WOMEN'S SUBORDINATION AS A SOCIAL PROCESS:

THE WALBIRI OF CENTRAL AUSTRALIA

A THESIS

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By
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STATEMENT

I certify that all work in this thesis is my own

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In a given cultural context, a woman's relationship to a man may be perceived as "second class", "junior partner" or "partner". Regardless of a woman's status and how it is defined in relation to a man's, both men and women are expected to fulfill different social roles. Within some relatively egalitarian societies all men may be considered to be essentially equal, as well as all women. However, men and women as two separate groups may have different rights and obligations which may make them unequal. In such societies the anthropologist may perceive that in many social arenas women are coincidental, whilst men are the main cultural actors. Yet this observation cannot be rejected solely as androcentric bias. It is apparent that in some societies, according to male actors, women are considered as socially unequal. Women, as a whole, may not have the mobility of men nor access to social support systems enabling them to attain power.

In this thesis I propose the following two hypotheses: that in a society in which male superiority is an important value, for example the Walbiri of Central Australia, 1) women and the ideas attached to them permeate and are important in male dominated domains; 2) male domination emerges as a kind of cumulative effect of the ways several institutions interrelate. Amongst the Walbiri, both men and women share the same classificatory kinship system and hold matriline and patriline in common; however, there is gross inequality between the sexes in the utilization of these systems. I suggest that an understanding of the male/female dichotomy is crucial in an examination of the Walbiri social system. Although women may play their predominate role in the domestic and social fields, their work and how they are evaluated makes their presence significant in domains in which they are not very involved.

In Walbiri society male dominance is an important value (Meggitt 1974: 90, 91, 93, 104). I shall argue that the importance of women to men and the control of women through male unity is a theme which runs through different aspects of Walbiri society. Seen in this light male
control of access to ritual, political and kinship systems pivot on a series of interlocking mechanisms which function (in part) to maintain male domination at the expense of women. The control of women by men emerges as a kind of cumulative effect of the ways several institutions interrelate in Walbiri society and the asymmetric differentiation of certain cultural values. In this thesis I attempt an analysis of women as members of a wider social system than just the domestic realm. I will focus on their roles in society and the effect and implications of male dominated domains on these roles.

The anthropological implications of generalizations which classify women's status as 'high' or 'low' relative to men in a given society are examined in chapter one. In addition, I will discuss the limitations of studies on women which divide the field of study into two intractable halves: what women do/what women do not do. In chapters two and three the Walbiri political system is discussed and the differentiation made between power and authority. I will argue this differentiation must be made in order to gain insight into male machinations. The position of women and their importance to men are integral to men's power games: women are necessary components of men's manoeuvring. They are thus a factor which must be controlled. I will argue in chapter three that the segments of the social structure combine to create a system in which women can be subjugated and suggest reasons as to why. In chapter four the discussion on Walbiri women is balanced by examining their power within the domestic sphere. An examination of the domestic sphere shows women as valuable social actors and the importance of roles other than those dominated by men. In chapter five I examine the Walbiri myth, ritual, and belief system. Male ritual, beliefs, and myths are what Australian anthropologists interested in religion have usually studied. This chapter deals with the implications of male religion for women and their role in society. In the final chapter of this thesis, I will deal with the adequacy of my approach towards the understanding of the rank and position of women in Walbiri society.
CHAPTER ONE

Ever since Radcliffe-Brown, social anthropologists have examined social structure in terms of actions and institutions. Behaviour has been classified into numerous integrated categories. These categories have been so ordered that theorists often specialize in only one aspect of society. With the upsurge of the feminist movement, interest has been regenerated in another domain, women. This field of endeavour, however, is different from previous specializations by analysts. Instead of focusing on ritual, politics, or economy, the analysts who examines women must cut across these boundaries. Women and the ideas attached to them cannot be fully studied at any one level of society.

Women are sometimes regarded as less important than men. In societies such as the Walbiri of Central Australia, there is no question but that women are considered to be inferior to men. This belief holds true when one observes the daily workings of the society. However, studies which analyse male structures and beliefs often implicitly concern women. By deductive analysis and the use of the available data, I will examine how different aspects of Walbiri society, e.g. kinship, ritual and economy, inter-relate and the resultant effects on women. These elements will then be analysed regarding their disparate advantages to the two sexes. By comparing male and female access to the infrastructure of Walbiri society and its subsequent benefits and limitations to the different sexes, I hope to gain insight into the mechanisms by which sexual asymmetry is created and enforced. In this chapter I will examine the concept of woman as a less important member of society and the limitations of that notion.

I chose to examine the Walbiri as they have been studied by several different theorists each with different interests. Mervyn Meggitt is the most proliferant writer on the Walbiri. Based on his fieldwork done in the 1950's, Meggitt wrote the DESERT PEOPLE (1974). In this work he analysed all facets of Walbiri life, as he saw it. Women are not central to his analysis, but he does place them within his model of Walbiri social organization. Although a knowledge of social organization and women's place in it is a necessary part of any analysis, I feel it is somewhat short sighted as an end in and for itself. Indeed it is myopic to
examine women merely as regards their position relative to men. Such classification gives the impression that women are not a worthwhile study in their own right as their position relative to men is inferior. The theorist may then go on to analyse ritual, politics and other aspects of social life without having to complicate his/her theories by adding the part played by women. Having reduced social organization to a structure concerned only with men, thus omitting from analysis female-associated roles and values, the anthropologist arrives at conclusions for the social whole. However, the conclusions drawn from such methods must be viewed with some skepticism, at least regarding their applicability for the total society. Although theorists have tended to specialize in discrete anthropological fields, the purpose of our discipline is to enlighten us in the nature of human life within society. Although studies on male ritual or politicking are useful and interesting, without an analysis of their place within the particular culture and its effects on women as well as men, we cannot really understand its implications or gain any greater insight into its roles and function. Thus theorists who omit women from their analyses, may not be presenting us with even a true account of half the population. Rather, it seems, we are presented with a paper in which the realities of that society are distorted. Accordingly, the separation of men and women and their relative statuses in analysis has created an arbitrary division which may have other consequences on how we conceptualise a society.

For example, an examination of the differences between men and women usually concluded that the highest status that women can attain in relation to men is that of a junior partner. Women cannot play the same prominent roles that a man can do. This inequality is especially marked in those roles that are labelled unambiguously male. It is interesting to note that in R. Lee's and I. Devore (eds) MAN THE HUNTER (1973) women are only mentioned very cursorily. This edited volume is a compendium of papers given at a symposium which was to discuss hunters and gatherers. Although women in the tropical zones provide most of the food and in the temperate zones about an equal share (B. Hiatt 1974), the papers deal overwhelmingly with the male activity of hunting.

Amongst the Walbiri, hunting is a male activity; the meat that the men bring home is exchanged according to social requirements. The food
that women bring back is shared among the immediate family group. Thus in terms of men's labour their products are used to fulfil obligations outside the immediate residential group. Prestige is given by Walbiri men and by reporting anthropologists to men's hunting, because of its implications for social solidarity. However, it should be noted that male exchange of food can only exist because of the labour of women. The women supply the necessary food for daily sustenance thus allowing men to fulfil their obligations without fear of starvation.

The labelling of women as junior partners or as less important than men is a view of women that only encompasses one level of male/female relations. At another level women are the most important partners that men can have. It is their labour which allows men to fulfil their social and religious obligations. Many anthropologists concede that women play some role in male dominated fields, yet this role has only been acknowledged not explained. For the theorist has already described women as secondary, therefore their part in these facets of life is presumed to be secondary also. Thus the decision as to whose actions are most important may be perceived as subjective. A man's action may be perceived as significant because he is male, whilst the woman's role is subsequently relegated to a lesser importance.

In her discussion of Tiwi bride bestowal, Goodale (1974) revealed the non-sequitur type reasoning involved in the interpretation of female roles. She argued that Hart and Pilling (1960) were incorrect when they concluded that Tiwi women were bestowed by men. This conclusion followed from their initial assumption that women were inferior as regards their ability to control their lives and so, I suggest, Hart and Pilling neither expected nor looked for any female power in this male dominated society. They therefore arrived, quite logically, at the conclusion that men bestowed women. But Goodale adopted a very different viewpoint. She assumed women were not inherently or necessarily inferior in all, if any, domains of Tiwi society. Goodale concluded the relative status of women, as regards bestowal, was equally important as the part played by men.

1. This is similar to the time consuming activity of child-rearing. As this activity is fulfilled by women, it allows men time to take part in their ritual activities and fulfill obligations.
The generalisation that women's lower relative status is true in specific activities, however it is misleading when applied to the society as a whole. Male activity in some aspects of society, such as ritual, does not necessarily negate the importance of the role women may play within it. Although society is an interaction of the different categories that anthropologists study, i.e. political, religious, economic, some anthropologists prefer to treat them as distinct from each other. In the study of women especially these categories are seen to be separate. Usually anthropologists divide social activities into two discrete categories; (a) those which women participate in and (b) those which women do not participate in. Meggitt (1974) and Munn (1973), for example, described the most sacred and important rituals as those from which women are excluded. As a general description this may be true; however, it is inadequate. Women are also excluded from men's hunting, yet no anthropologist suggests that hunting is sacred. Conversely, men may not enter women's ritual, yet anthropologists do not attribute the same importance to women's ritual as men's.

As pointed out in the beginning of this chapter, androcentric bias is an unquestionable part of many anthropological analyses. The student who examines any problem through the literature must be aware of the pitfalls inherent in such writings. Although information was available, to me, much exposition on the data deals only with male aspects of life. Therefore, due to these and other reasons stated in the beginning of this chapter, I examined the effects of male structures upon women and the subsequent implications for the female role. To assist in this study, I have drawn upon some writings on women in other societies.

Phylis Kaberry was one of the first anthropologists who, adopting a female oriented perspective enriched our knowledge of the life of the Australian Aboriginal woman. Kaberry's work made male and female analysts aware of androcentric bias in anthropological studies. Kaberry published ABORIGINAL WOMAN: SACRED AND PROFANE (1970) in 1939. Although one of the first studies on women, it still stands as one of the best examples of its kind. Kaberry proved that women, at least in the Kimberly group she studied, were not the sullen beasts of burden described by earlier observers (Ashley-Montagu 1937, Radcliffe-Brown 1930). Later Kaberry published an account of women amongst the Bamenda in British Cameroons (1952). This study showed
that at least in one West African society women were held in high regard and enjoyed their freedom and were given responsibility.

Until recently studies such as Kaberry's were few and far between. Evans-Pritchard delivered 'The Position of Women in Primitive Society and Our Own' (1965) in 1955. He admitted that a Victorian male prejudice had influenced the works on the topic at the end of the nineteenth century.² In regards to studies on women in his own time, Evans-Pritchard acknowledges that they were either non-existent or inadequate (1965:57). With the upsurge of the feminist movement in recent years, anthropologists have started to examine the position of women in a more indepth manner. I have found some of these writings useful while seeking an approach to the problem of the status of women.

SOME RECENT WOMEN'S STUDIES

In WOMEN IN BETWEEN (1972), Marilyn Strathern weaves a subtle mixture of male and female world views and roles to incorporate them into an constitution of the social life among the Melpa peoples of New Guinea. Men in the northern Mount Hagen groups perceive women as peripheral to society. Anthropologists Vicedom and Tischner and Mervyn Meggitt (1964) have discussed the relative status of women in the Hagen areas. Strathern questions this approach.

'The topic in fact raises the whole question of whether one can usefully gloss women as having an overall "high" or "low" status. In making this assessment Vicedom had to use dialectic, alternatively weighing up positive and negative factors. What women do or think, what men do or think about them, is as complex a sphere as any other domain of social life' (1972:X).

And so, Strathern prefers to examine the roles of women in the Mount Hagen area and the effects of male alliance systems upon them. She concludes that although women may be seen as peripheral by men, the custom of marrying off female kin for the purpose of alliance results in a central role for women. Although men deny that women attain any prestige for their intermediary role, Strathern believes that this role allows women a degree of autonomy and power. In addition, male fears about the nature of women creates a modicum of self-determination which allows women this autonomy.

² For examples of these works see Mason, O. T. 1895 and Westermarck, E. 1921.
Thus, Strathern attempts to integrate male and female concepts of society and discover the reasons why female status appears different from what men perceive it to be. In addition, her study does not negate previous studies of the area. Rather, it adds depth and richness to our understanding of these people.

Volumes of edited work have also appeared on women in non-western society. Some of these volumes appear to have been hurriedly organised and the analyses poorly done. Out of these works, however, there are two which I feel deserve some discussion. WOMEN, CULTURE AND SOCIETY edited by Rosaldo and Lamphere (1974) is the result of indepth studies done by many anthropologists. The topics range from women in the domestic sphere, the male:female:nature:culture controversy introduced by Levi-Strauss (1969a,b) to women as political strategists. The collection of writings on different aspects of women's life succeed at a number of levels. Firstly taken as a whole, the articles suggest that sexual assymetry is not a topic to be taken lightly by analysts. Different societies have different types of sexual relations. As an area for study, sexual asymmetry provides an oft ignored facet. Yet its implications for the increased understanding of a society are numerous. As discussed earlier, Strathern (1974) saw male/female relations as problematic. By examining the forces which created the balance of male/female relations in Mount Hagen she discovered the subtle processes of male/female relations in society previously ignored by analysts. Such approaches are gaining momentum as both male and female anthropologists discover the richness that an examination of women in society can provide for their analyses.

WOMAN'S ROLE IN ABORIGINAL SOCIETY (F. Gale 1970) is an interesting collection on Australian Aboriginal women in different areas of the subcontinent. Unlike the theoretical issues raised in WOMEN, CULTURE AND SOCIETY, WOMAN'S ROLE IN ABORIGINAL SOCIETY generally deals with specific questions which have arisen about women in Australian studies. Nicholas Peterson's article 'The Importance of Women in Determining the Composition of Residential Groups in Aboriginal Australia' (1970b) argues that the patrilineal-patrilocal band which Radcliffe-Brown (1930:30) claimed as the basic element of social structure is a conjecture which may have never existed. Instead, Peterson suggests a model in which the main residential group was of a mixed lineage composition nature. Upon a first marriage a
young man, instead of bringing his wife to his territory, actually left his group to reside with his wife's patrkin. Young women, he argues, are the main suppliers of daily food. Thus older men whose wives are ageing and unable to gather a sufficient amount of food, attempted to retain control over their young daughters in order to keep their family unit economically viable. Throughout the domestic life cycle then, there was a constant flux between the husband's and wife's patrilineal estates.

This view of residence contrasts with anthropological beliefs on Australian bride bestowal. Many anthropologists described the young bride as being wrenching away from her kin, and forced into the position of an outsider in her husband's kin group. The relationship, however, appears as one in which both males and females retained rights and obligations to their own kin groups and one in which enforced residence for long periods did not apply.

Peterson's examination of women as valuable members of society has challenged some earlier anthropological analyses which did not recognize the importance of women's labour in Australian Aboriginal society. I wish here to pursue the question of bestowal and residence as it represents, to me, one of the problems in the analysis of women. The rules regarding the control of women in Australian Aboriginal society are often strict and well defined. With such rules regarding women, one might expect relatively little conflict or confusion in regards to such aspects as bestowal. As in many aspects of Walbiri life which concern women, this is not the case.

At this point, however, I would like to comment on some ideas Peterson did not take up. In Aboriginal society, women are married at a young age to men who are much more advanced in age. Thus, a woman is likely to undergo several marriages and may bear children by different men. There is no distinction made between children born of one father or another. All children of one woman call each other brother and sister, and except in terms of territory which they inherited from their genitor, are considered equals. As the woman advances in age, the age difference between her and her spouse may lessen. However, as an old woman she may have a spouse who is a great deal younger than her (Hart and Pilling 1960:18-21, Elkin 1974:158-159). Catherine Berndt (1974:67-70) points out that amongst Australian Aborigines, age as well as sex is used as a factor to determine status and
importance. Kaberry (1970:184) reported that in addition to the power a woman exerted over her children, as she grew older she extended this power over other kinsmen as well. She was sought out for advice and protection by younger kinsmen and attempted to maintain 'peace and quiet within the camp'. In addition to these roles, Kaberry reported, 'Together with the old men, they are repositories of myth and are one of the forces which make possible the stability and continuity of tribal life' (1970:184).

RESIDENCE AND MARRIAGE

I would like to suggest, at this point, that there are factors at work here other than exclusively male power structures and economics. If the factors motivating this residence pattern were purely economic, then why could not the husband's father claim the same right over his son's wife? Like his counterpart, he too may need the production of a young female to support his group. In addition, the man who is now married to a young girl's mother may not be her first father. If the child was bestowed upon birth, or even before her birth, then the present social father would not be the man who bestowed her. The new father, therefore, may not be in the same powerful position as the girl's bestowal may have been. Furthermore, Elkin (1974:78-79) states that although an individual received his territory and religious totem from his father, his membership in those groups into which he could marry were determined by his mother's lineage group.

Hamilton (1974:28-35) reports that amongst the Anbara community of the Gidjingali linguistic group in northwest Arnhem Land, there was some confusion as to who actually bestowed girls in marriage. Young women believed it was their father who bestowed them, older women believed it was their mother and mother's brother; whilst grandmothers claimed that they had the right and indeed had bestowed their granddaughters. Earlier Hiatt (1965: 41, 45) claimed that amongst the Gidjingali, ideally a mother and her brother bestowed her daughters in marriage. The mother and her eldest brother had equal say in this bestowal and their opinions were of more importance in the transaction than either the woman's husband or any of her younger brothers.

Goodale (1974:52-53, 55-56) states that amongst the Tiwi, the relationship between son-in-law and future mother-in-law was one of the most
important and longest lasting in the society. Although at puberty a girl's father promised her first born daughter (his granddaughter) to another man, the mother of the child could negate the promise. The future son-in-law was obligated to provide the mother of the girl with all that she demanded. Her demands could take the form of goods such as tobacco, clothes and money, or they could be in the form of services. If these demands were not met to her satisfaction, she could insist that her father bestow her daughter to someone else. The child's grandfather had no similar power. Instead, he could negate the promise if, after the marriage, his granddaughter was being mistreated.

In similar studies throughout Australia, the position and importance of the mother is either implicit or stated. The mother of a girl plays an important role; this importance is acknowledged by the people of the society. The son-in-law and his kin owe a debt to the mother and her kin for the bestowal or involvement in the bestowal and continuation of the marriage. Yet, the discussion so far has been too simplistic.

Peterson (1976, personal communication) pointed out that although mother and niece bestowal are the perceived ideals, one must also be aware that personalities and manipulation of others by key persons in the bestowal transaction can shape events in a direction other than that portrayed in cultural stereotypes. Amongst Australian Aboriginals the husband may be a great deal older than his wife and his wife's brother. Thus, although in some societies it is ideally the woman and her brother who are recognised as the bestowers, the woman's husband because of his advanced age and political ties, may be the one who, in reality, bestows the girl. In addition, Hiatt showed that, amongst the Gidjingali at least, that only a 'small percentage of marriage resulted from orthodox bestowal' (1965).

Often, however, the factors involved did not involve any usurpation of mother and mother's brother bestowal rights. Instead manipulation of the system may have been due to the scarcity of eligible women for marrying. This scarcity did not arise out of demographic factors, but probably from within the culture. Men had conflicting rights to women as wives. Such factors as age, niece exchange, and whether or not one man already had a wife whilst another was still a bachelor created disputes amongst men as to who had the right to a girl.
The overall power structure of bride bestowal in such societies then appears to be one of conflicting personalities, needs, obligations and rights. Thus, individuals are manipulating and working towards desired ends whether or not the factors which they are manipulating are legitimate or traditional. Commenting upon such manipulation of power Firth stated:

'There is struggle, there are alliances; there is respect for the existing system and desire to change it; there is obedience to the moral law and attempts to get round it or reinterpret it to sectional advantage' (1964:143-144).

