An ethnography of emotion and morality

Toward a local Indigenous theory of value and social exchange on the Yolŋu Homelands in remote north-east Arnhem Land, Australia.

Bree Blakeman

School of Archaeology and Anthropology
The Australian National University
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For Ian Keen, and my Yolŋu family

Two nodes in a string that I follow up here
Abstract

Drawing on the key body of terms and concepts associated with affect and emotion in Yolŋu-matha, this thesis explores the way Yolŋu people of North-East Arnhem Land consider morality and value in everyday relations.

This material suggests that Yolŋu conceive of and consider persons to be fundamentally and necessarily interdependent rather than intrinsically autonomous. On a socio-centric level the relationship between groups is referred to as *raki'* (strings [of relatedness]). The normative ideal relationship between groups is when *raki'* are *manapan-mirri* (joined, connected, linked [together to each other]), and the groups thus *wanyany-urra* ([at] one). Proper practice and conduct is to *malthun *ŋhanju* *raki'* (follow [up] the string), while upset, disequilibrium, or conflict is said to threaten to *gulk*'thun *ŋhanju* *raki'* (cut or sever the string). This is paralleled on an interpersonal level by *ŋayaju* (state or sense of feeling [among and between people]), the basic concept of affect/emotion and ground of moral evaluation. Balance and equilibrium is denoted by the normative ideal of *ŋayaju wanyany* (one state or sense of feeling). Proper behaviour and moral conduct is said to be *ŋayaju-yu* (through *ŋayaju*), while moral transgressions register as *ŋayaju wuthuna-mirri *rom* (law or manner of doing things that affronts or assaults the state of feeling).

I analyse a series of case studies from different aspects of everyday life to show that this body of terms and concepts - and the shared understandings comprising them - motivate and shape forms and patterns of sociality and exchange in significant, culturally specific ways. This description and my findings depart from prevailing models of Aboriginal sociality and exchange in Australia, which are strongly influenced by approaches that foreground a tension between contrasting values of
autonomy and relatedness. Rather than either autonomy or relatedness, it is a particular state of the relationship between people that is significant for Yolŋu; social equilibrium, balance, and value are relative to a particular, culturally recognised state of the relationship between people and groups, rather than contrasting values of autonomy and relatedness. This key point of difference allows for a unique analysis of Yolŋu sociality and exchange.

As with Kenneth Liberman’s description of social consensus in the Western Desert, we see that the ‘orderliness’ that exists in Yolŋu society is the collaborative product of a great deal of social and moral work. In what is effectively an example of non-State sociality – largely unmediated by the market and bureaucratic relations - the relative distribution of energy, intelligence and social concern is geared towards the realisation and maintenance of social order. The primary and paramount value is -ŋayantu wangany; ŋayantu wangany is the paramount value in both material and non-material exchange, and sociality is characterised by the culturally specific strategies to maintain it.

I conclude by arguing that the local interplay of forms, material conditions, and social relations of exchange can justly be considered a local theory of value and exchange in its own right. As such it sheds light upon prevailing anthropological models of exchange as well as current anthropological theories of value.
Acknowledgements

In memory of Don Burarrwanga.

Except where cited this thesis may be the result of research carried out by the author, but it is fundamentally and necessarily a social product. The data that forms its basis I owe entirely to my Yolŋu family who not only took me in and loved and cared for me as their own kin, but who taught me with such patience, such care and affection, the everything of the something that I know about the Yolŋu social world. My deepest gratitude is to you, marrkap-mirri, gurrutu-mirri walala. Also to Nanni Concu who shared much of this journey with me, thank you. Many of the ideas in this thesis began as conversations with Nanni, a proud anarchist and unorthodox economist.

I don't recall exactly when my love affair with anthropology began, but I do recall that I have John Laurence and Victoria Burbank to thank for imparting their passion for and dedication to anthropology in my undergraduate years at The University of Western Australia. Victoria is also an advisor on my panel. Thank you to both.

To my marŋgi-kunha-mirri walala (teachers) at The Australian National University: I am grateful to my primary supervisor Francesca Merlan, who walked me through, step by step, as I learned to write ethnography, and who has challenged me to be a more rigorous anthropologist and scholar at every stage. Heartfelt thanks also to Frances Morphy, my advisor and Balanda namala, whose ethnographic experience, linguistic and writing skills have contributed so much to this thesis. I also owe my sincere thanks to Ian Keen who has been a quiet influence on my work since well before I began this PhD. Thank you Ian, for being so generous and supportive of this intellectual project and so rigorous and critical in your advice. And to a marŋgi-kunha-mirri of a slightly
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To my comradely friends and fellow activists, thank you for keeping me grounded and reminding me what is important.

Finally, to my family – to my Mum and Dad, Shaun, Harley and Tiana: words cannot express how grateful I am for your unconditional love and support. I could not have completed this thesis without you.
A note on Yolŋu-matha orthography

The orthography used here is the practical orthography in general use in the region where Yolŋu-matha (YM) languages are spoken. Most of the material in the thesis is in the Gumatj dialect, one of the eastern dialects of the Dhuwala subgroup of the YM languages.

**Vowels**

Most YM languages have three short vowel phonemes and three corresponding long vowels. The latter may only occur in the first syllable of a word. They are written as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>short</th>
<th>long</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>high front</td>
<td>i</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>high back</td>
<td>u</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>low</td>
<td>a</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Consonants**

Most YM languages distinguish six places of articulation for stop and nasal consonants. There is also a phonemic glottal stop, written /ʔ/. The stops and nasals are written as follows:
In the eastern YM dialects there is a phonemic distinction between /t/ and /d/ between vowels in word-medial position (e.g. *watu* ‘dog’ vs. *wadutja* ‘quickly’), and so both symbols can occur in this position. In western YM dialects a similar distinction applies at all points of articulation, hence the necessity to distinguish two sets of stops for the general YM orthography. For the eastern YM dialects, the voiced symbols (b, g, d, dh and dj) are written at the beginning of words and following nasals. Elsewhere the voiceless symbols (p, k, t, th and tj) are used. Note that the consonant cluster /n+g/ can occur (for example in the clan name Wangurri). Hence the need for the symbol /ŋ/ to distinguish the velar nasal from this consonant cluster.

**Liquids and semivowels**

The YM languages have two rhotics (‘r’ sounds), two laterals and two semi-vowels, /w/ and /y/. The laterals and rhotics are written as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>dorso-apico- lamino- lamino-</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>bilabial velar alveolar retroflex dental alveolar</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>stops</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>nasals</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
alveolar retroflex

laterals l̅ l̅

rhotics r rr

/rr/ is a trill, and /r/ is a continuant. For further details on the phonetics and phonology of YM see F. Morphy (1983: 12-25).

(Morphy, F. 1983)
Figure 1: The Yolŋu region (Morphy, F. 2008a)
## Table of Contents

Abstract .......................................................................................................................... ii  
Acknowledgements ........................................................................................................ iv  
A note on Yolŋu-matha orthography ............................................................................. vi  

**Chapter One: Introduction** ......................................................................................... 1  
Case study A ..................................................................................................................... 2  
Case study B ..................................................................................................................... 4  
My theoretical influences ............................................................................................... 8  
  *What is knowledge?* ....................................................................................................... 9  
  *The role of affect of emotion* ........................................................................................ 9  
  *From goals to values* .................................................................................................... 11  
Culture and the Intercultural ......................................................................................... 13  
Overview of the relevant Literature ............................................................................... 14  
  Intercultural relations in Australia ............................................................................. 14  
  Resistance and Aboriginality in intercultural relations ............................................ 16  
  Fred Myers' model of Pintupi sociality ....................................................................... 19  
  Nicolas Peterson's 'domestic moral economy' (2003) and 'demand-sharing' (1993) .... 20  
  Kenneth Liberman's unique description of Indigenous Sociality (1985) .................... 23  
  Basil Sansom's 'interactionist' approach to Indigenous sociality ................................. 25  
  Key themes that run through the Yolŋu literature ...................................................... 26  
The unique history of north east Arnhem Land ............................................................ 31  
The local history and context of Maŋaŋa (my field-site) ............................................ 35  
  *Mission Time* ............................................................................................................. 38  
  *The time when the Government came and 'took everything over' through until 'Government Time' proper (c. 1970 - 1980)* .................................................. 40  
Methodology .................................................................................................................. 45  
Structure of the thesis to follow ..................................................................................... 50  

**Chapter Two: Personhood, relatedness and social organisation** .............................. 52  
Selective overview of the literature on Yolŋu social organisation, introducing relevant key concepts ........................................................................................................................................... 54  
Series of diagrams and associated exegesis ................................................................ 60  
The first drawing: The collective body of the *bäpurru* .................................................. 62  
  *Description* ................................................................................................................ 63  
  *Discussion* .................................................................................................................. 65  
The second drawing: Regional relations between *bäpurru*, and *bäpurru* and place (or the self and others, and the self and place). ................................................................. 69  
  *Description* ................................................................................................................ 71  
  *Discussion* .................................................................................................................. 72  
The third drawing: The social body of the self (as a moral and political actor) .......... 76  
Situation these patterns topographically: The affective, moral and directive force of *rom* ................................................................................................................................. 84  
  Revisiting key social-organisation concepts in terms of shared understandings about the self and its relation to others. ........................................................................ 88  
Conclusion ...................................................................................................................... 91  

**Chapter Three: Key terms and concepts associated with emotion and morality** ...... 96  
Overview of the relevant literature ............................................................................... 96  
Basic concepts associated with emotion or affect ...................................................... 98  
  *Nyanyu* ....................................................................................................................... 98  
  *Dhākay* ....................................................................................................................... 103
Chapter 6: Culturally recognised forms of material exchange ................................................. 199
Overview of the relevant literature 199
Indigenous domestic moral economy .......................................................... 199
Demand Sharing .................................................................................. 201
Problems of articulation and stress ....................................................... 202
Key local terms associated with giving, taking and exchange 204
Gurrupan, wekama and marrama .......................................................... 204
bala-räli-yun[-mirri] ........................................................................... 205
ŋanydjalar-yun .................................................................................. 205
Buku-bak-thun-maronha-mirri .............................................................. 206
ŋäŋ’thun .............................................................................................. 207
Case Study A: The place and flow of material goods among close kin in camp 208
Discussion ......................................................................................... 210
Material exchange between neighbouring communities: realising difference as a value 213
Discussion ......................................................................................... 213
Case Study B: The articulation of ganydjarr (strength, power, speed) in material exchange 216
Discussion ......................................................................................... 219
Ganydjarr (power, strength) ................................................................ 219
Case Study C: The role and use of bankcards and telephones 223
Telephones .......................................................................................... 223
Bankcards and bank accounts .............................................................. 224
Case Study D: Batumbil’s entrepreneurial girri’ (personal effects or belongings, ‘things’)
business .............................................................................................. 227
Discussion ......................................................................................... 228
Conclusion ............................................................................................ 230

Chapter 7: Towards a local Indigenous theory and model of exchange. ................. 234
Sahlins’ continuum of forms .............................................................. 235
Placing empirical instances from Yolnu case ........................................ 242
Overlaying Yolngu terms and concepts ................................................ 248
Differences between these two schemes .............................................. 250
Conclusion ............................................................................................ 254

Chapter 8: Towards a local theory of value ..................................................... 258
Knowledge of the self, others and the relationship between them. 258
Affect, emotion and morality ................................................................ 260
Sociality and sociability ....................................................................... 261
Responsibility and accountability ......................................................... 262
Things ‘in between’: Money and material goods 263
The local theory of exchange .............................................................. 265
Towards a local theory of value ............................................................ 267
Countering moral misrecognition ......................................................... 269
Bibliography ........................................................................................ 272

Appendix 1: Mobility Data ........................................................................ 286
Appendix 2: Glossary of terms ............................................................... 290
Appendix 3: Genealogies ........................................................................ 305
Chapter One: Introduction

...
List of Figures

Figure 1: The Yolnu region (Morphy, F. 2008a) ix
Figure 2: The Yolngu Homelands, north east Arnhem Land 35
Figure 3: The first drawing 62
Figure 4: Second Drawing 70
Figure 5: The third drawing 76
Figure 6: Diagrammatic representation of previous figure 79
Figure 7: Betowal relations (adapted from Morphy 1991) 80
Figure 8: Topographically locating kin and bestowal relations 85
Figure 9: Movements for 12 month period to/from MataMata 87
Figure 10: Local template of emotion/morality 107
Figure 11: Balance between Self and Other 111
Figure 12: Sahlin's scheme of reciprocities 238
Figure 13: Generalised reciprocity (Sahlins 1972, p. 193) 239
Figure 14: Negative reciprocity (Sahlins 1972, p. 195) 240
Figure 15: The Yolngu template of emotion/morality as exchange/value 249
Figure 16: The relationship between transactors in Sahlin's scheme 252
Figure 17: Dyadic exchange: The relationship between transactors in the Yolngu case 252
Figure 18: Balance in dyadic exchange 253
Figure 19: Annual daily movements per month 286
Figure 20: Vehicles and mobility 287
Figure 21: Gender and mobility 288
Figure 22: Age groups and mobility 289
Figure 23: Genealogy Sheet 1 305
Figure 24: Genealogy Sheet 2 306
Figure 25: Genealogy Sheet 3 307
Figure 26: Genealogy Sheet 4 308
Figure 27: Genealogy Sheet 5 309
Chapter One: Introduction

I begin with two case studies illustrating the potential for what I refer to throughout the thesis as 'moral misrecognition' in intercultural relations. I have chosen to begin this way because the subject and focus of the thesis is, in many ways, a response to my experience and observations of this phenomenon; the content of the thesis is in many ways an account of my own gradual 'coming to terms' with, and eventual understanding of 'what is going on' in instances of misrecognition in intercultural exchange.

The idea or concept of moral misrecognition is very loosely based on Lacan’s notion of méconnaissance (1949). I use it in an intercultural or cross-cultural sense, however, to refer to situations in which the Self observes or experiences an exchange or interaction with or between a cultural Other or Others and – failing to recognise or understand the existence of cultural difference – interprets and evaluates their actions 'as if' they were the Self. This is a common experience for Yolŋu people and a phenomenon they are acutely aware of for this reason. People or situations of this kind are referred to as being dharajan-miriw (lit. lacking or without recognising/understanding [something or someone]).

The most significant thing about the material in, and findings of this thesis, in my mind, is their potential to promote a better understanding of the Yolŋu side of intercultural relations and in this way encourage recognition and understanding of cultural difference – to work against that which leads to moral misrecognition in the first place. In short, I hope to impart some of what I learned (or was taught with much patience) about the potential value of cultural difference. Difference may be realised as a value as
it forms the basis for ongoing relationships characterised by interdependence and reciprocity. Valued difference affords an opportunity to ‘carry and hold’ one another (gāma, ṅayathanha-mirri), to ‘help and assist one other’ (gūŋga'yuna-mirri), to ‘care for and look after one another’ (djāka-mirri) – all of which are important aspects of what it is and means to be gurrutu-mirri (to have kin, to have the quality of kinship for one another).

Case study A

It was the beginning of the wet season when social spacing becomes oppressive and mobility a luxury. The stalwarts of camp, luku-man'ka-mirri yolŋu (people whose feet possess the quality of the clay), which was about ten of us, had been sitting around expectantly from morning 'till night for ten consecutive days waiting for the mechanics from the local government service provision agency to fly in. The mechanics were expected to fix one of the three cars in camp.

Having a functional car in the wet season affords an invaluable expansion of social space and a degree of food security at a time of the year when both are scarce. They had also agreed to fix the ride-on lawnmower, which would have drastically reduced the time and energy we were spending cutting the grass around camp in order to keep the snakes and mosquitoes at bay. In short, their visit was expected to dramatically increase our quality of life at a time of the year when it’s at its lowest.

Each day of waiting family had called the office a number of times, but for whatever reason there was a general misunderstanding. We sat expectantly and no plane arrived.
On the tenth day *wāwa* (B)¹ Don Dhakaliny said he was going to *rakuny-thirri* (become dead, die) if he rang again, and asked me to call instead.

I got through to the head mechanic who explained that they were still waiting for a part for our car, and even then, wouldn’t come until they could double up the flight with the some other workers to avoid costs. He explained that they’d probably make it out in the next few days on the builders’ plane, that the builders were intending fly out to fix the diesel-generator shed, which had been damaged in a storm.

I thanked him, buoyed by the prospect of mobility, and relayed the story to family outside. However, my excited relief was short lived. *Yapa* (Z) Phyllis Batumbil reacted angrily, insisting she had told the builders not to come.

‘I told them to stay there and do whatever their work, bits and pieces. They were supposed to fix the diesel shed LAST year! Because they made us wait, so this one [the diesel shed] can just sit here now until June or September!’

I was baffled. ‘But if you stop the builders then the mechanics can’t come and fix the cars and the lawnmower . . . ’

Silence. Not only had we been waiting for the cars and lawnmower, but family had been complaining about the need to have the shed fixed for months. They’d even had me to take photos of the damaged shed to send the office in order to press the urgency of the matter, with the wet already upon us. However, when office administration rang the following day to organise the logistics of the builders’ and mechanics’ visit they were told in no uncertain terms not to come, ‘because the builders were supposed to have done it last year.’

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¹ I will explain the use of kin-terms at a later stage.
After the call, crestfallen, I joined the rest of family, who, in contrast seemed rather excitable. They posited what they would say and do if the builders attempted to fly out, making general insults and complaints about them, about Balanda (European/s, white person/people) at the Service Provider, and about the Service Provider in general. They speculated as to whether they’d heard the builders in the background during the call, and felt they had reason to suspect they might try and ‘sneak in.’ The more they talked about it, the more their sense of defiance increased, until Batumbil posited that we *dhal-'yurra* (close [up], block [off]) the airstrip, in case they did try to ‘sneak in.’ It was a perfect idea, a strong one – and within half an hour there was a lawnmower, children’s toys and a number of other stray objects right in the middle of the airstrip.

All the while I sat, frustrated, wondering what the hell type of strategy this was, and why they thought it might give them the upper hand, and how it was supposed to get the car fixed.

Case study B

The Service Provision Agency has a policy that Homeland residents pay $30 for each seat on returning service planes. Privately chartered planes, in contrast, cost $375 one-way and seat five people. This has been a longstanding policy and one with which family throughout the Homeland network are more than familiar. However, because there are almost always spare seats and almost never cash in camp, it’s inevitable that someone in camp will have their feelings affronted. Often times the workers don’t outright refuse people but simply name the cost, and this is enough for family turn away in a ‘state of shame[ing].’ On other occasions workers pre-empt requests to hitch a ride with explicit, public reiterations of the need for money up front. Whichever form it takes the exchange plays out the same in the sense that, when the Service workers remind family of the cost or the policy, family feel hurt, rejected, (a)shamed and angry. Privately, family express
their outrage, shame or frustration in terms very similar to the following transcription from a discussion about this these exchanges,

_Dayañu wutthuna-mirri walala dhàwu wekama ñanaparruy-gu._

(That story affronts/assaults our feelings.)

_Yaka ñayi ñunhi rom yukurra ñorra tronga 'yunara-mirri_

(that law or manner of doing things is not helpful or assisting)

_ñayaju yolù-wu. Dayañu wutthun ñanapurru-nha._

(for the state or sense of feeling for Yolñu people.)

_Gumurr däl ñayi ñunhi rom!_

(That law/manner of doing things is hard chested/difficult!)

_Walala ñäpaki balanya bitjan_ leaves blowing around!

(Those white people are just like leaves blowing around!)

Ideas and expectations about sociality and sociability entail evaluative, moral understandings about the nature of Self and the relationship between the Self and Others. These shared understandings are largely tacit or taken for granted (and largely a product or result of child socialisation), however, there is now a large body of literature detailing considerable cross-cultural variation on these themes. Foreshadowing the themes that run through this thesis, Markus and Kitayama write on the topic thus:

The shape of the self (i.e., its various meanings and practices) will . . . determine the nature of ‘good’ feelings and of the social behavior that will promote and foster these good feelings. This means that what is experienced as joyful or happy or as sad or angering depends on the mediating self. Aside from the good affective reactions that accompany sweet tastes or smells, or the bad affective reactions that result from extremely loud sounds, bright lights, or hissing snakes, most ‘good’ or ‘bad’ feelings
depend on extensive emotional socialisation. Through this process, people come to ‘have’ feelings of the shape and variety that reflect the specific value commitments of their significant social groups. Basic to this argument is the idea that being moral (i.e., proper, right, or appropriate) according to one’s group, feeling good, and being a person are all intimately connected. (1994, p. 93)

My experience with Yolŋu people suggests that when the actions and interactions of one cultural group are cast exclusively in the terms of another (as often happens in intercultural relations), the significance and value underlying or motivating these social actions or social forms is not only lost or effaced but often misunderstood or misrecognised in an evaluative, moral sense. Non-recognition, in such cases, begets misrecognition. The resulting interpretation may be positive or negative. In the case of the latter, such misunderstandings or instances of misrecognition may be cast as moral judgements in evaluative terms of deviance or disorder.

A marked asymmetry of power relations, such as sometimes occurs between cultural minority groups and the State, make certain people particularly ‘visible’ or vulnerable to ‘reparatory’ or disciplinary measures. These range from the disciplinary gaze of negative cultural or racial stereotypes, to ‘targeted’ forms of governance enacted or imposed by the State. The over-representation of Indigenous Australians in the legal system and in jails can be seen as an unfortunate outcome or exemplar of this phenomenon. As a corrective of sorts this thesis seeks to build upon the work of Frances Morphy (e.g. 2008) and that of Yolŋu people themselves, to ‘make visible’ the underlying socio-moral system in North East Arnhem Land, to present something of the local Yolŋu experience of intercultural relations – morality and value in social relations.'
These distinctions between ‘sociality and exchange,’ ‘morality and value,’ ‘evaluation and valuation,’ and ‘morality and law’ are not culturally significant in the Yolŋu case. Yolŋu are more than aware that the distinction between sociality and exchange exists, and that this distinction is of utmost importance to Balanda (white people, Europeans) and the way they consider issues of morality and value. It is also true that most Homeland Yolŋu partake in ‘impersonal’ forms of exchange whenever they travel to the nearby township to do shopping etc. It is simply the case, however, that most Yolŋu do not embrace this distinction, nor do they consider it ‘natural,’ inevitable, and/or desirable. Indeed, there is rich vocabulary (in Yolŋu-matha) to describe (and deploy in commentary about) the ‘typical’ Balanda approach to sociality as marked by this distinction. Drawing on Yolŋu interpretations of Balanda sociality, I suspect that these distinctions are cultural elaborations on a more basic Balanda conceptual theme – that which divides the world into two categories or ‘kinds’ of persons and social relations – those that are ‘personal’ and those that are considered to be ‘impersonal.’ The Yolŋu case reminds us that this bifurcation of the socio-moral world is a cultural phenomenon that is neither ‘natural’ nor universal.

While it is acknowledged in much of the anthropological literature that exchange relations are first and foremost social relations I have found that it is all too easy to lapse back into interpretations derived from (or based on) a categorical distinction between the two. In order to avoid this, I have found it useful (for myself as much as the reader) to recast the adage ‘exchange relations are social relations,’ in reverse – I will consider and refer to instances and forms of sociality as instances and forms of exchange. Sociality and exchange and morality and value are thus reduced to their most basic – the nature and state of the relationship between the one’s self and others.
I use exchange in the broadest sense of the term to refer to social exchange in all its modes and mediations – including both interaction and interlocution and exchanges that do and do not involve the transfer of material goods. Generally speaking I use ‘interpersonal exchange’ to refer to more immediate forms of interaction between people in the same place and time. I use ‘social exchange’ in a broader sense to refer to exchanges between any number of persons, including those between collectivities and groups. Social exchange may also take place between persons removed in space from one another.

**My theoretical influences**

More than any other, cultural schema theory is that with which I ‘think through’ my approach to and analysis of ethnography. I am aware that cultural schema theory often appears to be more biological science than anthropology and the methods more ‘laboratory’ style discourse analysis than participant observation. I suspect these two factors deter many anthropologists (not least because they seem to trigger traumatic memories of social evolution and biological determinism from our discipline’s childhood). However, as Strauss and Quinn make clear, cultural schema theory was never intended to be a ‘whole,’ nor an ‘exclusive’ anthropological approach.

Cultural schema theory affords anthropologists and ‘Anthropology’ an understanding of how, as human beings, we learn about the world around us in ways that shape who we know and feel ourselves to be – on an individual and collective (i.e. cultural) level, and how and why these understandings motivate people to act in particular ways. That is, it accounts for the explanatory gap evident when we try to understand why some people put so much effort into doing some things and not others. When used alongside other anthropological approaches and methods cultural schema theory thus affords a
genuinely humanist or ‘humanistic’ approach, in that we are all human beings who learn about the world in ways that shape who we know and feel ourselves to be – on an individual and collective level. This motivates us to do what we do, and to pursue the life we know and feel to be right and desirable for ‘people like us.’

I use cultural schema theory to draw together cultural understandings, value and action with an account of how and why cultural understandings motivate or instigate action – imbued as they are with affective, motivational and directive force. ‘Feeling,’ ‘affect’ or ‘emotion’ is in large part the ‘how and why’ of motivation.

What is knowledge?

Based on neurobiological models of the way the brain works, schema theory presents any form of knowledge – whether about the self, other, inanimate object or abstract thought – as patterns of neural connection, formed via associative learning, which when activated represent experience in the mind (Burbank 2011). To say that something is a schema ‘is to say that a distinct and strongly interconnected pattern of interpretive elements can be activated by minimal inputs’ (D’Andrade 1992, p. 29). A schema is, in this sense, a process not an object; it is a set of interconnected units which are, in turn, connected to other such interacting sets ‘in a seamless but far-flung web’ (Strauss and Quinn 1994, p. 287). On account of the associative process and neurological metaphor it is sometimes referred to as ‘connectionism’ (Strauss and Quinn 1994, p. 286).

The role of affect of emotion

From what is known about how the brain works we learn more than associations between observable features of the world; we also learn associations between these observable features and certain feelings (D’Andrade and Strauss 1992; Strauss and Quinn 1994, 1997). One of the central differences between Bourdieu’s theory of
habitus (1977) and cultural schema theory is that the latter model of internalisation accounts for the role of emotion, ‘feeling’ and motivation in the process of cultural production and reproduction (Strauss and Quinn 1994). Thought and feeling are part of cognitive processes, such that cognitive schemas exist as learned, internalised patterns that mediate both the interpretation of ongoing experience and the reconstruction of memories (Strauss 1992).

In this way, people come to regard certain understandings and behaviours not only as natural, but desirable; schemas may become associated with strong feelings and thus come to function as positive or negative goals. Furthermore, according to what is known about the way the brain works, ‘emotional arousal during experience alters the neurochemical environment in which relations among features of that experience are encoded, rendering the mental representations of those associations stronger than they would have been otherwise’ (Strauss and Quinn 1994, p. 290). Certain associations or understandings become powerful incentives and disincentives to seek out and, or avoid certain social situations, experiences or behaviours. That is, we build up strong links between certain kinds of situations and associated feelings and motivations (Strauss and Quinn 1994, p. 219). When certain associations or understandings become imbued or associated with emotion in this way they have the power to instigate action. One can say a schema has motivational force for an individual in the same way one can speak of a request as having directive force. An appropriate request does more than just describe what somebody wants; it has the pragmatic effect of instigating the other person to action. In a similar manner, a schema can serve as more than a recognition device; its activation can be an instigation to action (D’Andrade 1995, p. 231). Such processes highlight the importance of affect-laden life experiences, and the emotional life of informants. (D’Andrade and Strauss 1992, p. 14)
D'Andrade suggests, as a rough approximation that schemas can be ranked by hierarchical position into three classes. At the top of the interpretive system are schemas which function as a person's most general goals, called 'master motives.' They include things like 'love' and 'security' and 'play,' which instigate action relatively autonomously. In the middle range of the hierarchy are schemas for things like 'marriage,' 'my job,' etc. These contain whole clusters of powerful goals, but are not fully autonomous in the sense that one's marriage, or one's job are means to more ultimate goals like love and providing for oneself. At the bottom of the hierarchy are schemas for things like 'writing memos,' 'going to the bank,' 'finding a birthday present' etc. These schemas are entirely dependent on higher level schemas for their motivational force; one goes to the bank not for the sake of just going to the bank, but 'because it is part of some larger schema or plan perhaps relating to the purchases and savings, which in turn may be part of a larger schema having to do with providing for oneself' (D'Andrade 1995). Given the normal external conditions of human life, and the normal experience of living in a human body, D'Andrade argues, one can assume that certain things are likely to be universal goals, such as being healthy, having some protection from the attacks of others, maintaining relationships, etc. However, the specifics of life in particular societies and cultures brings about differentiation into specific goals; to earn money, to take a head, to accumulate yams, etc. Instead of seeing every action as the outcome of a limited number of universal motives, action is seen as the outcome of a hierarchical network of goal-schemas (D'Andrade 1995, p. 233).

Spiro (1987) has a similar approach, distinguishing four different levels of internalisation. At the first and lower level, an individual is acquainted with some part of the cultural system of representations without assenting to its descriptive or
normative claims. They may thus be indifferent to, or even reject these claims. At the second level are cultural representations acquired at the level of something like a cliché – the individual may honour the descriptive or normative claim more in the breach than in the observance. At the third level, individuals hold their beliefs to be true, correct and right. At this level, cultural representations or cultural understandings inform and structure behavior and action. At this level, according to Spiro, cultural representations can be said to be internalised. At the final level, the system of cultural understandings or representations are not only internalised but highly salient. The cultural system not only guides but instigates action, and the cultural understandings are invested with emotion and thus imbued with emotional and motivational force.

From among the many individual and shared understandings that may be imbued with affect or emotional force, there are some that may be identified and observed to function as ‘goals’ – they have ‘goal functions’ (D’Andrade 1995). This is a model of motives as schemas within a hierarchy. The central feature of or key to my theoretical approach in this study is that I consider these ‘goals’ as ‘values.’ From this perspective the aforementioned ‘model of motives as schemas within a hierarchy’ may be seen to parallel Dumont’s hierarchical model of value (1979, 1980, 1982) in strikingly similar ways.

From this perspective emotion is the key link between evaluative understandings, motivation and action – and the experience or feeling of realising value; from this perspective a ‘balance’ in the value of exchange is experience as an unmarked sense of balance in interpersonal exchange and social relations. Positive value is realised or experienced along the dimension of positive and more or less intense experiences or feelings. Negative value or the negation of value is realised or experienced along the
dimension of negative/unpleasant experiences or feelings of varying degrees of intensity.

Culture and the Intercultural

The way much of human social life is organised ensures that people in the same social environment will experience many of the same typical patterns (Strauss and Quinn 1994). Such symbolic regularity, which is necessary for sociality, is created as people internalise shared associative understandings that reflect such patterning (Strauss and Quinn 1994). This ‘sharedness,’ according to cultural schema theory, is what ethnographers describe as culture. ‘Culture,’ that is, exists as shared schemas or understandings learned or developed through common experience. Rather than focusing on ‘culture’ per se I focus on ‘cultural understandings’ as they have come to be shared. The degree of ‘sharing,’ in this approach, determines the degree to which one may wish to describe them as ‘cultural’ (Strauss and Quinn 1994, 1997).

I infer from a cognitive anthropological approach that individual and shared understandings of the self and others are meaningful and motivating concepts at the heart of intercultural relations. The intercultural exists or arises, I suggest, in contexts in which two or more collectivities or groups of people share the same ‘social fields’ and yet have and retain somewhat different or variously contrasting understandings of the ‘self’ — who they know and feel themselves to be, what kind of life they know and feel to be normal, right and desirable for people like them. Individual and shared self-understandings – the type of person we feel ourselves to be, and the associative understandings of what we know to be ‘normal, right and desirable for people like us’ – while relational, polyvalent and subject to change, comprise the most durable and motivating schemas we learn (Burbank 2011; Quinn 2003). This ‘knowledge of the
self" moreover, is not ‘just another’ differentially distributed schema, but forms one of
the most durable and motivating understandings an individual attains (Burbank 2011;
Quinn 2003).

Overview of the relevant Literature

In the following overview I will cover relevant literature and anthropological
approaches to the study of intercultural relations in Australia (between Aboriginal and
non-Aboriginal people and communities), Aboriginal sociality and exchange relations,
as well as relevant literature focused on Yolŋu people and Yolŋu communities more
specifically.

Intercultural relations in Australia

The history of writing about intercultural relations in Australia can be generally divided
into early ‘domain’ approaches, and later approaches, which focus on ‘engagement’ on
the one hand and ‘intersubjectivity’ on the other.

Before the 1960s, approaches to intercultural relations in Australia were largely
articulated through administrative colonial policies in which Aboriginal culture was
seen as reified, anachronistic, and Aboriginal people as part of a ‘dying race’ (Hinkson
and Smith 2005). Anthropologists of the 1970s, such as Tonkinson (1978), Kolig
(1978), and Maddock (1977) sought to displace such assumptions by reflecting more on
the experience and impact of government policy and institutionalisation of Aboriginal
people; but while these studies moved well away from social evolutionist approaches
they continued to treat Aboriginal and European ‘life-worlds’ as separable discrete
entities, and ‘culture’ remained reified as something to be either maintained or lost
(Hinkson & Smith 2005).
As the socio-spatial worlds of Aboriginal people and wider society continued to converge, and Aboriginal people defied predictions of population decline, ethnographers dealt variously with ways to conceptualise the engagement in cultural terms, adopting an overarching paradigm of continuity and change. This period saw ethnographies of urban (Gale 1972) and ‘fringe’ areas (Collmann 1988), exploring Aboriginal engagement with wider society and its various institutions (Woenne 1977).

It was toward the end of this period in the early 1990s, with the publication of Trigger’s ethnography in the Gulf of Carpentaria, that the trope of the ‘domain’ gained currency. Borrowed from Fortes and used in conjunction with Weber’s notion of ‘social closure,’ the ‘domain’ was invoked to describe practices that effect separable life-worlds of belief and practice (Trigger 1992). While acknowledging the complex interplay between ‘two distinct areas of physical, intellectual and social activity’ and engaging variously with concepts of ‘strategy’ and ‘agency,’ authors of this time continued to do so under the spectre of ‘adaptation’ and ‘change,’ and still did not explicitly problematise the notion that a distinct ‘Aboriginal culture’ existed in isolation from wider settler society. As such it continued to be regarded as something to be maintained or lost (Hinkson and Smith 2005). It was not until the late eighties that a cleavage appeared in the lineage of intercultural ethnography that gave rise to two new, different approaches, which remain somewhat unreconciled in the current literature – the ‘intercultural’ and that which foregrounds concepts and issues of culture, power and resistance.

With the publication of Merlan’s Caging the Rainbow (1998), an ethnography of ‘place’ in the town of Katherine, intercultural studies shifted away from the paradigm of ‘domains’ toward an ‘intersubjective’ approach grounded in insights from post-structural linguistic theory. Merlan introduced a focus on means and modes of
engagement with attention to the polyvalent and contextual construction of meaning in dialogue. Merlan argued that 'tradition' and identity had to be seen as social processes constituted in the ongoing interrelations between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people (1998, p. 4). In this way the locus of study shifted from a pre-conceived socio-cultural positioning of 'Aboriginal' and non-Aboriginal to the everyday experiences of interaction between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal town residents. Town residents not only inhabited the same socio-spatial world in Merlan’s ethnography, they were mutually constituted in the course of interaction or, at the least, variously aware of ‘virtual possibilities’ of forms of action and divergent meaning that the ‘other’ represented (2005). Approaches to the ‘intercultural’ shifted from the domain paradigm to one which sought to account for and describe the co-occupation of ‘social-fields’ (a concept taken from Bourdieu 1977).

This intersubjective approach gave rise to the contemporary body of literature which has followed in a similar vein, even the most recent papers employing Merlan’s work as a ‘key reference and something of a springboard’ as they consciously write against ‘anti-dualistic’ approaches to intercultural relations (Hinkson and Smith 2005, Austin-Broos 1996; Austin-Broos 2003, Sullivan 2005, Holcombe 2005, Batty 2003). This body of literature can be seen to consciously write against ‘dualistic accounts’ of the intercultural – against accounts that posit ‘separability’ and ‘boundedness’ in the intercultural; the authors seek to describe a view of the intercultural from both sides of the ‘inter,’ conceptualised within a ‘shared social field.’

Resistance and Aboriginality in intercultural relations

This second body of literature on intercultural relations emerged in light of the new fields of ‘resistance’ or ‘subaltern’ studies in the 1980s. As with the aforementioned
body of literature, it presented both ‘culture’ and ‘identity’ as constructed and discursive, but introduced a new, pointed focus on power. Gillian Cowlishaw’s *The Materials for Identity Construction* (1988), and Barry Morris’ publication of the following year, *Domesticating resistance: The Dhan Gadi Aboriginals and the Australian State* (1989), presented a post-marxist Gramscian view of culture-as-hegemony to explore forms of cultural resistance, and cultural domination as the primary focus of inquiry.

This work, and others to follow in a similar vein (Cowlishaw 1993; 1999; 2004; Lattas 1993; Morris 1990), argue the importance and centrality of ‘race’ as a cultural and analytical category. They explore forms of ‘agency derived from injury’ and ‘everyday forms of resistance’ that empower Aboriginal people, and serve as a vehicle to interrupt and mock the people and institutions that judge them. Drawing on theories derived from post-colonial and gender studies, these works focus on forms of disrespect and defiance as ‘radical opposition,’ thus so representing the poetics, dynamics and dialectics of interracial interactions in ‘settler’ Australia. However, by identifying as ‘resistant’ those Aboriginal practices and beliefs that were contra to the wider society (and not consciously regarded as ‘resistant’ by Aboriginal people themselves) (Cowlishaw 1988), these analyses have drawn much criticism for setting up a dichotomy according to which Aboriginal people whose beliefs and practices were not resistant – that is, whose practices and beliefs reflected the norms of the wider society were logically set up as ‘accommodatory’ and/or somehow ‘less Aboriginal’ (see for example Morton 1989; Rowse 1993).

More recently, such work has moved away from notions of ‘accommodation’ and ‘resistance,’ to the concept of ‘oppositional culture,’ which is similar in many ways to Clastres’ ‘counter power’ (Clastres 1987). However, this work continues to
conceptualise Aboriginality as oppositional, thus delimiting the dispositions and representations available to Aboriginal subjects,' and in the opinion of many, over-emphasising difference and separateness in intercultural relations (Hinkson and Smith 2005). So while the 'intercultural' body of literature emphasises relatedness as a reaction against domains and remains suspicious of accounts that posit separability and boundedness in the intercultural, this body of work describes the intercultural as marked by black and white 'race relations,' by power, difference and opposition.

While not intercultural ethnography as such, a closely related body of literature is that concerned with the politics of representation and the construction of 'Aboriginality,' which arose in the post 1960s political climate, when constructions of 'Aboriginality' were not only being made public but highly politicised through events such as Gurindji Walk Off and the Gove Land Rights case and later with the Tent Embassy and associated protests and the Land Rights movement. Represented most notably by Beckett (1988), Lattas (1992a; 1992b; 1993) and more recently by Myers and Ginsberg (2006), this work examines the ways in which European and Aboriginal people have attempted to construct and represent 'Aboriginality' in ways that capture Aboriginal people between the 'attribution of unchanging essences' (with the implication of an inability to change and adapt), and the 'reproach of inauthenticity' – what Myers (2006) refers to as 'the loss' – between aspects of identity reliant on the past and the present; as well as a 'loss' of identification between urban and remote Aboriginal people. This bi-directional identity construction is articulated in Beckett's adoption of what Sally Weaver calls 'public and private ethnicities,' the former being that as perceived by Aboriginal people themselves, the latter, that constructed in their absence in the public domain and most predominantly in the media (Beckett 1988). Notably, Friedman (1999) has cast such discussions in the context of Indigenous ethnogenesis arising in
the process of globalisation. This work has also been criticised for ‘essentialising Aboriginality’ (for example Morton 1989).

Fred Myers' model of Pintupi sociality

Fred Myers’ general model of sociality, originally developed in the context of Western Desert social forms, has been applied in many and various non-Western Desert contexts. This model pivots around what he identifies as three patterns of social action entailing values of autonomy and relatedness. What follows is not representative of Myers’ ethnography (which would require a great deal more depth and discussion) but the model or typology of sociality that Myers drew from his material, which has been adopted and applied as a general model or typology of Indigenous sociality in other regions of Australia (e.g. Martin 1993; Peterson 1993; Peterson and Taylor 2003).

Despite change and transformation over time, the ‘inner logic of Pintupi sociality persists,’ Myers writes, the underpinnings of which are based on three related patterns. The first pattern is an emphasis on ‘relatedness,’ on extending one’s ties with others outward, on being open to claims by others, on showing sympathy and a willingness to negotiate. This pattern, he writes, ‘involves a difficulty of sustaining an authoritative centre that excludes others from consideration’ (1986, p. 22). The second pattern is ‘a reluctance to permit others to impose their authority over oneself, an unwillingness to accept constraints on one’s autonomy’ (1986, p. 22). These two patterns are countered, or resolved, by a third – the cultural representation of hierarchy as nurturance or ‘looking after’ (1986, p. 22). The third pattern, Myers explains, ‘plays an essential role in placing certain principles beyond individual consideration, in constituting a transcendental realm of value’ (1991, pp. 22-23).
In every case the original three patterns are evident: there is a tension between the values of autonomy and relatedness, which is resolved by 'projecting' autonomy (the origin or basis for autonomy) outside the individual (often or usually onto The Dreaming). These salient characteristics of sociality, Myers argues, create a form of sociality in which dominance must appear muted (1986, p. 23). And the work required to do that makes it necessary to emphasise the individual and the self, placing a high value on individual autonomy (Myers 1991, p. 23). This general formulation is elaborated throughout the text, as in the following passage:

This is a social world dominated by the pressure of relatives, dominated by 'immediacy.' The cultural forms of 'compassion' and 'shame' constrain the ways in which Pintupi social action is organised. People protect their autonomy by hiding or removing it from sight, while in more basic ways it is 'hidden' by being sanctified as given. Pintupi structuring of the subject assumes a projection of the basis of autonomy outside the individual. This lends a particular form to social action that necessitates attributing its origins to something outside the actors, usually posited in The Dreaming. (1991, p. 125)

Nicolas Peterson's 'domestic moral economy' (2003) and 'demand-sharing' (1993)

There are two broad themes that unite the historical body of literature looking at Indigenous sociality and exchange (Keen 2010). Firstly, there is broad recognition that both sociality and exchange relations are primarily informed and organised by kinship relations and the underlying 'kin-based system of relationships' with its attendant obligations and responsibilities (Keen 2010). The second theme is that of reciprocity and demand sharing, as a defining feature of both kinship relations and the mode or form of exchange (Keen 2010). Peterson’s notion of demand-sharing (1993) and his model of the ‘Indigenous domestic moral economy’ (Peterson and Taylor 2003) have
proved hugely influential in drawing these themes together and characterising the nature of Aboriginal sociality as articulated through them.

