PENTECOSTALISM
AMONG THE BUNDJALUNG
REVISITED

The Rejection of Culture by
Aboriginal Christians in Northern
New South Wales, Australia

Akiko Ono

June 2007

A thesis submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy of
The Australian National University
STATEMENT

Except where cited in the text,
This work is the result of research carried out by the author.

Akiko Ono

School of Archaeology and Anthropology
The Australian National University
Canberra
A ten-page article in *Aborigines Now* (edited by Marie Reay, 1964) enticed me from a comfortable home in Japan into an ascetic life of a PhD research student in Australia—to academia in Canberra first and, eventually, into a more robust part of this country for long-term fieldwork. It was Malcolm Calley’s article I read at the library in Japan. In the article titled "Pentecostalism among the Bandjalang", he argued that Bundjalung and Githabul people “hid” Pentecostalism from white missionaries. He also demonstrated that among them orthodox Pentecostal doctrine had been augmented by indigenous mythology.

Such a form of resistance that was coexistent with a vernacular form of indigenous appropriation of Biblical stories instantly attracted a starting postgraduate in anthropology. In the first week of my preliminary fieldwork, however, my fantasies about tradition-oriented narratives and discourses withered rapidly: *culture and Christianity must not go hand in hand*—this was the prominent discourse I encountered upon my arrival in the field. Bundjalung and Githabul Pentecostals today reject Aboriginal “culture” nearly indiscriminatively. What has incurred a sweeping change in the same “all-Aboriginal” church community over the last fifty years? This was the conundrum given to me that shaped this study. It has led me to write a sequel to Malcolm Calley’s story.

This thesis would have never been written without Nicolas Peterson, my supervisor at the Australian National University (ANU). Nic Peterson assisted me coming to ANU and acquiring my scholarships, and from then onwards he has been strongly supportive of my project—whilst there was at that time in the atmosphere of Australian Aboriginal anthropology (not to mention the Japanese Aboriginalist trends) a lack of interest in and support for a study of Aboriginal Christianity in southeastern Australia—a heavily “settled” part of Australia consisting of a majority of whites and

---

1 For different spellings of this Aboriginal group as a social unit and/or language group, see Chapter 1.
only a minority of mixed descent Aboriginal people. I still remember such comments as “they would be just the same as whites” heard from everywhere.

Furthermore, without his understanding about and generous support towards a student from a non-English speaking cultural background, I would not have been able to solve many problems in the field and associated with writing an ethnography in my second language. Being a female researcher of Asian descent was no easy ascription in rural Australia. Writing ethnography in English was not a mere bilingual challenge for me, either. I had to go through an identity crisis in both the processes. Nic Peterson was always there; he did everything he could do to help me in the field, waited patiently for my safe return and watched over my slow writing-up process and provided me with positive comments throughout my post-fieldwork period. I thank him so much from my heart. He has been the best supervisor a student could wish for.

The other members of the panel—Francesca Merlan and Ian Keen—have provided productive feedback throughout my writing-up stage, which encouraged me so much and helped me to soothe my post-fieldwork blues and, especially, my regrets about heaps of could-have-been-collected information from the field. I particularly thank Francesca for “waking me up” in the most needed moments of the writing-up stage. Whenever I was lost in a trance, having been involved in enthusiastic but facile ethnographic writing, her incisive but all the more productive comments slapped me awake and led me to extremely worthwhile conceptual thinking. Another encouragement was that she once represented my English as “adventurous”. In writing this thesis, I kept searching for better and more apt English words; I consulted at least one of my three electronic dictionaries (Japanese-English, English Collocation and Thesaurus) nearly every two or three minutes. By “adventurous” Francesca means my English is not boring—this is the most desired reward for the work that I could wish for.

I am equally indebted to ANU for providing me with an ANU PhD Scholarship and a Faculty of Arts fieldwork grant. Also the International Postgraduate Research Scholarship I was awarded was provided by the Australian government. I am deeply
grateful for their generous financial support for an international scholar. Being a part of the School of Archaeology and Anthropology at ANU was the most privileged experience. I would like to thank many people for their support and friendship. I thank all of the staff and students who participated in the anthropology Friday seminar series for their friendly comments, productive criticisms and thought-provoking discussions; to the administrative and technical support staff, I thank especially Liz Walters, Sue Fraser, Kathy Callen and David McGregor for their support and friendship. I began managing my first “culture shock” not in the field of rural Australia but at ANU—in the hallways of the AD Hope Building and on the streets of Canberra. Their generous support and warm smiles always cheered me up. Lastly but not least importantly, I thank Sophie Creighton, an ANU PhD and Aboriginal expert, for proofreading my thesis and correcting my English. Her devoted work made this thesis reach a higher level as academic writing.

This thesis would not have been possible without the Bundjalung and Githabul people I worked with. I regret that I cannot mention their names here, as it was decided that people’s names would be kept anonymous—i.e. most of the names of people whom I mentioned and quoted in the thesis and of those who were involved in my project directly and indirectly. I thank them heartily for allowing me to come near them and enabling me to enjoy the most important period of my academic career. I am equally indebted to some local white residents for their information, support and friendship. Among them I particularly thank anthropologist and consultant Inge Riebe. She gave me expert advice and friendly support throughout my fieldwork. The fieldwork for this thesis drove a lesson into my head that doing anthropology is no romantic “grand touring”. The field experiences were not always pleasant and happy-go-lucky but through my attempt to come closer to an alien culture and society, I have reaffirmed my enthusiasm for doing anthropology. It was, is, and will be a never-failing, thrilling task for me.

I owe heavy debts to my family—especially my mother—who waited patiently in

---

2 Except for historic preachers, elders and leaders of the nationwide Aboriginal Christian networks.
Japan for my return over the years of my PhD program during their most difficult times. My father died while I was in the field and as the death was sudden and unexpected, I was not able to return home in time for the funeral, which caused shame for my family and kin. I could not participate in most of the mourning ceremonies that followed for several months, either. For me it is an essential prerequisite for membership of the hard-core traditional village I am from to fund and organise numerous mourning ceremonies to follow. My widowed mother was extremely hurt by her daughter's violation of family and community obligations. The elders of the village and our kin understood the difficult situation I was in, but a shocking sense of irony that I neglected my own culture and tradition in order to study the culture and tradition of strangers still linger in the minds of my family. I sincerely thank them for accepting my choices.
ABSTRACT

This thesis is an ethnographic and historical exploration of Aboriginal Pentecostalism which permeated quickly into the Bundjalung and Githabal community during the early twentieth century in northern New South Wales of Australia. This vernacular form of Aboriginal Pentecostalism has kept responding to the changing local socio-economic environment and performed diverse functions over generations.

Malcolm Calley, based on his research in the mid-1950s, emphasised that Pentecostalism had attracted Bundjalung and Githabal people because of its similarity to their traditional religious life. That the Bundjalung and Githabal Pentecostal movement of ca. 1940s-1950s created syncretic myths seems to be common knowledge today in Australian anthropology. The thesis reconsiders this picture. I present the argument that Bundjalung and Githabal people accepted Christianity as a total new form of exogenous moral order out of their own needs ever since their first encounter with Christianity. By careful examination of Calley’s ethnographic data, this thesis presents evidence that the syncretic appropriations of the Bible were not current in the context of Christian practice of the Bundjalung and Githabal Pentecostal movement in the mid-1950s.

Contemporary Bundjalung and Githabal Christian practice is completely “de-Aboriginalised”. Today Bundjalung and Githabal Christians reject Aboriginal “culture” indiscriminately. On the other hand, their affiliation with Christianity does not lead the adherents to cultivate greater congruence with the white mainstream value system. The Bundjalung and Githabal church networks and the organisation of factions have been formed exclusively in accordance with the social relations within the Aboriginal social domain. There was, and is, little interference from the white umbrella bodies. Despite the loss of traditional kinship knowledge and the drastic transformation of their marriage patterns, the system of relatedness has still been strongly maintained among them on the basis of the redefined social institutions such as new marriage rules and the moral economy that is “demand sharing”. All the
church factions are embedded in the closely related kin groups. Various inter-/intra-factional conflicts are entwined with different kinds of tensions—especially, those between a sense of relatedness and the desire for personal autonomy.

In Bundjalung and Githabul society, Christianity is needed by those who are deeply embedded in the lived reality of everyday life in the Aboriginal social domain that is based on the blackfellas' mode of thought. The emphasis is always on each individual's spiritual warfare against the Devil. Fear urges them to renounce culture. Loss of knowledge related to the *djurebil* (sacred places), at which both beneficent magic and destructive magic used to be performed, has enhanced fear as generations have passed. Throughout the process of the collapse of traditional social institutions, especially rites related to localised spiritual beings, Christianity has functioned as protection against evil spirits which are considered to have been left intact. Traditional knowledge has been replaced with sensitivity which anyone can obtain through faith. This thesis provides rich ethnographic data about the everyday life experiences of Bundjalung and Githabul Christians: conversion experiences, the way to “live like Jesus” and, especially, their way of coping with fear of the Devil or “culture”.

Faith in the supernatural power of God, however, functions to lead the adherents to come to terms with existing, unsolved problems. The euphoria of “spiritual living” induced by conversion enables them to establish a psychological equilibrium between a “spirit-filled” Christian life and a problem-laden blackfellas’ life today. This thesis analyses the phenomenon of “backsliding” from the point of view of oscillation between ideological cooption by the Christian moral order and a way of living as an Aboriginal person in the contemporary Aboriginal community. I conclude with a reflection on the way this vernacular Christianity has functioned in this particular colonial contact zone. What is seen in the change? Is it continuity or rupture? Then, I ask, what form of continuity, what kind of rupture?
TABLE OF CONTENTS

PREFACE & ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS .............................................. i
ABSTRACT ................................................................................ v
List of Maps ............................................................................ xi
List of Tables .......................................................................... xi-xii
List of Figures .......................................................................... xii
List of Kinship Charts ........................................................... xii-xiii
List of Plates ........................................................................... xiii
List of Abbreviations ............................................................. xvi

CHAPTER 1  INTRODUCTION ..................................................... 1
Thesis focus
The research community
The fieldwork situation
  The situation
  Positioning myself
Theoretical perspective
  Understanding a “settled” and Christianised situation
  The Aboriginal subject, domination and forms of resistance
The argument: resilience of a conquered society
  From knowledge to sensitivity
  The Lord is a last resort
Thesis outline

CHAPTER 2  HISTORY: PROPAGATION OF
PENTECOSTALISM IN THE EARLY DAYS ......................... 41
Prelude: Post-contact change
  Events
Sociocultural order

The pioneers
  The origins and expansion of Australian Pentecostalism
  The Aboriginal harbingers

The Aboriginal Christian network
  The black evangelists, lay pastors and the flock
  The wind of change

CHAPTER 3  COSMOLOGY AND RITUAL IN THE
  REVIVAL ERA ................................................................. 76

Reconsidering “Pentecostalism among the Bandjalang”

Practice
  The manifestations
  Small cottage meetings and huge rallies

Discourse
  Aboriginal Jesus
  The Trinity: Mamung, Bunam and Juggi

Aboriginal church from the beginning

CHAPTER 4  LOCAL CHURCHES: ORGANISATIONS
  AND NETWORKING ....................................................... 114

Pentecostal legacy

The structure
  Loose factional groupings
  Church policies: the Aboriginal way and the universal way
  The winds of change and turbulence

Mobility
  Networking and types of loyalty
  Rallies: a legacy of the golden age

viii
Families, kin and gender
Contemporary Bundjalung and Githabul families and kin groups
Gender issues: oppressing sexuality
Where to draw the line?: relationalism vs. individualism
Which solidarity: kinship or Christian fellowship?
Summing up
On a divine mission

CHAPTER 5 PRACTICE: LIFE AS A
CHosen VESSEL ........................................................ 179

Night service on Day Four, Christmas Rally, Muli Muli, Woodenbong

Doctrines
Discontinuity of syncretic narratives
Favoured verses and parables

Becoming a Christian
Full confession
Praise and worship
Prayers
Manifestations

Weekly activities and events
Sunday worship services
Weddings
Funerals
Water Baptisms

Sin, repentance and deliverance
Drinking
Sexual immorality
Involvement in culture
Signs of backsliding
CHAPTER 6  TESTIMONIES: IN BETWEEN...

Everyday life of an Aboriginal Christian
Two stories
Moral economy among the Aboriginal Christians

Universal imagination in the vernacular context
The nationwide Aboriginal Christian networking
Which is the whiteman's way?

My life with the Lord
Types of conversion experiences
Testimonies
- Jonah and Ruth: deliverance from addiction to yarndi, grog and freaky fights
- Eva and Joseph: the miracle on New Year's Eve
- Stranded souls: depression and loneliness
- Uncle Samuel: a spirit of fear

Backsliding
Oscillation between euphoria and despair
Mimesis and "mystical participation"

CHAPTER 7  DIMENSIONS OF FEAR: "CULTURE"
AND CHRISTIANITY

Magic and sorcery in New South Wales

Things to fear
Clever things
- The crystal-like stones
- The worm
- The spirit familiar or assistant totem
- The walking stick
- The canoe-shaped stone
Witchcraft: fear of getting “sung over”
Other spiritual torment
Renouncing the clever thing—or “culture”
From knowledge to sensitivity

CHAPTER 8  CONCLUSION: CULTURE, CONTINUITY AND
POWER OF THE HOLY SPIRIT .......................... 315

REFERENCES .......................................................... 325

APPENDICES .......................................................... 339
Appendix 1: The white Australian Pentecostal pioneers .............. 339
Appendix 2: Vernacular reality and universal imagination............ 347
Appendix 3: Episodes regarding Choc Mundine and
Ruby Langford Ginibi ............................................ 358

List of Maps
Map 1: The research area (The North Coast and New England
Regions of NSW) ................................................. 9
Map 2: The Northern Rivers region (the Bundjalung
and Githabul homeland) ....................................... 10
Map 3: The Bundjalung language group of dialects .................... 11
Map 4: Pentecostal sites covered by this research ..................... 123
Map 5: Factional groupings ........................................ 125

List of Tables
Table 1: Major stations, reserves and camps in the Northern Rivers region
(1883-1969) ............................................................ 69
Table 2: Timeline of major events in the Northern Rivers region and Australia (1880-1980) ................................................................................................................... 70
Table 3: The Bundjalung and Githabul words for the Trinity in syncretic narratives ................................................................................................................................. 99
Table 4: The Bundjalung and Githabul words for the Trinity used practically by Christians ........................................................................................................................ 99
Table 5: Postcode areas of high concentrations of Pentecostals .................. 116
Table 6: Religious affiliation of Indigenous people in the Richmond-Tweed statistical division (2001) ....................................................................................................................... 118
Table 7: Factional groupings ......................................................................... 127
Table 8: Congregations and pastors (as of December 2003) ....................... 128
Table 9: Examples of the Aboriginal rallies (2002-2003) .............................. 155
Table 10: Timetable of Sunday morning worship services ....................... 205
Table 11: Examples of weddings .................................................................. 209
Table 12: List of worldly pleasures regarded as sins .................................... 216-217
Table 13: Domestic economy, Case 1 (Christian female, Age: 50) ............. 235
Table 14: Domestic economy, Case 2 (Christian male, Age: 23) ............... 236
Table 15: Domestic economy, Case 3 (Non-Christian female, Age: 31) .... 236
Table 16: Revelatory experiences of the youth converts .............................. 248

List of Figures

Figure 1: Studies of Indigenous Christianity: examples of different perspectives ................................................................. 38
Figure 2: Types of conversion experiences (Total) .................................. 246
Figure 3: Types of conversion experiences (Youth: 16-35 years old) ...... 247
Figure 4: The relationship between the Holy Spirit and self ............... 260

List of Kinship Charts

Chart 1: A case study of Groups A, B & C and AICM ....................... 151
Chart 2: Contemporary “too-close” marriages ............................. 164
Chart 3: A case study of solidarity formation, Groups A and C .......... 172

List of Plates

Plate 1: Tabulam convention, 27-31 Oct 1955 .................................... 92
Plate 2: Organisers of the 1955 Tabulam convention ........................ 92
Plate 3: Tents hired to accommodate visitors to Tabulam convention .... 92
Plate 4: Meal break at hall, Tabulam convention ............................... 93
Plate 5: Open-air meeting, Cabbage Tree Island, ca. 1954-1955 .......... 93
Plate 6: Muli Muli Full Gospel Church (Group A) ............................ 140
Plate 7: View of Muli Muli Aboriginal community (in Woodenbong) .... 140
Plate 8: Christmas Tent Rally in Muli Muli
(all factions get together and rally) ................................................... 140
Plate 9: Open-air outreach at Box Ridge (Group B) .......................... 140
Plate 10: Church in the bush (Jubal Property, Group B) ................. 140
Plate 11: After church “cuppa” with kangaroo stew and damper
(Jubal Property, Group B) ............................................................... 140
Plate 12: Tweed Valley Community Church (Group D) .................. 141
Plate 13: Venue of Fingal Fellowship Church (Group D) ............... 141
Plate 14: House meeting in Yamba (Group E) ................................. 141
Plate 15: Rally in Boggabilla/Toomelah (Group EXT-1) ................. 141
List of Abbreviations

AICM  The Australian Indigenous Christian Ministries Ltd.
AIM  The Aboriginal Inland Mission
AOG  The Assemblies of God
CDEP  Community Development Employment Projects
NAIDOC  National Aborigines and Islanders Day Observance Committee
NAISDA  National Aboriginal and Islander Skills Development Association
UAICC  The United Aboriginal and Islander Christian Congress
UAM  The United Aborigines Mission
CHAPTER 1

Introduction

Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new.

— *The Second Epistle of Paul the Apostle to the Corinthians 5:17, The Holy Bible (KJV)*

"You gotta throw away culture once you become Christian."

— The oldest female elder of the Githabul language group, Muli Muli Aboriginal village

Thesis focus

This thesis is an ethnographic and historical exploration of Aboriginal Pentecostalism which was dispersed quickly over Aboriginal lands in the early twentieth century in northern New South Wales of Australia. The local Aboriginal lay leadership laid ground for Pentecostalisation of Aborigines in this particular region, where people identify themselves today as the Bundjalung and Githabul. The exogenous moral order, having been adopted in the form of an extremist Protestantism, has kept responding to the changing socio-economic environment in the local Aboriginal society and performed diverse functions over generations in a vernacular context. This study is about Bundjalung and Githabul Pentecostalism in all the social, economic and historical particularity from which exploration must proceed.

The name of Bundjalung and Githabul people has been noted in the Australian anthropological literature of the studies of Aboriginal Christianity for their "syncretistic" interpretation of Pentecostalism observed in the mid-1950s by Malcolm

Calley’s study was one of the earliest anthropological studies of religious change in Australian Aboriginal society which showed interest in the changing religious practice itself (cf. Rose & Swain 1988). Calley emphasised his collection of “syncretistic myths” or elaboration of the stories from biblical and Dreaming sources—such as the story of Aboriginal Jesus—in the community; he argued that Pentecostalism had attracted Bundjalung and Githabul people because of its similarities with their traditional religious life. Russel Hausfeld, who served as Station Manager of the Woodenbong Station (which was located in Githabul people’s territory) between 1956 and 1960, also reported a “syncretic cult”; he emphasised that the station residents still retained traditional practices and beliefs (Hausfeld 1960, 1963).

Half a century later, my field research for this thesis in the same community encounters something remarkably different. Pentecostalism has survived in the same region, and the memories of the great “revival” days are still cherished in many hearts. On the other hand, Bundjalung and Githabul Pentecostals today reject Aboriginal “culture” nearly indiscriminatively—whether it is talking about traditional religious life or participating in the contemporary cultural revitalisation movement encouraged by the government. Neither myths of Aboriginal Jesus nor any hint of nexus of the Dreaming stories and biblical stories are shared by the Bundjalung and Githabul Pentecostal Christians today. Culture and Christianity must not go hand in hand. This was the prominent discourse I encountered in the first week of my fieldwork. How to figure an exogenous religion that has incurred a sweeping change in the “all-Aboriginal” church community in this region over the last fifty years? This is the conundrum that shaped this study.

---

3 Calley represented the studied group as “Bandjalang”, which actually covered several linguistic groups in the Northern Rivers region of New South Wales. Up to now they have come under one political unit named and spelled as “Bundjalung”, except for one local linguistic group called the Githabul. In this study I use the term “Bundjalung and Githabul” people to represent the Aboriginal people that my research covers, which exactly nominates the group of Aborigines Calley’s research covered. See more detail given below about the research community.

4 Among Christians, the term “revival” means a new awakening of spiritual awareness and growth of faith in God, hence it does not mean that the revival which took place in the Northern Rivers region in the 1950s was the revitalisation of any former religious movements.
The analytic focus of this thesis is fixed at three points. First and most importantly, this study is about an Aboriginal society in “settled Australia”, the closely settled regions modelled by Rowley\(^5\) (1971; cf. Keen 1988b). From this standpoint I will look at the issue concerning “culturelessness” and “loss” as a dominant representation of Aboriginal peoples in southeastern Australia—as has been questioned by growing number of researchers recently (e.g. Creamer 1988; Keen 1988b; Langton 1984; Macdonald 2001).

Secondly, this is a study about Aboriginal Christianity, through which I must confront the prevailing analytical framework often dichotomised into Christianity and tradition, or dominance and resistance. As Robert Tonkinson has observed in over twenty years of the changing attitudes towards Christianity of the Jigalong people in Western Australia (Tonkinson 1974, 1988), a clear conceptual dichotomy between Aboriginal and “whitefella” domains is neither ahistorically sustainable nor are the two domains incommensurable. Blurring of the boundary between distinct domains, cultures and societies and emergence of a new consciousness have become the foci of recent anthropological studies of Australian Aboriginal society (cf. Hinkson & Smith 2005).

The third point of focus extends the method of this study to that of an historical anthropology. The historical particularity of Bundjalung and Githabul Pentecostalism has not yet been explored to the full extent it deserves. The permeation of Pentecostalism to the Bundjalung and Githabul community dates back to the early 1920s (see Chapter 2). Since this time they have had “all-Aboriginal” Pentecostal churches independent of white involvement for more than a generation—well before the Aboriginal Christian evangelical movement spread from Elcho Island in 1979 (Blacket 1997; Bos 1988; Rose 1988; Rudder 1993; Harris 1990:869-906) and the spiritual

\(^5\) Rowley (1971) put this model of “settled” Australia by contrast with “colonial” Australia which is dominated by pastoral production. The regions called “settled” Australia lie mainly in the southeastern and southwestern parts of the continent, extending on the east coast north to Cairns, and north to Carnarvon on the west coast. The category should also include Darwin, the major European and Asian settlement of the north (Keen 1988b:1).
awakening of Yarrabah mission took place in 1983 (Hume 1989; Harris 1990:869-906). In Aboriginal anthropology, whilst these movements are well represented as autonomous Aboriginal evangelical Christian movements, the pioneering “Bandjalang Pentecostal revival” in the mid-1950s has been somewhat overlooked with regard to this aspect. The Bundjalung and Githabul Pentecostal movement of that era was also based on lay Aboriginal leadership and networking; and it sent evangelical teams to the lands of other Aboriginal groups as well. In the Northern Rivers region, older Aboriginal people still recall the Gospel Belt (the trajectory of the “crusade tours”) formed by the Bundjalung and Githabul evangelical teams in those days, which extended from one Aboriginal settlement to another on the Far North Coast and beyond—as far west to the Kamilaroi area of the western plains of New South Wales.

I attribute this outcome to the particular academic bias in favour of continuity of traditionality regarding the studies of mixed-descent Aboriginal communities. It is, no doubt, deceitfully attractive to emphasise retention of traditional practices and beliefs among Aborigines in “settled” Aboriginal Australia, i.e., a severely socio-culturally deprived Aboriginal society. (I will return to this issue below.) By carefully reading the past ethnographies, however, a strange discrepancy can be found between the observed religious practices in the church context and the evidence of “syncretistic” interpretations of Christian dogma. “Syncretistic” practices were not collected amongst the Christian meetings. On the contrary, Calley observed and stated clearly that the Christian practice itself seen at everyday church meetings and frequently held large-scale conventions was no more Aboriginal (i.e. tradition-oriented) than white Pentecostal practice was (Calley 1955: Part III, pp.17-18 & pp.28.) “Syncretistic” myths were collected from elderly males outside the church context. Ethnographic data are too scarce to insist that church meetings in this era produced and circulated “syncretistic” interpretations of Christianity.

6 The Elcho Island revival spread throughout Arnhem Land, into the central and southern areas and to the Western Desert region. In Yarrabah mission community, the special gift of visions held by the Aboriginal residents lead to life-changing miracles whereby the alcohol-and-violence-stricken community changed. Both are regarded as new phenomena in Aboriginal Australia in that they were autonomous movements under Aboriginal leadership and that the movement emphasised the spiritual side of the gospel.
Calley's ethnography (Calley 1955, 1959) shows he had acute consciousness of and interest in the dynamics of the changing post-contact Aboriginal society. His insight is penetrating and his observation astute. Oddly coexisting with this is his pursuit for the reified archetype of the Old Rule—especially in the structure of religious practice. In his analysis of ritual practices and narratives he relates whatever appeals to him as being “mystic” or “ecstatic” to the Old Rule—or something intrinsic to Aboriginal spirituality. But Bundjalung and Githabul Pentecostals are still today “mystic” and “ecstatic” even after they have come to strongly reject Aboriginal culture, tradition and the “spirits of the bush”. Pentecostal Christians all over the world are, in fact, “mystic”, “ecstatic”, “spirit-filled” and leading “supernatural” lives? After all, what is looked at as being mystic, ecstatic or spirit-filled is simply about the new system of moral order that they adopted a century ago—not quintessentially about primordial Aboriginal spirituality. These practices are based more on the genuine Pentecostal Christian dogma than traditional Aboriginal spirituality despite the fact that many of the latter day researchers have represented the “Bandjalang Pentecostal movement”, for example, as “a remarkable and peculiar recrudescence of the traditional religion”(Prentis 1972:299).

A basic question arises here: have today’s Bundjalung and Githabul Pentecostals who reject culture given in? In other words, have they redefined their value system to conform to the European values completely? Have they become miglu (white) or assimilated? The immediate answer I can give (at this introductory point in the thesis) is that contrary to the general imagination about a crescendo process of socio-cultural change towards assimilation in the Aboriginal society of “settled” Australia, what happened at the point where Bundjalung and Githabul people seem to have discarded the tradition-oriented interpretation or elaboration of the gospel is not so simple as to be analysed from the framework of cultural loss or coercion by a white mission institution. To explore this question, particular configurations of relationships between

---

7 The Statement of Faith of the Assemblies of God of Australia, the largest Pentecostal denomination in Australia, declares that it is “tragically possible to have orthodox doctrines but to be cold and formal.” It emphasises the supernatural part of the gospel: “…we have a supernatural God, a supernatural Bible, a supernatural life, supernatural resources and a supernatural hope.” Australian Evangel, May, 1984, Supplement
social and moral orders of the local Aboriginal community and the nation's colonial and postcolonial systems must be put under scrutiny.

Today on the Far North Coast of New South Wales an anthropologist encounters, without exception, a somewhat strange phrase whenever she brings about the issue of becoming a Christian to Aboriginal persons. The majority would respond: "I'm not Christian, 'cos you gotta give up everything. I'm not ready." More outspoken people would say it is absurd to seek a church affiliation as long as one is leading a happy life. In addition to hesitation about having to give up an irresistible gust for drinking, gambling and sexual adventures, which is fairly understandable, local Bundjalung and Githabul people always put a hue of further self-torturing commitment on what they represent as being a Christian. "If you become Christian, the happy life of an ordinary person of modern times would have to be given up!" This kind of anxiety accompanies their narrative. This sentiment is indeed pervasive as far as Christianity in Bundjalung and Githabul country is concerned.8

Aboriginal Pentecostals in this region lead marginal lives. They try to withdraw into their own "Aboriginal domain" of Christian practice. For them Christian practice is not mimicry of the white lifestyle in order to stand out or to strive to become as "good", "wealthy" or "successful" as whites. Fellowshipping at white church is least preferable, because firstly, Aboriginal Pentecostals in this region do not feel comfortable about mixing with white people,9 and secondly, there have always been enough Aboriginal churches in the region to turn to, although most of these have been as small as "house meeting" groups. Furthermore, even within the "Aboriginal domain", Christians are in a decided minority today, as they refuse many of the common interests of the community. Besides destructive behaviours such as drinking and gambling, they refuse the productive ideals of modern times. For example, they

---

8 See Chapter 4 for the geographical range of influence of this vernacular Aboriginal Pentecostalism.
9 In 1978 the race relations in this region were as such, "Even today the Bandjalang are not allowed to feel welcome in what was originally their own land. Attitudes from the white population generally range from a sickening paternalism to blatant hostility" (Crowley 1978:4). In the late 1990s, a local Aboriginal scholar still had to tolerate such a level of overt racism as the refusal to serve to Aborigines at shops.
criticise political activism, frown upon involvement in native title, withdraw from most of the "worldly" concerns and disdain showing interest in realising secular achievements. Nevertheless they lead, the same as others, a life of dependence on welfare, which is the fruit of Aboriginal politics that they strongly criticise and disdain.

This phenomenon suggests two regional particularities: (1) Christianity for Aborigines in this region is considered synonymous with a Pentecostalism that has developed under their own regional Aboriginal church network (see Chapter 4); (2) affiliation with Christianity is not relevant to the ethical self-formation that can cultivate greater congruence with European values, e.g. virtues of accumulation, pursuit of personal happiness and prosperity (see Chapters 5 & 6). The process through which these particularities have developed must be examined in order to explore the contemporary practice and discourse of rejecting and renouncing culture. For this purpose, the first two chapters of this thesis (Chapters 2 & 3) look at the early process of Pentecostalisation and the “great revival days”.

The research community

My main field site is the traditional territory of Bundjalung and Githabul people in the far north coastal region of New South Wales. It covers the area between the Logan River in Queensland and the Clarence River in NSW, encompassing the Richmond River basin, and extending as far west as Tenterfield on the Tablelands in NSW and beyond Warwick in Queensland (cf. Calley 1959; Hausfeld 1960; Crowley 1978; Heron 1991, 1993; Sharpe 1985, Geytenbeek 1971) (see Map 1 & Map 3). The New South Wales component of Bundjalung and Githabul territory, the main location for contemporary occupancy of Bundjalung and Githabul people, is called the Northern Rivers region (see Map 2). Before European contact there were about twenty closely related dialect groups but today the term Bundjalung has replaced most sub-groups, except the Githabul group (Crowley 1978; Sharpe 1985). In this study I use the phrase “Bundjalung and Githabul people” to represent the Aboriginal people in this research area.
The Bundjalung and Githabal population is today dispersed widely in the Northern Rivers region and its Christian community cuts across several settlements — in the ex-station\textsuperscript{10} and reserve settlements, fringe towns and urban centres. According to the 2001 census, the Aboriginal population of this area is approximately 6,000, comprising about 3\% of the total population.\textsuperscript{11} Although there has been an increasing influx of Aboriginal people into the urban centres such as Lismore, Ballina, Casino, Yamba, Grafton, and Tweed Heads, still many of them live at the fringe communities consisting of ex-station and reserve settlements such as Muli Muli (at Woodenbong), Tabulam, Box Ridge (at Coraki), Cabbage Tree Island (at Wardel), Hill Crest (at Maclean), Ngaru (at Yamba), Baryulgil and Malabugilmah (at Grafton). (See Map 2.)

\textsuperscript{10} In New South Wales, the term "station" was used for a "reserve" (i.e. a reserved land for the use of Aborigines) to which a resident manager was appointed for supervision (Goodall 1996:xv).

\textsuperscript{11} The Richmond-Tweed statistical subdivision roughly covers the contemporary Bundjalung and Githabal communities.
Map 1 The research area
(The North Coast and New England regions of N.S.W.)
Map 2 The Northern Rivers region
(The Bundjalung and Githabul homeland)
The Bundjalung language group of dialects occupied the territory shown within the shaded line and the east coast of Australia.
Despite the obvious Europeanisation of lifestyle and loss of traditional material culture, Bundjalung and Githabul people are closely related through loyalty to kin that has been reinforced by complex intermarriage over generations, which enables them to live within the social domain of a somewhat exclusive Aboriginal community with its own social order and values. In the urban centres the Aboriginal population forms its own non-discrete "urban hamlets" (Riebe n.d.), instead of merging as individual households into white residential areas. Although it is obvious that they are a people of mixed descent, intermarriage with whites has been rare until only recently. In southeastern Australia, Aboriginal communities are now essentially mixed-race communities, not because of active inter-racial marriage but because of intermarriage through several generations within the Aboriginal community after the initial introduction of white blood that had taken place by the middle of the nineteenth century (Rowley 1972). Regarding the Northern Rivers Aborigines, Margaret Sharpe writes as of 1985, "As marriage is mainly within the Aboriginal community the proportion of European ancestry has not changed much in the last fifty years" (Sharpe 1985). Still today intermarriage is rare except for the Tweed area, in spite of fairly common temporary relationships with white partners.

The social domains of the local whites and blacks are distinctively separate except for a few domains of social interaction such as schooling and drinking. Mainstream job opportunities are rarely accessible for Aboriginal people because of their lack of higher education and due to racism. Local government jobs in Aboriginal administration are allocated through politics among the families. These positions at local Aboriginal institutions and CDEP cannot supply local residents with enough

---

12 Calley recorded the 1950s situation (Calley 1959:1) as: "Some approximate to the full-blood type; most are obviously part European and some are indistinguishable from Europeans. There are only five full-bloods left." Taking an example of the Woodenbong Aboriginal Station in the 1950s, out-mating was extremely limited; "...in the previous thirty years only three women had married whites. Those women were not favourably received by community members and had to leave" (Hausfeld 1960:79).

13 See Chapter 4 for the social, economic and ethnic difference of the Tweed area.

14 Few of such interracial relationships grow to become stable unions; generally, white partners do not tolerate the burden of Aboriginal kin obligation and when the couple reaches the limit of mutual tolerance, the white partner leaves and children are, without problem, absorbed into the Aboriginal kinship as if they were single-parent children.
attractive jobs to make them feel motivated and diligent at work. But on the whole, people can provide for their family unless they are absorbed in alcohol and drug abuse. Housing needs are well looked after by the local Aboriginal Housing Corporations and, more importantly, there are kin to whom individuals can turn for help at any time. The sharing of money, food, commodities, transportation and child rearing is substantially practiced based on kin relations regardless of generation, residential area, Christian affiliation, and the degree of fairness of skin colour. Frequent visits among relatives and casual, temporary cohabitation also circulate resources. Narratives of attachment to “our people”, “our community” and the “Blackfella way” are poignant even among Pentecostal Christians who are candid in rejecting Aboriginal culture and tradition.

The fieldwork situation

The fieldwork period was approximately eighteen months between July 2002 and March 2004, preceded by four months preliminary fieldwork between December 2001 and April 2002. Instead of choosing one single settlement for intensive observation, I dealt with all the Aboriginal congregations in a network which included sixteen congregations in total (including the four allies outside the Northern Rivers region) at the time of fieldwork. This is because it was obvious that choosing one (or two) factional groups for ideally intensive observation would lead me to lose sight of the whole structure of the Aboriginal network that was, firstly, extremely invisible to outsiders and, secondly, based on the endless cycle of merging and splitting up of small factions. Some of the factional groups were merely “house meeting” groups. I

---

15 The Bundjalung and Githabul Church community was split into many small groups despite such a small regional Aboriginal population of approximately 6,000. Church activities were unstable except for the two relatively large-scale churches in the town. All the churches are “black” churches with all-black adherents except for these growing “town churches” which have acquired a less black-oriented tendency for the sake of growth and a more stable financial footing. If I had chosen one of these relatively large congregations for more efficient observation, data collection and in depth rapport, I would have needed to stay away from the very core part of the local Aboriginal Christian community. If, on the other hand, I had stayed with one of the more black-oriented congregations, because of its small-sized and unstable nature I would have become a biographer of one small family and mostly neglected the
kept visiting sixteen congregations in rotation and attempted to get acquainted with the adherents at each place as best I could. Eventually it turned out that the adherents of the respective congregations travelled extensively too, not as frequently as I did, but according to a particular rule that politics inside the regional Aboriginal network had established (see Chapter 4).

I secured commercial rental accommodation in the town of Casino as a base and travelled extensively from there. This small pastoral town is geographically in the centre of the Northern Rivers region, from which I travelled to the localities scattered in a radius of 100-150 km, but towards the end of the fieldwork, I needed to extended my work up to a radius of 300 km from Casino—beyond the Bundjalung and Githabul area to cover the friendly Kamilaroi and Dhan-gadi groups. My research also covered the two nationwide Aboriginal Christian networks to examine their roles in local Aboriginal networking.16

The language used for the fieldwork for this thesis was Aboriginal English (see, for example, Arthur 1996; Blake 1991) spoken in southeastern Australia. All of the Aboriginal people in the researched community spoke Aboriginal English as their only language. It is English marked by some features as being distinctively Aboriginal (Hausfeld 1960:19-22; Sharpe 1985:102; Potts 1998). For example, English spoken by Bundjalung and Githabul people has distinctive accents and intonations, the absence of certain sounds, and vice versa (e.g. an 'h' sound is deleted in words starting with it, whilst it is added in front of words starting with a vowel), the use of 'bin' to form the past tense, erroneous conjugation of verbs, (e.g. 'have went' instead of 'have gone'), use of 'er' for he and she. The syntax is simple and frequently formed in deviant ways from the standard English grammar.

---

16 Two nationwide Aboriginal Christian networks have had influence in the Bundjalung and Githabul country over the past twenty years: the United Aboriginal and Islander Christian Congress (UAICC) and the Australian Indigenous Christian Ministries Ltd. (AICM). See Chapter 6 and Appendix 2 for detail.
Bundjalung and Githabul dialects\(^{17}\) are no longer spoken for practical everyday usage in the community (Hausfeld 1960:16-19; Crowley 1978:1-6; Sharpe 1995; Sharpe et al. 1985). Some local primary schools have Aboriginal language classes on a very casual basis due to the limited availability of Aboriginal tutors. The content of these classes, however, is within the scope of teaching both black and white children basic Aboriginal words; the classes do not aim at reinforcing Aboriginal people's fluent command of their regional dialects. At the start of my fieldwork in 2002, it was a shared understanding in the community that only three elders (one in his early seventies and two in their mid-eighties) were alive who were able to speak the local dialects fluently. In daily conversation, however, words borrowed from the Bundjalung and Githabul dialects are often incorporated into English sentences (see also, Oakes 1985; Fraser-Knowles 1985; Sharpe 1993; Potts 1998, for linguists' reports), besides the more general terminology of Aboriginal English used widely in southeastern Australia.

*Positioning myself and fieldwork methods*

The Bundjalung and Githabul community does not have any Aboriginal body authorised to issue official permits to researchers or any visitors who intend to come and live in the Northern Rivers region and meet Aboriginal people for any reason or purpose.\(^{18}\) As mentioned already, the small Aboriginal population is scattered over the Northern Rivers region. Located in each of the settlements and urban centres are the respective Aboriginal administrative bodies such as the Land Council and the Housing Coop established to function inside the respective small territories. Indeed rumours

\(^{17}\) See (Livingstone 1892; Smythe 1947-1948; Cunningham 1979; Geytenbeek & Geytenbeek 1971; Crowley 1978; Sharpe 1985) for studies of the Bundjalung dialects.

\(^{18}\) There is the Bundjalung Elders Committee based in Lismore, but it is a representative body of the regional groups who identify themselves with the lately introduced concept of the "Bundjalung Nation". The Githabul group does not have membership in this committee. I had a meeting with them at a council meeting in April 2002 and explained my purpose of visiting the Bundjalung community. As most of the elders in the committee were non-Christians, however, afterwards I began meeting Christians in the community on my own and individually. Regarding the Githabul community I went to see the pastor of their village church in Woodenbong in December 2001. Each time I started working with a particular factional group, I went to see the pastor or church elders for permission.
about visiting outsiders spread rapidly on the “Aboriginal grapevine” based on kin relationships, but acceptance of non-Aboriginal visitors falls outside the range of collective responsibility. It is up to each Aboriginal individual to negotiate such relationships.

Early on I did consult the Bundjalung Elders’ Committee in Lismore to publicise my research. Notwithstanding the friendly acceptance of me by the Elders’ Committee in April 2002, because of this particular local situation, I was not represented by any community members in a practical way regarding my position as a researcher. This caused extreme difficulty in convincing prospective informants of my social status and what kind of information I was after. I was confronted by three major problems throughout the fieldwork. Most of the Aboriginal people in the community did not understand: (1) why I wanted to hang around with ordinary Aborigines; (2) why I wanted to befriend Christians when I did not belong to a particular church myself; (3) why a non-white foreigner whom they regarded as inferior was able to obtain such a lucrative job as “research”.

Firstly, ordinary Bundjalung and Githabul people had only heard about researchers who sat down with elders to learn language or record tribal lore. None of them expected a researcher to come and see ordinary Aboriginal people for information. Hence they had already naturalised the public representation of the “culturelessness” of mixed-descent Aborigines with whom they identified. Unlike the white historians and linguists they had heard of, a very rare “non-white researcher” came to ordinary Aborigines and wanted to “learn” something from their mundane everyday life. This obviously awakened their puzzlement and suspicions. Secondly, among Pentecostal Christians contacts by non-Christian outsiders for the purpose other than Christian devotion are destined to cause suspicion. They hold strong a belief that demonic attacks by Satan are as real as the divine manifestations of God are. The quintessence of Pentecostal life lies in the warfare against Satan (the Devil). They usually interpret worldly intervention to church and Christians as a channel for the Devil to “come into the circumstances” regardless of the harmlessness of the original intention. Accordingly, the collection of a certain kind of information especially, for
example, about kinship/genealogy and about the administration of community politics, had to be severely limited even outside the Christian community.

I somehow solved the first two problems by spending enough time to let people get used to me and by becoming a reserved apprentice in Christian practice. The third issue, however, utterly prevented me from positioning myself as an academic and researcher. This was because, in this part of rural Australia, females of Asian-descent like myself were generally regarded as “shameless” mail-order slave wives or prostitutes of the brothels in urban centres, whose advertisements were well permeated into the daily scenery of rural life. In the eyes of the Aboriginal people I worked with, merely because of my partial resemblance in biological features to the stereotypical image of the particular type of Asian women they held, at first glance I was allocated a position of an inferior human being to them, both intellectually and morally. It was not easy to make them feel comfortable in my presence. My foreign accent in English was taken as proof of my low intelligence and illiteracy, and many of them did not seem to find communication with me worthwhile. My being a student convinced them that my education was not complete, and they did not understand that my doing a PhD at ANU as a mature-aged student was totally different from their doing Year 9 at the local TAFE at a mature age. It was not easy to approach local Aboriginal Christian women, either. Some of the widows and single women were continuously intimidating others out of envy for the other’s resources and love affairs. Many of the married women were suspicious of other women regardless of whether they were strangers, friends or kin because of their perceived need to guard their husbands. Christian women in the researched community were extremely obsessive about oppressing sexuality and they would often “get personal” with one another.

---

19 This setting was absolutely antithetical to what I had been prepared for in Canberra in accordance with the guidelines set by the Ethnical Committee on the Researches of Human Resources for the way to establish rapport with and respect human rights of prospective informants, as the committee’s preoccupation was to prevent conscious or unconscious exertion of paternalism and racism that would generate disadvantage to the informant only. The local Aboriginal people’s understanding of a researcher is someone who is superior to them—in terms of intelligence and morality. To this category of “superior people”, my biological background did not fit based on the local Aboriginal people’s standard.

20 This moral orientation seems to be the reason why the researched Christian community lack the agency of gender. Besides the formalities of biological categorisation such as women’s
This situation was certainly a grave disadvantage beyond my control, but it created certain advantages to make up for it: I decided to devote my time mainly to empirical observation, which enabled me to have access to the ordinary part of local Aboriginal lives. This was because in the early part of my fieldwork, due to these problems, I gave up the idea of collecting information that could have been obtained, if I had been lucky, in the form of a systematic corpus and in a somewhat romantic field situation. In other words, I gave up a romantic fantasy about enjoying something like what might happen between a white academic and her Aboriginal auntie-mentor. Besides these problems, none of my Aboriginal informants was accustomed to systematically explaining what they took for granted. My informants were not cultural identities who had learnt how to represent themselves movingly and efficiently to outsiders.

Notwithstanding this, if I had been a white student, I would no doubt have been given a more congenial field situation and received more generous information in some way or other. Local Aboriginal Christians dealt with occasional white visitors with extreme flattery and generosity—but in practice they refused access of these white guests to the ordinary part of Aboriginal lives. A half century ago, Russel Hausfeld, anthropologist and station manager of the Woodenbong Aboriginal Station, had to deal with the Aborigines' nasty-nice way of "dissembling" culture in the same fieldsite as mine (Hausfeld 1963). He had to start collecting material in the complete absence of co-operative informants, but once a rapport was established between the "boss" (white station manager) and some knowledgeable informants, Hausfeld's belief in persistence of traditional Aboriginal culture was quickly rewarded with a package of information about retention of traditional practices. It contradicts in some points the data of Calley (who was more conscious of the collapse of the operation of traditional social institutions) and the recollections of the present-day Aboriginal residents. Data collection in a congenial field situation, privileged with motivated informants, could

meetings and men's prayers, etc., no activities or women's/men's groups were observed that could function to solve gender-related issues and empower women/men as a whole. (See Chapter 4.)
make the researcher vulnerable to the informants’ construction of the ideal past (and present) that the researcher expected to find. Hausfeld’s knowledgeable informants (who did have knowledge of the past religious life) would have responded naturally to what the researcher was looking for and tried to reconstruct the nostalgic past to represent the present for him and thereby would have neglected the drastic change they were then undergoing.

I travelled extensively in order to be “everywhere” where Bundjalung and Githabul Christians met for church meetings, rallies and other activities. I stayed quiet and reserved, and devoted my time to empirical observation.21 I sat and recorded the services, counted the number of attendants and memorised their faces. For countless nights and days, I was subsumed in endless circles of prayers and praise and worship songs, given a meal at the back of the church after an exhausting service, and I asked for a bed at local homes wherever possible. I was often left behind, used, refused and forgotten. I spent an enormous amount of time in waiting for people to come along or for events to take place in vain. As such slow accumulation of quantitative data went on, I began to become involved in the domain of Bundjalung and Githabul people’s everyday social and religious practices. They were filled with logical inconsistencies and emotional ambivalence. In this process, I began to feel the texture of the everyday life of Bundjalung and Githabul Christians. Thus a somewhat difficult field situation enabled me unexpectedly to obtain certain methodological advantages.

Theoretical Perspective

Understanding a “settled” and Christianised situation

This study’s focus on Aboriginal church in “settled” Australia is unusual among Australian Aboriginal ethnographies. Not only does the church affiliation of

21 The only exception was testimonies of faith, which they allowed me to record. These testimonies were a kind of public information the local Christian community had shared already but many were not bothered re-enacting it for my recorder, for which I fondly thank those who allowed me to sit with them.
Aborigines in urban and rural locations suggest the cultivation of an Aboriginal self that has greater congruence with European values and virtues—and is therefore a departure from a “distinctive” Aboriginal way of life—but also my research target is, as above-mentioned, a group of mixed-descent Aboriginal Pentecostals who have come to reject Aboriginal culture and tradition. In the conceptual framework of culture loss, it is easy to interpret the situation in which this “once-syncretic cult group” has become a group of anti-culture advocates. This interpretation would lead to the conclusion that the assimilation of Bundjalung and Githabul Christians has been successfully completed. This would be the least attractive research target if I were interested in the zero-sum game of cultural persistence or loss.

The anthropological focus on change in Aboriginal society has been bound by an antithetical opposition, i.e., reproduction of traditional lives and a one-way process to change. The former sees Aboriginal people adapting new things to traditional ways. Particularly the studies of Aboriginal people in remote regions have demonstrated that Aboriginal culture retains strength to reproduce traditional lives or the traditional aspects of them—despite the increasing interactions between Aboriginal and European lifeworlds. During the 1970s and the 1980s, the remote regions saw a major socio-cultural transformation and Aboriginal people’s lives began to be articulated with many aspects of mainstream society (e.g., modernisation of transport and communications) and, most remarkably, with the state and welfare (e.g., emergence of the social order mediated by cash and commodities). Yet persistence of distinct aspects of Aboriginal cultural production has been powerfully demonstrated in the growing body of work that explored the milieu in which Aboriginal people’s lives have come to be articulated with exogenous socio-cultural orders (Altman 1987; Myers 1988; Peterson 1977, 1991, 2000). Conceptually, these works imply that people fit new circumstances into old categories. As with Sahlin’s analysis (Sahlin 1985) of the Hawaiian understanding of Captain Cook as the god Lono, cultural categories stretch to encompass new referents but do not change their relations to other categories. The relations between categories are left untouched and traditional cultural understandings can be reproduced in the face of new realities, or else a transformation of the relations between those categories may occur, but people are able to maintain a sense that their
familiar categories are still in play.

The latter position, a one-way process to change, argues that people are encompassed with new things and turn away from traditional lives. But people are also able to draw resources from a previous culture and to respond creatively to changes. This view is evident in the studies of Aboriginal people in "settled" Australia. These regions have been radically transformed by settlers of European origin and Aboriginal people in these regions have been given a stereotypic image of cultureless "part-Aborigines" or "half-castes"—now allocated the term "mixed-descent" Aboriginal people. Bundjalung and Githabul people are included in this category. Representation of "culturelessness" was prevailing until the 1980s in scholarly writings of Aboriginal studies. Early studies were concerned with assimilation and demonstrated cultural loss and dismissed rich data of signs of cultural distinctiveness (Bell 1959; Bell 1964; Reay 1945; Reay 1949). Some others argued that continuities in kin relations and obligations of sharing with kin groups demonstrate the retention of culturally distinct Aboriginal features (Barwick 1962, 1964; Beckett 1964, 1965), but these studies in the main treated members of Aboriginal society as those who "consciously retain no vestige of their tribal culture, yet they remain in some respects culturally distinct" (Beckett 1964:33) and who were conceptually bound by the one-way process to culture loss. Recent studies more positively criticise the representation of "culturelessness and loss" or "invention of culturelessness" (cf. Macdonald 2001) and emphasise persistence of a distinctive culture or a way of life (Keen 1988a). The conceptual direction of this position, however, is continuous with that of the work in remote Aboriginal society. Despite the antithetical momentums the two positions focus on, both expect that in confronting change people fit new circumstances into old cultural categories. The main concern of these positions is with what has been retained and what has been lost. Within this framework, it is evident that Bundjalung and Githabul Pentecostalism today retains no sign of persistence of the Aboriginal way or socio-cultural order.

22 Sometimes, however, the data of the same authors also showed continuity of Aboriginal culture and way of life (e.g. Bell 1961).
The study of Aboriginal Christianity has been bound predominantly by this conceptual framework of persistence and change. Until the 1970s – 1980s, Aboriginal Christianity was regarded as peripheral to mainstream anthropological study (cf. Rose & Swain 1988). The prevailing idea of the time was that Aboriginal peoples had only two options of either complete traditionalism or total assimilation into White Australian society, although there were some notable exceptions of early works in the sixties that dealt with the Aboriginal peoples' efforts to reconcile the divisions between Christianity and Aboriginal Law with each other (Berndt 1962; Calley 1964). As the focus of Aboriginal anthropology shifted from the salvage approach to observing change, the analytical focus on Aboriginal Christianity changed accordingly and was fixed on the tension between Aboriginal and exogenous socio-cultural orders—either in the context of incommensurable divisions between Christian practice and Aboriginal cosmology (Kolig 1981; Rose 1988; Tonkinson 1974; Trigger 1988) or in the context of synthesising the processes of the two religions (Magowan 1999, 2001; McDonald 2001; Slotte 1997).

The researchers of the former have focused primarily on whichever side of the binary opposition appears to be winning. Christianity and Aboriginal Law (or culture) have always been counterposed as an apparatus of an invading colonial ideology and the autonomy of an unchanging traditional Aboriginal mode of thought. More recent studies, which look at the latter context, outline the positive aspects of the synthesising processes on the two religions. This analytical direction contrasts with that of the prevalent anthropological writings that highlight the division between Christian practice and Aboriginal cosmologies. Not only has more attention been paid recently to syncretic forms of indigenous expressions of Christianity, but also the paradigm of studies of syncretism itself has shifted from viewing it as “cultural inauthenticity, pollution and even debasement” to an “indication of indigenous creativity, agency and autonomy” (Magowan & Gordon 2001:253). Conceptually, however, the dichotomised framework of persistence and change is posited in these positions in the form of the binary opposition of resisting Aboriginal culture (that is represented as somewhat a totality of meanings despite minor changes) and invading European knowledge. The new direction towards exploring Aboriginal creativity sits in the same framework as all
positions that unconditionally postulate *a priori* domains of European and Aboriginal socio-cultural order (or meanings).

In order to explore the "loss" itself as seen in the present-day situation of Bundjalung and Githabul Pentecostalism, as Terence Ranger (2003) nicely put it recently, the "real stuff of dynamic interaction" should be sought rather than the "shadowy play of unmodified tradition" (ibid.:257-258). According to Ranger, in contrast to the Africanist interest in interactive dynamics, the Australianist approach to Aboriginal Christianity, until recently, has been preoccupied with unchanging continuity and/or "the contrast with the excitements of Oceanic Christianity" (ibid.:258). He writes:

...communities do not have to produce millenarian movements and cargo cults in order to engage in a profound interaction with Christianity. (ibid.)

In reference to this, I demonstrate in this thesis what Calley witnessed among Bundjalung and Githabul people fifty years ago was a form of vernacular Aboriginal Christianity—a "profound interaction" with Pentecostalism—which was no more "syncretistic" than the contemporary Bundjalung and Githabul Pentecostal Christianity. His insight into the socio-economic transformation of the Aboriginal society was sharp and acute (Calley 1956a, 1956b, 1957) and his ethnographic data showed their Christian practice was de-Aboriginalised (Calley 1955). However, just like the anthropologists of the time who were enchanted by "cargoist" elements in indigenous Christian practices, Calley looked for new realities that appeared to have been taken into unchanging Aboriginal religious categories (e.g. archaic narratives of Aboriginal Jesus coming from the elders of the day) and attempted to seek structural similarities (see Chapter 3 for detailed argument).

In urban and rural locations as in the Bundjalung and Githabul community, Aboriginal society has shown the aspect of well adaptedness to the white community. Yet, as Calley depicted the Bundjalung and Githabul society as showing adaptedness but "leaning heavily on the logic and outlook on life of the indigenous traditions" (Calley 1956b:213), researchers have continuously reported aspects of cultural
persistence as mentioned above. For an ethnographer it is hard to resist emphasising these (continuously reinforced) aspects of distinction still found today in the field site in the southeastern Aboriginal community. In contrast, "remote Australia" continues to be conceived as culturally different, yet the Aboriginal lifeworld has increasingly come to be articulated with exogenous socio-cultural orders. The point is that conceptualising these situations of "difference-yet relatedness" (Hinkson & Smith 2005:157) and what can be called "adaptedness-yet difference" (e.g. regarding Bundjalung and Githabul society) needs deliberate theoretical elaborations to challenge essentialism. In much of the recent conceptual engagements anthropologists have sought a way to transcend the limit of existing positions that could lead to producing an essentialised concept of culture as an ordered system of meanings, categories, logics or understandings.

The notion of "interculture" suggested by Francesca Merlan (Merlan 1998, 2005, 2006) for example, urges us to focus on the processual character of the interrelationship of relations "between" people. Regarding the development of an intercultural ethnographic description of people in town space, she writes:

I did not want to begin with a notion of what Aboriginal culture 'is', a finished product. Nor, especially in town space, did I want to assume finished social persons or subjects. An 'intercultural' description needed to emphasize processes of reproduction as well as non-reproduction of socio-cultural patterns, interaction, and the varieties of reflexivity of participating subjects. (Merlan 2005:169, emphasis added)

Merlan highlights the situation, through a focus on the Aboriginal relationships to places, in which Aboriginal people in Katherine region are cutting across the binaries between traditionality and non-traditionality as they inform changing identities and routine life practices. Thus, to explore the processual manifestations of dynamics of "intercultural" interactions is a promising analytical focus.

Post-modernist (or constructionist) approaches—as identified by Linnekin (1992)—to emphasise the construction of tradition (Jolly & Thomas 1992; Linnekin 1992; Thomas 1990, 1992) is another attempt to confront the same conceptual challenge
to transcend an essentialist view of culture and change. Debates on the politics of
tradition, which proliferated in Pacific studies as elsewhere, should be understood as
an attempt to overcome an essentialist view of culture and tradition, rather than an
attempt at criticising (or defending) the invention of tradition or the identity politics of
Indigenous peoples. In the controversies over Aboriginality, some scholars were
preoccupied with the latter (e.g. Hollinsworth 1992; Keeffe 1988; Lattas 1993;
Mudorooroo 1992; Thiele 1985). Objectivist analysis of authenticity, i.e. genuine/
spurious distinction—such as the distinction between custom and tradition as an
opposition of unconscious cultural inheritance and the self-conscious proclamation of
the past in the present (Hobsbawm 1983; Keesing 1989)—has been called into question.

By these positions, Sahlins' model of structural transformation (Sahlins 1985,
1993b) is understood to be unable to transcend essentialism despite the fact that it deals
with change. From an interactionist view, absolute difference or completeness of
system cannot grasp the complexities of processual manifestations of difference in the
lived reality of Katherine town Aborigines' lives: an intercultural account of the
situation needs to assume kinds of difference, not absolute (Merlan 2005:74; see also,
Rumsey 2006, for critique of structural history). From a postmodernist view, the
ramifications of a range of contact processes are not easily discussed within structural
terms (see, for example, Sahlins 1993a, 1993b; Thomas 1992, 1993, for debates over the
Fijian custom of kerekere).

Some recent studies of Aboriginal Christianity examine the particularity of the
local contact processes in which vernacular Christianity has been formed (Austin-Broos
2003; Brock 2003; Van Gent 2003). Diane Austin-Broos (2003), in looking at the
changing meanings of Christianity for Western Arrernte people in Hermannsburg in
central Australia, does not reject the ideas of structure altogether. She relates Sahlins's
proposal—that in the context of modernity tradition presents as “a mode of

23 With regard to the controversy over Aboriginality, in the strand of argument referred to, the
concept of Aboriginality is discussed as an ultimately homogenous entity. It is captured by the
dichotomy of cultural and biological essentialism and anti-essentialism, i.e. Aboriginality
based on inheritance of cultural heritage and blood on the one hand, and Aboriginality based
on shared experiences of survival and resistance on the other hand. This is another variant of
the binary opposition between persistence and change.
change"—to her view for grasping the Arrernte experience of Christianity (ibid.:312). Pepe, a Christian law to Western Arrernte people, which was cultivated in the isolated domestic economy of the mission, has been undermined now as the conditions that sustained the order (i.e. the mission domestic economy) has waned as more recent changes—such as the increasing presence of cash, commodities and welfare bureaucracy—have occurred. The Arrernte have become less Christian but, paradoxically, Lutheranism, rather than pepe, is for Arrernte people history and identity now.

This is because of continuity in the change in the way Western Arrernte people relate stories to the country. Stories classified as "Lutheran" stories, which include the travels of Christianity and experiences of everyday life embedded in the Lutheran way and supported by the relatedness of kinship and so on, have become increasingly important in the vernacular context. I figure that, rather than looking for continuity of the system per se, Austin-Broos puts analytical focus on the workings of power in the field of intersubjectivity through which the Aboriginal person is constituted in the process of emending the forms of moral authority that constrain them (see also, Austin-Broos 1996, 2001). Could we gain any analytical framework to interpret such ways as people strive to sustain some coherence whilst we look into the "processual manifestations of difference" as Merlan put it? Bundjalung and Githabul Pentecostalism has obviously shown rupture in its manifestations as it shifted on the surface level from a "syncretistic cult" to an anti-culture fundamentalism, yet my fieldwork also collected rich manifestations of "adaptedness-yet difference"—continuity with and similarity to the past—in the way that they were coping with the outcome of change they had eagerly absorbed. My central concern is not to determine continuities they show with the Bundjalung and Githabul traditional culture and society but to draw a conceptual trajectory to understand those manifestations in the lived reality of this indigenous Pentecostal group in terms of the rupture that Pentecostalism specifies for them.

Out of conceptual concerns in a similar vein, Joel Robbins (Robbins 2003) criticises the existing "anthropology of continuity" (ibid.:221):
...the most common and satisfying anthropological arguments are those that find some enduring cultural structure that persists underneath all the surface changes and that in the last analysis, serves to guide them and determine the sense they make—a sense that, in spite of whatever foreign elements might be part of it, should still be a local one displaying some continuities with those of the past. (ibid.)

Thus he aptly challenges a tendency among anthropologists to stress cultural continuity and I completely agree with his criticism of judgements of continuity that are dependent on underlying judgements of similarity. He argues:

...a belief or practice that looks new actually manifests a continuity with a past belief or practice because the two are similar. So routine are such arguments in cultural anthropology that it is hard to imagine what is wrong with them. But...judgement of similarity is notoriously tricky...similarity on one dimension does not preclude difference on another. (ibid.:228)

According to Robbins, who had done intensive ethnographic research with a small group of converts to charismatic Christianity in a remote village of Papua New Guinea (Robbins 2004a), globalisation of Pentecostal and charismatic Christianity has been marked by apparent paradoxes: it has gained two faces—a face of continuity and that of rupture. He advocates an “anthropology of discontinuity (or rupture)” (Robbins 2003) in order for anthropologists of Pentecostalism to understand the globalisation of Pentecostalism fully. I will return to this issue in the latter part of this chapter.

The Aboriginal subject, domination and forms of resistance

Talal Asad (Asad 1983) argues that the problem of a Geertzian approach to culture and religion is its omission of the crucial dimension of power. He proposes:

Instead of approaching religion with questions about the social meaning of doctrines and practices, or even about the psychological effects of symbols and rituals, let us begin by asking what are the historical conditions (movements, classes, institutions, ideologies) necessary for the existence of particular religious practices and discourses. In other words, let us ask: how does power create religion? To ask this question
is to seek an answer in terms of the social disciplines and social forces which come together at particular historical moments, to make particular religious discourses, practices and spaces possible. (Asad 1983:252)

The dichotomy between change and persistence is what incarcerates Aboriginal people in the stabilised discourse of either unchanging tradition or loss of cultural inheritance. As Michel de Certeau put it,

...if it is true that the grid of “discipline” is everywhere becoming clearer and more extensive, it is all the more urgent to discover how an entire society resists being reduced to it.... (de Certeau 1984:xiv).

In light of this, this thesis is a study of the resistance of an Aboriginal group against colonial domination, or the European hegemony of knowledge and power (Althusser 1971; Comaroff 1985; Comaroff & Comaroff 1991; Foucault 1978; Foucault 1979; Gramsci 1971). My point of departure is an attempt to dissolve an a priori binarism of the invading European ideology and the resisting Aboriginal culture. There are some studies of Aboriginal people in “settled” Australia that have sought to analyse Aboriginal resistance in their response to the effects of colonial and state intervention (Cowlishaw 1988a, 1988b; Morris 1989). This strand of studies sought the resistance of Aboriginal people by first positing an a priori binarism of pre-modern Aborigines versus modern Europe and then asking whether the Aborigines are resisting or accommodating the invading European system of value. In this line of argument, only a monolithic image of the defiant “Native” (with a capital letter) is produced by the researcher. The moment the researcher names it resistance, a defiant subject is constituted, mobilised as an “autonomous” agent of cultural practices.

---

24 My study relies on the Gramiscian notion of “hegemony”, associated with the Foucauldian notion of “discourse” and the Althusserian notion of “subject” and “interpellation”. As an approach to examine the Bundjalung and Githabul case, I find the dialectical approaches developed by the Comaroffs (Comaroff 1985; Comaroff & Comaroff 1991) useful to explore Bundjalung and Githabul people’s experience as the product of a “dialectic in a double sense” – the product of the interplay between human action and structural constraint, and between the dominant and the subordinate in the colonial encounter” (Comaroff 1985:1).

25 This is the problem of representation of the Other criticised as one of the problems of resistance studies. In her provocative essay titled “Where have all the natives gone?” Rey Chow (1993) polemises academics’ practice of writing from the viewpoint of a postcolonial gaze. This holds true for the methodological and theoretical predicament of anthropologists’ writing ethnography: how can we write about “the otherwise silent and invisible place of the
Another recurring criticism of resistance studies derives from the problem of conceptualising subaltern subject and agency. Sherry Ortner (Ortner 1995) argues that many of the most influential studies of resistance are severely limited by the lack of an ethnographic perspective. The three forms of what Ortner calls “ethnographic refusal” are: (1) sanitising politics, (2) thinning culture, and (3) dissolving actors (ibid.:176).

First, to sanitise politics is to lack an adequate sense of prior and ongoing politics among subalterns. Many resistance studies, due to the absence of analysis of these forms of internal conflict, are fundamentally romantic. Second, cultural thinning is the way to construct the resistance/oppositional culture as autonomous and authentic. It is homogenising and de-historicising, because it attempts to “recognize authentic cultural universe of subalterns, from which their acts of resistance grew” (ibid.:183). Third, dissolving subjects is what Ortner calls the subaltern studies scholars’ attempts of going to the “opposite extreme”. While she admits it is necessary to deconstruct “a monolithic category of subaltern who is presumed to have a unitary identity and consciousness” (ibid.:183) to avoid the pitfalls of sanitising politics and cultural thinning, Ortner contends that the Indian subaltern scholars such as Gayatri Spivak have dissolved the subject entirely and ignored agency and the individual’s capacity to resist.

Although Ortner admits that “the freely choosing individual is an ideological construct” (ibid.:185), she insists on seeking the form of individual agency. In other words, she seeks the form of an intentionalised being (see also, Ortner 1984). In this view of agency, I find a problem of overemphasising the agent’s capacity to resist. The subject is constructed by the external sociocultural forms to keep reproducing existing hegemonies unconsciously. Regarding the process by which a dominant group co-opts subordinate groups into its lifestyle and ethos, we should pay more attention to the workings of hegemony as “ruling definitions of the ‘natural’” (Comaroff 1985:6) than to the efforts of the “freely choosing individual” (Ortner 1995: 185).

native (ibid.: 30)”, refusing, at the same time, to make ourselves become visible? Studies of resistance are vulnerable to this question.
Gramscian theory of hegemony holds that “cultural domination or, more accurately, cultural leadership is not achieved by force or coercion, but is secured through the consent of those it will ultimately subordinate” (Turner 1996:199). Hegemony thus offers a more subtle and flexible explanation than previous formulations because it aims to account for domination as something that is won, not automatically delivered by way of the class structure. Hence it has become possible for us to imagine that hegemony’s attempt to produce uniformity and coherence also implies that “such attempts must always, eventually and necessarily, fail” (ibid.). Studies of resistance are derived from such proliferation of interest in the dynamic process of conflict between determination and agency.

As the Comaroffs (1991) have argued, power consists in both the agentive and nonagentive modes (ibid.:22). The former refers to the command wielded by human beings and the latter is the mode in which power hides itself in the forms of everyday life. The effects of power are internalised “in their negative guise, as constraints; in their neutral guise, as conventions; and in their positive guise, as values” (ibid., emphasis added). We must be more concerned with the latter two situations, because:

Sometimes ascribed to transcendental, suprahistorical forces (gods or ancestors, nature or physics, biological instinct or probability), these forms are not easily questioned. ... This kind of nonagentive power proliferates outside the realm of institutional politics, saturating such things as aesthetics and ethics, built form and bodily representation, medical knowledge and mundane usage. What is more, it may not be experienced as power at all, since its effects are rarely wrought by overt compulsion. (ibid.)

I propose to explore the workings of such nonagentive power that is internalised in the ideological realms of European and Aboriginal knowledge that constrain Aboriginal people as agents “in the form of the natural”.  

De Certeau’s emphasis on “the clandestine forms taken by the dispersed, tactical, and make-shift creativity of groups or individuals already caught in the nets of

26 See, for example, Emirbayer & Mische (1998) for the notion of agency.
'discipline'" (de Certeau 1984:xiv) does not overestimate the degree of freedom enjoyed by the individual subject but, by contrast, evokes our attention to the social, political and economic frame within which ordinary people are situated. The initial concern of resistance studies is derived from this line of argument, but the situation now seems that the "interest in cultural democracy had gone too far" (Turner 1996:205). My position is that resistance studies should not seek to find a unified, freely choosing individual. Instead, before it was stigmatised resistance studies should have been understood as a conceptual engagement in search of an alternative way to represent the interplay between human practice and the structural constraints of hegemonic domination in people's everyday life.

The argument: resilience of a conquered society

From knowledge to sensitivity

Pentecostal Christianity has appealed to Bundjalung and Githabul people as most attractive—since its permeation in the first half of the twentieth century—with its message of "warfare" against Satan, the Devil. Pentecostal faith is to believe in what is written in the Bible from cover to cover, and, therefore, it assures that anyone can have the way of Jesus in oneself through faith. The teaching of the Bible guarantees that anyone who has faith—and nothing else—can obtain the divine power to discern and repel demonic spirits. Thus, by becoming Christian, one can expect an enormous reward. The Bundjalung and Githabul Pentecostals are convinced that they are divinely sensitive in discerning the Devil. They call this particular spiritual power "sensitivity" and it is a substantial weapon of warfare against the Devil rather than a mere "sense" or feeling.

27 Cultural studies' turn to Gramsci is the point that we should consider. In the second half of the 1980s, within British cultural studies the new emphasis on agency and the endorsement of people's capacity to resist the workings of hegemony led to overemphasis of the freely choosing modern self's capacity to resist the dominant ideologies. According to this shift, the aspect of the reproduction of hegemony has come to be neglected. (cf. Turner 1996).
Sensitivity is regarded as an equivalent of what they imagine the traditional Aboriginal knowledge was—i.e., knowledge once only “old fellas” (initiated people) were allowed to possess. In the Far North Coast Aboriginal society of New South Wales today, the communal mode of thought which is widely held by Bundjalung and Githabul people is thus: “proper” cultural knowledge is lost as initiated elders have died out and, therefore, all the evil spirits are left intact as the traditional way of driving away evil spirits is forgotten.

By the time the precursors of the lay Aboriginal Christian leaders encountered the story of Jesus, reconstruction of the primordial past had already begun in their country in response to drastic socio-economic changes. Throughout the process of the collapse of their traditional social institutions, especially rites related to localised spiritual beings, Christianity has functioned as protection against the “spirits of the bush”. Loss of knowledge related to the *djurebil* (sacred places) in which both beneficent magic and destructive magic used to be performed has enhanced people’s fear as generations passed. People began to identify *djurebil* with the remaining channel to sorcery. Later in the 1970s, in the background of post-Welfare Board Aboriginal administration another dimension of fear started to grow. The politics of Aboriginality and revitalisation movements focused on Aboriginal culture began to supply material benefits to the community. Desires, jealousy and suspicion caused division of kin and the community at large. Moreover, people have come to secure welfare-dependent livelihoods. As a consequence, they now have enough leisure time to become involved in unhealthy habits, violence, petty crimes and so on—in order to manage their boredom and apathy. Thus the revolutionary self-determination policies of Aboriginal administration have accelerated social problems such as drug/alcohol addiction and induced psychoses, chronic diseases, violence and abuse, and a devastating sense of hopelessness in the Aboriginal community.

In such a problem-laden community, people are concerned about “all the tragedies of human life” happening to them; and Christians regard the tragedies as the works of demonic powers through which the Devil can get into the course of their practical life. Two strands of “things to fear” are today regarded as “culture” in the
vernacular vocabulary of Bundjalung and Githabul people: (1) (imagined) traditional technique of sorcery that would allow their kinsfolk to curse one another, and (2) revitalisation activities of Aboriginal tradition that would allow the Devil to approach everyday life through the worldly desires (for material benefits) they evoke.

The anti-sorcery function of Christianity developed by indigenous people is widely reported (e.g. Magowan 2001, 2003; Van Gent 2003; Barker 2003). A certain emerging trend of the anti-sorcery function of indigenous Christianity is worth noting. As in John Barker's (2003) recent discussion of the changes in Melanesian Christian practice, the concept of sorcery has been shifting into "pure evil". Among Maisin people in Papua New Guinea recent charismatic revival has drastically changed the conceptualisation of sorcery as social apparatus into "pure evil", an act of the Devil. This aspect is relevant to the vernacularisation of Pentecostalism among the Bundjalung and Githabul. Viewed in this light, arguably the characteristics of Bundjalung and Githabul Pentecostalism is one of the particularities of historical development of vernacular Christianity that is now being witnessed as an emergent phenomenon in the longer contacted regions of Melanesia.

Barker's study (Barker 1990, 1993) of Maisin Christianity has so far made the biculturalism of Christianity among the Maisin clear. Maisin people do not suffer from the moral torment between the contradictory new and old traditions. Anglicanism belongs to the mission station, whereas traditional life is carried out in the village. The stability of the spatial and moral divide is maintained in the Maisin case. In his recent study, however, Barker (Barker 2003) argues that such a dualistic model of the study of religious change is now challenged by the recent changes to their religious practice influenced by the explosion of a worldwide charismatic revival movement. Among the Bundjalung and Githabul, arguably a similar shift in people's conceptualisation of sorcery from social apparatus to the act of the Devil, or pure evil, took place much earlier due to the pervasive collapse of traditional social institutions and the loss of material culture and cultural knowledge that Aboriginal societies in "settled" Australia broadly underwent.
The Lord is a last resort

The churches in the Pentecostal and charismatic tradition demand ascetic self-control, which often is in violation of the traditional moral code of indigenous cultures. Moral struggles between the contradictory two ways—the traditional social interaction of indigenous life and the individualist Christian moral order—are not, in their basic structure, unique in the context of indigenous churches. Kirk Dombrowski's ethnography *Against Culture* (Dombrowski 2001), for example, deals with the rejection of Native culture among Southeast Alaska Natives. There the Native Pentecostal converts advocate the rejection of Native culture under the region's fast-growing all-Native Pentecostal churches. The roots of Pentecostalism's appeal grow in the increasing internal differentiation of the regional community in the Alaskan context. In Dombrowski's study, the Native Christians' anti-cultural feelings are analysed as a reaction to the claims of cultural distinctiveness which have been invoked and enhanced by the recent wave of colonial expansion by the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act (ANCSA). Their anti-cultural responses are based on anti-ANCSA feelings and reactions. But change and continuity in the Southeast Alaska Natives' religious consciousness in the lived reality of everyday life is not much explored.

Joel Robins (2004), on the other hand, elaborately looks into the moral torment of Urapmin people in a remote part of the far western highlands of Papua New Guinea in the context of everyday life. This small group of roughly 390 people no longer practice their traditional religion. Since the late 1970s, they have rapidly taken on a new culture of Christianity in the domain of their moral orders. Now all the villagers practice a kind of charismatic Christianity focused on human sinfulness and the need for constant self-discipline. Simultaneously, they still live deeply embedded in the relationalist traditional value in everyday reality, reproducing their traditional grounds such as their families, their gardens, their hunting territories and so on. Thus the Urapmin are caught between the contradictory cultures promoting the two values: the relationalist value (traditional Urapmin culture) and the individualist value (Christian culture). Robbins, as discussed earlier in this chapter with regard to his critique of the
existing anthropological thinking of continuity, focuses on looking at discourses and rituals of disjunction in order to demonstrate a "nascent anthropology of discontinuity" (Robbins 2003:224). Urapmin people used to sacrifice pigs to the spirits to repair their relations with spirits, whereas today's healing rituals among the Urapmin performed by spirit mediums under the Holy Spirit aim at severing the relations between men and the traditional spirits.

In Birgit Meyer's study on Ewe Pentecostals in Ghana (Meyer 1998, 1999), it is their task to "make a complete break with the past". This means breaking with one's kin. Ewe Christians pursue individualism and independence from the family. Yet, this cry is not a mere plea to simply forget and proceed. Through analysing why demons have more influence on their interests in their daily lives than the High God and why people need the image of the Devil, she clearly designates the paradoxes of Pentecostal Christianity, i.e., "a religion that localized easily yet claims to brook no compromise with traditional life and that at the same time seems to have at its heart a set of globalized practices that often look very local in their makeup" (Robbins 2003:224). The Ewe Christian's deliverance ritual aims to rid people of the demons their past have lodged in them. For this purpose, people must go through personal history questionnaires or interviews, by which the deliverance rituals become something more than forgetting and proceeding to modernity and individualism:

After all, in the course of the deliverance ritual, people are held to realise that they are in the grip of 'the past', which is represented as fearful, out of control, and that they can only gain control over their individual lives—and, indeed, become modern individuals—by re-enacting in a ritual context all the links connecting them with that 'past' (i.e. their actual connections with, for instance, their extended family). (Meyer 1999:215-216)

Therefore, even people who are "consciously most devoted to rupture", Robbins argues, may still in some cases be "unwittingly reproducing their traditional culture in significant ways" (Robbins 2003:227, emphasis mine).

This face of rupture is one side of a paradoxical picture of interactive dynamics that Pentecostalism shows when it permeates into local cultures. Pentecostal movements worldwide have been offering anthropologists a somewhat paradoxical
picture of interactive dynamics in the cultural end as discussed in the Introduction to this thesis. Pentecostalism has replicated its canonical form through expansion, i.e., a theory of Westernising homogenisation, but there are also antithetical arguments that Pentecostalism can be vernacularised quickly, i.e., a theory of indigenising differentiation (cf. Robbins 2004). This is because of the paradox of Pentecostalism that it tends to accept their ontologies in its struggle against local cultures. A culturally unspecific new form that Pentecostalism offers in the process as it permeates into other cultures is the exact reason why it can easily be localised and entail cultural specificity. In the Bundjalung and Githabul context, Pentecostalism has manifested its varying functions according to historical particularities.

Therefore, rather than simply challenging continuity thinking, Robbins calls for anthropology’s awareness of the two paradoxical faces of globalising Pentecostal and charismatic Christianity that are continuity and rupture. Now let us return to the Bundjalung and Githabul. Despite the ostensible difference in representations between the past Christian practice and the present Christian practice, arguably Bundjalung and Githabul people took on an entirely new culture of Christianity on its own terms through a self-conscious effort since their first encounter with Christianity. The adherents’ practice and discourse at different historical moments may seem contradictory—such as the representation as a syncretistic cult vs. anti-culture advocacy, but in fact the fundamental function of the vernacular Christianity has remained unchanged—at least, up to the present. Moreover, as discussed earlier in this chapter, Christian practice itself observed by Calley during the revival days was no more Aboriginal (i.e. tradition-oriented) than white Pentecostal practice was.

The retained fundamental function of Bundjalung and Githabul Christianity is thus: in their community Christianity does not lead the adherents to cultivate greater congruence with the mainstream (European) value system—despite its completely “de-Aboriginalised” form of its ritual practice and dogma. Rather than functioning as a channel for upward social mobility, Christianity supplies problem-laden Bundjalung and Githabul people with a last resort to cope with their devastating reality. Those who are deeply embedded in the Aboriginal communal life are attracted to Christianity, not the ones who show interest in individualist value orientations. The Lord is the last
resort for those individuals who have hit rock bottom.