THE WALBIRIS AS AN 'ELEMENTARY STRUCTURE'

This type of manipulation must exist in all societies. In the societies studied by Hiatt and others, which appear from measurements to have relatively few marriages made in accordance with the ideal rule, this seems particularly true. However, according to Meggitt (1974), the Walbiri of the central desert of Australia, display a strong correspondence between the ideal rule and real marriages. Meggitt reports that in the early 1950s, 91.6 per cent of all Walbiri marriages were made in accordance with the preferred classificatory mother's mother's brother's daughter's daughter, whilst another 4.2 per cent were with the acceptable classificatory mother's brother's daughter (1974:86).

The strong adherence of the Walbiri to their marriage rules, at least as recorded by Meggitt in the 1950s, has become a subject for debate amongst anthropologists. R. Fox (1967) in his review of DESERT PEOPLE, suggests that Meggitt and other Australian ethnographers use Lévi-Strauss' theory of elementary structures of kinship as a framework in their analyses. Lévi-Strauss' theory of kinship was first set out in his book THE ELEMENTARY STRUCTURES OF KINSHIP (1949, see 1969a). An elementary kinship structure is one in which potential spouses are designated by the kinship terminology. He contrasts this with complex structures which do not designate potential spouses. Whilst elementary structures reflect an overall view of the directional flow of women between groups in a society, complex structures are not concerned with this aspect of marriage (Lévi-Strauss 1969a; preface). The value of this work, I believe, lies in his overall approach to kinship systems. Fox, and in my view quite rightly, responds to attacks on his suggestion that Hiatt and other anthropologists reject Lévi-Strauss'
view because they take it far too narrowly (Fox 1969). Some anthropologists seem to view Lévi-Strauss' works as 'how-to' manuals, rather than theoretical viewpoints which have implications worth examining. The result of studies which rigidly adhere to one approach, rejecting the possibilities of any other approach whether one follows Radcliffe-Brown or Lévi-Strauss, in my opinion, tend to be uninteresting in their conclusions. Such works appear to be more concerned with methodology than with gaining insight into a society.

KINSHIP AND THEME

Lévi-Strauss' thesis that the practice of wife bestowal based upon exogamic rules results in group cohesion is not new; for others (i.e. C. Seligman 1925) preceded him in this concept. However, Lévi-Strauss' concept of kinship structures as having meaning and a constant theme throughout is his own contribution.

'On the contrary, each appears as a variation on a basic theme, as a special modality outlined against a common backdrop, and it is only the individual qualities in each which are to be explained by reference to causes peculiar to the group or the cultural area under consideration. What, therefore, is this common basis? The only one possible is a general kinship structure, more or less completely reflected in every system, but which all systems with any of the features enumerated in the previous paragraph (different forms of cross cousin marriage) partially exemplify, though in differing degrees (Lévi-Strauss 1969a:124).

Although Hiatt (1967) refutes the applicability of Lévi-Strauss' kinship framework to Australian Aborigines, he does eventually make an interesting proposition. The hypothesis was first put forth by S. D. Proteus in 1933. Porteus suggested that the marriage system of Australian Aboriginals provides a means by which men in authority retain power. Although Hiatt does not further research Porteus' argument, he does rephrase the concept into a hypothesis; ' Aboriginal models of kinship and marriage
function as the ideology of a class of dominant males' (1967:474). Hiatt points out that the apparent equality of the moieties and semi-moieties which control marriage, does not create equality in reality. Older men may have a plethora of wives, whilst young men have none. In addition, adultery is a serious crime. A young man, then, has neither the sexual nor economic support of a wife.

I suggest the kinship and marriage systems are manifestations of a phenomenon which permeates all levels of Walbiri society: the need to control women. Although matrilateral cross-cousin marriage can be viewed as a system which "pumps" women out in one direction resulting in increased social cohesiveness (Lévi-Strauss 1969:309), it is Lévi-Strauss' notion of 'variation on a basic theme' which I want to stress. I suggest that amongst the Walbiri the marriage system, like ritual, economic, political and kinship systems can be viewed as interlocking mechanisms which are variations of at least one theme: the domination of women.

Although Walbiri men may regard women as 'less important', their actions indicate otherwise. The practice of polygamy and matrilateral cross-cousin marriage limits the number of women available to a man as wives. The politicking and manipulation surrounding bestowal reflects this limitation. Goodale (1974), Kaberry (1970), Peterson (1970b), C. Brendt (1974) and Hamilton's (1974) analyses of marriage and bestowal throughout Australia discuss the various conflicting rights men have to particular women and the political manoeuvring which occurs. The unifying feature implicit or stated

3. Hiatt argues this proposition would be an interesting one, if empirical evidence to support it was available. In a later publication, Hiatt (1971) argues that men assert their dominancy over women's domain through ritual. In his examination of the purpose of secrecy and the imitation of female procreative powers he states, 'Aboriginal men assert a pre-eminent role in human reproduction by ritually magnifying male sexuality; and that they transform boys into men by imitating female reproductivity. The aim of acquiring genitals of the opposite sex is absent from the first case and, in my opinion, present in the second case merely as an expediency (that is, men are not "re-producing" in an attempt to emulate female physiology but to break the bond between sons and mothers). The purpose common to both cases is to extend male mastery into areas where women have natural advantages. The success of the manoeuvre depends on the ability of the men to delude themselves and, through secrecy, to mystify and intimidate the women' (1971:82).

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in all these writings is the value placed on women. Women are valued for their labour as well as for their procreative abilities. A man without a wife to perform the daily food gathering and domestic chores cannot fulfill his social obligations to the extent of a married man.

Like the Melpa people of New Guinea discussed by Marilyn Strathern (1972), amongst the Walbiri the relationship between men and women and the ideas attached to their roles form a complex system. Generalizations of 'high' or 'low' relative status are not useful when seeking an overall understanding of women in society. I suggest that to more fully comprehend the role of Walbiri women and their place in society, it is necessary to go beyond an examination of what they are or are not directly involved in. Instead of focusing only on what women do, it is necessary to also examine what they do not do. The exclusion of women from particular male practices must also be analyzed, especially if, as in the case of the Walbiri, they implicitly involve women.

4. See Chapter Four of this thesis.
MEN, WOMEN AND POWER

Mervyn Meggitt's analysis of Walbiri political structures in the 1950s emphasises the operation of norms and social sanctions. These institutions create social order and allow the society to function without recourse to any powerful leaders (1974:242-263). Amongst the Walbiri some men have more prestige than others, but none has more authority. Any authority and prestige which men may display is situational and cannot be used outside a specific context; obedience to these social and moral norms is an important value for the Walbiri (250). Adherence to these rules, they believe, distinguish them from and make them superior to other groups who do not obey the laws as strictly (251). Failure to observe these expectations results in penal action by socially designated individuals or groups. Such designations are decided by kinship relationships, either to the trespasser or to the injured party.

The Walbiri kinship system belongs to the bifurcate merging type called Aranda, after the people it is usually identified with. The system identifies four major lines of descent. These lines are distinguished in the second ascending generation. The matriline and patriline intersect in a grid pattern and focus particular rights and obligations on individuals in accordance with their relationships to other people.

'Indeed, perceptive Walbiri men talk about it very much in these terms. The interstices of the lattice-work of descent lines are the loci of a series of the social relationships that express important rights and duties connected with circumcision, subincision, ritual guardianship, and the disposal of women in marriage. These further reinforce the structure which, ideally, is comparatively rigid' (Meggitt 1974:83).

MATRILINE, PATRILINE AND THEIR FUNCTIONS

The patriline and matriline form part of the basis for matrimeoieties and patrimoieties. Meggitt shows, however, that matrimoieties, which at first appear as 'the important regulators of marriage', are actually of secondary importance to the matriline. For example, although a man's opposite matrimoity is considered "the source of shame", his wife's matriline is the "true source of shame". Matriline and matrimoieties do not form residential descent groups. Members of these social units only assemble for circumcision and death ceremonies.
and disputes over betrothal and marriage. However, due to the dispersion of Walbiri settlements in recent times, it is more difficult for men belonging to units to fulfil these obligations (Meggitt 1974: 193).

Meggitt states that although the Walbiri speak of marriage and betrothal in terms of the function of matrimoieties, it is the structural elements of the matriline which actually control this selection. A man marries his classificatory mother’s mother’s brother’s daughter’s daughter. His mother’s mother’s brother is a member of his matriline. It is the mother’s mother’s brother (and mother’s brother) who control both a man and a woman’s betrothal.

The patrimoieties, however, are more cohesive and considered as more important to the Walbiri. Male ritual and ceremonial duties and obligations are meted out in accordance with relations between patrilines and patrimoieties. A boy is initiated into a patrilodge on the basis of his patrilineal descent. The lodge is usually connected with a dream site located in his own community’s country. Through its ceremonies and rituals, lodges are believed to maintain the delicate relationship between man, society and nature. Internally, authority is distributed amongst the elder members of the lodge. However, this power can only be manifested in regards to ritual matters. Although particular lodges “own” particular dreamings, they need the assistance of other lodges and the patrimoieties to perform their ceremonies. Lodge members and their patrimoiety (owners) act out the ceremony, whilst the opposite patrimoiety (workers) perform the ‘behind the scenes’ activities.

The matrimoieties and patrimoieties form some of the components of the subsection system. However, Meggitt (1974:168-169) reports that the subsection system, adopted by the Walbiri in the last 100 years, is, for the most part, superfluous. Although the subsection system expresses social relationships, it is unable to fully encompass the intricacies of Walbiri life.

‘Indeed it is difficult to see what other motive than a desire to keep up with their neighbours could have impelled the Walbiri to adopt these new systems. They apparently possessed already such ‘section-like’ phenomena double-unilineal descent groupings, merged and named alternate generation-levels, and preferred marriage with a type of cross-cousin; and the existing kinship structure could perform all the important functions apparently mediated by the section and subsection systems’ (Meggitt 1974:169).

The importance of the matriline and patriline amongst the Walbiri is also evidenced in their cosmology. According to Peterson (1969) and Meggitt (1966:67, 1972), Walbiri cosmology divided the world into secular and ritual domains. The matriline, which is associated with notions of flesh, marriage and women, determines the secular aspects of life; whilst the patriline,
associated with spirits and noumenal existence, determines the ritual. Thus, the cosmology interacts with the Walbiri kinship system to form an integrative whole. Although patrilineal values are more cohesive and integrative than matrilineal values, their interaction and affirmation in the cosmology of the Walbiri creates a highly ordered system of personal and group obligations, rights and duties. Thus, although no person has overall authority within the society, their cosmology designates certain individuals within the matriline or patriline as those who should take action when a particular sanction is broken. It also is important when deciding group membership in any ritual or ceremonial enactment. Overall, Walbiri political structure is in accordance with the ‘master plan’ set out by their religious and kinship systems (Meggitt 1974:247).

Discussion of Meggitt’s work points to a view of Walbiri society as one with firm values, expectations and rigid social order. Meggitt emphasises the ‘cultural conservatism’ of the Walbiri (1966:67, 1974:252-254), i.e. these people uphold traditional concepts of the social and moral order. However there are marked inequalities between men and women, and between individual men.

In addition, I suggest, that these inequalities are structural. The reasons for these inequalities are numerous and include mental and spiritual incapacity. There are men in Walbiri society who, due to various forms of mental illness, will never be initiated in a patrilodge or take part in male secret ceremonies (Meggitt 1974:309). However, the omission of women from these ceremonies is the most common form of discrimination. Unlike the few men who are omitted from ritual activity because of their lack of mental ability, women as a group are excluded because they are considered to be spiritually different from men. A central component of a man’s personality is due to his patrispirit. Although women, too, possess a patrispirit it is not considered central to their personalities. As such it is men, not women, who are the custodians of the knowledge and ceremonies given by these spirits. Men are believed to utilise this knowledge for the benefit of society (Meggitt 1974:210). The exclusion of women from these
socially highly valued activities means that in various ways their place in society is
denigrated.  

The most striking difference between men is as regards the control and possession of wives. Some men, especially the young, have no wives whilst others have as many as six (Meggitt 1974: 78, 234). As women are the main economic producers in Walbiri society (B. Hiatt 1974: 7, 10, Meggitt 1972:92), men without wives are at an economic disadvantage. In addition, bachelors are at a political disadvantage as they who have no children or wife are felt not to have the experience necessary to have worthwhile opinions on any important matters (Meggitt 1974:235). Thus, a man without a wife is not only economically disadvantaged, his status amongst other men is lessened.

POWER AND AUTHORITY

How then can we explain in a useful manner the disparities which exist amongst men and between women and men?

One way of dealing with this problem is to begin with Weber’s differentiation between power and authority, i.e. ‘the legitimate exercise of imperative control’ (1964:153).

‘Power (Macht) is the probability that one actor within a social relationship will be in a position to carry out his own will despite resistance, regardless of the basis on which this probability exists . . . Imperative control (Herrschaft) is the probability that a command with a given specific context will be obeyed by a given group of persons’ (1964:152).

Weber’s approach to power and authority enables us to conceive of this matter at two levels, i.e. that of organisation and of the individual. For example, although no one particular person controls ritual activity, a small group of elders organise and direct them. These men, therefore, at some time in their ritual life have acquired ‘imperative control’ of a given group of people. However, outside the religious sphere of life they may have to face resistance to their will. Medicine-men, for example, possess a degree of respect for their curative and occult powers. In everyday life, however, they do not possess any special powers, nor are

2. G.H. Mead (1939, see 1950:315-317) emphasised the integrative features of social organisation and the implication for the psyche of the individual. Individuals are interlocked in a psychological unity and a self-conscious awareness of their own identity within a society. Such feelings are often based upon a feeling of the superiority of one’s self and one’s own group. For example, in the past the English monarchy required that individual English men and women subject themselves to the rule of ‘superior’ people, e.g. kings or queens. The rule of the king or queen gave the people a feeling of commonality. Whether a person was rich or poor, they were all Englishmen (and superior to all non-English people). The second way in which individuals attain a feeling of superiority through their culture is by the performance of a role which is socially important. In this case, one does not necessarily need a group of people classed as inferior. When one individual does not perform his duty correctly others involved with him regret the ‘shoddy’ or incomplete way in which the task was done. By forbidding women to take part in male, ritual, Walbiri men denigrate women on two levels. Firstly, women are excluded from the social euphoria created by the participation in these rituals. As women cannot take part in male activities they cannot enjoy the feelings of commonality and superiority created by their enactment. Secondly, male rites and rituals are perceived as fulfilling a social functions. As women do not fulfill these same roles, their work is denigrated to a lower social position.
they given any special concessions. For example, some medicine men do not have a wife. They, like the rest of the male population, must receive their brides through the normal bestowal channels (Meggitt 1974:249). Thus, although one can agree with Meggitt that no individual has access to overall authority ('imperative control'), some individuals do possess more power than others.

To analyse personal power, one must then examine Walbiri social organisation which sets the particular contexts through which particular men may exercise personal power. Unlike 'imperative control' which is based upon the probability that a given order will be obeyed within a specific context, personal power is based upon the maneuvering of social relationships by an individual to attain his goal. To achieve his goal he may face great resistance, therefore one cannot immediately calculate his success. Thus, the problem is to determine what this power is, how men acquire it and how it is used. Peterson offers some suggestions regarding this matter. He sees that 'women and ritual are the dominant foci of politicking in Aboriginal life' (1969:31). The interaction of the secular, represented by the matriline and women, and the ritual, represented by the patriline and men is the area in which the politicking is manifested.

WOMEN AND MALE POLITICS

The acquisition of women during initiation is one context where politicking typically develops. The ceremony not only marks the period when a boy begins the process of becoming a man, but also the period when he gains his potential in-laws and ritual friends. It is the responsibility of these men to ensure that the individual with whom they have been linked receives a bride from the proper matriline. The circumciser is chosen by a consensus of the boy’s father, mother’s brother, mother’s mother’s brother, and elder brothers. As the circumciser must provide a wife for the initiate, these men choose an individual who has not already committed a number of girls to young men. It is also at this time that he receives his jualbiri, one type of ritual friend chosen from amongst classificatory wife’s mother’s brothers, who belong to the future wife’s matriline, or wife’s father. The jualbiri ensure that the matriline will fulfil its bestowal promise to the initiate. If for some reason, the circumciser cannot provide a daughter, he first turns to actual or close brothers to provide a daughter or sister’s daughter. If these men do not have a girl to bestow, the circumciser then turns to the initiate’s jualbiri for help in acquiring a wife for the boy (Meggitt 1974:266).

In addition, it is at this period that a young man receives another type of ritual friend, bilarti. These men are chosen from classificatory mother’s brothers and mother’s mother’s brother. Like the jualbiri, these men support one another in time of conflict and must never quarrel amongst themselves. If an individual’s ritual friend has been injured in a fight and he was not there to support him, he feels intense shame. In this situation, a friend will try to avoid
seeing the injured person as it pains him to observe the consequences of his lack of support (Meggitt 1974:191).

Other than the jualbiri's and bilarii's roles in the circumcision ceremony, it is of some importance to note their importance later as allies to the individual. The initiation ceremony broadens the number of men that the individual can turn to for assistance in conflict. In a society which is as quick to aggressive male behaviour as the Walbiri, allies are important if a man is to defend his rights successfully and to ensure that he receives as little injury as possible in these disputes (see Meggitt 1974:95, 97-99, 100, 105-106 for examples of these types of disputes).

After initiation a man no longer has to depend only upon his brother and classificatory brothers and sons for help, but can turn to those people who stand in ritual relationships to him. Indeed, Meggitt notes that those chosen to be bilarii are always young men, which 'later has practical advantages in regard to shared interests and the provision of aid of various kinds' (1974:306). Conversely, the circumcised boy must later give aid to individuals other than those to whom he owed allegiance at birth. He aids his jualbiri and birlarii and, in addition, he assists his wife's father and wife's mother's brother. Thus, older men gain a younger ally to assist them. Unlike his relationship with his ritual friends, with his affines a series of exchanges exists. The exchange objects are usually hair string and meat.

Thus, as a boy goes through different periods in his life, his relationships and obligations are ritually expanded and sanctioned. At birth the boy is aligned with members of his patriline and matriline. At initiation, he acquires in-laws and friends whom he must defend and, in some cases, continue exchange relationships with. Upon the bestowal of his daughter, he acquires more in-laws with whom he has a defined obligatory relationship. Thus, upon bestowal of a future wife, the implications of which are expanded in a ritual context, a young man gains obligations and duties to a particular group of men as well as assistance from these men.

3. The wife's father, who is usually also a man's circumciser, is looked after by his son-in-law when he is old. The younger man is obliged to supply the old man with meat and ensure that he gets assistance if he is ill.

4. It is interesting to note that these objects are also used in payment of bridewealth and payment for particular services, such as circumcision. However, unlike payments for services, meat given in the series of exchanges is raw, whilst in bridewealth the meat is cooked. The girl's mother reciprocates with a gift of cooked vegetable food. This is usually a type of ground grass seed cake. This vegetable food is presented to the young man by the girl's mother's brother, as mother-in-law avoidance is strictly adhered to (Meggitt 1972:267-268). In view of Lévi-Strauss' analysis of the nature of raw and cooked food and their relation to affinal relations (1969b:94, 97, 142, 164), one could also analyse this in terms of the nature/culture dichotomy. However, as this is not directly relevant to the ideas in this chapter, I will not pursue this theory any further.
CHART 2-1: CHANGING RELATIONSHIPS

--- circumcision
--- bestowal

• ritual

○ female ego

△ male

a. at birth

b. at initiation of a young boy and bestowal

c. at bestowal of daughter

The above chart is a schematic representation of ritual and bestowal ties. A female has been used as ego as it is with her relatives that the young man is being linked. The jualbiri and bilarli ties have not been included, as the purpose of this chart is to represent those ties between men who are his affines, and the nature of their relationship between those people. The ritual tie, here, represents the ritual nature of the association between brothers-in-law.