Before moving on to a discussion of the ‘moral domestic economy,’ it is useful to note the relationship between Myers’ ‘autonomy and relatedness’ model and Peterson’s notion of demand sharing. Demand sharing, Peterson writes, ‘reflects the underlying tension Myers has identified between autonomy and relatedness that runs throughout Aboriginal life’ (1993, p. 95). On the one hand, there is a socially created scarcity arising from the preparedness to recognise a widespread range of kinship ties that brings with it many demands, often more than can easily be met. On the other hand, the stresses of having too many social relationships to negotiate leads people to try to reduce demands by retreating into smaller groups, being passive in sharing and keeping production to a minimum (Peterson 1993).

The concept of moral economy has been used in a variety of ways, but generally to focus on beliefs and values underlying economic behaviour and relations. Scott (1976, p. vii, cited in Peterson and Taylor 2003, p.105) used the expression to refer to the moral content of the subsistence ethic, ‘the problem of exploitation and rebellion is . . . not just a problem of calories and income but is a question of peasant conceptions of social justice, of rights and obligations, of reciprocity.’

In Thompson’s (1971) use of the concept, the moral economy involves a set of beliefs and understandings that assign economic roles to classes and that endorse aspects of customary relations and practices across these class relationships. Others have used it to point to the allocation of resources for the reproduction of social relationships, but at the cost of the maximisation of profit and obvious immediate personal benefit (Cheal 1989).
Peterson picks out two aspects of the moral economy model in the context of encapsulated fourth-world peoples (Peterson and Taylor 2003). The first relates to the allocation of resources in the reproduction of social relations internal to the Indigenous social order. The second relates to ideas about relations with the encapsulating society. At least initially, relations typical of the domestic moral economy are likely to be the basis for relationships with outsiders. Peterson takes four elements to be important to the place of kinship and sharing in the domestic moral economy of Indigenous Australia: an ethic of generosity informed by a social pragmatics of demand sharing; a universal system of kin relations that requires a flow of goods and services to reproduce them; the constitution of personhood through relatedness, but valuing egalitarian relations and personal autonomy; and an emphasis on politeness and indirectness in interaction, making overt refusal difficult (Peterson 1993). Within this formulation Peterson is drawing together Myers' model of autonomy and relatedness, with his own ‘demand sharing’ in the context of a kin-based social universe.

Peterson’s model of demand sharing, which has gained widespread currency in ethnographies of Indigenous Australia, is based on his observation that much giving and sharing is in response to direct verbal or non-verbal demands. This raises the question, he writes, ‘of why generosity is so often expressed with what might be construed as contradictory meanness: Why do recipients often have to demand generosity?’ (1993, p. 860). There are four key aspects of features of demand sharing that may be identified in this model of sociality and exchange.

First is Peterson’s observation that demand sharing makes good sense in communities where everyone is related through kinship ties, in circumstances where there is often a scarcity of food and resources (1993). Second is his observation that such ‘inertial generosity’ also provides an additional possibility – that demands can be refused.
without offense by hiding, secretive behavior and lying’ (1993, p. 864). Third is Peterson’s observation that the practice is not construed negatively: ‘if moral obligation and commitment to others is construed not in terms of giving freely,’ he writes, ‘but in terms of responding positively to their demands, the morality of demand sharing is as positive as that of generosity’ (1993, p. 870).

Despite Peterson making explicit the fact that the practice should not be construed negatively, Jon Altman observes that demand sharing has been abstracted from context and adopted (and valued negatively) by non-anthropologists. It has become both over-emphasised and highly influential in public debate about Indigenous sociality, governance and a perceived need for change:

Much of the public policy discourse about demand sharing views the practice in highly moralistic negative terms and links it to the rhetoric of failure in Indigenous affairs; it is seen to slow integration into the mainstream individuated economy, to perpetuate poverty and disadvantage, and/or to aid and abet risky behaviours such as drinking and drug taking that results in costly social pathologies such as violence and child abuse. This discourse calls for an elimination of the practice of demand sharing – a fundamental change to culture – so as to empower Aboriginal individuals for advancement and modernity. (Altman 2011, p. 196)

This extrapolation and recasting of the morality of this concept or form of interpersonal exchange, I suggest, is less an issue or reflection of Peterson’s ethnography and description and more a reflection of the broader issue of moral misrecognition in intercultural relations.

Kenneth Liberman’s unique description of Indigenous Sociality (1985)
Together with Basil Sansom's ethnography of fringe-dwellers in Darwin, Kenneth Liberman's study is one of two to look exclusively at the everyday aspects of Indigenous social life. Liberman, a sociologist, began his study with a question about why the 'congenial sociability' of Indigenous social life, which had been mentioned or described in brief by most all ethnographers of Indigenous Australia (he cites Myers 1979, Tonkinson 1978, pp. 120-128, Sansom 1980, Elkin 1938, p. 113, Stanner 1969, p. 47, Meggitt 1962, p. xi, Maddock 1977, p. 187), had never been considered a topic of study in itself.

Liberman's book is divided into three parts, the first of which (with most relevance to this study), is entitled 'The Collaborative Production of Congeniality and Consensus in an Aboriginal Society' (1985, pp. 88). In this part of his study Liberman sets out to delineate 'the local organisational work' that he sees as characteristic of Aboriginal interaction in the Western Desert, arguing that 'congenial fellowship' is a social imperative sustained by a consensus-oriented discourse and action. At gatherings in the Western Desert, Liberman finds, people do not debate or contest ideas or opinions but work to produce a consensus by means of a process of successive elaborations upon impersonally offered 'summary accounts' (1985). Congeniality is maintained by means of a range of lexical and stylistic facilitators, by repetition of the agreed on and obvious, and by the deliberate avoidance of direct personal conflict (1985).

Apart from the feelings of congeniality themselves, Liberman explains, people have a number of practices for preserving harmony in everyday social relations (1985). 'Harmony and congeniality are not achieved exclusively through compassion,' he argues, 'but largely through a body of consistent structures for producing such harmony' (1985, p. 15). The 'structures' (what are effectively cultural expectations about normal and moral behavior) that Liberman identifies are those that are likely to
be familiar to anyone who has spent time in remote Indigenous communities. To offer three examples:

First, 'the centrality of sharing is a dominant aspect of interaction and social life,' Liberman writes, 'at one time well suited to their means of economic livelihood [it is] now, just as importantly, a valued qualitative principle of ordinary social relations' (1985, p. 13). Second is the existence of other forms of interaction that Liberman believes to be directed toward 'the maintenance of good relations, which is the primary concern of all social life' (1985, p. 13). 'The orderliness does not produce itself', he writes, 'but is the collaborative production of the Aboriginal participants' (1985, p. 27). Third, for Aboriginal people, Liberman writes, the production and maintenance of a community of feelings is something serious' (1985, p. 113). To quote him at length:

There exist no formal leaders, and their political life is highly egalitarian. The question of sociological importance which presents itself is how they manage to get along without formal headmen. In an environment where not only is there no headman but individuals are proscribed from advocating their own positions too strongly, decision-making is a very skillful affair . . . . Much of the social activity of an Aboriginal encampment is addressed toward the active production of collective solidarity (1985, p. 15).

Basil Sansom's 'interactionist' approach to Indigenous sociality

Sansom (1980, pp. 132–5) applies the concept of 'service economy' to the internal economy of a Darwin fringe camp, where life is centred on the consumption of alcohol. The owner of a ceremony, of 'trouble' of a problem owns a 'slice of action' and practically offers service to others. Each category of ownership has a capacity to generate and regenerate debt in the exchange economy. Sansom (1988) describes orders of service within which he calls a 'grammar' of services. The premises on which the
economy of the fringe camp are grounded are not those of capitalist economics; rather, they comprise a voluntaristic philosophy of action counter-posed to the Western philosophy of money.

Sansom does, however, retain the language – the terminology and concepts – of the market economy. A person with a ‘surplus,’ for example, is subject to continued demands for ‘help.’ One who helps others thereby makes a long-term ‘investment,’ with a generalised potential to collect a return rather than a specific one, and without going ‘rates.’ The amount in a reclaimed ‘debt’ is a function of the liquidity of the debtor, which depends on circumstances, balanced against the ‘creditor’s’ powers of extraction, which depends in turn on the relationship. People can resist the claims of others by ‘vectoring’ cash allocated to some morally unchallengeable purpose.

Key themes that run through the Yolŋu literature

Yolŋu is the term for (Aboriginal, Indigenous) person in most Yolŋu-matha dialects (Morphy, F. 2008a). It has become the most commonly used term to refer to the Yolŋu-speaking peoples as a whole, but did not originally have that meaning (Morphy, F. 2008a). In the earlier anthropological literature Yolŋu people were notably referred to as Wulamba (Berndt 1951, 1952, 1962), Murngin (Warner 1958), and Miwuyt (Shapiro 1981) (Morphy, F. 2008a). As Morphy notes, ‘the Yolŋu-speaking people of northeast Arnhem Land are one of the most intensively studied Aboriginal societies in Australia’ (2008a, p. 113). The breadth and volume of literature that has been written about Yolŋu people reflects this level of interest over time.

The following overview will cover only a portion of this body of literature; it is in no way exhaustive. I have chosen to focus, rather, on two key themes that run through this body of literature, namely, the importance and centrality of the three tiers comprising
the Yolŋu socio-political world (rom, gurrutu relations, bāpurru, and bāpurru relations) and secondly, the confidence that Yolŋu people have – and have shown over time – in the integrity and value of their cultural difference.

The first of the three tiers comprising the Yolŋu socio-political world is the foundation of rom, which is generally defined as ‘culture, behaviour, law, rule, custom, tradition, habit, way of life or doing things.’ All authors or ethnographies characterise and foreground rom as the foundation of the Yolŋu moral and political order. Keen writes of rom,

[a] performance of a ceremony instantiated rom, which Yolŋu translated into English as ‘law’ or ‘culture’. The food that an animal or other creature customarily ate was its rom, but the latter included explicit rules, as well as the proper way of doing something such as ceremony. I shall translate rom with the expression ‘right practice’ or ‘proper practice.’ (1994, p. 137)

In a contemporary intercultural context Frances Morphy writes of Yolŋu of Blue Mud Bay asserting the sovereignty of rom in the course of a Native Title hearing (2007a). In contrast to the Balanda concept of ‘law,’ she writes, ‘from the Yolŋu point of view, any performance of rom, in whatever context, simultaneously constitutes an enactment of rom, and performance in the context of the court is therefore, among other things an enactment that demonstrates the sovereignty of rom’ (2007a, p. 33).

The second of the three ‘tiers’ is the system of gurrutu (kin, kinship) relations – the Yolŋu system of kinship. All ethnographies foreground and attest to the significance of the Yolŋu kinship system as a basic organisational principle that informs, organises and structures relations in all contexts and at all levels of social life.
W. Lloyd Warner's early ethnography, *A Black Civilization* (1937) while very ‘structural-functionalist’ is still one of the most detailed and informative accounts of the system of *gurrutu* relations. Having studied under A. R. Radcliffe-Brown, Warner also had a keen sense of the relationship between kinship, everyday social relations and broader social structures, as well as the role of kinship in organising and effecting social order (1937). In the first chapter he writes:

A man or a woman’s place in Mumgin [Yolŋu] society is fixed by his or her position in the kinship structure. The totality of his behavior toward all the people in his community and of their behavior in relation to him, with all the concomitant obligations, duties, and privileges, is determined by his being placed exactly in this social structure through the operation of certain mechanisms . . . . The whole of the social organisation is built on the pattern of kinship. The kinship system is the fundamental form into which the rest of the social organization has been integrated. (1937, p. 7)

Warner notes that the whole kinship system is based on ‘fundamental kinship reciprocals, such as brother and sister, father and son, maternal uncle and sister’s son. Every individual term represents a complex nexus of social behavior which creates a well-defined social personality’ (1937, p. 49). This reciprocal social orientation and its associated behavioural norms finds expression on all social levels from relationships between individuals, to that between moieties, sub-sections and other collective social forms. It is this that Warner identifies as the basis for social solidarity (and differentiation) in the ‘Mumgin’ system:

Malinowski, in his *Argonauts of the Western Pacific*, has given a splendid description and explanation of the economic ritual called the *kula*. Reciprocation is the fundamental basis of this ceremonial exchange, which produces a stability and balance in the social relations of the groups and individuals involved. It organises the structure of the group
by the exchange of ceremonial objects. The fundamentals of Murngin kinship also rest on reciprocation, the underlying basis of which, however, is a mutual antagonism between the kinship personalities who form the lateral relationships. This organised antagonism is correlated with a sense of personal integrity or solidarity by each of the social personalities involved. (1937, p. 96)

The third tier is a combination of the previous two – *rom* and *gurrutu* – as they ‘map’ onto geographic space in terms of land tenure and onto socio-ceremonial property rights and relations. At the centre of this socio-spatial topography are *bäpurru* groups – variously described as sibs (Shapiro 1981), clans (e.g. Morphy 1991), patrilineal descent groups (e.g. Williams 1986), patrilifial descent groups (Keen 1994, 2003), and ‘least inclusive patrilifial descent groups’ (Keen 1995, 2000) – which generally own, hold one ‘big name’ Country and its associated ceremonial property and paraphernalia. The reciprocal basis of all relations has it, however, that each has rights in and responsibilities for property of other similarly constituted groups (as will be discussed in Chapter 2).

Frances Morphy details the way that this socio-cultural structuration or topography manifests and is expressed in contemporary Homeland life – not only the location of the settlements themselves but the ‘mobilities’ and ‘immobilities’ among and between settlements throughout the region (2010). She explores the ‘nature of immobilities that underlie and pattern the mobilities of Aboriginal people, and how these two features of Aboriginal forms of sociality – particular kinds of mobility and immobility – together define the structure of regional populations and settlement patterns in contemporary Aboriginal Australia’ (2010, p. 364).

The second key theme that runs through the body of literature (though explicit in some works more than it is in others), is the notable confidence of Yolŋu people in their
assertion of difference in intercultural relations, and of the integrity and value of this difference. This is true both historically and in a contemporary context. In the earlier literature this can be seen, for example, in their evident confidence in the integrity and value of rom as it played out in the Court in the Nabalco vs Milirrpum case, which was the motivation or catalyst for Nancy Williams’ The Yolŋu and their Land (1986) and her later writing about coexistence of ‘two laws’ in dispute resolution from a legal anthropological perspective (1987). It is also evident in non-anthropological writings of Harris (1990) and Christie (1994) who argue the need for separate cultural ‘educational’ domains in Yolŋu education from an educational and linguistic perspective. Howard Morphy has written about this disposition in terms of what he refers to as the Yolŋu ‘politics of persuasion’ (2005).

The confidence of Yolŋu people in the integrity and value of their cultural difference is best exemplified by the recent work and writing of Frances Morphy (e.g. 2007a, 2007b). In the context of Native Title hearing, for example, ‘from the anthropologist’s point of view,’ Morphy writes, the Blue Mud Bay hearing can be seen as Yolŋu discourse about the sovereignty of rom (Yolŋu ‘laws and customs) embedded in a native title discourse about rights under European law (2007a, p. 33). Not only do people have a clear idea of the constraints created by the Court system in this context, Morphy writes, but they have considered, effective strategies through which they are able to (and do, as her paper details) insert their discourse about sovereignty and enact rom: ‘Their political agenda was rarely explicitly stated, but rather manifested in the strategies that they adopted in their responses to questioning and in their deliberate placement, at two carefully selected points in the proceedings, of performances of rom’ (2007a, p. 33). In this contemporary intercultural context, Morphy writes, the Yolŋu view their position as ‘encapsulated but not colonised subjects’:
In the longer term the Yolŋu view of themselves as encapsulated but not colonised – as ‘living in two worlds’ – will come under increasing pressure. They have been able to sustain that view until now because ALRA [Aboriginal Land Rights Act Northern Territory 1976], unlike most European law, appeared immutable. In reality, like any other piece of Euro-Australian law, it can be changed and its effects substantially undermined by a government with the will to do so operating in particular political circumstances. Those changes – which may be viewed as the final act of colonisation – are beginning to happen now. (2007a, p. 56).

Also of note in the recent literature and particularly relevant given the focus on value is Howard Morphy’s *Becoming Art* (2008). This book investigates ‘value creation’ simultaneously in two areas: ‘the local frame of the production of Aboriginal art including the production of art for sale to the global market, and the global frame of the collection, curation, exhibition and marketing of Aboriginal art as fine art’ (2008, p. 21). This confidence in the value of ‘who they know and feel themselves to be,’ is also evident in comparatively high profile of Yolŋu musicians and performers such as Yothu-Yindi, Warumpi Band, Saltwater Band, Geoffrey Gurrumul Yunupingu, East Journey, and the Chooky Dancers.

The unique history of north east Arnhem Land

The history of the Yolŋu Homelands in remote north east Arnhem Land is unique to Australia. There are, generally speaking, three key historical factors that make it so. These historical factors also go some way to explaining – or contextualising, rather – the notable confidence that most Yolŋu people have in the value of who they know and feel themselves to be.
First, and most notably is the fact that there was no violent colonial frontier in remote Amhem Land, nor was there any broad-sweep of dispossession as there was in most other places and regions of Australia. It is difficult to stress just how unique and significant this is; with few exceptions, Yolŋu people have maintained continuity of residency on – and rights to – their respective Traditional Homelands (their Country) from pre-colonial times up until the present day. I am not aware of any other region in Australia where this is the case. Their rights to Country, moreover, were recognised and enshrined in law, under the strength of the Aboriginal Land Rights Act (Northern Territory) 1976, as freehold title held in fee simple.

Secondly, there is much to be said about the comparatively fortunate relationship between Yolŋu people and the Methodist Missionaries who were stationed in the region for some thirty years. The first Methodist Mission in the region was established in 1923 at Milingimbi, but had a localised sphere of influence in the Central Arnhem region. The second Mission was established in 1935 at Yirrkala. The Mission Station most relevant to my field-site – to my family’s local history – is that established on nearby Galiwin’ku island (then Elcho Island) in 1942.

There was a period of some twenty years when my brothers and sisters – the sibling set I was adopted into – regularly visited and variously nhina-nha (stopped, stayed) at Galiwin’ku island, in the company of their Mothers, along with other close and extended kin. Some attended the Mission school, others ‘helped Papa Sheppy’ – the Reverend and Superintendent at the time – in the various Mission ‘departments,’ which included sewing, timber milling, fishing, construction, and the like. Notable about all these activities is the fact that Mission Staff (who were only ever few in number) went

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2 With the exception of a number of isolated incidents, see for example Egan (1996).
out of their way to learn the local language, the kinship system, and those aspects of Yolñu ceremonial life that Yolñu consider both important and valuable. Not only did they go out of their way to learn about these things but they incorporated them into everyday activities and everyday Mission life. It is clear – in oral histories of family and relevant historical and archival material – that these were relationships characterised by reciprocal cultural exchange. *Bala-râli-yun-mirri*, as one would say in Yolñu-matha – they were ongoing relationships characterised by dynamic reciprocity and mutual interdependence.

Thirdly, there is also something to be said about pre-colonial relations between coastal Yolñu groups and traders from the port of Makassar, Sulawesi – known as Mangatharra in Yolñu-matha. From as early as the 1600s Mangatharra made the annual voyage to Arnhem Land, where they were hosted by coastal Yolñu groups throughout the season of trade (see for example Macknight 1976). From all accounts these were also relationships of reciprocal cultural exchange. The local history of these relationships, for example, is encoded or ‘enshrined,’ for want of a better word, in Yolñu languages – in the many loan words from *Makassarese* and Malay (see, for example Evans 1992). There are also many ceremonial songs, dances, and material designs which are either derived from, or direct references to these historical relationships with Mangatharra. Indeed, these relationships are still commonly invoked as a comparison to present day relationships with Balanda (Europeans, white people).

These historical relations with Mangatharra and Methodist Missionaries were valued relationships of sociality, exchange and trade that were *established and maintained across what may otherwise have been boundaries of cultural difference*. These aspects

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3 This relationship was not conflict-free, however. See, for example, McIntosh 2006.
of local history have given Yolŋu people a strong sense or vision of themselves in relation to significant cultural others – in social and cultural terms, but also in political and economic terms. They have given people a strong sense of what they know and feel to be proper and right in cross-cultural situations and intercultural relations. They also, I suggest, reinforce the Yolŋu approach to intercultural relations and their consideration of the potential value of cultural difference an approach which considers that difference may be realised as a value as it forms the basis for ongoing relationships characterised by interdependence and reciprocity.

These three historical factors – the fact that there was no major discontinuity of rights and residency; the fortunate relationship with Methodist Missionaries, and; the local history of pre-colonial relations with Mangatharra – go some way to explaining the observable confidence that Yolŋu people have in the integrity and value of their culture – their rom (proper manner of doing things, culture, law) – their relationship to Country and their way of life more generally. They are in a comparatively very strong position in the broader context of Australian settler-colonial history. I will now discuss the local history of my fieldsite and adoptive family in more detail, beginning with the history of the Methodist Missions in the region.
The local history and context of MataMata (my field-site)

According to the local Yolŋu account of intercultural relations, the history of my adoptive family’s relationship with Balanda in the region commences some time after the establishment of the mission stations at Yirrkala and then Elcho Island (now referred to as Galiwin’ku Island).

4 Reproduced with permission of the Centre for Aboriginal Economic Policy Research, The Australian National University
As noted previously, the first Methodist Mission in the Arnhem Land region was established in 1923 at Milingimbi and had a localised sphere of influence in the Central Arnhem region. The second Mission was established in 1935 at Yirrkala where Rev. Wilbur Chaseling was appointed Mission Superintendent. The Mission Overseas Mission Station most relevant to and historically associated with my field-site was that established in 1942 at Galiwin'ku, at which Harold and Ella Shepherdson were ‘pioneering’ figures. By mid 1950s there were seven mission staff: Harold and Ella Shepherdson, trained school teacher and lay missionary Dorothy Yates, lay missionary and nurse Kath Langdon, nurse and lay missionary Ruth Beazley, agriculturalist and lay missionary Russell Beazley, and Fijian lay missionary Ameniasi and his family.

Despite their expressed familiarity with the Yirrkala Station and later awareness of that at Elcho Island, my adoptive family continued to navigate their social exchange networks with infrequent and opportunistic contact with the Mission settlements while Gaţiri – the apical ancestor of the Burarrwaŋa lineage of Gumatj bāpurru into which I was adopted – was alive. All Gaţiri’s children were born on and grew up ‘foot-walking country.’ The siblings recall that while he was alive their father Gaţiri kept them on country ‘for reason, so they could learn from him first, upstream and downstream.’ This did not preclude the historical establishment of mutually valued intercultural relations between people on country and Balanda of Mission-Time.

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5 The first mission was in fact at Galiwin’ku in 1921, however this station close within a number of months on account of the presence of a mining company.
6 I refer to my adoptive Yolŋu family as either ‘my adoptive family’ or simply ‘Family’ throughout the thesis. This is, in part, because it is polite and respectful to speak inclusively in this way (and impolite to do otherwise).
7 ‘The siblings’ refers to the sibling set I was adopted into. See the genealogies in the Appendix 3 for further details, or the later discussion in this chapter.
Rev. Harold Shepherdson made a concerted effort to establish contact with people on country in the area, encouraging them to clear bushland for an airstrip so he could visit them there. In effect, this cleared the way for ongoing, intercultural relationships of exchange. From this time on ‘Sheppie’ visited the Homelands as regularly as once per week to trade crocodile skins for tobacco, flour and other ‘Balanda’ goods. The Homelands became ‘outstations’ from the Mission point of view, as hopeful ‘outposts’ of their own socio-religious kind, as Rev. Shepherdson and his wife Ella recall in an oral-history interview, recorded in 1980:

Ella Shep: Home towns they called them, didn’t they?

Interviewer: This is something that is developing even further now isn’t it, the outstation?

Harold Shep: Yes, and the way the Government have taken it, the way that it’s something new!

Interviewer: Well let’s hear about the original outstation movement. How – what was it about. Why did you develop this or why was this developed?

Harold Shep: Well the Aboriginals themselves wanted contact with the Mission – they didn’t want to come into the station, and I was very interested, of course, to go out to do some flying in any case, put it that way. If they’d built an airstrip I’d go out and visit them.

Interviewer: I see, yes.

Harold Shep: And then we could trade with them, any crocodile skins, and craft-work. I could pay them and take out amenities from the Mission in those days, flour, tobacco, and so on. They could stay in the bush and there was no need to come in.
Interviewer: This is it; your visit to an outstation would be a supply, trading, a medical and also you would conduct formal church services there as well?

Harold Shep: Yes.

(Northern Territory Archives Services (NTAS) 1980, NTRS 226: TS 325)

Gaširi passed away some time in the mid to late 1950s while family were camping near Elizabeth Bay with Warramiri and Gälpu kin. Family were still travelling around, ‘humble’ in ‘the dugout canoe’ after the passing of their father, at which time they began frequenting the Mission Station at Elcho Island. It was then, they say, that they started traveling around by boat instead of dugout canoe. The next ten years or so (c. 1960 - 1970) were the main years of ‘Mission Time.’

Mission Time

It is apparent from all accounts that Family regularly travelled between the Mission Station and Country during this period. It is difficult to get a clear sense of exactly who was stopping where and how long they were stopping at each place because evidently these factors were less important than the freedom and mobility to come and go as they wished.

Shepherdson’s weekly flights back to Camp and other Homelands provided a regular and reliable opportunity to return to Country, to escape any stress arising from settlement life, to be a part of mission life without the commitment to stay. Freedom of mobility and residence was a significant factor in the local experience and evaluation of settlement life during Mission Time.

The younger siblings attended the mission school and participated in mission activities when they were at Galiwin’ku during Mission Time. They recall ‘Mission school’ with
much affection although they note that there were some aspects that were difficult or hard. In addition to school there were various organised activities for children and young adults that the siblings were involved in. They played a number of sports including athletics, football, netball and hockey. They were organised into groups for team sports that, as they recall, were based on bapurru affiliation and represented with uniforms chosen to match the colour of their respective bapurru flags – Gumatj children, for example, were placed in the ‘yellow’ team with yellow uniforms, because the Gumatj bapurru flag is gangul (yellow). The incorporation of aspects of their own cultural (especially ceremonial) life, afforded a sense of familiarity and created a sense of kinship with individual missionaries and mission life more generally. This is evidently something which characterised most all Mission Time relations. The sisters also sang in a choir, for example. They remember this with great warmth and can still, to this day, recall and recite many of the hymns in full, in Yolŋu-matha – the hymns having been translated by Mission staff and taught in Gupapuyŋu (the Yolŋu-matha variety that predominates at Galiwin’ku).

After leaving school the siblings became involved in various Mission ‘industries’ when they were visiting the settlement. Many of the sisters, for example, worked in the ‘Sewing Department’ where they made and sold clothing under the instruction and supervision of mission staff. The brothers started work in various industries and departments at the settlement after the ‘pioneering days of the mission’ which they recall with much pride.

A number of the brothers also laboured in construction, building houses, fences and a stock-yard (where the present day oval is). A number of the older brothers found a valued niche ‘helping Clem Gullick’ in the fishing industry, operating a number of small timber boats equipped with small inboard diesel engines. The brothers recall that
the fishermen were from a number of different bāpurru and Countries, and organised themselves into mala (groups) based on bāpurru affiliated collectives. Each mala formed the crew of one of the small boats, named after their named collective.

The time when the Government came and ‘took everything over’ through until ‘Government Time’ proper (c. 1970 - 1980)

What had effectively been Government ‘out-sourcing’ of local government and the delivery of associated services to the Church (in the form of Mission Stations) became increasingly difficult to justify as public sentiment on Indigenous Affairs in Australia shifted markedly in the 1960s and 1970s. Many if not most people came to feel that Indigenous people had the right to manage their own affairs. Where the Government had previously funded the Mission with minimal intervention as regards policy and service delivery, from the early to mid 1960s through until 1972 and the official adoption of a policy of Self Determination, Government representatives became increasingly prescriptive and gradually required the Methodist Church to cede control of settlement administration.

In the local Yolŋu account the handover marks an historical shift in intercultural relations – an historical decline in Balanda morality and the value of intercultural relations in the region. The period in the early to mid 1960s, when various aspects of the settlement life were ceded to Government-employed staff, is locally known and referred to as ‘the time when the Government came and took everything over.’ This transition leads into ‘Government Time’ proper, which roughly coincides with the advent of the policy of Self Determination in 1972.

In 1965 town councils were officially established and then in the successful referendum of 1967 gave the Federal Government the power to legislate for all Indigenous
Australians. Missionaries felt that they were 'gradually becoming redundant' (McKenzie 1976, p. 244). All the schools except that at Elcho Island had to be handed over to the Government Education Department and the hospitals at Yirrkala and Milingimbi to the Government Health Departments (McKenzie 1976, pp. 190-191). Transitional organisations such as Arnhem Land Civic and Economic Development Council (CEDAR) were set up to prepare the various Mission Departments or 'industries,' and associated infrastructure, for incorporation under the Galiwin'ku Community Incorporated, with eleven Yolŋu on the council.

The Arnhem Land Progress Association (ALPA) was established 'to foster community and group participation in economic activities among the people.' ALPA was recognised by the Government and Aboriginal Benefits Trust fund as an Incorporated Aboriginal Association making it eligible to apply for and receive grants and funds (NTAS 1979, NTRS Box 1: File 13.2.1). The Local Committee of Community Development was also established, with a representative from each newly incorporated 'industry' on the committee, guided by newly introduced government staff, to assist with the transition. All the UNCA departments were incorporated and gradually handed over to Galiwin'ku Community Incorporated. Finally, a non-mission affiliated Balanda was appointed as supervisor or manager of each former Mission industry/department, and they were each re-structured to ensure economic viability.

The new arrangements that were introduced required that Yolŋu workers sign contracts. Local mobility, and residential patterns did not fit the expectations of full time, or even part time salaried wage labour. The demise of the Fishing Department exemplifies the ill-conceived consolidation and 'streamlining' of the former Mission departments at this time.
The brothers who worked in the Fishing Department during Mission Time recall that the demise of the industry began when a non-mission Manager-Supervisor was appointed – when he ‘started to take over everything.’ Archival material notes that the Town Council voted to incorporate the Fishing Department in 1973 at which time a new Balanda Manager was appointed (NTAS 1979, NTRS Box 1: File 13.2.1). As part of the process of economic consolidation, the new Manager chose to purchase one new larger boat to use as the sole fishing vessel rather than continue with the previous arrangements and smaller vessels. The brothers remember this in vivid detail. According to their account, however, the small clan-affiliated vessels were not just made redundant but were set alight, burnt, on a beach near the settlement. Regardless of whether this is ‘true’ it says a great deal about the state of Yolŋu-Balanda relations and their general feelings of Yolŋu at the time.

The process of consolidating the former Mission industries effectively reconfigured the priorities and values within the relationships that comprised each Department. In his oral-history Harold Shepherdson expresses frustration and regret at this lack of understanding of the relationships and values previously involved:

Well they sent a Manager out to manage their fishing enterprise they gave him a boat, $100 000 for the boat, and we, the Mission, then wanted to hand over the refrigeration which we already had there, and they made a company out of it, so that took it out of our hands altogether. The Aborigines didn’t want it, didn’t want a big boat, they didn’t want to work seven days a week, nor twenty four hours a day and that sort of thing; they wanted to go at their own speed and with their smaller boats, and prior to that we were doing very well, we were sending fillet fish to Darwin, frozen, all the rest of it . . . the fishing was going quite well under Clem Gullick there, he was a wizard. He really got it going. (NTAS 1980, NTRS 226: TS 325).
Parallel to this were other legal changes or shifts in intercultural relations after the excision of land near Yirrkala by the Government which was then leased to Nabalco Mining Co. to mine bauxite. Local Yolŋu, with the encouragement and assistance of Mission staff, petitioned the Government to recognise the breach of their rights to their traditional country – this was delivered in the form of a bark petition. The Commonwealth and Nabalco acted as defendants in the subsequent court case (Milirrpum v Nabalco Pty Ltd (1971) 17 FLR 141), which pivoted on whether Yolŋu had a recognisable system of land tenure – whether Yolŋu law made a provision for ‘proprietary interest in land’ (Williams 1986, p. 1). Justice Blackburn handed down his judgement in 1971 concluding that Yolŋu law did not make such a provision.

The following year, the Labor Government, led by Gough Whitlam, came to power and restated the Federal Government’s Indigenous affairs policy with an emphasis on equal rights and equal opportunity for Indigenous Australians that encouraged Indigenous people to administer their own communities and their own affairs. This became known as the policy of Self Determination.

In 1972 Whitlam also appointed Justice Woodward to head a Royal Commission of Inquiry into how the Indigenous system of law in the Northern Territory, which had been officially recognised for the first time by Blackburn in his judgement, could be recognised by Australian law. Based substantially on Woodward’s recommendations, the Aboriginal Land Rights Act 1976 (Northern Territory) was passed in Federal Parliament in December 1976 with bipartisan support, and with its passing the Arnhem Land Reserve became Indigenous freehold title, held by the Aboriginal Land Trust on behalf of Yolŋu with the traditional right to occupy and use the land.
By the mid seventies almost all of the siblings recall having ‘finished up’ with any and all departments and industries at the settlement. It is clear that they visited the settlement much less frequently from this time on. ‘Free life on the Homelands’ Gunbitija remarked when recounting this time, and his sense of the shift in the history of intercultural relations. While Family make little fuss over their withdrawal from settlement life in oral accounts of the time, it is clear that the decline of the departments and industries, and the loss of their respective, valued intercultural relationships with Mission staff, left them disillusioned with the new arrangements and resentful of the lack of respect and understanding shown by the Government Balanda at the settlement.

Thus, the local history of intercultural relations has been such that Homeland residents are in a comparatively fortunate position, with strong legal title to their traditional lands and a relatively unbroken connection to Country, language and rom. Indeed, the integrity of the foundation of rom is unquestioned on the Homelands. The social fabric of the Homelands is not only strong but vibrant, and the ceremonial life of the region – the socio-political processes that comprise it – ensures that it remains so. While I would not describe the region as a ‘stateless society’ – because it implies boundedness and separability – it is definitely true to say that forms and patterns of stateless sociality predominate on the Homelands and throughout the region. The State, the market and alienated types or forms of social relations are very much a marginal aspect or feature of daily life and sociality on the Homelands. Shopping trips to the nearby township communities are usually undertaken every three to four weeks, Service Provider agencies fly in once a month. English, where spoken, is the fourth or fifth language for most Homeland residents. Today the Homelands stand in stark contrast to life and the daily social round in nearby centralised township communities. ‘Peaceful life on the Homelands’ as wāwe Gunbitja once remarked to me, ‘no humbug, no police.’
Each Homeland community – as we will see in Chapter 2 – is comprised of a group of closely related kin and the network of Homelands in the region comprise a network of interrelated kin and intermarrying bąpurru groups.

Methodology

Once I had decided on a topic for my dissertation research I contacted a number of anthropologists with experience and knowledge of the north east Arnhem Land region. I sought advice regarding communities that may be interested, suitable and accommodating. The only firm criterion that I had was that the community was to be a ‘dry’ community (i.e. alcohol free). A number of people suggested MaʈaMaʈa, not only because it was ‘dry’ but because they thought the people of MaʈaMaʈa would be interested and welcoming of a young balanda woman wanting to stay in the community long-term. I contacted the community via a handwritten letter, outlining my planned research project and what that research would entail. I then made a number of follow-up telephone calls during which I was advised to undertake a short, preliminary ‘visit’ to the community before committing long-term. I did so. At the end of this preliminary trip I was taken aside by yapa Batumbil, Yethun and my three older brothers and they explained that they would like to adopt me into their family as their sister, and they very much hoped I would return to stay.

I returned three months later with my partner at the time. He was adopted by my waku into the Galpu bąpurru, filling the structural role of their father, - my sister’s and my ‘husband.’ (He stayed in the community for the first six months of my fieldwork, after which he visited every few months.) In the first few months of fieldwork it became apparent that, while I had outlined my research interests in my initial letter and subsequent discussions about my ‘djorra djäma’ (paper work, writing), that my sisters
and brothers had a more immediate or ‘grounded’ project for me in mind. I was first to learn the language – “my language” – and then I was to learn what it means to be a Gumatj woman, what it means to be guurru (kin), to be guurru-mirri (to have [the quality of] kin[ship]). This was made very clear to me. Over time the topic I had outlined in those early days faded away and their project and topic became my own.

My partner and myself were provided with a room in yapä Batumbil’s three-room house. In reality it was a corrugated iron structure of three rooms and an undercover wooden verandah. There was no internal kitchen or laundry, ‘living’ or dining areas etc. We slept on a foam mattress on the floor and cooked and ate from the ‘house’ hearth near the mango tree out the front of the house, along with approximately ten other people. We joined in the daily round of activities along with everyone else. The only exception to this was when I shut myself inside to write fieldnotes every late-afternoon.

My fieldwork, methods of enquiry and ethnographic focus were all strongly shaped or determined by the socio-structural position I was adopted into relative to that of the woman who adopted me, and who I came to know, love and respect as my sister. I was gumurr-märrama (adopted, taken by the chest), as Yolŋu say, by Batumbil Burarrwaŋa, a woman some fifty years of age from the Gumatj bäpurru, the ‘patri-group’ or ‘clan’ known by the proper name, Gumatj.

There are two major lineages within Gumatj denoted by the ‘surnames’ Yunupiŋu and Burarrwaŋa. Burarrwaŋa trace their lineage back to the late Gaṯiri Burarrwaŋa who had eight wives (see Figures 20-21 in Appendix for relevant genealogical data). In terms of my socio-structural position I became the youngest of Gaṯiri’s children; the youngest
‘little sister’ in a sibling set of some 32 siblings, almost all of whom who live on the Homeland communities in the local network and/or on the nearby island of Galiwin’ku.

In terms of residence I was the youngest sister in the sibling set that now comprises the eldest adult residents in Camp (with the exception of Gaṭiri’s last surviving wife, old Amala Wapalkuma). The senior sibling set who comprise the primary residents are descendants of Gaṭiri and three of his wives. Gaṭiri’s fourth wife Dhupi (a Gälpu woman whose mother was Warramiri), had seven children: Walunba (male), Johnny Barrmula, Terry Gunbitja, Dalala (female), Don Dhakaliny, Bluey, and Phyllis Batumbil. Wāwa Terry, wāwa Don and yapa Batumbil were all primary residents in Camp during the time I undertook fieldwork. I came to know and love Terry and Don as my older (chalk and cheese) brothers.

Gaṭiri’s sixth wife, Mary Wapalkuma (a Gälpu woman whose Mother was Warramiri) had three children: Doris Yethun, Elizabeth Banambuŋa, and Johnny Djirarrwuy. Yapa Yethun, my close sister and confidante, was among the primary residential set during my stay.

Gaṭiri’s seventh wife, Warraywarray (a Golumala woman (lineage of Gälpu) whose mother was Warramiri), had four children: Binyarri (female), James Djerrimara #1 (male), Kevin Garrurru, and Johnny GurrumGurrum. Wāwa Kevin and wāwa Johnny I came to know as the younger of my close, dear brothers. They were also primary residents during the course of my stay in Camp.

Within this older generation of siblings and primary residents, having been ‘taken by the chest’ by Batumbil, in terms of everyday power and authority, I was ‘under the shade,’ as they say, of the most authoritative and assertive woman (or person for that matter) in camp.
Being adopted into this socio-structural position certainly had its downside and difficulties. I had next to no authority, autonomy, privacy or sway; I was given a new wardrobe of appropriate clothing for a young unmarried woman living in close proximity to her brothers and disallowed from wearing my own. I was the person who was expected to collect the firewood by default, who ate snails instead of oysters after a day out collecting food. But this was also a particularly privileged position in many more important ways. My close adoptive kin considered it their role and responsibility to look over me and look after me. This was surely, in large part, because 'that is just what (close) kin do.' It was also, while never spoken, because my person and behavior very much reflected on my immediate close kin; I was 'their Balanda' as it were. My close kin were not just 'associated' with me but were considered (by themselves and others) as responsible for my person, my actions and behaviour.

As part of their role and responsibility to look out for and look after me, my immediate close kin, particularly my sisters, felt it their role and responsibility to teach me how to behave like a young Gumatj woman, what it meant to 'be and behave like kin' (gurrutu-mirri). While I was certainly 'bossed about' a great deal I was also encouraged and instructed to learn in ways that I perhaps would not have been if not in the breast of a small, close kin group. As it was and as it turned out I was able to marry my role as the youngest little sister with my ethnographic interests in mutually rewarding and productive ways. For example, my wanting to know about things that were of importance to my close kin, to Gumatj and/or to Yolŋu in general, was something looked upon favourably, affectionately, and even with a touch of pride. Sometimes, even just using a new word or expression in conversation, or getting one wrong, was cause for a giggling uproar of affectionate approval. In this sense I was exceptionally fortunate. There was not a time I did not feel crowded or somehow
frustrated. There was not a time I did not feel braced and comforted by the support, affection and encouragement of kin.

In the first six months in Camp my focus was almost exclusively on acquiring basic language skills, on learning Gumatj. English is not spoken as a matter of course in everyday conversation and my speaking English was strongly discouraged (not least because it excluded almost everyone except Batumbil, Yethun, Don and Johnny). During this initial phase I took notes at the end of each day and noted who had come and gone and by what means (notes toward my quantitative data on residence and mobility).

In the latter half of fieldwork, after the first nine months or so, I had a sense that there were certain key things that I needed to clarify if I was going to consolidate my understanding about certain things that seemed central to Yolŋu sociality and social life. I felt as though I had to pull the threads together, as it were, to confirm hunches and clarify assumptions that had until then remained tacit or implicit. Over the course of the last six to eight months or so I began to make use of my digital voice recorder, recording unstructured discussions with people (only the closest of my adoptive kin). Sometimes I would ask for clarification about the meaning of a particular word and an associated discussion would ensue about many and varied things, other times I was a lot more focused and insistent about the line of enquiry and thus controlled the course of discussion. Excerpts from many of these conversations are included as transcripts in the chapters to follow.

In closing, I ask the reader to keep in mind the size and remote nature of the Homeland community that is Camp. While it is part of a network of communities it is, by any
ethnographic measure, small and remote. This shapes and gives character to the body of knowledge and observations that forms the basis for this thesis.

Structure of the thesis to follow

Chapter 2 contributes to the body of literature on Yolŋu people with a slightly unconventional approach to (the description of) social organisation. The chapter is structured around a series of five drawings, drawn by my close yapu (Z) and waku (wC) to help me to understand why my questions about social organisation were always met with further questions – rhetorical questions about raki' (strings), łuku (foot[-print]), anchor, root of a tree) gamunungu (white clay) and lirrwi' (ashes, shade). This series of diagrams illustrate the outline or form of Yolŋu social organisation – the relationships through which expectations about morality and value are articulated – but give a sense of the local terms and concepts through which these social forms and relations are articulated, and how they reflect or express local understandings about the self, others and the relationship between them.

