual maintenance of this heritage. Both have sacred boards, both know songs and paint designs which encode the knowledge of the dreamtime (see also Hamilton 1978b:12). How each sex then fleshes out this common core of beliefs and knowledge is dependent on their
perceptions of their role and their contribution to their society. Men's roles and perceptions have been well documented; women's are rather less well known.

For the women with whom I worked ritual is one way in which the religious code of the dreamtime, the *jukurrpa*, is made manifest and communicated to others. In ritual enactment women come into direct contact with the dreamtime powers and the experiences of the ancestors become their experience (see also Kaberry 1939:257-8). Which rituals women chose to celebrate, which are deemed necessary or appropriate and which ones it is possible to stage at any given time or place are all limiting factors on what knowledge can be transmitted to successive generations.

Although the dreamtime law is asserted to be unchanging, there are and must be changes. In fact the potential for change is a necessary component in the dogma of dreaming if it is to remain the guiding force in people's lives and to encompass all things. For this to be so, there must be mechanisms by which new items are incorporated and new themes introduced. The notion of stasis, inherent in an apparently conservative doctrine like dreaming, applies more to an individual's relationship to the world than to the world itself. Because the *jukurrpa* gave form and meaning to the entire knowable world, there must be ways of explaining, incorporating and thereby bringing new items under control. The *jukurrpa* is not a bygone era, the dreamtime is neither static nor fixed, it is a living force in the lives of men and women. Ritual is one way of making sense of the world, for by ritually articulating the plan of the *jukurrpa*, one celebrates the order of the present day. Thus in ritual women not only make known the law of the dreamtime but also shape the body of knowledge which is the *jukurrpa* heritage.
SEXUAL POLITICS AND SOCIAL CHANGE

My focus on ritual brought forth rich data which bore directly upon both the ethnographic and theoretical levels of understanding women's role and status in desert society but it also led me directly to a consideration of social change and sexual politics. In the dynamic interweaving of these two critically important forces in the lives of Aboriginal women in Central Australia, today and in the past, lies the means of reconciling women's claims to independence and autonomy with anthropological models which characterize women as the dominated and oppressed.

I am using 'sexual politics'\(^1\) to evoke the image of an ongoing power play between men and women, one that is subject to a series of checks and balances which both sexes may apply. This play is manifest in such a radically different way in desert society from western society that it is necessary to clarify my use of the concept. In Aboriginal society both men and women base their claims to status within their society on their direct access to the *jukurrpa*, but each then elaborates their rights and responsibilities within separate, autonomous domains. An understanding of sexual politics therefore must be based on knowledge of the power base of each sex and the way in which male and female domains articulate. A corollary to this argument is that the separation of the sexes is not a solution to the tensions engendered by male-female relations, it merely orders certain aspects of the sets of relationships within and between the domains of men and women. Our understanding of sexual politics within Aboriginal society is skewed because we have inadequately explored the nature of

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1. Kate Millett (1970:23) and Susan Brownmiller (1976:13-14) have both explored the nature of sexual politics in terms of male control over women. While I am drawing on their insights as to the nature of the power structure of male-female relations I am not locating these relations within a patriarchal social order.
women's power base. My analysis of the relation between the sexes begins with an analysis of this base.

Woman's role of nurturer is that of an independent operator within a self contained world. Women's claims to status in these terms are not empty ones for they are legitimated by their direct access to the *jukurrpa*, by their separate and economically independent residential base in the *jilimi* (the single women's camp), and by their exclusively female rituals which are closed to men but which none-the-less affect men. In all these ways women demonstrate their independence, autonomy, solidarity with other women and their importance as members of their society.

Obviously if women held they were independent while men insisted they were subservient and the male claims were backed in terms of their control over women's domain, then we could suggest the women are not facing the harsh reality of life and that they are using ritual as an escape mechanism. This line of analysis I found hard to sustain in my fieldwork because women do have an independent base which is respected by men. Further in the rituals jointly staged by men and women, men's respect for the independence of women's worlds is amply demonstrated. Finally in the rituals associated with male initiation, an occasion when male control of women is said to be writ large, I found women to be engaged in key decision making which affected both ritual procedure and the aftermath of initiation. Further, their initiation associated rituals celebrated woman's ongoing role as nurturer of people, relationships and land. Thus, women's ritual domain is not subsumed by male ritual activity during initiation.

The structuring principles of women's rituals, their content and focus on the maintenance of social harmony, link women's ritual world with that of the men. In both sets of rituals there is a celebration of the central values of the society. Under the law men and women have
distinctive roles to play but each has recourse to certain checks and balances which ensure that neither sex can enjoy unrivalled supremacy over the other. Men and women alike are dedicated to observing the law which orders their lives into complementary but distinct fields of action and thought: in separation lies the basis of a common association that underwrites domains of existence. Men stress their creative power, women their role as nurturers, but each is united in their common purpose - the maintenance of their society in accordance with the dreamtime law. Ritual allows both men and women to demonstrate their commitment to the long established code of the dreaming in a manner which is peculiarly male or female.

In ritual the law is made known in a highly stylized and emotionally charged manner: the separation of the sexes, so evident in daily activities, reaches its zenith. Ritual may therefore be considered as an important barometer of male-female relations, for it provides, as it were, an arena in which the values of the society are writ large, where the sex division of labour is starkly drawn and explored by the participants. It was in ritual that I found men and women clearly stating their own perceptions of their role, their relationship to the opposite sex and their relationship to the dream-time whence all legitimate authority and power once flowed. However, while women and men today, as in the past, maintain separate spheres of interaction, the evaluations of their respective roles and their opportunities to achieve status have fundamentally altered during a century of white intrusion into Central Australia. Men and women have been differently affected in the shift from a hunter-gatherer mode of subsistence to a sedentary life style on large institutionalized government settlements.

Over the past century the material conditions of women's existence
have changed dramatically and some of these changes are, I believe, reflected in ritual, both in terms of the way in which new ideas are incorporated within the law of the dreaming and in terms of the opportunities to stage rituals. The loss of land over which to forage constitutes more than an economic loss for it is from the land that Aboriginal people draw not only their livelihood but also their very being. The mining and pastoral industries have alienated the best lands so that Aborigines must live herded together in controlled settlements which, like Warrabri, are poised on the margins of what was once their traditional country.  

In Northern Australia the incoming whites have brought new ideas and resources. These have been differently exploited by Aboriginal men and women. Women were disadvantaged from the onset because the male bias of frontier society immediately relegated them to the role of domestic or sex object. Men, I suggest, have been able to take real political advantage of certain aspects of frontier society, while Aboriginal women have been seen by whites as peripheral to the political process and through the ongoing battle of the sexes Aboriginal women have lost valuable ground. Their separateness has come to mean their exclusion from the white male dominated domains whence new sources of power and influence now flow. There was no place within the colonial order for the independent Aboriginal woman who, once deprived of her land, quickly became dependent on rations and social security. Thus while I am in agreement with Berndt and Berndt (1964:442-3) that Aboriginal women enjoyed privileged access to the hearth and home of

2. Under the *Aboriginal Land Rights Act* (N.T.) 1976 Aborigines may claim land which is 1) unalienated Crown land or 2) land in which all interests other than those held by the Crown are held by or on behalf of Aborigines. This has enabled some Aboriginal groups to hold secure title to their land. See Campbell *et al.* 1979.
white frontier society. I am arguing that women's status was not enhanced within this domestic and sexual context.

The desire of feminists in white Australian society to break down sex role stereotyping to achieve social equality with men was viewed by my Aboriginal women friends as yet another cross which white women had to bear. They often sympathised with the lot of a white wife and mother. 'Poor thing shut inside all day, like a prisoner', they would comment. For themselves they sought to have their distinctively female contribution to their society recognized and accorded the value which it had had in the past when they were critical to group survival. The role they wished to see recognized was not one of dependence or subjugation as wives and mothers but a role of independence, responsibility, dignity and authority wherein they were enhanced as women, as members of their society, as daughters of the dreaming. They did not wish to see their solidarity as women further undermined.

Thus I am arguing that within the context of Aboriginal society the maintenance of male-female relationships entailed an ongoing dialogue based on an interplay and exchange between the sexes. Women actively participated in the construction of the cultural evaluations of their role in their society. But today, as members of a colonial frontier society, Aboriginal women no longer participate so predominantly in this process. Women's solidarity and autonomy are being eroded and devalued. They are constrained and defined by the male dominated frontier society as the female sex, a necessarily dependent sex. No longer are women treated solely as members of Aboriginal society. The interrelations between the sexes are thus no longer shaped first by the set of male-female relationships of Aboriginal society but also by the new forces of the wider colonial society. The activities of men and women within this new order are differently evaluated and different opportunities for participation are available to men and women. In
seeking an understanding of the changing role and status of Aboriginal women we must cast our net widely. We need to explore not only the basis of female autonomy and solidarity within Aboriginal society but also to allow that claims to autonomy and expressions of solidarity now occur in a vastly changed and changing milieu.

An anthropological analysis of status is compounded by the separation of the sexes, but the nature of the separation is such that it requires that rather than endorsing models of male dominance, complementarity or asymmetry as accurate, we seek to understand each sphere from within before proceeding to explore various dimensions of interdependence, such as are discussed later. This formula has influenced the order and manner in which I present my data. My analysis assumes that we need firstly to examine female and male domains, secondly their complex and changing inter-relations.

Analyses of Aboriginal women's role and status, predicated on a static model of male-female relationships which denies the dynamic and complex interweaving of sexual politics and social change, I found inadequate and inappropriate. I turned to feminist analyses and found there the basis for my approach to women's rituals in Central Australia. In the following chapter I examine various modes of characterizing and interpreting the relation between the sexes. Here I merely wish to note that the separation of the sexes has too often been taken as evidence of a sexual hierarchy. Men have been cast as playing all the culturally valued roles and women have appeared as 'props' or 'extras' in these male spectaculars. A stroke of the anthropological pen may thus freeze male-female into a highly unequal modality. Instead, I am arguing that separation of the sexes has allowed women to build an autonomous power base which is in no way subsumed by male ritual activity. On the contrary, an understanding of women's ritual domain is essential if we are to appreciate fully the nature of the jukurrpa
heritage, how it is maintained, transmitted and reaffirmed through
time and across space.

In seeking a way in which I could communicate my understanding of
women's ritual life without doing violence to my data, I found it
necessary to construct a framework (the contextual and conceptual
levels of Chapters two to four) within which I could explore my
ethnographic data (the ritual analysis of Chapters five to nine).
Because the framework and interpretation of women's rituals are
inexorably linked, I weave back and forth between the two. Each
chapter addresses a particular facet of the problem of understanding
women's ritual activity, and in that sense is a self-contained building
block, but each block is also part of a large whole. In order for the
reader to have an idea of the whole towards which I am working, I now
provide extended chapter outlines which not only indicate the content
of the thesis but also explicate the rationale underlying the
organization of the data into particular blocks.

THE CONTEXTUAL AND CONCEPTUAL LEVEL

The framework within which I seek to make sense of women's
perceptions and ritual representations of their role and to interpret
the more structural - perhaps objective - patterns which bind and
shape the range of choices open to women as individuals, and as
members of the female sex, unites the contextual and conceptual levels
of my analysis. In Chapters two and three I am providing an overview
of various lines of attack on the conceptual problem of reconciling,
accommodating and articulating anthropological models of the relation
between the sexes with the level of actual behaviour of individual
actions. In Chapter four I examine the time and place within which
this conceptual problem is located. I found it analytically helpful
to separate these dimensions of the 'problem of women'. On the one
hand we have the interweaving of professional and personal perspectives of the anthropologist and on the other the interweaving of the internal dynamics of the community in which I worked with the external constraints on that community. Overall in these three chapters I am concerned to set up a framework for understanding women's rituals which relates the tensions of sexual politics to the far reaching impact of recent social and cultural changes. Only then can we explore the relation between the sexes as an ever shifting, negotiable balance. Women's rituals are both an element in the balance and an indication of the state of the balance.

In the first section of Chapter two I explore the more general aspects of the search by feminists for relevant paradigms within which the relation between the sexes may be analyzed. In the second section I look to the specific body of literature concerning the lives of Aboriginal women in Central and Northern Australia. Overall this chapter explores aspects of the conceptual problem posed to anthropologists thinking within a western perspective about 'the problem of women'. More specifically I compare modes of analysis favoured by feminists and those proposed by Australian anthropologists. I conclude that at the level of anthropological model making Aboriginal women have been rendered invisible.

The question, 'What is the status of women?', can be answered in several ways and on more than one analytical level. It is pertinent at this point to ask: is women's status an eternally elusive problem or rather is it that we lack the conceptual tools to probe the issues in such a way that answers could emerge? What is the epistemological nature of the problem of women? Rephrased perhaps we should ask for whom is this a problem? With particular reference to Australia I argue that we cannot resolve these issues just by funding more research:
rather we need to formulate appropriate concepts, theories and strategies which presume that the woman question is highly relevant to understanding society.

In the third chapter I turn from the professional perspectives of feminists and Australianists on the 'problem of women' to the personal perspectives of the fieldworker and anthropologist. Obviously I had preconceived ideas about the nature of the relationship between the sexes. Although some of my ideas rapidly altered as fieldwork commenced, my own personal values and life style were obviously continuing influences on my research. These developments clearly affected my acceptability to Aboriginal women and their responses to me were partly triggered (how much I shall never really know) by my attempts to adjust to certain attitudes and to accommodate people's perceptions. This complex of perceptions and adjustments affected the manner in which and the extent to which I was incorporated within women's culture.

In Chapter four I turn to an examination of the social dynamics of the Warrabri scene, to the history of the area and the biographical careers of many of its residents, in order to locate my study of women's rituals in time and place. I have divided this chapter into three sections - the past, the present and the jukurrpa - and it is in respect to these three milieux that I explore the range of experiences which have produced the stuff of women's social world today. It is from this world and within these milieux that women celebrate their dreamtime heritage and within which they make known to successive generations of women the role which women may rightly and properly play in upholding the law. My use of history is thus not so much to provide a past in order to establish an ethnographic base or a backdrop for the ritual action of today, but rather to show the way in which today new
ideas, living patterns and resources are evaluated, how some are incorporated and others rejected, how some constrain while others liberate. For kinship systems, marriage patterns and initiation rites do not exist in a state of social and cultural timelessness. Dreaming remains an alive, indeed an ever present force in the lives of people today as in the past. Although people may assert that nothing has changed because 'business is still business' and the 'law is still the law', actually dramatic changes have occurred.

Accordingly any analysis of Aboriginal ritual must be located within a context which allows that the dreamtime law, settlement life styles and the colonial experiences are shaping factors. It must further take into account the nature of the relationships between the sexes and allow that separation grants women the validity of their own perceptions of their role and contribution to their society. By their very nature, neither sexual politics nor social change can be taken as given or held constant. Thus I sought a dynamic model which would allow for interaction between the women's assertions of independence and autonomy based on their jukurrpa heritage and the playing out of these values and beliefs in the rapidly changing world of the greater Central Australian society.

Because my analysis of Aboriginal women's role and status in Central Australia differs substantially from that of Meggitt (1962) and Munn (1973) and because I have located my analysis within the as yet perhaps unfamiliar field of feminist studies, I have thought it necessary to spell out the levels of the 'problem of women' in some detail in Chapters two to four. Another reason for the detailed nature of these chapters is that I am anticipating two of the most serious objections which can be raised against my work. Firstly, much of the data I have on women's ceremonies and the claims I make for women's rights as the direct descendants of the jukurrpa, appear to be unique.
Why, many have asked me, did you find such things when others (Meggitt 1962; Peterson 1969; Munn 1973) working with desert people did not? The explanation is multifaceted. As I argue in the second chapter the way in which many anthropologists have conceptualized these problems (and thus their interpretations of the problem) has precluded them from arriving at any conclusion that recognizes the reality of independent women's rituals. Hence, as I argue in Chapter three, to reject the usual assumptions of women's 'natural' and 'secondary' status means a different way of looking at women. In doing this I found the Aboriginal women's perception of my age, sex, marital status and research design placed me in an ideal position. Warrabri women spoke directly to me as one ready to begin a course of ritual instruction. In Chapter four I detail the differential impact of the changes of the past century on the Kaititj and Warlpiri of Warrabri. This is a further strand in my explanation of why my findings differ from those of other ethnographers of desert society.

A second criticism of my findings is even if one accepts all I say of women's ceremonies as true, the dogma of male dominance remains unchallenged (Hiatt 1971; Cawte 1974). Women have a bad dose of false consciousness, that is all. This response stems, I suggest, from a complex of attitudes and theoretical perspectives with which feminists continue to struggle, albeit from different directions. In Chapter two I examine the way in which European feminists have proposed handling societies wherein exist conflicting views as to the nature of social reality. Solutions range from those who would rank world views in a hierarchical structure, through those who take sexual asymmetry to be a universal and each society a different theme on the same tune, to those who wish to examine sexual inequalities in terms of certain social formations - male dominance being one of them.
In my exploration of the past, present and jukurrpa in Chapter four, I argue that we should see male-female relations as an ever shifting and negotiable balance. 'Male dominance' may appear to be a satisfying gloss on the relation between the sexes, its persistence through time well documented, but I suggest that we look anew at the historical record of the past century. There we find evidence of a shift in the relative negotiating power of men and women. Because there has always been a potential for change and because male-female relations have always been fluid, I argue that male dominance is a dogma which may have some currency today but it is not a lived reality now and nor was it in the precolonial past.

RITUAL ANALYSIS

Although I write of the Kaititj in the ethnographic present this is not to suggest that the changes wrought by white settlement have not impinged. Indeed these have been and still are radical forces in the lives of people today in the desert regions of Central Australia. The ethnographic present here refers to existing living patterns within a complex society which now encapsulates both white and Aboriginal influences. These are worked out differently in different parts of Australia: amongst the Kaititj of Warrabri the 'past' is often extant with the 'present'. My use of the ethnographic present refers to what I observed and learned from the Aboriginal women living at Warrabri during my fieldwork: these patterns embrace 'new' adaptations and 'old' forces. While devastating for men and women alike, there are differences in the possible range of accommodations. While women today have increased opportunities to stage rituals, the range of rituals is restricted and women's independence eroded. Increased ritual activity has therefore not necessarily been accompanied by an increase in women's overall status.
Women, I have suggested, see their role as nurturers of land, people and emotions. This self image is sustained during times of the ritual round when male claims to authority and control over women reach a heightened pitch, that is, at times of male initiation. Rather than beginning with this component of women's ritual lives and then moving back to their world, I have begun with the way in which women defined their role within their own world and then moved to other ritual forums. I have concentrated on Kaititj women's rituals (for these were undoubtedly the most fertile and prolific of Warrabri dreamers and my most constant companions), but as my contention is that ritual activity must be seen within the context of settlement structures, I also frequently allude to the ritual lives of the other Aboriginal women resident at Warrabri. There are differences in the histories of these groups which are reflected in their rituals and which provide an explanation for the range of rituals celebrated. There are also differences in social structure of the different groups which are clearly articulated in the land tenure systems of Warlpiri and Kaititj.

In ritual many of the checks and balances which constrain, condition and determine the nature of these communities and of course male-female power relationships are evident. In my discussion of the range of women's ritual activity in Chapters five to nine I begin with women's domain, the jîlimî, and then explore those ceremonies in which women most clearly and unequivocally state their perceptions of their role as independent and autonomous members of their society, where the role of nurturer is given its clearest form. It is in respect of the interlocking themes of land, love and health that women give widest expression to their nurturance role and thus to a dominant dimension of Central Australian desert society.

In Chapter five I examine the way in which the daily lives of
Kaititj women are ordered and interwoven with their ritual experiences. The Kaititj jilimi, which provides a focus for the daily activities of all Kaititj women and the ritual headquarters for the older women, is at once a mark of women's independence and autonomy and a clue to the interests in land of the residents. It is from the jilimi that all female centred ritual is initiated. The organization of ritual is no haphazard affair and is closely tied to the residential structure of the jilimi. In this chapter I discuss women's rights and responsibilities in land, outline the extent of their country and the nature of the rituals which maintain the land of their ancestors. I suggest we focus on the inter-relations of people, land and dreaming rather than seek to isolate special purpose groups such as the patri-clan. Women, I argue, are critical to an understanding of land tenure systems, marriage patterns and ritual organization for it is through women that links are forged between people and domains of activity; thus women's rituals provide a very important clue as to the overall and dynamic nature of Aboriginal communities, the structures of independence which fashion a society and indeed communities from many smaller parts.

In Chapter six I explore change and continuity in the domain of health as evidenced in women's rituals. In the past, I argue, women's rituals centred on crises of life ceremonies and the health of the small intimately related bands in which people lived most of the year. Today women's health ceremonies centre upon the resolution of conflict within the larger more diffuse groups of people on settlements amongst whom women now live. Women have continued to assert their nurturing role but the range of expression and the constraints on this role in the past were of a different order from those of the present. As their circumstances have changed women have responded by turning to and emphasising different aspects of their ritual repertoire. On the
basis of case history material I trace a shift in focus, structure and content of women's health oriented ceremonies. Here lies one of the keys to understanding how women perceive their role in the domain of health to be changing. This understanding is important to an overall view of women's status on settlements today.

Health and emotional management are closely related themes in women's rituals for each entails the maintenance of social harmony. A healthy individual and community can only be so if each is at peace and living according to the dreamtime law. For desert people an absence of trouble is a precondition to good health and happiness. Jealous fights and unhappy marriages threaten such a desirable state and are therefore the subject of much of women's ritual.

In Chapter seven I explore the theme of love, more rightly seen, I suggest, as emotional management. In their love rituals women clearly assert their right to regulate important aspects of male-female relationships and their success rate is impressive. Many marriages are organized and recognized to be sustained by women's love rituals. In the mythology which validates women's rights to nurture the potentially explosive emotions generated by male-female relationships, there is clear evidence of the challenge which men and heterosexual society present to the world of women. As with aspects of women's health rituals there has been an intensification of certain aspects of love rituals as performed on settlements. Nowhere is the ethno-sexist bias of the Australianist as obvious as in the analysis of women's love rituals which, once designated 'love magic', are classified as petty women stuff. In this chapter I argue that love rituals are an important responsibility of women and one which involves not just women but the well-being of the whole society.

In Chapter eight, to explore the nature of the world which men and women hold in common, I describe two ceremonies I observed (one
in 1976 and the other in 1977) where men and women jointly displayed their knowledge of a particular country. In the first men were the brief guests of women and in the second women and men brought together their own boards, designs and songs in a week long celebration. During this ceremony, men and women sang songs in unison, exchanged designs, and displayed to the opposite sex their elaborations of the common core of knowledge each held of that country. The way in which men and women prepared for the ceremony and spoke of it in retrospect is important to an understanding of how women perceived the co-operative nature of the joint responsibilities with men to country and the *jukurrpa*. Women, it emerges in my analysis of these ceremonies, initiated much of the ritual action and displayed only that portion of their dreaming knowledge which they deemed appropriate and necessary to achieve their goals.

In Chapter nine I return to the problem of analysing Central Australian women's role in male initiation. As I have already noted, desert women are not negated at this time but, rather, find a continuing expression for their view that they are, above all, nurturers and that this role is underwritten by their access to the *jukurrpa*. I examine the role of women in the ceremonies of men during initiation and the separate ceremonies which women hold. I discuss the decisions which are made at initiation in terms of marriage arrangements and describe the way in which women establish alliances between and within countries. Women's role in male initiation, I find, is critical to the transforming of boys into young men who are fit for a mature relationship to country and the *jukurrpa*: women help make these young men just as do men but each does so in their own distinctive way. Women and men are required to sustain *jukurrpa* and country; society comprises men and women as equally significantly and complementary sexes. For reasons discussed in Chapter four women, however, have found their
political and social status eroded as a consequence of white colonization.

Each chapter of this thesis represents a strand in my argument concerning the nature of Aboriginal women's lives in Central Australia today. I have not written a formal conclusion because the issues addressed in Chapter nine complete my argument. In order to return to the more general problem of conceptualizing woman I conclude this thesis with an epilogue where I suggest that a new understanding of Aboriginal society emerges when women's own perceptions of their role in society are taken into account.

The literature contains many examples of how anthropologists have discussed ritual as if it were solely a male affair; in these analyses (Roheim 1933; Hiatt 1971; Maddock 1972; Munn 1973) women's views are either refracted through the eyes of men or viewed as pale shadows and reflections of the spectacular action of men. In this thesis I argue that women's rituals concern the maintenance of the society as a whole and that women's rights to celebrate the role of nurturers of people, place and relationships derive directly from the jukurrpa. Although the imagery, symbolism, thematic emphasis of song and story, and the structure of the rituals of both sexes evince considerable overlap, in their own rituals women reflect upon their heritage as daughters of the dreaming. This proud heritage of independence and autonomy today is given ritual form in a world which is radically different from that of a century ago. It is, I argue, in the dynamic interweaving of sexual politics and social change that we find a means of conceptualizing woman.
Chapter Two
THE SOCIAL INVISIBILITY OF WOMEN

INTRODUCTION

During the 1980 A.N.Z.A.A.S. held in Adelaide a workshop was organized to focus upon 'Aboriginal Women's Changing Role'. This three-day session heralded a new era in Aboriginal research. Aboriginal women were clearly in charge and spoke forcefully of their lives as women and Aborigines. Aboriginal and white women gave papers on the first day and on the second and third days the Aboriginal women held closed workshops. On the afternoon of the third day they reported back to the session. For those present it was poignantly obvious that Aboriginal women do have important matters to discuss and that they have a fine sense of political action. Again and again during the three days I asked myself, just where had anthropologists been looking all these years? How could they have missed so much?

In the field we meet with real live women who may well not agree with our anthropological characterizations of their lives. The women with whom I worked certainly did not subscribe to the cultural dogma of unrelenting male dominance. Are we then to continue to argue that a male ideology is synonymous with most ideologies simply because it appears to be dominant? Or are we to come to grips with the dynamics of women's culture and its inter-relation, not subsumption by male values, and enter the theoretical wasteland in search of new models? How have women in general and Aboriginal women in particular been represented in the anthropological literature? If, as I am arguing, the short answer is 'inadequately', how are we to approach the 'problem of women', to delve below the male oriented analyses? In my search for answers to these questions I begin in section one of this chapter on the
widest possible canvas with an overview of feminist perspectives on the 'problem of women' and then narrow the focus in section two to the literature dealing with Aboriginal women in northern Australia.

Problems of definition, methodology and epistemology confronted by feminists in the 1970's are neither new nor the prerogative of anthropology. Waxing and waning according to the regnant interests of the day, concern with the place of women in society has moved in and out of mainstream anthropology and intellectual modes of thought. In terms of certain Marxist and liberal activists of the nineteenth century, 'the women question' was central to an understanding of the market economy and capitalist mode of production. By the early twentieth century, studies of female roles and status had become a matter of cross cultural analysis which drew upon the insights of psychoanalytic theory. However, in 1956 Evans Pritchard (1965) could speak of the 'position of women', as occupying a peripheral position which, in the anthropological order of things, scarcely warranted serious intellectual consideration. But from the mists of motherhood and celebration of 'feminine roles' came a new awareness of how anthropologists have neglected women; Edwin Ardener's (1975) analysis of Bakweri rituals attributed to the 'problem of women' a new significance. Subsequently feminist anthropologists further explicated the problem in analyses which diversified, specialized and challenged the received wisdom of a mainstream anthropology committed to understanding society almost exclusively in terms of kinship, social structure, culture theory, ritual and economy.

The present women's movement embraces diverse perspectives, paradigms and programmes: from Shulamith Firestone's (1971) radical re-reading of Freud and her revolutionary solution, to the more measured reinterpretations of Juliet Mitchell (1974); from the search
for egalitarian society by Leacock (1978) to the explorations of sexual asymmetry (Rosaldo & Lamphere 1974). In the new feminist anthropology, attention has turned to the insights of ethnological studies and a refutation of dominance theory embodied in man the hunter (Slocum 1975; Tanner & Zihlman 1976), to the reformulation of structuralist, cognitive and psycho-anthropological models (Chodorow 1974; Ortner 1974). Thus women are offering diverse solutions to the 'problem of women' and drawing upon different conceptual frameworks in their attempts to understand the role and status of women, both today and in the past. The emphasis on 'women' as the unit of analysis immediately propels us into cross-cultural and cross-temporal analyses and it is in this area that women are attempting to establish new models (Edholm et al. 1977; Begler 1978).

There is, however, no consensus on how best to attack the problem. Feminists dispute whether the major task is to seek the origins or the mechanisms which perpetuate sexual inequalities (Rosaldo & Lamphere 1974:1-7). Feminists too are divided to a lesser or greater extent according to their political stance which frequently complements their commitment to a particular mode of analysis (Edholm et al. 1977).

SECTION ONE: PROFESSIONAL PERSPECTIVES ON THE PROBLEM OF WOMEN

In this section I offer a brief overview of different solutions proferred by feminists; this resumé should establish a context within which we can locate our conception of women and society in general and Aboriginal women and society in particular. To speak of the professional aspects of the study of women is to evoke many images. I have used 'professional' to encompass both the context of the academic discipline within which feminist anthropologists have been
socialized and present their analyses and, additionally, the intellectual challenge that feminists face in fashioning new and powerful approaches which recognize the contribution of women to social process.

Cognitive and Symbolic Anthropology

Anthropologists working within the framework of cognitive anthropology and symbolic analyses often attribute the social invisibility of women to male bias in research and to certain guiding premises underlying models which take men to be the primary actors. Here Ardener (1975) appeared to many as a guiding light. From my feminist viewpoint, his is an essentially conservative analysis because society is characterized predominantly in terms of a dominant and ideological order which is assumed to be controlled by men. Such analyses do not jar violently with the received wisdom of mainstream male oriented anthropology and thus receive partial endorsement from the academic majority. In fact the symbolists seek their own understanding of society - one which is really only marginally concerned with political questions of status - and so do not pose a serious challenge to anthropologically established paradigms.

Indeed to pursue this point a little further, I suggest in section two of this chapter that for Australianists, the psychoanalytic approach of Roheim (1933) fifty years ago and Hiatt (1971) today has proved more palatable than feminist thought. On a wider canvas, I think the same argument applies to Ardener's conceptual formulations regarding the woman question and also to the generalizing highly abstracted models of Lévi-Strauss (1949). This is not to deny that both recognize the importance of women in any symbolic analysis of society - of course they do - but they remain within a framework which restricts our acknowledgement of women's potential power to
(in Ardener's case) the world of ritual. There Ardener identifies symbolic realms peculiar to men and women - within each domain men and women express their own sex specific world views. Ardener then differentiates these domains in terms of their closeness and inclusion in the world of nature or culture. In the case of Lèvi-Strauss (1949) the focus is on the world of kinship which he sees predominantly in terms of various means of communication; and women are one such critical means. For Lèvi-Strauss (1949:69) women pass in one direction and valuables in the other.

Further fieldwork within the tradition of Lèvi-Strauss or Ardener can not challenge the conceptualizations that depict women to be more 'nature like' or as 'objects'; it can only provide more data which demonstrates that women are closer to nature or are the means of communication. Van Baal (1970) has suggested the possibility that women agree to behave as objects; they do not just claim the status of objects. In Van Baal's and Lèvi-Strauss's opinion women co-operate whether 'consciously' or 'unconsciously' in their own subjugation. For these anthropologists women's position is comprehended through concepts or models that incorporate certain assumptions about the nature of human society and society supposedly pivots on male-female oppositions, that are regulated hierarchically by the 'top' sex, men.

Academic feminists often speak of sexual relations in terms of the bias associated with 'androcentrism'. Feminists speak too of 'sexual asymmetry' and 'egalitarianism'. To my mind feminists' desire to distance themselves from any discussion of women's secondary role and status with the result that they reify it, is a reflection of our shared need to develop new concepts and to expand old notions in order to improve our objective understanding. Certainly a potential pitfall of feminist anthropology is the fear that perhaps the endeavour is not really anthropology, that it is really all too subjective
because it is reflective of many western women's concerns. A common anxiety amongst feminists is that an anthropology of women might become (or is becoming) a ghetto within mainstream anthropology; perhaps it will be (or is being) relegated to the periphery of mainstream anthropology. There the non-problem of women is generally found and there angry young women may work without challenging the entrenched interests of a male dominated anthropology.

Ardener's answer to the 'problem of women' is not really an answer because his model is based on one western society's conceptualization of male and female and so, in 'other' cultures anthropologists have to find out which structure is dominant. Perforce they must enquire about how this articulates with other levels and structures: the question then is, how do they fuse into a dynamic whole?

In Australia we have, I suggest, been over zealous in our desire to find a consistent and single characterization of Aboriginal society. In the process women's life experiences and the validity of their own self perceptions have been denied or erased. To assert that all inconsistencies can be resolved, may be an appropriate mode of analysis where there are recognized domains in which men and women may agree upon the evaluations of each other's activities. For instance, in Tiwi society men and women are initiated at the same ceremonies and neither has a world of private and separate ritual in which to secretly elaborate alternate models of reality (see Goodale 1971:338). But in desert society, the sexual division of labour and separateness of the sexes is highly marked in ritual. How then are we to decide whose is the greater exercise of power and authority, whose world is the most consistent and worthy of the label 'Aboriginal model of reality'? Most frequently the male oriented anthropologist has given the male models the higher status - mainly because men are known to exclude women from male rituals and to only permit women to witness certain
non-secret ritual acts (see Hiatt 1971). How then do we account for women's exclusion of men? I return to this key question in stages throughout the thesis, and more concisely in the Epilogue.

Evolutionists and Universalists

Those who have sought to locate debates concerning 'the problem of women' within the mainstream of anthropology, have focussed on the universality of the cultural dogma of sexual asymmetry. These I call 'the universalists' (Rosaldo & Lamphere 1974; Reiter 1975). Others have explored, within an evolutionary framework, the shift from complementarity to inequality. These I call the 'evolutionists' (Reiter 1977; Leacock 1978). Of course the two schools are not mutually exclusive, nor do all feminists clearly fall within one camp (Sacks 1974) but there is a tendency on the part of the universalists to work within an ahistorical framework and to focus on mechanisms, while the evolutionists seek to strip off the layers of social formations until the essential forms are laid bare. The former, in beginning with the assumption that everywhere men enjoy greater prestige, power and authority than women, suffers from an ethnocentricity in applying cross culturally concepts such as status and power. To take but one example of this point, pejorative overtones in the English language adhere to such terms as politics (a male activity) and gossip (a female activity). Women are relegated to a less important position in the overall political process on account of the descriptive labels attached to their activities. These labels are then given the status of concepts by the universalists. The evolutionists on the other hand, in their search for origins, read beneath the characterizations and sift the ethnohistorical record and male oriented analyses for evidence of women's former powers (Webster 1975). This endeavour is fraught with difficulties as the ethno-
historical record is meagre and male oriented. Accusations that one may find what one seeks bedevil the work and the hypotheses of the evolutionists. Both frameworks, evolutionist and universalist, are in need of further empirical testing and conceptual clarification. They are as yet frameworks, not the more elaborated and refined theoretical and conceptual paradigms which feminists need in order to think about women as social actors who create their own social reality.

An important debate within the universalist school centres on whether one begins with the overall structure of the society or the particular strategies of women (Lamphere 1974; Ortner 1974). This division and the need which underlies it, that is, how to relate the level of individual and class expressions and perceptions of their reality to the overall culturel level of ideology, is also an important problem for my analysis of Aboriginal women's models of reality in ritual. If we begin with the assumption that women occupy a secondary place in a society, then women's activities must appear to offer mere compensations and outlets. An analysis of male-female which begins by stating the overarching structure as articulated by men, cannot account for change through time because it is locked in a synchrony reminiscent of the structural functionalists of yore.

Ortner (1974) has offered a way out of the dilemma posed by societies wherein male and female may not entirely agree upon the evaluations of each other's activities and roles. Ortner (1974:69) argues that the first level to which feminists should address themselves is the overarching ideology and deeper assumptions of the culture which render women's powers trivial. Such a complex endeavour requires that we situate individual choice and consciousness within the overarching structure. If one chooses to endorse an ideology, namely male dominance,
as this structure, then the life choices and rights of women must be located necessarily within that framework.

The universalists also face the problem of explaining the bewildering cross-cultural variation in roles deemed appropriate to men and women in different societies in various eras. Universalists must postulate a dimension of male-female for which they have no other explanation than its universality (Rosaldo 1974). To claim that women everywhere give birth and lactate does not explain the different cultural evaluations of these activities. In some societies the actual time and energy expended on mothering and the value placed on it in terms of status are not great. In desert society it is more the symbolic structure which is based on the notion of mothering and nurture which has importance. The focus on woman's involvement in the 'domestic' sphere by virtue of her mothering role, rather than by reference to her contribution to the mode of production, falsely locates the basis of women's secondary status in several kinds of modes of production.

**Radical Feminists**

Feminists working within the Marxist tradition are questioning the basis of definitions and categories which purport to explain the subjugation of women (Rowbotham 1973). Their problem is partly that Marx does not specifically mention women's oppression as a qualitatively different experience from that of, for example, slaves and thus women must be further qualified as workers, domestic labourers and so on.1

1. Engels (1891) recognized that women and men are differently affected by the formation of capital. Elucidation of the way in which the sexual division of labour 'naturally' and 'spontaneously' evolves into a technical and production oriented society wherein are located the origins of class, has been seriously challenged by many feminists (see Critique of Anthropology 1977; Sacks 1974). Still others have questioned whether women may be said to constitute a class (Larbelestier 1977; O'Laughlin 1974).
Marxist feminists agree that the search for the origins of the world wide defeat of the female sex is spurious and in need of rethinking, yet all hark back to Marx and Engels. There are, I believe, good reasons for this. One is the search of feminists themselves for origins. The matriarchy myth proved unsatisfactory as a validation for women's claims to a glorious past (see Bamberger 1974) and Engels (1891) provides a basis for positing an earlier egalitarian era.

Anthropologically the Engelian tradition is attractive as it allows an explanation of the present order, a fresh look at the past and an explanation of social formations within an evolutionary perspective. The evolutionists of the Leacock (1978) school have sought to apply the insights of Engels to band society and they have come up with some interesting propositions. Elaborating Engels, Leacock (1978:255) argues that there have been transformations within family structures which have placed women at a disadvantage. Previous research, she contends, has failed to reveal the truly egalitarian nature of band society because research has been overly selective and has been conducted in societies long disrupted by capitalist colonizers. Women in band society, she argues, are distinguished by their control over their own lives and decisions.

Drawing on diverse data, Leacock (1978) demonstrates the ethnocentricity and over selective nature of past research and analysis. In substantial agreement with Engels, she argues women's control of produce is the critical factor in determination of the autonomous status of women in band society. The Iriquois are a prime case in point (see Brown 1975). Changes to these hierarchical social orders which lock women into domestic privatized labour are not, Leacock (1978:254-5) argues, a linear development from past forms of unilineal agnatic systems in which all jural power resided in men to the present clan...
structure but rather, the non-egalitarian social order is the result of qualitative changes. 'Family relations in pre-class societies were not merely incipient forms of our own', Leacock (1978:255) concludes.

Leacock cites various examples from the Australian material but like much of the North American literature, the reading is restricted to several classics taken out of historical and cultural context (see Berndt 1978:256). Often Aboriginal society is treated as if there was an Australian Aboriginal type wherein examples from different periods and different places (for example the Kimberleys and the desert) may all be jumbled together. However, as Hamilton (1978a) shows for the eastern areas of the Western Desert with respect to land tenure and as I argue here with respect to women's rituals, there have been dramatic changes in Aboriginal society during the past century which are reflected in male-female relationships. These are not constant across the continent, for the timing and context within which the changes occurred and the social organization of different Aboriginal groups vary enormously (see Gale 1980; Bell & Ditton 1980: 29-90). In one major respect though, I agree with Leacock that once upon a time the complementarity of the underlying structure of band society was apparent in the prevailing egalitarian relations between the sexes. Today this complementarity has become skewed: we now see sexual asymmetry entailing inequality. But this trend and some of the supporting conditions vary in important ways across Australia.

Sacks (1974:207) occupies middle ground between the evolutionist and universalist approaches. She accepts the public-private dichotomy of Rosaldo (1974) but traces its development from an evolutionary perspective. In Engels Sacks (1974:211) finds the model whereby women as free productive members of society are transformed into subordinate and dependent wives and wards and thus, in her analysis, the end of
kin based solidarity heralds the beginning of class differentiation.

The distinction Sacks (1974:222) draws between the role of wife and the status of social adult has relevance for understanding the role of Aboriginal women on settlements where their power base in land has been eroded and their economic independence denied. As we shall see in the following chapters the nurturance role which was once their proud and recognized claim to status as full members of their society, has become one means within the emerging social order of Central Australia whereby women are excluded from the white defined and male oriented decision making areas of politics and government. As Sacks (1974:219 writes:

It seems likely, then, that in class societies the subordinate position of women derives not from domestic property relations but from something outside the household which denies women adult social status.

Radical feminists see their role in understanding the mechanisms and origins of the oppression of women as a first step to the overthrow or reformulation of the present social order (Firestone 1971). These women openly admit that their models are often ethnocentric and their conclusions specific to the plight of contemporary American or English women. Their admissions have done much to highlight, explore and expose the sex bias in the categories and assessments of male dominated anthropology (Reiter 1977; Sacks 1974).

The 'Critique of Anthropology' school has pushed the understanding of gender hierarchies further than any other activist group. Edholm et al. (1977:101ff) suggest that because, at the core of the problem, is the 'unhistorical, atemporal nature of the category women', we need to find ways of integrating our studies of women's domain with our analysis of social production. Of particular interest to my analysis of desert rituals is their suggestion that:
women's perceptions of themselves, their position in production and distribution, their exclusion from public social participation, often have a high degree of congruence (Edholm et al. 1977:126).

What then of the Aboriginal women of my study who perceive themselves as independent producers, as self sufficient and as having the power to exclude? I would suggest that in desert society where Aboriginal women have been able to elaborate their ritual, economic and cultural contribution to their society in a separate domain, the congruence between perceptions and position in production supports high status.

Reiter (1977:5) in an imaginative and provocative search for the origins of gender hierarchies, isolated critical and self avowedly arbitrary junctures at which qualitative changes have occurred. This, read in conjunction with Sacks (1974), provides further elucidation of the qualitative change in sex roles that Leacock (1978) asserts occurred in the transition to feudal modes of production and subsequently to the capitalist mode of production. Reiter's (1977:9) suggestion that we look to the shifts in power within the kinship domain to understand women's subordination in the 'civilizational process' and to the context within which political formations change, elucidates the nature of the changes in the lives of Aboriginal women over the past century (see Chapter four).

CONCLUSION

The preceding discussion suggests that looking at the 'problem of women' rather coolly and cynically one might reduce the choice of frameworks within which to analyse women's status to two: first a romantic reconstruction of a long lost past; second ahistorical formulations from contemporary male/female relations which are then overlaid on past regimes and applied cross culturally to suit the purpose of the analysis. Uniting both approaches is the stated concern of feminists to develop analytical tools which are free of male bias.
and pejorative overtones. Each is concerned to measure the status of women and to speculate as to the mechanisms which constrain women. Evolutionists argue for qualitative changes which have transformed the alleged sexual egalitarianism of band society; universalists posit the public-private as a universal dichotomy to explain a world-wide fact-sexual asymmetry. All are agreed that anthropology is shot through with androcentrism; there is a profound reluctance on the part of the discipline to come to terms with the social contribution of women to their society and to develop theories which accommodate women as social actors in their own right.

In general, feminists agree that it is no longer possible to take female roles as a reflex of biology or of some hypothesized 'natural order'. In their explanatory prescriptions and in their political rationale and platform feminists differ about how we should conceptualize the problem. Evolutionists insist that to focus on the universality of sexual asymmetry means we ignore the material conditions of dominance and the historical transformation of female roles. However, universalists insist that a glorious past is wishful thinking: change can only be based on an understanding of the present social order so that then it can be dismantled or modified.

From different perspectives and from within different intellectual traditions feminists have sought and still seek the origins and mechanisms by which gender hierarchies and cultural dogmas, such as that of sexual asymmetry, are established and maintained. And yet, the conceptual problem of uniting the level of an ideology of male dominance and the concrete world of interaction between the sexes in a sex segregated society, lacks consensus; too many questions remain. As Edholm et al. (1977:127) write, we are still 'dependent on our empirical data' and the independent ritual life of women in Central Australia presents a profound analytical challenge.
Feminists have flirted with various analytical modes from Freudian psychanalysis through Marxian models, to structural symbolism. They have declared themselves to be outside the discipline and to present a major challenge to those interested in overhauling the discipline. Women as a sex, a class and a subculture have been described as 'the woman question' and 'the problem of women'. Some anthropologists have sought to faithfully describe the lives of women and have left the analysis of the combined cultural worlds of male/female to accretion of data or grafting of the domain of one sex onto that of the other. In all these writings there recur certain epistemological issues of method and conceptual definition: the dust has not yet settled.

THE SOCIAL INVISIBILITY OF WOMAN

SECTION TWO: AUSTRALIAN PERSPECTIVES

INTRODUCTION

Stated simply we could say that the problem which confronts a feminist consciousness in Aboriginal Australia is how best to characterize the relation between the sexes in a way which allows woman's domain to be explored in a non-prejudicial manner. The problem is compounded because the separation of the sexes, which reaches a climax in the desert, precludes the possibility of assessing and comparing within one political domain, male and female evaluations of their contribution to their society. In Central Australia, where male and female worlds are substantially independent of each other in economic and ritual terms, we have men and women elaborating separate sex-specific power bases. How then are we to approach the relations between the sexes?
When we glance at the range of issues raised by a feminist critique of society, we find the relevance to Australian studies to be striking and yet the feminist upsurge that questions the nature of woman's place in society has barely touched the discipline. Why this should be so is explained in this section where I argue that many factors have precluded a clear vision of the lives of Aboriginal women. I look to the way in which women have been depicted in the Australian literature and suggest that the theoretical preoccupations, context of fieldwork, research design and the nature of the discipline in Australia have all conspired to relegate women to a position of marginality within Aboriginal society and within the discipline. Whether or not this characterization is accurate is another question of both empirical and theoretical import to the problem of women in general and to my enquiry into desert society and Aboriginal women's rituals in particular.

THE SOFT OPTION: THE SEX FACTOR

In reading the Australian Aboriginal literature one is left with a quite different impression from the one I shall sketch here of the role and status of women and their relationship to men. The reasons are complex and many. At the most basic level the problem of understanding women stems from the sex segregated nature of Aboriginal society wherein it is extremely inappropriate (and in terms of indepth fieldwork, unproductive) to attempt to work equally with men and women. Usually one is identified with members of one's own sex and is able to move freely within that sphere. Most fieldworkers in Australia have been male, and not surprisingly men's culture has been rather better documented than women's. Female fieldworkers eager to work with Aboriginal women have been few and the challenge of their findings has either been overlooked or else, by a sleight of the mind, rendered
consonant with male analyses which rank the male world view as dominant. The real challenge has come from outside Australia (Leacock 1978) and from a few hardy stayers within Australia such as Berndt (1970, 1979) and Hamilton (1979).

Glancing at the 1935 A.N.Z.A.A.S. address by Elkin we might conclude that it is not for want of encouragement that women are absent from the ethnographies. Elkin (1935:197) cautioned that:

> We anthropologists, therefore, must take care lest, as a result of our scientific urge to systematise whatever we study, we abet this dehumanization of a living people ... women could prevent us from doing this; the wives and daughters of station managers, settlers, and officials should be encouraged to carry on the work of Mrs. Parker and Mrs. Aeneas Gunn, while specially trained women who go out to do anthropological work amongst the aborigines should work consistently through the native women, not to find out what a male worker can better ascertain through the men, but to get a real understanding of childhood, motherhood, the family, and women's place in society.

Few women, however, seemed anxious to take advantage of such encouragement. In fact Catherine Berndt (1963) suggests that such women were a potential hazard and did Aboriginal women a disfavour. With reference to Olive Pink and Daisy Bates, Berndt (1963:335) writes:

> Far from taking a positive interest in Aboriginal women, they actively fostered the notion that such women were invariably inferior, ignorant, down trodden and in fact hardly worth talking to.

Those who evinced a more positive approach were few. Kaberry (1939) and Berndt (1950) were the only two female anthropologists who published in-depth studies of the lives of Aboriginal women during that early period. (Although her fieldwork was undertaken in the 1950's Goodale's work did not appear until 1971). In her perceptive discussion of the social position of women Marie Reay (1963a) presents an overview, guidelines for future research and a look at some of the severe practical handicaps facing women anthropologists. She notes that to
Daisy Bates (1938) and K. Langloh Parker (1905), Aboriginal women were not of central importance.

In Ursula McConnel's (1951) reports on the north Queensland Wikmunkan, women's status is not a critical issue and the survey by Mountford and Alison Harvey (1941) of women's lives in northern South Australia is very brief. Other women, such as Diane Barwick (1970), Fay Gale (1970) and Marie Reay (1963b) herself, have worked on problems of assimilation. At the '1961 Conference on Aboriginal Studies', Canberra, Reay called for comparative research on the social position of women as being urgently needed. The published papers of the conference (Sheils 1963) reflect the theoretical interests of Australianists at the time. Women appear in the section devoted to 'Special Problems' along with 'Notes on Psychological Research' and 'Tribal Distribution and Population'.

At the 1969 A.N.Z.A.A.S. Congress in Adelaide thirty-four years after Elkin's plea and eight years after the Canberra conference (Sheils 1963), Catherine Ellis organized a symposium 'to counteract earlier misconceptions and to give airing to more recent scholarship' (Gale 1970:2). Betty Hiatt (Meehan), Nicolas Peterson, Isobel White and Annette Hamilton contributed papers on the role of women in traditional society, Diane Barwick one on social change and Catherine Berndt an overview. A decade later this volume remains a standard reference. We are in need of further conferences, symposia and texts which examine the directions in which the study of women has moved within Australia and within world anthropology.

In Australian anthropology the soft option has been to pay lip service to the need for more female research workers, but this is not sufficient to ensure that women's lives will be both documented and examined in their own terms. A rather harder line is to suggest that we need not only more fieldwork but also new theories which allow that
women actively create their own social reality. Some old and cherished assumptions about Aboriginal society may need rethinking. New ideas, data and analytical tools fashioned by feminists in the 1970's may yet alter our understanding of male-female dynamics in Aboriginal society.

Within Australia the tendency has been for male fieldworkers to study male institutions and subsequently to offer analyses which purport to examine the totality of Aboriginal society. Evaluation of female institutions has too often been based on male informants' opinions refracted through the eyes of male ethnographers and explained by means of the concepts of a male oriented anthropology. Thus statements concerning the role and status of women are formulated within the context of a public male ideology, which means they can only rarely be reconciled with the behavioural patterns of Aboriginal women in desert society. In a sex segregated society women can most easily be studied by another woman, but this is not sufficient to ensure that Aboriginal woman's perception of her own social reality is explored. The following discussion explains how Australian anthropological paradigms have positioned women as marginal to mainstream research. I pursue this question of women with reference to Australian field research by examining the development of and the debates generated by the discipline within Australia.

ACADEMIC ANTHROPOLOGY IN AUSTRALIA

Aboriginal society was not systematically studied until two Oxford scholars, Baldwin Spencer and W.R. Roth, began their scientific fieldwork in Australia during the late nineteenth century. Previous data relied upon casual observation of early explorers and

2. I am drawing on Elkin (1935) and Diane Barwick's lectures (Department of Prehistory and Anthropology, A.N.U.) (1978) in this section.
settlers or the collation and compiling of data by well educated professional men who dabbled in anthropology as a hobby. Even when the detailed research began, the methodology was more of an armchair variety where speculation abounds. Intensive participant observation fieldwork was not undertaken. Further, these early workers focussed upon formal structures of Aboriginal society such as kinship systems, religion and social organisation. Women were not considered to be critically important informants on such matters for such matters were assumed not to be reflected upon by women. The 'domestic' realm of family, child rearing and food gathering was taken to be their lot.

Day-to-day life wherein the ideal structures could be tested against lived behaviour, were spurned as phenomena worthy of enquiry. Another early researcher, who teamed up with Spencer, was Gillen (1901-2:147) who noted in his camp jottings that 'The morning was wasted through the natives being engaged in a squabble arising out of slander spread by one woman against another'. Thus it is too simplistic to say that it was the preponderance of male researchers which prevented women from speaking in the ethnography; it was also the orientation of the discipline. It is evident in Gillen's notes that women themselves were not invisible.

Of course Spencer and Roth were both men of the Victorian era and their own model of femininity is evident in their notes and in their published work. It was a model wherein their own social order was the epitome of all civilization, a characteristic of which was the domestication of female sexuality (Fee 1974:101). All other sexual values and sexual orders were primitive and lacking in civilization. Such an analysis was obviously satisfying, as fifty years later Evans-Pritchard (1965) was still extolling the virtues of Victorian womanhood as a standard against which to measure other women's position.
It is little wonder then that the independent and, to the Victorian eye, wilful ways of Aboriginal woman, received scant recognition in ethnological debates. In behaving in such an untamed fashion she was merely demonstrating her uncivilized and uncultured primitiveness. Men alone possessed culture.

Another factor which for many years kept women's activities well in the background was the scientific orientation of the Sydney Department of Anthropology towards human biology. Established in 1925 and financed by government grants and Rockefeller funds, the Department set out to train field officers and to record the culture of Aborigines before it disappeared. Aborigines continued to be the subject of scientific interest, a test case for theories of group marriage, totemism and kinship models. Because the research was predicated on a salvage rationale, little interest in the history of Aboriginal societies developed. Nor did the link between the psychology and anthropology departments in Sydney lead to an interest in the culture and personality school which had developed in North America partly as a result of such inter-disciplinary links. Thus history and social science were excluded and Australian anthropology was established as a science where the laboratory for human evolution might be seen and studied before it disappeared. In part this background of the development of the discipline in Australia explains why little emphasis was placed on recording a range of activities which may have highlighted women's role.

Australian anthropology bears very much the stamp of British anthropology from the appointment of individual professors to their theoretical interests. The founder and first professor of Anthropology in Sydney, Radcliffe-Brown, was a student of Durkheim and Rivers. For these men, women's opinions, values and activities were not critical to
an understanding of society. Durkheimian dualism has permeated Australian anthropology so that women, the profane, exist only to provide the other, the personal, the magical, to highlight the importance of men in the moral order. In such a scheme women have no religion, only magic. This has been a hard yoke to throw off. No matter how stridently or positively women assert the validity and uniqueness of their world view, they have and will remain mute or socially disruptive in analyses that posit such constricted contexts.

The Non Debates: Tepoztlán Was Never Revisited

The way in which women have either been excluded or ignored is well illustrated by the major debates which have erupted in Australian anthropology. Those that actually involve women, such as the debate on the ignorance of physiological paternity (Tonkinson 1978) reveal all too clearly that anthropologists do not credit women with an awareness of their own predicament. Whether Aborigines are aware of the role of the father in procreation has always struck me as a non-starter in any female oriented research. That this debate is ill conceived, the result of a western preoccupation with property and descent, rather than critical to the understanding of Aboriginal belief systems, is evident in the response which Aboriginal women gave to female research workers: Jane Goodale (1971:136) reports that liwi women thought her extremely foolish to ask such questions. But steadfastly and singlemindedly male anthropologists have attempted to understand Aboriginal reality in terms of one set of beliefs consonant with male behaviour. Women are rarely consulted but when they are, their direct answers are seen as further evidence of their profane nature, or as a by-product of contact.

One Australian debate which failed to achieve the notoriety it deserved is that over women's role in marriage arrangements. Below I
mention the divergence between Goodale (1971) and Hart and Pilling (1960). Annette Hamilton (1970b) has similarly questioned Les Hiatt who worked in the same areas as she did in Arnhemland. Both Hamilton and Goodale illustrate that the received male truths based on data gathered by men from men, about women's lives, may not be a lived reality for women.

Hamilton (1970b:17) has clearly demonstrated that the model offered by the Gidjingali men of the Anbara community of Maningrida settlement in the Northern Territory was an ideal model that did not constitute an accepted truth for women. Further, the women's model did not represent a random distribution of power. Hamilton (1970b:18) is able to show that the regularities observed are a reflection of the age distribution of the parties involved. Thus Hamilton (1970b:20) concludes it is surely not sufficient just to ask any able bodied citizen how a system works.

Jane Goodale undertook fieldwork with Tiwi in the 1950's but when she came to publish her thesis based on fieldwork with the Tiwi of Melville Island, Northern Territory, she hesitated. While Goodale had been working on Melville Island, Arnold Pilling had been working with Tiwi on Bathurst Island. The findings of the two dissertations appeared to clash. It was not until after further fieldwork in 1962 that Goodale prepared her dissertation for publication. It appeared in 1971, eleven years after publication of Hart and Pilling's monograph on the Tiwi. Perhaps partly for this reason and partly the hegemony of male models, the potential for debate raised by Goodale's findings has not yet been realized.

Goodale (1971:53) claims that by working with male informants Hart and Pilling have missed the importance of the marriage contract which is given ritual expression at the time of a girl's marinaleta (puberty) rites. This contract Goodale terms 'Type A': the contract
in which the father bestows his daughter 'Type B'. To quote Goodale (1971:54):

A Type A contract involves four principal individuals, three of whom are alive when the contract is made - the young mother-in-law, her father, and her son-in-law. The contract is arranged between a father and his daughter's son-in-law, but the carrying out of the terms of the contract is the duty of the two ambrinua (mother-in-law and son-in-law).

This relationship involves the son-in-law, who is present at his mother-in-law's puberty rites, in a web of lifelong obligations to his in-laws but for a number of reasons this contract may not actually be fulfilled. A father-arranged contract is, Goodale (1971:56) claims, always a secondary contract.

Hart and Pilling's (1960:16) recognition that:

The father of the bride was seldom an entirely free agent ... he was also caught in an intricate network of previous commitments, residual interest, and contingent promises made by other men who had some prior interest in the baby or the mother of the baby, can in Goodale's terms be made intelligible. The ambrinua relationship which underwrites marriage of Type A accounts for what appears in Hart and Pilling's study to be background noise.

Certainly the nature of marriage arrangements in Aboriginal society has not been ignored (see Lèvi-Strauss 1949), but women's role in establishing and maintaining marriages has been neglected. I return to this role in Chapters five, seven and nine; here I am merely underlining the importance of considering the perspective from which the data were gathered. I contend that it is the way in which solutions are sought which has rendered women inarticulate. What may a woman say of her role which will strike the anthropologist as affirming her importance if she is interviewed while executing the complicated steps of the circulating connubium?

One of the debates which continues to rage in Australian anthropology concerns the nature of the horde, band, clan and so on.
(see Radcliffe-Brown 1931; Hiatt 1962; Stanner 1965b; Lee & De Vore 1968:6ff). Women are strangely absent from these debates in anything other than a statistical or structural sense. Their presence in local groups becomes an enigma. Shades of Radcliffe-Brown's (1931) patrilineal, patrilocal, exogamous horde linger. Peterson (1970b) pursues a line of enquiry in which women appear to be important. Peterson (1970b:14) notes that the important points about the composition of the traditionally oriented band with whom he worked in 1966 in Arnhemland was that 'two of the five men are living with their wives' patrikin and three of the men have their wife's mother present'. In my analysis this would be evidence that women's rights and responsibilities in land are important factors in determining the composition of the band, but Peterson (1970b:9) has already stated that only men are the 'active owners' and his focus is on sociological and ecological factors. Peterson (1970b:14) writes:

The ecological factor is not the importance of women having a detailed knowledge of a particular tract of land, but the need of older men to have access to the labour of younger women.