At birth, a girl has a certain amount of men directly involved with her welfare. These men are already connected to one another by ties of ritual importance and affinity. However, three of the four men's interest directly involve the bestowal of the girl. At the initiation ceremony, a girl's future husband and her brother are added to the pool of men around her. It is interesting to note that, during this period, the brother is the only man with just one tie, whilst all other
men possess at least two ties in relation to this particular girl. At the bestowal of his sister's first daughter, the brother then increases his ties to two. At this time, the nature of these relationships and their importance begins to become somewhat obscure, i.e. many of the relationships charted would not exist as many of the older men would either be dead or too old to wield any real influence.

It is important to note that these relationships have not been weighted in any order of importance or power. Instead, these ties are viewed as a potential area where men may manoeuvre. A great deal of what a man makes of these relationships depends upon his personality and purpose. An interesting example given by Meggitt (1974:173-185) is an unusual dispute over the disposal of a group of women whose husband had been taken to an insane asylum. Although several men had rights in the bestowal of these girls, two men became the centre of the contention. Louis djuruburula, the real husband's half brother, and Yarry djabangari, the girls' classificatory father and step father, pursued the matter with greater ferocity than the others. Both men used different arguments to back their arguments and both men were given support in their dispute (for a more detailed discussion of this dispute see chapter three of this thesis).

By charting the relationships in this manner, one can see the complexity and quantity of relationships which are incorporated into the initiation ceremony of one male. It is important to recognise, however, that this represents the relationships of men in regards to only one girl. For example, the man who is chosen as her husband is shown on the chart to bestow only one girl, i.e. his daughter. However, he may also have a sister with a daughter. If this were so, he would be (as mother's brother) in a position to bestow another girl. In addition, he would have a ritual tie with his sister's husband. These relationships have not been included in this chart. The same holds true for all men shown here. A particular man may fulfil different roles to other men depending on their relationship to any particular woman. Yet, it is during the initiation ceremony that their relationship to any particular man will be qualified and publicly announced.

The initiation ceremony is a period when all these relationships, and the individuals who fulfil them, are mobilised and in action. The individual who is being circumcised and the bestowed girl's matriline, i.e. mother's brother and mother's mother's brother, are arranging a link between the two groups to be finalised in marriage. It is at this time that these relatives fulfil them, are mobilised and in action. The individual who is being circumcised and the bestowed girl's matriline, i.e. mother's brother and mother's mother's brother, are arranging a link between the two groups to be finalised in marriage. It is at this time that these relatives

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5. Radcliffe-Brown (1952 see 1968:64-67) suggests that the unity of the sibling group created the bond between ZD-MB, ZS-MB. This bond, he suggests, may also evidence itself in the kinship terminology. It is worthwhile to note that Meggitt (1974:155) reports that a man calls his son *nyalubi* and daughter *jundalba*. However whilst a man calls his sister's daughter by the same term as his own daughter (*jundalba*), he refers to his sister's son as *nyunjani* (138). One can suggest that a man uses the same term for both his daughter and his sister's daughter as his role in regards to the girl's upbringing and bestowal is similar; whilst his behaviour towards his son and sister's son is somewhat different.
become of great importance to the individual. For the boy being circumcised, they are not only aiding him in obtaining a wife, but are also selecting his future affines. Later these affines will play an important role in his life and he must fulfil particular obligations to them. At the same time, a confirmation is made between the two lines that they will be related by marriage. Gift-giving between the two groups begins and is focused upon the young man in whose name it occurs. The young man’s *bilarti* and *jualbiri* represent this promise by their immediate and close relationship with the boy.

At his circumcision, ritual friends (who represent his future wife’s matriline) help and comfort the boy during his seclusion and after the operation. The initiation ceremony, in this sense, is the time when all the people to whom an individual has allegiance and responsibilities co-operate for his benefit. Without this focusing period, the relationship between the men would appear somewhat attenuated as their responsibilities to the youth and their ability to perform them may not coincide. Each man will assist the youth in the future, however, it may not be possible to always be present during times of need. The initiation ceremony, therefore, may be the only time when all the boy’s ritual friends (and important affines) are present. During the ceremony these ties are publicly announced and recognised. The actions of these men during the initiation ceremony reinforces this recognition.

**WOMEN AND MALE DOMINATION**

So far this chapter has been concerned with male alliances. The importance and nature of these relationships to a woman has not yet been clarified. Whilst men manoeuvre and operate to receive and bestow women, the web of men who are important to a woman’s future and the future of her children begins to solidify. In this case, instead of receiving allies in the form of ritual friends, she gains men who have vested interests in her welfare. However, in a situation where the interests of men conflict with her welfare, the men will put their interests first.

Meggitt (1974) cites several examples where women are punished for their threat to male interests and domination. The woman who elopes is pursued by her (intended) husband and her male maternal kin. Her husband and his agnates beat the man who ran off with the woman, whilst her kinsmen beat and spear her lightly in the thigh (100). A woman who swears at her husband is also threatening the concept of male superiority. In one case, a Walbiri woman who was too free with her tongue to her husband in front of a group of men was knocked unconscious by her spouse with a boomerang. No man interfered with her punishment as the consensus supported her husband’s action (90-91). In addition, even when the woman is felt to have a case against her husband, she should not berate him. Instead, she should take the case to her father and let him take the necessary action (104-105).
The notion of male superiority is exceedingly strong amongst Walbiri men. Indeed, Meggitt states that although a man’s affines may try to shame him into better fulfilment of his duties as a husband and father, they will not usually try to punish the man too harshly for his behaviour as ‘This would indirectly attack the conventional belief in male superiority; and most men are more concerned to maintain male solidarity than to redress the wrongs done to women’ (1974:93). This is particularly evident when a woman has married outside her community. Although a woman’s real father may defend her from constant, damaging physical abuse from her husband, it appears this may be more because of affection than obligation. Indeed, if her actual father is too old to help her or lives in another community, her close fathers or other specified male relatives should defend her. In reality, however, a woman cannot depend upon relatives who are not directly related to her. These men may have no affective interest in her and, if other considerations are involved, will not assist her (Meggitt 1974: 90, 92, 122).

Thus, in theory and according to Walbiri ideology, a woman has particular rights and will be defended from physical harm; in reality, she often cannot rely upon the men who are her protectors to fulfil their obligations. Women’s rights are considered secondary to men’s. As it is men who defend women’s rights, if men feel that the fulfilment of their obligation to women is opposed to male interests they will not assist the woman. This results in the subjugation of women’s rights.

Van Baal (1975:72) suggests that in societies which practice bride bestowal women are not having their rights subverted. They acquiesce to having their partners chosen for them by the men in their kinsgroup as it is in their best interest.

‘... all the evidence we have, tends to confirm that they (women) are exchanged because they agree to be exchanged. Actually, it is their great asset and merit that they do. By agreeing to be married off she renders her brother an important and lasting service, lasting at least as long as her marriage endures ...

By consenting to being married off, the sister, physically the weaker, secures for herself a strong position. Her claim on her brother’s protection for her and her future children implies that her brother must have the right as well as the duty to intervene in the affairs of the family she is going to establish ...’ (1975:76-77).

Thus, according to Van Baal, women are not being forced into unwanted marriages for the purposes of male alliances. Instead, the marriage is also to the advantage of women, Van Baal claims that threat or fear is not used against women. Conflict between the rights of men and women does exist; women perceive that the system is to their benefit and agree to the terms set by their male kin.6

6. Van Baal (1975:78-79) later suggests that as women will be mothers, they welcome being given away in exchange for protection. In addition, as mothers they represent a mystical union of nature and culture. As such they have a tendency to mother all men around them. Thus, in a sense, a husband is seen by the women as a child and not a dominator. It is of some interest, however, that he does not discuss why this motherly interest does not extend to women, as women bear female (as well as male) babies.
However, as shown earlier in this chapter, men use physical force to support their claims over female autonomy. Any female attack on what men consider male 'superiority' and 'solidarity' results in the revoking of any claims women may have on male protection. Contrary to Van Baal's statement, women acquiesce to threats. The first threat is that she will be abandoned by her male kin who support her rights; the second is that her male kin will turn on her and that she will be subject to physical abuse from them. Brotherly protection is contingent upon the sister obeying his command, not on sibling affection. In addition, this 'service' rendered by sisters to their brothers does not result in the sister's protection. Unlike the suggestion made by Van Baal that the sister's agreement to her marriage places her brother in a debt to her, men hesitate to fulfil their obligations. As shown earlier in this chapter, men do not like to force a husband into the proper fulfilment of his duties. To do so would be an attack on the concept of male 'superiority'. Clearly, systems other than marriage exchange could result in women being protected from physical abuse. The difference between such systems may be what men get out of it, not women.

Unlike Van Baal, G. Simmel (1964:94-96) perceives that women, as the physically weaker sex, are open to economic and physical exploitation. As such women are dependant upon the particular customs which protect them. This protection, however, is not a binding obligation that men must uphold. It is more important to women to uphold these customs and, as such, give men no excuse to breach these customs which protect them from abuse. As there is no guarantee that a revolution would succeed, the result could be more exploitation than what existed before.

'This fight (women for protection against exploitation and physical abuse) which rarely pervades the inner and personal history of mankind, has rarely led to the direct cooperation of women against men. But there is a super-personal form which serves as protection against both of those dangers and in which the female sex is therefore interested, so to speak, in corpore: custom . . .

A strong personality knows how to protect itself individually against attacks, or at the most needs legal protection. The weak one would be lost even with legal protection if other, more powerful individuals did not somehow forego the exploitation of their superiority' (1964:94).

Thus, women forego revolution, in order to receive the best they can for the majority of their sex. Simmel's hypothesis, seems much more plausible than Van Baal's (1975). However, in the case of Walbiri women at least, one point needs to be brought out. Although, as Simmel points out, women may choose not to revolt because of the cost of a possible failure, there is no mechanism which allows women to co-ordinate as a group for a successful upsurge.

It is quite true that Walbiri women play a vital part in the economy, however, revolution is dependant upon more than the role that individuals play (as any trade unionist or militant is
Another important factor is the solidarity of the group. If the majority of individuals within the group do not agree to take part in the upsurge, or at least agree with its aim, the revolution cannot succeed. In a society where male claims on women are backed up with physical force of the men as a group, women (as individuals) cannot hope to overcome domination. The next chapter will deal with the social organisation of the Walbiri and why, given the situation, a female revolution is highly improbable.
FEMALE SUBJUGATION AND MALE POWER

Women are socially and ideologically the inferiors of men in Walbiri society. However, it is clear that this is not just a Walbiri phenomenon. Research from around the world and in our own society has shown that women hold a generally lower relative status to men in many different areas. In western society writers have analysed the subordination of women and attempted to understand it in terms of the society in which it exists. This chapter will deal with some of the western theories about the domination of women and apply them to the Walbiri. However, statements on women's subjugation and proof for its existence will not be the main topic for examination. Instead, I will try to answer the following questions. Firstly, how does the social structure work to create a system in which women can be subjugated? Secondly, does the subjugation of women fulfil any useful purpose for the dominant group, men?

In 1869, John Stuart Mill published THE SUBJECTION OF WOMEN (1973) which analysed female subservience in England. Mill's study about the power of men over women is one whose influence is still evident in the works of people studying modern women. However, some of Mill's writings suggest a type of reverse sexism. He writes:

Whatever gratification or pride there is in the possession of power, and whatever personal interest in its exercise, is in this case not confined to a limited class, but common to the whole male sex. Instead of being, to most of its supporters a thing desirable in the abstract, or like the political ends usually contended for by factions, of little private importance to any but the leaders; it comes home to the person and hearth of every male head of a family, and of every one who looks forward to being so’ (1973:198-199).

An argument, such as the one put forward by Mill, contains many analytical problems. Although some men undoubtedly receive some kind of personal gratification from any type of power they may possess; as an analytical precept it is lacking. Some men undoubtedly receive gratification from any type of power, whether it is over women or men. One counter argument that can be used against Mill is that women may not perceive of themselves as oppressed. Women, by being willing victims to men, therefore, detract from the personal gratification or pride their oppressors derive from their control. Mill, however, felt that this type of counter argument did not invalidate his thesis.

'When we put together three things — first, the natural attraction between opposite sexes; secondly, the wife's entire dependence upon the husband, every privilege or pleasure she has being either his gift, or depending entirely upon his will; and lastly, that the principal
object of human pursuit, consideration, and all objects of social ambition, can in general be sought or obtained by her only through him, it would be a miracle if the object of being attractive to men had not become the polar star of feminine education and formation of character' (1973:202).

It should be mentioned that Mill, like Freud, developed his ideas on women from contact with the middle classes, rather than the working class. However, the implications of this approach may be valid to both sections of the society. Women, even if they are not aware of the pressure of men on them, develop strategies which are in response to male attitudes about them. Oppression of any individual or group does not necessarily mean that a person must be either aware of it or even unhappy with it. It is enough that the system which uses individuals or groups for personal gain exists.

More recently feminist authors have turned their attention to this problem. Juliet Mitchell in PSYCHO-ANALYSIS AND FEMINISM (1974) examined Freud's analysis of middle class women in Vienna and discusses the psychological effects of patriarchal male ideology upon them. Kate Millett, in SEXUAL POLITICS (1971), sees the relationship between male and female in Western society to be political. That is, that such crimes as rape are basically those which allow men to retain their dominance over women. Such violent and aggressive behaviour by men, creates a tendency in women to restrict their own actions to minimise such intimidating situations.

Although the works of the three authors just mentioned deal with 'western' culture all these theoretical approaches can be applied to an examination of Walbiri women. Oppression of any type can not be said to exist in only one society. Older men may oppress younger men, younger men oppress older men or men oppress women. The manner of oppression may be social or individual in nature. Mill, Millett and Mitchell all emphasised the social aspects of subordination. For example, one can state that the relationship between sexes in 'western' society has political overtones. Not only may men use women as the means to power, but even the nature of the relationship between the sexes is a political one. As Millett (1971) shows, men retain some control over women through the use of social and physical force. The dominance of men affects women not only in physical activity, but also in how they approach the world.

WALBIRI WOMEN AND MALE DOMINATION

Turning to the Walbiri, although women have a fair degree of economic self sufficiency, they are dependant upon men for their protection in society. The woman without male kin is at the mercy of the physical force of other men. For example, if a betrothed or married woman attempts to run away with a man, she is pursued and punished not only by her husband and his
kin, but also her maternal kin. Under normal circumstances maternal kin are a woman’s protectors, but in such an offence they become her punishers (Meggitt 1974:99-100).

Although women attain some security by acceding, at least outwardly, to the demands made on their behaviour by men, other possible forms of protection could be adopted by women. One alternative form of protection is female solidarity. Simmel (1964:132-134) reports that female solidarity would be the result of conscious striving on the part of women. For the Walbiri, Simmel’s hypothesis holds true. As female groupings would cause conflict with kinship ties, women must be aware and committed to whatever cause brought them together. Although, amongst the Walbiri, female solidarity does exist to some extent, I suggest that their co-operation is less extensive than that exhibited by men. Demands made upon women by the male protectors create a system which factionalises women as a group. For example, the ritual system serves to unite men on large scale; men work together as a common group. Men are united, not only in one community, but through the use of ritual ideas involving other communities and other Aboriginal groups (Meggitt 1974: 36, 40, 41, 46, 67, 68, 233, 285).1

Although men may have their conflicts, it is interesting to note that one area in which they work together is to promote male superiority over women. Meggitt cites several examples of the effect of the belief of male superiority on women. For example, women cannot swear at their husbands. For a woman to berate her husband is considered an attack, not only on him, but on all men. If a woman swears at her husband, he must respond with physical violence (1974:90). In addition, if a woman does not fulfil her duties as a wife, she will be quickly punished. However, if a man does not fulfil his obligations as a husband and a father, her kin, who should reprimand him will hesitate to do so. To publicly shame him, would be an attack on male superiority. A man would thus have to commit a fairly serious ‘crime’ or be a perpetual offender for the wife’s kin to punish him. Men also support a sexual double standard. Brothers may exchange wives for a short period; but if the wives were to suggest this, the men would be suspicious that the women preferred other men to them (104). Another form of this double standard is the attitude towards adulterous affairs. If a man has an adulterous affair it is considered by the men to be amusing and is condoned. The woman who has an adulterous affair is considered promiscuous and the liaison is shameful. Women resent this double standard, but the men are oblivious to it (104). Although women dislike the double standard, they support their male kin in disputes. This support will occur even if it puts them in conflict with their own sex and female kin.2

1. Meggitt remarks that the Aranda and the Yanmadjari are considered to be half-Walbiri by the Walbiri. He attributes this attitude to the fact that they ‘have a long, common boundary; they have always traded together; they share totemic ceremonies, myths and tracks; and intermarry’ (1974:36).

2. Meggitt gave no explanation as to why women support their male kin rather than female in disputes. However, he did state that this support of male kin was expected in Walbiri society (1974:123).
Meggitt (1974:136) reports that although sisters should display support and solidarity, they often display hostility over particular men.\(^3\)

**MALE AND FEMALE SOLIDARITY**

Men support and maintain social rules and institutions which allow them general overall solidarity. Women’s institutions, however do not support a similar female organisation. For example, although women’s ritual (Munn’s *yawalyu*, Meggitt’s *jauwalyu*) deals with dreamtime ancestors as does men, it does not have the same social implications as men’s, but has definite and significant meanings for women. These meanings relate to women’s role as mothers and individual desires. According to Munn (1973:34-40) the designs used in these ceremonies are deposited in individual women. The owner then extends ownership to her co-wives and sisters-in-law (husband’s sister and brother’s wife). Her daughter has subsidiary rights and her husband is an honorary holder. In addition, the design may have been dreamt by her husband and then given to her. This is in sharp contrast to men’s ritual. The strict delimitation between male and female, evident in men’s ceremonies, is somewhat clouded in women’s. Although men are not allowed to take part in female ceremonies, the subject matter of these rituals is not hidden from men. This is emphasized by the fact that men can dream symbolic designs and rituals which fit into and are acceptable to the women’s ceremonies. There are no examples of where women have been able to similarly contribute to men’s ceremonies.

Men and women differ in their use of principles for organisation of rituals. Meggitt (1974:188-190) reports that the endogamous alternate generation moieties are more significant to women than men.

‘The chief function of the endogamous moieties (alternate generations) appears to concern the allocation of roles in the few ceremonial activities that are peculiar to women — in particular, the secret *djaradja* and *jawalju* dancing of the Ngalia women at Yuendumu and Mount Doreen . . . Apparently the moiety “boss woman” is chosen on the basis of her maturity, knowledge of the designs, songs and dances, her organising ability and her forceful personality.’ (1974:189-190).

The chosen ritual leader supervises the painting of the members of her moiety by the opposite moiety. This is similar to the “owner”—“worker” relationship used by men in their ritual organisation. However, according to Meggitt, whilst women use the concept of alternate generations to decide this division of labour in ritual, men divide in terms of patrimoieties. Men refer to their own patrimoieties as *gira* (fathers and sons) and the opposite moiety as

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3. This hostility is due to the Walbiri practice of sororal polygny. Although co-wives usually exhibit solidarity, arguments due to the husband’s preference for one wife and jealousy between wives, are intense and not uncommon.
gururnulu ("those who give arm-blood for ritual decoration" or "those who may not act in particular rituals").

Munn (1973:14) asserted, however, that Meggitt was incorrect in at least one aspect of research on the importance of the different moiety groupings. In her analyses of women's ceremonies, Munn could find no evidence to support Meggitt's findings on alternate generational groupings as a structural feature. Instead, Munn found that women could be painted by women from either their own moiety or the opposite one. In addition, in direct contrast to Meggitt, she found that women preferred painters that were either cross-cousins or sisters-in-law, i.e., members of their own generational moiety. However, these relationships were not expressed in terms of 'my own moiety'; instead they were perceived by the actors in terms of a dyadic kin relation (Munn 1973:14).