Chapter 3 introduces the key body of terms and concepts comprising the emotion lexicon in Yolŋu-matha. I include transcripts from digitally recorded conversations about emotion to contextualise these terms and the way they are used in everyday talk. As Myers suggests for emotion-concepts for the Pintupi of the Western Desert, these terms and concepts constitute a moral system that articulates and informs a particular view of the self and social life. Much of this cultural template is similar to that Myers’ describes for Pintupi; there are also, however, a number of key points of difference. I intend that the material in this chapter – the key terms and concepts that I introduce herein - to serve as something of a reference for the chapters to follow.
Drawing on the body of emotion-terms and concepts introduced in Chapter 3, Chapter 4 explores everyday forms of sociality in a series of ethnographic case studies to show how they shape everyday forms of exchange in specific, significant ways. Chapter 5 explores the way people consider issues of blame and responsibility through a number of ethnographic case studies. The following chapter, chapter 6, explores the way people consider value and engage in exchange relations (involving material goods), again through a number of ethnographic case studies. In this chapter we will see that there exists a robust local/regional economy characterised by salient, culturally recognised forms of exchange and local forms of value. As the material in this chapter will suggest, only one of the key features of the prevailing model of the Aboriginal ‘domestic moral economy’ resonates strongly with these local/regional Yolŋu forms. All these core chapters explore how concepts of affect play out in everyday social relations; how they shape the way people consider issues of morality, and how they motivate certain culturally recognised and recognisable forms of interpersonal and social exchange.

In chapter 7 I consider the interplay between forms, material conditions and social relations of exchange as a model or theory of exchange in its own right. I employ Sahlins’ general scheme of reciprocity as a heuristic, overlaying it with Yolŋu terms and concepts, to clarify what I see as the basic Yolŋu theory of exchange. My argument is that yayatju waijgany (one state or sense of feeling) is a fundamental value in both material and non-material exchange.
Chapter Two: Personhood, relatedness and social organisation

Kinship and marriage are about the basic facts of life. They are about 'birth, and conception, and death', the eternal round that seemed to depress the poet but which excite, among others, the anthropologist.

– Fox 1967, p. 27

This chapter contributes to the body of literature on Yolŋu kinship and social organisation with a slightly unconventional approach to (the description of) social organisation. The chapter is structured around a series of five drawings, drawn by my close yapa (Z) and waku (wC) to help me to understand why my questions about social organisation were always met with further questions – rhetorical about raki' (strings), luku (foot[-print], anchor, root of a tree) gamamungu (white clay) and lirrwi' (ashes, shade). This series of diagrams illustrate the outline or form of Yolŋu social organisation – the relationships through which expectations about morality and value are articulated – and give a sense of the local terms and concepts through which these social forms and relations are articulated, and how they reflect or express local understandings about the self, others and the relationship between them. Together with the considered exegesis offered by yapa and waku, they introduce and describe the regional system of social organisation in local terms. This discussion is grounded in the well-known literature on Yolŋu social organisation, relating to bāpurru or ‘clans’ relations to land and associated, broader social groupings. Lesser known are the local terms and concepts through which these social forms and relations are articulated and
how they reflect or express local understandings about the self, others and the nature of the relationship between them. I focus on the form rather than the content of these shared understandings about the self,\textsuperscript{8} other and the relationship between them.

The shape or form of this model is familiar in the anthropological record, and key aspects of the material resonate strongly with particular insights and descriptions in the literature. Bāpurru are here represented as collective social bodies, drawn as trees which are anchored or ‘rooted’ in place as/at sites or places referred to as luku wāŋa (footprint/anchor places), rumbal wāŋa (body/trunk places) or dhuyu wāŋa (secret/sacred places). The collective social body is discrete in the sense that it has or ‘holds’ a discrete corpus of maŋayin (sacra: songs, painted designs, proper names, ceremonial forms, ceremonial objects) here represented as the luku (footprint, anchor, root of the tree) and the rumbal ‘body, trunk or torso’ of the collective social body. However, each collective social body is also ‘joined, connected, linked’ together [to each other] to a number of significant others through ceremonial relations and marriage, here represented as raki’ (strings, ropes). What is unique about this model is the description or representation of socio-political forms as collective social bodies of a particular ‘cultural self’ – these are shared, substantive understandings about the self, others and the relationship between them – who I am, what I am [like] and how I relate to others.

\textsuperscript{8} I follow cognitive anthropology by defining identity as ‘self-understanding’ (Burbank 2011; Quinn 2006), or ‘knowledge of the self’ (Quinn 2003). This ‘knowledge’, as with any other form of knowledge, exists as interconnected patterns of neural connection, formed via associative learning (Burbank 2011; D’Andrade and Strauss 1992; Quinn 2006). Because knowledge of the self is formed via associative learning in socio-cultural experience, identity assumes a relationship between individual and socio-cultural context (Burbank 2011; Quinn 2006).
Selective overview of the literature on Yolŋu social organisation, introducing relevant key concepts

Much has been written about Yolŋu social organisation since W. Lloyd Warner’s early, now classic structural-functional ethnography of 1937. Each approach has offered further insight into different aspects of the Yolŋu system, all attest to the integrity and continuity of definite social forms comprising the regional socio-political system: the underlying ‘universalistic’ system of gurrutu (kin, kinship) relations forms the basic social fabric of the region and is central to the organisation of social life; bąpurru are the most salient and significant social grouping. They are patrilocal, exogamous and collectively hold wäŋa (Country, land, place) and madayin (sacra: songs, proper names, painted designs, ceremonial forms, ceremonial objects); The ‘emplaced’ nature of these patrilocal identities is marked and enduring; a system of cross-cousin marriage prevails, and intermarrying bąpurru form bestowal cycles or connubia – regional networks of connubial relations, and while a person is primarily associated with the bąpurru of their father, they also have important rights and interests in significant others, including their M and MM bąpurru.

The notable point of debate in this literature concerns the relative autonomy, or discrete, corporate nature of bąpurru groups and the terms anthropologists employ to describe or represent the nature of the relationship between bąpurru. Whereas much of the literature characterises bąpurru as corporate, exogamous ‘clans,’ each of which is included in a number of cross-cutting ‘sets’ or ‘aggregates of different kinds, Ian Keen argues that Yolŋu group identities extend outward from foci and connections among such identities are not those of enclosing sets but open and extendable ‘strings of connectedness’ (1995, p. 502, 2000, p. 421). Yolŋu modes of group identity and
relations, he argues, involve images drawn from the human body and plants, and beliefs about ancestral journeys traces: ‘far from being constituted by enclosure within boundaries or related in a taxonomic hierarchy of group and sub-group, Yolŋu identities, like their concepts of place, extend outward from a foci. Connections among such identities are not those of enclosing sets, but are those of open and extendable ‘strings’ of connectedness’ (2000, p. 421). Both Keen and Rudder employ the concept of ‘focus’ or ‘foci’ to capture the anchored nature of the bapurru as well as ‘points where a set of relationships come together’ (see Rudder 1993, p. 23). Rudder suggests that an identity can be considered as functioning as ‘one of the nodes or points to which a set of relationships is attached’ (1993, p. 23).

In the following section I will introduce key concepts with which this body of literature on Yolŋu social organisation is concerned. I will return to three of these concepts at the end of the chapter and suggest how they might be thought of in terms of shared understandings about the self, others and the relationship between them.

**Gurrutu**

The term gurrutu refers to ‘kin(ship), relation(ship) (Zorc 1986, p. 149). Keen rightly notes that a case could be made for avoiding the use of ‘kin’ and ‘kinship’ as gurrutu contrasts with mulkuru (stranger) – a person with whom one has no relationship – and thus denotes the existence of a social relationship (Keen 1994, p. 79). He chooses to retain the term ‘kin’ as well as ‘relation,’ however, because the category gurrutu does contrast with other kinds of social relationships such as lundu (friend) and because gurrutu relations are based on what anthropologists recognise as genealogical relations.

The Yolŋu system of gurrutu is ‘universalistic’ in the sense that everyone is considered gurrutu, expected to have the quality of oigurrutu, and refer to each other as such with
one of twenty-four reciprocal *gurrutu* terms. They are reciprocal in the sense that ‘if you are my *njandi* I am your *waku,* ‘if you are my *dhuway* I am your *galay*’ and so on and so forth. The suffix *-manydji* is used with *gurrutu* terms to denote the interrelation *between* people as one dyadic or reciprocal relation. For example a mother and child could be referred to as *waku-manydji* as well as, or *njandi-manydji*.

While all people are potentially kin, people distinguish between *galki* (close) and *dhanay* (full) kin, as opposed to kin connections that are *barrku* (distant, far off), and people who are *marr-ganja*, (somewhat, a little bit) or *nyumukunjiny*, (small) kin (Keen 1994, pp. 80-81). Yolŋu, that is, assess the quality of relatedness ‘along a dimension of distance (Keen 1994, p. 80). The suffix *-mirriju* is added to kin terms to denote one’s ‘own’ kin relation as in *waku-mirriju* ([own] child). Generally speaking, however, specifying exclusive relationships in this way is impolite (unless used to address the person in question directly).

‘Being *gurrutu*’ is a fact of life for Yolŋu in a similar way that being a socialised, moral person is for Balanda. As with kin categories like ‘uncle’ and ‘grandfather’ in Balanda kinship systems, Yolŋu kin categories describe and denote culturally recognised social relations and roles that entail certain expectations and obligations. Being and behaving

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9 Anthropologists sometimes describe this type of social system as a ‘classificatory’ system of kinship, because every known person is a certain type of kin, and can be addressed or referred to with a kin term. This is based on Lewis Henry Morgan’s distinction between ‘descriptive’ and ‘classificatory’ systems. However, following Kroeber (1929) it is now acknowledged that all kinship systems are classificatory to the degree that they classify people into types of relations as in the Euro-English categories ‘uncle’ or ‘cousin.’

10 This was illustrated, in response to Rudder question about ‘the world he lives in’ by a Yolŋu man named Maratja, who drew a series of concentric circles explaining that the inner circles represent close kin, while those in the increasingly farther, outer circles represent increasingly farther or distant kin (Rudder 1993, p. 128).
like *gurrutu* is among the most basic organising principles in Yolŋu social life. The fact of being *gurrutu* is only invoked when social relations are marked by imbalance, when it is used to elicit appropriate behaviour or re-balance relations. It would not be uncommon to hear someone privately remark, for example, if someone is behaving inappropriately: *Nhā dhuwala Yolŋu? Gurrutu-miriw?* (What is this person? Without kin [without kinship]?)

Questioning the nature of a person as *gurrutu* in this way is among the most severe of social judgments, akin to questioning their ‘humanity’. Similar to cases Levi-Strauss notes, in which cultural groups consider humanity to cease at the boundary of the group, to be considered ‘without kin’ or ‘lacking the quality of kin’ is to be *wakinju* (wild, belonging to no one) and *rom-miriw* (without *rom*). Such a person is often described as *wiripu* (different, of a different kind) or *gāna* (different, separate, alone) – a condition of suspect intent characteristic of *mulkuru* (strangers) and *galka* (sorcerers).

Yolŋu without kin or who lack the quality of *gurrutu*, as Levi-Strauss notes of ‘strangers’ and those beyond the boundary of the group in some cultures, are somehow considered to pertain to the domain of the extra-human. People who are not *gurrutu* are outside the socio-cultural fabric; people without the quality of *gurrutu* are outside socio-moral norms.

**Bäpurru**

As the predominant socio-political form or grouping *bäpurru* are the ‘building blocks’ of Yolŋu social organisation. *Bäpurru* are generally characterised as patrilineal land-holding descent groups (Morphy 1991; Williams 1986; Keen 1994). In addition to, or in association with *wāŋa* (land, country, estate), each *bäpurru* holds in common a body of ‘sacra’ or ‘property,’ referred to as *madayin*. Further, each possesses a distinctive
matha, ‘tongue’ or dialect named after the bāpurru (Schebeck 1968). Each matha has distinct and distinguishing grammar and vocabulary, though, as Schebeck (2001) notes, speakership of any one matha extends beyond any single bāpurru. Each matha, moreover, shares a great deal in common with some others (Morphy, F. 1983; Keen 2010, pers comm.).

Madayin

Madayin is most commonly used to refer to the body of sacra – songs, proper names, painted designs, ceremonial forms and paraphernalia or ceremonial objects – that bāpurru hold in addition or association to their wānya (land, country, estate). Each clan, Morphy writes, ‘possess a set of songs, painting and sacred objects that can be referred to collectively as the clan madayin, which we will term ‘sacred law’ (1984, p. 20). In a later publication (1991, p. 48) Morphy writes that ‘membership of a clan gives an individual sets of rights and obligations with respect to the ownership of land and madayin, which according to Yolŋu ideology are jointly owned by members of a clan as a whole. Keen writes that madayin, ‘as Yolŋu called anything connected with wanarr ancestors,’ were,

attributes of groups and of multiple cross-cutting, and rather open strings of groups.

People took sometimes strong measures to ensure the correctness of these shared forms, and also to maintain the differences that separated one group’s madayin from another. (1994, p. 132)

People negotiated and sometimes argued about the proper form of ceremony, in part to establish or maintain differences, or conversely, to deny differences between the madayin of two groups. For, ‘to assert that two religious forms were the same was to lodge a potential claim to resources associated with land and madayin (1994, p. 132).
The corpus of *madayin* held by any one *bapurr*ru, while distinct and different in many respects, ‘overlaps with’ that of several *bapurr*ru of the same moiety (Morphy 1984). Each *bapurr*ru possess a commonly held *likan* design (*likan miny ’tji*), and a number of *likan* names (*likan yäku, bundurr*), which are associated with a ‘big name country’ (*rapam*) that they hold or possess, and for which they are *wāŋa-watanju* (country holders). Most *bapurr*ru, in fact, possess two or three ‘big name’ countries as well as smaller enclaves within other countries (Keen 2010, pers. comm.). The number of *likan* designs and names they possess will, of course, reflect the number of big name countries they hold.

The identity of country centres around and extends out as a ‘big name’ (*rapam, yindi yäku*), from a ‘named locale – such as (and especially) a spring or lagoon’ (Keen 1995, p. 509).

**Waŋarr**

Each *waŋarr* belongs to one of the two moieties, Dhuwa and Yirritja. Zorc defines *waŋarr* as ‘totemic ancestors, culture heroes (god-like beings who originally inhabited the earth then changed themselves into animals, birds, monsters, etc.; sacred things’ (Zorc 1986, p. 254). The anthropological literature generally refers to *waŋarr* as ‘ancestral beings’ who lived long ago (*baman*). They are considered to have travelled from place to place across the region imprinting their footprints in, or as, the foundation of *rom*. Their footprints manifest as the form and significance the socio-spatial landscape (Keen 1994, Tamisari 1998).

**Inside and outside**

Howard Morphy describes the distinction between ‘inside’ and ‘outside’ as a key ordering principle in the Yolŋu system and one that is ‘crucial to understanding the
Yolnu system of knowledge’ (1991, p. 78). In a general sense, he writes, this contrast between inside and outside is a ‘logical schema that can be applied to many situations where it carries the same range of connotations’ (Morphy 1991, p. 79). Almost anything has an inside and an outside form or can be divided into inside and outside components (Morphy 1991). The opposition generally refers to a continuum of esoteric and exoteric meaning – to a continuum of more restricted to less restricted knowledge (Morphy 1991, p. 78, Keen 1994, p. 194). In this sense the relationship between the inside and the outside of things ‘forms part of a system of controlling the distribution of knowledge by providing boundaries between what should and should not be known by particular categories of people and individuals’ (Morphy 1991, p. 78). It also refers to an opposition in that ‘inside things’ are ancestrally powerful and sacred, and are thus restricted, as opposed to ‘outside things,’ which are neither (Morphy 1991, p. 194).

Keen further notes that the distinction between levels of esoteric and exoteric meaning and knowledge is marked by other, ‘similar pairs of antonyms.’ Similar to ‘inside’: ‘outside’ are the antonyms dhuyu (taboo, sacred) as opposed to yarangu (ordinary, profane) – as well as madayin (sacred) as opposed to garma (public, in the camp) (1994, p. 194).

Series of diagrams and associated exegesis

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11 The distinction between inside and outside, Morphy writes, ‘can be applied to solve particular problems as well as, at a more general level, to order relationships in the world’ (H. Morphy 1991, p. 78).
12 Yolnu people share a fundamental understanding that a level of inside knowledge exists, which is secret in that it is only known to a restricted set of people – adult initiated men (H. Morphy 1991, p. 78).
Understanding who was related to whom and how was, of course, crucial to understanding and participating in the give and take of social relations and sociality in everyday life during my time in Camp. I arrived in the field with an abstract understanding of the Yolŋu kinship system, the socio-political form of the bāpurru, and the regional networks of interrelations between them. By the time I completed my fieldwork I had come to understand these social forms in a grounded, localised sense—as they are invoked, talked about and implicated in everyday social relationships. The margin of difference between my earlier abstract understanding and later sense of familiarity centred around my understanding local terms and concepts associated with personhood and relatedness, which draw extensively on body part metaphors as well as associated metaphors of the (generic) botanical ‘body,’ including:

- **luku** (foot, feet, footprint; anchor; base of tree)
- **rumbal** (body, torso; stem, trunk; true, truly, faithfully)
- **wanga** (arm, front leg, wing)
- **gurrcurr** (vein, artery, tendon; branch, root; strength)
- **likan** (elbow, joint, corner; bay, inlet)
- **raki** (string, rope, root/s)

The following series of three drawings (and the associated exegesis) was produced and recorded in the course of an extended conversation with yapa Yethun and waku Gatjikin (Digital field-recording 2009). The conversation began in response to my having asked what raki” (string, rope) was. Yethun and Gatjikin understood this or interpreted this as my having asked what ‘our’ raki’ were – the raki’ of our bāpurru
To be clear, I sat down with Yethun and Gatjikin with a ream of butcher paper, textas and a pen. Yethun and Gatjikin drew the diagrams, and offered an explanation/exegesis of what they were drawing as they went. I noted some of this down in pen, on the paper as we went. I also digitally recorded the conversation and later transcribed it, and draw some of the material from these transcripts of this digital recording.

This set of drawings illustrates the ‘outline’ or ‘form’ of social organisation throughout the region (through which understandings and expectations about morality and value are organised and articulated). It also gives the reader a sense of the local terms and concepts through which these social forms are constituted in everyday talk and the way in which these terms – and the larger cultural conceptions of which they are a part – reflect or express individual and shared understandings about the self, others and the relationships between them.

The first drawing: The collective body of the bāpurru

This is the first in the series of diagrams. I will first walk the reader through the exegesis given by Yethun and Gatjikin before discussing it in more general terms.

Figure 3: The first drawing

13 Occasions like this were an opportunity to self-consciously reflect upon and explain in their own terms – to try and help me understand – certain ‘things’ about themselves and their lives. There were only a handful of such occasions when the discussion was as open, lengthy and involved as this particular occasion, because of competing demands, the presence of older authoritative kin when it would have been impolite to indulge in such discussions, the presence of mirirri (avoidance relationship of brother/sister; behavioural rules for a man where his sister is concerned), rumaru (avoidance relationship, especially of son-in-law/mother-in-law), and so on and so forth.
While it is not labeled on the page itself, Yethun and Gatjikin referred to the tree thus:

'ŋilimurrung-gu bāpurru, Gumatj.'

([This is] our bāpurru, Gumatj.)

The writing on the trunk of the tree reads:
Dharpa, rumbal, body, njilimurru wanjany bāpurru where we come from.

([This is the] trunk, or body, of the tree, we are one bāpurru, where we come from.)

On the left hand side of the trunk is written:

*Luku nherran gamununggu-ŋura, lirwi-ŋura, wāŋa-ŋura.*

([Our] feet are emplaced in the clay, [madayin] designs, the charcoal/ashes, in place.)

In the various branches from left to right is written:

‘*Wanja*’

(branch or arm)

‘*Yol-kala gumurr-lili?*’

(Towards whose chest?)

‘*Wanha-mala ŋayi gamunungu, ɲurrŋitj?*’

(Towards where [is] that clay/design, that charcoal?)

‘*Wanha-mala ŋayi ringitj?*’

(Towards where is [that] joint ceremonial group/ceremony ground?)

‘Branches telling same as the roots:’

(Branches telling same as the roots:)

‘*latjuwarr*-yun, spreading out – barrkuwatj-thirri’

(spreading out, becoming distinct from one another)

‘*wāŋa-lili ga ringitj-lili.*’

(towards [that] place and joint ceremonial group/ceremonial ground)

‘*Gurrkurr branches – wanja.*’

([The] roots, branches – branches or arms.)

On the right hand side of the page above the soil line is written:
Wanha-ka ṣayi dol-mala-nha ṣunhi wanha-ṣuru ṣilimurru
(Where [is] that ground that we [are] from?)

Slightly above the soil-line on the right hand side of the page is written:

Rom-kurru wâŋa-kurru
(Through law and country)

Nhā litjalan-gu lirrwi’ wanha-ṣuru gumurr-ṣuru mittji-ṣuru?
(What is our ashes/charcoal, from the chest of which group?)

Discussion

The rumbal (trunk, torso, body)

The trunk of the tree was described as ‘dharpa, rumbal.’ The word ‘dharpa’ is translated as ‘tree, stick’, while ‘rumbal’ is translated as ‘body, torso, trunk.’ This aspect of the tree, they explained, is ‘telling (of, about)’ such like: ‘we are one bąpurru from where we rumbal originate, from where we rumbal belong (to).’ As well as meaning ‘body, torso, trunk’ the ‘rumbal’ is here used in a second sense to mean ‘truly,’ as in ‘yaka ṣayi nyāl, rumbal ṣayi dhāwu’, ‘it’s not a lie, it’s a true story.’ It may mean either in this case, so the trunk, Yethun and Gatjikin explain, is telling of or about: ‘We are one bąpurru from where our trunk, our body or torso originates, from where our it belongs (to); from where we truly originate, from where we truly belong (to).’

The trunk of the tree, I suggest, describes or denotes that aspect of the individual and/or collective self (i.e. the bąpurru), that is gāna (separate, distinct, discrete, alone) and/or wiripu (different, of a different kind) – aspects or attributes which are proper to the individual and/or collective self.
Yethun and Gatjikin referred to the base of the tree as *luku nheran* in or at the *gamunungu, lirrwi, wāja*. The term *luku* can refer to ‘foot, footstep, footprint’, ‘anchor’ or ‘root of a tree.’ The synonym more commonly used to the east is *djalkiri*, about which Franca Tamisari has written in some depth (1998). The term *nheran* is a verb meaning ‘to put down, place down, impress (in, on), imprint (in).’ *Gamunungu* refers to the white clay used for painting (and by extension *bāpurru* design) (pers. comm. Frances Morphy 2010). *Lirrwi* can refer to ‘black ashes’, ‘shade, shelter’, or by extension ‘pupil of the eye.’ The term *wāja* is refers to ‘place or country.’ Thus, Yethun and Gatjikin refer to the root of the tree as: ‘The ‘foot(-print), anchor, root of the tree’ that is put down and impressed in the white clay (and by extension sacred design), in or at the ‘ashes, shade, shelter’, in or at ‘place, country.’’ The *dhuyu luku* of a *bāpurru*, their ‘*luku wāja*’ (footprint place), is the most salient, and significant form of social differentiation in the Yolŋu social world. Rudder quotes a man named Djalangi explaining the nature of these places:

‘Homeland is called *yirralka*. Identity comes from there. *Yirralka* tells you that you are Yolŋu. Without it you can’t be Yolŋu. *Manikay [madayin song patterns]* at *yirralka* is special and helps you know what you are’ (quoted in Rudder 1993, p. 194).

As rooted in place, in the foundation of *rom*, the root of the tree, I suggest, is best understood as representing the socio-centric as well as the ego-centric anchor of self-understanding.

*The raki’ (roots, strings), wana (branches, arms, strings) and gurrkurr (roots, veins, branches arms): strings of relatedness.*
The roots of the tree were described as the ‘roots, raki’, gurrkurr.’ The term raki’ translates as ‘string or rope.’ The term gurrkurr refers to ‘roots, veins, branches, arms’ (and by extension physical strength). This aspect of the tree, Yethun and Gatjikin explained, is ‘telling’ Yolnu ‘there-through wâŋa, there-through rom – what is our ringitj?’ (wâŋa-kurru, rom-kurru, nhâ litjalangu ringitj). Litjalangu is ‘your (inclusive) and mine.’ Rom refers to ‘law, way of doing things, way of life.’ The term ringitj refers to ‘a place that links groups of the same moiety that share the same wayarr and thus the same sacra (madayin), and ceremony (bungul). By extension it also refers to group of people that come together in this way at the ringitj, for ceremony. Thus the roots, they explain, are telling people of or about: ‘There through place, country, there-through rom, what is our ringitj?’

The roots, it was explained, are: ‘Going there through the white clay (designs)’ The roots are telling: ‘What or where are the ‘ashes, shade, shelter for us’?’, ‘Where-from the white clay (designs), where-from the mittji?’ The term mittji here refers to an aggregate or collective of people with a common attribute or quality, in a similar way to ‘mob,’ ‘set,’ or ‘bunch.’ These things that are ‘under the ground’ are the socio-religious, or ceremonial relations between clans of the same moiety (Pers. comm. Frances Morphy 2010).

The branches of the tree were described as wana, gurrkurr. The term wana means ‘arm, branch, creek, tributary,’ and by extension nyapipi/waku (MB/ZC). Gurrkurr, as above, refers to ‘roots, branches, arms, veins’ and is used by extension to refer to physical strength (syn. ganydjarr). These branches, it was explained, are: ‘Telling the same as the roots, spreading out (latjuwar’yun), becoming separate (barrkuwatj-thirri).’ The branches were also specified as particular reciprocal kin relations. This will be further explained in subsequent discussion.
Similarities and differences between branches and roots: the distinction between inside and outside.

The roots and the branches are the same in the sense that they 'spread out' and 'become separate' from the bāpurru, toward other bāpurru and other places and countries (wāŋa). As the gurrkurr, ‘roots, veins, branches, arms’ (and by extension physical strength), they are aspects of the self that are shaped and defined through one’s relation with significant others. They are both ties of relatedness that bind people together through ties of kinship and draw people together through their reciprocal responsibilities and obligations. More significantly, they draw people together through mutual ties of affiliation, attachment and affection.

While they are the same in this respect they are qualitatively different. Note the differentiating but also overlapping of use of terms: the roots are raki’, ‘strings, ropes’ and describe or denote ceremonial relations or social forms (mittji in general, riŋgitj in particular in this case), which are under the ground or ‘underneath.’ The branches are wana, ‘arms or tributaries’, and denote kin relations that are above the ground and visible on the ‘outside’. The roots are established a priori, ‘underneath,’ as part of the foundation of the bāpurru. The branches are secondary in the sense that they grow and are given form through inter-bāpurru relations through the matriline and marriage.

The anchored self and the distance of relatedness.

It seems accurate to describe the tree model as the body of the self and/or the collective body of the bāpurru. This was reinforced with reference to the final drawing when Yethun and Gatjikin explained the relationship between the bāpurru-as-tree and the moral imperative of ceremonial relations:
It seems appropriate also to consider relatedness as relative to the body in terms of proximity to the chest.\textsuperscript{14} Relatedness as a measure of distance from the collective social body of the bāpurru – relative to the rumbal (trunk, torso) or gumurr (chest) – this is the ‘proprietal shade’ of kinship.

The second drawing: Regional relations between bāpurru, and bāpurru and place (or the self and others, and the self and place).

This drawing (Figure 4) may be seen as a model of the significant forms of social organisation on a regional level in North East Arnhem Land. Together, the diagram and exegesis further allude to the motivational and directive force that underlies this model, or rather, the shared understandings about personhood and relatedness that comprise it.

This is the motivational and directive force of rom.

\textsuperscript{14} This is particularly significant in terms of morality and value as I will explain in Chapter 3.
Description

The tree at the top-left of the page is labeled:

'Bäpurru. Gamunungu. Dhulan'

(Group/clan, clay, painting/design)

At the base of the same tree (top, left) is written:

'Wanha-mala ŋali yurru gumurr yulk-thun-mirri gamunungu?'

(where is the place which we will always put on one another’s chest [with] white clay, with designs?)

'Likan ga gamunungu.'

(elbow/joint/connection [name] and white clay)

Written diagonally on the left hand side of the page are two slightly separate passages. The first reads:

'wanha-mala ŋali yurruru giritjirri likan-lili, ringijitj-lili?'

([The place] towards where we dance, to the ringitj place [that is our] connection)

The second passage, only the first word of which is visible in the image, reads:

'Nhaltijan ŋali yurruru ŋamaŋama'-yun litjalan-gu gurrutu-mirri?

(How will we make kinship relations for ourselves?)

The circled cluster near the centre of the page was labeled, in English, as ‘roots.’ The writing on this part of the drawing, diagonally below the cluster reads:

'Raki' dhurrwara manapan ringijitj-gu, manikay-wu, gakal-wu.'

([We] join the ends of the string [here] for ceremony, song and power [that we hold in common])
Discussion

Regional relations between anchored selves: What is different and separate, and what they hold as ‘one’

Here we get a sense of the relationships between bāpurru on a regional scale (obviously representative, i.e. not to scale), and a description or explication of the attributes or properties that make each bāpurru wiripu ‘wiripu (distinct, unique, different) as well as the attributes or properties that they hold in common, for which they are waygany[-yura] ([at] one). The latter comprise the ceremonial raki’ (strings [of relatedness]) that cross-cut the region, for which people ‘come together’ as one for ceremony – they are notable for their motivational and directive force.

Under the ‘us’ tree on the top left are listed the madayin or attributes or properties that make each bāpurru and their relationship to place both proper and unique. As mentioned in the introduction to this chapter each bāpurru possesses a commonly held likan design, likan miny’tji,\(^{15}\) or dhulanj, and a number of likan names pertaining to the rapam (big name Country) for which they are wāŋa-watjanyu (Country holders, land-

\(^{15}\) Likan as distinct from less significant designs. Morphy refers to these as clan designs (1991).
owners). These are, in a very real sense, the imprint of the footprint or anchor of the *bäpurru*, impressed in place in the foundation of *rom*. The reference to the white clay on the chest – ‘where is the place which we will always put on one another’s chest [with] white clay, with designs?’ – is a reference to the painting of the *dhulaj* on the chest of initiates but also the chest of the deceased. The line – ‘We [i.e. our identity] exist toward that place’ – lends further weight to the consideration of *luku wäña* (footprint places) as the anchor of self understanding. The term *gorru*[-*ma*], in fact, literally means ‘well, soak, womb, vessel’ and refers to the paramount source of fresh water located next to, or very near, each *luku wäña* (It is probably more accurate to say that the *gorru*[-*ma*] comprise part of the *dhuyu mädävin* complex of the *luku wäña*.) This is the place from which the *mali* (image, reflection, shadow) of children of each *bäpurru* are respectively said to originate, and to which the spirit of the deceased is returned after death.

The roots, as described ‘join the ends of the string [here] for ceremony, song and power [that we hold in common].’ These are the ‘underneath’ strings of relatedness from Figure 3, that join or link people and groups and places together [to each other] through *mädävin* for ceremony. Where they come together in a dense cluster in Figure 3 – described or denoted as/with the line, ‘[We are] linked here forever to that place, and elsewhere on the same figure as – ‘[The place] towards where we dance, to the *ringitj* place [that is our] connection’ – refers to both a *ringitj* ‘group’ and a *ringitj* site, where the different *bäpurru* comprising the *ringitj* group literally come together for ceremony.

The reader may have noted the pervasive use of the generic future tense (similar in meaning to the English generic present, and signalled by the particle *yurruru*) in the exegesis in each of the diagrams. This reflects the way Yolŋu talk about social relations in general, using rhetorical questions that concern orientation, direction, and movement.
This reflects a widespread conceptualisation of relationships and forms of relatedness as 'strings' which *manapan-mirri* (connect, join, link [people and places] together [to each other]) in fundamental and substantive ways. *Raki*, as I have suggested, are ties of kinship that bind people together through mutual obligations and responsibilities, they draw people together through mutual ties of affiliation and affection. A number of anthropologists have noted also that socio-political, ceremonial relationships are frequently represented in the paraphernalia or ceremonial performances by handmade strings (Rudder 1993, p. 20).¹⁶

Further examples of this way of talking about relatedness are found throughout my fieldnotes. For example, on one occasion in conversation about a funeral, I asked how people know what songs and ceremony to perform at a person’s funeral, because it was evident that this decision making process was of the utmost significance. I was told (quote):

> We have to go back to where they are truly from, where their trunk, body, torso is from, to sing from that place, from the root of the tree, mother’s mother *bäpurru*, sister *bäpurru*, father *bäpurru*, father’s mother *bäpurru*, husband-country songs, Datiwuy, Gälpu, Djapu, Djambarrpuŋu, Daymil. We can’t cut off any of the tree! (Yethun Fieldnote Book 4, p. 19)

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¹⁶ Williams refers to the photograph of a 'ritual string in place for ritual performance. The feather-ornamental string symbolises the course of the bee’s flight and is here strung between decorated poles representing the Wawilak Sisters (for the performance of Djunguwan ritual, a memorial to deceased elders and head of the Rirratjiju clan performed at Yirrkala in 1970)' (1986, p. 48).
On another occasion I was talking with Yethun about relations between ‘our’ bâpurru and other bâpurru countries (what might be described as the difference between primary and secondary relations between groups and country. She explained as follows:

‘Dhuwala nhe gulun’ wâñja’
(This here is your stomach place)

‘Wanha-ŋuru ŋayi dhurrwara-manapan’
(From where the mouth joins [together]?)

‘Wanhamala ŋayi raki’ dhuwala? ’
(Where towards is this string?)

Ga nhepi nhe yurru miny’ti dharrpum wanha-ŋura nhe Yolu.
(You yourself will paint the designs to show the place you are [truly] from)

Wanha-ŋura ŋayi ŋunhi raki’ nhuna dhunupa-yirra ga wanha-ŋuru nhe yuwalk?
(At where does that string make you straight, from where is your body/torso from where are you truly from?)

(Yethun 2008 Field-note Book 5:16)

And a final example, which gives a sense of the broader relationships between raki’ and the rumba: In a discussion about particular inter-bâpurru relations with Yethun, I asked which of the bâpurru in question shared which particular songs. Yethun sought to clarify my broader understanding of inter-bâpurru relations, explaining thus:

‘From every ringitj, white clay (gamunungu), ashes (gapan), it’s becoming separate, do you see? But [putting her hand on my chest] that is our front.’

In a more general sense, I suggest that this way of talking about relatedness also reflects the moral and directive force of rom. This will be discussed further in section 2.5.
The third drawing: The social body of the self (as a moral and political actor)

The third drawing (Figure 5) in the series, represents the self and its relationship with significant others in more detail (and on a smaller scale). It can be seen as either individual or collective self – a person or a bāpurru. This will become clear in the course of discussion as we move from egocentric relations to socio-centric relations between intermarrying bāpurru. Again, I will present the exegesis and translations before discussing them in more general terms.

Figure 5: The third drawing
The writing down the left hand side reads:

Wa^gany manapan-mirri.

(Joined/linked together [to each other] as one)

The writing in the branches (from left to right) reads:

ηathi, momu.

(MF, FM)

ηandi, ηapipi

(M, MB)

waku-walala

(wC, ZC [plural])

mari

(MM, MMB)

The top branch, ‘branching off” the ‘ηandi, ηapipi’ branch is labeled:

yilimurru

(Us)

The branch off that labeled yilimurru is labeled:

dhuway

(FZC [husband])

Off the branch labeled dhuway is a branch labeled:

gaminyarr, gutharra

(wSC/ZSC, wDC/ZDC)
The branches here are kin from different *bāpurru* who are nonetheless ‘joined together to each other’ with the self and the collective body through the matriline and marriage. These are particularly significant *galki* (close), *yindi* (big), *dhayay*’ (full) kin from different *bāpurru* and thus different, separate collective bodies but who are nonetheless ‘joined (together) to each other’ as branches or tributaries of the body. The branches also denote socio-centric kin relations between significant, close *bāpurru*. These are particularly significant kin who are pivotal in the bestowal cycle and form the basis for socio-centric kin relations between *bāpurru*, which, in turn, form regional networks of connubia that pattern residence and mobility in the region (Morphy 1991).

The kin Gatjikin and Yethun identified as branches or tributaries of the *bāpurru* are all from one of four *bāpurru* involved in the bestowal cycle. Centered on a male ego, the bestowal cycle involves interrelations between five *bāpurru*. Excluding one’s own (and thus one’s father’s) *bāpurru* these include two of each moiety - mother’s mother *bāpurru* (of the same moiety), mother’s *bāpurru* (of the opposite moiety), one’s sister’s children’s *bāpurru* (of the opposite moiety), and one’s sister’s daughter’s children’s *bāpurru* (of the same moiety) (Morphy, F. 2008, p. 6). Men look to their male māri (MMB) to bestow his own daughter (*gāthu*) as their mother-in-law (*mukul rumaru*), and look to their *ŋapipi* to bestow one of his own daughters to them as a wife (*galay MBD*). This is possible because *ŋapipi* marries *mukul rumaru* (Frances Morphy pers. comm.).

It is important to point out that the ‘tree’ is not actually ‘a’ *bāpurru*. The kin denoted by a number of branches are from different *bāpurru* and thus different collective bodies. It is helpful, here to introduce two figures. Figure 6 is a diagrammatic representation of Yethun and Gatjikin’s figure. Figure 7 is a genealogical diagram illustrating bestowal relations and genealogical bases for socio-centric clan relations (adapted from Morphy...
1991, p. 55). With regard to figure 7, each tree is a bapurru, joined together to significant others. The rest will become clear in the course of discussion.

Figure 6: Diagrammatic representation of previous figure
I will deliberately change tense here, for clarity of exposition:

The branch numbered ‘2’ in Figure 6 represents \( \eta \text{athi} \) (MF) and \( \text{momu} \) (FM). Our \( \eta \text{athi ‘mirinu} \) is our mother’s father, or ‘maternal grandfather.’ He is the husband of our \( \text{māri} \), my mother’s mother, who is one of the most important people in our life. Our \( \eta \text{athi} \)’s sister is our \( \text{momu} \). She is also our father’s mother, our ‘paternal grandmother’.

Our \( \eta \text{athi} \) and \( \text{momu} \) are from the \( \text{bāpurru} \) we refer to as our \( \text{nāndi-pulu} \). We call it thus because this is the \( \text{bāpurru} \) our mother is from. Our \( \eta \text{apipi} \) (MB and our \( \text{galay} \) (MBC) are also from our \( \text{nāndi-pulu} \).
The branch numbered ‘5’ in Yethun and Gatjikin’s diagram is \( \eta\dd{ndi} \) (M) and \( \eta\dd{apipi} \) (MB). Our \( \eta\dd{ndi} \) is our own mother\(^{17}\). Her brother, our mother’s brother, is our \( \eta\dd{apipi} \).

The men from our \( \dd{b\dd{a\dd{p}urru} \) have traditionally married the women from their \( \dd{b\dd{a\dd{p}urru} \). As a man I will look to my \( \eta\dd{apipi} \) for a promise wife among his own daughters. My wife, and my brother’s wives will thus also come from our \( \eta\dd{ndi} -\dd{pu\dd{l}}u \). Our \( \eta\dd{ndi} -\dd{pu\dd{l}}u \) refer to our \( \dd{b\dd{a\dd{p}urru} \) as their \( \dd{w\dd{aku}}-\dd{pu\dd{l}}u \). As \( \dd{w\dd{aku}}-\dd{pu\dd{l}}u \) we are their ‘\( \dd{d\dd{j\dd{u\dd{g\dd{a}}\dd{y}}a} \)’ and refer to their \( \dd{m\dd{a\dd{d\dd{a}}\dd{yin}} \) ceremony and country as ‘our \( \eta\dd{ndi} \).’

The relationship between a person and their \( \eta\dd{ndi} -\dd{pu\dd{l}}u \) is often referred to as ‘\( \dd{y\dd{o\dd{t\dd{h\dd{u}}-\dd{y\dd{i\dd{n\dd{d}}}}}} \)’, literally ‘child – big’, denoting the reciprocal relation between a mother (big) and a child (\( \dd{y\dd{othu} \). ‘Just as a person is \( \dd{w\dd{aku}} \) to their \( \eta\dd{ndi} \) (M) and \( \eta\dd{apipi} \) (MB) they are \( \dd{w\dd{aku}} \) to their mother’s \( \dd{b\dd{a\dd{p}urru} \) as a collective whole’ (F Morphy 2008, p. 3). This relationship is particularly significant as regards shared expectations, obligations and responsibilities to one another. \( \dd{W\dd{aku}} \), in fulfilling these responsibilities toward their \( \eta\dd{ndi \) country, \( \dd{m\dd{a\dd{d\dd{a}}\dd{yin}} \) and ceremony, are referred to as \( \dd{d\dd{j\dd{u\dd{g\dd{a}}\dd{y}}a} \), which, as Morphy observes, is often glossed by English speakers as ‘manager’, ‘caretaker’, or sometimes ‘policeman’ (2008, p. 3). ‘In essence’ she explains, ‘\( \dd{w\dd{aku}} \) have a duty of care to their \( \eta\dd{ndi \) country and \( \dd{m\dd{a\dd{d\dd{a}}\dd{yin}} \), which involves helping and sometimes ensuring that \( \eta\dd{ndi} -\dd{pu\dd{l}}u \) look after them in what they consider an appropriate or proper way’ (F Morphy 2008).

The branch numbered ‘3’ in Yethun and Gatjikin’s diagram was \( \dd{m\dd{a}}\dd{r\dd{i}} \). Our female \( \dd{m\dd{a}}\dd{r\dd{i}} \dd{m\dd{i\dd{r\dd{i}}\dd{n}}u \) is our mother’s mother (MM) or ‘maternal grandmother.’\(^{18}\) She helped to look after us from the time we were born and is one of the most important people in our

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\(^{17}\) Our male \( \dd{g\dd{a\dd{l\dd{a}}}} \)’s daughter, and our female \( \dd{g\dd{u\dd{t\dd{h\dd{a}}\dd{r\dd{r}}\dd{a}} \)’s daughter are also our \( \eta\dd{ndi}.\)

\(^{18}\) Our \( \dd{m\dd{a}}\dd{r\dd{i}} \dd{m\dd{a}}\dd{r\dd{a\dd{t\dd{j}}}} \) (usually our \( \dd{g\dd{a\dd{l\dd{a}}}} \)’s \( \dd{g\dd{a\dd{l\dd{a}}}} \)) is also our \( \dd{m\dd{a}}\dd{r\dd{i}} \).
life. Her brother is our male māri, our mother’s mother’s brother. We refer to their bāpurru as our māri-pulu. As a man, I look to my male māri to bestow his daughter to me as my mother-in-law, my mukul rumaru. I will call her children (that she has with my ṣapipi), galay. They are my matrilateral crosscousins.