Except for an immediate cease of drinking and drug use, however, faith in the power of the “miracle-making” God functions to lead the adherents to come to terms with the existing, unsolved problems of life. The euphoria of “spiritual” living induced by conversion enables them to establish a psychological equilibrium between a “spirit-filled” Christian life (euphoria mediated by faith in supernatural power) and a problem-laden blackfellas’ life (agony and despair mediated by fear of the Devil). Unlike the corpus of knowledge which can be learned by going through rugged initiatory rites, this spiritual measure contains innate fragility. Faith is, after all, an extremely personal relationship with God. No ascription to authorised status (which represents possession of proper knowledge) is necessary. Therefore, “backsliding”, which is the loss of faith and subsequent return to the worldly pleasures, takes place very often among them but it is not regarded as the issue of failing in ethical self-formation.

In other words, Bundjalung and Githabul Pentecostals have skipped over the process of internalising the intellectual part of the Judeo-Christian moral order in its European sense. Loss of faith is something akin to loss of enthusiasm which is usually interpreted as a simple result of the Devil’s attack. From the perspective of hegemony and human agency as the theoretical framework of this study, backsliding is an oscillating movement between the constraints of Aboriginal social order and that of Christian moral order. The oscillation is kept in motion between the Christian life and the worldly (sinner’s) life.

Figure 1 below shows a few different analytical perspectives of the studies of indigenous Christianity discussed in this chapter. The first diagram explains the research focus on the divisions between traditional Aboriginal culture and Christianity. The second diagram shows the research focus on synthesising processes between tradition and Christianity. These studies presuppose a homogeneous entity of converted Aborigines, traditional Aborigines, and Christians respectively, instead of looking at how each Aboriginal person copes with a particular conjuncture one is
The third analytical framework is that of my study of Bundjalung and Githabul Pentecostalism which attempts to explore the lived reality of everyday life of indigenous Christians: it focuses on the interplay between an indigenous person as an agent of the structures of different moral orders or cultures.

**Figure 1**

*Studies of Indigenous Christianity: examples of different perspectives*

1. **Focus on rejection of Christianity (Two ways)**

   *Aboriginal Way*  
   - Way of life  
   - Religious practice  
   - Cosmology & myths

   *Christian Way*  
   - Church (missionaries)

   | No Aboriginal Christian agent exists |

2. **Focus on synthesis (Mixing)**

   *Aboriginal Way*  
   *Aboriginal Christianity*  
   *Christian way*

   ![Diagram of synthesis]

   *Represents an Aboriginal Christian*

3. **Bundjalung & Githabul case (Oscillation)**

   *Blackfellas' Life in General*  
   (Relationalist social interaction maintained in modern forms)

   **Fear of the Devil**

   ![Diagram of oscillation]

   *Sinners' life: worldly pleasures*
Thesis outline

I begin with an event history, a chronicle which summarises the major episodes of the Bundjalung and Githabul past and present with regard to Christianisation—from the post contact period to the present day (Chapter 2). To clarify the process of propagation of Pentecostalism in this region, the local history about two separate groups of evangelists is detailed here: white missionaries and Aboriginal evangelists and “lay” pastors. The prevailing local discourse of the “Aboriginal church from the beginning” is examined—is it just a mythical discourse or an historical fact?

Chapter 3 examines the rituals and cosmology held by Bundjalung and Githabul Christians in the “revival” days studied by anthropologist Malcolm Calley. The purpose is to reconsider the well-circulated understanding of Bundjalung and Githabul Christianity as a “syncretistic” Aboriginal cult.

Chapters 4 to 7 are an ethnographic exploration of the present-day Bundjalung and Githabul Christian practice. In Chapter 4 solid sociological data of the present-day church organisations and networking are given. Various affiliations that the members of the respective congregations arrange, form and change are explored in terms of tensions between relatedness and personal autonomy in kin relationships.

Chapter 5 details the major Christian practices which are church rituals, rallies, house meetings, baptisms, funerals and weddings. The dogmatic grounding that the present-day Bundjalung and Githabul Pentecostals give for the reason why “culture” must be renounced is examined. Chapter 6 consists of a collection of testimonies that highlight individual processes of conversion. A portrayal of the everyday life of a contemporary Aboriginal person is given from both the emotional and socio-economic aspects. The way local people negotiate the particularity of their lived reality of their Christian lives with the nationalistic discourse of Aboriginality is examined, too. Their sufferings of modern times are revealed through their testimonies. Many adherents repeat the cycle of conversion and “backsliding”, an oscillating movement between a
Christian life and a sinner’s life. The logic of this practice is explored.

Chapter 7 looks into the way “culture” is embodied in the lived reality of Bundjalung and Githabul people. An ethnographic exploration of the “fear of culture” and the way their faith in the Holy Spirit power functions as a coping mechanism is attempted through the two dimensions of fear they hold: firstly, the memory of the past mediated by the notion of witchcraft which is under continuous reconstruction, and, secondly, the devastating socio-economic problems of contemporary Aboriginal society. Historical changes of the functions of sorcery, witchcraft, the land-related spirit world and “clever things” (sacred, secret and magical places and objects) are considered.

In the Conclusion (Chapter 8), questions in the Introduction (this chapter) are answered regarding how this vernacular Christianity functioned in this particular colonial contact zone. Is any “distinctive” Bundjalung and Githabul Pentecostal way observed? If so, how can it be conceptualised in terms of the theoretical concerns elaborated in this chapter? What is seen in the change of Bundjalung Pentecostalism? Is it continuity or rupture? Then, what form of continuity, what kind of rupture? Instead of resorting to the zero-sum game of persistence or loss of something that is primordial, a blackfella way of life, or a system of cultural categories, I propose to seek the answer in the dimension of the workings of hegemony. Based upon an ethnographic exploration into the profound processual manifestations of relations between people, cultural and political constructs, memories, personal emotions and sentiments, and fear and euphoria that Bundjalung and Githabul Pentecostalism has produced over generations, I will ask: has this vernacular Pentecostalism produced a principle of an anti-disciplinary network? Or has it been embedded in a principle of passive reproduction of a colonial subject?
CHAPTER 2

History: Propagation of Pentecostalism in the Early Days

And it shall come to pass in the last days, saith God, I will pour out of my Spirit upon all flesh: and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, and your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams:


"Before the missionaries came, blacks were talking about the Gospel round the campfire."

—Pastor's wife, Muli Muli Aboriginal village

What impact did the encounter with Christianity bring to the consciousness of the Bundjalung and Githabul mind? On the Far North Coast of New South Wales, during the initial stage of permeation of Christianity, missionaries evangelising the Aboriginal people did not establish a mission institution but rather blew through the scattered camps in the Bundjalung and Githabul country. The Aborigines Inland Mission (AIM) and the United Aborigines Mission (UAM), the main force that evangelised the Aboriginal people in New South Wales, only commenced operation in the Northern Rivers region after the turn of the twentieth century (Thompson 1998; Telfer 1939). But the Bible and Gospel were quickly absorbed into the Aboriginal communities. What, then, drove Bundjalung and Githabul people to Christianity—if there was no institutional control or lure of material benefits through the white church?

The following are some excerpts from the recollection by the United Aborigines Mission’s missionary (Telfer 1939) of their 1906 pioneering journey to the North Coast of New South Wales. We must of course deduct the routines of the missionary’s overcharged report, but the Aboriginal people’s feelings of wonder about and genuine interests in the novel Story of Jesus is not negligible.
A large native settlement is discovered midway between South Grafton and Ulmarra, and here the entire population, numbering 58, eagerly gathered on Sunday afternoon, and for 35 minutes listened to the Gospel story with unflagging attention. Returning a week later, we find the number increased to 65, and again they drink in the simple truth, that “CHRIST RECEIVETH SINFUL MEN.” While farewells are being said, four of the native people arrive from the Macleay, and promise to procure Testaments and Hymn Books, and teach their countrymen what they themselves know of the Word of God (ibid.: 73).

...and as the little band of coloured people assembled each morning and evening, we noted how eagerly they listened to the Old Story that to them was new...

(ibid.: 83)

The anecdote below was taken down in later years through the missionary’s association with the Dhan-gadi old man on the North Coast. The United Aborigines Mission had by then established the first church in the region. (It was not within the Bundjalung and Githabul country.) They met Frank Waddy, a “wise old man”.

Many long heart to heart talks we had with this native theologian. He took us one day to a lonely spot on the North Coast, and showed us a strange excavation in the earth where he declared Wirroombraul buried His only Son. “And is He down there now?” we enquired, and Frank replied: “Oh, no, boss, Him jump up big, strong fellow — never Him die any more.” That night we told the old man the inspired story of the death and resurrection of our Lord, and as he listened, the big tears rolled down his face and hissed amongst the embers of the tiny camp fire over which we sat. For many a day afterwards, Frank gathered little groups of his countrymen together and repeated faithfully the messages he had received from the missionary (ibid.: 62).

To draw on the author’s stirring expression, “Thus the [UAM’s evangelical] work continued to spread until, in most of the main centres along the North Coast, the native people had heard the grand old story of Redeeming Love” (ibid., bracket mine).

---

28 Grafton is in Bundjalung territory, whilst the Macleay River region is the Dhan-gadi land where the first mission church of the United Aborigines Mission was built in 1903. It was the headquarters of the North Coast “far-flung parish” to expand in the future. The Bundjalung and Githabul territory was at the farthest north edge of the North Coast “parish”.

29 “Wirroombraul” is, according to the writer, the Dhan-gadi word for the Great Spirit (Telfer 1939: 62).
Whether or not contemporary readers like the missionary's ostentatious reportage, the whole Northern Rivers Aboriginal community was indeed Christianised quickly. By 1940 all Aborigines in the region were at least nominal Christians (Prentis 1972:299; Calley 1959:194). This chapter, however, does not intend to depict how the missionaries worked to take over the moral order of the Bundjalung and Githabul society with that of Christendom. Instead, I want to explore how the Aboriginal side absorbed the exogenous god. It must be noted that it was not through missionary and Christian ideology first that the Aboriginal people in this region faced colonial institutionalisation. As mentioned above, the evangelisation in this region was rather late and for a generation or more Bundjalung and Githabul people had lived with the contact situation: they had been well acquainted with such kinds of people as escaped convicts, cedar cutters, miners and agricultural settlers (Calley 1959:193; Prentis 1972). This is a notable deviation from a familiar scenario of the cooption of the Aboriginal community by the Christian mission institutions in other parts of Aboriginal Australia (see, for example, Cole 1988; Edwards & Clarke 1988; Stockton 1988; Tonkinson 1978, 1988). When evangelisation reached the Aboriginal people in this region, their society was already confronting the post-contact collapse of their traditional social institutions.

In this particular situation and stage of the colonial encounter, how did the Bundjalung and Githabul respond to the introduction of Brave New Story of Jesus? The argument in this chapter puts emphasis on the Bundjalung and Githabul people's agency in their adoption of the Christian god. Evidence of white missionary's intervention is little. By doing so they were able to restructure their social orders that were endangered by the colonial contact. It was a substantial experience of modernity for the Bundjalung and Githabul. The historical evidence here shows it was not that they resisted Christianity; nor did they turn Christianity to syncretism for compromise — at least for the sake of Christian practice. Furthermore, the evidence also reveals their discourse "we knew the Gospel before the missionary" was not an oppositional reconstruction but a mere fact: they had their own Aboriginal lay Christian preachers before the UAM missionaries recognised the Bundjalung and Githabul country as their "far-flung" parish of the Far North Coast and settled down.

As the missionaries settled down in the era of the Protection Board's
superintendent stations, the network of the Aboriginal church went underground. Before the Board’s institutionalisation, Bundjalung and Githabul people had shown interest in the story of Jesus out of their own interest. I believe the evidence in this chapter is valid to argue that they had used a newfound exogenous moral order in the most fundamentalistic form—Pentecostalism. Starting from the post-contact social change, this chapter examines this process within the backdrop of the permeation of Christianity, especially, the old Pentecostal way.

Prelude: Post-contact change

Events

It was not until 1823 that the Northern Rivers Aboriginal people established face-to-face contact with Europeans. John Oxley and his expedition party, sailing into the Tweed River, encountered a man and several women and children. Their total nudity, lack of weapons and the man’s cicatrised chest was recorded by Oxley’s chronicler (Prentis 1972:105). In 1828, the Northern Rivers were probed intensively (ibid.) and the squatters began to arrive in the 1830s. From 1839 to 1840, the Clarence River was effectively occupied by pastoralists, and by the end of 1844, the lands along the Richmond River valley were also virtually completely occupied (ibid.:128-157). The initial period of open conflict lasted for about thirty years. Gradually, Aboriginal people began to work on stations as stockmen and drovers and for cedar cutters. In 1859 large numbers of Europeans and Chinese entered the area for gold mining. Consequently, Aboriginal people retreated and lived on the edge of the European

---

30 Between 1842 and 1848, the region’s main cattle stations were established at Casino, Runnymede, Wooroowoolgen, Wyangarie, Dyraaba, Fairy Mount, Tunstall and Lismore. (cf. Richmond River Historical Society 1999).

31 In 1843, conflict with settlers resulted in the massacre of up to 100 Aborigines (of the Birin clans) at Evans Head, which is remembered today as the Evans Head massacre. Rivers of Blood (Medcalf 1989) details the period of massacres of the Northern Rivers Aborigines and their resistance between 1838 and 1870, according to which the Northern Rivers Aboriginal population of approximately 2600 in the late 1830s dropped to 1200 in 1880 (ibid.:20). Killing of Aborigines by supplying poisoned flour was not unusual. However, Aboriginal resistance by killing white servants and stockmen, and stealing sheep was resilient until the combatant population drastically dropped as above.
settlements and worked as station hands or panned for gold. In the Northern Rivers during this period, a form of “fringe-dwelling” was encouraged on some pastoral stations to provide a semi-permanent pool of labour (ibid.:246-251). In such a flexible situation, the Aboriginal people were able to keep their traditional life going to some extent and also to take some advantage of working at cattle stations. Even those who remained fairly nomadic in the 1870s and 1880s could become temporary “fringe-dwellers” (ibid.: 247).

Greater government intervention in the lives of Aboriginal people commenced in 1883 when the Board for the Protection of the Aborigines was appointed. The Aboriginal Protection Board brought those reserves and camps under its administration by appointing resident managers. In the Northern Rivers region, most settlements have grown out of unofficial camps. Unlike Queensland where the development of small settlements was not tolerated and Aborigines were gathered onto very large “stations”, in New South Wales Aborigines were not obliged to live on “stations” and “reserves”. Since around the 1860s, the New South Wales Lands Department began to respond to the Aboriginal demands by reserving Crown land for their use (Goodall 1996:84-87). These reserves, however, eventually suffered from loss of Aboriginal control, as they were turned into Protection Board stations, partially leased to white settlers, or were revoked (ibid.:136-145). Revocation accompanied forced relocation of the residents. The Protection Board’s policy was at first segregation. Reinforced institutionalisation continued after the Protection Board was renamed the Aborigines Welfare Board in 1940 and started assimilation policy — up until the New South Wales Aboriginal policy underwent fundamental changes in the 1970s.

By the time the Protection Board began to increase intervention, farming became more important in the region’s industry and big pastoral properties became smaller and fewer. An industry of small farms and farmers—e.g., dairying, pig production, maize and sugar-cane growing—needed no hired labour and the scope for the employment of Aboriginal people was becoming less and less. Prentis (Prentis 1972)
argues that in the “narrow limits” of caring for the physical welfare of Aboriginal people in the economic situation of the post-contact era, the protection policy was not unsuccessful (ibid.:298). Indeed the drastic population decline—such as the decrease by half between 1839 and 1881—stopped (ibid.). There are opinions that the protection policy led to isolating Aboriginal groups from society as a whole in the Northern Rivers region and the increased social distance between Aborigines and Europeans, in turn, allowed them to recover their solidarity. As evidence of solidarity, the existing studies up to the 1980s rely on, firstly, continued use of the local dialects and, secondly, syncretic myths, beliefs and practices produced by the Aboriginal Pentecostal church33 (Prentis 1972: 297-304; Bell 1959; Sharpe 1985; Calley 1957).

Such aspects of the protection policy, of course, do not compensate for the colonial dispossession of land. The respective Boards promoted the leasing of reserves. Often revocation of reserves and relocation of residents followed. This facilitated alienation of Aboriginal people from the land of their ancestors, hence collapse of initiation and increase rituals. Therefore, in many stations and reserves, active political actions were continuing. The stations were neither some kind of peaceful refuge of a “dying race” nor were the inmates being submissive and content. Tenacious protest campaigns were continuing throughout the period of Protection and Welfare Boards’ control in the Northern Rivers region as well as other parts of New South Wales (see for full detail, Goodall 1996). It is worth noting that many of the Christian elders of the “revival days” were the central figures in these movements (ibid:297-313). Emotional hurts caused by surveillance must also be taken into consideration. Contemporary reconstructions of the “Mission days” are filled with reproaches for the abusive, disdainful or at best condescending attitudes of managers, matrons and missionaries.34

A somewhat confusing terminology must be clarified here. The “stations” (with resident managers) were also known as “the Mission” to both local Aborigines and

33 At the time of the fieldwork for this thesis, however, both have been lost in the everyday life context despite ardent reconstructive discourses in a political context.
34 Interestingly, though, today they seem to imitate the behaviour of the “white master” blindly towards coloured newcomers to entertain themselves. Such practice in contemporary context, once again, reinforces sense of group solidarity, in contrast to a relatively tolerant attitude of the mainstream society towards newcomers.
whites in the Northern Rivers region, as well as in many other parts of Australia. It must be noted that the New South Wales government removed any church control over any reserved land in 1893 (ibid.). It needs to be borne in mind that, generally on Bundjalung and Githabul land, missionaries did not wield institutional control. Due to longstanding custom, however, the ex-“station” settlements are still today called the “Mission” by local black and white people. Following Goodall’s terminology (ibid.:xv), in this thesis I use the Board term “station” to indicate the superintendent reserve, but in the ethnographic text I literally reproduce the term “the Mission” when used by Aboriginal people. If Aboriginal people themselves call their homeland “the Mission” in the ethnographic text, it must be remembered that the past institutionalisation was done by the Protection and Welfare Boards, not by Christian missions. Also, the “pastors” mentioned in this thesis are all Aboriginal, unless otherwise mentioned.

Ensuing from the 1967 Commonwealth Referendum which decided to count all Aboriginal people in the national census and ended constitutional discrimination, in 1969 the Welfare Board was abolished and the government policy gradually turned its directions from paternalistic surveillance to major improvements in the social well-being of Aboriginal communities—which reached the point of Aboriginal self-determination. The New South Wales Government policy on the philosophy of Aboriginal self-determination lasted until a recent change in the Australian government’s approach to Indigenous affairs whereby the philosophy of shared responsibility agreements was introduced. Acknowledging the problems of Aboriginal self-determination, in 2000 the New South Wales Premier announced a new approach based on the partnership between Aboriginal people, the government, and other

35 At unofficial camps missionaries may have established mission institutions for the benefit of local inhabitants with varying degrees of surveillance. Among the congregations this research covered, only one is a propagation from the AIM church. It is a small community on the coastal edge of the Tweed Valley. The community was formed gradually under the AIM missionaries and the resident missionaries stayed until the shift of church leadership to an Aboriginal minister in the 1970s. In this region (Tweed Valley), however, the sociocultural situation has been rather different from that in the rest of the Northern Rivers region: loyalty to the Bundjalung social organisation and consciousness of kin relatedness to the inland groups of the Northern Rivers have been thinned down due to a free interbreeding with Kanakas and a more multicultural atmosphere of the region (Prentis 1972). This trend was already recorded during Calley’s research (Calley 1955:10). Today, however, reconstruction of Bundjalung identity is going on in the political discourse. See Chapter 3 for detailed information on the Tweed area.
relevant sectors. The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission (ATSIC) operating since 1990 (up until 2003, practically) was finally abolished in March 2005. Since 2005, the Australian government has adopted a new approach to indigenous affairs: Shared Responsibility Agreements (SRAs) and Regional Partnership Agreements (RPAs). By signing an agreement—a SRA at a local level and a RPA at a community level—indigenous communities are expected to make commitments to achieve good outcomes in response to services or funding by governments.

Here we must pay attention to the fact that the Aboriginal policy was not the most important element to determine the course of events in colonial race relations. Instead of viewing the past through the change of policy titles such as “Protection”, “Welfare” and “Self-determination” and concluding a growing enlightenment among whites, Goodall (Goodall 1995) suggests that the dynamics of the interactions of three forces determined the direction of change: the economy and its social outcomes, government policy and Aboriginal interests. In New South Wales, particularly the depressions of the 1890s and 1930s, and the rural recession of the 1960s were the catalysts of each major increase in the controls over Aboriginal people (ibid.: 58). Even after the drastic change of policies from paternalistic surveillance to self-determination, Aboriginal sense of interest did not necessarily synchronise with the philosophy of government policy. Among those who are over fifty years old today, “when politics came” is a common phrase to start a yarn about the “beginning of the end” of their Old Christian Church United as One and also, of the “good-old-day” community and family. As a result of the fundamental change in the administration policy of Aboriginal affairs, Bundjalung and Githabul people—especially leaders of the community—began to have access to power. They call such channels to power “politics”. The Christian leaders of the time—and others alike—were lured to be involved in “politics”. Sentiments of grudging and unforgiving prevailed in the respective communities and the church was divided.36 Around the same time, in the 1970s-1980s, desires for better opportunities and modern life drove people to move out of their homeland (i.e. “the Mission” or ex-station settlement) into the town. Abundant

---

36 Local Aboriginal Christians usually say someone has “a spirit of” grudging, unforgiving, controlling, matchmaking, and so on. This may demonstrate their concerns about the influence of evil spirits over the changed psyche of their own people.
financial support for secondary education, Aboriginal housing, local employment (though limited) and, above all, social security money enabled them to do so. I will return to this issue in the latter part of this chapter.

In one aspect, however, the current welfare policy has supported an endangered niche of Bundjalung and Githabul Pentecostal Christians to survive. By living "on Centrelink", i.e., getting a variety of pensions such as an unemployment pension, an invalid pension, a caretaker's pension, and a parenting payment for single mothers, most of the researched Aboriginal Christians are able to pursue their evangelical commitments. Among the church leaders of the twelve North Coast congregations researched, only one has a permanent job (and two are on stipends as they run, exceptionally, prosperous churches). Some have chosen to leave a job and live on a pension to "make more time for the Lord". Today those who live a fortunate combination of being on a pension and "on fire" have enough leisure time to spare to undertake reading the Bible, leading ministering teams, or hanging over a flock of Christians to indulge in praise and worship music. At least, the Pentecostal Aboriginal Christians are taking good advantage of the current Aboriginal welfare policy—though at a short range of sight. (Chapters 5 & 6 are devoted in detail to this issue.)

Sociocultural order

The Bundjalung and Githabul were patrilineal and patrilocal (Radcliffe-Brown 1929:401). Girls were promised to a man according to this Old Rule and were given to him when he had undergone his initiations (Oakes 1988:1). In this region, there were arrangements for inter-group visits when the oysters, the bunya nuts or the wallabies were available (ibid.) and also for initiation ceremonies (Mathews 1897,1898a,1900). According to Calley who was following Elkin's (Elkin 1966:81-111) classification of Australian kinship terminology, their traditional kinship system was Aluridja-type system—in so far as preferred marriage was the male ego marrying with MMBSD (Calley 1959:130-135). Calley, however, said it was not a fully developed Aluridja

37 See Elkin (1966:103-106) for details of Aluridja-type kinship system.
system like the Kokata (cf. Elkin 1966:105) and that it was more like the Aranda type of system, since “cross-cousins were distinguished from siblings in terminology and sisters’ children from own children” (Calley 1959:117-118; see also Hausfeld 1960:78-82, Notes:48-50). Descent was traced to four couples in the grandparent’s generation and there were no sections (ibid.:117). The rugged, mountainous nature of the densely forested Bundjalung and Githabul country had made their territory to be a coastal remnant not only regarding contact with white settlers but also with other Aboriginal groups expanding their kinship system (i.e., the Kamilaroi type sections) from the north and the west through the agency of bunya nut feasts and initiation ceremonies.

In the Bundjalung and Githabul area, initiation ceremonies were performed on the ground of Bora rings, the eastern type of initiation ceremonies. Bora is a circular or slightly oval space made cleared of all timber and grass, with embankments formed around it. In two Bora rings—a bigger one and a smaller one—which were connected with each other by a narrow path, various rituals were held for neophytes to go through in seclusion. It involved symbolic departure from mother and women’s camp, receiving cultural knowledge, and drilling of loyalty to their group, obedience to elders and doughtiness to conquer fear (Mathews 1897, 1898a, 1899-1900). There were multiple degrees in their initiation ceremonies, for each one of which the Bora rings had different names in local dialects. The neophytes were brought to the inter-group ceremonies, often beyond the borders of their territory and into the countries of their traditional enemies. General cessation of hostility was the rule during the initiation ceremonies (Calley 1955, Part I, pp.5). Before the groups took leave at the end of each gathering, the head men assembled in council and arranged which group should take the initiative at the next gathering. It is the duty of this group to prepare Bora rings, as well as suitable camping sites for visitors capable of accommodating all the groups and providing sufficient game to furnish food for all the people during the ceremonies (Mathews 1897).

38 Mathews (1898b) and Radcliffe-Brown (1929) argued that the Bundjalung and Githabul social unit was of the Kamilaroi-type organisation, which was divided into four sections (under two moieties), each with a special animal affiliation. Calley, however, argued that the Kamilaroi sections had not yet been established among them before the thoroughgoing changes were brought about by the European invasion (Calley1959: 130-135).

39 See (Howitt1904: 509-642) for coverage of these types of ceremonies.
Only the first degree of initiation was compulsory and young men become marugan. A man could marry as soon as they were classed as marugan. Only those who were outstanding at the first-degree initiation were chosen for higher degree initiation. (ibid.) There is little information of the higher degrees of initiation of the Bundjalung and Githabul. In this region, there was no practice of circumcision nor tooth evulsion. (Calley 1955; Oakes 1988; Ryan 1964) Cicatrisation was practised on males into the flesh on the shoulders, arms and chest, which was supposed to indicate release from the restriction of food taboos. Women had initiation, too, which involved a period of seclusion and cicatrisation of the breasts (Calley 1955: Part I, pp.7). Young girls, on becoming promised or betrothed, had to lose part of the little finger of the left hand (Ryan 1964:63; Oakes 1988:6). Increase rites were practised in association with the totem sites or djurebil. These sites were the property of a clan or lineage. A particular clan or lineage is responsible for each of the numerous increase sites to perform rites to ensure the continued food supply. A man of the owner lineage of the site must “talk to the djurebil” in the lineage’s local dialect. (Calley 1955: Part I, pp.8).

By the time Calley initiated research into Bundjalung and Githabul Pentecostalism in 1952, these social institutions, especially the traditional marriage system and initiation and increase rites, had nearly ceased to operate. As they settled and began to depend on wage labour, their economic dependence on bush food resources diminished and the importance of the clan as a social group declined. Solidarity around the “station line” instead of the “clan line” was being developed. The clan was still patrilineal and virilocal, but there was already the uxorilocal aspect of marriage seen as it is at present. (See Chapter 4 for case materials of the present-day

---

40 See (Calley 1955: Part I pp.6) for some records. There were even higher degrees of initiation rites for “clever men”, which were done for a limited number of chosen youths separately from ordinary initiation rites. See (Elkin 1994: 142-146) for the Bundjalung case material. The Wuradjeri case collected by Berndt (Berndt 1947a; 1947b) offers rich material of this kind.

41 A typical series of scarrings would be the releases from such food: the fat male opossum, the full-grown male iguana, the female and young iguana; the full-grown male emu, the female and half-grown emus, a large grub and various other types of grub. A complex pattern of left-shoulder cicatrices indicated eligibility to eat carpet snakes, porcupines, turtles, etc. (Ryan 1964: 49).

42 The little finger was bound with bush silk (Oakes 1988: 6) or cobweb (Ryan 1964: 63) till it mortified and dropped off. In this region, disarticulation of a little finger joint was a sign of betrothal which on no account could be tampered with.

43 Bundjalung and Githabul people had a custom called ngarbindja, “living away from home for
social unit and marriage pattern.) People were no longer marrying their MMBSD and its variant because of the decline of "proper" pool of spouses, but were following the rule that one must look for one's spouse "a long way away" (Calley 1959:64-65,157-160). The function of totemism in social organisation to mark off exogamous groups had almost entirely vanished.44

Thus the hunter-gatherer lifestyle was quickly transforming after the completion of the occupation of the squatters in the mid-nineteenth century. It was not, however, until the regional economy shifted—from large-scale pastoral development to small-sized family holdings of farms in early twentieth century—that Aboriginal people were drastically alienated from land and the collapse of social institutions accelerated. The early twentieth century was still the last "golden age" for the Bundjalung and Githabul. To draw on Hausfeld (Hausfeld 1960), who served as manager of the Welfare Board's station in Woodenbong (between 1956-1960):

Aboriginal informants ... speak of these times, about 1900, as of a former golden age when [cattle] station owners and managers did not interfere with them and the land was theirs to roam at will, with the exception only that they stay out of the fattening paddocks. Work was available as required; tobacco, flour, sugar, tea and meat were readily obtained as rations for workers, and bush food was plentiful.

(Hausfeld 1960) (Notes to Section 1, pp.12, bracket mine)

The loss of this "golden age" coincided with the period in which the Aboriginal people, above all, the immediate precursors of Aboriginal lay pastors, began to be drawn to the Gospel. And by the time the Bundjalung and Githabul Pentecostal revival broke out, the local Aboriginal people had experienced an irremediable rupture with traditional social institutions.

the purpose of getting married" (Calley 1959: 65). By ngarbindja the bride’s people were able to know whether a prospective husband was a good hunter and mindful of his kin obligations in order to decide whether or not he would make a satisfactory husband. Calley suggests "in the event of a clan becoming so small that it was no longer able to resist the raids of other clans its surviving male members could become permanently ngarbindja with the clans of their wives (ibid.)."

44 In the early 1950s, Calley found the position of the totems in this region being "not at all clear" and "hopelessly confused" (Calley 1955: Part II, pp.3-4). The local Aborigines seemed to confuse the inherited totems, both patrilineal and matrilineal, and individual totems obtained during some kind of mystic experience which had a religio-magical aspect.
The pioneers

The origins and expansion of Australian Pentecostalism

The Pentecostal church has been a minority denomination until a drastic expansion began in the 1970s-1980s in Australia (Hughes 1996; Chant 1984) and there has long been prejudice against it in the white mainstream society. Mainline denominations often accused the movement of extremism or fanaticism. The phenomenon called “baptism with the Holy Spirit” is the typical mystic side of its service. One has a direct spiritual contact with God in a variety of ways, but on the whole, one gets in an ecstatic condition on direct outpouring of the Holy Spirit and glossolalia (or speaking “in tongues”) accompanies with it. Speaking in tongues is the utterance of sounds that are not understandable to the speaker. No distinction is usually made between unknown tongues and ecstatic utterances in known languages (Synan 1997:108).

In modern Pentecostalism the doctrine has been formulated that tongues are the “Bible evidence” of the baptism in the Holy Spirit (Synan 2001:3). These Pentecostal experiences are acknowledged by all denominations as far as the biblical evidence in “Acts 2” (Chapter 2 of The Acts of the Apostles) of the Bible is concerned, but mainline denominations claim what happened on the day of Pentecost was unique and no longer repeatable. Practically speaking, I have witnessed many of the adherents of the mainline denominations abhor such manifestations as fanaticism, though from the 1970s the mainline churches have seen the rise of “charismatic” movement. In addition, dramatic “miracle healings” were the main part that attracted the attention of

---

47 Specific features of the outpouring of the Holy Spirit never occurred again in Scripture precisely the same as in Acts 2, but the following New Testament Letters mention the gifts of the Spirit: Romans 12:6-8; 1 Corinthians 12:1-11; and 1 Peter 4:10. (cf. The Quest Study Bible, 1984 pp. 1505)
48 The charismatic movement is essentially a Pentecostal revival within the established churches. But charismatics are not so committed to the teaching that speaking in tongues is the evidence of baptism in the Spirit. Nevertheless, the charismatic renewal has introduced spiritual gifts—the charismata—into many mainline churches. There is no clearly defined membership because of its very nature and there is no easy means of finding out who belongs to it (Chant 1984:229; cf. Hughes 1996:108).
the society at large to the services of the early Pentecostal churches. Already in the first decade of the twentieth century in Australia large-scale conventions were held in big cities such as Melbourne, Sydney and Brisbane at which big crowds of lay people seeking excitement gathered (Chant 1984). At the same time, oppositional parties kept hindering the activities of the early churches.

A clear theological difference of Pentecostalism from that of orthodox churches is that the Pentecostal doctrine proclaims that (1) entire sanctification is experienced as "baptism with the Holy Spirit" and that (2) "speaking in tongues" is the initial evidence of receiving the baptism with the Holy Spirit (see, for example, Synan 1997, 2001; Chant 1984; Hollenweger 1972). Baptism with the Holy Spirit is a "second blessing" preceded by conversion. It had been regarded as entire sanctification since the holiness movement started in the Methodist church in the eighteenth century and spread interdenominationally, but on the proof of sanctification there had not been consensus. It was Pentecostalism that singled out tongue-speaking into a fully defined doctrine as an "incontrovertible and repeatable kind of evidence, supported by biblical references and uniform for all" (Synan 1997:112) and this gave Pentecostalism its greatest impetus.

Historians agree that the Pentecostal movement had its beginnings in the United States when a small group of Bible school students in Topeka, Kansas experienced the baptism in the Holy Spirit and spoke in tongues on New Year's Eve in 1900 (Synan 2001). The Azusa Street Revival in Los Angeles (starting in 1906) sprang from this line of movement and became the centre of multicultural Pentecostal church, through which Pentecostalism spread into the other parts of the world (ibid.). Australia, however, had its own parallel developments at the turn of the twentieth century, although some renowned American preachers were later invited by early Australian Pentecostal churches for short-term joint evangelical tours in Australia. There was the "spiritual hunger" among white Christians and it prevailed in many churches in the early 1900s in Australia (Chant 1984:88). In other words, there was the end-of-the-century atmosphere of expecting supernatural manifestations of God and it was erupting universally among white Christians towards the end of the nineteenth century. This must be remembered as we proceed to the history of Christianisation in
the Northern Rivers region.

This issue of the “spiritual hunger” of the time requires detailed attention. There is no space here to explore the Australian Pentecostal pioneers but Appendix 1 discusses a few of the leading Australian Pentecostal pioneers in order to shed light on their personal devotion which led them to the conviction that the outpouring of the Holy Spirit is experienceable in modern times—most of the pioneers witnessed it in the form of a miracle healing.49 Melbourne was the place of origin of the early Pentecostal movement in Australia. In this area, three leading figures—Janet Lancaster, Robert Horne and Charles Greenwood—had conviction of Pentecostal manifestations and started church nearly coevally, which attracted preachers from abroad and ignited the dispersion of Pentecostalism to other states of Australia. At the same time, the anecdotes in Appendix 1 will demonstrate that the practical side of the growth of the early Pentecostal churches is filled with complex interactions, merges and divisions, alliances and conflicts. Readers will find in Chapter 4 that the formation of the Bundjalung and Githabul churches shares similar aspects of discordance. This is a somewhat elemental structure of Pentecostal church.

Such was the wind of the time that two Aboriginal men, the protagonists in the following section, must have felt when they encountered Pentecostal teachings. As the constant occurrences of miracle healings as shown in Appendix 1 would indicate, early Pentecostal churches were the fruits of the time when more and more white Christians began to seek the supernatural. The pioneering Pentecostal leaders and their followers in Australia started in a small meeting in a humble place; all they had was no money but “Heavenly fire” in their hearts. Each movement grew rapidly and drew crowds and money that could build even a city like Dowieites did. Also, it is worth learning, from these early examples, that any Pentecostal movement innately has structural fragility because of the very point that it is meant to start from purely spiritual devotion. A lot of leaders did not care what others would think or say. Not only accusations of

49 Heart of Fire: The Story of Australian Pentecostalism by Reverend Dr Barry Chant (1973-1984) is regarded as the only and the best book of this kind—and an Australian classic. Written by a PhD in history and pastor of a Pentecostal denomination, it is based on objective research and it contains rich descriptions of the leading figures and the formation of churches of the Australian Pentecostal movement and the enthusiasm of the early Pentecostal churches. Chant’s historical data are mainly used to compile this section.
fanaticism and extremism but also of being false teachers or confidence men were brought against these pioneers. None of them started a congregation with a healthy business plan. It was all about faith and spiritual awakening. This fundamental feature is definitely found among the researched Aboriginal churches to be discussed in Chapter 4. We need to keep in mind that the Pentecostal movement has these characteristics in common, and should resist entertaining an idea of attributing whatever is deviant from the “mainstream values” to Aboriginal characteristics.

It is most likely that at one of these assemblies in the Eastern States mentioned above, the two Aboriginal men must have received the gifts of the Holy Spirit as well as a divine healing message—and more importantly, more than anything else, an undeniable faith in the gospel of Jesus Christ, who is Saviour, Healer, Baptiser in the Holy Spirit and Coming King. The Grand Story of Jesus was still a novelty to many of their own people. Driven by the zeal of evangelism, from there they set forth on outreach to the north for their own people, ultimately reaching the Northern Rivers. There the local Aboriginal people had already been talking about the Gospel under the Aboriginal lay leadership. But they were not yet been completed in the “fullness” of the Holy Spirit. Around the early 1920s the one arrived at the Stoney Gully Station, 60 km south of Woodenbong, and a couple of decades later, the other arrived at the Woodenbong Station. The former initiated the Bundjalung and Githabul into the teachings of Pentecostalism, and the latter boosted up the fire in their hearts and worked with the Bundjalung and Githabul lay pastors—soon to witness the great revival led by the local network of Aboriginal Pentecostals under Aboriginal leadership.

50 The local churches in New South Wales have largely neglected proselytising the Aboriginal population, except for a small number of mission institutions run by trained missionaries. In Woodenbong, the Minister of the local Church of England withdrew his consent to accept the Aboriginal people in all the areas to his church after consulting his congregation (Summary of discussion on the part the Christian churches can play. Proceedings of Conference on NSW Aborigines, 1959, pp.111-114).
The Aboriginal harbingers

Now I attempt to trace back the process of the propagation of Pentecostalism into the Aboriginal communities on the North Coast, especially, when, where and by whom. The scenario drawn by the past ethnographer (Calley 1959) was that of total subordination to the UAM mission institution. Calley states explicitly that the church in the Woodenbong Aboriginal Station (present-day Muli Muli Aboriginal village) functioned as the UAM missionary's base from which spiritual institutionalisation of the Northern Rivers Aboriginal settlements was accomplished (Calley 1959:193-196). But to what extent this institutionalisation affected the respective communities remains ambiguous. There is a record of the situation depicted by Calley:

Where a practice had become established, later missionaries were not supposed to interfere with it, and there is no evidence to suggest that they ever did in a manner sufficiently obvious to be noticed by the Aborigines. During the U.A.M. era, most Bandjalang became nominal Christians: certificates of conversion were issued. (ibid.:194)

Notwithstanding this, Calley's scenario presumes that the church under the Aboriginal leadership in the Northern Rivers region only originated in the shift in leadership from the white UAM missionaries to leaders of the Aboriginal adherents; if so, it was as late as in 1952 when the last missionary left Woodenbong. The information collected by the fieldwork for this thesis, however, can offer a completely different picture.51

During the first two decades of the twentieth century, when the pioneering work was going on, people in Australia began to absorb by osmosis the notion that receiving the "fullness" of the Holy Spirit is repeatable in a contemporary context. It was a misty dawn of Pentecostal spiritual awakening. As early as in this period, i.e., late in the 1910s or early in the 1920s, an Aboriginal preacher was tirelessly traveling on the North Coast of New South Wales to bring the "good news" to his people. He was traveling from the south of New South Wales to Queensland. He passed the Bundjalung and Githabul country and camped at the Stoney Gully Station for a while,

51 I talked with both Aboriginal and white witnesses including retired white UAM missionaries. They witnessed the Revival era while they were on service at one of the superintendent stations.
and preached to the Aboriginal people there in a fierce way: “Listen to God and repent, or you’ll die!” At first, the people did not listen; in six months, a plague came. So many people died in Stoney Gully that there was not enough time to make coffins for all the bodies. People surrendered to God in awe.... This misty and mythical account I had been told in the field eventually turned out to be a real story. The name of the Aboriginal preacher was Mick Cook.

Little is known about him. But at least the memory of this “Godly man” has survived—for nearly one hundred years. During the fieldwork for this thesis, evidence was collected from retired white UAM missionaries in addition to several old Aboriginal people. Mick Cook’s existence has been substantiated. There are Aboriginal Cook families in this region, but he was not related to any of these Bundjalung or Githabul families. Some say this “Cook” was the name of a white family who adopted Mick in his infancy, which is the reason why he was traveling from south to north to “look for” his relatives. This account implies he was town-bred and had an opportunity to encounter Pentecostal teachings which were just spreading from Melbourne into the cities of other states.

It may appear strange to see that none of the past ethnographies mentions Mick Cook. Presumably, it was partly because Mick Cook was a lay and maverick evangelist and that he was preaching on the North Coast probably for a short duration of time, as his original purpose was to travel to Queensland. Therefore, only eyewitness accounts from both black and white locals are available at present. Another reason is probably because the presence of the latter-day Aboriginal evangelist Dick Piety was overwhelming to the locals during the revival period when Calley and others were in the field. The researchers, who had known little of early Pentecostal movements in Australia then, did not seem to be interested in exploring further back. It should have been natural for researchers, on observing “the church in the superintendent station”,

52 So far no documental evidence of Mick Cook has been discovered. The whole day-to-day working papers of all the Aboriginal Protection Board stations disappeared decades ago in Australia and no one has had a chance to look at them.

53 Dick Piety not only repeatedly travelled on the North Coast but also got married in Woodenbong in 1958 with a Githabul woman when his first wife died (United Aborigines’ Messenger, 1 August 1958).
to unconditionally see the control of the mission institution through the Aboriginal activities they observed—especially, regarding ritual practice with a hue of Judeo-Christian ideology. These are, presumably, the reasons why the harbingers like Arthur Bundock, as well as Mick Cook, were left out of the existing ethnographies. Arthur was the first generation of the Aboriginal pastorship in Woodenbong who started preaching before the UAM missionary came—when it was still an unofficial camp. This issue is discussed later in this section.

It seems frankly surprising, even for those who are today fully acquainted with the origin of Australian Pentecostal movement, to know such a hinterland Aboriginal group as the Bundjalung and Githabul was introduced to Pentecostalism as early as in the 1910s or 1920s and, moreover, by an Aboriginal evangelist, not a white Pentecostal. A white local pastor of the Assemblies of God in Casino would not believe her when a 74-year-old Githabul woman told him she had been brought up in the “old” Pentecostal way. To this old lady, the white pastor responded negatively. He mentioned the year 1909, the year when Janet Lancaster (see the preceding section) started the first Pentecostal movement of Australia, and said it would be impossible for Aborigines of her age to “grow up” in an Aboriginal Pentecostal village. Mick Cook’s presence was, however, surely after 1909—probably a decade or so after. Moreover, this old lady was born in 1931, by which time the Pentecostal movement was surely growing in every state of Australia and, as above-mentioned, there were a lot of outreaches in the vicinity of the Bundjalung and Githabul country such as Brisbane, Toowoomba and Ipswich. But the fact is that even one of the best-informed local Pentecostal pastors today feels highly dubious about the idea of autonomy in early Aboriginal churches.

The black preacher was traveling on foot. An old Githabul man has heard his father Alex Vesper recollecting the way this “Godly man” reached Stoney Gully, a Protection Board’s station (1899 and 1939) located south of Woodenbong. Him being “on foot” appealed to the Aboriginal people. It was a hard way, which is their way. A retired white UAM missionary Barry Smith of Coraki (Box Ridge reserve) has heard a

54 She is a granddaughter to one of the legendary Aboriginal pastors of the revival days; after school she used to read the Bible to her illiterate grandfather who was preparing for sermons.
full-blood Aborigine and Christian elder James Morgan demonstrate a similar sentiment. He told Barry Smith that the Stoney Gully people listened to Mick Cook because of his way—whilst white missionaries held big meetings and went, Mick sat down with the Aboriginal people and stayed with them. Barry Smith is a local born missionary’s son and James Morgan befriended Barry Smith and his wife and shared much time with these young Christian friends. James told them he converted to Christianity under this evangelist after the time when he was supposed to be “initiated”, i.e., presumably in his late adolescence. If James, born in 1902, was converted in his high teens or early twenties, this Aboriginal evangelist’s presence in Stoney Gully should have been around the early 1920s. The Aboriginal people in Box Ridge were having Pentecostal worship on their own already when Barry Smith’s mother first came and started church in 1920 at Box Ridge. The Smiths had to tolerate the Aboriginal residents who, in disregard of their ministry’s commitment to the Box Ridge residents, frequently invited white Pentecostal preachers from elsewhere for their services.

It is interesting that, despite such detailed information, the retired white missionary and his wife had taken it for granted that Mick Cook was a white Pentecostal preacher until they talked with me. Charlotte Page of Woodenbong, the oldest elder of the Githabul group, affirmed definitely that Mick Cook was a real black man. She remembered her auntie Lola Close recollect how he was: “Because he was so spiritual, people could not look at him. His face was in the lights.” This account implies Mick’s teaching was identified with the supernatural. Mick Cook did not go to Woodenbong. By that time in Woodenbong, Githabul people had already been under a different Aboriginal Christian leadership. After he left Stoney Gully, however,

---

55 James Morgan was willing to sit at their church in Box Ridge reserve, whilst he organised their own Pentecostal meetings and bus tours to conventions on his own for the residents of Box Ridge. The missionary couple tolerated Pentecostalism among them and kept up a good friendship with him, but the idea never struck them that the evangelist who had stayed in Stoney Gully might have been Aboriginal and they never asked old Morgan.

56 Little is known about the details of his teaching. Warnings to people to repent and about the manifestation of God’s fury upon sinners form the major part of the local memory. There is no definite information on whether or not miracle healings took place or baptism in the Holy Spirit prevailed under his ministry, but it would be enough to mention that all informants, including the white missionaries, identified Mick Cook as a Pentecostal. This means Cook was preaching about the “Acts 2” experiences.
Pentecostal teachings quickly permeated into the Northern Rivers. The above-mentioned Charlotte Page was married when she was sixteen in 1935. She recollects people in Woodenbong were already Pentecostal then. Eric Walker from Tabulam, the oldest Bundjalung elder today, recollects that John Boyman—his "relation way back"—worked with Mick Cook in Stoney Gully and helped spread the Gospel.

In Woodenbong, among the first of several families who had moved to a camp which was later gazetted as a reserve were the Bundocks. It is a consensus among the living Githabul elders that Arthur Bundock was the one who started the church in this camp—probably around the turn of the twentieth century. This was well before Mick Cook brought Pentecostalism to Stoney Gully. Born in 1872, Arthur was settled in the camp by the time he got married in 1905. He was the direct grandfather of the present-day pastor Francis Bundock, and the father of Frank who was one of the leaders of the revival in the 1950s. Little is known about how Arthur was Christianised, but it is known it was before he moved to the camp and that he did not work for the missionaries. Surely he must have been Christianised by itinerant white missionaries or the Ministers of the local church, but he was a maverick preacher in the camp. By the time his son Frank was born in 1908, the Aboriginal people in the camp had the early prototype of the Woodenbong Aboriginal congregation under Arthur Bundock. The UAM had not yet begun its pioneering work on the North Coast.

There was hunger for God and miracles in the early church. Arthur was called a "Mountain Man" as he used to go up to the mountains and spend a long time to pray. He had an altar in the hills. Whenever a member of the village became sick, he went into the mountains and prayed to God for miracle healings. A story of Arthur raising a woman from the dead is still remembered by some villagers. Of course, how far his Christian influence had spread to the villagers during this period is not known. In addition, today older people say their legendary pastors, both Arthur and Frank, were "clever", too. Being "clever" means they were elders with high-degree traditional knowledge, which sometimes accompanied magical powers of the Aboriginal Old Way. At least, according to their descendants, it is clear the father and son Bundocks did not produce syncretic teachings for their congregation in the church context, regardless of
how they may have been bound by the Old Way in the practical aspect of everyday life. We will return to this issue of renouncing the “clever way” by Christian elders later (Chapter 7).

The Aboriginal Christian network

The black evangelists, lay pastors and the flock

The Protection Board revoked the Stoney Gully station in 1939 and incorporated it into the Woodenbong Station in 1940, during which time a lot of residents were relocated. The above-mentioned Alex Vesper moved to Woodenbong and became known as the most knowledgeable Christian, cultural elder and political activist who worked to regain the Aboriginal land. In this period, the stations and the reserve in the Northern Rivers region had a number of Aboriginal Christian leaders like Alex Vesper, Arthur and Frank Bundock. In Tuncester reserve near Lismore, Frank Roberts Snr had been tenaciously protesting against the Protection Board’s control since at least the 1920s (Goodall 1996:286-288). Many people had moved to Tuncester to avoid the managerial repression on Cabbage Tree Island. In 1934 the Protection Board attempted forced relocation of the Tuncester residents to Stoney Gully (and therefore, eventually to Woodenbong) but the Roberts stayed in the sized-down reserve renamed as Cubawee. Frank Roberts Snr was received by the white society as “a fiery rebel” (Horner 1996:198), as he was intelligent enough to confront the white authorities and “pursued a long argument with the Lismore City Council over the principle that the people should own Cubawee Reserve in Lismore, or else own land for residence in the city itself” (ibid.).

Such was the atmosphere of the Northern rivers Aboriginal community when they received another powerful itinerant Pentecostal preacher, Dick Piety. Dick Piety converted in Sydney. It is said he was Van Eyk’s follower.57 Like Mick Cook, he was a

---

57 Calley recorded Dick Piety became associated with the Assemblies of God at Newtown, a suburb of Sydney (Calley 1959:196). As is mentioned above, Van Eyk influenced many of early Pentecostals who joined the Assemblies of God later. Van Eyk’s influence over Dick Piety was
maverick evangelist. Van Eyk’s influence definitely implies this itinerant black evangelist’s enthusiasm for working in the field, i.e., to vigorously travel to new places and preach the teaching of the “fullness” of the Holy Spirit. He traveled intensively from Victoria to Queensland—thus mainly in the Eastern States until his death in the 1970s. According to Calley, he was intelligent and aggressive; he dominated the congregations in Woodenbong and Tabulam with his “hypnotic oratory” (Calley 1959:197). It is not clear what Calley meant by saying “hypnotic”. It is not unusual that Pentecostal rituals accompany long and ecstatic prayers and ultimately, at the peak of the most emotional moments, some people receive the “in-filling” of the Holy Spirit and many fall on the floor. Although this was a common feature of Pentecostal worship worldwide, it would be easy for social scientists to interpret it as hypnosis (see, for another example, Rose 1957:158) if they are little informed of the Pentecostal doctrine.

Frank Roberts Snr had the “native church” branch of UAM in Cubawee for a while58, but he was also affiliated with Church of Christ and then the Uniting Church. His son Frank Roberts Jnr was ordained as a Church of Christ preacher in the mid-1950s, which lifted him up beyond the category of a “lay pastor”. According to Calley, the itinerant evangelist Dick Piety soon “came to dominate the Woodenbong congregation because Frank Bundock was far less competitive with this visiting evangelist” (Calley 1959: 196-197). We, however, need to pay more attention to the fact that Frank Bundock, son of the founder of the Woodenbong flock, had surely been brought up in the reasonable expectation that he would succeed to his father’s position as a spiritual leader.59 Whether or not the UAM evaluated Arthur and Frank Bundock according to their bureaucratic standard would have counted little to the practical life of the residents at the Woodenbong Station.60 Likewise, all of the early Aboriginal

confirmed by the information I collected in Victoria from his grandson.

58 He held the September convention in Cubawee for 1947 under the title of the pastor of the UAM Native church. (The United Aborigines Messenger, Vol. XV, No.9, 1947)
59 The Bundocks have been respected for their leadership at church. The present incumbent of the Woodenbong Church (Muli Muli Full Gospel Church) is Frank’s son Francis. The villagers seem to naturally expect that Francis’ eldest son will be the next pastor.
60 According to Dick Piety’s closest descendant who travelled with him as a child in those days, Dick Piety kept travelling back to the Northern Rivers region more frequently than to many other communities he had influenced because the Bundjalung and Githabul country had a strong foundation of the Aboriginal church and he liked the community.
church leaders in the Northern Rivers stations and reserves were “lay pastors” in the sense that they did not maintain loyalty to any white institutional church bodies and that they worked and affiliated with white clergymen and missionaries according to the circumstances and their own needs.61

Regardless of the regional difference and the respective community leaders’ affiliations with white institutional bodies, the communication between the coastal communities and the inland communities led Pentecostal worship to become dominant across the whole Northern Rivers region and beyond. Part of the western plains and tablelands of the Kamilaroi people became under the Pentecostal influence during this period.62 Thus an Aboriginal Christian network between the stations and reserves across the whole Northern Rivers region was developed, in the very midst of the Protection Board’s intensified control over the stations and reserves. It is worth paying attention that this Christian network allowed communication and discussion on land and segregation issues among both coastal (e.g., Cubawee, Cabbage Tree Island) and inland communities (e.g., Woodenbong, Tabulam). The inland people’s traditional knowledge and coastal people’s experience in white politics were drawn together, and Christianity in this era came to have a highly politicised function (Goodall 1996:299).

During the 1920s and 1930s, church buildings and “special” schools (for the segregation of Aboriginal children) were built, by which the Protection Board attempted to reinforce control over the residents, and the reserves became stations. The UAM missionaries began to settle in the Northern Rivers region. Calley plainly affirms that the origin of the Bundjalung and Githabul Pentecostal church network was the structure of the UAM organisation (Calley 1959:199-200). He represents Bundjalung

61 Frank Roberts Snr was ordained and licensed to conduct marriage when he was affiliated with the UAM and it gave him an advantage to be ahead of others (Calley 1959:197). But Frank Bundock was unordained and there was no benefit he would have enjoyed if he had come under UAM. It is dubious if it was recognised by the Aboriginal side, when the last missionary left in 1952, that the UAM leadership moved from the missionaries to Frank. In later years, the pastor of Woodenbong church affiliated with the Full Gospel Church to obtain his certificate to bury and marry. Most of the Aboriginal Christian leaders in the region eventually sought affiliation with institutional bodies for this purpose.

62 I confirmed the influence of the Bundjalung and Githabul Pentecostal revival to the western part of NSW up to the Inverel-Tingha-Gyura region and the Boggabilla-Toomelah region. See also Flood (1985) for its influence in Moree.
and Githabul people as obedient UAM adherents who had to hide Pentecostalism from the missionaries (ibid.: 198), but also records that the UAM missionaries had to accept it as a compromise. Which side had the initiative? Calley’s rich records actually outline a very ambiguous situation—exactly when Pentecostalism came to them is not known:

Since long before the withdrawal of the U.A.M., ... Pentecostalism had been felt sporadically among the Bandjalang. (1959:195)

The first introduction of Pentecostalism may have dated from the conversion of E.Q. [supposedly Dick Piety] the evangelist to this persuasion some twenty years ago. Equally it may have been the work of traveling white evangelists lacking the usual prejudices of white people. One of these put in an appearance at the Cubawee Convention, much to the chagrin of the official U.A.M. representatives. (1955:Part IV, pp.1, bracket mine)

In contrast to Calley’s argument, when taking all the ethnographic and historical data into consideration, it seems that the Aboriginal Pentecostals maintained a peaceful coexistence with the intruding missionaries from the beginning, and waited patiently “until the storm passed”. This strategy is still seen today in their church administration. According to what I have understood from my field observations, it seems highly likely that Bundjalung and Githabul people are used to “using” white preachers for their higher literacy and hence, overtly superior knowledge of the Bible. As Arthur Bundock enjoyed listening to his daughter Marge reading the verses, it seems they have maintained the custom of inviting white preachers to make up for the lack of their literacy and proper learning of the Bible. In order to pretend to be complaisant to these missionaries, they seem to have made the already-formed...

---

65 Towards the end of my fieldwork, I observed a certain community allow visiting white Christian groups to do whatever they wanted to do in their community. According to the village Aborigines’ bluntly racist idea of social stratification, white “Christian” people are the most superior people and they would never dare to confront this kind of people. (Regarding white people “in political arena”, the situation would be different.) The village Christians patiently let white intruders dominate presentations at the convention or at weekly services whenever they visited. To outsiders, on such occasions the Aboriginal church seemed to be under a particular white institutional body. I, however, soon found their congenial silence did not mean acceptance. They did not enjoy the presence of this kind of white intruders, but they never wanted to ask intruders to leave openly; instead, they behaved nicely whilst being on the alert all the time, and waited until the intruders left. The villagers seemed to prefer frustrations and patience to confronting white Christian people, and such a situation would last sometimes for years.
Pentecostal network go underground structurally. But, whenever they were outside the white domain, they practiced spirit-filled worship relatively openly. This is exactly what the last missionary of the Coraki (Box Ridge) reserve had witnessed and tolerated; he and his wife told me about this out of a somewhat bitter memory of their service of evangelising these Aborigines. Towards his family or the Coraki ministry team, Aboriginal people behaved “diplomatically” to “please” them. The Aborigines came to the church building on Sundays and on other occasions and they were in order. But they had their own church meetings in cottages and in open-air meetings—in the Pentecostal way ever since the first generation of the ministry team, (his mother) started in 1920.64

For the Aboriginal people in the Northern Rivers region, the existence of a special school or a church building in an Aboriginal settlement did not automatically mean the total emotional and spiritual cooption of the residents by the institutions. At the Doonoon reserve near Lismore, for example, when in 1926 the Board reopened the special school after it had been closed ten years before at the protest of the Aboriginal residents, a number of families moved to an unreserved campsite called Tuncester because people knew that the special school was meant to segregate Aboriginal children and to increase the Board’s power of surveillance. However, Tuncester became a reserve later (Goodall 1996:144). On Cabbage Tree Island, when a new church building was inaugurated in May 1960, the newspaper article transmitted a conventional picture of the leadership of the white parishes in the vicinity (e.g. the Church of England in Woodburn, the Presbyterian Church and the Methodist Church in Ballina). Simultaneously, however, the article reported, “Residents of Cabbage Tree Island on the lower Richmond River have built their own church” (The Northern Star, 23 May 1960). Although Cabbage Tree Island residents have accepted white ministers coming to conduct Sunday school for children from Ballina up to the present, it was widely known that adult Christians have had their own meetings. To hold Pentecostal meetings, they invited Bundjalung and Githabul preachers from other reserves and

64 Unlike the UAM missionaries in Woodenbong, Barry Smith’s mother married a local man and the family or the ministry team settled down in Coraki as permanent residents. As associate workers for the UAM, his family members have witnessed the Coraki Aboriginal community over three generations. This may be the reason why he was aware of the “true structure” and was very candid in admitting the Aboriginal autonomy in church.
stations or traveled to the respective settlements in turn, or they even invited white Pentecostal preachers—in a different channel from that provided by the visiting white Ministers.65

The Aboriginal congregations at the stations often invited white Pentecostal preachers for the seasonal conventions and for Sunday services.66 They were eager to learn the good news from anyone including white non-Pentecostal preachers, but on their side they looked for Pentecostal preachers.67 In this light, they were open in one way towards white evangelism regardless of denominations, but at the same time, completely exclusive and secretive in another way. Calley wrote that Bundjalung and Githabul people “hid” Pentecostalism from the UAM missionaries (Calley 1959:198). With regard to the initiative, however, it seems it was the way around: it was the Aboriginal side that had spiritual autonomy. It is worth noting what kind of missionaries were allocated to the Woodenbong Station by the UAM headquarters:

Some missionaries were artisans, some elderly spinsters, some aged couples retired from over-seas mission fields. Woodenbong seems to have been both the testing ground for new missionaries and the place of retirement for those who were too old to stand up to the rigours of overseas service. The

65 Of course, they would have preferred having white Pentecostal ministers to visit, but first of all, it must be borne in mind that their Pentecostal church was no more a cult than other mainline Protestant denominations are. If they can talk to Jesus, they are happy. An old Christian leader of Cabbage Tree Island told me how he was converted as a young man under the white Minister at Sunday school for children on Cabbage Tree Island. One Saturday, being urged by zeal for conversion due to a certain happening and deeply impressed by the awesome life of Jesus, he spent a sleepless night and, on the following morning, as he could no longer wait for an appropriate “Aboriginal” meeting to attend, he went to Sunday school as an emergency measure. Although he was the only adult attendant, without hesitation he asked the white Minister to pray for his conversion. “I thought even a Sunday school would do,” he recollects. Of course, he joined the Aboriginal Pentecostal flock from the beginning after conversion. He has been renowned for his gift of prophesy in tongues. After the decline of the Aboriginal church, he has joined several white Pentecostal churches and white interpreters used to interpret what he said in tongues. He laments today that he is the only Christian on Cabbage Tree Island.

66 The Aboriginal church was making a “concerted effort” to have white preachers of their own choice. See (Calley 1959:199) and (Hausfeld 1960:81 of Notes) for some evidence. In Woodenbong, on Sundays, often invitations had been made behind the back of the station manager and the white (probably Pentecostal) preachers did not have necessary Welfare Board’s permission. Hausfeld recollects his hardship as a white person who had to confront the white group and refuse entry (ibid.).

67 During the revival, many sent cash donations to Oral Roberts by mail, an American preacher, in disregard of the UAM missionaries’ strong objection to it.
missionaries varied from the well educated to the barely literate.... (Calley 1959:193).

Calley draws a fairly conventional scenario of the Aboriginal locals’ submissive loyalty to the UAM institution (ibid.:193-200), whereas his ethnographic record shows such aspects of unimpressive presence of the UAM missionaries. He regards the withdrawal of the UAM as the shift of “leadership in religious affairs from the white missionaries to the aborigines [sic] themselves (Calley 1955: Part IV, pp.1)”, but there is also the following depiction: “there has been no violent transition from one to the other. I doubt whether it was even noticed that any transition was taking place (ibid.)”.

When we consider the situation of the time in which the Pentecostal boom kept attracting hundreds of attendants to the conventions and when we look at the rigours and commitment of the Aboriginal community, a simple question lingers: was such a sunset category of the UAM work force able to Christianise a huge population of Aborigines across the Northern Rivers and beyond and take leadership practically? And, if Pentecostalism had been a mere by-product of the UAM Christianisation, how would it have grown to the point that the train from Sydney to Cubawee was packed with the Aboriginal people visiting the convention (as told to me by Kath Connors, a granddaughter of Pastor Frank Roberts Snr)? It reminds us of the enthusiasm exactly seen at Richmond Temple in Melbourne in the mid-1920s under the ministry of Alfred Valdes (see Appendix 1). Did the Aboriginal Pentecostal revival spring originally from the white UAM organisation in the Woodenbong Station? At least in the memory of Bundjalung and Githabul people today, the origin of Aboriginal Church lies somewhere else.

I hope Table 1 and Table 2 below help readers to understand the local, spiritual and political situations of the region in chronological order. Table 1 is a list of the institutionalised camps and reserves under the Protection and Welfare Boards (see Map 2 in Chapter 1 for the respective locations). Table 2 is the integrated timeline of the major events on the Northern Rivers and the early Pentecostal churches in Australia.
Table 1 Major Stations, Reserves and Camps in the Northern Rivers Region (1883-1969)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Name of Settlements</th>
<th>1893</th>
<th>1895</th>
<th>1911</th>
<th>1922</th>
<th>1934</th>
<th>1939</th>
<th>1940</th>
<th>1946</th>
<th>1960</th>
<th>1969</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Stoney Gully</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(Runnymede)</td>
<td>1899</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Woodenbong</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Doonoon</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Tuncester/Cubawee</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Cabbage Tree Island</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Baryulgil* (the Square)</td>
<td>1893</td>
<td>1895</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Tabulam</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Coraki (Box Ridge)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Ulgarda Island</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Yamba</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Grafton</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* A squatter Edward Ogilvie who owned the area since 1841 (dec. 1895) bequeathed some land on the property to the Aboriginal people, and the Boards' surveilance was limited on this Aboriginal settlement in Baryulgil (the Square).

Compiled by the author on the basis of (Goodall 1996), (Prentis 1972) and (Long 1970).
Table 2 Timeline of Major events in the Northern Rivers Region and Australia (1880-1980)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>The Northern Rivers Aboriginal Congregations and Leading Figures</th>
<th>Leaders of Major Early Pentecostal churches in Australia</th>
<th>New South Wales Policy</th>
<th>Remarks</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1880</td>
<td></td>
<td>John Dowie</td>
<td>1883 Protection Board</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1890</td>
<td>Arthur Bundock (Woodenbong)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1900</td>
<td>Mick Cook (Stoney Gully)</td>
<td>Janet Lancaster</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1910</td>
<td></td>
<td>Robert Horne</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1920</td>
<td>Frank Roberts (Tuncestert/Cubawee)</td>
<td>Charles Greenwood &amp; others</td>
<td></td>
<td>UAM started to settle in the Northern Rivers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1930</td>
<td></td>
<td>Van Eyke</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1940</td>
<td>Dick Piety</td>
<td></td>
<td>1940 Welfare Board</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1950</td>
<td>Frank Bundock</td>
<td>The Walkers &amp; Hicklings (Tabulam)</td>
<td></td>
<td>1952 UAM left Woodenbong</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1960</td>
<td></td>
<td>PENTECOSTAL REVIVAL</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1970</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1967 Referendum 1969 abolished</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1980</td>
<td>Francis Bundock</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1978 Coraki UAM closed</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

70
The revival has produced more Aboriginal preachers. In addition to the harbingers like Mick Cook, Arthur Bundock and John Boyman, the following leading figures led the revival till the church began to split in the 1970s: Alex Vesper, Frank Bundock, Euston Williams Snr and Eric King (Woodenbong); Frank Roberts Snr and Jnr (Tuncester-Cubawee); Jack Walker and his son Bruce, Harry Walker, Kalman Hickling and his wife Olga, and his brother Eddie Hickling (Tabulam); and the legendary itinerant evangelist Dick Piety. At the Cabbage Tree Island Station, and Coraki reserve, there was no local congregation during the revival period, although there were community leaders such as James Morgan and Leo Bolt who invited preachers and organised bus tours to the seasonal conventions in other settlements. The southern edge (Yamba and Grafton) was in this period rather quiet as far as Christian congregations were concerned. These Aboriginal preachers were all “lay” pastors except for a few. They had done no proper biblical studies at the Bible School nor were they affiliated with an institutional church, although they sporadically worked with white evangelists and missionaries from both Pentecostal and non-Pentecostal churches. Many were illiterate but powerfully preached the Word from the Bible. This fact is always proudly remembered by today’s Bundjalung and Githabul Christians. The illiterate ones had others read the Bible for them.

As mainstream society has become more tolerant of mixing with Aboriginal people and communities, some Bundjalung and Githabul pastors became ordained by the mainline churches such as Harry Walker of the Uniting Church. But they were accepted by the white leadership only for evangelising the Aboriginal parishioners; the Aboriginal Christians and pastors, regardless of affiliations with any white churches they worked with, had “Aboriginal services” for themselves, separately from the white congregations. A white female resident in Bonalbo recollects the lively “Aboriginal services” on Wednesdays in the 1970s:

The services of the European community in Bonalbo tend to be rather staid affairs. Not very many people going to them, perhaps a dozen, perhaps less, in the church at any time, but the Uniting Church on Wednesday was absolutely

---

68 See, for example, the articles “Aboriginal pastor shows the way at Lismore” (Forward, April 11, 1979:6) and “The achievement of my goal - Rev. Harry Walker” (The Northern Light, Vol. 9, No.2, May 1992:1-2).
crowded out. The music thundered out with the drums and guitars playing and of course, all the children and adults, singing at the tops of their voices and clapping and dancing. (Walker & Coutts 1989:63-64)“

This recollection shows clearly that, although the congregation was under the Uniting Church, the style of worship was nothing other than the Pentecostal way. The black and white congregations were completely separate. It obviously shows that the ordination of the Aboriginal Reverend was not meant to facilitate the absorption of the Aboriginal Christians into the Uniting Church structure, but rather, to segregate the Pentecostal influence from the white parish.

It is worth mentioning that this process was unique to the Bundjalung and Githabul group on the North Coastal region of New South Wales. In most of the other coastal areas such as the Dhan-gadi and Gumbaynggir, Christianity functioned within the realm of the white mainline churches such as Catholic Church and Anglican Church. In contrast, in Bundjalung and Githabul country, a number of independent Aboriginal congregations developed under Aboriginal lay pastors and they formed a network, which was fairly invisible to outsiders, including the white locals. Some older Dhan-gadi women who married the Bundjalung Christian leaders commented that the Bundjalung and Githabul church was unique in this very way. Above all, it was a novelty for these Dhan-gadi women to come to know the spirit-filled way of worship had been long practised in their husbands’ country.

The wind of change

Thus the revival went on until it began to wane as the social environment for Aboriginal Australians changed drastically. As mentioned earlier in this chapter, the fact that “politics” brought about the division of the Northern Rivers Aboriginal church and community is now a shared discourse among the Christians. This, however, is not an anti-white discourse of resistance. “The land Council has brought a lot of tragedies to our people.” This casual remark made by an older Aboriginal woman was one of the initial shocks that struck me on entering into the domain of the reality of everyday life through fieldwork. It was made by a widowed mother of four, pensioner,
local born and local-bred, little educated but keen on contemporary Aboriginal benefits in disregard of the set eligibilities—in other words, she is just one of the ordinary Aboriginal women. Abstract arguments about Aboriginal rights and the democratic ideals of community development schemes are just alien to these Aborigines. In the first place, what is “politics” all about? As mentioned already, even before the 1967 Referendum and the consequential fundamental change in government policy in Aboriginal affairs, Aborigines were always involved in “politics”. We should recall that during the oppressive era of the Boards' supervision, many Christian leaders such as Frank Roberts Snr and Alex Vesper were devoted in political activism to regain land and secure the well-beings of the residents of the reserves and stations. They were committed in Christian faith but definitely did not find any problem with their commitments in both political activism and spiritual service to God (see for example, Horner 1996:298-307). Today, being involved in “politics”, especially land rights activism, is recognised as a channel to the Devil’s way among Bundjalung and Githabul Pentecostals. It is as serious as two other capital sins: drinking and adultery. A full discussion will be presented in Chapter 5, but here I would like to highlight that the highly politicised function of the Aboriginal Christian network which once existed across the North Coast (ca. 1940s – 1970s) has been deactivated.

The turning point was what is called “a renaissance” in the progress of Aboriginal education, healthcare, housing, community enterprises, cultural revitalisation and so on (see, for example, the pamphlet of the Richmond River Historical Society69 for the regional information). During the latter part of the 1970s, first became available were the grants for education at secondary and tertiary level from the Commonwealth Department of Education. Grants were given for tertiary study, and expenses for secondary education were all paid. Then the State Housing Commission provided housing for Aboriginal families. Community health nurses and health workers were employed. Local men and women were trained to work as teachers’ aids in schools. The respective communities began to establish Trusts and the administration by self-management began. Grants also became available to record and protect Aboriginal sacred sites and historic sites. Funds were secured to revive the

---

69 The Aborigines of the Richmond Area (Oakes 1988). See also information regarding policy on the protection of Aboriginal heritage of the north coast (Department of Planning 1988).
Aboriginal language, and researchers began recording local culture. (Oakes 1988:11) These were the outcomes of the improved government policy for Aboriginal affairs which was originally meant to promote the well-being of every member of the community (if funds were properly applied), but in the context of everyday life, ordinary people—such as the woman who lamented the introduction of the Land Council in the beginning—saw the situation converge into only one Truth: Culture and Aboriginality Make Money.

Now there is a bitter memory about the era when self-determination was introduced in the Northern Rivers communities: nepotism in allocating grants, housing and jobs was taken for granted; appropriation of funds was not regarded as theft. Instead of accusing others of corruption, everyone wanted to come in. Elders began to “save” their knowledge for white researchers to trade “culture” for money; they began to be suspicious of their younger generation who might steal their knowledge, i.e., intellectual property which the elders recognised as their own assets. Some lucky ones who became leaders of Aboriginal institutions used up the funds for projects or whatever for personal expenses; they put up their kin and friends at the five-star motel to entertain them; big money was spent casually for reckless projects which soon ended up in bankruptcy. Unqualified people got jobs by means of reciprocal kin obligations, and these uneducated, unqualified people regarded making free long-distance phone calls at the office as their only job. There was definitely a lack of experience in white politics and the European philosophy of rights and obligations accompanying citizenship. A lot of people, for example, did not understand why they had to pay rent for the Aboriginal housing if the leaders of the housing cooperative were to be their kin. Consequently, through emotional confrontations, grudges and jealousy, families split up; uncles and nephews, aunties and nieces, or close cousins stopped talking to one another.

Of course, these are reconstructions of the past in my informants’ emotional recollections and, therefore, I do not intend to insist these are evidence of what was really going on. But at least these are valid ethnographic data that help us glimpse the community members’ negative emotions that destroyed the Christian community. The church was united as one—politically against whites and spiritually against
non-Pentecostals—and it had resisted the invading forces from without and survived the Boards’ institutionalisation so resiliently, but it collapsed quickly from within. As grudges and unforgivingness accumulated in people’s minds, as a natural consequence the church declined: people left church in search for worldly gains. Confronting this conjuncture, those who stuck to the Lord were obsessed by fear that the Devil’s way was taking over the community. These Christians became a minority since the 1980s. The social change originated from human desires but it led the surviving Christian community to be obsessed by fear and warnings about the Devil’s attack prevailed. Thus the post Welfare Board situation in the local context completely destroyed the former “highly politicised” function of the Bundjalung and Githabul Christian church. Then the Christian community renewed its function in the direction of condemning “lusts”—i.e., “lusts” for the dazzling worldly pleasures that have become available to them. Temptations that the past Bundjalung and Githabul Christians could never have imagined suddenly began to torment them.

Now, abundant government money to enjoy extravagance and the power to control the minds of the community people has become readily accessible to the Aborigines, even to ordinary people, if they are lucky enough to win the game in the local “politics”. The sentiment that “culture” is the channel to the Devil’s way has been formed into a shared standard of faith in the post-Welfare-Board Aboriginal church in the Northern Rivers region. In other words, anything that is presumed to be part of “culture” in this context became potentially linked to worldly pleasures, hence regarded as a channel to the Devil’s way. This localised term “culture” the Christians use is identified vaguely with cultural heritage. The problem is that the standard of judgement is highly uncertain and circumstantial about what is included in this lustful, tempting “culture” and what is not. (I shall try to give a more precise account of the judgement standard in Chapter 5.)

---

70 “Culture” in this context is the modern reconstruction as a spin-off of Aboriginal activism. There is another sphere of “culture” derived from the practical side of their life that is imagined to be linked to the Devil’s way: witchcraft. See Chapter 7 for a detailed discussion.
CHAPTER 3

Cosmology and Ritual in the Revival Era

For the invisible things of him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even his eternal power and Godhead; so that they are without excuse.

— The Epistle of Paul the Apostle to the Romans 1:20,
The Holy Bible (KJV)

“They couldn’t read or write but they preached...Oh yeah, they all preached the Gospel powerfully.”

—The oldest elder of the Githabul community,
at the centennial celebration of Muli Muli Aboriginal church,
27 December 2005

Before proceeding to the ethnographic chapters of contemporary Bundjalung and Githabul Christian practice (Chapters 4 - 7), I would like to illuminate the discussion about change and continuity of the Bundjalung and Githabul society with the classic ethnography of “Bandjalang Pentecostalism” (Calley 1955, 1959, 1964). I would like to devote this chapter to the reconstruction of the cosmology and ritual in the Pentecostal “revival” era—on the basis of the past ethnography and the recollections of the revival days by the oldest generation of the present time. I am sharply aware that a reconstruction can always be only partial, and rather than for the sake of the reconstruction itself, I attempt to do so for the purpose of reconsidering the general framework of the past scholarly representations of change and continuity of Aboriginal society, culture and spirituality.
Reconsidering “Pentecostalism among the Bandjalang”

Malcolm Calley’s research into Bundjalung Pentecostalism, which covered the period from 1952 to 1956, has received more than passing attention in the field of studies of changing Australian Aboriginal society (Rose & Swain 1988). His data on the upsurge of the Pentecostal movement among the Northern Rivers Aboriginal group have helped researchers of Australian Aboriginal Christianity to understand the movement as a kind of social and spiritual resistance to the ideological incorporation into the mainstream society and its value system (see, for example, Trigger 1988:216; Swain 1993; Swain & Trompf 1995; McDonald 2001:14). The coeval report by Russel Hausfeld (Hausfeld 1960), a resident manager of the Woodenbong Aboriginal Station (who was on service from 1956 till 1960), argued in the same line and reinforced the idea of “syncretic” appropriations of Christianity in this region. It may be safe to say that today the name “Bandjalang” is known by Australian anthropologists as one of the “detribalised” Aboriginal people in the heavily settled South-East of Australia who nevertheless have developed some “elaborate” foundation stories from Biblical and Dreaming sources. Furthermore, arguments tend toward the link between Pentecostalism and its “intrinsic” nature to impel Aboriginal people to produce syncretism (Swain 1993:148-151).

Indeed there is a wide distribution of “Native Christ” narratives since the nineteenth century from the mid-north coast of New South Wales up to the Queensland border (see Swain 1993, for the detailed survey), but the fact is that there is no ethnographic record that proves an “intrinsic” link between the Aboriginal Jesus narratives and the Bundjalung Pentecostal movement of this period. That is despite a somewhat contrary notion circulated in the studies of Aboriginal Christianity. At least the hints of syncretism with which Bandjalang Pentecostalism has been furnished must be reconsidered. The Christian “revival”71 in the 1950s known as “Bandjalang Pentecostalism” was described at first by Calley (1955) as follows:

At the very beginning of the period spent in the field, it seemed likely that the Pentecostal Cult is similar to the Cargo Cults of Melanesia in form and function.

---

71 In Christian terminology, a “revival” does not mean a renewal of interest in something that once existed such as the past religious movements. It means a new awakening of religious fervour, i.e., an explosion of spiritual experiences and zeal for evangelical Christian missions.
As the research progressed, however, this was rejected as a hypothesis.... An open rejection of the alien culture is not a feature of the cult, nor does fanatic zeal ever reach the proportions that it does in Melanesia. Emotional, the cult certainly is, but not nearly so emotional as some religious groups within the White community. (ibid.: Section 8, Chapter I of Part I).