Munn's contradiction of Meggitt has some interesting implications for the study of women's solidarity. If, as Meggitt asserts, women were utilizing the general principal of inter-generational moiety co-operation, without reference to particular dyadic kin relation, the effect might be a base for interaction and obligation beyond those normally acted upon in daily life. In addition, the painting of a woman by her cross cousins and sisters-in-law, as well as the extension of rights by a woman of her ceremonial designs to her sisters, co-wives and sisters-in-laws, reflects the limited aspects of women's usage of any larger interactional principles.

Munn (1973:211-221) discussed the differences between the organizational and symbolic principles in male and female rituals. Whilst men are aligned in corporate groups for their ritual, women's ritual is channeled through individual women by means of their personal dreams (1973: 213-214). For example, whilst the male banba ritual is performed by the owning patrilodge, it benefits both 'owners' and 'managers'.

'On the basis of the characteristics of banba ceremonies described here, it is possible to suggest that the banba production of ancestral forms constitutes a process whereby sexual-procreative resources are transferred from one patrimoiety to the other, and from maternally-affinally linked males into a patrilineal descent group, a process that makes possible transgenerational, cosmic continuity' (Munn 1973:208).

Whilst men project social objectives in performances of their secret ritual, women deal with personal desires and motivations, i.e. female sexuality and children (Munn 1973:213). Thus not

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4. These different translations for gururnulu refer to rules or the lack of them controlling the relationship between a particular actor and the man who should donate blood for use in his ritual body decoration. For example, men at Phillip Creek stress that the blood should be from a close brother-in-law of the actor's. However, at Hooker Creek and Yuendumu, a man of either patrimoiety may donate blood (Meggitt 1973:203-204).
only do men and women use different organizational principals for the organization of their rituals, but they also reflect different purposes and aspirations. Men are concerned with the society, whilst women are concerned with either theirselves or with individuals directly related to them.

**MALE SOLIDARITY**

The implication of the different principles of recruiting ceremonial group member of males and females is, I suggest, crucial to an understanding of the different nature of the two groups and factionalization of women into smaller groups latently serves the purpose of allowing men to dominate women more easily. Men, through ritual, are uniting by a principle, whilst women are acting on actual relationships. For example, the ritual friends of a man are not, in reality, always related directly to the woman the man is marrying. They may be only members of his wife’s matriline (e.g. classifactory MMMZDS). Women, however, interact with women who are directly related to them through their husbands (i.e. husband’s sister) or are their actual close kin. Thus, only male relationships can be extended beyond actual affinal relationships that exist between close relatives. Meggitt (1974: diagram 3) indicates the importance and intertwining of kinship and ritual relations for Walbiri men.
Remarks:

a. To simplify the diagram, I have indicated only males.

b. ^ = (lodge) patriline of descent.

c. R.S. = patrimoieties.

d. = matriline of descent.

e. P.Q. = matrimoieties.

f. = direction of circumcision-relationship and the giving of daughters in marriage.

g. = ritual guardianship and exchange of sisters in marriage.

h. R1 = EGO's (lodge) patriline.

i. P1 = EGO's MATRILINE = WB's marriage line = “MBS” alternative marriage line.

j. Q1 = EGO’s marriage line = WB’s matriline.

k. Q2a = EGO’s alternative marriage matriline = “MBS” matriline.

l. Ideally, the structure extends indefinitely in all directions.

(Meggitt 1974: diagram 3, The structure of Walbiri kinship)

Meggitt's diagram graphically illustrates the complexity of ties between Walbiri men. For example, ego's mother's brother is a member of ego's matriline (which assists ego in receiving his wife). In addition, his mother's brother is a ritual friend of ego's father. The mother's brother is also the receiver of ego's father's father's (who may also be head of ego's patriline) line of circumcision and daughter bestowal obligations. Although, theoretically, Meggitt's diagram can be used for both men and women, I suggest that the intricacies of male relationships is in marked contrast to relationships between women. Whilst, as shown in Meggitt's diagram (above), male ties form a multi-faceted lattice of rights and obligations, women's are single faceted. In Meggitt's remarks to his diagram he states: 'To simplify the diagram, I have indicated only males'. However, his omission of women from the diagram is due, not only to his need to simplify the model, but also to the peripheral importance of women to it. The practice of the bestowal of women is one of the primary ways men relate to each other. However, they are not only the reason why men interact but also the means.

In addition, male relationships theoretically extend ad infinitum. Thus, for men, male solidarity has an ideological premise which is highly supportive. The importance of this principal is exemplified in Meggitt's account of the friendship between Paddy djabaldjari and his close sister's son, Jim Tulum djuburula (1974:140). Although Tulum was considered by the Walbiri as a man of little esteem and had attempted to run off with Paddy's daughter-in-law, the two men had a good relationship. When Meggitt enquired to Paddy about his comradeship, Paddy
responded: "Yes, Tulum is a larrikin, a man who is no good at all. He is always in trouble with women. But I can’t quarrel with him; I have to like him, for he is my boy, my close sister’s son."

**WOMEN’S SOLIDARITY**

Unlike the mother’s brother and sister’s son tie exemplified by Paddy and Tulum, the relationship between mother’s sister and sister’s daughter is not based upon obligation. The mother’s sister is classificatory ‘mother’ to the child (because of the practice of sororate, she may also be the child’s mother’s co-wife). The mother’s sister may assist in the education of the female child. In fact, the relationship between these individuals is usually very close. However, Meggitt (1974:127-128) reports that real mothers generally resent any interference with their child-rearing tasks. Indeed, such interference may result in particularly vicious fights between women. The mother-daughter relationship is also fraught with conflict over childrearing. Grandmothers feel great affection for their grandchildren and often interfere with their upbringing. This interference results in numerous fights between mothers and daughters. In addition, the relationship between father’s sister and brother’s child is one without obligation. Although the father’s sister has no duties to fulfill in regards to her brother’s children, ties between them are significant when the children are either close kin or reside in her country. However, the ties only exist under these circumstances, women are not interested in more distant relations as are men.

Women, therefore, interact within a circumscribed number of possible relationships. In addition, assistance and interest appears to be due to emotive, rather than obligatory, reasons. It should also be noted that in actual affinal relations women are being related by men who are endowed with power over them. The importance of this fact is shown in a description of a conflict given by Meggitt (1974:95). A woman who fights with the wife of her husband’s brother may be beaten and berated by her husband. Therefore, if a woman puts her own feelings above her husband’s important relationships with other men, she may suffer the consequences of male’s physical superiority. This relationship is similar to that described by Millett in SEXUAL POLITICS. That is that the physical abuse of women by men is political in nature. Such actions reinforce male dominance over women as individuals, as well as a group, through psychological as well as physical means.

In addition, Meggitt reports that all forms of female solidarity except mother-daughter, are extremely tenuous. Forms of female solidarity exist between adulterous wives, co-wives, sister-in-law and sisters. Adulterous wives assist each other in their extra-marital affairs by not reporting to any male relatives. However, this trust is somewhat reluctantly given. A woman never knows when, because of some dispute, the other women will inform on her (1974:106).
Co-wives are usually united by affection and by the problems they both face as wives of the same man. Meggitt claims that the bond ‘is a more intense form of the tenuous solidarity that most women display in the face of male superiority’ (1974:109). Co-wives share their possessions, not by law, but through affection. They hunt together and help take care of each other's children. However, there does exist some rivalry between the women. In addition to problems concerning raising each other's children, as reported earlier in this chapter, there is the rivalry of women who share the same husband. Meggitt (1974:78) shows that thirty-three percent of all married men have more than one wife. However, what Meggitt does not show is that fifty-six percent of all married women share the same husband. Thus, polygyny has a greater overall effect upon women than men.

Sisters should support each other and do display great affection for each other. However, as they may become wives of the same man, hostility may grow between them as they compete for the husband's affection. About thirty percent of all co-wives are related as sisters, half or full; and approximately three percent are parallel cousins (Meggitt 1974:79). Thus, although sisters should support and assist one another, the practice of polygyny may result in particularly vicious fights between them. Another form of female bonding exists between some sisters-in-law. This usually occurs if both were young when they were married. In times of birth, they may act as midwives to each other. However, if one of the sister-in-laws is older, then this friendship will not usually develop. The older woman may see her position as one who is concerned with insuring that her brother is not cuckolded. If the younger woman does engage in an adulterous affair, her older sister-in-law will berate or even physically attack her (1974:162-163).

The strongest bond between women, that between mother and daughter, is one of the longest lasting in Walbiri society. However, girls are usually married and residing with their husbands by the time they are ten or twelve years old (Meggitt 1974:80). As marriage between communities is statistically about equal to those within a community, a significant number of girls are separated geographically from their mothers at an early age. In addition, even if a girl marries a man from her community, she has gone from being under the control of her father to being under the control of her husband. Although the father and matriline still retain some control over her, her new husband receives the major control over her daily life. Previously, the mother may have been able to influence some of the decisions made about her daughter through her husband. The new marriage effectively destroys most of this influence. As the Walbiri practise mother-in-law avoidance and a young or old man must literally flee at the sight of his

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5. Meggitt (1974:57) states that if a girl is very young (between the ages of seven or eight) for the first year or so, the couple will live in the young girl’s parents’ territory to lessen the unhappiness of the mother.
mother-in-law (Meggitt 1974:153-154), the mother of his wife is not able to exert any direct pressure upon her daughter’s husband.

Whilst a form of female solidarity does exist, it is a tenuous bond. Most male alliances, as earlier discussed, are backed with prescribed behaviour and obligatory aid or exchange; female alliances are based on a common problem or kinship. It is interesting to note that the mother-daughter bond, which is affective and prescribed, is not broken by a dispute. Instead, they may be separated by distance. At the very least the mother loses some amount of her personal power in deciding the future of her daughter to the girl’s husband. This does not mean that women do not form social groups; on the contrary they do. However, their formations are on a much smaller scale than men’s. Whilst men’s stress obligation and assistance, women’s stress friendship and primary female kin. Women will assist each other in fights and exchange gifts. However, in all but the mother-daughter and sister relationships, the friendship precedes the obligation. These female bonds are more tenuous than the male ties. In the case of kinship bonds, obstacles can be placed in the way. However, the second tie is dependant upon friendship; if the friendship is broken, the support and exchange is stopped.

No woman can stand on her own in Walbiri society. Men, as earlier stated, tend to put their concerns before women’s. Women do not have a large enough social group to put any pressure on men to fulfil their responsibilities to them. In addition, no framework exists to allow women to unite as a group. Thus, women must remain within the limits set by society and especially the men who have vested interest in them. This ensures some protection and modicum of security. Because women are important in Walbiri society, the men receive a great deal in return for their protection.

WOMEN AS OBJECTS FOR CONTROL

Women not only provide children, child care and the majority of food, but through these actions ensure men status within their society. Children are important to men. Regardless of the pain that fathers are said to feel when their daughters are claimed by their betrotheds, the taking of the child cements a bond between the men. Not only does bestowal in marriage of a girl child create a bond between two men, it reinforces the relationships of all men involved (i.e. MB, MMB). In addition, women by performing the more time consuming acts of child rearing and food gathering (including the preparation of food) allow men the time needed to reinforce their complicated network of male ties. As women are so important to men, I suggest that women cannot be allowed to make their own decisions. If women made their own choices, an already complicated system would be further complicated. Men would no longer be able to manipulate through the already existing male channels. Instead, they would have to negotiate not only with men, but also with women. This, given the male belief in the superiority of their
sex, would not be acceptable. Instead, men continue to work through male channels, support male superiority and ensure that women will accede to their demands.

If, for any reason, women decide to make their own decisions and overcome the problems inherent in the system, they face the retribution of the men. Meggitt (1974:173-184) reports a complicated argument over the disposal of five women in marriage. The women's original husband, Romeo, after years of unusual behaviour (which ended in his assault on some men and his attempted suicide) was judged insane by a hospital in Darwin. Later, he was committed to a hospital in Alice Springs. After a year had passed it became obvious that Romeo would not be returning to the camp. In the meantime, Romeo's half-brother, Louis, had taken Romeo's two wives to live with him. These two women gave Louis a total of five wives. Many men felt that five wives were too many, especially for a relatively young man. In addition, widow's (which some men preferred to believe the two women were) should not be given to a close brother of the 'dead' man. Close brothers should be too grieved by the death to accept or gain women from it. As Louis was particularly difficult about giving up the two women, anger against him rose in the community. Instead of giving up two of his women, some men felt that he should lose more of his wives. During the extremely long sequence of events the five women, tired of being argued about, left Louis and joined the widow's camp. They refused to leave until they had decided as to what their future would be. Normally the women would have been thrashed into submission for their affront to male solidarity and superiority. However, as a European authority was present to protect the women, this usual tactic was not employed. Instead, all the men who had previously been fighting united to induce the women to return to the camp which they had left. Within a few days the rebel's solidarity had broken and all the wives returned to Louis' camp.

However, a similar event of a woman deciding to leave her husband resulted in a much more violent outcome. After her husband had inflicted several severe beatings upon her, a woman left him to reside in the widows' camp. When her husband discovered that she had left, he rampaged naked through the camps swearing obscenely and waving his boomerangs as he went. When he found his wife at the widows' camp, he beat and raped her then forced her back into his camp. Because her husband was a strong and able fighter, no one stepped forward to protect or assist her. In addition, the men stated that by abandoning her husband the woman had lost the right to be protected or defended by her male kin (Meggitt 1974:90). It is difficult from Meggitt's account of the dispute to determine which is the most powerful of the two reasons given as to why the woman was not helped. However, it seems likely that the power and fighting ability of her husband was the immediate reason. Meggitt reports that during this fight the community was shocked by the man's behaviour. Onlookers to the event left as they did not wish to see the woman's humiliation (1974:90).
WOMEN AND SOCIALIZATION

Women, however, are controlled by more than physical violence and lack of female solidarity. Women are socialized into roles and behaviour which work to keep women politically weak and allow men to maintain their dominance over them. I believe that this material can be examined in light of Mill's statement quoted earlier. Women and men in Walbiri society consider the mother as primarily responsible for her children. This strong tie between mother and children is not only due to the fact that women are the main providers of food and care for children. The Walbiri also believe that there is a physiological and spiritual link between them. This spiritual link is due to beliefs about the roles of two kinds of spirits, the conception dreaming spirit and the matrispirit in foetus creation. The former spirit enters the woman's womb, the latter is automatically transferred while the woman is carrying the foetus. These two spirits make the child is some way part of the woman and part of the ancestors of her matrilineage. That so, the link between mother and child is deeper than just the spiritual and affective ties between them. Walbiri also believe that women are best fitted for rearing children. However, if the child is over five or six years old the husband can dispute a woman's rights to the children. Public opinion will support the man's case. It is believed that a man should have the right and enjoyment of assisting his son in the circumcision ritual and guiding him through his ritual education. If the child is female, he should retain his rights to her so he may fulfill any ceremonial obligations he may have given to bestow her in marriage (Meggitt 1974:100).

Women feel that they have primary responsibility for their children and that they may lose them if they leave their husbands without the assistance of their kin to back them up. These two things act as a profound obstacle against women with children who wish to elope with another man or leave their husband against their kinsmen's wishes. A woman, it is thought, should be sensible about her children's welfare. Therefore, if she wishes to leave her husband, she will leave the children behind. There are two additional reasons for this decision. Firstly, the journey is likely to be an arduous one. She and the man she is eloping with must move quickly to keep ahead of her husband or betrothed and her kinsmen. If children were brought along, their pace would be slowed and greatly increase the possibility of getting caught. Secondly, if a woman leaves her children behind and her husband has several wives to take care of them, he may not pursue her so assiduously. The husband may decide that the woman is not really

There is a third spirit in the child, the patrispirit. However, the patrispirit is more active in men; it contributed to their personalities. Women also have a patrispirit; however, its involvement with their personality is negligible. This, for the Walbiri, explains why women behave differently from men. It also provides an explanation as to why women are represented in men's ritual, but cannot take an active part (Meggitt 1974:210). The implication of this belief will be discussed later in the chapter on ritual, myth and beliefs. Caroline Ifeka (1978: personal communication) has also suggested that the belief in the commonality of the patrispirit amongst men and women can also form the basis of male and female differentiation. In HOMO HIERACHICUS (1972) for example, Dumont shows that the Indian caste system must have some concept of unity in order to differentiate between the jatis.

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worth a great deal of trouble and that her separation from the children is punishment enough. Children and the beliefs about the responsibilities and obligation of the mother, create a situation where the mother has to make the decision of eloping with another man and abandoning her children or remaining with her husband and retaining her children. A woman with children is responsible not only for herself but for the welfare of her children.

WOMEN'S RIGHTS VERSUS MEN'S GOALS

Collier (1976:89-96) argues that to examine women as political actors, they must be viewed within their particular cultural context. She perceives that almost every woman is under the authority of at least one man. Therefore, if women seek to attain their own power they must necessarily clash with men within the area of the use of legitimate power. By seeking their own demands, women can be in conflict with the goals of men.

Amongst the Walbiri, men tend to view women's political activities as idiosyncratic and the effect of women's inferiority. In addition, a woman's political activities can be seen to conflict with those people to whom she is bound by social obligation, close kin and affines. This is due to the fact that women are mainly involved with people within a domestic context. As such they use personal ties, which they have in common with other women and their male kin.

In addition, Collier, like Rosaldo (1976:36), perceives that there is a correlation between women's relative status and differentiation between domestic and political spheres. If this distinction is sharp, then the relative status of the women will be lower. If the distinction is blurred, then women will be able to involve themselves to a critically valuable extent in the political realm and their relative status will be higher. Earlier Sacks (1974:207-222), reworking the ideas of Engles' thesis (1891, See 1972) in the ORIGIN OF THE FAMILY, PRIVATE PROPERTY AND THE STATE examined his ideas on the subordination of women. Engles argued in an evolutionary framework. His thesis stated that before the concept of property, men and women had equal status and production was within a large residential group. The smaller nuclear family did not yet exist. Individual members of a household performed services and worked for the good of all household members, rather than for individuals or couples. The use of property by men for exchange and its implications for political maneuvering and the production of goods by women for use only within the family because perceived as separate, rather than complementary. With the onset of the concepts of ownership and private property (controlled by men), the role and position of women was denigrated.

Sacks applied Engles' ideas to four African societies with agricultural economies, with classes and without classes. The interesting pattern that emerged from her study was that woman's relative status in society declined as their work became more domesticated and less
involved with the society as a whole. When individuals are involved in labour for society, Sacks calls them ‘social adults’ (1974:214). She stated:

‘I have suggested, then, that there are two aspects to women’s position — women as social adults, and women as wives — and these can vary somewhat independently. What determines, how, or whether, women are regarded as adults is not the same thing as what determines their position vis-a-vis their husbands. Basically, women are social adults where they work collectively as part of a productive group larger than or separate from their domestic establishment’ (1974:218-219).

Amongst the Walbiri, as discussed earlier in this chapter, women’s role and labour is sharply defined as belonging to the domestic sphere. Although women gather the bulk of the daily food, it is the food that men hunt that is used outside the domestic group. Sacks expands Engels’ concept of social labour to ‘include any work done ( singly or as part of a group) for use or appropriation by someone of another household’ (1974:212). For this to make sense in terms of Walbiri society, I feel I must define ‘social labour’ in terms of what the people perceive it to be. There is no doubt that exclusively male ceremonies are considered the highest form of social labour by the Walbiri. Male ceremonies such as Gadjari and the Big Sunday complex are procreation rituals which guarantee that animals, plants and humans will be renewed. Basically, they ensure that the life giving essences left by dreamtime beings will continue to replenish the world. Thus the ceremonies practiced by men are for the good of society. Indeed, according to their belief system male rituals are essential for the continuance of Walbiri society (Meggitt 1974:220). It is interesting to note that Walbiri men (especially the workers who assist the owners of any ceremony in the ‘behind the scenes work’) consider these ceremonies as hard work rather than entertainment. One Walbiri man commented: ‘This Big Sunday is a really important affair, and we working men must toil hard to follow the line properly’ (Meggitt 1974:232).