A man’s mother in law is always from his māri-pulu and over generations these bestowal interrelations show considerable stability such that, one bāpurru is considered to be māri for their reciprocal gutharra-bāpurru (Morphy, F. 2008, pp. 6-7). Our gutharra-pulu is the same moiety as our bāpurru and are particularly significant to us as we share mađayin, ceremony potentially also country. This māri-gutharra relation, Williams writes, ‘is the backbone of Yolŋu society’ (1986, p. 38).

The branch numbered ‘4’ in Yethun and Gatjikin’s diagram is ‘waku-walala.’ As a man my waku ‘miriju are my sister’s children. They call me ṣapipi. As a woman my waku ‘miriju are my own children. We refer to their bāpurru as our waku-pulu. Our dhuway (FZC) and gaminyarr (ZSC) (branches ‘7’ and ‘9) are also from our waku-pulu. The women from our bāpurru have traditionally married men from their bāpurru.

Branch number ‘7’ in Yethun and Gatjikin’s diagram is dhuway (FZC- patrilateral crosscousin). As a woman, my dhuway ‘miriju is my own husband and the other children of my father’s sister (my mukul bāpa). As a man my dhuway ‘miriju is my sister’s husband and the other children of our father’s sister (my mukul bāpa).

Our gaminyarr ‘miriju, denoted as branch number ‘9’ in Yethun and Gatjikin’s diagram, are also from our waku-pulu. As a man my gaminyarr ‘miriju is my sister’s son’s child; as a woman, my own son’s children. We spend a great deal of time with our waku-pulu because they are such close kin and because they are so important to us (Christie 2004).
Our waku-pulu refer to our bāpurru as their nāndi-pulu and sometimes yindi-pulu (refs). They are the opposite moiety to our bāpurru so we do not share any madayin or country (except sometimes a small discrete country within the greater bounds of theirs). They are particularly significant, however, as djungaya for us. They refer to our madayin, ceremony and country as their ‘mother’ and we consult them about anything that concerns our madayin, ceremony or country. Our waku-pulu also have a particularly significant role for us in ceremony. As a man, for example, my dhuiway held me and looked after me during and after my initiation ceremony (Christie 2004).

The branch numbered ‘8’ in Yethun and Gatjikin’s diagram is gutharra. As a woman my gutharra ‘miriju is my daughter’s child. We call their bāpurru our gutharra-pulu and they are some of our closest kin. As a woman I will spend most of my time with my gutharra as I get older. Their father is my son-in-law, my gurruij, whom I must avoid, though can depend upon to make sure I am well looked after (Christie 2004). As a man my gutharra ‘miriju is my sister’s daughter’s child, whose father is my gurruij. I treat him with much respect as rumaru. He will marry my sister’s daughter (my waku).

With some exceptions, Morphy observes, ‘people in the past tended to intermarry with bāpurru whose countries were close to their own.’ Intermarrying bāpurru from close or contiguous countries, linked through recurring ties of kinship, form what Morphy has termed ‘connubia’ (H. Morphy 2003, p. 3 (in) F. Morphy 2008, p. 7). These ‘dense connubial networks are recognised by Yolŋu as a social fact and are often associated with regional names’ (F. Morphy 2008, p. 7). The networks were the effective regional level at which the patterns of seasonal mobility and residence were organised (F. Morphy 2008, p. 7). Depending on the time of the year,
people were either scattered through the region in small groups, usually on the clan estate areas of the male members of the group, or they were gathered together, sometimes in very large numbers, at particular places on the coast or on the borders of the wetlands at times of the year when resources were abundant. (F. Morphy 2008, p. 7).

This is still very much the case in the network of Homeland communities around camp. This will be illustrated and discussed further in the next section, which illustrates my final point for this chapter, which is that these individual and shared understandings have motivational force.

**Situating these patterns topographically: The affective, moral and directive force of rom**

What does it mean in topographic terms to suggest that the shared understandings underlying this ‘tree-body’ model of sociality are imbued with affective, motivational and directive force? In the broadest, quantitative sense it means that the *luku* and *raki’* denote (or closely reflect) patterns of residence and mobility. The tree/body model of the self, others and the relationship between them can literally be mapped onto place, as illustrated in Figure 8 below.
Here we see the relationship between anchored selves in the immediate area surrounding Camp. Burarrwaŋa Gumatj, 'ego,' are anchored right next to their *dhuyu wāŋa* (sacred place) or *luku wāŋa* (footprint, anchor place) at MaṯaMaṯa. The other *bāpurru* depicted include their closest kin from different *bāpurru* who are nonetheless branches or tributaries of the Burarrwaŋa *rumbal* (body). These are particularly significant *galki* (close), *yindi* (big), *dhaŋay* (full) kin from different *bāpurru* and thus

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19 As previously mentioned, this is 'our' *māri* Country. Burarrwaŋa Gumatj have effectively succeeded to this part of Warramiri Country, in line with the principles of succession outlined above.
different, separate collective bodies, who are nonetheless ‘joined (together) to each other’ as branches or tributaries of the body. These are particularly significant bāpurru that together comprise a bestowal cycle. Recall that, centered on a male ego, the bestowal cycle involves interrelations between five bāpurru, māri bāpurru (MM, MF), one’s nāndi bāpurru (M), one’s own bāpurru, one’s waku bāpurru (ZC), and one’s gutharra bāpurru (ZDC). Ego here is Burarrwaŋa Gumatj. Their waku-pulu (WC, ZC group) is Dātiwuy, their nāndi-pulu (M group) is Gālpu, and their māri-pulu (MM, MMB group) is Warramiri – each of them ‘anchored’ in place on their respective countries but joined or linked together to each other through strong, close ties of relatedness.

The mobility data which I collected over a twelve month period illustrates the motivational force of these significant, close raki’. While based at MaŋaMaŋa I noted who came in or out of Camp each day for twelve months. Each person leaving or arriving was counted as ‘one unit’ of movement for the day recorded and I noted also where they had come from and/or where they were going to. Collated, the data shows the ‘pull’ of this close raki’ – and movement was predominantly between camps and countries of one’s closest kin, and their bāpurru. It is interesting to note, however, that the data is skewed or weighted by the townships of Galiwin’ku and Nhulunbuy – where many close kin now reside and where resources are now regularly accessed (i.e. people visit close kin, go shopping and access other resources at these places now on a regular basis).

While there are other bāpurru involved in this connubium or pattern of inter-marriage, those pictured are those that are most salient comprising a dense connubial network in the immediate region. (For reasons related to the succession to Maŋa-Maŋa by Burarrwaŋa Gumatj from their māri-pulu [MM, MMB]), their actual Father’s country is off the map to the East.
The Homeland community of Rrorruwuy belongs to our *waku-pulu*, Dātiwuy. The Homeland community of Nyinyikay is also Gumatj. The camp at Gikal is our *ŋāndi-pulu*, Gālpu. The area surrounding the township of Nhulunbuy includes our actual father’s country, and thus visitations to the township are also visitations to kin, although family usually stop with our *ŋāndi-pulu* Gālpu on their Country (largely to avoid problems associated with alcohol). When family visit Galiwin’ku they stop with their close Gumatj kin on what is referred to by *Yolŋu and Balanda alike, as ‘MātaMāta street’* (at one of two or three houses.) Thus do mobility patterns reflect being anchored (residentially) at or near one’s footprint place as the primary place of residence, and the frequency of movement between camps and Countries clearly illustrates the ‘pull’ or ‘draw’ of the closest ‘full’ strings of relatedness between *bāpurru*.
Before concluding this chapter I will revisit three of the concepts introduced at the beginning of the chapter to suggest how we might think of them in terms of shared understandings about the self, others and the relationship between them.

Revisiting key social-organisation concepts in terms of shared understandings about the self and its relation to others.

Bäpurru have been here represented as collective social bodies, drawn as trees – anchored or ‘rooted’ in place at places referred to as luku wāŋa (foot[print], anchor places). The collective social body of any one bäpurru is discrete in some important sense, but every bäpurru is connected – ‘linked or joined’ together – to a number of significant others through ceremonial relations and marriage, here represented as raki (strings, ropes.). The rumbal (body or trunk) can be seen as the minimal unity of the group or ‘least inclusive’ group. These are aspects of the identity of the bäpurru that are unique – things that it does not share with any other bäpurru – these unique aspects of group identity as a bäpurru include unique madayin (songs, ceremonial forms, names, designs and sacra). The most unique and important design of the bäpurru – their dhulany – is described as the ‘image’ of the luku – of the ‘footprint or anchor’ of the bäpurru – as it is impressed in place, in their ‘footprint, anchor place.’ These are actual sites and the focus of life on Country. The dhulany designs that pertain to the luku wāŋa of each bäpurru are effectively their ‘title’ to Country.

I suggest that madayin are sacred in the sense implied by the etymology of the English term ‘sacred,’ derived from Latin saceres which is connected the to base saq-, meaning ‘bind, restrict, enclose, protect.’ Bound, restricted, enclosed and protected, madayin are attributes of the body and properties of the self. As Gauthier writes, to appropriate something is to make it one’s own and,
the most complete and literal appropriation is of course appropriation into oneself – the conversion of an external object into one’s body. But not all goods can be appropriated in such a way that they lose their own bodily identity; what is one’s own thus extends beyond one’s body to the physically distinct objects which constitute property. To appropriate is then to acquire property; the very object of appropriation is individual possession. (1977, p. 147)

‘Property’ or ‘properties’ are attributes, characteristics or qualities that someone ‘has’ or ‘has control over,’ as in ‘possesses.’ The English word ‘property’ is recorded in use from c. 1300 to mean ‘nature, quality,’ and later ‘possession.’ However, the later usage was apparently rare before the 18th century. The word property is earlier derived from Latin proprius meaning ‘not common with others, one’s own, special, characteristic, particular, proper’. This is the same root from which the English terms ‘proper’ (the quality of being appropriate), and ‘propriety’ (correctness in behaviour and morals) are derived.

The semantic relation between ideas about ‘characteristic attributes or qualities’, ‘having’ or ‘having control over,’ ‘the quality of being appropriate,’ and ‘correctness in behaviour or morals’ reflects the associative meaning of the Yolŋu suffix -watuŋu, generally considered to denote ownership. The Yolŋu Matha Dictionary, however, translates the suffix as ‘proper, correct, owned, rightfully belongs to’ (Zorc 1986, p. 260), which is very similar to proprius, not in common with others, one’s own, special, characteristic, particular, proper.21

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21 This relationship between ideas about characteristic attributes or qualities, ‘having’ and/or ‘having control over’, ‘the quality of being appropriate’, and/or ‘correctness in behaviour or morals’ also lends explanatory force to the Yolŋu concept of rom.
Wayjarr and associated madayin describe, denote and or define the particular form of particular attributes, characteristics or properties of the self. This is suggested by passages such as the following, where Batumbil asks rhetorically,

\[\ldots\ \text{yarra nhā-nhara-mirri?}\]

(What, who am I? What am I [like]?)

Yolu yarra, yarra Yirritja, yarra Gumatj
(I am Yolu, I am Yirritja, I am Gumatj)

yarra nhā? Gurtha yarra, yarra bāru, yarra maranydjalk.
(I am what? I am fire, I am crocodile, I am stingray.)

Gumatj yilimurru, yilimurru Djutarra – Bayini yilimurru.
(We are Gumatj, we are Djutarra – we are Bayini.)

And further when she explains:

\[\ldots\ \text{yuli yilimurru yaka yunhi wayjarr yilimurru manapan-mirri-nha, we would be jus'}\]

(nothing.
(If we didn’t have wayjarr joining us together [to each other] we would just be nothing.)

Empty-nha – sitting here jus' empty-nha, yuli yilimurru yaka
(Empty – just sitting here empty, if we weren’t)

manapan-mirri-nha wayjarr-yu
(joined together [to each other] by [those] wayjarr)

yuli wāŋa dhuwala yaka madayin-mirri.
(if this country was without madayin)

The expression that I have translated as ‘possess the quality of’ as where Batumbil asks rhetorically ‘I possess the quality of what’ is ‘yarra nhā-mirri’ is constructed from the
first person pronoun \textit{yarr}a 'I' or 'me,' \textit{nhä} meaning 'what' and the suffix \textit{-mirri}. There are two \textit{-mirri} suffixes (Frances Morphy pers. Comm.)\textsuperscript{22} In this case it is the suffix that denotes the existential proprietive ‘full of,’ ‘possessing,’ or ‘having’ (Zorc 1986, p. 190). Linguist Beulah Lowe explains the meaning of \textit{-mirri} as something akin to the English suffix \textit{-ful} as in the term ‘joyful,’ ‘having or possessing joy’ or ‘full of joy’ (Lowe 1960, p. 7). Constructions using the suffix \textit{-mirri},’ she writes, denote ‘having or possessing something’ (Lowe 1960, p. 7). They describe, denote and define inherent attributes of the self, others and relatedness as Batumbil suggests when she explains that \textit{wayarr} and \textit{madayin lakarana-mirri} – they have or possess the quality of telling (of, about)\textsuperscript{23} – \textit{who I am and what I have in common with others – how we are related}.

\textbf{Conclusion}

The shape or form of the model outlined in this series of drawings is familiar in the anthropological record, and key aspects of the material resonate strongly with particular insights and descriptions in the literature. \textit{Bāpurru} are here represented as collective social bodies, drawn as trees which are anchored or ‘rooted’ in place as/at sites or places referred to as \textit{luku wāŋa} (foot[print]/anchor places), \textit{rumbal wāŋa} (body/trunk places) or \textit{dhuyu wāŋa} (secret/sacred places). The collective social body is discrete in the sense that it has or ‘holds’ a discrete corpus of \textit{madayin}, here represented as the \textit{luku} and the \textit{rumbal} ‘body, trunk or torso’ of the collective social body. However, each

\textsuperscript{22} One is \textit{-mirri} the proprietive added to nouns and the other is \textit{mi-} ‘reflexive/reciprocal’ plus -rri ‘unmarked tense marker’ which derives the reflexive/reciprocal form of the verb (Frances Morphy pers. Comm.).

\textsuperscript{23} The expression I have translated as ‘telling (of, about)’ is \textit{lakarana}, a transitive verb Zorc defines as ‘to tell (of, about), to speak (to), and/or ‘to call (by name)’ (Zorc, 1986, p. 154).
collective social body is also ‘joined, connected, linked’ together [to each other] to a number of significant others through ceremonial relations and marriage, here represented as raki’ (strings, ropes.).

What is unique about this model is the description or representation of socio-political forms as collective social bodies of a particular ‘cultural self’ – these are shared, substantive understandings about the self, others and the relationship between them – ‘who I am, what I am [like] and how I relate to others.’ The luku of the individual social body is the anchor or ‘root’ of self-understanding – ‘where I originate from/pertain to.’ The discrete corpus of madayin, here represented as the luku and the rumbal ‘body, trunk or torso’ of the individual social body, are attributes or qualities that are proper or true to the self. The raki’ (strings, ropes) of the individual social body are aspects of the self that are shaped or defined through one’s relationship to significant others – they are specific close, reciprocal gurrutu relations.

Key aspects of this model resonate strongly with the model Keen puts forward as an alternative to the clan model. This material suggests that bapurru are not discrete, bounded corporate entities, nested in a number of cross-cutting aggregates of various kinds; they are anchored social forms that are ‘linked’ or ‘joined together’ to a number of significant others through ceremonial relations and marriage. The luku (foot[-print], anchor, root of a tree) closely reflect Keen’s description of focused group identities, and the raki’ (strings, ropes) his description of group identities extending outward from this point. However, the raki’ (strings, ropes) in this model are specific gurrutu and inter-bapurru relations, which suggests a more distinct or definite form than Keen’s description of connections among such identities as ‘open and extendable “strings” of connectedness’ (2000, p. 421). Perhaps another minor difference relates to Keen’s argument against the description of bapurru as ‘corporate.’ This material suggests that
they are indeed corporate, but only in the sense and to the degree that each bēpurru has or 'holds' a distinct corpus of madayin, here represented as the luku (foot[print]/anchor) and the rumbal (body, trunk or torso).

This material foregrounds the importance of paying close attention to the constitutive terms that people use to frame and talk about group identities, which was a key aspect of Keen’s critique of the prevailing ‘clan model’ of Yolŋu social organisation. The nature and significance of Yolŋu social forms can only be understood with reference to constitutive terms that people use to frame and talk about them.

The final point is that these individual and shared understandings have motivational force. The sites referred to as luku or luku wäŋa (foot[print]/anchor places) are sites of residence, and raki’ (strings, ropes) closely reflect patterns of mobility when mapped onto place. This material suggests that emotion or ‘affect’ is critical to understanding the link between cultural understandings of the self and structures or patterns of social and local organisation. This is a point that has been made by a number of psychological anthropologists (D’Andrade 1984; Spiro 1961; Markus and Kitayama 1994), who suggest that the nature of the ‘lock and key’ arrangement between affective responses and the social order can be further understood through the idea of a self that provides a meeting point and a framework for the relation between the individual and the social world.

The key factor here is the ‘link’ of affective, motivational and directive force. Knowledge of the self, others and the relationship between them is not only interpretative but imbued with affective, motivational and directive force. This is not an unusual or radical claim; a large body of literature exists that suggests that we not only learn associations between observable features of the world; we also learn associations
between these observable features and certain feelings (D'Andrade and Strauss 1992; Strauss and Quinn 1994; Strauss and Quinn 1997). One of the central differences between Bourdieu’s theory of habitus and cultural schema theory is that the latter model of internalisation accounts for the role of emotion, ‘feeling’ and motivation in the process of cultural re/production (Strauss and Quinn 1994). Thought and feeling are part of cognitive processes, such that cognitive schemas exist as learned, internalised patterns of ‘thought-feeling’ that mediate both the interpretation of on-going experience and the reconstruction of memories (Strauss 1992). In this way, people come to regard certain understandings and behaviours not only as natural, but desirable; schemas may become associated with strong feelings and thus come to function as positive or negative goals. Furthermore, according to what is known about the way the brain works, emotional arousal during experience ‘alters the neurochemical environment in which relations among features of that experience are encoded, rendering the mental representations of those associations stronger than they would have been otherwise’ (Strauss and Quinn 1994).

It is now widely recognised that self-defining concepts are often the source of enduring values (Strauss 1992; D’Andrade and Strauss 1992). As understandings of the self and others self-defining concepts enter into the definition of a person’s existential concerns and life long ambitions. Recent research suggests that many if not most of these self-defining concepts are imbued with motivational and directive force – they are experienced by a person as a desire, need, or obligation to do certain things, to behave in certain ways, to be a certain (type of) person (D'Andrade and Strauss 1992). People are not motivated out of some abstract belief in these cases, but by an abiding sense that they would be less of the person that they want to be should they not do so, or at least make every effort to do so (Strauss 1992; Strauss and Quinn 1994). The force of
cultural models of personhood derives, in large part, from the seeming naturalness and
rightness that experience has granted to certain understandings about one’s self (Strauss
1992; Strauss and Quinn 1994). Ostensibly descriptive statements about one’s self often
implicate moral propositions about what is normal, right and desirable about, for
example, particular qualities, traits, roles and obligations (D’Andrade and Strauss
1992). Cultural understandings that define inherent attributes or traits of a person – that
define the self as a social person – ‘**who I am, what I am like, how I am related to
others,**’ implicate or articulate certain expectations about responsibilities and
obligations in the interrelationship. In this way they are implicated in an individual’s
ongoing experience and interpretation of the world, and they acquire motivational and
directive force. Such processes, D’Andrade reminds us, highlight the importance of
affect-laden life experiences and the emotional life of informants (D’Andrade and
Strauss 1992). Self-understanding and self experience ‘implies the emotional
experience of a political subject, and to articulate the psychological structure of
emotions can only give us more evidence to argue that power is inscribed upon our
bodies, and that moral judgement is a visceral act’ (Luhrmann 2006).
Chapter Three: Key terms and concepts
 associated with emotion and morality

In this chapter I introduce the key body of terms and concepts comprising the emotion lexicon in Yolŋu-matha. I include transcripts from digitally recorded conversations about emotion to contextualise these terms and the way they are used in everyday talk. As Myers suggests for emotion-concepts for the Pintupi of the Western Desert, these terms and concepts constitute a moral system that articulates and informs a particular view of the self and social life. Much of this cultural template is similar to that Myers describes for the Pintupi; there are also, however, a number of key points of difference. I intend that the material in this chapter – the key terms and concepts that I introduce herein – should serve as something of a point of reference for the chapters to follow.

Overview of the relevant literature

Fred Myers’ early papers (1979, 1988) remain among the only works dealing directly with emotion concepts in Aboriginal Australia. Emotion concepts, Myers argues, are critical to understanding what it means to be Pintupi; they constitute a moral system that articulates and informs a particular view of the self and social life for Pintupi.

Central themes of the Pintupi moral order revolve around the ideal of closely cooperating kin (1979, p. 353). Happiness is seen as the result of smoothly running relations between the individual and those they consider kin; to be among kin, to be shown affection and concern, and to show it, should make one happy (1979, p. 353). Being ‘not happy’ is conceived of in terms that represent different sorts of relationships with kin – being lonely, sorry, angry or ashamed. ‘Coming together’ for ceremony is
seen as a salient image of sociability. This model system, in turn, makes a significant contribution to social order – the political order made up of such selves – which is dependent upon the capacity of persons to maintain the official representation of co-residents as 'one family' – as all *walytja*. The self described in Pintupi ideology ‘is not an aggressive, self-contained, egotistic, autonomous individual,’ but one that is malleable and responsive to others, one which recognises a significant identity with important others, ‘such that these others are represented as part of the self’ (1986, p. 124).

In the Pintupi case, Myers argues, people do not consider this morally binding social consensus to be the result of human decision making processes, but rather, a consensus maintained by common adherence to a shared, external and autonomous ‘code’: The Dreaming’ or what Pintupi refer to as ‘the Law.’ People should not stress their own wishes but ‘should at least appear to be emphasising something external and objective to them, timeless, eternal principles: The Dreaming’ (1979, pp. 368-369). Thus do the emotions ‘ensure representation within the individual of the ‘community welfare’ (1979, p. 369).

Where the Yolŋu material differs from that described by Myers, is in the nature and orientation of the cultural self implied. In contrast and tension to the emphasis on relatedness and recognising the relationship of the self and others, Myers explains, there is a strong value placed on or accorded to individual autonomy: ‘[Pintupi] place an emphasis on individuals, their autonomy, and their capacity to choose courses of action’ (Myers 1986, p. 18). In the Yolŋu case, however, it is not the individual and their autonomy that is foregrounded and/or in tension with a contrasting value of relatedness, but rather, it is *the state of the relationship between people* that is emphasised and foregrounded as of primary concern. The Yolŋu body of concepts
describes emotion and affective experience as fundamentally relational and contingent upon the state of relations between people. If we were to ‘consider emotional meaning like any other semiotic practice, as a product of signification,’ as Myers suggests (1988, p. 591), most Yolŋu concepts associated with emotion and morality signify a particular state or sense of feeling between people. Yolŋu place emphasis not on the individual, nor necessarily on the self-in-relation to others, but on the state of the relationship between people in any given situation or event. The cultural self, as a moral and political actor, is expected to pay a great deal of social attention to the state of their reciprocal or dyadic relationship to/with significant others at any given time.

Basic concepts associated with emotion or affect

Nyayanu

The most basic concept is the emotion lexicon is nyayanu, which I translate throughout the thesis as ‘state or sense of feeling.’ As a cultural concept of affect there are a number of things that distinguish nyayanu from the meaning and use of the English term ‘feeling’ and/or ‘feelings’ because nyayanu does not necessarily distinguish between what Anglo-Europeans would normally consider distinct or different ‘senses’ – touch, sight, smell, taste and hearing – nor does it necessarily distinguish between affective and ‘physical’ feeling. Furthermore, while nyayanu is experienced or felt by individuals (it is associated with the gumurr [‘chest’]), it is always and necessarily relational.

24 There are more idioms based on the word gumurr (chest, sternum) than can be addressed here, however, to give a sense of the way they are used, or what they imply I will briefly introduce a few. The expression gumurr-mirri, translated literally as ‘having or possessing the quality of a chest’ is an expression meaning ‘to spread out.’ The expression gumurr-yun, translated literally as ‘to chest’ is an expression meaning ‘to meet’. ‘To meet’ may also be referred to as gumurr-buna, literally ‘chest-arrive’. The expression gumurr-manydji, translated
Dayaju refers to the state or sense of feeling among and between people in any given situation or event. The individual experience or sense of dayaju is considered as or ‘in’ relation to significant others, and contingent upon the state of the relationship between them (Morphy, F. 2007). This last point is significant as it gives rise to a theory of morality which foregrounds the affective influence that people have on one another in everyday life, and how this positively or negatively affects the state of feeling or state of relations among and between people more generally.

As something shared and contingent or mutually interdependent, dayaju is something that people can do to one another; it is something that people can give and take – something that they can exchange. Any given state or sense of feeling, whether positive, negative, pleasant or hurtful, can be exchanged. A person may wekama (give) a particular state or sense of feeling such as goran (shame, embarrassment, guilt) to another person or group of people, or mARRama (take, bring, carry) it from one place, or person to another. Dayaju can also be wuthun (affronted, hit, assaulted), or djaw ‘yun-mARRama (snatched, stolen) or more positively, nama-thirri-yama (made good). Dayaju implicates both positive and negative capacities of affective influence – constructive and destructive potentialities – in interpersonal exchange and social relations more

literally as ‘reciprocal relationship between chests’, is an expression used to describe or refer to close friends or consociates. The expression gumurr-dharrwa, which translates literally as ‘multiple or many chests’ is used to describe someone of inconsistent loyalties who is irresolute or inconstant in some way. The expression gumurr-djararrk, literally ‘chest-beloved’ is one of the more common exclamations of affection, sympathy and compassion, meaning something akin to ‘my poor dear one!’ Gumurr-yu-gama, literally ‘to carry by the chest’ is used to describe the act of farewelling someone, seeing them forth or carrying them onward a way. A final example is gumurr-yu-mARRama, translated literally as ‘to take or get by the chest’. This is the expression used to describe the act of adopting a non-Yolnu person into the Yolnu kinship system and wider social networks.
broadly. (The implications of this are clearly illustrated in Chapter 5, which looks at the way people consider issues of responsibility and accountability).

To give a sense of the way *ŋayaju* is implicated in everyday talk, the following are excerpts from recorded discussions with *yapa* Yethun, *waku* Gatjikin and *yapa* Batumbil.

**Transcript 3.1**

‘*Dgayaju manymak – nhe yurrur* [lakarama-mirri]25 *ŋarra-kala* . . .

(Nice, pleasant, healthy ŋayaju – we will tell or talk to one another)

so you and I have to have the same feeling.

(so you and I have to have the same feeling.)

*Yaka* holding in. *Yaka* keeping *in-nha* anger.

(Not holding in. Not keeping in anger.)

If I get anger with you, getting angry with you . . .

(If I get anger with you, getting angry with you . . .)

because you not going to share your feeling with me – feelings-*ndja*,

(because you not going to share your feeling with me – feelings,)

you must have holding something for me . . .

(you must have holding something for me . . .)

a secret that you not going to share with me,

(a secret that you not going to share with me)

25 *lakarama-mirri* is difficult to translate directly into English and I am not completely satisfied with this particular translation. The term or expression is from the transitive verb *lakarama* (to talk or tell [of or about]) and the suffix –*mirri* which here denotes the reflexive reciprocal form of the verb – to do to one another.
but *narra-kala*\(^{26}\) *wiyawuy yurruru lakarama yurruru*

(but *wyawuy* will tell me)

that you holding something there for me

(that you holding something there for me)

but *nhe yaka ykurra djal-thirri-ndja lakrama-nha.*

(but you are not wanting to tell or talk [about it].)

If you don’t share your feeling, you have a lot . . . getting a lot of heaviness-ndja

(If you don’t share your feeling, you have a lot . . . getting a lot of heaviness)

and everything is still stuck in your brain . . .

(and everything is still stuck in your brain . . .)

. . . then become a headache *nhamyu*, brain tumour *nhe yurruru marrama*

(. . . then become a headache for that person, and you will get a brain tumour)

because of that, keeping everything in, for yourself, whether it’s good or bad, see?’

(because of that, keeping everything in, for yourself . . . whether it is good or bad . . . . . . see?)


Consider also the following excerpt taken from a discussion with *wapa* Yethun and *waku* Gatjikin. This particular part of the discussion was prompted by my asking if it makes sense to say *wyiy wekama* (give the seat of emotions). I asked this question because there are conventional ways of talking about giving various states of feeling.

\(^{26}\) This term or expression - *narra-kala* is literally ‘to me.’
and wanted to ‘ask around’ *ηoy* (seat of emotions) to clarify my understanding of differences between *ηoy* and *ηayahu* in this respect:

**Transcript 3.2**


(It’s not . . . so much easing . . .)

*ηayi ηunhi* “*ηayahu* lay-yun”. . .

(it’s ‘ease the state or sense of feeling’ . . .)

yaka “marr wekama” wo nhawi . . . “*ηoy* wekama.”

(it’s not really “giving” *whatchyamacallit* . . . “giving *ηoy*.”)

Dunhi-ndja *ηayi ηunhi* “*ηayahu* wekama-nha” *ηayi ηunhi* ‘doing’ –

(What you are referring to is ‘[to] give the state or sense of feeling,’ which is ‘doing’)

*It is “doing something” . . . to get back*

(It is ‘doing something . . . to get back [i.e. mutual or reciprocal exchange])

[ . . . ]

*Dayahu lapthun-marama* is, it is make yourself free

(To make yourself open, it is to make yourself free.)

*Lay-yun . . . laytju-yirri-nha,*

(To ease or relax . . . becoming pleasant and smooth.)

*mulkurr ga rumbal-nha lay-yun-ndja.*

([to] ease or relax the head [mind] and body.)

It should be noted that the act of ‘giving something,’ as described above, is not
differentiated from the act of giving or ‘letting out’ one’s feeling[s] (*lapthun-marama
*yayaju*). They are both associative concepts or expressions that have meaning and
significance in contradistinction to ‘holding something in for one another’ or being *dāl*
(hard, difficult). Persons or proclivities that are not ‘open’ (*yayaju *lapthun-marama-
mirri*), which do not ‘give’ or ‘let out’ something for one another are considered or felt
to *dhal-yurra* (block up, close off) the possibility for realising or maintaining positive,
moral, valuable relations.

It is equally important to note that being ‘open’ in this sense is not akin to or the same
as the quality described as ‘being open and honest’ in English. It denotes or describes
an observant attentiveness to the state or sense of feeling between people in any given
situation or event – and reflects the valued ability to be attentive and sensitive to the
interpersonal context; the knowledge and ability to respond flexibly and adjust to social
contingencies. This is, as the reader will appreciate, quite a different thing to being
‘open and honest.’ In fact, as we will see in the following chapters, it often entails
withholding (or highly regulating the expression of) one’s private inner thoughts and
feelings.

**Dhākay**

The verb most closely associated with *yayaju* is *dhākay-ṇāma*, from *dhākay* (taste,
flavour or feeling) and the transitive verb *ṇāma* (to hear). Where *yayaju* is the state or
sense of feeling, *dhākay-ṇāma* is the act of ‘getting a taste, getting a feeling’ of *yayaju*.

People can *dhākay-ṇāma* a person, group of people, a social situation or place. They
may also *dhākay-ṇāma* songs as well as things like food. Literally, *dhākay-ṇāma* means
to ‘experience or feel a taste or feeling.’ An alternate but similar expression used
interchangeably with dhākay-ṇāma is dhākay birkaʿyun, from dhākay (taste, flavor, feeling) and the transitive verb birkaʿyun (try, test, taste). Dhākay-birkaʿyun is thus something akin to trying or testing the taste, flavor or feeling. Another similar term often used interchangeably is ṣanʿku-ṇāma, from ṣanʿku (taste, flavour) and – once again – the transitive verb ṣāma (to hear). These interchangeable expressions are often glossed by English speakers as ‘getting a taste, getting a feeling.’ The following excerpt from a recorded discussion with yapa Batumbil offers an example of the use of these terms or expressions:

Transcript 3.3

‘... ṣuli ṣali yurru dhākay mārrama ga birkaʿyun, dhākay-ṇāma dhuwala dhākay
(... if we get a taste/feeling, that’s dhākay-ṇāma, that’s dhākay [e.g.]:)

“Ya – dhuwali ṣatha wikana, ṣarra yurru dhākay-birkaʿyun!”

(‘Hey give me that food, I’ll get a taste/feeling!’)

Taste, like dhākay, same ṣayi mayali, eh?
(Taste, like dhākay, same meaning, see?)

When you go for a taste, have a go for a taste . . .
(When you go for a taste, have a go for a taste . . .)

... dhākay-ṇāma ṣayi yurru yoljuʿyulju-nha, eh? Yo.
(... Get a taste/feeling of those people, see? Yo.)

[ ... ]

Dhākay-ṇāma it can goes to anything; anything ṅhe yurru dhākay-birkaʿyun.
(Dhākay-ṇāma it can be applied to anything; you can get a taste/feeling of anything.)
Me: wāŋa—?

(Me: [of a place?]

‘Yoo . . . wāŋa ŋunhi nilimuru yurru birka’yun, mak ŋayi ŋunhi milk’milk-mirri . . .

(Yo, we can get a try/test whether that place, perhaps it has sandflies . . .)

. . . mak milk’milk’-miriw. Eh bitjan, wo wiripu mak ŋayi wāŋa nunhi mari-mirri

(. . . or perhaps it is without sandflies. See, thus so. Or perhaps that place is conflict-ridden)

. . . wo mak ŋayi laytju, yo, balanyara wiripu-nha ŋayi.’

(. . . or perhaps it is pleasant and smooth, yes, that’s a different [example].)

(Batumbil quoted from Blakeman, B 2008, Audio Recording YAB_SEP_17_2_2008’, @00.20-02:00).

Consider also the following discussion with the interchangeable expression ŋan ‘ku-ŋāma:

Transcript 3.4

‘. . . ŋan ‘ku-ŋāma ŋanya yurru, ŋan ‘ku-ŋāma ŋayi Yolŋu-nha ŋanya

(. . . ŋan ‘ku-ŋāma that person, they taste/feel that person)

. . . maymak ŋayi ŋayaŋu wo nhamŋu yätŋ ŋayaŋu

(. . . [is it] a good feeling or is that a bad feeling [between myself and that person])

. . . ŋan ‘ku-ŋāhara-mirri ŋali-pi-yu Yolŋu wo whether Yolŋu or Balanda . . .

(. . . they themselves will get a taste or feeling [of/for one another], whether Yolŋu or Balanda . . .)
Thus, where \textit{\textit{nyanyu}} is the state or sense of feeling, \textit{dhākay-\textit{nāma}} is the act of ‘getting a taste, getting a feeling’ of \textit{nyanyu}.

The following section will introduce the body of terms and concepts associated with positive value – that is, with positive, normal, valuable and otherwise desirable states of relations. Figure 10 includes a partial body of key terms and concepts to follow presented in a schematised manner according to their negative, normative or positive associations. I will address each in turn, suffice to note here that those on the left are those most closely associated with bad, negative, and otherwise undesirable exchanges, interactions or social relations; those on the right are the terms and concepts most closely associated with good, positive and otherwise desirable social relations; those in
the centre, which I will address first, are the terms and concepts most closely associated with normative, balanced, ideal social relations.

**Figure 10: local template of emotion/morality**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Negative</th>
<th>Balanced Reciprocity</th>
<th>Positive</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>X From the midpoint toward the negative extreme</td>
<td>From the mid-point towards the positive extreme</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- **Yayagu waggany-[yura]**
  - '[at] one state of feeling'
- **Yayagu manapan-mirri**
  - State of feeling [that is] joined, linked, connected together [to each other]
- **Guuga-yun-mirri**
  - 'assisting, carrying, sharing [one another]'
- **Rambanji**
  - 'close, together, level, at one'
- **Yan gurrupan**
  - 'just giving'

**negative**
- **Yayahu-wut-thun-nha-mirri rom**
  - law, manner of doing things, which affronts or assaults the state of feeling
- **Gumurr-dal**
  - 'hard, difficult chested'
- **Stricted: [loan word from English]**
  - 'restricted, restrained, strict, drawn tight'
- **Gana**
  - 'separate, distinct, alone'
- **Djul ganaagu-mirri**
  - 'wanting, desirous of being separate, distinct, alone'
- **Sharing-mirri[LN]**
  - 'without/lacking the quality of sharing [with one another]'
- **Dharaŋan-mirri**
  - 'without/lacking the quality of recognising, understanding [one another]'  
  - *yaka*-yun′ - no, refuse, deny
  - *dhul*-yurra - 'block [off], close [up]

**positive**
- **Yayagu yaama-thinya-nha**
  - 'making well/good the state or sense of feeling'
- **Bala-raли-yun-mirri**
  - 'giving and taking between one another'
- **Galga djulga-thirri**
  - 'becoming happy, familiar, in high spirits'
- **Galga-walga-thirri**
  - 'becoming happy, vital, lively, in high spirits'
- **Wangany manapan-mirri**
  - 'joined, linked, connected together [to each other] as one'
- **Marr yaama-thinya-nha**
  - 'making well, good [the] collective vitality, strength, power'

Normative, balanced, ideal, healthy states of relations.
Expanding on the evaluative-moral dimension of this concept, which was introduced in the previous chapter – the term *gurrutu* refers to ‘kin’ or ‘kinship.’ *Gurrutu* is contrasted with *mulkuru* (stranger) – a person with whom one has no social relationship (as discussed in the previous chapter). Being and behaving like *gurrutu* is perhaps the most basic organising principle in Yolŋu sociality and social life. ‘Being *gurrutu*’ is a fact of life for Yolŋu in a similar way that being a socialised, moral person is for Balanda.

The fact of being *gurrutu* is only invoked when social relations are marked by imbalance when it is used to elicit appropriate behaviour or re-balance relations. It would not be uncommon to hear someone privately remark, for example, if someone is behaving inappropriately, *Nha ngai nhulwala Yolgŋu, gurrutu-miriw wo nhă?* (What is this here person, without/lacking kin[ship] or what?) Questioning the nature of a person as *gurrutu* in this way is among the most severe of social judgments akin to questioning their ‘humanity.’ Similar to cases Levi-Strauss notes, in which cultural groups consider humanity to cease at the boundary of the group, to be considered ‘without kin’ or ‘lacking the quality of kin’ is to be *wakinju* (wild, belonging to no one) and *rom-miriw* (without *rom*). Such a person is often described as *wiripu* (different, of a different kind) or *gāna* (different, separate, alone) a condition of suspect intent characteristic of *mulkuru* (strangers) and *galka* (sorcerers). People who are not *gurrutu* are outside the socio-cultural fabric; people without the quality of *gurrutu* are outside socio-moral norms. Being and behaving like *gurrutu* is the benchmark of normal, moral behavior for socialised persons as normal, moral actors. It is firmly in the centre of the schema represented in Figure 10.
As with kin categories like ‘uncle’ and ‘grandfather’ in Balanda kinship systems, Yolŋu kin categories describe, denote and define culturally recognised social relations and roles that entail certain expectations and obligations. The nature and significance of such attendant expectations will become clear in later chapters.

Njaŋu waŋgany-ŋura

*Dayanu waŋgany* (one state or sense of feeling) is the most important evaluative concept in understanding the way people consider issues of morality and value. As a normative ideal it is something that people refer to or appeal to only when seeking reparation or claiming some kind of injustice. As being and behaving like *gurrutu* is the benchmark of normal, moral behavior, *njaŋu waŋgany* (one state or sense of feeling) is the benchmark for normative, ideal, healthy relations. Because the notion or concept of *njaŋu waŋgany* is something of a tacit, unmarked state of relations it is rarely elaborated explicitly in talk, however, the nature and meaning of *njaŋu waŋgany* becomes clear in association with and in contrast to other expectations about morality and value. This will become apparent as, in each of the following chapters, *njaŋu waŋgany* proves central to the way people consider morality and value in interpersonal exchange and social relations more broadly. Indeed, it emerges as the primary value in most social situations or exchanges in the following chapters. From this point on I will will use an abbreviated translation for *njaŋu waŋgany*, ‘one feeling.’ To give a preliminary sense of the type of relations that reflect this normative ideal, consider the following excerpt from a discussion with yapa Batumbil:

**Transcript 3.5**

‘Dilimurru laytju-nha yukurra nhina,

(We are all living/stopping smoothly, pleasantly)
when everybody's getting enjoying, just perfect-nha...

(when everybody's getting enjoying, just perfect . . .)

ŋarra yukurra nhuna mārrama . . .

(I am taking, picking you up . . .)

gā nhe yukurra ŋarra-nha mārrama,

(and you are taking, picking me up,)

and that's ŋayaju  manymak-nydja.'

(and that's a good, nice, healthy state of feeling.)

Manapan-mirri

*Manapan-mirri* (joined or linked together) is an important correlative of the normative ideal state of *ŋayaju wangany*. Both denote a normative, balanced, ideal, healthy state of relations between the self and others, as represented below in Figure 11.

*Manapan-mirri* is a key concept in shared understandings about the nature of persons, morality and inter-relations. *Manapan* is a transitive verb meaning ‘join [together], link, mix, combine.’ As an adverb it means ‘at the same time.’ The suffix *–mirri* here denotes a quality or characteristic of the subject. I will translate the full expression as ‘joined or linked together [to each other]’ throughout the thesis.
The concept and value of manapan[-mirri] is found expression at various levels of social organisation in various aspects of social life. This concept will reoccur or appear in many of the chapters to follow.

Rrambanji

Rrambanji is generally defined as ‘equal, together, the same,’ however, in my experience it has a broader, more grounded meaning in everyday talk. Consider, for example, the following:

Transcript 3.6

'Rrambanji is nayangu manapan-mirri-nha.

(Rrambanji is [when the] state of feeling is linked, joined together [to each other]),

djǟl wangany-ñura . . . djǟl-manapan-mirri

(to desire to be at one . . . to desire to be linked, joined together [to each other])
yunhi-yi Yolju . . . whether yunha-ku,

(that person, whether for,)

yatha-wu whether yayi yatha-wu

(for food, whether [or not])

yurru dhawar'-yun ga yayi yurru bitjan 'gam:

(that food will run out, that person will speak thus:)

"Yo, dhuwala yatha, nilimuru yurru

("Yo, this here food, we will all)

luka wangany-ura," yayi yurru

(eat [it] at one," and it will)

yayanyu manapan-mirri yuli . . .

(link or join the state or sense of feeling together [to each other] . . . )

djal manymak-ndja yayi yunhi Yolju . . .