On the basis of the evidence, there are good grounds for arguing that it was not the Pentecostal revival movement of Bundjalung and Githabul people that produced the syncretic myths. The myths in question, in fact, have more ancient origins. I would argue that during this Pentecostal boom, the eradication of the syncretic myths among the Bundjalung and Githabul was completed. Indeed the Aboriginal groups of the North Coastal region produced the narratives of Aboriginal Jesus for a certain period of time, but the information collected during the fieldwork for this thesis also bears ample witness to another fact. It is the fact that these narratives were never widely shared in the context of church in the revival days. Nor did they influence the practice and/or dogma of the Aboriginal Pentecostal movement as far as the Bundjalung and Githabul are concerned.72

My argument does not intend to disregard the existence of the syncretic narratives recorded in the wide area of the North Coastal region, but to draw attention to the link between Pentecostalism and the Old Way the past researchers assumed. This is for the purpose of rethinking the widespread understanding of “Bandjalang Pentecostalism” in Australian anthropology. When and among whom were the All-Father and Native Christ narratives shared? We must start from this point. There is evidence that, in the revival days, the narratives were shared, firstly, only by those who belonged to the oldest generation of the time, and secondly, outside the church context only. They were gradually replaced with the “proper” stories in the Bible along with the explosion of Pentecostal zeal of the time.

I argue this is the key to understanding the rejection of culture by today’s Bundjalung and Githabul Christians. I contend that people were attracted to the

---

72 The all-Aboriginal Pentecostal church which played the leading role in the revival was exclusive to the Bundjalung and Githabul country (and a certain small area of the west tableland of New South Wales covered by their Kamilaroi allies). Therefore, if the Bundjalung and Githabul did not advocate syncretism, it means there was no syncretic dogma or teaching spread by the Aboriginal Pentecostal movement on the North Coast.
teachings of the Bible to renounce tradition "from the beginning", that is, when they first saw the manifestations of the Holy Spirit—probably in the early 1920s, as discussed in the preceding chapter (Chapter 2). I would argue it was a natural course of events that the Pentecostal revival accelerated the eradication of the syncretic narratives maintained in the community, as daily cottage meetings and large-scale regional conventions (run under the Aboriginal leadership) urged them to cultivate the habitus of reading the Bible anytime and anywhere. People today still recall seeing the illiterate preachers asking literate ones to read the verses for them; at least in the context of public meetings, all preachers including the illiterate ones were preaching the Word of God according to the Bible. This inevitably supplied them with the opportunity of learning the "genuine" stories of Jesus in the Bible, whilst the collapse of social institutions (hence a loss of the channel to transmit traditional knowledge) relentlessly went on.

These Christians may have simply shaken off the shadow of tradition and the religious institutions that were anyway no longer in operation. It seems, however, that they did cope with the endangered situation by getting armed with the Word—the Judeo-Christian god's law. The shell of this practice may seem assimilative to the European ideology, but my argument is that Pentecostalism, in its genuinely fundamentalistic form, was powerful enough to give them strength to maintain and reinforce their attachment to their own people and their ways of being Aboriginal. I find their practice of rejecting culture today has developed along the same trajectory. This thesis is meant to provide ethnographic evidence for this seemingly paradoxical argument. As I argued in the Introduction (Chapter 1), even if what we see is the phase of loss only, in other words, if we find, as the chapters proceed, that the Bundjalung and Githabul syncretic narratives and all the eye-catching cultural substances are being eradicated, there is a lot to explore in the loss itself.

Calley (1959) categorises the researched community in those days into three: (1)

---

73 Already in this era there was a consensus among the Bundjalung and Githabul Christians that only the King James Version was the "true" Bible, although a lot of them, including powerful preachers, were illiterate. The Bible was treated literally as the Book of Life and Knowledge, which may have something to do with their general attitude towards the Bible today: they see it as something like a powerful sacred object.
Christians; (2) the followers of the Old Rule; and (3) the residual74 (ibid: 202-211). Whether or not this type of static categorisation is suitable will be discussed later, but at least I would like to mention that those who belonged to category (1) in those days do not relate the enthusiastic Pentecostal revival days to syncretic myths when they project their recollections back to the past from the present.75 I do not mean the syncretic narratives were just idiosyncratic—quite the contrary. Clearly, there is enough evidence for a relatively wide distribution of these stories on the North Coast (though probably among the elders only). What we must examine, however, is whether or not the propagation of Pentecostalism was practically relevant to the creation of syncretic myths and the retention of a traditional cosmology. Did Pentecostalism really appeal to them as the measure to retain knowledge of the Old Way? Calley’s analysis is positive but I contend it is dubious.

The most problematic point I find in Calley’s analysis is his pursuit for the reified archetype of the Old Rule, which oddly coexists with his acute consciousness of and interest in the dynamics of the changing post-contact Aboriginal society. In dealing with the economic and social domain his insight is focused on the dynamics of the changing society produced by the post-contact collapse of social institutions and newfound desires in modern life. In the domain of religious practice, however, he quickly withdraws into a romantic essentialist view of Aboriginal spirituality and presupposes an unconditional primordial attachment to the past. Consequently, it is obvious in his analysis of the Bundjalung and Githabul ritual practices and narratives that he would relate whatever appealed to him as being “mystic” or “ecstatic” to the Old Rule—or something intrinsic to Aboriginal spirituality.

From an objective point of view, a lot of such practices are, after all, genuinely Pentecostal ritual routines held by the white Pentecostal church—which are, in theological essence, genuinely Christian because Pentecostalism is not a school of heresy in Christianity. Pentecostal churches have long been exposed to the accusation of

74 The residual were those who were neither, i.e., those who no longer possesses the Old Rule knowledge nor intended to live to the strict Pentecostal disciplinary rules.
75 My field data cover a good number of witnesses (in the age group between sixty and eighty at present) who were of mature age at the time of the revival; and their witness accounts of the “genuine” Christian teaching are consistent. As a matter of fact, none of my informants has heard of any such syncretic myths as Aboriginal Jesus.
fanaticism, but their doctrines are not deviant from the Divine Trinity and the Bible (see Chapter 5 for detail). White Australians have been in quest of spiritual experiences with God—long before Calley’s research in Bundjalung and Githabul country and even before the Azusa Street revival in Los Angeles. The preceding chapter (Chapter 2) showed there was a “spiritual hunger” among white Christians and that it prevailed in many churches in the early 1900s in Australia (Chant 1984:88). The Aborigines were not the only ones who were spiritual; whites were spiritual too. The process of Christianisation which Calley presented is a conventional picture of forced cooption into Christian ideology—mainly due to diplomatic defeat under the missionary’s institutional control, although a certain transitional process of syncretism accompanies as a form of resistance in the spiritual domain. In this scenario, Aboriginal autonomy in church management usually emerges generations later.76

Should we not pay more attention here to the Aboriginal people’s interest in a newfound moral order to operate in their lifeworld? The story of Jesus situated in the geography of the Old Testament world must have been a Brave New Story to the indigenous Australians—as their naïve but genuine interest implies as quoted from the missionary’s travelogue at the beginning of Chapter 2. The emotional domain of such spiritual lives of Aboriginal people, however, has not yet been explored fully. How did such a total new moral order bring about reconciliation with the older one? In the same old scenario about Aboriginal society and change, Aboriginal people are always represented as extreme conservatives who are indifferent to novel things. Were they only capable of discerning similarities with tradition? Were they helplessly incapable of absorbing a new moral order as it was?

Practice

The manifestations

Despite the drastic rapture between the ways the Christian network functioned before and after the end of the Welfare Board’s control, each individual’s relationship with

76 See Tonkinson (1991), for example, for an ethnographic account of the change in Aboriginal attitudes towards mission institution through the generations.
God has not undergone change. From the initial stage of the Aboriginal church up to the present, becoming Christian for Bundjalung and Githabul people has meant to live with the supernatural power of God. The three key Pentecostal manifestations were all present among them in the revival days: baptism by the Holy Spirit, speaking in tongues and miracle healing (Calley 1955). Concerning theology, Calley is very clear about genuine practice of “white Protestantism”:

The theology of the group is, except for a few details, that of White Protestantism, of the more conservative sort. It possesses a Holy Trinity and a literal Heaven and Hell, the latter taking the conventional form of a lake of fire. The Holy Trinity has somewhat more direct bearing on religious experience than is the case with most Protestant denominations, as the Holy Ghost communicates direct with worshippers and causes them to speak with tongues. ...The “Father” and the “Son” are the recipients of prayers. Greatest emphasis is placed on the New Testament, the life of Christ, the Crucifixion, and the Revelation of St. John the Divine. (ibid.: Part III, pp.28)

The fundamental concept was salvation by Christ’s death at Calvary:

The fundamental concept is that of salvation and this is mentioned or implied in every hymn and testament. Associated with this is the idea of Christ the dying God, whose blood cleanses, ritually purifies the neophyte. (ibid: Part III, pp.30)

If the ritual had symbolism of blood, it is the very evidence of authentic Christian teaching, because it is not deviant from that of the orthodox churches. Likewise, the details of the ritual practise of Bundjalung and Githabul Pentecostalism were strikingly “de-Aboriginalised”, in discord with the past ethnographers’ attempt to find essential similarities with the structure of the Old Rule. Some details of the practise are shown below. It would be interesting to recall how the rituals were at the early white Pentecostal churches (see Appendix 1) and also to compare the contemporary ritual practice detailed in the succeeding chapter (Chapter 5) with the following observations in the mid-1950s. Readers will find that Pentecostal ritual practice has universal features regardless of colour and race and that most remained unchanged among the Bundjalung and Githabul through time.
The workings of the Holy Ghost:

...the second to these basic tenets is the belief in the ability of the Holy Ghost to communicate with his flock, either by making one of the flock his mouthpiece, when he will speak with tongues, or by more or less sitting in on the meeting and conferring the "blessing" of his presence. This is the "power" — the notion that the person who is saved may be granted ability beyond that of other men, to heal, to prophesy, to evangelise. This element is frequently a feature of the testaments ...(ibid.).

Taboos:

...the observance of taboos are [sic] also expressed in the ritual of the meetings. They are a prerequisite to salvation, a condition to be observed before the gift of ritual purity is conferred (ibid.).

Ritual procedures:

...the Pentecostal ritual is almost exclusively of a verbal sort, the singing of hymns and the delivery of testaments. It is only in the occasional communion service, in the baptism, in the anointing with oil in the case of sickness and in the handshake, that action plays any part (ibid.).

Venue, decoration and instruments:

Apart of the ubiquitous bible (sic), there are no ritual objects, no crucifix being in evidence at any of the services. The musical instruments used are very often played by other non-Christian members of the family, to accompany hillbilly songs and the like. ...There is no evidence that the instruments used are in any way part of the ritual or are sacred, associated with God. They are no more than means to an end, lacking all religious significance in themselves (ibid.).

Speaking in tongues was not observed frequently in public, though there is a record of prophesies in tongues and interpretation of tongues taking place at services (Calley 1959:231). The state of "baptism by the Holy Spirit" was observed by Calley as "extatic" (ibid.). To summarise the general pattern of the services (Calley 1955: Part III, pp.17-18):

1. Start of a service by a warming up hymns.

2. An opening prayer by the leading Christian present.
3. Hymn singing by the congregation, accompanied by a variety of instruments: violins, guitars, a special “auto-harp”, accordions, and gum leaves, and so on. Singing goes on for about an hour. (By the end of singing, most of the children are asleep on the floor or on the laps of their elder siblings, some wrapped in blankets or overcoats.)

4. The master of ceremonies calls for testaments. Some spontaneously rise, and some are called upon by the master of the ceremonies. A pattern of a testament is: speaking alone, reading from the Bible or singing a hymn. The routine start is, “Praise the Lord for all that He has done for me ....” Then instances of divine interventions are told. Emotional testaments raise emotional responses from the congregation.

5. Tension gradually increases. The preacher brings Word. Though it is a rare occurrence, speaking in tongues and receiving the Holy Ghost take place in the meeting.

6. Meeting ends with a closing prayer and a general shaking of hands.

Dick Piety, the legendary itinerant evangelist was depicted as a genius at manipulating the emotional atmosphere. Probably the following technique is what Calley meant by Dick Piety’s “hypnotic oratory” (Calley 1959:197):

Generally the master of ceremonies has not the skill to take full advantage of the emotional atmosphere and the receptive state which most members of the congregation have reached. However, E.Q. [the pseudo initials of Dick Piety], the preacher mentioned earlier, handles this part of the meeting with what almost amounts to genius. As the string band plays quietly, a particularly haunting hymn tune, he preaches, often using just a few words repeated again and again, building up the tension until his voice is nearly drowned by hallelujahs from the congregation. It is at this juncture that most of the converts are made. (Calley 1955: Part III, pp.18, bracket mine)

These are the same type of completely “de-Aboriginalised” Pentecostal ritual procedures that are generally seen at contemporary Pentecostal church (cf. Chapter 5) and, of course, at the early white Pentecostal churches in Australia (cf. Appendix 1). The content of the sermons by Aboriginal preachers in this period was rarely kept in
the records of past ethnographers. A white evangelist of the Church of the Nazarene was an exception. Evangelist Douglas Pinch showed interest in the local Aboriginal elder’s sermon and left a precious record of it (probably made ca. 1947):

You remember your initiation ceremony when you “became men.” We asked of you just what God is asking of you in a spiritual way. Firstly, you were young men and your whole life lay before you. To be a worthy man you were sent deep into the woods... You were presenting yourself completely to the Great Spirit. But you were not to resist; no matter how powerfully you were being possessed you had to be completely abandoned to the Great Spirit that would fill every part of your being—thus would you grow to be a worthy candidate for manhood. Then into the sacred cave you had to go for cleansing. Blood would pour upon you from the roof of the cave until you were ceremonially clean... We do not follow heathen customs today but there is an Initiation Service whereby you can prove your spiritual manhood. You present your bodies a living sacrifice to God. You lay aside every weight and you receive without resistance the Holy Spirit. You are then cleansed through and through from all sin. (O’Brien 2003: 229)

Here fancy cultural “substances” such as initiation ceremony, blood dripping roof and so on are used for preaching, but this is obviously different from what we would imagine from the dogma that would have produced the story of Aboriginal Jesus suggested by Calley.

Pentecostal healing practices are basically divided into two categories, i.e., praying for the sick and “faith healing”. The one is praying for the healing of sick

---

77 The Church of the Nazarene in Australia was a sectarian movement of radicals who were regarded by Australian evangelicals as “holy rollers” or purveyors of a populist, coarse and theologically suspect religion (O’Brien 2003:232). Douglas Pinch, who recorded the sermon in the above text, worked in Box Ridge with UAM missionaries till UAM charged the Pinches with heresy over their adoption of Nazarene teaching. They moved to the Tweed River region and established the base (ca. 1947). Although the record states that the “Bandjalang people, already marginalized from both white Australian society and other Aboriginal groups, proved very open to the Nazarene message” (O’Brien 2003:228), I would argue that probably this Nazarene influence in the Tweed area led to produce today’s emotional split between the Aboriginal Pentecostals in the Northern Rivers region and those in the Tweed area—especially at Fingal Head (see Chapter 4). The fanatic and “weird” behaviours of the “holy rollers” following Nazarene teaching that were seen on the beaches of Fingal Head is still remembered by the elders of Fingal Head with the negative image of “fanaticism”. Arguably this historical contingency—a temporary invasion of the Church of Nazarene to the Tweed area—cultivated a repulsion towards the Pentecostal and charismatic way of worship especially at Fingal Head. The rituals of the Church of the Nazarene were more fanatic and radical than “ordinary” Bundjalung and Githabul Pentecostal worship.
people as a part of ordinary "meetings" of any type. It takes place practically anywhere—at church services, at someone's house or at the bedside of a sick person. The practitioner can be anyone who is Christian. The other is the most controversial Pentecostal practice. "Faith healing" is a manifestation of drastic (and sometimes instant) healing which is normally impossible and hence a miracle. The former practice was somewhat part of ordinary Christian practice and is still so today. The examples of the latter, on the other hand, were meagre in the past ethnographic record in contrast to the memory of today's Bundjalung and Githabul Christians.

The contemporary reconstruction of the memories of the "great revival" is filled with miracles: cripples, lunatics and the demon-possessed were cured by prayers; faith saved a man who had been bitten by a tiger snake, and a few white people at the hospital, having witnessed the miracle, converted on the spot; a girl born without hip sockets got up and walked, and so on and on. Some of the healed are still alive as living witnesses. Apart from the dubious authenticity of these eyewitness and hearsay stories in general, the following record by Calley would suggest at least the Aboriginal people's receptiveness to miracle healings in those days:

E.Q. [pseudo-initial for Dick Piety] himself clams to have exorcised a demon which was tormenting a woman who "had gone mad with milk-fever" and had been "given up by the doctors". After ardent prayers on his part, the woman was "clothed in her right mind". This incident was claimed to have occurred somewhere in Victoria, and I was told of no cases of a similar nature within the Bundjalung areas. However, an itinerant white evangelist of a rather seedy sort attended the Convention at Cubawee and told all who would listen how he, himself, had been attacked by demons on several occasions. Many of the Pentecostals from Woodenbong were suitably impressed. (ibid.: Part III, pp.29, bracket mine.)

Small cottage meetings and huge conventions

The researched community was categorised by Calley (1959:202-211) into three groups: (1) Christians (2) the followers of the Old Rule, and (3) the residual. The residual were those who were neither, i.e., those who no longer possesses the Old Rule knowledge nor intended to live according to the strict Pentecostal disciplinary rules. Therefore,
being simply "sinners" (those who are not yet "saved" or who have "backslidden") was not the same as being the followers of the Old Rule. Such fixed categorisation does not help to understand the dynamics of Bundjalung and Githabul people's "lives with the Lord." Oscillation between conversion and backsliding is the essential feature of their Christian practice and its dynamics, rather than types of membership, must be explored. To backslide is to abandon one's faith in the Lord, but rather than refusing the existence of the Christian god, among the Bundjalung and Githabul today it is more a process of cooling down of one's enthusiasm to follow the strict taboos imposed upon the converts. On repentance, one can be delivered from the sins and can join the Christians again. It is virtually endlessly repeatable by theological standards—despite the hidden but deep weariness of the fellow Christians.

Types of Christian gatherings were: regular cottage meetings; Sunday church; tarry meetings; ladies' meetings, Sunday school for kids; rallies; and conventions. The general attendance except for the large scale rallies and conventions were only between a half dozen to two dozen people, but in those days cottage meetings were held every other night (Calley 1959: 219-222), which is a remarkable difference from today when the zeal of the Christian movement is at a low ebb with Christians being a minority. Rallies and conventions were large-scale gatherings. Unlike today, there were distinctions between the convention and the rally: the convention was the "festival activation" which took place once or twice a year, whereas the rallies were the

---

78 At least the information on the followers of the Old Rule is of some importance. In Calley's research, this category of people would not go into the church even for the funeral services. They were resolute refusers of the Christian cosmology. The actual ratio was 4% in the Woodenbong Station and 20% in the Tabulam Station (ibid.:200, Table 28). At the time of Calley's research, in Woodenbong there were only three people who were followers of the Old Rule and thirteen in Tabulam. In Woodenbong, they did not form a group, as they never engaged in co-activity. "They did not meet to placate or worship the spirits of the bush, nor do they cooperate in carrying out curative magic. The Pentecostal cult is in the ascendant while the Old Rule wanes rapidly. (Calley 1959: 207-208)" Therefore, it is more practical to understand that 80% of the Tabulam residents and 96% of the Woodenbong residents in those days were in some way or other involved in the Christian activities, as the large-scale rallies and conventions involved the Christians and sinners alike and functioned as the centre of inter-community communications.

79 The taboos immediately imposed upon the proselytes were: drinking, smoking, gambling, dancing, participating in sport, going to the films and immoral sexual relations. Regarding smoking and adultery, however, there was no consensus of opinion whether it is backsliding or not. (Calley 1959: 226)

80 The tarry meeting is held for the specific purpose of receiving the Holy Spirit personally. The prayer meeting (or prayer night) which most of the contemporary Pentecostal churches include in their weekly activities is of the same kind.
joint weekend fellowship with another congregations of the Bundjalung and Githabul settlements, which took place at least once a month, and every weekend at the peak of the revival.\textsuperscript{81} Rallies drew between 30 to 100 attendants and conventions drew approximately 200 up to 500 attendants. The latter also received many visitors outside the Northern Rivers region such as Bogabilla, Sydney, Taree and other places (ibid.: 219-222, 232-238).\textsuperscript{82}

According to Calley, a convention was held once a year (though twice in 1956), nearly always in November in Cubawee, but the 1955 convention “broke with tradition in being the first held at Tabulam and the first not attended by white U.A.M. personnel (ibid.:234)”. The origin of the convention is not given, but when Calley was in the field between 1952 and 1956 Cubawee Reserve was where there was the largest gathering at that time, following which Tabulam joined for the first time in 1955. The status of the Woodenbong station is not clearly mentioned in his ethnography, although today Muli Muli (the former Woodenbong station) is the only place where this type of “old tent meeting” has survived on the Northern Rivers.

According to the present-day old generation, during the revival there was a set agreement about the specific month of the year for the annual convention for the respective settlements: Cubawee, Tabulam and Woodenbong, which no one could impinge upon. October for Cubawee, November for Tabulam and Christmas time for Woodenbong. It is highly probable that after 1955, following the progress of the revival and withdrawal of the white UAM missionaries, the other two stations joined Cubawee as hosts of annual conventions, but I have not obtained clear information about this matter so far. The Muli Muli people’s memory of holding a rally goes back well before 1955, which probably means the weekend joint services called “rallies” (which also drew 100 hundred people at its peak) were as important as the far larger “annual conventions” in those days.

Calley records that the Cubawee convention was held under the auspices of the

\textsuperscript{81} Today, the seasonal conventions and smaller scale gatherings are both called rallies and the terminological difference is not as clear as it was before.
\textsuperscript{82} At 1955 Tabulam Convention, on rough counting of the coming and going attendants of a total of 445, the non-Bundjalung were 13% (Calley 1959:235).
How long Frank Roberts Snr, the legendary Aboriginal pastor, was under the UAM is not clear. At least his name is found in the issue for May 1, 1944 of The United Aborigines’ Messenger, a monthly newsletter of the UAM. He was one of the “Native Helpers”. In three years, in the issue for September 1, 1947, he was one of the “officers of the Native Church” and his title was Pastor. The extract of the report from Cubawee (Tuncester) by Pastor Frank Roberts was put in this issue:

... Thorough preparation is being made for the forthcoming Annual Convention in September. The principal speakers will be the well-known native evangelist, Brother Bert Marr83, and Evangelist John Thomas, L.T.H., lecturer of Hebron Bible Institute, India, and now lecturer at Strathfield Bible College, Sydney. The Convention theme will be the “The Highway to Holiness.” My brother, Donald Roberts, who is a deacon of our native church, and also my son, Fletcher, are helping me to erect tea rooms, kitchen and bathrooms. We spent an enjoyable week-end at the Cabbage Tree Island settlement with a band of revivalists. We opened our campaign on Saturday, and concluded on Sunday night. We were given a hearty welcome to the Island... (The United Aborigines’ Messenger, September 1, 1947)

The aspects of “festival activation” of their Pentecostal movement is depicted as below:

Numerically, it is the largest gathering of a religious nature that takes place among mixed bloods on the North Coast, probably in the State. It is really an institution valid for a larger group than the Christians and attracts a number of white missionaries and evangelists also. From every Station in the North Coast area the Christians come in buses, bringing with them their friends, relatives and neighbours. (Calley 1955: Part III, pp.21)

The relationship between the UAM missionaries and the “affiliated” Native Pastors is hazy. The following situation observed in the mid-1950s strongly suggests the existence of an invisible but substantial Aboriginal Pentecostal network as is the contemporary situation.84

---

83 An UAM affiliate in Purfleet, Taree, under the title of Evangelist (The United Aborigines’ Messenger, September 1, 1947).
84 The Bundjalung and Githabul churches in the Northern Rivers region today are affiliated with a variety of Pentecostal denominations but, in complete disregard of the official affiliation, their interest centres around the Aboriginal network of their own. (See Chapter 4 for detail.)
The numerous well organised and influential Christian congregation of the Cubawee Reserve is the centre of religious activity among the North Coast mixed bloods. They are at the same time the chief point of contact with the U.A.M. and the centre of Pentecostal evangelism. Only during the Convention is any discrepancy felt between the two loyalties, and were it not for the presence of the whites, it would probably not come to the fore even then. (ibid.: 22)

Officially, the Convention is held under the auspices of the U.A.M. but the majority of those who attend, really are followers of the Pentecostal cult, except the two or three semi-official U.A.M. appointed pastors, and it seems highly probable that the loyalty of even the pastors is more honoured in the breach than the observance. The white missionaries are well aware that most of those present are followers of what one of them called “the Pentecostal heresy”. As far as I could judge, resentment and mistrust smoulder beneath the show of goodfellowship [sic] on both sides, but are never permitted open expression. (ibid.:21)

Regarding the function of the Christian group as a social organisation, Calley observed the Christian group was cutting across the kin lines rather than reinforcing them, in which he saw an emerging new form of local solidarity (ibid.: Part II, pp.19)—not only the solidarity of all the Bundjalung and Githabul congregations but also that of all the Bundjalung and Githabul station and reserve communities. Both Calley and Hausfeld report that, when the relationship with the resident manager worsened, the frequency for having inter-station rallies increased. Regarding the formation of the Christian groups internally, Calley focuses on the categorisation of the type of Christians and degrees of the initiatory fulfilment of Christian practice in search of the structural and symbolic similarities with the Old Rule. Apart from the general observation of the generosity extended towards the members of the fellowship, whether or not the spiritual solidarity within the local Christian fellowship and among the congregations across the Northern Rivers had undermined the sense of solidarity and loyalty among the kin groups was not discussed fully with valid ethnographic data.85 In the succeeding chapter (Chapter 4) I shall give details of the contemporary aspect of this issue.

85He states the reason why the congregation in Cubawee was well-organised, outnumbered other congregations and was successful was precisely because it was the organisation, in which “kin group, local group and congregation nearly coincide” (Calley 1955: Part III, pp. 22).
The selected photographs of the seasonal conventions and rallies are shown below. They were probably taken between 1954 and 1955 by Calley’s team (Sullivan n.d., Haglund 1954-1955). Shown are the Aboriginal attendants, all well dressed and committed to organise the meetings. Just as they did at the big meetings for initiation ceremonies before the collapse of “traditional rituals” (see, for example (Mathews 1897:29), and just like today, the organisers prepared accommodation for visitors and provided them with free meals at the neatly arranged table in the community hall. From these photographs we can glimpse the devotion and enthusiasm of Aboriginal adherents of the Pentecostal congregations.
Plates 1-5

Plate 1 Tabulam convention, 27-31 Oct 1955

Plate 2 Organisers of the 1955 Tabulam convention

Plate 3 Tents hired to accommodate visitors to Tabulam convention
Plate 4  Meal break at hall, Tabulam convention

(Courtesy of AIATSIS Audiovisual archives)

Plate 5  Open-air meeting, Cabbage Tree Island, ca. 1954-1955

(Courtesy of AIATSIS Audiovisual archives)
Discourse

Aboriginal Jesus

There are only two stories that broadly hint at a syncretic link between the Aboriginal Old Way and the biblical stories—if limited to the ethnographic data concerning the Bandjalang Pentecostal movement. These stories were told by two different male informants who were “old and very influential”. There are, however, no ethnographic data that demonstrate that these stories were shared as dogma of the revival days in the context of Christian meetings. They are:

1. The equation of Christ with Balugan, one of the culture heroes. He was buried in the Arakoon racecourse near Kempsey. (Calley 1955: Part III, pp.29). His mother, Mary, mourns for him there every year in the form of a native-companion bird. (Calley 1959:205-206).

2. A variation of the Bundjalung myth of Ngathungali, Birin and Mamung. This story of the landing of Ngathungali from a canoe is taken to show that the Aborigines are one of the lost tribes of Israel. The narrator equated the culture hero Ngathungali with one of Jacob’s sons. (ibid.)

The first story was told by an old man on Cabbage Tree Island, but as a matter of fact, he was a “fully initiated, very alert Dangati man” (ibid.:206). Actually, “Native Christ” stories have a wide distribution on the North Coast of New South Wales up to

---

At least, there is one discourse mentioned in the same volume which was confirmed of its common use in the church context:

During my stay at Tabulam, it was announced at Baryulgil that as Australia had no savage indigenous animals, it must be the Biblical “Promised Land” and the Aborigines the “Chosen People”. Within about a month, this had been absorbed into the dogma of the Tabulam group, and had been accepted by many of the Woodenbong people also. (Calley 1955: Part III, pp.29)

Though Calley seems to identify this discourse with other syncretic stories, it seems to be more of a discourse of empowering racial identity seen worldwide than a mixture of Aboriginal cosmology and Christianity.

See 1 Kings and 2 Kings for the division of the kingdom of Israel into Israel and Judah; and for the twelve tribes of Israel deriving from Jacob’s sons, see Genesis: 49.

There have been intermarriages between the Dhan-gadi and the Bundjalung sporadically but the Kempsey area has not been included in the Bundjalung and Githabul Pentecostal network up to the present. (See Chapter 4 for more information on the present-day Dhan-gadi allies.)
the Queensland border, and have a continuous history going back to the nineteenth century (Swain 1993:147-151). For example, in late 1950s at Wilcannia, George Dutton made parallels between Catholicism and traditional myths of eaglehawk and crow; in the same region, Walter Newton dealt with the stories of “Holy Eaglehawk”, “Holy Crow” and “Holy Devil”, and the Rainbow Serpent was equated with the snake in Eden (Beckett 1958:101). In southern Queensland, Jesus was identified with a Being in traditional rituals and was killed by the Woagaia people (Kelly 1944:152). Variations of this myth are well documented.

Above all, a well-known published story is the one related to Roland Robinson by John Flanders (Robinson 1965:37-39), a Gumbaynggir89 man. The basic mythological framework is that God had two sons and they travelled by the coast in two opposite directions, making the world; they met at the Gulf of Carpentaria and one stayed there. The other brother, Birroogun, travelled further along the coast and met an old woman and her granddaughter and settled down with them. He is Jesus of the Gumbaynggir people; he conducted miracles identical to the biblical stories. Birroogun went to Arracoon and was speared to death there. He was buried in the racecourse, where native companions held corroborees for years.

In another version held by Kattang people90, their Christ’s name was Gulambra (Holmer & Holmer 1969). When his people were battling, he hung his loincloth in a tree and said if it bled it meant he was dead. Eventually he was speared in the chest and died. On the third day he rose from the dead. He rose in the air and promised he was coming back. The grass did not grow on the ground where his twelve disciples had sat around his grave. (ibid.:34-36) As is pointed out by Swain (Swain 1993:149), the information Elkin collected about Kattang Initiation before 1900 may contain a prototypical form of this type of syncretic myth:

The elders told myths of Gulambra, his virgin mother and followers, and showed marks in the rocks where they had been. ... A. Woodlands told of a ...circle at

---

89 The language group, just south from the Northern Rivers region. It is located in-between the Bundjalung and the Dhan-gadi.
90 Kattang people’s territory is located on the south of the Dhan-gadi area on the coast.
Arakun [sic]. In the middle was a stone; there is no grass in the ring. It is the burial ground of the cult hero—‘our saviour’ who was killed by a spear which had been thrown very high. The hero and his men travelled north; he left his girdle and tassel with his mother, telling her that if anything came out of it, this would indicate that he was ill or in trouble. The old fellows told D.M. that Gulambra was killed up north.


Evidently these versions have a more ancient origin than the Pentecostal revival in the Northern Rivers region.

The second story has the myth substances originating from a specific Bundjalung and Githabul origin myth, but it is evidently idiosyncratic. The informant was Alex Vesper, Calley’s major informant on Aboriginal “theology” and the most respected Christian and “culture” elder who had moved from Stoney Gulley to Woodenbong as mentioned in the preceding chapter (Chapter 2). In this narrative, one of Jacob’s sons sailed from the Holy Land in a sailing ship with his followers or family, and got shipwrecked on the coast of New South Wales. On the shore the crew built a bark canoe gundul and they continued their travels. According to him, “the tribes of the North Coast were twelve in number as were the tribes of Israel (Calley 1955: Part III, pp.29)”.

The mytheme is obviously the derivation of the Bundjalung origin myth dealing with Ngathungali⁹¹, but Calley concludes this myth would be idiosyncratic:

---

⁹¹ This type of myth has wider distribution beyond the Bundjalung territory, but within their own territory, too, there are many variations of this myth, and basically, there are four ancestral beings: one variant has four brothers, Jabiran, Birin, Mamung and one unknown other, who landed at Evans Head in a bark canoe gundul. Jabiran proceeded north, Mamung west and Birin south. As they travelled, they multiplied all the tribes of the present day being their descendants; another variant consists of Jabiran, Birin, Mamung and a woman but the woman was left behind when she was out digging yams and the three men sailed away; in another variant Ngathungali was the father of the three brothers; still another version says Ngathungali is the father of four sons and four daughters. (Calley 1955: Part II, pp.13) Mysterious is the number four in all the versions. Some informant told Calley it is the origin of the section marriage system. All informants said there was a fourth character, but they did not know which direction the fourth character travelled. Calley speculates that the section system had not yet been established in the Bundjalung and Githabul territory, and, therefore, he argues that, under this
The informant was unable to enumerate these very satisfactorily. I was unable to find any derivation of this story beyond the informant and as he is a very intelligent old man, it seems highly likely that he has thought it out himself. Almost all the people on Woodenbong Station accept its veracity without question, though it does not seem to be known on the other Stations. (ibid.)

Generally speaking, a certain nation being one of the lost tribes of Israel is a very common discourse held by a lot of Christian communities worldwide. Even today the local Aboriginal Christians would casually agree to this notion, as I have observed preachers who were sympathetic with indigenous Christians freely but idiosyncratically use similar discourses in their sermons. Usually, this type of interpretation or conviction is no more a dogma than is each testimony given at services.

Charlotte Page, the oldest Githabul elder (who was at the age of 86 when this information was collected), said she had never heard of this story, but she added she would have believed anything that Alex Vesper had said. He knew the Scripture and he was a "man of God"—or a committed Christian in our secular expression. On the other hand, regarding Christ's grave at the racecourse in Kempsey, she chuckled and said, "It should be a make-up by only one man!"—however, unfortunately her speculation is wrong. This story had a wide distribution—probably among male elders of the time. Charlotte Page was born in 1919 and was in her late thirties then. Belonging to the younger generation at that time, who had already had most of their traditional practice severed, and being a female into the bargain, it is most likely she did not know the information. Probably only old marugan were allowed to know such invading (Kamilaroi) section system, probably the endeavour to bring this myth into line with sections has resulted in the adding of the extra character. (ibid.) In my fieldwork, it was too late to consider this issue. The oldest Githabul elder does not carry any knowledge of these myths. Some of those who are younger than this elder claimed they knew the "stories", but it was hard to distinguish these narratives from mere reproduction of the white publications of Aboriginal oral records.

92 To give an example of such "popular" myths, even among contemporary Japanese Christians who constitute only 0.5% of the total population, some hold the belief that the Japanese nation should be one of the lost tribes of Israel. It is based on the geography that Japan is located in the east in the Old Testament geography. The Book of Revelation states that the servants of God, i.e., all the tribes of the children of Israel, will be sealed in their forehead by the angel "ascending in the east" (Revelation 7:1-2). Obviously, this narrative is not syncretism but simply the testimony of faith in the biblical teachings furnished with ethnocentrism.
information in those days. But what we must pay attention to here is not a contemporary female elder's lack of "authentic" traditional (and male-centred) knowledge, but the fact that these syncretic myths were not open to the Christian community at large in those days. This fact bears evidence that the syncretic myths were never shared as dogma as the grounds for worship in their Pentecostal movement.

The Trinity: Mamung, Bunam and Juggi

No Bandjalang regards culture heroes [sic] and spirits of the bush as false gods; instead they are closely associated with personalities of Christian mythology. Ngathungali is God, Gaungan is the Virgin Mary, gaungenmang (plural) are angles and Balugan is Christ. This is no faltering half-hearted attempt to weld the two religions together; to the Bandjalang the identity is self-evident. (Calley 1959:205)

This picture of the Trinity has been spread among Australian anthropologists for nearly a half century. In addition to the above-mentioned Ngathungali myth framework, the Bundjalung and Githabul had another myth framework of Gaungan.93 Scholars seem to have taken it for granted that these words in the local dialects were the ones the Bundjalung and Githabul used to talk about the Godhead in their Pentecostal movement. See the list of these words and their generic meanings in the Githabul language in Table 3.

Charlotte Page, on the other hand, who was born in 1919 and who is the eldest of all the Githabul group today, gave me a completely different Aboriginal terminology

93 The Ngathungali myth follows the mountains, whereas the Gaungan myth follows the rivers, starting at the river source to the south end, and covers almost every dialect group of the Bundjalung and Githabul territory. Gaungan is a culture heroine and holds the essential character of the fertility goddess. Gaungan camped near the headwaters of the Clarence River and built a hut over the water. She refused to permit anyone else to access to it, but when she was away digging yams, Balugan, a culture hero, approached her hut and stirred the water by a spear (or a stick). The water welled out of the hut and poured down the valley. Gaungan frantically tired to stop it, by thrusting up the mountains and waterfalls in its path, but the water escaped her and finally got into the sea. Her stopping places are marked by fig trees. (Calley 1955:Part II, pp.11)
for the Trinity that used to be shared in the church context. She was then the only living Githabul person who was able to speak the Githabul language fluently. Ever since she attended church, the Githabul words for the Trinity was: *Mamung* for God, *Bunam* for Jesus and *Juggi* for the Holy Spirit. The genetic English meanings of these words are listed in Table 4.

**Table 3** The Bundjalung and Githabul words for the Trinity in syncretic narratives

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>The Trinity &amp; Virgin Mary</th>
<th>Githabul term</th>
<th>Generic meaning in Githabul language</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>God</td>
<td><em>Ngathungali</em></td>
<td>culture hero</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jesus</td>
<td><em>Balugan</em></td>
<td>culture hero, or handsome young man</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Holy Spirit</td>
<td>(no record found)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Virgin Mary</td>
<td><em>Gaungan</em></td>
<td>culture heroine, or beautiful Aboriginal girl</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Table 4**
The Bundjalung and Githabul words for the Trinity used practically by Christians

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>The Trinity &amp; Virgin Mary</th>
<th>Githabul term</th>
<th>Generic meaning in Githabul language</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>God</td>
<td><em>Mamung</em></td>
<td>father</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jesus</td>
<td><em>Bunam</em></td>
<td>younger brother</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Holy Spirit</td>
<td><em>Juggi</em></td>
<td>secret and sacred</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Virgin Mary</td>
<td>(forgotten)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The Trinity in Table 4 seems to make much more sense for a Pentecostal Pantheon. The pantheon in Table 3 neglects the most important Godhead of the Holy Spirit for Pentecostals and includes Virgin Mary. Virgin Mary is neglected by Pentecostal church as she was merely a human. Charlotte Page told me there was a word for Virgin Mary
but she had forgotten it—as it was not important. This suggests that the syncretic myths that contain the equivalent of Virgin Mary have older origins than the Bundjalung and Githabul Pentecostal movement in the revival era. It is highly probable that Calley's intelligent informants, Christian but equipped with cultural knowledge as well, wanted to give a white "boss" or researcher the best Aboriginal classic story of Jesus which had been well-established among the elders in those days, rather than giving an account of the emerging spiritual zeal and explaining their present situation. To my mention of the word Balugan for Jesus, Charlotte Page explained that it would not be wrong to represent Jesus as Balugan, as it means a wonderful male character, but she asserted the practical term for Jesus was Bunam.

Why Jesus was called bunam, "the younger brother", instead of "the only son", is more intriguing and deserves attention. Charlotte Page was clear about her lack of knowledge of both the Ngathungali myth and the Gaungan myth. I was not able to collect any information about why Jesus was the "younger brother" during the fieldwork for this thesis. I can only draw readers' attention to the above-mentioned Gumbaynggir myth told by John Flanders (Robinson 1965:37-39). The one stayed at the Gulf of Carpentaria and the other brother came to Aboriginal people. This may suggest the early stage of allocating the local terminology to the characters in the Bible.

Charlotte Pages' version of the words for the Trinity are not current at Aboriginal churches in the Northern Rivers region today. She is the only remaining elder who can speak Githabul fluently, and local dialects are forgotten as practical languages in everyday life. Interestingly, some people who have access to the nation-wide discourse of Aboriginality attempt to replace such lack of local knowledge with a reconstructed Aboriginal word for God: for example, Baiame, a Kamaroi word for one of the sky heroes (cf. Berndt 1947a, 1947b), or Butheram, a Bundjalung and Githabul word for the mythical period and for the mythical beings who lived at that time (cf. Radcliffe-Brown 1929:401). Advocates of these local words are, however, usually very exceptional non-Pentecostal Christians or dominating anti-Pentecostal political activists of the Bundjalung and Githabul community.

It is interesting to see that juggi or djagi was also the word for a higher degree of
initiation rites (Calley 1955: Part II, pp.5). I do not take Calley's view that their Pentecostal practice had an initiatory nature just like the old rule (Calley 1959:223-226). On the contrary. For Pentecostals, supernatural power promised by God is open to anyone; and it needs no process of undergoing special training, education and rites. (Detailed discussion about this issue will be given in Chapter 7.) It is more likely that simply both of them (higher initiation rites and the Holy Spirit) were supposed to be extremely secret and sacred. Just as their initiation rituals were secret and sacred to outsiders and the uninitiated, after their acceptance of Pentecostalism the Bundjalung and Githabul Christians were very careful not to talk about the way they worship the Holy Spirit. We should just remember the hardships the early white Pentecostal churches in Australia had in the process of establishing their positions and spreading their teachings against opposition and criticism (see Appendix 1). Charlotte Page kept saying, "We mustn't talk about the Holy Spirit! You gotta be very careful." This was a virtual refusal that blocked me from asking about the old ritual procedures until the very end of my fieldwork. It was not until I returned to the field for a short visit when she was disarmed and gave me these Githabul words for the Trinity. In a sense, she was telling me open-heartedly from the beginning that the Holy Spirit is juggi (secret and sacred).

It was such a social situation in which the Christian elders, who also possessed traditional knowledge, attempted to renounce the Old Way when they were convicted and converted. Here, I must make it clear that I am not intending to elicit that they have given up the "practical" operation of the Old Way due to the introduction of Pentecostalism. My focus is on something else: how the Pentecostal movement has functioned to make up for the loss of their own religious practice caused by socio-economic reasons. First came the collapse of social institutions by drastic change to a subsistence economy caused by dispossession of land. Then, in order to cope with it, some leaders found effective measures in Christianity to restructure the Aboriginal Way with—especially regarding the increasing negative feelings towards spirit world in the bush among the younger generation which was severed from practical knowledge of the djurebil.94 When Mick Cook came in the 1910s-1920s to the Northern

94 In his 1929 field research Radcliffe-Brown (1929) collected a number of the remnant Githabul legends, which obviously functioned as practical knowledge for the respective groups of families to perform increase rites at the respective djurebil (sacred spots). Even during this
Rivers region (as mentioned in Chapter 2), it was just the dawn of Pentecostal acceptance. Arthur Bundock was still a harbinger. After Mick Cook and Arthur Bundock, that is, after the introduction of Christianity by their lay pastors, it actually took 30-50 years for Christianity and the Pentecostal movement to flourish.95

By the time Pentecostalism was at its peak (in the mid 1950s), however, the Old Way had become memories and nostalgia for most people. Their own religious practice as a social institution had ceased completely by the Revival according to Calley. Calley records there were only 5 initiated men on the North Coast (which usually includes areas beyond the Bundjalung and Githabul territory such as Dhan-gadi, Gumbaynggir, or even further south). The few people whom Calley categorised as the followers of “the Old Way” actually held it as pure ideology; Calley states clearly that they did not form a group as they never engaged in co-activity. “They did not meet to placate or worship the spirits of the bush, nor do they cooperate in carrying out curative magic (Calley 1959: 207-208).”

Seventy-four-year-old Marge Close, Arthur Bundock’s granddaughter (DD) who used to read the Bible after school for him, the community’s powerful but illiterate preacher, said to me in an assertive way, “Grandfather told me that once you believe in God, you must not believe anything else!” Above-mentioned Charlotte Page confirmed an intriguing anecdote which is still current among the contemporary Githabul Pentecostals: renouncement of the bogara on conversion. The bogara is a magical cord of the clever man and it was feared, rather than being worshipped or respected as sacred (See Chapter 7 for full detail). A very influential and well-respected elder testified at one of the services in the Woodenbong Aboriginal Station that he was converted to period, however, he depicted the local situation as such: “...none except a few of the very old people know...anything about the increase rites” (ibid.:408).

95 In contrast to Calley’s report that there remained only a few marugan on the whole North Coast according to his data in the former half of the 1950s (Calley 1959: 74), Hausfeld asserts the continuance of ritual initiation during his fieldwork in the latter half of the 1950s. He found two men who had cicatrices in the Woodenbong Aboriginal Station during his service. One was 56 years old and the other was 27 years old (Hausfeld 1960: 95). He was told the younger was cut at the ceremony in the latter half of 1955 in the Baryulgil area (ibid.:96). On the evidence, Hausfeld argues the continuance of ritual initiation in the Northern Rivers area (ibid.: Notes, 69-71), which is a difference from Calley’s understanding of the practical traditional social institutions. In either case, however, only a couple of the adult members of the community were observed as bearing cicatrisation; it is the evidence that the traditional religious life has greatly collapsed already.
Christianity and gave up the Old Way. He then told the congregation openly that he renounced the bogara and coughed it up when the pastor was laying hands on him (presumably at the white Pentecostal convention held in Tweed Heads). The black worm he spat out sprawled on the floor and vanished in the open public. The oldest Githabul elder living today remembers clearly everything that he confessed back at his home church in the Station.

Subsequently, it is extremely important to consider the following information collected during the revival days: it asserts the Christians belief in the Old Rule.

Being a Christian does not imply ceasing to believe in the spiritual beings of the old religion nor is it felt that Christianity and the Old Rule are incompatible. One can talk to djurebil, seek to be cured by Clever Men and even see gaungan in the bush without ceasing to be a Christian. ... Nearly all informants were most insistent that the Old Rule was both true and good. Woodenbong and Tabulam people indignantly rejected Dick Piety’s claim that the Old Rule was “the works of the devil” and that the spirits of the bush were “powers and principalities of darkness”. (Calley 1959: 205)

During one discussion with (H) he explained to me how it was that he could be a Christian and still believe the “old law”. His explanation was that the Butheram were created at the creation of the earth, whereas man was made by God. The Bible and Christianity had to do with man, whereas the “old law” had to do with man’s relations with the created beings of the Butheram. There is sincere belief in Christianity held by many members of the Church and there is equally sincere belief in the Butheram held by those same people. (Hausfeld 1960.: 101-102)

Eighty-six-year-old Charlotte Page denied the above statements as I mentioned them. She was in her late thirties when this information was collected. In the context of practical life, however, she did have a swollen leg healed by the clever man in her young days, and sent for a wiun when her sister was sick. Being a hard-core anti-culture Christian elder notwithstanding, she amusingly recollected “funny” corroborees—people dancing and playing mockery of having itches all over the body, and so on—and told me casually that she had enjoyed them. But she was absolutely certain, “Once you become a Christian, you gotta throw away the Old Way.” This was what Arthur Bundock held as his principle, too. But some say he was “clever”, too,
whilst being the pastor. What do all these troubling contradictions mean?

People’s discourse about the Old Way in the 1950s must be considered carefully. It seems quite likely that by saying, “We must give up the Old Way,” in this period of time people were talking about nostalgia. This is the same phenomenon as that which Reay (1949) and Berndt (1947a, 1947b) observed at around the same period in other regions (see Chapter 7). The Old Way in this time and region had very limited meaning; it exclusively meant “traditional knowledge of controlling supernatural powers”. We must remember that only a few marugan were alive in those days. Before, all adult males were supposed to be marugan. The Old Way was long gone, and the shift of the mode of thought was already obvious: younger generations began to fear spirits in the bush. All marugan were thought to be clever men by lack of knowledge and cease of practice of ceremonies as operating social institutions. The shift from practical knowledge of the spirit world to an ungrounded imagination was beginning in the Revival era. Therefore, the “Old way” in this context is equivalent with the local term of “culture” (see Chapter 7 for detail). The accusations to the Old Way by the Christians were targeted at those who had knowledge of the supernatural power. By saying “you’ve gotta throw away the Old Way”, the Christians of the time were picking off the dangerous channel to the spirit world. They were not saying they must give up the Aboriginal lifestyle or attachment to their own community.

Therefore, it seems highly probable that maintaining knowledge about syncretic myths and myth-related sites did not conflict with the wholehearted embrace of the Story of Jesus—if the knowledge was based on the details of concrete practice. For people younger than this last generation, these localities have become the centre of fear of unknown power. I have so far mentioned the names of the several pioneering Christian leaders such as Arthur and Frank Bundock, Euston Williams, James Morgan, Alex Vesper and others, and there is ample record that these elders still had knowledge of tribal myths and the localised clan totemism.

James Morgan, whom I discussed in the preceding chapter as one of the first-generation Pentecostal converts, for example, held the “full-blood” Aboriginal position on the Welfare Board from 1964 to 1968 (Horner 1996:197). As his children
were drawn to the more "de-tribalised" life cycle which consisted of itinerant odd jobs at farms, drinking, brawling and other amusements rather than learning about the traditional knowledge that their father held, he used to take the white missionary couple of Coraki reserve whom he had befriended with him to various places in his clan's territory and told them legends. This UAM missionary was a local-born, second generation of the missionary family and he and his wife sincerely held respect for Aboriginal traditional culture (including knowledge of totemic sites). They enjoyed strolling around with old James Morgan and listening to the Bundjalung legends. Such an open-minded communication derived from their trust in old James' genuine faith in the one and only God.9 6

James Morgan and Alex Vesper were parallel first cousins. Such record remains:

He [James Morgan] and his older relative, Alex Vesper from Kyogle, during the 1920s travelled around seeking rural work.... They kept up many traditional ways. They both knew all the names and legends and revered places of the area. Besides their fishing and hunting [by gun] for food, they built little gunyahs, and 'put a little fire in front of them, very cosy in winter.' (Horner 1996:197, bracket mine)

As such, these Christian leaders of the revival days maintained cultural knowledge, but simultaneously, they did live as Pentecostal converts around the same period as mentioned above.

Alex Vesper's son today recollects in a somewhat wistful manner that Alex would never want to remarry after his wife had run away with another man and left him with children. As Alex Vesper wanted to follow God, he did not want to kill the eloped couple according to the Old Way. This put him in an unfair situation: he

9 6 This UAM couple, being local residents, spent much effort in vain to convince a certain "hard-core" follower of the Old Rule in Coraki. Therefore, they exactly knew the difference between an Aboriginal Christian who had cultural knowledge and a follower of the Old Rule. Also they have seen those who were in between—someone once brought a "witch doctor" from other region to heal a sick person. They saw James Morgan had genuine faith in one and only God. A certain cultural elder, for example, kept refusing conversion by challenging them, "If you can show me God's power is greater than the power of our doctors, I would become a Christian." He told the missionary that he had seen the Rainbow Serpent moving over the boys lying on the ground at the initiation ceremony. Such hard-core followers of the Old Rule were, in fact, a minority in those days. What this missionary couple had to tolerate with, they told me, was the fanaticism of the "Pentecostal heresy" among the local Aborigines across the Northern Rivers.
ended up being a “married man” to a disloyal woman who had vanished from his life. Such a situation always prohibits a Pentecostal to seek a new life with a more committed second wife, because if he were to remarry in such a situation, he would be regarded as an adulterer. Alex Vesper accepted this lonely life as a testimony to his faith in the Christian god. This pathetic story, however, is now remembered by his descendants as that of God’s redemption and victory in faith rather than unreasonable tribulation, for “God put them together again as a husband and a wife in the last moment of her life”. The eloped wife returned to Muli Muli (the former Woodenbong Aboriginal Station) during the last days of her life, having contracted a lethal illness. Reconciliation was made and the husband looked after her till she died.

They may have indeed been cultural elders, but they were simultaneously committed to the genuine Pentecostal teaching. Language, legends, and legend-related localities were nothing wrong to them; but oral evidence shows they wanted to renounce the Old Way when it contradicted the teaching of love and grace of the one and only Spirit. Also, we must pay attention to the eventual shift as the Pentecostal movement flourished. The forgetting of traditional social institutions, including nostalgia for the lost “golden age”, was completed probably in the next generation—the generation to which Charlotte Page (born in 1919) belongs. People lost touch with the pre-existing practical functions of their subsistence economy and the spirits in the bush have become unknown spirits to them. Fear began to replace the awe and gratitude their forefathers had felt towards the localised spirits which once gave them propitious promise of abundant animal species. Calley had already observed the rise of ungrounded fear due to the lack of practical knowledge:

Already the younger generation is failing to distinguish the fully initiated man from the uninitiated greybeard, he who remembers and participated in the Old Rule from he who is old enough to have done so but did not. For many years after the last follower of the Old Rule is beneath the sod in the Tabulam graveyard the young will believe that old people, any old people, have magical powers and contact with the gods and spirits of the old religion. (Calley 1959: 208)

“Spirits of the bush are demonic”—at a certain point during the explosion of Pentecostalism, not after the decline of the movement, this discourse prevailed and
settled among Bundjalung and Githabul people. When Hausfeld returned to the field site in 1969, he observed that the church group had become “more withdrawn and exclusive than was the case ten years earlier” (Hausfeld 1972:131). Margaret Gummow, during her musicological research from 1985 to 1989, received a hostile reaction from the members of the Pentecostal church (Gummow 1992:64). Gummow was asking the Bundjalung people to listen to the recordings of old songs kept by the AIATSIS audio library. The Pentecostal church members strongly opposed “any attempt to revitalise any part of the traditional Aboriginal culture” (ibid). What was observed thirty years before by Hausfeld (1960) was that the singing of Aboriginal songs, fishing and the corroboree dance were not taboo (Hausfeld 1972: 100). Hausfeld, ten years later, and Gummow, thirty years later, both recognised the Christians’ marked inclination towards seeing “fearful” things in both the religious and secular practices of the old days.

Due to the misunderstood origins of these Aboriginal Jesus stories, latter-day researchers have often been led to reach a misleading understanding of what the Bundjalung and Githabul Pentecostal revival was all about. That the Pentecostal movement of ca. 1940s-1950s created syncretic myths seems to be common knowledge today. For example, combining Calley’s ethnography with other works of collected Aboriginal myths, Malcolm Prentis, the historian of the local Aboriginal affairs, states:

...by 1940 it could be said that all Aborigines in the region were at least nominal Christians. At the same time, the old religion did not die—rather, it lay dormant. Furthermore, it seems that, starting roughly in the 1940’s [sic], there began a remarkable and peculiar recrudescence of the traditional religion. ... This is seen in the reworking of the old legends to incorporate people or messages from the Christian stories. .... An excellent example is the story, “The Sermon of the Birds”, related by Galibal clansman, Alexander Vesper. (Prentis 1972: 299)

As discussed so far, I would argue that the Bundjalung and Githabul Pentecostal movement did not create syncretism. As far as we can draw from the ethnographic data, the following is the evidence for my argument:

(1) Variants of the story of Aboriginal Jesus had wide distribution on the North Coast
since the nineteenth century.

(2) Calley collected syncretic stories from the older generation of the Bundjalung and Githabul Christians in the 1950s.

(3) Calley’s ethnographic data on the Pentecostal practice actually hold good evidence that any influence of the Aboriginal cosmology and ritual institutions was excluded from the practice at church. (His analysis, however, contains a projection of his view of archetypical Aboriginal symbolism and structural similarities with the initiation process).

(4) In interviews outside the church context, Calley and Hausfeld found many of the church adherents did not deny the good aspects of spirits in the bush. Simultaneously, however, Calley records fear of the spirit world held by the younger generation who lacked practical knowledge of traditional cosmology.

Moreover, let us just examine Alex Vesper’s story referred to by Prentis. In fact, it does not seem to make “an excellent example” of a syncretic myth from an objective viewpoint. In the following I quote the whole story “The Sermon of the Birds” told by Alex Vesper to Roland Robinson for one of his collections of Aboriginal myths and legends (Robinson 1966:182-183):

The Sermon of the Birds

I was clearing thirty or forty acres once, out in the western range near Nightcap Mountain. And as I was working I heard a gathering of crows singing out in a jungle-gully. Their clamorous cries drew the attention of all the other birds. Jackass and butcher-bird, soldier-bird, sparrow-bird, scrub-robin, magpie, the black and the white cockatoo, they all flew down to the crows in the jungle-gully.

And I followed after their clamour, and in the midst of all the splendid excitement of the birds, I heard one fellow was singing above them all. It was the lyre-bird, the mimic of all the scrub. And they held this beautiful sermon for half an hour. The birds would stop and listen awhile, but still that beautiful voice, the lyre-bird, would keep on singing, and draw them and join them all to a chorus again.
And as I stood there and listened, the Scriptures was hitting me all the time. That sermon seemed like the prophecy when Christ shall come and summon the birds, the valleys and hills, the mountains and ocean, to sing in praise of the grace and the reckoning day, and the beauty of earth in the splendour that He created. And I went back and told my people of what I had seen, of the sermon of praise I heard on the mountain range.

This story seems to appeal to us much more as a testimony of faith and conviction of God’s omnipresence in the world than as a mixture of traditional religion and biblical stories. To be touched by the splendour of nature filled with animal species in the bush is not particularly relevant to a ritualistic attitude towards the Aboriginal spirits in the bush.

In fact, such a kind of “divine experience in the midst of nature” is often heard about among all Christians regardless of their colour and cultural background. When one of the Bundjalung Christians, a contemporary youth who was severed from a traditional lifestyle, testified the same kind of experience to me, he praised the ubiquity of God and referred to his favourite verse in the Bible:

For the invisible things of him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even his eternal power and Godhead; so that they are without excuse. (Romans 1:20)

What would Prentis have thought if the narrator of “The Sermon of the Birds” had not been an Aboriginal? If the informant were to be a white Christian person, would we find any hue of pagan syncretism in this story? Or if the speaker was, say, one of the white Eastern State Brahmins leading a nature-based lifestyle in the rainforest of Byron Bay?

The two major arguments I have presented in this chapter are about: (1) The Aboriginal (lay) leadership of the Aboriginal church and networking in the Northern Rivers region, and (2) a reconsideration of the historical position of the syncretic myths unconditionally linked to “the Bandjalang Pentecostal movement”. Interestingly, the
same author (Prentis 1972:301-302) who attempted to seek syncretism in Alex Vesper’s “The Sermon of the Birds” gives a somewhat illuminating insight into another two of Alex Vesper’s stories. These testimonies were of Aboriginal experiences of modernity—of colonial social change and black and white race relations brought about by squatters. The author exquisitely challenges the conventional white view and expands insight into autonomy of the Aboriginal mode of thought:

In two of Alexander Vesper’s stories, “The Story of Diamond” and “The Attack at Tabulam”, there are some relevant and interesting features. Both concern misunderstandings on the part of Europeans, leading to conflict. In both, an attack by Europeans is thwarted.... In the end, the Europeans realize they are wrong, apologize, and both sides live henceforth as friends. ...it is significant that Aborigines see themselves as determining to a very large extent the inter-racial situation. Regardless of whether this is self-delusion or not ... the Aborigines are in control of the situation. This is the exact opposite of what most early white settlers thought, and is still a salutary warning against ethnocentric accounts of the squatting movement based on written sources. (ibid.: 313)

Aboriginal church from the beginning

In December 2005, I returned to Woodenbong for three weeks to observe the centennial celebration of the Aboriginal Church at Muli Muli, the former Woodenbong Aboriginal Station (1931-1969). I drove about in the Northern Rivers region to have a reunion with some of the informants before the celebration ceremony. The celebration was to be included as part of the annual Muli Muli Christmas Rally. It goes for one week after Christmas Day. Soon I began to gather evidence of a disturbing atmosphere in the whole Bundjalung and Githabul Christian community. There was opposition of the advocates of the 100-year history of the Aboriginal church in Woodenbong. What attracted me most was not the opposition itself but the confusion that all the small-sized flocks of today on the Northern Rivers shared with regard to the “one hundredth anniversary of the Aboriginal church” advocated by the Githabul people.

97 See Robinson (1966:174-182) for the full stories.
Interestingly enough, no one referred to the past interventions by the UAM institution. The controversies were exclusively about “which one of us started what, and when and where was it?” I saw that the source of confusion lay in two widely shared major misunderstandings:

1. The history of the church is identical to that of the seasonal convention (in today’s term, “rally”) held by each church.
2. The Aboriginal church of the Northern Rivers region was Pentecostal from the beginning.

In a sense, these misunderstandings reveal exactly the existence of a lasting legacy of networking of the Aboriginal Pentecostal Christians across the Northern Rivers region under Aboriginal leadership shared by a number of lay Aboriginal pastors.

On the basis of the first misunderstanding, many people insisted that Muli Muli people were wrong because the Woodenbong rally would not be a hundred years old. There were a lot of people who insisted Cubawee rally was on before Woodenbong rally. In fact, however, Muli Muli church was only going to celebrate Arthur Bundock’s legacy of the Aboriginal church in Woodenbong (see Chapter 2). It was made clear by Muli Muli people that their Christmas Tent Rally would have about 60 years of history. From the point of view of the second misunderstanding, more intelligent and well informed people argued it would have been impossible for Woodenbong to be equipped with Pentecostal teachings in 1905, because the origin of Pentecostalism was the Azusa Street revival started in 1906 by the Afro-American preacher William J. Seymour. In the first place, however, Muli Muli people were not claiming for being the first Pentecostals but claming for 100-year-history of Arthur Bundock’s church which started before Pentecostalism was brought to the Northern Rivers. They were explicit about the origin of Pentecostalism in the Northern Rivers region: Mick Cook brought it to Stoney Gully first, not to Woodenbong.

98 On the contrary, in Kempsey (the Dhan-gadi people’s land) the centenary of the first North Coast evangelical church for Aboriginal people was held under the white UAM leadership in March 2001 (Messenger, January-March 2001). This shows a clear difference in the historical developments of UAM evangelism in the Dhan-gadi context and in the Bundjalung/Githabul context.
In the midst of opposition, criticisms and much more backbiting than misunderstanding, on 27 December 2005 the Muli Muli Aboriginal community had a celebration ceremony of one hundred years of the legacy of the Aboriginal church of Githabul people laid by Arthur Bundock. Born in 1872, Arthur had been settled in this hilly camp in Woodenbong by the time he got married with Mary Smith from Charleville, Queensland in 1905. Their son Frank was born in 1908 in Stoney Gully—Stoney Gully is only 60 km south of Woodenbong. Arthur's grandson Francis Bundock, the incumbent Pastor of Muli Muli Full Gospel Church, 60 years old, was the master of the ceremonies and the oldest Githabul elder Charlotte Page, 86 years old, gave a speech, preceding the representatives of the younger generations.

She mentioned many names of the respected Aboriginal lay pastors of the time. “They couldn't read or write but they preached. Oh yeah, they all preached the Gospel powerfully...” the old lady, paying a visit to the community from the nursing home in Urbenville, stated resolutely in a clear voice and with a clear mind. Kneeling down beside her, I was holding the microphone for her to save her frail hands from holding the microphone and the Bible together. Her memory was clear and specific. The harbingers were Arthur Bundock in Woodenbong, and an Aboriginal evangelist Mick Cook who brought Pentecostalism to Stoney Gully.

By then my fieldwork had already been finished but I was in touch with Auntie Charlotte including the post-field period in Canberra. But until this incident happened, she had never hinted Mick Cook, or the way the supernatural channel to the Holy Spirit had been brought to her people. Was I not trusted enough? Probably. It would not be a misguided speculation. I was the strangest stranger they have ever encountered throughout their intercultural and interracial experiences: fatally heathen, culturally and morally alien as I was female and Asian, and politically suspicious as I was from Canberra, namely, the centre of white politics. But a somewhat convincing feeling hit me when I was kneeling down beside this old lady on the stage. Probably it was just that she had been honest in her faith—that the Holy Spirit is juggi, secret and sacred. That summer, throughout the special festive season, Muli Muli people casually involved me in their relaxed yarns about the past. I probably should have felt greatly
obliged to the uneasiness and controversies within the Bundjalung and Githabul Christian community. After the turmoil involving all the Bundjalung and Githabul Christians, juggi the Holy Spirit was finally disclosed.
CHAPTER 4

Local Churches:
Organisations and Networking

And he said unto them, Go ye into all the world, and preach the
gospel to every creature. He that believeth and is baptized shall be
saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned. And these signs
shall follow them that believe; In my name shall they cast out devils;
they shall speak with new tongues; They shall take up serpents; and if
they drink any deadly thing, it shall not hurt them; they shall lay
hands on the sick, and they shall recover.


The Lord saved us to go out and tell the unsaved, which is you fellas
tonight, that Jesus loves you. ... We bin here that many times over
and over. Not only here but all over the place – Casino, Tabulam,
Boggabilla ... you name it. We are doing the same thing. Yamba last
Easter, we were down there... Easter time. Christmas time up in
Woodenbong. Doing the same thing every year, and this is the same
thing we are doing.

— A testimony at an outreach meeting, Box Ridge Aboriginal village

The Bundjalung and Githabul country has always been abundant in places for
proselytes to go to within the Aboriginal social domain. Therefore, in their community,
becoming Christian means that one shifts from the "sinner’s way" to the "Lord’s way"
within the same domain of the everyday “blackfella’s life”, as far as their social
orientations are concerned. In other words, it is only a shift from one lifestyle to
another in the same mundane life of the same Aboriginal community. The preceding
chapters (Chapters 2 & 3) attempted to answer what social dynamics operated in the
Bundjalung and Githabul society, so that they ultimately formed the Aboriginal
networking and kept their Christian practice self-dependent or, rather, withdrawn
from the white Christian community. This chapter aims at exploring how they keep up
with it in the present time. Selected sociological data are furnished in this chapter based on the primary data collected during the fieldwork for this thesis. The structure of the Christian community of Bundjalung and Githabul people is discussed on the basis of data on: church organisations, networking, people’s mobility for Christian activities, and contemporary forms of kinship, moral economy and agency of gender in their community.

Pentecostal legacy

According to the religious community profiles study (Hughes 1996:71), Woodenbong, one of the major field sites of my research (see Map 4 below), shows the highest concentrations of Pentecostals in Australia. In the survey based on the 1991 census data, the Woodenbong postcode area (2476) has 12.03 percent Pentecostals of the whole population (see Table 5 below). This postcode area covers the town of Woodenbong and the surrounding localities scattered at the foot of the Border Range between Queensland and New South Wales. In this area the local Aboriginal residents are mostly from the Githabul group. In 1991, there were 147 Aboriginal persons, which was 13.5% of the whole population. Obviously, it was the population of Githabul Christians that achieved the highest Pentecostal concentration in Australia for this postcode area because the Githabul community has been Pentecostal since the revival days as I already discussed. The legacy of the revival days in the mid-twentieth century has not yet been abandoned by Githabul people.

---

99 In 1991, the total population of this postcode area was 1098 persons.
100 In the 2001 census the ratio of Pentecostals dropped only slightly (to 11.99%).
### Table 5  Postcode areas of high concentrations of Pentecostals

(Reproduced from *The Pentecostals in Australia*, Hughes, P.J. (1996), pp.71)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Postcode</th>
<th>Area</th>
<th>Pentecostals as percentage of population</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2476</td>
<td>Woodenbong, NSW</td>
<td>12.03</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4876</td>
<td>Bamaga, Qld</td>
<td>11.05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6448</td>
<td>Gibson, WA</td>
<td>10.88</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4875</td>
<td>Thursday Island, Qld</td>
<td>9.43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4313</td>
<td>Toogoolawah, Qld</td>
<td>8.55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5472</td>
<td>Georgetown, SA</td>
<td>7.75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4890</td>
<td>Normanton, Qld</td>
<td>7.52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3237</td>
<td>Weeaproinah, Vic.</td>
<td>7.17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6770</td>
<td>Halls Creek, WA</td>
<td>6.61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4426</td>
<td>Jackson, Qld</td>
<td>6.57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3507</td>
<td>Walpeup, Vic.</td>
<td>5.73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3892</td>
<td>Mallacoota, Vic.</td>
<td>5.71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4626</td>
<td>Mundubbera, Qld</td>
<td>5.58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3375</td>
<td>Buangor, Vic.</td>
<td>5.51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3391</td>
<td>Brim, Vic.</td>
<td>5.36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3062</td>
<td>Somerton, Vic.</td>
<td>5.26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5273</td>
<td>Avenue Range, SA</td>
<td>5.20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5309</td>
<td>Sandalwood, SA</td>
<td>5.11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4694</td>
<td>Yarwun, Qld</td>
<td>5.06</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4412</td>
<td>Brigalow, Qld</td>
<td>5.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4346</td>
<td>Marburg, Qld</td>
<td>5.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6383</td>
<td>Quairading, WA</td>
<td>4.78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5311</td>
<td>Alawoona, SA</td>
<td>4.74</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4342</td>
<td>Forest Hill, Qld</td>
<td>4.59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5583</td>
<td>Edithburgh, SA</td>
<td>4.41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5210</td>
<td>Mount Compass, SA</td>
<td>4.31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4424</td>
<td>Drillham, Qld</td>
<td>4.26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4861</td>
<td>Babinda, Qld</td>
<td>4.24</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The census data on the Northern Rivers region, however, show that there are a lot more nominal Aboriginal Christians in the Northern Rivers region than the Pentecostal adherents my research has covered. According to the 2001 indigenous profile, the Richmond Tweed Statistical Division (which roughly covers the Bundjalung and Githabul area) counts 4,200 Aboriginal Christians out of a total of 6,118 indigenous persons. Only 344 Pentecostals are counted out of these 4,200 (see Table 6 below). This means that, first, Christians are majority among Bundjalung and Githabul people and, second, that more than 90% of the Bundjalung and Githabul Christians are non-Pentecostal. This would definitely contradict my primary argument in the preceding chapters that Bundjalung and Githabul Christians are all Pentecostal. I speculate that the church adherents are at best between 300 and 400 (see Table 8 below).

This contradiction derives from a simple trick that statistics performs. Table 6 shows that the major four denominations nominated by the Aboriginal Christians in the census data are Anglican, Catholic, Presbyterian and Reformed, and Uniting. "Nominal" Christians affiliate themselves to these churches; and they are not Christians in a practical sense by the Bundjalung and Githabul standard. Only those who live with the strict rules of a Pentecostal life (to be detailed in Chapter 5) are regarded as adherents of the local Aboriginal congregations. As a matter of fact, it is not unusual that as many as 4,200 out of only 6,000 indigenous population of this region have nominated affiliations with the mainline denominations. People in the Bundjalung and Githabul country would not nominate themselves as Pentecostal merely because they believe in the Christian god. Unless one has given up everything to live for the Lord alone, one is in the category of "sinners" by the local Aboriginal standard and is not included in the category of the Bundjalung and Githabul Christianity that is Pentecostal. It is highly plausible that these "sinners" nominated white denominations popular in their residential areas, as they need to relate themselves to church for practical reasons—i.e. they believe in the Christian god and they must bury the deceased and hold weddings. For ceremonies people must hire the halls of the white church in the town, although the local Aboriginal pastors usually look after the practical procedures for the non-Christians of their own people.
Table 6


AUSTRALIAN BUREAU OF STATISTICS 2001 Census of Population and Housing
Richmond-Tweed (SD 120), 9848 sq. Kms

107 RELIGIOUS AFFILIATION BY SEX

Indigenous persons

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Males</th>
<th>Females</th>
<th>Persons</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Christianity:</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anglican</td>
<td>754</td>
<td>786</td>
<td>1,540</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Baptist</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>99</td>
<td>157</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brethren</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Catholic</td>
<td>610</td>
<td>645</td>
<td>1,255</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Churches of Christ</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jehovah’s Witnesses</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Latter Day Saints</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lutheran</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oriental Christian</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Orthodox</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Presbyterian and Reformed</td>
<td>104</td>
<td>96</td>
<td>200</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Salvation Army</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seventh-day Adventist</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Uniting Church</td>
<td>175</td>
<td>183</td>
<td>358</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pentecostal:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assemblies of God</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other Pentecostal</td>
<td>148</td>
<td>163</td>
<td>311</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>164</td>
<td>180</td>
<td>344</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Other Protestant:</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aboriginal Evangelical Missions</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other Protestant</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other Christian(a)</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>73</td>
<td>136</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>2,025</td>
<td>2,175</td>
<td>4,200</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Other religions:</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Australian Aboriginal Traditional Religions</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other Religious Groups</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>99</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>78</td>
<td>135</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No religion(b)</td>
<td>512</td>
<td>471</td>
<td>983</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inadequately described(c)</td>
<td>103</td>
<td>89</td>
<td>192</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not stated</td>
<td>306</td>
<td>302</td>
<td>608</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>3,003</td>
<td>3,115</td>
<td>6,118</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(a) Includes 'Christian, nfd'.
(b) Includes 'No religion, nfd', 'Agnosticism', 'Atheism', 'Humanism' and 'Rationalism'.
(c) Includes 'Religious belief, nfd'.
It was the enthusiasm of a “revival” that Malcolm Calley observed and recorded for his ethnographies in the 1950s (Calley 1955, 1959). A revival is a new awakening of spiritual awareness and growth of faith in God among Christians. When it breaks out, church meetings explode and the zeal spreads rapidly from one community to another. People rush for conversion amid wild enthusiasm for deliverance from their past sins and expectations of miracles. It breaks out by mere chance and dies down in due course. The common explanation of a “revival” by Christians is that it is a part of “the Lord’s plan”, though there are more analytic opinions. An elderly white Pentecostal evangelist who had witnessed the past forty years of the ebb and flow of Pentecostal tides in the Northern Rivers Aboriginal community told me simply, “The revival lasts as long as people want it.” Of course, the Bundjalung and Githabul Pentecostal Christians have their own stories to tell and opinions to express. Amidst many stories and many opinions, there is one thing they do admit unanimously today: the revival is long gone.

During the first half of the twentieth century, Woodenbong, Tuncester/Cubawee (Lismore) and Tabulam sprang into fame under strong leadership of lay pastors (cf. Chapter 2). While the revival lasted, each small-sized flock worked together like one united body in boundless enthusiasm to spread the Gospel. When the tide was on the ebb people quickly withdrew from church and their activities dampened off. The endless cycle of such ebbing and flowing tides on a varying scale has been a dominant characteristic of Bundjalung and Githabul people’s Christian practice. According to those who experienced the revival days in the 1950s, a revival as zealous and sweeping as that one has never been back.

When I came to the community in 2002, my questions recalled older people to the excitement of the good old days but they finished talking in a few minutes by saying, “There is no revival now. Church is split up.” In the low tide of the past few decades, church activities have become individualised at the respective settlements and the networking among the Aboriginal churches has become perfunctory. It is not hard to understand this phenomenon, because all the Aboriginal churches scattered widely in
the Northern Rivers region are by nature independent of one another. They have
different historical backgrounds of church formation, origins from different regional
sub-groups (or different homelands as have been reformed into the Board’s Station
line), and by now have obtained affiliation with different umbrella bodies respectively.
It must not be forgotten, however, that most of the members of these churches are
somehow related to one another through blood relationship and/or marriage.

In times of decline of communal Christian activities, the networks among the
Aboriginal pastors and congregations become lukewarm. Rivalry frequently occurs.
The congregations are under different umbrella bodies and they have respectively
earned various incidental connections by now. They have different channels for
benefits and financial resources, which stimulates jealousy, coveting, and
gossiping—all of which are gross breaches of Pentecostal taboos. The pastors and
congregations, however, have never attempted to neglect networking among them,
however cold the relationships might have become. Furthermore, it is worth noting
that the local Aboriginal congregations have never merged into white Pentecostal
churches in the vicinity, although most of them lack a stable financial footing and
active manpower. The present-day decline of the Aboriginal church in the Bundjalung
and Githabul country unexpectedly makes a particular characteristic of them more
distinct: they are exclusively Aboriginal—that is, dependent on the social relations
within the local Aboriginal community—despite their rejection of Aboriginal “culture”
or their traditional religious knowledge.

When the community is at a plateau of “spiritual dryness” (i.e. stagnancy of
church activities), it is extremely difficult for outsiders to find out when and where and
by whom church services and other meetings are held in the local Aboriginal
community. Except for a couple of churches that have been known to have regular
weekly activities for the past couple of years or so, information about the time and
venue of church activities is generally only available on the grapevine of the local
Aboriginal community. It is not unusual, after all the hustle and expectations of a
church service, to find only a pastor and the family as the whole congregation and that
the venue is a lounge room of a private home, where kids rolled in blankets are
scattered on the floor, sleeping. The lack of interest in making church activities mandatory and securing a permanent property is one of the characteristics of the Bundjalung and Githabul congregations. The “good-old-day style” church lacked stable organisation including a firm financial footing regardless of the rise and fall of the Pentecostal fever. It is mainly because they, as Pentecostals, put more emphasis on personal communication with the Holy Spirit than the formalities of religious ceremonies respected by the orthodox churches. Fundamentally, this is a teaching universally adopted in Pentecostal denominations. White prosperous churches with international administrative institutions similarly emphasise the spiritual side of faith and deny the social side of the gospel. One Sunday morning service in an Aboriginal church in Casino, an international guest preacher from USA emphasised the following phrases repeatedly in a shrewdly agitating tone:

We do not want church,
We do not want gathering,
We want Jesus! (The congregation cried out, “Yeah!”)
We deny social gathering,
We deny rituals,
We deny mechanical things!

The “good-old-day style” Aboriginal Christians may take such messages honestly and feel content with the disorganised structure and financial difficulties. However, despite the slogan, the “universal” way of church managing is indeed mechanical and institutionalised: regimented organisation, demanding collection of tithing and offerings, and absolute loyalty to the pastor. Recently some Bundjalung and Githabul church factions have begun to be drawn to such a new style. The rest of the churches are, so to speak, old-fashioned, “unprosperous” churches which have common characteristics distinct from the “universal way”.