POLITICAL MANEOUVRING AND WOMEN

Sacks, Rosaldo and Lamphere’s ideas are interesting and useful in terms of an analysis of Walbiri women. Firstly, women are considered the inferior sex. As pointed out earlier in this chapter, women’s attempt at self determination conflicts with males’ political manipulations. As women are involved with a more limited group of people than men, they are basically interested in either their own welfare or their friends and close kin. This includes individuals of either sex. Men manipulate in exclusively male groups. However, women are not limited to either totally male or female groups. They may manoeuvre politically in both. Although a woman is excluded from male groups, she may have a relationship with a member of that group. Thus,

indirectly she may be able to apply some pressure on that group without being directly involved. The primary example of such a male would be the woman's son.

Young boys are under the control of their mother for the first few years of their life. The nature of the male role amongst the Walbiri limits the amount of time which a father spends with his young son. Although the father-son bond is strong and the relationship between them affectionate, it is not a time consuming relationship. As the father is a ritual and political actor, he must spend a great deal of his time in the company of adult men. In addition, the father does not take his young son on hunting trips with him; the young male is taken by his mother on her gathering excursions. For the first nine or ten months of his life, a boy is carried everywhere by his mother. The mother provides the child with food and, like the father, protects him from danger and attacks. It is not until the boy is able to walk well that he begins to spend more time with his father. However, the earlier relationship of the boy and his mother results in a strong affective tie. It is interesting to note that the role of the son changes as he gets older. In the beginning he is completely dependent upon his mother. Once he is old enough to get round by himself, he begins to spend more time with his father and other young boys. Upon initiation he is made an adult member and is ready for marriage. As an adult he becomes a member of the group which controls his mother. This, one could say, is a double edged sword. Not only has he become a dominator, but he is also one who has great affection for his mother. As such, he may be able to influence the body of men in some manner which may be useful to his mother. The woman with an adult son now has some influence over the group of men, which she did not have previously. In addition, she is now an older woman, she has had more time to learn the male system and develop friendships and alliances. Although Meggitt, unlike Kaberry (1939), does not report any increase of power with old age, it is still reasonable to suggest that an older woman may have more implicit potential power than a younger woman.8 In addition, Meggitt does report that older women are chosen to be ritual leaders of women's ceremonies (1974:190). This lasts until the woman is too old to be able to perform her duties well; she then nominates another woman to take her place.

Secondly, the distinction between the domestic and ritual-political realms is marked in Walbiri society. Meggitt (1972) and Peterson (1969) report that in Walbiri cosmology the secular, domestic aspects of society are linked with women, whilst the ritual and ceremonial are attached to men. Due to this separation and the fact that they are considered inferior, women cannot take part in the ceremonies which are deemed most sacred. It is important to note, however,

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8. In addition, Meggitt (1974:210) reports that a few of the older and more inquisitive women had managed to pry information out of their loquacious husbands about male rituals. Some of these women have worked out some aspects of lodge organisation and how they fit into the structure of their society.
that the ritual of circumcision, which they are not allowed to attend, is the one ritual which affects their lives directly. It is at this time that a young man is formally promised a bride by particular men. By refusing her admittance into this realm, men are making clear where women’s politics belong, in the domestic sphere. Women are also not allowed to see particular sacred objects as they are said to be dangerous to women. This is probably due to the idea that although women have a patrispirit, it is not an active factor in their personalities as it is in men. As men’s ceremonies and lodge membership is based upon the patriline, perhaps they consider the presence of the patrispirit as ‘too strong’ for women. If women do see either a secret male ritual or sacred objects they will be beaten by the men; in the past, however, they would have been immediately killed (Meggitt 1974:210). They also run the risk of supernatural punishment. This fear is backed up by cases where women actually do, either purposely or accidentally, see those things they shouldn’t. Meggitt (1974:260) reports a case of a widow who accidentally stumbled on a male ritual. The woman then left and within a few days had withered into a mass of bones. Although she recovered from her physical illness, she remained insane.

As women cannot take part in these ceremonies, men perceive themselves to be the representatives of their female kin. Thus, women are being represented in a lodge which they know little about and whose functions they are ignorant of. This, compounded with the heavy sanction against their ever learning its intricacies results in a situation in which women are being represented in a lodge which does not deal directly with their daily needs. The only way which a woman can use these situations is to attach herself to a male who is involved in the ritual.

SOCIAL ORGANIZATION AND MEN’S POWER

The social system of the Walbiri, then, is organized to assist men in keeping control of women. Thus, the matrilineal-patrilineal descent system through which people organize the different facets of their lives, is essentially a system which women live under, but in which men manipulate. This system of reckoning allows men to extend their relationships beyond those individuals to whom they are directly related. However, for women this extension cannot be used. Instead they depend on personal and close kin relationships.

Women are important to male status and male alliances. As such, women are not allowed to decide their own futures and make their own decisions. I suggest that one reason why men support the concepts of male solidarity and superiority is that by so doing they support a system which subjugates women to men’s advantage. If women were allowed to override male decisions on such things as bestowal of girls in marriage, this would weaken the power and prestige of men. The structure of Walbiri society is organized to minimize the possibility of women confronting men successfully. Women are mainly involved in the domestic scene and are responsible
for their children. The possibility for women organizing on a large scale is negligible. Women relate to other women on a more personal and friendship basis than do men. Men have far reaching alliances and obligatory relations with other men. Thus, women as a group would have to relate on a much larger principle than they do at present to form groups which could withstand male solidarity and power.

Up to now, women have been described as being under male dominance. However, this discussion is somewhat unbalanced in its presentation of female life. In some areas of life, women can live relatively independently of men. The next chapter will deal with women in the domestic scene and their power and self-sufficiency in this area.
WOMEN'S IMPORTANCE IN SOCIETY

It is not just recently that some have written of the subjugation of Aboriginal women by their men. Ashley Montagu (1937:23) viewed women in Australian societies as little more than 'domestic cows'. More recently, Kenneth Maddock commented on Australian Aboriginal marriage systems and their effect on women. '... freedom is denied to women ... The denial of women's freedom is easily perpetuated, because women are customarily at a disadvantage compared to men and custom is sanctioned by force' (1975:61).

As discussed in earlier chapters, women are under the influence of men in a great many matters. However, regardless of this, it must be remembered that each woman is still an individual. As individuals they fulfill certain necessary and important roles in society. Once their position is labelled as subsidiary to men, some theorists disregard women from the rest of their analysis. Such an omission reveals a lack of insight about the lives of Aboriginal women. Until recently, only two analysts had examined Australian Aboriginal women in their own right. Phylis Kaberry in ABORIGINAL WOMAN: SACRED AND PROFANE (1939) analysed Aboriginal women in the Kimberly region in the north-west of Australia. Catharine Berndt published an account of women's ritual in northern Australia in 1950. Both works showed how, in some social areas, women are autonomous and not under the control of their male kin.

However, it must be stressed that, as shown in the last chapter, there are particular boundaries women can not step over. Women can not interfere with what men perceive as men's business. In addition, they may not affront the concept of male superiority. Women, however, do work for personal gain. Such machinations are those which relate to their position and given role in society. As Marie Reay (1970) and Nancy Munn (1973) have pointed out, women's goals relate to personal ambitions in love, homelife and are for the benefit of their children.

'The female role ... is focused in the personal, biological, and family place of life maintenance. The part women play in ritual (including their role in men's initiation rites) and the major functions of their own ancestral designs tend to be confined to such matters as female sexuality, personal health, and the growth of children' (Munn 1973:213).

It is unclear as to why women's interests are focused on these particular aspects. Although the sorts of roles that women fulfill have been called 'natural' by some analysts, it is obvious that they are reinforced by the society. If a woman steps outside these boundaries she is no longer fulfilling her stereotyped role. As such, she may be heading for conflict, not only with
men, but also with women. In addition, as shown in chapters two and three, women do not have a feminine oriented social structure which enables them to manipulate as the men do. Thus, their interest in kin and their children is not surprising. To attain their desires, then, they use primary kin and call on supernatural agencies to assist them.

Women, therefore, do have some amount of power and can manipulate and try to attain their goals. Yet, it can be correctly stated that any powers they derive are related to their role and status within the domestic realm. Nancy Tanner defined the role of mother as structurally central when she had 'some degree of control over the kin units' economic resources and was (is) critically involved in the kin related decision process' (1974:31). These two criteria are fulfilled in Walbiri society. To fully understand women in Walbiri society, the analyst must take cognizance of these criteria. However, before elucidating on this point, it is important that theories relating to women's position in non-western societies around the world be examined. Such an examination of the work done on other societies can help in the task of unraveling the implications of women's position in Walbiri society and how anthropologists have interpreted them.

The anthropologist who adheres strictly to the notion of male dominance and builds models solely on this, inevitably ends up with too rigid a viewpoint. This idea implicitly categorizes the society into two intransigent groups, i.e. domestic, women and impotent versus public, men and powerful. Yet this belief that what is public is powerful is too simplistic to understand the conflicting interests and male/female relationships which exist within Walbiri and other Aboriginal societies. I suggest that power for men and women is dependent upon the particular situation surrounding a decision. Using Weber's definition of power as discussed in chapter two of this thesis, it is imperative that one defines the setting of any usage of power. Furthermore, I suggest that the lack of understanding of this distinction results in such misleading and vague terms as 'matrifocality'.

CONCEPTS OF MATRIFOCALITY

Tanner (1974:131), in her cross-cultural discussion on matrifocality, lists a series of criteria that must be met if a society is to be considered matrifocal. Firstly, the mother must be structurally central in the domestic sphere. Secondly, within the society in which the first exists, the relationship between the sexes must be egalitarian. Both sexes must fulfill active and important roles in the economic and ritual aspects of life. In addition, Tanner states that matrifocality exists in those groups where the 'culturally defined role of mother . . . is a powerful, economically significant, and culturally central one within the kinship group'. Thus, matrifocality and the relationship of women to it should not be described in terms of its negative aspects, i.e. what men are not; but rather in terms of what women are. Peter Kundstadter and
Sidney Greenfield are two theorists who have defined matrifocality in terms of what men are not and, in my opinion, added to the confusion as to what the term means and what its implications are. Peter Kundstater (1963), in his cross-cultural survey on the matrifocal family defined this system in terms of what men were not. He used as the basis for this argument societies in which the father, for various reasons, was "absent". Thus, he defined fatherless families in our society and the Nayar of India both as manifestation of this phenomenon. Randolf (1964) and Tanner (1975) took him to task on this issue.

'Investigating male roles can never tell us whether a kinship system is matrifocal; but for systems that we know to be matrifocal because of the nature of the mother's role, it is possible to differentiate subtypes according to how other roles (male and female) relate to the mother role' (Tanner 1975:134 f.n.).

Sydney Greenfield (1966:413-414) made a similar error. He proposed that matrifocality exists in Barbados because of the pressures of the highly stratified social system and the lack of status and income available to men in the lower levels of the social strata. Since men were unable to support their families, they tended to leave the household. The household then became matrifocal, or in his terms 'denuded' (415). Again, matrifocality has been ascertained in terms of what men are not. Greenfield's analysis is based upon the absence of men, not the lives of women. Thus, the implication is that there is something 'unnatural' about a society in which women are dominant in the household. This is, of course, a fallacious supposition on which to base an analysis.

Raymond T. Smith (1973:121-144) argued that although poverty may be conducive to the occurrence of matrifocality, it is not the only factor involved when discussing its appearance within an area. Smith perceived it as the result of a strong tie between mother and child to the exclusion of the same relationship between father and child. Thus, in a sense it is not an 'abnormal' institution, but an over-emphasis on what could be termed an entirely 'normal' universal; which develops often under certain economic conditions and values.

One study that examines matrifocality in terms of the structural position and importance of women within society is Hildred Geertz's THE JAVANESE FAMILY (1961). Men were present within the Javanese family as husband and father but, she asserted, played a peripheral role in it. In the town, where the extended family was more evident than the village, the relatives within one household were more likely to be consanguinal rather than agnatic relations. If one had to share a home with a relative, it was considered preferable and acceptable to move into households by which one was related through female relatives. As regards children, if there was divorce or separation the general rule was that offspring went with their mother to her new unit. When a child was adopted or individuals desired a child, there was a strong preference for women to receive and desire children from their own kin group (1961:41-46).
Geertz claimed that within the nuclear family and kindred network, the woman has 'more authority, influence and responsibility than her husband, and at the same time receives more affection and loyalty' (1961:41-46). In Javanese society, women exhibit a form of solidarity and inter-group assistance on the informal level which men do not. Thus, matrifocality is a phenomena which extends beyond the context of the domestic unit. It exhibits female ties on a larger scale than the immediate family and goes beyond the physical bond expected between mother and child. In this sense the role of the woman is a cultural creation, not merely the result of the 'natural' or biological event of childbirth.

MATRIFOCALITY AMONGST AUSTRALIAN ABORIGINES

It has already been shown that in traditional Walbiri society the bond between mother and child is strong. It is further extended by the fact that children spend most of their time in the company of their mothers who provide them with protection, care, food and other necessities. In non-traditional areas, Barwick (1975) and Rowley (1972:329-333) have acknowledged the importance of the Aboriginal woman in keeping the domestic unit together. I suggest that the role of the traditional woman must be considered when examining the role of the urban woman. Such an examination elucidates the position of women in traditional society and leads to greater insight into their role in urban areas.

Rowley (1972:329) reported that in the non-traditional Aboriginal households in New South Wales, there was a great deal of evidence to support the idea of matrifocal authority. Lickiss (1971:208) in her study of twenty-two Aboriginal households and one hundred and twenty children in Sydney, found that in twenty-two percent of the households an adult female was clearly dominant, whilst in only seven percent an adult male was clearly dominant. In the remaining households she was unable to ascertain who fulfilled the dominant role. A grandmother was invariably the dominant figure if she lived either in the household or in close proximity. Rowley stated that in his study of New South Wales urban Aborigines, twenty-one percent of the households had female heads and of all the people twenty-two percent were in households in which the woman was managing without the help of a spouse. These figures are similar to those he found in the Eyre peninsula which were twenty-one and twenty-three percent, respectively.

In South-eastern Australia, Barwick (1974:157) reported that 'Men have nominal status as household heads, but older women (spouse, mother or sister) are the effective managers and usually, since they incur any extra work, decide who may join the household'. Aboriginal women in non-traditional areas receive self-satisfaction in much the same way as do traditional women. Women make most of the daily decisions about the welfare of the domestic group and children. She gains respect through her fulfillment of, what Barwick (1969:89-90) called the 'good woman'

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role. Thus she is judged on her fulfillment of the role of mother and kinswoman. She is expected to take care of her children to keep them clean, to protect them and to 'do battle' for them. A woman should never desert her children but should take them with her or place them in the care of maternal female relatives, either her mother, sisters or aunts.

Barwick (1969:90) suggested that because of the commonality of experience of having to battle for their families, a form of female solidarity existed. Women would generally try to assist a mother in any way they could, even if they were unsympathetic about the factors which caused the plight. Thus, although they may have felt the woman had brought the misfortune upon herself, she would still be given support to help her out of the situation.

That there is a strong tendency for the matrifocal situation to exist in urban Aboriginal areas was shown by Barwick, Rowley and Lickiss, yet the reasons for this existence were expressed by Lickiss and Rowley in terms other than a propensity in Australian Aboriginal society. Both viewed this matrifocality as the result of the 'culture of poverty' which created this phenomenon in poor areas throughout the world. Yet, to examine matrifocality in terms of a universal phenomenon related to poverty is to over-simplify the reason for its occurrence. Usually matrifocality is explained by low economic status which results in male frustration and insecurity. Lickiss (1971:224) stated 'a deserted wife or unmarried mother is financially more secure than a woman in an unstable cohabitation situation'. Rowley (1972:332) viewed matrifocality as the result of men's seasonal and temporary work which forced them to live away from home for long periods of time. Although I certainly would not argue about the effect of poverty in this issue, this urban tendency should also be examined in terms of traditional Aboriginal family structures.

In Australian hunting and gathering society the family was never dependant upon the husband-father for economic survival. Women always provided the bulk of daily food. Men acknowledged women's economic independence and did not have feeling of inadequacy or reproach because they were not the main providers of food. Men's importance to the family was not as provider, but as pater and protector. Men were important to the society mainly in the public spheres as ritual and political actors. Men work for the propagation of society through their enactment of dreamtime ritual and maintain social order through their political machinations.

The lack of understanding displayed by some Western officials on the male-female make-up of the domestic unit of Australian Aboriginals has created problems for Aboriginal women. Hamilton (1975:173-174) reported that at Maningrida in the Northern Territory, men who received money for work done on the station made the traditional payments to their wife's
parents and spent the rest of their money on their own personal needs and desires. Men resented any demands made on their money by wives and children. Women, having been forced to live in settlements, could no longer depend upon their own ability for food gathering to support their families. Women received some child endowment money. The amount of the endowment was not, however, enough to provide for the needs of the mothers and their children. White officials, ignorant of the traditional domestic independence of Aboriginal women, felt that the men should use their money to take care of their families.

Barwick (1969:90-91) reported that although Aboriginals in South-eastern Australia defined a ‘good man’ as a hard worker who brought home a wage and fulfilled his kinship obligations, few women expected a man to live up to these standards. Instead, actions or lack of action were only condemned when the behaviour of the father-husband threatened the stability of the family.

Thus, if matrifocality is viewed as a domestic situation in which women are politically and economically dominant, it is not a totally alien or new phenomenon. The father, in a sense, has always been peripheral within the daily workings of the domestic group. In the city it is not his familial importance which has been eroded, but his public and ritual importance. Thus, matrifocality amongst urban Aboriginals might be more realistically examined as an overemphasis on a ‘normal’ mother-child relationship, rather than as an ‘abnormal’ phenomenon created solely by the culture of poverty. This approach is well illustrated by Hildred Geertz’s THE JAVANESE FAMILY discussed earlier.

To use the term matrifocal in urban and not in traditional Aboriginal areas appears misleading and not totally applicable. The analytical breakdown of traditional Aboriginal society, to illustrate this point might be viewed as domestic:public::women:men. In urban areas, however, it could be viewed as domestic: no public position::women:men. It is clear that in urban areas there is a public domain, however, Aboriginal men as a whole do not take part in this sphere. In addition, the public domain in urban Australia does not have the same implications as in traditional Aboriginal society. If one uses the criterion set out by Tanner used earlier in this chapter that matrifocal be viewed in female, and not in male terms, the distinction between traditional and non-traditional domestic groups appears misleading. For in the final analysis, the term matrifocal is ambiguous. In traditional society the domestic sphere is labelled matri-centred, whilst in the non-traditional it is matrifocal. However, the role and importance of the mother within the domestic group has not changed. The role of the father in the domestic group has also not changed significantly. What has changed is the society in which these people exist.

One must distinguish at this point the difference between a household and a society. In a
society, a pattern may emerge because of the ordered relations between its parts. This of course includes ideals and expectations. When using the term matrifocal, therefore, this distinction should be made clear. Within traditional Aboriginal society women are involved with the family, within that sphere they have a great deal of power and are economically self-sufficient. However, within the community as a whole women do not have the same autonomy and freedom. Walbiri women have many of the same responsibilities and hold many of the same attitudes of urban Aboriginal women. They believe that women are primarily responsible for the welfare of children. In traditional society a woman should not abandon her children; if she must leave them for any reason she should leave them with her mother or her sisters. However, as pointed out in earlier chapters, their autonomy and power is not extended beyond the domestic realm.