Meggitt (1962:50) also suggests that access to women is a factor in group composition. However I suggest all such analyses are wrong headed unless women are accorded the status of joint owners and managers along with their male kin (see Chapter five).

In the debates concerning conception beliefs, local organization and marriage, women have been cast as the profane, sex objects and pawns. Kaberry (1939), Berndt (1950, 1965) and Goodale (1971) have documented another side of women's role - one that is based on women as social actors in their own right. Why then are Aboriginal women still 'silent' in so many analyses? I wish now to turn to the paradigms and perspectives which have organized research in Australia to suggest possible answers.
PARADIGMS AND PERSPECTIVES

Male and female must both be considered in any holistic analysis of the society and the status of men and women should be seen to be closely inter-related. As I stated in the introduction of this section it is the nature of this binding which underwrites the problem of understanding women within the totality of Aboriginal society. I suggest that the problem has been tackled from within three different organizational frameworks, each of which has generated different questions and thus produced different answers. The first and most common response has been to cleave to men as informants and the male view as reflecting social reality (Hiatt 1971; Munn 1973). Those working within this paradigm assume that men are dominant because the model encourages them to see Aboriginal society in terms of man making all the important decisions, controlling all the important resources and thereby thoroughly dominating the women. As Cawte (1974:140) so gaily puts it, women are 'feeders, breeders and follow-the-leaders'. The second and closely related paradigm employs what may be termed the 'anthropology of women' approach. The fieldworker, usually a woman, sets out to document the lives of women as she believes women also have rights, opinions and values which may not exactly coincide with those of the men. She makes a chink in the doctrine of male dominance, she shows it is not as complete as we thought; never-the-less, as long as we insert certain qualifications the model suffices to characterize the society (Kaberry 1939). The third paradigm is that of feminist anthropologists who question the origins and mechanisms of the all pervasive and hitherto persuasive cultural dogma of male dominance. Perhaps they suggest, it is not an enduring, timeless, constant which regulates male-female in Aboriginal society (Hamilton 1979).

These three organisational frameworks are akin to Kuhn's (1970: 43ff) notion of 'a paradigm' which predicts a problem or a set of
related problems that the community of practitioners then sets out to solve. But, as Kuhn makes clear, one can not move easily from within one version of the paradigm to work with another, as to do so involves something of the magnitude of a gestalt switch. Although the various practitioners of one paradigm may use the same vocabulary, the conceptual baggage which adheres to a term varies radically between paradigms. For example, if politics is defined as a male domain, then it is difficult to document the activities of women politicians as anything other than deviants. However, if politics is defined as including sexual politics, that is, the power relations between men and women, both men and women can then be depicted as politicians.

Paradigm One: Man Equals Culture

For many anthropologist, secure in the knowledge that in Aboriginal Australia we have the thoroughly male dominated society, the problem of women has been to find a suitable characterization of woman's role and status in terms of her lack of control over her own life. Armed with diverse theoretical weaponry such as Marxian class analysis, Lévi-Straussian structuralism and Durkheimian dualism, Australianists have sought to explain women's secondary position in terms of economic markers, in the realm of symbolism, social organization and kinship. They have cast women as the profane (Warner 1937), the 'other' (Munn 1973), the devalued, feared and excluded (Hiatt 1971; Cawte 1974; Cowlishaw 1979). Male culture is taken to be synonymous with Aboriginal culture and women appear merely as the pawns in the games of the polygynous gerontocracy, the substance of symbols but never the markers, the exploited and dominated, but never the decision-making adult (Hiatt 1978).

Maddock (1972:155) has written an account of the relationship of women to men in the religious realm which conforms to certain European
stereotypes insofar as he argues that, despite their secret core, men's cults require the active participation of the community at large and express broad cohesive and impersonal themes such as fertility and continuity of nature, the regularity of society and the creation of the world. Women, on the other hand, have cults which centre upon narrow, divisive and personal interests such as love magic and female reactions to physiological crises. Hiatt (1971, 1978) then takes this a step further to argue that Aboriginal religion constitutes the ideology by which men dominate women. Male ritual becomes a political activity whereby men act as a class to exploit another class, women. This involves men appropriating the right to create life through pseudo-procreative rites. At initiation men destroy youths and 're-produce' them as men. Underlying this, Hiatt argues, is male insecurity because physically man cannot give birth and children develop strong emotional bonds with their mother which must be broken if male superiority is to be maintained.

Geza Roheim (1933, 1974) looked to the realm of myth to explain men's fear of women and argued that these rites are their means for maintaining their superiority. According to Roheim, for the Aboriginal male, there are two kinds of women - those who do and those who don't. The latter group must be transformed into the former and the tensions thus produced are reflected in dreams and ceremonial practices which Roheim documents. To quote Roheim (1933:237):

We know very well that the acceptance of the female position of the idea of not having a penis is the crucial point [sic] in the development of female sexuality. In order to be transformed from an aiknarintja [wild one] to a nguanga [quiet one] from frigidity to object eroticism, from homosexuality to heterosexuality, the female must be subjected to force: raped, conquered, castrated.

It is thus that the 'wild' are made 'quiet' and dominated by the
fear of an aggressive father-figure, women may then assume their roles as adjusted mothers and wives.

In seeking an understanding of Aranda and Lurija women's perceptions and their lives, Roheim (1933:207) asked: 'What sort of a person is she?' and 'What are her work, her play, her interests in everyday life, her passions, anxieties and pleasures?' Given his assumption about the nature of male-female relationships in his own and Aboriginal society, it is not surprising that Roheim found women to be primarily absorbed in the task of getting a living. To Roheim women remained disruptive, their interests minor and infantile. Roheim was concerned to validate his rather simplified version of Freud's (1950) thought insofar as he precast women as those without penis, religion and a collective ceremonial life. Roheim's particular version of the psychoanalytic approach, although crude, has provided insights which have been refined and were popular again in the 1970's. Shulmith Firestone (1971:46-72) has argued that Freudianism was a more palatable doctrine than feminism in the Victorian era, because it supported the status quo and the integrity of the family. Women who did not conform were simply deviants. Perhaps one could run the same argument in the 1970's, when feminism poses a threat to male domination and seeks more wide ranging concessions than simply the right to vote.

Perhaps the most sophisticated and well worked out analysis of the adherents to the 'man equals culture' paradigm is the symbolic analysis of Munn (1973). Like Roheim, Munn takes the male-female

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3. Geza Roheim's research for his influential *Australian Totemism* (1925) involved no actual fieldwork, but rather set out to apply the results and insights of clinical psychology to the available anthropological sources. Writing in the shadow of Freud's *Totem and Taboo* (1950), Roheim (1925:15) sought 'savage behaviour in the making'. Roheim's (1925:39) conviction was that woman was the source of conflict in Aboriginal culture.
opposition to be a fundamental starting point in any analysis of Aboriginal society, but Munn's concern is with the socio-cultural order whereas Roheim's is with the individual psyche.

Nancy Munn undertook fieldwork in the 1950's and as a woman certainly had access to the world of women but her focus is the ritual symbolism of men and her valued informants male, because in Munn's (1973:40) analysis, men control the keys to cosmic order. Munn (1973:xviii) describes how she was gradually permitted to witness and learn more of the men's secret ceremonies. Her relationship with women was less problematic than that with the men, and, the reader feels, less rewarding because Munn was primarily concerned to explore issues such as those confronted earlier by Stanner and Durkheim, issues concerning Aboriginal culture.

One of Munn's stated aims in *Walbiri Iconography* (1973:3) is to fill the gap in knowledge and understanding of certain problems in visual art and communication systems through an exploration of the graphic designs of the Walbiri. She begins with the sand stories which accompany the women's telling of mundane stories and moves into an account of dreams and *yawalyu* designs. Having established the basic repertoire of signs, Munn devotes the major part of her description and analysis to male ritual symbolism. Her structural analysis not only explains the manner in which signs are generated but also the relationship between the wider socio-cultural order and the graphic system. Munn (1973:213) ranks Aboriginal women's symbolic systems as less important and simpler because of their apparent lack of multi-vocal symbols. This rests on the anthropological characterization that woman, who is thought to express herself on a more personal plane than do men, is therefore of secondary importance.

Munn's analysis of ritual symbolism and her semiotic approach are clearly in harmony with Stanner's (1965a:233) statement:
The symbols by pointing to, stand for; by standing for, they represent; by representing, they objectify; by objectifying, they betoken ultimate or metaphysical things, which they thus mediate to living men by means of images.

Both Munn and Stanner wish to view Aboriginal religion from within, that is from the standpoint of an Aboriginal male elder; both are primarily concerned with Aboriginal religion at the level of life maintenance, the cosmological, that which infuses man with value. Munn never questions such a view as one which credits Aboriginal man with status at the expense of Aboriginal woman. Without reference to 'the other', to the women and children, the uninitiated, the men would have no one from whom to remain separate and secret and would have to create a different categorical division.

Durkheim's (1915) conceptualization of Aboriginal society as one which embodies the sacred and profane is perhaps the most pervasive and oppressive theory in Australian anthropology. As men are the ones who operate for the social good and women are motivated by self interest, it is a foregone conclusion as to which sex will be the one whose perceptions are enshrined in the religion as legitimate. Warner (1937) must go down in the annals of feminist social science as having given the clearest and most unashamedly blatant reading of the sacred-profane doctrine. Women make little sacred progress through life, he states (1937:5-6). This assumption, albeit in a far more sophisticated formulation, also underscores the work of Munn who takes men to be at the apex of the system. Women are thereby denied the reality and validity of their self assessments of their activities. The ranking pre-exists and male and female domains are thus prejudged vis-à-vis each other. Stanner (1967:217-240) has objected to the application of the sacred-profane in terms of its logical impossibility. Kaberry (1939) has provided ample ethnographic evidence that Warner is wrong
and Catherine Berndt (1950, 1965) has also offered sufficient evidence and argumentation that women have a secret life informed by their dreamtime heritage.

The debates which concern the sacred-profane do not question the content of 'the other', the world of the profane, often synonymous with the world of women. Do women remain perpetually without? How do they perceive this deprivation and relegation to an inferior status? What mechanisms have women developed to sustain themselves? By what tactic do they challenge these restrictions? But instead of answers to those questions, anthropologists have fallen back upon preconceived categories which flow from the sacred-profane dichotomy. Women's activities have been defined as non-social, particularistic, individual and marginal.

Within the 'male equals culture paradigm' women are deprived of a world view of their own and apparently co-operate in the process by internalizing derogatory self images through the socialization process. In support of this contention anthropologists (Berndt 1965: 27; White 1970:40-41) have looked to myth where they note that women were once powerful but lost their power through stupidity, negligence, or theft by men. By what means is not really important for these myths are taken to validate women's low status today. Few are prepared to speculate that these myths are male rationales of male attempts to subjugate women and that they may be neither accepted nor condoned by women who may well have their own mythical charter of values (see White 1975). I do not think I ever heard a woman say she was like someone in the myth who lost their power through stupidity. Desert women today are more likely to claim that their position vis-à-vis men is due to the cruelty and violence of men as we shall see in Chapter seven; they are more likely also to explore their current predicament through myths and to attribute it to loss of land
and the rights which flow from the land.

Paradigm Two: An Anthropology of Women

Those anthropologists who have sought to articulate the female sub-culture have provided ample data as to woman's own vibrant sense of her worth and her contribution to her society. Kaberry (1934), Berndt (1950, 1965) and Goodale (1971) have published lengthy works on Aboriginal women: many other writings within this mode are in the form of articles (Mountford & Harvey 1941; Ellis 1970). These writers have asked what are the rights, activities, values and beliefs of Aboriginal women. They have allowed that male and female are independent yet interdependent.

Working very much within the model of structural-functionalism and instructed by Elkin to 'tackle women through the problems of kinship, totemism social organisation in general and in religious life', Phyllis Kaberry found her answers in those anthropological ways of looking at the world of 'other' cultures which have been developed by men and which place men at the centre of social action.

In her extremely detailed and rich portrait of Aboriginal women, Kaberry (1939) was able to challenge several of Roheim's grosser misconceptions about the function of the women's religious life (ibid.:188-9); to offer a counter to Warner's (1937:5-6) assertion that women make little sacred progress, but remain mainly profane; to contribute to the debate on physiological paternity and indicate that Ashley Montague's case for ignorance of physiological paternity did not apply to women in the Kimberleys; and finally Kaberry (1939: could depict Aboriginal woman as:

a complex social personality, having her own prerogatives, duties, problems, beliefs, rituals, and point of view; making the adjustments that the social, local and totemic organisations require of her, and at the same time exercising a certain freedom of choice in matters affecting her own interests and desires.
Yet, many of Kaberry's most important observations concerning the nature of women's ceremonies have not been fully explored. Kaberry's (1939:221) critically important observation that men represent the uninitiated at women's ceremonies remains buried beneath a pile of studies of secret male cults, totemism and kinship which assume that the male view is the only important perspective.

In the ritual sphere, Kaberry (1939:219ff) documents the parallels between the women's and the men's secret ceremonies. Both have objects and songs which are their exclusive property; both have ceremonies which are tailored to their needs. In this respect Kaberry follows Malinowski in arguing that religion makes the unbearable tolerable. Observing the reactions of each sex to the ceremonies of the other, Kaberry notes the generally profane attitude of the women. The young male initiates are not seen as closer to gods, but as potential lovers. Women, she notes, also take their own ceremonies rather lightheartedly. Ritual is a safety valve for women in this analysis.

In this thesis I argue that women's ritual, like that of the men, contains many levels of expression and participants enjoy different levels of understanding. Kaberry has documented the level and knowledge available to younger women and those of their own country.

Kaberry (1939) is able to show that women's economic, personal and social contributions have been under-estimated, but she does not explore the possibility of male informants and male ethnographers devising mutually intelligible models. She recognizes that female power is not exercised through the same channels as those which men employ, but Kaberry looks to mothering and sexual roles as the context for women's political action. What Kaberry lacks is an analysis of the power differentials of male-female relations as political process.

Kaberry sees women as united, not as a result of their shared uncleanliness but rather as a result of their shared interests and
problems. The demands of the food quest and sexual division of labour throw women together for much of the day. However Kaberry does not explore the importance for women's position vis-à-vis men's of the economic and ritual independence enjoyed by Kimberley women. Like Berndt, Kaberry was working with women who had been off their own country for some time and were living on cattle stations. In my analysis it is this factor which tips the scales in men's favour and which accounts for a strengthening of male control. I return to the interlocking importance of country and ceremonies as a power base for women, in Chapter five.

Catherine Berndt (1950, 1965) has provided external data on women's ceremonies but she has explored also the relations between the sexes in terms of complementarity and a 'two sex model' (Berndt 1965, 1970). For this reason her work spans paradigms two and three. In her Master of Arts thesis Berndt (1950:9) sets out to discuss:

One element of an aboriginal culture pattern in west central Northern Territory, and to indicate something of the effect that alien culture is having upon it. Berndt (1950:10) was able to identify innovatory and destructive forces at work but she admits that her research was incomplete because of the demands of her wider research project on contact. Later articles (1965, 1970) and those written in conjunction with her husband, Professor Ronald Berndt, continue her documentation and interpretation of women's role in Aboriginal society.

Both the 1950 and 1965 articles are an empiricist's delight, but in the latter Catherine Berndt is moving towards a more abstract interpretation of her detailed data. In particular, the section on 'Sex at a Distance' explores the complex relationship between the sexes and men's and women's deep attitudes to their respective ceremonies. Berndt (1965:265) asserts:
The ceremonies emphasize both differences between the two sexes and complementarity; they are dissimilar, but interdependent ... Spatial withdrawal, temporary segregation from members of the opposite sex, is a means of achieving a close end: closer proximity, closer intimacy.

Several suggestions in this essay await more intensive and indepth studies of women's perceptions of their own power to stage ceremonies which exclude men and the implications this has for women's solidarity and personal identity. Like Kaberry's portrait of Aboriginal women, which concludes with questions concerning the nature of the relationship between men's ceremonies and women's ceremonies, so with Berndt. There are questions yet to be asked, answers yet to be given. The lack of models for analysing women's activities is a handicap. The Durkheimian yoke of women's profanity and the structural-functionalist equilibrium model wherein women are wives, mothers and sisters, weigh heavily on female oriented research in Australia.

In Berndt's (1950:25) threefold classification of totemic and religious ceremonies she isolates those in which men and women participate as equals; those in which women participate in a secondary role and which are designed for the society as a whole; and lastly those which are exclusive to women. Only later does Berndt (1965) take up the problem of men as the uninitiated at women's ceremonies. I believe there is another issue here. The women's secret ceremonies are usually discussed as if they benefited women alone, because they are women's business. Berndt (1950:73) gives some weight to this when she notes regretfully that love magic as a personal end is coming to dominate the ceremonies and that love magic, by implication, is a light affair.

The work of Jane Goodale (1971), like that of Berndt, straddles paradigms two and three. Goodale (1971:xxiii) claims that her work is mainly descriptive and limited to the Tiwi but comparison with mainland
Aboriginal studies is enlightening (see Rohrlich-Leavitt et al. 1975). The nature of Goodale's debate with Hart and Pilling (1960) is reminiscent of Kaberry's challenges to Warner and Roheim. Both Kaberry and Goodale went into the field to study women, worked mainly with women informants and stress women's importance, equality in some fields and near equality in others in their depictions of women's role and status.

The influential power of older women is noted by both Goodale and Kaberry (1939:184), who writes:

Together with the old men, they are the repositories of myth, are responsible for handing on tribal law and custom, and are one of the forces which make possible the stability and continuity of tribal life.

Goodale (1971:228) in discussing the domestic groups, outlines the extensive powers of the *taramaguti*, the first and eldest wife:

While a *taramaguti*'s powers appear to be restricted to her co-wives, in actuality they may extend farther because of her control over their children.

Although sons at marriage move out of her domestic group they still treat her with a great deal of respect, Goodale points out.

Like Kaberry, Goodale chose to organize her data within a life cycle framework which, while providing a sympathetic portrait of women's lives, allows one to sidestep certain critical issues concerning the way in which men evaluate women's activities. Goodale however does tackle this problem in her final chapter where she sets out the difference between male and female world views. Tiwi women are unusual in that they are initiated at the same ceremonies as are the males, pass through the same formal procedures and are not excluded at any stage during the ceremony (Goodale 1971:338). But Tiwi women, like the women of Kaberry's study, are substantially independent economically whilst being ritually dependent. In ritual women are not expected to be innovative but they are encouraged to participate (Goodale 1971:338). Although Goodale (1971:332) admits that after even further fieldwork
she did not arrive at a definite answer to the question of whether Tiwi men and women did in fact share identical world values and world views, Goodale (1971:337-8) does state:

Opportunities for males to express their individual qualities, and thereby gain prestige, appear to be more obvious and variable than those granted to females ... Women are not expected to be innovators or creators - they do not even create 'life'.

The women who have published indepth studies of women have been, I suggest, constrained by theoretical perspectives developed to focus on men as the leading and most interesting social actors. There was little impetus from within Australia to develop frameworks within which women were deemed of anthropological interest as social actors. While Elkin (1935) was encouraging women to document the lives of Aboriginal women, male fieldworkers who allowed that 'my wife collected material from the women' were laying the foundations for future research in Australia.

Paradigm Three: Toward a Feminist Perspective

I wish now to return to an issue foreshadowed in the introduction of this section: how may a feminist critique of male-female relations elucidate the role and status of Aboriginal women? As we have seen, within paradigm one women are credited with importance, but not the consciousness of their own power as women. Those within paradigm two have documented women's forceful social personalities and indicated the potential for debate. In so doing they have underlined ethnographic and theoretical problems for paradigm one and the need to search for new ways of looking at 'the problem of women'. However as yet paradigm three remains no more than a series of questions and suggestions. It is not a fully fledged paradigm in the sense in which I am using the term.
Jane Goodale (1971:338) goes to the heart of the problem of assessing women's status when she notes how men arrogate to themselves the right to create spiritual life. Berndt (1965:278), White (1970) and Hamilton (1978a:18) albeit in different ways, also locate the male power base within the ritual realm. Goodale's assessment of male and female values was facilitated by the existence of a public domain in which men and women express the sexual values of their society. But what of desert society where we have no such universe of discourse?

Catherine Berndt (1970:44) has proposed a model of the relation between the sexes in terms of domestic, economic and religious domains within which links of marriage and descent and relations of dominance and authority are articulated. This organizational device allows Berndt to discuss the interpenetration of the spheres of male and female action. Berndt (1970:41, 1979:34) emphasises women's importance as an economic producer and the brakes which women thus may apply to male ritual activity. A question mark remains though in respect to the relationship between male and female ritual domains (Berndt 1970:44).

Isobel White (1970) proposes we see the relations between the sexes in terms of a partnership within which, in principle, men and women may make reciprocal demands upon each other. However, White (1970:21) continues, a double standard is apparent when we examine which rights are enforceable. The superior physical strength of the male and his claims to create physical life ensure that women will be junior partners only. In White's (1970:26) analysis, women accept this position, secure in the knowledge that they alone can create bodily life. Berndt (1965:278) adopts a very similar position when she states women's acceptance of men's control is to some extent a 'conscious accommodation'.

On the basis of an exploration of sexual antagonism as symbolized
in male myths of Central Australia, White (1975) argues that the values celebrated are those of a male dominated society. Men, White (1975:136) contends, see women as sex objects. Turning to her own fieldwork material from South Australia, White (1975:139) proposes that women see men as sexual conquerors to whom they submit, but not without a show of resistance.

While I endorse White's analysis of Central Australian myths as exploring unresolved tensions inherent in male-female relations in Aboriginal society, I suggest that she has articulated a male value system which is not necessarily endorsed by women in Central Australia. Because of the extreme separation of the sexes in everyday life in the desert - a phenomenon which myths also explore (Strehlow 1947:92; White 1975:134) - it is all the more important to examine women's myths before endorsing one sex as controlling a mythological charter for the values of all members of the society. In published accounts from male oriented researchers (White 1975:24), we find conflicting images of male-female power; indeed my own findings confirm this also. White's (1970:24) suggestion of a correlation of degrees of exclusion of women with ecological zone may well be a fruitful line of analysis, but the women's myths I have recorded appear to argue for the extreme flexibility of male-female relations. The tension is not resolved even in the myth.

A further problem I have with the analysis of White and Berndt is that they wish to designate women's contribution to life-maintenance as predominantly physical. Their focus is on women's economic activities and life giving powers. In my analysis we must look to the way in which life-maintenance is construed within the *jukurrpa* and the way in which women have elaborated those values. We then see that women do have a spiritual role in the maintenance of life, land and relationships.
Hamilton's (1978a, 1978b, 1979) detailed ethnographic and theoretical exploration of the relations between the sexes in the eastern Western Desert of South Australia is of particular importance to issues raised by a feminist critique. Hamilton (1978b:7) explores male-female tensions and argues that women's secret ritual life represents a serious challenge to the 'consolidation of male dominance' not because of any 'coherent ideological opposition expressed within it', but because its 'mode of organization provides a structural impediment'.

Underlying the contrasts between the sexes Hamilton (1979:xxi) argues there is:

a well developed organization that can best be understood as a dual society; that is a society characterized by a dual economy, a dual politico-legal system (although one dominates the other); and a dual ideological system, each appropriate and applicable only to the correct sex group; and that these dual systems are integrated at the level of marital and kinship relations by means of reciprocal transactions between their members such that women feed men, and give daughters as sexual partners in exchange for meat. Further, I suggest that these two systems are, in the Western Desert as a whole, in a situation of dynamic disequilibrium whereby the men's domain is intruding into the women's through ritual transformations and through the strengthening of male links between generations as a result of changes in the system of kinship and marriage.

I have quoted at length because Hamilton's fieldwork data and approach are very similar to mine in some ways and quite different in others.\(^4\)

We are both concerned to explore the changing nature of the relations between the sexes from an historical perspective, but we have focussed from rather differing conceptions of time and place upon different institutions and sets of relationships. Hamilton (1978a:15) argues that at the time of the arrival of whites, the whole of the Western Desert cultural area was in a state of transition. She suggests possible

\(^4\) I deliberately avoided reading Hamilton's (1979) Ph.D. thesis until I had completed the first draft of my thesis because, while I realized our data were similar and while I had read shorter articles by Hamilton (1970, 1978a, 1978b), I wished to analyse my data before I compared our findings.
trajectories along which transformations can be traced and concludes that 'patrilineal descent has transcended the previous form of symbolic ancestor based descent' (Hamilton 1979:78-79). I have concentrated on the impact of recent changes on the relations between the sexes in Central Australia. It is in the shattering of the ritually maintained nexus of land as resource and spiritual essence that I have located a shift from female autonomy to male control.

Both Hamilton and I allow that men seek to control women but once again our focus and interpretations are different. I endorse Hamilton's (1979:373) claims that 'women can not become objects for men if they are constituted as subjects for themselves'. However, to infiltrate women's autonomous ritual world in the Western Desert, men need to undermine the mother-daughter tie because endogamous generation moieties organize ritual life. Here then is an important ethnographic difference in our research. As we shall see in Chapter five, ritual organization in Central Australia emphasizes the relation of person to place in terms of two distinct and complementary lines of descent - one through the father's patriline and the other through the mother's patriline. I am therefore examining a different level of integration of male and female worlds from that which Hamilton seeks.

Unlike the women with whom Hamilton (1979:81) worked, Central Australian women have a wide range of ritual items which symbolize their relation to land and jukurrpa. Further the population intensive settlement life style has allowed women to consolidate these relationships and to forge through ritual, new links with other women. In Chapter four I argue that we need to look to the way in which male and female roles are construed within the wider society of Central Australia in order to understand shifts in the locus of power. Then we can argue, as I do in Chapter five, that women's ability to stage closed sex specific rituals constitutes a continuing and potent element in male-
female relations in Central Australia.

CONCLUSION

With regards to men and women and models which purport to represent the relation between the sexes, I have argued that paradigm one is the most consistently worked out and certainly the most popular. It reinforces cherished notions of how the world is constructed. Paradigm two presents a challenge but is easily dismissed by practitioners of paradigm one. Paradigm three, a feminist approach, is the only real contender but in order to work within this framework, one must turn to see the world of male-female anew. As yet we have important questions but not a thorough going framework for the analysis of male-female in Aboriginal society.

Ultimately I have suggested that the 'problem of women' has been a non-issue in Australian anthropology because the development of the discipline precluded any interest in a field which may have raised 'the woman question'. The philosophical underpinnings, notions of sexuality and female stereotypes based on western experience led early fieldworkers to see Aboriginal women as deprived and devalued by their culture. The big issues to which anthropology directed attention were those which cast women as 'the other'. Those women who sought to work with Aboriginal women and to interpret their lives more sensitively have done so within this oppressive framework.

I am suggesting we need to explore the possibility that qualitative changes in the relation between the sexes may have occurred during the past century. We can not begin with a static model of male-female: we know too little of the female half of society to argue for male dominance as an enduring timeless reality. The recognition that male-female relationships are not rigidly fixed and that women may develop their own power base, leads us to an analysis of the power
differentials of male-female in desert society. Feminists have indicated important areas of enquiry but the extreme separation of the sexes in desert society represents an analytic challenge which I suggest is best met by increasing our understanding of women's domain. We need to be clear regarding the nature of woman's contribution to her society, her rights and responsibilities, before we endorse one particular model of male-female as an accurate gloss of the relation between the sexes. In the following chapter I describe the way in which I sought this understanding.
Chapter Three

PERSONAL PERSPECTIVES

INTRODUCTION

Ultimately the unravelling of the layers of the 'problem of women' and agreement on the use of key concepts in the characterization of male-female, is both a challenging intellectual problem defined within the professional framework of academic anthropology and a demanding personal and subjective experience. We are, in a sense, trapped within 'the problem' itself by the very fact of having female gender. In The Feminine Mystique (1963:13) Betty Friedan wrote of this phenomenon as 'the problem that has no name': a decade later Sheila Rowbotham had found a name, Woman's Consciousness, Man's World (1973). I too learnt in that decade that the elusive 'something' was located not only at a personal level, although that was where I most directly experienced it, but also at a socio-political level. In that same decade discussion of women in society moved from the initial attempts to name the elusive phenomenon to an exciting and far reaching challenge to male dominated characterizations of the nature of the world and women's place within it. In the later seventies women have come to focus on cross-cultural and cross-temporal analyses in their search for boundaries to the 'problem of women'. Yet underlying the work of many women in the women's movement there remains a personal commitment and emotional investment in their work that is qualitatively different from most areas of research (except perhaps that of the minorities by a member of the minority, but women are not a minority).
The honesty of the contributors to *Women, Culture, and Society* (Rosaldo & Lamphere 1974) as they spell out their involvement, prejudices and theoretical interests, attests to the permeation of the professional problem by the personal. In seeking ways to understand other women, they write, we seek ways to understand ourselves (Rosaldo & Lamphere 1974:1). Similarly, in Reiter (ed), *Toward an Anthropology of Women* (1975:12), the contributors recognize that the questions they ask are also about themselves. While this is true of much male oriented anthropological research also, women it seems to me have been rather more forthcoming than men in discussing the nature of their fieldwork experience as a subjective experience in which their sex and personality were critical factors. Why is it that women have struggled to come to terms with the experience as women in a way which men have not? Chodorow (1974:43) suggests clues may lie in the personality structure of women and the relationships they may potentially establish with other women.

**Women's Perspectives on Fieldwork**

The unwillingness, or inability, of academic anthropology to come to terms with the personal nature of fieldwork is evident in the various literary forms to which women have turned to explain the experience; for example Margaret Mead in *Letters from the Field 1925-1975* (1977) and Laura Bohannan in a novel *Return to Laughter* (1964) and the nom-de-plume of Elenore Smith Bowen. It is further indicative of the threatening quality of subjectivity, that in fieldwork manuals, one reads of 'culture shock', 'rapport', 'methodologies and strategies' but rarely of the emotional challenge of fieldwork. Freilich (1970) is a good example of the tradition which purports to reduce the fieldwork experience to a quantifiable experience. Turnbull's *Mountain People* (1973) is an exception as he makes his repressed moods and
outsider status abundantly clear to readers.

Peggy Golde (1970:5-7) has argued that women field workers present an ambiguous picture in the field where as innocents in the local culture they require protection but in lifestyle and bearing often they appear more confident and outgoing than their local female counterparts. Their statuses at home as wife and mother and academic may be equally ambiguous. Although in surviving to post-graduate level women academics have imbibed many male notions of how the world is constructed, I suggest ambiguities in women's status at home may alert female anthropologists to certain problems in the field. Conflicts between male informants' and male anthropologists' characterizations of women's role and status and women's own notions of their society are not novel to the woman who has questioned her own ability and capacity to accurately articulate her perceptions and gain acceptance of these as valid. She will not immediately label the lack of fit between normative male statements and female behaviour as 'enigmatic'. Many western women who, having questioned their own socialization within a society (and discipline) which allocated all the spectacular and, by definition, important tasks to men, are sensitized to the plight of other women who may not entirely endorse their menfolk's world view or who may seek power, exercise influence, and wield authority in their own distinctively different way. In finding that the fault lay less in our own lives than in greater social forces, women fieldworkers recognize that the female experience is conditioned by, but not reducable to, the male experience. Thus I am arguing that in addition to the identification of women (be it a first world woman with a third world woman), many women fieldworkers have further special perceptions on women's culture and women's perceptions
of their culture, which derive from their experience as women in their own culture.

However, all is not plain sailing, as the contributors to *Women in the Field* (1970) demonstrate. Many of them were single when they set out to do fieldwork but in terms of age were obviously adult. To the women with whom they work the alien female researcher may create a threat to other women who are married at that age. Their overly bold behaviour may be offensive to women of their own age who defer rather than question. Their interactions with men are often perplexing. The contributors' ability to assess these matters honestly sets their accounts of fieldwork apart from others of the genre. When collating the materials Peggy Golde (1970:2) requested that women 'present in an open, direct, and immediate fashion a variety of models that the student could, as it were, try on for size'. Golde (1970:5) went on to observe that:

There is need for more open speculation and consideration of such issues as: how were my data affected by the kind of person I am, by my sex, or other apparent attributes, and how did my presence alter, positively or negatively, the flux of life under observation?

Laura Bohannan (1964) offers a moving portrait of a young woman fieldworker struggling to establish herself and to survive. Her professors had advised her to 'Always walk in cheap tennis shoes; the water runs out more quickly' and 'You'll need more tables than you think' (Golde 1964:4). This advice was reminiscent of that which I received: 'Don't drown in data' and 'Always carry your own water'. Ill prepared, she began where all was unknown and gradually relearnt the significance of the world for the society in which she was working. Her insights are many:
I had held that knowledge is worth the acquisition. I had willingly accepted the supposition that one cannot learn save by suppressing one's prejudices, or, at the very least, holding them morally in abeyance. The trouble lay in my careless assumption that it would be only my 'prejudices' that were to be involved and never my 'principles' - it had not occurred to me that the distinction between 'prejudice' and 'principle' is itself a matter of prejudice (Bowen 1964: 290-1).

Margaret Mead in *Letters from the Field 1925-1975* (1977) chose a different form through which to explore the mystical experience of fieldwork. She offers glimpses in the letters which span fifty years of the changing nature of anthropology and her role as an anthropologist. In 1925 she wrote of the reprehensible and amazing spectacle of a twenty-three year old girl venturing into the field alone. In 1933 Mead (1977: 141) joyously announced her liberation when she walked into a village free of porters and other encumbrances of what was believed appropriate for the female in the colonial era.

Marie Reay (1970) employs a narrative method which she calls the 'dramaticule' to explain why the women of Borroloola, Northern Territory, put her into the Nangalama subsection. She argues that this allowed her to demonstrate the way in which 'Aboriginal women use the narrative of myth as a model for social action' (Reay 1970:164). Underlying her choice of literary form is the realization that she faced a problem similar to that of Bohannan and Golde: that is, how should one interpret and organize data about women. This is an especially acute issue if one suspects that the details may be trivial. Reay (1970:164) comments, 'Borroloola lacked all the qualities Herbert Read attributed to a good adventure story ... my notes read more like jottings for a landscape with figures than a dynamic account of ongoing events'. Another response to this organizational dilemma which I am suggesting confronts the anthropologist who seeks to understand the
lives of women is to present the data in a life cycle form. Both Kaberry (1939) and Goodale (1971) have used this format.

PERSONAL PERSPECTIVES ON THE PROBLEM

Because fieldwork is a personal experience, because women may establish qualitatively different relationships with women than men do with men, I should spell out my background and experience as a woman in the field. In the first place, I was not a fieldworker dispassionately observing. I was a woman of a certain age with a particular marital status, interests, capacities and resources. My personal attributes certainly shaped my responses to fieldwork and my findings. And so I shall now describe how I came to be located within Aboriginal society, how I learnt about women's culture and how I experienced the conceptual difficulty of translating individual and personal relationships into the abstract categories of anthropological thought.

During the 1960's and 1970's, a time of great development within the women's movement, I completed high school in order to qualify for university entrance.¹ I worked my way through an undergraduate degree as a full time student and mother and began post-graduate training and fieldwork in the Central Australian desert. During these years of tertiary education and fieldwork, I underwent personal readjustments in my relationships with fellow students, my own children and women in the field, which fundamentally altered my own self appraisal. I learned I was not alone in my inability to accept my role as wife and mother simply because I was female.

In my work with women at Warrabri, I am sure that this awareness

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1. Ten years earlier I had left school before I was due to matriculate. I had trained as a primary school teacher and taught in various schools during the 1960's. By the time I went to university I was older than most of my fellow students and had the sole care of my two children.
stood me in good stead. I had already thought through in my own life the ramifications of not conforming with many of the expectations held by my own society about the role of women with small children. I had learnt to distinguish between the way I felt about my work and my role as a mother. This is not to deny that tensions and conflicts existed; they did but when I found myself with women who believed in their own lives as women and saw themselves as full members of their society but were all the while being told they were second class citizens by virtue of being women in the wider society of the Northern Territory, I empathized.

THE FIELD EXPERIENCE

Classification

After an intensive language course in Warlpiri in Alice Springs, I travelled directly to Warrabri to begin my fieldwork. Initially I worked with elderly Warlpiri women for at that stage they were the most vocal and they sought my company. They quickly placed me in the Nakamarra subsection as the younger sister of one of the ritual leaders of the major women's dreamings of Warrabri Warlpiri, the willy wagtail jintipirri, the diamond dove kurlukuku and the seed ngurlu dreamings. From then on I learnt to be a woman as a Nakamarra. Had I been given a different classification this would probably have been

2. For example, as a single parent household, the years of training were financially difficult and filled with resentment and anger at the lack of adequate child care facilities, my inability to attend evening lectures, my restricted access to libraries and the physically demanding task of nursing children through the childhood illnesses while engaged in full time study. The student allowance I received was designed for students who could work during the holidays to offset the allowance during term time. For me the cost of child care far outweighed any income I could earn and anyway the holidays were the only time I had free to spend with my children.

3. For a discussion of this system of social classification see Meggitt (1962:165-187).
equally profitable. I would of course have established different friendships and relationships. During the language course in Alice Springs I had been given a 'skin' (subsection) in order to participate in the activities of the group. I was the only unclassified member of the language class for all the others had already been involved in a settlement where they had been given a 'skin'. I was given the remaining one of the eight 'skins' which did not place me in an avoidance relationship with my teachers. The Warlpiri teachers in the course were within my matriline and my seniors - a 'm.b.' and a 'm.m.b.'.

During the language course as a Nakamarra I learnt kin terms and how to respond to the different members of that group. This was important to my incorporation at Warrabri.

When I arrived at Warrabri late one Sunday afternoon in August 1976, I sought directions from several Warlpiri children. My speech in Warlpiri amused them and they followed us home. Excited children filled the house, touching everything. My daughter immediately made friends with the girls and went off to ride horses but could not get a turn by standing in line. She returned somewhat amazed. My son offered some of his toys to share in a game with several boys. They accepted and did not return them. After several hours the children had shut themselves in a room to avoid being further touched and questioned. Within two hours of arrival I had been advised by the local headmaster not to allow children into my home. Fieldwork had begun. Later that day we walked out into the open area beside our house and sat talking to some older girls. I spoke some Warlpiri but my vocabulary caused much laughter. If I spoke western Warlpiri, I must have a 'skin', they insisted. I explained that in Alice Springs they called me Nakamarra but I was not sure about here. I remembered Marie Reay’s (1970) article on her Borroloola experience where the women had manipulated
her 'skin' classification to justify the staging of certain love rituals. I remembered Annette Hamilton (1970a:12) writing (in her Master of Arts thesis) that her classification at Maningrida in the Northern Territory came from her friendship with fellow anthropologist Les Hiatt, who was already known to people there. I could have claimed knowledge of another person who had a 'skin' and been classified in terms of that, but I decided to wait to see which 'skin' the people would allot me.

The next day when I enrolled my children at the Warrabri school, I asked an Aboriginal woman working there if I could walk into the camps. They had heard I had arrived and gave me a long list of women to see and assured me I'd be welcome. I wandered around, was swept up by an argument between two young mothers trailing toddlers and shielded by a talkative Warlpiri woman. She asked what I was doing. I said I had come to Warrabri to learn about women's lives. Their only recent experience at Warrabri of fieldworkers had been a linguist and I was therefore immediately placed as a linguist. (Ken Hale is a hard act to follow and any future linguist at Warrabri can only excel in the light of my poor example.) I was invited that morning to a women's dance to be held in front of the school in preparation for an Education Department trip to Melbourne and Canberra, which these women were undertaking. 'My mother is boss', my guide explained. I waited in the shade and watched. 'What skin are you?', asked one of the boss ladies. Again I answered that in Alice Springs they called me Nakamarra. 'We'll see', she answered. 'Sit there for now'. I realized that Nakamarra was a fortuitous choice and that I could give a semblance of correct behaviour on the basis of my Alice Springs training. At the end of the week I was declared by these women to be a Nakamarra, the younger sister of the willy wag tail dreaming boss and thereby related to all the Warlpiri camp. Children from then on always called me Nakamarra. My surname sounded like 'Bill' which was kumunjayi (taboo):
thus I was never called Bell and my first name was rendered Diana. Usually I was called Nakamarra and to distinguish me from other Nakamarra I was *kikiji* (the 'long one').

I soon learned that the allocation of a 'skin' is no haphazard business. When in 1977 a linguist came to Warrabri, I introduced him to one of my 'husbands' as a speaker of the Warlmunpa language. This 'husband' adopted the linguist as 'son', that is, as a joint 'owner' of his dreaming, in the same *kirda* pair, but in a junior relationship which allowed tuition to occur. My first teacher had adopted me similarly, that is, as a member of the same *kirda* set, but as a junior, in my case as a sister.

Meggitt (1962:169) states that the subsection system is a 'shorthand' way of classifying people, a summary expression of social relations, but that actual kinship links determine how people interact. This certainly was my experience at Warrabri. The subsection system is conceptually closed in that everyone must have a place within it somewhere, and indeed for many mundane activities to proceed one must know the 'skins' of those present or gross breaches of the moral code may occur. But when precision is required, when it is a matter of land, marriage or ritual, it is actual relationships of kin which are traced. In the past there probably was not the possibility of a disjunction between the kinship system and the subsection system but today, with increased mobility and an influx of outsiders (including whites) there is a tendency to allocate a 'skin' but not grant a position within the kinship system (see Meggitt 1962:185).

That I was incorporated within the kinship system and not merely classified at the general level of subsection was obvious time and time again as men and women traced relationships to me through specific kinship links and not just by the shorthand of subsection affiliation.
wherein certain distinctions cannot be made. For example, men would distinguish between being my 'father' or 'son-in-law' by a second choice marriage of my 'daughter'. A Jupurrula could be my 'father' who should be treated with respect. If my 'daughter' had married a Jupurrula (her second choice after Jungarrayi), I called that man 'son-in-law', and he stood in an avoidance relationship. There is a big difference between calling someone 'son-in-law' (miyimi) and 'father' (kirdana). Both had the same 'skin' but the behaviour expected of a 'son-in-law' was not that expected of a 'father'. I was also taught to distinguish between those I called 'son' and 'father-in-law', both of whom fell within the Jungarrayi subsection. This was reckoned on the basis of seniority so the elderly Jungarrayi I called 'father-in-law', while younger men I called 'son'. There was however, a grey area in which men about twenty-five to thirty-five would make decisions, not entirely unambiguously, as to what I should call them. As their 'mother' they could ask me for food, as a 'daughter-in-law' they could instruct me (see Meggitt 1962:169).

In a similar way women would distinguish between being my 'sister-in-law' and my 'granny' (f.z.m.), both of whom were Napaljarri, but each involved relationships which required different behaviour. My 'mothers-in-law' and 'daughters-in-law' also fell in the same subsection, that of Nangala, but once again I had to learn how to distinguish. From my reading of the literature I had expected my 'sisters-in-law' to be my close friends but all the Napaljarri, my potential 'sisters-in-law', were of the granny generation. Their brothers were men I was allowed to call 'husband' (not f.z.m.b.) but these women, most of whom were older, traced the relationship through actual kinship ties to make me of the grandchild generation. They
were my 'father's sister's mothers', not my 'husband's sisters'. Thus they were the women with whom I, as a member of the Nakamarra-Napurrula kinda pair, called mother of my dreaming. I found my closest friends to be my 'daughters', 'mothers', and 'grannies'. It was my matriline which took the responsibility for teaching me as a woman: my 'sisters' taught me about the appropriate behaviour towards other men. I was always safe when wandering about with my 'sisters' because they shared major avoidance relationships with me.

My 'sisters', 'mothers', 'cousins' and 'aunts' took me hunting, joked with me, scolded me, protected me. They worried on behalf of my children. If any of us were ill, they were anxious lest my parents would think they were bad 'sisters', 'mothers' and 'aunts'. Later some of the women actually met my parents, first on a trip south with a dancing group, and second when my parents visited Warrabri in 1977. Several of the women stayed in my home in Canberra while I was still in the field. From these experiences I was known to have a family and a country which was declared to be too cold, full of 'money houses' and traps such as escalators. From then on these family and home concerns were included in conversations about my well being and position at Warrabri.

My marital position was disposed of somewhat more summarily. Where was my husband, I was asked. I explained I was divorced. How did I support myself, was the next question. On a pension from the government and a scholarship from the university which had sent me here to learn, I explained. (Canberra is known to be the source of all money and this was well understood.) 'In that case', said my older sister,

4. Because in the male line subsections cycle through only two generations, a man and his grandfather share the same classifications and there is a tendency to collapse the generations for distant kin.
'you are just like us'. In the next eighteen months I came to understand the ramifications of my classification as a 'widow' of independent means with children past infancy. I was the correct age and social standing to begin a course of ritual instruction, for I was freed of the immediate and time consuming task of child rearing but I still had to learn how to 'grow up' children and country. I had a daughter approaching marriageable age and a son nearing initiation. But, above all, I was self sufficient, and determined to learn to do things for myself. Women of importance are capable, not dependent, and my driving and mechanical skills were duly admired, as was my sewing ability.

Learning

My initial inability to track animals and my slow progress in learning to distinguish certain tracks caused some annoyance and puzzlement. I was obviously adult but quite useless. I did not know how to make tea, gut a goanna, or distinguish a witchetty bearing bush from any other acacia. My first goanna was a disaster. The hunting dog had already stunned it, I picked it up, swung it against my erect crowbar as I had seen women do many times, and missed. The bloody body of the warm goanna wrapped itself around my leg and I flinched. They were slightly more sympathetic about my desire to photograph the goanna hunt which moves very quickly at times. One woman kindly stuffed the goanna back into the hole so that I could photograph it being dragged out. For me the recognition of my competence in the bush came when one of my 'daughters' accepted without looking the fruit of a solanum which I offered her. We were in an area where both poisonous and edible species of solanum grew.

In the first few months at Warrabri I was free to move about the Warlpiri women's camps. I was accepted as a pupil who could be given
certain ritual and linguistic instruction. But I always felt a little uneasy: it was as if I had been accepted because I was a white woman and the Warlpiri had learnt not to argue with whites. I was a Nakamarra, a widow, a mother, but I was also a white woman. Maybe I was a little like welfare. Finally these women asked me if I would like to view an as yet unopened dreaming. I replied yes, if they wished. I knew already that one paid for such privileges in hair string, bush tucker, or other dreaming knowledge (and more recently in cash) but I was not prepared for the price - a trip to New Zealand. They explained the Education Department had paid for previous dreamings to be opened by financing trips to Canberra, Adelaide and Melbourne and that now they wished me to pay for a trip to New Zealand. I hesitated. I tried to explain I was not that rich. 'Canberra is', they answered. We continued to work together but subtle changes and new interest in the Warlpiri Nakamarra were apparent in the Kaititj camp.

During the early months of establishing myself at Warrabri, a 'niece' of my older Warlpiri 'sister', who lived in the Kaititj camp, had been shyly approaching me and had come hunting with me on several occasions. I had taken some women to Phillip Creek on a nostalgic trip to their former home and, on the request of Kaititj women, I had recorded some love songs. I asked her if she would help translate the tapes and she agreed. After several weeks she quit her job as a house girl for a family on the settlement and began working more and more closely with me. Through her I was invited to attend Kaititj rituals. I was watched very closely. After about a month the women decided I could be told something of their dreamings and still later they told me that in those months of watching and waiting, they had 'won' me from the Warlpiri. Indeed when we visited women in other parts of Central Australia, my Kaititj teachers would relate how they had won
me, taught me and that now I knew the law. Although they were excellent teachers, they overestimated my ability to understand and I feared I would disgrace them. I now realize though that they had effectively shielded me from blundering too dramatically. Learning by mistakes is a dangerous process and not one employed by Aboriginal women. I learnt by imitation and from their direct instruction and encouragement.

I worked with Kaititj women consistently for the remaining fifteen months, but because of their ties to other groups, I also had access to Warramunga and Alyawarra women's rituals. I realize in retrospect that the women with whom I developed the closest emotional ties were all of my matriline or joint owners with me of certain dreamings. I was considered to belong to a particular family and all relationships were reckoned from there. Even when we visited afar it was kinship links which mattered. In the Kaititj camp I worked closely with a Napurrula, a Nampijinpa, a Nungarrayi and a Nakamarra. In the Warlpiri camp I worked with a Nakamarra, a Napurrula, a Nungarrayi, a Napanangka and in the Alyawarra a Nakamarra, a Napanangka and a Purla. I also worked in Tennant Creek on Warramunga dreamings and rituals with several Napurrula and Napanangka. I was friends with many younger women who would visit my place in the evening and sometimes sleep there with their young children and the peer group of my children. But most of my close friends were older women in their fifties and sixties - women who were freed of child caring, who indulged their grandchildren but firmly handed them to mother when they cried. These were the ritual boss ladies who took me under their wing and carefully taught me, gradually at first and rapidly towards the end, to be a woman in their society. As well as these women who were my close teachers there were many other women with whom I chatted during the day, whom I took hunting and helped find lost children.
Obviously for the women with whom I worked there were practical advantages to having me work with them. I had a vehicle which was for women, a privilege they rarely enjoyed at other times. I was literate and prepared to use the telephone and seek assistance for those who wanted it. (This willingness confirmed me as 'welfare' in the eyes of some.) Several Europeans were upset by my activities in this sphere. I threatened their cherished right to control information and services as well as cash flow. I could answer the questions which parties of roving whites asked and thus relieve women of an irksome burden. In every community I know there is a 'front guy' who plays the role of informant to official enquiries and thus protects the older women from continual interruptions and the prying of visitors. The 'front guys' willingly surrendered their task to me while I was around. I could also attend meetings and transmit information back to the women. Often white male officials consulted only with the Aboriginal men, and a select group at that, and relied upon the information spreading outwards. Sometimes it did, but not always. Women often requested that I sit in and listen at meetings. Men also asked me to attend and to relay information back to the women. Some visiting parties welcomed my presence - Central Australian Aboriginal Legal Aid Service and Central Land Council - while others did not - Department of Aboriginal Affairs and Health Department. Several times I was impressed by the Aboriginal male's concern to balance the correct consultation procedures with respected female leaders against his own self image as a 'leader' in the eyes of white male advisers or politicians. Aboriginal men have since explained to me many times over that consultation must be with both men and women and that they cannot speak for their womenfolk. Aboriginal men did not want to appear subservient to their women but they knew they must consult. Often this was difficult to explain to
young male advisers who asked for an answer on the spot. I offered one solution. Men would either ask me to attend or they asked the white officer to get me to question the women. To me they would add, 'It is not my business to speak for women', or 'You tell him he must also ask women. We can't do it. He needs a woman to work with women'. I have since been impressed that it is not just any woman. 'For matters of gravity and importance, do not send us young girls', both men and women have told me (see Bell & Ditton 1980:21).

Obviously I had unequal access to certain groups of women. I knew few women in the opposite matrimoietty. At times when I was asked to fetch someone or assist in a particular activity, the request was made in terms of kin obligations but I also learnt from whom I could ask favours. As time went on I was expected to know without being told. It was in this way that I learned how much is negotiable, a matter of personalities and the tolerance of the other party. Nonetheless I frequently blundered unintentionally and was told to ask someone else for the information. Even my closest friend and most constant teacher would refer me to the person who could most correctly answer my question. It was often not that she didn't know the answer but rather that she did not have the right to answer. Once I had been given the information, I was able to discuss it with her and she would then correct or comment upon the information. On one occasion she sought out the other informant and scolded her for instructing me so poorly.

I realize also that I was taken to a selective range of sites and hunting areas. Each group at Warrabri had favourite and permissible hunting areas and did not want others to know when they had been there. Observing these restrictions may have limited my access but it was also advantageous in my relationship with the Kaititj women. Once they
tested me out by taking me to a site which belonged to certain Nakamarra and Napurrula Kaititj women. I was told not to tell others of its existence, that we had visited it, or of the resources we had exploited there. I complied. When asked later by a Warlpiri woman where I had been, I said, 'Ask Molly, it is her country'.

Women were always careful to differentiate for me that which was for my eyes only and that which was general knowledge. Other information which I was given could be passed on to women like myself in Canberra but was restricted to Aboriginal women who stood outside the ritual land holding and managing group. Canberra women were not considered to be susceptible to the ills which could befall an Aboriginal woman viewing these things. The material which I was told was for my eyes only, I marked with a large cross on the tape or page so that they could see I would know at a glance which material was 'open' and which was 'closed'.

I had thought that living in a house would separate me from women with whom I worked. Instead I found it had many advantages. Many Aboriginal people already lived in houses; my neighbours were Aboriginal. I was within hearing distance of the camp and on a major route from one set of camps to another. My yard became a thoroughfare. The house did give me somewhere safe to store tapes and the women were always particular that I kept them out of sight. It gave me a place where I could sit quietly with one or two women and work on tapes. This was critical. Information which could not be passed on to me in the camp, or even in the women's ritual area, could be given to me in private.

5. Their restrictions do not coincide exactly with the Australian Institute of Aboriginal Studies access and usage codes which are designed to safeguard male secrets. Obviously women's restricted material and men's restricted material cannot be stored in the same room. Aboriginal women visiting the Australian Institute of Aboriginal Studies from Central Australia were horrified to learn that this could happen.
The women were very considerate of my need to learn in a short time what they had acquired in a lifetime, and would make extra comments on tape which I would be able to hear on the play-back and discuss with my helper. The house also provided me with shelter which I could share during the wet season with homeless families and with facilities such as a shower which the women used. I could and did sleep in the camp but the settlement life style offers little privacy and my exit in the evening was a polite way of affording us both space. I did have many visitors, both night and day, but the house offered a place to be alone with my children and during our stay we did not contract any major illnesses which plague most fieldworkers and would have spelt doom for my project.

My home became a women's refuge where women could sleep safe from drunken husbands. I was impressed by the respect men showed for this. They would often wake me in the night and demand to know where was their wife or ask for food, but invariably they were apologetic in the morning. I was considered foolish by other whites for buying into such matters and I was told that any violence which rebounded on my head was my own fault. Men, however, were generally very protective of me and grateful that violence with their wives had been averted the night before. The women who sought refuge in my house recognized my vulnerability and left early in the morning so as not to embarrass me in daylight hours. The older women armed me with fighting sticks and instructed me in their use. They also commented on which women should be given refuge and which left to brawl in public and defend themselves.

During nights of having my house used as a refuge I became very close to a number of women and indirectly to their marriages. Alcohol was invariably the immediate cause of the feared violence but the women also recognized the deeper causes. They talked about their lives
as women on settlements, their past in the bush and asked me about European marriages and male-female relationships. I cherish the memory of these conversations which often extended late into the night and entailed frankness, inquisitiveness and devastating insights from my female companions.

The major drawback with the refuge was that I knew I was leaving and that there would be no other place for some of the women to stay once I left. Several of the teachers and nursing sisters offered protection but their role on the settlement was different from mine. They did not have the time to sit and learn. Women hate to be alone and would be rostered on to keep me 'company' in the evenings. As long as my light burned I was in need of company which they freely gave. This made the writing of notes very difficult. At times I went to bed, feigned sleep, and then began writing when everyone else was asleep. One child observed this habit of mine and from then on it was known that Nakamarra never slept; she wrote in her blue book all night.

After a year of working with these Kaititj women, I was told the reason I was trusted with women's secrets was that I didn't talk to men. Unlike other white women I did not deem it necessary to check out their story with a male for confirmation or correction. I trusted their judgement and only conferred with men when told to do so by the women, which they often did. I was a go-between who could be asked to attend men's meetings and to report back to the women. The men welcomed this because it simplified many transactions for them but as time passed it did become more difficult for me to play this role. I was expected to conform increasingly to the correct rules of behaviour and thus I had to avoid 'sons-in-law'.

Whenever I reported back to the women from a men's meeting, they always discussed whether the decisions were correct or not. A man's
decision was not accepted without comment and on one memorable occasion, after I had attended a council meeting, the women went fuming to the council and insisted on speaking. This subsequent challenge to male authority I had not thought possible. Men had overstepped the mark and attempted to apply restrictions to the women. That their rights had been infringed was left in no doubt by these women, who stated their case, dismissed the objections and triumphantly left the meeting after accusing men of breaches of the law from the non-maintenance of dreaming sites to misrepresenting women's role in the maintenance of the country to me.

To the Kaititj I had been on trial while I was working with the Warlpiri. To whom did I talk? Did I ask men questions? I was dedicated to learning a woman's point of view and had deliberately avoided seeing any films which concerned men's rituals before entering the field. I continued this practice with respect to men's affairs once in the field. I feared that if I knew what the men were doing while the women were elsewhere, my understanding of women's perceptions would be skewed. I would always be in danger of unintentionally disclosing something. Even familiar English words I had learnt, such as 'bullroarer', had to be repressed. I learnt to use only the female indigenous name for such items.

It was much later that several older men approached me, rather hesitantly, and told me that they too had some ritual business which I might see if I wished. They quickly added that they knew the women were teaching me properly but I might like to know that they were also important in the upholding of the law. Women weren't the only ones with the law, they told me. A male suggesting that his activities be recognised stood male dominance on its head. It is interesting that the men did not think that the women would have discussed any men's business with me or that they may have told me that men had no
business (as men tell white male researchers of women's activities).
In a sense they were right because the women had not told me much about
men's business. To begin with, it was outside the scope of the
interest I displayed in women's rituals and they did not consider it
essential to my understanding of women's rituals. I did not feel they
were frightened to discuss men's business. They left that to the men in
the same way that discussion of the dreamings of other women was left
to the correct 'owners' and 'managers' of those dreamings. Furthermore,
their own ritual activity kept them busy most of the day. There was
little time to feel excluded from male rituals. As one woman sympathised
with me one day when I was tired after an all night ritual with one
group and a full day of hunting with another group, 'If Canberra wants
you to learn all this, they should send you a helper'. Here was a
confident group of women secure in the value of their own knowledge
and worth.

The task of learning to be a woman and a Nakamarra was not an
onerous one nor was the life filled with drudgery. It was full of the
support and humour of women who were dedicated to teaching me 'straight'.
I was expected as time passed, to bear more and more of the
responsibility for my actions within the value system of the women.
During the first round of initiations which I attended with my Warlpiri
women friends, we once blundered into the ritual area when the men were
not ready for us. There was a fine to be paid and, although the women
were upset at the transgression, I was explicitly excluded from the
censure. It was a different matter a year later when I was expected
to know where and how I should dance, when I should speak and when I
should retreat. If I transgressed I was called mad or deaf. I should
know. I had been shown. I was no longer an outsider. My decisions as
to who would travel with me or suggestions as to where we would go
became more and more subject to audit by the women who would tell me that as a 'daughter', 'sister', 'aunt', I should do a certain thing.

I had relearned much of what it meant to be a woman. I was not defined in terms of my mothering roles alone although these were important. I was a mother, an adult female, and within limits I could leave the children in someone else's care. Certainly I was constrained by those religious beliefs of women which excluded them from certain activities but then I knew things which men did not know. I had learnt that a woman is not merely called an adult because she has aged: she must also be wise and grow in status and knowledge as she matures. To be old is to be respected but not necessarily deferred to. Old women with no interest in the law have no special ritual place in the community. As women leave behind their mothering roles they move into more prestigious women's activities and play an increasingly important role in community decision making.