(that person desires a good, healthy [state of feeling] . . . )

yayanyu manapan-mirri bili yayi djal

(the state of joined feeling because they desire)

sharing-gu yatha . . . yo: "Come and join with us having our yatha dhiyal-uru"

(to share that food . . . yo: "Come and join with us having our food here.")

Duli yatha-mirri yawra nhe yurru marrtji

(If I have food, you will come)

rali ga dhiyanyu yatha-wu luka yunhi-yi

(and eat it, and with this)
ηγανγο μαναπ-μιρρι-νχα ηνχι
([the] state of feeling [is] linked, joined together [to each other], that is)

dहारान ηγανγο ηνχι ηयι लिजालयु
(recognising, understanding [a] state of feeling for us)

γουκर्रु ηορ्रα γुνγα-γν-μιρरι ρομ,
(that law or manner of doing things is assisting/helping one another)

εχ βαλανγα, Ρॉम्बανι . . . ηγανγο-ζανγαγ
(see, thus so, together, Rrombanji . . . at one state of feeling)

same ηνχι ηयι, ηχαηι
(same, they are the same, whatchamacallit)

ηγανγο-μαναπ-μιρρι-νχα . . .
([the] state of feeling [is] linked, joined together [to each other] . . .)

feel together . . . together . . . rrambanji . . .
(feel together . . . together . . . rrambanji . . .)

ζανγαγ-ζυρα . . . same . . . everything same-νχα -
(at one . . . same . . . everything same -)

same together ga sharing together εχ βαλανγα,
(same together and sharing together see, thus so,)

gα walking together. Together. Together . . . sharing ga wangany,
(and walking together. Together. Together . . . sharing and one,)

βαλανγα . . . ζανγαγ-ζυρα ηयι ηνχι . . . ηγανγο ζανγαγ. Υο.'
(thus so . . . that is at one . . . one feeling. Yo.' )
When asked what the word for ‘sharing’ was, I was given – on a number of occasions by a number of different people – the same term: gunnga’yun-mirri (help or assist one another).\(^{27}\)

Gunnga’-yun

Gunnga’yun is generally defined as ‘helping or assisting.’ While it does have this sense of helping and assisting, in my experience, gungay’-yun does not entail the same sense of generosity and benevolence (as in ‘worthy of distinction or remark) as the English terms ‘helping’ and ‘assisting.’ In contrast to the English notions of ‘helping’ and ‘assisting’ which denote a marked, positive state of relations, gunnga’yun is normative and denotes an unmarked state of relations. Hence I have located it at the centre rather than the positive pole in Figure 10. Gunnga’-yun is closely associated with the concept of rrambanji and the idea of taking and picking each other up (see Transcript 3.5). It speaks of states of exchange or types of relations, which maintain or effect balance and equilibrium in social relations. Consider, for example, the following excerpt from a discussion with yap\(a\) Yethun and waku Gatjikin:

**Transcript 3.7**

---

\(^{27}\) One of the reviewers of this dissertation drew my attention to the expression ‘baku-gurrupan’ (sic; I assume they mean ‘buku-gurrupan’), which they described as ‘thinking and giving’. They write that ‘In any inventory of Yolngu terms, this should be included. Meaning forehead-giving – or thinking about the relationship and then responding accordingly in a monetary or material manner. I saw it when a Blanda who was adopted into a Yolngu family was accosted by a senior Yolngu woman for his breach of etiquette. He was taking without giving! I am sure that buku gurrupan is probably an overarching label for many of the specifics that the author has provided in this thesis. It is a much nicer way of saying “demand sharing”.’ While I have no doubt this is true in his experience I did not encounter this term/expression very often at all during my time on the Homelands.
‘. . . unless *nhe njarra-ku bitjan, ‘gam:*
(. . . unless you speak to me such:)

“Is only *yutjuwala natha* but I have to share with you.”
(“It’s only a little bit of food but I have to share with you.”)

ηunhi-yi ηayi manymak . . . balanya bitjan –
(That is good, nice, healthy . . . like that – )

guŋga’-yun-mirri ηayi rom . . . ηunhi-ndja
(helping/assisting one another, that law or manner of doing things)

by sharing one another . . . doesn’t matter
(by sharing one another . . . doesn’t matter)

ηayi yutjuwala ηatha but we have to share . . . eh
(it is just a little bit of food but we have to share . . . see?)

. . . sharing one another, sharing something one another . . .
(. . . sharing one another, sharing something one another . . . )

*balanya, yo.*
(thus so, yo.)

(Yethun & Gatjikin quoted from Blakeman, B. 2008, YAY_WUG_OCT_8.2_2008.mp3’, @ 31:40 – 33:20)

‘Sharing’ may imply giving something one has to someone else, or having something in common in with another person or group of people. Sharing ‘something’ one another may imply sharing ‘things’ as in material goods and so on. ‘Sharing one another,’ rather than ‘things’ or material goods, implies a form or state of mutual interdependence and/or ongoing reciprocity. ‘Sharing one another’ implies, on a basic level, a form of mutual recognition. It also implies recognising or regarding one another
as equable and mutually interdependent. ‘Sharing one another’ could also imply sharing space or [a] place, or sharing time together. It may also describe or denote sharing one other in terms of energy or labour, as in ‘doing something together’ (the significance of which is illustrated in Chapter 6). Consider, for example, the following from a discussion with yapə Batumbil:

**Transcript 3.8**

_Gungga’-yun bitjan ɲuli, spending time with Balanda..._

(Helping/assisting, for example, spending time with Balanda...)

_ga ɲuli interest walalan-gu ga ɲarra-ku..._

(and if they have an interest for them and for me...)

sharing one another...so they can get my story

(sharing one another...so they can get my story)

and I can get their story...their background story or

(and I can get their story...their background story or)

_nhawi, history...balanya ɲayi rom..._

(whatchyamacallit, history...that law/manner of doing things is thus so...)

_gungga’-yun-mirri ɲayi ɲunhi...yo..._

(that is assisting/helping one another...yo...)

spending time ga tea _luka ga_ sharing story, _eh balanya._

(spending time and drinking tea and sharing story, see like that.)

Me: ‘NHа ɲayi yάku sharing-gu?’

(Me: what is the word for sharing?)
‘Gungga’-yun muka bäyi!’

(Gungga’-yun of course!)


Summary of normative, ideal, healthy terms and concepts

As being and behaving like gurrutu is the benchmark of normal, moral behavior, nayaju wandgany (one feeling) is the benchmark for normative, ideal, healthy relations. Dayaju wandgany or nayaju manymak (good, healthy state or sense of feeling) is when everything is smooth and pleasant, when I am taking, picking you up, and you are taking, picking me up. Manapan-mirri (joined or linked together [to each other]) is an important correlative of the normative ideal state of nayaju wandgany. Rambangi (together, level, at one), in turn, is when the state or sense of feeling is manapan-mirri (joined or linked together [to each other]), which is when people are dharajaj-mirri (recognising, understanding one another) and gungga’yun-mirri (helping, assisting one another). Gungga’yun-mirri rom (law or manner of doing things) is when people are sharing one another, sharing something one another.

Terms and concepts associated with positive, good and otherwise desirable states of relations

There are many terms to describe good, positive and otherwise desirable social relations. I will introduce only those in use most frequently during the time I conducted fieldwork, represented on the right hand side of Figure 10.
Galŋa djulŋa-thirri; Galŋa-walŋa-thirri

The first of these is *galŋa djulŋa-thirri* (lit. ‘skin becoming dear, beloved’). The expression refers to something akin to ‘affectionately familiar, nice, happy, pleasurable.’ A further expression commonly used to refer to pleasurable and an otherwise ‘happy’ positive interpersonal relations is *galŋa-walŋa-thirri*, which refers to an experience or feeling that makes one happy and lively with a sense of vitality, lightness and good health. When asked when people might feel *galŋa-djulŋa-thirri* Yethun and Gatljk in replied, in part, as follows:

Transcript 3.9

‘... *galŋa-djulŋa-thirri* ... ɲayamu-manapan-mirri-nha

(...) *galŋa-djulŋa-thirri* ... [the] state of feeling [is] linked, joined together [to each other])

*bala ɲayamu-manapan-mirri-nha bala* feel happy-nha,

(and then [the] state of feeling [is] linked, joined together [to each other] and feel happy,

ɲayi ɲunhi wàŋgany-manapan-mirri ... nhina-nha

(and that is living or stopping ... linked, joined together [to each other]) as one)

... *ŋatha-nha luka* ... yindi nhanyu

(...) eat food ... a lot of)

*màrr-ŋamathinya-nha ɲunha* “get together” ...

(happiness, vitality – ‘get together’ ...)

*marr ɲanapurru yurru* share something to them ... 

(so that we will share something to them ...)

*yaka* keep on going, *ɲali yukurra ɲuli nhina*

(not keep on going, we aren’t always stopping)
ηunha djarrpi rom-dhu, yaka.
(that is the wrong/crooked law/manner of doing things, no.)

Galŋa-walŋathinya-mirri bala-rāli'-yun-mirri.
(Feeling light, happy and well, giving and taking one another,)

nhamŋu ga ŋarra-ku . . . mārr litjalanŋu biyapul
(for that person and for me . . . and another [thing])

yukurra nhā yukurra ŋorra?
(that exists [through that manner of doing things] for us?)

Linygu-nha, litjalanŋu-way ŋali yindi-nha lundu ga
(Well then, our way we have a big friendship and)

bulu nhe ŋarra-ku gurrutu-mirri ga ŋarra nhunu
(also you will have kinship for me, and me for you.)

Gurrutu-mirri. Yo'
(Have the quality of kinship. Yo.)

(Yethun and Gatjikin quoted from Blakeman, B. 2008, ‘Audio recording YAY_WUG_OCT^8_2008.mp3’, @ 00:00 – 2:00).

Gumurr-ŋama-thirri

The final term to draw attention to, albeit briefly, is gumurr-ŋamathirri from ŋamathirri (become good, become healthy, pleasurable) and gumurr (chest), which is – of course – the part of the body associated with ŋavyaju. The expression as a whole refers to something akin to ‘welcoming, accepting.’

Summary of positive-value concepts
Where the body of terms and concepts associated with normative relations describe a state of balance and equilibrium realised in relations of mutual interdependence, terms and concepts that describe good, positive and otherwise desirable social relations describe heightened versions of such relations in the context of ‘getting together,’ usually for ceremony. Positive terms and concepts describe a state of mutual interdependence and dynamic reciprocity in the context of ‘getting together,’ which, in turn, creates a state or sense of happiness, lightness, and vitality. It is important to note, however, that these positive concepts are not only relative to context (e.g. ‘getting together for ceremony) but temporally circumscribed also; one would not want to be in a state of social effervescence for any prolonged period of time – and indeed, it would not be possible to maintain such a state of relations for any considerable length of time (see Morphy and Morphy 2011 on the emotional stress of funeral ceremonies).

In the following section I will introduce a body of terms associated with negative value – with bad, negative and otherwise undesirable social relations.

**Terms and concepts associated with negative, disruptive and otherwise undesirable social interactions or social relations**

These associative terms and concepts describe or denote negative, immoral or otherwise undesirable interpersonal exchanges. They are those that disrupt the state or sense of feeling among and between people. These are ‘antithetical transformations,’ as Nancy Munn might describe them (1986). They are all associative concepts which are considered yāṭī (bad).

Ṉayaṇu wut-thun
As indicated in Figure 10, the most general term or expression used to refer to yatj (bad) negative or otherwise undesirable interactions or social relations, is *nyayaju-wut-thuna-mirri* (having the quality of affronting, assaulting or hitting the state or state of feeling). The expression implies a sense of injury, violation or offense, striking against, displeasure, or injury. If emotions are the most basic and immediate judgment about the rightness or wrongness of social actions, interactions or social exchanges (Luhrmann 2006) *nyayaju wut' thuna-mirri* registers moral transgression against the self, or state of relations more generally.

**Gumurr-dāl**

The term or expression most commonly associated with *nyayaju-wut-thuna-mirri rom* is *gumurr-dāl*, literally ‘hard, strong chest[ed].’ Recall that the *gumurr* is that part of the body associated with *nyayaju*. English-speaking Yolŋu people often gloss *gumurr-dāl* as ‘stricted.’ A person who is *gumurr-dāl* or *stricted* is considered to be needlessly and overly restricted from or in relation to others - restricted in the sense of being limited, confined within bounds or restrained.

*Gumurr-dāl* describes a state of exchange or social relations that effect distance, differentiation, division and/or separation. The expression may also imply a state or sense of dissociation (or ‘lack’ of mutuality – mutual recognition). Yethun and Gatjikin further discuss the ‘type’ of person considered ‘stricted, hard chested’ in the following:

**Transcript 3.10**

‘*Gumurr-dāl . . . nhe-nydja feel yunhi-yi shame-nha*

(*Gumurr-dāl . . . you feel shame [from that]*)

*ga feel guilty-nha.*

(and feel guilty.)
“Nhà dhuvala Yolju? Sharing-miriw?”

(“What is this here person? Without [the quality of] sharing?)

Sharing-miriw Yolju?

(A person without [the quality of] sharing?)

yaka-nha ngayi-nydja ngunhi share dhiyanju Yolju-wu?”

(That they are not sharing with that there person?)

“Nhà dhuvala Yolu dhuja gungga'-yun-minya-ra-wu?”

(What is this here person ignorant of sharing/assisting [one another]?”)

(YABSSept17.2 @6.00)

A person who is gumurr-dāl may also at times be characterised as buthurru dhumuk, (blocked, closed, blunt ears), bambay (blind), or dharaŋan-miriw (without [having] recognition or understanding). The expression has a sense of being ‘closed up’ or closed off’ from feeling as in ‘impervious’ or ‘insensate’ - as in unfeeling, lacking sympathy, and/or lacking sense or reason. The expression also has a sense of being unaffected, being unmoved and unmoving.

People who are gumurr-dāl risk or threaten to dhal ’yurra (close, shut off or block up) the state of social relations. That is, they threaten or risk to foreclose normal, positive, valued, healthy states of relations. Consider, for example, the following, which I will carry over into a discussion of yaka ’-yun (to no or refuse), as the two are almost inseparable.

Transcript 3.11

‘Gumurr-dāl ngayi mayali, balanyara bitjan

(The meaning of gumurr-dāl is like this:)

122
Yapa'yun yaka'-yun, yaka'-yun, eh.

(this person will say ‘no,’ ‘no,’ ‘no.’)

*Gumurr-dāl* ɲunhi-ndja ɲayi. That person is very strickled.

(That is *gumurr-dāl*. That person is very strickled.)

*Eh, ɲuli nhā-ku yurru ɲay’-thun ɲuli mutika*

(If [someone] was to ask for [the use of] a car)

*Wo ɲuli mārthanaj, girri, rrupiya, eh?*

(or boat, stuff, money, see?)

*Nhānu ɲuruki-yi Yolŋu nhāwi mala-nha – “belongings” nhānu, eh*

(That person will do such like with their things – their “belongings”,)

*balanyara – ga ɲayi yurru yaka’-yun. Yo. gumurr-dāl ɲayi ɲunhi.*

(thus so – they will ‘no or refuse.’ That is *gumurr-dāl.)*

And also the following:

*’gumurr-dāl . . . ɲali yurru bitjan, “Yol dhuwala Yolŋu? Wanhaŋu-wuy?*

(*gumurr-dāl . . . they will speak like this, “Who is this here person? Where are they from?”*)

*Wanhaŋuru? Nhā dhuwala Yolŋu, ḥay-wata-miriw?’*

(From where? What is this here person? Without easement?)

Yaka'-yun

*Yaka'-yun* is the intransitive verb ‘to no or refuse someone [something].’ The following excerpt was a response to my asking if it is always bad to be *gumurr-dāl:*

---

28 The verb or expression *yaka'-yun* primarily means ‘say no.’ It is often glossed by English speakers as ‘refusing’ or ‘knocking back.’
Yo when person are like getting angry with that person
(Yes, people will be getting angry with that person)
because that person won’t give anything to that person,
(because that person won’t give anything to that person,)
ŋayi yurrungora-mirri, feel shameful eh,
(cls will be shamed, feeling shameful,)
gora-mirri ŋayi yurrugom-mirri tjayi yurrunhanju-way
(They will be shamed – speaking to that person that way)
ŋayi goronj-yirri ŋayi with nothing.
(and they return with nothing.)

"Nhä dhuwala Yolŋu?"
(“What is this here person?”)
Nhe-ndja feel Ṯunhir-yi shame-nha ga feel guilty-nha.
(You will feel shame [because of that] and feel guilty.)

"Nhä dhuwala sharing-miriw’?
(“What is this here, without [the quality of] sharing?”)

"Nhä dhuwala gurrutu-miriw?”
(“What is this here without [the quality of] kin-[ship]?”)

As Yethun suggests here, ‘to no or refuse someone/something’ is to cause a person or people to feel shame – ‘that person returns with nothing,’ which makes people feel shame. Such people are ‘without the quality of sharing one another,’ without the quality
of helping or assisting one another, and without the qualities of kinship for one another.

The term translated as ‘shame’ here is *gora* (ashamed, be shy, embarrassed). When asked how Yolŋu feel if someone is *gumurr-dəl* for them, *yapa* Yethun replied:

**Transcript 3.13**

‘Yati-nha, warwuyun ŋayi yurru ŋuruki-yi Yolŋu warwuyun ŋayi . . .

(Bad. That person will be worrying [because of that] person, worrying . . .)

“Nhá ŋarra-ku wrong?” Wondering-nha ŋayi yurru, nhá ŋarra-ku wrong?”

(“What is wrong with me?” They will be wondering, what is wrong for me?”)

“Nhá-ku ŋayi gumurr-dəl ŋarra-ku?”

(“Why are they gumurr-dəl for me?”)

When asked for word for the English expression ‘feeling guilty’ Yethun said *ŋayantu-wutthuna-mirri* (to hit the state or sense of feeling). The associative relationship between negative concepts should be somewhat clear by this stage.

**Gāna**

People considered ‘*stricted, hard chested*’ are often those also considered to be *djiål gānaju-mirri* (desirous of, or wanting to be alone, separate, distinct, different).²⁹

Consider, for example, the following:

‘Djiål-gānaju-mirri . . . yaka rrambaŋi . . .

(Djiål-gānaju-mirri . . . not together, level, at one . . .)

“Nhá dhuwala djiål-gānaju-mirri Yolŋu?”

(“What is this here djiål-gānaju-mirri person?”)

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²⁹ The expression is from ‘*djiål*’ [v-int] ‘like, want, desirous (of)’ + ‘gānaju’ [adj, adv] ‘alone, separate, distinct, different, by oneself’ + ‘-mirri’ [suffix] ‘possessing the quality of.’
Yaka manda ga wargany-nha ḋayju. 
(Those two are not one ḋayju.)

Barrku-watj raki'... gulk-thurrura...
([The] string is separate, distant... [it has been] cut, severed...)

djāl-gānaju-mirri ga ḋayju wuthun-mirri – same ḋayi.

(djāl-gānaju-mirri and affronting the state or sense of feeling – they are the same.)

hurting litjalan-gu feelings ḋayi ḋunjhi...

(that is hurting our feelings...)

ṇunhi-nydja ḋayi ḋunjhi Yolŋu looking at himself or herself

(that is, that person is looking at himself or herself)

that he or she is a great boss.

(that he or she is a great boss.)

Balanya djāl-gānaju-mirri – it’s like “controlled”

(Thus so, djāl-gānaju-mirri – it’s like “controlled.”)

“Controlling” balanya

(“Controlling,” thus so -)

self-controlled ḋunjhi-nydja djāl-gānaju-mirri.’

(that djāl-gānaju-mirri is “self controlled.”)

In a general sense, people considered ‘stricted, hard chested’ are thought to be dharaŋan-miriw (without or lacking the quality of recognising or understanding. The following, which carries on from Transcript 3.13, gives a general sense of the types of interpersonal exchange or social relations characterised or denoted by the ‘bad’ negative concepts discussed in this section. I will then summarise the terms and
concepts associated with ‘bad,’ negative, disruptive and otherwise undesirable states of relations.

**Transcript 3.14**

‘Yaka litjalaŋ-gu happy one another.

(Not happy for one another.)

_Ga wangany-nha_ feel sad-nha

(And one [person] feel sad.)

ŋayaŋu wut ‘thuna-mirri ŋayi ŋunhi-ndja rom –

(that is a law or manner of doing this that affronts the state of feeling)

ŋayaŋu-wutθun-nha ŋunhi Yolŋu-nha.

(that is a person that affronts the state or sense of feeling.)

_Ga ŋunhi-ndja wangany_ Yolŋu feel:

(And that one person will feel:)

‘Djawaryun ɲarra-nha bay . . . bayŋu dhukarr,

(‘I am tired and weak . . . no path or way for me,)

wanha-ka ɲarra-ku dhukarr ɲarra yurru marrtji?

(where is that path or way for me to go?)

It’s too hard for me . . . mak ɲarra-nha dhiyalayurru

(It’s too hard for me . . . perhaps I will [just] stop here)

_nhina wâŋa-ŋura . . . gâna ɲarra yurru marrtji._[^30]

(stop at this place . . . and go alone, separate, lonely.)

[^30]: Walking off alone is, in effect, a demand for reparation. See Chapter 5.
Gâna-gâna ŋarra yurru marritji
(I’ll go by myself, alone)

instead of going the hard way."
(instead of going the hard way.")

Yo, heaviness ga worrying ŋayi yurru, eh bitjan . . .
(Yes, they will [have/feel] heaviness and worrying, like that . . . )

Summary of negative-value concepts

Gumurr-dâl (stricted, hard chested) describes a state of relations that affects distance, differentiation and division or separation. The ‘type’ of person or relations considered gumurr-dâl are those that yaka’yun (no or refuse [someone or something]), that are sharing-miriw (without or lacking [the quality of sharing [with one another]], gugunta’yun-miriw (without or lacking [the quality of] helping, assisting one another), or dharayan-miriw (without or lacking [the quality of] recognising and understanding one another). A person who is gumurr-dâl may also at times be characterised as buthurru dhumuk, (blocked, closed, blunt ears), bambay (blind). The expression has a sense of being ‘closed up’ or closed off’ from feeling as in ‘impervious’ or ‘insensate’ - as in unfeeling, lacking sympathy, or lacking sense or reason. The expression also has a sense of unaffected, being unmoved and unmoving. A person who is gumurr-dâl is following ŋayâŋu-wui’thuna-miri rom (law or manner of doing things that affronts or assaults the state or sense of feeling). People who are gumurr-dâl risk or threaten to dhal’yurra (close, shut off or block up) the state of relations. That is, they threaten or risk to foreclose the possibility of normal, ideal, positive or healthy states of relations.

It is important to note that people who behave in a manner that is djâl gônaŋu-mirri (desirous of, or wanting to be alone, separate, distinct, different) are also considered
and felt to be gumurr-dāl. Djal gānāju-mirri is also an example of nyayju-wut ‘thunamirri rom ([a] law or manner of doing things that affronts or assaults the state or sense of feeling).

Two concepts of power

There are two concepts of power in Yolŋu-matha, ganydjarr and märr.

Ganydjarr

_Ganydjarr_ is generally defined as ‘power, strength, energy or speed.’ Like _nyayju_, as an attribute or quality of persons, it is always and necessarily relational. It is an individual attribute but it is also something that people can receive or take from others (ganydjarr mārama), and something that they can give (ganydjarr wekama). Ganydjarr is not restricted to people; inanimate objects can be said to be ganydjarr-mirri (have or possess power), such as a boat engine, or a motor vehicle. In this sense it can also refer to ‘speed’.

Märr

I translate _märr_ as ‘[collective] power, strength, vitality.’ There has been a considerable amount of literature written about the Yolŋu concept of _märr_, much of it comparing märr to the Melanesian concept of _mana_ (James, B. _in press_).

Warner (1937) used the term mana as a substitute for concept or term of _märr_. ‘The mana of the Murngin well’, he writes, ‘is due not to any mundane biological value its water may have for the group, but rather to the spiritual power of the water’ (Warner 1937, p. 381). The sacred clan well, he goes on, is the origin from where each member has their beginning and end, the very centre of the ‘spiritual life’ of the clan, containing
the ‘souls of the dead’ and ‘those who are to be born’ (Warner 1937, p. 381). He continues:

‘The clansmen are identified with the totemic well by the fact that they come from it and allowed to be born by the action of the totem spirit that resides within the well; they are identified with the well because at death they will go back to it and because all of their kin who have died and those living, with whom they have had all of their social relations, are or will be either in this well into which their own soul returns or in other like clan wells; and finally, their wellbeing and that of their fellow clansmen and of other clans are dependent upon the proper enactment of the seasonal rituals which demonstrate the mana or power of the totem.’ (Warner 1937, p. 380)

Donald Thomson (1952) describes märr as a ‘spiritual force underlies all ritual ceremonial life in Arnhem Land, [which] finds expression most forcibly in the attitude toward totemic increase ceremonies which are carried out regularly at certain of the totem centres’ (Thomson 1975, p. 6). ‘This concept of a spiritual force, very like mana, is even more ‘strongly developed’ and is known and used across eastern Arnhem land’ (Thomson 1975, p. 2).

Howard Morphy (1989) writes of märr that it is ‘a positive force associated with happiness, strength, health and fertility, but it is also associated with death and can always have a dangerous dimension’ (1989, p. 11).

Bentley James has recently revisited the body of literature on märr in a critically comparative paper drawing out the similarities and differences of märr and mana (2015 in press). He points to the work of Christie and Garnggulkpuy (2002, p. 6) who translate märr as ‘ancestral connections’. ‘Outside the ritual framework controlled by men,’ Garnggulkpuy explains,
Yolngu social behaviours are directed by collective knowledge linked to “places, species and practices” using the expression *märryu-dapmaram*. (Gamggulkpuy and Christie 2002, p. 6) They translate *märryu-dapmaram* as “faith/trust/confidence/good will+instrument+clench.” (2002, p. 6). The quality of *märr* described here is said to control social situations by using the power of ancestral connections (*märr*), problem solving by appealing to people’s strength through identity and kinship (Gamggulkpuy and Christie 2002:6). This idea of the social connection of *märr*, of *märr* connecting people as kin, implies some fundamental linkage with the kinship system. As the kinship system entails all aspects of the Yolngu world *märr* is thus insinuated in every relationship with the sacred and mundane world. (Gamggulkpuy and Christie cited in James, B. *in press*, p. 3).

James goes on to argue that ‘rendering *märr* as a generalised ‘spiritual power’ is partial and misleading as it is a highly polysemous term with multiple significances. *Märr* as ‘spiritual power’ per se, is best understood as a kind of ancestral essence, arising from a Yolngu site-based ontology’ (*in press*, pp. 1-2). *Märr* in this sense, he writes, refers to ‘consubstantial connections between ancestors, people, language, and particular places that are fundamental to a substantial understanding of Yolngu notions of being-in-the-world’ (*in press*, pp. 1-2). If *bāpurru* are ‘kinds of’ people then *märr* is the power shared and derived from each respective collectivity.

I have always considered *märr* (which I translate ‘[collective] power, strength, vitality’) in contrast to the concept of *ganydjarr* (power, strength, energy or speed). Both refer to ‘power’ but the latter refers to power which is individual (though relational), whereas the former refers to a form of collective power.

Rather than thinking about *märr* in terms of ‘spiritual power’ I have always found it useful to consider *märr* as a form of collective power derived from the collective body
of the bāpurru. In Chapter 2., I describe the dhuyu luku (sacred footprint) of a bāpurru, their ‘luku wāŋa’ (footprint place), as the most salient, and significant form of social differentiation in the Yolŋu social world. As rooted in place, in the foundation of rom, it is the socio-centric and ego-centric anchor of self understanding. Mārr is the collective power, strength and vitality derived from this socio-centric and ego-centric anchor of self-understanding; it is a collective form of power derived from the body of one’s bāpurru rooted in place on County in the foundation of rom.

Conclusion

In this chapter I have introduced part of the key body of terms and concepts comprising the emotion lexicon in Yolŋu-matha and included transcripts from digitally recorded conversations about emotion to contextualise these terms and the way they are used in everyday talk. As Myers suggests for emotion-concepts for Pintupi, these terms and concepts constitute a moral system that articulates and informs a particular view of the self and social life. Much of this cultural template is similar to that Myers describes for the Pintupi; there are also, however, a number of key points of difference.

Where this material differs from that described by Myers, is the nature and orientation of the cultural self implied. In contrast and tension to the emphasis on relatedness and recognising the relationship of the self and others, Myers explains, there is a strong value placed on or accorded to individual autonomy: ‘[Pintupi] place an emphasis on individuals, their autonomy, and their capacity to choose courses of action’ (Myers 1986, p. 18). In the Yolŋu case, it is not the individual and their autonomy that is foregrounded and/or in tension with a contrasting value of ‘relatedness’ but, rather, the state of the relationship between people that is emphasised and foregrounded as of primary concern. This body of concepts describes emotion and affective experience as
fundamentally relational and contingent upon the state of relations between people. If we were to ‘consider emotional meaning like any other semiotic practice, as a product of signification,’ as Myers suggests (1988, p. 591), most Yolŋu concepts associated with emotion and morality signify a particular state or sense of feeling among and between people. Yolŋu place emphasis not on the individual nor necessarily on the self-in-relation to others, but on the state of the relationship between people in any given situation or event. The cultural self, as a moral and political actor, recognises the state of its reciprocal or dyadic relationship to/with significant others.

This is not unique in the ethnographic literature; emotions are typically experienced and conceived of relationally, and interpersonally in the many places and in cultures where an interdependent view of the self prevails (Markus & Kitayama 1994, Geoffrey White 1994, D’Andrade 2008). The intersubjectivity that results from interdependence and connection receives a relatively elaborated and privileged place in the behavioural process of the interdependent view of the self (Markus and Kitayama 1994). Key features of this intersubjectivity include a heightened sense of the other and of the nature of one’s relation to the other and the expectation of some mutuality in this regard. The goal is not individual awareness, experience and expression, but rather, attunement or alignment of one’s reactions and actions with those of another. This tendency toward interdependence between the self and others requires and fosters a relationship in which particular social emotions – sympathy, modesty (i.e. humility), agreeableness (i.e. harmony, balance, restraint) are foregrounded, elaborated and valued. These emotions promote the felt interdependence of self and others, and such engagement feels ‘natural,’ ‘right,’ and ‘good.’ The most common negative emotions, as characteristic of the interdependent view of the self others (see Markus and Kitayama...
1994, p. 102), are those that accompany a faltering of interdependence and a perceived disengagement of the self from others.

The relationship between cultural conceptions of the self, emotions, and eliciting scenarios is now broadly recognised; conceptions or views of the self strongly shape if not determine what kinds of experiences will feel ‘good’ and what social behaviour will be coded as ‘positive,’ and what kinds of experiences will produce ‘bad’ feelings and will accompany ‘negative’ social behaviour (Markus and Kitayama 1994). Typical eliciting scenarios are encoded or reflected in cultural schemas such as that partially represented in Figure 10.

According to this model sociality is cast between ‘more or less open’ and ‘more or less closed [off]’ nyajyu or social relations. The normative ideal nyajyu wajgany and associated concepts describe normal, positive and otherwise desirable relations as those in which people are ‘open,’ level and together or mutually interdependent. Negative, disruptive and otherwise undesirable states of relations as those in which people are more or less distant, ‘closed [off]’, ‘hard [chested]’, differentiated, distinct and alone. These are the kind of relations and social situations that typically affront or assault the state of feeling among and between people (nyajyu wut-thun) and thus the state of relations.
Chapter 4: Everyday and heightened forms of sociality

Being dependent does not invariably mean being helpless, powerless, or without control. It often means being interdependent. It thus signifies a conviction that one is able to have an effect on others and is willing to be responsive to others and to become engaged with them. In other words, there is an alternative to selfishness (which implies the exclusion of others) besides selflessness (which is to imply the exclusion of the self or self-sacrifice): there is a self in relationship to others.

– Markus & Kitayama 1991, p. 53

Drawing on the body of emotion-terms and concepts introduced in Chapter 3, this chapter will explore everyday forms of sociality in a series of ethnographic case studies to show how they shape everyday forms of exchange in specific, significant ways.

Overview of relevant literature

There are two broad themes that unite the historical body of literature looking at Indigenous sociality and exchange (Keen 2010). Firstly, there is broad recognition that both sociality and exchange relations are primarily informed and organised by kinship relations and the underlying ‘kin-based system of relationships’ with its attendant obligations and responsibilities (Keen 2010). The second theme is that of reciprocity and demand sharing, as a defining feature of both kinship relations and the mode or form of exchange (Keen 2010). In this section I will look only at those works most relevant to the material in this chapter, namely Fred Myers, Kenneth Liberman and Basil Sansom.
Fred Myers’ model of sociality, originally developed in the context of Western Desert social forms, has been applied in many and various non-Western Desert contexts. This model pivots around what he identifies as three patterns of social action entailing values of autonomy and relatedness. The first pattern is an emphasis on ‘relatedness,’ on extending one’s ties with others outward, on being open to claims by others and showing sympathy and a willingness to negotiate. The second is ‘a reluctance to permit others to impose their authority over oneself and an unwillingness to accept constraints on one’s autonomy’ (1986, p. 22). These two patterns are resolved by a third – the cultural representation of hierarchy as nurturance as ‘looking after’ (1986, p. 22). In every case the original three patterns are evident: there is a tension between the values of autonomy and relatedness, which is resolved by ‘projecting’ autonomy (the origin or basis for autonomy) outside the individual (often or usually onto The Dreaming).

‘Egalitarian societies’ Myers writes ‘always have the problem of justifying authority’ (1979, p. 366). The work and strategies required to achieve polity when dominance must appear muted pose a problem for the society’s participants. Collectivity is a problem for Pintupi (1986, p. 23). Hierarchy, positing an ontological order with a source outside human relations, poses a problem for social order which Myers considers to continue today.

Kenneth Liberman, in contrast, begins his study of sociality in the Western Desert with a question about the ‘congenial sociability’ which is so salient in Aboriginal social life. As well as concepts or ‘feelings of congeniality’ people have a number of practices ‘for preserving harmony in everyday social relations; harmony and congeniality are not achieved exclusively through compassion, but largely through a body of consistent structures for producing such harmony’ (1985, p. 15). ‘The orderliness does not
produce itself,' he writes, ‘but is the collaborative production of the Aboriginal participants’ (1985, p. 27).

The structures or strategies that Liberman identifies are likely to be familiar to anyone who has spent time in remote Indigenous communities. He characterises these forms of interaction as those directed toward the maintenance of good relations, which are the primary concern of all social life (1985, p. 15). The centrality of sharing is a dominant aspect of interaction and social life as a valued ‘qualitative principle of ordinary social relations’ as much as an economic imperative (1985, p. 13), for Aboriginal people, Liberman writes, the production and maintenance of a community of feelings is something serious’ (1985, p. 113). To quote him at length:

There exist no formal leaders, and their political life is highly egalitarian. The question of sociological importance which presents itself is how they manage to get along without formal headmen. In an environment where not only is there no headman but individuals are proscribed from advocating their own positions too strongly, decision-making is a very skillful affair . . . . Much of the social activity of an Aboriginal encampment is addressed toward the active production of collective solidarity. (1985, p. 15)

Basil Sansom’s work focuses on the concept of the ‘service economy’ within fringe-camps (often referred to as long-grass camps). This is an economy of voluntaristic action – of ‘helping and helping out’ – a ‘service economy’ within which there are ‘orders of service’ and, further, a ‘grammar of service’ or grammar of exchange (1980). This is an ethnography of shared experience and ‘words’ and how these two things shape the meaning and value of social action, patterns of ‘sharing,’ the flow of social action and events in everyday relations over time. He shows that each happening has a typical or culturally recognised and recognisable form, and ‘action that is worth noting or worth gracing with one’s own participation is action that is shaped to accord with
sets of culturally provided rules that govern proper performance' (1980, p. 3). This is done with close attention to the ‘interactional idiom’ – the standard words and phrases that people employ when representing or presenting happenings in everyday life (1980).

Fringe-dwellers place a high value on shared experience and the ‘special use to which they put the words they utter.’ These two things come together as expectations about proper conduct and ideas about what constitutes a typical or normative ‘happening,’ both of which are partly cast in terms of ‘the word.’ ‘The word,’ the socially consequential word or ‘determination’ – is both a product of group work and a currency in kind: ‘The value of any given word is a function of the collective authorisation that is its warrant. Any word to be given is always an agreed communiqué’ (1980, p. 25).

Many Yolŋu forms and patterns of interpersonal exchange reflect many of those described by Myers as characteristic of Pintupi sociality, however, as the material in this chapter will show, there are also a number of key differences, foremost among which is the fact that, rather than the individual or autonomy it is the state of relations and the state of feeling among and between people that is of primary concern, rather than any self-referential state or sense of feeling. As with the interdependent view of the self in other places and cultures, the value or goal is not individual expression but attunement or alignment of one’s reactions and actions with those another or others more generally. Secondly, Yolŋu do not ‘project their autonomy outside the individual,’ nor is social consensus maintained by a collective adherence to an external and autonomous ‘code’ (The Dreaming) (1986). As Liberman (1985) writes of ‘congenial sociability’ and social consensus in the Western desert, any ‘orderliness’ that exists is the collaborative product of a great deal of social and moral work and there are culturally recognised forms or patterns of sociability aimed at maintaining this order.
Structure to follow

The following case studies are intended to give the reader a sense of ‘what balance and equilibrium look or feel like’ in the everyday flow of social relations. In a general sense they all illustrate states of relations denoted or described by the evaluative concepts at the centre of Figure 10 associated with normative, balanced, ideal social relations. They illustrate what it ‘is’ or means to be gurrutu-mirri (have the quality of kin[-ship]), guŋga-yun-mirri (helping or assisting one another), rrambahji (close, equal, level, at one) and at ṣanyu wangany (one feeling). They also illustrate the ‘openness’ of persons and relations required to realise and maintain ṣanyu wangany: being attentive and sensitive to the state or sense of feeling between people; indirectness or obliquity of speech and withholding coming forward with one’s own personal inner thoughts and feelings when it serves to maintain ṣanyu wangany; adjusting to social contingencies as they arise, and finally; always paying primary social attention to ṣanyu (the state or sense of feeling [among and between people]).

As the case studies will show, the understandings and expectations associated with these concepts not only shape everyday forms of exchange in significant, specific ways, but they give a particular quality to Yolŋu sociality and a particular character to Yolŋu social life.

Case Study A takes the reader on a return car trip, at the beginning of the wet season, from camp to the nearby township with myself and Bāru (my dog) to pick up yapa Batumbil, wāwa Don, wāwa Terry, waku David and little gaminyarr Markus from ceremony at a nearby township community (Ski Beach). It was the final car trip we were able to make before the rains of the wet season made the roads impassable. This is
the longest of the case studies in this Chapter (and indeed in the thesis), presented in full to convey the rhythm and flow of social relations in a daily round.

Case Study A: Ski Beach day trip

I was woken up late on Saturday night by galay Mary who needed me to help her transfer the money over the internet so wōwa Don, wōwa Kevin, wōwa Johnny, waku David and yapa Batumbil (with two twin gaminyarr, Mark and Marcus) could catch the morning charter flight home from Ski Beach. They’d all flown in a couple of days ago to attend a funeral ceremony. Galay transferred $400 into wōwa Kevin’s account, which Batumbil was holding the key-card for. Come morning, however, Batumbil rang to say that Laynha and Marthakal airlines were all booked up. This was a request for me to drive out and pick them up in Mätjala-Witij (our car). I arranged to meet yapa Batumbil outside Woolies (in Nhulunbuy shopping centre).

Ten minutes after arriving in town she appeared all smiles – three shopping bags (col’ drink and chips), a cigarette in hand, handbag hanging off her shoulder, with her mobile phone dangling around her neck on a blinged up Elvis Presley lanyard. She was beaming. I got out and gave her a hug hello.

‘Warwu-yun ɲarra nhumalay-gu since you called wanting to come home and then you disappeared’ (I’ve been worrying for you all since you called the day wanting to come home and then you disappeared), I told her.

Ski Beach is notorious for sorcerers and ‘drunkens’ (sometimes one and the same thing) and I knew yapa Batumbil preferred never to stay there overnight.

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31 Ski Beach is a Yolŋu community near the township of Nhulunbuy (see Figure 2). Ski-Beach is Gumatj land, ‘our’ Father’s Country.
'Eehh . . . yoo gutha' manjgi nhe' (Ah . . . yes you know my little sister) she said with a laughing smile.

She introduced me to our gutharra and njandi who had given her a lift into town from Ski Beach. We chatted for a while but I was keen to get going because I didn’t want to have to drive home after dark. The roads were already partially washed away with the first rains of the season. I posited quietly that we go and get petrol for the drive home before picking up wawa walala (the brothers) and heading home.

‘Yoo I have to get rrupiya first.’ (Yes, okay I have to get money first)

I wasn’t sure why she couldn’t get cash out at the petrol station but before I could say as much she was walking off in the general direction of the bank, having left her bags and phone etc. in pile on the ground for me to look after. She returned a while later with a few people I recognised as close kin from East Woody (a Gälpu place, our njandibapuru). She was stuffing dollar notes into her purse. We drove to the petrol station.

I took the opportunity to go to the bathroom before we picked up our mirrirri (term used to refer to avoidance relationship [in this case our brothers]), bought us some ‘col’ drink’ and lollies, and handed yapa back the extra cash. We drove down to Ski Beach through town under and past the huge industrial bauxite mill-pipe out onto the peninsula. Yapa Batumbil pointed out the yacht club on our right. There were flashy white yachts and motor-boats glistening, rolling gently in the water moored along the beach. We drove on a little way before turning off to the right onto the unsealed track to the beachside community.

I drove at a snail’s pace past houses and hearths to ‘number six house’ which was hard to miss with its green, wall-size number ‘6’ painted on the side of the house. Number six

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32 I will discuss the term ‘posited’ following this case study.
I spotted wäwa Terry. He seemed bright, and almost commanding, which was something of a surprise given his characteristically unassuming self. He was sitting with two similarly aged older men drinking tea on a bed-sheet under one of the Casuarina trees. He gestured for me to collect his backpack from the fork of a nearby tree. As I pulled it down I saw it was open and stuffed with a large nylon fishing-net weighed down by a pair of bilma (clap sticks). I smiled inwardly, gesturing to Batumbil that I was going to put it back over in the car. It is always a real coup when anyone, or any camp, rather, acquires a fishing-net; they are one of the more valued material goods that circulate among and between camps and communities on the Homelands. Yapa Batumbil nodded to me knowingly, also smiling to herself. Then it was over to ‘number six’ house to collect her bag, bed-sheet and pillow. All the doors were ajar and louvers open. We tiptoed carefully through so as not to step on one of the many women and children sleeping out the hottest hours of the day on mattresses on the floor. We took Batumbil’s bags back to the car where wäwa Terry was waiting to let us know that he was going to stay on. There was another funeral coming in less than a week. Where were the other two wäwas? Terry gestured in the direction of the yacht club, which is one of the only establishments selling alcohol in the township welcoming of Yolŋu patrons. Without a word or without a moment of rush we were back in the car and driving up to the yacht club.