A man is not expected to take a major part in the care of the children. His main importance to the family lies in the society. He pursues ritual and political roles, not to obtain support for his family, but to further his status in the community and fulfill the expectations of how a socially involved male adult should conduct himself. Within the family unit, Walbiri women and men have always had personal ownership of belongings. Men could not give away their wives' belongings, just as women had no rights over their husbands' property. Therefore, it is not surprising that in some cases women have more say over the home in urban situations. Women have always had power over those things which appear to be classified within their realm. It is clear, then, that the phenomenon of matrifocality of urban Aboriginals is not only the result of the changed position of women within the society.

In urban Australian society, women do not have any more power than they did in traditional society. However, the male in western society is expected to live up to certain expectations. When Aboriginal men in Australian white society do not conform to these expectations, the result is they stand out as 'abnormal'. In traditional society the peripheral role of men in the family is not unusual. Women, in non-traditional households, still perform relatively the same tasks as they did before. Their overall power within the society that surrounds them has not expanded. However, the solidarity of men as a group which controls her has lessened. Therefore, although men no longer have the same power to control feminine behaviour as they did in the traditional arena, the result is the same. Women continue to live in the domestic, familial sphere of life with little say over the major working of the community; the change to urban life has not changed this. Their interest still lies in the welfare of the group which is immediate to them. The difference to the analyst is that, in a sense, this is what is expected in western society. Very few individuals in Australian white society have a significant degree of political or ritual power. In addition, very few men are directly involved with either of these spheres. Therefore, the analyst changes his criteria when examining households in contemporary white Australian society. The theorist cannot use political and religious activity as the guide for male
social involvement. Therefore the Aboriginal man, who does not fulfill either the traditional or western expectation of the male role is an anomaly. Those households which exist outside the traditional sphere are considered matrifocal, whilst the same development amongst traditional Aboriginals such as the Walbiri, Wongaii or Tiwi is not perceived to exist.

WOMEN IN TRADITIONAL ABORIGINAL SOCIETY

Women, in traditional Walbiri society, have some autonomy and freedom within particular spheres of life. This freedom must be recognized to understand and gain insight into their lives. Although women suffer from the domination of men in some aspects of their lives, they also fulfill roles which are necessary and important for the community. When the public sphere of men's action is taken away from an analysis of the society, one can view the role of women more objectively. In studies on urban and non-traditional Aboriginals, many analysts have commented on the matrifocal tendencies of their households. Various explanations have been discussed in this chapter as to why matrifocality occurs. Yet, I suggest, that amongst traditional Australian Aboriginal societies there is a propensity for matrifocal organization. Unlike Western society where men are the main suppliers of daily needs, it is the women who supply the families with their necessities. This is true not only for the Walbiri and Central desert people, but is generally true for all Australian Aboriginal groups (Meggitt 1964).

Women provide the mainstay of food for the residential group, cook the food, collect the firewood and water. In addition to this work they also fulfill the role of mother. As discussed earlier, in Walbiri thought mothering is a woman’s main function in society. Meggitt reported that at the Walbiri settlements of Yuendumu and Hooker Creek, for the two hundred wives present there were two hundred and thirty four children aged twelve years or younger (1965:154). The majority of these children were the offspring of women between the ages of nineteen and forty-eight. Children then, form a sizeable amount of the population. Their cares and needs are fulfilled by their mothers. The fulfillment of these needs, given the child population, involves considerable time and labour. The early relationship between child and mother results in an affection which is one of the strongest and most enduring ties exhibited in Walbiri society. This love excuses behaviour that would be considered unacceptable and even outrageous in other situations (Meggitt 1974:123-129).

Chodrow (1974:43-66) argues that the mother-child relationship is of a different socio-psychological nature than the father-child relationship. Women are universally responsible for early childcare and socialization. This socialization is continuous for the female child, whilst discontinuous for the male child. Amongst the Walbiri once the male child is old enough not to need constant care, men begin to socialize him. This socialization cumulates in the initiation ceremony and the boy's observance of male secret ritual. The link between mother and daughter
will only be interrupted if the girl marries outside her community. However, the early close relationship between mother and children has resulted in a strong emotive bond which is never completely broken.

At this point, women can no longer be dismissed merely as chattels or as Ashley Montagu viewed them, as 'domestic cows'. As a mother and chief producer of food she becomes culturally significant and as capable of political manoeuvring as men.

Women have some independence of men. The rule of men over women does not necessitate interference in every facet of female's life. In addition, unlike the ennui supposedly suffered by the oppressed western housewife, Walbiri women fulfill a role which is important both socially and personally. Due to the division of labour, Walbiri men and women live separate lives during the day. Traditionally, women spent the day foraging for food, whilst men set off in a different direction to hunt. This separation is further ensured as the territory which men and women were allowed to work in is clearly demarcated during the day. A woman who enters men's country in the past would have been killed, in recent times this punishment has changed to being raped and beaten. Conversely, a man who is seen to enter women’s country is thought to be seeking an adulterous liaison. If caught in this country with a woman, he and the woman are ridiculed and attacked (Meggitt 1973:52-54).

At present, due to government rations, women no longer spend as much time gathering as they did in the past. However, the division of labour between male and female during the day and the concept of different areas exclusively for the different sexes still persists. In women’s camp, women take care of their children, tell sand stories, talk and prepare food. In men’s camps men talk, play cards, and work on forthcoming ceremonies. In the evening both sexes and children return to the camp where they sleep and eat their evening meal (Munn 1973:10-13). The separation of the sexes during the daytime is a pertinent factor in understanding women as individuals and not just as political pawns. It is during this separation that a woman expresses herself without the limiting factor of men.

Although the most common time when women are free from the interference of men is during the daily routine, they are also free when they hold their women’s ritual. In Borroloola, near the Gulf of Carpenteria, Marie Reay (1970) reported an interesting case where the two types of female meetings (ritual and daily routine) resulted in certain decisions being made by

1. I use the word cultural here in the sense of meaning more than just social relationships. Women are significant not only in the social sense, but in cosmology, psychology and all aspects of Walbiri life and ritual.
the women. Reay found herself being placed in a particular subsection by a consensus of the women. This decision seems to have been made during the daily talks in the women's camp. In addition, by placing her in that subsection, it gave the women an excuse to hold a women's ritual. The decision to place the analyst in the sub-section was advantageous to women, not men. However, it should be noted that Reay does not report that this decision was in conflict with any male interests. Although Munn's (1973) analysis of Walbiri women's ceremonies (yawalyu) did not stress the independence of women, her discussion correlates with much of Reay's analysis. Women's ritual involves the expression of their goals and interests. These interests deal exclusively with women's roles and their position in society. Both Reay and Munn also recognize that women's ritual is one aspect of life that Aboriginal women perceive as their own. During female rituals, women express goals and desires which could not be expressed in the presence of men. However, instead of organizing to achieve their goals, they seek supernatural aid for their attainment.

Women, however, are capable of maneuvering on a small scale to attain their desires. Meggitt reports an interesting case when a young girl who was already married decided to marry another man. When the new young couple arrived in camp and announced they were married, the camp broke into two opposing groups, those that supported the couple and those that didn't. The young girl was protected from being beaten by a group of her new husband's kinwomen (Meggitt 1974:241).

'The presence of so many women effectively prevented the djabaljari men from continuing their attacks on Lucy, for some of the women were their "mothers-in-law". They had to retreat to the other side of the camp. Jimmy and his age-mates met them there, and a confused brawl followed . . . The outcome was that the djabaljari, presented with an accomplished fact, reluctantly approved the new union, and no more was heard of the matter' (Meggitt 1974:241).

It is important to note that the girl had no close kinsmen in the locality; if she had, the outcome might have been much different. However, the important point is that women acted in a positive manner to achieve a desired goal. It is unlikely that they would have been able to stand up against their husbands and sons; however, by siding with them they were able to give their male kin some badly needed support and protect a young girl from physical abuse.

Although women suffer from the domination of men in some aspects of their lives, they also fulfill roles which are necessary and important for the community. Men fulfill the ritual considered necessary for the maintenance of the community. Without their labour, the group believes it could not continue. Yet in the daily workings of the society, it is the labour of the women that supports the community. Within the domestic realm they are independent, powerful and self-sufficient. From an overall view of the society, women are the partners of men, albeit
junior partners. Men and women have different roles and duties, but both are perceived as necessary for the maintenance of society.
Belief, Myth, Ritual and Male Alliance

There is a close relationship between myths and rituals in Australian Aboriginal society. The Walbiri, like other Australian groups, believe in the dreamtime and celebrate and enact the mythology of this period in their ritual. Although both men and women enact ritual, most documentation has dealt with male rather than female ritual. Where anthropologists have analysed women's ceremonies, they have stated that they are individualistic in purpose and without the elaboration manifested in men's (Munn 1973, C. Berndt 1950). I believe that although women's ritual deals with those concerns directly related to their daily lives, it is not necessarily "individualistic". However, this is scant information for our purposes. Nevertheless, this chapter will attempt an exegesis of the data on male ritual and beliefs in order to explore their implications for women.

How then, can one bring women into an analysis of Walbiri social structure when, using the data of others, the discussion of ritual and myth has been male oriented? To do this it is necessary to examine Walbiri ritual and belief systems which are in a dialectical relationship with the social world, i.e. how reality and ideation interact and constrain each other. Thus ritual and belief systems will be seen as relating to the real world and the social relations in it. These social relations include women as well as men. Following Stanner (1964), I will also attempt to unravel the meaning behind symbols, rather than focus on the symbols themselves. Before I begin this analysis, however, I will examine some of the theoretical approaches to religion, myth and symbols. I do so in order to gain insight into their implications for the study of women and the society as a whole.

The study of religion is one which fascinates many scholars. Durkheim (1915 see 1976) perceived religion to have the effect of enhancing social solidarity and to be a projection of the society (since its representation and rites are socially constructed). In THE RITUAL PROCESS (1969), Victor Turner analyzed ritual and its meanings in Ndembu society. Following Monica Wilson (Turner 1969:6), Turner believed that ritual expressed the key values of people and their strongest emotions within a given culture. It is a dictum of anthropology that religious and symbolic systems are part of a social structure; since men and women occupy status in a structure, Turner studied the ritual of both sexes in his fieldwork. Thus, the social structure which he attempted to unravel was one which encompassed the lives of both men and women. Turner's approach, however, is not evidenced amongst all studies of Australian Aborigines.

1. I use the word "individualistic" here as having no larger social significance than the individual.
POLLUTION AND SOCIAL CONTROL

In PURITY AND DANGER (1966), Mary Douglas analyzed concepts of taboo and pollution and their symbolic relation to social life and ‘general view of the social order’ (1966:3). Regarding sexual relations, Douglas proposed that concepts of danger emanating from one sex and affecting the other can be interpreted as a symbolic representation of the relation between the sexes which may be hierarchical or symmetrical in the larger social system (1966:3-4). Douglas noted that amongst the Walbiri notions of female uncleanness and pollution are non-existent. She attributed this lack of a pollution concept to the physical force which women are subject to. Thus as women are already efficiently controlled, it is un-necessary to reiterate it in the symbolic realm (1966:140-141).

‘Sex is likely to be pollution-free in a society where sexual roles are enforced directly. In such a case anyone who threatened to deviate would be promptly punished with physical force. This supposes an administrative efficiency and consensus which are rare anywhere and specially in primitive societies. As an example we can consider the Walbiri of Central Australia, a people who unhesitatingly apply force to ensure that the sexual behaviour of individuals shall not undermine that part of the social structure which rests upon marital relations ... As a general rule if the female sex were completely subject to the male, no problem would be posed by the principle of male dominance. It could be enforced ruthlessly and directly wherever it applied. This seems to be what happens among the Walbiri’ (Douglas 1966:141).

Although Douglas may be correct in her assertion about the redundancy of a pollution concept for the Walbiri, I propose that this hypothesis explicitly deals with the notion of physical force as the most important factor in the control of women. So far in this thesis, I have focused upon methods for the control of women other than physical violence. I have argued that male domination emerges as a cumulative effect of the ways several institutions interrelate in Walbiri society. Domination cannot be viewed as due solely to the physical prowess of individual men. Instead, I have suggested that male physical power is enhanced by structural male solidarity. Against male solidarity, the factionalized groups of women cannot attain any goals which conflict with those of men as a whole. In addition, I will suggest in this chapter that men’s solidarity is reiterated and reinforced as well as reflected through male ritual and symbols.

MALE RITUAL AS A LEARNING ENVIRONMENT

Amongst the Walbiri, Meggitt described a typical Australian Aboriginal division of male and female roles within ritual and religious behaviour. Young men are initiated into a particular patrilodge by means of ritual, circumcision and subincision. After a period of seclusion and separation, they return to the social group with changed status and the promise of a bestowed bride. As they grow older they observe and take part in many more rituals through which they gain knowledge and an understanding of the dreamtime. Initially, however, knowledge is gained by observation rather than discussion. During the seclusion period preceding the boy’s
circumcision, songs are sung but the boy is only allowed to hear them. During this period he ‘lies with head on his guardian’s thigh’ and is covered by a blanket. ‘During the singing, the guardian (his brother-in-law) frequently brushes the boy’s head with the leaves of *Eremophila longifolia*, the badge of the novice among the Walbiri. This action closes the lad’s mind to everything but the songs, the “strength” (but not the meaning) of which he now absorbs’ (Meggitt 1974:287). At the early periods of their ritual involvement young men are not encouraged to ask questions nor are they given indepth explanations of all they observe. This will come when they are older and if they show interest.

However, ritual does provide an organized learning environment for young males. For women no such organized system of mythical education exists. Although women are familiar with much of dreamtime myth, explanations or meanings are left for the individual woman to unravel. Her education is ad hoc and eclectic. Although some women have been able to piece together their own observations and the information they get from a garrulous husband, this accumulated knowledge cannot compare with the systematic, coherent learning of the older men (Meggitt 1974:210). Thus, in terms of social structure, one must be aware that the studies of ritual and religious systems amongst the Walbiri, represent male ritual and cannot be projected as a phenomenon of the total society. That male ritual reflects dominance over women was shown by Meggitt (1966:23). In his analysis of the male Gadjari ritual, Meggitt reported that although the Walbiri imported the ritual from northern groups they have selected only particular elements for use. One aspect of the northern ritual that has been rejected is the mother concept. Meggitt partly attributed this to male bias and their belief in the subordinancy of women.

‘A belief in the existence of creative Dreamtime women, superordinate to other totemic beings, would at the conscious level not only tend to conflict with the prevailing ethos but also, I should think, would actually be repugnant to most men’ (1966:23).

RELIGION AS A ‘CULTURAL ETHOS’

Clifford Geertz (1968:1-44) perceived religion and its symbols as a cultural system... ‘sacred symbols function to synthesize a people’s ethos — the tone, character, and quality of their life, its moral and aesthetic style and mood — and their world-view — the picture they have of the way things in sheer actuality are, their most comprehensive ideas of order’ (1968:3). How does this view of symbols and religion apply to Walbiri society?

Nancy Munn stated that amongst the Walbiri symbols encode two different but complementary realities for men and women. Men’s symbols involve spatial organization. The geographical emphasis of the ancestor’s dreaming tracks allow for not only intergenerational continuity but also continuity over a geographical area (1966:211-216). As the dreamtime beings travelled through the land they created geographical features. These features are not
located within any one group's area. However, all men who are associated with that dreaming, whether or not they are members of that particular community, have rights to the area. Meggitt sums up the relationship thus,

'... when several lodges are connected with one dreaming-track, or with different countries of the one dreaming, all the members are united by a strong bond based on the possession of a shared spirit or soul. This tie tends to transcend community or country limits. A man from the Waneiga rain lodge thus expects to receive special courtesies from men of the Ngalia, Walmalla and Lander rain lodges when he visits those countries' (Meggitt 1974:69).

Munn's analysis is interesting in that it shows the relationship between social organization and symbolic systems and ritual. This is especially true when discussing women's role and status within Walbiri society. Although symbols have some common meaning for both men and women, their congruence is only minimal. Within different male and female contexts these symbols have different implications. Walbiri women use symbols in everyday sand drawings and have no secrecy attached to them. Men are even able to dream some of the ritual and give them to their wives to use in women's ceremonies (Munn 1973:90). In men's ceremonies, however, the same symbolic designs as the women use are given a power and meaning beyond the normal secular or women's usage.2

Overall, therefore, symbols cannot be said to represent the ethos of Walbiri society. I suggest, rather, that the context in which they are used is structured so as to give meaning to the particular group involved. Male secrecy in ritual ensures that the added meaning of these symbols is only revealed to men of initiated status. This creates some problem as regards to our accepting Geertz's idea of religion as 'synthesizing of people's ethos'. Instead, I believe that we can analyze male ritual and symbols as synthesizing male ethos and reality, whilst female ritual and the use of similar symbols express behavioural and ideational dimensions particular to women's roles. One can, however, argue that because women are excluded from male rituals, the male ethos is the dominant ethos of the society. However, this argument does not make Geertz's hypothesis any more acceptable. Such an argument as Geertz has put forward, ignores the possibility of a society in which the non-sharing of religious symbols and ideas is a structural feature. To ignore this and attempt an analysis in which the religious ideas and beliefs of the dominant group is seen as the religion of the entire society is to misperceive the role of religion in that society. Thus, I suggest, that in Walbiri society a view such as Geertz's proposes is incorrect.

2. Men also have access to more symbols than women. Although women are aware of some of these symbols, they consider their usage too dangerous (Munn 1973:40 f.n.).
SEXUAL ASYMMETRY AS A STRUCTURAL FEATURE

It seems clear that although this is only one aspect of the pattern that makes up the life of the Walbiri, it is a very important part. Given that the relationship between men and women is unequal socially, their inequality in kinds of ritual knowledge only highlights this feature. Nancy Munn (1973) pointed out that one aspect of male secret ritual is procreative. I wish to breakdown further the elements involved in renewal or fertility; I suggest that in Walbiri thought women are attributed with biological procreation, whilst men are responsible for social procreation. This responsibility is manifested overtly in their rituals. One express purpose of two types of male ritual, banba and maliara, is to continue guruwari, which are ancestral potencies left behind for the procreation of animals and men (Munn 1973:29).

'...it is men who are concerned with the societal plane of life maintenance that depends wholly upon the fabrication of symbols; by means of these artifactual forms sexual-procreative energy can be contained and released for the society as a whole' (Munn 1973:213).

Given that women are considered inferior by Walbiri men the ritual helps to maintain this dominance. Ritual and myth not only reflect the reality of life, but by their form help to maintain it. As such male ritual can be considered as partly political in its nature. It is political in the sense of an act which allows one group (men) to maintain control over another (women). Women are not allowed at these secret male rituals, but this is not because they are considered too unintelligent to fully appreciate the ritual, as no doubt some men would fit into this category. Rather the reason given by men is that observance of these ceremonies is dangerous for women; it could result in the death of any woman. Any woman would be deterred by the threat of violence and death from intruding on the rites. Thus, the performance of ritual necessitated by dreamtime beliefs and myths, allows men to unite as a group for a particular goal without the interference of women.

Because the separation of women and men in particular rituals has social consequences, religion amongst the Walbiri must be examined also in its relation to women. Stanner (1965:237) writes:

'Students with the patience to look beyond the symbol to the symbolized will find that the end of Aboriginal religion was in Confucian terms "to unite hearts and establish order". Understood in that way, a "totemic" system shows itself as a link between cosmogony, cosmology, and ontology; between Aboriginal intuitions of the beginnings of things, the resulting relevances for men’s individual and social being, and a continuously meaningful life. The associating of a totem with a collection of people was that which transformed them from just a collection into a group with a sign of unity... The yearly round of rites let the Aborigines renew both the sources and the bonds of life constituted in that way. The religion was not the mirage of the society, and society was not the consequence of the religion. Each pervaded the other within a larger process.'
SECRECY AND MALE RITUAL

Religion amongst the Walbiri, then, is not a mere reflection of male/female relationships (as purported by Munn 1973) but part of an ongoing dialectic with society which supports the continuance of the social structure. Why then is this reality only given to men of the Walbiri? Hiatt (1971) examined the purpose of secrecy in male procreation rites amongst several Australian Aboriginal groups, including the Walbiri. He rejected the notion of Basedow (1925), Roheim (1934) and Bettelheim (1954) that procreation rites reflect either incestuous desires or envy of female child-bearing powers as total explanations. Although the theory of incestuous desires is not a popular explanation, Bettelhheim's theory is one which is still evident amongst writers of today. Isobel White (1970) in her examination of female status amongst central Australian Aboriginal groups concluded that male rituals reflect envy of female procreative powers.³ Hiatt rejected such hypotheses as total explanations and pointed out that dependance upon such 'deeper meanings' are misleading when trying to completely understand such Aboriginal rituals.