121
The structure

Loose factional groupings

The field research conducted for this thesis covered sixteen congregations. Map 4 below shows the geographical locations of the main settlements I visited to participate in various Christian activities such as church services, house meetings, open-air meetings, baptisms, seminars of different kinds and large-scale regional conventions, and so on. Twelve of them are Bundjalung and Githabul congregations, which scatter widely on the Far North Coast of New South Wales. The remaining four congregations are located outside Bundjalung and Githabul country. They belong to other Aboriginal communities on the north-west tablelands (of Kamilaroi people) or the south-eastern coast (of Dhan-gadi people) of New South Wales. They are examples of the friendly congregations (i.e. kind of allies) to the Bundjalung and Githabul congregations.
Map 4  Pentecostal sites covered by this research

QUEENSLAND

Tweed Heads
Fingal Head

Woodenbong (Muli Muli)

Kyogle
Casino 2 Lismore
Casino 1

Coraki (Box Ridge)

Cabbage Tree Island

NEW SOUTH WALES

Inverell
Tingha

Armidale

Grafton

Yamba

Mackean

0 100
kilometres

Kempsey
All of these congregations belong to a big network of Aboriginal churches on the North Coast of New South Wales, but they can be grouped into loose but distinguishable factional sub-groups. In this thesis, I use the term “faction” to define a group consisting of those who share a sense of strong loyalty with one another to support mutual Christian activities. For analytical purposes, I categorise the twelve congregations in the Northern Rivers region into five factional groupings:

A. Woodenbong Group, the Githabul people
B. Tabulam Group, a combination of the Bundjalung “Mission” congregations
C. Casino Group, adherents of the Casino Foursquare Church
D. Multi-ethnic Tweed Group
E. Southern Fringe Group, Grafton and Yamba

The four friendly churches outside the Bundjalung and Githabul country are geographically divided into three groups:

EXT-1: Boggabilla-Moree Group
EXT-2: Tingha-Armidale Group
EXT-3: Kempsey Group

See Map 5 below for the locations and factional groupings of the respective congregations.
Map 5 Factional groupings
The main five factional groups maintain inter-group cohesions by means of the following factors:

A. Intimacy as members of one united Aboriginal village
B. Solidarity based on shared life experiences (including memories of the past alliances between the families) as Christians
C. Loyalty to the church as one fellowship
D. Shared social orientation and lifestyle
E. Convenience of regional vicinity

Each factional group holds a different type of loyalty, which exactly represents its characteristics. In Table 7 below I have summarised the factional groupings, the types of loyalty and general characteristics of the respective church policies. Table 8 is a summary of the sociological data: locality, factional grouping, umbrella body, size of congregation, regional Aboriginal population, and pastors’ occupation and age.
Table 7

Factional Groupings

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Localities</th>
<th>Type of loyalty</th>
<th>Characteristics</th>
<th>Remarks</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A Woodenbong</td>
<td>Muli Muli</td>
<td>① as &quot;the Gidabal&quot; to &quot;the Bundjalung&quot;</td>
<td>Followers of the &quot;old style&quot; church and &quot;mission way&quot;. Still renowned as the centre of the Aboriginal church. &quot;Church in the village&quot;.</td>
<td>Inherited &quot;good old style&quot; of the blackfellas' church</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B Tabulam Network</td>
<td>Casino 1, Tabulam, Jubal, Coraki, Ballina, Cabbage Tree Island, Lismore</td>
<td>① as members of kin groups ② as friends who shared time before and after conversion</td>
<td>Followers of the &quot;old style&quot; church and &quot;mission way&quot;. Connected to Tabulam by kinship and shared experiences. Unorganised and small-scaled.</td>
<td>Inherited &quot;good old style&quot; of the blackfellas' church</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C Casino Four Square</td>
<td>Casino 2, Kyogle</td>
<td>③ as adherents of Casino Four Square Churc</td>
<td>Withdrawn from Aboriginal local politics. Encourages individualism. Influenced by the universal church management the Four Square Church headquarters demands.</td>
<td>A new wind of &quot;turbulence: more interest in individualism&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D Multi-ethnic Tweed Head</td>
<td>Tweed Heads, Fingal Head</td>
<td>④ as a people of Aboriginal and Pacific Islander descent and with different historical background</td>
<td>Different in social orientations and lifestyle from the rest of the Aboriginal communities on the North Coast.</td>
<td>More interest in universalisation &amp; growth than in local politics</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E Southern Fringe</td>
<td>Maclean, Yamba, Grafton</td>
<td>⑤ as proselytes in the fringe area of the Christian community</td>
<td>Established by different expectations for Christianity. Pastors are keen on representing Aboriginality.</td>
<td>Efforts to put &quot;new wine in old bottles&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EXT-1 Boggabilla-Moree</td>
<td>Boggabilla, Toomelah, Moree</td>
<td>② as long-time Christian friends</td>
<td>The Kamilaroi Christians, longtime acquaintances with the Bundjalung and Gidabal Christian leaders.</td>
<td>Close to A and some of B through AICM*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EXT-2 Tingha-Armidale</td>
<td>Tingha, Inverell, Guyra, Armidale</td>
<td>① as members of kin groups</td>
<td>The Kamilaroi Christians, longtime acquaintances with the Bundjalung and Gidabal Christian leaders.</td>
<td>Close to B through shared life experiences</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EXT-3 Kempsey</td>
<td>Green Hills, Crescent Head</td>
<td>⑤ as Pentecostals as a minority among the Dhan-Gadi organised by a Bundjalung pastor from Lismore</td>
<td>A small group of minority Pentecostals among the Dhan-Gadi organised by a Bundjalung pastor from Lismore</td>
<td>Close to B as members of kin groups</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Factors for factional cohesion
① intimacy among close kin groups
② friendship based on shared life experience as Christians
③ loyalty to the church as one fellowship
④ shared social orientation and life style
⑤ convenience of regional vicinity

* AICM = The Australian Indigenous Christian Missions

127
### Table 8

**Congregations and pastors** (as of December 2003)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name of Locality</th>
<th>Factional grouping</th>
<th>Umbrella body</th>
<th>Size of congregation</th>
<th>Regular service Yes: X</th>
<th>Pastors' occupation</th>
<th>Pastors' age</th>
<th>Indigenous population* (A&amp;TSI)</th>
<th>Total population*</th>
<th>Ratio of indigenous population*</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Woodenbong</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>Full Gospel</td>
<td>30-50</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>retirement pension</td>
<td>60s</td>
<td>185</td>
<td>1,001</td>
<td>18.48%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Casino 1</td>
<td>B</td>
<td>Apostolic</td>
<td>5-10</td>
<td></td>
<td>CDEP</td>
<td>40s</td>
<td>740</td>
<td>13,492</td>
<td>5.48%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Tabulam</td>
<td>B</td>
<td>lay pastor</td>
<td>5-10</td>
<td></td>
<td>caretakers pension</td>
<td>50s</td>
<td>311</td>
<td>4,049</td>
<td>7.68%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Jubal</td>
<td>B</td>
<td>lay pastor</td>
<td>&lt;5</td>
<td></td>
<td>community job FT</td>
<td>50s</td>
<td>Included in 3 (Tabulam)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Coraki</td>
<td>B</td>
<td>lay pastor</td>
<td>5-10</td>
<td></td>
<td>invalid pension</td>
<td>50s</td>
<td>256</td>
<td>3,219</td>
<td>7.95%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Ballina</td>
<td>B</td>
<td>Christian Outreach Centre</td>
<td>15-20</td>
<td></td>
<td>Abstudy</td>
<td>50s</td>
<td>510</td>
<td>25,592</td>
<td>1.99%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Casino 2</td>
<td>C</td>
<td>Four Square</td>
<td>50-80</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>mainstream job FT</td>
<td>30s</td>
<td>The same as 2 (Casino 1)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Tweed Heads</td>
<td>D</td>
<td>Assemblies of God</td>
<td>100-120</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>wage from chruch</td>
<td>40s</td>
<td>727</td>
<td>27,368</td>
<td>2.66%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. Fingal Head</td>
<td>D</td>
<td>lay pastor</td>
<td>25-30</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>community job PT</td>
<td>50s</td>
<td>368</td>
<td>8,993</td>
<td>4.09%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. Yamba 1</td>
<td>E</td>
<td>lay pastor</td>
<td>&lt;5</td>
<td></td>
<td>invalid pension</td>
<td>70s</td>
<td>230</td>
<td>6,286</td>
<td>3.66%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11. Yamba 2</td>
<td>E</td>
<td>lay pastor</td>
<td>&lt;5</td>
<td></td>
<td>caretakers pension</td>
<td>60s</td>
<td>The same as 10 (Yamba 1)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12. Grafton</td>
<td>E</td>
<td>Uniting</td>
<td>10-15</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>stipend</td>
<td>60s</td>
<td>1,298</td>
<td>29,005</td>
<td>4.46%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Sub-total (Northern Rivers Region = Tweed-Richmond statistical division)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th>300-400**</th>
<th>2.90%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

**Friendly congregations outside the Northern Rivers Region**

<p>| | | | | | | | | | |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>13. Boggabilla</td>
<td>EXT-1</td>
<td>Christian Life Centre</td>
<td>25-30</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>community job FT</td>
<td>50s</td>
<td>554</td>
<td>1,254</td>
<td>44.18%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14. Moree</td>
<td>EXT-1</td>
<td>Apostolic</td>
<td>25-30</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>unemployment</td>
<td>50s</td>
<td>2,019</td>
<td>11,941</td>
<td>16.91%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15. Tingha</td>
<td>EXT-2</td>
<td>Full Gospel</td>
<td>30-35</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>community job FT</td>
<td>50s</td>
<td>216</td>
<td>861</td>
<td>25.09%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* From the 2001 Census, Postcode area of each locality

**Maximum number of "active" Christians estimated by observation
Group A: Muli Muli Aboriginal village in the Githabul area

Group A consists of the congregation of Muli Muli Full Gospel Church. This group is united as “the Githabul” in rivalry to “the Bundjalung” which is represented by Group B. The church building is located in Muli Muli, the Aboriginal reserve at the outskirts of Woodenbong Town. Because of the nature of the church in the village, the congregation consists exclusively of Githabul people from Muli Muli, Woodenbong Town and the surrounding localities whether the Aboriginal residents are mostly Githabul. Only during the Christmas holidays, does the church attract visitors to the annual “Tent Rally” from all over Australia, both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal, including local white Christians who seldom approach the reserve in daily life.

As discussed in Chapter 3, Muli Muli was the centre during the Revival era, rivalled by the reserves such as Tabulam and Cubawee (Lismore) of Group B. Muli Muli still today enjoys its reputation as the centre of Aboriginal Christianity on the North Coast. Muli Muli remained predominantly Christian, whilst the church in other Aboriginal settlements declined and the Christian leaders moved away during the period of change in the 1970s-80s. Tabulam reserve is today one of the most alcohol-affected communities in the region. No practicing Christian lives there. Cubawee today is a weedy open ground. Muli Muli has been hosting the annual Christmas convention for nearly sixty years. They enjoy the reputation as the organisers of the longest running non-denominational Pentecostal convention in Australia run solely by Aboriginal people. Every year in this small village of about 150 residents, every household makes a donation to raise money to hold the convention. Some of those who have moved out of the reserve generously send money, food and commodities. The convention that runs for seven days from Christmas night to New Year’s Eve and feeds a hundred or more people three meals every day is funded and organised solely by a score of households of this village.

Despite the glitter of the Christmas convention, ordinary activities of
Muli Muli Full Gospel Church was at a low during the fieldwork for this thesis. Although the church holds regular Sunday services in the morning and evening at least, other weekly activities such as Women’s meetings, Bible Study, Youth meetings through the week are often cancelled or attract few people. The observed number of attendants at Sunday services is usually between thirty and fifty persons (See Table 8). There are several complex reasons why attendance at the services and meetings fluctuates, but the major reason is that the Githabul Christians follow the “good-old-day style”. Including the pastor and his wife, they are accustomed to the old way of rallying around the gospel wherever opportunities arise, and the pastor cannot demand unconditional loyalty to Muli Muli Church only by prohibiting the adherents from visiting other factions. The villagers casually enjoy travelling around to visit kin. Visiting churches in other Aboriginal communities is a customary agreement. Group A is willing to support other factional groups to maintain the local network of the Bundjalung and Githabul churches. The type of loyalty they have to one another, however, is formed by strong sense of oneness as the Githabul group in the Woodenbong area (see Table 7).

**Group B: Tabulam Group, combination of the micro-flocks in the Bundjalung area**

Group B is a network of Christians from the “Bundjalung” sub-groups. It consists of the congregations in seven different localities (see Map 5):

1. Casino 1 (town)
2. Tabulam reserve
3. Jubal (bush property adjacent to Tabulam town)
4. Coraki (Box Ridge reserve)
5. Lismore (town)
6. Ballina (town)
7. Cabbage Tree Island reserve

Most of the leaders of the respective sub-groups are connected to the families in Tabulam by kinship or shared personal experiences as friends or coeval converts at some stage of their lives. The leaders of Group B started a support network after the respective settlements in the Bundjalung area began to lose
momentum in Christian activities in the 1970s (cf. Chapter 2). The networking is loose and casual. In other words, this is a group of pastors and Christian leaders who cannot afford to maintain regular church activities on their own—mainly due to difficulties of recruiting new adherents at each locality. A small congregation means constant financial difficulty. It is hard for the leaders to make a living by ministering or even to maintain rental of a venue for regular gatherings. The leaders have experienced the enthusiasm of the revival days and hope to revive the same “good-old-style” church as they remember, but unlike Githabul people (Group A), during the period of change the Bundjalung people have failed to maintain stable congregations.

Group B repeatedly forms and dissolves at short intervals. It is a very unstable, temporary network according to which they hold joint meetings in rotation at the nominated settlements throughout the week. Each time, with slightly different members as organisers, this group starts meeting throughout the week, and eventually after about three or four months, the networking dies down until it resurrects again at someone’s suggestion in a few months. As far as I collected, the excuses made for the suspension of networking were almost always family obligations for which the leader(s) needed to travel away for a while or wanted to cancel further meetings abruptly. Formation is fairly capricious and takes place through incidental interactions among long-time Christian friends, which entails dissolution again in due course. Personal circumstances and family obligations are put first priority by all the members, including the leaders. As long as the enthusiasm lasts, however, all make great efforts to show loyalty to the meetings scattered in the Northern Rivers region. In fact it is not easy to travel to multiple places throughout the week, but as long as transportation is secured, the adherents, as well as the motivated organisers, do travel tirelessly—for example, from Tabulam to Ballina by driving at night for one and a half hours one way just to meet fifteen to thirty Christian friends in a shabby cottage or someone’s lounge room. (See Table 8 for the size of the Group B congregations. The size of each congregation always has unpredictable fluctuations.) During my research
period, the average size of each joint meeting of Group B was 15-30 people and it was usually heavily influenced by the weather as well as each individual's contingent family obligations.

Group C: Adherents of the Casino Foursquare Church (Casino 2 church)
I have categorised only one congregation—the Casino 2 faction—as Group C. The Casino 2 church consists of the adherents of the Foursquare Church in Casino. They are mainly the residents of Casio and Kyogle. The Casino 2 and the Tweed (mentioned below in Group D) are the two churches I would categorise as new type of churches which have adopted the “universal” way of church management. The Casino Foursquare Church, however, used to be a typical “good-old-day style” Aboriginal church. When the incumbent pastor was appointed in 1996, it began to change its policy. Moreover, the former Casino Foursquare Church was unique among the “good-old-day style” churches because it was successful. If the pastorship had not been assigned to a young half-Maori and half-Githabul incumbent pastor, the church would have definitely kept its position as a central force of Group B up to the present.

The Casino 2 Church—"Arise and Shine" Foursquare Fellowship—is under the Foursquare Church of Australia (headquarters in Sydney) and was founded in 1991 as its first Aboriginal church. It was also the first church in Casino established for Aboriginal people. Through the 1980s a group of allied Aboriginal lay pastors had itinerant church meetings in the town of Casino. A middle-aged, newly converted ex-alcoholic man from Box Ridge reserve had access to the Foursquare Church in Sydney with the support of his eldest brother who had become a respected elder of the Awabakal people in the New Castle area through his first marriage. The two brothers, who used to be most wretched alcoholics, were ebullient in their devotion to the ministry after spiritual experiences and founded the Casino Foursquare Church under formal affiliation with the Foursquare headquarters in Sydney. The church

101 See Appendix 1 for the unique background of the organisation of the Foursquare Church in New South Wales as an outcome of an affiliation with the International church of Foursquare in the USA after the death of its original founder, Van Eyke.
grew constantly, helped by an increasing Aboriginal population of Casino, though the size of the congregation was fairly small: 20-30 persons. In about a year, the Foursquare headquarters in Sydney purchased a house in Casino town for this congregation on ten-year loan, as they were satisfied with the amount of tithing they had been receiving. This was an unusual beginning in the history of the Aboriginal church in the Northern Rivers region.

The founding pastor wanted to have the church in the Aboriginal way, or "the Mission" way, according to which this church became a centre of an Aboriginal networking. It actually sprang out of the loose joint activities held in Casino in the 1980s when the structure of the church in the Bundjalung and Githabul community was going through a transformation. The pastor released every Sunday evening service from his pastorship to other Aboriginal Christian leaders who had been managing more unstable ministries. In the first five years, Groups A, B, and E (see Table 7) had joint meetings with Group C nearly every week. During the rally seasons, the pastor organised a bus tour for his congregation and encouraged the adherents to participate in most of the regional rallies on the Aboriginal reserves (see Table 9 below).

Eventually the founding pastor was accused of an immoral relationship with a young woman in 1996 and the white Foursquare Church in Moree, a supervisory church in the district, removed him and assigned a 23-year-old youth to the pastorship. This unprecedented decision was mainly due to the lack of recruitment of an eligible Aboriginal convert in the community. As the youth had not been taught properly as a successor, the headquarters let him look after the church temporarily instead of giving him the pastor's credentials instantly. In 1999, this young successor was officially appointed as the pastor by the headquarters. Despite general disagreement to his young age, the young successor has managed to maintain regular weekly activities, unlike the small and unstable congregations the respective Group B leaders had been used to. Casino 2 church gradually grew. During the first half of 2002, the size of the congregation was between 10-20 and it was more or less a family church,
with the pastor and his wife leading a chorus and his mother and cousins singing and playing in the band. During my fieldwork for this thesis the church began recruiting Aboriginal youths, former Aboriginal adherents who had once left the church, and even some white Pentecostals. The young pastor’s youthfulness, innate smartness, very fair feature, and the church’s orientation towards contemporary universal Pentecostal church management which emphasises entertainment and prosperity seem to have attracted the local white people’s interest and sympathy. Through 2002 and 2003, the congregation grew dramatically and suddenly to have 80-90 adherents at its peak.

Group D: Multi-ethnic Tweed Group

There are two Aboriginal churches in the Tweed Valley area: The Tweed Valley Community Church and the Fingal Fellowship Church. The one is Pentecostal (under the Assemblies of God) at Tweed Heads and the other is an independent church grown from the Aboriginal Inland Mission (AIM) at Fingal Head. The Fingal Fellowship Church is somewhat exceptional for an Aboriginal church on the North Coast. All the congregations of the Bundjalung and Githabul and of their allies identify themselves as Pentecostal or charismatic but the Aboriginal church at Fingal Head distinctly draws the line from the Pentecostals. This is the one and only exception within the Bundjalung and Githabul territory as far as my research covered. In the domain of social interaction within the Bundjalung and Githabul society, the Fingal congregation is willing to maintain solidarity with other Christian congregations, but communication is limited to courtesy visits rather than willingness to be involved in mutual support. The Fingal church leaders at the moment do not agree with the gifts of speaking in tongues and laying hands on people or outpouring of the Holy Spirit.102

The two Aboriginal churches in Tweed Valley, however, can be grouped

---

102 See Chapter 3 for the Church of Nazarene’s bad reputation in Fingal Head during the revival days.
as one in light of the more distinct features they share. The Tweed Valley Community Church and Fingal Fellowship Church share the outstanding characteristic of the Aboriginal community in the Tweed area (e.g. Cane 1989). Difference of lifestyle from the rest of the Northern Rivers Aboriginal community is evident. There are hardly any intense everyday social interactions through kin relationships between the Aboriginal community in the Tweed Valley area and the rest of the Northern Rivers region. The situation can be adequately described as follows: better housing, better education, better employment, greater Pacific Islander population, and consequently, less kin relationships with other factional groups of Bundjalung and Githabul people.103

The church leader of the Fingal Fellowship has an Aboriginal mother from the Githabul area and a Chinese father. The present size of the congregation is 25-30 and consists mainly of the church leader’s family and relatives at Fingal Point. His five sons and their wives are now the central force of the church. Interestingly, white Christians who belong to white churches in the vicinity often come and enjoy “having fellowship at an Aboriginal church” for a change —usually for either the morning service or the evening service on Sundays—and sometimes these white visitors outnumber the original adherents. In contrast to the extremist Pentecostal Aboriginal congregations I have mainly covered, the ritual practices at the Fingal Fellowship are somewhat silent and nicely in order. It still maintains a loosely supportive connection with white churches related to the AIM.

The pastor of the Tweed Valley Community Church is from Sydney — a city-born Aboriginal man who has run a successful Pentecostal church in Taree (New South Wales) for sixteen years. The pastor and the family decided

103 The ratio of Islander population out of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander population in the Tweed area is 28.8 percent, whilst the ratio in the whole Tweed-Richmond Statistical District is 13.6 per cent. At Casino (urban centre only), for example, the ratio goes down to 4.7 percent. In the Kyogle Shire which includes Woodenbong, the ratio of Torres Strait Islanders is only 2.5%.
to move to the Tweed area, his wife’s homeland, in early 2001 to take over the small Aboriginal congregation kept by the local elder for decades. They started with five staff, and in three years, the congregation grew to 120. About half of the congregation is white and the rest consists of adherents of Aboriginal and/or Pacific Islander descent. Through marriage the pastor identifies with the Northern Rivers Aboriginal community but he distinctly puts more emphasis on individualism in church management which has led the church to attain rapid growth. Recently the Tweed Church and Casino 2 Church, which I have described as the “new type” of Aboriginal church in Bundjalung and Githabul society, have started enforcing mutual support.

Group E: Southern Fringe Group
There are three Aboriginal congregations at the southern end of the Northern Rivers region. Coincidentally, two of the pastors are female and they hold similar policies. The woman pastor of Yamba church is a Christian leader and the most respected elder of the Yamba Aboriginal Community. She was born in Yamba, married to a man from Tabulam and has established close friendships with the Bundjalung Christian leaders in Group B. In the mid-1990s, she returned to her homeland to work for her own people. The southern edge area of the Northern Rivers region has been a kind of fringe of the Aboriginal Christian movement throughout history. This well-respected woman, on returning to Yamba, preferred mobilising the community for seasonal rallies to establishing an organised church. In the southern “fringe” area, the environment was immature—the “Mission” in Yamba was (and is) a dominantly drinking community. Thus in the mid-1990s Yamba New Year and Easter rallies began. As a respected elder of Yamba Aboriginal community and beloved friend and kin of the people in the Tabulam area, the pastor has enjoyed support and respect to the rallies by all the factional groups, and Yamba rallies quickly became a fixture in the calendar of the local Aboriginal Christians during the past decade.

In 2003, however, the Yamba Christian gathering split into two. The
woman pastor and her group (Yamba 1) eventually joined Group B and began holding irregular house meetings with their support. Another group (Yamba 2) began meeting on an irregular basis at personal homes in Yamba and Maclean. The organiser of Yamba 2 group was a Githabul man who moved from Muli Muli, Woodenbong to Yamba for family obligations. This man, in his sixties, had been under the female pastor for a while and then became interested in establishing his own ministry. He had rich kin connections to the established Christian leaders from both the Githabul and Bundjalung groups and expected to obtain a pastor's credential through this kin network.

At Grafton, a woman Aboriginal Reverend of the Uniting Church runs Goori Ministry Church. She is from Lismore and the granddaughter of Frank Roberts Snr, the legendary figure of the great "revival" days (cf. Chapter 2). Being in her early sixties, she has been ministering for forty years—during the first thirty years as a wife to Reverend Charles Harris, the founder of the UAICC (the United Aboriginal and Islander Christian Congress), the funding body for Aboriginal and Islander pastors under the Uniting Church (see Chapter 6 for details). Bereaved of her husband in 1992, she sought a diploma of Aboriginal theology at Nungalinya College in Darwin and, after obtaining her credentials, she returned home and started a house meeting in Grafton with Aboriginal Christians in 1997, which grew into the present Goori Ministry Church. In 1999 she was ordained by the Uniting Church as the first Aboriginal woman reverend in New South Wales (and the second in Australia).

The church is under the Uniting Church but the pastor identifies her church as "charismatic": she agrees with the gifts from the Holy Spirit such as speaking in tongues, and healing by laying hands. Nevertheless, due to her experience and training under the Uniting Church, some find her church less "spirit filled", just as some people refer to the same problem at the Fingal Fellowship Church because Aboriginal Christians in the Northern Rivers region are accustomed to the Pentecostal worship. The adherents are all
Aboriginal people living in the Grafton area but most of them are originally from the northern part such as Tabulam, Woodenbong and Lismore. On the whole, the two female pastors are eager to support the local Aboriginal Christian network; they welcome visitors from other factional groups as they have close ties to many of the Bundjalung and Githabul families; they are keen to invite white and international evangelists to their churches as guest preachers, and generously offer funding for Christian youth activities as their positions guarantee access to Aboriginal funding for their community.

External Groups 1, 2 and 3
Regarding the four supporting churches outside the Bundjalung and Githabul country, for the sake of clarity, I outline their relationships to the Northern Rivers factional groups only. The four congregations can be divided into three regional groups (see Table 7 & Map 5):

- **EXT-1**: Boggabilla-Moree Group,
- **EXT-2**: Tingha-Armidale Group,
- **EXT-3**: Kempsey Group.

**EXT-1**
The Kamilaroi Christian leaders in Boggabilla, Toomelah (Mission) and Moree are longtime acquaintances of the Bundjalung and Christian leaders. They are in their fifties and have built up friendship and support by meeting at the regional rallies and later through the national network AICM. The pastors of EXT-1 are all affiliated with AICM, and they hold loyalty to Group A and some of the Group B pastors as AICM allies. They have no kin relationships to the Bundjalung and Githabul Christian leaders.

**EXT-2**
The Kamilaroi Christians in Tingha, Inverell, Gurya, and Armidale area are, like Ext-1 Group in the above, longtime acquaintances of the Bundjalung and Githabul Christian leaders through the
regional rallies and casual visits as friends. The descendants of the Hicklings from Tabulam, the legendary figures, lived for a while in this area and have an intimate acquaintance with the local people. As they recently began organising a family-based church (Jubal, Group B), this external group (which contained three small churches) was often seen with Group B during my fieldwork but was seen supporting the annual rallies in Woodenbong (Group A) and in Yamba (Group E), too. Some of the lay pastors in this group are affiliated with UAICC.

EXT-3
This is a small congregation organised by a Bundjalung husband from Lismore and a Dhan-gadi wife from Kempsey. In contrast to the Bundjalung and Githabul historical setting, Pentecostalism was and is a minority in the Dhan-gadi area. Having settled down in Kempsey through marriage, the husband has worked as a lay pastor for the community but the congregation consists of only family and a few Aboriginal friends who chose to leave the dominant Catholic, or Seventh Day Adventist adherence. The pastor is one of the grandchildren of the legendary Christian leader Frank Roberts Sr. and is an old friend to most of the Christian leaders of the Northern Rivers region. This is the ground of the faithful support he extends to the Bundjalung and Githabul churches.
Plates 6-15
Church meetings and venues of major factional groups

Plate 6: Muli Muli Full Gospel Church (Group A)

Plate 7: View of Muli Muli Aboriginal Community (in Woodenbong)

Plate 8: Christmas Tent Rally in Muli Muli (all factions get together and rally)

Plate 9: Open-air outreach at Box Ridge (Group B)

Plate 10: Church in the bush (Jubal Property, Group B)

Plate 11: After church “cuppa” with Kangaroo stew and damper (Jubal Property, Group B)
Plate 12: Tweed Valley Community Church
(Group D)

Plate 13: Venue of Fingal Fellowship Church
(Group D)

Plate 14: House meeting in Yamba (Group E)

Plate 15: Rally in Boggabilla/Toomelah
(Group EXT-1)
Church policies: the Aboriginal way and the universal way

Group A (Woodenbong) and Group B (Tabulam network) are what we can call the “good-old-day style” Aboriginal church. The unorganised church structure is a common problem for most of the Aboriginal congregations, except for the ones influenced by the new trends in the town (Group C and Group D) and the Uniting Church (Group E). Local Aboriginal people follow a highly mobile lifestyle and they casually travel and enjoy extended stays with their kin groups and long time friends—especially during the school holidays. Christians look for such opportunities wherever possible and, naturally, loyalty to their own fellowship church in the place of their residence becomes perfunctory. Thus, the old way has an innate potential to jeopardise the prosperity of the church—especially, its position in the community as fund-raising institution. The “good-old-day style” church cannot grow mainly because the amount of tithing is too small—even for the rent to secure a permanent venue. The old way puts more emphasis on “rallying around” the church to experience the Holy Spirit power wherever available. Due to its nature as “the church in the village”, Group A is rather stable about its financial ground, but a network of extremely small scaled congregations such as Group B is not. Still, at their meetings, the organisers usually do not collect offerings. It seems that the enthusiasm of fellowshipping together as allies makes them content to spend money on travelling and cooking to prepare after-service “tea” (meals) for all the attendants out of their own expenses.

The Group B Christians see no problem in holding joint meetings on a regular basis, which inevitably creates a decentralised structure of their own congregation. Besides supporting one another out of necessity, the Group B organisers seemed to prefer maintaining the church structure based on a sense of relatedness to pursuing success and growth as an independent ministry. As Table 8 shows, the organisers of the seven localities of Group B are either in a semi-retired condition or unemployed; according to the unsuccessful recruitment of new adherents in the past decades, they are the least convinced
of the future success of their ministries.

Most of the pastors of Groups A and B used to be "lay pastors" and they eventually obtained credentials from the umbrella bodies (the white churches) they had been working with for years. The congregations are not under virtual control of the umbrella bodies. Pastors pay for the membership to the umbrella body (it costs approximately 60 dollars per year), but for most of the pastors of these groups, the only benefit of and necessity for the membership is to maintain the certificate for marriage and burial. They are self-taught. Whether pastors are Bible-College graduates or self-taught, pastors' educational backgrounds count little, in the Aboriginal way, with regard to the popularity and respect they earn in the community. The local Aboriginal Christians, well informed about the respective pastors' life stories, show respect to the length and quality of the pastors' life experiences that are known to them.

In this regard, Group C experienced an unprecedented deviation from the long respected Aboriginal way, namely, the appointment of a young, inexperienced pastor by the white supervisory church in 1996. This has set the trajectory of the newborn Casino Foursquare Church (Casino 2 Church in Table 8) to be armed with individualism against the norm of the local Aboriginal community. The church at Tweed Heads (in Group D) has gained a similar direction, too. The emergence of such new churches is not only due to their sociological position as "town churches" that are accessible to a larger population of both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people with mixed-bag origins but also due to the rather exceptional personal backgrounds of the pastors. Both the pastors of the two new-trend churches, though being related to the members of the community by kinship, have less emotional attachment to the local Aboriginal way of life. The young and ambitious pastors have adopted the universal way of church management to make the church prosperous. It is definitely a new wind of "turbulence" in that they resist the old, taken-for-granted relational way of social interactions among their kin.
and openly encourage adherents to pursue individualism and prosperity.

Group C (Casino 2: Foursquare) and D (Tweed Heads: Assemblies of God) have more institutionalised organisations and enable regular weekly activities and fixed venues. (The venues are, however, rental properties in the town.) They are rapidly growing new churches in urban centres and they are keen on observing the "universal" way of running the church according to the policies shown by the respective umbrella bodies: systematic organisation, demanding collection of tithing and offerings, and absolute loyalty to the pastor. Such a "universal" way is extremely different from the "good-old-day style" of the black church the local people have enjoyed throughout the history of Aboriginal church on the North Coast.

Both the pastors of Casino 2 Church (as Group C) and the church at Tweed Heads (in Group D) are not bound by kin obligations emotionally. They do not show much interest in everyday contact with other factional groups (i.e., Groups A, B, C and E). Instead, they show more interest in the wider, non-Aboriginal Christian community and they are keen on representing Aboriginality appropriately to maintain an "Aboriginal niche" in the mainstream society. The Aboriginal people in the Tweed Valley are practically "outsiders" to the main figures of the Aboriginal Christian network in the Northern Rivers in its substantial context, i.e., tension between kinship and Christian solidarity. The Group D members are outside the complex web of kin relationships and everyday life experience shared with the members of other factional groups. Therefore, the Pentecostal church at Tweed Heads prospers in a new, universal way without receiving any pressures such as those to which the Casino 2 Church has been exposed. The non-Pentecostal Fingal Fellowship Church has also been able to keep the Bundjalung and Githabul Pentecostal movement at an arm's length throughout the decades.

The "good-old-day style" Pentecostal leaders (Group A & Group B) focus more on the personal relationship with the Holy Spirit than on establishing a
healthy business plan for ministering. On the southern fringe of the Bundjalung and Githabul Christian community, two women leaders have attempted different tactics to bring God closer to the community. They attempt to put “new wine in old bottles”, i.e., to maintain the spirit of the good-old-day style in a contemporary form. Especially the respected two woman pastors look more at realistic aspects of what Christian activities can bring to the community. They attempt to empower the problem-laden community by means of more realistic measures for providing educational and economic resources through the medium of the church. Because of their expectations in the “social side” of the gospel, they are keen on representing their Aboriginality in search of financial support from the mainstream society. In the old Pentecostal way, however, the channels to “politics” and money are regarded as worldly pleasures and must be avoided however altruistic the intention may be (see Chapter 5 for detail). This issue has led the situation at Yamba to become controversial and as an outcome, an elderly organiser who had faith in the good-old-day Woodenbong way began to hold separate meetings after its split in 2003.

The winds of change and turbulence

The formation of the Bundjalung and Githabul church networks and organisations has, in the main, been going on according to the Aboriginal way, namely, in accordance with the social relations within the local Aboriginal community. There has been little interference by white missionaries and even by the respective umbrella bodies (except for the Arise and Shine Foursquare Church in Casino, Group C.) Rather than the external pressures, the members of the Christian community are more concerned about internal pressures. Engagement in issues in social relations in everyday community life directly influences their behaviours at church. Speeches at the meetings are often expressions of one’s view about current issues in the community, although they are veiled with biblical stories and verses from the Bible. The information on the people one travels with, stays over at or sits with at church supplies the
community members with resources to use in the context of everyday social interactions—outside the domain of religious practice.

The new growing churches, on the other hand, discourage the adherents to follow the conventional norm of Aboriginal social relations, although the pastors are indeed keen on maintaining the church policy which demonstrates Aboriginality. As it is their natural course to run, such new winds have started to cause turbulence in the local Christian community. The contrast between these two extreme wings—in other words, between the good-old-day style (Groups A & B) and the universal style of church management (Groups C & D)—represents the change that the Bundjalung and Githabul Christian community is experiencing now.

This is especially so of the distinct features of the “newborn” Arise and Shine Foursquare Church in Casino (Group C). This church has achieved a rapid growth, firstly due to the merit of its geographical location in the town as a new frontier for ministry. It is the only Aboriginal church held on a regular basis in the town of Casino.104 Aboriginal Christians in Casino had no other option regardless of any disagreement with the church policy or the inexperienced young pastor. Above all else, Aboriginal Christians need to meet with one another in the “blackfellas’ social territory”. When the Group B network was not functioning, indeed older Christians from Lismore, Cabbage Tree Island and Ballina were frequently seen at the services of Group C despite the overall opposition to coming under a young pastor. Few Aboriginal Pentecostals look to join any of the local white Pentecostal churches.

Secondly, the issue of racial and social orientations in the context of a small rural town of New South Wales must be considered. The young pastor

---

104 Casino is a growing town drawing Aboriginal population from the surrounding Aboriginal settlements, i.e., ex-Station settlements and other fringe communities such as reserves. The population of Casino town is 13,492 and the indigenous population is 740, which is approximately 5.5% of the total population in the 2001 census (see Table 8).
has had support from the white churches in Casino because of the campaign that his family had carried out against “oppression by Aboriginal gerontocracy” which successfully raised local white Christians’ sympathy with the young pastor. Moreover, the young pastor’s family members are exceptionally fair; white Christians definitely seem to act more receptive to the leadership of this family. Fair Aboriginal people in this region testified that white people were in the main more congenial and sympathetic towards fair Aborigines.105 The church constantly has joint meetings with several white churches in the town, and local white Pentecostals seem to show interest in and support to this “fair and bright but Aboriginal” pastor, but yet the racial composition of the Casino Foursquare Church was predominantly Aboriginal during my fieldwork. It has, however, become no longer an all-Aboriginal congregation as it was before.

Thirdly, there is an issue of emerging diversity of life style in the local Aboriginal community. Due to the young pastor’s personal background of being of half-Maori descent, he has less attachment to the local Aboriginal way, a smaller number of relatives in the local community, and therefore, seems to experience less psychological burden in neglecting the Aboriginal way casually and adopting what seems to be the “rational and efficient” universal way instructed by the headquarters of the Foursquare Church of Australia. Interracial marriages such as that of his mother (a Githabul woman) and father (a Maori labourer, deceased twenty years ago) are still rare today among Bundjalung and Githabul people. In the case of such a recent inter-racial marriage, emotional detachment essentially derives from the lack of shared life experiences. Other than emotional detachment caused by such inter-racial marriages, nothing can affect Bundjalung and Githabul people’s sense of loyalty to kin regardless of personal factors such as age, church

105 “If I was more blacker, I wouldn’t have got this job!” A middle-aged handyman working in the local hospital on permanent contract laughed away his luck at being very fair. He is an exceptionally diligent and responsible worker for an Aboriginal male by the local standard, but he seems to think (with mixed feelings) that his fairness counts more to his employers.
affiliation and residential areas.  

The last point worth noting is that there is definitely the influence of the global growth of Pentecostalism and its universalisation evident in this congregation. From the beginning, the Casino Foursquare Church has been under the control of the umbrella body, whilst other Aboriginal pastors are, practically, independent. Getting a credential to marry and bury from a certain umbrella body (Groups A, B, D and E) and being under the continuous supervision of the umbrella body (Group C) are completely different situations. The young and ambitious pastor seems to have quickly adapted to the contemporary trends. He has managed to maintain the regimented organisation and weekly activities through his personal devotion and diligence, and in turn, has received good support from the umbrella body. He has continuously suggested to his congregation that there would be novel and exciting opportunities—such as evangelising tours abroad, trips to cities for conferences and seminars, and welcoming international prophets and preachers and giving entertainment to his flock living in a rural backwater. New praise and worship music is another attraction. Modern, swinging music of his choice at the Casino Foursquare Church has attracted young people and produced many young converts. His congregation has shown great interest in such new visions and distractions.

**Mobility**

*Networking and types of loyalty*

Most of the churches my research covered do not have a permanent venue in a

---

106 Some of the youth members of Group C congregation are even younger than this young pastor but those who were born in Missions clearly show difference in their behaviour. Even if they are living in Casino and fellowshiping under the Casino Foursquare Church, they are vulnerable to the obligations of their kin groups in other factional groups and usually, in times of a clash, seek to make a compromise between the dividing loyalties.

107 The Groups C & D are the only churches where new praise and worship songs are continuously introduced in the service. In other factional groups, the pastors still favour old-style country gospel.
building of orthodox church architecture. Nevertheless, it does not mean that financial difficulties of maintaining church activities are unparalleled today. It has been customary among Bundjalung and Githabul people that the church meetings and relevant activities are unplaced and uncertain about schedule. Some congregations which have secured a venue for regular meetings often and casually have gatherings at a rental property such as a hall in the town for convenience's sake (e.g. better access, larger capacity of the venue or better heating in winter time) or at a private home to secure a more relaxing environment. As the local Aboriginal people are connected via the local grapevine of information circulation, it does not matter to them if their church activities are totally invisible to outsiders. Even white Pentecostals in the same small locality on terms of friendship do not know when and where to go to meet the Aboriginal fellowship unless they are invited.

Not only for the seasonal rallies, but also for ordinary church meetings, the Aboriginal Christians travel casually to wherever a preacher is attending, or a seminar is being held. By doing so, they form a loose supporting network so that the meetings can be attended well and the organisers be honoured. All the Groups from A to EXT-3 follow this way willingly, except for Groups C and D which are more interested in adopting the universal way for growth and prosperity.

Kinship Chart 1 below shows kin relationships of some members of Group A, B, and C. The pastors and church leaders are shaded in the chart. Church is basically a family practice, as shown in the composition of each congregation above, and in this sense, obligations to the family and kin groups weigh heavily upon the Bundjalung and Githabul Christians. At the same time, there is always room for personal autonomy. The best example is

---

108 The pastors do so, too, but because of their mission to “shepherd the flock”, i.e., to look after the church activities on a regular basis, the pastors who have larger-sized congregations are less mobile than others. The pastors are, usually, very often requested to be guest preachers and to perform music.
the situation of rebellious youths in Christian families. The majority of the Bundjalung and Githabul Christians, including all the pastors, tolerate their children's apathy to the Gospel. The same is with their close family such as brothers and sisters. Except for one's spouse, Christians casually overlook the problem of non-Christian members of their family. This is where unconditional loyalty to the family works. Excuses are usually given by such a discourse as "I am praying for my children (to stop drinking and to become Christian)."

Generations of intermarriages have formed a very complex and closely related kin relationship among Bundjalung and Githabul people. Rather than depicting the Christian group as "cutting across" the kin lines—as was the situation in the 1950s (Calley 1959)—today it would be more appropriate to describe the Christian group as embedded in the intricately entwined web of kin relations and to argue that it is practically impossible for Aboriginal people themselves to rely on observing any fixed rules in order to fulfil their kin obligations. In such a situation, a sense of loyalty is formed, split up and dissolved according to circumstances. The outcome is highly unpredictable.

Let us look at the pastors and church leaders of Group A, B and C in Kinship Chart 1. They are all related to one another either by consanguinity or affinity. According to the opinion of the people concerned, the degree of consanguinity and affinity is less important than the primary fact that they are related. Intimacies cultivated through everyday social interactions are more important factors for enforcing loyalty to a certain group.
A rivalry between Group A and Group B is always expressed in the framework of the Githabul versus the Bundjalung, but in practice, the Christians concerned live complicated relationships in everyday life as kin and community members. For example, let us look at the Hickling’s family tree. The children and grandchildren of Eddie Hickling are divided between loyalties to three different factional groups (Group A, B & C). First, Eddie’s daughter’s daughter is married to a Group A member. Second, Eddie’s son lives with this niece’s family in Muli Muli (Group A base) for the sake of convenience to his work place. Although Eddie’s two daughters are organisers of Group B, Eddie’s son and niece belong to Group A church, though they freely visit Group B gatherings as they wish. The Group A pastor does not intend to prevent the community members who wish to support their own family despite the covert factional rivalry against Group B.

Another example is Group E. A brother-in-law to the Group A pastor organises a different church. He is, furthermore, a second cousin to the Group A pastor’s wife. But the Group E organiser is more attracted by the support from AICM. He is a second cousin to the AICM organiser’s wife. Two of his (adopted) sons have been put in a difficult situation. As part of only a few youth Christians in the hillbilly community of Group A (they are in their twenties), they showed interest in Group C in the town where the pastor was young and the youth group lively and attractive. Living in the town is an attractive option today for young people in the Mission. They are second cousins to the group C pastor. However, through their biological father (deceased), the two boys are grandsons to Kalman Hickling, the Group B leaders’ father’s brother. Due to the matrilocal life of their deceased biological father, they seem to find themselves emotionally distant from these full aunties of Group B. Despite a close blood relationship to the Group B members, the boys have more shared experiences with Group A people.

Having sorted out various factors in the complex web of kin obligations and personal choice, the two boys chose not to follow their father (and
support Group E) but to move to town and come under Group C. As long as his sons stay away from Group B, their father agrees. Their father, i.e., the Group E organiser, is related to Groups A, B, and C to varying degrees, but because of certain personal reasons, he does not permit his sons to visit Group B.

If we look at one of Eddie Hickling’s daughters, it is obvious her children have enjoyed similar autonomy. Her six children have recently converted. Instead of the Group B network, the children chose Group C for their church. For young converts, Group C and Group D churches are outstandingly attractive because of a greater number of youth members and modern, swinging gospel music. Such choices are usually accepted to some extent by the close family members—as long as these children would not attempt to completely neglect their family and kin obligations. Therefore, in disregard of the Group C pastor who is more inclined to individualism and would not permit supporting the Aboriginal network based on what he calls “tradition” and “colour”, the children occasionally work for their family as part of Group B. As there is always tension between Group C and Group B, the six children are under intense pressure of divided loyalties between their mother and their pastor.

Pastor Peter and Maria Walker, the founders of the nationwide network AICM (The Australian Indigenous Christian Missions; see Chapter 6 & Appendix 2), are related by a blood relationship to all the Christian leaders in Kinship Chart 1. The degrees vary from the first cousin to the second cousin, but they are not conscious of the different degrees of consanguinity in distributing support and funding. The AICM offers more generous funding to some of the Aboriginal pastors who are not kin. They evaluate friendship, shared experiences and reciprocal help in their longtime ministering life.

Similar to the ultimate choices made by the individuals in the sampled cases in the above, the Bundjalung and Githabal Christians choose which
church to attend according to various contingent circumstances—the person who has motivated them, convenience to the place of primary residence, favourite style of praise and worship music and service procedures, congenial friends from their home territory, and so on.

Rallies: a legacy of the golden age

There are large-scale seasonal rallies almost every school holiday throughout the year. The attraction of the seasonal Christian conventions as major recreation and distractions for the Aboriginal Christians has declined, but they are still fixtures of the Bundjalung and Githabul Christian calendar. Table 9 below shows examples of the annual seasonal rallies that the Christians of the Northern Rivers region are familiar with. They scatter all over the Northern Rivers and even extend to the west and south beyond. The conventions held in Canberra and New Castle where the local people do not have many kin connections have become included in the rallies of interest due to the close kin relations with the organisers who have extended their activities to the national level. The local Aboriginal Christians are keen on travelling to attend these rallies as long as transportation and finance allow.

Attending the rallies today is also a part of holiday recreation away from home—even for those who are unemployed, being away from the family obligations and daily routines in the closed community is attractive. Some Christians argue that this aspect of the rally collides with the prohibition of worldly pleasures. Moreover, some complain that the rally functions as the meeting place for men and women, which implies hidden adultery and fornication among the local Christians. Rallies, however, do provide Christians with opportunities to meet their prospective spouse in a “proper” way.109 It is obvious that the rally serves as the place where information is

109 One of my informants (a bachelor) once spotted a pretty girl in the rally. As he found her a single mother, he sent a message to her instantly. It was understood by all as a formal courtship. He waited patiently for a year to hear from her but when he
exchanged. Deaths and sicknesses of people are announced during the service, and people send messages to members of kin living away from home through the attendants on their return. New gossip is continuously made by speculations about the way people seat themselves or the contents of testimonies made during the rally season.

Table 9  Examples of the Aboriginal Rallies (2002-2003)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name of locality</th>
<th>Factional grouping</th>
<th>Type of Venue</th>
<th>No. of attendants</th>
<th>Date of observation</th>
<th>Duration (days)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Woodenbong</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>tent</td>
<td>150-250</td>
<td>Dec 2002/3</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Jubal</td>
<td>B</td>
<td>tent</td>
<td>30-60</td>
<td>Sept 2002/3</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Tabulam youth</td>
<td>B</td>
<td>tent</td>
<td>20-40</td>
<td>Oct 2003</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Lismore</td>
<td>B</td>
<td>tent</td>
<td>50-80</td>
<td>Dec 2003</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Yamba</td>
<td>E</td>
<td>commun. hall</td>
<td>80-150</td>
<td>Jan 2002/3</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Grafton</td>
<td>E</td>
<td>church/ hall</td>
<td>40-60</td>
<td>Nov 2002</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Boggabilla</td>
<td>EX-1</td>
<td>church/ hall</td>
<td>50-100</td>
<td>Jun 2003</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. Tweed Heads</td>
<td>D</td>
<td>tent</td>
<td>100-200</td>
<td>April 2002/3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Most of the Aboriginal attendants have relatives to stay with in the community they visit, except for the large-scale rallies like Muli Muli or Yamba that attract outsiders both black and white from other parts of Australia. At the rallies, strangers who do not have relatives in the locality expect to sleep on the floor of the church venue, which is mostly in a large

first dated her, unfortunately, he found it was a mistake. The girl was not as pretty as he had thought. He spotted her from a distance only but due to the extremely small pool of single Christian girls who were not "too close" to him in kin relationship in the community, he sent a messenger instantly without meeting her face to face.
community hall. It is not unusual to see adults who are too tired to participate at the service lying with swags and children running about in the venue while the service is going on in the same building at such rallies. The host community and church look after meals. Aboriginal people expect free meals and accommodation when travelling for the rallies. Expenditure is covered fully by the commitment of the community and the organisers. To give an example, Muli Muli Rally generally budgets five to eight thousand dollars for meals only for the seven-day rally that accommodates 100 to 200 people each day. Offering is collected at every service and it is desirable to offer at least a couple of dollars at one time, though it is not compulsory. A lot of Aboriginal Christians generously make offerings—between five to twenty dollars, sometimes much more.

The Bundjalung and Githabul Christians are all “known” in the area in which they travel for Gospel meetings. Beckett (1965) argues being “known” means to Aboriginal people having kin who will receive them and act as sponsors in the local community and that the area within which an Aboriginal person moves is defined by the distribution of kin. Inside this trans-regional Christian network, the Aboriginal Christians are indeed “known” in accordance with Beckett’s definition. They continuously renew their sense of relatedness to other Christians within this network. In this sense, their local network can be interpreted as the extended form of the Bundjalung and Githabul people’s “beat” or “run”, the terms Beckett employs for the area where an Aboriginal person likes to travel, in his account of Far West Aboriginal people’s tendencies in their mobility:

Mere proximity need not be a major factor: an Aboriginal may go 200 miles to a place where he is known, rather than 10 miles to a place where he is not. (ibid.: 9)

Similarly, today’s Bundjalung and Githabul are happy to drive 300 kilometres to Tingha (Group EXT-2) of the Kamilaroi region, for example, rather than 5 kilometres to a Christian event held by white people held in their own town.
The kin-based mobility pattern fits well with the way that Christians choose the gospel meetings they attend. Though, in fact, many of them have kin in most of the areas within the local networks, Christian affiliation has expanded their "beat" to the places where they have less close kin. They seem to regard such a "Christian beat" as prestigious and, indeed, the process of becoming a Christian brother or sister to someone means something more than sponsorship in a foreign land. The information on the current issues inside the network, for example, who converted (i.e. stopped drinking or terminated promiscuity, etc.), who fell (i.e. committed adultery or went back to drinking, etc.) or who received a divine healing (or who died, got sick, etc.) is being disseminated constantly all over the area covered by the network as evidence of the members' faith. The whole process one has undergone to become "a member of kin in the Lord" represents the quality of one's life as a Christian and candidacy for the fame of families of polity—in the context of the Christian community. As far as the information collected during the fieldwork for this thesis is concerned, this Christian version of an Aboriginal "beat" has not extended to the local white Christian community.

The rallies within the Bundjalung and Githabul Pentecostal network are all Aboriginal ones whose organisers are (including the organisers of national networks) all "known" (according to Beckett's definition) to them. Gospel events held by white churches in general public, where local Aboriginal Christians are not "known" from the point of view of this Aboriginal sense, are not attended willingly. If it is a black-and-white-combined meeting, sense of shame prevents the local Aboriginal Christians from mixing with white Christians casually. Small matters such as the types of sweets Christians are supposed to cook and bring from home for fellowship tea give an uncomfortable sense of worries to local Aboriginal people. Some individuals explained such an uncomfortable feeling as follows: "We feel what we bring won't be good enough for white people." A lot of times, because of this reason, Aboriginal people neglect their duty to bring food for fellowship tea.
Families, kin and gender

Contemporary Bundjalung and Githabul families and kin groups

Researchers of "settled" parts of Australia have reported that traditional kinship knowledge has largely been lost but at the same time they have provided evidence of the maintenance of kin relations and moral and economic obligations according to the systems of relatedness that have been drastically transformed (see, for example, Barwick 1962, 1964; and Beckett 1964, 1965). In the context of customary relationships to property in the post-classical Aboriginal society, Sutton describes the contemporary situation as the older forms of relating to people and country having "'gone underground' or been so transformed as to be no longer readily recognisable as recast practices with classical foundations" (Sutton 1998:56). He argues that "a distinctive form of social organisation, centred on Aboriginal family identities and combining features of both classical Aboriginal and modern European societies" (ibid.) has emerged in urban and rural areas of most of Australia. These "families" are identified by surnames, and constitute important internal subgroups of recently emerging land-affiliated group categories, such as language or regional groups, which are emerging wider categories defined as the claimants' or applicants' relevant landed groups and which are increasingly used instead of a set of smaller entities such as clans.

In the Christian community of Bundjalung and Githabul people, too, families identified by surnames have been functioning as chief identifiers of factional leaderships and of reputation for the "spiritual strength" of the

---

110 'Post-classical' means "those cultural practices and social institutions that have arisen since colonisation, as distinguished from those that are in large measure in continuity with those prevailing at the time of colonisation" (Sutton 1998: 60).
111 Sutton also argues that not only in urban and rural areas but also in "remoter" regions, the family-centred form of social organisation is becoming increasingly manifest (Sutton 1998:59).
family. Calley found use of the main surnames occurring among Bundjalung and Githabul people (Calley 1959:92). In the history of the Bundjalung and Githabul Church, there have been certain families who have been recognised as influential as structural elements of the existing factional groups. Sutton (1998), although he limits it to the context where customary rights and interests in land are transmitted and expressed, discusses the emergence of “families of polity” as one of the features of the post-classical Aboriginal society. They are “cognatic descent groups of enduring and central importance to the conduct of Aboriginal business”:

They persist over long periods, and thus have many recognised deceased members who are not merely remembered but who continue to form powerful reference points in determining how their living descendants establish rights and interests in traditional forms of cultural property, including country (ibid.: 60).

Calley (1959) recorded the existence of stratification based on three different categories of the Aboriginal people in Woodenbong station regarding the membership of the church (ibid.: 193-236), but the stratification he studied was based on the degree of “faith” in Christianity. Unlike the rights and interests in traditional forms of cultural property in Sutton’s concept of “families of polity”, reputation as a Christian leader cannot be reproduced merely through membership to the cognatic descent groups concerned. Nevertheless, in the sense that many recognised deceased members continue to form powerful reference points in the present-day Christians’ discourse of the community’s Christian legacy, the surname groups such as the Bundocks and Williams from Woodenbong, Hicklings and Walkers from Tabulam, and Roberts from Lismore may have established a form of “families of polity” (cf. Chapters 2 & 3). The issue of faith is to be discussed in the next chapter about church practice, and here I would rather focus on the contingent nature of the

112 First, there were the followers of the Old Rule. Secondly, the “hard core” of the Christian group were members of long-standing whose participation had been continuous over many years and who had never “backslid”. The third category is that of those who were “saved” but contingent in their faith. These members regularly “backslide”. (Calley 1959:202-203)
formation of factions influenced by a complex of obligations to kin groups and
to the Christian fellowship with which each Christian person must live. In
order to explore this issue, the contemporary marriage pattern of Bundjalung
and Githabul people is briefly outlined first.

As suggested by the studies of kinship in post-classical Aboriginal society
(see, for example, Barwick 1962; Sutton 1998), concerns with community
exogamy are now observed among the Bundjalung and Githabul people
because of this sense of closeness to the whole community of members.
According to Sutton, in some Aboriginal groups, there is a recent emergence
of a rule of "tribal (not just kin group) exogamy" (Sutton 1998) and this is
exactly the same tendency seen among the Bundjalung and Githabul people
today.

...a recent tendency is for the emergence of a rule of tribal (not just kin
group) exogamy, based on the view that people of the same language group
are 'too close' to marry, even if no blood link between them is known.
There has been great sensitivity over the issue between those who hold this
view and those who have married members of their own tribe. Marrying a
non-Aboriginal person is often considered a safe choice from this point of
view. (ibid.:70)

As discussed in Chapter 2, the traditional marriage system of the Bundjalung
and Githabul was of an Aluridja type classified by Elkin (Calley 1959:117). It is
a promised marriage with MMBSD/MMBDD and its variations for male Ego.
At the time of Calley's research in the late 1950s, people were broadening
exogamy rules because of the dense web of bilateral kinship grown in the
stations (ibid.:145-146). The major shifts from the traditional marriage system
(promised marriage) that have occurred to the Bundjalung and Githabul
community are, firstly, a shift to regional endogamy, followed by the recent
tendency towards regional exogamy due to the urgent need for incest
avoidance. In the following these shifts are outlined with some examples of
their own discourse about the "proper" marriage rules.
PHASE 1: The traditional marriage system (Aluridja type)—pre-contact situation.

PHASE 2: [Transitional period]
Collapse of the traditional marriage system during the enclosure in the stations. People started to get married within the community in which they live together (ibid.).

PHASE 3: Emergence of regional endogamy.
This period is what the contemporary Bundjalung and Githabul people remember as the “old way” of prohibiting marrying a stranger.\(^{113}\)

Examples of discourse:
“Marrying into our own colour is our way.” (Female: 84 years old)
“In olden days, we were not allowed to marry a stranger.” (Male: 25 years old)

PHASE 4: [Transitional period]
Collapse of the regional endogamy after the community has reached the point that people are so closely related to one another that they can no longer marry into their own regional group.

PHASE 5: Emphasis on incest avoidance and on marrying a “stranger”.
This is the present marriage pattern most encouraged by the community members. A “stranger” usually means an Aboriginal person from outside the Northern Rivers region.\(^{114}\)

Examples of discourse:
“I cannot find anyone to marry in the Northern Rivers because I have

\(^{113}\) The term “stranger” used in this context is targeted towards other regional groups of the local Aboriginal people rather than towards white people. As intermarriage between the black and white has been rare until recently (Sharpe 1985; Hausfeld 1960), such concerns were more related to the maintenance of the modern form of tribal endogamy (cf. Sutton 1998) than with inter-racial marriages. In the Northern Rivers, too, tribal endogamy was favoured for a certain period—after the traditional marriage system fell under the sedentary life in the stations up until everyone became so closely related by marrying into one another (see, for example, Calley 1959: 115-164).

\(^{114}\) Whites are of course considered as candidates, but among local Aboriginal people there is no strong incentive to seek “proper” marriages with whites because of the dominant redneck sentiment in the local white community. Most of the cases of white and black couplings I collected had ended after years of abusive relationships and a considerable number of children had been absorbed into the Aboriginal kinship system. The local Aboriginal kinship never extends to include the white partners’ side of the family.
"cousins everywhere." (Male, 25 years old)

"We marry into a different tribe from other 'country' (region)." (Male, 30 years old)

"They are too close, but there are no elders now to give them punishment." (Female, 35 years old, talking about a marriage between the same regional group in the Northern Rivers)

Avoidance of "marrying too close" is an obsessive concern for Bundjalung and Githabul people today. Rather than concerns about biological problems of hereditary illness or deficiency as an outcome of close marriages, almost all the informants have given concerns about the social side of kin interaction. An elderly woman mentioned a case of a woman who had married with a man she classified as uncle (i.e., father's first cousin). The first thing this woman mentioned as a serious problem implied the ever intensifying emotional stress that their complex kin networking bound by "unconditional" loyalties to kin was producing: "It's terrible. Everyone wants to get involved in what goes on!" Practically, close marriages blur who is the closest and the most entitled kin to "have a say" and control the situation.

According to the information collected during the time span of the fieldwork for this thesis, the relationships within the range of "second cousins" were unanimously regarded as incest regardless of being patrilateral or matrilateral, and even cases remoter than second cousins were often questioned as being "too close". The most interesting aspect of this general rule shared today is that the "correct" pre-contact marriage pattern is unanimously rejected as being "too close". It is worth noting, as shown below in Kinship Chart 2, that any distinction between matrilateral and patrilateral cousins is now utterly extinct. Only "closeness" matters today as a problem.

Kinship Chart 2 shows the "correct" pre-contact marriage pattern and four examples of questionable marriages I collected according to the present-day elders' standard. Aluridja type marriage, the correct marriage
pattern of Bundjalung and Githabul society in pre-contact time, is a certain type of second cousin marriage. An ideal spouse to male Ego is his MMBDD or, if MMB has no daughter, MMBSD and its variation (cf. Chapter 2). Case 4 in the chart (male Ego married MMBDSD) is a correct “old way” one time removed, but today everyone including the oldest elder in the community (84 years old) regards this marriage (of 40 years ago) as “too close” and incestuous. In fact, the children of this marriage complain that they have been hurt emotionally since childhood by the community’s gossiping circle in which their parents’ marriage would never be forgotten. Case 1 (FZSD) and Case 2 (FFZSD) are close marriages on the patrilateral side which took place approximately 40 years ago. In protest against the incest, the first cousin of the wife of Case 1 cut off communication with the husband for ten years. In Case 2 the couple eloped from the village. (The two couples are now back to normal membership in the community.) Case 3 (FMBSD) is also a patrilateral second cousin marriage. Regarding this case, I collected no information of any direct punishment other than criticism by gossiping.\textsuperscript{115}

On the whole, the most important issue to note with regard to the contemporary Bundjalung and Githabul marriage pattern is that the drastically changed marriage rules have all the more reinforced their sense of loyalties to kin relations. Because they are bound by unconditional obligations to kin in social interactions as intensely as before, it seems that they want to avoid becoming complicatedly related to one another, hence repulsion to close marriage.

\textsuperscript{115} The difference between Case 2 and 3 is that in Case 3 the male Ego’s FF was a white man. In the traditional Bundjalung and Githabul society, one’s grandfather (FF/FMB/MF/MMB) was called \textit{Nuthung} and was a central figure who arranged marriage. To have a white grandfather means one lacks \textit{Nuthung}, i.e., the proper channel to ideal marriage (cf. Hausfeld 1960) and, presumably, such idiosyncratic circumstances may have produced different reactions to these close marriages respectively. But because of the technical difficulty to collect information on kinship in this peculiar religious community, I was not given any further information.
Kinship Chart 2  "Too-close" Marriages

Correct Pre-contact Marriage (MMBDD or MMBSD)  Case 1 (FZSD)  Case 2 (FFZSD)  Case 3 (FMBSD)  Case 4 (MMBSD)

- ▲ male Ego
- ○ ideal spouse in pre-contact time
- ● spouse in today’s questioned marriages
It is most likely that questionable marriages unavoidably have taken place continuously as the rules of correct marriage changed. Firstly, in the contemporary situation of sedentary life, it is practically impossible to prevent boys and girls from ending up having relationships within the community. Secondly, and more importantly, the chronological shifts in the concept of the “correct” marriage pattern have apparently caused confusion among them. In PHASE 4, the transitional period from regional endogamy to “tribal exogamy” (Sutton 1998:70), people’s emotional attachment to regional endogamy seems to have remained for a long time in spite of the urgent necessity to accept strangers into their group. See the following examples of conflicting discourses about the atmosphere of this period:

“My mother wanted to whip him off, as he (her husband) followed me to Tingha (the locality outside the Bundjalung area). Our family had moved to Tingha. Mum did not want her daughters to get married with the men from the same Mission (Tabulam). But we three daughters all ended up with Tabulam men (laughing)! ” (Female, 55 years old, talking about the courtship by a man from the same Mission, 35 years ago.)

“When my wife and I got married, people said (negatively) we were strangers.” (Male: 56 years old, talking about their marriage between two different Missions in the Northern Rivers 20 years ago)

“As my wife was from the far west part (of NSW), at first it was hard for her to fit in. People saw her as a stranger.” (Male, 50 years old, talking about their marriage between one of the Bundjalung groups and a group outside the Northern Rivers region 15 years ago.)

The local Aboriginal people from each of the different “Missions” or each language group (i.e. regional sub-groups inside the political identification of the Bundjalung Nation) hold a sense of oneness toward their own groups, and it is most clearly shown when people move into towns. In each town, Aboriginal people recognise the respective “Mission hamlets” though they are not discretely located. Therefore, group solidarity along the “Mission” line is still maintained in urbanised context.
On an emotional level, loyalty to family and kin groups is unconditional, whereas kin relations among them have become extremely complex. Therefore, it is impossible for the Christian leaders who are complicately related to one another by consanguinity and affiliation to seek and rely on any customary rules when they must negotiate with other factional groups—for example, in forming new allies or dealing with antagonism. There is no relevance between the proximity of consanguinity and affiliation and the social interaction among the church factions except for the loose sense of “Mission-line” solidarity I have categorised for analytical purposes (Table 7). The contemporary Bundjalung and Githabul kin relations have become exorbitantly complex to the extent that these leaders rely more on intimacy cultivated through everyday social interactions than figuring out proximity of consanguinity and affinity in their kin relations. Of course, for them kin are definitely closer than strangers and whites, but they seem to think that it is practically impossible to grade those who are more remote than first cousins in order of intimacy.

**Gender issues: oppressing sexuality**

Bundjalung and Githabul Pentecostals are obsessive about oppressing the sexuality of fellow Christians (both male and female). The surveillance and punishment of sexually active people is close and constant—sometimes paranoid. Besides the formalities such as “women’s meetings” or “men’s prayers”, I observed no activities that were meant to solve gender-related problems in lived reality and empower people for the sake of their personal welfare. The one and only message the adherents can receive from the church is that one must oppress sexuality; keep celibate; stay away from secular interest in the opposite sex; live for the Lord alone. The only exemption for having sexual intercourses is through Christian and legal marriage. The wedding ceremony must be done by a Christian pastor and must accompany signing the Australian marriage certificate. Divorce is not permitted.
Whatever the problem is, one must maintain marriage. The only cure for those who suffer from broken marriages is to pray to God—for miracles to cease violence, addiction, child abuse, delinquency, or whatever.

Among other Christian communities, the politics of gender take a very different shape. In many of the indigenous societies which have had contact with Christianity, the conflicts between the traditional moral system and the moral system committed to the ascetic Christian code of behaviour are usually not so completely negotiated. In Jamaican Pentecostal churches, for example, Austin-Broos (Austin-Broos 1997) discusses how especially women—urbanising, coming from local and magical milieux of creole cosmology—are drawn to Pentecostalism to render their experiences in the ritual terms of Pentecostalism. The traditional Jamaican life is committed to the eudemonic life and Jamaican Pentecostal women, in fact, live with the coexistence of concubinage and monogamous marriage in their pragmatic lives. On the contrary, Bundjalung and Githabul women (and men) oppress women’s (and men’s) sexuality to an extreme extent which leads the small congregations bound by complex kin relations into a cycle of continuous dissolving and merging due to suspicion, emotional hurt and eventually animosity within the fellowship.

The Bundjalung and Githabul experience also contrasts remarkably, for example, with the church-linked Melanesian women’s groups. Melanesian women, rural dwellers and hard workers at the local end, eagerly appreciate and actively adapt the Christian women’s groups formed originally by European missionaries and find a protected, increasingly respected social space. There the women can build solidarity, confidence and leadership, which is their only or main opportunity for sociality or collective action beyond the family. Such a new social space can even offer them opportunities for external activism and funding (see, for example, McDougall 2003; Paini 2003; cf. Douglas 2003a, 2003b; Jolly 2003). Somewhat similarly to the Bundjalung and Githabul situation, however, older women’s pressure to
control young women's sexuality is seen among them, too (Paini 2003; McDougall 2003). But that is to help young women avoid too frequent childbirths. Birth control, for example, was discussed in opposition to conventional Catholic dogma (Paini 2003). As Douglas puts it, they brought the traditional and Christian community values "to bear on cautious, pragmatic engagement with modernity" (Douglas 2003b:7). These functions are completely different from those of the Bundjalung and Githabul Christians. The personal welfare and desire of an ordinary modern person are not what concerns Bundjalung and Githabul Christians. Unless one goes through a Christian wedding in the presence of the collective witnesses conforming to the legal regulations imposed by the state law, Christians must end up giving up procreation forever, not to mention giving up sexually active personal lives—which may be far more bleak than too frequent childbirths as were the concerns of the Melanesian women's groups.  

On the other hand, it is noteworthy that in the Bundjalung and Githabul churches there is no clear-cut gender division of status or roles in the context of church rituals and overall church activities. Just like the two female leaders of Group E, who are unquestioningly respected by both men and women (as both material leaders and pastors) mentioned in the above section, women in the Christian community enjoy free and independent rights to participate in all kinds of Christian practice and activities. By the mid-1950s, women had already secured equal status in the church (Calley 1959). Today at each of these small congregations female adherents outnumber male adherents to some extent, but in the main the reason for a somewhat unbalanced gender

---

116 The following is a sadly clear demonstration of the gloomy prospect of Christian marriage. Fifteen years ago, a daughter of a devoted Christian woman got married with a Christian man at the age of sixteen. Because of the husband's Christian faith, the young girl accepted a legal marriage straight away after courtship. The marriage did not work out and in a couple of years they were separated. Since her teenage years, this young girl has had no hope for finding Mr. Right without committing a "sin" because of her exceedingly early Christian marriage. The only option left to her was to live with the identity of an adulterer, as she did not want to maintain her celibacy throughout the long procreative period of her life. Now she cannot be at church because of this social label given to her in spite of her strong Christian family background.
constitution is a high death ratio of Aboriginal males. Young, single converts are only minority even in the two new-style town churches (Groups C & D).

A husband-and-wife unit is regarded as the basics in the church context among the Bundjalung and Githabul, as they strictly observe the rule that Pentecostal Christians must not get married with “sinners” or non-Christians. There are, however, a few exceptions caused by the spouse’s conversion (or backsliding) after marriage (or conversion). Historically, a ministry team is expected to be a husband-and-wife unit and a pastor’s spouse is always expected to form part of the leadership, regardless of his or her educational background and training. Very often female spouses take the initiative for the service—performing praise and worship music, preaching, and praying and laying hands for healing purposes. There is no gender differentiation for access to theological training or obtaining credentials between the husband and wife in a ministry team. (As stated above, most of the pastorship in the researched group is supported by “honorary” credentials issued regardless of the leaders’ institutional training or literacy.)

In this regard, the general model of gender relations in Pentecostal and charismatic churches is not emergent in Bundjalung and Githabul Pentecostalism. Robbins (2004b) argues, in his intensive survey of the cultural features of globalising Pentecostal-charismatic Christianity, that gender relations in the world’s Pentecostal-charismatic churches are in many cases constructed in such a way as to solve the “paradox” of the nature of patriarchy in the church (Robbins 2004b:131-133). Drawing on world-wide studies from

117 In the case of conversion or backsliding happening to one of the spouses, in many cases it influences the other because of a drastic change to one’s lifestyle whereby they must observe strict taboos (see Chapter 5 for detail). Usually, it either leads the other spouse to convert (or backslide) or ends the relationship (but married couples are not allowed to divorce and they begin to live separately; but the Christian counterpart must maintain celibacy until death). It is very difficult for converts who deviate from this ideal of maintaining a husband-and-wife unit to associate comfortably with the fellowship. Married couples and, above all, widows and widowers criticise such “deviant” members by circulating gossip about violating the Lord’s law or worse, of ungrounded adultery.
places such as Brazil, Sicily, Chile, Colombia, Bolivia, Alaska and west Africa, he argues that men monopolise formal institutional positions such as pastor or missionary, whereas women are routinely seen to underwrite work related to gifts of the Spirit so that their voices are often heard in church despite the patriarchal structure of the church. Pentecostal-charismatic Christianity’s asceticism prohibits behaviours primarily valued by men, and its dualism enjoins respect for the marital bond which domesticates men. The former demonises traditional patriarchy and the latter domesticates men. Thus, women can obtain “the one place in patriarchal societies where women can forge new relations outside their kin networks without exposing themselves to charges of immorality” (ibid.:132) According to Robbins, in many parts of the world Pentecostal-charismatic churches serve as “hybrid public/private spaces...that...facilitate women’s efforts to construct public social lives for themselves as modernity develops” (ibid.:133). The Bundjalung and Githabul situation regarding gender relations sits starkly in the opposite direction.

Where to draw the line?: relationalism vs. individualism

Which solidarity: kinship or Christian fellowship?

There is always latent tension between Group A and Group C. It is in the nature of the conflict between the good-old-day style church (Groups A and B) and the emergent universalistic individualism (Groups C and D), but the tension is higher between Group A and Group C than between Group A and D, because of the close kin relationship between the pastor of Group A and the pastor of Group C as discussed in the above sections (see Kinship Chart 1). The young pastor of Group C has never once attended the regional Aboriginal rallies since taking over the church. Moreover, after the church has grown, the pastor and his wife (who, in turn, is related to many of the Group B leaders) have held their own events to coincide with the Aboriginal seasonal rallies. He
demands that his congregation demonstrate an absolute loyalty to him personally and discourages them from visiting the rallies and the meetings of other factional groups. Despite criticism from various parts of the community, especially from the older generation, the Group C pastor and his family seem to be reluctant (although not intending complete neglect) to support the local Aboriginal networking. The exact reason is the young pastor’s inclination towards the universal, individualist way of church management and his personal aversion to the “local Aboriginal way”: in order to make his church grow, the adherents are told to have “firm ground”, by which he implies that his congregation is not allowed to “shop around” the ministries of the fellow Aboriginal people or even the ministries of their kin.

It is obvious that recent inter-racial marriages lead the offspring to have a smaller number of kin in the local Aboriginal community. 118 (As mentioned earlier, the non-Aboriginal side of these families are usually excluded from the Aboriginal kinship system.) This, however, does not necessarily lead the offspring of this type of inter-racial marriages to feel less attached to the Aboriginal community or to the conventional norms of Aboriginal social relations. Negotiations are continuously going on among these mixed-descent members of the community to maintain a balance in social relations and to reconcile one’s family and racial identity with the ever-changing circumstances. The more significant factor is lack of “shared” life experiences such as the case of the pastors of Group C (half-Maori Githabul) and Group D (Sydney-born non-local) as discussed earlier in this chapter.

There is a good example to demonstrate this (see Kinship Chart 3 below). A certain family related to the Group A pastor has a family history of recent mixed descent formation (i.e. of white and/or Pakistani patrilateral descent)
just like the young half-Maori pastor (Group C). This family, in contrast to the Maori pastor, has turned out several powerful supporters of Group A: a church elder of the Board of Group A Church, an Assistant Pastor to Group A pastor and a leading member of the younger generation of the church. Their fathers were non-Aboriginal but as the first parallel cousins to the Group A pastor (MZ5), they were reared up with the Group A pastor in the village on the most intimate terms—as classificatory brothers to him.

The mother of the young pastor in Casino, on the other hand, is a female first cross cousin to the Group A pastor (FZD). She did not experience the same type of social relations as those first parallel cousins to the Group A pastor. It is, however, important to note that there are seven more siblings of these Group A supporters. All the siblings shared intimate life experiences with the Group A pastor but the rest of the cousins are “sinners” and totally indifferent to the church politics that their three brothers are involved in. Also, a twin brother of one of the three supporters has moved to Casino to help Group C because of his personal friendship with the young pastor of Group C. Apparently, choices are made according to personal circumstances rather than any set rules of the family or kin groups involved. Therefore, expectations for unconditional loyalty from family and kin groups cause emotional turbulence when personal autonomy causes too much amongst kin groups.

The following is telling evidence of the situation whereby Group C is interfering with the rules of the Bundjalung and Githabul Pentecostal community. At Christmas in 2003, the young pastor of Group C organised a trip to New Zealand to meet the Maori Christians through his (deceased) father’s family. The tour clashed with his own uncle’s historical Christmas Tent Rally of Group A, but Group C widely invited Aboriginal Christians of all the factions of the region, including all the pastors and elders of other factional groups with courtesy—of course, his uncle who was the organiser of the Christmas Tent Rally was included, too.
Kinship Chart 3
A case study of solidarity formation, Group A and Group C

Robinsons

Local white

Pakistanis

A supporters of Group A

C supporters of Group C

E supporters of Group E

non-Aboriginal spouse

the Pastor in issue

Christians

Sinners (non-Christians)
It was suggested at first as a family tour to attend the twentieth anniversary of the death of the pastor’s Maori father, but it eventually grew into an evangelising tour abroad eligible to any Aboriginal Christians in the Bundjalung and Githabul Christian network—if they decided to cut loyalty to their own factions for the sake of realising a personal desire and leaping at the chance of “evangelising” abroad. Because of the novelty of international travel and its attractive conditions, many Christians in other congregations responded to the recruitment: a bargain price and, moreover, travel in company with fellow kinsmen. The number of the tour participants was blown up to around fifty people, and the Christmas Tent Rally shrank in 2003 to the least visitors ever.

Everyone, including the young pastor’s uncle who had received a damaging blow, knew it was extremely attractive for anyone to be able to enjoy the novel experience of travelling abroad. From the structural point of view, however, of the Aboriginal church network in such an exclusive local Aboriginal community, it was a palpable challenge mounted by individualism against the traditional, relational way of the Aboriginal community. This year’s New Zealand tour by a group of Bundjalung and Githabul Christians was understood in the local Christian community as compelling evidence of the violation of kin obligation by the young, “half-Maori” pastor. Thus Group C is clearly producing winds of turbulence in the local Christian network. It is the tension between one’s sense of relatedness to the community/kin and one’s desire for the personal autonomy to do what one emotionally wants to do. Answers are being continuously sought regarding where to draw the line between one’s emotional attachment to relational social interaction in the Aboriginal way and one’s desire for seeking personal autonomy in one’s life.

The young pastors’ kin on the Aboriginal side never resort to the ethnic factor to explain his rebellious attitudes, but, interestingly, they unanimously represent the Maori ethnic group in Australia as “superior to Aborigines”—although in a reproachful way.
Summing up

To sum up as a conclusion to this chapter, there are two distinctive features in the way formations of gender, politics and economics in the Bundjalung and Githabul Pentecostal community rest on their retention of a strong loyalty to local kin groups. Firstly, the Bundjalung and Githabul church networks and organisations have been formed exclusively under the (lay) Aboriginal leadership. Indeed it is a totally new form of exogenous moral order that they have quickly adapted, but it was through the Aboriginal agency that Pentecostalism permeated their community. There was, and is, little interference by white local Pentecostal churches or the umbrella bodies. Recently, however, such conventional norms for social orientation (i.e. relationalism embedded in kin relations) for Aboriginal Christians has been challenged by the universal way (i.e. individualist/modernist social interactions) influenced by the global Pentecostal movement.

Secondly, as Bundjalung and Githabul people have maintained a strong sense of obligation to kin relations, all the church factions are embedded in a complex web of closely related kin groups. Despite the loss of traditional kinship knowledge and the drastic transformation of their marriage pattern, the system of relatedness has been maintained on the basis of the redefined social institutions such as new marriage rules and a moral economy that is “demand sharing” (Peterson 1993; cf. Chapter 6). The formation of gender relations and church politics are constructed in accordance with the social relations within the local Aboriginal community. Various inter-/intra-factional conflicts are intricately entwined with different kinds of tensions: between the families, between the older generation and the younger generation, between loyalty to kin groups and to Christian groups, between sense of relatedness and the desire for personal autonomy. Decisions about actions are made at each critical point according to the context. The standard of judgement fluctuates constantly.
Scholars generally speculate that Pentecostal and charismatic Christianity functions to introduce people in the local societies to modernity, individualism and the global capitalist economy (cf. Martin 1990; Robbins 2004b). I can argue that this vernacular Pentecostalism in its Bundjalung and Githabul particularities have functioned in a more complex, winding way. Interest in individualism, modernism and capitalist economy is not yet compelling among them; at the same time this fact does not necessarily lead to the argument that Pentecostalism has been vernacularised or Aboriginalised completely in the Bundjalung and Githabul context. Their contemporary kinship, moral economy, and above all, religious practice must all be understood as processual manifestations of the way this group of Aboriginal people absorbed drastic social and cultural change in southeastern Australia. A culturally unspecific new form that Pentecostalism offers in the process of its permeation to other cultures leads Pentecostalism to be localised and to entail cultural specificity. Still, it is nothing but an exogenous religious culture that inevitably brings rupture to the local cultures. As I have discussed in the introduction to this thesis (Chapter 1), it is anthropology’s commitment to “continuity thinking” (Robbins 2003:221) that this thesis attempts to challenge by revisiting “Bandjalang Pentecostalism”. The next chapter (Chapter 5) is all about the rupture that Pentecostalism has brought to Bundjalung and Githabul culture and society.