All the while I was learning to be an adult woman I was also learning how to relate to men. I established few easy relationships with men of my own age. Boys to the age of about ten would talk openly with me but from that age to about forty, I had few male contacts. It was older men who stood in the relationships of 'father' or 'father-in-law', 'mother's brother', 'husband', 'maternal granny' (m.m.b.) or 'older brother', who most frequently talked to me, offered information and assistance. After a year I realized I hardly knew any of my 'daughters' husbands' (sons-in-law). If they wished to communicate with me they sent messages through their 'wives'. I knew all my 'husbands' and 'maternal grandfathers' with whom I could joke endlessly in language and signs. My 'older brothers' and 'maternal uncles' would advise and help me but I knew few men younger than myself. In fact there was tension and embarrassment if I was in close confinement
with such men. My 'fathers' and 'father-in-law' treated me kindly and gently. In describing the relationship between 'father-in-law' and 'daughter-in-law' an old man said, 'He should love you like a daughter'. That was one of the few times I ever heard 'love' used as the basis of a relationship.

Such tact had been exercised in getting me out of the way of my 'sons-in-law' that when confronted with one in the local magistrate's court one day, I failed to recognize the man by his physical appearance. I did, of course, know his name and flinched when I realized I had stared directly at him in an attempt to recognize this man who averted his gaze from mine. I had always been led to avoid these men by circumnavigation of any area where they might sit or camp or were known to be working. If by accident I approached one along a path, I was gently moved to another path by one of my 'sisters'. My 'husbands' however were continually spoken about in front of me. They were the subject of ribald joking and serious discussion about their merits as husbands. In a very short time I learnt with whom I might joke, with whom I might have affairs, whose name I should not speak aloud and from whom I should seek favours. In all this I was learning to be a Nakamarra. As I began to understand the kinship system so I learnt how to name people. In this way I learned a wide range of behaviours which conditioned my response as a woman to men. I also learned how to reprimand men who behaved improperly.

One thing I noted happened frequently; while men, white and Aboriginal, were around my house the number of women visitors declined, even if it was a man they knew and liked. When men stayed overnight, as did field officers of Central Australian Aboriginal Legal Aid Service or Central Land Council, I was warned not to speak with them about women's business and to put my notes and tapes in a safe place.
I was told that white women tell their husbands of the day's activities but that I must not do this with visiting males. As a widow-pensioner I was deemed independent and any liaison I might have with a man was regarded as temporary, and of no threat to the safety of the women's secrets I knew. Once, when a male ethnomusicologist who was working with men related to Warrabri men, visited with his wife and stayed in my house, I was warned very seriously that I must not tell him anything of women's business nor should I ask about men's business. This advice concerned how I should behave, not what I could know. Women and men do know much of each other's ritual business but it is not for public discussion or acknowledgement. During initiation time I was often alerted to women's precise knowledge of male rituals but it was not for open discussion. The information was transmitted in signs or by merely being present when certain knowledge was accessible in song, dance, designs. Women did not speak of these matters in public and I was warned not to ask questions although I was permitted to attend and therefore to be exposed to a learning situation.

Men exercised great tact in that I was never made to feel that I was excluded because I was a woman. Mostly one is not in the position of having the existence of men's business flouted under one's nose. It is obvious that men are at business either by their absence from camps or the distant sound of their singing but it is not crass. Men's exclusion from women's ceremonies is not crass either. Men avoid all paths which lead by or to the camps of women and not infrequently travel circuitous routes to avoid passing near or stumbling upon women at business. The women, like the men, may make public statements such as the wearing of their ritual designs after the ceremony which announces to men that women were engaged in ritual,
the exact nature of which must remain unknown to the men.

The ritual violence, which I had believed was a major factor in the subordinate position of women, was not what I had expected. It was not blind terror which kept us with our heads down at initiation, it was respect for the law which restricted both men and women. Respect for the law also kept men away from women's camps and ritual business. Both men and women told me it made them 'too sorry' to look. The law is backed by sanctions, the most dramatic of which men are always said to control. Persons who transgress male rules are violently punished by men for it is their ritual which has been violated. Similarly women punish the persons who violate their law. Women's rights to impose sanctions have been severely undermined on settlements as they can no longer visit the sites from which they derive the power to do such things as to send men up in a 'puff of smoke'. Aboriginal men of course are relieved that women no longer have some of these powers and attempt to slough off and joke about those that women have retained. However women may still inflict a lingering illness and death on a man. On settlements men have the opportunity to gang up on women. This was not possible in the past where the family group was smaller. Women I believe are responding to an enhanced male solidarity by increasingly living the jilimi (women's camp) which provides a focus of female support and solidarity (see Chapter five).

I was acutely aware that my presence affected the behaviour of women and men at certain times. During one fight several said they were pleased I was present because it prevented bloodshed, while another wished I wasn't there because blood had to be shed to finish the argument. Blood was not shed at all and the conflict was resolved at the fight which I witnessed. Fights did however create a dilemma for me. Should I interfere or remain an observer? In the case when my
home was used as a refuge I was obviously interfering but it was not resented by men or women. It was a welcome alternative. Fights were most frequently scheduled for weekends when fewer whites were present on the settlement and I took my cue from the women as to whether I should attend and how I should respond. At times I found this very difficult and I still have trouble relating cheerfully to one man who in my view bashed his wife cruelly for an adulterous liaison of hers when he had a long record of affairs.

Almost in the last month of my stay I realized I could have asked many more questions of men and on subsequent visits I have. But I consider it was critical that in those initial eighteen months I was clearly identifiable and identified as a mature widow with children and an interest in women's law. I joked with only my 'husbands' and 'grandfathers'. I reared my children with care but allowed them independence. When I did leave I told the all-male council the date of my departure and explained what would happen to the notes and stories I had written. They asked what had they done wrong that I should leave. Why were they being punished? Could they write to Canberra and ask for me to stay? If not could Canberra send a replacement? Would I leave one of my kids and take one of theirs? - a request from a 'husband'. I promised to return. I have five times but it is not the same. I learn new things, I am told the news from the perspective of several months' absence. It concerns the major births, deaths, marriages and affairs. They ask after my children, my parents and do I have a husband yet?

I have sketched my own perceptions of being female and learning to be a woman in the field. Certainly the transformation was apparent to my close Kaititj friends, one of whom said to me shortly before I
left, 'Nakamarra, when you came here you were young, now you are Nakamarra, my *pimirdi* (f.z.), an old woman'.

CONCLUSION AND COMPARATIVE COMMENT

In presenting my perspectives on the problem of women, I have argued that age, sex, marital status and length of stay in the field are critical factors in access to information. I would like here to briefly comment on how these factors may have affected the fieldwork of other researchers in Australia. Roheim, for instance, must have presented an enigma to the Lurija and Aranda women of the Northern Territory with whom he worked in 1929. Here was a male fieldworker asking questions about sexuality and dreams. He no doubt caused some suspicion to men and puzzlement, if not embarrassment, to women. Within culturally defined limits, sex is discussed in desert society, but in a special joking fashion when men are present or in front of strangers. It is not, therefore, surprising that Roheim learnt much of the profane love magic and little of the emotional management discussed in Chapter seven.

Roheim admits he was forced to work with younger women because the older women would not discuss song words with him. He therefore learnt little of the religious significance of women's ceremonies and concluded that women were without support from the supernatural world. On one occasion Roheim (1933:218) was hushed by an older woman of whom he asked elucidation of song words with, 'Who were the *mamu* (devils) who sang you this? They must have been mad'. Older women are the only ones with access to the deeper meanings: the younger women know little. It is as if a male ethnographer only sought information from uninitiated males.

Roheim's bias as an obstacle to his knowledge of the role of women is perhaps the easiest to isolate because he was quite open about
informants. The bias in others is at times harder to document. As a young single woman, Kaberry would have been told about those things which were appropriate for her age (if the comments of my older friends are any indication). She moved from community to community in an area where the recent dislocation had not yet allowed women time to adjust to different country. (The ramifying effects of residential changes on women's dreamings are discussed in Chapter Five). Similarly, Jane Goodale was a single female. She admits that at first she was an enigma to the women who had to teach her basic skills. Only finally did they comment that she was no longer like a white woman (1971:xvii-xviii).

Catherine Berndt was the wife of a fellow researcher who was interested in men's business. Once again, if the women with whom I worked were any indication, Catherine Berndt may not have been told at first of things which it was improper for a man to know. Further she moved from community to community and did not have the opportunity in her early research to establish deep relationships. Certainly in the years of her research, Aboriginal women must have changed their perception of her as she matured. Yolanda Murphy and Robert Murphy, in Women of the Forest (1974), discuss how Mundurucu Indian women's perception of them changed and matured from the time when they were fresh graduate students to when they were mature and middle aged. They note how their perceptions changed with age as they matured. They were perceived differently as they aged, and people got to know them more intimately. Surely we must allow the same for the women with whom we work.  

6. Jane Goodale, in discussing her return to Tiwi after a lengthy absence, also speculated on this complex of changes (June 24 1980. Seminar Australian Institute of Aboriginal Studies).
I have suggested that the nature of one's project is also important to how fieldworkers are classified by those with whom one is working and to the kind of access one is allowed to desired information. All questions will be contextualised by the persons one is with and if one consistently asks about ritual matters, answers will be slanted to accommodate the question. If one asks about food one will be told about food. I asked about women's rituals and learnt much. In order to understand the answers I turned to a framework within which I could analyze the levels of reality I found women to be representing.
Chapter Four

CHANGE AND CONTINUITY

INTRODUCTION

In the last three chapters I have argued that the obstacles preventing us hearing women are multifold. Personal and professional perspectives on the problem of women have converged in the case of Aboriginal women to deny them a voice. But it is not merely a corrective to male bias which is needed. We must seek a paradigm which will generate questions and accommodate answers concerning women's independence and autonomy in a sex-segregated society. In this chapter I turn to the nature of forces which have shaped the contemporary scene, to the constraints on the lives of women and to the ways in which they have fared in a century of change. I do so in order to situate my analysis of women's rituals within a framework which allows for the dynamic interweaving of sexual politics and social change.

Whereas in the last chapters I explained my personal perspective as a link between the literature on women and my fieldwork experience, here I look to the past as a force in the present, to the relevance of yesterday for today. Since I am arguing that in ritual women articulate their models of social reality, it is necessary to see the stuff out of which the models are made and to examine the nature of the world that women are representing in ritual. I have isolated three critical dimensions of Central Australian Aboriginal women's world: the past, the present and the jukurrpa. It is in the latter that the past and present are interwoven and women's insistence on the continuity of their world in the face of change is rendered intelligible.
Change, Continuity and Dimensions of Time

My aim here is to provide the opportunity for the women of Warrabri to live historically. This is necessary for their world today is a dynamic blend of the old and the new. My exploration of the events of the past century provides a context for the ritual action of today and a perspective on the world in which the ritual occurs. Women's rituals are a living form, underwritten by the mythology encoded in the all pervasive dreamtime law on which it draws but given form in ritual action in the contemporary reality of Warrabri. On the one hand, the *jukurrpa* maps out themes of rituals, dictates the structure and governs the behavioural interactions of living persons. But, on the other hand, we have only the here and now (in this case Warrabri in the late 1970's) to provide the raw materials for the rituals in which the law is made known and thus transmitted to others.

While living Aborigines, as the descendants of the dreamtime, assert that the law never changes, it is obvious that it does change and is changing. Although inherent in the dogma of dreaming is a structural potential for change, there is consensus as to how things ought to be done, that is, what the law states and has always stated. It is possible, for example, to map out the extent of land for which any group is said to be responsible and to know that there is a high degree of correlation with the past - at least if one deals with the last century where there is comparative material from Tindale (1974), land claim documents (Hagen & Rowell, 1978, 1979; Wafer & Wafer 1980) and my own genealogical research - but in terms of what actually happens and is happening there will be deviations. Again with reference to land, in certain instances people may hold land in trust for another group. They will however be able to state for whom it is they hold it.
Ultimately, 'the holders' may become 'the owners' but that appears to take several generations to be deemed legitimate and also appears to be a response to dramatic population shifts.¹

The twin notions of an ideologically fixed universe and a structural potential for change through actual behaviour, are not irreconcilable but rather allow one to maintain a secure position known to be underpinned by the law, while having room to respond within particular constraints. Stanner (1966:168) puts it nicely when he says 'They attained stability but avoided inertia'. It is possible to establish how life ought to be lived and to be relatively certain that in these values there is continuity with the past. It is somewhat more difficult to determine what is or was the actual behavioural content of the law when applied and acted out in any given situation, unless one has actual documented observations.

In the detailed exploration of the past, present and jukurrpa that is presented in this chapter, I am marshalling evidence and argument in support of my assertion that the relations between the sexes in Central Australia today is subject to complex interweaving of many factors, past and present. I am also continuing to explore the conceptual level of the 'problem of women' of Chapter two, that is how we may most appropriately assess and characterize women's role and status in a sex segregated society. Hopefully I am thus proceeding

¹. For example, Meggitt (1962:288) noted that the Hooker Creek Warlpiri were extending the dreaming tracks to validate their recent resettlement at Hooker Creek in the 1950's. Similarly at Warrabri I noted that the Warlpiri had recently found evidence of the travels of malikijarra (two dog dreaming) crossing the Stuart Highway south of the Singleton turn-off. Prior to that their travels were only known to extend to the west of the bitumen through the sandhill country. At Warrabri these Warlpiri dogs are said to meet with the Alyawarra/Kaititj dogs. Several travel on with the local dogs, others are repulsed at the smell of the urine of the local dogs and still others remain in the district.
further in my search for a framework within which to make sense of the data I culled on women's independent ritual life. I have thought it necessary to treat these three dimensions of time in one chapter in order to underline the essential unity which they constitute. In the conclusion of this chapter I return to the intertwining of sexual politics and social change in the lives of Warrabri women.

DIMENSION ONE: THE PAST

Sources

Because women are absent from most of the reports of early explorers, observers and ethnographers, sources have presented a major problem. I found that in the anthropological literature, based on fieldwork with people long settled, women appeared briefly as wives, sisters and mothers, but not as full members of their society or as social personalities in their own right. For reasons suggested in Chapter two, Aboriginal women may have been observed and unreported, but I think there is also another reason. In the desert the first documented contacts were male to male. Following quickly on the heels of the explorers, came the overland telegraph line and stations at Barrow Creek and Tennant Creek. These were exclusively male domains. Only when Aborigines settled on cattle stations, missions and in towns were the lives of women subject to comment and by then Aboriginal men had learnt that their rights in marriage contracts were not appreciated by white men. In accommodating whites I suggest the relationship between the sexes shifted from one of independence and interdependence to more rigid male control. All this was before Aboriginal society was systematically studied by anthropologists.
In speaking to women today about the past, I found that they did not consider themselves to have been invisible. In their opinion their role had been significant. In the observations of two men, Gillen and Chewings, who lived and worked in Central Australia for several decades around the turn of the century, I found supporting evidence for women's importance and independence.

Gillen's (1855-1912) relationship with the Aborigines was based on trust, friendship and mutual respect. His work experience and observations in Central Australia from 1876 onwards as telegraph master, special magistrate and sub-protector of Aborigines proved invaluable to visiting anthropologists such as Spencer and Stirling. In my own research I have found Gillen's diary of 1901-2 to be of greater use than the analyses which were the result of his collaboration with Spencer (Spencer & Gillen 1899, 1927). Gillen records everything which comes before him, including women. They appear as informants on economy and rituals (Gillen 1901-2:107,110,112,113), as hunters (ibid.:106), as holders of mythology (ibid.:153), as social personalities (ibid.:149), as the subject of his pen and ink portraits (ibid.:127). Working with Kaititj and Anmatjirra at Barrow Creek, Gillen was careful to allow that the past quarter century had left its mark. Unlike many later anthropological analyses of Aboriginal life, Gillen records the life he sees. His informants wear clothes, eat sweets and ride horses.

Another early observer I found useful was Charles Chewings (1859-1937) who first visited the Centre in 1881 and continued in close contact with Aborigines for many years. He played various roles - camel trader,

2. For the Aranda he was a special white man because he had brought trooper Wiltshire to trial for the murder of an Aborigine and although acquitted Wiltshire did not return to Central Australia.
geologist, mining consultant, explorer, pastoralist (see Mincham 1976:634-4). Like Gillen, he set down his observations in one format and his analyses in another. Chewings' interest in Aborigines is apparent in the records of his 1909 survey of a stock route from central Mt. Stuart to the Victoria River (Chewings 1930) and his later more sensational *Back in the Stone Age* (1936), which contains useful anecdotal material. Chewings' familiarity with Aboriginal material is also not inconsiderable; he translated C.F.T. Strehlow's works into English. But like Spencer and Gillen, he is seeking to validate an evolutionary model of marriage forms from data on Aborigines. His material must be evaluated in that light.

Historians such as Hartwig (1965) and Read (1978) have gone to some lengths to include Aborigines as people with feelings, motives and life choices. Hartwig's (1965) history of the encroachment of white settlement into Central Australia from 1860 to 1894 is an excellent source but only covers the early period and says little of women. This is a reflection of his sources as much as his biases.

In addition to these historical sources there are various ethnographic descriptions of peoples closely related to Warrabri residents but women are rarely the focus of the study. Of the four language groups resident at Warrabri, the lives of Warlpiri are the best documented (Meggitt 1962, 1972; Munn 1973; Peterson 1969, 1970a; Cawte 1974) but the focus is more on the western Warlpiri of Yuendumu and Hooker Creek, than the eastern Warlpiri of Warrabri.

Meggitt's *Desert People* (1962) deals with the Warlpiri eighty years after the building of the telegraph lines, fifty years after the gold mining on the Tanami and twenty-five years after the Coniston massacre. His history chapter and postscript provide a background and evidence of change in the lives of Warlpiri, who at the time of his
study were living on large government settlements. Meggitt's careful documentation of the social structure stands as a tribute to his fieldwork and the ability of Warlpiri to articulate their structural principles, but it tells us little of the lives of women or the way in which settlements have affected women. There are however clues in Meggitt (1962) and Munn (1973) which indicate the nature of the changes and adjustments in women's rituals which settlement life induces. I return to these in Chapter five.

The desert people of the 1950's are not snap frozen replicas of a century ago, nor in 1980 can we expect to replicate these studies. The social structure as mapped by Meggitt in the 1950's is definitely remarkably resilient and persistent, but it is the negotiable bases of relationships which I sought to probe. Much of Meggitt's case material shows that women are exercising rights, but he develops his analysis from a male perspective and emphasizes male interests.

The Aranda of Central Australia are one of the best known of Australian Aboriginal groups (see Spencer & Gillen 1899, 1927; Roheim 1933; Pink 1936; Strehlow 1947, 1965, 1970, 1971; Yallop 1969, 1977; O'Connell 1977a and Denham 1978). Like the Warramunga, they were directly in the path of development from the south to the north, ideal subjects for Spencer's investigations. They became Strehlow's (1947) religious men and Roheim's Children of the Desert (1974). Yet, as Meggitt (1962:xi-xii) complains, we know little of many aspects of their lives in spite of the long period of contact and the number of observers. The Aranda of Warrabri are northern Kaititj and Alyawarra speakers who have been little studied. They are too far north to be in the Central region and too far south for survey from Arnhem Land. They were not in the path of the telegraph lines as were the Kaititj of Barrow Creek, nor subject to pastoralists' usurpation of their lands as
were the Alyawarra in the Frew River area. The Warramunga to the north were studied by Spencer and Gillen (1904) and by Stanner in the mid 1930's. In his report Stanner (1934:4) comments that 'the Warramunga are now decadent and few'.

The focus of these anthropological sources is not on peoples now resident at Warrabri; indeed few fieldworkers have undertaken research at Warrabri or with closely related peoples. Meggitt (1965) visited Warrabri and has documented shifts in marriage patterns but other fieldworkers have been linguists (Hale 1974; Reece 1975; Koch 1976), a prehistorian (O'Connell 1977a) and an ethnomusecologist (Moyle 1980).

One emerging source of as yet untouched potential is that of Aboriginal oral history being recorded in the preparation and hearing of land claims in Central Australia under the Aboriginal Land Rights Act (N.T.) 1976. Central Land Council (Alice Springs), in documenting claims, has undertaken detailed research in certain districts and Aborigines as witnesses in court have documented hitherto unrecorded aspects of their history. I have found access to these sources to be invaluable. They include the claims books prepared by Central Land Council (see Hagen & Rowell 1978, 1979; Peterson et al. 1979; Wafer & Wafer 1980), the transcripts of the hearings of land claims (see transcript of evidence 1980) and the reports of the Aboriginal Land Commissioner (Toohey 1979a, 1979b, 1980). The bilingual programmes in several schools in Central Australia are also providing material which throws new light on Aboriginal perceptions of the past and events which have gone unrecorded in histories of white settlement of the country.

In the course of fieldwork I collected much life history material which has further illuminated many of the other written sources.
Alyawarra women give evidence in the Utopia Land Claim 1979
NORTHERN TERRITORY: 'COUNTRIES'

Darwin

WARLPIRI

WARRAMUNGA

Dixon Creek

Davenport Ranges

Devils Marbles

KAITITJ

Taylar Crossing

ALYAWARRA

Harrison River

Stirling Swamp

Sandoor River

ARANDA

- Alice Springs.
Comparative material from other anthropologists working with women in situations of rapid change have also been useful (Leacock 1978).

'Countries'

As far as we can know prior to a white Australian presence in Central Australia, Aborigines of these desert regions (such as the Kaititj, Alyawarra, Warlpiri and Warramunga) lived for most of the year in small kin based groups which moved across vast tracts of land in rhythm with the seasons, the availability of water and food and in accordance with ceremonial obligations (Chewing 1930:326; Gould 1969; Tindale 1974:1-30). The population density was low and large gatherings could only be sustained in times of plenty (Meggitt 1962:49-50; O'Connell 1979:3). Access to the country of one's forebears provided substance for the dreamtime experience and an identity based on the continuity of life and values which were constantly reaffirmed in ritual and in use of the land. Economic exploitation of the land, in the gaining of a living, and its spiritual maintenance were not separate aspects of people's relationships to country, but rather each validated and underwrote the other. Land was a living resource from which people drew sustenance - both physical and spiritual. As Meggitt (1972:80) says, 'The environment was both icon and material resource'. The nexus between the two was shattered through the alienation of land by mining and pastoralists' interests. Women were particularly affected as they drew directly on the land for their sustenance.

Since the 1950's the lives of the Kaititj, Alyawarra, Warlpiri and Warramunga have become increasingly intertwined but each has retained a clear notion of their distinctive heritage. Each has followed a distinctive path, interacted with white Australians in different contexts and in varying degrees of intensity and come from markedly different 'country'. As a first step in understanding the
complex of values which underpin and guide the lives of Warrabri residents, I shall briefly map out the 'countries' of each group, the nature of white Australian activity in the area and the Aboriginal response.

Kaititj country extends from around Barrow Creek and the Stirling Swamp area to north of the Devil's Marbles. Warrabri Kaititj hold dreamings for these areas but focus on the northern area around the Devil's Marbles. It is in this area, in the wolfram mines of Wauchope and pastoral properties at Stirling and Greenwood, that these women first came into contact with whites.

The Alyawarra and Kaititj of Warrabri have much in common: both are members of the Aranda language family (see Hale 1962; Yallop 1977), both share a similar system of land tenure (see Chapter five and Hagen & Rowell 1978:8) and similar initiation and bestowal practices (see Chapter nine). They also share many experiences of white Australian intrusion into their country. Alyawarra country centres around the Sandover River to the south, but extends as far north as the Davenport Ranges (Yallop 1969; O'Connell 1977a:120; Bell 1978; Hagen & Rowell 1978:1). Northern Alyawarra have married Warramunga and, like the Kaititj and Alyawarra, share a complex of relationships based on their ritual maintenance of land (see Stanner 1934:4). Alyawarra women experienced white Australian society on the cattle stations of Elkedra, Amaroo, Utopia, Kurundi, Epenarra, Frew River and in the wolfram mines of Hatches Creek.

3. I began with Tindale's map (1974) and compared this with data forthcoming in land claims and my own research. I am sketching the land for which one is said to be responsible - this may be quite different from the land in which one actually lives and uses. At the level of responsibility there is a high degree of correlation between Tindale and contemporary sources. I have avoided the use of the term 'territory' as it is apt to mislead and used instead the Aboriginal English term 'country'. 
The Warlpiri of Warrabri are mainly from the Lander River area, people who fled the massacres in the 1920's to either Tennant Creek or Wave Hill and were later drawn into the mission at Phillip Creek and thence to Warrabri (see Meggitt 1962:24-31). Their contact has been within the context of pastoralism, mining, towns, missions and reserves - the dead hand of institutionalization has fallen more heavily upon the Warlpiri than the Kaititj and Alyawarra. In the Lander and Hanson River areas Kaititj and Warlpiri have intermarried and there are jointly maintained countries in that area (see Chewings 1930:316; Nash 1980:36-37; Meggitt 1962:39; Wafer & Wafer 1980:3).

The Warramunga have the longest and possibly the most disruptive history of all as their country around Tennant Creek was settled in the 1890's and their land quickly alienated by mining and pastoral interests.

Each of the 'countries' outlined above lies in a different ecological zone. The Kaititj and Alyawarra who enjoy relatively favourable environments for Central Australia, have smallish named 'countries', a tight family structure and rituals which stress the exclusive and closed nature of their spiritual world. The Warlpiri and Warramunga on the other hand, have less well watered country, few ranges and more sand hills. Their 'countries' are ill defined, sprawling tracts of land, cross-cut by dreaming tracks; their family structures and rituals stress the inclusive and incorporative nature of their relationship to the spiritual realm. Although differences exist in land tenure systems, social organization and rituals, these groups are united in their common belief in the power of the law laid down in the jukurrpa.

Women's status and the relation between the sexes must be evaluated in view of the different experiences of these peoples in the
past century as well as the differences amongst Aranda (Kaititj and Alyawarra), Warlpiri and Warramunga. Each group has its own stereotype, which, as we shall see, is a reflection of events of the past century. Kaititj have become known to whites as 'treacherous bastards' and according to Meggitt (1962:39) are regarded by Warlpiri as 'a sullen, suspicious and hostile people'. Warlpiri, on the other hand, are deemed by the Kaititj to be 'hungry buggars; hungry for land, for young men, for sex'.

**Ethnographic Base**

Were it possible to describe with any certainty the ethnographic scene of a century before, it might be possible to untangle outside forces from those of the *jukurrpa*. It is not possible to establish an ethnographic base and to attempt to do so would be a wrong headed endeavour. I have taken ritual to be a living, adaptable, ever changing form and even if we could ascertain the exact nature of women's role a century ago, it could not be used as a fixed reference, for it, too, would have to be viewed in the context of the forces at work at the time. Meggitt (1962:168), for instance, has argued for the introduction of new social forms such as the section system as recently as one hundred years ago. Spencer and Gillen (1899:426, 441-3) also suggest that women's role and status has changed with reference to access to certain rituals. Hamilton (1978a:17) has argued that at the time of contact the land tenure system of the peoples of the Eastern section of the Western Desert was undergoing a change. In each of these instances the changes would have impinged upon women's status and world view.

While change is not unknown to desert people, the changes of the last century are qualitatively different from those documented by Meggitt, Spencer and Gillen, and Hamilton because Aborigines have little feeling of control or ways of evolving control over these new forces.
I have already outlined the way in which outsiders must be classified within the local Aboriginal social system, in order to be able to work and live in an Aboriginal community. In this chapter I argue that Warrabri people are gradually, if partially, accommodating certain aspects of white Australian health, education and law enforcement systems within their own world view and thus, to a limited extent, bringing them under their control.

Women's Rights and Responsibilities

In my interpretative analyses of events of the past century, I am not writing a history of the peoples now resident at Warrabri, nor of the progress of white Australian settlement in Central Australia. Rather, I am exploring the context within which the shift was effected from a hunter-gatherer mode of subsistence to a sedentary lifestyle; from small mobile kin based groups to large population intensive government settlements; from independence to dependence; from autonomy to control. I am seeking answers to my questions concerning the nature of the changes in woman's worlds and hence in her role and status.

Given the nature of the sources and the flexibility of gender values, much must remain conjecture. We can be certain that the division of labour between the sexes entailed, as it does today, a marked segregation of the sexes in daily and ritual activities, but what does this mean? Too often it is assumed that if women are involved in child rearing and other domestic duties, their role and status can automatically be known. Women's spiritual life remains unexplored. Strehlow (1971:647) laments the passing of women's secret ceremonies and speculates about the insights we might have gained. Gillen's photographs (Chewings 1936:120) indicate that women were engaged in ritual in 1901-2, but in accordance with the values of his
day he classifies them as 'magic', not religion. Once again we lose the opportunity to explore woman's domain.

Women are rarely mentioned in the literature as owners of country in their own right or as decision making individuals; they appear as wives and mothers, their relationship to the *jukurrpa* always mediated through another (Roheim 1933; Munn 1973:14). Yet I believe women enjoyed direct access to the *jukurrpa* from which flowed rights and responsibilities in land, a power base as an independent economic producer and a high degree of control over their own lives in marriage, residence, reproduction, production, sexuality. In the light of women's insistence that they were and still are full members of their society, let us look again at the records of such men as Chewings and Gillen and at the ethnographies of Spencer and Gillen. I suggest that the portrait of women's lives which emerges reveals a persistent tradition of women's rights and responsibilities in land and of autonomy in decision making.

Attachment to country, a critical dimension of identity for desert people, is expressed in a number of forms. As women move through the country in search of food they sing of the travels of the ancestors who gave the land form, shape and meaning; they cull, prepare and share food according to the law which those ancestors made known in the dreamtime; they explain to their children the significance of the land and its bounty; they impress upon children the integration of person, place and the dreamtime heritage as one living complex whole. This role of mother, gatherer and provider is one in which women proudly state their contribution to nourishing their society. Much of women's day was caught up with child care and food gathering but this needs to be seen as a pleasurable activity rather than the eking out of a living in constant drudgery.
The sharing of activities such as child care, food collection and preparation with other women, provided the basis for later happy conversations (Roheim 1933:207) and I would suggest a basis for female solidarity (Kaberry 1939:183). Strong ties with other women such as co-wives, who may well have also been sisters, actual or classificatory (Meggitt 1962:109) were more enduring than the tie to an older promised husband. The idea of men exploiting the potential jealousies of co-wives is, in my experience, a male myth. The relationship between co-wives often precedes and post-dates that of the marriage (Bell 1980a:253). Men assiduously avoid fights between women because they are the affairs of women, but also, in my experience, because in these fights women enumerate the shortcomings of the spouses and lovers in a way that men prefer not to hear. There is some support for this in Gillen's (1901-2:149) and Chewings' (1936:92) descriptions of fights and in Meggitt's (1962:110) recounting of women's taunts.

In the past, as today, during the day men socialized with men and women with women (Gillen 1901-2:199; Chewings 1936:80,88). In the evenings the men and women came together to share the news and produce of the day's activities. In this ebb and flow of daily life the independence and interdependence of the sexes was apparent. Women brought with them the knowledge of their importance and a sense of their own worth, a dignity based on their contribution to the society. There was no need for women to further mark their independence in a retreat to or display of sexual solidarity, as is the case today, for in living they realized their independence.

With their children and female relatives, women hunted in the country of their ancestors. Their bounty included a wide range of foods from roots, seeds, berries, honey ants, to lizards, goannas,
snakes, rats, frogs, birds, crabs, mussels, fish and larger game such as echidna, cat and perentie. Women also exploited their country for ochre, resin, spinifex wax, bark and timber. Hunting parties achieved other ends, the most important being an affirmation of women's relationship to the land - a relationship which embraced rights and responsibilities.

While it is allowed that women's contribution to the diet was considerable, up to eighty per cent\(^4\) in desert regions, this datum is none the less frequently belittled. The male catch, the meat, is said to be of a higher cultural value because it is through the distribution of meat that men establish and maintain political alliances. This evaluation of the relative contribution of the sexes needs rethinking in the light of my data from Warrabri women. Firstly, Warrabri is the wrong country for large game: kangaroo are rarely caught. Men therefore have little meat to distribute. Further, at Warrabri as on most settlements, it is the women who do the shopping, including meat, and it is theirs to distribute. I do not think this is such a break with the past as it may at first appear. Women, today, as in the past, catch large game, which in addition to grubs, goanna, eggs and so forth, constitutes the major regular protein intake (see also Hamilton 1979:212ff). These, as we shall see, are distributed (like the store bought meat) by women according to kinship obligations and to parties with whom women wish to establish and maintain relationships. Secondly, in addition to woman's control over her important contribution to the survival of the group, we need also

\[\text{4. The various estimates of the relative contribution of the sexes to the diet were all calculated after cattle had grazed on the land and rations had been introduced. This renders the reliability marginal. However all indicate the critical importance of women to the physical survival of the group (Hiatt 1970:2-3).}\]
to reconsider diet from an Aboriginal point of view. Meggitt (1962: 307) for instance records that men, who at certain periods of ritual may eat only meat, complain of their hunger and desire for a balanced diet which includes vegetables. Thus I am arguing that not only was women's contribution important in terms of calorific and protein intake, but it was evaluated as such.

In organising a hunting party, women decide who will accompany them, that is, with whom they will share much of their catch and the experience of the activity; where they will hunt according to information discussed amongst women and what they will hunt in terms of knowledge and the country, the seasons, the dreamings of the area. Much food is consumed as culled; much eaten in half way camps before returning home (see Hamilton 1978b:8-9). Women distribute the food they collect but they also distribute the food men collect. I have seen men bring home and distribute a bush turkey (bustard) in the evening and then in the morning the women undertake a secondary distribution. Through these various distributions women emphasise the bonds they wish to see cemented. These include the relations between ritual groups and marriage lines.

While women's access to food and rights to distribute it mark a degree of independence for women and a dependence of men on the produce of women, the community's reliance on women's contribution has another facet. Because women are the economic mainstay, they must camp near sites where they have access to food resources. In this

5. Slocum (1975:46) and Tanner and Zihlman (1976:585-608), in their reappraisals of the role of woman the gatherer, argue for the social importance of women's activities in the evolution of our species. Certainly men's hunting parties in the desert are usually small and involve a minimum of communication and shared action, whereas women's hunting parties are the context within which children first learn about country. See also Hamilton (1979:215).
way women determine camp location and movements. Hamilton (1978b:5) and Tindale (1972:245) comment on the way in which women, by claiming that there is no more food to be found, control camp location and apply limits to the time men may spend in ritual. This is only one of women's several influential activities in a complex web of checks and balances but it does serve to underscore the point that women were in charge of important decisions concerning not only their lives but also those of the men and thus the whole group.

The patterns of hunting I observed would differ from those of the past, when women lived in small bands. Obviously men and women would have spent some time moving from place to place together; none-the-less the way in which women gather, consume their catch, explain the country to their children and celebrate the bounty of country, is not new. Nor is the idea that what women find is women's to bestow. Men have often commented to me that if they wanted a share they should go along themselves. Women will bring back food for a husband but their primary concern in hunting is to feed themselves and those with whom they are camped.

Women were responsible for the care of children to the age of about five when, if not already displaced by a younger sibling, they were weaned. Thus it was at the mother's knee that children learnt first of the importance of country and the law, it was women who mapped out for children the knowable world of kinship, land and dreaming. Fathers regard their children very affectionately and indeed play with and handle children often, but a crying child is the responsibility of its mother. The role of 'growing up' children extends for women to their adult sons and daughters: at initiation women continue to assert their nurturance role and to base these claims on their rights in land.

Women, as we shall see in Chapter five, trace their relationship
to the ancestral heroes and thus to the land, in a number of ways. Through mother, father, place of birth, conception and residence flow qualitatively different rights and responsibilities. In the comprehensive all-embracing nature of the web of relationships of land and people these rights and responsibilities are united with those of the men. It is necessary to look to the politics of kinship and to the way in which relationships are based on land, to understand this extremely flexible system. Like the Warlpiri men of Meggitt's (1962:67) study, women also define country (and relationships) in a way best suited to their purpose. This is possible because the land tenure system is not one of conical clans but of interlocking, overlapping groups recruited according to diverse criteria. Evidence for this fluidity and the nature of the checks and balances is, I believe, apparent in the survival of knowledge in areas where massacres occurred and whole patriline were killed. Giving evidence in the Willowra land claim, Johnny Martin (transcript of evidence 1980:179A) recalled the 1928 massacres: 'I saw my father, grandfather, all his brothers killed', he said. This must have amounted to the near extinction of the patriline but the knowledge survived because there were others closely related in both the father's and the mother's line who could rekindle and rebuild the knowledge. The land survived and so also people who could care for it. One of the old men of the desert, Engineer Jack Japaljarri, once told me that although there had been a fire and the trees had been burnt, the new ones were coming up just like the new *kirda* for that country (Bell 1979a:31).

Chewings (1930:334) lends weight to the notion that women not

6. Meggitt (1962:212) notes that his informants could not countenance the idea of a patrilodge dying out.
only know country but also have rights in land. In 1909 on his return trip from Victoria River, he engaged an Aboriginal woman as a guide. This was at the insistence of a 'stockman' who was not identified as either white or black. What is interesting is that this woman was obviously considered to be competent and appropriate by her own people to act as a guide through country.

Spencer and Gillen (1899:134) note that very old women know of churinga (sacred objects), that female churinga exist (ibid.:312), that women own churinga (ibid.:338), that churinga are brought to women's camps (ibid.:315), and Chewings (1930:141) comments on the power of old women over youth but like Chewings, Spencer and Gillen, insist on referring to old women as the no longer useful nor desirable members of their society. They mention female ancestors who variously travelled in female mobs and with boys (Spencer & Gillen 1899:220,286, 336,432-6) and Gillen (1901-2:152-3) notes that women are the direct descendants of ancestral beings such as the 'seed' totem. He also mentions the practice of a woman who, after tooth avulsion, threw the tooth in the direction of her mira alchera, translated as the origins of alcheringa ancestors (ibid.:117).

In his comments on myths of origin, Gillen (1902-2:140) states that men refer to the wandering bands of female ancestors by a term which means 'belonging to men'. This may be so, but Kaititj women today do not refer to female ancestors in this way and insist they never did. Instead, as we shall see in Chapter seven, the women cast the wandering bands of men in the dreamtime as the uninitiated

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7. Later Gillen (1901-2:137) uses this same term to gloss the country of the mother's brother to which a skull is faced at burial. This is the country for which one is kurängurlu, that is, 'mother's, father's' country (see Chapter five).
and in need of care.

Much is made of men's rights in and control over women in marriage and I shall return to this theme in Chapters seven and nine. Here I am merely citing supporting evidence of women's rights in and out of marriage to suggest two things. Firstly, women did not in the past and do not today confuse sexuality with the conditions of a marriage contract based on an alliance between families. Secondly, women display a good deal of independence and freedom within the bonds of marriage. Men, I suggest, are co-conspirators in these power plays. We need to re-examine much of the literature on prostitution and wife lending/trading in view of these tactics. As Meggitt (1962:93) writes, men are more 'concerned to maintain male superiority than to redress the wrongs done to women' and this I suggest has allowed women a great deal of latitude in their affairs.

Gillen (1901-2:105) reports how the young men eagerly cleaned their clothes for the young ladies of Barrow Creek to admire. Certainly these women were already married to promised husbands considerably older than they were but this did not stop romances between young men and women, nor women say, has it ever done so. In one incident Chewings (1936:35) recounts women, while employed to mind sheep (another clue to their independence), were engaging in affairs with young lads.

Women displayed a fair degree of independence in pursuing the men they desired, as Chewings reported, but they also were able to retain the men in their own country. Women were not grabbed and dragged off to another country; rather, men stayed in the country of the woman in order to be near her (see also Meggitt 1962:57). Chewings (1936:30) tells of a young man in his 1909 party who stayed with his love, in her country, and did not attempt to carry her off to his country,
and of another incident of a man inducing a woman to elope, but remaining in the woman's country \textit{(ibid.}:86).

One incident glossed by Chewings (1936:80) as wife stealing appears on closer examination to be a woman exercising her right over her own sexuality without damaging the marriage contract. In a more complex case reported by Chewings (1936:86-7) the man who eloped with another woman is punished, not the woman. He is then deemed to have been too severely punished by the culprit and the punisher is forced to relinquish his wife. This example, Chewings states to be evidence of women's low status but the woman was not harmed, only stayed with the new husband until he was well and then left him for his unfaithfulness (see also Chewings 1930:81). There appears to be a fair degree of give and take between wives and husbands. Even Spencer and Gillen (1899:50) state that the relationship between the sexes was not harsh, just based on a double standard and this must be understood within the context of their ideal of womanhood.

I have outlined rights and responsibilities which indicate that women were autonomous decision makers. They may determine where a family group will camp, they may curtail male ceremonies, they may run away and form liaisons with young men, they may marry and remain in their own country, leave men who are unfaithful, and maltreat those who accuse them. They control their own sexuality, it is theirs to bestow as they please and to a large measure they also control their own fecundity (see Cowlishaw 1979:239ff)

Is this evidence of mere vestiges of female autonomy or does this sketch of women's domain bespeak a persistent tradition of autonomy? It is difficult to say, but if land is the power base which I understand it to be, through the maintenance of responsibilities and exercise of these rights, women attained authority. That women like
the Kaititj, who have enjoyed continuity on their own land, show a higher degree of autonomy in decision making than those like the Warlpiri who have been displaced, appears to support my argument.

If we look back to the events of the last century and the context within which women came to live at Warrabri, there are some stark comparisons and striking similarities. For women of all groups there were limited opportunities for employment. Women on cattle stations fared rather better than their missionized and urbanized sisters in this respect, for they engaged in stock work, shepherding and wood-chopping while the others were expected to be mothers and wives. Women, I am arguing, enjoyed a complex set of rights which were validated by their direct access to the dreamtime and the use to which they put the land. The other side of the coin is the responsibilities which devolved upon women. The land was held as a sacred trust, to be kept alive, to be made to come up green and lush. As one witness said in the Willowra land claim, 'We've got to keep that corroboree going so as to make this country good and make the people happy' (transcript of evidence 1980:175).

Women claim to have always staged land maintaining rituals as described in the following chapter. In these rituals women celebrated their heritage as daughters of the dreaming in themes of attachment to country, people and all the life forms which are part of it. As both Gillen and Chewing admit, they had little access to women's domain but they persist in writing of women's hard lot and women as property. In maintaining the land and the complex of relationships attached to it or rather based on it, women assumed responsibilities for the health, happiness and harmony of their community. In view of the changes of the past century, this is an awesome task.
The Historical Past

Written as the history of the conquest of the desert, the past century of white Australians venturing into Central Australia is one of hardship, financial ruin and deprivation (Baume 1933). From the Aboriginal point of view the past century of white intrusion into the land of their ancestors has been one of dispossession, violence and disruption (Terry 1934; Hartwig 1965; Hagen & Rowell 1978, 1979; Peterson et al. 1978). This look at the past is in no way a history of black/white relationships. Rather, I am looking to the stuff out of which women construct their world and upon which they draw to spin their ritual representations of that world. It is a world constructed according to the precepts of the dreamtime law but lived out in the reality of the 1970's at Warrabri. Therefore, after outlining the various forms which colonization assumed in the Central Australian region, I shall discuss how men, women and various groups were differentially affected and how women in particular have responded through the dogma of dreaming and strategies such as the spatial organization of different camps at Warrabri. The way in which Aborigines have made sense of the past century is not in terms of an event-person oriented chronology. They have asserted continuity and found it in the dogma of the immutability and continuity of the dreaming and the flexibility of the system of checks and balances designed to maintain the dreamtime law.

All the women I know at Warrabri who are over sixty can recount stories of the 1928 massacres, women over fifty of sexual abuse by a missionary at Phillip Creek and of enforced movement of people from Yuendumu to Hooker Creek, while women over forty recall the forceful removal of part-Aboriginal children from their parents. Women in their thirties struggle to rear children in a community tormented by disease,
alcoholism and poverty. Women in their twenties query the value of their western education in view of chronic unemployment on settlements, while girls of twelve and thirteen become mothers, deserted wives and pensioners. Warrabri, women agree, is a sad, sick place. They look nostalgically to a bygone era when their contribution to the society was respected, when their status was backed by authority derived from the relationship to their country. 'When we lived in the bush', women say, 'we were not frightened of men, our marriages were safe, there was no sickness, there were no jealous fights, no alcohol, no money and we did not starve. Our children were healthy, our daughters married their promised husbands, our sons spent years in the bush for business and we were able to enjoy the bounty of our country and to celebrate the continuity and strength of our religious beliefs in rituals which were powerful and renowned for their intricacies'. Much of this may be nostalgia, but in the light of the events of the past century, much is shown to be based on experience.

The history of white Australian intrusion into Central Australia is characterized by violence and dispossession: it is a celebration of the arrogance and chauvinism of late nineteenth and twentieth century society. Irreplaceable ritual objects were taken, water holes were despoiled, the balance of flora and fauna was rapidly transformed by extensive grazing, punitive parties massacred while rescue/pacification parties brought people in from the desert.

*Exploration*

From the 1850's onwards individual explorers such as Gregory (1969) in 1856, Stuart (1865) in the 1860's, Gosse (1874) in the 1870's, Warburton (1875) in the 1870's visited Warlpiri territory. It is generally assumed that these transients had little impact on the lives of the people through whose country they fleetingly passed. However, I think that Aborigines very quickly became aware of white Australian
treachery, their lack of regard for Aboriginal treasures and customs and that this information travelled well ahead of the actual frontier of settlement. It is a mistake to believe that explorers' dates signal the beginning of Aboriginal knowledge and classification of whites as those not to be trusted. Even Stuart (1861:135), thought to be the first white man into Warramunga country, states that he had the impression they had seen white men before.

To me Warburton's entry in his journal of June 26 1873 (1875: 181-182) signals the recorded beginning of dispossession of desert people. When forty-eight kilometres north of Waterloo Wells he wrote, 'found two sacred boards, 15" x 6" with decorations hidden in a hole in the top of a hill - took them. Also a round stone'. A violation of a sacred site such as this would have been widely reported amongst desert people but the whites understood neither the ramifications of their actions nor the enormity of the theft. Strehlow (1970:117) records that an Aranda man who had accidentally chipped a sacred object, died for the damage he had caused to an irreplaceable object. How much more seriously then must the loss of objects have been regarded? Strehlow (1970:120) notes that when Stirling, Winnecke and party in 1894 stole Aboriginal possessions from a place near Haasts Bluff, these actions were attributed to the guide. Spencer (Strehlow 1970: 120), commenting on the tribal execution of the guide, said it was regrettable that the true nature of the value of the objects was not known at the time of the removal but added that none the less the guide was responsible for his own death. Like many guides, police trackers and station workers, this man was in an invidious position.

These thefts were not isolated incidents. If Gillen's (1901-2: 147) camp jottings are any indication, the Spencer and Gillen expedition of 1901-2 removed many sacred objects from Aboriginal
owners. Although the method of acquisition was no longer theft - Spencer and Gillen 'paid' for the items (Gillen 1901-2:129) - the loss was substantial. Stone 'boards' cannot be replaced by the manufacture of another for their value lies partly in their uniqueness and the manner in which they were found. The casual note struck by explorers, scientists and travellers who actually recorded at least some of the treasures they removed, makes one wonder how many were removed but not recorded. Gillen's (1901-2:123) comment that the Hanson River blacks, who came into Barrow Creek, were impoverished is not surprising when one considers the actions of the punitive parties which rode through their country in the 1870's and the activities of explorers in the 1860's.

Of the several early explorers who passed through Kaititj and Alyawarra country, Stuart reports frequent meetings with local people in the 1860's but Ross, while exploring the overland telegraph route in 1870, reports that he encountered no-one (Hartwig 1965:259). Certainly the contacts with Stuart were not marked by mutual understanding and as Hartwig (1965:241-2) suggests, news from western Queensland Aborigines in the Hubert River district of white pastoral alienation of land in the 1860's, was probably the first information that Alyawarra had about whites. This, I suggest, could have preceded the exploration of the telegraph line route and possibly even Stuart.

Stuart's observations provide information as to location and groups' size in the 1860's (see also Meggitt 1962:17). He saw evidence of occupation in the Davenport Ranges and a wurli on the Hanson River. The Kaititj were obviously cautious because they followed him but did not venture close as he travelled through their country in the Taylor Creek area (Stuart 1861:138). In the Bonney Well district he came across a party of fourteen Aborigines at breakfast and
let his horses drink from the water left behind when the group ran away in fear. He camped at Bonney Well between July 3 and 9 and depleted the water hole at the rate of six inches a day (Stuart 1861:136). This was a favourite campsite according to Kaititj today and we frequently 'camped out' in this area.

In 1878 Winneke did a similar thing on the Sandover River when he watered his horses at a soak at which sixty Alyawarra were said to depend (Hartwig 1965:391). One wonders how many other instances of whites despoiling and depleting Aboriginal resources have gone unnoticed and unrecorded.

**Attack Creek**

The first recorded clash between Aborigines and white Australians in the Central region occurred between Stuart (1861:133-4) and Warramunga on June 26, 1861. He was attacked by upward of thirty warriors said to be members of the Warramunga tribe:

[S]uddenly up started three powerful, tall fellows, fully armed, having a number of boomerangs, waddies and spears, ... their distance from us being about 200 yards. It being so near to dark and the scrub we were then in being very disadvantageous for us, I wished to pass them without taking any notice; but such was not their intention ... they performed some sort of dance ... they were now joined by a number more, which in a few minutes increased to upwards of thirty; every bush seemed to produce a man ... I told the men to get their guns ready ... they paid no regard to all the signs of friendship I kept constantly making.

Stuart attempted to leave but as soon as he turned a boomerang was thrown. By this time the Aborigines were only forty yards away. After a second volley of boomerangs, one of which hit the ear of a horse, Stuart gave the order to fire. In view of the determination the Aborigines showed, Stuart (1861:134) decided to camp further on. He looked back in regret and commented: 'If I were to stand and fight, which I wish I could ...' However his party of four, he felt, was too vulnerable.
Several versions of the encounter are extant. Although details vary in each is an element of fear. The welfare report (1961:28) describes the warriors as being painted and carrying spears and boomerangs. Hilda Tuxworth (1978:1-2), in a romantic pioneer history, suggests that a small Aboriginal child was teased by one of Stuart's men: 'His cries for help brought tribesmen and a short struggle followed. No lives were lost - Stuart named the stream 'Attack Creek'.' In a less whimsical vein Hartwig (1965:244) reports that the reason for the hostile reception lay in the fact that the two parties were competing for the limited supply of water available in the district. Stuart's diary (1861) entries suggest this. For there to have been thirty or more adult males in one area where water was a scarce resource, appears to indicate that the Warramunga had decided to make a show of strength.

Aborigines today who claim to be the descendants of those Warramunga people, tell of the attack with a degree of pride. Women, water and fear are all mentioned as possible causes of the attack. Given the novelty of whites and their gross infringements of Aboriginal law, I think it is reasonable to assume that news of Stuart's explorations, and the behaviour of other whites, had reached the Warramunga. Whatever the motivation, the result of the attack was that Aborigines in the area gained a reputation for treachery and whites armed themselves for protection.

Ashwin (1930:62), writing of the 1870's in Warramunga country, gives a gruelling account of his contacts with the natives just north of Powell Creek:

I let six staghounds go, and away they went towards the rising moon. Then we heard a stampede like a mob of cattle breaking through the scrub; then a native yelling for about five minutes; then all was quiet.
About ten minutes later the staghounds came back to camp and were tied up again. They were covered with blood. Milner said, "Aye, mon, Arthur, they have done good work; I think the fear of God will be with the natives to-night".

In the morning I went out to where I heard the yelling ... About 400 yards from the camp there was a native lying dead with his throat torn out. The staghounds must have bitten others of the natives, for there was blood on their tracks for two or three hundred yards further afield. There must have been quite 200 natives, judging by their tracks a quarter of a mile wide, and all making for Ashburton Range, about one mile distant.

News of events such as these would have travelled far and wide (see Gillen 1901-2:199). For instance Gillen (1901-2:130) records that one of the persons most certainly implicated in the Frew River attack of 1896 was at Barrow Creek, and that during Gillen's stay there, news came in of trouble at Anthony's Lagoon (ibid.:126).

The Telegraph Lines: Barrow Creek

White Australian colonisation of the desert began in earnest with the construction of the overland telegraph line from Alice Springs to Tennant Creek in the 1870's. The influx of all male workers directly affected the Kaititj and Warramunga through whose country the line was built and less directly the Warlpiri and Alyawarra, whose country lay to the west and east of the line. The telegraph stations established at Barrow Creek and Tennant Creek in the early 1870's provided a focus for Aboriginal experience of whites. Chewings (1936:85) notes that desert dwellers west of Barrow Creek came into the station to see whites.

The confrontation at Attack Creek in 1861 was warrior versus intruder. The attack at Barrow Creek telegraph station in 1874 though indicates that Aborigines were already adjusting to white ways. Hartwig (1965:277ff) and Gillen (1901-2:107-9,144,168) provide detailed descriptions of the attack on the station in 1874 in which two whites were killed and a number of Aborigines fell. Here I wish
to explore possible causes, Aboriginal tactics and white Australian reactions to the attack.

As to possible causes, Gillen (1901-2:108) offers one explanation which is more of a short term cause then anything else. Stapleton, Gillen claims, was generous to a fault, but finally refused to comply when he found Aboriginal demands for rations excessive. This must be seen within the context of the underlying rationale of the ration system as it operated in the 19th century. Whites assumed that the aged and infirmed should receive rations but not the fit and youthful. Probably the elderly shared their rations with others but the latter still desired their fair share.

A longer run cause may be that after two years of telegraph stations (1872-1874) the Aborigines had decided that the whites were not transients. An armed attack by warriors, a show of strength, a display of hostility as had occurred at Attack Creek, had not repulsed the intruders and in the thirteen intervening years Aborigines had had time to observe and to consider white behaviour. This, Hartwig (1965:277) claims, is evident in the planning and execution of the attack. Barrow Creek was attacked by young men who took advantage of the terrain, blocked an exit by which several telegraph workers attempted to escape and kept up surveillance on the station for several days. Gone was the element of display, the confrontation of man to man.

In the punitive parties following the Barrow Creek attack, Aborigines soon learnt that overt resistance would be met with violent retaliation. The press of the time obviously reflected the mood of many whites. Commenting on punitive parties, the Adelaide Advertiser stated the Aboriginal attackers were 'killed red handed as it were [and in] a sufficient number to strike terror into the hearts of the
whole tribe'. Punitive parties rode through the country within a fifty mile radius of Barrow Creek, through the Taylor, Stirling, Hanson, Central Mt. Stuart area, killing as they went. Unofficially eleven were killed but the strong and angry party rode unfettered by instructions (Hartwig 1965:270,419), spurred on as they were by the righteous indignation of the press which called for swift, severe and prompt retribution. It is likely that many more than eleven were massacred, if the lack of correlation between the 1928 official and unofficial figures is any indication of the 1874 tally (see Hartwig 1965:274).

The Kaititj have gone down as the villains of the Centre, their reputation for treachery kept alive by the sight of the roadside graves of Stapleton and Frank. Drover George Williams (Tuxworth 1978:47) claimed that when droving in 1906 through Barrow Creek country he always carried a gun. On the other hand Chewings (1930:358) notes the local people were never hostile. He recognized though that this would have been a strong party to attack.

In Hartwig's (1965:277) view the Barrow Creek incident ended the period of conciliation and heralded the beginning of the era of pacification. During the next decade when cattle and Aborigines increasingly came into conflict over water resources and land, whites knew they had the power to insist on putting down the murderous Aborigines and Aborigines had learnt the futility of open confrontation. The bleached skulls north of Barrow Creek, at Skull Creek, the violation of sacred sites, the loss of relatives who took with them to their graves knowledge of the country, the grief and fear which kept people out of certain tracts of land, were constant reminders to the Kaititj of the meaning of a white presence in Central Australia.
Where in all this are women? That their presence is not noted is perhaps explicable in terms of the sex segregated nature of the society, the male dominated nature of Central Australian white society in the nineteenth century, but what were they doing? Aborigines suggest that women played a role in the Attack Creek incident. There is no written documentation of the ill treatment of Aboriginal women by the explorers, which again is hardly surprising, but once the pastoralists came to Central Australia, the written history changed. There were few white women in Central Australia in the last quarter of the nineteenth century - Hartwig (1965:345) states the ratio of white men to women was 10:1 - and liaisons with Aboriginal women were by no means unusual. I shall return to the nature of these liaisons below; here I am looking at the recorded role of Aboriginal women on the pastoral frontier.

While explorers and telegraph line construction teams and the manning of stations brought violence to Central Australia, it did not alienate vast tracts of land in the way in which the pastoral boom of the 1870's and 1880's had done. Although short-lived, this boom alienated much of Alyawarra and Kaititj country. The new era tore people from land, pauperized them with rations and broke the nexus of access to land as a spiritual and economic resource. Continuity of occupation also brought forth the possibility of sustained liaisons with Aboriginal women.

Spurred on by high cattle prices in the 1870's, Winnecke's finding of an overland droving route in 1877 from Queensland to Alice Springs (down the Sandover River through Alyawarra country) and heavy capital investment by large companies such as the Willowie Land and Pastoral Association and the Barrow Creek Pastoral Company, cattle runs were established in the Frew River, Elkedra, Murray Downs (an outstation of...
Stirling Creek station) and Barrow Creek regions. Pastoralists spread out over the land in search of good grazing country and inevitably came into conflict with Aborigines. Persistent attacks on the Annas Reservoir Station caused it to be moved to Stirling Creek. The northern Aranda kept up a steady opposition to pastoralists across a wide area.

When drought hit in 1889 and cattle prices fell dramatically, runs were abandoned or fell into the hands of larger companies, some of whom did not stock their properties. In a decade the northern Kaititj and the Alyawarra learnt at first hand of white pastoralists but they also learnt much of effective resistance.

Cattle spearing and attacks on Annas Reservoir in the 1880's occasioned more police to be sent to Barrow Creek and a further punitive party into Aranda country (Hartwig 1965:347ff). In June 1891, the Alyawarra and Wakaja attacked the pallisaded Frew River station but were repulsed by manager Coultard and three men. By 1895 there had been two more attacks and by 1896 the station and the cattle were abandoned (Hartwig 1965:403).

The presence of eight women at the Frew River station was mentioned by the *Adelaide Observer* on 11 July 1891 as one possible reason for the attack. This is borne out by Eylmann (1908:462) who had spent more than a year in the Centre between 1896-8 and had visited the Frew. He wrote:

The station dwellers are said to have always treated the Aborigines with the greatest severity and mercilessly shot down every cattle thief they could get hold of. When I was there I found two human skulls in one piece, one which was pierced by a bullet, and I heard from a really reliable youth about 20 years old that the whites had once brought in a large number of lubras - among them his mother and two sisters - and let them go only after several weeks. When the insolence of the stockman had gone much too far, the warriors of all hordes in that country, attacked the station for several days; but their
intention, to burn down the buildings and murder their oppressors - was thwarted by the watch and ferocity of a large number of kangaroo and blood hounds which were kept inside the pallisades. (Translation by Hartwig, pers. comm.).

For the Aborigines the toll of such attacks and counter attacks was great. In the Frew River F.J. Keane reported in 1898 (Hartwig, 1965:411) that there were '45 bucks and 460 gins' in the Frew River area. We have no statistics with which to compare this for the decade earlier but the imbalance, even if overstated, is horrendous.