Male procreation rites allow men to extend their power and control into an area in which women would naturally have predominance. To be successful men must be convinced of the efficacy of their ritual. This depends, in part, upon their ability to assert this dominance over women. This is effected through mystification, secrecy and intimidation (Hiatt 1971:88). In a later article, White (1975) appears to have accepted the validity of Hiatt's argument. 'Just as Millett and Greer (1970) see modern literature as a charter for male dominance, so too can we see Aboriginal mythology' (White 1970:139).

SYMBOLS AND BELIEFS OUTSIDE RITUAL CONTEXTS

As mythology and ritual can be political, so the symbols used can have political connotations. One aspect of male ritual that makes them overtly sexual is the symbolism of male and female genitalia. This symbolism is obvious and so it is in these rather simple views that much analyses of ritual symbolism is conducted. Yet these symbols are used in contexts other than those of rites and sacred myths. Although not enough information is available to continue this analysis in depth, some general information does exist to allow for a degree of interpretation.

³ At this point some comments need to be made about the notion of envy in the Freudian sense. Recently, authors such as Juliet Mitchell (1974) have argued that Freud's conception of penis envy has been misinterpreted. This envy on the part of women was not so much an envy of the organ as it was the envy of men and their dominant place in society. The penis became the object of fixation as it was symbolic of the male as a whole. The phallus was a symbol of subjugation, not the object that was in itself important. In this light, it is interesting that theorists which claim male ritual is in essence the expression of male envy of female procreative powers claim a deepness which is the result of examining the human mind. Yet, what would cause this envy of women? There is no evidence which supports this envy in Walbiri society. The hypothesis that male ritual is the result of women's child bearing powers appears largely unsubstantiated. It seems an inconclusive argument to state that ritual reflects an envy which is not apparent at any other level. This is not to say that male envy of women's procreative powers does not exist. However, I do believe that the information on this aspect is inconclusive.
Amongst the Walbiri, men and women hold common beliefs about the attributes of non-Walbiri people and some dreamtime beings: these beliefs can be examined as symbolic. Munn (1973) has examined symbolic drawings in secular and ritual situations, but she did not analyze the social beliefs underlying some of the icons. As shown in the above chart, particular features are attributed by the Walbiri to other Aboriginal groups. Some features are attributed solely to one sex, whilst others are held in common. Walbiri attribute sorcery solely to men of the North-east desert and the Pintubi; whilst changing into demons and child-eating is regarded as a purely female attribute. Other than the hairiness of the Pintubi women and the over large penes of the Lungga men and dreamtime djanba, most of the above features are social rather than physiological. However, those characteristics that Walbiri believe distinguish a certain group should be discussed further.

Firstly as each group becomes more distant in terms of interaction and communication, it is perceived more negatively. As part of this view, men and women are both given more negative features. The Pintubi, who have rituals in common and intermarry with the Walbiri, have fewer negative aspects than the groups north and north-east of the desert. Whilst the Walbiri are becoming more familiar with these northern groups, their interaction with the Lungga (people inhabiting between the Western Australian border and Wyndham) is still very limited. Of all

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(Information in this chart is compiled from Meggitt (1974, 1967, 1955)
other human groups, the Lungga have the worst reputation amongst the Walbiri (Meggitt 1974:37-42).

The Pintubi, however, are neither unequivocally ‘safe’ nor ‘dangerous’; they are, rather, regarded ambivalently by the Walbiri. Whilst the Walbiri enjoy fairly good relations with Pintubi and consider them to be “naive bumpkins”, they are respected for their magical powers (Meggitt 1974:41-42). For example, women are considered to be able to change into demons and eat their own children. Although, the Walbiri demur that this is due to lack of game in Pintubi country, it does not explain why men are not considered to be eaters of children, too. One could explain this attribute in several ways.

Firstly, the same attributes are given to the dreamtime Gadjari women. I suggest that the eating of one’s children can be regarded as an attribute which can be given only to women. As women are the bearers of children and are considered generally to be responsible for the welfare of young children, the act of devouring one’s offspring can be considered anti-procreative. Secondly, the only frightening aspect of Pintubi men is that some of them have a reputation for powerful sorcery. It is important to make the point that the Gadjari women, who turned into demons and ate their own sons, were overcome by their husbands’ use of sorcery. In addition, sorcery implies a superior ability to manipulate rites, rituals, or paraphernalia. Since women are thought to be inferior, clearly sorcery could not be attributed to them. Other practitioners of sorcery are thought by the Walbiri to be males of the northern groups. It should be noted that although men and women of this region share all other features listed in the table, women are not thought of as sorcerers. Thus sorcery, I suggest, represents male superiority. The myth of the Gadjari women verifies this. Although the Gadjari women were dreamtime beings, and as such different from mortal beings, they were not imbued with power over men. Men, not women, have the ability to use magic to outwit their adversaries.

The over-large penes attributed to Lungga men and the dreamtime djanba is of interest as the use of penes and other male and female genitalia as symbols is common in Walbiri ritual. These symbols have given ritual its sexual, procreative overtones so often noted by anthropologists. However, although these rituals are procreative in nature they serve other purposes. Hiatt (1971) argued that the sexual nature of these rituals are not solely the result of envy of female procreative powers, but serve to allow ‘Aboriginal men (to) assert a pre-eminent role in human reproduction by ritually magnifying male sexuality’ (87-88). How, then, does one explain the use of the idea of overlarge penis of djanba and Lungga?

THE PENIS AS A ‘MULTIVOCAL’ SYMBOL

The penis is a symbol which is used in many contexts. For example, if a man is accused of
a misdeed at a public gathering, he places his penis in the hand of a real or classificatory brother. If the man holds the penis, the holder will support the miscreant in his fight (Meggitt 1974: 133). Men from other groups first place their penes in their hosts hands before they take part in any ceremonies. If no one will take an individual’s penis, this is a sign that the group has a grievance against him. The visitor must either then prepare to fight or run away. If the hosts take hold of the visitor’s penis, then they must support him and defend him against any man who has reason to quarrel (1974:262).

Furthermore, the man who circumcises a young boy, as well as those of his countrymen who take part in the circumcision, offer their penes to the “fathers” and “mother’s brother” of the boy before they operate. The circumcisors offering shows that they have sympathy for the kinsmen of the boy; and by accepting, the kinsmen evince confidence in the circumcisor’s ability to perform the operation correctly. The actual father and mother’s brother of the boy should not accept the offer as they are displaying great sorrow at the boy’s impending ritual death (Meggitt 1974:300). This offer is not made to the boy’s brothers, for their duty is to kill the circumcisor if he does not perform the operation successfully (304).

Thus the penis, I suggest, can imply more than sexuality. In the cases discussed above, the holding of the penis represents trust and assistance. It assures the individual that he will be given protection. In another sense it reinforces group cohesion; if there is a possibility of violence the offering of a penis will do one of three things. Firstly, it publicly shows that the majority of men support the individual, thereby quelling the aggressiveness of an individual or a smaller group. Secondly, refusal of the offer brings a dispute into the open where it can be discussed or, finally, if no-one will assist the man, the dispute is solved by the group expelling the offender. Regardless of the outcome, the practice of penis holding indicates that the penis signifies more than sexuality or procreation. The penis must be considered to be what Victor Turner calls a “multi-vocal” symbol (1978:48); it ‘represents many things at the same time’. In addition the enlarged phallus as a symbol one can argue, has a meaning denoted by the multi-vocality of the concept.

To further elucidate the added meaning of the concept of the penis, it is useful to refer back to the chart in this chapter. There is no reference to oversized or undersized female genita-lia. Yet, the Lungga men and the evil djanba have oversized penes (the Walbiri consider large penes ugly and indecent). To understand this attribute we must look further into the Walbiri relations with these two groups.

The Lungga are reputed to break their own marriage laws and to be incestuous. They are considered lecherous, cannibalistic and drinkers of human blood (Meggitt 1974:43). On the
other hand, *djanba* are dreamtime beings. Unlike most other dreamtime beings they are considered malevolent and evil. Their one good feature is they are not cannibals. Like the Lungga, however, they have little direct contact with the Walbiri. But unlike the polygamous Lungga and Walbiri, *djanba* are monogamous. In addition as *djanba* are always male, they must steal a woman from an Aboriginal group to procreate. The woman who is the wife of a *djanba* is thought to be exceptionally intelligent and kept happy by her husband by his exceptionally virile love making. Although the *djanba* do marry Walbiri women, they attain their brides by abduction, not bestowal. The offspring of these unions are always male, thus *djanba* cannot engage in the bestowal system as used by the Walbiri. Since they are monogamous they do not use women as Walbiri men do to set up networks. In addition, a *djanba* does not steal women to bestow. Instead he rapes and kills any lone woman he meets. Thus *djanba* appear as the very antithesis of the Walbiri. Whilst the Walbiri are social beings, *djanba* are solitary. Unlike the Walbiri, *djanba* have no social organization which allow them to inter-relate or interact with outside groups. As they are monogamous, they have one wife and the woman is not used to form any kind of affinal bond. In addition, the *djanba* are not reciprocal beings. As women are stolen, they are under no obligation to her relatives or kin group.

The Lungga and the *djanba* have similar relationships to the Walbiri. Because of their distance from the Walbiri, the Lungga do not exchange women or interact with the Walbiri. Although *djanba* do marry Walbiri women, they attain their brides by abduction, not bestowal. The usual result of marriage, i.e. obligations to one's affines, does not apply to a *djanba*. If the penis only represents fertility and sexual matters, how then can one explain the enlarged penes of the Lungga and *djanba*? One cannot, unless one adds another meaning to this multifaceted symbol; that of male solidarity and support. I suggest it not only represents fertility, procreation but also the cohesion of the male group and its cooperation.

Male solidarity and support is an important value for Walbiri men. It provides men with assistance in everyday life and protects individual men from gross physical harm in conflict with other men. Men also unite as a group to maintain their control over women. The penis, I suggest, is the symbol which is used to evoke the importance of the male group. The ritual which surrounds such symbolism is one of the means by which men group and unite. In addition to its

4. Meggitt (1955) found some confusion of this point. Some of the men maintained the *djanbas* were cannibalistic. However, the medicine men informed him that this was a confusion with another evil-spirit, the cat-like *gugulba*.

5. Women out foraging never go alone as they are frightened of being murdered by a *djanba*. Walbiri men are aware that this is a fringe benefit as it keeps women either in groups or in camp, both limit the woman in her adulterous liaisons.

6. The male victim may be killed by the curses of a *djanba* and then resuscitated so that he will return to camp. Another alternative that a *djanba* might prefer is to take a length of the victim's intestine and then let him return to camp. Regardless of which method the *djanba* uses the result is the same. The male victim will die within two to three days unless cured by a medicine man (Meggitt 1955:386-387). Women, it appears, are never subjected to these alternative forms of killing; they are always killed outright. This, I suggest, may have to do with men's use of the *djanba* to create fear for women. Unlike men, a woman who meets a *djanba* has no chance to escape the episode alive.
procreative and sexual functions, it emphasizes the need for cooperation between men. Without mutual assistance the rituals cannot take place. In order for the ceremonies to be performed men of different groups must support and assist each other.

Just as the symbol of the penis has many meanings, so ritual has many implications. Although some anthropologists have analyzed Aboriginal ceremonies with regards to religious and socio-psychological effects there are others. Anthropologists have traditionally stressed a Radcliffe-Brownian approach as regards cohesion and the role of social institutions. Amongst the Walbiri, however, the male group receives the benefits of the feelings of “togetherness” from the performance of secret ritual. This cohesion is obvious in daily behaviour when men as a group feel bound to uphold the honour of their sex. It also provides the ideology which allows men to dominate. Even in the dreamtime, women are troublesome beings who need to be controlled by sorcery, or else outwitted by men.

WOMEN’S RITUAL AND ‘THE PROBLEM OF WOMEN’

The implications of male ritual and symbols for the control of women are clear. However, how women define themselves within the Walbiri social system has not yet been elucidated. As discussed at the beginning of this chapter, the literature available for such an analysis is inadequate. Yet the data are sufficient to suggest some intriguing possibilities.

Edwin Ardener in ‘Belief and the Problem of Women’ (1972) argued that at the ‘meta’ level of anthropological studies, i.e. debate and argument supporting interpretations, analysts pursue male models. This imbalance is not necessarily due to the androcentric bias of the analyst, but rather to the relative inarticulateness of the native women (1972:136-137). However, Ardener suggested that the ‘problem of women’ in study goes beyond the technical problem set out above. He argued that the inarticulateness of women is due to the difference between male and female models of society. Thus women’s lack of exegesis on social structure is related to their different social template rather than their inability to perceive. Female models of society may not be of a type which ethnographers will readily accept. In addition whilst male informants may use models which delineate between society and nature, women may not perceive this distinction in the same way.

‘They (women) lack the metalanguage for its discussion. To put it more simply: they will not necessarily provide a model for society as a unit that will contain both men and themselves. They may indeed provide a model in which women and nature are outside men and society’ (Ardener 1972:138-139).

Although Ardener deliberately exaggerated the difference between male and female models of society, he did so in order to provide an analytically distinct alternative to male models of
society. Hence, in his analysis of the Bakweri of Cameroon, he pursued an analytical approach which separated male and female beliefs and rituals. Thus he found that whilst male models of society included and defined women, (women were aware of these models and defined themselves within it), Bakweri women extended the male symbolic and belief system to define themselves in a way unknown to men.

'The objective basis of the symbolic distinction between nature and society ... is a result of the problem of accommodating the two logical sets which classify human beings by different bodily structures: 'male'/'female'; with the two other sets 'human'/'non-human'. It is, I have suggested, men who usually come to face this problem, and because their model for mankind is based on that for man, their opposites, woman and non-mankind (the wild), tend to be ambiguously placed. Hence, in Douglas's terms (1966), come their sacred and polluting aspects. Women accept the implied symbolic content, by equating woman-kind with the men's wild' (Ardener 1972:154).

Ardener's realization that Bakweri women have a social template different from men may have some relevance for Walbiri ritual. The categorization of women's ritual as "individualistic" may be a misnomer. Indeed Munn, in her analysis of women's *yawalyu* designs, states: 'In looking over my data again, it seems to me that there may have been more metaphor available in women's thinking about *yawalyu* than that for which I have explicit expression' (1973:90-91 f.n.).

**WALBIRI WOMEN AND THEIR RITUAL**

Unlike male ritual, women's ritual (*yawalyu*) is not the property of corporate groups (Munn 1973:36-37). In addition, as discussed in chapter three of this thesis, *yawalyu* designs and rituals are dreamed and owned by individual women. The woman then extends ownership to the other women who were sleeping in her camp, i.e. own sisters, co-wives and sisters-in-law. Most *yawalyu* are relatively "new", their form, songs and designs having been dreamt by women who are still living. *Yawalyu* ritual and songs are revealed through intermediaries which women call *yinawuru* (called *guruwalba* by men, *guruwari* by Meggitt 1972).7 *Yinawuru* children stand around the dreamer and sing and dance.7 8 It is through these actions that the *yinawuru* give the

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7. Munn offers no explanation as to why men and women use different terms to refer to the same being. In addition, I could find no reference in any of Meggitt's writings to these two different names. Meggitt refers to the spirit entity as *guruwari*, following male usage.

8. Meggitt (1974:65, 272-275) strongly refutes the notion of *guruwari* as spirit children. Thus he wrote: 'They should be regarded rather as impersonal and casually-effective entities — as catalysts that, in appropriate circumstances can set off trains of reactions ... Throughout the discussion, I shall refer to these spirit catalysts as *guruwari* in order to distinguish them from the dreaming that precede them, as well as to avoid any suggestion that they are necessarily anthropomorphic' (Meggitt 1974:65-66, my emphasis). This is an interesting discrepancy in view of Meggitt's admitted lack of research on Walbiri women. Munn's information that Walbiri women perceive *yinawuru* (*guruwalbu*) anthropomorphically is in direct contrast to Meggitt's information from men. In addition, Meggitt states that *guruwari* are emphasized by men, rather than women, as the most important factor in pregnancy. He attributes this difference to the importance of *guruwari* in men's ritual. 'The women, having few ritual attitudes, generally emphasize copulation' (Meggitt 1974:273). In view of Munn's findings on the importance of *yinawuru* to *yawalyu*, Meggitt's statement on women holding 'few ritual attitudes' seems incorrect.
particular *yawalyu* to the woman. Munn (1973:91) commented on the similarity between a woman becoming pregnant and receiving *yawalyu*. In both instances women are in contact with the special beings. In pregnancy the *guruwalba* enters the woman's womb to animate the foetus; whilst, in the passing on of *yawalyu* the spirits 'pierce' the woman with the dream.\(^9\)

**MEN, WOMEN AND CONTACT WITH THE DREAMTIME**

The methods of obtaining and enacting ritual are markedly different between men and women. As already discussed, the form of ritual in *yawalyu* is dreamt by individual women and ownership passed on to women who reside in her camp. Men's ritual, however, is not due to the revelation of any living man. Each ritual associated with a particular 'dreaming' is the property of a cult-lodge whose members are recruited from one patriline. The rituals are believed to be passed down from one generation to another without any discontinuity or change in their form. All aspects of male ritual are considered 'an important part of the group’s heritage' (Meggitt 1972:213). In addition, men are believed to transform themselves 'into dreamtime beings for a short period of time during ritual' (Meggitt 1972:60). I suggest, that whilst women are dependant upon *yinawuru* to act as intermediaries for their dreamtime experiences, men (as dancers, singers and actors) use the ritual to become the intermediaries. Thus men relate directly to the dreamtime, whilst women are able to experience the dreamtime only vicariously through *yinawuru*.

The different organizational principles utilized by women and men in ritual, I suggest, reflects the different dreamtime experiences of the sexes. Men, using strictly defined organizational principles, transcend the present and secular life. Women, on the other hand, are more loosely organized and never merge into the dreamtime. Male ritual organization strictly defines the roles of groups of individuals within it.

For example, in the procreation rituals performed by men, the primary owner of any one ritual is the patrilineally organized cult-lodge. Although members of the lodge are the true 'owners' of the ceremony, all men of the same patrimoity as the lodge may participate in the ceremony. The opposite patrimoity acts as the 'behind the scene' organizers of the ceremony. When the time to perform a ritual arrives, the men of the opposite patrimoity ask the relevant lodge members to perform the ceremony. During the ceremony, the opposite patrimoity (workers) to the owners of the ritual make the necessary regalia and paint and decorate the actors. The worker patrimoity is symbolically associated with women (Wild 1975, 1976, 66)

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\(^9\) It is interesting to note that both pregnancy and *yawalyu* are, in a sense, obtained through chance. Women do not perform ritual to entice *yinawuru*; rather *yinawuru* select the woman.
Munn (1973). This reflects their relationship as affines. Thus several theorists have seen the relationship between the two patrimoieties as similar to that of husband and wife. Wild (1976) reports that Walbiri have two styles of dancing in ritual. Mimetic dancing, in which each dancer represents a specific dreamtime character, is performed only by men. Non-mimetic dancing, which represents the general behaviour of generalized ancestor, is usually performed by women. However, during ritual performances workers (members of the opposite patrimoieties to the owners of the ritual) dance in non-mimetic fashion. This dancing by the managers evokes the opposition and complementarity of the two sexes.