I pulled into the gravel car-park near the boat ramp. Batumbil pointed out the car that they had come in – a dented and rather weathered white Toyota van. I pulled up next to it. The sliding door was open and leaning out of it was a very surprised wäwa Johnny.
‘Ya, *marrtji-nha!’ (hey, let’s go!) I exclaimed, smiling at his clearly tipsy surprise.

Before he could gather his thoughts or say a word he was in the back of our car with his seatbelt buckled – startled by the sudden appearance of his authoritative and disapproving older sister (Batumbil). It wasn’t long, however, before he was hustling for Batumbil to agree that he could have a few last drinks to ‘say goodbye.’ She handed him a fifty-dollar note, rolling her eyes in tired humour. Just then *wāwa* Don emerged from the beer garden with a number of kinsmen, all of them painted up handsomely with clay, all of them in good spirits and high humour. It was lovely to see him. We all milled about around the cars chatting and catching up.

‘*Yol gayi Balanda dhirramu?*’ (who’s that Balanda man) I asked Don in a whisper.

‘Peter, Paul, Peter . . .’ he replied.

Close enough. I was curious as to who he was. I felt some distant kind of affiliation. Here we were two Balanda sitting at the wheel of functioning cars (a very Balanda thing) waiting for our *Yoŋŋu gurrutu* to decide what we’re doing.

I ate a carrot and switched the engine off. Five, ten minutes later Batumbil posited that we drive back to Ski Beach to drop the *wāwas* off so they can sing for one last *manikay* (ceremonial song) to ‘say goodbye’ to the deceased while we’re shopping before we all head back to camp. We were going shopping.

‘Yooo, ma’ (Yeeah, ok) I replied, reminding her that we should leave as soon as possible though, because the road from the turnoff to camp was dangerous in the dark. It was already half washed away in places, full of potholes and obstructed by branches and debri.

‘Half an hour and we’ll pick them up from number six house’ I added, as if I had some control of the situation.
We dropped them off, handed over a few cigarettes to kin who came to say hello and pulled back out of the settlement to go shopping. We had only driven a hundred meters or so when we saw waku David walking along the side of the road with two yawirriny (initiated bachelors), close kin from East Woody. Waku David flagged us down. Waku David wanted to come shopping. The two young men stood at a distance behind David smiling wryly. A young woman driving any car was always cause for comment and a source of amusement. And here I was a young Balanda woman who was not only driving a car and taxi-ing people around but speaking broken Yolŋu-matha and talking directly to David who is a man not many years my senior who, although my close adoptive waku is not my real ‘actual’ waku so (for those with an imagination) could be my [potential] secret lover. Waku decided to come with us but had to fill his water bottle up first. Bottle full from the beachside tap some five minutes later he returned and jumped in and we pulled out onto the sealed road.

‘To Captain Cook’ he posited (the name of one of the only two shopping complexes in the township).

‘That shop is expensive’ I replied, ‘Woolies is cheaper. It’s heaps cheaper’.

‘Too much humbug from drunkens for money.’

Fair enough I thought, realising that I should have filled a jerry can with petrol when I filled the tank given all this driving, ‘going up and down’ as they say. I said that I was going to go back to the petrol station while they were shopping to fill up one of the jerry-cans, just in case and pick them up on the way back to Ski Beach to get the wāwas.

‘Yo, ma’ (yes okay)

As we approached the town proper, however, along Matthew Flinders drive waku David posited that we all go to the petrol station. I kept driving past the turnoff to Captain Cook. We were all going to the petrol station.
Along the road yapapa pointed out a cross decorated with plastic flowers where our waku, she explained, rolled his car four times. Petrol station pull’im up. I topped up the tank and filled a jerry can, and then it was back to Captain Cook. It was three o’clock.

We pulled in at the car-park away from the taxi rank where we would have been expected to stop and chat (forever). Batumbil gave waku David twenty dollars as we walked through the automatic doors into the air-conditioning with an audible collective sigh. I pointed out an outboard motor for sale in the hardware-ish shop as we walked through to the IGA shops. We had been thinking about all ‘chucking in’ for an outboard to get to Mayikurr Island for turtle eggs for a while. One after the other we clicked through the turnstile into the supermarket.

Gaminyarr Markus took control of the trolley and we followed behind him throwing in the usual staples making our way up and down the isles (flour, sugar, tea bags, milk powder, oats, a few vegetables, rice etc). Trolley full we shuffled through the checkout. Batumbil topped the amount owing up with cartons of cigarettes, which is usual practice for most people on shopping trips from the Homelands. We paid with the money we had made from selling hollow logs to the local art centre a week or two ago, with wāwa Kevin’s keycard. I pushed the trolley out of the IGA. Gaminyarr started throwing a tantrum, refusing to move beyond the video store. I took the trolley outside and waku David and I started packing the bags into the car.

Batumbil and gaminyarr emerged fifteen minutes later – gaminyarr all smiles with and a stack of old ‘action-mirri picture’ – second hand action films. Batumbil was looking a bit frazzled. Five minutes and we were back on the road to Ski Beach. Fifteen minutes or so and we were pulling up again at ‘number six house’ where the two wāwas were sitting on the veranda, green cans (VB beer cans) in hand. Wāwa Johnny walked over to the car, introducing me to my gāthu and dhuway who came to say hello. He suggested we wait
and 'say goodbye' for one more song. They were having such a time of it, I couldn't say no.

'Yo, ma.' (yeah, ok.).

I put my feet up on the dash board in a very unladylike, very Balanda-like fashion, leant my head against the headrest and closed my eyes. A while later I sat back up and rummaged around to find another carrot to eat. Sitting half in the car half out I ate my carrot, leaning on the window frame, watching the ceremony. Peter-Paul-Peter (the Balanda driver of the white van) caught my eye to ask (in Yolŋu sign language) for me to give a particular young woman sitting on the bed-sheet nearby a carrot. I rummaged through the shopping bags in the back again. I walked over to where the lady was seated with a couple of carrots and a few apples, put them on the bed-sheet beside her, asked for a cigarette and sat down. I sat wondering how it might be so that he too had come to find himself enmeshed in the social fabric out here.

The ceremonial set finished with a chorused 'aiy!!' and as if on cue gaminyarr Marcus, I saw across the gathering, began to throw a tantrum. Batumbil picked him up and gestured that we go.

'Marrtji-nha yej?' ([We're] going?)

'Ma, yali . . . (ok, shall we . . .),' I said, standing up to join her heading over to the car.

Three wawas made their way over also and hopped in. I started the engine and pulled out onto the gravel road as slowly as slow (haunted by the repetitive warning I was given when working as an applied anthropologists – 'do not under any circumstances, reverse your car in communities). Second gear and wawa Johnny called the car to a halt. He had to get his lighter off găthu, who he’d just spotted. She had his lighter.

'Ya marraja' (ya get it).
He jumped out and returned with gäthu. There was talk and goodbyes and Batumbil handed gäthu a packet of cigarettes through the window. And we were off. Out of camp and onto the sealed road that passes by the yacht club, refinery, through town. We made it a few hundred meters before wäwa Johnny began to chatter, hustling for Batumbil to agree that they were to buy a six pack of beer for the drive home (negotiated down from half a carton by a now weary Batumbil). Batumbil turned to me and asked loudly,

‘No ḋainiti in your car isn’t it?’

(No alcohol in your car right?)

‘Nhumalay-gu decision yapa’

(It is your decision yapa).

I regretted this as soon as I said it because I realised that I had missed my cue to allow Batumbil to indirectly say ‘no’ by eliciting a Balanda, proprietorial assertion over the car. But I missed my cue. My reply was as good as a collective agreement. We were making one last stop at the yacht club for takeaways.

Batumbil handed wäwa Johnny a twenty-dollar note and warned him that he daren’t return with any more than a six-pack. He was in and out directly, and in the best of moods.

We were back on the road. Three celebratory brothers in the back, waku David in the very back, yapa Batumbil in the passenger seat, Bāru at her feet and gaminyarr on her lap, everyone in the back sitting among piles of shopping bags, all our windows down, all of us smoking, now late afternoon.

The sun had weakened behind the storm clouds that were building to North-ish. By five o’clock we were back out cruising along the Central Arnhem Highway. Every time a car approached wäwa Don, convinced it is illegal to smoke while driving, insisted that we hide our cigarettes in case it was the police.
Well out of town and the road narrowed to single gravel passage through the open eucalypt forest – palms with new fronds and the undergrowth newly green after the season’s fires. Yapa Batumbil, the brothers and waku David talking about manikay and laughing about silly drunkens and the antics of the last few days. Half an hour and we took the turn off from the Highway toward camp. Two hours of rough 4wd tracks, up and over the ridge, half washed out already with the beginning of wet season rain following talk as we go, wāwa-walala (the brothers) pointing out waku wāŋa (waku Country), nāndi wāŋa (Mother’s country), the direction wāwa Don and wāwa Kevin footwalked to Nhulunbuy to get njarali (tobacco) one time, along the ridge and up the hill knowing now that family would be able to hear the drone of the engine back in camp, back down and coming up to the ridge where watu walala wajarr (the dog wajarr) travelled, the caves over up past Gikal were there are galka (sorcerers), something about Marrawumburr, the cat wajarr up that way, the dry season hunting ground on the flat near Peter John River. Seven thirty, watching for galapajά (buffalo), we come down the last hill and then dogs have all come out to meet us in the headlights barking and wagging their tails and there is old ‘amala Wapalkuma. We all let out cheer and laugh. ‘Amala was standing right in the middle of the path smiling, waving blindly in the headlights. Batumbil scolded her for walking out of camp alone at night. She joined Batumbil and Bāru and gaminyarr in the front passenger seat and a few minutes later we pulled in home. I dropped the bottom-campers down at the green house and the top campers at the red house, where the fire was already lit. Dhuway was waiting on the verandah. It was nine o’clock.

Discussion

I chose to begin this chapter with this extended case study because it captures so many familiar aspects of Homeland life and Yolŋu sociality – aspects of everyday sociality that would be otherwise difficult to explain. I will isolate and discuss the most salient of them in turn.
The value attributed to mobility

The first observation of note in this case study is the value attributed to mobility and dynamic social process. The means, opportunity and process of being mobile is a significant, valued feature of life on the Homelands. During my time in the field I became aware that there was a direct relationship between the presence of a functional car and the size of the population in any given homeland camp. This relationship was not as straightforward as it first seemed. That is, the population did not increase because people were arriving in the functional car. Many if not most, in fact, flew in from the nearby township on the island. The population increased markedly because the presence of a functional vehicle made the camp that much more desirable as a place to visit and stay. The presence of a functional vehicle affords opportunity to actualise and affirm kin relations and navigate these networks with an assurance of mobility – an assurance that social space will not become stifling nor social relations staid. The presence of a functional vehicle represents the potential to visit kin on nearby homelands, to go hunting and visit areas of nearby country otherwise inaccessible, the potential to drive into the township and go shopping, and importantly, the potential to attend funerals and other ceremonies. In a general sense this is the capacity to follow up one’s own raki’ (to keep personal gurrutu relations/networks energised), and the raki’ of one’s bapurru, in both ceremonial and non-ceremonial contexts (see Chapter 2).

Indirectness, obliquity and posited dhäruk.

The second observation of note – another salient aspect of social life – is the characteristic ease with social contingencies. This is partly a reflection of the value attributed to mobility and dynamic social process and also, in part, a reflection of the basic moral expectation to be open; to be attentive and sensitive to the state or sense of feeling between people, which is to dhākay njāma; to be indirect or oblique in one’s
speech; to withhold coming forward with one’s own personal inner thoughts and feelings when or where it serves to maintain *nayaju wangany*; to adjust to social contingencies as they arise, and finally; to give primary social attention to *nayaju* (the state or sense of feeling [among and between people]). These associated understandings or expectations give rise to what Keen describes as ‘a pervasive obliquity in social interaction’ (1994, p. 290).

With the exception of exchanges involving material goods it is generally the case that moral expectations hold that indirect is *dhumupa* (straight, correct) and direct is *djarrpi* (crooked, wrong). Indirect speech acts leave open the state of relations and accommodate *nayaju wangany*. Direct speech acts foreclose the state of relations, threaten to ‘cut’ strings of relatedness, and delimit the potential for *nayaju wangany*. Withholding coming forward maximises the potential for an equable and equitable state of relations. This reflects the primacy accorded to the state of interpersonal relationships; the moral value attributed to the regulation and restraint of one’s private feelings, motives and desires. It further reflects the cultural value of maintaining *nayaju wangany*. This general rule is marked by forms of exchange that involve material goods.33

The moral norm of ‘withholding coming forward’ gives rise to a style of discourse in which people rarely (if ever), use speech acts that we would describe as commands or

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33 In non-material exchange the value of indirectness holds true without exception. When material goods are at issue, however, we see that ‘direct’ forms of exchange are not crooked because ‘directness’ is a form of leveling that serves to ensure that strings of relatedness are not alienated (and potentially made crooked) by the presence or flow of material goods. This is worked out in the micro-economy of social exchange in everyday life. This will be further discussed in Chapter 6.
directives, and rarely speak in an interrogative manner, explicitly attempting to elicit information through the use of ‘who, what, where, why or when’ questions.

As I became more familiar with the nature of talk, oriented as it is toward maintaining and furthering a shared state or sense of feeling, I began to use the term ‘posited dhăruk.’ The term dhăruk can refer to word(s), speech, discussion or message. I use the term ‘posited’ as in ‘to posit’ – ‘to put something somewhere (to propose or suggest).’ I found this term useful for a number of reasons.

I use the expression ‘posited dhăruk’ to refer to speech acts that are characteristic of and consistent with the moral norm of withholding coming forward; those utterances that are as passive or intransitive as dhăruk can be. Posited dhăruk leave open the state of relations and accommodate nayayu wajgany – and yet convey something important about the speaker’s private, inner thoughts or feelings. Posited dhăruk are ‘put’ or placed in conversation to propose or suggest something – to convey something important about one’s private, inner thoughts or feelings – in a manner that is indirect, oblique or ‘open’ enough that it does not delimit the potential for maintaining or realising the normative ideal and primary value of nayayu wajgany. That is, so as not to delimit the potential for accommodating a difference of thought or feeling on the part of others; so as not to dhal’-yurra (block up, close off) the relationship; so as not to upset or affront the state of feeling (i.e. nayayu wut-thun) among or between those involved. To revisit one of the many examples of posited dhăruk in the case study, recall that whilst we were driving into the shop from Beach Camp, waku David posited that we go to the Captain Cook shopping centre:

‘Captain Cook-lili . . . ’ (to[ward] Captain Cook. . . ).
It seems paradoxical, initially, that saying something like ‘Captain Cook-lili’ in the way he did can be, and often is, completely ignored by all. Such a proposition or request is ‘posited’ to no one in particular without necessarily affecting anyone. In this way no one is put in a position in which they feel pressured and waku avoids the risk of being directly refused and thus embarrassed or shamed. This, in contrast to something like:

‘ŋândi, manymak ɲilimurru marrrji-na Captain Cook-lili dhunupa – ɲathili?’

(Mum, is it ok if we go straight to Captain Cook, first?)

If waku had said something more akin to that above it would have been a completely different scenario because I would have had to either accept or reject his request directly. It would have been an imposition not only on me but on the state of feeling between us (including other passengers in the vehicle). This difference may not seem significant but it is the difference between a potentially hurtful or stressful exchange and one which maintains ɲayaju wangany and thus a manymak (good, healthy), lâťju (pleasant, smooth) flow or state of relations. Posited dhāruk and indirectness of speech are important aspects of everyday sociality and important to the realisation and maintenance of ɲayaju wangany.

It is important to note that the self regulation, attentiveness to others, and the self restraint entailed in being open – being attentive and sensitive to the state or sense of feeling between people; indirectness of speech; withholding coming forward with one’s own personal inner thoughts and feelings and adjusting to social contingencies as they arise by no means implies that people do not have a strong sense of themselves or that they lack a capacity to reflect and act upon their own thoughts, feelings and desires. On the contrary, it takes a high degree of self-control and agency to effectively adjust
oneself to various interpersonal contingencies. As Markus and Kitayama write of interdependence and associated proclivities cross-culturally:

Agentic exercise of control . . . is directed primarily to the inside and to those inner attributes, such as desires, personal goals, and private emotions that can disturb the harmonious equilibrium of interpersonal transaction. This can be contrasted with the Western notion of control, which primarily implies an assertion of the inner attributes and a consequent attempt to change the outer aspects, such as one’s public behaviours and the social situation. (Markus & Kitayama 1991, p. 228)

**Gurrutu-mirri, rrambaŋi and ṣayantu wanyany**

In general terms this case study illustrates the kind of relations denoted or described by the evaluative terms and concepts associated with normative, balanced, ideal social relations. It conveys something vital about what it ‘is’ or means to be gurrutu-mirri (have or possess [the quality of] kin[-ship]) and to be ṣayantu wanyany ([at] one feeling), which is otherwise hard to explain. In a similar sense this case study also reflects something important about the nature and value of what it ‘is’ or means to be rrambaŋi (level, together, at one). It conveys something of the more grounded significance of this concept as it denotes a normative, valued state of ‘being together and doing together as kin’ in the flow of social relations in everyday life. Recall Yethun and Gatjikin’s elaboration of ṣayantu wanyany in Transcript 3.5 and also Transcript 3.6.

**‘Sharing one another, sharing something one another’**

This case study captures something of this normal, valued and unmarked flow of goods – from galay Mary transferring money over the internet into wāwa Kevin’s account for Batumbil and kin to catch a plane (which was, in all likelihood not from Mary’s account but another close relative whose card she was ‘holding’), to the permeability of my proprietorial use of the vehicle, to the various unmarked social exchanges of
money, shopping, carrots, *njāniti* (alcohol), cigarettes and so on. The flow of goods, which in this case took place in the space of about six hours, is a normative feature of everyday social exchanges and everyday social process and social life more generally. Such a flow of ‘things’ in exchange is not only unmarked but unremarkable (in the sense that it does not warrant remark). This is part of what is ‘is’ and means to be ‘sharing one another, sharing something one another’ as described in Transcripts 3.7 and 3.8.

*The unique social milieu of town*

The final thing to note about this case study is that the township represents a particular or unique social milieu. Generally speaking, people from the Homelands have an ambivalent relationship with the township and prefer not to stay for any longer than necessary. Among other things the township offers the opportunity to mill about, in an almost urban setting, within an open weave of social relationships (with Yolŋu and non-Yolŋu alike). For Homeland residents who live and move almost exclusively within familiar networks of close kin, the excitement of the unfamiliar is alluring, stressful and sometimes unsettling.

When Homeland residents are visiting the township to buy groceries and goods for Camp (which is the most common reason for going there), they prefer to avoid the dispersed crowds of extended kin because it is not possible to ‘share something one another’ and also return to the homeland with the groceries and goods that they came for. While there are certainly ways of not sharing everything without explicitly refusing

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34 Notable in this case was the socio-centric exchange of the fishing net between Homeland camps. Fishing nets are among the more highly valued ‘things’ on the Homelands and thus, this exchange was somewhat special. Material goods in exchange will be discussed at length in Chapter 6.
anyone, refusing kin is never a pleasant experience. It may be possible and in some cases necessary but refusing kin is never pleasant and often a source of stress. The typical visit to town is an example of heightened sociality – of ‘getting together’ in a non-ceremonial context that most people would prefer not to maintain for long.

Visits to town offer access to the market economy and the opportunity to acquire, share or consume market bought food and goods, or take them back to the homelands where they are always more scarce and valuable to consume, to use, or exchange. The excitement and pleasure that Homeland people derive from the opportunity for conspicuous consumption should not be discounted. Recall Batumbil emerging from the shopping complex – three shopping bags (col’ drink and chips) and a cigarette in hand, handbag hanging off her shoulder and her mobile phone dangling around her neck on a ‘blinged up’ Elvis Presley lanyard. Bliss.

The next case study further illustrates aspects of morality and value discussed above and also something of the heightened sociality of ceremony.

Case Study B: buŋgil (ceremony)

Yesterday we all drove out to the funeral at Rrorruwuy. As usual it took forever to actually depart. Sitting around the fire and smoking not-all-waiting-to-go-anywhere-or-do-anything. There was more obfuscation than usual because not everyone was going to be able to fit in the car and the roads were still far too rough to overload.

At some stage I looked over to the car and saw that yapa Yethun, waku Alison, amala Wapalkuma and gaminyarr Valerina had squashed themselves into the two-person seat in the farthest back section of the car. I smiled at their scrupulous, spatial economy. The

35 This is our waku wäña, the place of our waku-pulu, Datiwuy.
general pre-travel buzz was moving forward even if everyone else was still sitting around
the fire and smoking as if they were all not-all-waiting-to-go-anywhere-or-do-anything.

There was general talk back and forth – ‘when was local government service provider
delivering diesel next?’ ‘Check that ‘amala [who suffers from dementia and secretes
random items into her skirt pockets at any opportunity never to be seen again] doesn’t
have a secret stash of tobacco because there is only a little bit left.’ ‘Who has flown in
for ceremony thus far?’ – and so on and so forth. In the midst of such talk passing back
and forth wåwa Don’s Balanda wife, oblivious to the social process going on around her,
emerged from one of the houses and walked directly towards the car and sat down in the
front passenger seat. She didn’t even have time to close the car door, however, before she
was shouted back out again by waku Alison and yapâ Yethun:

‘Waay yaka dhuwala nhuju seat-ndja! Ya!
(Hey that’s not your seat! Ya!)

Batumbil-gu ŋayi ŋunhi! . . . Yol nhe dhuwala? Princess-nha!??’
(It’s for Batumbil! . . . Who are you? [A] Princess!??)

Slightly startled and clearly not-quite-sure-as-to-what-just-happened, she walked straight
back to the Green house and sat inside. Don interceded on her behalf,

‘Gumurr djarrarrk yaka wirrki wâniya.
(Poor thing, don’t talk roughly [to her])

Dhuŋa-mirri ŋayi. Gumurr djarrarrk.’
(she is ignorant. Poor thing.)

I rolled another cigarette, gathered my stuff and joined Yethun, Alison, ‘amala and
gaminyarr in the car. Sitting facing backwards chatting and smoking with the door half
open, the morning moved on. Batumbil scooped another pannikin of tea from the pot.
Gatjikin wandered up from bottom camp. Wàwa Terry, sitting in his usual spot facing out
toward Mayikurr Island, posited that we were going to bring some tobacco back for him. Ever considerate and measured, he was ready and willing to be the one to miss out. He was staying. *Waku* Tony was still asleep. Ten minutes later without a word or plan we were on the road. It was so lovely to be out on country again. All squashed in together in the breast of kin, travelling through country – ‘This here is where we rested at two in the morning when the car axle broke . . . ; This is the place with the really trees to make turtle harpoons’ – etc., and everyone all the while naming areas of country and particular places and sites, half to themselves but also, in part, for my instruction. Everyone all the while also and noting also the various *luku* (footprints, tyre-tracks) on the track – *gatapaja* (buffalo), *bapi* (snake), *weti* (wallaby) – noting also *mak* (perhaps), where they had travelled from and to, and also *mak* when. I was never able to see any such tracks, especially not from inside the car, so relied upon and enjoyed the commentary of what was otherwise unrecognisable to me. The car tyre tracks diverged at the forked turnoff to either Rrorruwuy or Nyinyikay.

‘*Galkurra! Ya – Nyinikay-lili yapap aathili,* Walmadji-nha pickup-nha ye?’
(Wait! Ya – to Nyinyikay first, pick up [yapa] Walmadji no?)

‘*Yaka*’ (No), chimed the very back-seaters, ‘*Rrorruwuy-ura, bungul-ura haiyi*’ (She’s at the ceremony at Rrorruwuy)

‘*Ma, bala-kuru*’ (Ok, through this way) confirmed Batumbil, pointing with her lips to the left.

The track opened out to skirt the edge of the open gravel airstrip, at which point I saw the entire length of the airstrip, both sides, were lined with beautiful coloured ceremonial flags, blowing and flapping (*bungul-wanja*) in the wind. It was like a completely different place. I was the only one to let out an exclamation of awe (and everyone laughed and jeered at my surprise). We drove on as if on a red carpet along the sandy track alongside the now *minytji-mirri* (colourful) through to the camp. The track opened out onto the
clearing of camp, but it was blocked with forty-four gallon drums. We turned off around to the left onto a freshly cut track around to the outskirts of camp and pulled up near the Yellow House at Batumbil’s instruction.

As the airstrip had been brought to life so was camp transformed and animated with the effervescence and excited sociality of ceremony. There were people everywhere. There were tents in between six or so houses, and tents in between the tents. The women had laid out tarpaulins on the ground in the space between dwellings with bed-sheets laid out to sit on, where small gatherings of people were tending small camp-fires. I pulled up next to the yellow house that Yethun shared with her late *dhuyaw*, which she still shares with her co-wives and their families. There were people everywhere. We all tumbled out.

*Yapa* Batumbil sat on the tarpaulin under the shade of the Yellow House with her pillow, and then reclined to roll a cigarette. *Amala* Wapalkuma joined her, as did Balanda *galay* Michelle. I accompanied *yapa* Yethun and *waku* Alison to collect some wood for a fire. We set up the fire around the back of the house upon our return, and put a pot of tea on the boil, half reclined on a bed-sheet, now watching the goings on. Further beyond the mortuary shed was the clean-raked sand of the ceremony ground, bordered with coloured ceremonial flags. There were a group of women singing Christian songs at the edge of the white sand at one end of the ceremonial ground. It was evidently a prelude to the ceremony because no one was taking much notice, although I did hear Yethun sing along to herself quietly.

I lit a cigarette to occupy myself as familiar faces appeared to join us – *waku-walala* (our *waku* [plural]) from Nyinyikay and all the *gutharra* and *gaminyarr*. Someone carried over a white bucket of sweet tea and a near-full round of damper. We settled in. At some

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36 The late Mickey Ganambarr (see Figure 23; Genealogy Sheet 4)
stage Yethun whispered to warn me not to look over in the direction of the bush beyond our end of camp. The men were there somewhere (dhika). Dhuyu (secret/sacred). Ma (ok, I understand). Indeed, I realised I could hear the faint sound of manikay. I was relieved that I now knew what I wasn’t to be aware of.

Most of the day was spent like this in the same spot catching up with kin, drinking tea and smoking listening to the men’s singing which was taking place on the far side of camp near the mortuary shed and ceremony ground. Our waku and gutharra casually came and went and at some stage I dozed off. Yapa Yethun laid her head in my lap and we both fell asleep with little gaminyar Valerina curled up beside us. When I woke again Yethun had made fresh tea and Batumbil and yapa Nancy Walmanydji and others had joined us. I rolled a cigarette and drank someone’s tea. Everyone was doing the same, quietly chatting and observing the goings on. At some point yapa Yethun gestured for my accompaniment to war-yun (urinate) so we wandered off into the bush the two of us, as if to collect more wood for the fire.

When we returned there was more movement and buzz, and I noticed that the men’s singing circle had enlivened in the middle of the camp area. Waku-walala (waku [plural]) and gathu-walala (gathu [plural]) from Nyinyikay carried over the white clay softened with water in a ubiquitous small white sugar bucket. Yapa Yethun, waku Alison and yapa Batumbil painted themselves up and gathu Geraldine gestured that I should do the same but my yapa manda (two sisters) were not going to miss an opportunity. They painted my (very white) face, (the airstrip in my) hair, and then my arms and legs. As Batumbil finished painting my legs she paused and turned to yapa Nancy and Yethun, and touching the top of my foot, smiling, said:

‘Luku man ‘ka-mirri Yoliju.’

([idiom]: person whose feet have the quality of clay)

They both smiled proudly, and coo’ed,
‘Yaa marrkap-mirri Djutarra, luku man ‘ka-mirri - ‘

(Ahh beloved Djutarra [collective name for Gumatj women], feet with the quality of clay)

Yapa Nancy repeated it, giggling, and we all laughed aloud. If I wasn’t already feeling self-conscious I certainly was now. ‘Too many eyes’ (as they say). So many people that I did not know. I was also conscious of how very white I was among an otherwise Yolŋu crowd.

We were almost done when I noted that the singing over in the men’s circle picked up in tempo and moved pace again. Wäwa Don and gurruy approached from behind and came to stand in front of us, now a gathering of women. The crowd of young men joined with shovel nose spears. The short, sharp sound of the hilma sounded out an even beat and without a word we were moving as one – a line of dancers in ceremony. (By now I felt like an uneven stone in an otherwise smooth stream of ceremonial process.)

‘Wap! Wap! Wap!’ the young men sounded the chorus and speared the ground with a low shrilled cry. Gurruy sang lead. The chorus of young men sounded out a punctuated, high pitched bird call that I thought I recognised as Djirikitj, the brown swamp quail wayarr. The song moved forward, as did we, carrying our light collective step in time, moving forward toward the mortuary shed, toward the sand raked ceremonial ground, toward the body of the deceased, in a low cloud of dust and singing, and whirring, and movement.

Discussion

As with the previous case, case study B captures many common and familiar aspects of everyday life and everyday sociality: The valued, moral expectation to be open and the value of being gurrutu-mirri and luku-man ‘ka-mirri. It also illustrates the value of
mobility and something of the excited sociality and effervescence of ‘getting together’ for ceremony.

**The basic moral expectation to be ‘open’**

At the beginning of this case study, wōwa Don’s Balanda wife illustrates what it ‘is’ or means to be ‘open’ through an unfortunate example of not being or doing so. What did galay Michelle not do when she made a beeline for the front seat of the car? Her actions could be described as *dharaṇjan-mirri* (without or lacking recognition or understanding [for one another]) because she did not recognise or notice the social process going on around her, nor see or understand how she and her actions were enmeshed or involved in the process. She was not attentive and sensitive to the state or sense of feeling between people – that is, she did not *dhākay nāma* – she did not demonstrate or act in an indirect or oblique manner, but acted on her own personal whim without paying primary attention to *nyayatu* and demonstrating a willingness to adjust to social contingencies should they arise. Hence wōwa Don describing her as *dhunja-mirri*.

**Gurrutu-mirri and STRU-man’ka-mirri**

In general terms the case also further conveys a sense of what it is to be *gurrutu-mirri* (to have or possess the quality of kinship for one another) – a sense of ‘being and doing together as kin.’ This can be seen in the unassuming intimacy between close kin who were all born on that particular tract of country; who were raised (*nyuthan-marrama*) in between camps on that particular network of homelands on that particular tract of country; who have shared a life in common, with few and brief exceptions, stopping together, living together, and *footwalking* together, on that particular tract of country; who will most certainly all be buried in the same camp on that particular tract of
country. This is a significant part of what it means to be luku man 'ka-mirri Yolŋu, literally, 'people whose luku (feet, footprints/anchor) have the attribute or quality of white clay.' This expression is used to describe the relation between the people or a group of people who are the primary residents of a particular country – who are seen to have a proper relation to country – to be ‘looking after’ it in a proper fashion. In this sense, it describes people whose footprints are literally impressed on that country.

Through such an extended, intimate relationship with a particular area of country people develop a body of knowledge about that country (the local ecology, geography, including socio-religious geography), which is unsurpassed. It is the recognition of this relationship with and knowledge of country that forms the foundation of a ‘proper’ (and thus proprietary) claim to that country. For Homeland Yolŋu this relationship between kin and country is the basis of self-understanding and the primary source of self-esteem – it affirms the value of one’s madayin – the qualities, attributes and/or properties of the self - and thus the value of the self. It is not only ancestral footprints but a person’s own footprints that are imprinted and impressed in country as an anchor of self-understanding. We also see the value attributed to mobility as a capacity to follow up the raki’ of one’s bāpurru in a ceremonial context. Those gathered for the ceremony had ‘come together as one’ from Homelands and townships across the region. In this sense, the case study also illustrates the motivational and directive force of rom. This lends further weight to an understanding of raki’ as aspects of the self that are shaped and defined through one’s relations to or with significant others; as ties of relatedness that bind people and places together across the region, that draw people together through mutual responsibilities and obligations and draw people together through mutual ties of affiliation, attachment and affection.

_Getting together, effervescence and vitality_
Particular to this case is the animated, excited sociality that surrounds socio-ceremonial gatherings – ‘getting together’ for ceremony – the anticipation and import of ceremonial gatherings and ceremonial performance. This case study illustrates the kind of situation and state of relations denoted or described by the positive evaluative terms and concepts on the right hand side of Figure 10, including *galja-walja-thirri* (becoming happy, vital, in high spirits) and *nyanyu yama-thinya-nha* (making well/good the state or sense of feeling), *galja djulja-thirri* (becoming happy, familiar, in high spirits), and also *wangany manapan-mirri* (joined linked, connected together as one), which is an important part of the ceremonial process.

**Case Study C: Gikal**

Yesterday we drove out to Gikal for the first time this year, *yapa* Batumbil, *wōwa* Terry, *waku* Alison, *yapa* Yethun, *gaminyarr* Valerina and myself. We took the whipper-snipper and the lawnmower on the trailer and us women each took a sharpened axe to cut and clear fallen trees on the road. After three lengthy stops to clear fallen trees and pause and smoke we approached the final stretch of the sandy track which opens out onto the clearing of camp. As we came up over the crest, the water of the bay in view, Batumbil, Alison Yethun and even *wōwa* Terry exclaimed affectionately,

‘*Yaa Gikal, marrkap-mirri* . . .’

We all spoke of how we’d been worrying and missing this place, ‘our’ beloved Mother’s Country, all Wet Season.

I parked the car near the main fire site in front of one of the two houses and we all tumbled out. *Waku* Alison collected small wood for the fire that Yethun made: the fire for the tea (and fresh fish to come). *Wōwa* carried the fishing net down to the shore to untangle it. Once the tea was brewing the rest of us made our way to the shore to help
him set it up. There is only one tiny window of opportunity when people feel safe
even to immerse themselves in the sea water (which is home to crocodiles and other
dangerous marine life), and that, is in the moment after a fishing-net has being erected.

Once the net was completely untangled wâwa Terry took the farthest end, which was tied
to a star picket and waded out into the water. Waku Alison held our end, tied to an old
spear and I fed out the net until wâwa was up to his shoulders. He staked his end into the
sand as best he could and began wading back to shore. This was the cue for everyone to
hurriedly throw themselves into the water – fully clothed – accompanied by gasps,
which, if my experience is anything to go by, were half in terror and half in glee.

Discussion

Mobility as a measure of social space

In this case study we see the value attributed to mobility as a measure of social space;
the palpable relief of the ‘opening out’ of social space at the end of the Wet Season.
The collective venture of cutting and clearing the road back out of Camp to Gikal
marks the end of every wet season, and heralds the onset of another dry season – the
season of a socially and spatially dynamic life of mobility, visitation, hunting and
camping. Maintaining a state or sense of nyanyu waygany is often dependent upon the
capacity for mobility as an assurance that the state of relations will not become stagnant
and/or tension be permitted to build. It is worth noting also that Gikal is what people
describe as a ‘rich’ place and extended kin from other countries visit to enjoy the
quietude and plenty of Gikal throughout the dry season.

Gurrutu-mirri as a relation to Country and the correlative of war’wuyun

In this case study we get a sense of raki’ as ties of relatedness between people and
place. Raki’ not only join people together to each other across the region, and they also
bind people and places to each other through responsibilities and obligations and draw
people to place through ties of affiliation, attachment, and affection. Everytime we visited Gikal after an absence of a month or more, the first sight of the camp area and bay was always met with a chorus of,

‘yaaa, Gikal, marrkap-mirri wäŋa!’

(yaaa, Gikal, dear beloved place!)

The feeling of ‘missing’ or ‘longing for’ country is commonplace and something that people openly express, particularly when people hear manikay (ceremony songs) of or for their country when they are elsewhere at ceremony or just visiting. The common expression is warwu-yun, which is something akin to ‘worrying (for/about), feeling sad or sorry (for), longing (for), grieving (for), be concerned (about, for). This kind of worry is something dramatised in jest as people wail and feign crying for their country as women do for the recently deceased.

Conclusion

Drawing on the body of emotion-terms and concepts introduced in Chapter 3, this chapter has explored everyday forms of sociality in a series of ethnographic case studies. While many of the forms and patterns of interpersonal exchange reflect many of those described by Myers as characteristic of Pintupi sociality, there are also a number of key differences. Unlike Myers description of Pintupi sociality, people do not display a reluctance to permit others to impose their authority over them, nor an unwillingness to accept constraints on their autonomy. Indeed, such a tendency would be considered negative, disruptive and ‘unfeeling’, if not immature, in the Yolŋu case. There is a great deal of value attributed to the ability to be attentive and sensitive to the state of relations among and between people in the Yolŋu case, as well as the ability to
be willing and able to respond according to how it serves to maintain the normative ideal state of relations, *yayamny wanyany*. It is the state of relations and the state of feeling among and between people that is of primary concern, rather than any self-referential state or sense of feeling. As with the interdependent view of the self in other places and cultures, the value or goal is not individual expression but attunement or alignment of one’s reactions and actions with those another or others more generally.

A further difference from Myers’ description of Pintupi sociability is that Yolŋu do not ‘project their autonomy outside the individual,’ nor is social consensus maintained by a collective adherence to an external and autonomous ‘code’ (The Dreaming). As Liberman (1985) writes of ‘congenial sociability’ and social consensus in the Western desert – any ‘orderliness’ that exists is the collaborative product of a great deal of social and moral work and there are culturally recognised forms or patterns of sociability aimed at maintaining this order.

In the Yolŋu case, for example, as the analysis in this chapter suggests, there is a pervasive expectation that a person will or should withhold coming forward with their private, inner thoughts and feelings, to maintain or realise the normative ideal state of relations, *yayamny wanyany*. There is an associated moral expectation that a person’s actions (including speech acts), are, or should be contingent upon and to a large extent organised by the state of feeling (*yayamny*) or state of relations with others (particularly as it serves to maintain the normative ideal state of *yayamny wanyany*). We also see that there is significant value attributed to dynamic mobility and that there is a characteristic ease with social contingencies.
Chapter 5: Blame, responsibility and accountability

‘To be responsible is to be liable to both blame and praise’


Drawing on key Yolŋu-matha terms and concepts associated with morality and value, this chapter explores the way people consider issues of blame and responsibility in a number of ethnographic case studies.

Bernard Weiner’s framework for the Responsibility Process

In a general sense to be ‘responsible’ means to be morally accountable. To be accountable, in turn, is to be liable to be held to account. ‘To blame’ is to hold, or be held responsible for what is considered a morally or socially reprehensible act. If we accept this as a working definition, my particular interest is in understanding, in the Yolŋu case, what it is that determines who is responsible, and for what reprehensible act. And further, what determines who is to blame and who is it that is held to account.

The literature on blame and responsibility provides a general answers to these questions in the form of a model of what is referred to as the ‘responsibility process.’ The framework put forward by social psychologist Bernard Weiner (1995) is as follows:

Incident → Causal Determination → Judgement of responsibility → Apportioning of blame → Social reaction or Punishment
This framework, Weiner tells us (1995, p. 5), is adapted from the work of three psychologists who have been particularly active in exploring these issues—Frank Fincham, Kelly Shaver and Thomas Shultz. As the above suggests, there is first an incident, after which people seek to determine the cause of the incident, considering what was empirically observed to have happened and factors of impersonal and personal causality. A judgement of responsibility is then made, as per determination of personal causality (unless mitigating circumstances^37 are considered to diminish personal responsibility). This gives rise to blame and generates punishment. The central points at issue in this process are those of ‘personal causality’ and ‘what actually happened.’ The process in general is aimed at determining ‘the truth’ and ‘personal responsibility.’

In this chapter I present four case studies. The first, largest study, is used particularly to explore the utility of the Weinerian framework for the Yolŋu case. The second and third case studies explore the attribution of responsibility in typical, everyday scenarios involving material goods. The final case study explores the attribution of ‘positive’ responsibility or ‘praise’ in three short stories.

^37 There are a few key variables that give rise to ‘mitigating circumstances’ that may diminish judgements of personal responsibility. A person must have had the ‘freedom to do otherwise’ in order to be responsible for their actions. They must also have had the capacity to inhibit their actions. These are factors of controllable and uncontrollable causality. In cases where an act serves a higher moral goal people may not always be responsible for their actions either. Weiner gives as an example, the hypothetical case of a police person that kills someone because they suspect they may have been trying to harm someone. The last thing to note is Weiner replaces ‘blame’ with mediating factors of either anger or sympathy, which mediate between judgements of responsibility and punishment (Weiner 1995).
Responsibility in the Australian literature

Very little has been written on the topic of ‘responsibility’ in Aboriginal Australia. Fred Myers touches on the issue of responsibility in his study of Pintupi sociality, arguing that people do not consider this morally binding social consensus to be the result of human decision making processes, but rather, a consensus maintained by common adherence to a shared, external and autonomous ‘code’: The Dreaming’ or what Pintupi refer to as ‘the Law.’

Basil Sansom addresses the topic implicitly in a number of the case studies in his ethnography of fringe camps in Darwin (1980). One of the consistent themes underlying the case studies in his ethnography is that aggregate ‘mobs’ are responsible to and for one another; from the basic responsibility of ‘watching for witness’ (1980, p. 80), to the kind of witnessing apposite to moral violence (1980, p. 98), to the ‘rally for emergencies’ in which case there is the expectation that everyone will or should rally to help, with those ‘close up’ to the central actors leading the charge (1980, pp. 99) – the basic adequacy of a mob is that they are collectively organised to be responsible for each other and to ultimately ‘save all its members from actual harm’ (Sansom 1980, p. 108). This is also true of the various kinds of ‘organising for business’ (1980). This theme is also implicit in the work of Kenneth Liberman and his acknowledgement that ‘orderliness’ is the collaborative product of a great deal of moral work: ‘The orderliness does not produce itself,’ he argues, ‘but is the collaborative production of the Aboriginal participants’ (1985, p. 27). Congeniality is maintained by means of a range of lexical and stylistic facilitators, by repetition of the ‘agreed on and obvious, and by the deliberate avoidance of direct personal conflict.
In contrast to Myers’ description of Pintupi sociality in which people project their autonomy outside the individual and deny that social consensus is the result of human decision making, the material in this chapter foregrounds Liberman’s point about congenial fellowship: social consensus and orderliness is the collaborative product of a great social and moral work. It also closely reflects Basil Sansom’s observation about the time, energy, intelligence and concern attributed to mutual responsibility among close kin and absolute responsibility among aggregate sets being responsible to and for one another and ultimately for saving all its members from harm.