By the 1890's Hartwig (1965:443) suggests that the treatment of Aborigines was becoming less harsh probably because the pacification drives had been increasingly successful. By 1894 he reports that sizable Aboriginal camps were attached to all cattle stations and telegraph stations. The Frew River was the only exception. The Alyawarra had successfully repulsed the would-be settlers and the run was abandoned. This withdrawal of pastoralists marked the end of the first pastoral era in Alyawarra and Kaititj country.

By the turn of the century there were ration depots at each of telegraph stations where Aborigines were employed to cut wood, mind herds and to act as trackers (Chewings 1930:68; Tuxworth 1978:2). Hartwig (1965:610) records that in Tennant Creek in 1890, ten aged were receiving pensions while in 1891 there were still ten, but a hundred Aborigines were estimated to be in the area. Beckett's (1914-5:26) report states that the Warramunga had been pauperized by ration handouts which were insufficient and only intended for the infirmed while good country remained out there for the fit. 'They hang about whining and in constant hunger', he wrote. By way of contrast he noted that the Alyawarra remained in the bush and were far more dignified. They, one might add, had won a temporary respite, the Warramunga had not had such an opportunity.

The Frew River area was again occupied in 1918 when pastoralists
returned to northern Aranda country. The Chalmers holdings in the 1920's alienated much Alyawarra country and gold mines were worked in the Kurundi area. According to Beckett (1914-5:26) when Hanlon and Wickham put horses and cattle on the Frew run, the natives met them with friendliness. Beckett (1914-5:26-7) writes, 'A perfect understanding was arrived at by which both sides undertook to respect each other's rights'; in return for services he paid them generously in rations. Thus nearly half a century before anthropological research was carried out in the area, a process of mutual accommodation was evident.

Experience of whites was not consistent through northern Aranda country. After the first violent contacts with whites, the Kaititj of the Barrow Creek area stayed near to the telegraph station and today their camps remain at the nearby Neutral Junction station. Beckett (1914-5:27) noted that the 'Kaitichi' had settled around Barrow Creek telegraph station and were drawing government rations and 'deriving little good from the same'. He reports that their many water holes were then filled in with sand drifts and that they had come to rely on government wells. The northern Kaititj avoided this early contact and were not settled until the second era of pastoral development in the 1930's.

There was some pastoral development in Warlpiri country during the 1880's but it was the second wave of pastoral expansion in the 1920's which brought a degree of violence to Warlpiri and Kaititj. That is well remembered by many living Aborigines today. The Coniston massacres are a well documented, though certainly not isolated, example of frontier violence in the twentieth century which have become a touchstone for many Aborigines. In 1917 the Coniston station was established. In 1924 a severe drought had set in which forced
Aborigines and cattle to compete for the same limited water resources. Two whites were killed by Aborigines in 1928. Official reports of the subsequent punitive parties launched by whites acknowledge that thirty-one Aborigines were killed. Aboriginal oral tradition and my own genealogies suggest a much higher number (see also Meggitt 1962:24). Also Strehlow (1970:107) on the basis of information from local station owners in 1932, claimed that the death toll was higher than the official figures.

Difficult access to water and a desire to keep their land free of intruders (Terry 1934:233) certainly were major factors behind the attack on whites. Aboriginal survivors of the massacres suggest that the non-return of an Aboriginal woman by Brooks, the prospector who was murdered by Aborigines, was the reason why he and not someone else was the victim of their anger. The need to protect women from the clutches of white men who did not understand the nature of the terms on which Aboriginal women were able to be with them, is frequently discussed today as a reason for the violence and for running away from the advancing settlement. Women are more ambivalent in their discussion of such matters than are men. Women suggest that they could go freely to such white men and that they enjoyed both the relationship and the goods they thus procured. They insist it was only with their consent that they entered into such relationships. Aboriginal men on the other hand argue that white men stole their women. There is a degree of pride in each explanation.

While pastoral expansion in the 1920's and 1930's alienated the best waters, personal and ritualized grief kept people out of the areas associated with violence (Strehlow 1970:107; Bell 1979a;b). In this way Aborigines came more and more to depend upon rations. This involved a coming in process which may well have begun with curiosity but which all too quickly became dependence. The life fortunes
of many Lander River Warlpiri and Warramunga joined in Tennant Creek in this period. Some people retreated to marginal areas where they could avoid the danger of conflict with Europeans but still eke out a living. However, in such marginal country, survival was only possible in the good years and only for small groups (see Meggitt 1962: 24ff).

The Mining Frontier

Davidson's (1905) excursions into the Centre for the Central Exploration Syndicate in 1900 did more to open up western Warlpiri country than the telegraph lines (Peterson et al. 1978:10). Gold rushes to the Tanami in 1910, the Granites in 1932 and to the Tennant Creek area in the 1930's disrupted Aboriginal lives and despoiled their lands. In Aranda country, Hatches Creek was worked from 1913 onwards and by 1947 had a mixed population of two hundred and fifty. Wolfram finds at Barrow Creek and Wauchope also were established (see Meggitt 1962:27). Mining areas were restricted areas for Aborigines but if the number of part-Aboriginal children is any indication, these rules were not too closely observed. What distinguished mining activity from the pastoral experience was that Aborigines were employed in considerable numbers. Tuxworth (1979:4) notes that the Tennant Creek field population in 1935 was six hundred with approximately forty-six Asiatics and half castes. In the 1918 Chief Surveyor's report (Hagen & Rowell 1978:16), we find Aboriginal workers at the mines of Hatches Creek and Wauchope and the problem of paying these workers who had no proper classification. He reported in 1918 there were forty Europeans, four half castes and twenty-three Aborigines employed. Employment of Aborigines on mines was usually for rations and men and women worked side by side on the windlass, loading and clearing. As well as the larger mines, there were also lone prospectors who took
up life-long residence near their mine and established long-term relationships with Aboriginal women.

Contrary to Meggitt's (1962:27) claim that the war had little impact on Warlpiri, I found that the war years were important for many Warlpiri-Warramunga and Kaititj now resident at Warrabri. The 'Army Time' as it is known by Aborigines, offered equal wages for those employed, good rations, training in the field of mechanics and most of all widening horizons. It was a male frontier and Aboriginal men learnt to drive, to tell the time, to calculate distances in miles and to recognize cash money. In 1943 a ration depot was established in Tennant Creek for Darwin evacuees and work conducted on a string of waterholes fourteen miles north of the town. In 1944-5 two hundred Aborigines were moved to Phillip Creek under the eye of missionaries (see Meggitt 1962:28).

As a consequence of the 1940's assimilationist policies, many Aborigines were forcefully removed to new centralized settlements often situated far from their own country.

For those Aborigines who came into the towns there was little work after the war. Women were sometimes able to find domestic employment and the men casual work as stock men. By the 1950's the best country in the Centre was despoiled by cattle. Wolfram prices had fallen and there was little employment in the mines (Meggitt 1962:28). It is hardly surprising, given the loss of land and the savage

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8. Yuendumu, the one Warlpiri settlement actually in Warlpiri country, was established in 1946 with one hundred and twenty people from Bullocky Soak and one hundred and fifty people from the Granites ration depot. Hooker Creek settlement was proclaimed in 1947, but not occupied until 1952 when people were trucked to the settlement but walked back to Yuendumu. Two forced resettlements and Aboriginal walk backs occurred again in 1958 and 1965 (Peterson et al. 1978:14). Strehlow (1970:107) has likened these settlements to refugee camps.
repression of pacification drives, that people stayed on settlements and near ration depots.

DIMENSION TWO: THE PRESENT

Warrabri

The dynamics of the Warrabri situation involves a delicate interplay of historical and cultural factors. The Aboriginal response to large settlements is one which entails both accommodation and rejection of aspects of white Australia life styles. A century ago, scattered across vast tracks of land, there were small mobile bands congregating only in times of plenty for ceremonies, in times of need clustering at the last permanent water. Today these people are cramped on settlements in daily intense interaction with groups who a century ago were virtual strangers. Settlement dwellers brought with them different experiences of the past century of white colonization of their lands. Different accommodations are evident in the life style and particularly in the land based rituals of different groups at Warrabri. If one looks to the dynamics of the Warrabri community, from the apparent chaos emerges a pattern which owes as much to differences between the Aboriginal residents as it does to the presence of the whites.

Here I wish to explore the nature of the changes as they have been incorporated and rejected by Warrabri residents. I am sketching the social world as women have explained it to me and as they see their place within it. The contemporary Warrabri scene so described provides the raw materials for women's lives and their ritual representations of their heritage. Thus my exploration of the Warrabri scenario is further exploration of the stuff out of which women's worlds are made. This world continues to be underwritten and informed by the dreamtime
law but it is also a world into which new ideas, resources, people and behaviours have exploded rapidly and with an intensity over the past century which has threatened the fabric of social life. Women continue to assert the continuity of their role as nurturers in their daily lives and rituals which stress renewal and the all-encompassing nature of the dreamtime law.

After several abortive attempts to find water at Powell Creek, Attack Creek and Morphett Creek, Warrabri was chosen in 1954 to be the new home for the Warlpiri and Warramunga of the Tennant Creek area. The site, four hundred and forty square kilometres, surrounded by the cattle stations of Singleton, Murray Downs and Neutral Junction, appeared to be ideal from the point of view of Welfare (South Pacific 1959:75) because it fulfilled all their conditions: there was sufficient water, the possibility of agricultural development, the 'local tribes' were all friendly to each other; and Warrabri was far enough away from Tennant Creek to protect Aborigines from the 'contaminating effects' of town life. To the Welfare Department, it was a perfect choice. In their misguided enthusiasm, they stated (Dawn 1960:17), 'Fortunately traditional Aboriginal life is flexible enough to permit this congregation of people from different tribes to be effected without causing any major social disturbance'. The choice of the name 'Warrabri', a combination of the 'Warra' of Warramunga and the 'bri' of Walbri (Warlpiri) was a further attempt to create unity. But the country remains known amongst desert Aborigines as yalikurangu (dog dreaming). For them Warrabri is the antipathy of all that Welfare expected.

9. The Warramunga reserve was proclaimed in 1934 but never occupied for sufficient water could not be found (Welfare Report 1961:4). Phillip Creek was established in 1945 but abandoned in the 1950's when the water supply proved insufficient.
The words of the Warrabri school song,

There's a place in the Centre
And we call it Warrabri
Where we all live together as one,

held a promise which has not been fulfilled. Living 'together as one' at Warrabri was a European ideal of the late 1950's and 1960's. The government presented Warrabri as a model for cultural assimilation and social progress; it provided the opportunity for what Welfare saw as the 'socially backward' native to be trained and be protected from the harmful effects of the towns. In such an environment correct social values could be gently inculcated; an acceptance of a European life style would be facilitated (see *South Pacific* 1959; *Dam* 1960).

According to the 1961 *Welfare Report*, Warrabri's hope lay in the newly trained and literate under thirties; it was they who would prosper as Warrabri became economically viable and self-sufficient. This goal of Welfare has not been achieved. Warrabri is an unhappy divided community where in 1976-7 some sixty to seventy whites delivered services to and administered the affairs of the approximately seven hundred Aborigines who were effectively marooned and stranded at Warrabri. Although Aborigines are extremely emotional about country, burst into song and dance and go into trance states when they sight their country, I have never seen such reactions when people return to visit or move to Warrabri. Enforced co-residence of these groups engenders tensions and conflicts which find no easy outlet. Alcohol and violence constantly disrupt family life. Outstations which have relieved the pressure on other settlements are not an option for most Warrabri residents because the settlement is hemmed in by cattle stations.

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10. Even Gillen (1901-2:171) in his camp jottings notes that the area north of Taylor Crossing where Warrabri is now situated, was one of the most barren stretches of country they encountered in their trek north.
Within one day of arrival at Warrabri I had heard rumours of illicit black-white affairs, suspected corruption, of white cliques, of hostility between the traditional owners of the country, the Kaititj, and the interlopers, the Warlpiri. In a community of seven hundred and seventy I had expected that it would be possible to become acquainted with most of the residents. Armed with Meggitt's *Desert People* (1962), I looked for disputes which bore on kinship obligations and social structure and which threw into relief the values of the community. Very quickly I learnt that there was no one Aboriginal community at Warrabri but that public debates were none the less instructive.

**Spatial Models**

Early in my field work I listened to an eloquent exchange outside the co-operative store: the disputants debated whether or not the strip of land outside the store was an appropriate place to hold their fight. The Warlpiri women argued that as a neutral piece of ground, where all the residents of Warrabri felt free to gather and listen, this was an ideal place to argue. The Kaititj women responded that *yapa* (Aboriginal) business belonged in the camps away from the gaze of white fellows. Encapsulated in this dispute are structural principles and Aboriginal perceptions which underpin the Warrabri life style. Warrabri is not a unified coherent Aboriginal community but people are developing ways of thinking about their changed situation in order to cope with the pressure of settlement life.

It is no longer possible to simply move away from trouble, nor is it possible to ignore the white presence. At Warrabri solutions to the problems created by population density and a sedentary life style can be clearly seen in the spatial organization of camps.
Once again country is a major factor in choosing a camp site on a settlement. But the impact of the changes of the past century are also evident in the orientation of camps and the division and links within the population. Here I describe the Warrabri situation as one which entails an east-west division of the Aboriginal population (a division based on affiliation to country) and a centre-periphery model of the distribution of power and resources amongst the Aborigines and whites of Warrabri (a distribution which owes much to the lessons of the past century).

These two models exist in concrete reality, on the ground, as well as in the minds of Warrabri residents. The first reflects the orientation of the Aranda, the Kaititj-Alyawarra to their country in the east in contradistinction to the Warlpiri and Warramunga who look to their country in the west. This division is not an artefact of settlement life. As I have argued above, these people really do hold country to the east and west of the settlement. However, on a settlement, the east-west distinction is rather more dramatically drawn in terms of numbers, permanency and location of camps, attitudes and values than would have been possible in the past. The second model, that of the centre-periphery, reflects the distribution of certain introduced resources. Those who live in the centre, that is, in the European dominated settlement core, control information coming into and moving out of the settlement, the kind of material goods that circulate and the fortunes of those particular families who have emerged as supporters of white interests. On the periphery, in the camps, are those who have either rejected white values and thus remain materially impoverished, or those who are excluded from the centre because of their abhorrent behaviour. The Kaititj and Alyawarra, who live on the periphery of the settlement, do so, not because they have just come in from the bush (as
we have seen in their histories Kaititj have a long and bitter history of experience of whites), but because they have made a deliberate choice to remain as much as possible outside the sphere of influence of the centre. Unless these distinctions within the population are spelt out, some people might appear to have changed relatively little compared to the 'core' residents. Really though, they have coped with the changes of the past century, but in a way which has emphasized the unity of family and country.

Warlpiri are territorially aggressive and dislike their subservient position at Warrabri. The Kaititj, on the other hand, are numerically weak and prefer to avoid open conflict. An uneasy resolution has been for the Warlpiri to seek socio-economic status in terms of employment and control of such bodies as the local council, while the Kaititj and Alyawarra remain secure in terms of their rights in the country.

In my view Aborigines are deliberately and consciously rejecting and at other times incorporating aspects of the white culture to produce a distinctive settlement life style. It is one which owes much to linguistic, kinship and ritual affiliations but one which recognizes that the population density and institutionalized structure of settlements have introduced a new set of markers of status. The emerging life style is not uniform across the Warrabri settlement. The people who come from the west and those who come from the east, have elaborated distinctive life styles to cope with the conflict between the demands of a settlement and Aboriginal social structure. Differences in the role and status of women is one facet of this complex process.

The East-West Division

If one asks a Warrabri resident, 'Where do you camp?' the most common response is kakarrara or kalarrara (east or west). Colonization has torn people from their country but the most basic identification
is still in terms of country. The Warlpiri camp at Warrabri, or 'the village' as it is known locally, is situated to the west of the settlement core facilities and is thereby oriented towards the traditional country of the Lander River Warlpiri. The Warlpiri people are thus the people who camp to the west; they are the *kalarrara* people. Within the camp there are finer distinctions to be made which reflect kinship, ritual and economic factors. Warlpiri have further elaborated their distinctive life style through their involvement with the cash economy. Until recently it was predominantly Warlpiri who held all the jobs at Warrabri, who spoke on council, who were registered to vote, who received pensions and who starred in fights, consumption of alcohol and court appearances. The Warramunga camp in the sandhill country to the north east of the Warlpiri, but they are still considered to be westsiders. The Alyawarra camp is as far as possible from the settlement core, lying some several hundred yards from water, toilet facilities and nearly a half mile from the hospital and school and store. These are the *kakarrara* people. Their camps have moved many times, to avoid trouble generated by the settlement and to preserve their separateness from the westsiders. Many Warlpiri have no idea of the composition or location of eastside camps, whereas most eastsiders know the westside camps which are clearly visible from the store. The Kaititj camp is located to the east but one camp is to the northside for people who hold country to the north around Devil's Marbles, and the Barrow Creek Kaititj camp to the south. Location of camp is towards one's country but it also reflects aspirations of the residents in its distance from the centre core of the settlement.  

11. At Yuendumu and Papunya there is a similar patterning of camps. The Pintupi camp is oriented to their southern country but at a greater distance from the settlement core than the Warlpiri camp. It is the Pintupi, like the Alyawarra and Kaititj, who quickly take advantage of good seasons to move out of the settlement in trips and in camps in their country. Within each of the major camps at
There are disadvantages to camping some way from the core facilities. Women must carry water and rations over long distances, but remoteness removes them from accusations of jealousy and illicit affairs with westsiders. Their geographic position symbolizes their distinctive identity from those of westsiders and whites. Another distinctive feature of the eastside camps is the strength of the family as a focus in the camps. The organization of the camps is much tighter than on the westside, where families sprawl out over large areas. Within the eastside camps women exercise a degree of control and autonomy which is lacking on the westside. Amongst eastsiders most disputes are settled within the camps and between the families involved: police rarely intrude. For the westsiders police patrols are a fact of daily life.

In the previous section, I outlined the context within which the various groups now resident at Warrabri have found their way to Warrabri. How then do Aborigines speak of their past experiences of white Australians? Ex-Phillip Creek inmates, now in their fifties and over, remember how in their youth they would collect rations from the mission and move out some five to ten miles from the mission to favourite waterholes. They remained there until the rations ran out, when they returned to the missions to replenish their stocks. Thus in the 1940's it was possible to retain some autonomy and to live in small groups, but the demands of the white institutions for integration placed enormous strains on Aboriginal parents and children alike.

F.n. 11 continued. Warrabri and within each of the family camps there is a jilimi, a single women's camp. I shall return to a fuller discussion of these camps in Chapter five. Here I merely wish to point out that Warrabri Warlpiri women have two major single women's camps which are located very centrally within the Warlpiri camp. They are surrounded by other family camps, whereas Kaititj and Alyawarra jilimi are on the fringe of the eastside camps. Kaititj women thus have access to an open area of land behind their camps which is not accessible to other residents of the area where eastsiders camp.
Welfare removed children from homes they deemed unsuitable and placed them in 'good' white homes. Part-Aboriginal children were forcefully removed from their parents and placed in institutions or with 'good' white families. There are adults alive today at Warrabri and elsewhere who speak of their lost siblings in Adelaide and Darwin (see also Tuxworth 1979:50).

Those parents whose children were of school age felt the punitive arm of the mission even more keenly. The dormitories at Phillip Creek were not only segregated on the basis of sex and degree of Aboriginal ancestry but also by age. A hostage system operated whereby if parents and older siblings wanted to see their relatives, they had to remain within walking distance of the mission and visit during the day. Children were locked in at night. For their parents there was also a restriction on camping too close to the mission buildings. This regime was not accepted passively but those who attempted to escape were quickly taught the error of their ways. Today women speak of the mission with mixed feelings. On a nostalgic trip we took to Phillip Creek in 1976 and 1977, they remembered with humour the escapades and affairs of their life at Phillip Creek.

Fearful attitudes towards school and expectations of schools as white institutions have persisted at Warrabri, where in 1976-7 the police tracker rounded up the children and delivered them to school. Parents and children still attempt to evade the fights and alien discipline of schools by retreating to the bush or to camps some distance away. Although there are teachers who desperately want the school to work, the constraints of the bureaucracy and the philosophical underpinning of western education render the school an alienating
Other unfortunate attitudes have persisted from the Phillip Creek days. One is the tolerance and acceptance of the inevitability of sexual abuse of Aboriginal women. Young nubile girls fared rather badly at Phillip Creek. Bereft of the protection of mothers and aunts, the dormitory girls were exploited by one missionary who was eventually ambushed by concerned mothers, brought to trial in a European court and sentenced (Meggitt 1962:28). Middle aged women at Warrabri have told me of their experiences with this man and then gone on to discuss other examples of liaisons with road gangers and itinerant workers of Tennant Creek and Warrabri. This kind of brutalization has been part of Warlpiri women's lives who say philosophically that once whites acquire the taste they do not go back to white women. Yuendumu Warlpiri say they would not tolerate such behaviour from whites on their settlement but Warrabri Warlpiri shrug in an embarrassed fashion. They have learnt to fight back is dangerous.

Sexual abuse, children held as hostages and restrictive legislation are all important aspects of colonization that remain fresh in the minds and experience of Warrabri Warlpiri. Patterned responses developed at the mission are nourished by expectations that whites behave in such ways, that their behaviour towards Aborigines is predictable in a stereotyped fashion. The situation is one where they are always the losers. There is no such thing as a free lunch, even from missionaries, and Aborigines have learnt that welfare is also an

12. Brennan (1975:27) argues that prior to 1968 the school was a foreign institution but claims that with self determination instead of imposed changes, as the underlying philosophy, the school was becoming part of the community. Unfortunately it is hard to see this change. Unlike the Yuendumu and Willowra schools, Warrabri is not bilingual and many parents consider it to be merely another white institution which drives a wedge between parents and children.
expensive gift. For these Warlpiri in particular, whose country and families have been rent asunder by the colonization of the Northern Territory, by massacre and welfare, a new identity has emerged based on 'traditionally' Aboriginal criteria. They are now the eastern Warlpiri, marked off from the other Warlpiri communities by a softer speech and variations in the law. This is not merely an ethnocentric view but one shared by other Warlpiri and neighbouring groups. Meggitt (1962:172-3) in the 1950's found four communities of Warlpiri - Lander River, Yalpiri, Wanegia, Walmalla. Warrabri Warlpiri belong to the northern and Lander River divisions but their experiences of the last fifty years are forcing them into a new 'community', the Warrabri Warlpiri.

Warrabri Warlpiri, unlike other Warlpiri communities, have become virtually the monogamous Warlpiri. Of one hundred and twenty-eight marriages for which I have data, one hundred and twenty were monogamous. Husbands may have more than one wife in a lifetime, just as may women, but the pattern is one of serial monogamy. Meggitt (1965:148) in 1956 noted this tendency of the Warrabri Warlpiri. It appears the trend has continued. Although this shift to marriage patterns which approximate more closely to the white ideal appears to release women from an unrelished bondage, it has in fact placed women at a disadvantage. They can no longer appeal to the relatives who arranged their marriages for protection, nor can they rely on assistance from white law keepers who dismiss marital violence as domestic strife and refuse to interfere. The isolation of the Warrabri Warlpiri from other Warlpiri communities has also meant that correct, or the most desirable marriage arrangements, cannot be made. Although most marriages, eighty per cent, can be considered 'straight', the rules are bent so that people marry for love as well as ritual business arrangements (Bell 1980a:249).
The Warlpiri view the Kaititj and Alyawarra with suspicion and as foolishly ignorant of many white ways. The Kaititj view the Warlpiri as the instigators of most fights, the consumers of alcohol, as those lacking a strong law. Although the Kaititj have been unjustly treated as pastoral employees, the experience appears to have been less destructive of family life and cohesion than the mission experience for the Warlpiri. The Kaititj and Alyawarra have been able to preserve an autonomy not manifest in the life style and history of the Warlpiri. Although since about 1958 Kaititj and Alyawarra have drifted into the settlement (South Pacific 1959:76), they have retained a high degree of mobility and spend much time on neighbouring cattle stations visiting, working and attending to ceremonial business.

The closest cattle station to Warrabri is Murray Downs, where several large Alyawarra families live and the people of nearby cattle stations of Epenarra, Elkedra, Kurundi, Amaroo and Utopia are all closely inter-related to Warrabri families. Visits are exchanged for extended periods. Although the loss of the best country has meant dependence on white foods for most Alyawarra families, changes in Alyawarra communities have been qualitatively different from the Warlpiri case. Hunting remains an integral part of the lives of most eastsiders. This is understandable as they are in their own country and at liberty to make use of its bounty. The country of the eastsider is, in any case, richer than that of the desert Warlpiri and the dispossession has been less violent.

Alcohol is less of a problem for eastsiders than it is for west-siders, where initiation business may be disrupted by drunks. Access to alcohol for station people is and has been limited and any extended drinking was done in town during the stand-down period. Cattle station people had little cash in hand so drinking sprees could not be sustained.
Further, their life style on stations offered some purpose (see Bell 1978).

Initiation rituals are performed by both sides but the east-siders are more private about their business. This is both a continuation of traditional values and a response to white intrusion. The favourite days for staging rituals associated with initiation are Boxing Day and Christmas Day, because whites, as Aborigines correctly observe, are usually in no fit condition to pry into their business on these sacred days of the Christian calendar.

Most Warrabri eastsiders come from nearby cattle stations where several large families form or formed the core of the station community. Law and order is maintained by these groups and the voice of women is heard loudly and clearly in the decision making process. Whites rarely interfere in the affairs of the Aboriginal camp on a cattle station. Before the arrival of the Aboriginal Benefit Trust Fund Toyotas in the mid 1970's, travel was on foot, horseback or by generosity of the manager. This caused dependence of a kind in that no protest against non-payment of wages and poor work conditions could be sustained (see Bell 1978). On the other hand, the station people enjoyed a rather more stable relationship with the manager. On most of these stations the management is of many years' and sometimes several generations' standing. In most cases a working relationship has developed between Aboriginal employees and managers which allows work to proceed but ritual business to continue away from the view of the management. The Christmas stand-down period from December to March allows a convenient time for people to retreat to the bush to perform initiation and land maintenance ceremonies. Settlement Warlpiri could theoretically do this but Warrabri is not their country and their dependence on white food is far greater than that of the
cattle station people, who rarely see a wide range of goods amongst the rations they receive. Even during the months of the year when stock work was underway, people could live off the station in small family groups. Independence, pride and autonomy of action were thus possible.

Family life is also less disrupted by station life. The possibilities of fights are reduced. One need not fear that the absence of a spouse indicates infidelity and less time is spent in jealous fights. Further, people are not constantly fending off the demands of marginal relatives for food and other goods. The pace of life is generally slower and some privacy is possible.

Marriages conform more closely to the rule of polygamy. Younger women still go to older men as promised wives but because these arrangements are within business alliances, there are sanctions applied to cruel or irresponsible husbands which Warlpiri women cannot expect to see enforced. Joint arrangements are made by co-wives in the organization of the domestic economy and jealous fights are fewer. Women spend more time enjoying the company of their spouse in relaxed conditions.

Eastsiders are not as involved in the cash economy at Warrabri. Fewer are employed. They tend to be under represented on the village council and as voters on the electoral roll. They keep very much to their own camps and spend a minimum of time in the public areas such as store and school.

Most importantly, Warrabri is Kaititj country. Men and women do not have to impress upon the outsider their importance. It is being constantly affirmed by contact with the land and the country's fertility. Kaititj women are the prolific dreamers of Warrabri. It is they who are in constant contact with the country of their parents and who daily find
evidence of their rich heritage. The relationship to land is being constantly reaffirmed. This is of economic, religious and psychological importance. In the life history material I have collected from these women, a striking theme is the amount of time quite young women have spent in small family groups camping in and walking through their own country. As women tell these stories they proudly name the water holes, ridges and foods of the area. This sort of memory for west-siders belongs back in the 1940's before the days of mass settlements.

Centre-Periphery

Where one camps immediately indicates important allegiances but also important aspirations. As one woman who moved between the camp and a house in the centre explained to me, 'We have two different sets of rules at Warrabri. While we are in the settlement, we do it papulanji (white) way. In the camps we do it yapa (Aboriginal) way, but some people think they are white'. This adjustment, this cultural hopscotch, applies to speech, dress and family life styles. An interesting comparison can be drawn with Yuendumu where camp values permeate the settlement area. For instance, after a death the hospital is swept to make way for use when mourning is completed.

Unlike the east-west division, which is an elaboration of a traditional form, greatly magnified, the centre-periphery is an artefact of settlement life. White intrusion constitutes such a violation and invasion of the Aboriginal life style that to speak of white rules and Aboriginal rules eases the strain a little.

One painful example of the compromise is changes in the practice of not calling dead names for a certain period after a death: this is the kumenjayi system. In many small ways offence can be given. For many people who knew a man now deceased who was named 'Peter', that word is taboo. Every packet of Peter Stuyvesant cigarettes which is
sold in the store gives offence. In other areas of settlement life, it is more blatant. Schools want individual names for their charges; hospitals want unique names on their record cards. Name changes are annoying and clog the computers and government departments. One way of accommodating the demands for rapid registration of names at birth is to give rare and hopefully unique names to children and then not worry about it for some time. This does, however, result in some strange names. To speak a dead name aloud is to cause grief to all relatives of the deceased. Children, who can be excused as not knowing any better, are often asked to oblige with names but I have seen fights arise from this practice.

One solution for teaching assistants and health workers who are constantly being addressed by white supervisors is to allow names to be called in the settlement area and preserve the kuminjayi system in the camps. It is as if one crosses a line where the intrusion of whites is no longer the prime consideration. This "solution", although it allows some social intercourse in the settlement area, still violates the custom and is emotionally disturbing for many people. Eastsiders appear to hold closer to using their own naming system than do westsiders who have been registered for longer. In fact, some eastsider mothers have told me they do not know the name of their child. In answer to my question, 'What is this one's name?', women might say, 'I call it baby. They [the hospital] didn't tell me its name'.

Naming is but one example of the way in which rules are bent to accommodate the whites of Warrabri. An examination of the institutions and facilities of the centre reveals that although key whites control opinion and resources, certain elites have formed to support these factions, the Aborigines are manipulating and integrating the power structures within their own system of obligations and rights.
The Factions of the Centre

Within the centre, politics are qualitatively different from those on the periphery. It is white goods, services and control of opinion which are at stake. The major institutions, supposedly developed to deliver services to only Aborigines but also used by whites to build power bases (for personal and ideological gains), are mutually independent at one level, but independent at others. Let me explain.

Institutions such as the school, hospital, store, police and Department of Aboriginal Affairs have secured the loyalty of particular families at Warrabri - many of these relationships continued from Phillip Creek days when certain persons had certain jobs. Each of these institutions operates as a separate unit and vies with the others for control of opinions and resources. For example, during the operational days of the farm and while it was under a white manager, the Aboriginal employees enjoyed privileged access to housing, vehicles, cool storage for meat and vegetables. They also had a literate spokesman should they ever run foul of the law and need assistance with bureaucracies. In return they offered support for the employer should any prying individual ever suggest that the farm was not efficiently run. When the confrontation came between store and farm over marketing policy, it was the store with its more entrenched interests which was victorious.

The farm worker-manager relationships are repeated in the structure of the police, store and hospital. It is less evident in the Department of Aboriginal Affairs and the school, where, until recently, the white personnel have stayed relatively short periods. The 'mutual admiration societies' of Warrabri flourish where a white 'boss' has spent many years in the community. For example, after seven years'
residence, it has been necessary for Aborigines to come to terms with the continued presence and power of the store manager. Further, it is practically impossible to ask most whites to leave after a long time at Warrabri because they can ask Aborigines to repay all outstanding debts - a very effective way of ensuring that opposition to whites' continued presence will fade.

Aboriginal employees have attempted to come to terms with the compromised position in which they find themselves by incorporating the white 'boss' within the social system at the level of sub-section affiliation and hopefully imparting notions of correct behaviour also. Most whites are delighted to be thus honoured and interpret the 'skin' to be a mark of acceptance. (Some whites stay forever outside the system and never receive a 'skin'. Their residence at Warrabri is limited). The other strategy is to designate the control or orientation of an institution of the centre as west or east or as a male or female domain. This creates a more ordered social environment in potentially chaotic areas of daily interaction.

The school is a fairly harmless example of attempted incorporation as very little real power flows from affiliation with the school. In 1977 the head teacher was Jampijnpa and his teachers often received Jangala or Nangala. This put them in the position of his children, in a respect relationship, which explained their subordination to his authority. An old Warlpiri man, the then power behind the school board, was also a Jangala, but interpreted this in terms of his seniority: he was father to the head teacher.  

13. An amusing aspect of teachers' skins is that frequently teachers bring a skin from another community and then do not behave in the appropriate manner at Warrabri. Some of the teaching assistants prefer to wait until they see which way the affections of new teachers lie before conferring skins. Any potential romance is preferred to be 'straight'.

school is basically a female domain as far as social interaction is concerned and is considered to be a westside institution. The hospital is perceived as a female domain and the allocation of subsection conforms to the principles of matrilineal descent. It is, I believe, an extension of the matrilineal focus of certain traditional health-curing activities.

The Links Between the Divisions of the Centre

At the level of inter-connectedness, complexity of black/white relationships is bewildering but underlying it are deliberate strategies pursued by both blacks and whites. Linking the divisions are sexual, kinship, ritual and financial ties. Not only is the kinship network of Aboriginal people of importance, but the extended white families on settlements must also be noted. At one time the store manager was married to the nursing sister in charge of the hospital at Warrabri. The other nursing sister there was married to the police sergeant; the police constable's wife worked in the school. The bookkeeper of the store was the sister-in-law of the manager, while the mother of the nursing sister worked in the co-operative store. Police, store and hospital were thus closely linked. Any attempt to change store policy, to bring charges against the police or to suggest community involvement in the hospital could be thwarted by a closing of the ranks. Although the school is not involved in the ongoing policies of the other institutions, the policeman's wife did work as the head teacher's secretary and common allegiances to Country-Liberal Party politics were a further uniting force.

Prior to 1976, regular meetings of the 'Heads of Departments' at Warrabri, that is, school, housing, co-operative store, Council, Department of Aboriginal Affairs and the farm were able to provide a united front in the face of any external threat. During 1976 when the
Community Adviser prepared a report on the corruption and irregularities on the settlement, his report, without his permission, was circulated amongst the 'heads' and discussed at an emergency meeting. The Adviser finally left and the Department of Aboriginal Affairs spent the next year smoothing over the troubled waters.

Aboriginal kinship and ritual links underwrite and bolster these white family alliances. The Aboriginal managing director of the store is also the police tracker. The Warrabri Council president is married to the head health worker in the hospital. The wife of the police tracker is a sister of the woman who works in the co-operative store. These women are all full nieces of one of the most important ritual leaders on the Warlpiri side. It is he who is the uniting power behind the co-operative store and the Council and it is he who is consulted by the white manager. These ties are exclusive to the westside. Eastsiders sometimes announce, with some pride, that such 'business' has nothing to do with them. At other times they complain bitterly of their exclusion from the major networks.

The Periphery

If one tried hard and always faced the east, it would almost be possible to collect sufficient data to write an ethnography of the 'traditional' life of the Alyawarra and Kaititj at Warrabri. In the most easterly camps, situated some four hundred yards from ablution blocks and almost a mile from school and store, no English is spoken. These are people who rarely venture into the settlement area. Police visit infrequently. Concerns of kinship and ritual obligations are paramount.

However, the very choice to live at the extreme edge of the settlement and to not participate, leaves these people materially impoverished, a position they view with ambivalence. Until 1977
they had little say in the running of Warrabri, but as a result of a Department of Aboriginal Affairs’ directive, the Council has been made more representative of local groups than it was previously. Elections were held which re-structured Council but these could not erase years of corrupt practices and the Council expectations about the nature of centre politics.

The people on the periphery do not control the flow of goods or opinion. Several enterprising whites working for the housing and farm associations recognised that their organizations could find a possible support group for a new empire which they might conceivably build. They sought to establish alliances with the eastsiders. The farm is now defunct for many reasons, one of which is the lack of interest displayed by Alyawarra in achieving status in socio-economic terms. The scale of the project was too vast and was not integrated into their life style. When attempts to render the operation of the farm compatible with their life style and aspirations failed, this group disbanded.

East-west, centre-periphery are, as I have already stated, cross-cutting models of spatial relations which articulate power relationships between and amongst blacks and whites. The investment of westsiders in centre politics is of long standing. Their experience of institutionalized living and dispossession of their lands has created an environment wherein Warlpiri now seek status in a blend of socio-economic and ritual terms. In an attempt to render their existence less schizophrenic, they have incorporated whites and their goods, to a degree, within Warlpiri social structure. Where clashes are unavoidable the rules have been bent.

On the other hand, eastsiders have less investment in centre politics and seek status in ritual, rather than socio-economic, terms. Settlement tensions have impinged less on Kaititj and Alyawarra as they
are still in contact with their country. In the shift from a semi-
omadic to sedentary life style, they have managed to preserve some
autonomy of action and mobility and hence are less dependent on
white institutions and goods. Although they recognize the existence
of two different political arenas, and the advantages of a degree of
identification with white values, they see their Kaititj and Alyawarra
identity as precious and threatened by interaction with whites and
even with Warlpiri. Before drawing any conclusions for women's role
and status from this overview of the contemporary Warrabri situation
and exploration of the past, I wish to examine the way in which the
dogma of dreaming provides a unifying force in the lives of Warrabri
women.

DIMENSION THREE: THE JUKURRPA

In the two preceding sections, I have not attempted to strip back
the layers of 'contaminating contact' to reveal the pristine social
forms of desert society, nor have I sought to extract that which is
traditional from that which is a product of contact in the contemporary
scene and to analyse the 'mini-world' of the 'real native'. Such
procedures would assume that we can hold constant outside forces and
focus on an internal, static field of actors and beliefs. In the
introductory chapter I stated that I was seeking a dynamic model
within which to analyse women's rituals, one which took account of
sexual politics and social change. It is within the complex notion
of dreaming as an era, a force in the lives of the living, a moral
code and ancestral spirits of the land that we find such a framework.

At one level the *jukurrpa* is an era, shrouded in the mists of
time from which people claim to be descended without actually tracing
the links. Information concerning past generations is difficult to
locate on a chronological scale because there is a taboo on the calling
of the names of the dead. This is often given as an explanation for
the shallowness of genealogies, patrilines, matrilines, and so on.
Such an explanation is tautological. I think it is more pertinent to
recognize that the remembering of a unique name and exact dates adds
little to Aboriginal understanding and perceptions of the past. What
is stressed when identifying a person, alive or dead, is their
relationship to others, their dreaming affiliations and their ritual
associations. In this way it is possible to locate every person as a
unique individual: no two persons share exactly the same social,
ritual and kin field. (Siblings are perhaps the closest and it is no
accident that it is the sibling relationship which, in seeking to
represent Aboriginal relationships in terms of the genealogy, is
collapsed by Aborigines. This allows them to assert that 'we are
descended from the one ancestor'. To say that 'our grandparents were
siblings' is sufficient to bind two people as sharing the same
country, rights and responsibilities). This shallow genealogical
memory is not a form of cultural amnesia but rather a way of focussing
on the basis of all relationships - that is, the jukurrpa and the land.
By not naming deceased relatives, people are able to stress a relation-
ship directly to the land. It is not necessary to trace back through
many generations to a founding ancestor to make the claim. By stating
that a person is of a certain country, that of, say, a grandparent, the
identity of a person is known. That relationship to country which
underpins relationships between people is also evident in the way in
which people refer to ritual objects. Frequently I heard women speak
of certain ritual objects which represented a particular ancestor,
site or track as 'mother', 'father', 'aunty'. Relationships are
stated and affirmed in terms of rights and responsibilities in country
as it is from the land that one gains identity.
At another level the *jukurrpa* is only two generations behind the present generation: it is moving concurrently with the present, its heritage entrusted to the 'old people', to the deceased grandparents. It is this aspect of the *jukurrpa* which makes any attempt to establish an ethnographic base line a misguided endeavour. The *jukurrpa* is not a long dead and fixed point of reference. It is a living and accessible force in the lives of people today, just as it was in the past. Here then is the structural potential for change; the Aboriginal mode of incorporating change with their cosmos.

The dogma of dreaming states that all the world is known and can be classified within the taxonomy created by the ancestral heroes. All possible behaviour is covered by the moral code made known through the activities of the ancestral heroes. In the *jukurrpa* was established an all encompassing law which binds people, flora, fauna and natural phenomena into one enormous interfunctioning world. This law and the order which the ancestral heroes established is immutable. The living persons who give form and substance to the law live in ever increasingly divergent life styles from those envisaged as correct by the *jukurrpa* of a century ago. For instance, people no longer live in small mobile bands but on large settlements; people no longer subsist from hunting and gathering but from rations and store bought food; people are no longer independent producers but rely on social security and wage labour. These settlement dwellers are the people who are acting out the *jukurrpa* and giving it form in rituals. Many new items can be accommodated; for example, crow bars as digging sticks and car springs as adzes. Other resources can be brought under control of the law by classification within the subsection system and still others are utilized in a distinctively Aboriginal fashion; for example, cash money in ritual exchanges (see also Meggitt 1962:260). Even residence in a new
territory can eventually be legitimated once evidence is found of
dreamtime activity in the locality. Thus the law is not challenged
by certain changes; others such as alcohol are presenting a problem. 14

The ideology of dreaming is also an historical epistemology
within which the sifting of mythical fancy from historical fact has
little relevance. In this brief exploration of the *jukurrpa* as
historical doctrine I am looking to the meanings of the forms and
offering context for the events (described in white oriented history)
which, in Aboriginal terms, are construed differently from the way in
which a person-event oriented chronology of the past century would be.

The possible disjunction between people's belief in the
immutability of the dreamtime and the actual opportunities of living
descendants to uphold and follow the law was nicely stated for me by
one woman. I was discussing with her what I took to be a breakdown in
the marriage code amongst girls living in a town camp. Young girls were
marrying younger and to men of their own choosing. 'Does this mean,'
I asked, 'that the law is breaking down?' 'No', said the woman, 'people
just get lazy. The law is still there'. Of course in time the law
becomes, within limits, what people do (Bell 1980a:248) but there is
the notion that it is there as the framework.

This notion that there is a framework is apparent in the way
in which women dream about the country in which they are living and
hunting. While out in country for which a woman has rights or wishes
to assert rights, she may have a dream or see something of

14. It is interesting to note that under the Liquor Act 1979 in the
Northern Territory Aborigines have, for the first time, been able
to express opinions on licencing regulations and they have asked
in the great majority of cases for their home areas to be declared 'dry' and restricted licences to be issued to close-by
outlets for alcohol. It appears that one solution to the alcohol
problem is to shut it out of the world in which people live their
daily lives and to confine it to towns where the rules and law
are different.
significance she believes to be associated with the travels of her ancestors through this country. There is a level of assumed activity on a particular tract of land and it is for living descendants to learn of and to transmit this knowledge. This is done in the context of ritual and visits to country when direct teaching is possible, but it is also done by finding the evidence of dreaming activity and thus being able to reassert and reaffirm the knowledge of the activity in the area. For instance, in the song repertoire of an Alyawarra woman at Warrabri there is an allusion to a Japangardi. He is kirda for the country for which she as a Napanagaka is also kirda. I had heard the song many times but on one occasion when I was translating songs with the woman she explained that the Japangardi was her younger brother's son who had fallen from a windmill and died while still a child. She explained his place in the family to me and how old he was when he died. I was then able to fix a date to the song. To her this was interesting but unimportant. She related how she dreamt of him on the day he died. When she returned to camp she knew of the death before she was told. This song is considered to be her song and when she dies it will be put aside as will all her property, name, swag, camp site and so forth. If her bush name is also the name of a site, that too will be put aside.

Many places have several names or are named at different levels of specificity according to features at a site. One of these names may be lost but the next will be retained. Eventually another kirda or kurdungurlu in the country will dream of her singing the story of the Japangardi and the song will be refound. On this occasion it will be shrouded in non-specificity of name or relation; the hero will

15. Meggitt (1962:222) comments that the loss of place names from songs causes a reorganization of songs. In my experience the naming is merely reorganized.
simply be a Japangardi of that country and it will not be dated or specified as a particular place. Often it is a person who is to assume responsibility for the country who has the reactivating dream but not always. The onus is on the finder to perform and teach the content of the dream, be it song, design or both, to other members of the land maintaining group. Because other women have heard the song when it was originally sung by the first finder, they will be able to correct the singing when it is refound.

I have seen Warrabri women correct songs when refound. On one occasion a particular phrase of a song was sung in conjunction with the second phrase of another closely related song. One older woman claimed she had heard the song some twenty-five years earlier but had remembered it. Of course it is impossible to know whether the two versions were actually the same. The important value being stressed is the sameness that is derived from the country and the evidence of the activity in that area. At the cultural level one can assert that little has changed but at the level of the word itself much may have changed. These changes do not in themselves alter the direction or intent of the ancestors as that is bound by the law but because the law is only made known through human agents, over generations, changes must occur.

Although each song, dance and design bears the stamp of its finder, the dogma of dreaming which entails this necessary and continuous process of re-invention ensures that no one person may claim to be an individually inspired creator; living persons may only assert and reaffirm the law and act as the custodians of knowledge of the dreamtime experience. This process of reinvention is necessary because of the taboos on a person's property at death. It is continuous because the dreamings must be shown to have continuity and
people to have access to the dreamtime. Renewal depends on access to country. Over the generations a song which referred to a specific incident will become shrouded in oblique references, intelligible only to the contemporaries of the person depicted in the song or design. Thus once the reference is to subsection and no longer to a particular person, the song becomes part of a more general repertoire of ancestral activity in an area. Ultimately it will concern the ancestors themselves.

WOMEN: CHANGE AND CONTINUITY

Warrabri women's interweaving of the past and present within the seamless web of the *jukurrpa* has created an illusion of stasis. For the anthropologist it is tempting to read directly from the present to the past and by an act of retrodiction to declare that women are, and always have been, excluded and oppressed. Such a conclusion is over simplistic and accounts for neither the sexual politics of desert society nor the inevitability of change. Women's role has changed and with it the relation between the sexes. While it has always been possible to accommodate gradual change and remain secure that the law is untarnished, the dramatic changes of the last century have taxed the dogma of immutability. In their rapidly crumbling world, women have clung tenaciously to certain key values and institutions such as the separation of the sexes in the *jilimi*. In so doing women have found continued meaning for their self image as independent and autonomous members of their society. In this section I wish to tease out contrasts between east and westside women's responses to the changes of the last century. The distinctive way in which each has elaborated and accommodated change indicates important aspects of women's status today and in the past. In conclusion I argue that woman's separateness within her own society has become the means of
her exclusion from the wider society of the colonial north.

Kaititj women worked beside their menfolk in the mines and on the stations. From the northern Kaititj women I have heard their reminiscences about working the windlass, chopping wood, breaking horses, mustering and droving. None of these tasks were considered to be sex specific but they were none the less pursued separately from men. The enshrined stereotype is of men as glamorous stockmen and women as domestics and sex objects. This is not borne out by life history material I collected, nor reports of men such as Chewings (1930, 1936) who states that women were engaged in wide ranging jobs (guides, camel minding) early in the century. Women did engage in stock work and continued to work as responsible individuals in 'traditional men's work' until very recently. In the remoter areas Aboriginal women worked in jobs which were not considered suitable for white women. Camel minding, for instance, was a dangerous task, as Chewings (1936:58) willingly admits; mustering was hard work but the independence of Aboriginal women gave them the right and opportunity to be thus employed. It was the presence of white women on cattle stations and the missionaries in the towns which curtailed many of these activities.

Opportunities to engage in productive labour were limited for women on settlements and missions. Men were classified as the household heads and men did what little work there was. Meggitt (1962:153) provides insights to the Phillip Creek mission where, unlike Yuendumu and Hooker Creek, men carried out all the ration distributions. Women were thus immediately classified as dependent on men. Women did find work as domestics but when this was in the context of a mission, they were domestics who served. No longer were they the individual producers as they had been in the past. Thus I am suggesting it was not
only the opportunities available to Aboriginal women but also the white perception of woman's role which constrained Aboriginal women. Missionaries needed to create god-fearing women who knew shame. In addition white bosses needed women to perform certain duties. Cattle station managers wanted workers who were all-round helpers. Of course in frontier conditions the usual double standard applied to women, who were expected to work like cart horses during the day in the fields and to be mares for the master in the evenings. Women on missions did not escape sexual exploitation either and the Phillip Creek experience was a traumatic one for many women alive today. One woman told me that following the encounter with missionaries her family moved and did not return to Tennant Creek for a decade.

Women in the towns, near the telegraph stations and mines, were undoubtedly drawn into liaisons with white men. Women today claim that their grandmothers entered into these relationships because their sexuality and their feelings were theirs to bestow as they wished. Today also younger women insist that liaisons with younger men, white or black, are their affairs and do not necessarily threaten marriage contracts. The trouble occurs when the Aboriginal male, who had always had to tolerate a degree of discrete sexual freedom in his wife, finds his marriage contract challenged. Aboriginal women were expected to return and when they did not Aboriginal males expected the proper exchange of goods and services to occur. This was rarely the case. White men had no sense of lasting obligation. Often white men/black women relationships are written of in terms of prostitution where the Aboriginal male is the pimp, but many older Aboriginal women disagree with this characterization. They state they went willingly, that they enjoyed the love making and the payments they received. Women exercised their own initiative, secured goods, admiration and pleasure of themselves. Ultimately it was the Aboriginal men who were
dissatisified because they were not being recognized properly. They were being paid but the nature of the contract which binds Aboriginal men was not honoured by white men. The Aboriginal male reaction was to remove women from the gaze of white men. So from a position of independence women became vulnerable, in need of protection in a way previously impossible when marriages were based on alliances (backed by a web of kin rights and responsibilities) between families, not individuals, and affairs were a woman's own business. I am suggesting that although women are visible very early in the literature as strong, independent personalities, they were quickly removed and protected by their menfolk who wished to retain a basis to their claims that they had the right to bestow women's services.

On many cattle stations the liaisons between white males and Aboriginal women were enduring relationships with children raised as the heirs to the property, only to be deposed by the arrival of the white wife in the second decade of settlement. Women on missions and in the towns were engaged in shorter, more brutal liaisons with white men and often their children were removed by Welfare to institutions or raised by the Aboriginal mother and her Aboriginal husband. Assessments of the lot of these children vary. Tuxworth (1979:47) states that the women were 'adaptable to all station duties, including handling cattle'. Beckett (1914-5:28) writes that:

The lot of the half-caste man is necessarily much easier than that of his sister ... the half-caste girl who remains with the tribe anywhere in the vicinity of a civilized settlement has one inevitable destiny, and that the most degraded.

In many analyses Aboriginal women are denied an active decision making role in black/white liaisons because observers tend to believe that women are a kind of property or object (see Berndt 1979:29). Wives were not sold: they were able to exercise a high degree of choice: they fought, they insulted, they remained in their country where their power
base was strong. The marriage contract was one between families, it did not entail control over sexuality but it did entail rights and responsibilities for the children of the women. My data here are based on discussion with women over the age of sixty who remember the first time they saw a white man and speculate as to the nature of 'woman trouble' today and in the past.

The male dominated nature of the colonial frontier in the Northern Territory impinged on both eastsiders and westsiders but in each situation women played different roles and enjoyed different statuses. Westsiders' formative experiences were within the context of institutions like the church, mission, and settlement, whereas eastsiders learnt of whites while still living in small family camps on cattle stations or mines. The context within which the Aranda women of Warrabri and the Warlpiri women have learnt of white society and been dispossessed of their land is different and accounts for some variation between the groups. We do, however, need to look into the relationships now and in the past between women and land. There are marked differences between the westsiders and eastsiders which are no doubt magnified by the events of the past century but which are none the less ideas which people have about their worlds.

In the land maintaining rituals of Warrabri women, we can see evidence for the differential impact on eastside and westside women of the changes of the past century. Aranda rituals are closed, private, exclusive family affairs with little overt desire to incorporate the outsider made manifest. The Warlpiri, on the other hand, stage wide sprawling, all inclusive rituals designed to incorporate and to recruit people. In the Aranda system of land tenure people are mapped onto land with a tightness of organization and structure which is possible in their relatively well watered territory. However the Warlpiri system of land tenure is more diffuse; the land maintaining
group a shifting and negotiable ensemble of persons held together by a widely based interlocking web of relationships.

Within the context of cattle station life the Aranda have been able to accommodate their land maintaining rituals. They have remained in family groups and near their own land or at least land to which they have ties which can be activated. The demands of the cattle industry have dovetailed with their desire to be out in country and to organize their own work routines. Women have been able to maintain a tie to the land which included use of the land and to be employed as independent workers. Most importantly cattle station people have retained control over many affairs which the station managers did not want to know about. Warlpiri, on the other hand, have experienced missions and ration depots where white control was extremely intrusive and the heavy hand of administrators ever present; where male-female liaisons were short and brutal. They have come into towns, been moved to settlements and attempted to live as communities, a rare opportunity in the past, but in so doing have lost their access to and use of land. They have attempted to incorporate others in their rituals but have lost many secrets in the process.

For Kaititj and Alyawarra their tight organization, coupled with the possibility of remaining in small family groups on cattle stations, has enabled the women to feel that their rituals are still of relevance to their land and that they are in control. They continue to feel this, although some rituals are no longer possible. Because of these factors, I am arguing that Kaititj women have maintained their position via-à-via men. They have worked beside them, remained on their own country, and hence have retained the power basis for certain claims they may make on men. Most importantly they have continued to live in small family groups where they are consulted and able to express
their demands to be heard and right to be respected.

Warlpiri women, on the other hand, have not enjoyed this small supportive family atmosphere. They have lived in situations where the expectation is that women must appear subservient in public. They have been cast as wives, as mothers, as ones who support a male but who are not consulted in the distribution of resources. They have not enjoyed the privileges which flow from living on one's own country but men have gained some support from living as 'household heads'.

All of these accommodations, however, occurred after the brutal and violent pacification period. This was felt particularly acutely by Kaititj in the 1880's and by the Warlpiri in the 1920's. Kaititj therefore had several generations in which to assimilate and make sense of the changes. One response of the Kaititj, I am suggesting, has been a turning inwards and a rejection of all white values as distasteful. In this way we can understand the apparent enigma of Warrabri where the Kaititj, with a long contact period with whites, famed for their treachery at Barrow Creek and feared from then on, massacred in reprisals and subject to two major pacification drives in Central Australia, have none the less retained a tight reign on their rituals and country.

Small family groups on cattle stations have been able to retain hunting and gathering skills in a more meaningful way than have the settlement people. The area around cattle stations does not become as devastated as it does around settlements. Also, the country was very often that for which the family had a special responsibility and in terms of the pride and skills passed on to one's descendants, this has been very important. The heavy hand of the assimilationists did not reach the cattle stations with anything like the force it did on settlements and missions. Polygyny persisted with all the checks and
balances intact and initiation continued to be performed in the bush, as did birth until very recently. In summary, women and men were manifestly engaged in a joint enterprise of maintaining their country and their families.

I have gone to some lengths to spell out the context of a century of contact for the residents of Warrabri for several reasons. There is a big difference between the vitality, range and theme of the Warlpiri and Kaititj but there are also many similarities - mainly of a structural nature. I am suggesting that the difference between the small tight group organization of Kaititj and the more sprawling communities of Warlpiri has been further elaborated and magnified in the last hundred years. Kaititj women have become so private about their rituals (which have always been a closed affair) that observers such as Strehlow (1971:647) believed that the rituals no longer existed. The contact period has been brutal and women have turned to and grasped different strands as anchors. Warlpiri women have sought to throw off the burden of constant food gathering by seeking security in the 'love marriage', Kaititj have sought to come to terms with their radically altered world by elaborating existing rituals which have continued meaning. This has been possible because people have remained on their land whence they may constantly reaffirm their worth.

CONCLUSION

The idea that men have certain roles and that women occupy a particular place is today as clear cut as it was in the past. Women's work is still women's work: men's work is still men's work. However, the context within which this work is undertaken, the way in which the work is evaluated and the nature of the work have altered radically. While women's separateness was underwritten by a critically important economic and ritual role, while it was possible to draw directly on
the land, women's authority and autonomy was secure. Although today women continue to assert their rights within their society and to celebrate these in their rituals, their position vis-à-vis men has been considerably weakened. For the context within which male-female negotiations now occur is an arena where male control is the norm and the roles made available to women are restrictive and predicated on an image of women as sex objects, wife and mother. Where once was independence now there is relative dependence. In Aboriginal Australia women worked constantly and that contribution made them indispensable to their menfolk. Rations relieved woman of the burden of food getting but made her primarily someone's wife and mother. Today woman has no security as an independent producer but is dependent on social security payments which entail relationships over which she has no control. She is the member of a household, one with a nominal male head and notional breadwinner; she is a dependant. In the past women lived with men in small mobile bands where female solidarity was possible. Today women live on settlements where male solidarity is given new support and additional opportunities to be realized. Men now monopolize the work which men and women previously shared.

While women are recognized as the 'feeders and breeders', men are groomed as politicians by their fellow white male administrators and liaison officers. Aboriginal women have been cut out of much of the political life of larger settlements and left in their camps to produce babies and small artefacts. Such is the wont of women, runs European reasoning. Further, because it is inappropriate for Aboriginal men and women to sit together in large mixed gatherings, most consultations with settlement communities take place between Aboriginal and white males (Bell & Ditton 1980:5-8). By the time it was proposed that councils should be established on settlements, the die was cast.
Men had become the political spokespersons and women the followers.

To pursue this argument of a shift in the meaning and consequence of women's separation from men in ritual and daily life, I have explored the changing face of desert society. The contemporary Warrabri scene I examined in terms of cross-cutting cleavages and ties, such as the east-west division of the Aboriginal population, a centre-periphery division between the white dominated service core of the settlement and the Aboriginal camps scattered around this periphery. This is the underlying framework within which women gave the *jukurrpa* ritualized form. The past was rather more difficult to characterize because the documentation is meagre and male oriented, but it seems to me that the situation between and within groups has always been one of flux and fluidity. The shift from a hunter-gatherer mode of subsistence to a sedentary life style on government settlements, cattle stations, missions and towns has meant more than the loss of land for Aboriginal men and women. Today they no longer control the resource from which both physical and spiritual sustenance may be drawn. The use one makes of the land and the spiritual maintenance of that land in ritual are intertwined and underwritten by the all encompassing immutable dreamtime law. In spite of assertions that the law does not change and that everything is known within the law, there have been changes. Some entail incorporation, others rejection. The law had always been able to accommodate change but those of the last century have proved to be of such an intensity and quality that the very basis of Aboriginal existence is threatened. In the face of this upheaval women have continued to assert their importance as nurturers of people, land and relationships but they do so in a radically changed *milieu*. Today in terms of the cash economy, women are the members of households with a male breadwinner as head,
they are subject to Australian law, their role usurped by health, education and law enforcement agencies. In their camps they continue to play out the role of autonomous individuals but it is a losing battle. They no longer enjoy the relationship to the land which allows them to assert and reaffirm their direct access to the *jukurrpa* and their heritage as daughters of the dreaming. Their continued assertion in ritual that the law is relevant to their lives has allowed women to cope with many of the changes of the past century, but the nexus between land and people has been shattered. The land is now used by persons not bound by the *jukurrpa*. Nevertheless the loss of control over land has affected men differently from women and Kaititj differently from Warlpiri.