On a divine mission

Most of the Aboriginal pastors live “on faith”, i.e., they receive no wage for ministering. They have to manage making an economically unstable living. Securing the car and petrol money is always an urgent need for them as well as preparing food for after church cup-of-tea or supper offered free of charge to the congregation. Furthermore, their social life must be stressfully split into two conflicting domains of family life and life for God as described in this chapter. Why can they devote themselves to such a rewardless life? Unlike the
big-scale Pentecostal congregations all over the world, about which these local Aboriginal Christians know well by watching their favourite televangelist Benny Hinn every morning, today there is no such enthusiasm in their own Aboriginal community. Everyone has to face the bleak reality: the zeal is in the ebb and Christians are regarded as crazy, “different” people by the fellow community members. Then again, why do they keep up with such an unrewarding life?

One night at Box Ridge “Mission” (Aboriginal community) at Coraki, I participated in a bleak open-air meeting. It was an outreach to the drinking majority of Box Ridge. That night there were only a handful of attendants. They all belonged to Group B and had travelled from other localities after sunset. There is no Christian in Box Ridge except for old Aunty Grace Cowan who offers her front yard every time for the outreach. Due to a usual lack of communication, there was no musician that night, and the meeting consisted of robust a cappella chorus and coarse loud voices of preaching amplified by the P.A. equipment set in the yard. When there had been at least a guitarist, the meeting and chorus would have undoubtedly cheered up and the innate bleakness of an outreach toned down. That night all the preaching words for repentance faded into the darkness of the heavily drinking community. Dogs were yelping in the distance. No response from the houses with drunken residents. Under the dim light of the unshaded bulb above the front door of Aunty Grace’s house—the only light source for the meeting—it was not easy to recognise who was who in the front yard. I was low-spirited by the bleakness of the night and my thoughts were wandering into the local’s comments about the plateau of “spiritual awakening” that the whole Northern Rivers Aboriginal community had been going through for decades.

There was, however, not an air of melancholy in the chorus and testimonies that followed. Why can these Christians be like this? Why can they do the same thing tirelessly? There is absolutely no prospect (from a sociological point of view) of Box Ridge to turn into a Christian community
again after half a century. One speaker took up the microphone for a share of testimony, and the voice told me it was Malachi Robinson. He is one of the members of Jubal group (Group B) who are struggling to establish a new Aboriginal church from scratch—on a recently obtained property in the bush—against the pressures from other factional groups. He spoke into the darkness in a sober voice:

We bin here that many times over and over. Not only here but all over the place – Casino, Tabulam, Boggabilla ... you name it. Brisbane. Last week we bin gone up in Tweed Heads. We are doing the same thing, Yamba last Easter - we were down there ... Easter time. Christmas time up in Woodenbong. Doing the same thing every year, and this is the same thing we are doing. That's the same thing that Noah done. And what the people done? They did not take ear to Noah. They did not wanna listen to Noah. They thought he was stupid. It's the same as these people you fellas do today.

Malachi spoke into the darkness that he and other Christians would never give up and would do the same thing again and again to warn sinners not to wait until the “rain comes” (as it did when Noah was ready for it). The message Malachi attempted to extend to the alcoholics in the Mission was all about faith. Doing the same thing over and over again and never getting weary. Those who are “on fire” do not have doubt in the Lord’s plan; and they keep telling people, never be intimidated or disappointed by people who do not understand you and say you are stupid and crazy! For them simply living with the awareness of the existence of the supernatural being promises an enormous reward. The next chapter (Chapter 5) is all about how Bundjalung and Githabul Pentecostals define the way to “live for the Lord alone”.

178
Chapter 5
Practice: Life as a Chosen Vessel

But the Lord said unto him, Go thy way: for he is a chosen vessel unto me, to bear my name before the Gentiles, and kings, and the children of Israel: For I will shew him how great things he must suffer for my name's sake.


I will serve no foreign gods
or any other treasure.
You are my heart's desire,
SPIRIT without measure.
Unto your name I will bring
A SACRIFCE.

— One of the most favoured praise and worship songs
of the Bundjalung and Githabul Pentecostals

Night service on Day Four, Christmas Rally,
Muli Muli, Woodenbong

When Sister Elizabeth challenged the pastor, the night turned into a blessing, as defined later by one of the attendants on that night. Her stiffened but undistracted voice slapped me alive from a dormant mode I had been thrown into during the past few days at the village. I had become weary of the monotonous (but exhausting) services of long praise and worship music and prayers that went on night after night. It was a Christmas Tent 'Rally' (seasonal convention) that I was attending, a one-week 'rallying' period for local and visiting Aboriginal Christians, held in a small Aboriginal reserve at the foot of the Border Range on the northern edge of New South Wales. The preacher for that night was an Aboriginal pastor from the local community who had been based in Sydney for his
prison ministry and had recently started nationwide activities. He lamented the sexual immoralities prevalent in the Aboriginal community today. He condemned these sinful acts and warned that one must have a clean body to make it as God’s vessel. The tent was packed with approximately 200-250 Aboriginal Christians. Everybody seemed to be listening in agreement. Her cry of disagreement, or rather a demand, was that the preacher should think about the “sinful, unclean bodies” that had been forcibly brought into corruption.

Everyone turned to a good-looking, elderly woman sitting in the middle of the packed audience. I found it was Elizabeth Barker. She was visiting this tent rally for the first time from the Kamilaroi area (a neighbouring Aboriginal group) approximately four hours’ drive south. I had met her at the breakfast table a couple of days before, and we exchanged greetings and some personal background with each other. With all of her children grown up and her husband deceased, she lives alone and does voluntary counselling work for a women’s refuge. “Different,” was what I felt during our conversation coloured by harmless middle-of-the-road topics. Different from “the people I was meeting in the Northern Rivers region for my research” is what I mean. She spoke in less localised English, which helped me understand her clearly, and she talked in a clear-cut way as if everything she wanted to say had been scrutinised thoroughly by an invisible but substantial objective lens she had in her clear and sound mind. Looking back now, in Bundjalung and Githabul country, I have met only a few people like her, most of whom I have met in the area of local politics and at the governmental institutions, and seldom did I meet a person like Elizabeth Barker in the church community. The Aboriginal Christians talked about surrendering to God’s complete control over them, whilst she let others feel her strong self-discipline.

She was taken away as a child, she continued under the tent packed with people, and was sent to a girls’ home and lived through repeated rapes by a white worker at the dormitory since she was eleven when it happened in the garden...and she could not talk any more as she broke into tears. Several visiting pastors rushed to where she was seated and started prayers, holding her together like one big umbrella attempting to fold her in. The church, the service, the venue, and the night changed drastically. The preacher asked the Stolen Generation (but there were only two more), and next, anyone who had suffered from sexual abuse or, more widely, from (sexual) relationships to come up to the front for
prayers. Music started. Everyone stood up, prayed and sang for those who needed healing, and in the end, more than half of the whole church walked up to the front and waited for the prayers by the pastors and fellow Christians – until the Holy Spirit “rained down” on them.

And He came. The tent was filled with screams of joy of deliverance, cries of repentance and dozens of the attendants lying on the grass being “slain in spirit” (being touched by the Holy Spirit). A big woman from Armidale in front of me, who was praying and laying hands on another woman in her row, suddenly fell down on my chest in the middle of the prayer, being touched by God. She staggered to her feet in a minute, though being overwhelmed by the Holy Spirit moving then (to the Christian’s eye), and she did not forget to thank me for holding her to avoid the crash to the hard ground.

On the following morning, I looked for Sister Elizabeth everywhere in the village, but she was gone already. I regretted missing the golden opportunity to talk with her about what had happened to her by the prayers of that night, but at the same time, I felt relief from the burden of intruding into the painful realm of someone’s memory regardless of the anointing and healing that may have been given to her on the previous night. On Day Five of the rally, with mixed feelings I was again depressed and helpless as I failed to take hold of a useful channel to get access to this unfathomable arena of faith held by the Aboriginal Christians. I soon found out, however, that local Aboriginal Christians could never avoid running into one another whenever and wherever the gospel was preached in the Bundjalung and Githabul country. I met her on many occasions in so many unexpected places throughout my fieldwork. “Unexpected” because the places of some gospel meetings seemed, by my standard, to be too far to visit from her residential area and too small-sized and trifling for her to spare such a long time driving and such a handsome amount of petrol money. I waited patiently until both of us got used to each other. Exactly two years later, finally I was sitting in the lounge room of Elizabeth Barker’s house with a recorder on the table for an intensive “yarn” about her life with the Lord.

What is it to be Christian for today’s Bundjalung and Githabul people? This chapter attempts to answer this sole question. On the surface level, the answer is quick
and simple: it is all about faith. Being Christian is to have faith in the fact that Jesus died for Man's sins and resurrected from the dead. This is the universal truth for all Christians regardless of a denominational difference. When converted, one becomes a new creature and must live like Jesus—every minute of their life. How such a simple change of attitude works on today's Bundjalung and Githabul person, however, is complex. They have the Christian faith on the one hand and they have the Aboriginal way of life on the other hand, both of which cast control over the social and moral orders in their everyday life.

I was out of Canberra for just one month when I encountered this Holy Spirit night in Muli Muli Aboriginal village. Far from the excitement of having taken off to the field, I had been helpless as there was not much prospect of my fieldwork becoming rosy and efficient. My experience already had shown me that I was thrown into a group of people who talked only about Jesus by reciting the verses from the Bible whenever I asked questions about their church and faith from the point of view of their "dealing with the two ways". My aim in the field was to look for something distinctively Aboriginal, regardless of the change of lifestyle and exogenous cultural elements they had adopted. My academic concern had been with how the Aboriginal Christians would reconcile the two religious worlds—or the Aboriginal and Christian ways of life in a wider sense—with each other. In the field, however, the most common discourses inside the church community were either direct parroting of the verses in the Bible or ecstatic repetition of clichéd prayers to God. The Bundjalung and Githabul church today seemed to be fatally "un-Aboriginalised" regarding both rituals and discourses in everyday activities.

"Culture and Christianity must not go hand in hand" was what I was told on my first few days in the field by the Aboriginal Christians in the fieldwork area. Recent revitalisation of traditional local culture was fastidiously excluded from the church context. As far as the practical operation of the Aboriginal religion is concerned, it had

---

120 In a practical way, it means to give up worldly pleasures and devote one's life to the evangelic mission. This basic teaching of Pentecostalism causes general complaints from the public about the Pentecostal adherents' fanatic and obstinate recruitment of new adherents.
already stopped generations ago in this area (cf. Chapter 2). My questions about “culture” and why they must reject it were evaded by dodgy responses. Do they intend to reject Aboriginality or do they loathe just certain cultural practices? Answers were endlessly dissembled. Thus the fieldwork had begun.

Doctrines

Discontinuity of syncretic narratives

In Chapter 3 I attempted to refute the general notion that “Bandjalang Pentecostalism” produced syncretic doctrines. This chapter will demonstrate that contemporary Bundjalung and Githabul Christians do not live with the legacy of myths about Balugan (a culture hero with Christ’s character) and Ngathungali (a culture hero with God’s character) but that they live in an unchanged legacy of the Trinity of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. The latter used to be called the Trinity of Mamung, Bunam and Juggi in the local dialects but the Bundjalung and Githabul dialects have long been forgotten in everyday life now. No narratives of Aboriginal mythology, ancestral heroes, or anything related to their traditional culture are expressed in the church context. The testimonies, behaviours and narratives that take place at church are furnished with biblical terminology only. In Chapter 3, however, ethnographic data from the revival era showed that their Christian practice was as de-traditionalised as it is today. My argument is that the Bundjalung and Githabul Pentecostal movement has not changed its direction—regardless of the drastic changes that they have undergone outside the church context.

With regard to the drastic changes outside the church, remarkable above all else is the elders’ role. As was shown in Chapter 2, with the onset of cultural revitalisation starting in the mid-1970s, cultural knowledge has transformed to become the economic assets of elders. Long before this trend, however, discontinuity of traditional knowledge had already begun. At the time of the Revival in the mid-1950s, the traditional social institutions had no longer been operating and the younger
generations no longer needed traditional knowledge in practical life; transmittance of knowledge had ceased as a natural course of events. The clan had lost its authority and political functions at the time of Calley’s research (1952-1956) and there had emerged a category of “adult male clansmen who had never been initiated” (Calley 1959:76-77). He speculates about the process of the discontinuation of traditional knowledge below:

As their authority was challenged and undermined first by the white invaders and then by their own juniors, the initiates ceased recruiting new members and passing the religious and magical tradition to the oncoming generation. It is impossible to distinguish between the decay of the old religious life and the loss of authority of the old men in the disintegration of the clan, for they were and are one and the same process. (ibid.)

The status of the “true” elders (i.e., marugan, the initiated men) in the mid-1950s was fairly chilly. Calley depicts that the few survivors were “on its periphery” and it was “partly because they scorn the new ways and partly because they are feared as potential sorcerers” (ibid.).

By this time, most of the myths had become faltering in the community. The memories of the informants were no longer reliable, as they were “recalling tales heard in childhood and which may have been imperfectly understood” (Calley 1955:Part II, pp.11). Collecting the stories was possible (e.g. Calley 1958), but in practical terms these myths which Calley salvaged with great effort and elaboration were no longer current among them. In other words, these myths had become just “stories” by then and lost their role as knowledge for the performance of rituals and rites for maintaining their own religious life and the rules of their subsistence economy (cf. Radcliffe-Brown 1929). Accordingly, the djurebil, the sacred places associated with the myths—the places where one of the culture heroes camped, performed some important actions, or was buried—did not have much significance for the people in those days except for only a few, very old remaining marugan, the initiated men (ibid.: Part II, pp.8).

According to such a change, the myths may have become increasingly open in terms of secrecy and gained wider distribution in the form of Aboriginal old stories or
fairy tales to the general public, but within themselves the contrary wind is seen. The elders have begun to recognise their memories of the past—anything that is related to the past—as economic assets and to hide it from other members of the community, whereas their stories have become more open to white researchers who can afford generous payment. The local elders have long withdrawn to the area of cultural representation and kept the white society in view, where they can trade cultural knowledge and performances.\footnote{Regarding this common notion of an Aboriginal gerontocracy, I must mention the clear discrepancy between the local white imagination and the reality in the Aboriginal churches my research covered. Those who are the oldest in the community who are also fluent in the local languages are respected by all as “elders”, but they are not in a position to make demands upon or give sanctions to other members, nor in the top position of one unitary system of the local Aboriginal community. In particular, the “elders” who are Christians do not hold any acting positions as powerful spiritual leaders, although they are respected as an emblem of the community and expected to support the churches. Quite the contrary, their interest in representing cultural knowledge and heritage in full-view of the mainstream society innately conjures up questionable motivations by the Christian standard and as such they enjoy ambivalent reputation amongst the local black Christian community.} This is exactly the reason why reproachful criticism of the local Christian elders is repeatedly made today among the most active generation of the local Aboriginal Christians, who are mostly in their forties and fifties.

The members of this generation carry strong pride associated with growing up in Aboriginal ex-station settlements. On the other hand, they declare a complete rupture with the channel to traditional knowledge. One such man said gaily to me, “The dreaming stories are nonsense—they are just lies.” To my question about the links between Aboriginal spirituality and Christianity, he said:

I believe in those stories the full blood Aborigines have (the stories about the links between the two cosmologies) up in the North. But our elders have never given us the evidence.

By “up in the North” he meant vaguely the Aboriginal groups in the Northern Territory or north Queensland. In this region, it seems that the cultural revitalisation movement has accelerated the discontinuity of transmittance of the traditional local knowledge. Instead of the local knowledge which once had practical meaning to the local people’s everyday lives, the decontextualised, non-Bundjalung/Githabul
Aboriginal culture and activist representations of Aboriginality have prevailed in the community as educational material to encourage the community members' self-esteem.

In the local church context, although elders are shown respect for the sake of their old age, old people who are so-called and respected as "elders" in the general public, if they are Christian, do not hold acting positions as powerful leaders in the local Christian community. Rather, it is the lay pastors and leaders who are obscure from the local white society that the local Aboriginal Christians go to and ask for prayers. None of these "practicing" spiritual leaders (or lay pastors) can indulge in theological talks with a foreign researcher who is seeking to find an exotic pantheon. Few of them have received proper institutional theological education but have received the credentials to bury and marry through unguided lay pastorship. Some are barely literate. They once were "boozers", drug abusers, adulterers, mentally sick, or even criminals. They are shabby, "crazy" people in the eyes of the ordinary citizens of Australia—according to their self-representation. They are not eligible of the romantic representation of Aboriginality which would entertain the white society. In the preceding chapter (Chapter 4) these types of people were mainly portrayed except for the nationwide leaders. They are the only pool of people whom the local Aboriginal Christians can spiritually rely on today in order to have access to the supernatural power of God.

There have been many divisions over the practical points of belief and practices among Pentecostal groups, but Pentecostalism never deviates from the orthodox doctrines. The quintessence of Christianity is the belief in the Trinity and justification by faith. The former is the belief that there is but one God, who is the maker and preserver of all things visible and invisible, existing eternally in the three persons of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. The latter is the doctrine that one can receive the remission of all one's sins and the gift of eternal life by simply believing in the death and resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ. This is definitely held by Pentecostalism as well as by the orthodox churches.

Pentecostals are simply unsatisfied with the Christian tradition that has become a culture of Sunday churchgoing. To their eyes, orthodox Christians are unaware of the
awe of the supernatural God. They emphasise a “spirit-filled life”. The keywords for
the modern Pentecostal phenomena are the “miraculous”, “supernatural” and
Heavenly “fire”. The quotation below, as an example, is from the Statement of Faith of
the Assemblies of God (AOG) of Australia, the largest Pentecostal denomination in
Australia, issued in 1984. It condenses the essence of the “spirit-filled life”:

It is tragically possible to have orthodox doctrines but to be cold and formal. The
need is for truth quickened with Heavenly fire. In his ‘Plea for the Supernatural’,
Dr. A. B. Simpson stirringly reminds us that we have a supernatural God, a
supernatural Bible, a supernatural life, supernatural resources and a
supernatural hope. The first church was born in Holy Ghost fire and in Holy
Ghost fire she should continue.

—Australian Evangel, May, 1984, Supplement (Kaldor 1988: 358)

In essence, Bundjalung and Githabul churches today do not deviate from the
general patterns of belief and practices at white Pentecostal churches in Australia,
churches emphasise experiencing “victorious living” in the present, rather than the
reward after the imminent return of Jesus Christ. Most Pentecostals believe that they
will receive rewards in material benefits for their faithfulness and tithing. Some insist
positive believing, by which all kinds of goals may be achieved. Some measure one’s
faith by success. Along these lines, the pastors and missionaries have been expected to
“live by faith”, i.e., they believe that God will supply what they need. In many cases,
therefore, churches do not pay a stipend or salary.

“Victorious living” refers to a so-called “prosperity doctrine”, a contemporary and
most controversial dogma of Pentecostalism. By the 1980s, the Pentecostal and
charismatic revivalism has changed from the healing ministries of the 1950s to the
advocacy of the prosperity doctrine. The healing ministry was the most attractive
feature in the early days (cf. Chapter 2) but the contemporary messages of the
Pentecostal churches are more focused on success and entertainment. While healing
was still a feature part of most of the “glitzy television ministries of the eighties”, the
“health and wealth doctrine” has become a contemporary Pentecostal feature (Synan
In contrast, the tendency towards prosperity is as yet small among the Bundjalung and Githabul churches which my research covered. This is a remarkable difference from the atmosphere of a few local white Pentecostal congregations in the North Coast region which I observed for comparison. This feature apparently bears evidence that the present day Bundjalung and Githabul Pentecostalism is a direct inheritance from their "old-day" Pentecostal movement. As is discussed in Chapter 2, the origin of their autonomous Pentecostal movement goes further back than such renowned Aboriginal Christian revivals as the Elcho Island "charismatic" movement in 1979 and the Yarrabah Mission's spiritual awakening and visions in 1983 (see, for example, Harris 1990:869-906). The Bundjalung and Githabul Pentecostals still hold the belief to disclaim the "riches of the world". A lot of the local Aboriginal Pentecostal adherents seem to find difficulty in accepting contemporary "mainstream" (or universal) Pentecostal teachings with emphasis on victorious living in the present rather than the reward after the imminent return of Jesus Christ.

**Favoured verses and parables**

It is not easy to demonstrate the features of the sermons given at the meetings of the researched Christian community. An approach to the intellectual aspect of these sermons does not offer much information. No set subject is generally given at each sermon. There always exist, of course, such broad themes as the issue of faith, repentance, forgiveness and so on, but the preachers usually do not prepare or give sermons with an extended elaboration of theology. Pentecostals believe the Word (of

---

122 The local white Pentecostals were eager to achieve material success and wealthy lives and they believed that their dedication to church—especially by abundant tithing and offering—they would receive rewards from God, e.g., by one hundred times as much as they had given. Therefore, white Pentecostal church usually grows rapidly shortly after it is established. This feature was never seen among the fourteen Aboriginal congregations my research covered.

123 I have observed some Aboriginal adherents changing church in repulsion for the prosperity doctrine a certain (exceptionally) ambitious Aboriginal pastor was trying to introduce to his church (see Chapter 4 for detail).
God) for preaching should be given by the Holy Spirit. Also, it should be recalled that there is a general lack of institutional training among the preachers of the Bundjalung and Githabul churches. Services go as things flow—this is one of the local characteristics regarding this Aboriginal Pentecostal group. A well-programmed and timed meeting is regarded as the Whiteman's way. There is only one principle: the Word (of God) must be given. Some preachers can only provide a sermon that ends up in a mere agitating recital of verses from the Bible, but verbal repetition of biblical words and Jesus' name is itself regarded as a testimony of faith, hence regarded as meaningful and important worship practice.

On the whole, the preachers' interpretation of the material from the Bible is fairly basic (namely, word-for-word understanding) and the main part is to present the verses and parables from the Bible to the audience, not the interpretations. Among the numerous sermons I have collected, sermons relating to how to make use of biblical teachings for practical life are unusual. Rather than giving everyday life moral codes, most of the sermons focus on how Jesus lived and how the adherents must relate themselves to the power of God on the spiritual level—so that they could get rid of the "misery" of their lives. The content of the "misery" was often euphemised as one's involvement in the Devil's way. It is important, however, to pay attention to the fact that most of the Aboriginal members of the local congregations have specific information about what the preachers are talking about in each context. Veiled speeches dominate in the local church context, which is, in fact, filled with specificities and emotional responses to the current problems of the Bundjalung and Githabul community.124

Apart from such local issues, at least the basic features of their interest apparently

---

124 To give an example, once a young pastor of a certain faction preached about repentance at a Sunday meeting, by mentioning such Devil's way as witchcraft and adultery. It seemed clear that a few white visitors to the meeting understood it as a general message, but the whole congregation picked up that their pastor was intending to degrade his competitor, a certain senior Aboriginal pastor in another faction, who was then suffering from an ungrounded rumour of adultery. Rumours, once made, spread quickly to most of the local Bundjalung and Githabul people through their grapevine. This pastor's sermon on this Sunday functioned as the confirmation of the rumour to the adherents of his church, according to which this young preacher was improving his game and the senior pastor's reputation began to fall.
emerge in the verses and parables frequently chosen for preaching and sharing at the testimony time in the service. In the following are shown some of the well-favoured verses and parables I collected in the fourteen congregations my research covered. Two outstanding issues were of deep interest to the Aboriginal adherents. Firstly, the issue of faith is endlessly repeated. The depth of one’s faith is questioned, and the promise of miracles mentioned. Secondly, as a consequence of faith, a promised cycle of sinning, repentance and deliverance is repeatedly chosen for preaching.

**Two main issues emphasised in sermons**

(1) Faith secures a promise of miracles from God:

*Mark 16:15-18*

And he said unto them, Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature. He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned. And these signs shall follow them that believe; In my name shall they cast out devils; they shall speak with new tongues; They shall take up serpents; and if they drink any deadly thing, it shall not hurt them; they shall lay hands on the sick, and they shall recover.

(2) Man is destined to sin. By merely repenting, anyone can receive salvation at once:

*Romans 10: 9-10*

That if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved. For with the heart man believeth unto righteousness; and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation.

*1 John 1:8-10*

If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. If we say that we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us.

*2 Corinthians 5:17*

Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new.

**Favoured parables**

(1) The parable of Jesus calming the storm in front of the worried disciples on the boat (Mark 4:35-41; Mat 14:22-33). To question one’s depth of faith, this parable was frequently referred to.
(2) The parable of the prodigal son. The father loved the prodigal son who returned after long years of sinful life better than the hardworking, dutiful elder brother. (Luke 15:11-32). This parable was the most frequently mentioned one by which deliverance of all sinful deeds of one’s past was demonstrated. It is worth noting that, rather than the symbolic emphasis on the importance of repentance, this parable seemed to appeal as an excuse for the present prodigal life. The father as a judge chose the prodigal son who had kept neglecting the values of diligence, dutifulness and hard work.

(3) The parable of the woman with the issue of bleeding. A woman who had been suffering from bleeding for twelve years was healed instantly by merely touching Jesus (Luke8:43-48; Mat 9:20-22; Mark 5:25-34). This parable was frequently referred to by both males and females as evidence of faith healing.125

Aboriginal adherents on the whole do not show much interest in absorbing the mainstream value system that encourages diligence, personal responsibilities and the motivation of upward social mobility. Because the adherents believe faith can solve any problem and bring about miracles, it seems they are led to continue their dangerous, reckless behaviours. It is true that drinking and drug abuse stop instantly on conversion, as this is the prerequisite for conversion to Pentecostalism. That one must become a “clean” vessel of God is emphasised as the condition of spiritual awakening. Therefore, it is a legacy of Bundjalung and Githabul people to understand that Christians never drink nor use drugs to keep their bodies “clean”. By contrast, other “covertly” unhealthy and destructive lifestyles just continue, or sometimes gather momentum in the negative direction. As they believe in faith healings, for example, many diabetics stop taking medication if they go through spiritual experiences that have hinted at complete cure. Faith in miracles also prevents them

---

125 Regarding the status of female adherents in the congregation, I found no particular gender-related discrimination or division of roles (cf. Chapter 4). The researched Aboriginal Pentecostals neglect Virgin Mary as well as other Pentecostal churches. The fact that Pentecostals refuse Virgin Mary worship does not seem to have relevance to the gender-roles at church. Their opinion is that Jesus is not Mary’s child but Godhead and that the Virgin Mary was just a human being— not worthy of worship.
from reflecting upon their lifestyles and eating habits. For example, as diabetes lacks self-evident symptoms, I have seen many diabetic patients among the Bundjalung and Githabul Christians neglecting their medication.

Another deviation from “mainstream” common sense or the “worldly” standard is the general lack of self-discipline and motivation for establishing a positive life plan. This is led by their complete belief in “God’s plan”. Instead of tying hard not to commit sins or to suppress one’s worldly desires, a lot of the Christians seemed to let out their desires. For them it is guaranteed by the Bible that by merely repenting, all sins are to be redeemed. In this light, I have observed that non-Christian members of the community are much more prone to taking responsibility for their deeds and to upward social mobility—unless they suffer from broken families or alcohol and drug addiction (I shall discuss this issue in more detail in Chapter 6). In other words, those who can take control over their lives do not need the Lord to look after them, as they can look after themselves and cope with economic, psychological and health problems.

Becoming Christian in this researched group means one has given up the responsibility to control one’s own life. They must abide by God, which means they must not take control of their own lives with “man-made” goals, however successful they may seem. In this point, their way is deviant from the wealth and success doctrine of contemporary Pentecostalism. This is the most fragile aspect of their Christian life. For example, it was a heartbreaking incident for me to witness one Githabul youth, a promising athlete born to a hard-core Pentecostal family, give up his goal of running at the Olympics as a sprinter and withdraw from his training at Griffith University. He had a revelation one night in a Christian meeting, after which he never bothered to go back to Brisbane. In fact, he had long been persuaded by his family to give up the “sin of competition”, i.e., involvement in sports. The youth’s new life of living on the dole and reading the Bible all day in the rural backwaters was most gladly supported by his family. After two years, I found him blown up obese and he had begun to have a mental breakdown. The last news I heard of him during my fieldwork was that the police had just put him in a mental asylum, as he had smashed his house and attempted to kill his father. The youth is a direct grandson of one of the most respected
“cultural and Christian” elders in the revival days. This highly respected elder bridged the old and new through Christianity, which, generations later, prevented his grandson from bridging the present and the future because of this exact legacy of the “old” Pentecostal faith. By now many of the goals of a modern person have become the sins of “worldly pleasures” among the Bundjalung and Githabul Christians. This issue will be discussed in more detail below and in the succeeding chapters.

Becoming a Christian

Full confession

When one reaches the point of a strong personal urge to become Christian, among Bundjalung and Githabul people, the verses nine to ten of Chapter ten of The Epistle of Paul the Apostle to the Romans in the Holy Bible is a start.

That if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved. For with the heart man believeth unto righteousness; and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation (Romans 10: 9-10, KJV).

The proselyte recites the verses while receiving prayers and hands laid on him or her by the pastor and other Christians. This short ritual performance is specifically called “full confession” by the Bundjalung and Githabul Christians. By doing so, the proselyte confesses his or her sin of not having believed in the love and grace of Jesus until conversion. Becoming Christian is simply believing in the death and resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ.

126 This ritual requirement, consisting of reciting these particular verses from the Romans, is held by a limited number of Aboriginal congregations in the Northern Rivers region.
Praise and worship

The Bundjalung and Githabul Christians indulge in contemporary “praise and worship” music and practice the worship procedures which are, in general, no different from those at the white Pentecostal churches. “Praise and worship” is a recent style of gospel music starting in the 1980s, which emphasizes the role of music as a form of worshiping and praising God. Orthodox hymns are about God, whilst praise and worship songs are to God. New songs are being continuously written today. In Australia, the Hillsong Church in Sydney is well known for the stronghold of praise and worship songs and musicians. Rather than these new gospel songs, which are no different, except for the lyrics, from pop songs in the secular domain, the Bundjalung and Githabul Christians favour country gospel songs. This is one distinct difference from the universal trend of contemporary Pentecostal worship style.

Praising the Lord all the time literally “through the mouth” is the basics of the Pentecostal way of worship, and praise and worship songs are very important as the way of building up a spiritual channel to God just like prayers and reading the Bible every day. Praise and worship makes the preacher ready to give the Word (i.e. to preach). The local Aboriginal Pentecostal adherents say that without praise and worship it is impossible to preach. On the other hand, some non-Pentecostal Aboriginal Christians in the researched region are more interested in the intellectual interpretation of the Bible. For this group, music is seen to be subordinate.

Thus, non-Pentecostal Christians often sneer at the Pentecostal church for being too demanding and exuberant. There is some truth in this comment. With regard to the Aboriginal Pentecostal congregations I worked with, on average, a church service goes on for two to three hours. When people travel and gather for seasonal rallies, they have morning, afternoon and night services day after day for about one and a half weeks. The majority of the time at the service is spent on praise and worship music followed by ecstatic prayers and, ultimately, baptism by the Holy Spirit, i.e., speaking in tongues, getting slain in spirit or receiving miraculous healing, visions and
prophesies.

The Pentecostal denominations in general share this church procedure of “doing praise and worship” music, but it has been observed that the local Aboriginal Pentecostal churches would put more emphasis on spontaneous and substantial aspects of singing to God on the spot each time so that they can open up a channel through which they can communicate with God. At the white Pentecostal meetings, on the other hand, the white adherents seem to follow the formalities first, though they do not neglect the purpose of praise and worship. At a house meeting of an all-white Pentecostal group in a rural town, for example, I observed them begin the meeting with music from the CD player. (There was no musician in that small group of local whites.) Two modern Hillsong praise and worship songs were played but the attendants could not follow the swinging beats and melodies. A copy of the lyrics was given to each one and the organiser urged them to sing anyway. After this unexalted praise and worship, sharing of testimonies and the preacher’s message followed. At the end of the meeting the old lady organiser gave a prophecy “for the week” to each attendant, as she was known to have a “gift of prophesy”. Each one then moved to the kitchen for a cup of tea and cake when his or her turn at receiving the prophecy was over.

If compared with the above, the local Aboriginal meetings always seek spontaneous and substantial communication with the Holy Spirit. When I was asked to offer my own place for the local group’s house meeting, unfortunately no musician came along that night. As a host of the night I felt responsible for avoiding a gloomy atmosphere and suggested playing praise and worship songs with my cassette recorder. To my surprise, no one responded to my suggestion made out of a good will to cope with the problem. My suggestion was neglected by their silence. Then, the meeting started with an *a cappella* chorus and, as their emotions heightened, the meeting shifted from a soulful but diffident chorus of country gospel songs to a deeply spiritual tarrying mode until the preacher started the night’s message. I learned from this incident that for the local Aboriginal Christians, whether the service would turn out boring and low-spirited or spirit-filled should be put under the complete control of
the Holy Spirit.

Prayers

Prayers are another important measure by which Bundjalung and Githabul Christians access God. Pentecostal life consists of restless prayers. The Bundjalung and Githabul Christians are surprisingly eloquent in speaking the Word of God in terms of rhetoric, and so are their prayers. They tirelessly spin out prayers which are as theatrical as their praise and worship songs. They believe that the practice of speaking the Word (of God) and praising God though the mouth has power in itself to ward off Satan. The Bundjalung and Githabul Christians pray every time before they drive a long distance, every time they part from fellow Christians or kinsfolk, and every time they sleep at night. They bless the food every time before they eat. When they get embarrassed, for example, in the middle of the conversation or important meeting with others, very often the Bundjalung and Githabul Christians would begin to pray abruptly in order to secure the protection of God. All of a sudden a prayer would take place in the middle of the street or in a conversation on the phone.

The word “blood” is especially powerful to drive Satan away with. So Bundjalung and Githabul Christians never fail to have a prayer and to “plead for” the blood of Jesus. “Pleading for the blood of Jesus” is a commonly used expression among Pentecostals and it is a symbolic expression that one prays to God for his protection from all the “negative” things in one’s life. “Negative things” vary from spiritual attacks by evil spirits or Satan to such mundane incidents as sickness, traffic accidents, financial difficulties and even feelings of depression and loneliness. Simultaneously, for Pentecostals the blood of Jesus is a miracle liquid in a practical sense. A white Pentecostal author advises proselytes to “plead for the blood of Jesus” (i.e. to pray as above-mentioned) whenever one gets hurt so that the injuries will heal instantly (Whyte 1973). The author, who had hit his head against a pole in the dark, experienced the instant cure of his injured and bleeding forehead. He testifies that he simply
pleaded for “the blood” (of Jesus).\textsuperscript{127}

Once a prayer is started, the passionate rhetoric of praising God would last forever. The people in the prayer circle always become oblivious of their surroundings, but simultaneously they are aware of their “different” behaviours. Once I witnessed a circle of prayers commence abruptly in the middle of the road among the members of kin groups exchanging departing greetings. Because of the handsome length of the prayers, cars needed to stop to avoid running over this group. They did not stop their prayers for the cars, but after the prayers were finished, everyone laughed, referring to how the drivers (i.e. local whites) might have thought about such “crazy people like us”. However “crazy” or “different” they may be represented by others, they seem to be content.

\textit{Manifestations}

The Pentecostal faith is to believe in what is written in the Bible from cover to cover. Being Christian is to have the way of Jesus in oneself. This Pentecostal nature of the Aboriginal church in the Far North Coast region has led the community into two groups of people: people who are eager to live like Jesus, and people who want to do so but cannot live with such a extremely high level of spiritual awakening. “I cannot give up everything (i.e. all of the worldly pleasures),” is the most common reason the non-Christian people mention. Without reaching such spiritual awareness, neither conversion nor attendance at church is expected by the fellowship. In compensation for “giving up everything”, the Aboriginal Christians can have access to the manifestations of the supernatural power of the Holy Spirit. This is an enormous reward for them.

\textsuperscript{127} See the following sales pitch in an excerpt from the book. It markedly hints at the concept of the blood of Jesus for Pentecostals: “...astounding results can take place in your life once you have learned about the power of the blood of Jesus and how to use it in coping with life’s difficult situations. This mighty weapon of spiritual warfare holds the secret to a life of miracles.” (Whyte 1973, emphasis in the original)
The manifestations which the contemporary Bundjalung and Githabul Christians expect are the same as the older generations did in the revival era: baptism with the Holy Spirit, speaking in tongues and miracle healing (cf. Chapter 3). Firstly, baptism with the Holy Spirit, or emotional ecstatic experience, takes place very often and commonly during the service. Unlike Calley’s observation that baptism with the Holy Spirit is of a higher initiatory level than baptism by water, today water baptism has become a formality conducted whilst receiving the outpouring of the Holy Spirit takes place regardless of the length of one’s Christian life. There were children between eight to eleven years old who had this type of experience. At one youth “tent rally” held during Easter week, in the enthusiastic holiday festival atmosphere, a group of teenagers who responded to the “alter call” (i.e. those who went up to the front of the venue and expressed their intention of conversion) were immediately “baptised” in the Holy Spirit on the spot. Some of these youths, just converted, even spoke in tongues on the spot. What kind of experience the outpouring of the Holy Spirit is varies according to each individual. Some say it is like being struck by electricity; some say they just feel warmth. Some lie still and see visions; some start crying and some are brought into laughter. Usually they do not lose consciousness but just abide with the “strange” feelings they are receiving.

Secondly, speaking in tongues (glossolalia) is a very common phenomenon observed during the services of the researched fourteen congregations, similar to baptism in the Holy Spirit. There are two different contexts in which glossolalia is observed. In one context, adherents experience it as spontaneous utterance of unknown words. It is widely believed by both Aboriginal and white Pentecostals that words spoken in tongues can be interpreted by a person who has the gift of interpretation, but in the researched congregations there was no one who was gifted in this job. In the other context, speaking in tongues is a completely controllable practice. For example, when some old ladies were trying to purify the venue for a meeting after ominous

---

128 An old man at Cabbage Tree Island was once known for his gift of prophecy “in tongues”. At the white church he used to fellowship for a while, there was an interpreter for him and his prophesy was interpreted to the audience at the service. He says it is the necessary church procedure, but as there was no Aboriginal interpreter in the community he no longer prophesises as he did before.
incidents, they agreed that they should speak in tongues while walking about in the venue to sprinkle anointing oil to the walls, chairs and the floor. They were praising God in tongues; they believed the Devil could not intervene if praises were spoken in tongues. An interesting feature of the tongues spoken by the members of the researched Aboriginal group is that there is definitely a similar pattern in phonetics—presumably highly subconsciously learned from the local church lore or through the popular televangelists’ broadcasting programs.

The third manifestation to mention is “faith” healing. Prayers for healing a sickness are most frequently asked for during the prayer time at the end of the service when the pastor invites the congregation to walk up to the front. Jesus said to his disciples, after he was resurrected from the Dead: “In my name shall they cast out devils; they shall speak with new tongues; They shall take up serpents; and if they drink any deadly thing, it shall not hurt them; they shall lay hands on the sick, and they shall recover.” (Mark 16:17-18) Not only the pastors but also everyone who has faith in Jesus can pray for others. Every kind of serious sickness such as cardiovascular disease, cancer and diabetes, psychopathological problems of drug and alcohol addition, everyday physical disorders such as back pain, colds, stiff necks and even problems of loneliness and depression are brought to the front to receive prayers.

Can prayers actually heal diseases? The Christians do believe in healing by faith. However, they are ambivalent about the aspect of the Lord’s healing power regarding chronic illnesses such as diabetes.129 “The Lord wants you to take the doctor’s medicine,” is most frequently heard as a pastor’s advice given together with a prayer for healing, and most of the Bundjalung and Githabul Christians find no problem with accepting the necessity for medical treatment and maintaining their faithfulness to God. After revelatory experiences or following high expectations at a special healing Ministry held by visiting evangelists, however, many of them stop proper medical

129 The prevalent diseases observed among the Aboriginal Christians are: diabetes, kidney problems accompanying dialysis, heart problems and drug and alcohol induced psychosis. Schizophrenia is prevalent among youth drug-induced psychosis cases, and D.T. (delirium tremens) is often seen among the alcoholics. Symptoms of D.T. are interpreted as demon-possession by the local Aboriginal Christians due to the patient’s possession-like status which accompanies violent reactions and extraordinary strength.
treatment. Several cases of these patients were indeed suggestive of the tragic end, but
the more vivid and revelatory these special spiritual experiences with the Holy Spirit
were, the less probability there was that the patients would resume medical
treatment. Apart from these self-assured cases, during my fieldwork I collected no
case material of miraculous healings in recent times in the researched group.

Weekly activities and Events

Church activities extend throughout the week. Generally, there are morning and
evening services on Sundays, and during the week there are Bible studies, men’s
meetings, women’s meetings, youth meetings, elder’s (or board) meetings, prayer
(tarry) meetings, and at least one music practice night. There are also occasional
open-air outreach meetings. Outreach is a meeting mainly with music and short
messages targeted at those who do not know Jesus, i.e., “sinners”. Often these are held
in an open-air setting in the street or in the problem-laden “Missions” or Aboriginal
reserves.

Devoted adherents spend five or six days a week on church commitments,
although weekday meetings are held basically in the evening (with some exceptions
such as special luncheon meetings)—each approximately for one to two hours. A
church in town, encouraged by its recent growth, started Friday all-night prayer
meeting from 8PM till 5AM on Saturday morning. People came and went through the

---

130 One middle-aged woman told me she had long stopped medication for diabetes since she
communicated with God and was given a miracle healing. Now she would not listen to the
doctor’s warning about near-future necessity of dialysis or imminent death. Once being stout,
she already had begun to lose weight in the past couple of years and was now very thin. Very
often she said she felt drowsy during the daytime, but instead of worrying about a
hypoglycemic coma, she understood the situation as God’s suggestion to let her body sleep.
131 I found three living persons whom the local Aboriginal people remembered as the evidence
of miracle healing which took place some thirty years ago. The one was an old man who used to
be demon possessed, the second was an old man who survived a tiger-snake bite. The last was a
forty-year old woman who was given a healthy hip-socket and stood up and began walking
when she was eleven. I met her during the fieldwork for this thesis. Practically there is no clue
to what really happened to them from medical point of view.

200
night to “tarry” (to communicate with God) until they felt the touch of the Holy Spirit and were satisfied. The prayer meeting is, in essence, meant to be a tarry meeting, although in a variety of forms. At another prayer meeting, people came and went, and there was no clear announcement of the start and end of the meeting by the pastor. The participants did not communicate with one another; they were solely absorbed in prayer to develop spiritual communication with God during the night.\textsuperscript{132}

\textit{Sunday worship services}

Sunday morning worship service is most intensively attended and performed. A service starts with an opening prayer. The band and the choir play a set of praise and worship songs until the congregation has turned into a spiritually heightened state ready for the message of the preacher. Then there comes a part allocated to testimonies. A couple of voluntary speakers give testimonies of faith by referring to how they spent the week. Sometimes it leads to the speaker’s confession of a little weakness of faith he or she experienced during the past week. The speaker’s singing a hymn or two usually follows it. Tithes and offerings are collected before the message. A tithe is one tenth of each individual’s personal income paid for the support of the church. An offering is any amount of money one can offer if one is a visitor for the day, or one wants to give extra money to God in addition to tithing according to the circumstances – such as thankfulness for a healing of sickness, or for a coming church event, and so on.\textsuperscript{133} The pastor requests a prayer for the message from the congregation. Then the preacher gives the Word. Usually preachers speak roughly for an hour. The message of the preacher or sermon is also called the Word (of God).

After the Word, the musicians go back to the stage for the music for “prayer time”. Music is indispensable to set the people free to be ready to receive the Holy Spirit.

\textsuperscript{132} At a non-Pentecostal Aboriginal congregation I observed, the prayer night was totally different. The participants sat at the table, prayed in turn as if it were a prayer lesson at school, and when everyone had had his or her turn, the meeting was over.

\textsuperscript{133} Even at an all-pensioner congregation, ten-dollar and twenty-dollar notes are not unusual. At white Pentecostal churches, however, seeing bunches of even fifty-dollar notes in the bucket is common.
Now those who want to receive prayers may walk up to the front. Anything can be prayed for by the preacher and the elders of the church such as for sickness, family problems, financial difficulties, loneliness, anxiety, and so on. Prayers often include spirit in-filling, which incurs glossolalia and getting slain in spirit. ‘Getting slain in spirit’ is the physical condition of a person who is being touched by the Holy Spirit. In most cases, people fall down on the floor, not by fainting or losing consciousness, but by being pushed physically by God’s power. This is the most exhausting part of the service. Eventually, a closing prayer signals that the congregation may be dismissed. On Sunday, the morning service includes communion at an appropriate place in the proceedings. Broken pieces of bread and grape juice are distributed to the congregation to eat and drink as the representation of eating and drinking the flesh and blood of Jesus. By a comparison with the summary in Chapter 3 based on Calley’s record, it seems that the procedure of Sunday worship has remained unchanged for a half century.

Table 10 below shows the respective timetables of one Sunday morning service at the four different Aboriginal congregations in the researched area. This chart illustrates that a similar pattern of worship procedures is shared by these Aboriginal churches despite the denominational differences. In the content of the service, however, lies the difference. The churches located in small Aboriginal communities are prone to unpredictable changes in the service procedures, but it is not regarded as problematic by either the pastor or the congregation, but rather, it is regarded as a sign of the spiritual status of being under the control of the Holy Spirit. On the other hand, at the large-scale churches where the first priority is the pursuit of a well-programmed service, any hindrances to the timed flow of the service are discouraged.

In the main, the outstanding differences among the respective congregations are (1) how well the service is programmed, and (2) how long the “ministry by the Holy Spirit” lasts during the service. Both work as the standard by which the degree of attachment to the old Aboriginal way of church can be measured. In other words, firstly, the better the service is programmed, the more universalised characteristics (or similarities to the white church) the congregation has. Secondly, the more flexible the
praise and worship music performances and the ecstatic prayers are, the more the church supports the “old-fashioned” blackfellas’ way. The more unpredictable the time schedule is, the more attached the church is to the Aboriginal spiritual expectations. In a more universalised congregation, anything coming up spontaneously (incurred by the power of the Holy Spirit) during the service is discouraged from being brought to the front.

As in Table 10, the praise and worship time is generally longer at the “good-old-day style” Aboriginal churches (as categorised in Chapter 4) than at the more universalised “town churches”, but truly characteristic of the Aboriginal way is the unpredictability of the procedures for each service. Would the pastor and congregation welcome and accept sudden words of prophesy, unexpectedly long sharing of testimonies, emergent requests for prayers and laying hands, and so on? One night, the pastor of a small Aboriginal church got into a lengthy praise and worship music performance and he looked oblivious of the time, the proceedings and the congregation. He was devoted in singing, with the guitar, with his eyes shut throughout the long praise and worship he led. Then he said, “Tonight I will be obedient to what the Holy Spirit tells us to do. The Holy Spirit tells us to bring the Word now. We will leave the testimonies until after the Word.” Then the preacher, who had been invited to preach from other “Mission”, was called up on at an unexpected stage of the service. Such a contingency is a common routine at the old-style church in this region, and another pastor supported the above-mentioned pastor:

White (Pentecostal) church is programmed. They are well organised. They are programming the Holy Spirit. We wait until the Holy Spirit moves. Blackfellas can keep going on and on until the Holy Spirit moves. The Holy Spirit can’t be programmed.

At one of the churches in the town, such unpredictability is strictly excluded. One female adherent who has a “gift of prophesy” was repeatedly chastised by the pastor whenever she stood up to share the vision she saw under the Holy Spirit’s influence
during the service. Though the church emphasised the spiritual side of the service, her behaviour was regarded as neglecting obedience to the pastor. She left the church eventually. In another congregation with a similar church policy, a female elder incurred the displeasure of her pastor by openly talking about a vision she received concerning the pastor. Since she was no longer permitted to stand up and speak in the church, the female elder left the church disappointed by the neglect of respect. It is generally agreed that worship is to wait for the move of the Holy Spirit and that it inevitably contains contingency, but in the churches with modern, universalised characteristics, there is much more emphasis on the authority of the pastor. This type of Aboriginal church in town attracts white adherents, which accelerates the church policy towards a more universalised direction.

134 In the old-style Aboriginal churches, the congregations including pastors are extremely patient with what elders do and say in the church regardless of the appropriateness of their behaviour.
Table 10  Timetable of Sunday morning worship service

Some examples from the services in 2003

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time frame</th>
<th>Case 1</th>
<th>Case 2</th>
<th>Case 3</th>
<th>Case 4</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Pentecostal church in the Aboriginal reserve</strong></td>
<td>10:00 Start</td>
<td>10:00 Start</td>
<td>2 hrs 30 min. at least</td>
<td>about 2 hrs 10 min.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Pentecostal church in a rural town with high Aboriginal concentration</strong></td>
<td>Praise and worship</td>
<td>Hymn singing from the hymn books*</td>
<td>Prone to contingencies. Receiving the Holy Spirit is not routine. If there is no request, there is no prayer time.</td>
<td>Evidently lacks the Pentecostal characteristics: praise &amp; worship and prayers under the Holy Spirit power.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Pentecostal church in the town, with multi-ethnic adherents (Aboriginal, Islander and white)</strong></td>
<td>Pray and worship</td>
<td>Testimony</td>
<td>Time spent for prayers in expectation of receiving the Holy Spirit</td>
<td>Timetable is strictly observed. Receiving the Holy Spirit is a fixed part of service.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Non-Pentecostal church, Aboriginal but with predominantly Islander descent</strong></td>
<td>11:00 Testimony</td>
<td>11:00 Testimonies</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Pentecostal church in the Aboriginal reserve</strong></td>
<td>Pastor's greetings</td>
<td>Preaching</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Pentecostal church in a rural town with high Aboriginal concentration</strong></td>
<td>Offerings</td>
<td>Songs by choir*</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Pentecostal church in the town, with multi-ethnic adherents (Aboriginal, Islander and white)</strong></td>
<td>Offerings</td>
<td>Preaching</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Non-Pentecostal church, Aboriginal but with predominantly Islander descent</strong></td>
<td>Testimony</td>
<td>Pastors greetings</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Pentecostal church in the Aboriginal reserve</strong></td>
<td>Prayers</td>
<td>Closing songs by the band*</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Pentecostal church in a rural town with high Aboriginal concentration</strong></td>
<td>Preaching</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Pentecostal church in the town, with multi-ethnic adherents (Aboriginal, Islander and white)</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Non-Pentecostal church, Aboriginal but with predominantly Islander descent</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Pentecostal characteristics:**
- Time spent for praise & worship music performances including ecstatic prayers
- Time spent for prayers in expectation of receiving the Holy Spirit

* The hymn singing at this non-Pentecostal Aboriginal church is somewhat different from the Pentecostal praise and worship performance, hence it is not categorised as praise and worship in my analysis. The distinct difference is the lack of devotion both by the choir and congregation to have communion with God while singing. There is no time for prayers, either.
Weddings

Among Bundjalung and Githabul people, once Christians get married, neither divorce nor remarrying is permitted. When facing a broken marriage, non-Christians may start a new relationship, but Christians can neither have another relationship nor remarry. The punishment is just the same for adultery. This strict observance of Pentecostal asceticism at the local end is extremely oppressive for women who have unfortunately gone through broken marriages. The surveillance of them by their fellow Christians is close and constant and anyone who is “unmarried” (according to legal status) and sexually active cannot stay with the church unless he or she completely gives up sex and procreation. This rule, by its nature, is destined to lead all adherents eventually to a “no-win” situation. Having casual sexual relationships is common practice in their community but once they convert, this customary habit becomes strictly forbidden. A legal marriage as soon as they find a partner, however, is a most risky choice as they must be bound to the first spouse until the end of either one of their lives.

Converts must keep themselves as “clean” vessels. Sexual relationships outside a husband-and-wife union are regarded as an abomination to the clean vessel to be used by the Holy Spirit. The only solution to achieve a happy and “correct” way of life for sexually active women/men is to get married legally and keep up with the marriage until death. The most concerned and pressing issues of a sexually active, ordinary Aboriginal person—such as a youth’s dream for future romantic relationships, or married people’s concerns about an imminent broken marriage, domestic violence, and so on—are completely neglected on the agenda of Christian women’s and men’s meetings and activities. Whatever the reason is, the answer is one and simple: If an adherent has a pre-marital or extra-marital relationship, he or she is condemned mercilessly by the fellow Christians and eventually ends up leaving the church with no counselling or consultations in search of repentance and redemption.

Therefore, young converts are by and large thrown into a no-win situation regarding the practical side of marriage. If they convert at a young age, having a sexual relationship, which is common practice these days starting in the early part of their
teens, is strictly forbidden—unless they go through the cycle of conversion and backsliding repeatedly. A marriage as soon as they find a partner, however, is most risky choice at such young age as they must be bound to the first spouse from the early stage of their life until the end of either one’s life. They are usually bullied into leaving church as soon as they fall in love with someone. Young girls are especially mercilessly bullied away from church by older female adherents—usually older widows who are sexually active but not as successful in their efforts to attract men as they covertly wish. Among the Bundjalung and Githabul, there are three options for Christian youths: (1) to maintain their celibacy until a legal marriage in the mid-thirties as recommended by custom; (2) to get married and make an effort to maintain the marriage; and if the marriage is broken, to keep celibate and give up procreation afterwards until the separated spouse dies, or, (3) to find a partner again and live “in sin” (i.e. to have a relationship) by accepting the social position of an adulterer and ostracism from the church.

Practically, however, premarital cohabitation is widely accepted because of various circumstances (see examples shown in Table 11 below). It often extends to several years or more. According to the recently married couples in their middle twenties, by the Aboriginal standard getting married (legally) at their age is too early. Usually, after a long stable de facto relationship with several children, people start thinking about marriage. Once Aboriginal people get married before God, it is a shared opinion of the Aboriginal community that, regardless of Christian affiliation, the couple is not usually meant to divorce. Separation, however, is omnipresent in the local Aboriginal community including Christians, but usually a marriage would keep going on without resort to divorce despite a couple actually ceasing cohabitation. As Calley observed the civil divorce had been rare (Calley 1959), it seems this feature of Aboriginal marriage has remained unchanged since the 1950s.

Table 11 (to follow) is a comparison of the four weddings held respectively among the four different factional groups (see Table 7 in Chapter 4) during ten months between 2003 and 2004. It includes three Christian couples and one non-Christian couple. Regardless of Christian affiliation, a legal marriage (which produces
certificate of marriage) in Christian style is carried out and, without exception, the local Aboriginal pastors are invited to marry the couple. Official invitations are not made to anyone except for a limited number of elders. However, those who should attend the wedding according to kin obligations come without fail, all dressed up, through word of mouth. In each case, a limited number of the families' white friends from school, the neighbourhood, or former relationships were seen. For the family and organiser, this is the most difficult part, as they must estimate the number of guests as precisely as possible in order to avoid any shortage or wastage of food for the reception.

The procedures for the ceremony are similar in the respective cases. Led by her father, the bride walks into the venue (a tent or a building of any kind) to the bridegroom waiting behind the pulpit or stage (for the band). The father gives her to the bridegroom. The pastor gives a message to the couple and to the guests. Then the bride and the bridegroom exchange the wedding rings, followed by the wedding vow. The couple sign the marriage certificate on the spot. When the couple, the pastor and the witnesses finish signing the documents, the pastor declares, “they are now a married couple”. The couple and the family drives out of the venue to the selected outdoor location for family photography, whilst the guests directly drive to the venue for the reception and wait for the arrival of the married couple and the family. The reception consists of buffet style meals, music by the Aboriginal band and choir, songs and messages by relatives and friends. At the end of the reception, the married couple cuts the wedding cake.
Table 11  Examples of weddings held under the respective factional groups  
(held between May 2003 and January 2004)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Factional Group (see Table 7)</th>
<th>A</th>
<th>B</th>
<th>C</th>
<th>D</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Setting</td>
<td>Aboriginal reserve</td>
<td>rural town close to Aboriginal reserve</td>
<td>rural town</td>
<td>village community on Aboriginal/Islander property</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Venue type: ceremony</td>
<td>tent in the reserve beside the church building</td>
<td>Uniting church rental building</td>
<td>tent beside the church building</td>
<td>own church building</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Venue type: reception</td>
<td>town hall</td>
<td>town hall</td>
<td>(as above)</td>
<td>town hall</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Who married them</td>
<td>pastor of the church in the reserve (Aboriginal)</td>
<td>pastor from other town requested by the family (Aboriginal)</td>
<td>the couple's pastor (Aboriginal)</td>
<td>the couple's pastor (Aboriginal)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Christian affiliation</td>
<td>Husband non-Christian; wife Christian for 10 months</td>
<td>Both non-Christians</td>
<td>Both Christian for one year</td>
<td>Both Christian but not through Pentecostal process of conversion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age of the couple husband/wife</td>
<td>26/24</td>
<td>32/31</td>
<td>25/25</td>
<td>25/21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Duration of relationship</td>
<td>6 years</td>
<td>16 years</td>
<td>11 years</td>
<td>4 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of children before marriage</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How they met</td>
<td>school/local community</td>
<td>function</td>
<td>school/local community</td>
<td>function/local community</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How they lived before marriage</td>
<td>Lived together on their own in the reserve in Aboriginal housing</td>
<td>Lived together first at the husband’s mother’s place, then on their own in the town</td>
<td>Lived together on their own in Aboriginal housing in the town</td>
<td>Lived at husband’s parents’ place</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Descent details of the couple</td>
<td>From the same group in N. Rivers.</td>
<td>Strangers from North Queensland and N. Rivers</td>
<td>Strangers from two different groups in the N. Rivers</td>
<td>Strangers from N. Rivers and Western Australia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Response from the community</td>
<td>May be too close to marry; may be too young for legal marriage, but all relatives now support.</td>
<td>Appropriate timing to settle down after long de facto relationship</td>
<td>May be too young for legal marriage. But as it is great they are free from alcohol and drugs, they must keep up with the Lord’s way.</td>
<td>Appropriate timing after premarital cohabitation.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Incentive for legal marriage</td>
<td>Because of increased sense of parental responsibility when the second baby was born with a problem.</td>
<td>According to general trend in the local Aboriginal community to get settled down in mid-30s.</td>
<td>Encouragement by the pastor to terminate fornication.</td>
<td>Personal decision to get serious with each other.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

209
For Christians, marriage is the most demanding contract with God. For those who are living “in sin”, there is no way other than by legal marriage to “come back” to the Lord. All the sampled cases before the weddings fall into the category of fornication according to the Christian judgement. There are, however, certainly differences between the respective local standards of judgement in these cases. As Case D is a non-Pentecostal church, there seems to be less pressure exerted on the premarital sexual relationships of Christian youths than in the Pentecostal local areas such as A, B and C. The Christian youths in this group speak about “having a relationship” fairly casually, as part of their ordinary life just like non-Christian youths without showing any sense of guilt. Case A, in spite of the relatively young age of the couple, is a marriage supported by a dominantly Christian reserve community where most of the residents are related complexly by consanguinity and affinity. Close families of the community, out of unconditional loyalties to kin, have supported this couple from the beginning of their relationship despite many objections among the community members.

Case C, situated in a town setting, is an example of a typical dilemma that young people must go through when they become Christian. The husband and wife are both 25 years old and too young to marry according to Aboriginal standards. But after converting one year ago, they could no longer continue what is judged as fornication by their pastor. If they wanted to remain Christian, there would be no other way for them than getting married “before God”, which not only means a Christian ceremony but also signing a legal document. They are too young to be married yet by Aboriginal standards, but there is no other option for them if they want to maintain their born-again life. This is the process in which Bundjalung and Githabul Pentecostalism enforces its institutional power to oppress sexuality as discussed in the previous chapter (Chapter 4). The Case C couple, however, was at least allowed to stay with the church between their conversion and their marriage—which was actually as long as a year. On the other hand, if a youth convert falls in love, the church (the pastor and the fellowship) becomes extremely hard-hearted and the youth would have to leave church sooner or later disappointed by the lack of support for youth converts who all suffer from the “no-win situation” as mentioned above. A relationship continuing
before one's conversion such as Case C is more tolerated by the congregation than converts starting relationships as Christians. Everything before one came to know God can be forgotten. (Otherwise, the authority of the pastor cannot be maintained. Most of the pastors used to be far more awful "sinners" than anyone else.)

Non-Christians are not bound by such a sense of guilt. The decision to get married legally is usually made in accordance with Aboriginal standards. Case B in the table is a typical case of contemporary mating among Bundjalung and Githabul people. The couple met when they were fourteen and started living together at the husband’s mother’s place soon after. When they were fifteen, they had their first child, which turned out to be twins. All the family and relatives, who had been disapproval of such an early teenage relationship, softened as soon as the twins came and their relationship was accepted, although with some remaining concerns. They have been in a stable relationship and have had six children during the past sixteen years. When the husband was thirty-two and the wife was thirty-one, they started to think about marriage. It is commonly considered appropriate timing to do so in today’s Aboriginal community. So they became a husband and a wife legally and they are happy with it despite the drastic difficulties in their economic life incurred by the legal marriage.135

Funerals

Funerals are also conducted by the local Aboriginal pastors. Similar to weddings, the venue is either a tent in the community or a rental church hall. The ceremony is always held in the Christian way, regardless of the Christian affiliation of the deceased. The ceremony procedures are, in general, as outlined below:

135 The household income dropped down to a half amount. During their long de facto relationship, they had registered for welfare payments as single parents separately from different addresses. The husband registered as a single father with one child, and the wife as a single mother with five children. The husband did not necessarily look for a job to support his big family, as their fortnightly welfare allowance was more than $2000. A family allowance for them as a married couple is $800. He works on CDEP (Community Development Employment Projects; cf. Chapter 6) but he can only earn less than half of the welfare money he used to receive.
Opening prayer
Opening hymn
Service (messages shared by the Aboriginal pastors)
Eulogy (delivered by a representative of the kin group)
Tributes (delivered by friends and relatives)
Songs (sung by gospel musicians including pastors)
At graveside: prayers and songs

After the ceremony, the attendees move to the cemetery and there is a brief time for prayers and messages over the coffin. After the funeral is finished, people move to the place for refreshments.

Many non-Christian Aboriginal people accept Jesus before they die – very often on their deathbed. A lot of times in a sickroom at the hospital, families and friends encourage a person on his or her deathbed to invite someone to pray for him or her and this is usually accepted. This is a common way of persuading “sinners” to convert before it becomes too late. “He (she) accepted Jesus before (s)he died” is a common narrative heard at the funeral, which is spread to the community members as proof that all the past sins had been forgotten and the deceased person went to Heaven however sinful the majority of the person’s life had been. Again, like weddings, relatives and community members who must attend funerals show up without fail. They carefully sort out the closeness of themselves to the deceased to fulfil expected kin obligations. Arguments sometimes take place over the absence of kin members who should have attended the funeral.

Unlike weddings, at some funerals “traditional” protocols are introduced. This phenomenon is limited to the funerals of the elders who were well known by the white mainstream society as political and cultural leaders of the Aboriginal community. Some fragmented proceedings such as a smoking ceremony and a song or prayers in a local Aboriginal language are the common elements to be incorporated into the otherwise dominantly Christian funeral procedures. All of these traditional elements are criticised by the Aboriginal Christians, but there is also an understanding that they

136 Some Christians interpret a “smoking ceremony” sporadically held at funerals as a derivative from a Catholic ceremony, and therefore, non-Christian. (Mainly due to lack of drinking taboos, Catholics are not regarded as Christians by the local standard because of the
should overlook anything at the time of a family tragedy. According to the information
I have collected, such involvement in traditional culture (shown in such open public
meetings) does not derive from the family’s practical inheritance of the rituals but from
the family’s strong interest in the political representation of Aboriginality to impress
the white mainstream society.

*Water baptisms*

Once a year, the respective congregations look for candidates for water baptism. Conversion is just the beginning of the Christian life, and it is completed by the proselyte simply saying he or she will receive Christ and believe in the death and resurrection of Lord Jesus Christ. Therefore, proselytes are expected to “grow in God” after conversion, which is the main part of their Christian lives. Water baptism is one of the steps they should go through. It is, however, a formality by which the proselytes judge whether or not they are ready for this stage, unlike an uncontrollable experience of baptism in the Holy Spirit in the spiritual realm. In Pentecostal denominations, baptism is full immersion in the water. After a prayer by the pastor, the adherent goes under water and comes back from the water as a “new creature”. It is one’s outward confession and pledge to the Christian community that one belongs to Christ and has died and risen with him symbolically.

It is up to each individual proselyte to decide when to receive the water baptism. In the researched Aboriginal community, the period between conversion and water baptism varies from a few months to a few years. This is partly because there are not so many proselytes each year at each church who are suitable for this stage, and partly because recruitment for water baptism is not ardently made. Even at big seasonal rallies, when it is expected that a water baptism event will be included as part of the programme, one or two each year is the average number. In the Northern Rivers Aboriginal community, some churches use the river, lake, or ocean, but some in the

---

strong legacy of Pentecostalism in this Aboriginal group.) This interpretation is more sympathetic than the interpretation that the smoking ceremony is an evil tradition.
Sin, repentance and deliverance

Pentecostal doctrine rejects worldly pleasures in order to keep each individual's body as a clean vessel for God. On the one hand, the rejection of culture by the Bundjalung and Githabul Christians today has been led by this teaching. Today a lot of aspects of "culture" of the Bundjalung and Githabul have been "detoxified" into such harmless fragments as dreamtime stories, language education, and Aboriginal arts and crafts. They do not find any problem with the revitalisation of these cultural elements because they are "nothing" - as far as the probability of the manifestation of a "fearful" outcome is concerned. Rather, as shown in Chapter 2, the problematic part is the incentives to maintain or revitalise Aboriginal culture offered by the state, hand-in-hand with abundant funding for community self-determination. The general concern of the Christians is that through one's lust for money and social status in the community, "the Devil" may insinuate himself into each individual's naive mind. This is the reason why people who are involved in the modern jobs related to cultural revitalisation and obligations to the community projects, which seem to be harmless from the viewpoint of traditional sorcery and curses, are sometimes accused of following the Devil's way.

On the other hand, in their discourse of "culture" there is another area of "cultural" practice: the direct engagement of the spirit world of the ancestral powers. (This aspect of "culture" will be detailed in Chapter 7.) This concern stirs up the community members' fear, and the loss of proper traditional knowledge has functioned to increase the fear of "culture" (cf. Chapter 3). Regarding practical taboos, the rejection of "culture" is more linked with rejection of the worldly pleasures.

 Unlike the Baptist church which has a pool under the church, getting baptised in stale water is not favoured very much by the local Aboriginal Pentecostals. They prefer "living waters". Although water baptism should occur only once in a lifetime, one old lady from the western part of New South Wales, upon visiting the baptism service in the Northern Rivers region, wanted to be baptised again in the river. She had been baptised for her part in a drum can in the desert and she sort of regretted it.
Practically, the worldly pleasures that Pentecostal Christians must avoid are mostly left to each individual's own judgement. In the modern context of material life, there are actually countless items to discuss—if a Christian wants to seek perfection in one's rejection of worldly pleasures. There are, however, certain forbidden deeds agreed unanimously by the Bundjalung and Githabul Christians in today's context. These are the "sins" that may deserve social ostracism from the community. In the main, the following issues are the unallowable worldly pleasures: adultery, fornication, alcohol and drug abuse, cigarette smoking, divorce, remarrying, gambling, watching football and doing sports, dancing, listening to worldly music, watching immoral TV and cinema, gossiping, coveting, involvement in political issues in the community, and involvement in the issues related to cultural heritage, traditional beliefs, and Aboriginal arts and craft.

See Table 12 below for a list of the unallowable worldly pleasures, standards of judgement, and local rules of chastisement.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Practice</th>
<th>Judgement and chastisement</th>
<th>Remarks</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Adultery</td>
<td>Ostracism from church community for a certain period. Strictly observed.</td>
<td>Withdrawal from church varies between a few months and a couple of years. With pastors, social ostracism can continue for a lifetime, but it depends on the local power games.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fornication</td>
<td>Not permitted but practically prevalent in the Christian community. Pressure to terminate it or get married, and discouragement to speak at church (while the relationship is on) will continue.</td>
<td>When one is involved in a premarital sexual relationship, one is expected to stop taking leading roles at church such as preaching, playing in the band, and giving testimonies. This common rule is not observed totally obediently, but emotional pressures are indeed serious to fornicators.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Drinking (&amp; drug use)</td>
<td>The moment one starts drinking, one withdraws from church voluntarily.</td>
<td>Drinking is the most evident sign of backsliding.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cigarette smoking</td>
<td>Permitted, though not recommended.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Divorce</td>
<td>Not permitted. But if one maintains celibacy, separation in practical life is not directly regarded as sin.</td>
<td>There are a number of “separated” married couples in the church, but as long as they stay away from “adultery”, the church is not concerned by separation.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Remarriage after own divorce</td>
<td>Ostracism from church community.</td>
<td>Regarded as adultery.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Remarriage after death of spouse</td>
<td>Celebrated.</td>
<td>Regarded as Christian marriage.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marriage with a divorced person</td>
<td>Not permitted, but it depends on the individual circumstance.</td>
<td>Regarded as adultery.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marriage with non-Christian</td>
<td>Not permitted, but sometimes reluctantly accepted according to circumstances.</td>
<td>As one’s spouse may backslide after Christian marriage, to have a non-Christian (backslidden) spouse is unavoidable.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gambling</td>
<td>Not permitted, but TABs are in a grey zone.</td>
<td>Poker machines, TABs, card games, betting on football games, etc. At least, gambling related to the places like clubs and associated with drinking is inexcusable.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Football &amp; sports</td>
<td>Standards vary from accusing football of destroying the community to supporting it as the empowerment of Aboriginal identity. Watching football is regarded as less sinful than playing it. “Clean” sports are permittable.</td>
<td>The issue is how one enjoys football - whether one wants to support the family and relatives who are players, or wants to seek money from betting on the game, or if one is attracted by the spirit of competition, etc. Other sports are less problematised than football regarding the vulnerability to drugs and sex, though interest in competition in general is not encouraged.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Activity</td>
<td>Standards</td>
<td>Rightist Extremes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>----------------------------------</td>
<td>---------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>-------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dancing</td>
<td>Standards vary from prohibiting all dancing to allowing dancing for good purpose at Christian meetings and so on.</td>
<td>The rightist extremes insist any act of dancing is evil. The leftist extremes insist such a project as dancing to Christian music can work as a good measure to recruit young adherents. At least, going to &quot;immoral&quot; places like a disco is unanimously rejected.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Music other than Christian music</td>
<td>Unethical music should be avoided (violence, sex). But restrictions are very loose.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TV and cinema</td>
<td>Unethical programs should be avoided (violence &amp; sex). But restrictions are very loose.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gossiping (backstabbing in power games)</td>
<td>Practically prevalent; one must repent on a daily basis</td>
<td>Backstabbing and rumour making are, in fact, part of the foundation of the local Aboriginal grapevine, and it works to unite the community members; therefore, this sin is unavoidable and the Christians constantly repent for this sin.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coveting (Jealousy and envy)</td>
<td>Practically prevalent; one must repent on a daily basis</td>
<td>As the local Aboriginal people are acutely interested in one another’s fortunes and misfortunes in an exclusive community of kin groups, this sin is unavoidable; therefore, the Christians are led to constant repentance for this sin.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Involvement in politics for community management</td>
<td>Not recommended, as the desire for power and money will attract one to the devil’s way. But treated as a matter of individual will and discipline.</td>
<td>Interest in keeping leading political positions.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Involvement in cultural heritage, cultural events, native title, etc.</td>
<td>Not recommended, as the demonic power may be released accidentally. Also one may be caught up with desire for money by dealing in cultural heritage. But reluctantly left to each individual’s will and discipline.</td>
<td>Interest in working on cultural heritage projects, native title, etc. For such work it is often necessary to deal with traditional ceremonial knowledge and visit sites, which Christians must not do.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Belief in the traditional spirit world</td>
<td>Evidence of vulnerability to demonic power. Rebuked and corrected if known openly.</td>
<td>Some older people have a confused understanding despite their devotion to Christianity (see Chapter 7).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Involvement in the traditional spirit world</td>
<td>Evidence of involvement in demonic power. Feared and avoided by Christians.</td>
<td>People in this category do not communicate with the church (see Chapter 7).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aboriginal arts and crafts, Aboriginal cultural performances</td>
<td>If it is related to the spirit world such as creators other than God, it is demonic and dangerous.</td>
<td>If the Christian principle of the one and only Creator (God) is not impinged upon, traditional stories and arts are harmless. By this standard, ancestral creator spirits including the Rainbow serpent are not permissible for production.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
To sum up the data in Table 12, among the above-mentioned numerous social practices, in fact only three are regarded as serious breaches of faith by a consensus among the Bundjalung and Githabul Christians: (1) drinking (and drug usage); (2) sexual immorality (adultery and premarital relationships); and (3) involvement in the traditional Aboriginal cultural knowledge and practices. These instantly lead to ostracism from the Aboriginal church community. Other practices are unanimously regarded as questionable, but judgement is usually left to each individual and circumstance.

Committing these sins means that one has instantly “backslidden” or lost one’s faith in God. But it is also agreed that the fallen situation is somehow recoverable, as is mentioned above, according to the Christian doctrine of God’s forgiveness. Over this very process of sinning, repentance and deliverance the Aboriginal social and moral order dominates. Responses to the sinners who have committed the three serious breaches of faith are heavily influenced by the status of the sinners’ family and kin in the Christian community. Details are given below.

**Drinking (and drug usage)**

The moment one goes back to drinking, one is judged to have left the Lord or “backslidden”. Usually the proselytes would not hide it; the moment one is overcome by the temptation to drink, one regards oneself as a loser. I have observed the backsliders being unable to bring themselves emotionally to step into the church building. It is relatively easier for drinkers, however, to come back to the Lord (i.e., to convert again by repentance) than those who have committed other serious sins such as adultery. Regardless of the status of the backsliders and their families, those who repent for drinking are always welcome to come back to church. Due to the addictive nature of drinking, there are many of those who repeat conversion and backsliding over the years. At least, it is surprising that during affiliation with church, all the addicts can completely stay away from alcohol and drugs. Beer, wine, spirits and methyl alcohol are drunk by the locals. Drinking goes on for days without a break if
they drink at private homes in the reserve. The local pubs are also where the drinkers meet. Because of the support system among kin, no one worries about the shortage of alcohol. There are always cousins hanging around who can “chuck” money in.

Drug abuse is also included in this category, as drinking and drug usage often accompany each other. Drugs for the Aboriginal people in this region used to be “yarndi” (marijuana) only, but recently, cocaine and chemical tablets have been introduced. Young addicts are often involved in drug smuggling from Nimbin (a locality established by the new-age movement in the 1970s) to the community. Petrol sniffing has not prevailed in the community. Cigarette smoking is not regarded as an agreeable habit, but is tolerated in the local Christian community.

Sexual immorality

Only adultery terminates one’s social position as Christian instantly. Fornication, which includes long and stable de facto relationships as well as promiscuity, is not permitted but often overlooked according to various circumstances. There is a general consensus that Christians who are currently having premarital relationships are requested to refrain from speaking at church. Preaching, giving testimonies and performing in the band and choir are not permitted until these people cease their sinful relationships.

Adulterers can come back to church in due course. How long adulterers should stay away from church is one of the most controversial issues in the Bundjalung and Githabul Christian community. There is no consensus among them, nor are there any rules shown by the Bible, although there are plausible rumours everywhere. Some say six months for lay Christians and three years for pastors is God’s law to the adulterers. Some say one must stay away until the oldest Christian elder gives one the green light in an open public meeting. My research has come to the conclusion that at least among the Bundjalung and Githabul Christians, it all depends on the circumstances. Generally speaking, if the adulterer is from an influential family in the local Christian community,
he or she can come back to normal relatively quickly—even a case of a pastor's adultery can be forgiven quickly, for example, in a year or two.

On the other hand, if the adulterer is unfortunately from a less influential family or kin group in the local Christian community, it is impossible to recover their original status. Ungrounded rumours about continuing adultery are often made up by the enemy side of the factional groups. It all depends how many Christians are related to the sinner, and especially how many influential Christians such as pastors or Christian leaders fall into the sinner's family and close kin groups. Because of unconditional loyalty prevalent among the Bundjalung and Githabul to the family and kin, if the sinner has a big group of family and relatives who are Christians, it inevitably makes the majority of the local Christian community sympathetic to the sinner—whatever sin he or she may have committed.

Regarding fornication (love affairs between single people), there is a consensus that fornicators are not to be immediately ostracised but they must keep low profiles at church as long as the sinful relationship continues. The degree of tolerance, however, varies according to the personality of the pastor and the leading families in the congregation. Still, the emotional pressure they feel from the congregation is enormous and usually fornicators—especially youths who have fallen in love and begun suffering from their “no-win” situation as Pentecostal converts—leave church at their own will. When the relationship is terminated, fornicators are most welcome to come back to church. On the whole, there is no counselling and consultancy function in the Bundjalung and Githabul church community. The pastors and elders are those who fulfil the ideal status of married units or widows/widowers in celibacy and, therefore, are quite indifferent to the universal dilemma of the “no-win” situation of Pentecostal converts who are sexually active. The most outstanding characteristic of Bundjalung and Githabul Pentecostalism is its punishing function to oppress sexuality (see discussion on gender issues in Chapter 4).

Divorce and remarrying are not permitted by the Aboriginal Christians in this region. Remarrying after divorce is regarded as adultery. Ostracism from church
follows. Apart from the Christian doctrine, the local Aboriginal people usually do not divorce after the marriage has been broken. The couple simply live separately and lead lives on their own respectively. Non-Christians may start a new relationship, but Christians can neither have another relationship nor remarry. The punishment is just the same as for adultery. There is, however, an important aspect of this standard for sexual immorality to be considered. Anything that one has done before conversion is forgotten. An adulterer, fornicator, or even a criminal of sex offences would not be condemned and be warmly accepted into the church if these sins were committed before one’s conversion. Therefore, there are many divorces and divorcees who are Christian, and actually this category of people are allowed to remarry after conversion. Extended families as a result of past extramarital relations are fairly common among the local Christians, including the pastors. The bottom line is whether one has betrayed the contract with God _during_ the period one is Christian. Things done outside this framework can be completely forgotten as the past that one is no longer responsible for.

_Involvement in culture_

As in the above table, there are numerous issues in contemporary Aboriginal communities that are related to “culture” in the widest sense: involvement in politics for community management, jobs related to cultural heritage, cultural events and native title, doing Aboriginal arts and crafts and cultural performances and so on. Many of these fall into a grey zone. At least, to believe in the traditional spirit world is clearly regarded as involvement in “culture”, hence the Devil’s way. However, there is no one today who identifies oneself as Christian and who is simultaneously involved in practice of traditional cursing, love magic or traditional healing. There are those who are suspected of being involved in the traditional spirit world. This category of person is not in the grey zone. This behaviour is clearly seen as breach of faith. This issue is explored in detail in Chapter 7.