The notion of responsibility in the Yolŋu context

Expectations about morality and responsibility, in any group or society, are enmeshed in, and structured by networks of social relations. In the Yolŋu case, expectations or responsibility, and morality in general, are informed, organised, and structured by kinship relations and proximal relatedness.38

A person’s closest kin are those from or within the collective body of their bäpurru. These are the people to whom a person is most responsible as well as accountable. Bäpurru are patri-filial social groups that are anchored in place on country. While they are patri-filial, however, it is important to note that the collective social body of any one bäpurru is ‘joined together to each other’ (manapan-mirri) to or ‘with’ a number of other bäpurru, through what Yolŋu refer to as gurrkurr. The term gurrkurr refers to ‘veins, arteries or roots, and by extension physical strength.’ In this context, however, they are ‘strings’ of relatedness.

38 There are places and social spaces where intercultural relations make this more complex.
Case Study A: Giving the shame, giving the power

There had been gossip for some months that *waku* Terence, who is married with twin boys, had been running around with a secret lover. Terence’s wife Jessica\(^{39}\) had been *jealously*\(^{40}\) him and arguing him about the rumours for months – rumours that Terence denied.

By the morning of the day that the conflict came to a head, despite Terence’s denials, the rumours had resurfaced and gained currency. On this particular morning Jessica crossed paths with Terence’s alleged lover, Michelle, out on one of the township streets. There was a heated exchange of words between the two women, witnessed by the ever-public community of kin. And during this exchange Michelle made a public claim or public assertion about the nature of her relationship with Terence. The situation was *dhukun-*\(^{\prime}\)mirri* (soiled or mess’d). The story was, and the word spread that Michelle had called Jessica a ‘skinny’ woman. She had said that Terence did not want Jessica anymore and that he was going to throw her in the rubbish. She, that is, Michelle, was his *rumbal* (true, body, trunk) woman.

*Waku* Terence was setting up the shelter for a mortuary shed, with a number of close male kin, when Jessica arrived in a flight of rage, a few close female kin following her at a distance behind. Never out of sight of ever-public kin, Terence and Jessica argued one another, shouting injustice and disaffection. And although Terence still denied the claims it was not enough to assuage his wife who raged down the township street, rushed headlong into a yard, grabbed a length of rope and marched purposefully out of the township and into the surrounding bush. Such public threats of estrangement through self

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\(^{39}\) Jessica is the daughter of Wanguri man Peter Djulaymuŋ. Her Mother, Yangãthu Ganambarr, is one of the (many) daughters of the late *dhuyay* Mickey Ganambarr (i.e Yethun and *yapa* Nancy’s late husband)

\(^{40}\) This term is used interchangeable with the Yolŋu-matha term or idiom, *mel de’-yun*, literally ‘eye + itching’ but glossed in English as *jealously*. 

171
harm, while often cause for worry and concern, are not uncommon – but an extreme way to at once threaten and invoke the value of being and behaving like kin, and the significance of *gayangu wangany*.

*Waku* Terence, now the sole focus of the ever-public community of kin, demanded his own hearing. He raged in disaffection out on one of the township streets, proclaiming his innocence and demanding compassion.

‘I am not a rubbish man!’ he declaimed ‘I do not possess a lover!’ ‘What am I here!? ’ he demanded, ‘Am I without kin?! Do I belong to no-one?!’

In this midst of this rage *waku* Terence broke away from the sparse gathering of kin. He raged forth down the road and into a yard. In a moment he managed to unhitch the fuel tank from a dinghy outside one of the houses, and douse himself with petrol. Now truly commanding the focus of what is effectively the jural community of kin, he fumbled for a cigarette lighter in his pocket and threatened to set himself alight, all the while continuing his proclamation of defence.

Emotions were high and a few people being ‘witness’ started arguing each other, while others feigned disinterest and ‘casually strolled past’ to get a glimpse of the drama unfolding. In the midst of all this, came a decisive act. *Waku* Carl – Terence’s close, younger brother – intervened. He intervened and grabbed the lighter off Terence. At this point the focus of the drama was spontaneously, and almost seamlessly displaced. Carl’s older brothers, Brendan and Ronny, started arguing him, which escalated and ended with Carl taking more than a few blows, which he suffered without struggle or incident. Then, and from then on, *waku* Carl was considered responsible for much of the drama. The story was and the word spread that he had *ganydjarr wekanjala* (given the strength or power) to *waku* Terence, giving him the impetus or force to act.

The following morning there was an announcement over the P.A. attached to a flag pole in the centre of the township. *Yapa* Batumbil, Terence’s mother, called for a meeting to
‘sort things out.’ Some kind of organised discussion or diplomacy is expected in situations like this, so the call for a meeting was not unusual. The meeting took place that afternoon. In the meantime, however, there was another episode in the drama when Michelle’s close older sisters beat-up on her, out in public on one of the township streets. They argued her, dragged her by the hair, tore her clothing and left her to pick herself up. The story was and the word spread that she had *gora wekanjala* (given [the state or sense of] shame). Come evening a crowd had gathered for the meeting outside the house where *wōwa* Tall Johnny lives with 10 to 15 other close kin. *Wōwa* tall Johnny is Terence’s mother’s brother, and a senior man for their *bāpurru*. His house is among a cluster of others belonging to their *bāpurru*, on a street known by the name of their *bāpurru* Homeland. The first thing that was addressed at the meeting was that no one wanted to put Michelle’s husband ‘in the mess’d’ – *dhukun-mirri ngi gaŋala* (brought or carried a soiled or messy state of relations). This agreed, he and his closest kin left the meeting. It was clear that no one wanted the mess’d to extend to their relationship with him, his close kin and/or *bāpurru*.

Formal Yolŋu meetings such as this, are characterised by indirect waves of talk, which ebb and flow and peak intermittently with formal speeches by (usually male) senior figures from the *bāpurru* involved. At this particular meeting it was *yapa* Batumbil who held the veranda first. She told the crowd that people weren’t going to put her son in the mess’d.

‘*Waku* Terence is married to Jessica,’ she said – ‘she is in our bones and flesh. We allowed Terence to marry Jessica. He is her husband, not Michelle’s.’

Michelle was sitting with her head down among her own close kin clearly shamed.

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41 *Waku* Gatjikin later remarked to me that Michelle’s husband was a ‘kind heart, ‘humble man.’
‘Terence and Michelle had to *gulk-thurra* (cut, sever [the relationship])’ Batumbil went on. ‘Our families are connected by the string, [referring to that between Terence and Jessica and by extension their respective *būpurru*]. Our families are connected by the string and this *mess’d* is breaking the line. I already lost one child, she said, and I’m not going to let something happen so my boy will lose his life. This time I burnt you with my words, next time I’ll be coming for the fight.’

Speaking in such a pointed way, as we will see, is more than a little undiplomatic and rarely warranted in situations like this.

Batumbil’s conclusion was carried over into a wave of talk upon which *wāwa* Tall Johnny took up to the veranda. He spoke in a much more circumspect way, which is characteristic of senior figures when they are genuinely trying to ‘sort things out.’ (The expression for sorting things out is *mittji djarr’yun*, literally, ‘to choose or select a collective or group). *Wāwa* tall Johnny’s speech carried over into indirect waves of discussion between respective parties, which he eventually carried over, into the ebb of an agreed close.

A few days after this meeting *wāwa* Tall Johnny rang Batumbil and *raypirri gurrupan* (lit. gave her discipline). He told her that she wasn’t to speak in public again at the Township. This was the only time I observed Batumbil having been disciplined.

The story was that she hadn’t *dhukarr nhāma nāthili* (first looked to see the path), or followed up the *raki*’ (string, rope). Commentary had it that she had *yurru-yun/yuduyun* (spat [out]) at the meeting, instead of going slowly and carefully and speaking in a diplomatic and circumspect or indirect manner.

In the aftermath of the event *waku* Terence, his wife Jessica and their twin boys stopped for an extended period in camp on the Homeland, in the proprietorial shade of kinship and close relations, away from the intensive sociality of the Township. As a promising young ceremony man, however, he had ceremonial obligations to fulfill and was required
at a ceremony some while later. He flew out to the ceremony accompanied by an unusual number of close, female kin.

‘That rubbish woman might be walking around,’ I heard Batumbil say, which suggested to me that the entourage was not coincidental nor the issue completely at rest.

Discussion

What was it, in this case, that determined who is responsible and for what reprehensible act? What determined who was to blame and who was held to account? Why is it that waku Carl was held to account but not, apparently waku Terence? And who or what determined that Michelle should be held to account and yapapa Batumbil reproached?

How were these decisions and the reparatory process informed by shared understandings about the self, others and the relationship between them and/or understandings associated with affect and morality? To elucidate these questions I will work back through the responsibility process in terms of Weiner’s framework – from punishment, to blame, from blame to responsibility, and finally to the cause of the incident or event.

Who was rebuked or punished?

In the first instance, waku Carl was punished by his brothers who beat-up on him in public out on one of the township roads. The following day Michelle was given a hiding by her sisters, once again in public out on one of the township roads. Of subsequent note is that Michelle was shamed by yapapa Batumbil, and Batumbil, in turn, reproached by her brother.

These punishments handed out to Michelle and Carl, as we will see, reflect the allocation of blame as marked by commentary at the time. This correspondence, along
with the public nature of hidings, and the fact that the victims did not fight back, nor onlookers come to their defense, suggests that, in both instances, these hidings were acts of what Basil Sansom refers to as ‘moral violence’ (1980, pp. 92-102). ‘Acts of moral violence’, he writes, ‘have a judicial character. They are due punishment, executed with due attention to formal witnessing by others’ (1980, p. 92). 42

Who was considered blameworthy?

In the first instance waku Carl was subject to the anger of his actual older brothers who clearly thought he was to blame in some way. Later the following day Michelle was subject to the anger of her actual older sisters who clearly considered her to blame. Batumbil pointed the finger at Michelle at the meeting. She was subsequently rebuked by her close older brother for doing so.

It is notable that it was closest of senior kin that apportioned blame and enacted the punishment. Batumbil was the only person who apportioned blame to someone who was not her close kin, when she shamed Michelle, and was subsequently rebuked by her close older brother for having done so. The cases where blame gave rise to the harshest punishment – in the cases of Michelle and Carl – it was the closest of kin, their senior same sex siblings, that pointed the finger and gave them a hiding. What does this suggest, or what is significant about the fact that it was the closest of kin who apportioned blame and mete out punishment?

42 An act of moral violence is when ‘somebody ‘bin take hidin/flogging/thrashin’, phrases which are definitive, for the essence of moral violence is in the victim’s passivity’ (1980, p. 92). The victim is not restrained, he observes, but ‘suffers the flogging or beating or hiding without fighting back’ (1980, p. 92). So waku Carl and the alleged sweetheart Michelle were punished or subject to acts of ‘moral violence’ (1980, pp. 92-102).
In general terms this is consistent with the idea that expectations of morality and responsibility are informed, organised and structured according to kinship relations and relative to the distance of relatedness and social action. In the Yolŋu family of relations it is same sex siblings (same mother, same father) who are more alike or ‘the same’ than any other kin. They are, in effect, the same structural ‘ego.’ They stand in the exact same structural relation to everyone else within the kinship universe. The same people are their ḟāndi (M), for example, and they call them all waku, the same people are their bāpa (F) and they call them all gāthu, the same people are their māri, gutharra, and so on and so forth. For sisters, the same men are potential husbands (dhuway) and for brothers the same women are potential wives (galay) – and the same women potential mother in laws (mukul rumaru). It used to be the case, and is still quite common that actual sisters marry the same man as co-wives. It used to be the case also, that if women were widowed they would take up residence and become wives of their late husband’s brother.

As the closest of relations, who are more alike than any other kin, same sex siblings are more responsible for one another and responsible to one another than most other kin. This sense of mutual accountability is amplified when same sex siblings are also co-residents and/or close consociates. They, above all, are affected by the breach of ḳayangu wangany, and they, above all, have the right of redress. It is significant, I think, that if people are punished by their own close kin it likely reduces the risk that the punishment will be excessive, or involve excessive force. Further, if people are

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43 My sister Yethun, for example, is the youngest of six co-wives among whom three are her sisters (same father, different mothers - though their mothers were sisters also – see Appendix 3).
punished by their close kin in public, it likely also reduces the risk that ‘less close’ aggrieved parties will feel the need for revenge or retribution.

Who was judged responsible for what reprehensible act?’

The moral transgressions that were marked by commentary were those of Michelle, waku Carl and Batumbil.

In the first instance Michelle was said to have dhukun gäma. This expression or idiom is comprised of the term dhukun’ (rubbish, litter, trash)⁴⁴ and the transitive verb gäma (to carry). Literally, it refers to someone carrying something spoiled, messy or soiled. In this instance it refers to someone carrying or bringing a spoiled, messy, soiled state of relations. This created a situation that was dhukun’-mirri (spoiled, messy, soiled), which is often glossed by Yolŋu who speak English as a situation that is mess’d. This is one of the most common expressions that people use to refer to or describe disruptive, unsettled social relations or social situations. It is worth noting that, in my experience, dhukun’ often connotes a sense of threat or danger. A person or social situation described as dhukun’-mirri carries a sense of disruption, volatility, or implied danger.⁴⁵ So Michelle was considered responsible for carrying the messy, soiled relations and a volatile social situation.

With regard to her own family she was also said to have gorů wikanjala (given a state of feeling of shame, guilt) to her close kin. Waku Carl, who took a hiding from his older

⁴⁴ The antonym of dhukun’ is ‘darrtjalk’ (clean, clear; good, not spoilt)
⁴⁵ The term dhukun’ is strikingly similar to the term ‘dukun’ in Malay and Indonesian languages. In Java the terms is used ‘as a general label to describe anyone with specialist powers and knowledge whose actions and advice can affect the physical well-being of individuals in the community (Nitibaskara 1993, p. 125). Thanks to my colleague Catherine Smith (whose research is based in Aceh) brought this to my attention.
brothers, was said to have *ganydjarr wekajala* (given the power, strength). This expression is often glossed by Yolnu in English as *giving the power, giving the pressure*. A related term, though used less often, is *gur'kur-yun*, which is a transitive verb meaning ‘to push, incite or exert pressure.’ As early as the 1920s, anthropologist W. L. Warner observed something similar in the region, which he refers to as ‘pushing’:

The ‘pusher’ (pidgin English word describing the instigator) is a social personality most prominent in the narrup warfare. When young men kill, everyone speculates on who did the ‘pushing’, for it is always assumed that an old man is really responsible. Although not always true, it is a rule of pragmatic value for a clan to follow when meteining out vengeance. (1937, p. 158)

Warner also observes that both the ‘killers’ and the ‘pushers’ run the gauntlet of spears in the conflict-resolution ceremony (1937, pp. 163-165). The ‘pushers’ are made targets of spears with the spear-head removed and run through the ceremonial space first while the ‘killers,’ who run second ‘after emotions have subsided,’ are made the target of spears with the spear-head still in-tact. They are also, Warner notes, subject to a subsequent ritual spearing in the thigh (1937, p. 165).

These networks through which responsibility is dispersed are still evident in the way that people make judgments of responsibility, as in the case of *waku* Carl. ‘Giving the power,’ ‘giving the pressure’ or ‘pushing’ – these are all concepts that describe an affective chain of interpersonal influence, and by extension, a chain or string of responsibility through which people are held to account. Sanction and approval may

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46 They are accompanied by close relatives who are also close kin of the other side to, as Warner puts it, ‘deter the aggrieved clan from throwing spears with too deadly an intent for fear of hitting their kin, and to help knock down spears which might hit the pushers’ (1937, p. 164).
give encouragement, encouragement give confidence, confidence give strength, which may be the impetus or momentum – the power or force for a person to act. Waku Carl was clearly considered to have influenced or affected Terence’s actions in some way, though how and to what extent is not yet clear. This question will be further discussed.

What was yapə Batumbil’s reprehensible act for which she was reproached? The general opinion was that she hadn’t dhukarr nāma nāthili (first looked to see the path), or followed up the raki’ (string, rope). She had just yurrų-yun/yudun (spat [out]) her dhrūk (story, message) instead of proceeding slowly and speaking in a diplomatic and circumspect or indirect manner. ‘Spitting out,’ of course, registers an instance of example of ngaytu wut-thunamirri rom (law or manner of doing things that affronts or assaults the state or sense of feeling [among and between people]). In an unrelated discussion with yapə Yethun (about Country and maŋayin), she explained the significance of following up one’s raki’ thus:

*Raki’ nitjalaŋ-gu is very important . . .

(Our raki’ is very important . . .)

ŋali tracking, follow up ga marrtjina ŋali yurrų follow up raki’

(tracking, follow up and will move toward, following up that raki’)

wanha-mala ŋali yurrų marrtji ɲurinji niitjalaŋ-gu yuwalk wanga.

(towards where our true/body place is, through that [raki’].)

Yaka ŋali yurrų buku mengunara-mirri yurrų where we really comes from.

(We will not be forgetful, we will not forget where we really come from.)

Always follow.

(Always follow.)
This seamlessly segued into a discussion or retrospective commentary about Batumbil’s behaviour at this particular meeting, the general point of which is captured by the following comment:

See, bayyu hayi follow up njilimurrung-gu raki’-nha marrtji. Straight away hayi spitting out.

(See – nothing – she didn’t follow up [or proceed by] our raki’. Straight away she just spat out.)

This was the only time during my period of fieldwork that Batumbil was not the morally steadfast figure she prides herself to be. It as the only instance I have heard of in which she lost her composure and acted in way that required reparatory rebuke. In many ways, despite this rebuke, Batumbil’s loss of composure was understandable, and I think, understood. Her eldest child, waku Gloria, had died less than five years ago (from a bacteria infection that reached her heart), and this was clearly in the forefront of her mind when she learned of waku Terence having threatened to take his own life. As she said at the time,

‘I already lost one child and I’m not going to let something happen so my boy will lose his life. This time I burnt you with my words, next time I’ll be coming for the fight.’

It is also the case that Batumbil is a confident and forthright person. Her confidence and strength are what make her a pivotal figure among kin and a valued intercultural broker on the Homelands. It is because she is the type of person to speak with such confidence and force, for example, that she is able to access and utilise resources from institutions like local government service providers.

Thus, in answer to who was considered responsible for what reprehensible act:

Michelle was responsible for having gora wekanjala (given the state of feeling shamed,
guilty) to her family and *dhukkan* gāma (carried the spoiled, messy soiled [state of relations]). Waku Carl was responsible for influencing or affecting *waku* Terence in some way, though it is yet clear how or to what extent. There is still the question of Terence, however, and the overarching question of how the attribution of responsibility fits into the anatomy of events.

Working backwards through the responsibility process in this case, the relationship between ‘what happened’ and ‘who was involved’ still does not seem consistent or to correspond with ‘who got the blame’ who got a hiding. How is it that *waku* Terence avoided all blame and responsibility? Even in Warner’s example where the ‘pushers’ were held to account it was the killers or central protagonists that were dealt the heaviest hand. These questions will be carried forward into the discussion of ‘cause.’

**What did people determine was the cause of the event?**

According to the motivational sequence of the responsibility process the first step (in the process through which people make judgments of responsibility) is the determining of factors of impersonal and personal causality. So the final question to ask is what people determined to be the cause of the event.

We cannot be sure whether it was true or not that *waku* Terence and Michelle were lovers. We do know, however, that Michelle publicly claimed it was so. The significance of this claim, however, was not necessarily their potentially being lovers. It is not, exactly, an earth shattering claim. It is generally true that people assume that young adults, married or not, have a secret sweetheart of some kind. Michelle is married to a man many years her senior so while it is not necessarily appropriate or ‘good’ to have a secret sweetheart, it is not altogether unexpected. As a promising young ceremony man this is perhaps even truer in Terence’s case. No one would
'blame' him for having a sweetheart. In both cases I think it is fair to say that being sweethearts would not necessary be a blameworthy act. That is, unless or until it becomes public and negatively affects the state of feeling between people as well as the state of their respective close, straight relations.

The significance of Michelle's public claim was not so much about her relationship or potential relationship with *waku* Terence, nor necessarily her motivation or intent. It was foremost and primarily the way that it affected the state of feeling and the state of relations between people and *bāpurru* involved. Recall that, with the exception of exchanges involving material goods, it is generally the case that indirect is straight (*dhunupa*), and direct is crooked (*djarrpi*). Indirect speech acts leave open the state of relations and accommodate *ŋayaju wangany*. Direct speech acts foreclose the state of relations, threaten to 'cut' strings of relatedness, and delimit the potential for realising or maintaining *ŋayaju wangany*. Michelle's public assertion was definitely of the latter kind. It was not just direct, but public.

To speak in public is described in Yolŋu-matha as talking or speaking *napungga-ŋura* (in the middle or in between). A person who acts *napungga-ŋura* assumes responsibility for mediating between, steering or controlling the string of relations between the people involved – the people between whom they are standing. Thus, if people become disaffected or the state of relations a *mess'd* (i.e. *dhukan'-mirri*) it will be, in all likelihood, the person who acted *napungga-ŋura* who will be held to account. This was clearly what happened to some degree in the case of Michelle.\(^47\) Michelle's public

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\(^{47}\) The attribution of responsibility in instances where a person acts *napungga-ŋura* exemplify the case that morality and value are determined less by instances of action and underlying intent than by the way people and actions effect the state of relations.
Close, straight relations between any two people are relative to the collective social body of the bāpurru, which is socially anchored in place. They are those between any man or woman who call each other dhuway and galay. Close, straight ‘true’ romantic relationships are those between people that call each other dhuway and galay and whose relationship is consistent with, or ‘follows up’ the socio-centric ‘string of relatedness’ between their respective bāpurru. Note, with reference to the local model of social organisation in Chapter 2 that rumbal, the term for ‘true’ also refers to ‘torso, body or trunk of a tree.’ Close straight rumbal romantic relationships are those that are said to follow the raki’ (string, rope) and make people dhunupa (straight, correct, proper). Romantic relationships between people who are not ‘straight’ for one another are djarrpi (crooked, wrong).

Thus, Michelle’s public claim was an act of speaking ‘in the middle’ or ‘in between’ the close, straight, ‘true’ romantic relationship between waku Terence and Jessica and by extension, an act of speaking in between the close, straight relationships between their respective bāpurru. Intervening in this close, straight, ‘true’ relation, Michelle’s public statement affronted or assaulted state of feeling between those involved (i.e. ṅayaŋu wutthun), which effected a ‘soiled’ and ‘messy’ state of relations, which created a volatile social situation – all of which gave her family the feeling of shame, which

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48 This marriage was, in fact, ‘made straight,’ as Terence and Jessica did not stand in a dhuway-galay relationship to each other. They were, nonetheless, from close, intermarrying bāpurru – or connubial network (see Figure 8 and associated discussion).

49 Crooked romantic relationships can threaten to ‘cut’ or ‘sever’ (gulk-thun) the string of relations between people and groups. If close, straight ‘true’ relationships are threatened it almost always gives rise to a dhukun-mirri – soiled or messy state of relations. Thus crooked relationships can be the basis for an emergent wrongdoing and an emergent ‘event.’
was the probable cause of her getting a hiding. So not unexpected. But was Terence not implicated at all? What do we make of his dramatic reaction?

Terence’s public rage began as a legitimate act of ‘proclaiming’ (Sansom 1980) in response to having been publicly implicated in the affair. Proclaiming, Sansom writes in the context of the fringe camps in Darwin,

is entering a demand for a specific verdict on a defined issue. This gives the purpose of proclamation. Its style is nagging and vociferous. Its duration is extended. Its prime message is thrusting and simple. The grounds for the demand, however, are presented as a set of detailed assertions. Because it is an immediate form of expressive activity, proclaiming (like commentary) is full of details. A deal of energy is expended and words are presently used with liberality in the attempt to make and imprint a social fact that will live on as a verdict, eventually to be sparely and simply stated. (1980, p. 89)

‘Proclaiming lasts and proclaimers must have stamina,’ he goes on, ‘any sympathy is to be created, not assumed (1980, p. 89). The act of proclaiming is a defense put forth to what is effectively a jural community of kin. Terence’s proclaiming was likely a defense of himself and his standing in the community, as well as a defense of his close, straight *rumbal* relation with Jessica, and by extension that between their respective *bäpurru*. Indeed, if Terence had not put forth such an impassioned public defense I am almost certain that the situation would have been worse.

While his defense began as an act of proclaiming, however, it seemed to develop into something more serious when he threatened to set himself alight. While this threat of self harm may have potentially been dangerous, it did not necessarily warrant immediate intervention. That is, it was not yet an act of ‘berserk’ (Sansom 1980). ‘In the man who goes wild or goes mad,’ Sansom writes, ‘the campers recognise a person
in extremis' (Sansom 1980, p. 99). The act of berserk is an involuntary response to what has become an extreme situation. Quoting Sansom at length:

No one can go wild in private and so the berserk is always an essay in communicative work. The sight of a crowd, in fact, provokes it. The objectively deprived person’s awareness of his social isolation is only fully realised in a crowd made up of more fortunate others. What the act of going wild has sociologically to say about its social context relates to the basic demand that governs the more ordinary witnessing of undramatic everyday events. In ordinary witnessing, witnesses are required to express indifference to what is deemed to be the ‘own business’ of others. Indifference is the most general and ordinary expression required in run of the mill witnessing. And the berserk is the ultimate protest, the emotional overflow of the lonely man to whom all others in his current world seem to be collectively indifferent. (1980, p. 101)

The nature of the emergency represented by the berserks is not of a self-evident sort and needs to be defined with reference to local conceptions’ (Sansom 1980, p. 99). ‘A berserk in camp evokes the rally for emergencies,’ he observes, ‘placing an onus on all those present to act to put an end to crisis,’ with those close up to the protagonist leading the way (1980, p. 99).

During a separate incident involving a young man who was (known to be) psychologically unstable, I witnessed the response to a situation in which there was absolutely no doubt he was truly out of control, or gone berserk. In this case, the reaction of kin was strikingly similar to that Sansom describes, with people moving to shield the berserker from serious harm, and from seriously harming others. I would speculate that if Terence really had lost control and was liable to bawa-yurra (do

50 On a number of occasions actually, but it was in camp on the Homeland, so slightly different circumstances and social distribution of responsibility.
something crazy, do anything) then the community of kin who were present would have rallied to action in a similar way. So it is important to note, with regard to waku Carl, that intervening and grabbing the lighter was an unusual thing to do.

By doing so waku Carl implicated himself as being somehow involved in the drama. We know that he was said to have ganydjarr wekama (given the power, strength) to Terence – to have influenced or affected him in some way – but we cannot be sure exactly how, or to what degree this was the case. In my own estimation I cannot imagine Carl would or could have heavily pressured nor ‘forced’ Terence to do anything. The two young men are roughly the same age and waku Terence is quite a steadfast and strong personality. Indeed, he is something of a moral exemplar of the ‘good’ young man. The main difference between the brothers is that Terence is married with twin boys and carries the responsibility of a young ceremonial figure, while waku Carl is still a yawirriny’ (initiated, single/unmarried young man). I would suggest that waku Carl, if anything, was probably encouraging and pestering Terence to carry on like a yawirriny’ and ‘chase after two legged’ as my sisters would say.

In any case, while we cannot be sure how or to what extent Carl was involved, I am certain that the brothers who apportioned blame and enacted the punishment knew exactly what it was he had or had not done. The brothers that reacted to Carl grabbing the lighter, along with waku Terence, are the closest of consociates and rarely seen without one another. So while I cannot say for sure how Carl was involved it is fair to assume that they knew among themselves exactly what he had or had not done.

It is also important to note that by intervening and grabbing the lighter waku Carl did not just implicate himself as being somehow involved. As same sex siblings who are the closest of kin and the closest of consociates this implicated his two brothers as well.
So his brother’s reaction to him grabbing the lighter and the reason they gave him a hiding was most likely: a) for whatever it was that they knew he had done and how he’d been involved; b) for being stupid enough to implicate himself – in public – and at the height of the drama, and; c) for being stupid enough, not only to have implicated himself but, by association, them as well. Their reaction was also likely, in part, an act of proclamation as a defense of themselves (after Carl implicated them as having been involved) and a defense of the close, straight relations between people and bapurru involved. Waku Terence is not only their close classificatory brother but Jessica’s mum is their close classificatory sister (same father, different mother).

That brings us back to the end of the event and the beginning of the responsibility process. And there is still an elephant in the room of causality. There is still the question of Terence and how or why he managed to avoid all responsibility and blame. The most we can say of mitigating circumstances that might have reduced his personal responsibility is that Carl, who is not a particularly strong personality, may have encouraged or pestered him to chase after women. This did not, by any standards, reduce Terence’s personal responsibility to zero. Whatever it was that determined who was responsible and who was held to account, it doesn’t seem to be the case that it hinged on issues of personal causality.

Concluding remarks on causality

The literature on blame and responsibility and the framework of the ‘responsibility process’ in general assume that issues of ‘personal causality’ and the ‘truth’ are always the points at issue when people make judgments of responsibility and hold people to account (e.g Weiner 1995, Fincham & Shulz 1981). It assumes, moreover, that the
reparatory process is always directed towards the goal of determining the 'truth' and 'personal accountability.'

There are three major differences, I suggest, in the way Yolŋu consider blame and responsibility. The first relates to the aim of the 'responsibility process.' The event that initiated reparatory action in this case study, and gave rise to blame and punishment, was first and foremost the 'event' of the state of dhukun-mirri relations – the soiled and messy relations – the volatile social situation. Accordingly, the 'outcome' people sought to achieve was foremost that of reparation – of re-establishing the state of feeling and state of relations between those involved. With regard to question of Terence – the issue is not so much 'how or why he avoided responsibility and blame,' as it is a question of 'how blaming him and holding him to account' could have contributed to re-establishing the state of feeling and state of relations between those involved. The only reason that may have warranted pointing the finger at Terence is if he had not launched a public, impassioned defense. Then perhaps, he may have been the subject of blame and punishment – for not 'following up the string' and at least attempting to make it straight.  

The second major difference, I suggest, relates to the assumption that personal causality is always the point at issue in first making judgements of responsibility. Causality, if we consider it in Yolŋu terms, is more an issue of distributed causality. Moreover, causality is as much an issue of affect as it is a relationship with effect. Feeling is something someone has, but it is also something that people do to one another, which

51 It is also not insignificant that Terence is a promising young ceremony man. Many senior people have invested a great deal to carry the knowledge and power of the bapurru.
can not only lead them to affect one another, but can affect them in such a way that it effects action and/or as well as physical states of health and wellbeing. This, in turn, gives rise to a theory of morality in which causality and responsibility are distributed. Thus, the local Yolŋu theory of morality and value casts issues of blame and responsibility in a way that foregrounds the influence that people have on one another in everyday interpersonal exchange.

In the Yolŋu case, as this story suggests, people are not necessarily concerned with what was empirically observed to have happened in any given situation or event. As is arguably the case in other face-to-face settings, judgments of responsibility are strongly shaped by people’s understanding of the relationships among the people involved. In fact, people’s understanding of the relationships and the felt need to sustain them contribute greatly to the shaping of the events and the ensuing ‘responsibility process’ through which people are held to account. The ‘responsibility process’ in this case is not a matter of ‘personal causality’ and the ‘truth’ but directed towards the goal of ‘straight relations’ and the value of ḃayayu ᦂaygany. This goal and thus the process is informed, organised and structured by the relative weight of the respective ‘strings’ between people and bāpurru involved. Furthermore, and the final more general point of difference, I suggest is that people are not concerned with the morality or possible consequences of any particular individual’s particular or discrete actions, so much as if and when anyone’s actions negatively affect that state or sense of feeling among and between people (i.e. ḃayayu). This is consistent with an approach to morality that foregrounds the state of the relationship between people rather than any one inner state of feeling, or the individual as the locus and cause of their own actions. Hence the ‘event’ that initiated reparatory action in this case was the ‘event’ of dhukun-mirri relations – soiled, messy relations.
The three case studies that follow depart somewhat from the length and tone of this case. The next two case-studies look at the attribution of responsibility in the most quotidian of circumstances. These case studies are paraphrased excerpts from my fieldnote books, amended to add context and detail. The final case study is in fact a series of three short stories told to me by my wāwa. I have included these as examples of the attribution positive responsibility, or ‘praise.’

Case Study B: Sabotaging the power cord with an axe

This morning I was awoken by an almighty noise. It turned out to be the sound of gutharra Michael smashing into the corrugated-iron wall of the adjacent room with an axe. He was trying to sever the electrical cord that ran into the adjacent room because gutharra Raŋ (his younger brother) – who had barricaded himself inside the room, refusing to give him a turn on the Play-Station computer console.

Batumbil emerged from her room. She was furious. The room they were using belongs to waku Tony (the boy’s njapipi [MB]) and the game console is among his prize possessions (not easy things to come by out on the Homelands!).

‘He’s going to be so angry’ she shouted, Raŋ messed up-nha! How is he going to power his game now?’

Raŋ, of course, was the one still barricaded inside. Michael, who had wielded the axe and severed the cord, stood by seemingly exonerated of any blame.

Discussion

As with the previous case study, the attribution of responsibility seems to challenge implicit Balanda expectations. Why did Raŋ get the blame when it was Michael who
severed the power-cord with the axe? How can the attribution of responsibility be explained in this case?

Once again the issue or ‘event’ that was cause for reparatory action, which set the responsibility process in train, was first and foremost the state of unsettled or upset relations. In this case, however, a material item was the point at issue or focus of this state of relations. In Chapter 4 we saw that, with the exception of exchanges involving material goods it is generally the case that moral expectations hold that ‘indirect is straight/correct’ (dhunupa), and ‘direct is crooked/wrong’ (djarrpi). However, I also noted that this general rule is marked by forms of exchange that involve material goods.

In material exchange we see that ‘things’ or material goods that threaten to become *napungga*-yura (in the middle, in between) may be hidden, destroyed or otherwise removed from the immediate setting in cases where it serves to maintain *nayaju* wangany. Michael severed the power-cord, which ensured the material item could no longer be played, which eliminated the material good from its problematic position *napungga*-yura. In the previous lengthy case study we saw that a person who acts *napungga*-yura assumes responsibility for mediating among the people involved, and that if people become disaffected or the state of relations is a *mess’d* (dhukun’-mirri) it is, in all likelihood, the person who acted *napungga*-yura who will be held to account.

In this case we see that someone allowed a material item to be or become *napungga*-yura. Who allowed the material item to be or become *napungga*-yura and upset the state of relations? It was Ranj, which is consistent with the attribution of blame and responsibility. The attribution of responsibility is thus not only logical and justified but expected.

Case Study C: Smashing the wheelbarrow
The only wheelbarrow in camp, after the car and the lawnmower, is one of the most valuable (non-\textit{madayin}) material items. One afternoon my two \textit{gaminyarr}, Mark and Marcus (then six years old), were pretending it was a car, one pushing the other around in it and running into things.

\textit{Yapa} Batumbil and my two \textit{wawas} (who are all \textit{māri} [MM/MBB] to the boys) told them to stop it, to put the wheelbarrow down, over and over again. They didn’t take any notice, however, and carried on for a good ten minutes until everyone was stressed out. Then, and as was bound to happen, they crashed it into something and the wheelbarrow tipped over with Marcus half stuck underneath it, screaming and crying. \textit{Wāwa} Terry, calm as anything, while Marcus was still screaming and carrying on, picked up the axe lying nearby and started walking over towards them.

Marcus made a quick recovery and scrambled out from underneath the wheelbarrow. Giggling, both of them ran toward the airstrip as \textit{wawa} raised the axe, and brought it down on the barrow, once, twice, three times, until it split. And then, just as calmly returned to his seat and sipped his tea.

The boys giggled, someone complained they had blunt ears, and the wheelbarrow was stuffed.

Discussion

Once again in this case, we see that it is a material item is \textit{napunga’-jura} and threatening to upset the state of relations, and once again, we see that \textit{tjaya} takes precedence. That is, despite the wheelbarrow being one of the more valuable and valued material items in camp, its value was encompassed – as Dumont would say – by the value of \textit{tjaya waijgany}. The role and value of material goods will be the subject and focus of the next chapter. First, however, a final case study which illustrates the attribution of positive responsibility or praise through a series of three short stories that
were told to me by wāwa Terry one day while we were drinking tea and smoking, sitting on old plastic school chairs out in between the Green House and the airstrip. The first two stories involve wāwa Bluey (deceased). The final story involves a number of the brothers including wāwa Terry. These are my summaries of the stories.

Case Study D: To be responsible is to be liable to both blame and praise

Story 1.

When they used to camp down at the bottom where the airstrip meets the mangroves, wāwa Bluey\textsuperscript{52} accidentally let the canoe drift. There was a strong current, and the water quickly carried it away. Without thinking, wāwa Bluey jumped in after it and swam and swam and kept on swimming single mindedly, until, realising how far out in the deep water he swum, he noticed something in the water – it was Garrajununj’ (Hammerhead Shark). Garrajununj ‘showed himself’ to wāwa, and wāwa reached out to him. Garrajununj carried wāwa toward Mayikurr Island, to where the dugout canoe was, now rocking still, not far from the shore. Wāwa climbed into the dugout canoe and Gurrajununj disappeared back under the water.

Story 2.

Another, different time, wāwa Bluey was at Gikal, out in the dingy not far off shore. It was a calm day but he noticed that the dingy began to rock. Just then, Mirinyunu (Whale), our māri (MM/MB), appeared from under the water – right underneath the boat. Mirinyunu’s tail flicked up out of the water, hitting the bottom and side of the dingy so hard that it nearly capsized. The outboard motor came off and, heavy as it was, sank to the bottom of the ocean in a moment. Wāwa’s raki’ (string, rope) and his lungu (turtle

\textsuperscript{52} Wāwa Bluey is the actual brother of Batumbil, Terry, Don and Tall Johnny; the children of Gatiri and his fifth, Gālpu wife Dhupi Yalaykupa Gurruwiwi.
hunting harpoon) and gara (spear), however, fell back down onto the floor of the boat, now full of water. Relieved, wāwa started bailing water.

Story 3.

This story took place when, one day, all the brothers were at Murumura (Gan’burra), one of the Homelands on Galiwin’ku Island. Wāwa old man Charlie\textsuperscript{53} was out in the dingy. It was a calm day and he was just paddling with his hands, not far from shore. It was not long, however, before a strong current picked up, as well as strong winds, and it started to rain heavily. Wāwa Charlie tried to paddle back to shore. He kept paddling and paddling but the current took him further away from shore and he eventually grew tired and weak. After a time he lost all his energy and fell asleep.

Four brothers, including wāwa Terry, jumped in to swim after him to bring the boat and Charlie back to safety. They swam and swam, but could barely see for the rain and wind. They kept on swimming. Two of the brothers grew tired, so the other brothers supported them, carrying them, keeping their heads above the water. They swam from morning until midday, when they finally caught sight of the dingy. They grabbed onto the raki’ (string, rope) attached to the front of the dingy and woke wāwa Charlie up with a start. He helped them in. They all waited a while, so tired, before paddled with their hands, all the way back to shore.

‘Something must have been looking after them,’ wāwa Terry said to me at this point.

‘Something must have been carrying them.’

The thing I want to draw attention to with these stories is that in not one instance is responsibility – positive (as in praise) or negative (as in blame) – attributed to the actions of a particular single individual. In the first story in which wāwa Bluey loses

\textsuperscript{53} Wāwa old man Charlie (Matjuwi) is the son of Gatiri and his second, Gālpu wife Djākminy Gurruwiwi. Yapa Nancy, among others, shares the ‘same mother same father.’
and then recovers the *naku* (dugout canoe), responsibility is attributed to Garraŋununŋ (Hammerhead Shark). In the second story, responsibility is attributed to Mirinyuŋu, our *māri* (MM/MB), and in the third story, the brothers not only carry and hold one another but responsibility is ultimately (if ambiguously) attributed to ‘something’ – which is usually a reference to *wanarr*, or *madayin*, or the power and strength derived from either/both. In all three stories, those involved derived power and strength – directly or indirectly – from ‘our’ *wanarr*. This is the main point that I wanted to draw attention to with regard to these stories. Finally, however, it is worth noting that *wanarr*, I have suggested (in Chapter 2) are socially recognised forms of *madayin*, and *madayin* attributes, characteristics or properties of the collective, ancestral self – attributes, characteristics or properties of the collective body of the *bāpurru*.

**Conclusion**

Drawing on key Yolŋu-matha terms and concepts associated with morality and value, this chapter has explored the way people consider issues of blame and responsibility in a number of ethnographic case studies.

In contrast to Myers’ description of Pintupi sociality in which people project their autonomy outside the individual and deny that social consensus is the result of human decision making, the material in this chapter foregrounds Liberman’s point about congenial fellowship: social consensus and orderliness is the collaborative product of a great deal of social and moral work. Characteristic of this work and the processes entailed in the reestablishment of social order – as we see in the first extended case study of conflict and disorder – is that responsibility and accountability are considered

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54 See discussion about *mārr* in Chapter 3.
as, or in terms of, a ‘string’ or chain of interpersonal influence; the closer the relation, the more valent the ‘string’ or chain of influence, the more salient the chain of responsibility by means of which people may be held to account. ‘Affect’ and influence are just as significant as ‘action’ as key points at issue when considering issues of responsibility and holding people to account. Feeling is something someone has, but it is also something that people can do to one another – something that people can give or take, which can not only affect one another but can affect them in such a way that it effects action and/or as well as physical states of health and wellbeing.

The event that initiated reparatory action in the extended case study of conflict and disorder in this chapter, was the ‘event’ of the state of *dhukun-mirri* (soiled, messy) relations – the volatile social situation. The two individuals thought to have caused this event, were deemed responsible for *gora wekama* (giving the state or sense of shame) and *ganydjarr wekama* (giving the power’ i.e. influence, pressure, encouragement), respectively. The outcome that people sought was foremost that of reparation and the process directed toward the goal of *jayatju namathirri* (making well [the] state or sense of feeling), and thus reestablishing the normative ideal of *jayatju wangany*. As Liberman writes of the Western Desert, the production and maintenance of a community of ‘feelings’ is considered to be something very serious, and much of the social activity is addressed toward the active production of such collective solidarity (1985, p. 15).

We also saw that people are less concerned with any particular, discrete acts or actions when making judgments of responsibility and more with the way actions affect *jayatju*, and thus the state of relations. Accordingly, the process through which people are held to account is not directed toward arriving at any ‘truth’ (of fact, intention or opinion), nor is it directed toward the goal of ‘personal accountability.’ On a socio-centric level,
the responsibility process and the process through which people are held to account -
are directed toward dhunupa-kuma ṣayi raki'-nha (straightening out the strings [of relatedness]), and thus – again – reestablishing the normative ideal of ṣayaju wangany.

Perhaps more than any other chapter the material presented here foregrounds the fact that any orderliness that exists is the collaborative product of a great deal of social and moral work. The culturally recognised forms of interpersonal exchange comprising this ‘work’ and broader salient patterns of sociality, can only be understood with reference to local terms and concepts associated with affect/emotion and morality.
Chapter 6: Culturally recognised forms of material exchange

‘Far more than we ordinarily suppose, economic relations rest on moral foundations’ – Raymond Firth 1951, p. 44.