The sexual politics of desert society have become increasingly enmeshed in those of the wider society of Northern Australia in a way which impinges upon women's role and status. For Aboriginal women there is a continuity of self identity but this is given expression in a radically changed world and fashioned with dramatically different tools. For the anthropologist there is a necessary task of sifting the women's assertions from the new possible construal of women's role; of exploring the possibility of new meanings in new context.

Today and in the records of the past there is evidence to back women's assertions of independence and autonomy. Their claims are not fantasy. I have looked anew at the documentation of the past century of white 'conquest' of the desert regions and indicated evidence of women's independence and autonomy which were backed by real sanctions. In looking back nostalgically to a bygone era, Aboriginal women are not indulging in fantasy; they are yet again demonstrating that there are a number of world views and that theirs on the past explains their present day predicament more satisfactorily than the statement that women are the property of men, second class citizens, persons enjoying
few rights, and that this has always been so.

The framework within which I now wish to analyse women's rituals allows that the relationship between the sexes is underpinned by the interdependence of the sexes and the essentially complementary nature of their roles. But each sex has a separate and distinctive contribution to the society which is the basis of their sexual solidarity. This set of male-female relationships was flexible and subject to change; each party had room to manoeuvre; each had a power base. I am suggesting that in the living out of this set of relationships the nature of the roles has become increasingly rigid, the give and take a fiction, the checks and balances skewed. Aboriginal men have found a more accommodating niche in the emerging male dominated colonial society of Northern Australia. It is their power base which has been deemed a negotiating forum, not women's. Men may continue to manipulate the system, they are the politicians in the eyes of many white Australians. Women have limited access to this world of decision making. It is to the jilimi as power base and retreat that women are now turning to mark their independence and autonomy.
Chapter Five

WOMAN'S DOMAIN: THE JILIMI

INTRODUCTION

A refuge, a focus of women's daily activities, an area taboo to men, a power base, an expression of women's solidarity, the home of the ritually important and respected women, the jilimi or single women's camp is all this and more. In this chapter I explore the jilimi as a multifaceted institution which embodies much that is dear to women, while providing visible proof in the wider society of women's separateness and independence. In the past, in small family camps, there would have been only two or three women to form a jilimi, but on settlements the residents of the jilimi may number upwards of twenty. Thus the possibility of women forming larger and potentially more powerful jilimi has increased.

That women have chosen to form larger jilimi and, in ever increasing numbers, are choosing to live in the jilimi instead of entering second or third marriages, is, I suggest, indicative of women's perceptions of and responses to their changed lives in the 1970's (Bell 1980a:265-266). Further, that women live in jilimi which have as their residential core respected and powerful ritual leaders and which are known by the country in which these women have rights, is a reflection of one of the bases of women's power and authority, that is, their rights and responsibilities in land.

As women's ritual activity is controlled and initiated by women in the jilimi, I continue, after describing certain features of the jilimi, with an outline of the structure of women's rituals. Finally, I turn briefly to the implications of this portrait of women's domain for anthropological arguments concerning the nature of rights and
responsibility in land and the composition of local and social groups.

THE JILIMI OF WARRABRI

The jilimi provides shelter for single girls who are either too young or reluctant to go to their promised husbands; a safe environment both for women visiting Warrabri without their spouses and for women who, following a dispute or argument, have temporarily vacated the swag of their spouse; solace for women who are ill and emotional support for women who are not yet through the final stages of mourning (see also Meggitt 1962:76, 181). Accompanying all these women are their dependent children and charges. Forming the permanent core of the jilimi are those widows who have chosen not to remarry and other women who, although 'married', are not domiciled with their husbands. It is these women who today are the active ritual leaders and the repositories of religious knowledge. They are old enough to have reared children (not necessarily their own), to assume adult responsibility and to have acquired the necessary knowledge befitting the status of ritual leaders.

During the day women from nearby camps come into the jilimi to socialize. At night married women return to their husband's camp. The atmosphere within the jilimi is usually pleasant and supportive. Conversations centre on family, recent hunting expeditions, local scandal, ritual business and health. Women spend much time talking about their rituals but rarely discuss male rituals. At initiation time there are discussions about the timing of the 'capture' of the boys and the maturity of the youths but women do not behave as if they resented their exclusion from male domains any more than they expect men to resent their exclusion from female domains.

The life of women in the jilimi is not that of a celibate and women will wryly remark that another is looking very well that day
and speculate as to why she should look so well. The *jilimi* offers a base from which women can exclude men and seek them when desired. Of the eighty-three eastside marriages on which I have reliable data, there are twenty-eight women who remain unmarried and live in the single quarters of the *jilimi*. This is a sizeable proportion of the adult female population living outside the control of men. The *jilimi* provides the necessary environment for women to maintain both their independence of men in daily life and their separation from men in ritual. Both are mutually reinforcing aspects of *jilimi* life.

The *jilimi*, like the east-west division of the Warrabri population, is an elaboration of a traditional form but one which today is rather more starkly drawn than was possible a century ago. The physical reality of separation of the sexes which the *jilimi* represents for women is, as it were, a mode of expressing continuity of a key facet of the relations between the sexes. However, I am arguing that today this separation is construed differently within the wider society of settlements and the Northern Territory. While men and women lived in small mobile bands a respect for the independence of women was assured by the importance of their physical and spiritual nurturance roles. Separation of male and female activities allowed each to demonstrate independence but also to celebrate the essentially complementary nature of male-female in the maintenance of their society. Today the separation of the sexes and women's independence are no longer mutually reinforcing facets of women's lives. There is, I believe, an increasingly felt need on the part of women to assert their sexual solidarity. The *jilimi* has thus become both a bold assertion of independence and a celebration of separation. But as I am arguing throughout, women's independence has been eroded and their lives are increasingly threatened by the intrusion of white society into their
domain. I am suggesting that women have responded by asserting their solidarity as women who may be separate and therefore, to a degree, independent.

A large family camp, where a husband, wife and their dependent married and unmarried children and spouses live, may have a small *jilimi* within the camp area but most of the *jilimi* of which I am aware are only loosely tied to a family camp.¹ In fact, the larger Kaititj *jilimi*, in which I spent much of my time at Warrabri, was surrounded by smaller family camps which looked to the *jilimi* for financial support. The *jilimi* was a focus of female activities; rather than the older women looking to the younger women or men for support, many looked to the *jilimi*. In some ways the spatial organization of *jilimi* to family camp marked the relative financial independence of the parties involved and in other ways the personalities and strengths of character and knowledge of the women who were the core members of the *jilimi*.

O'Connell (1977a:123) has noted a similar trend in the use of space and distance between camps as markers of the relative independence of children from parents in the Alyawarra camps of MacDonald Downs. At Warrabri in 1976-1978, the Warlpiri women had two large *jilimi* which divided along the lines of age, interest, commitment to 'centre politics' and its rewards. The older women maintained a larger and more permanent camp which initiated or hosted most Warlpiri women's rituals and much of the 'sorry' (mourning) business also. The women stored their ritual treasures in a forty-four gallon drum, sat in the shelter of their bough shade to paint up but

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¹ Meggitt (1962:52; 1972:81) argues for the existence of 'women's country' in which the women's camp is located and through which women set out to hunt and gather. This is true of Kaititj at Warrabri but not Warlpiri.
In the temporary dwellings of the Karlu Karlu women:
Nampijinpa, Nakamarra
rarely danced in the area of the jilimi. Any performances were held closer to the centre of the settlement in the school grounds. Their control over their performances was thus limited but they had the advantage of displaying to others and to whites, their ability and skill in staging certain women's rituals. Much activity did take place in camp but the performances involving mass painting-up and use of ritual paraphernalia were nearly always in a public arena which became taboo to men for the duration of the ritual. This obviously was not as secure as remaining in the women's jilimi where men may not enter at all.

Alyawarra and Kaititj women on the other hand remained within their special ritual area near to the jilimi and only brought the business to the school area when specifically invited to do so by whites. The Alyawarra maintained an ever shifting complex of jilimi which moved to accommodate large groups of visiting people from other cattle stations, 'sorry' camps, personality conflicts and changes in the weather. During my stay at Warrabri I saw this complex transformed three times. There was however agreement about which women constituted the core of the jilimi and usually some of these women could be found in the jilimi. The area in which these women actually danced was attached to, but a little removed from, the jilimi. Ritual objects were stored in a lock-up shed in which several of the women slept during cold or wet weather.

The Kaititj women had one large independent jilimi and several smaller ones which accommodated the Barrow Creek and Neutral Junction people who visited and occasionally stayed at Warrabri. During 1977 the Kaititj jilimi split, after years of permanent location, and finally moved completely. When I left Warrabri in February 1978, the women were just beginning to return to the area to live but by September 1978, a further death had resulted in the establishment of a
'sorry' camp some distance to the south. The temporary ritual ground had been cleared in this area and, as of late 1979, the women had not returned to the old ritual ground.

When this camp first split, women moved out of the immediate vicinity but remained close enough to the *jilimi* site to meet during the day in the shade of some nearby salt trees. Misfortunes such as death are keenly felt by women but both Warrabri Kaititj and Papunya Warlpiri have told me that they only temporarily vacate the actual ritual area after a death and that they ultimately form another camp close enough to the old one to be able to continue to use the ritual area. However the deaths have isolated one family in a 'sorry' camp on the south side of Warrabri and for them to participate in ritual is difficult and socializing during the day in the Kaititj *jilimi* is almost impossible. The camps are just too far apart.

The Kaititj *jilimi* was always known to outsiders as the Karlukarlu *jilimi*. Karlukarlu is the name for the rock formation at Devil's Marbles in Central Australia and also the name by which Aborigines refer to the surrounding country. Several of the major dreamings which are held and celebrated by these women centre on this country. Within the camp there are finer distinctions and groupings but the overall basis of membership was an association with the dreamings which pass through the Devil's Marbles area. All the women could offer genealogical validation for their residence in the camp but as these links could also be forged with other women who did not live in the *jilimi*, I looked further for an explanation of their co-residence in the Karlukarlu camp. It was only when I began collecting life history material from these women that I was struck by the pattern of co-residence in the past. These women had all lived together for many years at the wolfram mines at Wauchope, Barrow Creek and Hatches Creek, and at Greenwood Station. Thus genealogy had been further reinforced.
by work and residence histories. Wives and mothers of kirda and kurdungurlu, by their long period of residence in the Devil's Marbles area, have attained a high degree of knowledge about the country and thereby rights of a non-inheritable nature in the dreamings celebrated by the women who are kirda and kurdungurlu. As we shall see in Chapter eight, there are ways of incorporating such persons within a ritual land maintaining unit.

The Kaititj jilimi living area was situated to the east of the settlement and to the north of the other Aranda eastside camps. Thus it is oriented to the country in which the residents have an interest and responsibilities. The internal organization of the Kaititj jilimi and ritual area was indicative of the serious and devout attitude of these women to their country. Within a large cleared area, the women had built two long constructions which ran north-south and faced each other across a cleared space. On the east side were the long, low sleeping quarters which could be adapted to afford protection against rain and opened out to take advantage of winter sun. The building was, like most other desert jilimi, a long, snake-like building which expanded and contracted to accommodate visitors and other temporary residents. Within the sleeping quarters, the space was further divided into individual areas which held the swags of one or two closely related women and their children. In the Alyawarra jilimi and sometimes in the Kaititj, these swags were separated by a low wall and each always had an individual fire. (Warlpiri women do not have such markers of privacy and unit within their jilimi.)

The Kaititj jilimi was one of the few dry places during the extraordinary rains of February 1977. Women would sit inside the dry sleeping quarters of the jilimi and explain with a sense of pride and achievement, the virtues of the jilimi which they themselves had built.
Their skills were based on a lengthy tradition of craftswomen (see also Hamilton 1979:195). Across the open space where cooking and general socializing occurred was the long, but not so low, daytime shade of the *jilimi* complex. This opened to the east and thus provided deep shade in the hot afternoon but took advantage of the early sun on the crisp desert mornings. Women spent their days peacefully chatting, caring for their children, cooking, mending and sewing in this shade. This description of *jilimi* life contrasts with Meggitt's (1962:236): 'The old women also constitute cliques, generally centred on the widows' camps which are 'hot-beds of gossip'.

**THE ECONOMIC BASE OF THE *JILIMI***

During my eighteen months at Warrabri, I frequently went hunting with women but in no way could one consider the foraging activities of these women to provide the reliable portion of the diet. The food resources have been over-exploited in the close vicinity of the settlement and thus women are forced to travel further afield for food. Due to their limited access to vehicles, they can rarely get very far from the settlement. Warrabri is in Kaititj country so not all women are free to gather in all areas adjacent to the settlement. The Warlpiri women prefer to gather to the west of the settlement, while Kaititj like to hunt in the Devil's Marbles or Barrow Creek area.

In the past women's contribution to the diet in the desert was considerable, but women certainly do not now, and claim they never did in the past, rely upon men for their daily food intake. The meat caught by men was more a bonus, a feast, than the daily fare. As I have stated in the previous chapter, when women hunt they bring home only that part of the catch which they do not wish to eat or have reserved for those women and children who did not join them in the day's hunt. Women will also retain some food for their husbands but...
they do not state this as their primary aim in collecting food (see also Hamilton 1979:212ff). The ones who wish to eat, the ones they wish to feed, should accompany them on the hunting trip.

Food is still distributed by women amongst women according to certain obligations, but they no longer have the daily opportunity to consume their share before they return to camp. Once they have purchased food in the store they are prey to all askers. Women have thus lost the right to distribute food amongst a finite number of close women relatives with whom they have chosen to spend the day, and must instead make decisions concerning requests for food from their co-settlement residents. Control of food was possible in the past because women were separate while food gathering and in control of their produce, at least until they returned to camp. I wondered whether men resented the way in which women ate their fill before returning to camp to distribute the few remaining morsels. I also wondered whether men tried to force women to share the entire day's catch with them. For women living in the jilimi this is not such a problem for they return to the company of other women after a hunting trip. Some women, however, may return to a married camp. I have heard men say tentatively 'Anything for me?' and accept what was given. I have also heard men joking that if they really wanted to eat the food they would have to accompany the women. One said to me, 'That's what happens when you stay in camp'.

Although I have stated that the hunting and gathering I saw did not produce a reliable or sizeable portion of the diet, the activity had other ends. It allowed women valuable time away from the tensions of the settlement and a time with their children to whom women could demonstrate their knowledge and skills. The presence of children on hunting trips is important for many reasons. It is one way in which
children learn of country, but it is also the way in which children come to enjoy a varied diet. School attendances reduce the opportunities for children to enjoy their country and the company of their female kin in this way. Kaititj and Alyawarra women have more opportunities for their children to admire the activities of women and for the women to display their talents because their country is more accessible. These women also have less commitment to their children attending western oriented schools.

Economically the *jilimi* women still enjoy a measure of independence and rely on their own income. Today this is in the form of pensions - primarily old age pensions and some supporting mother's benefits (see Bell & Ditton 1980:94-96). Pensioners are considered to be important within the Aboriginal community as they are the persons who receive a reliable income. In the Aboriginal view this is an appropriate policy of the Department of Social Security, that is, caring for the aged. Other pensions are less reliable and subject to variation. It is not unusual to find families attached to a *jilimi* in order to share the benefits of the pensions which the elderly and widowed receive (see Bell & Ditton 1980:39). Hamilton (1975:174-5) has argued that people's perception that social security payments such as child endowment are women's wages has placed women at a disadvantage *vis-à-vis* the men who receive other benefits in their role of household head. She argues that in accordance with the independence of the sexes each perceive the money received as theirs to spend. Women whose only allowance is child endowment are in greater difficulties in this respect than are women who receive widow's pensions. Many *jilimi* are in fact relatively independent in terms of pension income and the older women have debts they may call upon from such persons as sons-in-law. Thus I am suggesting that the basis of independence has changed but
women may still remain substantially economically independent. They do not however exercise the same degree of control over their produce as was possible in the past and they are responsible for a wider group of persons.

THE RITUAL LAND BASE OF THE JILIMI

Much of my knowledge of jilimi life is oriented towards the ritual activity that the older women residents initiate. This is not surprising because once it was known and established that I was at Warrabri to learn of women's business, answers to my questions were slanted towards ritual. It is also, however, I think a reflection of the way in which women name jilimi and the way in which they conceive of its core membership.

Land Tenure: Warlpiri and Aranda

The rights and responsibilities a woman enjoys by virtue of her affiliation with certain country help explain the composition and focus of the jilimi of Warrabri. In the Warlpiri system of land tenure, the link between the role and relationship of a person to country is stressed in the use of kin based terms to denote the nature of the affiliation to land. Warlpiri inhabit vast stretches of sand dune desert country where a basic problem is to achieve a balance between people and land which permits knowledge of vast tracts of country to be maintained. Warlpiri emphasize dreaming tracks and the interlocking nature of the tracks which criss-cross the land. People are thus 'spread out' across the land. The sites at which tracks cross may be shared by several groups of persons who meet to celebrate rituals for the maintenance of that land. Often such meeting places are 'hand over' sites where members of one dreaming terminate their responsibility and rights in the dreaming and hand it over to the next
group which then 'carries' the dreaming to the next 'hand over' point. In this way groups may be linked across vast areas and each will know something of the dreamings of the other. While the notion of a discretely held parcel of country is not pronounced, Warlpiri will speak of 'my country', nguru, and mean an area, not merely a site or track. In the better watered areas, such as in the Lander River area, the land tenure system comes to resemble the Kaititj system which it abuts in this district.

The Aranda system of land tenure works by mapping people as a group onto an area of land, and then marking the relationships with a suffix which encodes the nature of the affiliation. Warlpiri mark the same relationship with a kin based term. Aranda country is on the whole better supplied with water, broken by substantial ranges and thought of as comprising discrete blocks within which there are a number of sites which tend to cluster in areas of key resources. Tracks also tend to converge within 'a country' rather than transverse it as do Warlpiri tracks. These differences in land tenure systems are made manifest in the rituals which maintain the land, such as the yawalyu staged by the older women of the Warlpiri and Kaititj jilimi of Warrabri.

*Kirda* and *Kurdungurlu*

Women have two clear sets of descent based rights and responsibilities in country. I shall discuss this pair in most detail because it is this pair which structures the land maintaining rituals of both men and women. Both Aranda and Warlpiri speak of themselves as being related to country in a specific way. Of one country a person may say, 'That is my mother', and of another 'That is my father'. To each of these countries, that is, the countries of one's parents, a person has a duty to ensure that certain ritual acts
occur in the manner prescribed by the *jukurrpa*. In the spiritual maintenance of a particular country both people who call the country 'mother', the *kurdungurlu*, and people who call the country 'father', the *kirda*, must be present. The ritual roles of these two categories of person are essentially interdependent and complementary (Bell 1980b; Hale 1980). In attempting to explain the relationship between *kirda* and *kurdungurlu* to a land claim hearing, a witness stated: 'It is level like that - *kirda* and *kurdungurlu*. *Tudalka* we call them, *jukurrpa*, *kirda*, *kurdungurlu*, *tudalka*. As he spoke he pressed his thumbs together side by side and then the fingers of each hand (transcript of evidence 1980:113).

Fig. 1. Descent: *Kirda* and *Kurdungurlu*

The Warlpiri kin based terms which distinguish these two lines and sets of rights and responsibility are known and used by the Kaititj of Warrabri. Both Kaititj and Warlpiri state that a person is *kirda* for the country of one's father, and father's father, while one is *kurdungurlu* for the country of one's mother and mother's father (see figure 1). *Kirda* is one of the Warlpiri terms for father and *kurdu* the term for
woman's child: thus the meaning of the terms is contained in the etymology of the words (Bell 1979b:16; Wafer & Wafer 1980:6; Nash 1980:17). In Aboriginal English these terms have been given the glosses 'owner' for kirda and 'worker'/manager' for kurdungurlu. The analogy is based on the cattle station experience and is apt to mislead if taken as a literal translation.²

Aranda appear to have taken more readily to the term kurdungurlu (than to kirda), it being an extremely useful term and frequently within the Aranda system, a more precise description in terms of actual genealogical relationships, that is, the child of a woman, than for the Warlpiri. (This is discussed below in terms of marriage patterns.) Kirda and kurdungurlu are used to gloss both ritual roles and relationship to country by Warlpiri but Aranda tend to use the terms for the ritual role and mark the relationship to land by the addition of a suffix. Thus for mother's country aljirra (dreaming) is affixed to the name of the country. This then becomes the name of the persons who call the country 'mother'. For father's country one affixes arinya (associated with) and this term becomes the name of the people who call that country 'father'. For the country of Karlukarlu (Devil's Marbles) the kirda will be called karlukarlu-arinya and the kurdungurlu, karlukarlu-aljirra. This mode of mapping people directly onto country is one of the differences between the Warlpiri and Aranda systems of land tenure and is indicative of the tight nature of the relationship of people to land and land to people in Aranda territory (see also Strehlow 1970:99 and Meggitt 1965:147).

² Under the Aboriginal Land Rights (N.T.) Act 1976 'traditional ownership been further interpreted. To avoid confusion I use the indigenous terms. See also Bell 1979b:2ff, 1980b:6; Maddock 1979, 1980.
A woman shares her responsibility as *kirda* with her 'sisters', 'brothers', 'fathers', 'fathers' brothers and sisters' and 'fathers' fathers' brothers and sisters', and so on back through the patriline, but this is not the way in which women speak of land. Women tend to say, 'I hold *mardimi*, that country from my *pimirdi* (f.z.) or *warringiyi* (f.f.) or *kirdana* (f.)'. As *kirda* a woman holds certain knowledge which is encoded in myths, designs, songs, gestures and various ritual objects. These validate her rights in the country. She must perform certain rituals to uphold that trust and to transmit the knowledge. This can only be achieved with the co-operation of the *kurdungurlu* for the country for which she is *kirda*. A woman is *kurdungurlu* for the country her mother holds from her father. Thus a woman will say, 'I hold that country from my *jamirdi* (m.f.)'.

Fig. 2. 'Holding Country' *kirda* and *kurdungurlu*

![Diagram](image)

shares her responsibility with her own sibling set, her 'mothers' sisters' children', her 'mothers' fathers' sisters' children' and her 'mothers' brothers' daughters' children' (Fig.2). As *kurdungurlu* she is responsible for the safety of the ritual objects for the correct performance of rituals, for the singing and painting up. It is she who 'wakes up' the *kirda*, who opens the dancing ground and who 'lifts up' the country. In giving evidence in the Willowra land claim, a
Nangala demonstrates how women 'lift up' the country.
*Kirda* and *kurdongurlu* lift up the boards.
Nangala said: 'We lift it up straight in the correct way - of the mother and of the mother's father' (see transcript of evidence 1980: 263,271-2,279). Kurduŋurlu participate in rituals for the maintenance of country and are custodians of the dreaming knowledge. In fact one Warlpiri woman at Willowra stated that it is the kurduŋurlu who hold the 'secret side' of the knowledge (ibid.:273). This is certainly true of Warrabri Kaititj. Kurduŋurlu must be present at all ceremonies and important site visits because it is they who keep the kirda 'straight' and punish them if they deviate from the business. In this role kurduŋurlu are sometimes called 'policemen'. Kurduŋurlu have a detailed knowledge of country and responsibility to ensure the proper management of country - that is, that the nexus between the use of the land and the maintenance of the land - is not threatened.

The primary kurduŋurlu (that is, tracing the relationship in terms of actual genealogy) for the country of Karlukarlu are the children of the senior women kirda of that country. Thus for a woman kirda, her actual daughter may play the role of kurduŋurlu in ritual performances. This is possible because the age difference may be as little as fifteen years. For male kirda of a country, the primary kurduŋurlu will be his sisters' children, that is, his nephews. The persons who together act as kirda are related by patrilineal descent which for women entails an aunt-niece pair while for men a father-son pair. The former use a reciprocal term pimirdi and the relationship is an egalitarian one. The father-son relationship is one marked by authority and respect and perhaps an age difference of thirty-five years. Although male and female kirda differ in their kin inter-relationships, the unity of these agnatically tied sibling sets is emphasized in the sign/gesture language. Pimirdi, and son to father, are indicated
by a gentle tap with the outstretched index finger on the chin.

The actual persons who assume the responsibilities of key *kirda* and *kurdungurlu* in ritual comprise a smaller, ideally sub-group, of those who are *kirda* and primary *kurdungurlu* as outlined above. Only those who are old enough, have gained the necessary knowledge and skills and been in lengthy contact with the country will play the ritual roles of *kirda* and *kurdungurlu*. Pragmatics often cut across prescriptions at this point in such a way that a person who is a distant classificatory *kurdungurlu* may assume the ritual role. Persons who are resident in a country are far more likely to acquire the necessary knowledge, be able to exercise responsibility and thus be recognized as *kirda* and *kurdungurlu* for the purposes of ritual, rather than those who live in a distant country (Bell 1979a:16, 1979b:15). The persons who are related to the country but who are absent will still have rights; they will need however to spend time in the country to achieve status as knowledgeable and therefore authoritative ritual *kirda* or *kurdungurlu*.

In ritual the people may act as 'stand in' *kirda* and *kurdungurlu* but generally they can trace a relationship, distant though it may be, to validate their claims to act as *kirda* or *kurdungurlu*. They may however claim to be *kurdungurlu* simply at the level of patrimoiet. This I term 'secondary *kurdungurlu*' (see Wafer & Wafer 1980:16). I have been using *kirda* and *kurdungurlu* in relation to ritual roles and relationship to country but there is also this third sense in which the terms are used, that is to distinguish one patrimoiet from the other (Meggitt 1972:69). Where a four section system applies, as with Alyawarra, this does not create confusion between the section affiliation of primary and secondary *kurdungurlu* as the relationship between the patrimoieties is one of direct reciprocity. However when
Jakamarra and Napaljarri, *kirda* and *kurungurlu*, share the maintenance of the country in which they live.
there is an eight section system, as with Warlpiri and Kaititj, the division into semi-moieties is neutralized in the reckoning of the secondary kurdungurlu (see Bell 1979b).

Fig. 3. Reciprocity: *kirda* and *kurdungurlu*

**Four Section System**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Kamarrria (A)</th>
<th>Pitjarra (C)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ngwarrayi (B)</td>
<td>Purla (D)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Eight Section System**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Nakarrria (A)</th>
<th>Nolpyarri (C)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Nungawayi (B)</td>
<td>Nappinga (D)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Marriage and Land Tenure

The *kirda* and *kurdungurlu* relationship is descent based but it is through marriage links that the placement of *kurdungurlu* within another *kirda* group is achieved. Thus, as illustrated below, if women of *kirda* group A marry men from *kirda* group B, the children of this marriage will be *kurdungurlu* for country A and *kirda* for country B. If this woman's 'brother' were to marry her 'husband's sister', then the *kurdungurlu* for *kirda* group A would be in B and B's *kurdungurlu* would be in A's.  

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3. Meggitt (1962:196) notes that 'In a structural sense intermarriage between a pair of Warlpiri matrilines involves men in the exchange of sisters' but he prefers to focus on lines rather than groups. The topic of marriage is vexsome because of the asymmetry between a male and female model of a first choice marriage. This is ideally said to be, for a man with his 'm.m.b.d.d.', but this must be seen as a category of cousin rather than an actual genealogically traced relationship. As discussed in Chapter nine, a woman, in a first choice arranged marriage, marries into the second ascending generation from herself.
In the Aranda system the preference appears to be to find spouses from adjacent countries and to thus establish kurdunguru links with neighbouring countries. How marriages are contracted then becomes an important factor in understanding the ritual maintenance of land. This is further discussed in Chapter nine. What is important to the discussion at this point is that the exchange is not solely between country A and B. Country A will abut several countries and seek to establish links to all of them. One patriline within country A may seek spouses within a patriline of country B who may reciprocate. Another patriline within A may look to C, and another to D. If we place A at the central node in the marriage/land alliance complex, we get the pattern of an overlapping checkerboard (see Fig. 5).

4. O'Connell (1977c:5-6) distinguishes level one and level two countries within the country of a patriclan. Level two is the 'highest level of integration' at which a patriclan may be said to 'own' land. Level one countries are usually named after a major site within the level two country. There may be no level one countries for some named countries. As further data is forthcoming from land claims it may be possible to determine at which level exchanges occur. On the basis of my own data and land claims to date, I believe it is the level one which organizes marriages. See Bell (1979b) for criticism of level one-two countries as a static model. (In Figure one, patriline A and B could constitute a level two country.)
Within this system there is always the possibility of incorporating yet another country and the potential of spreading knowledge further afield. At 'borders' of Kaititj country in the Lander/Hanson River area there is intermarriage between countries which are thus jointly maintained by Kaititj and Warlpiri (Wafer & Wafer 1980:3). A similar thing occurs between Alyawarra and Kaititj, Warramunga and Alyawarra. Underlying this system there is a notion of reciprocity (see Meggitt 1972:73). People say 'Today I am kirda: tomorrow I will be kurdungurlu. We turn around to help each other'. This level of reciprocity is manifest at the levels of patrimoieties discussed above and at the level of marriage exchange discussed in Chapter nine.

The reciprocity inherent in the system of social classification into section and subsections, in marriage and in land tenure can be represented diagrammatically thus:

Fig. 6. Ritual Reciprocity: Marriage, kirda and kurdungurlu.
(ii) Marriage links between *Kirda* pairs

(iii) *Kurdungurlu* links between *kirda* pairs.

Viewed in this way we can see the relationship of people to land as a web of circulating relationships. It is not a system of isolated patricians each maintaining and jealously guarding its own discrete territory. Without the links established through marriage, without the ritual reciprocity of *kirda* to *kurdungurlu*, patricians would exist in total isolation unable to paint themselves for ritual, unable to visit their own sites, unable to maintain their country or to reproduce the next generation. During the Willowra land claim a witness was asked if *kirda* could paint themselves in the absence of *kurdungurlu* (that is, were *kirda* ritually self sufficient). 'No', he answered, 'kurdungurlu paint. *Kirda* would become disassociated/without desire/apathetic if they tried to paint themselves' (transcript of evidence 1980:147-8. Interpreter Ken Hale).

**Conception Rights in Land**

A third set of rights in land which I have not yet mentioned are those conferred by one's conception dreaming - that is, the place near which one's mother first noted her pregnancy. To mark this relationship a person has certain rights in the rituals of the country
within which the conception site is located but not in the entire country. The rights include access to ritual objects associated with the site. Although people assert these are non-inheritable rights, based as they are on pragmatics, there is a sense in which they may merge with the rights which flow through mother or father. Of course, place of conception may be within mother's or father's country and it may be manipulated. If a person lives all his or her life in the country associated with the conception site, then it may, in several generations of residence, become the country of father or mother. For example, all children born at Warrabri are considered to be dog dreaming but not all are initiated into this cult lodge. However, increasingly, second generation Warrabri residents are accepting that they hold dog dreaming in a different and more transmittable form than a conception dreaming. There are rights which, like those of conception, may be activated to allow the continuity of land to people relationships. For instance, if one grows up in the country of a closely related group which stands in a 'company relationship' to the country of one's father, then that may eventually be accepted as the father's dreaming country. If one grows up with parents who are living on the country for which the mother has *kurdungurlu* rights, then the child may be considered to have special rights in that country (that is, in the

5. Meggitt (1962:73) notes that settlement life restricts the number of possible conception dreamings. Hamilton (1979:77-83) discusses the relationship between Aranda conception dreaming and that of the Western Desert within the context of changes in life style.

6. Company relationships exist between two land maintaining groups of the same subsection pairs who are responsible for land along the same dreaming track.
country of the 'm.m.f.'). Similarly, if it is the country for which one's father has kurdungurlu rights, then a child may have special rights in the country of the father's maternal grandfather.

Other Rights in Land

Another strategy in the transmission and spreading of knowledge is to 'give away' or to 'lend' certain dreamings and the associated objects. In one case several Warrabri women who were known as prolific dreamers but who had suffered severe losses and bad health, gave away some of their knowledge to an impoverished group who owned knowledge further along the track. The formal handing over entailed only a small portion of the songs which the other women are now said to know. Of course, many of the women had already heard and sung the songs in joint rituals with the givers, but the ceremony marked the formal handing over. It was then up to the new owners to elaborate the songs; to demonstrate their right by using the knowledge.

A further way in which knowledge is safeguarded is by a custodian passing knowledge to another custodian. The mother's people may hold songs in trust for the kirda if there are none of suitable age, as may the kirda for the kurdungurlu. When a person of suitable age comes along the songs and business will be passed back formally, but the person will know much already from attendance. Persons may participate in rituals by claiming rights and exercising responsibilities through any of these channels. The system of mapping people onto land is one of checks and balances which is designed to survive. Safeguard mechanisms ensure knowledge will be preserved and transmitted. Therefore there is no need for formal rules of succession because, setting aside a demographic disaster, groups don't disappear; their membership is too widely based; there is always someone who may move into the space. That this is so is well illustrated by the example I cited on page 117 of the
killing of a patriline. Many people today insist that some of the 1928 massacres occurred during business time and although the toll was heavy, there is still knowledge and the possibility of rekindling knowledge in the area. Evidence can always be refound of dreamtime activity if people have access to the land.

THE JILIMI AND THE 'RING PLACE'

Situated to the north of the jilimi and conceptually in the bush, is the ritual store house and 'ring place' of the Karlukarlu women. Such is the location that it is inaccessible from the road and not visible from the other Aboriginal camps or from the settlement core. Here older women gather during the day to care for and to celebrate their dreamings. The area is divided into two main areas; one where women may sit to paint, display their boards, dance and also occasionally sleep. This is known as the 'ring place' or 'business ground'. The other part of the area which backs onto the 'ring place' has a store house opening out into a shade facing east. This provides another area in which women may paint, sit and work on their ritual objects, or simply chat and rest. It is, however, a far more serious atmosphere in this space and all grave matters of concern are discussed in this section of the ritual area.

Within the store house the women keep separate cases which contain the boards, hair string, stones, ochres, painting sticks and fat of particular countries. All these items are essential for the ritual maintenance of country. The ritual objects and materials are stored high above the ground, away from the dogs who eat the fat and the prying eyes of children or intruders.7 Women say they can no longer

7. Laughren (1980:10) notes that at Yuendumu the women organize the contents of the store house on a north-south axis according to patrimoity affiliation. I did not note this level of organization within the Kaititj jilimi.
risk leaving their ritual gear at the sites to which they belong and that they must therefore store them nearby on the settlement in their ritual store house. In spite of their care of the area surrounding the store house accidents do occur and several years ago a fire destroyed some of the wooden objects cared for by these women. When the women's museum was built at Yuendumu, the women insisted on a brick construction so that fire was not a hazard. The care taken of the area surrounding the store house is similar to that which the men exhibit around their sacred sites. The ritual area is kept swept and clean and is approached with respect. All speech is carried on in hushed tones. One enters by invitation.

To the west of the shade and store house is a large cleared area known in Aboriginal English as the 'ring place'. Berndt (1950:35) also notes the use of 'ring place' by women further north. It is interesting to note that in Aboriginal English both the men's and women's ritual areas are known as 'ring place', just as the ritual of each is known as 'business': the similarity of function is expressed in the English gloss. In the past 'ring places' were the areas where offenders were brought to trial and disputes resolved by ritual means. Although many of these functions have now been usurped by school, hospital, church and police, the 'ring place' is still considered to be a peaceful place where it is therapeutic to sleep during times of social unrest or personal sorrow. Important meetings which concern women may also be held in this area. When a woman lawyer came to discuss with Kaititj women their concern about land rights and the village council, it was the ring place which was chosen as a fitting area for such an important meeting (Bell & Ditton 1980:30).

As with the jilimi living area, few fights occur to disrupt the calm of the ritual area. Any which do explode are likely to occasion camp movement and fears of future illness. Men never attempt
to enter the area of the store house, even when drunk, a time when they will sometimes violate other taboos such as mother-in-law avoidance. Boy children rarely visit after the age of about five, from which time onwards they begin to spend more and more time with their peers and less and less with their mothers. While children may be humoured within the general area of the 'ring place' they are excluded from the store house area. Berndt (1965:246-7) on the other hand notes the ambivalence of women towards children in this regard. In my experience women, if engaged in a ritual activity, will carry through disciplinary threats to children which at other times are not enforced.

The Kaititj jilimi and ritual area is clearly laid out so that the areas of specialization are evident. There are areas for sleeping, general socializing, and a retreat for specialized functions. The maintenance of these areas consumes much of women's time. In the open area of the jilimi women demonstrate their competence to live together as women and to provide for their children a safe and loving environment. In the ritual area they demonstrate their right and intention to celebrate in rituals the values which they hold dear. While I was living at Warrabri my house became known as a jilimi and the calm, dignity and pride which women display in the Kaititj jilimi was evident in the way in which they would discuss women's issues in my house.

RITUAL ACTIVITY AND ORGANIZATION

Yawalyu Themes

The term yawalyu is known and used by women to refer to their own ceremonies throughout Central Australia. Indeed use of the term extends into the Western Desert (Hamilton 1979:239) and north to Wave Hill (Berndt 1950, 1965). For Warrabri Kaititj it is a general gloss for all their land based rituals but at the level of the song, design,
gesture and object, there is further specification. If a *yawalyu* is being celebrated to restore harmony (see Chapter six), then the designs, songs and gesture will be those associated with the maintenance of social harmony and restoration of good health. If the focus of the *yawalyu* is emotional management then powerful *yilpinji* designs, songs and gesture will be used. Uniting all ceremonies glossed *yawalyu* is the celebration of country based on the rights and responsibilities of the participants.

*Yawalyu* ceremonies evoke the three major themes of land, love and health within the context of women's *jukurrpa* heritage. The imagery of these interlocking themes is embedded in the central symbols of fat, colour and the attendant emotional, physical and psychological state. In analyzing my data, I have isolated those songs which have to do specifically with themes such as health and love as if they constituted discrete corpora. These songs occur within the context of *yawalyu* performances of country in general but there is some support for my classification in the practices of the Warrabri Kaititj.

Health songs which have to do with a particular condition such as a swelling, sore, pain or temperature are said to be 'properly old ones' or 'properly dear ones'. They are thus distinguished from other songs sung during a *yawalyu* performance which may have health as its focus, but also concern country in a general sense. These are said to be 'properly *yawalyu*'. When the women sing these specific songs for health, they bathe with water to stem swellings and fevers and massage with fat to ease pain and weaknesses (see Strehlow 1971:651). At a higher level of generality, curing songs are specified by a gesture which involves a pushing away action. In this action the women hold their cupped hands before themselves and shuffle the hands outwards from their bodies, thus signifying the sending out and bestowing of power.
ANCESTRAL ACTIVITY

Junkajiy (A 3°P) Junkajiy (A 3°P)
ngapa, jipi ngarpa

Karlukarlu
ngarpa

Wakulpu

 yawaki
woringi

Walapanpa

ngarpa

Yalkarilpa

South

Waaka

ngapa

North

(After a woman's sand map: not to scale)
They also use this gesture when singing specific health chants and certain land songs which have to do with the restoration of well being. It is a gesture which is said to be for those who are sick (marrumarru). Women therefore clearly distinguish, in several ways, songs which have to do with health and curing. Similarly yilpinji associated designs, songs and gestures are distinguished within yawalyu performances. These themes of health and love are discussed in further detail in the following two chapters.

The Country of Kaititj Yawalyu

Two of the most important dreamings of the Kaititj women at Warrabri are ngapa rain (a different rain dreaming from that of the Warlpiri) and yawaki (bush berry). These dreamings belong to women of the Nangala and Nampijinpa subsections who are the kirda for these dreamings and are managed by the Nungarrayi women.

The activity of the dreamtime ancestors of these dreamings focusses upon the sites of Waaka, Wakulpu, Junkaji, Ngapajinpi, Walapanpa and Karlukarlu. Although many other tracks such as wardingi (witchety), warnajarra (two snake), criss-cross and link these sites, it is in the travels of the ancestral women of the rain and bush berry dreamings and in the final going down into the ground of the essence yawaki (bush berry) that the themes of health, land and love find clearest expression. From the red of Devil's Marbles (Karlukarlu) rises the power of life force and blood.8 Through massage with fat, prepared during a performance of a yawalyu for the country around Devil's Marbles, the power can be activated by women. To this redness is juxtaposed the whiteness of rain and lightning as it flashes

8. Meggitt (1962:224) notes the men's use of this symbolic complex of red ochre, blood, health and strength.
dangerously overhead at Devil's Marbles and forms the designs of Ngapajinpi - both person and place. This whiteness is disturbed and challenged by the brilliance of the colours of the rainbow men who pursue women in the area which is the focus of many of the love rituals (see also Spencer & Gillen 1899:308). With bush berry is associated all that is black in the natural world. In his tiring journey from Waaka to Wakulpu, bush berry is accompanied by his faithful companions, the little birds called yirpadirlpadirlpa. He is confronted by bush fire, crosses over and travels with wardingi and is dependent on ngapa. Mourning, the devotion of his bird friends, and correct ritual relations between kurdungurlu and kirda are portrayed in the travels of bush berry. Yawaki goes into the ground at Wakulpu and re-emerges further on but this point of his travels is not the responsibility of the Kaititj. In both dreamings fat is the medium through which the power of the dreaming is transformed and transmitted by the women who are kirda and kurdungurlu for the ceremonies and the country.

Fat is the central symbol of women's ritual in that it links the major themes of love, health and land which are further explored in Chapters six and seven (see also Spencer & Gillen 1899:465, Strehlow 1971:651-2). While the dreamtime heroes pioneered the country, they rubbed themselves with fat and admired the beauty and redness of their bodies. To glow with health is to be as one who is covered with fat. A lover cannot help but be attracted by the glowing good health of the body which reflects contentment and the strength of one who had access to country of one's dreaming. As bullock fat is now readily available, it is possible to grease and paint more bodies more often than in the past when one relied on emu, goanna or witchety fat. Fat is seen as imparting strength and requires special ritual attention in
all women's health maintaining and curing rituals. Fat is also seen as a sign that one is loved, lovable and in tune with country.

**Yawalyu: preparation**

A first step in staging a *yawalyu* is to consult with the *kirda* and *kurdungurlu* for a particular dreaming. A time and place for the ceremony are then arranged. Within the confines of Warrabri this can be done almost spontaneously but if it is intended to join with women from another area, transport becomes a problem. Women do not have access to vehicles because although many of them pay for vehicles in use at Warrabri, they do not have licences and therefore it is the men who use vehicles. This is as much a reflection of the male dominated police force and the availability of other women to teach them to drive as it is a conscious effort on the part of the men to prevent women driving. The one woman who had a licence was much in demand. The only other avenue available to Warrabri women is the use of the council truck or bus and women must compete with men for this. As the council is all male and as men are ambivalent about some women's business (such as *yilpinji*), it is not surprising they contrive to have vehicles non-serviceable or unavailable. Because women do not regularly speak on council, it is difficult to alter these biases, but I have seen women's demands for access to vehicles (on the basis of their right to stage certain ceremonies) respected and met by men. On one memorable occasion a male council member woke the white mechanic at 5.00 a.m. and insisted he repair the truck because the women needed it. 'Of course they fixed it', the woman explained to me, 'it is my duty and right to

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9. At places such as Utopia cattle station, where women own a vehicle and hold licences, they are able to retain exclusive use of the vehicle.
travel with this business. He might get sick if he doesn't help'. She was a woman from a cattle station and accustomed to being heeded in such matters.

Women's ceremonies may continue over several days or a period of weeks; they may focus on one complex of dreamings or the links between countries. Here I describe the usual format of a one day ceremony which may be repeated many times over or interspersed with contributions from another group in an extended ritual.

Women begin gathering in the afternoon anywhere between two and four, depending on the heat of the day. In the women's ritual area several senior *kirda* and *kuurdungurlu* prepare the ritual objects—hair string, fat, ochres, stone and wooden objects, feathers and headbands.

*Yawalyu sacra: preparation*

Hairstring and boards must be carefully maintained at all times by rubbing with fat and red ochre. Today the fat is dripping bought in the local store or rendered down from bullock kills. The possibility of staging rituals has increased with the availability of this resource which in the past came from grubs, emu and goanna. Red ochre comes from a mine close to Devil's Marbles, where it is easily quarried because roadworks have exposed the ochre. As women quarry ochres they sing of the ancestors who turned red while travelling in the area and of the duties of *kirda* and *kuurdungurlu* to maintain this resource.

Red ochre is used extensively in rituals, traded and exchanged by those with quarries in their countries and Kaititj women are said to be 'rich in ochre'. The women shape ground ochre into large oval blocks for ritual exchange, trade and storage. Kaititj also grind white and black stones but not yellow. (Warlpiri trade yellow stones from Hooker Creek, Willowra and Yuendumu but Kaititj at Warrabri do not have dreamings which require the yellow.) White stone quarries
appear to be women's resources; certainly men do not use the brilliant white which women use with such pride. The brilliant white for Kaititj women's designs comes from a quarry near Neutral Junction. Men avoid the area; it is known as 'women's country' and women are always anxious to cover their tracks when they have been there. The black stone comes from a site near Kurundi cattle station. Once again access to these resources has increased with transport and cash facilitates purchase (see also Berndt 1950:69). There is a cash price on all ritual items which in no way is seen as diminishing the value of the item or the validity of the exchange.

Today men and women sometimes transform ordinary wool into hair string by applying a coat of red ochre and fat. Although women do value the real hair string made available to them through initiation business, they are aware of the freedom they enjoy by being able to produce their own hair string. As soon as it has been used and stored with other ritual objects, it has the status of real hair string.

Another important and distinctively female ritual item is the headband. Like the white paint, these must be brilliant and 'shine' to be considered of fine quality. Today women use sheeting and store purchased bleach or a naturally occurring rock, to keep the headbands white. In the past they used paper bark which had to be carefully worked and stored. To complete the headgear women also use white cockatoo feathers which are kept 'sparkling' in a similar fashion to the headbands. In the past women used a bunch of the tails of a small marsupial rat but this is now extinct because women say, 'We needed too many tails'.

10. Instead men use fluff from plants or animal-down to achieve the same whiteness. Both men and women use a dull white pipe clay in mourning rituals.
Other items which must be prepared are the objects on which the designs are painted for display. Warlpiri at Warrabri favour shield-like boards and paraja (baby carriers), other Warlpiri also use small concave boards. Alyawarra have large boards, similar to those of Warlpiri men, while Kaititj use small boards which stand for the ritual packages which women carried in the dreamtime, larger boards, like the paraja, digging sticks, long thin spears and shorter fatter sticks.

Women state that in the past they had to rely on men to cut the wood for these ritual items but today access to tomahawks has extended their domain and they may now manufacture their own ritual items. Headbands are also used to display designs and may be held as substitutes for boards by some ritual participants. In addition to these items there are objects such as a woomera and a spear, which women use for special rituals. Small stones of significance, bone or teeth set in wax and hung on hair string, and beads and necklaces made from the bean tree are also used on occasions. Many of these items are extremely sacred and I do not intend to discuss them further. It is however worth noting that the existence of stone objects in the women's store house forces us to look anew at assumptions underlying ethnoarchaeological models where stone ritual items are taken as evidence of exclusively male ritual activity.

While women are preparing the ritual items, they sing gently and harmoniously of the dreamtime experience which validates their use of the objects. It is during this period that children and outsiders are not welcome; that songs known as 'dear ones', that is old and cherished, are sung; that instruction at the level of the word occurs and that ritual roles are sorted out. During this period the range of songs, rhythms, harmonies and symbolic meanings is far more extensive and complex than during the open and public singing which follows.
There are special songs for the 'sending out' of the power, and the transformation of paint by the absorption of the power, which are only sung at this time. One woman explained it to me as being like a transfusion: the blood is given from another and provides life to that person. Once the objects are prepared, they are carefully hidden under blankets until they can be properly introduced during the dancing and display of body painting which follows.

Body Painting

Body painting appears to some to be a casual affair (Meggitt 1962:190, Munn 1973:36) but it is in fact a highly structured period of ritual instruction, an opportunity to ask for explanation and a time when women establish their ritual ranks. Ideally an important woman is painted first (a kirda by a kurdungurlu), then women of lesser status and finally the senior kirda for the ceremony is painted. This is the way in which women state painting occurs and often it does, but on many occasions other relationships are emphasized and the painting order and roles are varied. For instance, I have seen kurdungurlu painting kurdungurlu. In these cases women were either emphasizing the kinship relationship between them or the act of being able to use a design rather than the structural relationship between painter and painted. Further there are women who are considered extremely skilful painters, such as those with a steady hand, who are favoured. Although the person applying the paint may not be the closest to the ideal, there will always be someone present to check and supervise that the designs are properly applied. Knowledge is an important criteria in painting and the necessary expertise does not always reside in the person who is the closest to the ideal. Women are painted with designs which they are entitled to wear either as kirda or kurdungurlu and indeed it is possible to tell the ritual relationship to a dreaming by the design
worn. Because singing, painting and instruction occur in a group situation, both *kirda* and *kurdungurlu* and those resident in the *jilimi* have a working knowledge of a wide range of dreamings.

Kaititj women always begin the painting process by first greasing their own bodies - sometimes with the help of the painter. Once well greased, the red outline design is applied with the index finger in broad strokes (see also Munn 1973:36). This maps up the basic contours of the design. Black if it is to be used, is applied next, also with the index finger and finally with a small painting stick, the brilliant white of which outlines and encloses the designs. In Warlpiri women's designs there is always a final enclosing line which surrounds the entire body design and thus gives a double outline effect (see also Berndt 1950:34-5). Some designs extend over the shoulder but there are special back designs. The most usual one for the Kaititj is made by red ochring the back and then dragging finger marks through it. (Warramunga women have more elaborate back motifs). The most jealously guarded design and one not publicly displayed, surrounds the navel. It is known as *jirra* (fat) and is for both strength and *yilpinji*. Again the themes of health and love are shown to be intertwined. When paintings are applied to naked bodies, the design runs the length of the body, but when wearing skirts, women often apply designs to only the upper thigh and top of the body. Kaititj designs, unlike the Warlpiri, employ straight lines and do not enclose all the red and black lines. Many of the designs represent maps of ancestral activity, features of the landscape or natural phenomena. The particular mythology which underwrites the designs is only discussed during the early part of the preparation. Body and board designs contain the same symbols but the board designs tend to vary less because the shape is more constant.
As the designs are applied, the women sing of the country with which they are identified and make reference to the ancestral heroes who named the land. Thus when women are singing of the country in the Stirling Swamp area, they sing of ngapa (rain) travelling north, of the travels of the kurinpi women, of wardingi (witchety) which meets with yawaki (bush berry) and of ngapa further north. When singing of the country west of Wauchope, of Nakulpu or Junkaji, the women sing of the travels of yawaki, ngapa and of a Junkaji and Ngapajinpi. (The latter two are both place names and ancestors). When singing of the Devil's Marbles dreamings the women sing of ngapa and junkaji, of the travels of the young girls and yilpinji business. Thus songs and designs may concern a site, an ancestor, a theme such as love or health, or the inter-relations of dreamings, sites and themes. It is during this singing that women explain who has responsibility for which places and why; it was during this time that I was given ritual instruction and explanation. It concerned the structural level of inter-relation of site, person and dreaming. More detailed fine grain analyses of song texts, designs and gestures were only offered to me after performances and after I had a general idea of ancestral activity in the area.

During the painting the kurdungurlu may dance to 'open up the ground' but this also may occur when the painting is completed. There are various precautions taken at this time to ensure that the power is contained - women throw dirt, take care to control their fires, utter certain low swishing noises and click their fingers. Once the body is painted women complete the preparation by red ochring their own legs; blackening their eyebrows (as did the dreamtime women to demonstrate their power to attract and transform); applying fat and ochre to their hair and adorning themselves with headbands, beads and hair string crosses.
Following the ancestors: Nungarrayi presents and plants the ritual items for which she is kaänga.
The dedication of the sacra and the returning of the power to the ground.
When all is complete most of the women move to the dancing place and sit facing west. They begin the songs which call all peoples together. Women's rituals, like those of the men, are a time when distant people come together to exchange and assert their common bonds in responsibility to country. A fire is kept burning throughout the rituals and as a symbol of ritual continuity the same pile of ash is reraked and relit for each new ritual.

Performance

After the kurdungurlu have introduced the country with several songs, the senior kirda appear holding the boards on high and dance forward following the tracks of the dreaming until they arrive at the fire. (In Warlpiri rituals the kurdungurlu first collect the kirda and 'wake them up' for the dancing). The seated kirda and kurdungurlu sing of the place at which the dreaming rests or visits and the boards are planted while the kurdungurlu dance flanking the kirda. The boards are then admired and called by the name of the country for which they stand but are also addressed affectionately by participants with the appropriate kinship term such as mother, father, aunty. In this way the ritual relationship to country is articulated but the deep emotional personal tie to country is also given expression. Once planted, the object becomes the focus of the performance as the dreaming travels are re-enacted. Both kirda and kurdungurlu dance and both kirda and kurdungurlu sing, but unlike some Warlpiri women, the dancers do not sing for themselves.

In order to follow the dancing it is necessary to know certain things and the information is encoded in different ways. From the position of the dancers, their role and body designs, an observer can determine whether they are kirda or kurdungurlu. In the patterns of the dancing feet, the women's gestures as they dance, the orientation
of the boards, an observer may know something of country but details could not be deduced by those unschooled in the dreaming. An observer would know the various roles different people were playing, the direction of the dreaming and, from the gestures, the broad category to which the song belonged, but from the words of the songs and symbols in the designs little is available to the outsider unless instruction is offered. Some are learnt by rote and many designs are very similar. Without explanation of specific meanings they are unavailable.

Once the dancing is finished the women sing the dreaming into the ground and expect visitors to leave. They then smooth over all traces of where the boards have been, throw dirt to nullify any remaining power and rub the painted boards onto their bodies to reabsorb the power. This transferance of power is extremely dangerous and in certain contexts, not discussed here, constitutes the most sacred moments of women's resolution of conflict yawalyu. The boards once stripped are carefully returned to the storehouse. Women may either return to the jilimi or prepare to sleep the night at the ground. The paint on their bodies is allowed to wear off and is often the only sign that women have been engaged in ritual.

Settlement Ritual Activity

Such performances took place on average once a week during my stay at Warrabri, but the performances tended to cluster, either because during certain times of social unrest there is a moratorium on ritual action, or because of a tendency to concentrate ritual action at certain times of the year. Even during the quiet times though, women would be busy in the ritual storehouse area.

Obviously this is a greater frequency and intensity of ritual action than could be achieved by women living in small mobile bands
(see also Berndt 1950:69). Access to white goods and the sedentary life style have allowed a flourishing of certain of women's rituals but at the same time the severing of the tie to land has meant that many sites are no longer visited as regularly, if at all. Consequently certain segments of rituals are no longer performed. Settlements also limit the range of rituals in other ways: some are too dangerous to be performed close to so many people and yet others have been usurped by white authorities. Thus although there is a resurgence of ritual activity, without access to land, the potency of range of rituals is reduced.

The impact of this process (that is ritual performance away from the sites) is clearly at work in Warlpiri women's rituals. One cycle, it was found when the women actually visited the country, had been incorrectly celebrated for a number of years in a way which would have been impossible had women been in continuous contact with the country. Kaititj women suffer less in this respect but still realize that the more distant country is less well represented and celebrated in ritual than is closer country. This in turn constrains the knowledge which is passed on to successive generations.

COMPARATIVE COMMENT

The portrait I have painted of women's ritual life is markedly different from that of Meggitt (1962, 1972) and Munn (1973). Because throughout this chapter I have been noting underlying similarities between Kaititj and Warlpiri women's ritual worlds - similarities which are supported by data arising from land claims in Central Australia (Bell 1979c, 1980a; Rowell 1979; Laughren 1980; Wafer 1980) and my own work in other communities (Bell & Ditton 1980) - discussion of the differences is necessary. The most important ethnographic difference concerns the organizational stricture of women's rituals but it is one
which must also be seen within the context of divergent analyses of women's role and status in general.

In this chapter I have described the articulation of women's ritual organization with land tenure systems in terms of a ritual division of labour of *kirda* and *kurdungurlu*. In my analysis, because women's rights and responsibilities in land are derived directly from the *jukurrpa*, women participate as autonomous decision makers in the maintenance and transmission of this heritage. Women, I have also claimed, are of critical structural importance in the establishment of links between groups. However, writing of Ngalia Warlpiri, Meggitt (1962:189-190; 172:74) states endogamous generation moieties organize women's ceremonies. These ceremonies Meggitt (1972:74) contends are 'not seen as part of the dreamtime ritual life' and further, such is their ignorance that women believe men's ceremonies are organized in endogamous moieties too. Munn (1973:37), working also with Ngalia Warlpiri, found no evidence of endogamous generation moieties but rather that ownership of designs was channelled through affinal ties. Women, Munn (1973:36,213) stresses, lack corporate group membership.

This location of women's ceremonies outside the sphere of spiritually empowered rituals is consonant with Meggitt and Munn's analysis of the role and status of Aboriginal women in general. In exploring women's domain both focus on the absence of certain elements. In Meggitt's (1972:73,78) analysis women lack direct access to the *jukurrpa*; all relations are mediated through men; in rituals of initiation women participate as kin not in ritual roles; women possess only a bipartite psyche whereas men enjoy a tripartite. Similarly Munn (1973:213ff) describes women's domain in terms of their limited and conscribed interests of camp and family and the absence of such symbolic complexes as the line/track/travel or meander line/snake/
penis (ibid.:128). In Munn's (1973:214) analysis women are concerned with the microtemporal, with heterosexual reproduction and themes of intra-generational moment. Men on the other hand are concerned with the macrotemporal, the transgenerational and spiritual reproduction within the patrilineal descent group.

As illustrated in this chapter my own experience is at odds with these portraits of women's world. Aranda women do have line designs which encode information about the travels of the ancestors. They also share with Willowra Warlpiri the meander line to depict the travels of warnajarra (two snake). Both Aranda and Warlpiri women have a variety of ritual objects which represent the person/place/jukurrpa complex and are a symbol of the corporate nature of the ritual land maintaining group. Are we looking at regional variation? Are the differences evidence of rapid social change? Or is the difference in part one of orientation of the ethnographer?

Even if we could dismiss the differences by answering in the affirmative, we would still be left with the discrepancies between Meggitt and Munn who both undertook fieldwork in the mid-1950's with Ngalia Warlpiri. I would like to suggest that the apparent confusion concerning yawalyu structure reflects, in part, the upheaval in the lives of Warlpiri but in a special way. As explained in Chapter four, the Warlpiri in the 1950's had only recently been settled at Yuendumu and the women had not yet had time, through interaction with the country, to explore fully and to confirm to the point of consensus, the nature of ancestral activity in the area. Without this knowledge they could not assert their rights and exercise responsibilities in land through the performance of large scale yawalyu where ritual kirda and kurdungurlu must be precise. This may also account for the apparent paucity of women's ritual activity and women's reluctance to stage
'bush yawalyu' (Munn 1973:41). The 'necessary and continuous process of reinvention', described in the previous chapter, had reached a low point. Twenty years later women could act with confidence in the roles of kirda and kurdungurlu.