Except for this particular area of “culture”, general understandings about
culture are flexible. Involvement in things related to “culture” is not recommended for Christians, but they are left in the grey zone because of the great many things categorised under the name of “culture”. One distinct “evil” is involvement in the spirit world. Otherwise, things that are called “culture” broadly are permissible for Christians as far as they stay away from the cultural knowledge and practices that have potential to summon up evil spirits or to stimulate ones “lusts” for money, social status, and so on. This is a fairly ambiguous standard and indeed there are always questions and suspicions about the contents of this category. (See Table 12 for particulars.) This is exactly the reason why some Christian elders today are often suspected by fellow Christians of cheating their faithfulness to God by enjoying lucrative jobs related to cultural heritage. According to the local Christian standard, unfortunately the elders have found a questionable, monopolistic channel to worldly pleasures supplied by the mainstream society.138

Signs of backsliding

When Christians have lost their spiritual relationship with God, going back to the worldly pleasures usually follows. Those who have “gone back to the world” as such are called “backsliders”. Signs of backsliding are drinking and usage of drugs, which are quickly picked up by the community members. Committing other serious sins

138 To give some examples, traditional dances, giving lectures about Aboriginal culture, doing life story sessions at public meetings, sitting for researchers’ recording local languages, and selling arts and craft can produce a good income to make a living with. The Far North Coastal region of New South Wales now holds increasing numbers of white people interested in nature-based lifestyle and new age trends, which is evident in the multi-ethnic towns such as Byron Bay and Lismore. The Aboriginal elders are admired by the mainstream society as far as they represent the persistence of traditional Aboriginal culture and spirituality that fits with white romanticism. In the domain of rural industry, in a more practical sense, white farmers would listen to Aboriginal elders owing to their own benefits. The farmers are willing to pay for a “cleansing ceremony” for the massacre sites if they are told to do so by Aboriginal elders. Once a cleansing ceremony was held by a Christian elder in 2002, to which many of the local Aboriginal Christians responded negatively. It was regarded as that particular elder’s cunningness to get paid by white farmers; but the local white Christian community took the featured message of reconciliation seriously and was supportive. Most of the local Aboriginal Christians did not have that kind of romanticism. They insist that only God can cleanse the place, not the elder—regardless of being “Christian” or “traditional”. Therefore the Christian elder’s demonstration of cleansing the massacre sites was regarded as an unpermissible deviation from the Lord’s law.
such as adultery, fornication and belief in the traditional spirit world are also backsliding behaviours. Involvement in “grey-zone” worldly pleasures is not regarded as backsliding. Backsliding takes place very often in the Bundjalung and Githabul Christian community. Non-Christians tend to explain that this is because of the too strict, ascetic moral order for self-formation demanded of Pentecostal proselytes. But at least as far as the Bundjalung and Githabul Christians are concerned, it is rather the consequence of the loss of spiritual intimacy with the Holy Spirit. In the first place, the very nature of Pentecostal faith, i.e., the absolutely personal relationship with the supernatural, contains a big risk for proselytes. It leaves them defenceless against the Devil’s attack. It is left to each individual’s strength of faith whether or not the Devil can insinuate himself into and undermine the place for God in one’s mind.

As long as one believes one’s faith in God is not yet dried up, one would not leave the church but rather seek for deliverance by repenting. As Man is made to sin and God is to forgive, as long as one’s faith in God is strong, failing to follow the required ascetic life or committing a sin or two does not lead one to a sense of guilt. The fundamental teaching of the Christian dogma is that man is made to sin and God is to forgive (1 John 1: 8-10). There is always God’s forgiveness and the promise of redemption from sins. Loss of spiritual intimacy with God, on the other hand, takes place with no reason and once this happens, one is left utterly vulnerable to worldly pleasures. At this stage, one’s prayers for repentance and deliverance will not work: one’s relationship with God is shattered. This is the reality of becoming a backslider according to the Bundjalung and Githabul standard. This issue will be discussed in detail in the next chapter (Chapter 6).
CHAPTER 6

Testimonies: In between...

If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. If we say that we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us.

—The First Epistle of John 1: 8-10, The Holy Bible (KJV)

"It was a funny feeling coming up on me. My heart was burning and my belly was sort of rumbling all inside. I knew it was the Lord."

—A youth convert in Casino

"Those young fellas...they stay with the Lord as long as the enthusiasm lasts."

—A local white sympathiser who provides Aboriginal youths with drugs

A young white girl helping at the Christian bookshop in Lismore town made her own point of view known, that Pentecostals are a perpetual nuisance today to the everyday lives of ordinary Australians. She mentioned the importunacy of those hard-nosed recruiters who canvass in the neighbourhood, in the street or at school and urge people to convert. The bookshop was not run by a mainline denomination but by one of the "charismatic" churches in Australia, which was, according to the girl, better balanced than the Pentecostal church. A casual remark "we are not Pentecostal" was clearly a proud expression of her Christian identity. By saying, "better balanced," she meant that her church was spiritual but not so exhaustive in its demands for spiritual commitments like those of the Pentecostal church.

139 See Footnote 48 (Chapter 2) for the difference between the charismatic movement and the Pentecostal movement in the recent, interdenominational Christian spiritual renewal movements.
The Bundjalung and Githabul Christians, however, do not fall into such a common category of Pentecostal stereotypes as the girl described. They show no interest in recruiting people they do not know well. Only when they see extreme problems and sufferings among their kin or close community members, do they encourage the sufferers to surrender to the Lord so that these loved ones can receive God's power to drive away the Devil who they believe is the prime culprit in causing human problems on earth. The Bundjalung and Githabul Christians are not at all concerned about the "unnamed mass" they pass by in everyday life.\textsuperscript{140} This chapter mainly explores their lifeworld situated in the vernacular reality of everyday Christian practice in the local context. Today's Bundjalung and Githabul people, however, are also keenly aware of the universal imagination of Aboriginality and Aboriginal Christianity.\textsuperscript{141} The discrepancies between such a universal imagination of Aboriginality and Aboriginal Christianity and the lived reality for Aborigines in the rural backwaters are clearly irreconcilable. In this chapter, how they manage and use such a universal imagination of Aboriginality in the vernacular context is also shown.

\textbf{Everyday life of an Aboriginal Christian}

\textsuperscript{140} I have never heard of any complaints from white locals that local black Christians importunate them for conversion. Far from recognising that all the real (as opposite to nominal) Aboriginal Christians in the Northern Rivers region are Pentecostal, white locals seem to be hardly aware that there could be any "tamed ones like Christians (generally speaking, or according to their standard)" among the Aboriginal part of their countrymen, whilst they are acute in spotting the visible signs of the social malaises among the local Aboriginal communities. The Bundjalung and Githabul Pentecostals say that the heart is burning for evangelising, but it is also a palpable fact that they are securely withdrawn within their own people and community. Their interest does not extend to "outsiders" as far as the pressing need to remedy the suffering of sinners is concerned. Only when they are situated in a certain context, i.e., in the context of the nationwide Christian network, are they able to incorporate the unnamed, non-Aboriginal mass into their thoughts as people in flesh and blood.

\textsuperscript{141} The idea and activities of solidarity of Aboriginal Christians have been formed nationwide and introduced to the Bundjalung and Githabul community during the past twenty years through the several Christian leaders the Bundjalung and Githabul country has turned out. These leaders (see blow in the text for detail) got through to the national context of Aboriginal Christianity and become the medium for their people who are usually content to withdraw in the fringe communities in rural New South Wales.
**Adam, in the hillbilly Mission**

Adam Bundock is a twenty-five-year-old Christian living in Casino. He has been on Centrelink for the past couple of years. When he is enrolled at TAFE, he is busy with his assignments and obligations to attend school for five days a week but he receives 360 dollar’s of Abstudy fortnightly. He is not at TAFE now, but being on the dole, he still receives some 300 dollars fortnightly. To eke out a living is manageable for Adam even in the town, away from his home and his own people. He is from a small village which is called Muli Muli today. It is an Aboriginal reserve which both Aborigines and local whites call “the Mission”, although it has never been a mission settlement started by any missionary. Adam’s great-grandfather, with a few other families, moved to this hilly part of the Woodenbong area at the foot of the Border Range at the turn of the twentieth century, and it became a reserve as the local Aboriginal people gradually moved there from other camps. The Protection Board designated it as a station and appointed a manager afterwards. Adam’s great-grandfather Arthur Bundock was the founder of the church in the village before it became the Woodenbong Aboriginal Station.

With all the Christian family background and reputation he has as a Bundock, Adam has been Christian for only three years or so. His life did not run smoothly until recently. After growing up in Muli Muli and leaving school at Year 9, he had been on a modern version of the “initiation journey”, visiting his kin in different parts of New South Wales and Queensland, following his friends to enjoy drinking and smoking, and doing a lot more fun things like going to nightclubs, meeting girls, and so on. After all those years of drinking and worldly pleasures he was involved in since high school, one night, after getting dead drunk and having arguments with his mates, in despair he called upon the Lord to deliver him from drinking. The Lord answered his prayer. His desire for drinking was gone overnight. A couple of weeks later, at the rally in north Queensland he attended with his relatives, he gave his heart to the Lord. He eventually came back to Woodenbong to enrol at TAFE to do Year 10. It took some time but he has stopped cigarette smoking completely now. Life is clean and stable for Adam now. He has moved to Casino with his younger brother to fellowship at the Aboriginal church.
there. The pastor of Muli Muli church is Adam’s full uncle, but his Dad has permitted him to move to Casino. Living in the town is a good distraction although Adam thinks he is and will be a Muli Muli boy forever.

Adam has relatives everywhere in the Northern rivers region, except for Tweed Heads. Here in Casino he has no worries of getting stranded with nobody who looks after him and his brother. The rent is 120 dollars a fortnight, and he shares the rent and electricity with his younger brother, his flat mate. The brothers do not eat much. They are young, thin and healthy. As for food, they buy takeaways occasionally but they usually go to their Auntie’s house for meals. They don’t make regular contribution for meals, but whenever he is asked to give he gives until he becomes broke. On “dole day” he puts aside 40 to 50 dollars for himself and gives away the rest to the members of kin groups on demand. His younger brother, more naïve and soft-minded, puts aside even less—20 dollars or so for his humble entertainment with occasional take-aways or ice cream. Usually, in two or three days, all the money is gone. “Sharing among the relatives - we do this heaps,” he says. But the brothers never get worried. Tithing to church must be 10 percent of income. The brothers pay rent and the Lord’s money instantly on the pension week.

Jeremiah, at the beachfront Mission

Most of the Bundjalung and Githabul youths say life today for young people is boring. For a lot of them life consists of yarndi (marijuana), grog and CDEP. Jeremiah Smith is a twenty-four-year-old young man living in another town near the Mission on the beach. Jeremiah knows the mob in the Mission on the hill, too. Jeremiah and Adam used to hang around in the gangs at Muli Muli in their childhood during Jeremiah’s holiday visits to his Nan’s. Smith is his white Dad’s name. His Aboriginal Mum had four men so far with whom she had children. His Dad was the second one and the only one who married her legally. Dad was a white-collar worker and the family lived in Darwin for a while with Dad working

---

142 CDEP stands for Community Development Employment Projects. Indigenous community organisations in Australia are funded to run CDEPs in the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. CDEP relates to each community’s needs and also acts as a stepping stone into the mainstream labour market (Australian Government Homepage: Centrelink).
there. But he did not stay with the family very long. When the marriage broke
down, Mum and the four children came back to the Mission. (Mum had another
two kids—Jeremiah’s half-brothers—to two other men afterwards.) His own Dad
died a couple of years ago. He and his younger sister, the two being their Dad’s
only children, looked after him on his deathbed. “I liked Dad, though my sister
didn’t”, he said. Jeremiah has five siblings (two sisters and three brothers), all of
whose fathers are different from his own Dad except for this younger sister. He is
handsome, smart and very fair with blue eyes. He can pass for white, but he knows
no other way than the blackfella’s way. He grew up in the Mission on the beach.
He once had a white girlfriend from school and moved to Sydney for a while with
her but it did not work out. With a broken heart, he came back to his own people.

The white sandy path extending from a cluster of vandalised houses at the
Mission to the beach and the blue ocean beyond the sand dominates his memory of
childhood. He lives on odd jobs, CDEP or on social security and he has never had a
permanent job. He did well at school, but he has nothing that excites him for a long
time. He finished Year 12 straight, which is a rare achievement for an Aboriginal
male youth in this local community. His disciplined Aunty calls him bluntly “a
lazy dog”, referring to his innate smartness and present apathy. But his mother
seems to think he is not too bad, if compared with heaps of other youths in the
Mission. The Mission is a place in which such lifestyle is nurtured. By saying,
“How the Lord works...
Jeremiah, these days, often sleeps at his cousins’ places in the Mission away from
Mum’s house to enjoy drinking and smoking and sleeping with girls. Life is
boring...an endless cycle of yarndi, grog, girls, TV, and CDEP. Youths in the
Mission say there is no future in the Mission. For Adam, on the contrary, life
cannot be boring because living a Christian life is very busy. He must “have church” anywhere, anytime. That means he must think of God all the time—through reading the Bible, praying to God and tarrying for the Holy Spirit to rain down on him. In addition, he has church commitments five days a week, and he has relatives to communicate with daily. Full-time church commitments, reading the Bible, practicing praise and worship songs, and visiting his cousins, uncles and aunties in the neighbourhood. Life is going well, if not filled with novelties in the world. For Christians, however, the Lord’s supernatural power is a never-ending novelty.

Back at the beachfront Mission, it is usual practice for drinkers and drug users to smoke and drink for days without a break, supported by the sharing system. Sometimes one experiences a quasi-“spirit-filled” condition, but it may be the moment when one is on the verge of developing psychosis from excess alcohol and drug consumption. To the immature brains of youths, excess marijuana smoking often causes irrecoverable damage. Jeremiah’s younger brother (half-brother, strictly speaking) who is only nineteen has gone too far and he will have to live with drug-induced schizophrenia. There are a lot of these youths around him. Jeremiah himself has gone through the same process and spent half a year in a psychiatric asylum, being locked up in a straightjacket and under heavy medication for treatment but he was lucky to be able to get back to normal with no after-effects.

It was the police who sent him to the asylum. Under the influence of drugs and alcohol he had been paranoid for quite a while by the idea of being Jesus. In that year a big flood attacked the region. On the night when the flood was about to swallow the houses in the neighbourhood, he wore a white sheet like a robe and attempted to walk into the water like Jesus or Moses. The police rescued him from the troubled water—and took him to the asylum. When he was discharged from the asylum, he gave his heart to the Lord, as his Mum and Nan were Christians and wanted him to. Mum used to be a heavy drinker. When she converted, the family moved out of the Mission to avoid contact with drinking lifestyle but the “new-born Mum” has only been known to Jeremiah and his siblings for just the
last two or three years. Drinking and child neglect had been a lifestyle he was born with. Eventually he withdrew from churchgoing and returned to grog and *yarni*. Also it was difficult to keep away from the girls running after him. He has backslidden.

In contrast, Adam’s life is flowing on calmly – with the Lord, the church fellowship, and meeting kinsfolk – unlike his peers who are trapped with sinner’s lives of drugs, alcohol, violence and fornication. If there is something for him that is lacking now, it is a girl and a happy married life under the Lord’s blessing. It is fairly difficult in his present situation of settled life in the Northern Rivers region, because most of the single Aboriginal girls around him are cousins to him in some way. This is a big problem for Adam that prevents his dream from coming true quickly, but at least he has dreams and hopes. He uses his abundant free time enabled by the welfare system for the Lord, whilst his peer Jeremiah uses all the resources he has for sinning. Adam’s uncle Haggai, however, is a little concerned about the welfare dependence of his Christian nephew. Haggai used to lead a life like Adam and devoted all his time in travelling and playing music in the gospel band. But he quit living on the dole at some stage of his life. He has come to be aware that Aboriginal people need to make a concrete ground of living. He now works for the Aboriginal Medical Service as a field officer and has moved out of the core part of the Bundjalung and Githabul Christian network. But, of course, Haggai is happy with Adam, because being Christian is already a wonderful achievement for youths in the local Aboriginal community severely hit by alcohol, drugs and violence.

*Moral economy among the Aboriginal Christians*

In his 1964 article on rural Aboriginal communities in New South Wales Jeremy Beckett (1964) made clear that traditional kinship knowledge had been completely lost, but he emphasised the fact that there was a distinctly Aboriginal way of life still kept intact. Such arguments, despite the depiction of “culture loss”, depart from judgements such as: the Aboriginal people living in “settled” Australia simply have a group
identity as black, in opposition to whites, or a mode of life typical of the white working
class (Eckerman 1977; Fink 1957; Smith & Biddle 1975). Diane Barwick (1964) outlined a
similar mode of distinctively Aboriginal life in Victoria:

Most of these people desire an urban standard of housing and regular
employment. Few as yet desire the other characteristics of urbanization: the
breakdown of extended family and kinship bonds, and the achievement of
material success on an individual or nuclear family basis. (ibid.: 20-21)

Calley discussed life among the North Coast Aboriginal group along the same
lines as Beckett and Barwick in his 1956 article about Bundjalung and Githabul
people’s economic life (Calley 1956b). There was continuing influence of the extended
kinship system over modern Aboriginal life in many different ways, yet the society
was quite well adapted to the white community that encompasses it on all sides. Calley
saw it as “a degree of stability” that it had achieved (ibid.: 213). His conclusion was:

It is the group life as a whole which displays significant differences from the
white norm (or perhaps ideal) and it is impossible to consider isolated aspects,
unpunctuality, wastefulness, willingness to share with kin, apart from this
background. (ibid.)

Apparently, today’s Bundjalung and Githabul people retain a similar mode of
Aboriginal life as described in the above. They seem to be somewhat withdrawn from
the white society of this region emotionally as well. There is also a more practical
reason, i.e., their lack of opportunities to mix with the members of the local white
community (cf. Calley 1956a, 1957, 1967). They are candid in admitting their standard
of living is both “lower” than and “different” from that of the local whites and that
they often feel daunted when they have to mix with whites. Regarding this perceived
“lower” standard, they refer to their neglect in minding the house and garden, their
unsophisticated behaviours, lesser education and lower-class jobs.

Regarding “differences”, similar to the examples in the above-mentioned studies,
the most distinct Aboriginal feature among Bundjalung and Githabul people is the firm
maintenance of a sense of loyalty to kin relationships and the consequent obligations
for sharing food (including alcohol and drugs) and money with kin. People sometimes seemed to be “obsessed” with the sense of loyalty to the other members of kin groups. For example, I often observed such strong social and emotional attachments to their own people lead them to feel depressed, frustrated, furious and sometimes even frightened. Younger generations brought up in the contemporary mixed-race environment and more liberal education system does hold such social orientations, too. Among the Christians, the overall situation seems to be the same. Loyalty to kin groups is unconditional as is discussed in Chapter 4 in the context of Christian activities.

Australian Aboriginal modes of sharing are culturally distinctive: sharing is an obligation to give on demand, i.e., sharing as a response to a demand which is initiated by the receiver. The obligation to give in response to demands without the expectation of a return constructs particular dynamics of social relations. Peterson has elaborated on the notion of “demand sharing” in his studies of remote area of northern Australia (Peterson 1993) and emphasises the aspect of the system of sociality rather than looking at sharing in terms of the cost-benefit theories of evolutilional biology. In “settled” parts of Australia such as the Bundjalung and Githabul country, too, the Aboriginal moral economy is based on demand sharing (see, for example, Macdonald 2000, for Wiradjuri communities of central New South Wales). Demand sharing continually tests, defines and shapes kin relationship.

Peterson and Taylor (Peterson & Taylor 2003) discuss kin sharing as the basis of the domestic moral economy in contemporary Aboriginal society, and argue that major trends away from sharing is influenced by mixed marriages. Data are collected from western New South Wales. Exactly as they suggest (ibid.: 117), church membership might be another factor to facilitate greater congruence with the mainstream moral economy. If it were the collectivity of a shame orientation (and consequent tensions between connectedness and personal autonomy) that draws people to demand sharing, the individualism of Christianity in its sin/guilt orientation would affect such Aboriginal selfhood as is mediated through the social value of relatedness. In Chapter 4, I have given examples of the tension between the good-old relational way of forming the local church network and the emerging individualistic way among the Aboriginal
Christians who are still today closely related as kin members in terms of social practice in their everyday life. Then what about the domestic moral economy in Christians' personal lives?

To look at the two youths mentioned above, it seems the only difference between them is the way they use abundant “free” time. Adam the Christian uses his time to do things that please the Lord, and Jeremiah the sinner uses his time to enjoy “worldly pleasures”. Regarding economic life, the major part of their livelihoods is supported by Centrelink, but they have no habit of accumulating income. Their survival between pension days is supported strongly by their kin. Has church membership changed Adam to attain a more individualistic self-orientation? Has he been encouraged to accumulate money after conversion? On the basis of his testimony about his life after conversion, the answer seems to be negative. I would like to demonstrate this conclusion by examples of three different types of Bundjalung and Githabul families.

Case studies

Tables 13, 14 and 15 below are the examples of a fortnight domestic economy collected respectively from:

Case A: a married Christian female,
Case B: a single Christian male,
Case C: a married non-Christian female.

Due to various technical difficulties, I obtained data from three families and for a fortnight only, but at least a fortnight period covers the payment cycle of various kinds of welfare money. The sampled families are not very closely related as friends, kin or through church affiliation. They all reside in the same rural town (Casino) but they are from three different ex-station settlements respectively.

Table 13 shows Case A, a family of a married 50-year-old Christian female. The household consists of nine members. Five are adults and the rest are four of her grandchildren. All the adult members are unemployed. The informant is on a
caretaker's pension to look after her own grandchildren neglected by their mothers (i.e. her daughters) and entrusted to her by DOCS (Department of Community Service). The husband keeps another household on a bush property despite frequent visits to her household in town. Three of the five adult members are Christian and two are backsliders. Only the informant is a longtime Christian (over thirty years). The son (19 years old) and daughter (21 years old) make in-kind contributions as well as cash. Contributions are irregular but constant. They often stuff the fridge with food without mentioning it to their mother. The husband contributes to the expenses for the family car (minibus) but the informant's and the husband's households are kept separate.

Family constitution (5 adults and 4 children):
- The parents (the informant and her husband)
- Two of her children (a son and a daughter) and the son's girlfriend
- Four of her grandchildren (children of her other daughters and of her brother's son)

Table 14 is from Case B, a household of two Christian males who are brothers. They are both single and unemployed. The informant’s age is 23 and his flat-mate brother is 25 years old. He and his brother usually have meals at Aunty A's house in the neighbourhood. They do not make regular contributions for meals, but whenever they are asked for money, they give. They visited and stayed at their father's place from Day 4 to 14.

Table 15 is about Case C, a family of a 31-year-old married female who is not Christian. The household consists of fourteen members. Seven are adults and seven are children. All adults are not Christians in that they are not churchgoers and do not want to give up drinking, smoking and de facto relationships. (The informant and her husband recently married legally after fifteen years in a de facto relationship.) All the adult family members are unemployed except for the informant's husband who is on CDEP (doing manual labour in the vegetable fields).
Family constitution (7 adults and 7 children):
- Eight direct family members (the informant, her husband and their six children)
- Two of her husband’s younger sisters (in their twenties).
- Two young white men living with the above-mentioned two sisters.
- A young male cousin to the informant who has been reared up together.
- One baby of one of the above-mentioned de facto couples.

Table 13  Case A (Christian female, Age: 50)
Total number of the members of a household: 9
(A family living in an Aboriginal housing property in a town)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>DATE</th>
<th>ITEM</th>
<th>IN-COMING</th>
<th>OUT-GOINGS</th>
<th>REMARKS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Day 1</td>
<td>Centrelink Parenting Payment</td>
<td>$453</td>
<td></td>
<td>As family allowance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Day 8</td>
<td>Centrelink Parenting payment</td>
<td>$404</td>
<td></td>
<td>As pension</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Day 8</td>
<td>DOCS Caretaker payment</td>
<td>$800</td>
<td></td>
<td>For 4 grandchildren</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Day 4-8</td>
<td>Rent</td>
<td></td>
<td>$200</td>
<td>@ $100/week</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Day 8</td>
<td>Electricity</td>
<td></td>
<td>$220</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Day 1-14</td>
<td>Food</td>
<td></td>
<td>$340</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Day 1-14</td>
<td>Clothing</td>
<td></td>
<td>$110</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Day 1-14</td>
<td>Petrol</td>
<td></td>
<td>$120</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Day 5-8</td>
<td>Car insurance</td>
<td></td>
<td>$20</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Day 1</td>
<td>Children school lunch</td>
<td></td>
<td>$20</td>
<td>@ $10/week</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Day 1-14</td>
<td>Money to little kids</td>
<td></td>
<td>$40</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Day 1-8</td>
<td>Court fines (for daughter)</td>
<td></td>
<td>$40</td>
<td>@ $20/week</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Day 1-8</td>
<td>Loan repayment</td>
<td></td>
<td>$40</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Day 8</td>
<td>Fridge Lay-by</td>
<td></td>
<td>$300</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Day 8</td>
<td>Cricso Christmas hamper Lay-by</td>
<td></td>
<td>$40</td>
<td>@ $20/week</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>To church</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Day 4</td>
<td>Tithing to fellowship church</td>
<td></td>
<td>$50</td>
<td>at Sunday service</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Day 11</td>
<td>Tithing/offer to fellowship church</td>
<td></td>
<td>$150</td>
<td>at Sunday service</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Contributions by household members:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Day 7</td>
<td>From Son</td>
<td>$50</td>
<td></td>
<td>For board</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Day 7</td>
<td>From Daughter</td>
<td>$50</td>
<td></td>
<td>For board</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Total</td>
<td></td>
<td>$1,757</td>
<td>$1,690</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Table 14 Case B (Christian male, Age: 23)

**Total number of the members of a household: 2**

(Brothers living in a commercial rental flat in a town)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>DATE</th>
<th>ITEM</th>
<th>IN-COMINGS</th>
<th>OUT-GOINGS</th>
<th>REMARKS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Day 1</td>
<td><strong>Centerlink Social security</strong></td>
<td>$370</td>
<td></td>
<td>dole</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Day 1</td>
<td>Rent</td>
<td></td>
<td>$120</td>
<td>Electricity paid by the flatmate (elder brother)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Day 1-14</td>
<td>Food (take aways and snacks)</td>
<td></td>
<td>$40</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Day 3</td>
<td>Tithing to fellowship church</td>
<td></td>
<td>$40</td>
<td>at Sunday service</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Day 10</td>
<td>Offering to visiting church</td>
<td></td>
<td>$10</td>
<td>at Sunday service</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**To church**

| Day 1    | Sharing (to elder brother)                | $40        |            | B, member of the fellowship                       |
| Day 1    | Sharing (to Aunty A)                      | $50        |            | MFZD, elder of the fellowship church              |
| Day 1    | Sharing (to second cousin)                | $40        |            | MFZDD, member of the fellowship                   |
| Day 1    | Sharing (to remote cousin)                |            | $7         | MFZ's husband's BSD, member of the fellowship     |
| Day 10   | Sharing (from Dad)                        | $20        |            |                                                   |
| Day 12   | Sharing (from nephew A)                   | $30        |            | FZDS                                              |
| Day 12   | Sharing (from Dad)                        | $30        |            | F                                                 |
| Day 14   | Sharing (to Aunty B)                      |            | $10        | MFZD                                              |
| Day 14   | Sharing (from nephew B)                   |            | $20        | FZDS                                              |
| Day 14   | Sharing (to Dad)                          |            | $20        | F                                                 |

**Total**

$470 $377

### Table 15 Case C (Non-Christian female, Age: 31)

**Total number of the members of a household: 14**

(An extended family living in a commercial rental house in a town)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>DATE</th>
<th>ITEM</th>
<th>IN-COMINGS</th>
<th>OUT-GOINGS</th>
<th>REMARKS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Day 2</td>
<td><strong>CDEP payment to husband</strong></td>
<td>$190</td>
<td></td>
<td>3 days/week</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Day 6</td>
<td><strong>Centrelink Parenting Payment</strong></td>
<td>$760</td>
<td></td>
<td>family allowance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Day 9</td>
<td><strong>CDEP payment to husband</strong></td>
<td>$190</td>
<td></td>
<td>3 days/week</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Day 6</td>
<td>Rent</td>
<td></td>
<td>$96</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Day 6</td>
<td>Electricity</td>
<td></td>
<td>$213</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Day 1-14</td>
<td>Food (Groceries)</td>
<td></td>
<td>$510</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Day 1-7</td>
<td>To husband for lunch &amp; fuel</td>
<td></td>
<td>$40</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Day 1</td>
<td>To children</td>
<td></td>
<td>$10</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Day 1</td>
<td>Children's school lunch</td>
<td></td>
<td>$35</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Day 1,4,11</td>
<td>Lay-by for Christmas toys</td>
<td></td>
<td>$700</td>
<td>for her six children</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Day 1-14</td>
<td>Cigarettes*</td>
<td></td>
<td>$60</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Contributions by household members:**

- n.d. from husband's sisters and their men $300 for 2 weeks' board (4 adults and a baby)
- n.d. from cousin (classificatory brother) $50 for 2 weeks' board (one teenage male)

**Total**

$1,490 $1,664
Analysis

Two basic aspects of the local characteristics were found:

1. Christians neither show a hesitation towards the sharing of money nor an interest in its accumulation.
2. With regard to large families, there is a striking lack of difference in the features of the domestic household economy regardless of Christian affiliation. The first priority for a large family is, explicitly, to feed members of its household daily.\(^{143}\)

According to information collected in daily conversations, sharing practice is common among both the Christians and non-Christians, but in Case A and Case C, no record has been made for the limited period of time for data collection. Explicitly, it is not as intensive and frequent as Case B, a household of a single male Christian who has no obligation to support his family members. In the large families with a number of children (like Cases A and C), the majority of the income is put aside for subsistence expenses regardless of the Christian affiliation. The surplus money goes to church in a Christian household (Case A), and to cigarettes in a non-Christian household (Case C).

As is usual among the local age group of between twenty and thirty years of age, there may be drug and alcohol consumption as well as the recorded cigarettes in the non-Christian family (Case C), but no cash transaction for it has been recorded. It is probable that an in-kind kin economy of alcohol and drugs may be functioning outside the domestic household cash economy. With regard to this household, “Mum is in … (locality where the husband's mother lives)” is a subtle expression that she is out at drinking.

As for the money given to the church, both the Case A Christian female and Case B Christian single male satisfy the expected 10 percent for tithing. Precisely speaking, during the sampled period, the Case A housewife paid 12 percent of her personal

\(^{143}\) As it is not technically easy to collect reportage on all the household incomings and outgoings from a non-Christian family heavily affected by alcohol and drug abuse, it is inevitable the non-Christian sample picked up here (Case C) is a relatively well-managed household with a committed housewife, which may not be common among the researched group, but the household features such as family size, occupation etc. have a very common local pattern.
income and Case B youth paid 11 percent of his personal income. Generally speaking, ten percent tithing seems to impose too heavy an obligation on these households with such limited incomes, but apparently the sampled two Christians seem to find no hesitation towards this duty. The Case B youth actually ended up offering 10 dollars at the church he was just visiting on holiday, which became an extra expense on church for him. (See Day 10; he asked his father for the money for offering before the service because he was already broke.)

Contrary to showing interest in accumulation, Christians on the whole are encouraged to give away money. This practice is supported, first, by the Christian doctrine of “giving”, which often extends to contingent charities in addition to the relatively heavy 10 percent tithing obligation. In the church context local Aboriginal Christians casually give away money on demand. It is evident that the adherents are not encouraged to budget to accumulate money. Instead, they are drilled in willingness to give on demand—regardless of the purpose. Whether it is for church, charity or for kin, giving is a common virtue among the Aboriginal churchgoers. Paradoxically, it is most likely that manageability of cash circulation among the kin supported by such kin sharing indirectly relieves these Aboriginal Christians from the sense of burden when they are asked to fulfil a heavy duty of tithing and offering to church.

Why has Christianity failed to draw Bundjalung and Githabul people to the accumulation of wealth and property? Is it not that the Pentecostal faith they hold is based on personal relationship with God? Yes, it sure is. The sin/guilt orientation of Christianity, however, has always been heavily mediated by their own social value in the reality of living in an exclusive, rural Aboriginal community. As discussed in the preceding chapter (Chapter 5), for Bundjalung and Githabul people, before everything, Christian faith is all about empowerment in the spiritual domain rather than an intellectual cooption of the European moral order which encourages them towards upward social mobility—or, in their routine expression, a “dainty-dainty” whiteman’s lifestyle. Pentecostalism has penetrated the Bundjalung and Githabul with the blessing of the miracle-making power of the Holy Spirit, not as an educational ideology for improving their lifestyle.
Becoming Christian is neither a departure from the Aboriginal community in order to have access to the mainstream society through church nor is it regarded as the channel that would enable access to a white lifestyle. They go to church to relive the moment of salvation from their longstanding sufferings and live on “anointing” or a spiritual healing by the Holy Spirit power. It is almost palpable that for them lifestyle is subordinate to this overwhelming feeling of the supernatural. If they are broke, they might postpone tithing until the next pension day, or when God suddenly sends them money out of nowhere as a reward for their faithfulness.

When the Northern Rivers region was going through the religious differentiation of the Pentecostal enthusiasm, the other parts of New South Wales were going through similar differentiation processes of various kinds. In his 1965 article, Beckett (1965) refers to the revivals on the North Coast by drawing on Calley, the increasing claims about the superiority of lighter skin colour in Brewarrina reported by Fink (Fink 1957), and Reay and Sitlington’s report about the emergence of interest in the accumulation of property in Moree (Reay & Sitlington 1948). Having discussed the maintenance of kin relations against a backdrop of the complete demise of the traditional kinship knowledge, Beckett (1965) argues that these economic, political or religious differentiations would reduce or modify the use of kinship as a means of classification and a framework for social relations. Regarding religious differentiation, he states:

Similarly, those who have joined some puritanical religion will wish to stand apart from those who remain addicted to drinking and gambling. (ibid: 21)

I find his speculation very reasonable but at least with regard to the Bundjalung and Githabul Christians it failed to foresee this result. The Bundjalung and Githabul Christians do wish to “stand apart” from the sinners, but, interestingly, what has been

---

144 Those who have chosen to fellowship at white Pentecostal churches have particular reasons for doing so. Most of these people are in strife within the Aboriginal community or suffer from the lack of an Aboriginal church in the neighbourhood. Back at home in everyday life, their affiliation with white Pentecostal churches and having white church friends do not cast changes to everyday life style of the blackfellas, as their affiliation with white churches is, after all, the result of their deep involvement of the Aboriginal Christian community.
happening among them is that they have kept up with their “puritanical life” but had no need for separation in any physical or social form from the rest of the community. I have shown good grounds so far to argue that church in their community has functioned to reinforce their group solidarity. At the same time, however, it is worth noting that this situation is unique to this particular region. The main distinction of the Bundjalung and Githabul church is, as discussed in Chapter 2, its long legacy of Pentecostalism and human resources to provide Aboriginal lay leadership, which has enabled virtual separation from white leadership up to the present.

Calley’s article on the economic life of the North Coast Aboriginal group (Calley 1956b) was written about the situation during the revival days when Pentecostalism was fast spread in the Northern New South Wales Aboriginal communities. In this period, their expenditure patterns were heavily influenced by intensive obligations to constant demands by family and kin. Similarly, as is demonstrated in this section, the Bundjalung and Githabul Christians today show distinctive attachment to the Aboriginal moral economy. Regardless of church membership, the contemporary domestic moral economy of Bundjalung and Githabul people is, in the main, based on kin sharing, not to mention the secure social welfare system of Australia.

Universal imagination in the vernacular context

The *nationwide Aboriginal Christian networking*

The Bundjalung and Githabul Christians are firm in insisting that they can not (and would not) live away from their own people. When they are situated in a certain context, however, a change occurs. When they encounter Pan-Aboriginal (and Pan-Christian) discourse that encourages them to imagine anonymous “brothers and sisters in the Lord” living in Australia and beyond, all of a sudden their enthusiasm for evangelising bums and their sympathy extends to strangers — Aborigines in other states, whites, Chinese, Filipinos, Pacific Islanders, Koreans, black and white Africans,
and so on. They can even imagine and love unknown people in heresy in foreign lands yet to be saved. In this specific context, all of the Bundjalung and Githabul Christians, young and old, express strong interest in preaching “among the nations” as their dream.

Two different nationwide Aboriginal Christian networks have had influence in the Bundjalung and Githabul country over the past twenty years. The first is the United Aboriginal and Islander Christian Congress (hereafter referred to as UAICC) and the second is the Australian Indigenous Christian Ministries Ltd. (hereafter referred to as AICM). The former is the committee within the Uniting Church to support Aboriginal and Islander ministries and the latter is a much smaller independent funding body for Pentecostal Aboriginal churches and ministries in need of covering and support.

UAICC was introduced to the Bundjalung and Githabul Christians in the 1980s by a family connection. The Reverend Charles Harris, the first President of UAICC had a Bundjalung wife Dorothy Roberts from the Lismore region. She is a granddaughter of the legendary Bundjalung Christian leader Frank Roberts Snr. (cf. Chapter 2). (She is now the Reverend Dorothy Gordon.) UAICC is now the largest non-governmental indigenous agency in Australia. It operates in all States and the Northern Territory. Congress determines its own goals and objectives, decides its policies and priorities, and runs its own programs and institutions (cf. UAICC Home page). AICM was launched in the year 2000 under the leadership of Pastor Peter and Maria Walker, a Bundjalung and Githabul husband and wife evangelical team who had organised activities to promote the nationwide network of Aboriginal ministries for nearly a decade. One of these grounding activities had been the annual convention

---

145 UAICC was established by resolution of the Uniting Church Assembly in 1985. It is part of the Uniting Church, but membership is not confined to Uniting Church members. Between 1982 and 1984, under the leadership of the late Reverend Charles Harris the Aboriginal Christian leaders gathered and constituted the mold of UAICC. They wanted to break out of white structures and established the Black National Congress for Aboriginal ministries. Eventually the Uniting Church adopted its charter. The Reverend Charles Harris (from Queensland) was formerly a Pastor of the Assemblies of God, came under Methodist Church later and then under the Uniting Church. (Edwards & Clarke 1988; Harris 1994; UAICC home page)
called the Praise Corroboree held at the Parliament House between 1996 and 2002.\textsuperscript{146} AICM is keen on affiliating with Pentecostal Aboriginal churches and ministries because of the leaders’ strong Pentecostal background. The funding is provided by an anonymous white business group which is interested in supporting Aboriginal Christians.

All the affiliated personal members and ministries from the Northern Rivers region in both the networks are related to the leaders somehow.\textsuperscript{147} Kinship affiliation cuts across between them, too. It is not directly because of nepotism. Rather, it is because of the way the contemporary Bundjalung Githabul kin groups have been formed: today it is not unusual to find relatedness in some way between a Bundjalung/Githabul person and anyone else in the community (see Chapter 4). As has been repeatedly stated in the previous chapters, becoming a Christian by the Pentecostal standard is a fairly high personal achievement that is only won by individual spiritual awakening. Distribution of resources within the close kin members is practically impossible because of the lack of enough numbers of expected proselytes within the kin group. The two networks have conflicting dogmas, but among the Bundjalung and Githabul they practically merge as friendly Aboriginal Christian networks at local activities.

The conflicting dogmas are regarding culture and Aboriginality. In short, UAICC is pro-culture and AICM is anti-culture. UAICC is a Black National Congress which has come out of the white structure of the Uniting Church and, therefore, emphasis of Aboriginality is its \textit{raison d'être}. Furthermore, UAICC seeks to fulfill their calling as Christians in the area of “wholistic” community development for Aboriginal and Islander people. “Wholistic ministry” is an approach that emphasises the social side of the gospel. A summary of UAICC states:

\begin{quote}
Congress has developed a style of ministry - wholistic ministry - based on the way Jesus ministered and taught.
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{146} See Appendix 2 for the detail of the convention Praise Corroboree.

\textsuperscript{147} As of 2003, there were seven members under UAICC among the Christians the research for this thesis covered. The number of affiliated ministers of the AICM was twenty-five, fourteen of whom were included simultaneously in the local factional groups of my research area.
We proclaim the gospel as it relates to every part of life: the physical, social, emotional, spiritual, cultural, political and economic areas of human existence.

(UAICC Home Page)

This is something that clashes with the Pentecostal way of ministry. As discussed in the preceding chapter (Chapter 5), obviously such commitments to Aboriginal culture and to political and economic activities are questionable to Pentecostal Christians. AICM, on the other hand, as a Pentecostal denomination emphasises the spiritual side of the gospel—especially, the supernatural experiences manifested in the Bible.\textsuperscript{148} This seems to be the reason why in the Northern Rivers region there are only several members in spite of the Reverend Dorothy Gordon’s return to her homeland and her devoted ministry in Grafton since the middle of the 1990s (see Chapter 4). She herself admits that the low profile the UAICC maintains in Bundjalung and Githabul country is mainly because of its strong Pentecostal background.

The AICM Statement of Faith emphasises such issues as the Lordship of Jesus Christ, the authority of Scripture, the power of the Holy Spirit and the unity of the Spirit with every believer [The AICM Minister’s handbook, n.d.]. The unity of the Spirit means they command every believer to confess faith in Jesus Christ.\textsuperscript{149} For them the unity of Aboriginal people can not be achieved by anything else; advocacy of Aboriginality or cultural inheritance, resolution by political activism and pursuit of materialistic benefits for the community and individuals are too worldly to be merged into the spiritual relationship with God. There is no room for “cultural, political and economic areas of human existence” like the UAICC manifesto.

Which is the Whiteman’s way?

In the nationwide context of Aboriginal Christianity, however, AICM is not reluctant to

\textsuperscript{148} The gifts of speaking in tongues, prophesy and healing by baptism with the Holy Spirit manifested in Chapter 2 of \textit{The Acts of the Apostles} in the Bible.

\textsuperscript{149} Biblical evidence is sought in John 17:21 and Ephesians 4:3 [from the AICM Minister’s handbook (The AICM 2003)].
use “cultural elements” in its meetings and conventions, for it is the crucial point of their identity to appeal to the Australian mainstream society. The Aboriginal Pentecostals, too, must fulfill realistic tasks to maintain the ministry. Very often, however, it is difficult for the AICM leaders to draw the line between “good” culture and “bad” culture. On the whole, the AICM would look more at the spiritual side of the gospel in contrast with the UAICC’s advocacy for involvement in cultural, political and economical areas, but I often observed deviations from the standard lines drawn among the AICM affiliates. When talking about culture, the AICM affiliates seemed to leave negotiations and compromise open-ended. Seeing these two distinct attitudes about culture and Aboriginality, some said the AICM and the local Pentecostal Christians had become like whites because of their renouncement of culture. On the other hand, some said that bringing culture and politics to church is the Whiteman’s way. The majority of the Bundjalung and Githabul Christians in the local context agreed with the latter. For them those who were “caught up with culture” were following the Whiteman’s way. “The Whiteman”, they say, “does not know anything about the dangerous part of culture, but we Aborigines know it (how dangerous it is in a practical way)”. One of the local church leaders told me during a casual conversation in the family’s lounge room:

Once a white lady gave a stone to our pastor as a present.
Our pastor got sick. The wardrobe started to shake.
White people do stupid things. But we don’t tell them (anything about such incidents).

He said his pastor, after these ominous incidents, gave the stone back to the white lady with no clear explanation. The pastor never told the white lady that they must renounce culture.

The local Aboriginal Christians knew white people would not listen to such “uninteresting” opinions. This is how they respond to white sympathisers with regard to culture and Aboriginality. In a striking contrast to bitter controversy among themselves in the Aboriginal community, the local Aboriginal Christians seemed to be very tolerant with white intrusion and obey whatever white people recommended. But in the end they did not change their way. This is what I observed as the most tricky
part of their practice of maintaining the “Blackfellas’ way of worshiping the Lord” in friendly coexistence with both extreme sides of the white intervention. In the rightist extreme were the past white missionaries and in the leftist extreme are today’s white missionaries, institutional churches and lay sympathisers. The former undermined the traditional Aboriginal way. Today the latter people encourage Aboriginal Christians to accept “syncretism”, i.e., the incorporation of the traditional Aboriginal spirit-world into Christian practice and rituals for the sake of social justice. Interestingly, the Bundjalung and Githabul Christians, securely withdrawn from the extreme changes of policy and the mainstream ethos towards Aboriginal culture and society during the past centenary, follow their own Aboriginal way in every aspect of their Christian practice by continuously restructuring it on their own. The bottom line for them is that they simply “don’t tell them” (white people).

Bridging the national-local gap is always a challenge for the leaders of the nationwide networks who need to arouse the local Christian population to fit into the national imagination of Aboriginal Christianity. Talking about Aboriginality and traditional culture positively from the national standpoint could easily detonate the subtlest issue and evoke controversy in the Bundjalung and Githabul local context. Discrepancies between the arena of the universal imagination and that of the vernacular reality are irreconcilable. As there is not enough space to explore this issue in this chapter, more ethnographic exploration is given in Appendix 2: “Vernacular Reality and Universal Imagination” and Appendix 3: “Episodes regarding Choc Mundine and Ruby Langford Ginibi”.

My life with the Lord

Types of conversion experiences

The process of conversion and the motivation to retain one’s faith are the most favoured topics among the Christians in the researched group. At each church meeting,
there is a part allocated to “testimony time” in which voluntary speakers give testimonies of faith by referring to how they spent the week. Sometimes it leads to the speaker’s confession of a little weakness of faith he or she has experienced during the past week, and sometimes, often at the time of a seasonal rally, testimonies tend towards grand stories of the revelatory moments in one’s Christian life which are repeated each year and with which everyone of the local Christian community has long become familiar. The testimonies collected for this thesis show there are three major different types of personal experiences that have led them to conversion. They are:

(1) Long-standing personal sufferings—from devastating drug and alcohol addictions, serious illness and domestic violence to a more uncertain sense of loneliness.

(2) Traumatic or revelatory experiences such as nearly committing manslaughter, attempted (but failed) suicide, or recovery from near death experiences or torment by evil spirits.

(3) Circumstances that encourage one to convert, such as family Christian background, involuntary involvement with church activities, and so on.

The first two types constitute the majority of the converts (80 percent). Of course, these two types are not mutually exclusive. They can also be inclusive of the third type, i.e., circumstantial reasons such as Christian family background\(^\text{150}\). Therefore, the data in the following tables of the ratio of the respective types of conversion experiences are based on the first priority put by the proselytes themselves. Ninety cases have been collected in interviews, through informal conversations and at the open church meetings. Figure 2 shows the total of the 90 testimonies and Figure 3 shows the data limited to the youth age group.

\(^{150}\) Family background shows no level of significance with regard to a members’ Christian affiliation. There are converts who come from a Christian family background, but in all cases, they do have many non-Christian siblings. Most of the current pastors and church leaders have children with constant problems of drinking, violence, drug abuse and sexual immorality, which is not unusual for any members of the community.
An interesting feature is that the youth generation today is more attracted by the revelatory experiences as a drive for conversion, though they lack eyewitness experiences of dramatic manifestations of miracles and divine healing reported by the older generation. The contents of the revelatory experiences the fourteen youths claim tend towards more self-centred, psychological healing. (See Table 16 below.)

\textsuperscript{151}The "Youth age group" of the Aboriginal churches includes persons up to 35 years old or sometimes older. This standard is too deviant to be accepted by the mainstream standard of church youth groups. Among white churches, a youth group is restricted for people between 12 and 23 years old. Aboriginal people themselves know the deviation, but partly because of the difficulty in recruiting the younger generation to church in the Aboriginal community, and partly because of the immaturity of younger generation taken for granted by the elders' generation, it is not unusual to find among the Aboriginal churches middle-aged people—who are already fathers or mothers of several children—remaining in the "youth" category and working as youth leaders.
Another important aspect is that the converts of the third type with "circumstantial" reasons for conversion also proclaim that they have had certain "revelatory" experiences in the course of their Christian life. The people of this category are in the main those who had led a relatively soft and clean life before they converted, but they claim that revelatory experiences have strengthened their faith. Elizabeth Barker mentioned at the beginning of the preceding chapter (Chapter 5) is a typical example. Sister Elizabeth challenged the pastor at a Christmas "Tent Rally" as she could not reconcile the memory of profanity she had kept for sixty years with the nice beautiful rhetoric of becoming a clean vessel preached that night. Despite a lot of heartbreaking dramas in her life, the drive for her conversion, in fact, falls into the third type.

**Sister Elizabeth: follow-up**

When Elizabeth Barker was discharged from the girl’s home when she was seventeen, with some money in stock she had saved through the work at the girl’s home,
she was hoping to look for her family. (It was in the 1950s.) On her way to the station, she heard a beautiful melody in the street and was lured into a building. It was an Anglican church. She stayed after the service, and she ended up in living there for two years before taking off to look for her family. This was the way she became Christian; church was more a welcome haven for a lonely young girl than the door to dramatic spiritual awakening. Eventually she had reunion with her uncle and his family in a small Aboriginal community in the Western Plains of New South Wales and got settled there. She has kept up with high aspirations for a good standard of living, and through the ups and downs of an ordinary Christian person everywhere, she has lived a decent life—notwithstanding a broken relationship with a dandy Aboriginal gospel musician, which was followed by a happy married life with a mature, hard-working Aboriginal man. The marriage lasted for fifty years until he passed away recently.

The true reconciliation, however, was not made until that night in Muli Muli in 2002 for Sister Elizabeth. She said, “Through all these years, the smell of sweat and grass is what I remember of the Whiteman. It is the smell of the man who first raped me in the garden on that day.” She had lived with an obsession that she would inevitably sexually attract white males. Her close female friend once told me Sister Elizabeth would become restless whenever and wherever white males came close to her. She would feel she is being stared at by them. Until that night when the Holy Spirit fell down on her, the Christian standard set by the Anglican Church had not helped her to cope with the traumatic memory, although Christian teaching had helped her to lead a decent life for half a century and maintain a happy family. Now she spends more time travelling to visit the Pentecostal conventions and small meetings held by the Aboriginal churches, including the Northern Rivers region.

With this living Holy Spirit power, the Aboriginal Christians I have met are seeking their way out of the sufferings of their body and mind. Just as in Elizabeth Barker’s case, these sufferings derive from being Aboriginal and living as an Aboriginal person in this contemporary time and space. In the following, the way

152 White Pentecostals do claim the same effects of the Holy Spirit power and that sufferings in their life are to be healed in the same way by the Holy Spirit. As there is no traditional
this power of the Holy Spirit functions for Bundjalung and Githabul people as a coping mechanism against daily sufferings is explored. Testimonies of sin, repentance and deliverance are given as case materials.

Testimonies

The testimonies in this chapter demonstrate the two major drives for conversion. They need the power of the Holy Spirit with which (1) they could fight against fear of contemporary forms of evil spirits, and (2) heal the physical and psychological bruises they receive in a problem-laden community.

Case 1: Jonah and Ruth: deliverance from addiction to yarndi, grog and freaky fights

Jonah and Ruth are the youth leaders of an Aboriginal church in a small rural town. When they were 21 years old, they experienced miraculous deliverance from long time drug and alcohol addiction. Their relationship has been renewed in a drastic way, too. It had been a devastating relationship for a long time maintained only by hurting each other. They used to have "freaky fights" (according to Jonah). Ruth stabbed him once and at another time ran over him with a car. On the night of salvation three years ago, all the desires for drinking and smoking left them instantly. They are a married couple now with one little child.

Jonah: We was hitting the grog and the yarndi pretty hard. We was just doing it because, I don't know, because everyone was doing it, all our friends are doing it, mates and everything.

Ruth: Just felt one of the parties, aye?

Jonah: Everyone used to come to me and Ruth because we used to carry around

Aboriginal ritual substance incorporated into Bundjalung and Githabul Christian practice today, the ritual practise and activities of the Aboriginal churches are almost similar to those of the universalised Pentecostal way except for minor differences at the local end. But again it must be recalled that this does not mean in the Bundjalung and Githabul case that the Aboriginal Christians have been simply co-opted by the white Pentecostal church. In the Northern Rivers region, the black and white Pentecostal churches have developed separately.
big bags of yarndi to sell it. People would follow us to get some. We were selling
it for a while. I believe that was just the thing in our relationship to make us
happy for one another. As soon as the yarndi went and the grog went, that’s
when me and ‘er had one another a stroke. Used to fight for a lot of times. Just
hurt one another real bad. Doing stupid things and always locked up in the
Police station.

Ruth: Sometimes I felt that every time me and Jonah have gone the grog and
yarndi, the Police was following us around, because every week we was in at the
court house, just for offensive language, fighting around in the street, you know.
They just liked they followed us (laughing). We was bit seen back then.

Jonah: One night...me and ‘er was at the front talking, and I was telling ‘er, "No,
I don’t want this relationship where we are going because it’s just hurting both
of us. I don’t feel like it's going anywhere." She was saying, "Yeah, yeah, we
know, I am sick of it, too." And Ruth just come straight out, "Why don’t we try
the Lord?" We tried everything like grog, yarndi, and all our mates, that did not
work.

Ruth: That night we had the yarndi and grog on us, but just chucked it away. Did
not even have any before. It was just something told us to stop it. Just as we put
it all down, Aunty Norma come in the back of the house down there. We just fell
into ‘er hands and ...Aunty Norma and Uncle Neville raced up and told Jen and
Peter (Jonah’s Mum and Dad). We went from there, went inside and got prayers.
We was delivered there and then.

Jonah: That night, I saw black spirits leave us, just like a smoke or cloud. And
when I looked up it was just leaving Ruth’s body. Everybody was crying. That
night I accepted Peter (his step father) as my father. I hugged Peter, and I never
hugged him like that before.

Case 2: Eva and Joseph: the miracle on New Year’s Eve

Eva and Joseph are another young couple who saw the Holy Spirit deliver them
from heavy abuse of drugs and alcohol, gambling and neglect of their children. They
met when they were fourteen years old and they have been together since then – for
eleven years. They have two little children. Their life was under heavy abuse of drugs (marijuana and cocaine), alcohol, and gambling (poker machines). Every morning they dumped their children at their mother's place. They lived on the dole and drug dealing - until the miraculous New Year's Eve a year and three months ago. The Lord had planned it for them, they say.

Eva: We was on drugs and alcohol like real strong. Everyday we used to have them. Probably we remain Christians for a year and four or three months...three months now, 'cos we come in New Year's Eve. We was bonging at the back, you know, yarndi. At the back veranda...we both was. Kids was inside. Lord was speaking to me every...about six months or so. And I tried to ignore it. I got Joseph, and Joseph and I used to get some drugs every half an hour. Yeah, every half an hour. The Lord was speaking to me all the time, and I tried to keep it out, get it out of mind. And I kept telling Joseph every time we drink or bong "Joseph, I sorta feel the Lord coming. I sorta just get a strong feeling."

Joseph: And I used to say, "Don't talk about these things. Let me doing this, like doing yarndi and drugs and that."

Eva: And I said, "No, Joseph, this New Year's, I wanna go to the church as a family...me, you and kids." And we ended up in church that New Year's Eve.

Joseph: We had plans to go out with other couples to the club and that. And somehow we ended up at church. We can't even remember how we ended up in the church. Like today we can't remember. We don't know whether we walked or got a ride with someone, we don't know. We've just totally gone, aye? We don't know how we got up there.

Eva: We got up at the church. And then, Pastor was preaching, aye? And all of a sudden I started crying and, I said "Joseph, I sorta gotta go out. Support Maresha (their baby) ", and I walked out and just started crying. Pastor was preaching. This was happening there. And I just cried just like everything's just coming out, too, you know. And then when I looked beside me Joseph and Maresha were there. I sorta was saying, I was hoping that they wasn't coming because of me but he said when I left, the Holy Spirit went to him
and told him to go out.

Joseph: He was just telling me, "Joseph, you can't be like that. You've gotta go out. You can't act like this." My heart was burning. And I had folks to find to pray for. I had a bit of drug that night and, we chucked that away.

Eva: We got home, and when we got home we chucked all the equipment, you know, the use of drugs and everything. We chucked all that out and we never looked back since that day. The Holy Spirit took that desire away.

Joseph: At first, I felt nothing (at the church). When Eva sort of said that to me, "I've got a funny feeling"...and, "Joseph I'm going up to the front, I'm gonna give my heart to the Lord," then it was a funny feeling coming up on me. My heart was burning and my belly was sort of rumbling all inside. When I felt the feeling, I knew it was the Lord. Like someone was telling me I can't be like this, you've got to give your heart to the Lord.

Case 3: Stranded souls: depression and loneliness

It is well known by the local Aboriginal people that their two young pastors have hit the bottom but survived the devastating end. They hanged themselves but failed to die. Afterwards they converted. It was drug-induced depression that lured them to suicide. In such a tragic event, in this local Aboriginal community it is usually the Christian pastors that people go to and ask for prayers for their broken heart. Since then, they have devoted themselves in the Lord's way and, not just being content with leading a drug/alcohol-free Christian life, they wanted more. They are now two of the youngest Christian leaders in the community.

One night in the Mission, a young woman, dead-drunk, battered her cousin with a piece of wood nearly to death in the grog party. Violence was a usual thing among the drunken youths. She did not remember anything about the fight on the following morning when she was told the victim had been flown to Brisbane and was in a critical condition and that she would be put to gaol for
manslaughter. Unfortunately, she was told, the piece of wood she grabbed had nails on it, which injured her cousin terribly. Frightened, she drove away and attempted to commit suicide—by smoking a bong to death. She did not die, but saw the light. It was the Lord. As the victim recovered fortunately, she still lives in the Mission with her kin.

Salvation may come in a less drastic form in many other cases. Getting freed from long standing sufferings still can become a turning point in one’s life; sometimes it may seem to the proselyte that it is worth giving up one’s life-long dreams. Mark used to dream about running at the Olympics. After finishing Year 11, he moved from the Mission to Brisbane and belonged to the team at Griffith University and was getting trained under a private coach. He was on his own in Brisbane on social security but was managing to pay the coach for training somehow. There was no exciting prospect for quick success, but there was no sign of disaster in his life, either. One day he came back home on holiday and attended a church meeting to accompany his relatives. The young pastor who had survived the suicide was preaching, referring to his own experience. Mark thought the pastor was “talking about me!” He gave his heart to the Lord right away and never returned to Brisbane. He did not bother picking up his clothes and shoes.

Being an athlete, he had never drunk alcohol, used drugs, or consumed unhealthy foods. Unlike the pastor’s life before conversion, his life was clean. He was not unhappy but...after a pause he said, “I was lonely.” Now he lives in the local town, on the dole as before, and fellowships with the church of this young Aboriginal pastor. Mark’s life is for the Lord alone. His family, who had always shown respect for what he chose to do, supported his decision this time, too. This time, however, it was with the most delighted approval. “We are happy that he has finally come to the Lord’s way—from the worldly way of competition.” By the Githabul Pentecostal standard, running as an athlete for

---

153 About sports, the Bundjalung group seems to be much more tolerant with worldly success than the Githabul group. The Bundjalung families have turned out many footballers and
the Olympics is another sin of seeking worldly pleasures, as it is the involvement in competition. Mark was born to a hard-core Pentecostal family in Muli Muli, unlike Anthony (Choc) Mundine (see Appendix 3) in Baryulgil. (Baryulgil is a non-Christian community where people are supportive of worldly success.) “But track sports are clean and permissible,” his Christian father says, “unlike sinful sports like football.” In his understanding, the footballers’ environment is more vulnerable to drugs and sex. Because it was not football but a “clean” track sport, Mark’s father had not objected his son’s devotion to running so far, but discouraging it may have been indeed if one’s family kept praying for one to get rid of one’s dream. His younger sister agrees with his father and told me that she was happy that her brother stopped competition, though she was content with her own sinner’s life of drug and alcohol addiction.154

The sense of loneliness is not unique among the young generation only. An elderly man, until he converted several years ago, had enjoyed his life travelling with the side carnival. It was a life of having fun with footballs, clubs, drinking and gambling on poker machines. “With all the years of fun,” he said, “I was always lonely.” His loneliness disappeared when he gave his heart to the Lord.

Case 4: Uncle Samuel: a spirit of fear

A feeling of fear is not an ambiguous sense of anxiety and danger to Uncle Samuel, nor, according to his sharing of his story, to a lot of Aboriginal people. It has always been real and pressing to him; it has kept emerging in a different form of life to confront him. He is an elderly man who witnessed the enthusiasm of the era when the Mission churches were at the centre of the revival. He has also witnessed the fall

athletes such as Anthony (Choc) Mundine from Baryulgil.

154 As is briefly mentioned in Chapter 5, towards the end of my fieldwork, Mark began to develop a mental breakdown and was finally locked up in the mental asylum after attempting to kill his father. According to the evident circumstances, not only the sudden termination of his long-standing dream of becoming an athlete indirectly led by the family’s long-standing discouragement but also family tragedies, the drastic change of lifestyle and various other factors struck this youth’s mind to collapse.
of the revival coinciding with the change of the Mission communities. Below is what he shared at a small prayer meeting held at night in the Mission. There were only a dozen people attending, all of whom were his kinsfolk, except for an itinerant evangelist and his wife visiting for the night.

From childhood, I had a very hard upbringing, and I believe it's with what the old people say to us about fear. There is a lot of fear that is within us. Fear of different areas in our lives. I'd like to share it here tonight, as one blow came for me. It started from way back ... from childhood. When I was a child, one of me uncles used to always say, "There is a fella coming to put you in this...bag right on the horse to take you away." I've had so much fear in that and I used to run every time I see this horse coming with this bag on it. I ran one day, and right at the door was an axe - and I still see that today. When I fell, I slipped there, and the axe cut me right across here (he showed his forearm). The scar is there to prove it. These are the fears that sorta come right through. And tonight, I... (urged by the pastor) I want to be free from my fear. ("Amen!" and "Hallelujah!" from the audience.) Ever since I married Camilla (giggles from the audience), I've always been fearful of my wife. Honestly I've had fear of my wife. (Again giggles. "It was, Brother, I nearly stabbed him," his wife Camilla said to the visiting white evangelist.) I've always had fear. Don't fear, whatever you want to do, go here, go there....

All the attendants gathered around Uncle Samuel quickly, and with everyone holding hands, they started fervent prayers simultaneously for his deliverance from fear. The venue was the community canteen of the alcohol-affected reserve. The exterior of the canteen was wired to prevent vandalism by the youth gangs. The prayers, including occasional glossolalia, became more and more fervent, louder and louder coming from a small circle of only a dozen people lit by the dim light of an unshaded bulb inside. Outside, in the pitch-dark of the night the wired-up canteen stood among the residents' houses built spread-out on the spacious land of the reserve. Inside these snug and modern houses supplied by the Aboriginal Housing Cooperation, drinking was relentlessly going on. That night there was a young girl in the meeting. "She is not a Christian", someone said, "but
here to ask for a prayer for her”. She had been tormented by the spirits that haunted the house she lived in. From Uncle Samuel, earnest prayers shifted onto her next.

**Backsliding**

*Oscillation between euphoria and despair*

As discussed at the closing of Chapter 5, “backsliding”, which is the loss of faith and consequent return to the worldly pleasures, takes place very often among Bundjalung and Githabul Christians. There is no explanation available for what brings a Christian to lose spiritual connectedness with the Holy Spirit. The spiritual experiences are all personal, not guaranteed by learnt rules or principles; faith is based on one’s sensitivity towards the Holy Spirit power, not on theological knowledge. Of course, devotion to reading the Bible to “grow in Jesus” is a fundamental rule that every Aboriginal proselyte is demanded to follow, but as a matter of fact, keeping in touch with the excitement of feeling the “presence” of God is not necessary guaranteed by deepening an intellectual understanding of the Bible. Usually, backsliding is ascribed to an unfortunate Devil’s attack to which all the Christians are exposed.

Oscillating back and forth agonisingly between the two spiritual realms—euphoria of God’s love and fear of demonic powers that dominate the life filled again with worldly pleasures—is not an unusual event for Bundjalung and Githabul Christians. Usually, backsliders seem to have little sense of responsibility or shame for having lost self-discipline. They do seem to suffer greatly from the shift from the euphoric state of mind to the devastating “spiritually-dry” life, but I have seldom collected opinions which relate backsliding to a lack of self-discipline. It takes place frequently without much moral and ethical self-reflection about oneself. Repentance of sins is always described more like the practice of tarrying for the recovery of feelings—i.e., personal feelings of spiritual “fullness”.

257
Such a mode of thought is probably what has driven a friend of mine in a Christian Aboriginal village to discard all aspects of her social life in response to her breakdown of church fellowship. When I returned to the field site after one and a half years, I spotted her being heavily drunk and staggering around in the village. I had met her as a Christian before. In her thirties, she used to be a fit and stout sports woman but now she was living on alcohol and had stopped eating. She used to buy size 20, but she wore size 10 then. She used to enjoy all kinds of recreation sports and had earned a reputation as a local Aboriginal representative in many sports games. She greeted me by yelling gaily, but as we walked inside and when the two of us were alone, she wept out loud on my shoulder, saying, “I lost the Lord and I lost everything.” “Having to lose everything” as an outcome of backsliding is what I was not able to understand nor was I able to furnish a convincing answer from her. I tried to persuade her that she did not have to lose everything due to simply stopping attending church or breaking a taboo of drinking. Even after breaking up with the church and starting drinking, one could still be eligible for many productive things in life instead of sitting all day at the table and keeping drinking without a break—only to look at dozens of empty bottles of beer with a crying heart. She did not seem to understand it.

When her peer cousin explained to me why she had backslidden, the enigma deepened more. It was not because she gave in to the desire for alcohol that she left the church. She used to be an alcohol and drug addict but on conversion the desire stopped completely and as long as for a few years. First came disappointment with the senior church member’s deception, hypocrisy and hostility; and she began to stay away from attending meetings. I did witness her in this period. She did not seem to be resisting any addictive temptations. She carried the Bible with her and obviously her mind was with the Lord. After I left the field, it seems she lost her spiritual connectedness with God eventually. Once this dryness came, regardless of the initial reasons which had severed her from faith, she had to go back to drinking as a natural course of events—at least by the Bundjalung and Githabul standard. This last stage appeared an enigma to me. Why does she have to go back to drinking? The reason why she left church was not the temptation for drinking but the disappointment with the
church leadership. Therefore, to me, leaving church and resuming drinking seemed to be two different things.

Gradually I have gathered from the puzzled and ambiguous responses to my questions that the Bundjalung and Githabul Christians share a certain mode of thought regarding backsliding. It is based on the concept of a Christian person as a "vessel" of the Holy Spirit. A Christian is compared to a vessel. One should be "clean" first, and one should be empty to receive God, hence the taboos. All the worldly pleasures must be evacuated from the proselyte. Figure 4 below shows each stage in the process of backsliding as follows:

**Stage 1:** While a person is a clean vessel for the Holy Spirit, it is filled with the Holy Spirit. With the Holy Spirit in oneself, one can act like Jesus. When one is of faith, God takes complete control of oneself. Now, one is a vessel filled-up with God's power.

**Stage 2:** When for some reason or other, the spiritual relationship with the Holy Spirit weakens, the Holy Spirit leaves the vessel and one is left behind as a vulnerable empty vessel.

**Stage 3:** Now, the vessel is destined to be filled with something else. If the Lord leaves, there is nothing else but worldly pleasures that can fill up the vessel. One becomes an unclean vessel filled with worldly pleasures. There is no room for the Holy Spirit to intervene. This process is regarded as a natural flow of things and nearly beyond one's will or intention.

There are only two ways for the Bundjalung and Githabul Christians: either being a clean vessel which contains the Holy Spirit or being a vessel filled with worldly pleasures. There has been no "middle way" for them for generations.
Figure 4  The relationship between the Holy Spirit and self

Stage 1: When one is in the state of a Christian, one is a clean vessel and is filled up with the Holy Spirit.

Stage 2: When one loses connectedness to God, one becomes an empty vessel.

Stage 3: Empty vessel is quickly taken over by worldly pleasures, after which the Holy Spirit cannot get in to the fully-contained, unclean vessel.
A frustrating fact for the Bundjalung and Githabul Christians is that there is no reason why the spiritual relationship weakens. All of my informants explain the process as part of the warfare with Satan which Christians are destined to take up. The entire process is beyond Man's ability - ultimately God's plan and backsliding is not the issue of failing in ethical self-formation. There is no sense of responsibility or shame felt by backsliders, although concerns of devastating future spiritual-dryness do dominate their minds. Until they come to the spiritual "fullness" again, they would not try to go back to church. Faking repentance for the sake of recovering reputation is impossible for them from this point of view. Some local whites, however, who have relatively good communication with the Aboriginal people in the region say Christianity functions as a good excuse for them to avoid frictions in their own community. These white people know that the local Aboriginal peoples are related closely with one another and follow their own social order. They would analyse that the Aboriginal Christians would be exempted easily from peer pressure for drinking and gambling without having to break up the social relations. On the other hand, some whites who have known much more of the emotional aspects of the local Aboriginal people's lives would not take on such a point of view. Referring to some youths he had befriended, one white person amusingly said, "Those young fellas...they stay with the Lord as long as the enthusiasm lasts."

This comment, in fact, appeals convincing to me with regard to the youths' future. I know this man has seen a good deal of the processes in which the local Aboriginal youths failed to cope with their problems and "hit the bottom". He is the owner of a large property in the region. He is a "primary producer" (of cattle) and sympathiser to the local Aboriginal activism. After working in Sydney and pursuing an acting career for many years, he returned to his family property on the Northern Rivers and now runs the farm. Being in his mid-fifties, he is also a follower of the new-age lifestyle. Aboriginal youths hang around him for a congenial meeting place at his house and the drugs he provides. He is a good benefactor for the youths and is candid to admit he uses various kinds of drugs including mushrooms from his garden for experimental purposes. Because of his philosophy, he refuses to kill snakes on his property, which is fairly a risky habit on this property located in dense rainforest. Aboriginal Christians
backbite him and call him Snake Brother, but despite this criticism he has been empathetic towards the problems the local Aboriginal people have. Being a critic of the Christian ideology as a follower of the new-age philosophy notwithstanding, he understands the power of the local Aboriginal church which has attracted his young Aboriginal friends. Having seen the emotional aspects of their conversion—and backsliding, he seemed to understand the local Aboriginal Christian practice as irrelevant to an intentional action for managing the intra-group social relations within the Aboriginal community.

*Mimesis and "mystical participation"

It is safe to say that these Pentecostals live on “anointing”\(^{155}\) — extremely heightened sentiment that assures them their physical union with the Holy Spirit. They can achieve oneness with God instantly without going through new ethical self-formation. Their devotion to asceticism seems to derive from such a heightened state of mind, not a laborious undertaking of self-disciplinary efforts to intellectually digest the ancient laws in the Bible. For them sensitivity is the one and only need, not knowledge. As Taussig argued by the notion of mimesis (Taussig 1993), the issue of great concerns to Bundjalung and Githabul Pentecostals is “not so much staying the same, but maintaining sameness through alterity” (ibid.:129).

What Taussig (1993) mainly argues by his notion of mimesis is the kind of mirroring relationship between the coloniser and the colonised. The power of the copy influences what it is a copy of, and, more importantly, it operates in the “two-way street” between them. Taussig argues that the “mimetic faculty” is “the nature that culture uses to create second nature, the faculty to copy, imitate, make models, explore

\(^{155}\)The Bundjalung and Githabul Christians use the term “anoint” very often. To “anoint” means to rub oil or ointment on objects or individuals as a sign of consecration, but in the daily usage by Christians, this word has a more symbolic meaning. Oil was used for medicinal purposes in New Testament times (Luke 10:34) and it symbolizes the pouring out of the Holy Spirit upon someone in need of supernatural healing. Deriving from this, whenever and wherever they feel spiritual oneness with God, the Bundjalung and Githabul Christians depict the condition as “anointing”.

262
difference, yield into and become Other” (ibid.:xiii).

In an older language, this is “sympathetic magic,” and I believe it is as necessary to the very process of knowing as it is to the construction and subsequent naturalization of identities. But if it is a faculty, it is also a history, and just as histories enter into the functioning of the mimetic faculty, so the mimetic faculty enters into those histories. No understanding of mimesis is worthwhile if it lacks the mobility to traverse this two-way street... (ibid.:xiii-xiv).

Drawing on this notion of mimesis, with regard to the Australian Aboriginal situation, Merlan (1998:149-181) discusses the “social technology of mimesis”. The change of Australian government policy from “assimilation” to Aboriginal “self-determination” — i.e., abandonment of policy demanding Aborigines to become like other Australians and recognition of them as a distinctive people especially through the representations as people of the land—has produced “the strikingly greater salience of imitative behaviour and the material power in the lives of indigenous people of other’s representations of them in recent relations between those now called Aborigines and the nation-state” (ibid.:231).

Regarding Bundjalung and Githabul religious thinking, besides this mirroring relationship I would like to attend to the “magical, soulful power that derives from replication” (Taussig 1993:2). I do not aim at bluntly drawing on the often-contentious binary opposition of Primitive epistemologies and Enlightenment thought in the theory of Lucien Levy-Bruhl implied in what Taussig calls “mystical participation” (ibid.:278), but Bundjalung and Githabul Christian practice apparently shows potential for what Taussig called a function that could break the closed circle of mimesis and alterity:

...the colonial wilderness imputed to the primitive and to mimesis could function in ways other than domestication. The circle could be broken by that very same wildness. ... Adorno gave greater emphasis to the notion that the mimetic faculty, with its capacity to combine sensuousness with copy, provided the immersion in the concrete necessary to break definitively from the fetishes and myths of commodified practices of freedom. What I have termed “mimetic excess” is just such a possibility—an excess creating reflexive awareness as to the mimetic faculty... (ibid.:255, emphasis added).
The Bundjalung and Githabul way of achieving mimesis is to skip over the European quintessence of conversion, i.e., internalisation of "rational" thinking. This work should have been the most elaborate part of the process of internalisation of the Christian moral order. In a sense, this unerringly produces their predicament of having to live in a cycle of backsliding as discussed. On the other hand, this is an oscillating movement between the constraints of the Aboriginal social order and that of the Christian moral order. Backsliders unwittingly escape from being completely "caught up" with either of the structures of these orders, though on their own emotional level, the experience is each time agonising.

"This excessiveness was once in the hands of seers and magicians," (1993:255) Taussig states regarding his notion of mimetic excess. The seers and magicians "worked images to effect other images" and "worked spirits to affect other spirits which in turn acted on the real they were the appearance of" (ibid.). Just like the shaman's healing practice in his own ethnographic material from Southwest Colombia (Taussig 1986), the ethnography of Bundjalung and Githabul Pentecostalism demonstrates this in the way history specified for them—especially in the next chapter (Chapter 7). As a bridge to the next chapter, here a long-time devoted Christian man on Cabbage Tree Island makes an appearance...

"Our people are addicted to anointing," he lamented. "Our people lack proper teaching...even pastors," this old Cabbage Tree man added. He explained what he thought to be the reason why the great Revival had died down:

When the revival is on, people get excited and say Hallelujah. This is of course good, but when the pressure comes, they did not know how to cope. The Enemy attacks the weakest points. Because of the lack of teaching, people cannot maintain faith. Jack Walker, Frank Bundock... these ones were good preachers, but they were not taught. They had to be taught. When they [such charismatic elders] died out, there was nobody who could lead people. Because of the lack of proper teaching, when the hard time came, with no more elders people went
The “Enemy” he refers to is an equivalent word for Satan or the Devil in common Christian discourse. The Enemy thrives on people’s fear.

He laments that on Cabbage Tree Island, even the young generation are drawn to follow the “superstitious” way. Commonly seen is people’s belief that the dirt from a grave would protect them from evil spirits because they believe it makes a channel to the guardian spirits, i.e., the spirits of the deceased family members. When tormented by fear of something evil, people—young and old—visit the grave to take dirt and put it in a sock and hang it at the door. To his eye, this is the most lamentable situation caused by the lack of proper teaching (of Christianity). Moreover, it is worth noting that the practice sounds more of a contemporary occult way—rather than of the local Aboriginal religious knowledge. Superstitions that are seen in general public and in Australian (and global) popular culture are now blended into the homogeneous category of “the evil” with fragmental pieces of knowledge of the contemporary reconstruction of the Australian Aboriginal culture, “proper” Bundjalung and Githabul knowledge of the traditional past, and also of their own changing imaginations about their primordial past. It is important to pay attention to the fact that the Bundjalung and Githabul Christians today are engaging in warfare with such complex dynamics of “the evil”.

What, then, are the dimensions of fear which constitute the dynamics of “the evil” of modern times? In the researched community, becoming Christian does not mean that someone has become a saint. Rather, it means that someone has lost all other measures to tame urges for desires, cruel and wicked thoughts or devastating despair in one’s own life. Fear haunts them because they are the ones who have difficulty in resisting desires for worldly pleasures and the lure of sins. They fear because they feel their minds are vulnerable, which makes them obsessed that the Devil is so close to them—always hiding and waiting in ambush. It may be plausible that the more worldly a mind one has, the more one is driven to Christian practice in order to secure good preventive measures. The life stories of the local converts (which are known to
everyone in the community) make this fact an open secret, but friendly outsiders are deliberately kept off this touchy area. The next chapter focuses on it. It is all about “culture” as part of the dynamics of “the evil”—and the Bundjalung and Githabul Christians’ fear of it and their desperate attempts to renounce it.
CHAPTER 7

Dimensions of Fear: "Culture" and Christianity

For God hath not given us the spirit of fear; but of power, and of love, and a sound mind.

- The Second Epistle of Paul the Apostle to Timothy 1: 7,
The Holy Bible (KJV)

"They had the Lord in their heart but was attracted by the golden calf."

--A female Christian, Muli Muli Aboriginal village

The English word "culture" is two-fold in its usage among the Bundjalung and Githabul. On the one hand, in the social domain shared with the mainstream society, both the Christians and non-Christians perceive nothing ominous and abominable when somebody mentions "culture": e.g. a NAIDOC\textsuperscript{156} cultural festival, introduction of Aboriginal culture and language to school, Australia as a multi-cultural country, etc. On the other hand, in the context of Christian practice or everyday life within the Aboriginal domain, the word "culture" makes everyone to halt and lower his or her voice to a whisper: it explicitly means practice and knowledge of witchcraft based on the Old Way, i.e., the traditional Aboriginal knowledge.

"Witchcraft" is today a common local English term the Bundjalung and Githabul

\textsuperscript{156} NAIDOC celebrations are held around Australia in the first full week in July to celebrate the history, culture and achievements of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. NAIDOC originally stood for "National Aborigines and Islanders Day Observance Committee". This committee was once responsible for organising national activities during NAIDOC Week, and its acronym has become the name of the week itself. The week is celebrated not just in the Indigenous community, but also in increasing numbers of government agencies, schools, local councils and workplaces. (See NAIDOC Home page: http://www.naidoc.org.au/default.aspx)
use for an intentional act of cursing by a living person through the use of traditional magical powers. The contemporary common purposes are to kill, bring illness, or sexually seduce females and males. In anthropological literature this type of purposive practicing of magical powers is called “sorcery” since Evans-Pritchard created the witchcraft paradigm out of his studies about the Azande (Evans-Pritchard 1937), in which witchcraft was, far from being the intentional manipulation of magical techniques, an individual trait that caused injury, misfortune, or illness through “witchcraft substances” in one’s body without one’s knowledge and intention. Correspondingly, in speaking of destructive (i.e. “black” or harmful) magic in Aboriginal Australia, anthropologists usually call it sorcery rather than witchcraft (Berndt and Berndt 1999: 305).