Wild (1975) found that roles in women’s ritual can be perceived as divided into a worker/owner dichotomy (the principal of division into dancers and non-dancers is not, however, practiced). Munn (1973:36-37) states that although women should be painted with yawalyu designs by sisters-in-law, this rule is often broken. Thus although there is evidence that women may possess rules for the performance of their ritual, they are not strictly adhered to. Men’s concern for adherence to the rules and roles during ritual is, I suggest, due to their merging into the dreamtime. Women’s laxity in the upholding of rules, reflects their physical separation from the dreamtime. Furthermore, I propose that this may be why women’s participation in particular aspects of male ritual is strictly banned. Although outwardly the danger to women viewing male ceremonies emanates from the men; internally, it is the direct contact with the dreamtime which endangers women.

MALE RITUAL AS POLITICAL

Perhaps it is because of our tendency to examine ritual, myth or ceremonies only within their religious context except for obvious social correlations that the political implications of
male ritual has been for so long ignored.\textsuperscript{10} There are many approaches to religion in anthropology; however, for the most part, we have been content in recent years to examine religion as religion, and relate its practice to the social context in which it exists and is maintained. Amongst Australian Aboriginals the social context which anthropologists, on the whole, have examined is the male social context.\textsuperscript{11} Yet to lose sight of the fact that male rituals and belief systems are political in their nature, since they deal with the dominance of one group over another, is as Hiatt (1971:88) said, 'to miss the trees for the woods'.

As a charter for male dominance, male mythology and ritual is powerful. However, male ritual and ceremonies assist men not only as a group to maintain power over women as a whole, but also individual men over particular women. When men as a group feel threatened by women, they unite to form a cohesive group. However, regarding individual relations between men who hold common power over particular women, under normal circumstances male solidarity is problem ridden. Meggitt (1955) has pointed out that disputes and fights between men during ceremonies are kept at a minimum only because men believe that arguments at this time makes them susceptible to attacks by \textit{djanba}. However, conflicts between men have been incorporated into an expressive ritual called \textit{bulwandi}. In the ceremony a man is attacked and may even be severely injured by his mother’s brother and daughter’s husband. As ego and mother’s brother are members of the same matriline, they are usually bound to support and aid each other. Similarly, a daughter’s husband is required to give frequent gifts of meat to his wife’s father and, although he is not obliged to, usually assists his father-in-law in disputes. It is these relationships, which are also important in ritual, that Peterson (1970) suggests is the cause of the conflict. Thus control over women appears quite clearly as a central locus of meaning during this particular ceremony described by Peterson. However, this is an attempt to resolve disputes between men, rather than to extend power over women — for men as a group already wield this power.

Peterson (1970a; 214) suggests that an understanding of conflict about women between men is fundamental to an analysis of \textit{bulwandi}. Peterson (1970:213) writes: ‘To spell out this

\textsuperscript{10} The examination of religion in its own terms is an important and useful aspect of Australian Anthropology. As Stanner (1965:520) stated: ‘It is preposterous that something like a century of study, because of rationalism, positivism, and materialism, should have produced two options: that Aboriginal religion is either (to follow Durkheim) what someone called “the mirage of society” or (to follow Freud) the neurosis of society . . . . The primary duty now is to avoid mishandling what opportunities of study remain. The Aboriginal religions must be described and analysed as significant in their own right, as expressions of human experience of life; as essays of passion, imagination, and striving among peoples to whom our historical dissents, clear and blurred, have meant and still — except here and there — mean nothing’. However, whilst the anthropologist must be aware of their biases and the creativity of Aboriginal religion, I suggest that we must not blind ourselves to the other functions and results which occur through the practice of a specific type of religion.

\textsuperscript{11} Thus Meggitt’s analysis of the Walbiri, which includes an in-depth analysis of male ritual is flawed because he never witnessed any female ceremonies (1974:189). Although there may have been some difficulty for Meggitt (as a male) if he had tried to attend these dances, it is not an unusual occurrence for a male anthropologist to send his wife to observe female practices. According to his forward, Meggitt’s wife was present, yet he does not report having used her as an observer of female activities he was not allowed to watch.
implicit aspect of the explanatory model, it can be said that the conflict which the Fire ceremonies (*bulwandi*) attempt to resolve results from an opposition of interest between patrkin and matrikin in the bestowal of the former’s Ds who are the latter’s ZDs. That is, that an individual will, when he is the father of a girl being bestowed, conceptualize his rights in terms of D-bestowal; but when he is the MB, in terms of ZD bestowal’.

I suggest that whilst the *bulwandi* is concerned with individual male rights over particular women and the concomitant problems between men, male secret ritual (in addition to its religious meanings) is concerned with male dominance over women as a group. For as Peterson (1970a:214) points out, women are the centre of many disputes and politicking in Aboriginal society. Women are used as the basis for an entire series of male relationships. As shown in chapter two of this thesis, every girl’s bestowal results in a new group of men relating through her to her kin. In addition, until a man is married and has his own children, his opinions are considered of little importance. In a society such as the Walbiri without hereditary leaders and with no one man holding absolute power, a man’s standing is based upon his ability to influence. Without a wife, his ability to do so is lessened. Thus, in understanding the Walbiri, women and their subordination must be acknowledged as present in all facets of Walbiri life, including ritual and religious life.
CONCLUSION

Women have generally been ignored in analysis of Australian Aboriginal groups. Anthropologists have tended to study the more 'exciting' male activities and rituals rather than women's subordination, lifestyle and involvement in the daily mundane routines of food gathering and child rearing. Although women are not the main participants in these more colourful activities, the meanings acted out in them are always as relevant to their lives as they are to the men who dominate them.

In this thesis I have examined the mechanisms by which women are subordinated. In so doing, I have shown that male domination is a system and should be analyzed as such. Women's domination by men has been taken for granted by many theorists. Some arguments as to why women are subordinate have been based upon biological factors. To explain women's junior status in so many societies around the world, some theorists have stressed either men's superior strength or the fact that women bear children. By examining women's subordination in Walbiri society as a system, I have shown that such arguments are too simplistic. If women's status could be accounted for by biology, how then can one explain the mechanism used by men to subdivide them? Such mechanism would be superfluous if biology was the deciding factor. As anthropologists we are not surprised by superfluity. However, as I have shown, women's dependence/subordination does not exist on just one level, but is emphasized in practices throughout the society. Superfluity may be an acceptable answer in isolated practices but not, I suggest, when we find women's subordination so systematically enforced.

Although men's use of women for gain has often been noted, the implications of this must be more closely scrutinized. Perhaps these implications seem unproblematic to western theorists because women's subordination has been so pervasive in their own societies. Thus instead of analyzing Australian Aboriginal society as one which practices domination, the analysts are unable to objectively interpret the data. The fact that the inequality of the sexes has been so often ignored is evidence of a more general failure in our society.
MALE DOMINATION AS A SYSTEM

Amongst the Walbiri this domination is so marked that it deserves further investigation. As noted in earlier chapters, any threat to either the myth or the realities of the male dominated system results in immediate retaliation. The perpetuation of the society as one in which men are the unquestioned rulers is a goal that all men hold in common. Meggitt (1974), Munn (1973) and Peterson (1970b) have all reported this value as a major one for men. All three have reported cases in regards to its continuance. However certain reports of physical violence can be misleading. Although violence is one tool men use to dominate women, as anthropologists we should also examine other subtler, ways in which men work. I here suggest that the system is a subtle one and that physical force is only the overt manifestation of a far more effective mode of domination. The system of domination pervades many levels and aspects of Walbiri life. Women are kept subordinate by their inability to fully utilize or be influential in the kinship, marriage and religious orders. Although men may find recourse to physical threat, it is used in conjunction with the above three aspects to ensure that male domination succeeds in Walbiri society.

Hiatt (1972) and Peterson (1969) perceive that Walbiri cosmology divides the society into two distinct halves. Flesh, the present, and the matriline are associated with women; whilst men are associated with noumenal beings, society as a whole, and the patriline. Although the cosmology of the Walbiri may divide the society into complementary male and female parts, the workings of the society are far more complex. At the secular level women are of obvious importance. Not only do they provide the mainstay of the food that the Walbiri eat, but they bear the children and provide for their care so that men can have the time to be involved with other social domains. Yet male freedom is maintained at a price; the price is paid by women. In the early stages of its life the infant is rarely separated from its mother. A woman carries her child with her whilst gathering and keeps it with her when in camp. Both men and women consider a mother as primarily responsible for her children. Yet if a woman decides to leave her husband without the support of her kin, she can lose her children. Thus children are not only time consuming for a woman, but are also an effective tool for men's control over women. If she wishes to stay with her children, she...
must also stay with her husband.1

WOMEN AND THE KINSHIP SYSTEM

The raising of children, however, is only one aspect which assists in the control of women. Child-rearing is an aspect of life which concerns women who are fertile and within a particular age range. The kinship system and its classificatory kin reckoning affects them all. Theoretically, the rules are organized so that men and women have an equal number of kin and relations.

'In theory, the structure can extend indefinitely in time (that is, vertically and diagonally) and in space (that is, laterally); but in practice there are limits to this extension, chiefly the absence of written records and the presence of physical obstacles to communication' (Meggitt 1974:83).

However, this theoretical extension of the kinship structure is relevant to men, not women. Whilst men's relationships are being extended by this system, women's are not. For men the classificatory kinship system gains importance through ritualization and physical closeness. If these two criteria are not met, many of these possible kin relations and their concomitant rights and obligations remain dormant.

The male practice of using kin as ritual friends is not developed by women. As pointed out in chapter three of this thesis, in their ritual and daily lives women act predominately on matrilineal principles. Through ritual, men are able to utilize both the matrilineal and the patriline. The matriline indicates the primary family one is born into and, since it is exogamous, defines where one will marry. The patriline provides the principle to unite people through generations. It is of ritual importance to men as their patriline will decide which patrilodge they will belong to. Although women are nominal members of the patriline, their exclusion from the rituals denies them access to its benefits. One might expect that women could use their own ceremonies to reinforce their patrilineal relations. However, according to Meggitt (1974:799), women are ignorant of this organizational principle utilized by men. Instead individual women own the ritual

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1. Meggitt (1974:107) reports that couples who have children are more stable and co-operative than those who are childless. He does not, however, discuss this stability in terms of the fears examined above.
and extend ownership to their close female kin. Thus instead of extending the range of their relationships, women reinforce and stress those that already exist. The more circumscribed and less ritualized nature of women's ties to each other, I have suggested, is integral to understanding how men dominate women.

In addition, even this form of women's recruiting is severely limited. Although Meggitt spoke of the theoretically unlimited extension of the classificatory kinship system, he also pointed out limits placed on its extension. It is the second of these, the 'physical obstacles to communication', which is useful here. The decision as to where and with whom one will live is one that is not often made by women. Until marriage a girl lives with her family. When she is between the ages of eight and thirteen the girl leaves her home to reside with her new husband. Although this does not necessarily entail that the girl move a great distance, her future location depends upon the judgement of her husband. Traditionally, during the dry season (which comes in late spring and early summer) only small groups were able to forage sufficient amounts of food to survive. The decision as to who would be allowed to be part of the group was in the hands of men, not women. Usually men used kinship relations as a major recruitment principle.

'Thus, actual and classificatory brothers, especially those who had been circumcised at the one ceremony, commonly hunted together. They did so not only because of the bonds of ritual friendship, but also because they were more willing to share wives than were more distantly related "brothers" ...Brothers-in-law were also likely to be good mates and suitable hunting companions, for they had shared in important ritual activities and exchanged actual or classificatory sisters in marriage' (Meggitt 1974:50).

Women's feelings on the subject of group composition were irrelevant. Any desire a woman might have to include in the party women to whom she feels close is not included in the criteria used by men. Instead the inclusion of particular people into the group was to the advantage of men and dealt with their feelings rather than women's. Thus, interaction with

2. Although women usually dream yawalyu which refer to their patrimoieties, Munn (1973:37) states that they occasionnally lay 'claim to a design for an opposite patrimoieties ancestor within her (their) own local community'.

3. However the chance that women will live in another community after marriage is significant. Meggitt (1974:57) states that intracommunity marriages only slightly outnumber intercommunity marriages.
classificatory relatives was limited by particular conditions for both men and women. However, men reinforce their importance by ritualizing these relationships and including these men in their groups. Thus men are able, to some extent, to overcome the problem of lack of communication and separation. Women, however, do not ritualize their relations with classificatory kin nor do they have the power to make decisions as to their location or with whom they will travel. They had to accept conditions as they existed and could not seek to strengthen relationships in either of these ways.

The kinship system exists as a subtle tool for men to use in their domination of women. Women and men theoretically have the same kin relations and access to them. In reality, however, men's control of other factors, which at first seem unrelated to kinship, creates unequal chances between men and women in respect to utilising the advantages inherent in the system. Thus men are able to relate and organize in large groups; whilst women's groups are smaller and confined to immediate friends and relations.

The implications of the different recruitment principles for male and female groups are discussed in chapter three of this thesis. Women are dependant upon men for their physical safety in the society. As a group women are weak and cannot be depended upon to assist each other in conflict. Men unite as a group when women confront the male dominated society, and only a comparable uniting on the part of women could result in the protection of their sex. However, in Walbiri society there exists no mechanism through which women can relate to each other as a group as do the men. Thus, faced with the hostility of men as a whole and the threat of the withdrawal of support from their kinsmen, women must conform to the demands that the male society makes upon them.

MARRIAGE AND VESTED INTERESTS

Women are always expected to conform in marriage. It has been noted by many authors that the marriage system entails unequal rights between men and women. Levi-Strauss (1969:309B) in his discussion of subordination structures states:

"According to this writer's interpretation, which does not need to be expounded systematically since (in spite of efforts toward objectivity) it probably permeates this paper, kinship systems,
Marriage rules, and descent groups constitute a coordinated whole, the function of which is to insure the premanency of the social group by means of intertwining consanguineous and affinal ties. They may be considered as the blueprint of a mechanism which "pumps" women out of their consanguineous families to redistribute them in affinal groups, and so on.'

Marriage then is a system which perpetuates group cohesion; however, it does this at the expense of the freedom of women. It is such systems which allow men as individuals to maintain their dominance over women. Male power is due to male utilization of the social structure which they use to support and maintain the system. It is not the product of individual action of men upon individual women; instead it is the result of the expectation of the society that one group (men) has the right to dispose of another group (women) in a particular manner and therefore is rooted in social structural principles.

Such expectations mean that women are born into a kin group and therefore certain men use the fact of their birth in order to fulfill male obligations to other men. In chapter two, I discussed the results for the women caught in this web of male politicking. As a girl grows up her father, mother's brother and mother's mother's brother are preparing to use her in the fulfillment of their ritual obligation to bestow her upon a man to whom they have promised a bride. It is interesting to note that this promise may have been made even before the female child was born. As one must assume that Australian Aboriginal men are not gifted with psychic powers which enable them to foretell the birth of female children, this bestowal of the female child cannot be considered as the manifestation of a personal or sexual desire for one particular female. Therefore, it is not the woman as an entity which is important, but what she represents and her labour. At this level the bestowal of women can be considered as impersonal. At another level, that is the relations between men involved in the bestowal,

4. Impersonalisation of the individual is something that most theorists are aware of. However, in native, non-western societies most anthropologists appear unaware of its existence. The existence of such a marriage system as practiced by the Walbiri has much in common with a computer. When using a computer, particular data and relevant changes are fed in to be analyzed. If the computer is making decisions about particular people it will usually end up with several candidates for the position. The marriage system of the Walbiri distributes women in accordance with its criteria. However, neither the computer nor the marriage system can be considered as personal. They both deal with particular criteria to be met.
the marriage system is personal. It involves developed, adult personalities and mutual obligation and support.

As the female grows older, manifesting a distinct personality and will, the group of men grows larger who have certain rights to control her. As a married woman, her husband becomes her most powerful dominator. In addition, the husband is now involved in a ritual relationship with her brother. The woman's brother, along with her husband and mother's brother will later emerge as the men who control her daughter's future and make the decision as to whom she will marry. Thus, as she goes through different stages in her life the woman will acquire more men who control her and display vested interests in her proper behaviour and her offspring.

The importance of this vested interest in women's behaviour is manifested throughout the society. Not only is this manifested by physical violence, but also in the way the male dominated system prevents women's reflecting about the effects of the system. Whilst women as individuals may attempt to gain some independance of the system, women as a group do not. Invariably the individual women's attempts to make their own decisions in such matters (for example whom they will marry) incurs the wrath of all the men involved in their control. Such attempts by women cannot be successful, unless they manage to leave the community.

The rationale of men in the continuance of this system is not, however, based totally upon the control of women for the sake of alliance. There is no evidence in the writings of different analysts that Walbiri men are conscious of their marriage system as predominately a form of alliance. Unlike other cultures studied, the Walbiri do not appear overtly concerned with the cohesive force of the marriage contract. Instead, the male rationale for this system is embedded in the firm belief that women are truly the inferior sex. Much of the justification for this belief comes from male myths and ritual. For example, the division of labour is justified in the myth of the travelling women and the incestuous man. In this myth some women, who are travelling with a group of men come along a group of wallabies. The

5. For an example of a culture which is overtly aware of marriage as an alliance system, see M. Mead, SEX AND TEMPERAMENT IN THREE PRIMITIVE SOCIETIES 1935, p. 84.
women, unlike the patient male hunters, grow excited and hurl their dig­
ging sticks at the animals. Their aim is unsure and they only succeed in
frightening the wallabies away. Meggitt (1966:177) reports that this myth
is cited by Walbiri men 'to account for, and to justify, the observed
division of labour whereby men hunt and women carry'.

However rituals and religion do more than justify male dominance; they
provide a charter for male dominance and organize men into a powerful, co­
hesive group. As shown in chapter five, a major justification for women's
subordination lies in dreamtime belief and ritual practices; however, its
consequences are truly evident in women's daily lives and their experiences
of male behaviour, as well as in other social domains.

The exclusion of women from ritual is an important aspect of male
dominance. Women are excluded from ritual not only because it is dangerous
to them. In a sense it is dangerous, but not only in the sense that the
Walbiri perceive it. Cohesion and cooperation are the very foundation of
Walbiri society. Strehlow (1970) perceived that the geography and totemic
landscape of central Australia is used by Aboriginal groups to create a
bond not only with the past but with other communities and people. It re­
quired men to cooperate in ritual, thus reinforcing distant ties. Women
provide much the same function in society. However, in order that women
fulfill this goal their distribution must be organized and coordinated.
The men are the organizers and guardians of the system. Thus, I suggest
that if men allowed women to choose their own husbands the cohesion of the
group could be threatened.

The control of women is thus perceived as an important and necessary
value in Walbiri society. This is manifested by the many ways in which the
Walbiri social system is organized to prevent female solidarity. The many
levels of society interact to maintain male dominance. Although women and
men may appear to be equal in some aspects of Walbiri life, when examined
in depth the inequality of their lives permeates society. Thus women are
not only the objects through which men manoeuvre politically, but are also
subject to male politics.
SEXUAL ASYMMETRY AS A STRUCTURAL FEATURE

An understanding of women and their control is therefore integral to an in depth study of Walbiri society. To ignore the role of women and their domination is to misrepresent and misunderstand the workings of the culture. The inequality of the sexes must be considered as central to the society and thus should be of central importance to the anthropologist. The examination of male workings can never fully give a clear understanding of any society.

In this thesis I have proposed that amongst the Walbiri the mechanics of male domination of women extends into many social areas. In addition, I have suggested the control of women is integral to male alliances and power structures. I have shown that women are not controlled only by male physical force. Female subordination must be considered as subtle and systematic and, as such, male physical power is only one aspect. Men work as a co-ordinated group to prevent any female interference to the androcentric status quo. In addition, I have shown that women and the ideas attached to them cross-cut the economic, political and ritual sections of Walbiri society. The study of women, therefore, should not be examined merely by what they do; their labour and its benefits to society are thought about and reacted to at all levels of society.
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