Perhaps there was a reluctance to stress these ritual roles, but why then did Meggitt find endogamous generation moieties and Munn affinal ties? Both Meggitt (1962:189) and Munn (1973:41) elicited information without witnessing a secret 'bush' yawalyu. It is possible that women stressed the kin relations of mother and daughter in their discussion with Meggitt. As I have stated this is the kinship correlate of the ritual roles of kirda-kurdungurlu and important in the transmission of knowledge, the application of designs and the positions of dancers. Could it be that in describing their ritual organization the mother-daughter dyad was glossed as endogamous generation moiety affiliation? Meggitt (1962:189) notes the terms

Fig. 7. Endogamous Generation Moieties: Mother to Daughter

Men use for generation moieties but did the women also use these terms? What then of the ties of affinity in Munn's work? Munn (1973:36-7) observed the painting dyad as comprising sisters-in-law but this is consonant with my experience of the 'secondary kurdungurlu' as members of the opposite patrimoiet. Further, as I have argued, 'kurdungurlu', with the advantage of residence in a country, have greater opportunity for ultimately assuming the role of ritual kurdungurlu. Sisters-in-law are such persons.
Thus I am suggesting that there may have been confusion as ceremonies were not actually witnessed and because the women themselves had not yet organized their ritual ranks in that 'country'. To this I would add that the intensification of ritual activity and larger more permanent jilimi are interacting elements. Two decades after Meggitt and Munn the women of large jilimi with continuity in an area, have the necessary numbers and knowledge to clearly articulate the structural relations to land in their yasalyu. They also have more reason to incorporate persons in these roles because the base of the jilimi is wider than was the case in the past.

Because women's ceremonial life has not been seen as a key to understanding relations to land, the rights channelled through women have been inadequately explored. The kurdungurlu have been cast in an essentially mundane or person-oriented role which provides support in a complementary, but secular fashion, to the spiritually empowered patrician (Strehlow 1947:124,132; Pink 1936:300-303; Meggit 1972). But as I have argued the spiritual basis of the kurdungurlu role was clearly evident during the Willowra land claim and in the use of suffix such as aljirra (dreaming) by Aranda for kurdungurlu country. The tendency to view the patrician as the location of spiritual responsibility and relationships which flow through women as secondary and secular (Peterson 1969; Munn 1973) has been a major obstacle to gaining a clear understanding of women's relationship to land and the nature of land tenure systems as living systems.

We need a model of ritual organization which allows for the integration of male and female worlds at the level of kirda and kurdungurlu. Knowledge of country, as I illustrate in Chapter eight, is held in common, but as I am arguing in the following two chapters, women play out their responsibilities in a distinctively female way.
Ceremonial activity provides a forum for the expression of rights and exercise of responsibilities for both men and women. Their common purpose however is evident - the maintenance of the jukurrpa heritage.

**LOCALIZED SOCIAL AND RITUAL GROUPS**

The model I am proposing of the relationship between male and female ritual worlds has ramifications for the ongoing debate concerning the nature of the land owning group in Aboriginal Australia. Because these ramifications are indicative of the way in which paradigm one (see above page 48) has rendered Aboriginal women inarticulate and thus produced only a partial portrait of Aboriginal society, I shall comment briefly here.

At the core of the debate is the patrilineal, patrilocal, territorial exogamous horde of Radcliffe-Brown (1931:35, 1954, 1956). The level at which this model may be said to exist (Stanner 1965:10), its fit with empirical reality (Hiatt 1962:286) and its universality (Berndt 1957:347) have all consumed many pages of anthropological texts. Writing of Central Australia Meggitt (1962:51) emphasized the fluidity of Warlpiri social organization while Strehlow (1965:136-9; 1970:98) depicted the Aranda as having a land-based kin-group class system of ngina (father-son) sections. Uniting these contributions to the debate is the desire, not always made explicit, to isolate groups and to attach a function which can be specified as spiritual, economic, marriage contracting. In my portrait of Aboriginal women's social and ritual organization I have not sought the discrete land using or land owning group but rather the ritual land maintaining group which encompasses many overlapping ties and claims to country.

The core of the land maintaining group - in my case the Karlukarlu women - is composed of people who traced their relation to
land in two distinct and complementary ways. Using Scheffler's (1966:542) notion of a 'descent construct' as a culturally conceptualized model of a series of parent-child links connecting living persons to ancestors, we have two descent constructs in the land maintaining group. As people have multiple group membership no group at any one time will contain all its possible members.

While Australianists have recognized that rights may flow through both mother and father (Peterson 1969; Meggitt 1972) it has been the agnatic descent construct which has been deemed of greater significance for it organizes the religious life. I have argued that both constructs organize parent-child links to the _jukurrpa_.

The group living in the _jilimi_ is a localized socio-ritual group held together by cross cutting ties of land, family, personal history, and the common assertion of rights and responsibilities in a particular tract of land. Underlying this group is a balance between the interest one has in one's mother's country and in one's father's country. However the group of women living together in a _jilimi_ share the maintenance of certain dreamings and therefore have a common function.

11. My contention that the core population of the _jilimi_ reflects ties to land is supported by O'Connell (1977:121), who says of the Alyawarra of McDonald Downs that the women of the _alugera_ (_jilimi_) were related as f.z./b.d., m./d., m.z./z.d. In terms of ritual relations we see that these women are _kirda_ or _kurdiangurlu_ to each other but that yet again it is their kin ties which are emphasized by the ethnographer.

12. That more than one construct may be culturally recognized in a society is explored by Keesing (1980).
In the model I have proposed of the land maintaining group we have a way of linking groups together for the purposes of ritual. *Kirda* to *kurdungurlu* is conceptually a reciprocal relationship in that a person is *kirda* in one ritual and *kurdungurlu* in the ritual of the persons who played that role for you in your ritual. In practice the exchange is never symmetrical for marriages are not arranged between patrilines as they would need to be for the children of the senior women of one patriline to be found in the patriline of one other group. Instead the children of the senior women are scattered throughout several other patrilines. In this way knowledge is spread and links are established from one patriline to several others. Ritual reciprocity is, none the less, the model which Kaititj state underlies the *kirda-kurdungurlu* relationship and one which, as we shall see in Chapter nine, they strive to achieve.

**CONCLUSION**

In seeking an understanding of women's world through an analysis of a multi-facet and changing institution such as the *jilimi*, I have located women at the centre of my analysis. Before examining how the ritual role of nurturance is expressed in specific *yawalyu*, I have thought it necessary to detail and discuss the bases of women's rights and responsibilities in land as daughters of the dreaming. My intention is to allow women to 'speak' at this structural level before proceeding, in the next two chapters, to their 'speech' as spiritually empowered actors in their own ritual domain.

The *jilimi* has, I believe, always been an expression of women's solidarity and it remains today a stronghold of female assertions of independence and autonomy. This has allowed women the opportunity to act out and confirm important relationships such as *kirda-kurdungurlu*. In the past it was a place where women could socialize together and
organize aspects of their lives which were of importance to them as women—hunting parties, health and nurturing rituals, crises of life ceremonies, social relationships. Some of these activities are no longer the focus of women's daily lives. Hunting and gathering has been largely replaced by a trip to the store; much of the health and curing activities by a bottle of Vicks or a trip to the clinic. But the *jilimi* remains a place where women discuss topics which concern them as women. The atmosphere within the *jilimi* is one of caring and consideration for the well-being of others. The health of individuals, groups and whole communities is a recurrent theme of conversation and a persistent preoccupation of *jilimi* women.

By living in the *jilimi* women assert their separation from men. In the past I suggest, this separation did indeed achieve (as Catherine Berndt (1965:265) argues) a closeness, but today the separation is indicative of new meanings and functions. The *jilimi* area remains taboo to men but where in the past this allowed men and women to express their spatial separation, it now affords women the opportunity to live almost totally outside the world of male-female. As violence and social disturbances more and more become the daily norm, women are seeking refuge in the company of their female kinsfolk. Within the *jilimi* women may escape from the violence and troubles of the settlement. The retreat and refuge functions of the *jilimi* are becoming increasingly important.
Chapter Six

CHANGE AND CONTINUITY IN THE MAINTENANCE OF HEALTH

INTRODUCTION

Increases in leisure time, population density and access to certain resources have facilitated an intensification of women's ritual activity at Warrabri. But expanded possibilities for ritual displays and assertions of women's solidarity are not necessarily also signs of an increase in women's status in the wider society of the Northern Territory. As I argued in the previous chapter, jilimi life constitutes a complex interplay of women's need for a refuge in a strife-torn community such as Warrabri and woman's proud assertions that she is an independent member of her society. Similarly, in the domain of health, women's perceptions of their role in maintaining health must be explored within the changing milieu in which nurturance roles are played out.

In this chapter I explore the Kaititj concept of health as one which entails the maintenance of harmonic relations between people and place. Women, as the ritual nurturers of relationships, seek to maintain and to restore harmony, happiness and thus health. Disruption of this complex of values and relationships may come in different forms. Over the past fifty years, it has been the shift from a hunter-gatherer mode of subsistence to a sedentary life style which has posed the greatest threat to social harmony and intensified interpersonal and sexual tensions. In the following chapter I discuss women's love rituals as an arena in which women explore some of these tensions. Here I am concerned to explore change and continuity within the domain of health as it is defined by Kaititj women.
Settlement life has not only introduced new conflicts but also new constraints which have curtailed several of women's major health activities - especially those concerned with reproduction. Although crises of life ceremonies (for example birth and menarche rituals) have been attenuated, there are other rituals, yawalya, concerned with the maintenance of land relationships, in which women explicitly state their health giving powers and responsibilities. It is to these ceremonies that women are now turning.

The shifts in focus, structure and content of women's health oriented ceremonies provide valuable insights to women's role and status on settlements today. In elaborating different aspects of their ritual range, women clearly demonstrate their recognition of the nature of the problems which beset their communities. Health-related problems now occur within the context of large heterogeneous settlement communities, not the small homogeneous family groups as was the case in the past. Today women focus on the resolution of conflict between groups rather than on the restoration of health to individuals. While women continue to shoulder responsibility for the maintenance of the harmonic relationships of people, land and law, today for Kaititj women at Warrabri, the pivot of this complex of relationships is the ritual group resident in the jilimi. In the past the pivot was the individual within the family.¹

On the basis of case history material presented in this chapter, I suggest that over the past fifty years women's health oriented activities have undergone a subtle shift from those organized within the matriline and focussed on the individual, to the more general

¹. Berndt and Berndt (1942-5:185) argue with reference to love magic that the collective ceremonies evolved from the personal.
yawalya rituals based on the ritual relationships of kirda to kurdungurlu. The shift, like the elaboration of new functions of the jilimi, reflects the interaction of women's perceptions of their necessarily changing role as nurturers and the constraints on the expression of that role.

Having documented women's changing role in the maintenance of health and harmony, I then turn to an examination of the way in which anthropologists have represented health and curing activities. I argue that these are inadequate because they fail to accommodate women as anything other than patients. Instead I suggest we recognize that both men and women, now as in the past, play vital and interlocking roles in the maintenance of health in their society.

There are I believe two inter-related reasons for the neglect of women's health roles. Firstly, the focus on the spectacular role of the traditional healer (Elkin 1977; Cawte 1974) and a narrow medically oriented definition of health, have obscured women's role in the maintenance of health. Secondly, in addition to this conceptual problem, is the profound misunderstanding of the usurpation and erosion of women's autonomous role. During a century of contact, white institutions such as schools, hospitals and welfare agencies have severely undermined women's role in health maintenance. Women however have not been the passive recipients of western oriented medicine. They have sought to accommodate western health practices and to elaborate old practices where appropriate and possible. But, there is no way in which women can restore the good health, happiness and harmony they enjoyed in the past for their independent base for action has been undermined by loss of land. In the process women's confidence that they can effectively maintain good health, has been seriously shaken.
ABORIGINAL PERSPECTIVES ON HEALTH: people, place and practice

Aboriginal medical practice and classification of disease are sensitive to shifts in mood and situation: conflict between members of a community or transgressions of the law are considered injurious to smooth social and religious relations. Because a healthy individual or community is one in harmony with others and the world of the *jukurrpa*, Aboriginal health practitioners seek to maintain an existing state of good health or to re-establish harmony and thus to restore good health. Underpinning the indigenous concept of good health is an equilibrium model of society backed by the dogma of dreaming which Aborigines vehemently assert exists at the level of lived reality. As I stated in my discussion of the dogma of dreaming in Chapter four, this conscious model masks the actual experience of people who, in their daily lives in a world of rapid change, are constantly engaged in power plays and negotiations.

In retrospect, Kaititj women state they were competent nurturers of people and country and that in this role they were enhanced as women. Today Kaititj women refer to Warrabri as a 'sickness place' and comment upon the good health they enjoyed in the past. Settlement sickness is juxtaposed to bush health and women will often comment that they were never sick in the bush. Indeed, one remedy for a lingering illness is time in the bush away from the contaminating influence of the settlement. For Kaititj there are few happy associations with the growth of Warrabri as a linguistically and culturally mixed settlement and time away from the pressures and tensions of Warrabri is beneficial. But, Warrabri is considered a 'sickness place' for reasons other than the stress of life in a heterogeneous community. It was, for instance, an unfortunate choice
of a site for a settlement. Various ritual codes were violated and continued to be so following the establishment of the settlement.

As I noted in Chapter four, in selecting Warrabri as a site, Government officials were guided by such criteria as the availability of water on land which pastoralists might not want. Unfortunately they did not seek the permission of the Kaititj spokespersons of the country who were affronted when Warlpiri people were moved to the settlement area. To further compound the error, the unfortunate Aboriginal 'front guy' who was consulted, did not have the authority to sanction Warlpiri settlement in his country and died shortly after the move. Twenty years later Kaititj Aborigines claim that he died of worry and the knowledge that he had transgressed. Warlpiri have paid heavily in cash and ritual exchange items for their residence at Warrabri and there are still disputes which erupt from the tensions between the holders of the country and the interlopers.

Unfortunately the incidents surrounding the settlement of Warrabri impinged little upon the consciousness of white officials who continued to behave as if they were exempt from the strictures of Aboriginal law and its punishments. An oft repeated tale, told by Kaititj with some pride, is of the policeman who attempted to rid Warrabri of its dog scourge by rounding up and removing the diseased dogs from Warrabri and destroying them some distance away from the settlement core. This violated a sacred trust of the Kaititj and Alyawarra at Warrabri to care for dogs and never to kill them.

Because Warrabri is dog dreaming all children born at Warrabri have an interest in dog dreaming; the lives of children and dogs are inexorably linked. In the jukurrpa dogs scratched and today children also scratch. It is said, if dogs are destroyed, children will die and
sicken. After the policeman had destroyed the dogs, the old people predicted that children would become ill and indeed they did. In order to restore harmony, the men took the policeman to the bush to reveal to him something of the power of dog dreaming. As a consequence dogs are no longer destroyed by whites at Warrabri. Dogs may thus continue to scratch as do the children. Aborigines have since suggested that a veterinarian would be an appropriate answer to new health problems created by dogs.

Further tales which link behaviour, location and health, concern sorcery accusations. When the Warlpiri and Warramunga were moved from Phillip Creek to Warrabri, the old people promised the government and the mission that they would leave all their 'bad magic' behind. But, say the Kaititj, one old Warlpiri, Jangala, brought it with him. The Kaititj believe that Jangala's grandfather, father and now his son have all caused trouble for people. This Warlpiri power to harm is based on their rights in and access to certain mythology associated with rain dreaming. At Phillip Creek Jangala had used his powers in order to reinforce his claims to certain women. He threatened illness if they refused him. With an ever increasing population at Warrabri Jangala's scope to harm women increased dramatically. No longer content merely to harry women who stood in the correct marriage relationship to him, he extended his activities to married women and women over whom he had no claim at all. In a period of one week at Warrabri, this man was believed to have caused three women to suffer.

The first, an introspective Kaititj/Anmatjirra women, who worked in the school, was in a very distressed state for some time. Jangala had made a pass at her at school but she had thought him merely to be a work friend, for he also held a position in the school. She then
began to have recurrent dreams in which images of water appeared. Finally, she confided these dreams to several older Warlpiri men who recognized the work of Jangala. She claimed to have no idea of the content of his dreaming nor the particular mythology but had faithfully recounted the story to the men who recognized its origin.

In another case the man performed certain rituals which focussed on the Warramunga mother of a girl he wished to marry (that is, his mother-in-law). At the same time another young Kaititj women, whom he fancied, was suffering with a paralyzed arm. Like the other woman, these two repeated having *ngapa* dreams although each dream was different. The old Warlpiri men met and decided that Jangala should remove the evil from the women. All but the first completely recovered. She moved to Tennant Creek in an attempt to get away from Jangala after unsuccessfully appealing to her relatives at Ti-tree two hundred kilometres south of Warrabri, and the local Warrabri council to assist her. When I saw her several months later, she had completely recovered.

Communities and individuals lack good health for many reasons. At the most general level women speak of the times of 'troubles' and state that if these can be ended good health will ensue. 'Troubles' may be anything from a family fight, a sudden death, an unexplained accident, a sorcery accusation or an accumulation of persistent but minor incidents of ill fortune for a family or camp. 'Troubles' do not include issues associated with the European world such as money

2. Women are placed at a disadvantage by all male councils who do not wish to become involved in male-female affairs and perhaps lose face with their fellow men. See also Bell and Ditton, 1980:11-12.
3. Berndt (1964:266) gives four examples of the practice of the native doctor in the Katherine area of the Northern Territory. Each could be glossed 'troubles' in my use of the term. The exacerbating nature of white intrusion is also evident in her examples.
worries, the need for car repairs, nor a child's school performance, although people do worry about these issues.

During a time of 'troubles' there is a moratorium on travel because it is considered to be too dangerous to move about until the source of the 'troubles' is located and treated. It is a time of self and social examination and criticism of the behaviour of one's self and others which may have occasioned the misfortune (see Spencer & Gillen 1899:412). It is a time when sorcery accusations proliferate and old arguments are revived. Thus within the domain of health we need to include not only the ngangkayi (traditional healers) but also broadly based concepts of who are the patients and what constitutes modes of diagnosis and treatment. As good health has ultimately to do with good social relationships, it is essential that we examine how these are maintained. In the cases of the three women, the old men explained and began the resolution of the problem. It was the relationship to certain dreamings which gave them the power and knowledge to act in this way.

SE T T L E M E N T  H E A L T H  P R A C T I C E S

As discussed in Chapter four, most settlement hospitals appear to be conceived of by Aborigines as female domains, as an extension of women's caring roles in the past, and in a sense this is supported by the appointment of white female nursing staff. Men may visit and receive treatment but they do not generally work in the hospitals nor do they gather in the shade around the hospital, as do the women, to exchange news and rest. In 1977 in the hospital at Warrabri there were two nursing sisters employed by the health department and several Aboriginal health workers who were receiving literacy and basic care training. The degree of responsibility given to the Aboriginal health workers depends on the personality, age and maturity of the health
workers and sister. Health Department policies with regard to training and health worker education also intrude. On certain settlements in Central Australia traditional healers and western practice exist side by side. At Warrabri, the ngangkayi may be consulted by health personnel but this practice is not institutionalized (see Elkin 1977:158-9). If people wish to visit the ngangkayi at Warrabri they usually do so in camp. A different blend of traditional and western practices operates at Utopia, a cattle station south east of Warrabri. There the Angarapa Health Programme, which is independent in certain respects of the Health Department, has, since November 1977, funded a doctor who works closely with the local Aboriginal leaders (see Tom 1978).

Certain literacy skills are required if Aboriginal health workers are to assume real responsibility in health care programmes. Frequently, young girls chosen as health workers because they have the literacy skills, do not have the status in their own community to exercise the authority required of the really autonomous health workers. Also young white women assume positions of authority as nursing sisters on settlements which is hard for older people, especially older men, to accept. Through the health worker education programmes organized by the Health Department, older women are being given the necessary training to cope with the demands of the position. Health worker schemes are also attempting to integrate aspects of both medical systems by demystifying western medicine while at the same time encouraging incorporation of Aboriginal practices. A new and growing respect for Aboriginal values is also apparent amongst some medical personnel as they have come to realize the depth of knowledge and concern which Aborigines demonstrate in times of illness.

However the autonomy which women once enjoyed in the domain of health has not been regained through participation in health worker
schemes. These proceed cautiously; authority and responsibility are delegated slowly. Certain critical skills are withheld, as the Warrabri people found to their chagrin in late 1977. On this occasion the Health Department in Alice Springs decided to withdraw all nursing sisters and certain medicines from Warrabri because there had been a series of attacks and two alleged attempted rapes of white women by Aboriginal men. The Health Department feared for the safety of their nurses. Although many old and bitter arguments were aired in public, in the open confrontation between the health personnel and the Aboriginal people at Warrabri, one taunt from the women recurred. 'We have been trained but we can't take over', the women challenged the officials. 'We can't give injections. Our old people will die if they can't have the medicine they now need'. 'Why are we being punished?', asked one younger woman. 'What have we done? We do not rape white men. We need the medicines'. The men were more concerned to assume responsibility for the wayward youths and assure the white officials that there would be no more attacks. The women were more interested in the area for which they assumed responsibility. That they had, since contact with white Australians, been reduced to a state of dependency and were being kept there, was clear to most women that day.

HEALTH CEREMONIES

Crises of Life Ceremonies

Catherine Berndt (Berndt & Berndt 1946:15), writing of the cattle stations in the north west of the Northern Territory in 1944-1946, noted that women's ceremonies are the first to disintegrate at contact with Europeans. At Warrabri it is also true that the major crises of life ceremonies for women have been almost entirely usurped by white institutions. Childbirth now occurs in hospital and first menstruation is most likely when a girl is at school. Other traditionally female
responsibilities have also been undermined on settlements (see also Berndt 1965:273). For example the health of babies is now monitored by health authorities. I would suggest that not only has this created a situation in which women no longer control their own fertile lives but it has also engendered a feeling of inadequacy in women. The loss of control and the damage to woman's self respect have scarcely been noted by anthropologists who have considered women's activities to be small scale and of little consequence. Women's ceremonies have been relegated to the realm of the magical, the secular and the domestic hearth.

Because birth and early child care are exclusively female affairs where strict rules and practices are observed, women in the past were able to exercise control over their own bodies and fertile lives (see Cowlishaw 1978:235-8). If a child was born to a young mother, too close to a sibling, or obviously deformed, it was the decision of the mother to practice infanticide. This is not to imply that women did not love and cherish their children, it is merely an example of their right to decide which child and how many would live at birth. Although actual birth now nearly always occurs in hospital, as soon as the mother leaves, the women take her and the child away into the bush where they perform certain rituals to ensure the health and growth of the child and the renewed strength of the mother. The use of herbal preparations and plants in the childbirth rituals is the only consistent use of plants (for health and curing) I observed at Warrabri. Women have extensive knowledge of plants and usage but they tend to discuss rather than use the plants. 'Aspirin and Vicks are more powerful', they say, 'but we like to visit the country and collect the plants too'.

As neither childbirth nor first menstruation can be timed to occur in a season of plenty, as can initiation, these ceremonies have to concern those female relatives who might be present in the family camps.
It is interesting to note that women state that now, as in the past, it was their 'mother's mother' who attended them in birth. For this to be so the couple must have lived with, or close by to the wife's grandmother.

In the past, formal rituals to limit the size of families were in the hands of men. However the practice of extensive breast feeding, the segregation of the sexes, the later sexual maturity of girls in the past, the tolerance of a high infant mortality rate and infanticide, all supported the male ritual statements that large families were undesirable but left the actual physical controls in the hands of women. The shift to a sedentary life style has altered many of these patterns and women are now bearing many children, younger, and closer together. Sickly children are surviving but spend many months in hospital away from their families. They return to their communities as outsiders and with younger siblings who require attention. Younger women are beginning to seek contraceptive advice but are still somewhat bewildered by their increased fertility and fecundity.

Older women comment that the law is no longer being upheld. In the past, children could not have been born to mothers so young, they insist. I pursued this with one close friend and asked why such young girls were having babies today. Mindful of the experience of other fieldworkers (see Goodale 1971:136) I feared a withering reply but was told that in the past girls didn't marry until 'their breasts hung down'. 'But what about the young unmarried girls who play around?' I continued, indicating one young mother whom the women had been discussing. It was then I got the reply, 'In the past girls slept in one place and the boys in another. There was no 'humbug' then'.

At first menstruation women celebrated the attainment of sexual maturity of a female child who could now assume new responsibilities. Although these were relatively small scale rituals, they were acknowledged as areas of female autonomy and authority with special
importance for members of the girl's matriline. For the mother of the
girl it marked the beginning of a new stage in her role as a mother-in-law
and for her mother a realization of arrangements made for her daughter
some fifteen years previously (see Chapter nine).

Yawalyu

As areas in which women could express their powers and control
over their bodies (birth, menarche) have declined and been undermined
by western institutions, other modes of expressing concern, care and
communication have been elaborated and emphasized. This involves, as I
have stated, a delicate interplay of women's perceptions of what is
their role (to care, nurture and restore harmony) and the pragmatics of
the situation (hospitals, group structure, settlement location). Women
have recognized that their ill health has more to do with conditions of
the settlement than with their individual behaviours and that powerful
remedies must therefore be sought to restore the balance. They have
responded by incorporating certain elements of the individual healing
rituals within the larger group based yawalyu ceremonies.

Increasingly women are drawing upon yawalyu rituals but all the
various ritual forms to which women have been turning in their pursuit
of good health, can be seen as falling along a continuum. At one end
are the individual oriented ceremonies organized within the matriline and
primarily concerned with crises of life and at the other are the group
oriented ceremonies which involve women as kirda and kurdungurlu. Focus,
scope, structure and content all reflect women's changing role and
status.

CHANGING CEREMONIES

In the following three cases the changes and continuities in
women's role in health maintenance are demonstrated. In the first two
cases women who are kirda and kurdungurlu prepare the fat while singing the country of rain dreaming. This fat is then taken to the camp of the patient where massage (and perhaps more singing) occurs. In the second case the specific songs are sung for fat and ochre which are prepared in the presence of the patient. These activities are concentrated within the matriline but other relationships are involved. The structural principle underlying the dreamings being used in the health ritual is that of kirda to kurdungurlu.

In the third case, the women sang for the individual but the songs were then incorporated into a wider celebration of country. Once the song for the particular condition had been sung, the women then continued with the cycle until they had reached a point where they were satisfied the patient had absorbed the power. On these occasions there may be more than one patient and small children are often brought forward to be painted. In the most complex form, as described later for case four, the women staged a full yawalyu with dancing, ritual paraphernalia and exchanges of gifts or knowledge. Although it must remain supposition on my part, I believe this elaborate form and mode of expressing concern with ill health and attempting to restore good health, is now sought more often than it was in the past. As women find their powers undermined they are turning to the more powerful, spectacular rituals in the hope that, by correctly observing the law, their health will improve.

Case One: Jakamarra

Old Jakamarra had been ill for some time but had only recently been brought to Warrabri by his concerned relatives from Barrow Creek. They hoped that the Nungarrayi of Warrabri (his nieces, close "sister's daughters") could help restore the man to good health. In their own ritual area, the women prepared fat and red ochre, which was formed into a ball and taken to the camp of Jakamarra by Nakamarra and Nungarrayi women (that is, "sisters" and "sister's daughters"). After a brief discussion with the wife of the man, the women
massaged the patient in much the same way as does the *ngangkayi*, but the culmination of the massage was the painting of the feet through the soles of which the illness could later leave. Although the visit lasted only about 15 minutes, the man knew that the women were working for him before they arrived and that they would continue to do so after the visit until he improved. Later that evening he drank tea for the first time for weeks and the next day began eating.

It is not unusual for people to seek health care from professionals who do not belong to their own community. In the case above, the man was closely related, but women have asked me to take them to places as far away as Areyonga, south of Alice Springs, in order to seek particularly powerful *ngangkayi* or a more appropriate dreaming for a particular condition than the dreamings they may use. In the case of Jakamarra, he was cured, the women said, because he heard the songs of his country sung. It was a restoration, a 'putting-in-touch with' process, whereby he experienced, through the women, the attachment of the Dreamtime heroes as they travelled through the country and the well-being the ancestors felt in their country. The 'daughters' were *kurdungurlu* for the country, that is, those who assist in the staging of rituals. They were therefore playing a dual role - firstly as 'daughters' and members of his caring matriline, and secondly, as ritual 'workers' for his dreaming.

**Case Two: Jakamarra**

Another case, similar but more elaborate, and remembered as successful, is that of another Jakamarra. This incident took place 30 years ago but today the man lives at Warrabri. He is an unusually tall and muscular man but I was told of a time when he was so weak that he could no longer stand.

At the time of Jakamarra's ill health the people were living at Wauchope, fifty kilometres north of Warrabri on the wolfram mines. All the Napanangka (his 'mothers') gathered to assist in his treatment. Together, in the bush away from the camp of the man, the five 'mothers' prepared a mixture of goanna and witchetty fat. The ritual involved singing over...
various pieces of hair string which, once prepared, were taken to the man's camp. He was stripped and dressed with hair string.

In retelling the story, the women emphasize that the men were powerless to do anything. "They just sat there worrying." The women were in charge and directed the men as to which articles of clothing were to be removed and which not. Before they began even Jakamarra was convinced he would die. The women massaged his head, shoulders, hands and feet with special attention to the navel for which there are powerful health and love designs. At this stage the women were using fat only.

They kept vigil all night as they sang the dreaming which infuses the country with strength and colour. In the morning they again massaged the man but this time with a mixture of red ochre and fat. A white head band was substituted for the hair string around his head. This was a symbol of purity as well as attractiveness. All day he lay in the men's camp. In the afternoon he began to feel better and announced that the next day he would go hunting, which he did. Everyone was happy to see him better and moving around. According to the women he is now protected from that illness for the rest of his life.

When I asked about the possibility of a ngangkayi treating the man, I was told that no ngangkayi was present at Wauchope years ago, and that in any case his condition required the treatment given by the women, by his mothers.

Health and curing activities break down many barriers. In the above case women visited the men's camp and publically viewed a naked man. In his or her practice, ngangkayi also cross such barriers. The women who cared for him were his 'mothers', within his matriline but not related as kurdungurlu as were the 'daughters' in Case 1. This care by 'mothers' was, I believe, more prevalent in the past than is now the case.

In the next case the use of the yawalyu to cure the woman was structured differently from the two previous examples. A particular song was required and it had to be sung in the context of the country to which it belonged. The women worked from the particular (that is the

4. Chewings (1936:95) comments that one woman in their party violated an avoidance relationship to nurse a sick man.
Above: Napurrula painted and treated to ease the pain

Left: A child is also painted during the ceremony
condition of the patient) to the general (that is association with country) in attempting to restore health. This performance required the presence of the kirda and kurdungurlu which was facilitated by the concentration of people at Warrabri. The Jakamarra at Wauchope could not have expected to be treated by this scale of ritual because there were too few people living in the mines to be able to stage such a yawalyu.

Case Three: Napurrula

Napurrula had recently undergone gynecological surgery but was still retaining fluid and was in some discomfort. She herself was a ngangkayi but it was the women of the Nampijinpa-Nangala semi-moiety who, in consultation with a Nungarrayi, the kurdungurlu for those dreamings, assisted her. All this took place in the presence of Napurrula, a sister. Women may ask each other for yawalyu, or for arm blood (a potent medicine), and no doubt other items to do with health, but it is generally a joint decision of the patient and the kirda and kurdungurlu to stage a yawalyu.

The group assembled and sang the specific songs to ease the pain and reduce the swellings. This involved two dreamings: rain, to reduce the swelling and bush berry to impart strength. The women sang of the ancestral women who rubbed fat into hair string to make them feel strong again. They then invoked with singing, the presence of the ngangkayi familiar so he could enter the woman and remove the source of the pain. Once that was achieved, the women moved to rain dreaming to sing the wound shut. All the while they were massaging and painting the patient with a design which is particularly powerful in restoring good health and good spirits. Aspects of the ceremony are even considered a little provocative by the women in that the designs and songs have sexual overtones.

During this ceremony two other ailing women with long standing conditions were painted and massaged. Children were also painted but the major focus of the ceremony was on the pain and swelling of Napurrula.

This ceremony incorporated the emphasis on the individual being cared for by members of her own matriline with the structuring
relationship of *kirda* to *kurdungurlu*. The children who were painted belonged to those women present at the ceremony. In some cases this meant that the children were *kirda* or *kurdungurlu* but in others they were neither. Once again I believe that in this ceremony we can see an incorporation of smaller family rituals, focussed on the caring matriline, into the structure of the larger land based ceremonies based on the *kirda-kurdungurlu* relationship.

In the fourth case described below, the shift from the family and matriline to the ritual group is complete. Although in this case 'sisters' help 'mothers', they refer to each other as *kirda* and *kurdungurlu*, not in the kin terms of mother and daughter, or sister to sister.

**Case Four: Nungarrayi**

Nungarrayi is the daughter of an extremely important Japaljarri, *kirda* for kangaroo dreaming. He had taught his daughter the stories of other dreamings for which he was also part *kirda*. The woman is held in high esteem in Willowra, Tennant Creek and at Warrabri, for she is considered to be extremely knowledgeable and powerful. Through her father she is *kirda* for snake dreaming near Willowra. She also holds the songs and stories for a honey dreaming site, Lilpunju, and through her conception site, spear dreaming at Kurlarda Kurlangu. She is the chief *kurdungurlu* for the Nampijinpa-Nangala dreamings of rain and bush berry. She has two older sons who have been through initiation ceremonies and a younger daughter by her second husband. On all counts she is extremely important and knowledgeable.

Her love rituals, which secured her present husband, are considered powerful and envied by many other women at Warrabri who alternatively blame this woman for troubles in their love lives or ask her to work for them. Her own marriage has been a stormy love-hate relationship with
passionate and jealous fights. Her mother-in-law is closer in age to Nungarrayi than Nungarrayi is to her husband, who is many years her junior. Added to this, Napangardi (the mother-in-law) is a querulous woman who constantly interferes in her son's marriage. She had been asked to leave several camps because of her temper and finally the daughter-in-law and husband moved camp to the other side of Warrabri to avoid her meddling ways.

Nungarrayi is very aware of the power and potential danger of the love rituals she owns and frequently cautions other women not to sing songs which are not correctly theirs. She herself is very careful to observe all precautions to control the powers but her mother-in-law accuses her of starting all the fights which take place. The husband does little to check his mother and, after returning from one spree in town, accused his wife of adultery and in spite of her pleading, beat her unmercifully. She left him and refused to return until he promised to stop drinking. This he did but women outside her group say that she is sick all the time because of his ill treatment.

Nungarrayi had been generally ill for some time and had sought assistance from the hospital, the ngangkayi and the women of her own dreaming group. Finally the old ngangkayi, a classificatory son, (that is within the matriline) was called in and prescribed yawalyu.

It was a close daughter and a 'mother's father's sister' of Nungarrayi who told me of the beginning of her 'troubles'. Several years back when the mother, son and wife had been at Willowra for initiation business, Nungarrayi had fought with her mother-in-law and drawn blood. Napangardi took the blood in a handkerchief to several Namplinja 'sisters-in-law' at Willowra. (The sick Nungarrayi is kurungurlu for the dreamings of these Willowra women). The rituals which the Willowra women did with the blood are said to have caused Nungarrayi's illness. The only way for her to recover was to appease the Willowra women with a gift in exchange for the blood.

The organization which preceded the Willowra trip took over a month and it became evident that the Nungarrayi women were going to use this occasion to settle many old scores. As I have already pointed out women have restricted access to cars, so they cannot visit as readily as can men. The women maximized the opportunity to restore as many harmonious relationships as
possible. The trip to Willowra became a complex of relationships, beliefs about health, personal knowledge, dreamings and demography.

Although the two days of dancing, singing, painting, teaching and exchanges centred on the rain and bush berry dreaming of the Kaititj women of Warrabri, the revelation and gift of the knowledge of snake and honey dreaming to the Willowra women was also effected. Nungarrayi was at the centre of proceedings but all the Nampijinpa and Nungarrayi women of Willowra participated.

The activities which could be glossed as strictly health related were short and spectacular. Nungarrayi, after she had presented the dreamings of snake and honey to the Willowra women, also gave them the sacred paraphernalia of bush berry to look after for some years. They then painted, massaged and exorcised the spirits from her. The separation of fat and colour, as in the Jakamarra cases, was also followed by the Willowra women, but Nungarrayi assured them if their work was not good she would 'hot it up a bit' with rainbow dreaming. Once all the gift exchanges and dancing were finished the Willowra women painted Nungarrayi with a Willowra owned design and thus completed the singing of country.

Throughout the rituals held at Willowra the organization both reflected and was spoken of in terms of kirda and kurdungurlu. In presenting snake dreaming, Nungarrayi was kirda to the Willowra women who were receiving it as her joint kirda. In fact they were also full or close sisters but that was not the aspect of the relationship which was stressed. It was not the kin relationship which was important in these rituals but the power of ownership of women who also were sisters. In presenting the bush berry sacra, Nungarrayi was kurdungurlu to the Willowra kirda. These women were related as 'mother' and 'daughter' but again that was not the aspect of the relationship which was stressed. In giving away so much ritual property, Nungarrayi hoped that the jealous fights would cease and that her health would improve once harmony was restored.

In presenting these case studies I have argued that, despite the changes of the past one hundred years, women have continued to assert that they are nurturers of country, people, and social relationships. Within this analysis it is impossible to dismiss women's activities
in the domain of health maintenance as merely 'growing up' children and applying a few herbal remedies. Women, in order to maintain good health, are staging ceremonies which focus on health at the cosmic level of restoration of harmony and happiness. This is so because women have rights in the country from which they derive power and for which they hold a sacred trust. It is this aspect of their heritage which they are increasingly emphasizing.

CEREMONIAL INTERDEPENDENCE: male and female, old and new

Women's role in health maintenance has been overlooked and trivialized, because women have not been recognized as owners of country, as ritually important to the whole society and, further, the domain of health has been over narrowly defined. The focus has been on the role of the healer rather than on the way in which health is maintained over a period of time. Before turning to an examination of why this should be so, I wish to present one final case study in which the interdependence and complementarity of male and female roles and the accommodation of western medical practice in maintaining health are apparent.

Case Five: Nampijinpa

Nampijinpa was an astute young person who enjoyed caring for other people's children but was, she told me, terrified of having children herself. She was married to a man who already had a large family by his first wife. Her 'mothers' and 'sisters' had been concerned about her for some time because she was not eating, was listless and breathing rapidly. The women massaged and painted her, but this was not producing the hoped for results. The hospital had not been able to relieve the woman's symptoms either. Although at Warrabri she had the support of close 'mothers' and 'sisters', she
wanted her actual mother who lived at Willowra some four hundred and eighty kilometres away. The woman summoned the mother by telegram. (It is not unusual for people to travel many hundreds of kilometres to visit sick relatives or to seek attention).

At dusk one day, at the request of the patient, the women of her mother's camp held a conference. The woman was examined and it was decided that rituals of a dreaming other than those held by the Kaititj at Warrabri were needed. The 'mothers' had tried with their own ngapa dreaming rituals but they now prescribed the diamond dove dreaming of a Warlpiri Napurrula woman. It was hoped that this dreaming might be successful in restoring the woman to good health. (To visit this Napurrula meant crossing the east-west line which divides Warrabri into those who come from the west and those who come from the east. Such a crossing of boundaries is not unusual in case of illness).

Napurrula in consultation with the 'mothers' and 'sisters' of the patient, decided the services of the ngangkayi were necessary. Nampijinpa then visited the healer who examined and massaged her in much the same way as her own 'mothers' and 'sisters' had. He could find no foreign objects to remove from her body and did not draw blood. 'She needs rest and her husband', he diagnosed. The women returned to their camp, made a separate bed for the young woman and allowed her and her husband some privacy for the evening. She recovered slowly but appreciably during the following week and later sought contraceptive advice from the hospital.

In this case the knowledge of the ngangkayi far exceeded that of the normal general practitioner and certainly that available to the settlement hospital. The diagnosis and treatment involved both western medical practice and the knowledge and care of the members of her own camp, women of another ritual group and a male ngangkayi. Her health was the concern of her society.

Anthropological Models

Male ngangkayi practice could possibly be analytically opposed to female curing and peace-making procedures in order to achieve some neat symbolic oppositions, but I believe the foregoing discussion shows that the oppositions cannot be so starkly drawn. For, in Central Australia while the ngangkayi is predominantly a male role, women may also be
ngangkayi. Also, elements of ngangkayi practice are incorporated in women's health maintenance activities. During ritual performance women may summons the ngangkayi power which manifests itself as a clicking in the head. (See also Cawte 1974:45 and Elkin 1977:23). Women may also carry the ngangkayi stones and, through the performance of their crises of life and yawalyu ceremonies, effect similar ends to that of ngangkayi. Men, on the other hand, stage resolution of conflict ceremonies which restore harmony and diffuse tensions within a community (Peterson 1970a) and, as Elkin (1977), Reid (1978) and Berndt (1964) demonstrate, curing and the restoration of harmonious social relations are also part of male ngangkayi practice. Both men and women, in seeking to maintain health, are drawing on a shared set of values and practices.

How then are we to characterize the roles of men and women in health maintenance? On the basis of the following brief discussion of the literature on health in Aboriginal society, I suggest that the restrictive nature of the research and the anthropological models in Aboriginal Australia, have obscured the role of women in health maintenance and in the process also obscured the interdependence and complementarity between male and female practices in the domain of health. Rather than excluding women from the practice of medicine, I have suggested we need to examine their contribution in terms of the indigenous concepts of good health and women's role as nurturer. All women's group ritual curing activities have to do with giving, with the infusing of the body with strength. Women attempt to restore a person to health by the gift of blood, fat or bodily secretions from underarm or eyes. In giving women are once again acting out their nurturance role where love, care and power are freely given. Ngangkayi practice on the other hand is an essential individual activity
concerned more with the removal of foreign objects and alien forces from a person.

Elkin (1977:66), writing primarily of the 1940's (with inclusion of some more recent material in the 1977 edition), characterized the medicine men as those who are respected, often of outstanding personality and of "immense social significance, the psychological health of the group largely depending on their powers". In Elkin's analysis medicine men have skills, as well as specials powers which women rarely attain or possess. Women care for the minor ailments and accidents but men have the access to the supernatural forces in the execution of their activities (Elkin 1977:12).

Cawte (1974:xvii), in his comparison of coastal and desert people, argues that medicine men's activities are directed at law and order rather than the relieving of suffering. His data on Central Australian women, who in his analysis cannot be doctors as they lack access to dreamtime powers (Cawte 1974:144-5), was elicited from Mrs Fleming, the wife of the missionary at Yuendumu and some of her Aboriginal women friends.

The common factor in the studies of Berndt (1964), Cawte (1974) and Elkin (1977) is that Aboriginal men are depicted as controlling the domain of health. Women may have their own business, but they do not appear as doctors and healers.

At Warrabri I found that women may well assume the role of ngangkayi. Important criteria for selection of ngangkayi in Central Australia, and perhaps the most critical, appear to be place in family and the dreamings upon which one may call. Should the first born be a girl, whose younger sibling is a girl or a much younger boy, she will not only enjoy the unique position of the first born, but also the investment of dreaming knowledge from her father not shared by subsequent siblings. Further, if she belongs to a dreaming which has
important ngangkayi powers, she may well develop the skills and exercise the powers of ngangkayi. One of the constraints on women who may have received or activated the latent ngangkayi power is their involvement in the time consuming and emotionally demanding task of child rearing. As with the male practice of ngangkayi, it is generally older individuals who practice. These women are released from mothering duties, but they are also the women who a male ethnographer is most unlikely to contact because most of their day is spent in the single women's camp which is forbidden to men. Neither Cawte (1974) nor Meggitt (1955) worked closely with women on health related issues.

Elkin (1977:115, 124) does make passing reference to two incidents involving women doctors among the Anula and some East Kimberleys peoples. Spencer and Gillen (1899:465, 526) also mention women doctors and the role of women in health maintenance. However passing reference is merely made to their training and getting of wisdom in a fashion similar to that of their male counterparts. Their activities are not closely documented or analysed.

In Strehlow (1971:650-3) there are clues concerning the nature of the relationship between the sexes in Aranda health practice. Both men and women, he notes, have songs exclusive to their sex. Only women may sing the songs for women although a brother may sit nearby to increase the efficacy of the 'charm'. In form, metre and language, the songs of men and women are identical, Strehlow (1971:653) claims. The difference lies in the women's use of red ochre and fat and the men's use of blood and fat. Only men may sing sacred place names which are

5. Meggitt (1955:377) mentions in his discussion of Djanba and medicine men that his female informants were two young women, aged 20 and 25, whereas his male informants were old men who were obviously schooled in the law.
taboo to women but as Strehlow (1971:653) admits, he learnt the women's songs from a man and possibly women have other songs of which he is unaware. Certainly in my experience women's secret songs are sung by the women in their own ritual area before any 'treatment' occurs in a more open area.

In focussing on the activities of women which maintain health over a period of time I have argued that underlying the changes is an enduring model of women's role through which Aboriginal women at Warrabri achieve continuity in their rituals. I have suggested we look beyond the assertion that 'nothing changes and that is how health is maintained' to examine how health is maintained through time. Rather than focus on the success and failure of a dyadic relationship which is cast as adaptive or maladaptive (Cawte 1974) I suggested we examine change, continuity and complementarity.

CONCLUSION

The role of women in the domain of health in Aboriginal society has been rendered almost invisible by the focus upon the healer and not the healed, the disease and not the context of the ill health, the magico-religious practices and not the social structural relationships of health to other aspects of the culture. However, I suggest that women are acutely aware of the decline in physical health and the breakdown in social relationships. Fighting and drunkenness now disrupt their lives in a fashion unknown several generations ago. Women are aware that in the shift from a hunter-gatherer mode of subsistence to settlement life they have suffered. Daily they are presented with tensions and sorcery accusations on a scale which could not have been sustained in the past. They have sought to repair and restore damaged bonds through their most powerful and spectacular rituals.

This resurgence in women's ritual activity has not been
accompanied by a concomitant increase in the status of women. As I have argued, their autonomy has been fundamentally eroded and their relationship to land dislocated. Women's contribution to the maintenance of health in the past was within the small family group and focussed upon life crisis ceremonies. It was in these rituals that women stated their importance as the makers of adult women and their control over their own bodies. Here, then, is the psychological basis for their nurturance roles: women do give birth, they do menstruate. This power and the nurturance roles associated with birth and growth are symbolised in *yawalyu* rituals.

The increased attention now being paid by women to the *yawalyu* ceremonies is both a reflection of women's perceptions of their changed circumstances and evidence of women's continuing intention to find a role in the maintenance of health and harmony. The nurturance role is now more symbolically expressed than prior to settlement life, when woman's control over the lives of the family group and bodily care and functions was more immediate and direct. Nurturance is now being stated in terms of country and relationships.

This change in emphasis does not negate the self image of women. It does however partly explain women's low status on settlements, for the task they have set themselves and the means with which they seek to obtain harmony, are constrained by the male oriented and dominated European controls and policies which govern Aboriginal affairs. The women's ceremonies which I have glossed as concerned with health are also concerned with other aspects of women's role and status in Aboriginal society. Women's ceremonies have often been characterized by anthropologists as hearth bound and their cures as domestic. Women certainly do have extensive knowledge of herbal remedies but their activities are not restricted to the hearth. The designation by
observers of 'domestic' as of less importance than the male 'political' roles is only possible today when the relationships between men and women have been fundamentally altered. In the shift from a kin based group to the emerging stratified society on settlements, women have moved from being members of an autonomous sex to being dependent and controlled. But yawalyu persists, albeit in a changing form and with new functions for maintaining the bonds between people and country. Like the love rituals discussed in the next chapter, health oriented yawalyu persist, as it were, within settlement structures.
Chapter Seven

YILPINJI

INTRODUCTION

Central Australian Aboriginal women's responsibility to maintain harmoniously the complex of relationships between people and land is manifest in the intertwining of the ritual foci of health and emotional management. In the shift from a hunter gatherer mode of subsistence to a sedentary life style, the nature of these responsibilities has changed. In the previous chapter I explored change and continuity in the domain of health. In this chapter I turn to women's role in establishing and maintaining relationships between men and women through their access to and use of yilpinji rituals. Once again we see women asserting their importance as nurturers of people and relationships within the context of their rights in land. In yilpinji, as in their health oriented yawalyu, women seek to resolve and to explore the conflicts and tensions which beset their communities. At Warrabri in the late 1970's jealous fights, accusations of infidelity and illicit affairs occurred on a scale impossible a century ago when people lived in small mobile bands. In fact, writing of Aranda at the turn of the century, Spencer and Gillen (1899:99) commented that sexual jealousy was not a major tension. But today, women's role in the domain of emotional management is, like their role in the maintenance of health and harmony, truly awesome.

Women's role in maintaining male-female relationships has been misunderstood because yilpinji has been designated 'magic' and of concern to women only. Glossed in this way, yilpinji appears to be a

1. The term yilpinji is known and used throughout the desert region of Central Australia. Berndt (1950), Meggitt (1962) and Munn (1973) ilbindji, Roheim (1933 & 1974) ilpindja and Strehlow (1971) ilpintja.
deviant, illegitimate activity pursued on the periphery of the real
decision making domain of men. According to Kaberry (1939:265-7)
love magic was a safety valve and at times a form of vengeance. To
Roheim (1933:208-9) it was the sort of activity in which women
indulged. It was magic, it could not be religion because women did not
have access to the dreamtime power. Although Kaberry (1939:220-1,
276-8) and Berndt (1965:238-282) have challenged this aspect of
Roheim's characterization of women's lives, the designation 'magic',
with all its pejorative overtones, has persisted. Love magic remains
a haphazard activity, lacking any structure or purpose. It provides
background noise, a low level of interference for descriptions of the
culturally valued activities of men.

Writing of the west central area of the Northern Territory,
Berndt (1950:70-3) argues that the focus on sexual intercourse and
reproduction in women's ceremonies is part of the general religious
scheme as exemplified in the major cult theme of fertility and
increase. *Yilpinji*, in Berndt's (1950:43; 1965:243) analysis, is the
least secret of women's ceremonies and more vulnerable to corruption
than *jawalju (yawalyu)*. In my analysis of Kaititj women's *yilpinji,*
I am endorsing Berndt's contention that women's ceremonies are under-
written by the *jukurrpa* and that they concern the whole society.
However the themes, imagery, symbolism and structure of Kaititj
*yilpinji* indicate that it is emotional management, not fertility which
is the major concern of women. Through these rituals Central
Australian Aboriginal women work to maintain the values of their
society in a distinctively female way.

Through *yilpinji* women claim to establish male-female relation-
ships deemed legitimate by their society. This aspect of women's role
has been overlooked because, as with male oriented approaches to an
analysis of health maintenance, the paradigms which have organized
research within Australia have not been those designed to focus upon women as social actors in their own right. Anthropologists have too often sought an understanding of the way in which male–female unions are regulated in terms of the twin institutions of polygyny and the gerontocracy. Within the context of arranged marriage old men are depicted as allocating scarce resources and arrogating to themselves the right to bestow women's services in marriage (see Meggitt 1962: 264-270, 1965). But as I argue here and in Chapter nine, this model disregards women's decision making role in formal bestowal practices and the rights women assert and enjoy in marriage. It also fails to account for my statistical data on marriage.

During my period of fieldwork at Warrabri eighty percent of marriages were correct within the kinship system but promised marriage accounted for only five to ten percent of extant marriages. How, I wondered, were the other ninety to ninety-five percent organized? Obviously formal business contracts entered into at initiation do not organize the totality of marriage arrangements. As Meggitt notes, (1962:264) there are three ways a man may find a wife, but there are also ways in which a woman may find a husband. Yilpinji, women claim, is one such way. Thus I am arguing that both men and women seek to regulate male–female relations. Neither has total control of all the possible strategies, formal or informal: each has room to manoeuvre.

The model within which I am suggesting we analyse male–female unions

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2. The politics of marriage is not the focus on my thesis but I have argued elsewhere (Bell 1980a:247) that marriage from a woman's point of view, be seen as the experience of evolving social monogamy wherein women politic to contract progressively marriages which are more and more to their perceived benefit.

3. Hart and Pilling (1960:18) point out that old men can not control widow remarriage in the same way they organize their infant daughters. In their view widow marriage 'supplied the loophole in the system, or the cultural alternative that took care of young men'.
is one which allows for the dynamic interaction of sexual politics and social change in desert society today and in the past. In yiilpinji, as with formal decisions made during initiation, women clearly demonstrate that there are choices available to them and that they chose as independent members of a society which respects their views. In their opinion they are not and never were pawns in male marriage games. That the unions into which women are now entering are characterized increasingly by violence is evidence for the changing arena in which the sexual politics of the society are played out today, rather than evidence for women's chattel status. Like their responses to the changes discussed in the previous chapter, Aboriginal women's response to the changing nature of male-female unions is based on an interplay between women's perceptions of their role as nurturers of relationships, and the constraints which settlement life imposed on that role.

It might be analytically convenient to set up an opposition whereby men control the formal arrangements (that is promised marriage) and women the informal (that is love rituals). This however, is not possible for the informal and the formal are not so easily separated. Women politic in marriage arrangements and men perform love rituals. I have no data of my own concerning men's yiilpinji at Warrabri but Meggitt (1962), Munn (1973) and Strehlow (1971) provide important insights which indicate that Central Australian Aboriginal men seek to regulate aspects of male-female unions through yiilpinji. Although their analyses differ in certain respects it is evident

4. Warlpiri men, according to Meggitt (1962:270) perform ilbindji (yiilpinji) to speed the growth of breasts and buttocks of young wives (see also Strehlow 1971:470). Munn (1973:48) disagrees that ilbindji functions within the context of marriage. In her analysis this is the function of the closely related yangaridji and manguru. Ilbindji concerns extra marital sex and is glossed as 'men's ancestral designs and ceremonies for attracting women' (Munn 1973: 223). The three categories of design are however, Munn states
that Aboriginal men are using *yilpinji* to establish and to maintain relationships of importance to them. Like women's *yawalyu* and *yilpinji*, the themes which men explore in their *yilpinji* are consonant with their perceptions of their role and the practical situation in which marriage rules are acted out. Thus men's *yilpinji* explore the ramifications of and tension inherent in the institutions of polygyny and the gerontocracy. In both male and female *yilpinji*, the ritual participants make statements concerning their role in their society in a way which illuminates the nature of sexual politics in desert society.

**YILPINJI AND COUNTRY**

Of the three hundred Kaititj love songs which I collected and translated in the field, only a few have to do with actual consummation of the act. Major themes are longing for country and family, sorrow, anticipation, agitation, concern, shyness and display. Country is both a basis of identity and an analogy for emotional states.

Love is in fact a very poor translation of *yilpinji* but one that has found acceptance in the anthropological literature and fed back into the indigenous conceptualization. It is a translation which feeds the male notion of what women ought rightly to be about. For white itinerant road gangers and station hands with whom some Aboriginal women have had sexual liaisons, 'love magic' has been a smutty joke. It was something for which one could pay and then reap the results. It marked women clearly as sex objects. Acting with the support of some Aboriginal converts, the missionaries at Phillip Creek banned 'love

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F.n. 4 continued.

(1973:33), imbued with a strength supposed to increase men's control over women. Strehlow (1971:524) agrees that *ilpintja* (*yilpinji*) allows old men to win not only the services of a spouse but also a fondness of a wife.
magic' and labelled the practitioners 'witches'. Women continued to perform yilpinji but connotations of love magic as the devil's work are still current at Warrabri today. For Aboriginal men these debasements of yilpinji as 'love magic' and classification of women as sex objects allowed them an avenue by which yilpinji could be defused. Thus the white men encouraged yilpinji and Aboriginal men could, with this new found male support, construe yilpinji as 'magic'. Aboriginal women's religion in the process was stripped of its actual complexities. Aboriginal men were able to score telling points in their ongoing tug of war with women.

By locating yilpinji within the context of land and interpreting the myths in terms of power symbolisms, I have not dwelt upon the explicit themes of sex as have some previous analyses of male-female relationships (Kaberry 1939:262-3; Berndt & Berndt 1942-5:146-9, 255-258; Berndt 1950:36-42, 46-51; Roheim 1973:153-224). Kaititj women are not explicit but employ euphemisms like 'going hunting together', or being led away by the wrist or a profane hand sign. They may dance holding a rhythm stick or bunched up skirt before them in a mock penis, but consummation is always off stage or obliquely indicated (see also White 1975:123-142). Had I asked for love songs and love myths I am sure I would have collected few songs but they would have been explicit in sexual reference. I accepted the Kaititj gloss of yilpinji and have a majority of songs which deal with country and generalized emotions and few which are explicitly sexual. The songs and myths have more to do with the way in which women elaborate the common core values which underpin and shape male-female values and behaviour than the playing out of strictly sexual relationships.

Love and sex are aspects of yilpinji which encompasses the sweep
of tensions and emotions engendered by male-female relationships.\(^5\) These, however, must be seen in their cultural context where country is a major symbol of attachment. Devil's Marbles and the surrounding area, known as Karlukarlu, is a focus for rain dreaming. It is spectacular country where enormous round rocks stand in the desert. During rains numerous small streamlets run from the rocks and ridges, wild figs grow from the crevices, water collects in the rock holes and depressions high on the Marbles. The desert lives. The colours and contrasts are sudden and dramatic; red rocks and green water heavy with slime weed, tall ant hills and spinifex plains.

Karlukarlu country is extremely rich in dreaming sites and ancestral activity but when the road was built from Alice Springs to Darwin, it was located through the very centre of the Marbles so that important sites are no longer accessible to the Kaititj. Sorrowfully the women claim that they can still hear the old people crying from the caves. This loss has meant that certain important rituals can no longer be performed but, as the area is within a day's travel of Warrabri, women may still hunt, camp and dream there. Nonetheless by losing access to important sites where they could express their attachment and whence they can draw power, women have been weakened.\(^6\) One ritual object associated with this area was so powerful that it was believed that if a man came within close range, he would meet a violent death. This terminal sanction is no longer available to women. Men have,

\(^5\) Strehlow (1971:524) clearly recognizes this when he notes how old men guard their most potent love songs from younger men who may otherwise win the hearts of young promised wives.

\(^6\) This shattering of the nexus between land and ritual may explain why the women of whom Catherine Berndt (1950) writes appeared to emphasize sex and not emotional management. Both Kaberry (1939:256) and Berndt (1965:247) note that 'love magic' songs are said to be introduced from other 'countries'. Thus the rituals would not be located within rights to land as are the Kaititj rituals.
Kaititj women eat 'bush tucker' prepared in the jilimi after a day's hunting at Karlukarlu.
however, retained violent sanctions which they apply during initiation time.

**YILPINJI: STRUCTURE AND RANGE**

*Yilpinji* may be performed for a number of reasons other than attracting a lover. *Yilpinji* may force a wayward husband to return, remind a wife of her duty to family and country, or even repulse the unwanted advances of a spouse or lover (see Kaberry 1939:255; Berndt 1965:243; Berndt & Berndt 1942-5:146-9). In Central Australia the focus of *yilpinji* is the community not the individual for whom the ritual is performed. Both men and women respect the power of *yilpinji*. Great care is taken by women after a performance in nullifying the power of *yilpinji* by throwing dirt and cleaning away all traces of the activity. It must only bring about immediate consequences for the subject of the ritual and more indirect consequences for the whole community who benefit from the restoration of harmony and maintenance of correct marriage alliances. Consultation before a performance is undertaken to determine the appropriateness of *yilpinji* in the particular case. I have never heard women admit that they sang for a 'wrong way' partner although this can result if the power is not properly controlled. Warlpiri women were forever accusing the Kaititj of making trouble with their *yilpinji* by the indiscriminant singing of songs. Although the Kaititj appear to exercise enormous care in *yilpinji*, these accusations have forced them to desist from using several powerful songs. Residence on the settlement has thus limited their range of expression and played a part in narrowing recognition of women's religious activities.