In this thesis, however, to maintain consistency with the original narratives collected in (Aboriginal) English, I use the term “witchcraft” in the ethnographic texts to represent the Bundjalung and Githabul practice of destructive magic. In speaking of destructive magic, the Christians (both black and white) of the researched area only used the English word “witchcraft”. During the fieldwork period for this thesis, I collected no other English synonym such as “magic” or “sorcery”, nor any local Aboriginal equivalent words, for this type of practice—although the effect of such practices was sometimes referred to as a “curse” and people would more casually use such euphemised expressions as: “I got caught”.; or “she was sung over”.

157 This is not because of taboo or avoidance of using the Aboriginal words for sorcery. Today, among the Christians under the age of seventy, even the local Aboriginal words for God and Jesus (see Chapter 2 for detailed discussion about equivalents for biblical terms) were not known. Only the elders in their eighties remembered them but they did not show any particular interest in helping others learn them. According to the ethnographies of the 1950s, bugoi is the word for Bundjalung and Githabul sorcery (Calley 1955, 1959).

158 It is not known why the researched Aboriginal group has chosen the word “witchcraft” as an equivalent to “culture” and to represent the evil side of their traditional practice. The Bible actually contains all the relevant English words which could be used to represent this type of magical practice (and practitioners): witchcraft, witch, wizard, sorcery, sorcerer, sorceress, magician, curse, and cursing (Strong 1997). These terms do not have any added biblical meanings which are deviant from ordinary usage.
Magic and sorcery in New South Wales

In Aboriginal Australia, as in many other parts of the world, people carry out certain rites based upon their belief in magic. Berndt and Berndt (1999:304-335) categorise the forms of magic in Aboriginal Australia into beneficent magic (non-harmful magic) and sorcery (harmful magic). The former relates to “hunting, food-collecting and fishing; rainmaking, and weather control; love magic; magic of jealousy; curing or healing magic; divination after a death; magic to stop quarrels, counteract destructive magic, avert misfortune, evade enemies, keep away snakes and so on” (ibid.312). The forms of the latter in Aboriginal Australia, for example, are: the pointing bone (which draws up the victim’s blood or soul into the skewer-like bone); poison powder; use of magical items as weapons such as the magical cord; image sorcery by using an effigy; magical (ritual) operations in revenge expeditions, which have three general types by region: the removal of kidney fat, the insertion of spikes or pointed sticks, and the removal of blood and soul stuff. (ibid.:319-329).

However, demarcation between the non-harmful magic and harmful magic is not so clear-cut (ibid.). Love magic is an example. The cases of love magic collected among the present-day Bundjalung and Githabul, for example, are identical to sexual assaults according to contemporary social values, which are depicted as ethnographic accounts below. This is why Aboriginal doctors or medicine men (who perform beneficial magic) sometimes acted as sorcerers (the performer or organiser of destructive magic), and vice versa. “Clever men” is the term for Aboriginal doctors, and also for Aboriginal sorcerers. Being “clever” meant in Aboriginal Australia “not only clever in the sense of shrewd, but also intellectually clever, and having the ability, through the help of spirits and psychic agencies, to perform wondrous feats, in a way incomprehensible to ordinary people” (ibid.: 307-308). Such men possessed the knowledge that ordinary members of their society had no access to and this knowledge must be acquired through effort—through special initiation rites broadly similar for the whole Australian Continent (See, for example, Elkin 1994). In Aboriginal Australia, therefore, Aboriginal doctors (sorcerers) were “men of high degree”.

269
In “settled” Australia, the contemporary research asserts that people still maintain the aspects of the traditional beliefs in strong continuity with the pre-colonial past. People foster beliefs in the power of magic, sorcery, bone-pointing, curses, ghosts, and healing practices (cf. Berndt 1947; Berndt and Berndt 1951; Lickiss 1971; Fink 1957; Bell 1961; Eckermann 1977; Bryant 1982, cf. Keen 1988a: 19-20). But it must be noted that in settled parts of Aboriginal Australia, these beliefs have been maintained in the contexts in which organised religious practices were no longer performed and practical knowledge had no longer been transmitted to younger generations (see for example, Berndt 1947a, 1947b; Reay 1949). In this context, contemporary aspects of the traditional beliefs can in no way be the same as those of the pre-colonial past. In this light, rather than looking for continuity of decontextualised beliefs in magic and sorcery as evidence of cultural inheritance, this chapter aims at exploring the dynamics of the dimensions of fear that contemporary belief in magic and sorcery creates in the minds of the Bundjalung and Githabul people. Beneficent magic is expected to bring about direct results such as increase of natural species and of personal trouble, whilst sorcery is a mechanism of control which capitalises on conflicts inherent in social relations; we must not ignore the dynamics of the way magic and sorcery work in response to the continuous processes of adaptation to the changing social environment.

With regard to the situation in New South Wales, Reay (1949; 1945) provided some pieces of information on magic and sorcery among the Kamilaroi people, and Berndt’s articles on Wuradjeri magic (1947a, 1947b) revealed abundant anecdotes of the power of clever men generally similar for the South-Eastern region of Aboriginal Australia. When Reay reported strong continuity of “tribal beliefs, attitudes and sentiments” among the Kamilaroi people in the mid-twentieth century (Reay 1949), the formal mechanisms for enforcing the native laws, after more than a hundred years of intensive contact with Europeans, had already been abolished “during the lifetime of the parents and grandparents of living adults” (ibid.: 89)—i.e., presumably in the first decade of the twentieth century. Still, Aboriginal modes of thought and basic religious attitudes persisted. The Kamilaroi people in those days had a prevailing attachment to the belief in the spirit world, the important role of dreams and spirits in everyday life, and knowledge and sympathy with tribal institutions which were no longer operating.
Magic and the powers of medicine men were also feared—people believed in such things as the removal of kidney fat, travelling in dreaming, poisoning, and sickness, madness or death which the curses of clever men would cause (ibid.).

Berndt (1947a, 1947b) recorded the Wuradjeri magic at the Aboriginal Station on the Darling River in New South Wales in 1943. The two main informants were old enough (63 and 77 years old) to have associated with clever men or native-doctors from infancy for their candidacies for initiation as clever men. The informants were initiated men but had not been initiated as clever men. They told the anthropologist the forms of magic and sorcery and abundant anecdotal stories of Wuradjeri clever men, but they themselves did not have the power to perform magic to its fullest extent. The rites for making clever men had ceased and their power had not been properly developed. Accordingly, the last generation of the practicing clever men was that of their parents and grandparents—their mentors both died around the turn of the twentieth century (ibid: 328). Thus, at the point of the 1940s the situation was that these old men were only able to talk about “a picture of Wuradjeri magic as it lives to-day in the minds of a few old men” (ibid.; my emphasis).

Now the Bundjalung and Githabul community was a part of the coeval research material. Hausfeld (1960) asserted continuity of traditional religious life and practice of magic and sorcery among the Githabul people:

Sufficient material has been recorded to show that ritual initiation is not a thing of the remote past for aboriginal [sic] men at Woodenbong. Further, that magic remains a living force in their society, and that medicine men may be found amongst them, who still exercise considerable power and influence.... That this is after thirty years of constant supervision by resident managers, fifty years of day to day contact with a closely settled white community and after a number of field investigations by anthropologists and allied fieldworkers, is a tribute to the group solidarity and intelligence of the aborigines. (ibid.: 94)

Hausfeld’s field material was collected while he was serving as resident manager of Woodenbong Aboriginal Station between 1956 and 1960. The data on magic and sorcery of the Githabul given in his thesis were heavily dependent on the “interpretations” of the Githabul people about what had happened and what was
going on in those days (ibid.: 94-98, Notes. 69-77). Instead of using the data as the material through which the dynamics of the aspects of traditional religious beliefs prevalent in that particular time were to be explored, he attempted to salvage the knowledge and practice of unchanging magico-religious beliefs of the Githabul, although he was well aware that he was dealing with the "dissembled culture" (Hausfeld 1963).159

Some of the evidence of the continuity of the unchanging past Hausfeld mentioned, on the contrary, suggests the dynamics of the changing social and moral order from the contemporary anthropological perspective. For example, once a 19 year-old boy at the Station was ill. Hausfeld had a talk with an alleged clever man after the cure of this boy. The clever man, on visiting the sick boy, was told by the members of the church in the Station not to put a hand on the body. The church members said to the clever man that they were praying for the boy. But as the boy did not improve on the next day, the clever man got impatient and said to the villagers that he would fix the boy up; and according his own testimony, he went to see his spirit familiars that night to let them work for the cure of the boy. The boy recovered rapidly on the next day (ibid.: Notes, 75-77). Hausfeld did collect the opinions of several other informants that supported the clever man’s allegation. But we should pay more attention to the transition of social order undoubtedly seen in this incident: the church was starting to take over the role of clever men as healers.

Malcolm Calley researched the Bundjalung and Githabul society between 1952 and 1956, and he observed the community being in the midst of an endless process of restructuring the pre-contact social institutions. There was still a group of people who performed increase rituals and they knew "the correct form of address" (ibid.: Notes, 74), but as there were so few initiated men still living—only five on the North Coast—the uninitiated elders and even women were justified in their talking to

159 According to his article on methods of fieldwork (Hausfeld 1963), the people in Woodenbong Aboriginal Station had an overall tendency of dissembling information. He needed to "decide on a purely subjective basis" that "some informants were liars and some were not" (ibid.:50).
The notable evidence here is that those who were uninitiated disregarded increase sites or benign spirits of the bush and showed interest in placating malign spirits only (ibid.: 75). This evidence as analysed by Calley in the following is what is directly relevant to the argument of this chapter:

The reasons for this are mainly economic: modern Bandjalang gain an infinitesimal proportion of their food from the bush and so no longer depend on the cooperation of the increase butheram\textsuperscript{162}. It matters little to them if o’possums do not increase or if there are no edible grubs in the wattle trees. Evil spirits had less economic importance and have held their position; they still function as a projection of feelings of insecurity which are perhaps more acute now than before the Europeans came. (ibid.)

The change in the social environment notwithstanding, we must pay attention to the fact that it was the uninitiated – which included the justified women – who ignored benign spirits and were sewed up with placating evil sprits. What was the difference between the initiated and the uninitiated? The initiated had complete knowledge, according to which they knew how to preserve the religious protocols correctly according to the Old Way. There was potential that the uninitiated, lacking knowledge, were more drawn to dealing with the concerns in the current community ethos which were ceaselessly responding to a new social situation.

Regarding knowledge, however, for Aboriginal Australia all religious ritual was relatively "open" and it is inaccurate to speak of traditional knowledge as the monopoly of religious elites (Berndt 1999: 332-335). In the acquisition of particular knowledge, it is normally open for all ordinary youths to move from one stage to the next through initiatory rites. Therefore, the situation in Calley’s time suggests that this openness was approaching the very point, among the Bundjalung and Githabul, when sensitivity was about to replace knowledge.

\textsuperscript{160} Djurebil, in this context, are centres of magico-religious power, such as sacred places, pools, outcrops of rock, large trees and so on, where butheram (localised spirits of the bush; see the next footnote below) were generally associated. Besides referring to the place itself, the word djurebil is also for the spiritual beings or diffused power found therein, and in this context, it means the same as butheram. (Calley 1955, 1959) See detailed classification in the latter part of this chapter.

\textsuperscript{161} Butheram means "the most important class of spirits" (Calley 1959) among various totemic spirits. It also has a broader meaning referring to cosmology: "one reality, all features of totemic and cult myths, ritual and belief" (Hausfeld 1960). See Chapter 2 for detail.
This chapter provides ethnographic evidence that this shift from knowledge to sensitivity has been accelerated in the Bundjalung and Githabul community along the continuum of social change up to the present—with a backdrop of Pentecostal faith. Faith in God enhances discernment of evil spirits—this is a universal Christian understanding. Furthermore, as the preceding chapters have made it explicit, faith is not knowledge but an extremely personal relationship with God—one which, particularly for Pentecostals, provides a sensitivity that enables a spiritual channel to synchronise with God’s power at a critical moment, i.e., the moment of rebuking the Devil. Sensitivity is the keyword. The ethnographic accounts in this chapter are all about the way their faith in God helps the Bundjalung and Githabul Christians to discern and renounce evil spirits—in the midst of ordinary Aboriginal people’s mundane lives.

**Things to fear**

Today there are two sources of fear for the Bundjalung and Githabul Christians. The first is a fear of “culture” or witchcraft and the second is that of demonic powers infiltrating their community through the medium of devastating social problems sweeping over the Aboriginal community. In the present-day condition of the total loss of traditional material culture and social institutions such as initiation and increase rites, the former is producing more anxiety than it was in the past. In contrast to their political discourse that fearlessly advocates cultural heritage and primordial attachment to land (see for example, Goodall 1996), everyone in the context of ordinary everyday life says (as a routine discourse to outsiders) that “proper” cultural knowledge is lost, as initiated elders have died out. They also say that, on the Far North Coast, clever men have died out by killing one another by abusing the power God once gave them as a gift. Therefore, witchcraft today has become a far more dangerous practice, for no one, including the practitioners themselves, knows what would happen due to the lack of “proper” knowledge about how to control the power. Now all the evil spirits are left intact. All the “oldfellas” are gone. This is the source
of enormous anxiety for Bundjalung and Githabul people. And culture is still around, i.e., 
*witchcraft* is being practiced still today among them — in the realm of their spiritual life.

Memory nurtures the pseudo-past which reflects the desires people have today. For example, an anthropologist can pick up a couple of inconsistencies in their narrative instantly: the demarcation between initiated elders and clever men is already mixed up; people who are just very old (and are just able to speak “the lingo”) are now regarded as the “oldfellas” who can talk to the *djurebil* and drive away demonic spirits (but alas, they are rapidly losing these old people, too). The local Aboriginal word for the clever men is almost forgotten. Some very old people remember the local word *wiun*, a few educated people have learnt it at the university from white linguists, and the rest have no idea. Once a woman in her mid-thirties mentioned a Western Australian word *mabarn*[^1], when she was talking me out of visiting other factions of Aboriginal church in all the other settlements. She said it was because of “our Law-related things” that urged her to warn me against visiting around the settlements and she mentioned evil techniques of the *mabarn*. And then she told me certain names of the *mabarn* who were ready to curse me.... Hence there is no romantic essentialist nostalgia in this chapter. This chapter is written with a clear and full recognition that the present-day Bundjalung and Githabul live with what we can call the “twenty-first-century version” of memory of the primordial past.

I saw the fear of “culture” always being evoked in their minds in the form of the most fashionable style of the time, including the wide spread popularist knowledge about the Australian Aboriginal culture such as the *mabarn*. Still, I saw that the fear of “culture” — or witchcraft — was genuine in the Bundjalung and Githabul minds and it was being restlessly reproduced in gradually changing forms. Despite the most meagre information on the primordial past or “culture” of her own people she now held, I found that the above-mentioned woman who warned me actually feared those persons she mentioned. The following are the major contents of fear they have today:

[^1]: This is a word from the desert area in Western Australia. *Mabarn* refers to the “divine-curer” and to the magical objects that are essential to his craft (Tonkinson 1991: 196).
1. People who are said to have inherited the "clever things".
2. Witchcraft manifested in real life.
3. Locative evil spirits and alien places.
4. Social tensions among the community and kin members—as seeds for grudges, unforgiveness and jealousy, which may eventually induce witchcraft.

The second category of fear, i.e., fear associated with the devastating social problems typical of the Aboriginal community, is inextricably entwined around fear of "culture" or witchcraft. The problems of the contemporary Aboriginal community—such as drugs and alcohol addiction and induced psychoses, sickness and tragic deaths, violence and abuse, and emotions such as apathy, boredom or depression—are all interpreted as the outcome of demonic power working its evil in their community.

**Clever things**

At the time of my fieldwork for this thesis, there were certain people in the Bundjalung and Githabul community who were rumoured to have inherited the "clever things". These people were not regarded as the "remaining" clever men, but simply as possessors of a somewhat incomplete kit of tools that had the potential for witchcraft. Clever things were the objects the clever men used in old times and their magical power was associated with the possession of them. Broadly in the South-East, such clever things as the magical cords and the quartz crystals were reported (Elkin 1994; Berndt 1947a, 1947b; Reay 1949). In this region, too, the **bogara** or sacred cords and the **njurum** or quartz crystals were historically recorded (Calley 1955; Hausfeld 1960).

Today, each particular type of object is either referred to collectively as "the clever thing" or called by the English word simply according to its appearance. For example, the **bogara** is today called the "worm"\(^{163}\), and the **njurum** the "stone(s)". Clever things

---

\(^{163}\) Though magical cords for the South-Eastern clever men were well recorded in the anthropological literature, no one called this type of clever thing "cords", except for a few who seemed likely to have read the anthropological documents. In today's practical daily usage, it was called solely as the "worm". See detailed description of the worm in the latter part of this chapter.
were associated with magical powers of the *djurebil* and generally found there. *Djurebil* is the Bundjalung and Githabal word for the sacred places or “clever” places; and also, it often refers to the spiritual beings or diffused power found therein—in this context, the word *djurebil* is synonymous with the word *butheram* (localised spirits of the bush) (Calley 1955: 8-10). Interestingly, the word *djurebil* is still well remembered even among the Christians, though today people regard *djurebil* with fear alone. Undoubtedly, the functions and original associations of the *djurebil* have become very confused as the time passed. The following is the rough classification of the *djurebil* on the basis of Calley’s work (ibid.).

The *djurebil* had many classes—or forms. Broadly they were relevant to the myths and culture heroes, the totemic sites and the relevant spirits of the bush, and the initiation rites of the clever men—hence magic and sorcery. Calley made the classification of the *djurebil* in terms of the functions in the old culture:

1. The *djurebil* associated with the myths:

   These mark the place of some happening in the creation myths, such as the place where culture heroes camped, performed some significant act, or were buried. This form was no longer significant for the people in Calley’s time except for the *marugan*, the initiated men.

2. The *djurebil* of the totems owned by a clan or lineage responsible for performing increase rites:

   These were very numerous, but in Calley’s time the species or commodity associated with many had already been forgotten. This was partly because of the extinction of the owner lineage and partly due to the dislocation of people to the Aboriginal Stations. The increase rite required a man of the owner lineage to “talk to” the *djurebil* in the local dialect. By the time of Calley’s fieldwork, people had lost touch with their own home territory and few of the younger people could speak the local language. So, even if there was a person of the right lineage, the

---

164 Calley attempted this classification in his M.A. thesis on the Pentecostal movement (1955) but in his Ph.D. thesis *Bundjalang Social Organisation* (1959), he discarded the attempt to classify *djurebil*. According to his “Notes on the Rewriting of the Thesis” (ibid.: unpaged), it was because the obtainable material was insufficient for a detailed analysis and their classification was not essential to the argument. He wrote, “It (the classification) would have meaning for only a very few people today (Calley 1955.: 8).” This situation was presumed, already in his 1955 thesis, from his remarks on the confusion of the informants’ knowledge (ibid.: 10). My attempt here for reconstruction, though partial, of the classification on the basis of Calley’s 1955 work is solely for the purpose of examining the dynamics of the Christians’ mode of thought regarding magic and sorcery from Calley’s time up to the present.
increase rites were then seldom carried out.

3. The *djurebil* owned by a particular family but with no connection to increase rites. They had the reputation for being used for sorcery. People deposited hair clippings and other things associated with the victim in or near such places.

4. The *djurebil* that were used by the clever men for initiation rites:

   These were located in the mountain streams or on the tops of the mountains. There the neophytes receive the *bogara*, which, in the form of thread-like cords (or like fine worms), would come out of the water, crawl all over the initiate and then enter his body. Different *bogara* had different functions and so, the neophytes tried several *djurebil*. Unlike other regions, quartz crystals in the Bundjalung and Githabul country were not attached to the cord to be gained at the spring, but found in the bush. Any trespass by someone who did not “own” the *djurebil* would be punished by the spirits (*batheram*) therein. (If one owns the *djurebil*, one can “talk to” it.)

5. The *djurebil* found by the initiated men (and sometimes by the old women) in the bush:

   These usually took the form of an outcrop of ore, a strangely shaped stone or a deposit of quartz or ochre. They were inherited patrilineally, usually from father to son, but failing a male heir they could pass to a daughter.

In today’s discourse about *djurebil*, the first and the second forms (i.e., the sacred places of the creation myths, and the increase sites to ensure the continued food supply) have been totally eclipsed by the third, fourth and fifth forms of *djurebil* which are associated with sorcery and demonic spirits of the bush. The fourth and the fifth are the archetypal forms of *djurebil* where the “qualified people” obtained the clever things. Notable is the *djurebil* of the third form. Calley speculated that this form of sorcery was the product of the collapse of the traditional culture and social institutions by the colonial encounter and that its original association had been forgotten.

It is the third form of *djurebil* for sorcery that is exactly what people today imagine in terms of the function of the “sacred sites” — especially among the Bundjalung and Githabul Christians. In their discourse, all the beneficent functions of the *djurebil* are blotted out. A middle-aged church leader in a predominantly Christian community

---

165 See, for example, the Wuradjeri way of making a clever man at the initiation rites, in which the postulant first receives the sacred water (which was said to be liquefied quartz crystal that made the postulant grow feathers to fly), and then was “sung” a quartz crystal into his body, followed by the flame and the cord by the spirit being *Baiami* (Berndt 1947a: 334-338). See also Elkin (1994:142-146) for the essential qualifications of the clever men in the Bundjalung region.
told me they would be more than happy to "dissemble" their knowledge about the *djurebil* even in response to the land rights hearing. He continued, "We must do away with those sites. Sacred sites are where some people raise evil spirits. People *are* killing each other by witchcraft!" Accordingly, in considering how the Bundjalung and Githabul Christians regard the *djurebil* fifty years later, I contend that the following example of Calley's speculation regarding the third form is highly significant:

This form of sorcery might, however, have arisen over recent years, due to a misunderstanding of the nature of the *djurebil*, in the following manner: The attitude of the younger people towards the *djurebil* is one of mistrust and fear, and as there are no Clever men about now to whom they can take the hair clippings of their enemies, it is natural that they should attempt to gain their ends by making use of something that everyone knows is dangerous. It is possible then, that this class of *djurebil* is a product of the contact situation (ibid.:8).

... Attitudes change radically and elements like the *djurebil* which once evoked a feeling of awe, respect and sanctity, as well as fear, now are more frequently regarded with fear alone, and tend to become the stock-in-trade of the sorcerer. (ibid.:10)

There is a similar report from the other region regarding the development of fear in the process of transition of social institutions. It was recorded by Berndt (1947a) who collected information from the initiated Wuradjeri men in 1943 on the demonstration of magic of the clever men:

The informant stressed that before tribal disintegration, the novices would naturally have felt some timidity at viewing these extraordinary performances, but this was never crystallized into the fear which some young men were said to feel during the period when their whole culture was in direct contact with Missions. On that account, and to escape the authority of the elders and the laws of their tribe, some youths "would go to a Mission to avoid all this." (ibid.: 342)

While engaged on the fieldwork for this thesis fifty years after Calley collected the above information, I was constantly impressed by the dynamics of the way the Aboriginal mode of thought was being restructured. Calley saw such dynamics already at the time of his research and, instead of attempting to reconstruct the corpus of traditional knowledge being projected from an arbitrary point of time, he attempted to record *in situ* the process of change as well as the people's appropriation and
invention of the primordial past. Now this trend is accelerating more and more. Especially, the Christians have fear alone regarding “culture”.

In olden days, clever men (wiiun) obtained the clever things during the initiation rites. Every initiated man (marugan)—and the old women, too—sought the clever stones in the bush. The former were obtained only by going through the harsh initiation rites accompanied with the acquisition of the esoteric knowledge of the Law. The latter, once found by the initiated after a suitable petition to the butheram, were inherited. Now, all the present-day clever things among the Bundjalung and Githabul bear characteristics of family inheritance: they are handed down generation after generation just broadly to a “family member”. The following are what I recorded, during the fieldwork for this thesis, as the clever things that were said to have been inherited and kept by living persons today:

- the crystal-like stones
- the worm
- two examples of the spirit familiars or assistant totems: a “little fella” on the shoulder; a carpet snake
- the walking stick
- the canoe-shaped stone removed from the bush to the community hall

The crystal-like stones

It was widespread in the research community that three women possessed the stones. They were women between the mid-seventies and mid-fifties in age, and were related to certain families who had historically turned out a number of clever men. The names of these families were a kind of open secret when I was in the field. I was told not to approach them because there was always the potential that I might offend them carelessly and become a victim of curses or that they might get hold of my body particles such as hair—for stock until they needed to use it for some reason or other. Two of them were said to curse people when they were offended—for example, by obtaining the victim’s hair and doing something to it by the power of the crystal-like stones, and putting it in tea and have the victim drink it (then you will get sick or die), or by throwing one of her stones into
the victims’ pocket or in the victim’s car (then you will get sick, killed by a car accident, etc.). The third woman, who was much younger than the first two, was said to have inherited the stones without knowing much about the way to use them. She had magical powers as long as she kept the stones but she had not been taught to control the magical power; for example, when she held the stones she could guess what was being talked about downstairs, whilst she stayed upstairs. “What I am concerned about” the pastor of the region said, “is she does not know what is going on when she is using the stones like that.”

As there was no information from the practitioners’ end, the techniques rumoured by the community members were varying, but I could not risk the allocated position I had in the research community in exchange for further information. (It was definitely too dangerous, if I wanted to keep a low profile as an apprentice to a Christian, to go to meet them directly and let them know I was interested in “culture” and I knew they had the stones.) According to the records about this region in the mid-twentieth century, the njurum, quartz crystal was believed to be used by the clever men who put it to the victim’s body and let it cut the victim’s entrails to shreds, unless removed by another clever man (Calley 1955: 9). As evidence of the continuing beliefs in such usage, I can mention a number of eyewitness stories (see, for example, Rose 1957) of the curative magic of the clever men in this region in modern times. The clever men were believed to take a quartz crystal, a curse, out of the patient’s body without leaving a mark.

A rather different type of case material from the above-mentioned usual usage is that of the quartz crystals related to women’s business (Calley 1955: 9). It was used like the pointing bone in other areas. “When taken from this particular djurebil, the njurum were used to sorcerise the women of some hostile group so that they could not stop menstruating. The djurebil is located at the head of a small creek near Coraki, and its locality is known to only two old men; neither is initiated” (ibid.). No information relevant to this particular method of women’s sorcery was, however, attached to these women. On the whole, these women are vaguely “feared” by the unknown, unspecified magical powers they were
imagined (by others) to have inherited. It is worth paying attention, however, to the fact that, as is shown in Chapter 5, among the researched Aboriginal group one of the most favoured stories of Jesus’ miracles is that of a woman with the “issue of bleeding”. The woman who had been “subject to bleeding for twelve years” was healed instantly by touching the edge of Jesus’ cloak (see Luke 8: 43-48; Matthew 9: 20-22; Mark 5:25-34, for the relevant verses). With regard to this miracle, to my surprise, there seemed to be no hesitation among both the female and male speakers to talk about women’s menstruation in public, i.e., at church during preaching and testimony. At least it is highly plausible that the fear of “unstoppable menstruation” has been one of the big concerns of the women of this Aboriginal group.

With regard to the inheritance pattern of the stones, whether or not it followed certain rules was unknown. All the three women inherited the stones patrilineally. The fathers of the older two women were brothers; and both the women were single and maintained their father’s surname. The first was given the stones by her elder sister and the second was given the stones (and also some other clever things) by her father. The third woman was related to the other two women’s family through her mother. As she was given the stones by her grandmother (FM), her stones did not have the same family lineage as those of the older two women. This younger woman inherited the stones, skipping her father and her elder brothers, for some reason or other not well known to the speculators. Regarding this, some suggested the stones might be for women only, for it was well known that her elder brother, who was the custodian of the owner lineage of a certain djurebil, claimed the stones but was not allowed to have them by the grandmother, although he had obtained everything else such as a huge property associated with the family’s djurebil by land rights and was then regarded as the custodian of the family heritage. The reason why the stones had been handed down to these women instead of their brothers may have something to do with the above-mentioned women’s business, but reliable evidence was no longer available during the fieldwork for this thesis. At least it is worth mentioning that the younger woman who queue-jumped her brother, unlike other two women, was
exactly from the above-mentioned area where there was a certain family who had inherited the njurum for women's sorcery.

The channel for the information on witchcraft was severely limited throughout my fieldwork and it always accompanied the risk of ostracism from the hard-shelled Christian community that was I researching. On the other hand, the Christians were remarkably generous toward their own people. The third woman's husband was a long-time Christian and he had been praying for his wife to give up the stones and convert to Christianity. She knew she should and actually she was seen around at the Christian gatherings accompanying her husband. But every time she was at the point of conversion, the husband pastor told me, she confessed to her husband that the power was too attractive for her to give up. Besides these women, some of the born-gain Christians were rumoured to have kept clever things of various kinds. The Bundjalung and Githabul Christians understand that these people were split into the two conflicting camps, i.e., the Lord's camp and the Enemy's camp and that they were in agony. Accordingly, for the sake of their agony, the fellow Christians seemed to be generously mixing with the possessors of clever things to watch over them patiently until they eventually renounce "culture".

The worm

The bogara was today called the "worm". In contrast to the widespread description of the "magical cord" in Aboriginal Australia, which, for example, was invisible but strong enough "like a rope" to hold the clever man in the air, or which flew in the sky with the clever man on top of it, or travelled along the ground "like a snake" to enter the victim's anus to pain the victim until the victim becomes unconscious (Berndt 1947a; Calley 1955; Elkin 1994), the contemporary version of the Bundjalung and Githabul cord was depicted as being rather thin. In the mythological accounts the "cord" or "rope" was usually kept in the lower abdomen of the clever men, but in contemporary accounts, the "worm" tends to be associated with the torso and the mouth. During his fieldwork in the late 1940s, Elkin (1994:142-146) recorded, from the several initiated men in the Bundjalung
and Githabul country, the depiction of the bogara as the "ropes". In the 1950s, however, Calley's ethnographic depiction of the bogara was "the thread-like cords" or "like fine worms" (Calley 1955:16). Similarly, the magic cord Rose (1957:101) recorded among the Githabul people was also thin.

Ronald Rose was a parapsychologist who studied the magic and sorcery of the two types of Australian Aboriginal groups. The first was the "almost fully tribal" people of Central Australia and the other was a group of "detribalised natives on the east coast", which referred to the Bundjalung and Githabul. His research was done approximately at the same time as Calley was in the field. He and his wife as a research team had extended an association with the group for over six years by frequent visits to the Woodenbong Aboriginal Station (now Muli Muli Aboriginal Village) and its vicinity. As his interest was to test the psychic capacities of the Australian Aboriginal people, he was more interested in seeking the possibility of hypnotism regarding such mystic experiences of the Aboriginal people. Nevertheless, his interviews and questionnaires constructed on the basis of the western scientific framework unexpectedly produced rich and fresh anecdotal accounts. There has been adverse criticism on his book. Elkin (Elkin 1957), for example, shows fair and square that there is obvious cheating in Rose's ethnographic information from the Central Australian group; this would support the speculation that the whole book cannot be trustworthy, but I contend that, surprisingly, the New South Wales material (i.e. the Bundjalung and Githabul material) appears to be trustworthy when examined on the basis of the data from my fieldwork for this thesis.

166 Swain, in his bibliographical survey of Aboriginal Religions in Australia (1991), judges the eyewitness accounts of this book as "a B-grade, half-fabricated travelogue (ibid.:106-107)". Elkin (1957), in the year of the book's publication, reviewed the book and aptly pointed out Rose's grave problem as follows, "The inescapable reason for adverse criticism lies not so much in Mr. Rose's errors, as in his use of his Pidjandadjara informants, or rather "mouth-pieces. ... If the author had stated frankly that he did not succeed in obtaining Pidjandadjara accounts of magic, and was using material collected by anthropologists for other tribes over half the continent, and if he had made the appropriate acknowledgements, reaction would be somewhat different..." (ibid.:79). Elkin stated, "The so-called Pidjandadjara magic material should be ignored, and the anecdote and story material from Woodenbong and Tabulam read with reserve" (ibid.).

167 Having lived with the members of the exact Aboriginal community for a long-term fieldwork, I contend that Rose's ethnographic accounts are genuine and reflect at least the
Half of the interviewed residents of the Woodenbong Aboriginal Station claimed to have seen a magic cord (ibid.:97-103). From a number of eye-witness accounts, Rose built up “a picture of the cord that differed somewhat from the second-hand or mythologically embellished accounts” (ibid.:101):

Mostly the cord was inches long rather than feet, and a couple of feet at most, sandy to black in colour, very thin rather than thick, and seemed to be alive. Usually it came from the doctor’s mouth, and sometimes he pulled it from his mouth and sucked it back again later (ibid.).

Indeed the magic cord was a reality to the Bundjalung and Githabul people according to the record by Rose; and this reality seems exceedingly realistic. Rose concluded his analysis by being convinced that “hypnotism plays the major part and is probably associated with the Gordius168 worm, or animal sinews, or spittle manipulation, or some other such form of deception”(ibid.: 103).

In the contemporary narratives about the worm, such realistic depictions as Rose recorded are fading, let alone the breath-taking magical scenery of the initiation rites and the water pools and mountains where one confronted the

---

168 Rose suggested the possibility of the clever men’s ordinary sleight-of-hand tricks. He speculated how they could do it: “In bodies of fresh water throughout Australia a fine, thread-like worm, Gordius, may be found. (Bert Mercy said the cord came from sacred waters.) It is unusual in that it grows within a host (a beetle or grasshopper) and emerges as a fully grown adult. So that one day a pool may be completely clear and the next have number of writhing, threadlike worms in it. It would seem that doctors, at an appropriate time, might swallow and later regurgitate these, or at least secrete them in the mouth. (Bert had also said the doctors take them in, and before doing so, tie a knot in them; perhaps that had some significance.)” (Rose 1957: 101-102)
butharam, the spiritual beings. Nevertheless, new imaginations are being added by
the younger generation to make up for the loss of particular details—although fear
predominated as ever around the clever thing, and especially, the “worm”.

A dramatic deviation today from the old memory of the bogara or the “clever
cord” deserves attention: the worm is now believed to be inherited generation
after generation. In mythology, the magic cords were obtained by the initiation
rites of high degree only, and they had to be severed and broken up immediately
after the clever man’s death (Berndt 1947b:83-84), otherwise the spirit of the dead
would leave the body with the cords and would become evil sprits to become the
tools of sorcery. How can the worm be handed down from one person to another?
What is the function of such a thin worm today? Further details will be discussed
in the anecdotal accounts in the latter part of this chapter.

The spirit familiar or assistant totem
Two of the possessors of the “worm” or the “stones” allegedly had spirit familiaris
or assistant totems, too. An old man said his late auntie who had the crystal-like
stones must have kept a carpet snake, her djurebil, because he was sure he had
heard the noise of a big snake creeping in the ceiling of her house. Although this
informant implied the evil function of his auntie’s assistant totem, according to the
record about the spirit familiaris in this region, they also helped the clever men for
beneficent practice. Fred Cowlin was a well-known and well-recorded clever man
or a doctor of the Bundjalung and Githabul country (Rose 1957; Calley 1955). As
his totem was the dingo, he lived with as many as thirty dingoes and a wife; the
dogs helped him in healing practice. Some people still remember Fred’s “clever”
dogs.

The second case was a man who was rumoured to keep a “little fella” on his
shoulder. He was an intelligent, knowledgeable middle-aged man and it was
widespread in the community that he was the powerful practitioner of love magic.
This little fella on his shoulder works for him to get a woman he wanted. With
regard to such a “little fella”, I was told by several informants from the
Bundjalung and the Dhan-gadi areas that a "little hairy man" was a common fairy-type spirit widespread among the Aboriginal people. According to them, every blackfella must have seen it when he or she was small. When ten children were playing together in the evening, there appeared an eleventh one without anyone's noticing it. The 'tu.tui or bunyip recorded by Berndt (1947b: 80-81) among the Wuradjeri may belong to the same category as this type of small spirit being. They had lived on this earth "from time immemorial" and they lived in "large colonies, whose social organisation was similar to that of ordinary natives except that, instead of hunting animals and birds for food, they hunted men, women and children. In form they were extremely small, varying from a quarter of an inch to six inches in height, and of human shape" (ibid.).

Eyewitness accounts of a "little red man" were collected among the Githabul villagers (Rose 1957). The father of the oldest informant of mine (who was eighty-four years old in 2003) had explained its nature to the parapsychologist in the following manner:

Tom Close took off his steel-rimmed spectacles and, breathing heavily on the lenses before polishing them on his vest, he said, 'Mostly you see these fellows about this time of night.'

Some fearful glances attempted to penetrate the gloom around us.

'But,' he reassured us, as he examined his spectacles against the glow of the fire, 'usually they don't hurt you none. Mostly them folk belong to a mountain, or a creek, or a big boulder, and they tries to scare people that go near them. Now in the old time, if a fellow came here from Queensland ways, he might be going along this time o'night and he'd see someone like that little red man. He'd be dead scared, all right, and he'd come along to us and say what he'd seen. "Oh," we'd say, "you seen the little red man. He won't hurt you none."' (ibid.:125-126)

Today it is no longer traceable whether the "little fella" on the shoulder of this powerful practitioner of love magic and other examples of "little man" were relevant.
The walking stick

Auntie Mary had been told by the pastor of the Aboriginal church in the village to give up the clever things she had kept. She had been a Christian since a young age and she knew she had to give up “culture” but she could not; she had kept the stones, the worm (a “green-slimy thing”, my informant depicted) and the walking stick. Everyone in the village knew she had them. The walking stick was an ordinary, though old, men’s western-style walking stick with a curved handle on the top part; allegedly she was given the stick by her father. It was in 1995, when it happened. My informant Daniel, her nephew, was lodging in her house in the village. Daniel was an intelligent young man and had contemporary attitudes. He was twenty-five years old then and witnessed all that happened on that day in her garden. The pastor walked down to Auntie Mary’s house and urged her to burn the walking stick. The pastor was Daniel’s close uncle (FMZS). Auntie Mary reluctantly followed the pastor and threw the walking stick into the fire they made in the garden and burnt it. Satisfied, the pastor went away. But then, Daniel saw Auntie Mary take it from the fire—so quickly! It was not burnt down completely. Daniel saw her rush into the house and hide it. After all, she still kept it now.

In fact, a modern form of the clever thing like this case is not unusual, though the walking stick was not a mirror resemblance of any other type of clever things in this region. Among the Kamilaroi people, Reay (1949) recorded a “magic-stone”, as a “recognised modern instrument for working magic” (ibid.:103): it was the cut-glass top of a scent bottle, which was chosen for its iridescence. Fred Cowlin, the above-mentioned powerful Bundjalung clever man had a glass paperweight as one of his “clever” stones (Rose 1957: 84). Old Fred was then presumably between ninety and one hundred years old. He showed it to Rose on their first encounter, and to Rose it looked like a stone with strange markings on it at first, but it turned out to be an “old-fashioned fancy glass paperweight, with an intricate coloured pattern cast in the glass” (ibid.).

The Canoe-shaped Stone

This canoe-shaped stone was a different class of clever things from that of the
above four. It was found in the *djurebil* of the fifth form: a part of the landscape in the bush. It actually was a huge stone, which had a canoe-like shape. It was because of the removal from its original position rather than the stone itself that the community members were thinking it was casting evil influences. It was brought by the whiteman's helicopter into one of the rooms of the big community hall in the middle of the Mission several years ago. It was for the generous purpose of preserving the natural artefact that was culturally significant to the local Aboriginal group, but regardless of the good intentions of the project under the white leadership, the community members—especially the Christians—manifested their displeasure at the community leader's acceptance of the whiteman's proposal. The leader was also a pastor of the church in the community. This decision was nearly unbearable for the flock, and gradually suspicion about their pastor's faith in Christianity grew among them, which lead to the collapse of the congregation in this settlement. The nice church building they rented in the centre of the town was closed down, as few were willing to devote themselves in support of the pastor. But the pastor kept holding the seasonal conventions in the community hall as ever for the visitors from other settlements. Likewise, when the nice church in the town was inaugurated, it was put in a newspaper article. The pastor was always thus somewhat drawn to worldly reputation. A few of the flock started to hold house meetings with no attendance by the pastor, though they still honoured this community leader as their pastor by courtesy. After all, humble cottage meetings were *no* new thing to the Bundjalung and Githabul way of worshiping the Lord in the past one hundred years.

When I started the fieldwork for this thesis, the community hall of this Aboriginal village had become somewhat like the centre of spiritual “heaviness”. When the Aboriginal Christians gathered for the seasonal rallies in this hall, it was said, they sensed diffusing evil powers. Their discourse suggested the reason was mainly because of their suspicion about the leader and pastor of this community, supplemented by the presence of the huge “clever thing” located in the hall, though it was locked up in one of the small meeting rooms. “I had a yarn with ...(certain pastors' names), and they agreed. They feel heaviness here, too.” "For
two nights, my son saw a snake at the door (of the room in the hall where his family was camping) and it hissed at him.” Such narratives were surrounding this settlement among the Christians. Once a group of old ladies, who were visiting for the summer convention held in this hall, were sprinkling the olive oil inside the hall—onto the walls, the chairs, the doors and everywhere. The olive oil was a substitute for proper anointing oil they lacked; and they were speaking in tongues while walking around and sprinkling the oil. One summer before I first visited this settlement, a “snake woman” was witnessed there. According to the eyewitness accounts, when all were sound asleep on the floor of the hall—people usually camped with their swags in the venue of the rally—suddenly one of the old ladies noticed a woman peeping through the door in the dark. Her face was like a snake—and she had a forked tongue! Her company, a group of old ladies, woke up and saw the same thing, and at last all the campers were woken up and saw it. Panicked, all the people camping in the hall that night moved out in the middle of the night.

Witchcraft: fear of getting “sung over”

Contemporary Bundjalung and Githabal people still hold a general feeling of fear about those who are said to have inherited the clever things. They fear getting “sung over”, which means getting “caught by the sorcery”. The practice of sorcery in Aboriginal Australia is usually accompanied by singing a spell over something—the clever thing, or things directly related to the victim. In the main, deaths, sickness and sinful sexual relationships are often attributed to witchcraft today. Usually tragic

---

169 According to these old ladies, what they were speaking “in tongues” then was the praise for God. It is the truth of Christianity that wherever God is praised, the Devil will be there, they said. Therefore, they had to speak in tongues because the “tongues” were the only languages the Devil cannot understand.

170 This incident would probably be diagnosed as mass hypnotism. It is notable that the attendants in fact had met this girl beforehand. She was a young girl brought by her Bundjalung relatives from Cherbourg in Queensland to the Christian convention in this community. The witnesses, whom I interviewed for detailed information two years after this incident, implied the girl had psychological problems which probably had made her relatives bring her to the convention to let her receive the healing prayers. It was highly probable that the girl had been behaving peculiarly throughout her stay in this community— even at nighttime.
deaths and serious or strange sicknesses are attributed to the act of the possessors of the clever things, but the practice of love magic is not a monopoly enjoyed by a person who has inherited a clever thing. Traditionally, ordinary men and women had techniques of performing love magic (see, for example, Calley 1959: 161-163; Berndt 1994:341-319). Knowledge of some kind or other, which is obtainable even today, is regarded as sufficient for corrupting women (or men) whom the practitioner desires. Therefore, "sinful" love affairs among Christians are today often regarded as the outcome of witchcraft. Suspicion about love magic is ubiquitous in the researched community and Christians are especially vulnerable to this type of suspicion; some are always spreading ungrounded rumours to condemn "innocent" men.

Witchcraft is real to a lot of them. Naomi, my friend, said witchcraft was all about controlling. One evening she came along and we had dinner together in my kitchen. She needed someone to listen to her "let it out". She told me how it happened to her that witchcraft made her drive away with a married man and stay down south for a few weeks until her husband came to take her back home. It was about five years ago. Everyone in the community knew it. I had heard about it, too. It was

171 The level of "learning" or knowledge regarded as sufficient for love magic today is roughly seen in the following three examples. The first is the rumour made by a group of Christian women about an adulterer. A middle-aged Christian man had an affair with a schoolgirl a decade ago. According to them, the man, as he desired the girl, went down to South Australia to learn the skill of the Old Way to seduce women (on a short trip, according to the known circumstances). He came back and practised witchcraft on the girl; so the girl left the young man who was courting her and went to this married man. As the girl was caught, she was not to blame, they say. "The girl had no idea what she was doing," the young man who had this girl stolen by the adulterer did say this to me in a calm manner. The second is a middle-aged woman who was rumoured to have been taught by her "clever" granny some technique to catch a man. It was said she would do something in the toilet. So whenever she was around, some said, at someone's house, men who knew the rumour would gradually pull away as they would feel uncomfortable to use the toilet in the house. The third is regarding an affair between married Christians a decade ago. The onlookers were highly suspicious that the man's involvement in "culture" might have given him power to control the victim, such a devoted Christian woman. The fact was that he had been involved in some cultural heritage project for a while, but by the Christian way of thinking, it was exactly the channel by which anyone could obtain a piece of knowledge to practice witchcraft.

172 According to today's knowledge of love magic in the researched area, when the woman starts feeling a burning sexual urge towards the practitioner, it is the sign that she has been caught. This logically leads that with the benefit of hindsight any love affairs can be interpreted as love magic practised by men. Another symptom accompanies fear rather than sexual desire: the woman is haunted by the practitioner's image in dreams or experiences a supernatural link to the practitioner whatever she does in daily life (see the testimonies of the two victims in this chapter).
controlling—everything from the beginning until the end. Even in the aftermath. She was a longtime Christian but her husband was a sinner. She was always on her own at the Christian meetings. “The Enemy knew that I did not have companionship with my husband,” she said, “so, after church, the man waved ‘come on’ and he said ‘I love you’ and other things in front of everybody. But I just wanted companionship (but he wanted sex).” She was bewildered about the sexual urge she felt so abruptly and, looking back, she regarded it as the evidence of witchcraft by the man.

After having been brought back home by her husband, Naomi was still under the control of the man. One night, she felt a sudden, uncontrollable sexual urge she had never felt. She thought, “It’s not me!” But she sneaked out of her house as if she were drawn to the man’s house. When she arrived, she saw his house all lit up in the middle of the night, and the man was sitting in the lounge room, drinking a bottle of water out of the fridge. She said she could still remember the exact scene. He saw her and said, “I knew you’re coming.” She did not tell me how she felt at that time but when she was reliving it on that night in my kitchen, she said, “See? This is controlling.” It seems that in hindsight any love affair which they regret now can be interpreted as the outcome of love magic in women’s discourse.173

The relationship was over now. The man went back to his wife in the end and she felt betrayed and disappointed. Naomi and her husband were together again but she said they were “no longer one” as before. After a while she found, by chance, a paper bag of her hair hung in the garage: it fell down and the hair was scattered. “I said to the Lord, ‘Thank you for revealing this.’ This is controlling!” Her husband did it to get her

173 By the same token, any satisfactory, unregretted love affair, regardless of its appropriateness according to the Christian and/or Aboriginal standard, is interpreted as the Lord’s will in their discourse. For example, an old Christian man interpreted his secret love affair with his first cousin as the Lord’s will, though this was not testified openly at church but told among friends. He even said if one was the level of “man of God” (i.e. Christian of high degree on the basis of one’s faith), one was allowed to do the same thing as King David. (King David committed adultery to his soldier’s wife and set him up to get killed at war [2 Samuel 11:1-27].) Moreover, in such a fundamental Pentecostal Christian community which prohibits divorce and remarrying, actually there were several Christian leaders who had married a divorcee or an unsaved spouse. I observed unanimous disagreement with such marriages in the community on the level of general discourse, but after all, the community seemed to stay permissive because of “mitigating circumstances” with each case. The larger and the more politically powerful the sinners’ families were, the easier it seemed to obtain tacit approval for any kinds of sin.
back to him. Also, her favourite dress was missing. Probably it was hid in the ceiling,
she said. "Witchcraft is real, my dear. Be careful," she said in a soft voice as usual,
thanked me for the dinner and a yarn and went home where she lived on seemingly
good and peaceful terms with her husband.

It is common discourse that the Aboriginal sorcery is not effective on white people
but only when a white person violated the *djurebil* would he or she be cursed to
sickness or death (Calley 1955:9). However, I believe the following case material would
suggest that it is a matter of spiritual sensitivity, not a matter of racial and cultural
difference, that determines who is vulnerable to the Aboriginal sorcery and who is not.
In this case material, Christianity mediated between the different socio-cultural
backgrounds. This is worth considering. Being Christian enhances discernment of evil
spirits—this is the universal truth among Christians. This lead a highly spiritual,
committed white Christian woman to discern the evil spirits cast by Aboriginal love
magic, and she went through an agonising process of rebuking it. It was Sophia Taylor,
the wife to a local-born UAM missionary, who became a victim of Aboriginal love
magic some thirty years ago. When I met her, Mrs. Taylor was well into her sixties but I
was shocked to find it so. Her husband looked like he might be, but she was too
beautiful to be estimated at over fifty. Harry and Sophia Taylor were the retired UAM
missionaries who used to run church in one of the Aboriginal Stations in the Northern
Rivers region. I could imagine how attractive she was in her youth when she started
helping her husband's family in one of "the Missions". The following bizarre story was
told in a cosy lounge room where she and her husband were leading a leisurely retired
life.

"The Aboriginal people experience supernatural sightings and feelings much more
than Europeans do, unless the Europeans are, of course, into some sort of witchcraft or
occult practice—then they do obviously experience supernatural phenomena. They are
tuned into spiritual things, because they've been an animist people in that they
worshipped their ancestors or the spirits associated with their ancestors. I think spirits
feel they have the right to anyone that's like that. If so, spirits would easily manifest
themselves to you because they know that you are aware they are there. The
Europeans aren’t aware there is spiritual world at all. That’s why the Aborigines say they are more spiritual. They are definitely tuned into the spirit world more than the Europeans are, unless, as I said, they are involved in some supernatural spiritual stuff.”

Her husband: “You could tell when a person was outside the door and who it was...?”

“Yes. See, that was something spiritual. Without doubt I knew these things but at the same time I had fear associated with it. When I cried about it, and said to the Lord, “What’s going on here, why am I aware of things that are going to happen?” He just seemed to say to me, “What do you want? Do you want to just walk with me by my Word and trust me? Or do you want to have these feelings?” It was like it was offered to me. I had a choice: did I want to just be in touch with the supernatural which God forbids us to do except through his Spirit? ... It happened to me after I’d been married and I had two children—so, that’s thirty-six years ago. I got that and I had the ability to know when Alex (a youth in the Mission) was coming home, and when Jo Walker’s brother (an Aboriginal pastor’s brother) was coming to our Mission. I knew what clothes he was going to be wearing—things like that. And I just couldn’t understand why it was happening to me. I felt the association of fear and I thought, “God has not given a spirit of fear but of love and of power and a sound mind,” and I thought, “This isn’t God.” I am getting this like a bait—has been offered to me and if I would go down that path, I could go down there but at the end I would be serving the wrong master. I felt it was just a trap.”

O.A.: “How long did it last?”

“A couple of years.”

O.A.: “Do you think it was because of your association with the Aboriginal people in the Mission?”

“Yes. I’d believe it was. Because there was always an Aboriginal person. I don’t think I ever had a knowledge of anyone else other than an Aboriginal person that they were coming or...whatever. One time I woke up, when I was pregnant with my third child. I woke up and... in the afternoon it was, and I looked out this tiny little window—we were living in a house built by a ship builder—and, it had this tiny little window down near the floor like a porthole. And I got up in the bed and I was lying and I got down on my knees and I looked out through there. I could see the road in front of

174 Timothy Chapter 1, verse 7.
where the house was—at that particular time when Alex was walking down that road. It was like a feeling like they say Aboriginal people “sing” you. It was a feeling like that...as if there were some supernatural strings pulling me that I would get down and look out there. Then I remember just sitting on the floor and crying, “What’s going on here?” Because I trusted the Lord since I was sixteen as my Saviour and I just felt this wasn’t of Him. Why should I wake up in the middle of the good sleep I needed and look out there just to see an Aboriginal person walking down past there? I got to realise that there was something more than just chance happenings. I realised it was something else.”

“That’s why I made that choice. After that I made that choice. Because it really worried me. That was the final time that the experience happened to me that I thought, “No, I am not going to this path.” And I went to talk to a guy who dealt a lot with the Aboriginal people in Australia. He was a psychologist. His name is Dr. Lyn Barrow. He was practicing at the Monash University in Melbourne for good many years. He was a renowned psychologist. He said, “Do you feel you’ve been sung?” I said, “I don’t know what’s happening to me—whether it’s a calling of a spirit associated with the Aboriginal people or not.” But I said, “I don’t want anything that God doesn’t want.” Then he said, “I can tell you’ve got the faith in God. If you don’t want this in your life, why should you have it?” I said, “I don’t want to have it, I don’t want to have anything that gives me fear.” “I would just resist it,” he said. And I resisted it, and it went. He wanted me to go and talk to a lady doing research on Aboriginal spiritual experiences but I did not ever go and see her. I was stressed out and my health was failing. I was feeling too much under control—that I was being controlled rather than me in control.”

“I knew it would have had advantages if I had gone down that track. But I said No. When I said, “No, God I don’t want that, I want to just obey you,” the thing—the ability that I had that time—just went. I am glad I renounced it.”

The following is a more “ordinary” example of case material about witchcraft between an Aboriginal protagonist and an Aboriginal sorcerer. A young Githabul man
was “caught” when he was swimming in the river outside his people’s territory.

“I was a young fella from here and went for turtle hunting. We love bush food sometimes, you know. There were certain areas in Tabulam there. I placed my thongs, my shirt, and everything was folded neat in one place. So that was OK, and I went up to the river and started turtle hunting. Then I came back to my place where I left my clothes and stuff. One of my thongs went missing. That was Saturday. I was fit as anything, I was well. Saturday night I was looking back...I didn’t know how that thong was missing. Come home Sunday morning and I was sick as anything. And my wife’s uncle said to me, “Where did you go down there? Did you go anywhere? Was anything that belongs to you missing?” And I said, “One of my thongs was missing.” So, someone wanted to wipe me out—or destroy my life. When I went to Dr Dawson in Kyogle, he said, “I can’t understand this. I don’t know, this should not have happened.”... After six weeks, the doctors told me, “We are gonna measure you up for the coffin at night.” Someone in Tabulam wanted me out of the road. I nearly died, but the Lord restored me again....”

Then his wife cut in:

“We are aware of certain areas. We don’t go there ignorantly just to try and test. You don’t go there. Because we don’t believe in the practice of it, we don’t go to those places. Because they are—whether they are Christians or not we don’t know—still practicing these things, or think it is OK to hang on what they got, what they were given. Because those things are passed on...in some of the families.”

The man’s testimony seems basically to follow the traditional structure of sorcery: he was caught by someone in Tabulam, i.e., non-Githabul people. Swimming in a river, however, suggests the potential of having been caught by the localised spirit, not by a sorcerer, although there lies still a possibility that the djurebil spirit was summoned by the sorcerer. As his wife’s emphasis on the “certain areas” shows, it seems there is already some confusion about the rules about how the djurebil spirits would attack and how the human sorcerer would follow the procedures—if it were in the Old Way.

I was not given any names of possible sorcerers but on one occasion the victim’s brother said the sorcerer must have been a certain person in their own village who was
jealous about his brother. This seemed more unlikely; if it was true, it meant the victim was cursed by one of his close affines. In accordance with the traditional way of sorcery in Aboriginal Australia, usually sorcery was projected outside one’s own social group, though not always (Berndt & Berndt 1999: 334). Sorcery served as a means of retaliation or as a punishment in the service of social order. The procedures were the basis of the traditional legal system. Regarding the Bundjalung and Githabul, too, Calley (1959) observed that “one does not fear the sorcery of one’s neighbours but the sorcery of people on other stations” (ibid.:102). According to Calley’s research done in the 1950s, allegations of sorcery had become generally along station lines. Under the Old Rule, they were along clan lines. Calley observed the station (the superintendent Aboriginal reserve) was replacing the clan as the local group towards which people felt loyalty. He concluded, “Sorcery buttressed station solidarity.... Fear of sorcery plays a part in enforcing group norms” (ibid.). In this case, however, whether or not it was a mere speculation, there was already a different interpretation—the fact that the accused person allegedly had the stones was, for the victim’s brother, good evidence to rely on. Now further change is seen: allegations of sorcery along genuine fear lines are emerging. It means there is no standard to rely on except for one’s sensitivity to the evil spirits.

There is tangible ethnographic evidence to support this argument. An “eerie incident” happened one summer night and it aroused the extreme fear of witchcraft in the minds of one generation. But later, their assumption was denied flat out by the older generation.

The ladies I accompanied to one summer night service were tired and nervous. It was partly because they were visiting an alien place away from home, and partly because the ladies were on the rightist side of the Aboriginal Christians who advocated the danger of “culture”. In the hall where the seasonal convention was held, there was a huge clever thing preserved, though hidden from the public. Everyone knew it. The ladies seemed to be on edge while they were at service, although they seemed to be enjoying the secular part of their holiday trip. The night service finished at midnight that day. After a cuppa at the church, we all headed for a modern four-bedroom house
in the quiet residential area of the town. It was one of the rental houses the local Aboriginal housing co-op held, and the ladies’ kin were living there. Everyone fell asleep immediately, lying on the offered beds of the rooms or on the mattresses that filled the floor of the large house. I was sleeping on one of the mattresses on the floor of the bed-sit at the corner of the house facing the front garden and the main drive, with five other women and two infants. Everyone was sound asleep, when suddenly a loud voice woke all of us up. It was a male voice, loud and eerie, and it was too fast for me to catch what he was saying. My watch showed it was 1:30 a.m.

“Somebody’s talking in the lingo!”
The oldest of us in the room said. She was fifty-three. We all looked outside the window in the dark. Someone must have been walking around the house, but we saw no one.

“Someone was talking in the lingo to curse us,” she said.

“What’s that?” I asked, imaging possible family feuds or confrontations of the church factions.

“It’s the Devil.”

“What, Aunty? The Devil... manifested ‘in flesh’?” Her niece asked, bewildered. She was thirty-three.

I can recollect no further meaningful communication. The auntie went dumb on the subject, and we all went back to sleep as nothing could be done.

On the following day, the ladies from this local group were talking frantically about this incident—in whispers but everywhere in the streets whenever they caught up with their kin who were visiting the convention. The ladies were roughly between fifty and seventy years old, all Christian, visiting the convention held on the Aboriginal reserve located in a resort coastal town. Among flamboyant white tourists strolling about through the town, these Aboriginal ladies were walking up and down the streets just like them, but their minds were preoccupied with the Devil and reality of witchcraft. Strangely, they were more concerned about the manifestation of the Devil “in flesh” than in speculating about who the uninvited visitor to the house was. I heard the voice too. It was a loud discordant voice but human, not supernatural. At first I thought a man might be shouting in drunkenness, but I was told by the ladies it
was the lingo, not English, although no one in the house was able to speak the lingo. The house was miles away from the Aboriginal reserve where the convention was held and, therefore, no “casual trespassing by blackfellas” could have happened; anyone who was there should have visited the predominantly white residential area on purpose. Fear among these ladies accelerated and any contingencies during the convention—such as a presumed rape at the camping ground at night, arrest of their girls for shoplifting in the town, their boys’ vandalising the kitchen of the venue, news of the death of an elder of another community, and a snake hissing to the campers inside the venue—were all jammed together to produce a bunch of hearsay evidence of the outcome of the manifestation of the Devil “in flesh” on that night.

A few months later, I told the oldest elder of the same language-group as these ladies about what had happened. (She was a longtime Christian, eighty-four years old, and a full auntie to the family I was sleeping with on that night.) I asked for her opinion about what it was. She said without turning a hair, “These fellas must let it go.”

“Sorry?” With all the consequential frenzies of fear I had observed among the lady Christians during the convention, I did not understand what this Christian elder meant at all.

“That fella was swearing, girl. You cannot stop these fellas swearing,” she grinned annoyance.

Then I gathered she was sort of disappointed by the groundless fear the younger generation of her people was overwhelmed with. Swearing in the lingo outside the house had nothing to do with the traditional or “properly cultural” way of cursing someone. It is not a pleasant experience according to the universal human standard if someone swears at us at night in an unknown language, but it is just an unpleasant experience. The elder meant that. But the ladies mixed up everything that was eerie, spooky and unpleasant to produce a huge receptor for fear. Unlike me, they never bothered to go to their elder for her opinion and/or knowledge.

The elder and her niece thus made completely different interpretations. Their age difference was thirty years. This case material suggests a shift from knowledge to sensitivity when people are put in the situation of facing the primordial past. It also
suggests that, besides the ongoing loss of traditional knowledge about "culture", the enormous social tension imposed upon them today is playing a major role in this shift. There are important implications of the emotional stress entrenched in their minds as discussed below.

Other spiritual torment

There are some other things that cause spiritual torment to the Bundjalung and Githabul people of modern times. They fear ghosts and witches—and they are most vulnerable when they are in alien places. In the traditional religious life of the Bundjalung and Githabul, there were an indeterminate number of *butheram* at each of the *djurebil* for which the members of a particular clan had a special responsibility. The *butheram* were localised spirits and spiritual guardians of clan morality (Calley 1959: 68). There were other spirits which were more personal and less localised (but they were nonetheless associated with the clan territory). One of them was *derangan*, which still today lives in the minds of the Bundjalung and Githabul, though in a more arid and superstitious framework. *Derangan* were “anthropomorphic female monsters” (ibid.), i.e., witches. There are several points on the roads in the Northern Rivers region where the local Aboriginal people today witness a woman witch, or its male counterpart, or just a “thing”, i.e., a feeling of the presence of something spiritual. This “thing” is known for its habit of jumping onto the car to have a free ride until it gets bored and jumps off. The ghosts of dead people near the cemetery and the victims of the long-remembered traffic accidents at certain spots and so on are today mingled with these less localised but still “locative” spirit beings.

Whatever it is (i.e. wherever the evil spirit may derive from), *with faith* any Christian can drive away evil spirits. The Bundjalung and Githabul Christians never fail to have a prayer and plead the blood of Jesus¹⁷⁵ every time they drive, as driving

¹⁷⁵ Pentecostals use this expression daily. This expression means to pray to God to protect one from all the negative things in one’s life with the blood of Jesus symbolically. The “negative things” vary from spiritual attacks by evil spirits or Satan to routines such as sickness, traffic accidents, financial difficulties, and even feelings of depression and loneliness.
has a potential risk of trespassing the territory of other social groups. This should always be the only and completely sufficient procedure to rebuke the Devil according to the Bible. Still, fear prevails in the human mind. The following is a somewhat elegiac example.

Auntie Estelle started seeing “spirits” when she was put in a hospital in Maclean by her daughter for a respite. She was a Githabul woman and Maclean was an alien place to her, but as it was no longer appropriate to let this old lady live by herself, her daughter took her from Woodenbong to where she had settled and raised her children. Maclean was approximately 300 kilometres south of her home in Woodenbong. It is the Yagir people’s land, an alien place for the Githabul, although both groups are under the big territory of the Bundjalung Nation today. Some have intermarried between these two groups, but not many. The respite was supposed to be two weeks and there was nothing that needed immediate treatment for her except old age; the respite was meant to help caretakers to take a brief respite, not for the benefit of the patient. In the hospital, she got worse.

Being old, frail and lonely, she was now moreover taken away from the only family she was related to in this alien land. She had to spend time with strangers everyday—the senile white ladies who could only stare at her with blank eyes. The oldest elder of the Githabul people was losing her mind bit by bit in an alien land. “I see spirits every night,” she started complaining. Every night, men, women and children walked around her bed. They were strangers. She was scared because it was not her own country that she was living in now. For a few nights, as a Christian elder, she prayed to God and rebuked the spirits. But they stayed. Soon she became paranoid. “I saw my dead father Amos on the TV screen in the kitchenette. I don’t know why he was there. He was talking in the lingo.” Finally she asked her daughter to get the Yagir elder to pray on her and rebuke the spirits in the Yagir lingo. Coincidentally, just like Auntie Estelle, there was one remaining female elder who could speak the lingo fluently. Moreover, she was the Christian pastor.

On the following afternoon, the old lady was totally delirious. The nurse told us
she was walking up and down in the hallway to enjoy some walking in the morning, and therefore, the nurse seemed to think the old lady was just sleeping after a nice little exercise. Her daughter and I exchanged glances at once. We instantly understood she had been rebuking the spirits in the hospital by walking up and down in the hallway. She must have been praying in whisper. She was totally delirious that afternoon and we could not communicate with her well. That evening, we came back to the hospital with the pastor. “The spirits are after me!” The old lady cried at the pastor as soon as she recognised the pastor’s face. The pastor calmed her down in the bed, and read the Bible, prayed to Jesus and rebuked the spirits, and sprinkled water in the room, to the door and to the upper threshold. She prayed in English mostly, then at the climax of her hearty prayer she spoke “in tongues” (glossolalia). When she sprinkled water onto the threshold, she uttered a couple of words in the lingo. And the exorcism was over. It was done in a quiet manner and the nurses sitting up at the end of the hallway did not notice that a hard-fought spiritual battle was going on in one of the rooms down the hall. Auntie Estelle’s white roommates were lying on their beds quietly, looking nowhere with blank eyes. Persuaded to try a nap, she started to calm down, and believing in her daughter’s words that she would stay all night at her bedside, she fell asleep. In three minutes, her daughter pulled off her hand and we three were in my car on our way back home after a long and tiring day.

In my car, the elder and pastor said it was just the same when her brother was dying. He was in the room opposite to Auntie Estelle’s and he started to see the gumbora (ghosts). He died shortly after. To my question whether it was one of the Yagir people’s local spirit beings, she answered honestly she could not tell. I sensed they were prepared to lose Auntie Estelle anyway. On the following day, however, Auntie Estelle looked better and was nearly back to normal. In the following few days she grew better and better, but towards the end of the respite period, after reassuring me of her wellness, she said, “To tell the truth, my dear, they came back.” But she was going back to her daughter’s home soon where the night would no longer be bleak and faces of her grandchildren and great grandchildren would surround her again. The respite period was nearly over. She feared no more.

Did Auntie Estelle fret for her Githabul land 300 kilometres away or her family 2
kilometres away from the respite? All of my informants say they cannot live away from their people. Their community, however, is far from a caring and sharing utopia. The devastating social problems of their community are often attributed to the Devil. Very often the practice of the Devil itself is called witchcraft among the Bundjalung and Githabul Christians; this means the practitioner is the Devil. Why does the Devil do it? “‘Cos the Devil is meant to.” This is a circular argument, which obfuscates the possible practitioners of witchcraft. In speaking about the devastating social problems of their society, instead of casting thoughts on the individual lifestyles that allows apathy toward upward social mobility, crassulous eating and drinking habits, undereducation or lack of self-discipline, the political activist discourse would often merge into accusations of colonial dispossession. Meanwhile, the most circulated Christian discourse I observed was to blame the Devil. The principle line of the Aboriginal Christian discourse was unanimous and simple: it is all because of the Devil that we are poor, sick, drunk, lusty and unhappy. Confronting someone who is playing the prodigal, for example, the Christians never talk about self-discipline or self-help efforts; they simply blame the Devil and pray.

One evening, among the Christians waiting for the church service to start in the waning twilight, an account of a stinking smell at the cemetery set off a chain reaction of similar eyewitness accounts. A group of the Christians there had just finished the funeral held in the Mission of a young boy who had died of drug overdose. In the early part of that day, in the cemetery when a woman and her family were waiting in the car for the coffin to arrive, the area suddenly stunk. It stunk so foully that she thought it was a dead kangaroo lying near there. It was the Mission’s cemetery located in the hilly part of the property. The woman’s family leaned out of the windows of the car but they saw nothing in particular. “The Devil stinks!” Instantly, the woman and her family pleaded for the blood of Jesus. When the coffin arrived, she tried smelling the coffin, thinking that the body had been sent from Sydney to the Mission in Woodenbong, the boy’s homeland, but it did not stink and the foul smell had gone by then. “There are ‘tribal areas’ around there,” Uncle Ezra, the Mission pastor’s first cousin, immediately followed her. His wife joined in and they agreed they should pray.
over it; by their accounts the evil spirits were most likely around that afternoon because of the tragedy of the youth they buried. "The Devil tempts our young people to drugs to destroy our community."

Uncle Ezra then recollected how he rebuked the Devil—it was a good while ago when it happened in Muli Muli. One night, youths were making noises with *yarndi* and grog outside and he saw the "thing" in the tree out there. He grabbed the Bible, opened it, and went out into the garden, holding the open Bible in his hands. The "little thing" in the tree rushed down the tree and passed at his feet and ran away. And a dog went chasing it. Uncle Ezra meant it was that little thing—a sign of witchcraft or manifestation of the Devil—that made the youths drawn to *yarndi* and grog. It was worth paying attention to the fact that an older witness, Uncle Ezra, saw a little "thing" in the tree, which definitely bore an echo from a "little red fella" or a spirit familiar of the clever men, whilst the woman of the younger generation (the age difference was approximately ten years) saw nothing in particular on discerning the evil spirit in such a distinct physical manifestation as a stinking smell.

Tension among the community members produces feelings of anxiety and insecurity, and in an ultimate stage, fear of their own people. It is plain common sense to everyone in the Bundjalung and Githabul community that *people watch one another*. It is such a small, exclusive community, though geographically dispersed on the North Coast. A Christian youth once testified stressfully and sadly, "We watch one another. Aboriginal people are like this." He had a lot of stress—there are always unresolved issues in the community, even brothers and sisters are "having issues". "Grudging, unforgiveness...," he continued, "In the church there are jealousies, criticisms, backstabbing, and gossiping. We know offences are being talked about and we hold

---

176 It was a common procedure of rebuking the Devil among the Bundjalung and Githabul to open the Bible and rebuke the Devil by holding it. I have observed many to do it on the occasion of praying, sleeping at night in the house of the recently deceased and so on. When I was allowed to sleep at Uncle Ezra's house for one night alone and wait for the family to come back the following morning, the bed for me had been neatly made for me and the Bible was on the bed, with the pages open. I knew Uncle Ezra's wife was concerned that I was going to sleep alone that night and wanted to give me protection.
the grudge. It is left in the lurk." He professed a complete improbability for them to bring up the issues and confront one another. They are suffocatingly related to one another in a complex way. "We just can't do it." Rather, they would live with emotional stress and surveillance by their own people.

The following are the major concerns in their relationships with others:

- Complex and substantial kin obligations must be tirelessly fulfilled at the expense of everything; especially attitudes towards upward social mobility such as accumulation of money and work responsibilities are irreconcilable with this.
- Family crises can happen easily and casually: people get sorely emotional within the kin group and among siblings over a little thing.
- Jealousy between spouses is fierce, which often causes violent assaults. It is not unusual that husbands stalk and assault their wives on mere speculation of flattering, and wives assault with weapons their unfaithful husbands or the suspected seducers. Still, many such relationships are kept.
- Self-centred jealousy towards others' fortune and happiness is intense. Backstabbing follows.
- There is plenty of leisure time for the community members (as they are mostly on Centrelink) to sit down and gossip, which makes them get obsessed by rumours, ungrounded speculations and, finally, resentment towards others.

In such a closed community of kin under intense surveillance as that of the Bundjalung and Githabul, looking for the causes of problems, i.e., talking directly about the problems, offences and resentment, risks breaking down the emotional equilibrium of the community. Thus people withdraw and avoid confrontation and it makes people get caught in a vicious circle. They end up living with negative feelings towards community members, which are mainly formed through rumours and suspicions about which credibility can never be demonstrated. I observed them continuously grudge and complain, but they never want to upset the status quo. Fear thrives on suspicion. Talking about the Devil produces at least no offence to anyone.
Renouncing the clever thing—or “culture”

All the ladies remember clearly how it was at the ladies meeting a decade ago. In the village, female Church members met on Tuesdays to share testimonies and to pray over one another. It was a small meeting with a dozen or so female villagers. Everyone knew everyone. Everyone was related to one another somehow. One Tuesday, Auntie Mary came to the ladies meeting for prayers. She said she was sick. Everyone there knew the old lady had the stones, the walking stick and the worm. The ladies prayed for her. While praying, two of the ladies “got in spirit” and “the Lord showed them what was wrong” with the old lady. It was the worm she had. “Let it go! Let it go,” the ladies prayed. And the two ladies in “spirit” saw the ripples on the stomach of the old lady going up to her mouth. The old lady was about to let the worm go. But at the last moment, she abruptly sat up and said, “I’m all right.” She had swallowed it. She could not renounce the worm.

This was an eyewitness account I was told by Daniel, my young Christian friend, while we were cruising the town going to the shopping centre to get some groceries for his auntie. This auntie of Daniel’s was the one who prayed for Auntie Mary many years ago—strictly speaking, Daniel said, it was in 1995. Daniel is a longtime Christian in his mid-thirties, clement and brotherly, and intelligent enough to work full-time as an Aboriginal Teaching Aid at a high school.

“In order to hand down the worm...,” he continued, as if he could no longer stop talking nonsense once he had let it go, “the person who receives it lies on the bed and opens his mouth...”

Listening, I looked out of the window of my car at the halcyon scenery of a nice little town in rural Australia. Daniel was the driver and we were heading for Coles. A mundane picture of the everyday life of ordinary people...except for the fear lurking in this contemporary youth’s mind sitting next to me.

“You may think I am crazy, but this is the reality of blackfellas life,” said Daniel
somewhat sarcastically, shrugging his shoulders. But he could not stop. "He was lying on the bed, and the green slimy thing moves. It is tangible...."

According to the eyewitness accounts collected by Ronald Rose (Rose 1957: 101), the colour of the worm was sandy to black, but the "green slimy thing" did have reality in this contemporary Christian youth's imagination. Truly, a vision of the worm moving from the attacker's mouth to the victim's mouth appeals to the imagination of the younger generation of the twenty-first century who are used to the body-snatcher type science fiction movies.

What Daniel told me was the hearsay evidence of his aunties, who were "in spirit" and were not coldly objective when they witnessed the worm. The first was thirty, the second was in her mid-forties, and Auntie Mary was then about sixty years old—in 1995. In fact, one of the "spirit possessed" ladies had told me about this incident before. The detail was exactly the same as that Daniel told me. In fact, in the Bundjalung and Githabul community, there were still a number of people today who recollected the story of the Christian elder who had renounced the worm at church. A half century ago, the elder testified himself—how he coughed up the worm when he was receiving the prayers for conversion. It was a black, snake-like worm and it crawled on the floor and then vanished, but because it happened when he was visiting the ministry in another region, the testimony was brought back to the community in the form of memory—or confession of faith to the Christian god. It was not a cold objective piece of evidence.

Towards the end of the fieldwork for this thesis, at last, I collected an eyewitness account of a sober fact. In her young days, a woman (now seventy-three years old) saw one of her affines in Tabulam take the worm out of his mouth when he was dying. It was a thin, slime-like worm. He held it in front of his brother. His brother said, "No." He refused the worm. The dying man's brother was a Christian lay pastor then.

177 A "slime" is a sea worm common in the coastal part of the North Coast region. The local people collect them on the beach to use as bait for fishing. Tabulam, however, is a mountainous part of the northern New South Wales and the local people are not much familiar with the sea worms. The witness was married into the Tabulam area from the coastal region.
He refused his dying brother and renounced "culture" for the sake of his faith in God.

The following story was told by a twenty-eight-year-old youth. He lives with his wife and three children in a small shed adjacent to the humble church of the little Aboriginal community of his people. He quit his job at the Bundjalung National Park a couple of years ago to live "on faith" and become "more serious" about the Lord. Everyday before dawn he prays on the rock along the shore and watches the first light of morning cast upon "the invisible things of him from the creation of the world178". He is a fisherman during the day and a preacher and youth leader of the community in the evening. He lives the life of Jesus. He was seventeen when this happened.

"There was one old fella who come from the North End. He called for me before he died, and I went to see him in the hospital. He said he wanted to hand this "old man thing". He said, "You know what I am talking about." And I said, "No. Not now...." And I went away. He said, "You've gotta come back." Then I was running away...I was really. I thought this to me was a crossroad to choose. Because I knew Christian way, I knew God's always been there and I knew this way, too. I knew what'd be offered to me with that. I didn't go back there...."

"And I was staying up north for a while. Then one time ... I knew something was coming. I could just feel...something was coming. I waited there to see who it was. When it come—this was coming and it grabbed hold of me. It grabbed hold of me and it was saying to me, "Now belong to me." It was big, black...like spirit and big like up to the roof. Big and very powerful and when it grabbed me, I had no strength to act against it. I knew that in that situation I can only pray. And it called me "Boy." It called me like old people talk. That was bad way for me because I am used to do what elders tell me. So when it talked to me like that, I would think I can't say No. But very deceitful, see? Very deceitful. When it first come, I'm not that frightened, cos I've seen things before. But never been grabbed like that. Yeah, I seen other things before—different things, spirits and things. I knew about it. But from the voice....

178 The following is a verse he mentioned to relate his faith. "For the invisible things of him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even his eternal power and Godhead; so that they are without excuse. (Romans 1:20, KJV)"
when it spoke, the voice...that frightened me more than the thing being there. Because the voice was just *pure evil*. I knew the voice was just *pure evil*. That frightened me more than any other thing—to hear that voice. And I thought I would have to pray. Only way I can do is to pray—that’s the only way out of this. This is the time now I need to be doing that. When it grabbed me, I couldn’t talk, I couldn’t get the voice. Because it ran on my neck. I can only move my lips. I can’t even call out to the Lord—call out “God help me, Jesus help me.”

“...I still remember today the prayer I prayed—I said, “Jesus, if you are all what they say that you are, I need you. Help me now!” That was it. And straight away, instantly, I believe it was the Holy Spirit—from top of my head, the whole body. It dropped me and gone. Flat out! You can hear the dog barking. Know all the different things you can hear them going. I never felt nothing like that before—what that feeling I felt in my whole body. I was jumping around. I did not know the feeling ever before like that.”

“A little while later I come back home and I told Mum and Dad all what happened. Mum said they were seeing that I was heading down the different road. She said—they always knew that God had his hand on my life from when I was small—all my life. And she said that she prayed God would take his hand off me for a bit so that I can see where I was going. With that old fella and...that’s the only way the spirit can touch me.”

Elijah was born into the Church leader’s family, but by his grandmother (FM) he was taught the local Aboriginal dialect. She was a Christian but she wanted to hand down the good side of the Aboriginal way to her eldest grandson as she could not let her children (including Elijah’s father) learn the language in fear of the Welfare Board. Being exceptionally young, now Elijah is the only one in his Aboriginal community (i.e., a sub-group of the Bundjalung nation) who can speak the local dialect. After this incident, Elijah started helping his father’s church earnestly. It was ten years before I sat down with this youth to write down this testimony. Now Elijah has kept the lingo as ever, and he is not reluctant to perform Aboriginal dances and singing, but he puts
the Lord first. Strictly speaking, an attitude towards cultural activities such as Elijah’s is rather exceptional in comparison with the general attitude towards culture among the Bundjalung and Githabul Christians. This is mainly because the above-mentioned youth is from the Tweed area, in which exclusive Aboriginal social traits have been diminishing (see Chapter 2 for the regional history and Chapter 4 for Christian practice). Still, Elijah’s absolute faith in the manifestation of the Holy Spirit in the physical form, as he testified, is no less incontestable than that found among the Pentecostals at the hinterland area of Bundjalung and Githabul country.