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7. Roheim (1933:212), Kaberry (1939:259) and Berndt and Berndt (1951:240) argue that *yilpinji* may be used for 'wrong way' partners.
Yilpinji is achieved through a creative integration of myth, song, gesture and design against a backdrop of country. The circle, the quintessential female symbol, finds expression in the body designs, the rolling hands gesture and patterns traced out by the dancing feet. Certain yilpinji and health/curing designs are the same, because, as Kaititj women recognize, love, health and sexual satisfaction are intertwined at the personal and community level. Exclusively yilpinji designs concern agitation, excitement and longing. Such feelings are said to be located in the stomach which quivers and shakes like the dancing thighs of women or the shaking leaves of men's poles at initiation, or the shimmering of a mirage or the getting up of a rainbow. (See also Spencer and Gillen 1899:543; Berndt and Berndt 1942-5:149; Munn 1973:46).

YILPINJI AND MYTHS

The following discussion of myth develops the argument that women are claiming a right to express feelings, ambivalent as they may superficially appear. Ownership of myth and the rights to perform rituals provide the power base for women's claims while the content of the myths explores women's autonomy and male-female encounters. Women in the myth encapsulate two warring principles which underpin women's identity. On one hand there is autonomy, on the other there is the desire for social intercourse which involves men. No invariable sequence is apparent in the myth encounters although women's loss and pain are consistently present. Myth provides an explanation for male violence but not a justification. It is more a warning of what one may expect from men and the danger of leaving one's own country.

In extracting the story line from the ritual performances and presenting it in the form of a myth which has a beginning and end, I am doing violence to the cultural conception. My justification for
such a representation is that, short of a lifetime spent as a woman in women's camps, it is impossible to comprehend the kaleidoscopic range of nuances, ramifications and elaborations of the behaviour of the dreamtime ancestors who acted out *yilpinji* myths. By organizing the fragments I gleaned into such a form I was able, by way of clarification, to ask further questions of the women. On several occasions I have read back to the women my rendition of the myths; they have nodded assent but declared my version to be a written text which constitutes another form, one peculiar to whites. Their telling of the myth in ritual emphasizes the richness of country, rather than the development of plot or character: two cultural views are thus encapsulated in 'myth as action' compared to 'myth as text'. Country and the sites are part of a metaphysical knowledge system that is totally opposed to the system, which elaborates meanings and ideas about society and the significance of life through focussing on persons and their seemingly highly individual actions. Kaititj women's ritual myths look to country-dreaming and other spiritually empowered events to discuss themselves and their relations to men and thus their position within the whole society. A group of European women or men would approach the task of explaining their position and view through a human centred social drama.  

I should also point out that by presenting the myths in this form I am providing an overview of ancestral activity in the area which no

8. Berndt (1976:143) touches on this issue in his contrast between song cycles which stress sequential development and cyclical seasonal variations and celebrate themes of fertility and procreation with other more piecemeal arrangements from Arnhemland. The former appears more intelligible as it follows the European style more closely. It may in fact reflect the nature of the country from which it derives its power. Sequential development and a cyclical form are absent in Central Australian song cycles which I have recorded.
individual woman could recite. The different dreamings are the
responsibility of different women and although each is aware of the
content of the dreamtime activity and characters of others, one may
only rightly speak of one's own dreamings. Because I was able to
record dreamings from all the women of the Kaititj group, my synthesis
is not the product of one person's knowledge and would not occur in
this form. Women would correct me if I mislabeled the dreamings of
others but would not comment on the content of the dreamings of others.

There are no occasions on which a woman would sit down and tell
an yilpinji myth, although there is a corpus of songs which are
glossed yilpinji. There are ritual practices, designs, gestures and
sacra which are only used in conjunction with yilpinji, (see also
Strehlow 1971:651) and certain conditions which are said to eventuate
exclusively from yilpinji. I have put the myths together from actual
performances I attended, subsequent discussions and translations of
songs and symbols, women's explanations of ritual action and song
furbished during performances or while listening to a replay of a tape.

The two inter-related myths which provide the scenario for most
yilpinji songs, designs and performances belong to the Lurinpi (or old
women dreaming) and the ngapa (rain) dreaming. These dreamings
belong to the women of the Nampijnipa and Nangala subsections and are
managed by the women of the Nungarrayi and Napanangka subsections, all
of whom trace descent from the founding drama of the Stirling Swamp and
Devil's Marbles area. The behaviour glossed as yilpinji (in myth) only
occurs in the Devil's Marbles area, because, say the Kaititj women, our

10. Munn (1973:84, 179) and Roheim (1974:155ff, 221) comment that
men's yilpinji is connected with rain dreaming also.
dreaming for that area also has rainbow, whereas Warlpiri rain dreaming (further west) only has rain. This prompts jealousy and suspicion by Warlpiri and pride for Kaititj. On settlements it provides a further wedge for men to drive into women's solidarity.

Yilpinji and the Kurinpi myth

The Kurinpi myth exemplifies the dilemma facing women: they want the advantages of children and the company of spouse, but fear the unpredictability of men and men's challenge to their independence and autonomy. Here I discuss only that portion of the Kurinpi myth which concerns Yilpinji, women's claims to feelings as their right and an exploration of the complexities of male-female interaction.

In the Kurinpi myth two elderly, knowledgeable and respected women, known as the Kurinpi, wander about in the Stirling Swamp naming the country and performing such rituals as are their responsibility. Their life is one of ritual observance and celebration of the bounty of their country. Their power is manifest in their ability to turn red as they rub themselves with fat while travelling from their swamp home in search of company and thus meet with other travellers of the area. On their journey they observe the ritual relationship of owner to worker, experience sorrow at death and come into conflict with members of the younger generation and opposite sex.

Once out of their swamp homeland they cease to name the country and travel more warily. They poke the ground with spear like sticks. As they pass through another swamp area closer to Devil's Marbles, they enter a patch of tall spear trees. Fearing that perhaps someone might see them, they clutch their ritual packages to themselves and continue. Several young boys appear and dance flanking them, just as did the Kurdungurlu for the Kirda in their previous encounter with this ritual relationship. The boys are carrying spears similar to the women's. The women teach the boys to throw spears in an overarm action. The women wonder why the boys, who are also carrying ritual packages, continue to travel with them. The young boys have ritual packages such as are the right of older people. At the meeting and while travelling with the boys the women feel a mixture of shame and curiosity. Finally each reveals to the other the contents of their packages. The Kurinpi attempt to leave, but the boys beg them to stay so they can show them everything. 'No', say the women, 'You are too young and we are leaving'. Suddenly the boys disappear and reappear as initiated men. The women look on in amazement.
as these men are wearing their ritual headbands and arm bands. Again they hasten to leave and again the men beg them to stay. The women fear that these men might spear them for they now have long strong spears such as men carry. The men follow the departing women who soon leave them far behind. 'Nevermind', say the men, 'We shall sharpen our spears, harden them in the fire and spear the women when we catch them'.

The women say to each other, 'Come. Let them go their way. We have everything we need'. As the men travel they say, 'Let them go. We have all we need and can easily catch them later when we learn how to throw these spears'. As the kurinpi dance on they see and join another group of women who are performing yawalyu rituals. The men with the spears are unsuccessful in catching the women as they are not prepared to violate the restrictions of the women's ritual area.

The meeting with the boys has many connotations not discussed here where I shall comment only on the significance of the myth for women's perception of themselves as social actors and of themselves in relation to men. Before encountering the boys the women had never felt shame. They had confidently and authoritatively known their country and their relationship to it. The status of the boys is ambiguous and compounded by their transformation, without ritual, into men. Each is prepared to respect the ritual packages of the other but the men rather fancy the women and decide to pursue them. The women continue to display their power by the rubbing of fat into their bodies and by producing colour changes (see also Strehlow 1971: 471-3). The men decide to use force and a new technology to win the women but are thwarted when they discover the women have sought sanctuary in the company of other women.

In another encounter of the kurinpi with men, they do not escape, but are overpowered. These two encounters are not considered to exist in any temporal sequence but like the women's ability to turn red and the colours of the desert, are in constant flux, an ever shifting and dynamically constituted power on which women may draw. The two accounts are not considered as conflicting versions of the same myth but rather are taken to be an illustration of the vagaries
and complexities of male-female relationships.

The women were returning to the camp from a day of hunting when some men began throwing stones at them. 'What is this?' asked the women, 'We want to get food not to run away'. The women were unaware of the presence of the men. They continued home and on the way dug for grubs. One man ran after one of the women and stood on her digging stick and asked the woman for food. They felt shamed because they had never met a man like that before. He told the woman to get up and they would dig together. 'Don't be shy', he said, 'We shall go together'. He gently took the woman by the arm and they all continued together. But as they travelled and the woman left her country behind she held back and tried to go the other way. The man crippled the woman with a spear and as she lay naked and complaining of this cruelty, he began to beautify himself so that she would love him. He brought her animal skins to warm her body and sat with her. She tried to straighten herself but it hurt too much. She looked back to her country but knew she must leave with her husband.

It is worth noting that hitherto in the myth the women were depicted as old. Here they appear to be younger but this is of little consequence as in myth and reality older women and men court each other and younger partners. Women regard themselves as desirable regardless of age and do not have the self image of old hag.

Women's perception of men is that they are so insecure that violence is the only way they can express emotion. Roheim (1933:237) would interpret this myth as the wild being made quiet, but if seen within the context of land and male-female as power relationships, the myth argues the importance of women's power base and also that, through marriage, men can disrupt women's ties to land (see also Roheim 1974:189). The once kind suitor who took her by the arm now spears her. Her tie to her country is also damaged. In being crippled by the spear wound the woman is also deprived of her land. In the loss of land she loses her autonomy and power base but he gains a wife to whom he can now afford to show affection and from whom he now seeks love by beautifying himself. In her crippled state, she feels the pain, loss of movement of her own choosing and loss of land. As they
continue together she sees his country, like a mirage, before her
and he begins instructing her in the wonders of his country. Through
men, women may thus gain knowledge of other country but the price is
high. It is worth noting that on marriage men do not succeed in
carrying off young wives to another country. Frequently they take
up residence in their wife's country.

*yilpinji and ngapa myth*

In the section of the rain *ngapa* myth which concerns *yilpinji*,
a complex series of relationships are played out. The wise rain father,
known as Junkaji, attempts to restrain his overly pretentious sons, the
rainbow men, who come into conflict with their older brother lightning
while pursuing young girls to whom they are incestuously related.
Rain's wife, as mother of the boys, finally lures them from the dangers
of their exploits by feigning illness. Their duty to their mother
overwhelms them and they return, only to die, at the insistence of
their stern father. There are important themes of father/son
authority flouted and mother duty/devotion/destruction, but I shall
concentrate on the aspects of male/female which are explored in the
myth. During the pursuit, both men and girls in contemplating the
possible outcome of their behaviour, express fear, ambivalence,
tenderness, aggression and insecurities.

The rainbow men, as older and younger brother, travel
around in circles in the Devil's Marbles area from Dixon Creek
to Greenwood station. Their father warns them not to
venture too far but they ignore his warning. 'Rainbows
should stay close to rain', he says. 'Let Rain rain himself',
say the sons. 'We shall travel further'. They travel up so
high they can see the sea. They sit on top of the clouds
and display their brilliant colours. They swoop into the
green water below. They hide from rain in hollow logs and
from the girls in creek beds and behind ridges.

In most of the encounters the girls, who are
classificatory sisters, but not identified as younger and older,
are unaware of the presence of the men who creep closer and
closer to them. The younger brother warns the older not to
go too close or he may frighten the girls. 'Hold back', he warns.
The older brother counters, 'Don't be silly'. To their delight the women are picking sweet fruits. 'You'll frighten them if you go any closer', warns the younger brother. 'Wait for rain before showing yourself'. The men have rubbed themselves with red ant hill to dull their brightness and thus not frighten the girls. As they add marks to their bodies, they reflect on their own beauty and wonder if the girls will like them. 'Why don't they love us? Have we shown ourselves for nothing?' they wonder. The younger brother questions the correctness of the pursuit of the girls. 'They may be of the wrong subsection', he suggests, 'We can take wrong skins', says the older brother but the younger still holds back.

Finally the girls separate. One goes to dig yams, the other to swim. The older brother descends upon the girl who is digging and such is his brightness that she closes her eyes. He woos her and finally convinces her that she should accompany him. As she leaves she looks back in sorrow for her country but also like the kurinpi, she knows she must leave with her husband. The younger brother goes to the water where the other girl is swimming but she is too frightened to go with him and attempts to escape. He spears her in the leg and while she lies naked before him, he beautifies himself with body scars, all the while gently wooing her with tender words.

In the exploits of the rainbow men their brightness and its malleability are the subject of constant references. They can overpower women with it. They can thus tear women from their land. The kurinpi women on the other hand change colour in a way which demonstrates their power over their bodies and men. One of the stated reasons for the extreme power of Kaititj yilpinji is this access to colour in the rainbow myth.

In yet another encounter, the young girls are camped with their mother who remains in camp while they go in search of spring water for her. They return very tired and do not realize that men have been working yilpinji for them. Like most dreamtime women (and women today) they carried their ritual packages with them but because they were so tired, they decided to leave them behind in the camp, high in a tree. The next day they returned from hunting with two men they had met during the day, only to find their packages missing. The girls were reluctant to go with the men who then speared them and finally, travelled along with the mother, into the men's country.

In this myth woman's power, in the form of their ritual packages, is stolen. Her ownership of land is thus rendered less powerful, through this symbolic rupture of her tie to the land.
Yilpinji and women in myth

In many of the exploits of the rainbow men, the girls are actually working the yilpinji for the men who follow them through the scrub or are far away. In a dream a man may see his beloved wearing her yilpinji design and hasten to join her. As he returns to her she makes a bed for him so that they may comfort each other when reunited. 'Make my heart still', she pleads, 'Lie with me'. Or as he travels he may hear the sound of her voice like music from afar. He may fish by throwing grass into the water to attract the fish and see his loved one instead. Or she may have prepared a ball of the green slime weed which she threw out to him from a distance and this has now reached him.

When finally reunited, he kneels before her, woos her and gently encourages her to appreciate his charms or he makes a pillow of his woomera (spear thrower) or swishes away the flies with it. Sometimes the girl is afraid but he reassures her. In one song she lies in a tight ball but he soothes her and covers her until she relaxes. He asks, 'Do you love me? If not I shall go away forever. Please tell me'. Such behaviour is a far cry from the single mindedness of the songs and myths discussed by Berndt and Berndt (1951) and Roheim (1933, 1974) where the end point is always copulation. In the women's songs a man may even feign illness in order to gain his loved one's attention and hope that she will eventually come to love him.

Yilpinji: themes and symbols

A major symbol of yilpinji is colour and its power to attract. In the myth the whiteness of the headband and feather twirled by the opening woman dancer are contrasted to the bursting colour of the rainbow men which must be dulled with green slime weed so as not to dazzle women in the myth. In ritual practice women throw balls of green slime to attract a lover (see also Roheim 1933:213 and Berndt
Thus both men and women use green slime to attract. But like the men's colours the women's colours are not static. They shift and change hue. The *kurinpi* turn red, the colour of the country.\(^\text{11}\) The rainbow men burst dangerously with all colours but use red of the ant hill and green from the water to dull their brilliance. Women see their own and men's colours as dynamic, not as fixed in a colour spectrum, but as fluid, unpredictable, and dramatic as the country itself, and as ever changing as gender values.

The shining of watch bands and buckles, the sparkling of lightning, the lure of blond hair, the blackening of eyebrows and the reddened legs of women dancers, all induce a lover to notice and appreciate the charms of a possible partner. A major theme of ritual is display. Male decoration and display has found expression in terms of traditional and introduced items. The head band which the woman wears to attract a lover is pure white and shines (see Kaberry 1939:263; Berndt 1950:46 and Strehlow 1971:467). His head band may be sung by women but in some songs, and in reality, it is no longer a hairstring band but the scarf or band from a stockman's hat. The arm bracelets, which adorned with feathers, were celebrated in song may now be replaced by the shining watch which winks across the desert. The pubic cover which is pushed aside by the impatient lover becomes the shining belt buckle which is seductively left open but catches the sun and shines. For women in myth the digging stick may now be a shining crow bar or the wooden carrier, a metal billy can. Such items glisten as women travel and attract the attention of a lover, just as bald heads are said to shine in the sun and to attract lovers. Certain qualities, that is,\(^\text{11}\)

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\(^{11}\) Chewings (1936:66) claims red as the colour of love and joy. Strehlow (1971:471-3, 651-2) notes use of red in love and health ceremonies.
colour and reflection, have given women a way of elaborating within their own metaphysical world view, introduced items.

The intrusion of such themes and items which are often associated with a particular person, has been construed by Berndt (1950:43) as evidence of the non-religious nature of certain love magic. I think it has more to do with manner in which women dream and the ever present nature of the dreamtime. In ritual the dreamtime moves concurrently with the present so that the presence of introduced goods and their evolving meanings is not a contradiction so much as proof of the relevancy of the dreamtime law. Many of the songs belong to, or depict, actual living people and in time will become part of the repertoire of songs and be given a kin term as are the characters of the songs which are readily accepted by anthropologists as bonafide dreaming songs.

The mixture of songs suggests to me that these present day themes are in the process of achieving a nonspecificity and vagueness which other songs have already achieved. The introduced themes have a relevancy for today's world and as one Kaititj/Alyawarra woman commented to me when I watched in amazement as money was added to a ritual exchange, 'It does not matter what it is. It is what it stands for that is important!' The accommodation of such items within ritual lulls women into believing that they have continued control over the power to attract and that this is demonstrated by successful liaisons with white men. For women this strengthens their self image and demonstrates the power of yilpinji; for men it strengthens the image of woman as a sex object.

EXEGESIS

In these myths various admired female stereotypes are presented. The kurinpí are the ritually important women, while the young girls
exude sweetness, youth and the ability to hunt proficiently. In ritual these qualities are celebrated by women in emphasizing their desirability for a number of reasons. There are striking similarities between the kurinpi myth and the rainbow myth on which women often comment. Men are like that they say, cruel, unsure, vain. In all cases the men beautify themselves after wounding the women. The rainbow men were very insecure about their ability to woo and win, so they win then woo. They continually ask each other, 'Will she like me? Will we frighten them?' Once they make contact there is no standard response. Contact means that the stable, symbolically ordered positions on the axis are freed and negotiable. Like the shifts in colour, men constantly shift, like the unpredictability of the country from which women draw their power. One brother uses soft words and beauty. He has been the confident one all along. The other uses physical force and soft words.

In an Aranda men's song cycle as recorded by Strehlow (1971: 475-77) the sequence of attraction, violence, consummation and travel to a new country is followed, but the male perception and articulation casts woman as the passionate partner; so passionate in fact that she leaves her own country to travel with him. When sorrow fills her as she leaves, he empathizes and beautifies himself to console her. Thus men also recognize that in marriage women may lose land but in the song explain it as women's passion and credit themselves with tenderness. In Munn's (1973:47) account of Warlpiri male yangaridji (closely related to yilpinji) the crippling is said to be to ensure fidelity. Uniting both the male and female versions of yilpinji myths is the depiction of love as crippling and the drawing on the base symbol of land which is also an actual living resource. It is tempting to interpret the spearing as a metaphor for sex. While the women
explicitly rejected any suggestion of mine that the spear may symbolize penis, Strehlow's (1971:487) translations suggest that men do see spear, penis, crippling and sex as a symbolic complex.

Although in all these encounters which are glossed yilpinji, the men are working yilpinji on the women, when these myths are acted out in ritual it is the women who are acting yilpinji on the men through their ownership, knowledge and access to the myth. The appropriate myth will be chosen. If duty to family and community harmony are to be encouraged then the myth of the girl and her mother travelling with the men will be used. Even if it means loss, women assert that this is their 'feeling'. If one wishes to go, one may. If one wishes to stay, then there are other appropriate yilpinji myths. Women's control of feelings is established through their ownership of the myth and their right to use it in ritual. This is another aspect of women's exercise of their rights.

By evoking their control of land they may attract men. The display of colour so powerful in the rainbow men's and kurinpi women's myths is given form in the body decorations and secret rituals of the women. In kurinpi performances women redden themselves, and like the kurinpi, have the power to attract and face possible violence or escape to the closed world of women. Women's ritual practices, unlike the action of men in myth, are deemed invariably successful. Such differentiation and separation of the qualities of powerful, cruel/gentle men in myth is dynamically opposed to powerful, irresistible women who give the myth form in the rites. Like the kurinpi, women may remain apart or seek a spouse: like the girls in the rainbow myth they may lead a man to destruction or entrance him with their sweetness. It is their choice.

The conflicts and tensions which arise when men and women must enter into the same direct negotiation of rights, privileges and
obligations with each other burst forth in violence such as the jealous fights which are the life blood of many communities, but also find expression in the ritual statements of women in yilpinji. In every day life men worry that if they really hurt a woman she may take ritual action. If a woman 'turns away' from a man she usually has good reason. It will certainly have been the subject of much public discussion. If she acts rashly she will incur the censure of other women and have no security in their camps. Women are not considered to be fickle in the eyes of men or women and if a woman uses yilpinji against a man he knows he has deserved it. Fights begin with accusations of infidelity (a vastly expanded possibility in settlements) not fickleness. This, like magic, has been imposed on women and their highly predictable responses to maltreatment and their emotional responses have been stereotyped without consideration of their perception of their feelings or diminution of enforceable rights.

In yilpinji women not only articulate their models of social reality but also attempt to shape their worlds. This latter aspect is, I believe, apparent in the way in which women comment on ritual as it proceeds. At one level they discuss the myth as I have delineated it and at another they comment on the power and efficacy of the rituals. These two levels are not always as clear as I have made it appear in the analysis. They are interwoven in the seamless web of life which encompasses the now of today and the now of the dreaming.

Particular songs or combinations of songs and actions are remembered as having been sung at a particular place for the particular person and with a particular result. Two older women married to much younger men did not see the action of a man taking an older wife as duty but of a man desperately in love with an irresistible woman. Such is the women's perception of the affair.
They do not see themselves as being shuffled around a circulating connubium but as capable of deciding whether or not they will go to a younger man. As women exercise wide choice in second and subsequent marriages it is hard to believe that they go to younger men merely to uphold the gerontocracy. They go if they wish. To ensure the success of the match they work *yilpinji*. The two older women mentioned above are celebrated cases of *yilpinji* but all the women with whom I worked would admit to having used *yilpinji* to achieve results they desired and all attested to the success they had.

As songs are being sung women comment on the possible outcome of the ritual and the action in the ritual. They assert their rights to feelings. 'That is my feeling', I have heard women say in explanation on many occasions. 'If you want to stay you may'. If a woman wants to get out of a marriage which she finds distasteful because the man is playing around, taking a second wife or acting violently, a wife may ask for her ritual group to perform *yilpinji* to make him turn away from her. These are powerful and only allowed after the women have weighed the case. However, if a woman says, 'That is my feeling', it is respected.

In the myths the lovers are often improperly related. Roheim (1933:209-210) cast *yilpinji* as a holiday from the rules but in my experience, love rituals are very carefully used and then only after extensive consultation and consideration of the merits of the request. *Yilpinji* only induces certain states, it does not have the power to condone wrong way unions which at Warrabri are rare, notorious and generally short lived. *Yilpinji* is used to establish correct unions and this is why it is feared by men, because *yilpinji* impinges upon the set of relationships which men claim to control through marriage alliances. They know they cannot negate women's *yilpinji* and often do not even know they are being performed. At any time a woman may thus
overturn the plans of men. Men do not attempt to prevent women from staging *yilpinji* but rather turn to their own sphere of control of male-female relations and intensify demands in the domain of promised marriages. Women respect the marriage codes but not necessarily the plans of men. In using *yilpinji* for correct unions they are upholding the moral order but not endorsing men's rights to determine actual marriages. By claiming that women use *yilpinji* for wrong way unions they are deemed immoral by anthropologists and women's endorsement of central social values is obscured.

**CONCLUSION**

In this analysis of *yilpinji* I have stressed that the rituals be seen within the context of land and as achieving socially approved ends. By denying these dimensions anthropologists have rendered love rituals as personal affairs. Berndt (1950) offers only fragments of love songs and so it is impossible to judge the context, while Strehlow (1971:477) omits the last verses of one love song because, in his opinion, they have nothing to do with male-female relations but merely name the animals the lovers meet. By dismissing the context of country and attachment, Strehlow strips the songs of their real import.

I have stressed that *yilpinji* and *yawalyu* are based on women's rights and responsibilities in land. Although much has changed, Kaititj women enjoy a continuity in their relationship to land which is the basis of the strength of their assertions that they regulate aspects of male-female unions and thus maintain health, happiness and harmony.

In exploring women's mythology I have argued that women represent their world as one which is self contained, known and secure. The authority to control this world and the power to exclude men from this domain are underwritten by the *jukurrpa* - the all encompassing law of the past and now. In acting out the responsibilities conferred upon
them as women by this law, women engage in work which is distinctively theirs. In the past this ensured that they would be recognized as full members of their society. Today, although they continue to work in their domain, one which remains separate and distinct from that of the men, they no longer enjoy the same status as full members of their society.
INTRODUCTION

In the previous three chapters I have explored women's domain from a woman's perspective. I began with the *jilimi* as a tangible evidence of women's independence and separateness, discussed women's affiliation to country as the basis of ritual action and knowledge, analysed *yilpinji* as maintenance of social harmony and examined women's changing role in health maintenance. Women, I argued, were the nurturers of people and country. In ritual they projected a self-image of independent and autonomous individuals and displayed sexual solidarity in the organization of their daily lives. If I were to stop at this point, I could conclude that all we need to know of Aboriginal religion is contained in women's ritual. Knowledge of men's ritual world, I could argue, merely adds a depth but does not fundamentally alter our understanding. This approach, but with male as ego, has been the dominant trend in Australian anthropology.

However, I have claimed that underlying male and female rituals is a common purpose and shared belief in the dreamtime experience. Each sex, I have suggested, elaborates that common core in a distinctive fashion appropriate to their sex. Complementarity and interdependence are, I have suggested, apparent in the dreamtime plan, one manifestation of which is the organization and structure of male and female rituals. In this analysis the two halves cannot be grafted together to form a neat whole. Instead we need to explore the way in which each sex presents their half to the other and the way in which this process of 'showing' shapes the whole. One way in which the relationship between and the unity of the ritual worlds of men and women is objectified, is in the role that each sex plays with respect to
the rituals of the other. In my examination of *yilpinji* myths I noted that the symbolic representations of men were as cruel, unpredictable and a challenge to women's power base in land. Male oriented anthropologists (Hiatt 1971, Roheim 1933, Munn 1973) have explored the symbolic representations of women in men's rituals as the feared, the profane and the negated. In addition to symbolic representations, men and women also have a physical presence at each other's rituals. In the next two chapters I examine three such occasions. In this chapter I describe a *yawalyu* ceremony at which men were the brief guests of the women and a *yungkurru* ceremony in which men and women performed separately and together. In the next chapter I turn to the third occasion, male initiation, where women are present at men's ceremonies.

The presence of each at the ceremonies of the other is necessary to ensure that the common core retains its consistency; that neither sex has erred in their finding of evidence of the dreamtime experience through the necessary and continuous process of reinvention; that each may assert their uniqueness and unity. The sexual politics of ritual are evident on these occasions when the display of knowledge of each sex vies with the other for brilliance, while at the same time it is constrained by the need for meticulous representation of the dreamtime experience. Thus mixed ceremonies such as *yungkurru* have the dual function of permitting monitoring of the activities of the opposite sex and of providing a forum for display of the ritual worlds of each sex. Attendance and participation, no matter how limited, at the rituals of the opposite sex allow each to obtain a mental map of the physical layout of the ritual area of the other and of certain ritual procedures. Most importantly, however, ceremonies such as *yungkurru* provide a ritual opportunity when male and female assert their unity in the law which underwrites their
separateness. For the anthropologist it allows a unique opportunity
to observe and to explore with the participants the way in which each
has portrayed their domain to the other.

What men may know of women's rituals and what women may know of
men's is a delicate matter for any anthropologist to probe. Women
know more of men's rituals than is made available in mixed rituals
and I suspect the same is true of men. Women often indicated in their
behaviour that they knew more of the content of the rituals than that
which they observed, but they did not readily vocalize this knowledge.
It was rather akin to the practice of not calling dead names and of
avoiding certain sites, which in order to be avoided, have to be known.

Men, as well as women, face the problem of having to know what to
avoid vis-à-vis the rituals of the other. In the yungkurru men and
women are able to make public statements about their own rituals and
to allow the other to approach and to handle the ritual objects.
This, however, is not the same as admitting members of the opposite
sex to one's own sex specific ceremonies. Kaititj women have retained
control over their own ritual domain. Yungkurru is not an opportunity
for men to infiltrate and to thus gain control of women's autonomous
world. Women were aware of the danger and were careful throughout to
present only a partial display of their ritual knowledge.

Because each sex has a separate and restricted area within which
closed ceremonies are performed, there is little opportunity to observe
the reaction of the opposite sex to sex specific ceremonies. However,
while I was at Warrabri working in my house with women transcribing and
translating recordings of their closed ceremonies, I noted that men
totally avoided my house and would send another woman in to fetch me if
they wished to speak to me. On one occasion, described below, I was
able to observe the reactions of a man to a recording of women's
yawalyu and to probe his understanding of the songs. The songs were not sacred songs but they were ones which women sang in their own ritual area. This was one of the few occasions when I was able to compare men's and women's accounts at the level of the 'word'.

YAWALYU: MEN'S KNOWLEDGE

I had been recording and translating women's yawalyu songs for some time and in so doing had learnt of the constraints imposed on ritual performance by settlement residence. There were frequent accusations from Warlpiri that Kaititj had overstepped the mark and sung too far into the country of another or strayed onto the secret side of a dreaming. This is a serious charge and a slur on the kurdungurlu whose responsibility it is to ensure that the kirda stay 'straight' and don't 'run off' onto another track. The kurdungurlu must also bear witness to the correctness of performance.

These issues (that is, correct and appropriate ritual performances) were particularly in the minds of Warrabri residents in mid-1977 because the Education Department had been recording songs and stories for use in the school. The imbalance of teaching assistants in the school ensured that Warlpiri songs were well translated but that Kaititj songs were rather more sketchily translated. Further, the teaching assistant who had been asked to work on the Kaititj songs was not of sufficient status to know much of the dreaming law. The Kaititj women were distressed because they felt that yet again they had been neglected and that this time it impinged on their world. They approached me and asked if I would retape their songs. They wished to sing it 'straight' and to correct aspects of the translation. One of the difficulties had been that the Warlpiri songs which were recorded for use in the school followed the track of a particular ancestor from site to site, whereas the Kaititj dreamings emphasized the country and its
many dreamings. Thus in one performance of Kaititj it was possible that several dreamings which converged on a site could be mentioned. The idea of Kaititj singing the dreaming 'straight' turned out to be vexsome. We spent many hours recording and re-recording in order to follow the travels of ngapa from one place to another. It was one Warlpiri-Kaititj woman who had the clearest idea of what was required and was delegated to edit the tape with me.

As well as the concern with singing the dreaming straight, there is always the worry that one may sing into the secret side and although women always indicated to me when this happened in a taped performance, they did not want any such songs being available at the school. The men had also been approached for songs which could be taught to the boys and had spent much time discussing the logistics of such an enterprise. In order to vouch for the openness and correctness of the women's tape and, I suspect, so the men could find out just what the women had contributed, they decided that a man should listen to the tapes with me.

The man chosen by the women was the brother of one of my closest friends in the Karlakarlu camp. I went before the Warrabri Council to explain the purpose of my tapes and the intention of Jupurrurla to listen to them. He was confirmed as the correct person to listen and we began work the next day. For a week he sat and listened to the women's singing of ngapa dreaming. I had already translated several of the tapes but had not finished the set. After the first day, I ceased attempting to marry his explanation of songs to those I had obtained from the women, or those I knew myself from the ritual instruction I had received. I have since been able to compare the women's comments, glosses and explanations with those of the men. I found that the common ground concerned that which I discuss below in terms of structural aspects of ancestral activity in the land, and that sex specific
explanations concerned the content of the activity and the interpretation of the songs. Men know the structure but not the details of the activities of the ancestors. It is women who flesh out their knowledge.

The tapes to which we listened traced the travels of *ngapa* dreaming from the Stirling swamp area to the Devil's Marbles. On the way both *yawaki* and *wardingi* dreamings are encountered. Jupurrula's commentary on the tape consisted of stating to whom the song belonged, the name of the ancestor and the direction in which the ancestor was travelling. There were several songs the meaning of which he did not know. He stated they were in a language he could not 'hear'. Indeed the songs of this tape included several in Anmatjirra and Warramunga as the travels of the ancestors cut across country in which these languages are spoken. There were also place names which he could not call because at one he was 'made a man', that is, initiated, and another was the name of a now deceased man. There were several songs on which he commented on the meanings of the words. These were songs which are sung in public and accompanied by graphic mimes. They are songs which children also know and enjoy. An example would be the mimed song of the woman who limps after picking up a prickle in her foot. It is a song which is sung in public performances and appreciated by audiences of men and children alike.

My comments on the common ground between the men's and women's knowledge of rain dreaming was, in this instance, limited to discussion of taped material. However on other occasions when I have discussed, with men, country of which women had already taught me, the information deemed significant by men has been in accord with Jupurrula's comments on the tapes, that is, at the level of the structure of the dreamings.
At this level both men and women name the *kirda* and *kurdungurlu* for an area, state to which sites individuals have special rights and responsibilities and cite the nature of affiliation of such persons to the sites. They name other dreamings which crossed over *ngapa*, travelled alongside or are in some way associated with *ngapa*. Both name the particular ancestors responsible for the location and features of certain sites. At Devil's Marbles there are wild fig trees which grow from the rocky boulders; these are celebrated in the women's songs and commented upon by both sexes. It is this knowledge which is held in common and which is transmitted in mixed and open performances.

Women do not provide details of place, ownership and travels in their commentary on ritual songs. The more spontaneous comments of women concern the actual activities of the actor in a particular song. In a *yawalyu* performance the structural elements on which men first comment are physically present. From the boards on display and the body painting one knows which dreaming is being celebrated. From the gestures of the dancing women, one can follow the interactions of various ancestors. Thus in listening to tapes women would comment on the actual text of the song. This appeared to be unknown to the men. How then did Jupurrula know anything of the songs without the extra props provided by the ritual action and display entailed in a performance? One of the answers lies in the performance of ceremonies which both sexes attend. First I shall discuss the role of men at a women's *yawalyu* ceremony and then a *yungkurru* when men and women exchanged knowledge of several dreamings.

**YAWALYU: MEN'S PARTICIPATION**

I had only been at Warrabri several months when this *yawalyu* took
place. The Education Department, as part of its cultural programme, had organized a trip for Warrabri Kaititj and Alyawarra women to Neutral Junction and Ti-Tree schools. With all the best will in the world the teachers had arranged a time table which allowed the women to dance in both places on the same day. The buses arrived at Neutral Junction mid-morning and the women began the necessary negotiations and discussion with the local women before the yawalyu could take place. For the Kaititj women the occasion provided the opportunity to link the ngapa dreaming which travels with Waaka, west of Neutral Junction to Karlukarlu, with the rain dreaming knowledge of the Neutral Junction women. The Alyawarra women were able, as kurdungurlu for some of the local women, to perform sections of the ngapa dreaming and thus to extend their dreaming range further to the north east. On this brief visit the women were only able to begin their yawalyu and unfortunately were unable to complete their exchange and display of knowledge of objects. The women resolved to return and did so on two separate occasions a month apart. Over this period they were able to link together the dreamings of adjacent countries and to activate rights they enjoyed in country through mother, father, conception and residence. Once the women were certain that their display was correct men were admitted.

The second visit took place two days after the abortive school trip. Haste was necessary because the women had opened up the dreamings by singing for the various countries. The women sat to prepare their boards, bodies, and to sing of the country in three separate groups oriented to the country of the ritual. During the painting they intoned the songs which made the paint shine, which send out the power and which call together all people for the showing of the designs on body and boards and the witnessing of the re-enactment of the dreamtime experience. The Kaititj women sang of the travels of the kurinpi
Alyawarra women dance their dreaming into the ground
at Neutral Junction
women from Stirling Swamp to Devil's Marbles, of the travels of \textit{ngapa}. The Alyawarra women sang of their dreamings near Kurundi where the ancestral dog turned around. These were new dreamings for the Neutral Junction women who sang of \textit{ngapa} for which the Alyawarra women were \textit{kurdungurlu}. On the second visit it was the Kaititj of Warrabri who opened the ground and called in the Neutral Junction women who remained shy, reticent and afraid that they had little to offer next to the other two groups. The Neutral Junction Kaititj suffered many losses during the massacres of the 1870's and 1920's and the visit of their northern sisters provided an opportunity to repair, to replace and to refine their dreamings, but during this second visit their repertoire was impoverished when compared to the vitality of the other two groups.

First the Kaititj displayed and planted their boards, the Alyawarra followed and lastly came the local women. The boards were then taken by \textit{kirda} and \textit{kurdungurlu} to each of the other groups and eventually returned to their home fire. On the return journey of each board the other groups followed. In this way all the women literally followed the dreamings of the other and marked out the travels with their dancing feet. The singing, dancing, display and tracing out of tracks continued all night and in the morning when the most sacred songs were sung and the children's heads covered to protect them, the women removed the boards, carefully smoothed over the ground and rubbed down the boards to reabsorb the power. In payment for the rich displays and for the hospitality of the Neutral Junction women, each group of women made presentations and counter presentations of blankets, money, food and ritual items to the other. The Kaititj left behind several painted items for the Neutral Junction women who spent the next month in feverish activity reconstructing their songs and designs.
On the third and final visit of this *yawalyu* sequence, the atmosphere was different. Men were now permitted into the ritual area and some Warrabri men accompanied the women on the trip. As before the women set up three separate groups for the preparation. During this time men were nowhere to be seen. As night fell the women began displaying boards and singing the country to each other. The men could now be seen some distance away in the direction of the main camp. They crept closer as the women sang the songs for all people to gather for business. They sang in all the languages of those present and those through whose country the dreamings passed. Finally the men arrived at the dancing ground but their view of the action was marred because the women had allocated them a position on the other side of the substantial woodpile - a woodpile provided by the Neutral Junction men.

The Neutral Junction women had a wider vocabulary of songs and board designs on display than on the previous occasions and the men were very approving. The Alyawarra women were particularly admired by the men for whom that dreaming was held through their fathers. A small group of men retreated some distance, held a conference and suggested to the women that they would dance their section of rain dreaming. According to the women of Neutral Junction this was the first time many had seen this dance and according to the men the dance was in payment for the display by the Alyawarra women of country they had not seen for many years. It also allowed their own women to extend and confirm their knowledge of the rain dreaming they held. The men hurriedly painted, and danced carrying painted boards before them. The women sang them from the dark into the light of the fire so that the boards could be seen. After the men had finished the women continued singing until dawn when exchanges were again made.
This occasion is remembered by men and women alike as a highly satisfactory display and exchange. Men expressed no resentment at the treatment they received from the women, only pride and pleasure at seeing the country so well cared for. Perhaps the way in which the Neutral Junction women were able to reconstruct their dreamings and to perform with such confidence can be likened to the process I suggested was at work with the Warlpiri women of Meggitt (1962) and Munn's (1973) studies (see above Chapter five).

**Yungkurru**

The exchange between men and women in the Neutral Junction yawalyu was brief. Only once while I was at Warrabri did I observe a more lengthy ceremony in which men and women exchanged knowledge and displayed objects to each other. I can find no references to such ceremonies in the literature.¹ Spencer and Gillen (1899:350) do comment on the presence of women at men's ceremonies. They also mention that women actually saw the sacred objects when they were brought to the women's camp - an occurrence which confounded Spencer and Gillen (1899:367-8). Kaititj insist they have always performed *yungkurru* which they consistently translated as 'young man ceremony', that the last time

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1. *Yungkurru* appears to be the Warlpiri pronunciation of the Arandic *ingkura*. Spencer and Gillen (1899:271ff) write of engwara, Strehlow (1947:100ff) of *inkura* and Alyawarra women at Warrabri also use *ingkura*. Although in different orthographies, it is the same term and refers to a final, or near final, stage of male initiation. The *yungkurru* I saw in 1977 was not associated with initiation ceremonies. The only resemblances of the *yungkurru* to the *ingkura* were that, like Spencer and Gillen's (1899:324) ceremony, *yungkurru* is a way of introducing change while maintaining tradition and like Strehlow's (1947:100) ceremony, the *yungkurru* focussed upon an important totemic site. It is not unusual for Warrabri Kaititj, although members of the Arandic language family, to use Warlpiri forms. Women often use yawalyu, not the Arandic awalyu, but this glosses the same ceremonies. I have not been able to find a reference to *yungkurru* in Warlpiri vocabularies or from field linguists (Laughren pers. comm.). I am therefore left with *yungkurru* as the Warlpiri form which glosses a ceremony which is not described in the literature.
they performed this *yungkurru* for *yawaki* was just after the Darwin cyclone (December 1974) and that *yungkurru* have always entailed an exchange of ritual objects, songs and designs by men and women.

In the *yungkurru* I observed in June 1977, both men and women prepared material separately in their own ritual area and then jointly displayed and exchanged their knowledge and expertise in an open public area. In so doing each was able to display to the other their elaborations of the common core of beliefs and values of the dreamtime heritage which they share. While demonstrating their unique contribution as men and women, each was also able to monitor the content of the ritual world of the other. In the *yungkurru*, as in other ritual situations, there was a clear distinction between what women and men knew, admitted to knowing and were prepared to show to each other. In separate areas men and women prepared their songs, designs and boards and allocated ritual roles. When they came together they brought but a fraction of the knowledge which had been celebrated in the preparation, but each knew something of what had happened in the restricted 'work' areas of the other. In the display to each other and in their separate celebrations, men and women emphasized their ability to establish relationships across space and between people through the use of dreamtime knowledge in the form of songs, designs and ritual roles. The portion of their heritage which women brought into the open area was a special rendering of their world in a form deemed suitable for men. Similarly the men brought into the public arena a form of presentation which they deemed appropriate. These displays hinted at, but did not flesh out, the contents of the myths which underwrote the dreamings being performed.

The *yungkurru* discussed here lasted for over a week and culminated in a visit to Hermannsburg for the centennial celebrations of the establishment of the Finke River Lutheran mission. Earlier in
1977, an ex-Hermannsburg man had taken up residence at Warrabri where he established a country and western band which quickly gained him the support of many young people. Initially he was also popular with some older people because he was familiar with white ways and appeared as the prophet arising from the masses. But no one person can remain in favour with all groups of Warrabri for any lengthy period and it soon became evident that he must choose or be chosen by one of the factions. He chose and was chosen by Kaititj. To demonstrate his allegiance, he painted an enormous back drop canvas of the rocks at Devil's Marbles which he displayed at his concerts. The Kaititj, after a period of assessment, decided to teach him something of the country of Wakulpu. Through his Aranda mother he was able to forge links with a Kaititj Nampijinpa. For a period all parties were satisfied that he was a true 'son'. His country lay to the west of Wauchope where yawaki, ngapa and wardingi dreamings were active.

The negotiations for the trip to Hermannsburg were complicated and involved many persons with diverse interests. The ex-Hermannsburg man suggested the trip as part of a cultural exchange with the mission. The proposal was greeted warmly by the Kaititj and coolly by the Warlpiri, who subsequently made access to the one community bus awkward. The women immediately began to prepare for yawalyu but the men decided that they too should perform and that the man needed some ritual instruction if he was to be 'theirs' at Hermannsburg. Finally the decision to stage a yungkurru was taken jointly by men and women. This was necessary because a high level of co-operation between the sexes was necessary to stage the yungkurru.

One old Jampijinpa had sought further knowledge of the dreamings of the country between Walapanpa and Wakulpu from a Nungarrayi to whom
much had been revealed in a dream many years ago. Finally she agreed to show it and to pass much of it on to him. She was empowered to transmit this knowledge by the ancestor in the dream but she also sought to incorporate more senior men within the country of the dream because there were too few men who were prepared to shoulder the responsibility for maintenance of the country. "I'll sing it and paint it', she agreed, 'and then you'll know it'. In this way she was able to incorporate new ritual 'bosses' and to revitalize the activity of the Wakulpu area.

In explaining to me the decision to stage a yungkurru, the women stated that the men were a little jealous of them. Women had been stealing the limelight and it was time for men to display their expertise. Throughout the yungkurru the tension between male and female ritual worlds was evident but in these sexual politics the men rarely had the upper hand. When the men were somewhat tardy in beginning, the women reminded them of their resolve to be 'level' with the women. The men regrouped and danced. On another occasion the women refused to complete their dancing because the men were not fully participating. (I have seen this happen on other ritual occasions also and at times women have brought the action to a halt). During the preparations for the yungkurru, the old Jampijinpa asked one woman for details concerning the travels of yawaki. 'Don't ask me', she replied, 'I am a woman'. She, only half an hour before in the women's ritual area, had been discussing the travels of yawaki and teaching other women. All she would show to the man was the designs she had elaborated. When women were dissatisfied with aspects of the male performance, they said so. They accused the men of just sitting and listening and dismissed a male request for more yungkurru, made several months after the one discussed here, with exactly that charge.
Yungkurru, women said, was the boys' equivalent of yawalyu. It was a 'young man ceremony' but as such the 1977 yungkurru lacked young men. The ex-Hermannsburg Jangala was forty and the only other young man who consistently received instruction was the adopted son of one of the kirda for yawaki. The adoptive father sought to teach his 'son' something of his dreaming. Both men were given instruction at the structural level of dreaming knowledge of the country of Wakalpu into which they were being inducted. This knowledge was imparted by both men and women. The view of the jukurrpa presented in the yungkurru was one in which the independence and interdependence of the sexes was clearly marked. It also became evident in the course of the week-long celebrations of country that women not only were able to direct men, but that they were also often the initiators of ritual action. The world which was on display for the 'young men' was one in which men and women displayed degrees of autonomy but one which was ultimately maintained through the complementarity of male and female roles. The yungkurru was not an occasion for the negation of women as mothers, sisters or wives, but rather a very busy period - full of serious discussion, co-operation and negotiation between men and women, between kirda and kurdungurlu.

While yungkurru must have 'young men' to instruct, I suggest there is another equally important purpose in staging a yungkurru. In order for men and women to jointly share and maintain their dreamtime heritage, there must be opportunities when each may view the ritual activities of the other. There must also be times when men and women make public not only who is kirda and kurdungurlu by virtue of descent, but who has gained the knowledge and expertise to act out the ritual roles of kirda and kurdungurlu. The yungkurru provided such an opportunity.
In Chapter six I mentioned a resolution of conflict ceremony wherein the women of Warrabri presented ritual knowledge and objects to the Willowra women in exchange for the restored health of a Nungarrayi. One consequence of that exchange was that the Willowra women extended to the east, the range of their dreamings which they could legitimately celebrate and confirmed the closeness of the ritual roles of the Warrabri and Willowra Nungarrayi, Nangala and Nampijinpa, as kirda and kurdungurlu for ngapa and warnajarra dreamings. A similar end was achieved in the Neutral Junction yawalyu and in the course of the yungkurru. The dreaming range of one Jampijinpa was extended to the east and the ritual roles and relationships of a Napurrula and Jupurrula were confirmed and two Jangala were incorporated. Central to this process was the dream of a Nungarrayi, the men's desire to learn about it and the women's resolve to incorporate senior men within the complex of ngapa and yawaki dreamings of the Wakulpu area.

Of all the senior women of the Karlukarlu jilimi, several were considered especially skilful and ritually revered. The Nampijinpa who were senior ritual kirda for ngapa and yawaki dreamings of the Stirling Swamp and Devil's Marbles area were recognized as ritual 'bosses', but it was the Nungarrayi and one Napurrula who were the most celebrated dreamers and ritual experts. These women were not particularly old - one was in her late forties, the other her early fifties - it was the breadth of their knowledge, their thirst for understanding and their exercise of responsibilities in country which were the bases of their high status. Their actual genealogical ties to country were important but on different occasions different aspects were stressed. During the yungkurru, a particular set of relationships to a now deceased Nangala was stressed by all
participants and ritual roles were allocated accordingly.

Fig. 1. The *yungkurru* relationships

The Karlukarlu Nampijinpa were the daughters of the brother of the Nangala. The Jampijinpa who sought instruction was the child of one of the classificatory brothers of the Nangala. He stressed the closeness of the sibling tie between the Nangala and his father. The relationships of the Nungarrayi and Napurrula, while appearing more tenuous, were consolidated during the *yungkurru* and are now accepted as a relationship sanctioned by the *jukurrpa*. The Nungarrayi held country to the west of Devil's Marbles through her father and country to the south west through her mother. Napurrula's Warlpiri father's country lay to the north west but she was *kurwangurlu* for the country of Nungarrayi because her mother was the sister of Nungarrayi's father. Although both Napurrula and Nungarrayi celebrated the dreamings of both parents, the country of Nungarrayi's mother and Napurrula's father lay some distance from where the women had lived much of their lives—that is, in the Wauchope/Devil's Marbles/Greenwood Station area. The relationship to country which they stressed was to the country of Napaljarri and Japaljarri - Nungarrayi's father's country and
Napurrula's mother's country. From these full siblings they traced back to Nangala, their mother, to the country for which Napurrula's mother and Nungarrayi's father were kurdungurlu. This was the country for which the Karlukarlu Nampijinpa were kirda. Thus the Nampijinpa, Napurrula and Nungarrayi were closely related and these relationships had been strengthened by co-residence and the opportunities for continuity of ritual renewal of the land of their ancestors - in this case the Nangala's.

This Nangala was symbolized throughout the yungkurru by a decorated kurduru (ritual pole) which was placed in the centre of all the displays of the men's decorated boards. It was she who provided the unity for the ritual participants - the dreamings of ngapa and yawaki - and also the bridge between yawaki dreamings to the east and west of Wakulpu. This was achieved by the actual location of her dreamings, through her instructions while alive to the Napurrula and through the revelations of her Jampijinpa father in the dream of Nungarrayi.

Some twenty years ago Nungarrayi had dreamed of her f.m.f., Jampijinpa, who had revealed to her songs, designs and ritual procedure for his country in the Wakulpu area where the complex of ngapa, wardingi and yawaki dreamings are intertwined. This dream was central to the yungkurru for it provided the jukurrpa sanction for the shift in emphasis of ritual relationships of the Nungarrayi and Napurrula and the opportunity for Napurrula's half brother Jupurrula and a Jampijinpa to be incorporated within the country and bestowed with important ritual status.

The Napurrula and Jupurrula shared a mother, were directly related to Nangala and thus to the Jampijinpa of the dream. However their fathers held country some distance apart. Jupurrula's Kaititj
father was killed in the 1928 massacres and he had been raised by the Warlpiri husband of his mother, the father of Napurrula. Through different channels each was able to establish a link to yawaki dreamings and therefore ritual status in the country of the Nangala and Jampijinpa to whose patrimoieties they belonged. In the Aranda four section system, N/Jangala and Na/Jupurrula merge as Purla and N/Jakamarra and N/Jampijinpa as Kamarra - thus the ability and potential to collapse or merge sibling relationships is only two generations away, whereas in the eight subsection system the semimoieties distinguish two kirda sets within a patrimoiet. The Napurrula belonged to the other semimoiety from the Nangala and Jampijinpa but to the same patrimoiet.

It was to the Aranda system which the Napurrula turned in establishing her relationship to the Nangala/Jampijinpa yawaki dreaming. On Boxing Day 1976 she had been introduced by Alyawarra men to their yawaki dreaming. This was a different yawaki from that of the Kaititj and Warlpiri further west. The Alyawarra yawaki ancestor was Purla/Kamarrara, a dry yagi, as distinct from the Kaititj and Warlpiri yawaki which was J/Nangala and J/Nampijinpa, a cheeky black one. The former was represented as red and the latter as black in ritual designs. In the Alyawarra ceremony, Napurrula had been brushed down with leaves (as are sacred objects and persons on the first occasions of display) and shown red yawaki designs by the men. Although she now 'knows' this business, she will not sing of it, nor speak of the mythology, but she did use one of the designs during the yungkurru. By conferring this dreaming on her, the Alyawarra confirmed her status as an east-sider (her status had been ambiguous) and through her linked the 'dry' yawaki to the 'cheeky' yawaki. Her tie to the black yawaki was long standing. As a child she remembered her mother's mother, Nangala, performing maintenance ceremonies for yawaki. Permission to cull yawaki was withheld until
*kirda* and *kurdungurlu* had undertaken certain tasks in the country. One important ritual act was for the *kirda* to paint a *kurduru* with the black juice of *yawaki* before the *kurdungurlu* visited the *yawaki* 'secret place'. Nangala had painted the Napurrula and told her to follow this *yawaki* because her father's country was too far away. It had been the scene of pacification drives in the late 1920's and was to be 'left alone' for a period of ritualized mourning (see Bell 1979a:11). To strengthen the claims, Napurrula's conception dreaming was in the country of Nangala and her m.m.b. had conferred on her a special name to mark this tie. During the *yungkurru* she played an important role in preparation and display of *yawaki* and thereby confirmed her ritual status. The Nungarrayi provided special instruction for her and announced 'Now it is your dreaming, you carry it on for me'.

The Jupurrula's link with *yawaki* was traced through both father and mother. Through his father he was *kirda* for wardingi which crosses over and travels with *yawaki* near Wakulpu. He thus knew songs and designs for *yawaki* and of the rituals for Wakulpu, the site where *yawaki* enters the ground. Through his mother and mother's mother he had similar kinship claims to those of the Napurrula. During the *yungkurru* he executed important ritual tasks in preparation and display and it was he who made the speech which made public the set of relationships and ritual roles being celebrated in the *yungkurru*. The speech was also of course a mark of his status and claim to status.

Jampijinpa's father's country was in the Walapanpa area but he was able to forge a link between countries of Waaka, Wakulpu and Walapanpa by claiming they were all brothers: *yawaki* had looked from one to the other and commented upon the closeness of these siblings. During the *yungkurru*, this Jampijinpa was given instruction by Nungarrayi and his dreaming range extended.
It is apparent in ceremonies such as the yungkurru, the Neutral Junction yawalyu and many others I have recorded, that ritual allows people to exercise their responsibilities and thus to make public their rights in country. There are many ways in which relationships may be traced and the Warrabri Kaititj are maintaining a living system in their rituals which permit such realignments as those described here. That rituals provide a forum for people to state their relationship to land was evident, through the yungkurru, in the preparation, performance and displays.

The first step taken by the women was to prepare the ritual objects and ritual business to be used in the ceremony. Each afternoon on six consecutive days the women sat in the shade of their ritual storehouse to grease and red ochre hairstrings, boards and sticks, to paint their bodies and the boards, to bleach the head bands, to sing of country and to discuss the dreamings to be celebrated. On the first day they spread out the entire contents of their ritual storehouses and arranged each set of objects according to dreamings and sites. Thus all the objects associated with yawaki were placed together for Wakulpu, all the ngapa objects for Waaka were in another and the ones for Karlukarlu closeby. Together the kirda and kurdungurlu for each discussed which needed repair, what needed remaking, what should be taken to Hermannsburg and what should be left. They decided not to show their incised boards for wardingi and an elaborate board of the Jampijinpa's dream. 'Leave them till next time', the Nungarrayi said. The final decision agreed upon by all the senior women was that a new board should be made, a Nangala for Wakulpa, and that the Jupurrula, who was kirda for the witchety dreaming which crosses ngapa and yawaki, should be asked to assist. He did cut the wood but it was not fashioned into a kurduru. In addition to this new
board they planned to take two of their existing kurduru, one for Wakulpu, and one for Ngapajinpi. Ultimately they took only one because jealous fights were beginning. They then decided that the men should also display three new boards, two for Wakulpu, and one for Ngapajinpi. These would be the brothers of their objects. In fact the men made new boards at Warrabri but only transported three boards to Hermannsburg and made the rest for display from Hermannsburg wood. In that way they were able to leave the boards at the mission.

After the decisions had been made, they were communicated to the men who waited at the edge of the jilimi area until one of the women came over to inform them. The women immediately began greasing and measuring hairstring and preparing the central ritual item. This kurduru had been cut west of Wauchope several months before by the Napurrula who had fashioned it. She always called it grandmother. As the women worked the kurdungurlu softly intoned the myth of the travels of yawaki and wardingi, both of which change colour as they travel along. Wardingi changes from white to red as witcheties do after rain, and yagi changes from red to black. 'Yawaki also needs rain', women explain. The initial reddening of the kurduru was for the wardingi and Alyawarra yawaki. The Jupurrula who had been delegated to prepare a kurduru was kirda for wardingi and it was of his country, where the wood would be cut, that the women sang. The kurdungurlu for yawaki sang of the travels of the little birds who accompany yawaki and watch as he goes down at Wakulpu. Thus in the singing, the women celebrated the interdependence of the roles of kirda and kurdungurlu and the inter-relations of the dreamings of ngapa, wardingi and yawaki. The kurduru, Nangala, symbolized the unity of this complex of relationships and roles.

In the preparation of these objects it was apparent that the
jukurrpa was both present and past. The kurduru was prepared and spoken of as a person. It was adorned with headband, feathers and body design; it was called kirda for the country but was also spoken of as aunty, granny and sister in an affectionate way. While painting the kurduru, the women sang of how in the jukurrpa the young girls (Nangala) stood up and showed themselves at Devil's Marbles. It was just like the kurduru now. The women sang of the name for the kurduru, Junkaji, of how he turned from yawaki to ngapa, from an old man to a young man, of how he stood up and observed all the activity of the Jampijinpa brothers in the area of Wakulpu. Follow Waaka, Wakulpu and Junkaji, he sang in various languages. Junkaji showed himself wearing various designs: the straight line design of Ngapajinpi (the lightning design which runs straight down the kurduru), he said to show. He then sang the yungkurru songs for the display of the designs. The women sang of the way in which the ground would vibrate as the dancing feet approached and how leaves would rustle and then would part, as in a dream, to reveal the designs. Later when the men and women sang in unison for the display of the men's boards, it was these songs which were sung.

The women always distinguished between the yungkurru songs of the Jampijinpa and the yawalyu songs of Nangala. The former concerned display, the latter concerned the mythology. Jampijinpa had instructed Nungarrayi in the use of yungkurru songs and told her to take the business to the 'ring place', to build a jungkgyi (brush shade) for the men facing north, and to hold the boards high above her head so that all could see. She was then to make everyone sit down, as had the kurdungurlu birds at Wakulpu, to wait for yawaki. This display is marked with sorrow for he shows himself only to die.
The actual ritual procedure of the displays which followed the preparation conformed to the instructions of the Jampijinpa. A group of women sat at yungkurru ground to sing of the travels of yawaki, wardingi and of the travels of ngapa from Walapanpa to Wakulpu. These were songs which had been taught to Nungarrayi and Napurrula by their sibling parents. The men sat some distance away, where they were preparing their boards, and also sang of the travels of yawaki. They had prepared two boards, one of yawaki in red and one in black. In each the little birds were flanking the travels of their kirda. The women sang of the impending display and were joined by the men who also sang, 'Listen for the dancing feet'. 'Watch for the parting of the leaves'. Finally in the distance the Nungarrayi appeared carrying Junkaji high above her head as Jampijinpa had instructed. The kurdungurlu flanked her and swept the paths clean with leaves. Once she had planted the kurdaru, she invited the Nampijinpa and Jampijinpa to approach it but the men held back. The men then planted their boards on either side of the women's kurdaru.