From Knowledge to Sensitivity

Fear urges Bundjalung and Githabul Christians to renounce culture. Loss of knowledge has enhanced the fear as generations have passed. The ethnographic accounts in this Chapter suggest this. Throughout the process of the collapse of their traditional social institutions, especially rites related to localised spiritual beings, Christianity has thus functioned as a strong measure to cope with the fear of evil spirits which are considered to have been left intact in the reality of their everyday lives. My argument emphasises, firstly, Aboriginal agency in the process of adopting Christianity when faced with the need to restructure their society, and, secondly, the outcome whereby they have—probably inadvertently—ended up exploiting the power promised by the Holy Spirit so successfully. That they maintained the Pentecostal faith under Aboriginal leadership from the beginning is a historical fact as discussed in Chapter 2.

In traditional religious life, the Bundjalung and Githabul lived with spirits, benign and malign. “Therefore, the teaching of the Holy Spirit was easy for us to accept”—once a pastor said this during a casual “yarning”. That was an extremely crude viewpoint, at least made by someone who held a title of pastor. Following the legacy of lay pastors, although each pastor was an intelligent and powerful preacher of their time, the local Aboriginal church had no pastors who were capable of engaging in
theological esotericism about their beliefs in the Christian god and the Christian Trinity. For their flock, anointing was all that mattered—in the past and in the present, too. Faith in God promises each individual supernatural power, the manifestation of the Spirit: the word of wisdom; the word of knowledge; faith; gifts of healing; miracles; prophesy; discerning of spirits; diverse kinds of tongues; and interpretation of tongues. Faith enhances sensitivity to discern the evil spirits. This fact alone probably is enough. This group of dispossessed indigenes was thus compensated for the loss of knowledge with divine sensitivity.

It should be noted here that, at least in this part of New South Wales, loss of traditional social institutions was not the outcome of Christianisation but rather of colonial dispossession. Despite the influx to the more convergent camps from their original clan territories, unlike the large-sized concentration camps such as the ones in Queensland, the Bundjalung and Githabul people have still lived on their own country even through the period of the superintendent Aboriginal stations. Knowledge of country and land tenure was strong among older people, but they were not transmitting that knowledge to younger people (Hausfeld 1977: 271). Regarding the discontinuity of knowledge as found in Hausfeld's observation, as an introduction to the anthology of contemporary Aboriginal life in "settled" Australia (Keen 1988a), Keen comments:

We should note, however, that this is not a failing in the old or the young, because knowledge is transmitted through engaging in the performance of ceremonies, or travelling over the country, rather than in formal teaching... The removal of these contexts leads inevitably into the loss of knowledge. (Keen 1988b: 20)

Loss of knowledge was an inevitable process for the Bundjalung and Githabul, too. But fear prevailed because they had retained a substantial memory of culture. It was culture that maintained the channel to the spiritual beings. They had to be tamed and put under control but it was only done by ‘talking to’ them properly in the proper local dialect by the proper clan lineage if they followed the traditional way. Something

179 See 1 Corinthians, verses 8 to 10 of Chapter 12 for the nine spiritual gifts.
was urgently needed to cover them against the loss of knowledge. And it is most probable that, for the people living in conditions where there was no practical knowledge being handed down to control the spirit world, "culture" transformed in their mode of thought from the corpus of customary laws to the channel for witchcraft—the craft of releasing evil spirits.

Today they face a new situation: decontextualised, fragmented pieces of culture are ardently reconstructed by mainstream society to make "traditional" Aboriginal culture a national icon. Pressure is brought to bear on the Aboriginal communities to welcome it and every encouragement is given to them to promote cultural revitalization activities and projects. The material available today, however, is only partial and fragmental. For the Bundjalung and Githabul Christians, being too small a minority to represent the opinion of the Aboriginal nation in the Northern Rivers region, this is a resurrection of fear. The channel to uncontrollable spiritual beings would be made open to the ignorant young generation. Being Christian means one lives in the spiritual world, where one experiences the supernatural power of God as a reality of daily life. When considering the reality of their spiritual warfare, they cannot trust the fragmental, decontextualised pieces of knowledge taught at school or reconstructed from the whiteman's records. Such a bricolage of knowledge would never work to help them rebuke the power of the spirit world. To the contrary, "It is like driving with no one behind the wheel, or a child playing with a gun," said some pastors. Accordingly, the rejection of culture by the Bundjalung and Githabul Christians was a natural consequence. Christianity was a convincing measure to heal their psychic bruises. To renounce the tools for digging up the relics of the past means to block the dangerous path to the spirit world.

In Chapter 32 of Exodus, the Israelites, who had been brought out of Egypt by Moses, were tempted by other gods when Moses was on the mountain. While waiting, they gave away their gold earrings and made them into an idol—in the shape of a calf, and worshipped it. They had lived in Egypt for many years, surrounded by the visible gods of Egypt. As soon as they lost sight of Moses, the representation of God, they could not feel God's presence and wanted a substitute that they could see. This invited
God’s fierce anger. A Christian woman, in her forties, referred to this when we were talking about culture and Christianity. It is a shared memory of the community that their cultural elders renounced “culture” and became Christian elders—in the old days. Still, there were always temptations for all of them, the Aboriginal converts, like the Israelites while Moses was on the mountain with God, to draw them back to culture. Today there are new temptations that draw people—even Christians—to culture in a multitude of ways.

“They had the Lord in their heart but was attracted by the golden calf,” she said. She had seen many instances in the past and in the present that made innocent Christians get attracted by the golden calf. She was the one who prayed to God, a decade before, to help Auntie Mary give up the worm. She was a full niece to this old lady who had withheld herself against the divine challenge. She was also the one who had her husband nearly killed by witchcraft two decades before. After ten years, her aunty was still split in two opposing camps: the Holy Spirit and the Old Way. As such, the “culture” they have known in their practical lives is no easy a lollipop to enjoy at school or a side dish for the Europeanised way of life they have got well into. Her cousin who was one generation older (with an age difference of approximately 25 years) said in a hearty way:

You can’t combine culture with Christianity. You just can’t do it. It won’t work. And it will never work. ... Teaching culture at school—they only know about it from a theoretical point of view, but to live it in a practical way—like I did—there are two separate issues there. ... Culture is still around—witchcraft is still around. That’s one thing colonisation has never exterminated, or wiped out, you know.”

To sum up, people are fearful of “all the tragedies of human life” that are happening to them by intentional acts of cursing by living persons or by evil spirits being accidentally released. And Christians interpret this situation as “being taken over by the Devil’s way”. They are fearful of the prospect that these already manifested
problems would form a channel for the Devil to get connected with their practical lives and destroy their lives with more tragedies. Therefore, they need the power of the Holy Spirit with which (1) they can fight against the sorcerer or the Devil, and (2) heal the physical and psychological bruises they receive by living the lives of contemporary Aboriginal persons in such a problem-laden community.

To carry out the warfare against “culture” or witchcraft, the Bundjalung and Githabul Christians have resorted to sensitivity. Their spiritual relationship with the Holy Spirit is intense. However, it is not stable. The absolutely personal relationship with the supernatural, in essence, leaves the proselytes defenceless. As discussed in Chapter 6, “backsliding”, which is the loss of faith and consequent return to the worldly pleasures, takes place very often among them. On such a fragile ground, upon which they nurture spiritual sensitivity, the past is integrated into the present through their sensitivity to discern the Devil. The contemporary Bundjalung and Githabul Christians’ discourse and practice of renouncing “culture” have emerged in this process.
CHAPTER 8
Conclusion: Culture, Continuity and Power of the Holy Spirit

Christianity has to thank precisely this miserable flattery of personal vanity for its triumph—it was thus that it lured all the botched, the dissatisfied, the fallen upon evil days, the whole refuse and off-souring of humanity to its side. The “salvation of the soul”—in plain words: “the world revolves around me.”

— Friedrich Wilhelm Nietzsche, The Anti-Christ

“Our old Law was cruel and strict. Now we have freedom in Christ.”

—Testimony of a long-deceased Bundjalung elder, as remembered by a local white friend

Throughout this study we have gained insights into the ways Bundjalung and Githabul Christians experience their everyday Aboriginal lives through the medium of vernacular Pentecostalism. The activities of the region’s all-Aboriginal Pentecostal network have been maintained for nearly a century in a rural backwater of southeastern Australia. It has become clear that conversion to vernacular Pentecostal Christianity for them neither entails the pursuit of individualism and detachment from loyalty to kin relationships, nor prompts them to cultivate social orientation and ethical self-formation towards the mainstream (European) values (Chapters 4 - 6). Despite the explicit discourse and practice of rejecting and renouncing “culture”, the value orientations of Bundjalung and Githabul Pentecostals today are embedded in the communal mode of thought which is heavily bound by cultural constructs. Notwithstanding the fact that they have been continuously engaged in articulating their experience with the present, they profoundly draw on the “traditional” past

---

180 See Nietzsche (1999[1920]: 61).
I do not mean by this that they retain cultural persistence in that they are going backward—quite the reverse. This study has unravelled evidence that they have kept absorbing whatever is offered to them in the on-going processes of articulating their socio-cultural order with that of the exogenous world, which covers the period since Christianity’s permeation into their community in the early twentieth century until the present day. Needless to say, the Bundjalung and Githabul in the former period have been represented as defiant subaltern subjects who vigorously revitalised the old religion in the form of syncretism; in the latter situation they have gained an unsavoury reputation as anti-culture advocates. What was and is (and will be) continuous regarding Bundjalung and Githabul socio-cultural order is the resilience that is a forward momentum towards negotiating their way in the changing socio-economic environment.

To return to the central question posed in the Introduction, what has been elicited regarding the way Bundjalung and Githabul Pentecostalism has changed over the last fifty years? I have demonstrated, firstly, it was not Pentecostalism but the collapse of traditional Aboriginal social institutions (caused by colonial dispossession) that made the Old Rule falter; secondly, it was not the structural similarities with the Aboriginal religious life that attracted them to conversion to Pentecostalism but the power of the Holy Spirit with which the healing and anti-sorcery functions of extinct traditional religious knowledge were replaced (Chapters 2 & 3).

The latter situation was a natural consequence of the former, because the collapse of the hunter-gatherer economy and the relevant socio-religious rites quickly transformed people’s attitudes towards the religious knowledge in the local and practical context. Secrecy based on practical rules was immediately replaced with uncertainty and suspicion, which eventually cultivated fear as generations passed and, especially, as pragmatic knowledge of djurebil (sacred places and clever things) transformed into fragmented Dreaming stories and scary stories of ghosts and spirits. The “spirit world” of their religious life transformed into a “pure evil” and their
communal lifeworld has become a space where the Devil can insinuate himself into human minds and control people’s everyday practice. But the loss of knowledge was counterbalanced by the messages of the Bible: their weapon transformed from knowledge to sensitivity (Chapter 7).

In all ages, Bundjalung and Githabul people expected spiritual awakening from the church. But in each particular situation, Christianity had a different outcome. In the “revival days”, people’s enthusiastic quest for spiritual awakening and euphoric experience led this all-Aboriginal Pentecostal church inadvertently to form a social space where Aborigines under the surveillance of the Protection/Welfare Board were able to communicate closely and reinforce a sense of unity. After the good-old-day community ethos was destroyed through the post-Welfare-Board period of burgeoning policies of Aboriginal self-determination, the sense of unity was replaced by the recurrent suspicions of duckshovers who could get a windfall money and power. In this bleak time the local Aboriginal Pentecostals’ discourse and practice transformed drastically into anti-culture advocacy.

Opposite momentums seen so far in the dynamics of the formation of their social orientations notwithstanding, Pentecostalism in the Bundjalung and Githabul environment has been working in a logically consistent way. Throughout the past one hundred years, despite the changing discourses and practices, Bundjalung and Githabul Pentecostalism has functioned to reinforce relationalism within the Aboriginal domain of social interactions in the vernacular context. It does not demand proselytes to “improve” and internalise the mainstream value system (Chapter 6), nor does it encourage them to cut off their deep-rooted loyalty to kin relations (Chapter 4). Far from promoting individualism, Pentecostalism has worked on Bundjalung and Githabul people so that they are ultimately led to reinforce social and emotional relatedness to one another in their community, although emotional relatedness varies in the full spectrum from the most benevolent fraternity to the fiercest animosity.

Let us look at the process of the emergence of the anti-culture advocacy. First, the English term “culture” was given its Bundjalung and Githabul particularities. It was
because people had begun to fear things related to the traditional past and the "revitalised" tradition. Bundjalung and Githabul people named these fearful things "culture". They are fearful of: (1) witchcraft (i.e. intentional act of cursing) as they live in the midst of enormous emotional stress caused by the complex net of kin relations; and (2) social problems sweeping over the Aboriginal community as they see demonic powers infiltrating their kinsfolk's minds through the medium of these problems—because they judge the interest in worldly pleasures (e.g. desires for drinking, liberated sexuality, money, fame, and higher social status) as the source whence these evils spring.

After all, the anti-culture Pentecostal slogan today functions to condemn those who have shown interest in individualism—i.e. the whites' lifestyle which encompasses worldly desires for pleasure and success. By defining everyone's irresistible desires for worldly pleasures and success as the Devil's way, this anti-culture slogan can condemn those who are being drawn to upward social mobility—which is equivalent in social orientation to independence from the family and kin. As long as they stay with the church in this vernacular context, they will not be able to become "assimilated" Aborigines despite, paradoxically, their extreme obedience to the Christian moral order. Thus the function of the church has transformed to such an extent that church facilitates division of the community by demanding that community members strive for an unachievable goal—that is, to turn away from the desires of modern times. Accordingly, the majority of the community members have left church.

For a small minority of people who stayed with church, in such a drastically changed Aboriginal society where social problems and increasing complexities of kin relations are overwhelming, the supernatural power of the Holy Spirit enables them to confront increasing unease and stress. Conversion to Christianity makes them vessels filled with the euphoria of oneness with the Holy Spirit, which gives them power to resist. It is not the power to directly resist the colonial intervention but the power to resist the dark side of what they have absorbed into their society through history—for example, fearing images of traditional knowledge that used to be productive, division
of church and community caused by self-determination policies, and the somewhat stabilised problem-laden condition of the Aboriginal community such as chronic diseases, alcohol and drug abuse, psychosis, violence, apathy and withdrawal from the mainstream society.

However bleak the secular side of life is, faith in God keeps them tuned into the spiritual side and makes them anchored securely to the status quo. That is to say that being Christian does prevent people from scattering off from the communal life. Strong belief that Christians will be protected against the Devil, i.e., the surrounding problems of their lived reality, allow them to stay content with the present situation. Except for an immediate cease of drinking and drug use, faith in the power of the "miracle-making" God functions to lead proselytes to come to terms with the existing, unsolved problems of their society. The euphoria of "spiritual" living induced by conversion enables them to establish a psychological equilibrium between the "spirit-filled" Christian life and the problem-laden blacksfellas' life.

Outstanding among the Bundjalung and Githabul is the resilience that was shown in the process of the massive transformations of the kinship system—especially marriage patterns. The transformed kinship system did not lead their sense of relatedness to falter. On the contrary, Bundjalung and Githabul people have restructured and reinforced their own moral economy on the basis of the transformed kinship system (Chapter 6). Being a Christian ultimately leads proselytes to support the social order of relatedness seen in these systems. The Holy Spirit power enables them to tolerate emotionally suffocating kin relations and to live content with being constantly impoverished by their moral economy. The local Bundjalung and Githabul church does not inspire them to get rational or turn towards individualism as the white Pentecostal church would encourage them to. This characteristic is also demonstrated in their overall tendency to reject contemporary Pentecostalism's most popular appeal of the "prosperity doctrine" (Chapter 5).

On the other hand, those who do not show interest in the Holy Spirit power have two options. Most "sinners" are subsumed in "sinful" life and are awaited by lethal
problems, because of which sinners would have to "live in fear". Of course, Christians do end up in similar social situations but they would not need to fear the Devil's attack; they would even refuse medication for serious diseases. A minority of motivated and hard-working Bundjalung and Githabul people, however, may become so-called "uptown niggers". They would not have to fear because of their disciplined lifestyle and educated, rational thinking. Bundjalung and Githabul Pentecostals label both of these categories of their kinsfolk as "having gone the Devil's way", but they still identify the former with themselves. They are more detached from the latter, as the latter group of people have begun to cut off kinship obligations both socially and emotionally.

In light of this, the ruptures (i.e. non-production of certain socio-cultural patterns) which this study has highlighted are products of continuity. The traditionally "correct" marriage pattern of a type of second-cousin marriage is now deemed repulsive incest (Chapter 4) but this change has led to the emergence of a totally new marriage pattern for them, which does lend impetus to dislocated and dispossessed Bundjalung and Githabul people to live in unity. The new marriage pattern has created a sense of relatedness and obligation to kin. Similarly, their Pentecostal discourse has shifted to anti-culture advocacy, so that it unites Pentecostals. The Pentecostal moral order, as well as the marriage pattern, has been ceaselessly redefined in the local context; and it has been functioning to reinforce relatedness—at least up to the present day.

If this vernacular Pentecostalism in its Bundjalung and Githabul environment were to change again, and indeed it will, arguably the change would lead the anti-culture sentiments to become quiescent among adherents. This particular construct of Bundjalung and Githabul "culture" that this thesis has explored will become extinct sooner or later, and so will its function to reinforce relatedness among kin and community. This study has already shown the embryo of such a change to come. Where social institutions (e.g. kin relations, moral economy, and shared life experiences) that produce relatedness are faltering such as the situation of the two "town" churches described in Chapter 4, people show more interest in the abstract part of being Aboriginal Christians; adherents are naturally being drawn to the romantic
discourse of black-and-white (or multicultural) reconciliation through God.

The policy of such churches inevitably has begun to undermine the specificities of Aboriginal lives in the vernacular context. The universal Pentecostal appeal of the "prosperity doctrine", for example, is gradually filtering into these churches. "Uptown niggers" who used to be indifferent to the good-old-day style of their forerather's Pentecostalism may be drawn to this new wind, or more likely, the existing adherents may gradually "grow" and pursue upward social mobility. They are already aware of the profound benefits they can gain through empowering themselves with the abstract and romantic construction of Aboriginality (cf. Chapter 6 & Appendix 2). Such a new generation will make Bundjalung and Githabul Pentecostalism remarkably different again.

The point-of-no-return to the good-old-day church was the "renaissance" era of Aboriginal administration in the late 1970s (Chapter 2). Since then the Old Pentecostal way has survived so far by extremely oppressing individualism and modernity but it is palpable that it has almost come to the final limit. Obviously, the small factions are on the verge of extinction. Less and less people are attracted to the good-old-day factions, whilst the town churches have begun prospering (Chapter 4). The reason is singular and simple: it is too hard for the Aboriginal self in modern times to give up everything—as I mentioned at the outset of this thesis. The new, "town" churches are not as oppressive as the old-style factions regarding the modern person's desires. They have absorbed what the modern Pentecostal movement drills into its adherents—that is, entertainment and the promise of prosperous personal life. Such a version of Pentecostalism is what the old-styled Bundjalung and Githabul Christians have not known. It never demands adherents to abandon their cosy material life and participate in the bleakest "warfare" against the Devil.

I think this study has probably caught the last glimpse of Calley's "Bandjalang Pentecostalism". In the future, Bundjalung and Githabul Pentecostalism will probably turn towards individualism and independence from kin obligations. But there will be a new emergence of the cultural specificity of Bundjalung and Githabul Pentecostalism
in the next generation—regardless of continuity or rupture of its discourse or function. Many scholars argue that Pentecostal movements worldwide have been offering anthropologists a somewhat paradoxical picture of interactive dynamics in the cultural end as discussed in the Introduction of this thesis. Pentecostalism has replicated its canonical form through expansion, i.e., a theory of Westernising homogenisation but there are also many who present the antithetical argument that Pentecostalism can be vernacularised quickly, i.e., a theory of indigenizing differentiation (Robbins 2004b). This is because of the paradox of Pentecostalism that, in its struggle against local cultures, it tends to accept their ontologies (Robbins 2003, 2004b). After all, a culturally unspecific new form that Pentecostalism offers in the process of its permeation into other cultures is the exact reason why it can easily be localised and entail cultural specificity. Another ethnography will surely be written for the next generation of Bundjalung and Githabul Pentecostalism about another form of cultural specificity.

Worthy of mention at this stage regarding Bundjalung and Githabul Pentecostal practice is the frustrating fact for them that there is no reason why the spiritual relationship weakens. The process is beyond Man's comprehension—ultimately God's plan. Hence for them backsliding is not an issue of failing in ethical self-formation. There is no sense of responsibility or shame felt by backsliders, although concerns of devastating spiritual-dryness to come do dominate their minds. Until they come to the spiritual "fullness" again, they would not try to go back to church. This precisely demonstrates that Bundjalung and Githabul Pentecostalism does not urge adherents to internalise the European standard of virtues and individualism. These Pentecostals only live on "anointing"—an extremely heightened sentiment that assures them their physical union with God's power.

As Taussig (1993) argued with the notion of mimesis, the issue of great concern to Bundjalung and Githabul Pentecostals is "not so much staying the same, but maintaining sameness through alterity" (ibid.:129). And, more importantly, their way of achieving mimesis is to skip over the quintessence of conversion, or the most elaborate part of the process of internalisation of the exogenous moral order. They have been able to achieve oneness with God instantly without going through new ethical
self-formation. Observance of strict taboos is, after all, part of enthusiasm for them, not a laborious undertaking of self-disciplinary efforts. For them sensitivity is the one and only need, not knowledge—regardless of it being indigenous or exogenous. Hence comes their predicament of having to live in a cycle of backsliding as discussed in Chapter 6.

From the perspective of hegemony and human agency, backsliding is an oscillating movement between the constraint of the Aboriginal social order and that of the Christian moral order. With regard to this cycle of sinning, repentance and redemption, it is worth noting that backsliders unwittingly escape from being completely “caught up” with either of the structures of these orders, although on their own emotional level, the experience is each time agonising. At least, this situation suggests that the Bundjalung and Githabul Pentecostals—throughout their one hundred years of faith in Jesus Christ—have not been “caught up” completely as agents of the structure of European knowledge that interpellates them who they are and who their master is.

This study does not concern the intrinsic good of Bundjalung and Githabul Pentecostalism. Realistically speaking, having to maintain psychological equilibrium between euphoria and despair in a double sense—i.e. oscillating between conversion and backsliding, and between the spiritual aspects of life and a lived reality—is too bleak a reality for a human being. But this study considers the creativity of “groups or individuals already caught in the nets of ‘discipline’” (de Certeau 1984). Christianity is the dominant hegemonic discourse that Bundjalung and Githabul Pentecostals resort to, but we live in societies structured by that discourse, and the oppressed need knowledge forms that are tied to that reality. Simultaneously, subaltern scholars (e.g. Chakrabarty 2002; Chatterjee 1993; Pandey 1998) draw our attention to Gramsci’s (1971) formulation that the history of subaltern social groups is necessarily “fragmented and episodic”. They propose to conceptualise the fragmentarity and the episodic as “those which do not, and cannot, dream the whole called the state and must, therefore, be suggestive of knowledge forms that are not tied to the will that produces the state” (Chakrabarty 2002:35). To draw an example from Spivak’s (Spivak 1988)
well-known argument about subaltern “speaking”, it is a silent part of the subaltern subject that becomes a revealing subaltern message (cf. Chow 1993:27-54).

In this study, I have explored the processual manifestations of the cultural, social and historical particularities which Bundjalung and Githabul Pentecostalism has experienced. In addition to this analytical framework, I proposed to look into their “use” (de Certeau 1984) of the dominant social order. It has become clear that Bundjalung and Githabul Pentecostals’ own interest in mimicking the dominant hegemonic discourse has only reinforced relatedness in a variety of modern forms, which has led them to withdraw into the Aboriginal domain of social interaction and prevented their social orientation from merging into the wider (mainstream) community. Furthermore, their ultimate faith in a spiritual relationship with the Holy Spirit leaves them vulnerable to unpredictable breaks from God, which makes them end up in an endless cycle of backsliding—oscillation between euphoria and despair. In lived reality, such a status quo is desolate—I am sharply aware of this sober fact. Yet, from the perspective of the subaltern subject and its agency, apparently the Aboriginal agents in this conjunction are beyond the reach of the knowledge forms that are tied to the will that produces the state, the whole. What, indeed, could be a greater instance of anti-disciplinary network against the ruling definitions of “the natural”? 
References


Robertson.


326


Cane, S. 1989. Welcome to Fingal: Aboriginal associations with Fingal Head, N.S.W. A report to Ocean Blue Pty. Ltd.


Bedford Park, S.A.: Australian Association for the Study of Religions.


Riebe, I. n.d. Personal communication with the author.


Slotte, I. 1997. We are family, we are one: an Aboriginal Christian movement in Arnhem Land, Australia. Ph.D. Thesis: Australian National University.


Association for the Study of Religions.


APPENDICES

Appendix 1: The white Australian Pentecostal pioneers .................. 340

Appendix 2: Vernacular reality and universal imagination ............... 348

Appendix 3: Episodes regarding Choc Mundine and Ruby Langford *Ginibi* ...................................................... 359
APPENDIX 1

The White Australian Pentecostal Pioneers

This section is compiled on the basis of the historical material from Barry Chant's book *Heart of Fire: The Story of Australian Pentecostalism* (1984). Reverend Dr Barry Chant is a historian and pastor of a Pentecostal denomination. It is based on objective research and it contains rich description of the leading figures and the formation of churches of the Australian Pentecostal movement and the enthusiasm of the early Pentecostal churches. This book is regarded as the only and the best book of this kind.

**John Alexander Dowie: Catholic Apostolic Church and Zion City**

To explore the attitude towards the supernatural in this era, the ministry of John Alexander Dowie must be mentioned briefly before discussing early Pentecostal churches. Starting at a little Congregational church in South Australia in 1872 at the age of twenty-five, he gradually earned a reputation for his first-rank knowledge of the Bible and preaching gifts through his independent ministries in Sydney and Melbourne. In 1875 he gained new insight into the healing ministry in the midst of the desperate situation of the epidemic then sweeping the Eastern States and a miracle healing happens to a young lady dying of the epidemic. Since then he allegedly saved many from the epidemic but for a few years he did not emphasise the healing message very much. After 1884 when he had his own tabernacle in Melbourne, he put more emphasis on the Divine Healing message and great crowds started to attend at his ministry called the Catholic Apostolic Church. In 1888 Dowie moved his ministry to the United States, where his dramatically successful and dynamic evangelism continued, accompanying miracle healings happening in large numbers.

---

181 The tabernacle was capable of seating 3,000 persons but everyday thousands were turned away. It was reported that once an open-air rally was attended by 20,000 people (Chant 1984:14).

182 In a tabernacle at the World's Fair in Chicago from 1893, it was reported, "Soon the back wall of the 'hut' was decorated with the crutches discarded by cripples who had been healed.

---

340
In 1899 he makes a drastic turn to a preoccupation with material affairs. He announced a plan to build a city: Zion City. It was built on a property north of Chicago and eventually 10,000 people were settled in, having committed their whole livelihood to the new city. After this, Dowie’s impact started to fall, partly because of his lack of ability to manage business affairs and partly because he started to suffer from a mental imbalance. Finally, all sorts of accusations—of dishonesty, of pride, of luxurious living, of fornication with young female Zionists and of believing in polygamy—were made against him. In 1907 he died at the age of sixty. Dowie never became Pentecostal—he had not developed more of the gifts of the Holy Spirit. Chant (1984) argues, however, that early Pentecostals in Australia clearly recognised their debt to Dowie. He “prepared the way for further steps of faith (ibid.:24).”

Janet Lancaster : Good News Hall

“Where are the elders of the church? I have been lying here for 20 years waiting for them to come and raise me up!” (ibid.:35) This demand by a sick old man Janet Lancaster visited was the life-changing challenge that she was faced in 1902, which led her to establish the first organised Pentecostal assembly in Australia in 1909 at 104 Queensberry Street, North Melbourne—Good News Hall. She was forty-four years old, an active Methodist and mother of seven, and part of a rather legalist congregation when she was thus urged to look for co-operative elders who could anoint the sick. Having found none, she began to study the Scriptures for herself and soon she was convinced of the truth of divine healing. She had a miracle healing of her own broken and disfigured arm. She began to preach and practice it. People opposed her and called her a “Dowieite” or a “Christian Scientist” but she knew nothing about them. It was during 1904 when she began preaching to others: it was the year Dowie last set foot in Australia and two years before the Azusa Street outpouring of the Spirit. Eventually she was informed of the teachings from England that Pentecostal baptism in the Spirit was valid still today. On April 2, 1908, Janet was

up shoes, leg irons and braces of all kinds hung among the crutches.” (Chant 1984:16)

183 The city still stands today but Christians form a minority of the population.
baptised in the Holy Spirit. "Electric shocks went through her frame", and "strange and unwonted notes burst from her mouth." (ibid.) She spoke four different languages and burst into songs of praise to the Lord184.

A number of people received healing or baptism in the Holy Spirit through Lancaster’s ministry. The Hall was big enough to seat 300 people and was always open for prayers. Prayer meetings were held regularly, and sometimes seemed unstopping. A number of smaller rooms in the building were for people to stay there and pray and study the Bible. In its periodical Good News, articles from overseas Pentecostal magazines were reprinted and the magazine’s aggressive, evangelical approach largely contributed to the early spreading of the Pentecostal message throughout Australia. Services were conducted in other parts of Australia during the 1920s—such as Sydney and Adelaide. By 1920 an assembly was established in Parkes, NSW. There was also considerable outreach in Queensland since the 1910s and by 1923 an assembly was established in Brisbane and later in several towns including Townsville. In 1921 and 1922, the renowned overseas evangelists were brought to Australia by Good News Hall and attracted great crowds at huge venues such as the great Wirth’s Olympia in Melbourne. A number of miracles occurred.

During the 1920s, Good New Hall began to be exposed to criticism because of Lancaster’s viewpoint about the Godhead. She taught Christ was God’s son and called him “divine”, but not clearly “God”. This is actually synonymous with denying the deity of Christ. This was the beginning of Good News Hall’s isolation from the Pentecostal mainstream, but despite opposition and criticism the Good News Hall ministry flourished and lasted until 1935, when a South African evangelist Van Eyk’s association ultimately led the Hall to collapse—along with the death of Lancaster in 1934. (This is discussed under Van Eyk’s item below.) As far as the practice is concerned, definitely the Good News Hall people set the pattern for

184 Later, she learns she was not the first in Australia to experience the Pentecostal baptism in the Spirit and speaking in tongues. Some testified later that they had experiences of this kind (sometimes without knowing what it meant) back in 1870 and 1907.
most early Pentecostal believers. Prayer meetings, "tarrying" meetings designed to help people receive baptism in the Holy Spirit, three services on Sundays—as many as a dozen meetings might be held in one week. Emphasis was put on manifestations of miracle healing, baptism in the Spirit and speaking in tongues. Many present Pentecostal Christians, most of whom belong to the Assemblies of God today, trace their origins back to the Good News Hall (or to the ministry of Van Eyk).

Robert Horne: the Southern Evangelical Mission

Another Pentecostal assembly was started by Robert Horne in Melbourne soon after the Good News Hall became established. The second Pentecostal assembly in Australia became known as the Southern Evangelical Mission. Horne's hunger for the "fullness of the Spirit" had been awakened by reports of overseas Pentecostal manifestations. In 1910, when he underwent a water baptism by immersion, he received baptism in the Holy Spirit. In 1911 he started his ministry in Caulfield, then in Brighton, with all the properties having been enabled by people's gifts and his faith in God. About 200 people attended meetings. Instead of establishing branch assemblies, he took advantage of the newly discovered world of radio for outreach. The radio talks were printed in suburban newspapers and in its magazine The Southern Evangel. His preaching was always Christ-centered, so was his teaching on the baptism in the Holy Spirit. On this point, he could not accept some of Janet Lancaster's doctrines. Interestingly, worship at the Southern Evangelical Mission was quite "dignified" for a Pentecostal church: the features of Pentecostal practice such as ecstatic vocal praise and physical expressions were absent (ibid.:82-83). There was, however, occasional singing in tongues at services and Horne spent long hours praying in the Spirit—he did pray in tongues at great length. Horne's autocratic inclination and isolationism gradually led the Mission to become isolated and ingrown. It lacked outreach; people could not participate in meetings and the work centred very much on Horn. Since Horne's death in 1950, the Mission has gradually

---

185 Being pioneers in introducing Pentecostalism to Australia, the Good News Hall people sometimes became extremist or disorderly and lost control. They did not care what people would say. Casting out demons in public meetings, "holly rolling" and "dancing in the Spirit", for example, would be ruled out of order as unnecessary today.
lost its momentum under new leadership and ultimately split into many groups. By
the 1980s the building had been sold and only a remnant remained.

**Charles Greenwood, Alfred Valdes and Kelso Glover: Richmond Temple/the
Assemblies of God**

The third Pentecostal meeting place emerged again in Melbourne. In 1916, under a
twenty-five year-old young man named Charles Greenwood, a small group of
people began to meet in the Melbourne suburb of Sunshine—at Greenwood’s home.
Greenwood was a moulder by trade and he had no education, was equipped with
little polish or sophistication, but people responded to his message which was given
authority by “his simple and literal approach to the Word of God” (ibid.:89). His first
spirit-filled experience happened when he heard a South African Evangelist, John G.
Lake, in his teenage years. Lake was a Canadian-born American coming from the
lineage of Alexander Dowie’s pioneering healing ministry. During the cottage
meeting period, a few were baptised in the Spirit and some were saved and baptised
in water in the bath at Greenwood’s home, and thus they continued for nine years
until they purchased land and erected a timber hall they named Sunshine Gospel
Hall in February of 1925. By that time, to the majority of people in Melbourne, the
three Pentecostal assemblies established by then in Melbourne were hardly known,
but from this humble hall seating 200 at the most, the revival broke out and,
according to Chant, finally “the Pentecostal movement had come to stay” (ibid.:90)”
in Australia.

The dramatic success of Sunshine Gospel Hall owes much to another young
man, Alfred Valdez, an American preacher who had just arrived in Australia, with
little money and a sense of calling to minister in this country, on the very day the
Hall was opened. After preaching at some meetings respectively at Lancaster’s and
Horne’s ministries, he joined Greenwood. Soon the hall was packed within a few
nights of their first fortnight’s campaign. Many were converted, baptised in the Sprit
and healed. The news spread and people attended the campaign from all over
Australia. The train from Melbourne to Sunshine was packed with people attending
the meetings, and on their way back some had to be helped onto the railway station because they were so exhausted by the manifestations of the gifts such as prophesy, speaking in tongues, interpretations of tongues, healing, exorcisms of demons, and so on. Like the original Pentecost, they staggered like drunk men. Valdez preached with simplicity, authority and energy. The worship was filled with “noise and fervour”. During the first twelve months, about 400 people were baptised in the Holy Spirit. Following the dramatic success, Valdez set up an organised church and thus the Pentecostal Church of Australia was established in 1925. As an outcome, many nominal Christians forsook their own churches, which once provoked a meeting of protest by 200 clergymen of the churches in Melbourne (ibid.:93).

Within twelve months of the first meetings by Valdez, money was raised to purchase an alternative meeting place. 6,000 pounds was raised in one meeting and a huge theatre in Richmond was purchased and named Richmond Temple. The Spirit of God continued to be poured out upon it. The Australian Evangel began publication in 1926 for the purpose of providing spiritual reading, not as an evangelical tract. In 1926 Valdez felt his work was done and he returned to the United States. The church invited Kelso Glover, another American preacher who arrived early in 1926, to take over the pastorate. In contrast to Valdez who appealed with simplicity, being a thinker and a teacher, Glover attracted the assembly with his lectures on the second coming of Christ, whilst the baptisms in the Spirit and the revival atmosphere continued. In 1927 Glover returned to the United States and Charles Greenwood became pastor of Richmond Temple. He held his position until his retirement in 1968. In 1937 the name “the Assemblies of God” was officially applied to the Richmond Temple congregation. From the beginning, i.e., since Pentecostal Church of Australia was established in 1925, the movement had identified itself with the Assemblies of God and was “aimed at cooperative fellowship with the Assemblies of God in Great Britain, America, Canada and New Zealand” (ibid.:123). The Assemblies of God is today the largest Pentecostal denomination in Australia, and Richmond Temple has continued to flourish and is still today one of the largest Assembly of God congregations in Australia.
Frederick Van Eyk: the Apostolic Faith Mission/the Church of the Foursquare Gospel

Frederick Van Eyk, a thirty-one year-old South African preacher who arrived in Perth in 1926, quickly led the Apostolic Faith Mission to power and promise in Australia. In only a few years, he severely tarnished the fame of the Mission and other associated Australian congregations. Above all, Janet Lancaster’s Good News Hall was foundered irretrievably. The Apostolic Faith Mission which sprang out of John Dowie’s Catholic Apostolic Church (a pioneering healing ministry originating in Australia) flourished in South Africa since the 1910s, and remains today still the largest of the Pentecostal movements there. It no longer exists in Australia. Immediately after his arrival in Australia, Van Eyk achieved successful meetings in Perth and Adelaide, and began his ministry in association with the Good News Hall. Baptisms in the Spirit and miracle healings occurred. A blind girl, a hunch-back, a deaf woman, a dwarfed baby and a child with a growth in his throat were healed. A lady’s goitre disappeared at the touch of the evangelist. Gastritis, catarrh, bad nerves, blood pressure, rheumatoid arthritis, influenza, kidney trouble, curvature of the spine, insomnia and nervous tension were healed. (ibid.:104) Van Eyk’s influence increased considerably and the Good News Hall and other associated assemblies adopted the name of the Apostolic Faith Mission in 1927. The subsequent growth is owed directly to Van Eyk. He tirelessly traveled and preached the gospel in almost every state of the Commonwealth. Especially between 1927 and 1928, the Mission grew drastically in Queensland owing to Van Eyk’s vigorous campaigns—in Brisbane, Rockhampton, Toowoomba, Ipswich, and Townsville, Mackay and so on—which drew large crowds everywhere he held meetings.

It is undeniable that he strengthened the foundations of Pentecostalism around Australia. Meanwhile, the seeds of the fall of the Mission were lurking unseen during the most prosperous period of the Mission. In 1929, people started witnessing him spending much time with an attractive young lady who was a daughter of the pastor in Cairns. His wife had returned to South Africa with the children in the preceding year due to a mental illness. Van Eyk’s reputation fell quickly; at a newly
established church in Toowoomba angry crowds burnt down the tent. At the 1929 annual conference of the Mission, Van Eyk’s name was erased from the membership of the Council and the Mission. Eventually the associated assemblies dropped the name Apostolic Faith Mission. He was cut off from the Pentecostal work in Queensland and asked to return to South Africa. The Apostolic Faith Mission’s promising movement was set back drastically and it never recovered.

Van Eyk, however, did not return to South Africa. He returned to Melbourne quickly after his fall in Queensland, and from there he moved to Cessnock, New South Wales. After successful meetings in association with the local Methodist minister and the Salvation Army there, he established the Church of the Foursquare Gospel. Thus he continued to evangelise vigorously and generally successfully as he did before in New South Wales till his death in 1939 at the age of forty-four. After his death, the Foursquare movement lost its momentum but in 1957, the International Church of the Foursquare Gospel, Aimee Semple McPherson’s organisation in America, requested an affiliation. Unique terms of affiliation were offered and the branches in New South Wales and Queensland with Van Eyk as their antecedent were allowed autonomy, whilst the Foursquare churches in Western Australia are the direct product of a missionary outreach from the United States (ibid.: 157).

186 He died in South Africa on his homecoming just after divorcing his wife and remarrying with a young lady he had been befriended with in Queensland. He was bitten by the tse-tse fly but refused medication due to his conviction in faith healing; after recovering once, he passed away.
APPENDIX 2

Vernacular Reality and Universal Imagination

The following is an ethnographic exploration of the various issues related to the rejection of Aboriginal culture that the Bundjalung and Githabul Pentecostals categorise into the “gray zone” (see Chapter 5).

Vernacular realities

The following episode from Muli Muli Aboriginal village in Woodenbong shows how the universal imagination of Aboriginality and Aboriginal culture is received in the vernacular context. An Aboriginal preacher from the Northern Territory once visited Muli Muli church through AICM. The old Aboriginal preacher was, according to my informant, a “tribal” person and talked about culture and tradition at sermon. My informant walked up to this visiting preacher immediately after the service and said to him, “Brother, you are wrong,” and showed him the following verses from the letter of Paul to the Colossians:

Beware lest any man spoil you through philosophy and vain deceit, after the tradition of men, after the rudiments of the world, and not after Christ. For in him dwelleth all the fullness of the Godhead bodily. [Colossians 2: 8-9, KJV]

The old tribal elder walked away in silence. My informant concluded, “And he died shortly after, “ meaning his death was the outcome of the Devil’s way which the old preacher had chosen.

The preacher was not a UAICC but an AICM affiliate. As discussed in Chapter 6, although AICM looks more at the spiritual side of the gospel in contrast with the UAICC’s advocacy of “wholistic ministry”, it is often difficult for the AICM leaders to draw the line between “good” culture and “bad” culture when managing its affiliates in different Aboriginal communities in diverse regional backgrounds all over Australia.
Deviations in the standard lines drawn among the AICM affiliates are often seen. Incidentally, the above-mentioned Muli Muli man, my informant, who challenged the visiting preacher from Northern Territory was the one who nearly got killed by a curse some twenty years before (see Chapter 7 for the ethnographic data). His objection to the “tribal” man was something other than a confrontation between a “real” Aborigine in Northern Territory who lives according to the “authentic Aboriginal way” and an “assimilated” Aborigine in New South Wales “brainwashed by the Bible”. The challenger had strongly renounced involvement in “culture”, which meant witchcraft to the village people. My informant referred to the Bible, but he knew, from his own experiences in practical life, how much tragedy had been brought to his people by the dark side of the Aboriginal spirituality.187 This is a fact of his lived reality. A similar situation can be found in a recent controversy over the rainbow serpent paintings ignited by an Aboriginal gallery owner and Pentecostal pastor in Cairns (Anderson 2001). An Aboriginal gallery owner who is an ordained Pentecostal pastor refused to exhibit paintings with this too-well-known universal icon of Aboriginal culture.

In this Cairns case, the bottom line is that the people involved agree that the rainbow serpent represents a political statement about the survival of Aboriginal culture and the inheritance of Aboriginal spirituality, whereas repulsion for the rainbow serpent derives from the gallery owner’s lived experiences of being Aboriginal and Christian (ibid.: 294). The artists paint the rainbow serpent in a national context to answer the expectations of the “imagined” Aboriginal community. But this gallery owner and Pentecostal pastor speaks from his everyday life experience. Radcliffe-Brown’s concept of a single and universal rainbow serpent deity conflicts with ethnographic indications as Anderson shows (ibid.:297). If the rainbow serpent is an invention through anthropological and new age involvements, repulsion for such a false Creator Spirit to all the Aboriginal groups can be interpreted as manifestation of an authentic, locative Aboriginal culture.

In Bundjalung and Githabul mythology, there has never been a creator spirit

187 He is still young in his early forties and he was brought up in a contemporary lifestyle as an Aboriginal person living in rural NSW.
represented by a snake. The rainbow serpent, which has become a “finished” product of the intercultural interactions between the Australian nationalism and the Aboriginal traditional past, will remain loathed forever by the Bundjalung and Githabul Pentecostals owing to its univocality, but such agenda will be activated only in the discursive arena of abstract notions of Aboriginal identity, culture and reconciliation where the imagination of all the races “in one blood of Jesus” is advocated enthusiastically but only abstractly. On this point, the Bundjalung and Githabul Christians agree that dealing in culture is a whiteman’s way and that renouncing culture is the Blackfellas’ way.

Universal imaginations: the Praise Corroboree at Parliament House

At the convention Praise Corroboree held in the Great Hall of Parliament House in November 2002, the supporting Pentecostal and charismatic Aboriginal Christians did not object to the music performances using the didgeridoo and Aboriginal-style dancing by an Aboriginal dancer. A Bundjalung Christian elder who sang praise and worship songs in the local dialect was enthusiastically applauded by the audience. The venue was designed in a motif of the red, yellow and black Aboriginal flag. Yet in practical life, the attendants of the convention agreed, that it is difficult to draw the line between “gammon (false) gods” and “things of the world” God has given to Aboriginal people.

One of the female Christian elders from South Australia insists that it is all right to use the didgeridoo and perform traditional dancing at church if culture has been redeemed. According to her, the bottomline is who the Creator is. If the cultural things represent faith in the creator(s) other than God, it is the Old way, which is heresy. If not, anything from the Aboriginal culture—dances, songs, arts and craft should be used because God has given them to Aboriginal people. She told me an example of having

---

188 The word “gammon” is an Aboriginal English word (originating from English criminal slang of the nineteenth century). It means nonsense, pretence, rubbish (noun); to pretend or lie (verb). It is also used as an adjective (cf. Arthur 1996: 96).
to use didgeridoos without the marks of traditional ownership. The marks of traditional ownership represent belief in creator spirits. According to her understanding, to make and use the instrument without any of these marks is the way to “redeem culture”.

Similarly, the young woman who performed Aboriginal-style dancing believes that things from Aboriginal tradition relating to procreation are “gammon gods”. Believing in them is the way to believe that the Creator of Aboriginal people is something other than the Lord. She said the Dreaming and the Rainbow Serpent were false gods and that she would not dance for them. “But once you strip away those things,” she said, “you can use culture because God has given us the language, dances, nature—things of the world.”

She was a semi-professional solo dancer. I found out that this young woman was the daughter of a renowned Aboriginal Pentecostal pastor from Cairns but that she was a graduate from NAISDA Dance College\(^1\) in Sydney. I felt it was a little strange for a girl brought up in a strong Pentecostal background to choose to spend as long as five years at NAISDA and learn Aboriginal dancing. She told me she had never lost faith in God during her five-year training at NAISDA Dance College, though she was clear about the “worldliness” of the student community and also the philosophy of the College emphasising traditional Aboriginal spirituality. She kept away from the worldly part as a Christian living according to Pentecostal faith. She openly told me how she coped with the ambivalent part of the career she had chosen.

NAISDA is not a Christian school. You have to be there for five years! It is “worldly”. Christian students leave NAISDA at an earlier stage. ... I did not

\(^1\) The NAISDA (National Aboriginal and Islander Skills Development Association) Dance College is a professional dance training course in Sydney. It provides training for Indigenous Australians in each field of the arts, including drama. The College has two different full-time certificate courses (for one year and for 2 years) in dance and related fields, after which a full Diploma Course (3 years) is offered. The reputable Bangarra Dance Theatre was formed by graduates of NAISDA Dance College. The philosophy of NAISDA appeals to strong Aboriginality: “Dance is a key form of cultural, spiritual and political expression. Today, dance can also be the basis for a professional career as well as a powerful educational tool. Dance, like so many other aspects of Indigenous civilisations, has survived a period of over 200 years of intense impact from societies foreign to this country. This survival is an indication of the spiritual depth, resilience and importance of Indigenous cultures.” [NAISDA Home page]
participate in some of the dances—ones about creation. The teachers understood me."

She taught me the story of the dance she performed that day for Praise Corroboree. The dance had a traditional Aboriginal style in setting and costume but it was not a reproduction of any traditional dances from any particular regions but an original dance in a contemporary concept. It was the story about Jesus. She said the message of the dance was, "We have to prepare the place for Jesus, and it is in us."

The *Praise Corroboree* was first held in 1996 under the banner of a cross-cultural gathering to glorify God for reconciliation – led by Aboriginal and Islander Christian people in partnership with their fellow Australians of all nationalities and representatives from the nations of the world. Although it included all ethnic groups of Australia and outside Australia from the beginning, the choice of the Great Hall of the Parliament House for the venue demonstrated the Aboriginal Christian leaders' commitment to reconciliation with the white settler society. Each year at the *Praise Corroboree* the Aboriginal leaders prayed for the lawmakers of Parliament House, and in 1996 the Aboriginal leaders invited the Prime Minister John Howard and laid hands on him and prayed for him.

In spite of the splash headline as mentioned above, the *Praise Corroboree* has been one of the grass-root level activities that the *Praise Corroboree* President Pastor Peter Walker (Chairman of AICM as above-mentioned) has committed to in his long time devotion to the evangelical mission. It started in Bundjalung and Githabul country when he was saved in a small Aboriginal Reserve, and expanded to Sydney and into other parts of Australia through the growing network of friendly Aboriginal Christian leaders (See Chapter 4). The funding group of the future AICM sponsored the *Praise Corroboree*; and it was held seven times in the Great Hall of Parliament House from 1996 until 2002. The *Praise Corroboree* I observed in November 2002 was the seventh convention and it turned out to be the last one held at the Parliament House. After it, the convention *Praise Corroboree* has become more "regional". According to my

---

190 The eighth *Praise Corroboree* was held in Lismore in 2004.
observations, this shift seemed to be a natural outcome of this Christian convention which intended to include all nationalities and all nations for its original purpose. For its initial purpose of demonstrating reconciliation, the convention needed to be held in the “centre” and the convention innately attracted the mainstream society. This, in turn, gave this convention increasing momentum in multicultural direction.

In 2002, there was a clear shift in the message of the Praise Corroboree. The theme for the November 2002 meeting was “Synergy of Worship”, which meant “greater than the sum of the individual parts” according to the organisers. “Synergy” is not a biblical word, but they emphasised a biblical principle in its meaning.191

The President Pastor Peter Walker had suggested the shift in the letter of invitation to Praise Corroboree 2002 sent to supporters of Praise Corroboree:

For weeks I struggled with what God wanted this Praise Corroboree to be about then only a few short weeks ago when asked to Minister (sic) in Cairns, it suddenly came to me that God was saying Reconciliation has moved on (sic) it is now time for the Church to start to walk in it. ... We have worked through a lot on the Reconciliation front and even as a few weeks ago, God was calling Islanders and Aboriginal peoples to make amends in Him up, in Cairns. The Reconciliation process is ongoing and will do so locally but for the Nation it’s time to give leadership by modelling ONE Body to celebrate all that God is in our beloved Nation....

(A letter from Praise Corroboree Office to supporters, 10 October 2002)

Thus the November 2002 Praise Corroboree showed a shift in its message from commitment to reconciliation of the indigenous nation of Australia to that of a more multicultural Christian worship to realise the unity of churches of all nationalities and in all nations. In my observation this made the convention lack the centrality (from both the spiritual and practical aspects) to attract Aboriginal Christians. There were already practical problems for Aboriginal people. According to one of the Aboriginal elders of the board of Praise Corroboree, five thousand people attended the first convention in 1996, and most of them were Aboriginal Christians from all over Australia. It was, however, unrealistic for Aboriginal people to be able to afford to

191 Such verses were referred from the Bible: Ecclesiastes 4:12, Revelation 5:9-10, 2 Chronicles 5:13-14). These verses were linked to their urgent call for multicultural cooperation in Australia and beyond in one body as Christians.
travel to Canberra every year and to pay for a fairly expensive admission fee and accommodation as well as food for a week. After the initial enthusiasm—about going to the "centre" to attend the Fair—calmed down, the number of Aboriginal participants kept shrinking year after year. After six years, at the 2002 meeting the number of the attendants I counted per meeting was approximately three hundred at the most, and I observed that the non-Aboriginal attendants from the ACT region exceeded the Aboriginal attendants in number.

The convention went on for a week from Monday evening to Saturday, but the main meetings with services by preachers were held for four days from Tuesday until Friday. Each day it started with an early Morning Prayer meeting at 7:30 a.m. at the camp side at the Exhibition Park in Canberra. The prayer meeting was for a small group of individuals who wanted to pray voluntarily in a circle. Then there was morning service (9:30-11:30 a.m.), afternoon service (1:30-4:00 p.m.) and night service (7:00-9:30 p.m.) each day with a different preacher each time. For two days the meetings were held in the Great Hall of Parliament House; afterwards the venue moved to the biggest shed at the Exhibition Park in Canberra where the visitors were accommodated. The preachers invited by the organisers were multi-cultural and multi-ethnic: two Aboriginal pastors including the President of the Praise Corroboree Pastor Peter Walker, two international evangelists from the United States (one was of African descent and the other was of South American descent), the concurrent president of the World Indigenous Christian Gathering (a Maori pastor), a Native American Bible teacher, a white female pastor from Christian City Churches in Sydney and a white male coordinator of the Australian Prayer Network.

192 Admission fee for 2002 was $60 per adult, and a 6-birth caravan that may accommodate a family, for example, cost $340 per week.
193 Among the Bundjalung and Githabul Christians, however, Praise Corroboree had become a public event in the calendar because of the organisers' close affiliation with their churches and families. The November 2002 meeting was talked about often among the local Christians but many held back at the last moment as it was too close to Christmas and they could not afford the expenses for travelling for one week. Still, at this convention, I counted about thirty people I had known from the local network. Elders, pre-appointed preachers and musicians travelled on funds; but some who were on their own dared to travel "on faith"; they just hung around and got through the whole week by demanding support through kin obligations.
In the meetings throughout the week, as is the nature of Pentecostal and charismatic churches, the focus was more on the spiritual side of the gospel and on the Word. The main message in the meetings was to call for individuals' spiritual awakening to take up the commitment to serve God. In a multi-ethnic context, issues about the culture and tradition of each different ethnic group were incorporated into the discourse and practice in such an abstract way that the preachers were able to encourage the self-esteem of each individual's ethnic identity but no more. It safely lacked the specificity of local practice related to culture and tradition which could raise controversies among the followers of the one and only God.

An Ethiopian-born female evangelist from the U.S. preached one night at Parliament House that the Aboriginal people have the mandate for revival. That night, “Arise and be doing and the Lord be with you!” from the first book of the Chronicles194 was the key phrase. She preached, “there is a hunger in Australia now and it's time to press in and wake from slumber”. She likened the Aboriginal people to Joseph in Genesis 39:

In Genesis 39 the Lord was with Joseph. He was taken from the pit to the palace, because inside him was the destiny of nations. He dreamt and his brothers tried to kill his dream but the Lord was with him! He was disconnected from his family but the Lord was with him! Taken to the place of idolatry but the Lord was with him! Falsely accused and imprisoned but the Lord was with him! Forgotten and let down but the Lord was with him!

As the preacher's elated tone escalated (as set out in bold text above), the Great Hall of Parliament House was filled with applause and cries of commitment. The preacher was shrewd and efficient; she roused a sense of Aboriginal self-esteem but its abstractness avoided the clash between the endless differences of the Aboriginal way and the Christian way in practical life. The message was eligible to any ethnicity, as it completely lacked the vernacular reality of ordinary Aboriginal people's lives.

194 "In my affliction and trouble I have provided for the house of the Lord 100,000 talents of gold, 1,000,000 talents of silver, and bronze and iron without weighing. I have also provided timber and stone; you must add to them. You have workmen in abundance: hewers, workers of stone and timber, and all kinds of craftsmen without number, skilful in doing every kind of work with gold, silver, bronze, and iron. So arise and be doing, and the Lord be with you! (1 Chronicles 22: 14-16, The Amplified Bible)"
In another meeting, when a husband and wife team of Maori evangelists performed the Hakka ceremonial war dance during the sermon, they made it clear that they intended to dedicate it to Jesus. They implied Christians were in God’s army. No one objected to this explanation. The details of the Maori Hakka were not relevant to that night’s mixed-bag congregation in the context of multi-cultural Christian worship. They lacked any more information for judgement on any possible problem in that particular Hakka dance. The only exception to the discourse of reconciliation of all nations and nationalities was an anti-Muslim assertion. Muslims were represented as a threat to the Christian community but, on the whole, ethnic issues were not related to the problem of Islamic invasion in a spiritual context.

One morning, however, a young white man from Sydney made an aggressive testimony and asserted that underground terrorists were operating and recruiting Australians in jails and universities. He linked Middle Eastern descent with Muslim terrorism and warned that the University of Sydney had become a dangerous place of Muslims. Interestingly, the Bundjalung and Githabul attendants did not show much attention. At the local churches in Bundjalung and Githabul country I had never observed anti-Muslim discourse. Unlike this white young man from Sydney, they simply did not have any opportunity to meet Muslims in daily life. Such discrepancies between the abstract and the specific are what the Bundjalung and Githabul Christians experience every time they come out of their rural backwater. It was interesting for me to find that the Bundjalung and Githabul Christians were fairly obedient to all the performances (including political and cultural discourses) at the Praise Corroboree.

Discrepancies irreconcilable

The Church of the Bundjalung and Githabul people in their local context is unequivocally different in one way from that of the nationwide setting. It is not domesticated under such abstract concepts as Unity in One Blood or a nationalistic Aboriginal Christianity. It is not necessary for Bundjalung and Githabul people living
in the vernacular reality of Aboriginal life to compromise with the representation of Aboriginality that should be eligible to any Aboriginal community. Their own local church is keenly sensitive to the idiosyncrasies of the problems of their lived reality in their community. The specific facts of sufferings, grief and passions for repentance overwhelm the time of worship that the converts share with the Holy Spirit. Therefore, church in the everyday context is untamed. The local church must respond to the specificity of each fact, pray over it, heal it and everyone expects it to happen. And all personal experiences of sin, repentance and redemption are doomed to be revealed to their fellow Christians, which eventually produces the unity of the Christian community, although the unity is under extreme tension.

On the other hand, in the church headlined by the flash representation of Pan-Aboriginal Christianity, Christians must rely on the abstract concept of being Christian in order to relate to one another. Prayers will converge on God’s love and grace and Aboriginality. The abstract, in itself, can never be broken down into everyday practice. To a researcher and outsider like me, indeed, such discourses of Aboriginality and Aboriginal Christianity were always lucid, transparent and openly understandable. The white and black Christians can rejoice together to realise “true reconciliation” under God; and the Aboriginal Christians are drawn to accept the positive representations of Aboriginal culture and Aboriginality expected by the white mainstream society. Aboriginality in such a national discourse, however, is imagined as homogeneous and it cannot have locative features for the sake of its initial purpose. What is shared mainly in this imagined community is not substantial, vernacular life experiences but the outcome of individual’s imagining a “universal” primordial past. After the Fair, the Aboriginal Christians go back home respectively and must ask for the standard of Aboriginality, the line to draw between “gammon gods” and “things of the world”, and many other things in the “gray zone” according to the local situation.

By contrast, the discourses and practices at the local church congregations were always wrapped in mystery in the eyes of an outsider. Intensions and messages were hidden in veiled speeches laden with specific local information about each individual, congregation and community. The moment the specificity of the case was known,
however, a crying need for the power of the Holy Spirit in their practice at church impressed me. In their prayers, healings, a lot of crying, visions, prophesies and testimonies I perceived a substantial tie between them and God the supernatural being. Here, Bundjalung and Githabul Christians reject culture—because it is the way through which they stay involved in and survive life as an Aboriginal person. “Culture” to them is not a representation but a reality that could bring the Devil to their lives. In such a context of everyday life, their pastors back home confront the pressing problems of the adherents; and the only way to rebuke the Devil is to cut the channel through which the Devil insinuates himself into daily life, that is, Aboriginal “culture”. The Bundjalung and Githabul Christians live everyday with the emergencies and contingencies of the warfare with the Devil, and the mere discourse of Pan-Aboriginal Christianity is too toothless to use as a weapon for the warfare.

Thus the discrepancies between these two different arenas of the Aboriginal Christian practice—national and local—are irreconcilable as far as the positioning of Aboriginal culture in Christianity is concerned. Positive representations of Aboriginality and Aboriginal culture in Aboriginal Christian practice, paradoxically, function to reproduce the images of Aboriginality and Aboriginal Christianity invented through European involvement—in the form of the mirroring relations of mimesis (Taussig 1993) as discussed in Chapter 6. On the other hand, the rejection of Aboriginal culture in the local context of the Bundjalung and Githabul Christian practice derives directly from the lived reality of an Aboriginal person’s everyday life. Each individual renounces culture out of one’s pressing, practical necessity of life as an Aboriginal being who lives in the Aboriginal community in modern times. Such practice intervenes in the control of the images of Aboriginality conferred by the white mainstream society.
APPENDIX 3

Episodes regarding Choc Mundine and Ruby Langford Ginibi

Through the literature research I conducted in Canberra, I had come into some names of the “cultural and political identities” from Bundjalung and Githabul country. During my fieldwork for this thesis, I had the opportunity of observing two of these “Bundjalung identities” being talked about by their kin and countrymen in the everyday life context. The first is Anthony Mundine, a former rugby league star and now a controversial “Black Muslim” boxer from Baryulgil, and the other is Ruby Langford Ginibi, an Aboriginal authoress and activist from Box Ridge. In the light of the local Christians’ rejection of culture, tradition and advocacy of Aboriginality for political activism, these two seemed to me to have too “worldly” profiles according to the Bundjalung and Githabul Christian standard. In their homeland I found rather inconsistent attitudes among the Christians towards them. First, the local people including Christians recognise them as the “big shots” of a success story. Second, the Bundjalung and Githabul Christians did not show much opposition to the “cultural” and “political” representations they had gained.

The funeral in Baryulgil

Anthony alias “Choc” Mundine is a boxer and former Australian Rugby League player. In August 2000 he quit football to take up boxing. In three years as he had forecasted, he won the WBA super middleweight title in September 2003. He was then twenty-eight years old. By this he became the second Aboriginal world boxing champion after Lionel Rose. When he won the title, the Koori Mail wrote, “Anthony Mundine was hailed as ‘an icon and a legend’” (The Koori Mail, September 10, 2003). He converted to Islam in 1999, as Muhammad Ali, who converted to a militant racial sect of Islam in America in the 1960s, was his direct influence. Anthony’s anti-American comments on
September 11th terrorism in 2001 raised stormy criticism from the media despite his subsequent apologies.

A local white person told me it would be interesting to survey the supporters of Anthony Mundine among the Bundjalung Christians. The locals had heard Anthony was Muslim, but the reality I found was that the local Aboriginal Christians (who were his relations in some way or other) completely ignored the media profiles he carried outside the local community. They only talked about what they remembered about him from home or about how his family were. The “Choc” (this was a favoured nickname in his homeland) they had seen in the local context was their only reality. Furthermore, for ordinary Aboriginal people in the Northern Rivers region, there was no chance to mix with Muslims in everyday life. They did not know how Muslims really were.

When his cousin was lost to an unexpected death, Choc came back home for the funeral. In April 2003, I attended the funeral as a driver for one of the Bundjalung Christian pastors at Baryulgil Aboriginal Village. The deceased was only thirty-five and the funeral was very painful. A big blue-and-white striped tent, which accommodated approximately 200 chairs, was built in the middle of the village; it was one of the biggest funerals I had seen. There were roughly three to four hundred people filling up the small village (the population of the settlement was approximately 100), and a lot of them could not get a seat and stood outside the tent during the funeral.

The funeral was lead by the local Bundjalung pastors. Baryulgil was the place my research did not cover, as there was neither a congregation nor a Christian leader living there. Nevertheless, it was still a part of the hard-shelled Bundjalung and Githabul Christian community. Six of the twelve pastors and a well-known local gospel

---

195 Anthony Mundine commented on the September 11th terrorist attack in New York that "America's brought it upon themselves [for] what they've done in the history of time". He subsequently apologised and said, "I condemn killings on any side and all acts of terrorism. I know people who were in New York on September 11th and my heart and soul goes out to those families who lost loved ones." (Biography of Anthony "The Man" Mundine, from Boxing World web site)
musician—all Aboriginal from the local Bundjalung and Githabul community—were there to perform the funeral service in a Christian way. There were neither white clergymen nor white locals except for a few friends of the deceased from work. The funeral started with an opening prayer by a Bundjalung Christian elder, followed by an opening hymn, and a Bundjalung pastor performed a service. After the eulogy and tributes, other Bundjalung pastors and family members shared songs. They were all Christian hymns: Send a message to my mother; Look for me; If we ever meet again; Here today gone tomorrow; Tears; and Leave this world loving you. The ceremony was held exclusively according to the Christian way (and for the Lord’s mercy on the deceased who passed on without knowing Jesus); there was no hint of traditional spirituality and not even an expression of Aboriginality, unlike the funerals of cultural elders.

At the beginning of the funeral, a group of young men in orange Rugby uniform caught the hundreds of mourners’ eyes. They marched in a line into the tent. They were the members of the local football team Turtle Divers. A coffin followed—carried by several young men in black trousers and white shirts. Youths, close kin to the deceased, usually carry a coffin wearing black and white garments. The controversial Black Muslim and superstar athlete was among the pallbearers and maintained a low profile—he looked just like one of the homegrown boys in Baryulgil.

I collected no complaint about a Muslim participating at the Christian funeral in this case material. On the other hand, usually among the Christians, things related to worldly intentions and traditional Aboriginal culture expressed at funerals always raised controversies. When a non-Christian nephew of the deceased once took up the role of the Master of the Ceremony at a Christian elder’s funeral, there was much criticism in the community. “The next of kin (the deceased’s daughter) followed tradition,” was the way they expressed concerns. After the funeral many of the Christian relatives were whispering to complain about this scandalous choice. “She shouldn’t have put the sinner for the Master of the Ceremony. Pop was such a devoted

---

196 The Aboriginal pastors and musicians my research covered are the only candidates from whom the family would choose to ask to do the funeral. Both Christians and non-Christians send for these Aboriginal pastors—although a lot of times they hire the hall of the big white church (Catholic, Anglican or Uniting) in the town for convenience’s sake.
Christian. She weighed *tradition* more than the Lord’s way!” By *tradition*, they meant the worldly interest in the social status of the non-Christian person appointed as the Master of the Ceremony. I had observed such silent but stern criticism before. Now in this case, Choc’s presence did not clash with the Christian people’s feelings.

Back at home, the controversial Aboriginal Muslim boxer, the icon and a legend, was seen as just one of the kin who were supposed to be there to mourn in the Christian community. On my way driving back from Baryulgil, I was contemplating the prospect of a young white man from a neighbouring village meeting Choc—for an autograph and a handshake. Only when the man was brought to him later, might it remind the people sitting around in the lounge room that their boy was an icon of the Bundjalung or of the Australian Aboriginal Identity. I had seen a young white man, Choc’s relative’s neighbour in Tabulam, helping out with the funeral eagerly in the early part of that day. He had brought dozens of chairs from his home for the mob of people coming to the funeral. He was willing to drive them for an hour on the rough and cliffy road from Tabulam to Baryulgil. The Aboriginal lady, his neighbour in Tabulam, had offered a trade-off between the chairs from his home and letting him meet one of her distant grandsons.

**Ruby Ginibi, a returnee**

The position of Ruby Langford *Ginibi* among her Bundjalung people is somewhat different from that of Choc. She is an Aboriginal authoress who is known for her autobiographic novels *Don’t Take Your Love to Town* (1988) and *Real Deadly* (1992). After having become an established author and Aboriginal activist, she travelled back home. She made four journeys between March 1990 and January 1991 back to her home country, which were made into her novel *My Bundjalung People* (1994). Ruby was born at Box Ridge Aboriginal station in 1934 and lived at several places in the Northern Rivers region until she moved with her father to Sydney when she was fifteen. According to her book, *Ginibi* is her “tribal name” given to her in 1990 by her aunt, Eileen Morgan, a tribal elder of Box Ridge.
Eileen Morgan was already dead, so were five of her seven children when I started visiting Box Ridge during my fieldwork for this thesis. I talked with the remaining two (in their fifties) quite a lot of times during my research because they were both Bundjalung Pentecostal pastors and belonged to the local and national Aboriginal Christian networks I had been researching. They told me that their parents James and Eileen Morgan were devoted Christians and were generous benefactors to the church meetings at Box Ridge and bus tours to the other Aboriginal Stations during the North Coast Revival days in 1950s-60s. Indeed James Morgan was remembered by everyone today as a man of God for his prophesy of the “Golden Ladder in Tabulam”. Even the retired white missionary of Box Ridge knew James was one of the first generation of the Pentecostal converts.

Such Christian parts of her relatives’ lives are completely lacking in Ruby’s story about her reunion with her people. According to the memories of the family, the Christian members of the family (which included Auntie Eileen) had complicated and ambivalent attitudes towards Aboriginal culture, traditional spirituality and activism, whilst Ruby was the person who had climbed the ladder of success through representing Aboriginal culture, tradition and political activism. Still, these first cousins talked about her favourably. One of them, a pastor from Box Ridge, was willing to show me her autobiographic video given to him by Ruby, which was filled with intense discourse of Aboriginality and her primordial attachment to traditional Aboriginal spirituality.

He emphasised his kin relationship with her as first cousin and tried to explain how close first cousins were in the Aboriginal way. He said he would accept certain sacrifices if the issue was between him and his first cousins. He said, “Ruby was

---

197 It is not unusual for ordinary Pentecostal Christians to see prophetic visions. James Morgan’s vision was remembered still today because it was realised later. In his young days (before the revival days in the Bundjalung and Githabul land), he saw a vision of a golden ladder stretching from Tabulam to heaven. People interpreted it as a prophesy that Tabulam would become a divine place. It came true when everyone in Tabulam once became Christian during the zeal of the revival days in 1950s and 60s.

198 He had not known Ruby at all until she made a reunion with her people in 1990 but he took their kin relationship as first cousins to weigh heavily with him. He mentioned the following anecdote as explanation: Once he tried to sell his car. He was in need of money. An old woman...
taken to Sydney and she has known nothing about our way. Then she came back and she wrote a beautiful story about her hometown. My Mum was her auntie. She gave her the name Ginibi." And he added somewhat amusingly, "No one around here would take *djurebil* for one’s name." But he validated her choice of "tribal name" firmly by saying, "it’s a funny thing here, but in Sydney it’s all right.” He continued:

*Ginibi* is a black swan – a totem of my mother’s side. But it is nothing important to us now. Those Sydney people, aye, they come and look at our life here and romanticise it. If they knew how it is really like - the life here, they would take flight right away. Oh, it’s OK they write about us. Who can resist a beautiful story?

He concluded, "...and she is my first cousin.” Then he added, “But there is one thing I don’t agree with.” His objection was to the “spirit” of her father she mentioned in her biographic video from the *Australian Biography Series* (Film Australia 1997) she had given him:

I was going to have to put my children in the homes so that I could go to work for them – back to machining. And the night before this happened, I cried myself to sleep. ... And in the middle of the night...I was crying and sobbing, and all of a sudden, Dad’s spirit was there. It moved the door open, and it was padlocked! Wheeeew! The wind came and I could feel Dad’s presence right beside me and I felt him patting me. All I can say was, “Dad...” and I went sound asleep. It was him reassuring me that everything would be all right. And the next morning, guess who was there? Mr. Langford! He was saying, “Get dressed quick! I gotta take you somewhere.” ... He rushed me in his sister’s car and rushed to the Jew Town and stood in front of the jewellery shop and said, “Pick us up rings you want and we are getting married.” How romantic! And my problems...I did not have to put my kids away! So I married him. He loved my kids, made no difference.

(female elder) he knew very well at Box Ridge said she could pay 800 dollars. Someone in Casino offered 500 dollars. Meanwhile, his first cousin in Cabbage Tree Island wanted the car but could offer only 300 dollars. He sold the car to his first cousin. He got only 300 dollars although he was in need of money, but he was satisfied with his decision. He was happy to make his first cousin happy. According to the Aboriginal way, first cousins are important like *this*. To my question about whom he would give more weigh, a first cousin like Ruby whom he did not know well, or a good mate and cousin from the Mission but not as close as a first cousin, he answered without hesitation, “The first cousin.”

199 *Djurebil* in the Bundjalung and Githabul languages means: (1) localities used for ceremonies such as for increasing natural species and for sorcery, and related animal species (2) items that have cult-magic importance (See Chapter 7).
Regarding this comment, her first cousin and pastor said, “You can’t talk to the dead. Dead people are gone (to the Maker). They are the spirits…demonic spirits. The Devil can copycat your parents and relatives.” His tone was uncompromising and his face was stern; but he had never told this to Ruby.

He explained how important being somebody’s first cousin meant. At the same time, however, he represented her as part of the “Sydney people” all the time. In contrast with Choc, it was obvious that Ruby had been put into a different category. The local people regarded them both as “big-shots” from Sydney. Regarding Ruby Langford, they had quickly picked up that she knew nothing about their way and categorised her into a certain group – the “Sydney people”; they were generous enough to give her a “tribal name” after her fancy into the bargain. On the other hand, Anthony Choc Mundine is a homegrown boy; he is the one who could never escape from his kin obligation for funerals – regardless of the “heresy” he follows; the community must see him as one of the pallbearers at the hard-shell Christian funeral. And he came back, cast away all the fame and shame from Sydney as an icon and a legend of Aboriginal and Australian nationalism, and silently carried the coffin of his peer cousin at the painful funeral, whereas Ruby Langford returned to her hometown as an established authoress and advocate of Aboriginality, and her kin welcomed this “odd-bird relation” because of that exact position.

Sydney people and “uptown niggers”

In My Bundjalung People, Ruby and her adopted daughter Pam, an assistant and driver to her, never slept in her relatives’ house during the homecoming journey but each time stayed at their white friends’ houses, a motel in Lismore or at a hotel (pub) in Bonalbo. Ruby was not the only one whom the Box Ridge Aboriginal people received as a returnee; they had seen some other returnees like Ruby and they mention some “funny” feelings. The sum of their feelings is as in the following:

These “Sydney people” are eager to look for their relatives and are so interested
in “Aboriginal issues”; and they say they are happy to be reunited with their blood-kin. But when they stay in the community each time they come back, they do not sleep at their relatives place; they seem to like dainty-dainty places like white peoples’ houses or motels and prefer staying there. They generously pay a lot of money to invite relatives to such places as RSL Club for a reunion party, but couldn’t they rather prepare meals to sit down and relax for the party at their relatives’ place?

I was told that attitudes regarding these daily behaviours form the line they draw between “us and them,” namely, between the local Bundjalung and Githabul people and a certain category of Aboriginal people who are part of them, as a fact, but not in a practical sense.

There is a term the local Bundjalung and Githabul people use clandestinely to refer to this category of Aboriginal people. They call them “uptown niggers”. (There are derogatory implications in this expression.) There are two sub-groups of the “uptown niggers” in Bundjalung and Githabul country according to their own standard. The first is a group of Aboriginal people from another region. Their main features are:

- In spite of the different modus operandi from that of the local Bundjalung and Githabul people, they are Aboriginal (by blood). There are “dark ones” as well as “fair ones” in this category of people, but on the whole, the local Bundjalung and Githabul call them “fair people” and they have a way of identifying this category of “uptown niggers” with whites.
- They do not have kinship relations with the local Bundjalung and Githabul people except for rather recent marriages between the younger generations.
- In daily life, they do not share the same social domains as the local Bundjalung and Githabul people.
- However, many of them have jobs at the local Aboriginal administrative institutions.

200 Already in the mid-1950s, this category of “upper class” Aborigines was found in the large towns within the Bundjalung and Githabul territory (Calley 1959:111). They were “immigrants from other tribes” who had no ties with kin groups on the station. Lack of kinship obligations to distribute wealth led them to become comparatively prosperous, whilst on the station, income was fairly evenly distributed and this prevented a station becoming economically stratified (ibid.).
• Their life-style is assimilated: “They have a dainty-dainty way (i.e. better standard of living).” “They are on their own (i.e. they adopt individualism).”
• They started identifying themselves as Aboriginal only when “Aboriginal money” became available. In contrast with their lack of interest in mixing with the local Aboriginal people in daily life, they are keen on Aboriginal events and activities.

My informants gave me certain names of a few families they regarded as this category of “uptown niggers”. Unlike the second category of “uptown niggers” to be mentioned below, they could easily put a finger on these families and my question did not seem to tread on their toes. One of my informants told me he had once found a certain family in the town joining in an Aboriginal event with the Mission people. He was surprised because he had long been thinking they were Indians. He said, “At the barbeque on Australia Day in the town for Aboriginals, the Mission mob and such Town mob did not even mix. We ate in two separate groups.” It is this category of “uptown niggers” that the local Bundjalung and Githabul people complain about with regard to their “abuse” of culture. My informant, recollecting their keenness in representing Aboriginality and Aboriginal culture to the white mainstream society, complained, “Culture means nothing to them (because they lack a shared life experience in the Bundjalung and Githabul community). So they have no hesitation to perform cultural things anywhere...at a funeral, church and even at a graveside! They don’t know that we cannot just enjoy culture (as there is a dangerous part in culture).”

The second category of the “uptown niggers” in the Northern Rivers region seems to make the local Bundjalung and Githabul people feel even more frustrated. It is a group of people from their own kin who have moved to the town and have gradually turned away from the “Mission way”. They are called the “Town mob”, too, in distinction from the “Mission Mob” just like the first category of the “uptown niggers” in the above. Their features are:

• They come from the local Bundjalung and Githabul families; therefore, they are no different with regard to the complex kin relationships with one another among the local Bundjalung and Githabul people.
• After moving into the town, they have turned away, or are gradually turning
away, from kin obligations with the "Mission mob" they are originally from.

- There are intermarriages between the Mission mob and the Town mob; but after marriage, the Town partner often encourages the other to live up to the uptown way – especially, to become less involved in kin obligations.

- They live outside the Aboriginal quarters where people from the Mission form urban hamlets; they live uptown and make a clear distinction in their lifestyle from the "Mission mob just living in the town".

- In lifestyle, they are more assimilated to the white way than their Mission relatives: "They have a dainty-dainty way (i.e. better standard of living)." "They are on their own (i.e. they adopt individualism)."

I do not have any information about how large this second category has grown now; my "Mission mob" informants would not let me know the names; but they told me very vaguely that especially those who were born in the town had the above-mentioned attitudes. It must be noted that those who are in this category do not pass for whites; and they do maintain their Aboriginality. But their way is different from the "Mission way" and, unlike their feelings about the first category of "uptown niggers," the second category makes the community members get emotional. The Mission mob express a clear emotional gap between "them and us." For example, a young informant told me that she, as a Mission Aboriginal, had never been allowed to take her little nieces for a drive by her sister's husband. He came from this category of "uptown niggers" and her sister's family lived in the town – not far away from her Mission. She had perceived that her brother-in-law was intending to keep his children away from his wife's side – "Because he looks down upon us...the Mission Aboriginals."

In another case, an old lady living in town (my informant) complained about her first cousin's family. She told me about the cold attitudes of her first cousin's family as follows. Her first cousin moved from the Mission to town after marriage some thirty years ago. The children were born and brought up in several places in an urban environment. Now they are a renowned Christian family in town not far from the Mission. When an elder of their language group, and full auntie to the family, was on her deathbed for months in hospital, none of the family came to see her, which was unusual according to the local Aboriginal standard. Even a newly appointed pastor of a white church in town, having heard the rumour of her imminent death, came to pray
for her as his clerical duty. One of the members of this family was an Aboriginal pastor, but he never came to pray for his dying blood-kin. When she died the family attended the funeral. It was not that they completely ignored their kin obligations. My informant said puzzled, “I don’t understand why they want to stay away from our people.”