The Napurrula presented Junkaji with a stone from west of Wauchope and the Jupurrula made a speech about the unity of the dreamings. At this point the Hermannsburg Jangala arrived and was told that all those boards were his country. The Jampijinpa was extremely emotional and asked me to replay the section where the women had sung of his country. The women returned to their ritual area where they slept the night and the men began discussing who else should be invited for subsequent performances.

The next day the preparations continued. The men borrowed wool from me and began spinning 'hair string'. After several hours' work the Jupurrula declared it a mess - which indeed it was - and passed it to his wife, who was the daughter of one of the senior Nampijinpa and therefore kurdungurlu for Wakulpu. The men spent the rest of the day
A Selection of wardingi, yasaki and Karlukarlu designs.
working on the planks of a tea chest to make their boards and the women worked on the designs of their headbands. In both exercises the way in which a limited set of symbols may be combined was apparent. The men's boards showed the line of yawaki's travel to Wakulpu, the small birds, the lines made by wardingi as he travelled across and with yawaki, the waterhole at Wakulpu, the rain clouds which Junkaji saw at Walapanpa. The women used the same set of symbols but in addition used the round Devil's Marbles design and the straight lines of Ngapajinpi. The Jupurrula drew on a piece of cardboard the lines of wardingi and yawaki and gave it to his wife and sister. They then rearranged the symbols to produce ten different headband designs. Each day from then on the men and women brought something new to the yungkurru ground. The women brought one of their ngapa kurduru on which they blew water before dancing. Children were introduced to each of the new boards and the Nungarrayi, Nampijinpa and Napurrula spent many hours leading the younger girls around the boards and kurduru. The men painted new boards and displayed them in the way the Nungarrayi had related. They painted their bodies in the designs of the boards which were strapped to their heads and carried before them. The Nungarrayi explained how the Jampijinpa had told her that the men must cut the fluff of certain grasses in order to decorate themselves properly.

The displays, singing and designs continued to stress the inter-relatedness of yawaki, ngapa and wardingi; men and women continued to discuss which board would be taken to Hermannsburg and which left. The women told the men not to show too much. 'Leave something for next time', they cautioned.

When the men and women actually performed at Hermannsburg, it was short, intense and spectacular but there was no hint of the way in which
Kurdungurlu for the dreaming dance holding the men's boards which depict yawaki
the dreamings had been woven together, nor of the negotiations which had taken place. The women painted and sang of their dreamings at Devil's Marbles. These were open songs which tell of the humourous exploits of two old women out hunting and of several younger girls who steal their produce. It is a favourite dreaming of the women but gives no hint of the complex of dreamings they own or those they had celebrated in the previous week. The women danced around the men's boards which were already in place and then retired to sing for the men who were preparing to display more boards as the Jampijinpa had instructed. The women sang of the board they had decided not to show and of the sparking of Junkaji. When the men were ready, the fires were built up and the women sang the men from the darkness to the light. The women flanked the men's dancing in of the new boards, danced around the boards and then removed them and returned the boards to the men's shade. They danced holding the boards aloft so that all could see. 'Play with them', the men shouted to the women, 'these are your dreamings now'.

Had I only observed the performance at Hermannsburg, where the ritual roles had already been sorted out, the displays perfected and the exchange of knowledge completed between men and women, it may have been possible to conclude that women were playing a supportive role. Like Spencer and Gillen I could have expressed wonderment at the sight of women handling the male boards, but not speculated further. However I had been able to observe, participate and record over a period of a week. To me it was apparent that in this yungkurru we can see woman's ritual contribution to her society as critical to the continuity and renewal of the complex of land/people relationships. As the central focus and unifying force of the ceremony we have the Nangala both as a kinswoman and a symbolic representation. The yungkurru sanction for the
ritual action was provided by the dream of the Nungarrayi in which her father's mother's father had not only revealed to her the structure of the inter-relations of the dreamings of his country, but had also instructed her in the way in which men and women should display knowledge. In the yungkurru men and women did indeed exchange knowledge in this way and in so doing shared the dreamtime experience of the country of the Jampijinpa. The interdependence of male and female was strikingly apparent in the negotiations during the ceremony. The women needed men within their ritual group: the men needed the knowledge to back their claims to rights in the country. This contrasts with Munn (1973:38) who found asymmetry in the way in which ritual knowledge was channeled. Again this may have been evidence of women's newness to the country rather than evidence of their low status.

CONCLUSION

Like most desert rituals I have recorded, the yungkurru and yawalyu discussed in this chapter were multi-purpose rituals. At one level the ceremonies provided the opportunity to establish relationships across space and to confirm the ritual status of the participants. It provided an opportunity to incorporate persons and to extend the range of one's knowledge and therefore rights. Men and women played distinctive roles, brought into the public arena but a fraction of the knowledge each celebrated separately, and acknowledged the contribution of the other. When the women picked up the men's boards at Hermannsburg it was with the knowledge that they had been instrumental in making this 'their country' and that they retained control of their own ritual world.
Chapter Nine

INITIATION

INTRODUCTION

In the previous four chapters I have explored the themes of love, health and land as articulated by women in the rituals in which they, either as sole participants or jointly with men, give form to their nurturance roles. I have argued that in these ritual activities women work in structured ways to maintain a central core of beliefs which are shared with the men and based on the jukurrpa heritage.

While most male anthropologists are prepared to allow that women do have a separate ritual life, they dismiss it as exactly what one would expect in a sex segregated society and as of concern to women only. In answer to this dismissal of women's ritual activities, I have already provided ample data of the complex nature of women's rituals and argued that women's rituals concern the well-being of the whole society. A second dismissal is that, interesting as they may be, women's rituals are entirely swamped by the magnitude and the spectacular nature of men's rituals at initiation. In this chapter I explore women's role in and perception of initiation to argue that woman's ritual contribution to her society is not negated during initiation and that rather than comparing men with women, we look to the ways in which they are co-operating to maintain their world and that of the jukurrpa.

Once the ritual correlates of the kin roles women play at initiation are recognized, it is evident that these complement, extend

1. Throughout I use the term 'initiation' to refer to the ceremonial activity associated with the circumcision of boys.
and overlap with those of the men to provide an avenue through which women may assert a continuity in their role as nurturer of people and relationships within the context of affiliation to land. Sisters and aunts (fathers' sisters) become joint kirda with the initiate as members of his patriline, while the mothers become the kirda for the boys' kurdungurlu country and the mothers-in-law 'kurdungurlu' to the mothers. In allowing that women's ritual roles pervade the domain of initiation and structure much of their behaviour both at the initiation ground and in their own separate camps at initiation, I am shifting the balance from women as members of the boys' kin group (see Meggitt 1962: 284) to women as ritual status holders in their own right: marriage arrangements then become an integral part of initiation for they, like the act of circumcision, are hedged in by ritual politics and serve to create new webs of relationships within the society. Thus, as well as documenting women's ritual role at initiation, I am also seeking to reintegrate marriage arrangements within that complex of rituals associated with initiation which include men and women of various ritual statuses politicking to achieve personal ends and favourable alliances between families and countries.

Through their ritual participation in segments of male rituals, through their own yawalyu staged independently of the men during initiation and through the control exercised over certain key decisions associated with initiation, women demonstrate some of the checks and balances which they may apply to men, even in their most glorious moments. Rather than endorsing initiation as a time when old men make unequivocable claims to control over women and youth, I am continuing to argue that initiation, like other rituals, is a time when women may make certain statements about the importance of their role in the presence of men. The right to make these statements is a reflection of
the basic complementarity and negotiability of male-female relations.

Given the sexual politics of the society and the claims which men make at initiation, it is hardly surprising that male oriented anthropologists who concentrate on male activities at initiation, remain only dimly aware of the importance and the nature of women's contribution. As well as the obvious sex bias in reporting initiation, there is also the more difficult conceptual problem to be faced. My position in Chapter two suggests that an important question to pose at initiation is this: if women are not negated as persons at initiation, how then are we to characterize initiation? How are we to assess and analyze the differential perceptions and meanings that men's and women's worlds lend to their respective roles in initiation? I shall explore these questions in this chapter by focussing not only on women's activities during initiation, but also on what initiation achieves, what men and women seek to gain by participation and how these findings may be best assessed. I am thus returning to the more general problem posed in Chapter two of how to characterize women's role and status in a sex segregated society.

Without doubt initiation is a time when the whole society pauses, when all resources are directed to the making of young men. However, while old men 'make' boys into young men through the ritualized death and rebirth of circumcision and thereby arrogate to themselves the role of spiritual procreator, old women organize the feeding and nurturing of the boys, sit in all night vigils with the boys, stage yawalyu which celebrate the continuity of land and people associated with the boy and nominate the mother-in-law for the boy. In this way, women do not arrogate to themselves a new role in initiation but rather, maintain balance and harmony between individuals, families and groups. It is they who provide the links between groups through marriage, the
incorporation of outsiders, the extension of knowledge in ritual action and, at initiation, it is they who provide the mother of the girl who the boy may ultimately marry. Most importantly they do so as persons whose rights to participate derive directly from the jukurrpa.

While I am juxtaposing the circumcision of the boy by men, with the nomination of the mother-in-law by the women, I am not opposing the two as sacred and profane (see Peterson 1969) but rather as two sides of the same ritual coin. Both men and women acknowledge circumcision and mother-in-law nomination as key events in initiation ceremonies. Although acts which serve to crystallize male and female roles, they cannot, in my analysis, be categorized as sacred and profane, for both are political acts based on the ritual rights, responsibilities and ambitions of the participants. Therefore, while I am in agreement with other anthropologists that at initiation the values of the society are writ large, I am suggesting it is a complex of values which is celebrated and nowhere near as simple as the dogma of unrelenting male dominance suggests. Male claims to control over youth and women are balanced (as they are at other times of the year) by the ritual activities of women. Complementarity of roles and ritual statuses of men and women are no less evident at initiation than during the rest of the ritual year. At initiation men and women co-operate to ensure the continuity of their society but do so in distinctive ways: old men through exercising control over young men and old women through the nomination of mothers-in-law. Throughout initiation women are able to sustain the self image and world view they expound in their own ritual world. They are neither negated as persons nor humiliated by men's ritual strategies; rather, they gain in status and knowledge through participation.
THE QUESTION OF INITIATION

In the first chapter of this thesis I stated that I do not claim to know all there is to learn of women's lives and perhaps initiation remains the haziest of domains. In seeking an understanding of woman's role and her perceptions of that role, I had first to learn how to ask questions. I discussed this problem with reference to women's domain in Chapter three but I had many things to unlearn before I could begin to understand women's role at initiation. In addition I had to learn much of community structure and family relationships before many of the women's answers, when they started to come, began to clarify and link up into a statement of what women's participation in initiation meant.

My anthropological training involved exposure to knowledge about male initiation and although I had deliberately avoided viewing films of male secret-sacred material and the like, I still had a mental map of the activities associated with initiation. At first it seemed I knew more than Warrabri women were prepared to vocalize of certain aspects of the male activities. I lived in fear of using male specific phrases or indicating in some way that I knew what was going on at the men's ground. Slowly and painfully I learnt that not only should I suppress most of what I had learnt but that, if I was to understand how women thought about initiation rituals, I had to begin from a new starting point. I learnt my knowledge was structured around events which were not of prime concern to women and certainly not the focus of their ritual activity. My knowledge of the male role and his perceptions of the female role were thus real obstacles which I am not sure I have yet completely transcended. I have however concentrated on the aspects of initiation which women told me were important and on which they lavished much time and consideration.
Furthermore, that my understanding of initiation is consistent with my analysis of women's rituals gives me heart that at least I am on the right track.

Over the Christmas holiday period of 1976-7, 1977-8 and 1979-80 I was able to observe and participate in three initiation seasons of Warrabri Warlpiri and Alyawarra Aranda. The east-west division of the Warrabri population is starkly drawn at initiation time. Warlpiri congregate at their ground on the western limit of the settlement while the Arandic eastsiders, the Kaititj and Alyawarra, congregate to the extreme east. The first initiation cycles began shortly after I arrived at Warrabri and left me more confused than illuminated. While the anthropological portrayal of the men's role was confirmed in men's action, I could not reconcile what I had seen and heard from women with Meggitt's (1962:281-316; 1972) depiction of women's role. Parts of the ceremonies were familiar (such as when the 'mothers' carry the boys on their shoulders to the area where they are fed), but women appeared to be more involved, their activities more structured and their attitude more reflective than Meggitt had allowed. Above all there appeared to be a high degree of co-operation between the sexes, more marked in the eastside initiations than the westside Warlpiri. In attempting to reconcile his approach and my mental map with my field data, I asked questions which were answered with blank stares, embarrassed silence or shrugged off as nonsense questions.

That I did not know all the actual relationships between the ritual participants in that first round of initiations led me to ask questions which were either irrelevant, shameful or immediately marked me as an outsider white fellar. I found that many of the questions I asked concerning the identity of participants and their
relationships could not be answered; for example, the names of
initiates can not be spoken by women from the time of their capture
to the time of the 'finish up' business described below. Further,
different sets of relatives were scattered in special purpose camps and
difficult to locate: mothers-in-law were under a speech taboo and
along with 'mothers' restricted to the area of their particular camp.
I participated in one initiation cycle (which lasted over ten days)
without knowing the identity, other than 'skin' terms, for the men and
many of the women involved. At the time I felt as if the women were
being pushed back and forth from camp to dancing ground in a totally
insensitive way. By the next year, when I knew the participants and
the overall procedure, the participation became a pleasure with much
to speculate about, prepare for and discuss.

Some 'facts' still remain unknown. My blunder with the use of
the English word 'bullroarer' (see Chapter three) had been a salutory
lesson but I persisted with dictionaries of Warlpiri (Hale 1974;
Reece 1975). I briefly tried to elicit the names of the various nights
of initiation and the participants. Immediately one younger woman
warned me in English, 'We can't say 'initiation'.' Ultimately I learnt
the word for the period preceding the circumcision by listening but
my linguistic curiosity was curbed.

The Warlpiri women were interested to tell me about the night
when 'the firestick was passed', but little else, except that I was
welcome to attend and was 'a big help'. I stopped asking questions
and decided to wait until the next year when I would know more of the
people and their affiliations to land. At an eastside initiation the
Kaititj and Alyawarra, with whom I began to work during the first
initiation period of 1976-7, sensed my frustration and gave me sound
anthropological advice: 'Watch us, follow us, only go where your
'sisters' go, move with others, never alone. We'll explain it all
to you afterwards', they promised, 'All about the white fluff, the running away and the finish up'. Again I translated this into a male oriented structure. The white fluff became the down of the men's body decorations, the running away the time when women hurriedly leave the ground while men swing menacing bullroarers and, the finish up became the reintegration of the boy into the community at the completion of his bush exclusion. Fortunately I didn't ask questions based on these suppositions since to have done so would certainly have set back further my search for understanding. The sequence of events described to me had nothing to do with the act of circumcision but, rather like the Warlpiri women's interest in the firestick, concerned key moments in the nomination of the mother-in-law. Only after I had attended and participated in another season of initiation was instruction offered. By then I had learnt how people were related, which country was which and that women were not the pawns in male games but rather, daughters of the dreaming who proudly and forcefully made decisions concerning their lives and heritage. The instruction I was given during this second round of initiations centred on the role of mothers, sisters, aunts and mothers-in-law and the countries represented in the yawalyu rituals of these women.

The general structure and sequence of events at initiation are well known to all women - when the boys will be caught, when women will dance, when men will dance, and when visitors from other places will arrive are all important events which affect all women and are discussed at length in the women's camps. Actual ritual roles and ritual procedure however are not openly discussed. The role of a mother, a mother-in-law or a sister at initiation is known through participation in that role. Thus in order to learn the different roles which women play at initiation I had to participate in those capacities. I am fortunate to have been present at sufficient
initiations to have participated in all the major female roles. Where I have been able to be present more than once, I have been given extra instruction. The way in which I learnt of the content of the ritual roles was the same as for my teachers. The knowledge which women have of initiation is role specific and built up over participation in successive initiations. When one participates as a mother, one has limited access to the activities of the mother-in-law and this was one of the difficulties I confronted in the first season of initiation I attended: I simply did not know where people were or who they were.

By the third round of eastside and westside initiations which I attended in January 1980, I knew much more of the country and the people. I had also had time to reflect upon my data. I was invited by a woman whom I called 'mother' to attend the eastside initiation of her brother's son. This 'mother' was a close friend with whom I had worked, camped and travelled and from whom I had learnt much over a period of four years. Because she was my 'mother' and teacher, I was able to ask her questions which would have been impossible of a 'sister' or 'mother-in-law'. As my 'mother' she taught me the importance of 'growing up' people and country. She was concerned that I understood the purpose of the initiation and its importance for her and other women. 'Mother' explained how in initiation people are 'turned around', that is, transformed from one sort of relative to another. I had heard men say this in relation to initiation; they had commented that women were 'turned around' to become mothers-in-law but my 'mother' explained that boys were 'turned around' into men by the work of the 'sisters', 'mothers' and 'mothers-in-law' during the entire period of initiation, not just in the period preceding circumcision. Subsequently I was red ochred from top to toe and propelled into ritual action which I had previously only observed from
a distance. Afterwards the women said, 'Now you know the answers to those questions you were asking last time?' Did I? I certainly knew there was more to being a mother than preparing food. The eastside men thanked me for participating, as had the westside men in previous years, and commented they were proud of their 'sister' who sat all night or danced all night, as was the case. It was, they said, 'a big help' and from then on the families of those boys have treated me with special care and affection. My son had been 'claimed' by the Alyawarra men in the throwing ceremony (see below) three years previously in an eastside ceremony and his maturity became the subject of mild joking amongst men and women. Would I hold onto him? Who would push him out? Who would catch him? It was time I began to consider such questions.

ARANDA AND WARLPIRI INITIATION

Although many decades separate Spencer and Gillen's (1899) and Strehlow's (1947) observations from mine, the Arandic initiations I attended in the summers of 1976-7, 1977-8 and 1979-80 had much in common, in terms of male activities, with the Arandic circumcision ceremonies outlined by these early anthropologists. Similarly but more strikingly, the male role in the westside Warlpiri initiations I attended, closely paralleled those Meggitt (1962) witnessed in the 1950's. Regional variation in both Aranda and Warlpiri initiations, a feature noted by Spencer and Gillen (1899:261) with reference to the northern Aranda and Meggitt (1962:284-290) with reference to the Warramunga influence on Warlpiri at Phillip Creek, partly accounts for the differences between our observations. We need also to note the nature of the changes in the world of Alyawarra-Aranda and Warlpiri as outlined in Chapter four. Perhaps two of the greatest changes in initiation are the shortening of the period of bush exclusion for the novices in order to meet the requirements of white educationalists and
the absence of an extended 'bush tour' in which boys are shown and taught of country (see Meggitt 1962:285).

At Warrabri I had the unique opportunity—not only to note variations within Alyawarra-Arandic and Warlpiri ceremonies but also to observe and to probe the differences between eastside and westside ritual practice. No Kaititj initiations took place during my stay at Warrabri but my Kaititj women friends participated in eastside initiations as close relatives of the Alyawarra boys who were initiated. On one occasion several Kaititj women, as the 'sisters' of a lad who was being initiated by westsiders but who held country which was jointly maintained by Kaititj and Warlpiri, assisted the westsiders. All preparation was undertaken in the Kaiaitj camp and the women only joined the westsiders for the dancing. On all other occasions Kaititj stressed their Arandic heritage. Because my focus is on women's ritual worlds, a thorough exploration of differences and variations between eastside and westside initiation is outside the scope of this thesis. Further, as discussed above, the topic of initiation is a vexsome one and I consider additional research is necessary before a comparison of the Alyawarra-Arandic and Warlpiri initiations I witnessed and those of the earlier ethnographies can be undertaken. However in order to explore women's ritual role and contribution during initiation, it is necessary to sketch the structure of initiation for Warlpiri and Aranda as I understand it. Although my discussion of eastside initiation is based on Alyawarra initiations, I believe the data also apply to Kaititj who share most of the initiation procedures outlined here.

It is important to sketch the structure of east and westside initiations for two reasons. Firstly there are similarities between the two cycles which point to critical aspects of women's role and
status in initiation. Secondly, the descriptions of Spencer and Gillen, Strehlow and Meggitt, while consonant with my observations and understanding of male roles and perspectives during initiation, are at cross purposes with my understanding of women's role and perceptions. Meggitt treats women's participation as peripheral to the main purpose of initiation and Spencer and Gillen (1899:366-367) admit to being at a loss to explain women's presence and access to certain objects. Neither of these anthropologists records women's views on the male initiation rituals and neither records women's perceptions of their own ritual activity during initiation. When documentation of women's activities is read in conjunction with Meggitt, Spencer and Gillen and Strehlow, it does not merely add a new depth of meaning or dimension, it forces us to look again at the complex of relationships, statuses and roles articulated during male circumcision. Like so many other ritual occasions described in this thesis, we find that initiation is also a multipurpose ritual occasion.

This outline of initiation is not intended as a full description of all the events, decisions and negotiations which occur during this time of the year. I have chosen to focus on certain aspects of initiation - aspects which women underscored as important - in order to dispel a few misconceptions about women's role and status during initiation and to highlight others. In particular I wish to illustrate the way in which women's independent ritual life continues to provide a context for women's action and decision making and how these ritual activities articulate with those of the men. Certain decisions, such as the choice of circumcisor, are taken independently by the men, while others, such as the nomination of a mother-in-law, are taken independently by the women. But these choices and decisions are interwoven in the ritual action of both men and women in the way in which action moves back and forth between men and women. Much is
subject to negotiation for young men cannot be made without the
coop-eration of women, and men recognize this. Finally, in this
outline of initiation, I hope to show that a fixed model of man to man
ritual negotiations is inappropriate. Men and women, young and old,
engage in ritual politics and express preferences in diverse ways.

Preliminaries: Who? When? and Where?

The initiation season at Warrabri usually coincides with the
school holidays although this constraint bears more heavily on Warlpiri
than on the Arandic eastsiders at Warrabri or the Warlpiri at Yuendumu
and Willowra. It is probably yet another example of the way in which
Warrabri Warlpiri have come to accommodate white institutions (see
Chapter four). Warlpiri begin in November and extend through until
February-March, while eastside initiations tend to begin after the
Warlpiri in January and to run until March-April. Aranda aim to
coincide with the stand-down period in the cattle industry and the
height of the holiday season for Europeans who are present in the
fewest possible numbers at these times.

Within the family camps, husbands and wives discuss the forth­
coming initiation season. A mother's decision that her son is ready
must be secured before any plans can be made. This is based on her
assessment of his maturity, both physical and emotional, and the
availability, or possible availability, of potential mothers-in-law
that coming year. Generally there is agreement between a couple and
negotiations begin with the mother's brothers (see Meggitt 1962:281)
for the Warlpiri, and the older brothers (see Spencer & Gillen 1899:
218) for the Aranda. At times women will withhold permission and this
is respected by men. I have seen this occur as has Mary Laughren at
Yuendumu (pers. comm.). Ultimately, however, a mother will agree
because it is in her interests to have adult sons.
The timing of an initiation is a nice example of the interplay between male normative statements concerning initiation and the actual reality of enforcing preferences, that is, of the politics of ritual decision making. Women should appear reluctant to lose their sons; they should cry and worry for their safety. In reality boys have usually been living in all male peer groups for some time and are the bain of everyone's existence, mothers included. A mother should mourn the loss of a son but in actuality she gains much through the initiation of her son - a relationship with the woman he calls mother-in-law and she calls wonkili, a new status as ngarka parnta (man-having) and as one who has reared a son to physical and emotional maturity, access to ritual knowledge, and further, she retains the right to discipline her son. While women joke about holding their sons until they are too old for initiation, they also state that boys should be 'pushed out' before they are too heavy to pick up. (Women must carry their sons on their shoulders during certain periods of initiation).

Today Warlpiri boys are being initiated younger in an attempt, it seems, to quieten them down (see Bell & Ditton 1980:27). Women often object that a boy is too young and seek the co-operation of the school authorities to allow the lad to finish his schooling. After initiation boys attend school irregularly, although they are returned to the settlement in time to resume school. Initiated boys find the discipline of school, mixed classes and women teachers difficult to manage. Alyawarra boys on an average were several years older than Warlpiri boys, a fact which probably reflects both a difference between the two initiation procedures and the differential impact of the changes of the last century on Alyawarra and Warlpiri.

Generally several boys of the same skin are initiated at the one ceremony. Women are happy to see a large assemblage of people because
it provides a greater scope for their political dealings in finding a suitable mother-in-law and an opportunity to extend and share the range of their ritual knowledge with other women. A large gathering also means many classificatory relatives for each of the boys, the possibility of staging a big show and establishing for the boy a wide set of age mates.

Where an initiation will be held is subject to many factors. In the past they were held on the country which was celebrated in the rituals associated with the initiation but today much of the ceremonial activity occurs on the settlements, within walking distance of the main camps. On occasions a boy may be taken to Willowra to be initiated but more often the Willowra men and women come to Warrabri for the initiation of their local boys. Ritual instruction is thus increasingly becoming separated from actual country and for Warrabri Warlpiri this is a greater problem than for other Warlpiri closer to their own country. It also has ramifications for marriage because, as I argue below, a woman must be present to be nominated as a mother-in-law and thus Warrabri Warlpiri face the problem of limiting their choice to those Warlpiri present, entering into less than correct marriages or marrying eastside women. All these options are exploited (see Bell 1980a:247ff). As the number of second choice marriages increases so does the number of children with dual subsection classification. Initiation, it appears, is sometimes used to 'straighten a skin' and confirm the boy as correct in the mother's line or father's line. A certain amount of politicking occurs between mother's family and father's family to have the 'two skin' boy initiated within a particular country - the father's side are by no means the foregone victors.
While Warrabri Warlpiri tend to be initiated at home, Aranda travel many miles to initiate: even beginning in one country and finishing up in another. This is in part a reflection of their greater mobility between station and settlement and also their proximity to their own country. Over the past few years there has been a growing tendency for the larger ceremonial gatherings associated with Alyawarra initiation to occur at Warrabri. On the one hand there are practical advantages to Warrabri. The store can provide, in theory at least, for larger numbers than can a cattle station store, and the politics of cattle stations are changing rapidly. On the other hand the eastsiders of Warrabri are beginning to take a new political stand on the ownership of the country and turning to the rituals associated with initiation to state their claims to the area.  

The Aranda ceremonially mark the initiates for future years by the 'throwing up in the air' ritual. Spencer and Gillen (1899:214) describe this as a separate ritual for the Finke Aranda but in the Alyawarra-Arandic initiations I saw at Warrabri, it was incorporated into the week of ritual activity which precedes the actual circumcision of the boys (not the ones who are thrown). The throwing in the air is an indication that there are many more young boys to follow the present crop, that the boys thrown are entering a new period of their lives and will soon be initiated and that they should begin to absorb the power of country, a strengthening process welcomed by youth, women and men alike. On the second last night of the initiation the young boys

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2. The country is said to be Kaititj but the present owners are all Alyawarra speakers. Two such statements are not inconsistent with each other but I think that as the Alyawarra are numerically strong in the area they are protecting the rights of the closely related and intermarried Kaititj against possible takeovers or extension of dreamings by the Warlpiri. This is done by activating and consolidating their knowledge of the area in the necessary and continuous process of reinvention.
are thrown high into the air by the assembled men and then bounced onto the painted shields on the ground, while all the women stand, motioning upwards with their hands and trilling. The boys are painted afterwards by the men seated within the men's wind break area with simple white line designs. In 1977 my son was quite unexpectedly grabbed, along with several of his 'brothers', and thrown into the air by Alyawarra men. They regarded me very seriously as they did it and the women encouraged me to participate in the 'sending of the power' hand action which they were employing. From then on matters concerning the readiness of my son for initiation were discussed with me by women and instruction was begun in how I should plan the timing of his initiation.

Catching the Boys

Like the decision to initiate or not in a particular season, the catching of the boys who are to be initiated is one where normative statements need to be balanced against actual behaviour. On the one hand men say the capture is a surprise which frightens, shocks, causes women to hide their heads, young boys to quiver and quake and younger children to believe they will be beheaded if they look up. In fact everyone knows ahead of time who will be taken and about what time the catch will occur. The boys can only be caught when all is ready for the initiation to begin and to this end mothers often keep their sons by them so that they are available for the catch. Men pass this off by saying women are trying to shield their sons.

While the fiction must be maintained that the catch is a surprise, it can not be too much of a surprise and in fact one surprise catch which I saw - the Warlpiri grabbed an Alyawarra boy - aroused the Alyawarra to righteous indignation backed by serious sanctions. Some warning is necessary because at the time of the catch the boys are
paraded through the camps by the red ochred captors who let out blood curdling cries to alert all to their presence and the need to hide. For several hours before a catch, if it occurs in day time, older women will be found sitting quietly in their camps waiting. They decline to go hunting or shopping, for the danger of being on the wrong side of the red ochred men is too grave.

After the catch both Warlpiri and Alyawarra women dance briefly at a 'half way' initiation ground but because the procedure is so different in each case I shall treat them separately, beginning with the Warlpiri. As soon as the cries die down, the Warlpiri 'mothers' emerge and follow in the direction of the cries to a ground which is between the camps and the main initiation ground used later in the week. There the women dance on the ant hill 'to soften the soil' and return quickly to their camps, whence they do not emerge until evening to join in the action with the men. While in their own camp, which is often a special purpose camp constructed on the initiation side of the major camps, the women prepare their ritual paraphernalia, elaborate body painting, feathers and food for the evening.

This is the first occasion on which women paint-up specifically in connection with initiation and a clear hierarchy emerges. The designs of the mother (that is, those of the country for which the boy is kurdungurlu) are widely used, the mother reserving the most spectacular for herself. Her actual daughter, the sister of the initiate and one who shares the boy's ritual affiliations, is given special attention during the ritual preparation and while expected to

3. I have no explanation of this, apart from a cross reference to Alyawarra, who state that boys are circumcised on an area where ant hill has been spread and tramelled. Ant hill is also associated with child birth, a women's domain. Perhaps there is a symbolic cross referencing from birth to initiation. I have not yet probed this issue.
work, as *kurdungurlu* to her mother, is also given instruction. On later occasions the visitors from whom a mother-in-law may be chosen, are singled out for special attention and the country of the boy's patriline is celebrated. But on this first day it is clearly the mother who is in charge.

That evening the women wait until they are called down to the ground. They take their swags and rest nearby until called over by the men. Fires are lit by the women, one for each boy, and the women sit in groups behind their own fire. The men send small concave boards to the mothers, who 'hold' them until the end of the ceremonies. During the night the men sing of the travels of the two kangaroos and the women dance following the songs. 'Mothers', 'mothers-in-law' and 'fathers' sisters' dance in the middle, while 'sisters' and 'mothers' mothers' dance to the side. The 'sisters' dance with a sideways action and call out to the 'brothers', while the others dance in a tight formation with the fire stick. At dawn the women farewell the boys and leave.

In the 1977-8 season, during a Jungarrayi initiation, I shared a swag with a close 'sister', a Nungarrayi, who began to whisper to me as each song was sung of the meaning of the words which she claimed to have learnt from her father. I have not had the opportunity to compare these interpretations with those of a male anthropologist, but it seemed to me she offered full details of the purpose and intent of the kangaroos, the direction of their travels and the places they visited. Finding someone whispering explanations in my ear during a night of dancing became a familiar mode of instruction from Warlpiri. Women spoke of things which they would not or could not discuss away from the action. Alyawarra women on the other hand were more concerned that I be present for then I would 'know'.
For Alyawarra boys there is less of an element of surprise manufactured by the men and throughout the initiation period all parties stated they were, and appeared to be, well informed as to what would happen next. The men's ritual store house is just visible from the women's *jilimi* and they can see the comings and goings of the men who travel to and from museum (store house) to initiation ground. All around are the leafy poles of the initiation ceremonies of previous years as reminders of the boys made into men. The whole atmosphere in the camps is one of a dearly awaited and cherished time of year when, although much hard work is required, many families can congregate and share ritual business. Unlike Warlpiri initiation, which are large sprawling affairs with a momentum of their own, Alyawarra initiations are very tight family affairs where there is a clear notion of what is correct and much criticism if this is not realized. Women will leave the initiation ground if they are dissatisfied or refuse to dance if the ground is not cleared properly. Such things happen rarely because Alyawarra men and women, while each fulfilling their own sex specific tasks, remain in constant communication with each other throughout initiation.

The action following the catching of the Alyawarra boys is a good example of this level of co-operation and of the difference in atmosphere between westside and eastside initiations. Usually the boys are caught mid-morning, there being no real fear on the part of the Alyawarra that whites may stumble upon the red ochred party. From their camps the women watch as the men prepare for the next stage of the ceremony. Finally, an older brother calls out to the women that all is ready for them. The women of the mother's *jilimi* then come forward in a wide line and place bags of flour and hair string on the road leading to the initiation ground. Two older brothers come forward and take the flour to the group of men who have returned from the
nearby ground. The 'sisters' of the initiate then go straight to the camp of the mother of the future mother-in-law of the boy. They dance on the way and when they reach the camp they pick up the girl and call out 'la-la-la'. They then take her to the mother of the initiate, who holds onto her in the front row of the group of assembled women. The party of men and women then proceed to the ground. The men carrying flour lead the way, under the guidance of the 'older brothers', while the women, with the mother and mother-in-law in front, follow. 'Sisters' call back and forth to the 'brothers'. The women are supervised by a senior 'mother's mother', who acts as mistress of ceremony throughout the coming week of ritual business. As they travel, the party pauses, the men place the flour between them and the women, the women dance briefly and then the men retrieve the flour and continue on their way. When they arrive at the ground, which is east of the camps, the flour is put on the ground in front of the waiting party of men who place emu feathers on top of the pile. The women dance briefly and retire to about fifty yards away. From there they watch the 'older brothers' dance and accompany the performance with the upward cupped hand action of lifting up the business and sending out the power. After the third man has danced they return to the main camp.

The nomination of the mother-in-law is a decision which all agree is a woman's decision and more specifically that of the mother who must like the person chosen. Men ponder aloud who will be chosen and although there are obviously limits within which the mothers will choose, the actual decision is not known until that morning. Ideally the girl should be under twenty, not yet married, or if married, have no children. It is an opportunity, really the first in the context of initiation, for a young woman to play an important role and she must therefore be someone who is willing to learn. Some girls are never
chosen because they marry, absent themselves at the time when mothers-in-law are being chosen, or are just too busy 'playing around'. Therefore, although a mother may wish to choose a certain girl and have discussed the matter with the girl's mother, the girl may exercise her options by being sick on the day or merely absent. (As discussed below, this is a tactic employed by Warlpiri women on the night when mothers-in-law are nominated in the Warlpiri ritual cycle. These considerations reflect personal preferences but there are important ritual/country factors which guide women in their choice. As one woman explained to me, 'We have to keep the families straight'. As I argued in Chapter five, there is a level at which marriages may be seen to establish reciprocal links between groups and in women's discussions of initiation they imply just such a model, but it involves a complex set of relationships which extends over three generations.

Here I describe two cases which occurred in 1980. In case one (Fig.1) where a Japangardi (1) was being initiated, it was the duty of his sister, Napangardi (2) to pick up the mother-in-law, a Nungarrayi (3), for the Napurrula (4) mother. The Nungarrayi mother-in-law then contracted to provide a Nampijinpa (5) daughter as a wife for the Japangardi. The negotiations occurred between the mother (Napurrula) and the mother of the mother-in-law, a Nakamarra (6). Case two involved the initiation of a Jungarrayi. As a Nakamarra I was given instructions in both sets of negotiations: as the mother in case two and the mother of the mother-in-law in case one. The sister of the Jungarrayi (1) initiate, Nungarrayi (2) (the mother-in-law in the previous sequence), picked up Napangardi (3) (the sister in case one) and took her to her mother, Nakamarra (the mother of the mother-in-law of case one). The Napangardi mother-in-law was then obliged to provide a Nangala daughter for the Jungarrayi initiate. Negotiations
Fig. 1. *Initiation Relationships.*

**Case One**

- **1** Japangardi
- **2** Napangardi
- **3** Nampijinpa
- **4** Napurfula
- **5** Nungarrayi
- **6** Nakamarra

**Case Two**

- **1** Jungarrayi
- **2** Nungarrayi
- **3** Napongardi
- **4** Nakamarra
- **5** Nongala
- **6** Napurfula

Fig. 2. *Initiation and Marriage.*

- **Nakamarra**
- **Napongardi**
- **Nungarrayi**
- **Jungarrayi**
- **Nongala**
- **Japangardi**
occurred between the Nakamarra mother of the initiate and the Napurrula mother of the mother-in-law. This pair are, of course, notionally at least, joint *kirda* for the *kurdungurlu* country of the boy and in some cases are actually *kurdungurlu*. In the painting up which occurs in the women's ceremonies, opportunity is taken (as in the *yungkurruru* described in Chapter eight) to extend the knowledge and rights of such notional relationships so that they achieve a new ritual status.

This is clearly a squaring of the ledgers between families because, as women said, 'The Nungarrayi who gets our Napangardi, gives us back his sister for Japangardi in business'. Genealogically this exchange implicates three generations with Japangardi and Napangardi appearing two generations apart (Fig. 2). This can be accommodated within Warlpiri and Aranda kinship systems which tend to classify grandchild and paternal grandfather as siblings.

In this model of marriage generated by the exchanges of mothers-in-law, initiates and sisters we see clearly that initiation is indeed a multipurpose ritual which serves to realign relationships (that is, 'to turn people around') and to provide a forum within which alliances between countries may be established and maintained. Although in this discussion I am not concerned to discuss at length differences between 'm.m.b.d.d.' and 'z.s.d.' marriage (see Meggitt 1962:199) it is worth noting that in Figure two, with the sister and brother two generations apart, a 'z.s.d.' marriage is easily generated.4

The evening of the day of the ceremony in which the mother-in-law

4. Laughren (1980 pers. comm.) suggests a man ideally marries two generations below to the daughter of a maternal nephew who is older than he is. Thus for a man, marriage is to his 'z.s.d.' while for a women it is to her 'f.m.b.'. Once again this is easily demonstrated in Figure two.
INITIATION GROUND
east side

Where the women wait.

Single fire (where men stand after the circumcision)
is nominated provides a further opportunity for demonstration of the joint venture between men and women which initiation represents. At dusk the women proceed to the initiation ground, where they sleep until about midnight. On the call of 'wadja' they move to where the men are assembled at a small wind break. The 'sisters' and 'mothers' 'mothers' dance with a special sideways knee jump step and limp arms on each side of the 'mothers' and 'mothers-in-law', who dance in a tight formation in the middle. The 'sisters' call out across the space and are answered by the 'brothers'. The mothers dance holding the mothers-in-law, who are said to be 'hanging on' for support. As they dance they make a track towards the men with their dancing feet in a line which echoes the east-west groove which the male kurdungurlu make through the initiation ground (see Spencer and Gillen 1899:219-220).

At about one a.m. several of the men light a fire to the west behind the women. The women then separate in two groups either side of the centre of the ground, a blanket is placed on the ground in front of the men and shields, painted with the country of the mother, are laid on the blanket. The mother and mother-in-law then sit facing the east on one blanket. A 'brother' brings a firestick which is given to the mother, who passes it to the mother-in-law, while the 'sisters' hold a torch to light the mother-in-law's face (see Spencer & Gillen 1899:222). The mothers-in-law and mothers dance briefly together and then a 'brother' puts white fluff on the mother-in-law's head. The 'sisters' then take up a position between the man and the mothers-in-law, where they stand for the rest of the evening, twirling a small head scarf (in the past, a bunch of tails from a marsupial possum). Calls echo back and forth to the 'brothers', who answer 'wadja'. At dawn, when the men announce they are ready, messengers are sent out and then the boys are escorted, arm in arm, to the blanket, where they sit down
Sisters of the initiate, wearing designs for the dreaming for which they are *kirda*, that is, for the country they share with their brother, prepare tea and damper for the men who are initiating him.
before the mothers-in-law, who rub their ochred bodies against boys (see Spencer & Gillen 1899:244). This was explained to me as being like when women rub sacred objects over their bodies to absorb their power (see Chapter five). The boys are then taken to a cleared space on the side of the men, where the women fall upon them, while the men recite a couplet about growing hair. The women then depart, mothers-in-law being supported by mothers. From then on mothers camp separately from mothers-in-law, who look to their own mothers to feed them. Movement is restricted for both mothers and mothers-in-law and the latter are under a speech taboo until the 'finish up' (see Spencer & Gillen 1899:251). 'Mothers' are required to be red ochred from this time until after the circumcision and to sleep near the ground.

It is apparent from this description that the role of 'sister' as a worker, as kurdungurlu, is critical to the ritual action and the dedication with which a 'sister' dances for her 'brother' is always the subject of comment and something for which a 'brother' must show gratitude in later years. Warlpiri 'sisters' also work but they do so by preparing tea, transporting it to the initiation ground and calling out all night. These differences are marked in what women call the 'half night' dancing which follows the first full night for Warlpiri and Aranda.

Half Nights

After the first full night of dancing there is a break of several days which, the Warlpiri say, allows the men to 'find' the new

5. I have been told that boys crawl between mothers' legs at this stage in a mock birth but I have not seen it myself. Like the ant hill (see footnote three) it is a matter which requires further gentle investigation but it does appear to indicate that 'birth associated' symbols in initiation are a continuation rather than a negation of women's reproductive role.
initiation ground and the Alyawarra women say is long enough to allow the leaves to dry on the break which the men construct at the new initiation ground. It is also for Alyawarra a time when visitors, called 'strangers', begin arriving from far away places. The real influx, however, does not occur until later in the week. Women also begin stockpiling food during this period. In the Warlpiri camp there is discussion about when the dancing will resume, how long it will last, the need to be finished before the next pay day and the influx of drunks. All women discuss the weather (both heat and rain are regarded unfavourably), the condition of the dancing ground, the persons who will visit and their stocks of fat, ochres and feathers.

Warlpiri women wait in their camps until they are called down to the initiation ground. Each night they prepare the tea and damper and each night they paint up. During every Warlpiri initiation I have attended there has been at least one occasion when the women were ready but the men called off the night's dancing. When this happens women grumble but take no further action. The initiation ground is out of sight and it is difficult for them to determine whether or not the postponement is for ritual reasons or others, such as the presence of drunks. This is accepted philosophically by the Warlpiri who will often continue despite interruptions from drunks, but eastside women refuse to dance if disrupted in such a way. They are, on the whole, better informed and can see most of the men's comings and goings from their camp. Both eastside and westside women exercised a high degree of choice as to whether they would attend a night's dancing or not. Different reasons were given but it was obviously a matter of personal

6. 'Family' is stressed throughout and the 'visitors' who arrive to witness the event, to share and extend the ritual range of countries celebrated, are called 'the strangers'.
A 'father's sister' of the initiate, that is, his joint *kirda*, paints a potential 'mother-in-law' while a 'sister' watches. A 'mother' also painted, sits in the background. The 'f.z.' is wearing a design for the country for which she is *kurdungwulu*. The 'mother-in-law' is being painted with the country for which the boy and his sister are *kirda*. The 'mother' is wearing a design for which she is *kirda*. 
preference not to attend every evening, although if a woman does not attend at all she is called lazy.

The *yawalyu* which Warlpiri women stage prior to these half nights of dancing, emphasise different lines of descent and countries. I have already discussed the mother's country painting up on the first night. On subsequent nights the 'sisters' of the boy display the designs of their *kirda* country. In this they are assisted or led by the 'fathers' sisters' with whom they are joint *kirda* with the boys. Women who are visiting from other countries are incorporated at the level of patrimoieties or semi-patrimoieties and are thus able to extend their knowledge and ritual range. Also, as on other ritual occasions, women use *yawalyu* during initiation as an opportunity to link dreamings across wide areas and thus to forge links with future possible in-laws. This applies particularly to the Aranda, where the mother of the mother-in-law and the mother of the boy are in the same semi-patrimoiety potentially joint *kirda* for a country, or *kirda* for countries in a 'company relationship'.

For Warlpiri women these *yawalyu* have an added importance. In the painting up and discussion of women during this period, the range of possible mothers-in-law is narrowed down and finally the mother makes her preference known in the painting order. As with the Aranda choice the woman must fulfil certain requirements but these are not as clearly articulated as they were by the Alyawarra. Warlpiri do achieve a balance in their exchanges, similar to that I describe for the Aranda, but my data for this is drawn from extant marriages rather than from actual initiations I witnessed or direct statements from women.

During the dancing of these 'half nights' which lasts from dusk until nine p.m., the women dance in different formations as they follow the travels of which the men sing. As each new song is begun
the dancing revives until the last song, when women say it is 'nearly
time' and prepare to leave. When the last song is sung, some return to
the main camp and mothers to a nearby special purpose camp. This
quiet and informed retreat of Alyawarra women is in direct contrast
to Warlpiri women, who leave amid cries and the howl of bullroarers.
There is also a marked difference in the way in which women approach
the male ground. Warlpiri women are called through in stops and starts,
whereas Alyawarra women wait within earshot of the men and then proceed
directly to the ground. Dragging leaves and calling, the 'mothers' run
through the initiation ground of the previous year where the leafy poles
are still standing and then down the centre on the new initiation ground.
There the male kurdungurlu have prepared a long east-west groove. This
leads from a single fire at the west end to where the men sit at the
east end. 'Mothers' and 'mothers-in-law' dance along this line to the
place where they state the boy is 'damaged'. (This appears to be
similar to the Warlpiri women's dancing on the ant bed - see footnote
three above). The leaves which the women drag are placed on the men's
wind break. When visitors arrive they, too, are required to 'open the
path' by dragging through leaves.

Throughout this period the initiate of the eastside ceremonies
is absent but the Warlpiri lad is present throughout and it is to
him that much of the women's attention is directed. After each night
of dancing the Warlpiri women retire with the boy to a clearing some
fifty to a hundred yards towards the main camp where they feed him.
He is carried aloft by 'mothers' who then sit with the boy on their
lap while the 'sisters' feed him and the 'father's sister' performs
certain rituals to ensure his growth within the country which she and the
'sister'share with him. There is a clear statement here that the
affiliation to his mother's country and the role he will play as
kurwungurlu is interwoven with his responsibility to his kirda country. In many respects these rituals evoke the symbolism of birth which, like the feeding of the boys, is an exclusively female activity. There are the smokey leaves and the exhortations to grow strong. It seems to me also to be an indication that women are co-operating in the symbolic rebirth of initiation. A 'sister' stands at the edge of the group of women and calls back and forth to the men. When the women are finished the boy is returned to the men by the 'sisters' and all the women hurriedly return to camp.

The Penultimate Night of Initiation

Although the Alyawarra women do not engage in a feeding ritual with the boys, they do have a night which achieves the same ends. At the conclusion of the 'half nights', usually after three or four, and when sufficient 'strangers' have arrived, the boy is ceremonially returned to the initiation ground. Following further ritual (described below) the 'mothers' and 'mothers-in-law' sit in an all-night vigil with him. During this night, when the naked boy sits clasped on the lap of the mother (see Spencer & Gillen 1899:238), with his mother-in-law seated behind, it is clear that he is being claimed as the child of women; that women bore him and women will marry him.

Before women engage in this vigil there is the 'getting of the somebody' ceremony by the men when firesticks are whirled into the air (see Spencer & Gillen 1899:365). Women are present throughout and thus although the 'somebody' is the father-in-law and probable circumcisor of the boy, the women continue with their care of the boy and statements that they have chosen a mother-in-law. Women emphatically state that the 'somebody' is not of the same family as the mother-in-law they have nominated. We have therefore an interesting conundrum. If the mother-in-law and father-in-law are not husband and wife, does the boy
have two possible marriage lines? Both will be within the same semi-
patrimoiety but may be of different countries. I tried to elicit terms
distinguishing a marriage which was the result of the nomination of a
mother-in-law from a father-in-law but met only with puzzlement. 'It
depends if she likes him and he likes her. It depends where they live',
was all women would say. Using my genealogies I explored the puzzle
with women whose 'promised marriages' entailed an age difference great
enough for the marriage to be the result of mother-in-law bestowal.
Again I met with shrugs. I tried with the young girls who I knew had
been nominated and who had daughters. This was more promising but
women wisely said,'Who knows what will happen tomorrow. People are
getting lazy'. It remains a puzzle but one which I think illustrates
that all is not fixed, that there is room to manoeuvre, that there is
room for choice, even for youth, and that relationships are spread
over the widest possible range of people.

The penultimate night of initiation for Warlpiri women is when
the choice of mother-in-law is made public to the men. Throughout the
'half nights' dancing the 'mothers' have danced with the firestick which
is rekindled anew each night by the sister but on this occasion the
mother passes it to the mother-in-law, who then dances holding it.
Although the possible range of women is known, the actual woman who
will contract to provide a daughter is not nominated until about two a.m.
during the women's dancing. It must be a woman who is present and women
will often say they were intended, but were not chosen, because they fell
asleep and did not dance, or because they were ill and did not attend.
The question, who will be passed the firestick?, becomes an item for
speculation and different reasons are advanced in support of different
choices. Once again women insist it is the mother's choice and that
both personal and ritual considerations are important. The mother of
the mother-in-law may support her daughter by her presence but her role is not institutionalized as in the Alyawarra case.

The Night of the Long Poles

The women's responsibility to dance is taken over by the men in the final night of initiation when the leafy poles are paraded, the choice of circumcisor made public and the boy is actually cut. For Warlpiri women this is an occasion to enjoy spectacular male theatre and retire early, for Alyawarra women it is another all-night stand which involves further action from them. This night is well documented by Meggitt (1962:301-3) and Spencer and Gillen (1899:240) and I do not intend to further discuss the male role. Rather, I wish to flesh out the role played by women who I maintain are continuing in a co-operative venture with their menfolk.

After the dancing with the long poles, during which time the mothers and mothers-in-law are seated in the middle of the group of men facing the dancing, and sisters assist in the stripping of the poles (see Spencer & Gillen 1899:244), the women retire to a nearby camp where they wait until just before dawn. Calls echo back and forth, the vibrations as the poles hit the ground are felt and the calls of 'wadja' rent the air as the hair string is unwound from the boy. Bullroarers can be heard. On a signal from the men that the boy has been cut, the mothers and mothers-in-law move quickly to the wind break of the men. The leafy poles, almost completely stripped, are now in two long rows from the single fire at one end to the ground where the women danced at the other. The women run the length of the ground to the waiting men, whom they rub against, breast to back, and brush down with supplejack leaves. The men click their fingers and assure the women that the boy is alright. The women then run back to the place where they have danced, to the place where they say the 'damage'
was caused. Here they kneel and rub out the traces of the dancing feet. 'That', one woman said to me, 'is the main thing'. The mothers then escort the mothers-in-law away to a secluded place where they remain until the 'finish up'.

**Finish up**

I have only seen this ritual with Alyawarra although Warlpiri women tell me they have a 'finish up'; the only Warlpiri ceremony I have seen entailed a rather casual exchange of clothing between the 'mothers'. For the Alyawarra of Warrabri the 'finish up' occurs within a week of the actual circumcision. The women say the 'mothers-in-law' do not like being away from the camp for long periods and the children of other women who are with them want to return to the settlement. On the appointed night, at dusk, the 'mothers' sit in a semi-circle facing east. The boy is brought and placed in front of them. A sister, with the firestick hidden behind her back, approaches from the north and plants the stick. The 'mothers-in-law' bearing gifts then appear from the north and run around the assembled group. Food placed by the 'mothers' on the ground in front of them is then distributed to the 'mothers-in-law' under the supervision of a 'mother's mother'. All the while the 'mothers' clap in the hollow lap style used during certain of their own rituals. The 'mothers-in-law' rub against the boy's back and then turn around to rub the 'mothers' breast to breast. Together the women blow out the firestick. In this action the boy is said to be 'turned around'. He is now a young man. He now has a mother-in-law, not just a 'cousin', he now has responsibilities to these women which are of a different order from when the women last sat with him. From then on all taboos on speech and movement are removed. The women have finished up. They have played their part in making a young man.
CONCLUSION

The role I have outlined for women at initiation is one which entails separate ritual action and co-operative ventures for which women are essential. There is room for negotiation and key decisions are by no means the prerogative of men. Women are continuing to assert their importance as nurturers of mothers and mothers-in-law but they do so within the context of their affiliation to country and are guided by their ritual responsibilities. They are not merely members of the boys' kin group, they are also descendants of the *jukurrpa* and male ritual action at initiation does not negate or undermine that relationship.

My depiction of women's role is a far cry from the image of terrified women running away from men who make total claims to women during initiation. Rather I have argued that women are also engaged in the business of making young men but in a distinctively female way. The feeding, the vigils, the choice of mother-in-law, all indicate that women continue to care for the boy's well-being. The *yawalyu* and ritual action suggest that women do so on the basis of their relationship to the dreaming. The use of designs, the rubbing of bodies, all indicate that women are not subsumed by men but that they continue to be able to transmit the power of the *jukurrpa*. The choice of mother-in-law points to the continuing importance of women's decisions in maintaining a society.

The focus of Meggitt's (1962:281ff) analysis of initiation is on the way in which men are establishing relationships with each other in a ritual context. Strehlow's (1947:108) interest in *tjuringa* ownership leaves women as the cooks and keepers of the home fire. Spencer and Gillen (1899:367,369) are at a loss to explain the presence of women during initiation, although they do allow that women have a role. The role which I have suggested women play at initiation is consonant with
the image that women project of themselves in their own ritual and with the nature of sexual politics in a sex segregated society.

My exploration of initiation from a woman's point of view is the final building block in the model of women's ritual domain which I have been constructing throughout the thesis. I deliberately delayed discussing initiation until I had established the nature of woman's ritual contribution to her society and the basis of her authority: I did so in order to provide the framework within which a shift of focus could be effected from initiation as a male oriented and dominated arena, to initiation as a time when both sexes make important decisions concerning the maintenance of the jukurrpa.

Before returning in the epilogue to 'the problem of women' posed by a sex segregated society, I wish to underline, with respect to initiation, that while the sex of the fieldworker has obscured the importance of women's ritual role, the questions ethnographers characteristically have asked has had a similarly distorting effect on our understanding of the diverse ways in which men and women are creative participators in the rituals of their country. As I explained earlier in this chapter, I had to learn to ask new questions, I was 'turned around' and refocussed. While the accepted frameworks explain male dominance of women and children in terms of the gerontocracy and polygyny, I have argued that women are not pawns in male marriage games and are not the uninitiated of their society. I have shown that women are autonomous, independent ritual actors who actively participate in the creation, transmission and maintenance of the values of their society. These values are not those which constrain woman to the domestic round of child rearing and limit her contribution to her society to the economic considerations. Aboriginal women are the proud nurturers of people, land and the complex of relationships which flow from the jukurrpa.
EPILOGUE

In the foreword I stated that this thesis was, in a sense, a documentation of my search for understanding. Chapter nine completes my exploration of women's ritual contribution to her society, but many questions remain. For this reason I have not written a formal conclusion: to do so would be premature. Rather, in this epilogue I wish to return to the broader issues which my analysis raises for those who would probe 'the problem of women' and who seek an accurate portrayal of desert society.

In exploring women's rights and responsibilities in land, the nurturance themes celebrated in ritual and women's power to exclude men, I have argued that women's self perceptions of autonomy and independence are neither fantasy nor nostalgic longings for a bygone era. But women's perceptions of themselves do present an analytical challenge to anthropological models which purport to characterize male-female in terms of male dominance. I have suggested throughout that our understanding of woman's contribution to her society is constrained by male oriented models within which our questions are located. Instead, I have begun with an examination of women's power base and then looked again at the nature of the relation between the sexes and of desert society itself. I have shown women to be social actors in their own right but I have also demonstrated their structural importance.

New understandings emerge when women are allowed to speak. Without a knowledge of the complexities and richness of women's ritual world, our ethnographic understanding of desert society is impoverished. Too often we have taken male ritual activity to be the totality of the religious experience in Aboriginal society. The vital and complementary role of women in maintaining the jukurrpa heritage is thus obscured. It is through the co-operative endeavours of both women and men that...
the *jukurrpa* is maintained across space and through time; it is women who keep the land alive and nurture the relationships of the living to the *jukurrpa*; it is through the links established by women that knowledge is transmitted and ritual reciprocity established; and it is through women's interactions with the country that the *jukurrpa* is reaffirmed and activated. That desert society is a living, vibrant, dynamic culture is apparent when woman's ritual contribution to her society is explored.

I believe the depiction of desert society advanced in this thesis furthers the search for a fruitful analytical schema informed by a feminist perspective. Earlier I argued in Chapter two that notwithstanding some 'problems in the model', there is considerable scope for progress towards a feminist anthropology that will yield insights regarding the anthropological understanding of Aboriginal society in general and desert society in particular.

Thus I am suggesting that a feminist approach can lead us to not only new understandings of women's place in desert society but also to a new conceptualization of the society itself. I have argued that a feminist analysis of desert society confronts a specific problem - sex segregation and women's autonomy - and I have suggested an approach tailored to that problem. I began within woman's domain; I looked for evidence to support women's claims to independence and autonomy; I allowed that dramatic changes had occurred in the relations between the sexes. I have thus been able to demonstrate that women are social actors in their own right but I have also been able to locate this understanding within a framework which demonstrates woman's structural importance in desert society.

While the focus of my ritual analysis was on the Kaititj women, I have situated this discussion within an exploration of women's lives at Warrabri and within the wider society of Central Australia. I have
argued that male-female relations are in a constant state of flux and that the impact of the changes of the last century has been devastating. The separation of the sexes, I suggested, was not a solution to the tensions engendered by male-female relations, it merely re-ordered certain aspects of these relationships. Underlying male-female domains there remains the unresolved tension between men and women. Woman's role in the maintenance of harmonious relationships has been taxed, eroded and usurped in a century of white colonization of desert lands. Thus while men and women have remained separate, the evaluation of their activities has changed as has the relation between the sexes. That this process is complex is evidenced in the different responses of women at Warrabri.

One important question posed by my analysis is how to evaluate women's power base and exclusion of men. I have throughout this thesis avoided speaking of sexual equality or inequality, because I believe these concepts disorient our understanding of male-female in desert society. Women too often have been cast as peripheral to the main religious purpose of the society and therefore necessarily unequal. I have argued that both men and women have a power base which is elaborated and celebrated in sex specific rituals. But, I have also shown that in jointly shared rituals, woman's participation is based upon her relationship to the dreaming.

I have not argued that women's autonomous ritual life is a challenge or a threat to the consolidation of a male power base. I have instead allowed that both men and women strain to consolidate their position and that this is evident in the way in which women extend their dreaming range and organize ritual relationships. It is the settlement life style which is the greatest impediment to the consolidation of women's power.
Separation of the sexes, I have suggested, once assured woman's independence but today it is the means of her exclusion from important political domains. Although this can only be an hypothesis, I would suggest that the higher the degree of separation of the sexes, the greater the possibility of women establishing and maintaining a power base which is both independent of, but inexorably linked to, that of the men. In desert society this power base was supportive of high status but it was a negotiable position. In the shift from a hunter-gatherer mode of subsistence to the sedentary life style on settlements, women have lost the assurance that they can maintain social harmony: consequently and tragically they have lost the independence which once backed their claims to power.
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