Drawing on the body of key terms and concepts associated with emotion in Yolŋu-matha (introduced in Chapter 3), this chapter explores the way people consider value and engage in exchange relations (involving material goods), through a number of ethnographic case studies.

Overview of the relevant literature

There are two broad themes that unite the historical body of literature looking at Indigenous sociality and exchange (Keen 2010). Firstly, there is broad recognition that both sociality and exchange relations are primarily informed and organised by kinship relations and the underlying ‘kin-based system of relationships’ with its attendant obligations and responsibilities (Keen 2010). The second theme is that of reciprocity and demand sharing, as a defining feature of both kinship relations and the mode or form of exchange (Keen 2010). These come together in the prevailing model of the Indigenous domestic moral economy (Peterson and Taylor 2003).

Indigenous domestic moral economy

The notion of the Indigenous domestic moral economy is in many ways an expansion of Peterson’s writing on demand-sharing (Peterson 1993), which is, in turn strongly influenced by Myers’ model of Pintupi sociality (see Peterson 1993, p. 869). Peterson
and Taylor use the term 'domestic moral economy' to cover the allocation of resources to the reproduction of social relationships 'at the cost of profit maximisation and obvious immediate personal benefit,' that is, it is 'anti-market' (2003, p. 106). Peterson and Taylor detail four features of everyday social practice that make sharing with kin so central to the domestic moral economy. The first is the 'ethic of generosity informed by a social pragmatics of demand sharing' and the centrality of sharing, which characterises Indigenous sociality in many and various communities throughout Australia. Quoting Basil Sansom, Peterson and Taylor note that sharing is 'part of the Aboriginal commonality found across the continent and very much part of Aboriginal self-identification' (Peterson and Taylor 2003, p. 108). The second feature is the universal system of kin classification which requires a flow of goods and services to produce and reproduce social relationships. This sets up complex systems of rights, obligations and expectations, which are (re)produced, fulfilled or maintained through social action and exchange, with a particular emphasis on sharing (2003, p. 108). The third feature is that personhood is constituted through relatedness but egalitarian autonomy is also valued: the 'relational constitution' of the Indigenous self is central, Peterson and Taylor argue, to the Indigenous domestic moral economy (2003, p. 108). Here we see the strong resonance with Myers' model of Pintupi sociality. Selfhood is mediated through the social value of relatedness, 'which is largely constituted through dyadic relations and an egalitarian ideology that both respects personal autonomy but constrains its forceful assertion' (2003, p. 109). The fourth and final feature – an emphasis on polite indirectness in interaction that makes open refusal difficult – 'relates directly to both demand sharing and the importance of the relational emphasis in the construction of the self, which together greatly influence the nature of everyday


communication because they make the deflecting or avoiding of demands a constant and delicate issue' (2003, p. 109).

Combined with the economic significance of these practices, these four socio-moral factors account for the central constitutive role of sharing with kin in the domestic moral economy. They thus, it is argued, help to explain the resilience and persistence of sharing 'and the strong anti-accumulation pressures associated with it’ (2003, p. 110). It should be noted that from a particular perspective in the intercultural or cross-cultural sphere these salient ‘anti-market’ characteristics of the Indigenous domestic moral economy are seen as problematic in the sense and to the degree that they make accumulation difficult and act as a socio-economic levelling practice (see Altman 2011).

Demand Sharing

Peterson’s model of demand sharing – a component of the domestic moral economy – has gained widespread currency in ethnographies of Indigenous Australia. The notion of demand sharing is based on his observation that much giving and sharing is in response to direct verbal or non-verbal demands. This raises the question, he writes, ‘of why generosity is so often expressed with what might be construed as contradictory meanness: Why do recipients often have to demand generosity?’ (1993, p. 860). There are four key aspects of features of demand sharing that may be identified in this model of sociality and exchange.

First is Peterson’s observation that demand sharing makes good sense in communities where everyone is related through kinship ties, in circumstances where there is often a scarcity of food and resources (1993). Second is his observation that such ‘inertial generosity’ also provides an additional possibility – that demands can be refused
without offense by hiding, secretive behavior and lying' (1993, p. 864). Third is Peterson’s observation that the practice is not construed negatively: ‘if moral obligation and commitment to others is construed not in terms of giving freely,’ he writes, ‘but in terms of responding positively to their demands, the morality of demand sharing is as positive as that of generosity’ (1993, p. 870).

Despite Peterson making explicit the fact that the practice should not be construed negatively, Jon Altman observes that demand sharing has been abstracted from context by non-anthropologists. It has become both over-emphasised and highly influential in public debate about Indigenous sociality, governance and a perceived need for change:

Much of the public policy discourse about demand sharing views the practice in highly moralistic negative terms and links it to the rhetoric of failure in Indigenous affairs; it is seen to slow integration into the mainstream individuated economy, to perpetuate poverty and disadvantage, and/or to aid and abet risky behaviours such as drinking and drug taking that results in costly social pathologies such as violence and child abuse.

This discourse calls for an elimination of the practice of demand sharing – a fundamental change to culture – so as to empower Aboriginal individuals for advancement and modernity. (Altman 2011, p. 196)

Problems of articulation and stress

Diane Austin-Broos (2003) addresses ‘problems of articulation that occur between kin-based and market-based societies’ among the Western Arrerrete (Aranda). Austin-Broos draws attention to the importance of ego-centred, bilateral networks of kin, which are characterised by relations, which have been described in terms of a ‘grammar of exchange’ ‘demand sharing’ or as the social relations that give a particular life to things – forms of distribution and exchange rendered through the idiom of kin.

Settlement, commodities, and access to cash, as Austin Broos shows, have created a
situation in which the Arrernte struggle to articulate kinship relations with workplace and welfare relations; the density of relatedness in centralised settlements, low-income households and the presence of commodities and other shop-bought goods contribute to the stress and struggle of articulating the demands of bilateral kinship networks with a welfare economy and the state. In a more recent publication Austin-Broos extends her analysis and argument such that ‘a kin-based and emplaced life that renders the subject first and foremost as a relative’ has ‘left [the Arrernte] struggling with different and conflicting regimes of value’ (2003, p. 268). The prevalence of ‘stress’ as a central feature of settlement life in centralised communities has been more recently addressed by Victoria Burbank in her ‘ethnography of stress’ focused on Numbulwar in the Northern Territory (the old Rose River Mission) (2011).

In this chapter we see that there exists a robust local/regional economy characterised by salient, culturally recognised forms of exchange and local forms of value, and that only one of the key features of the ‘domestic moral economy’ resonate strongly with these local/regional forms. Rather than an ‘ethic of generosity’ (Hiatt 1965) we see that the flow of goods in exchange takes place through unmarked and unremarkable states of yän gurrupan (just giving) (Thomson 1949). Unmarked and unremarkable forms or states of exchange are those in which people are ‘sharing one another, sharing something one another,’ in which people are rrambahji (close, level, together, at one/the same), which is when there is a state or sense of nyanju wanjany. The latter is a marker of balance and equilibrium rather than positive value or ‘generosity’; it is a basic aspect of what it is or ‘means’ to be and behave like kin. Peterson’s alternate terminology ‘mutual taking’ (which many seem to have ignored) – or Donald Thomson’s (1949) yän gurrupan (just giving) – is more appropriate than the notion of demand sharing, in the Yolŋu case. While exchange is certainly organised by kinship
relations, the basic moral obligation and commitment is not construed in terms of responding positively to demands, but as a basic expectation to be ‘open’ not only in an affective sense, as discussed in Chapters 3 and 4, but in terms of material goods.

**The structure of this chapter**

In what follows, I will first introduce key terms and concepts associated with exchange in Yolŋu-matha, giving a sense of how they reflect or interact with those of affect and morality. I will then present three case-studies in order of social distance – from the most quotidian of scenes involving material exchange between close kin around the fire in Camp, to the exchange of goods and resources between kin in neighbouring Homeland communities, to the exchange of money and material on a trip to the nearby township of Nhulunbuy. Then follows a discussion of more or less ‘open’ and ‘closed’ forms or states of exchange with regard to the use and role of bankcards and telephones. The final case study of the chapter and the discussion to follow draw together two key themes that also run through previous case studies.

**Key local terms associated with giving, taking and exchange**

There are a number of terms associated with giving, taking, asking and exchange. I will introduce those most commonly used during my time in the field, beginning with terms for giving and taking.

**Gurrupan, wekama and mārrama**
The most common terms associated with giving are the transitive verb *gurrupan*, which means ‘to give,’ and its synonym *wekama*. The most common term associated with ‘taking’ or receiving is *märrama*, which is a transitive verb meaning ‘to get, bring, take, pick [up].’ Among the terms in frequent use relating to ‘exchange’ are *bala-räli-yun-[mirri]*, *nyanydjalar’-yun*, *bilyun-[marama]*, *räli-yun-mirri*, and *buku-bak-thun[marama]*.

I will introduce them in this order.

*bala-räli-yun-[mirri]*

The first term, *bala-räli-yun-[mirri]*, is from *bala* – ‘away from the speaker, räli – ‘toward the speaker,’ the suffix *-yun* which derives a performative verb, and the suffix *-mirri*, which here denotes the reflexive reciprocal form of the verb. A literal translation renders the term something like ‘(moving or doing something) backwards and forwards in an alternating fashion to each to the other.’ A less awkward literal translation would be, ‘back-and-forthing one another.’ I am confident that the term is accurately represented by the idea of reciprocity. Indeed, the similarity between *bala-räli-yun-[mirri]* and ‘reciprocity’ is striking – the English term ‘reciprocal’ is derived from Latin *reciprocus*, ‘returning the same way, alternating,’ from pre-Latin *-reco-proco*- where *recus* is from *re-*-, meaning ‘back’ + *-cus*, denoting the adjective form *+procus*, which is from *pro-*-, ‘forward’ + *-cus*, again denoting the adjective form.

*nyanydjalar’-yun*

The second term is *nyanydjalar’-yun*. A common synonym used interchangeably with *nyanydjalar’-yun* is *bilyun*, which is generally defined as ‘turn [round, about face], turn [into], change, become [a new thing].’ In my experience these terms are those most

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55 The former term is specific to the Gumatj dialect and the more common term used within the local network of homelands. According to Zorc the term is also Djapu (1986, p. 263).
frequently used to refer to transfers of money or payment into or between accounts, as in:

\[ \text{yanydjalar'yun yayi yurrurru rrupiya amala-wu account-lili.} \]

(he or she will yanydjalar'-yun the money toward Mum’s account)

(Blakeman 2008, field notebook #5, p. 31).

Buku-bak-thun-maranha-mirri

*Buku-bak-thun-maranha-mirri* is comprised of the idiom *buku-bakthun* and the derivational suffix *-marama* which forms a causative verb and the suffix *-mirri*, which here denotes the reflexive or reciprocal form of the verb. The idiom *buku-bak-thun* is comprised of *buku* ‘forehead’ or ‘will’ and the intransitive verb *bak-thun* - ‘to break.’ A literal translation would be something like ‘to make one’s forehead or will break into pieces.’ *Buku-bak-thun-maranha-mirri* thus refers to a form or state of exchange in which two or more people mutually accede to one another (or yield to one another in the case of material exchange). Like most terms and concepts associated with normal, healthy, desirable social relations in Yolŋu-matha, it refers to a state of relations characterised by mutual interdependence and reciprocity.

An example of the semantics of these terms and how they resonate with or reflect key terms and concepts associated with affect and morality (cf Figure 10) consider the following. Having become aware of the term *bala-rāli'-yun* but mistaking it for *rāli'-yun* I asked yapayapa Batumbil to clarify the term. Batumbil begins by offering alternate terms that she thought I was after and then explains what they mean:

‘*Buku-bak-thun-maranha-mirri-ndja* . . . *buku-bak-thun-maranha-mirri-ndja*’

(lit. breaking each other’s foreheads)
With regard to the phrase, ‘you [will] give that person, and that person will give you, thus,’ it is important to point out that the semantics of this expression are not incidental; Batumbil could have, but did not say, ‘give something to that person’ or ‘give something for that person.’ The expression used was ‘give that person.’ This is similar to expressions such as ‘buku-bak-thun-maranha-mirri’ which are transitive verbs in the reflexive reciprocal. It also resonates strongly with the notion or idea of ‘sharing one another, sharing something one another’ (see Transcript 3.7, for example).

ŋāŋ’thun

The most common term used to describe or denote the act of ‘asking’ is the transitive verb ŋāŋ ’thun, ‘to ask [someone].’ Nicolas Peterson writes of ŋāŋ ’thun thus:

Asking, such as asking permission to use something, is ŋāŋ ’thun and is distinguished from demanding in our sense of ‘bumming’ something off somebody, which is ‘barl-yun’ (1993, p. 862).

This is also true in my experience – if one were to substitute djaw’-yun for barl-yun (they are synonyms, and the latter was simply more commonly used during the time I
was in the field). *Djaw '-yun*, is a transitive verb meaning ‘to take [away from], snatch, catch or steal.’ With regard to *yajj '-thun*, however, it is important to note that close kin do not generally ‘ask’ as in the sense of ‘asking permission to have or use something’ for reasons I will discuss.

Case Study A: The place and flow of material goods among close kin in camp

I walked down to bottom camp in the afternoon. *Waku* Helen and *yapa* Yethun were sitting on a bed sheet by the fire tending tea (brewing in a ubiquitous red flour tin), and a round of damper dusted with loose flour in a near-new non-stick frying pan. I sat down and started rolling a cigarette. Yethun said someone rang the public phone earlier, and she suspects they may have been galka (a sorcerer).

*njarali ama*

(tobacco Mum)

I tossed *waku* the tobacco pouch and lit my own. *Gaminyarr* Tara and gaminyarr Valerina were inside Yethun’s room (in the Tall House), listening to a cd-recording of our *wawu* singing bapurru songs, to an accompaniment of *bilma* (clapsticks), *yidaki* (didgeridoo) and chorus of young men. The door of the room was open, and the music loud enough that we could listen too.

After a while sitting and talking and smoking, little Valerina, who had been rummaging through bags and piles of clothes stacked along the wall in Yethun’s room, started

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56 The ordinary word for giving, Thomson writes, is *gurrupân* [*gurrupan*], while ‘to take property or possessions without asking is *djauyun* [*djaw '-yun*] (1949, p. 49). He goes on to explain that *djaw 'yun*, ‘used without qualification, as almost the force of “steal”, but a stronger word ‘mânänjirri’ [*mananjirri*] is properly used for actual theft’ (1949, p. 49).
singing out and crying because she couldn’t find the vegemite. No one took any notice. 

*Gaminyarr* Tara joined us down by the fire. Valerina still couldn’t find the vegemite and marched down the stairs to join us, stomping and crying. No one took much notice so she threw herself on the ground crying louder still.

*Waku* Helen flipped the round of damper once last time to check that it was ready and Yethun went inside to get the melted margarine, jam and vegemite. Talk turned to *gāthu* Aggie and *waku* David. Yethun said that *gāthu* Aggie thinks she’s a big boss, always controlling *waku* David who never comes out of the house (at Galiwin’ku). She went on (clearly *jealous*) suggesting that she is running around with another lover etc, etc. but she is always *jealous* Aggie over David so no one took much notice. The conversation moved on and Yethun passed me the round of damper. I tore off a portion, put the remainder back in the pan, scooped a pannikin of tea and rolled a cigarette while I waiting for the sugar tin and milk powder.

Talking, stirring and sipping tea, scooping melted margarine and jam up with dipping portions of hot damper, talk ebbed and flowed as it does in the casual intimacy of close kin. *Waku* Helen flicked a tick off the bed-sheet and the public phone rang. Yethun hurried to answer it. It was her (secret) lover. She raised her arm to lean it against the side of the public-phone box and settle into a conversation.

Later in the afternoon I decided to head back up to top-camp to join *yapa* Batumbil painting the bark paintings we had started a few weeks before. I posited my leaving the fire (as is polite),

‘*yarra yurru mak min ’ti djäma yunha – ’*

(I might/perhaps do painting over –)
These sentences never need finishing because they are intended that way, so that whatever a person suggests may appear to elicit the directive of others, however cursorily.

‘Ma – marrtji-nha nhe yurru . . . ga tilip’ marraŋa, buku djurlj!’

(Ok – you go… and get tea leaves! [bags] please!)

Discussion

Yän Gurrupan

The first point of observation is the general setting of this quotidian scene. This is worth noting as it is the primary place and context in which food and goods are shared in camp. This case study is representative of the most quotidian or everyday, unremarkable flow of things between close kin in camp, characterised by the sharing of natha (food), narali (tobacco) around the gurtha (fire, hearth), ever the focus of camp life out in the open in between houses. The gurtha serves as the focus of social life in most every camp or community. It is usually the case that there is one semi-permanent gurtha per family ‘unit’ which usually consists of a man, his wife or wives and their respective children as well as a number of grandchildren (biological or classificatory). In addition, there are often one or more elderly, close relatives, and/or one or more unmarried or widowed siblings (of the man and his wives). Open doors, the ubiquitous bed-sheet, which (along with the more expensive options such as tarpaulins and imported Indonesian plastic mats), and the cd player blasting ceremony songs – these are all among the most common features of an everyday fire-side scene. The

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57 In most cases camp-fires are no more than a salvaged metal grate of some kind, which sits atop a couple of tin cans or rocks (over the fire). Often the embers are kept alight for the length of a day.

58 For a detailed discussion of ‘dwelling’ composition see (Morphy, F. 2002)
unremarkable preparation, consumption and sharing of food and tobacco in this case study is the most common scene of exchange among kin in everyday camp life. This is the epitome of *yän gurrupan* (just giving) – a state of *sharing one another, sharing something one another*, when everyone is *rrambanji* and there’s a general state or sense of *ŋayaju wangiŋany*.

**Posited dhārūk and indirect exchange.**

It is worth noting, however briefly, the example of posited *dhārūk* in this case. Recall that when I decided to return to Top camp I posited my leaving the fire (as is polite): ‘I might/perhaps do painting over – ’ which was met (or finished for me) with, ‘Ok - you go . . . and get tea leaves! [bags] please!’ This moral etiquette is consistent with the examples of posited *dhārūk* discussed in the previous chapter. The general or underlying value is the acknowledgement that one’s actions are – and should be – contingent on the state of relations with others. This is often contrasted with the perceived Balanda habit of behaving in a way that is *djāl gānaju-mirri* or *self-controlled*, which is considered *ŋayaju wuthuna-mirri rom* (law or manner of doing things that affronts or assaults the state of feeling [among and between people]), insensate, and *djāl* (hard, difficult). This kind of etiquette, the perspicacity required to be ever-attentive to the state of relations and the skill or ability to be able to effectively respond and adjust to social contingencies – these all reflect the value of *sharing one another, sharing something one another* and the value of *ŋayaju wangiŋany*, which is realised in a state of relations characterised by mutual interdependence and reciprocity. Concomitantly, it is important to note that no ‘asking’ took place in this case study. The closest example of ‘asking’ – when *waku* Gatjikin posits my passing her the tobacco – does not even register as *ŋay’thun* from the local point of view – let alone ‘demand-sharing.’
As instances or acts of exchange which are ‘unmarked’ and thus ‘unremarkable’ in local terms, the instances or forms of material exchange in this case are more accurately considered or described as a *state* of exchange – as a state of ‘sharing one another, sharing something one another,’ of being and behaving like kin (*gurrutu-mirri*), in a scene in which people are *rrambani* and the state of relations more or less *nyanya* *wangany-nya* (in or at one state or sense of feeling). Recall from Transcript 3.5:

‘Dilimurru laytju-nha yukurra nhina.

(We are all living/stopping smoothly, pleasantly)

when everybody’s getting enjoying, just perfect-nha . . .

(when everybody’s getting enjoying, just perfect . . .)

*yarra* yukurra nhunha marrama . . .

(I am taking, picking you up . . .)

*ga nhe* yukurra *yarra-nha marrama,*

(and you are taking, picking me up)

and that’s *nyanya manymak-ndja.*

(and that’s a good, nice, healthy state of feeling.)

While exchange is certainly organised by kinship relations, the basic moral obligation and commitment is not construed in terms of responding positively to demands, but as a basic expectation to be ‘open’ not only in an affective sense, as discussed in Chapters 3 and 4, but in terms of material goods. We will see this further reflected or illustrated in the cases to follow.
Material exchange between neighbouring communities: realising difference as a value

Batumbil and I drove food out to Rrorruwuy yesterday to visit Yethun. It was wonderful to see her. Unfortunately she has a terrible flu and gaminyarr Valerina is covered in sores. Nevertheless she seems happy and relaxed. She offered us fresh guku – native bee honey mixed with pollen and fine wood shavings – and shells to make necklaces, which she and the other women had collected from the beach.

The four of us sat and had tea and guku and chatted. We stayed for a few hours before leaving to come home to paint. Yethun gave me her bankcard to *nyathama* (carry, hold) because it had been ‘emptied out’ every fortnight while at Rrorru without the return of any food. I told her that I would drop food off after the next shopping trip.

Discussion

**Realising difference as a value**

This brief case study is representative of common visitations between neighbouring and nearby Homeland communities, which (as we saw in Chapter 2) are generally comprised of close, interconnected networks of kin. Every Homeland community has access to and is thus plentiful in certain foods and resources, which others are not. It would be unusual to be visited by or to visit people from another community and not exchange, share, give or take resources of some kind. Family in Camp, for example, have comparatively easy access to plenty of *gunga* (*Pandanus*), which is used for weaving, *man'ka* (white clay), which is used for painting and also a mineral supplement and also *mewana* – a reed-like plant used for basket weaving. When

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59 *Pandanus yirrkalaensis*
60 *Cyperus conicus, C. javanicus*
visiting kin at nearby communities or expecting a visit people will often harvest or collect one or more of these resources and prepare them in some way if necessary. Which resources and how much depends on seasonal availability and, as one would expect, on perceived need or desire. Neighbouring and nearby communities, in turn, regularly provide Family in Camp with resources they would otherwise not have access to or at least have difficulty accessing. With regard to the brief case study above, for example, we saw Yethun give Batumbil and me shells to make necklaces (which are then sold to the local art-centre for cash). These shells are plentiful along the coast near the communities of Rrorruwuy and Nyinyikay but nowhere within the vicinity of Camp. A simple yet demonstrative example.

Thus, the key point to note with regard to this case is the way that variability or differential access to certain resources forms the basis for ongoing relationships of interdependence and reciprocity. As Sahlins writes – ‘economic imbalance is the key to deployment of generosity’ (1972, p. 207). This variability or valued difference forms the basis for what Sahlins might characterise as ‘generalised exchange’ or ‘delayed reciprocity’ among and between communities throughout the region.

In combination with variable distribution of resources there are other factors that make them contextually more or less valuable. Seasonal foods, for example, such as guku are valued goods to give or receive because they are only available at a certain time in the seasonal cycle. This is true of many resources, particularly or especially if that resource is scarce. Much joy and excitement, for instance, surrounds the giving or receiving of the highly prized miyapunu (Green Turtle).

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61 This should serve as an important prompt for asking questions about other cultural contexts and under what conditions this is not the case.
Another factor that makes resources contextually more or less valuable is labour; the economic imbalance or differential access to resources includes the resource of labour. Differential access to labour serves as a further basis for ongoing relationships of interdependence and reciprocity. If at any given time there is one community with markedly few residents or younger people, fit and able people from neighbouring or nearby communities within the local network will always djäka (care for or look after) and gunga'-yun (help and assist) by providing food and other resources. Alternatively, it is not uncommon that kin from neighbouring communities may nhina (stop or stay) in order to djäka, and/or gunga'-yun.

Economic imbalance or differential access to resources also includes or extends to the means of mobility (which could be considered ‘tools’ or ‘technology). In this case study, for example, differential access to the means of mobility gave Yethun reason and opportunity to entrust me to nayathama (carry, hold) her bankcard; my functional vehicle gave me reason and opportunity to nayathama Yethun’s bankcard and later provide her and kin at Rrorruwuy with shop bought food and goods. This is common practice among and between close kin. I will discuss the role and use of bankcards later in the chapter, suffice to note here that it was the unequal access to the means of mobility which formed the basis for an ongoing relationship of interdependence and reciprocity.

_The relationship between valued difference and being gurrutu-mirri_

A further important point to note with regard to this case is the fact that it is the variable or differential access to resources that creates or forms the basis for the ongoing ‘state

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62 In most cases it is young adults in the community that spend the most time away from the camp area sourcing fresh food.
of exchange' or state or 'shared-ness' between kin on respective Homeland communities. That is, it is the valued difference that creates opportunity to gāma (bring, take, pick up, carry) ḳayathama (carry, hold), to be gungay yun-mirri (assisting or helping one other), or djäka-mirri (caring for and looking after one another) – all of which are important aspects of what it 'is' or means to be gurrutu-mirri (have or possess [the quality of] kin[-ship]).

An open 'state' of exchange

Finally, rather than contrasting emphases on relatedness and 'egalitarian autonomy' – as in the prevailing model of the domestic moral economy – we see that the primary concern in this case is the maintenance of an ongoing, open state of exchange. The 'reckoning' or 'balance' of accounts is less about any particular or discrete instance or act of exchange or reciprocity, and more about a state of exchange – it is the maintenance of a more or less open state of exchange that is significant.

Case Study B: The articulation of ganydjarr (strength, power, speed) in material exchange

The outboard motor we had all 'put in for' arrived in camp on Friday. However, we only had one jerry-can of petrol, so I offered to drive into the nearby township to buy some. This was a good opportunity for wāwa Terry to access his bank account for the first time since being back (and since the lady on the phone froze it because he didn't know his date of birth etc). Yapa Batumbil had previously mentioned that she was tired and would wait behind. However, when wāwa Terry posited her accompanying us she went to gather her bag and purse without hesitation. Gutharra Jessica also accompanied us,
carrying *waku* Terence’s keycard. A number of people had mentioned that *waku* Terence was *rrupiya-mirri* (lit. ‘money-having’).

As we pulled into town *yapa* Yethun gave me her wallet to *nyayathama* (hold), so she wasn’t subject to requests for cash and stuff from extended (i.e. ‘less close’) kin in town. A familiar taxi driver (who was adopted by Gälpu kin) greeted Yethun as we walked from the car (parked in the Woolworths car-park) to the ‘plaza’ area in the centre of town. He greeted her in Yolŋu-matha and handed her two cd’s (of music he had copied as presents for Yolŋu kin).

‘For me. They cost nothing. He’s a kind heart man,’ Yethun later commented when it was just the two of us.

*Wdwa* Terry gave most of his money to Batumbil after sorting things out with her at the bank. He gave her $1800 all up so he wouldn’t get ‘humbugged.’ He did, nevertheless, accompany us into Woolworths, which is very unusual (and something that he would not have done except for the fact that we were spending such a large amount of money from his account). *Wdwa* followed Batumbil, *gutharra* Jessica and me (who were pushing two trolleys between us), at quite a distance making an occasional request and voicing the occasional preference (e.g. ‘cornflakes not jus’ porridge’). Batumbil and I purchased the items that *wdwa* suggested, and a great deal more besides. At the end of the day I estimated that between Batumbil, *wdwa* Terry, *gutharra* Jessica and me, we must have spent over $1000 on:

- 2 trolley loads of food from Woolies
- 4 plastic paddles for the dingy from the petrol station
- 5 jerry-cans (filled with petrol after purchase)

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63 It is not often that one observes a middle age man or men shopping for groceries. On occasions that one does, they are invariably following or accompanied by two or more close female kin.
1 new mobile phone
Girri' from yapa Marcie including new sheets and thongs
4 cartons of cigarettes
A ridiculous amount of take-away food to eat on the way home and take back for others.

As usual we kept going back in to spend whatever was left over until it was all spent.
After shopping we milled about greeting and talking with kin, drinking soda pop and smoking cigarettes. We were also greeted by ḋāniti-mirri (drunk) kin in all their hilarity and drunk vivacity. They greeted ṭāwa with hugs and in some cases, which I could barely believe – kisses on the cheek! And as we were leaving two of the women burst into tears as if mourning the loss of him! He had the biggest, broadest grin and was laughing at their drunken antics. He asked me to buy him one six pack of green cans to drink before the turnoff. Batumbil said it was ok and that she would ‘allow him six green cans’ on the proviso that he drank them before we turned off the highway. She later commented that no one humbugged her for money, especially not the drunkens because they were scared of her.

Yethun, who had $200 from her own bank account (which she’d asked me to ‘hold’) was so distracted and excited by the sociality of town that she forgot to spend any of it by the time we left (despite there being no milk powder and sugar down at bottom camp).
Batumbil noted the fact that she didn’t do any shopping and noted also her exchange with the taxi driver. Before we all met up again near the car she remarked:

‘She’s got a brain like a teenager . . . she always says that she’s the youngest sister
(Shes got a brain like a teenager . . . she always says that she’s the youngest sister)

but she’s middle-age miyalk – she’s 48-mirri!
(but she’s a middle-age woman – she’s 48!)
You the youngest sister not her. But she still says that she’s youngest.

(You the youngest sister not her. But she still says that she’s youngest.)

_Bayu nyi young miyalk . . .’_

(Shes not a young woman . . .)

Notably when we got back to camp the specific items that _wawa_ Terry asked for when we were shopping were unpacked separately and given to him to keep in the middle house (where he and _wawa_ Kevin stay). This is not very common. Usually the brothers all give the food to Batumbil and we all eat together at top campfire. Indeed, there is no campfire in between Batumbil’s and Yethun’s (i.e. between ‘top camp’ and ‘bottom camp’).

**Discussion**

The differential articulation of _ganydjarr_

The point I wish to draw particular attention to with regard to this case is the differential articulation of _ganydjarr_ (power, strength) in interpersonal exchange as it affects the relative capacity of persons to regulate the elicitation, yield and circulation of material things.

_Ganydjarr_ (power, strength)

The term _ganydjarr_ is generally defined as ‘power, strength, energy or speed.’ The key thing to note about _ganydjarr_ as an attribute or quality of persons is that, like _nyanyu_, it is always and necessarily relational. It is something that a person may have or possess, something that they can receive or take from others (_ganydjarr mārama_), and something that they can give (_ganydjarr wekama_). _Ganydjarr_ can also be stolen (_ganydjarr djaw’yun_) or exhausted (_ganydjarr dhawar’-yun_). A person’s _ganydjarr_ may also become or ‘be becoming’ very ‘big, large’ (_ganydjarr yindi-thirri_). _Ganydjarr_
(power, strength, speed) like jayatju (state of feeling) is almost always associated with transitive verbs. It is not insignificant or incidental that English speaking Yolŋu draw on English terms associated with emotion in such a way that they ‘become transitive,’ e.g. ‘powering’ (which is often used interchangeably with ‘empowering’) as in ‘he or she was powering that person’ (i.e. inciting or influencing them and therefore partly responsible).

One example of the implications of being either ganydjarr-mirri (having ganydjarr) or ganydjarr-mirri (lacking ganydjarr) can be gleaned, in this case study, by peoples’ varying ability to regulate the yield, elicitation and circulation – the ‘sharedness’ of material goods in the flow of exchange. In this case, for example, we saw that gutharra Jessica gəŋala (carried, brought) waku Terence’s keycard to town; yapa Yethun gave me her wallet to jayathama (hold) as we pulled into town; wäwa Terry gave Batumbil approximately $800 to jayathama (hold) after their visit the bank; waku Terence’s Bankcard was used interchangeably with that of wäwa Terry’s as part of one big shop; Yethun did not use or supervise the use of money from her account; wäwa Terry accompanied Batumbil, gutharra and me to supervise or partake in the expenditure of money from his account; wäwa also persuaded Batumbil to agree to the purchase of a small amount of alcohol. Toward the end of this episode Batumbil remarked that no one dared ‘humbug’ her for money.

The articulation of ganydjarr here can be seen to manifest in the varying ability to ‘hold’ - and thus regulate the yield, elicitation or sharedness of money and bankcards in the difference between those individuals who feel the need to give their bankcard or money to other people to hold (because they do not trust in their own ability to regulate this flow), and those to whom they entrust to ‘hold’ them (because their ability to regulate the yield, elicitation and circulation of these things can be relied upon). This
resonates with Austin-Broos’ analysis of the problems of articulation that occur between kin-based and market-based societies (2003), as well as Burbank’s observation about the prevalence of stress as a centre feature of settlement life in centralised communities (Burbank 2011).

**When regulating the state of exchange becomes difficult and/or stressful**

Regulation becomes increasingly more difficult and stressful in contexts of intensive sociality such as the township. When visiting the township to buy groceries and goods for Camp as in this case (and which is the most common reason for going there), it is not possible to ‘share something one another’ with everyone and also return to the Homeland with any of the goods that one came for. While there are certainly ways of ‘not sharing,’ refusing kin is never positive or pleasant and often a source of stress. This is exacerbated when there is alcohol involved, which is characteristic of the social milieu in around the Township (in contrast to the Homelands, which are ‘dry’).

To focus the example of *ganydjarr - yapa* Yethun gave me her wallet to *nyaathama* (hold) as we pulled into town and did not seek to use any of the money it contained, nor did she posit, ask, instruct or supervise someone else to buy groceries for her. This was despite the fact that she and the rest of Bottom Camp had been without milk-powder and sugar for a number of days. This was the reason Batumbil was so disparaging.

This was not the only time that Yethun displayed a lack of *ganydjarr*. On another occasion *waku* Megan rang Camp to let Batumbil know that Yethun’s bankcard had arrived at Nyinyikay with *waku* Joel and *gāthu* Geraldine without Yethun having any knowledge of where it was. This was not unusual for Yethun but it was certainly not a normal, healthy desirable state of affairs; it was because, as people are heard to remark, Yethun is *ganydjarr-miriw* (without or lacking power, strength). In yet another
example, on a shopping trip to the nearby township Yethun picked herself out a pair of thongs. She handed them to me along with her purse and posited my buying them for her. I did so happily. A number of times over the next few days I noticed Yethun looking at and admiring the new thongs on her feet. Generally speaking everyone prefers to wear thongs rather than go barefoot. That is, people value thongs – and Yethun was clearly pleased to have them. A day or two later our close Gälpu kin came to stop at Gikal and, as is usual, they spent the daylight hours with us in Camp. On the first afternoon one of our njändi walked up from Bottom camp to ask me for some milk powder. I noticed that she was wearing Yethun’s thongs. No one else noticed – my noticing was a very Balanda thing! Two weeks later I arranged to fly into the nearby township for an appointment. Before I left Yethun posited that I buy her a pair of thongs, remarking, ‘I’m a kind heart woman. I allowed njändi my thongs.’ ‘Allowing’ here, I suggest, is a retrospective claim to have been in control of the yielding, elicitation or circulation of material goods. This is a common refrain or recasting of events.

Thus, we see the differential articulation of ganydjarr (power, strength) in interpersonal exchange manifests as a relative capacity of persons to regulate the elicitation, yield and circulation of material things.

*From yän gurrupan to more stressful forms of exchange*

While most of the relations between closest kin in this case can be accurately described or characterised as yän gurrupan, or sharing one another, sharing something one another, something less than normative and ideal registers in situations or contexts of intensive sociality such as the township, where regulation becomes increasingly difficult and stressful. Homeland residents will go out of their way to avoid being subject to ‘humbug’ and associated demands for money from drunk relatives in and
around the township because it is both stressful and generally really very unpleasant. This is why, in the Case Study A in Chapter 4, \textit{waku} David posited we shop at the more expensive supermarket in the township, to avoid drunkens asking for money at the larger, cheaper supermarket in the centre of town. This context – of intensive sociality in centralised townships near supermarkets (and usually alcohol outlets as well) – is the only context, in my experience, where the description of demand-sharing is both relevant and apt in the Yol\-\textnu case. To make this point clear, the types or forms of exchange described by the notion of ‘demand-sharing’ (Peterson 1993) only register in situations of stress in contexts of undesirable intensive sociality in or around centralised townships such as Nhulunbuy, where alcohol is also available and substance abuse a problem for/among many local residents.\footnote{This undesirable intensive sociality associated with drinking alcohol also spills over into Yirrkala and Ski Beach.}

\textbf{Case Study C: The role and use of bankcards and telephones}

\textbf{Telephones}

Public camp telephones, home telephones and mobile phones feature at the centre of much social life on the Homelands and more so in the larger communities and townships. Telephones offer a unique opportunity to initiate and participate in social exchanges outside the gaze of the ever-public community of kin. Thus, for instance, it is not uncommon for young men and women to simply dial any number they come across to test whether it might be an opportunity to simply flirt or initiate a romantic relation. Despite all this, from a Balanda perspective people seemingly ‘sabotage’ phones on a regular basis. People \textit{dhal’-yurra} (block off, close up) telephone accounts,
gulk-thurra (cut or sever) telephone cords (literally and, or metaphorically) and also change numbers (i.e. purchase new sim-cards) on a comparatively regular basis.

‘Blocking off, closing up’ and/or ‘cutting, severing’ the telephone – these are normal and appropriate responses to situations in which the telephone has become or threatens to become a source or vehicle for tension or conflict. Among the most common reasons for blocking, closing or cutting off a telephone are; a) because the phone has become a source of jealousing between kin using it – for example, where particular kin were trying to buggawa 'thirri (become boss [for]) for the phone; b) because there is arguing going on between lovers, kin groups or bapuru, and; c) because too many people have acquired the number, or alternatively, because the number of incoming or outgoing calls has become ‘too much’ – that is, the phone has become ‘too open’ a vehicle for social exchange.

These forms of exchange – ‘blocking, closing off’ or ‘cutting, severing’ the phone – are clearly more concerned with the value of the state of relations among and between people than they are with the value of telephones as material goods or ‘things.’

Bankcards and bank accounts

It is normal practice for key-cards to circulate among and between close kin, often with the pin number written on the back. This is referred to as nayathama (carrying, holding) the card. People nayathama one another’s bankcards and regularly transfer amounts from account to account (as we saw in the previous case study). Once people run out of money they make it publicly known by simply saying so, or by ‘singing out’ in

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65 One of the reviewer’s of this dissertation noted that: ‘The sabotage of cell phones is an important topic and has been since public phones were first introduced to the region in the 1980s’.

66 It is not insignificant also that galka (sorcerers) are known to make threats on the telephone.
complaint as in, 'baynu rrupiya narraku. Liggunha' (I have no money. Finished), after which the expectation to share will shift to others.

Close kin are almost always aware of how much each gets paid and how much, at any given time, each has in their respective bank accounts. Despite the fact that it would be quite easy for people to deny, I am not aware of any instance in which close kin have denied or misled one another about having money in their bank accounts. It is also common for people to give their bank cards to small business owners or taxi drivers with whom they are familiar to hold for an undefined period of time (with the pin number written on the back). This effectively keeps ‘open’ the state of exchange between those people involved.

If or when a person considers that the person holding their bankcard is misusing it in some way (e.g. buying alcohol, taking too much money out, or allowing other people to use it), the first thing that people suggest is to dhal ‘yurra (block off, close up) either the bankcard as attached to an account or the bank account itself. In these cases the ‘owner’ of the card will normally request a close kinsperson who is confident speaking on the telephone to phone the bank and close it on their behalf. It would not be unusual for people to close or cancel their bank account more than once a year in this way. This is despite the fact that it may take several months and a great deal of organisation to open another, new account. The value of the bankcard or bank account is encompassed or enveloped by the concern and value of nayanu – the state of feeling and state of relations among and between those involved; the material goods are eliminated or removed if and when they threaten to affront the state of feeling and, or disrupt the state of relations. This closely reflects the two case studies we saw in the previous chapter, which I invite the reader to revisit at this point.
When direct is not crooked

These observations about the role and use of bankcards and telephones, along with the two case studies in the previous chapter illustrate the exception to the rule elaborated in chapter 4, that ‘indirect is straight/correct’ (*dhunupa*) and ‘direct is crooked/wrong’ (*djarrpi*). In material exchange we see that ‘things’ or material goods that threaten to become *napunnga*-*ndata* (in the middle, in between) may be hidden, destroyed or otherwise removed from the immediate setting in cases where it serves to maintain *nyangyu* *wangany*.

These same case studies also further illustrate the fact that while exchange is organised by kinship relations, the primary moral obligation and commitment people have to one another is not construed in terms of responding positively to demands but, rather, as an obligation and commitment not to foreclose relations and/or allow ‘things’ or material goods to become *napunnga*-*ndata* (in the middle, in between).

It is worth noting before moving onto the final case study, that Fred Myers (1989) analyses very similar case studies through the ‘autonomy/relatedness’ framework to quite a different effect. People hide or destroy personal effects and food, he writes, as a means to assert their autonomy within networks of relatedness, which gives rise to the tension he sees as characterisitic of Pintupi life. To give a sense of his analysis with regard to food, for example,

Thus, the rights to the kangaroo as property are involved immediately with an exchange used to maintain one’s relatedness to others. It is possible, of course, for a person to assert his (or her) autonomy, the right to decide who gets a kangaroo. Rights exist, but what do they mean? Insofar as exercise of choice may defy other people’s claims about their relationship or obligations, these choices are likely to create a threat. Herein lies the
tension between a valued autonomy and the claims and necessity of shared identity. 

(1989, p. 22)

This attitude to property, he writes, underlies much of Pintupi social life: ‘Put in familiar terms, if faced with a choice between caring for their property or for their relatives, they prefer to invest in people rather than things (1989, p. 24).

The final, following case study draws together two key themes that run through these case studies of material exchange presented here and the previous Chapter.

Case Study D: Batumbil’s entrepreneurial girri’ (personal effects or belongings, ‘things’) business

Batumbil had been running a girri’ business since before my arrival and stay in camp. This business was organised in such a way that Batumbil would purchase imported Indonesian clothing, bed-sheets, material and other small-goods from Marcie, an East Timorese small business owner whom she had adopted as a yapa. Yapa Marcie owned and ran a small business in Nhulunbuy.

Every four months or so Batumbil would purchase a number of large boxes full of goods from Marcie, often on ‘tick’ or in exchange for Batumbil giving Marcie her bankcard to hold for an undefined period of time (with the pin number). Batumbil sold the girri’ at Galiwin’ku at the markets, which were held every fortnight (from what I could gather). Batumbil’s ‘customers’ would have all been either close or extended kin who she has known all their lives.

On this particular day Batumbil and I were folding and packing the last of the girri’ she had in stock. She was flying over to Galiwin’ku for a meeting, which was to coincide with market day. Out of curiosity I asked how much she sold them for and she was uncharacteristically circumspect. I asked how much Marcie charged her and she gave me
an amount per box, which would have contained approximately sixty items. We kept packing. After a while, clearly having thought my question through, Batumbil repeated how much she paid per box, and paused to explain:

'She [Marcie] asks a big price. I make it easy for people. Yaka making it hard, I'm a kind-heart woman, I allow my things, I only ask a little bit of money for the girri.'

I should note also that Batumbil was employed as the manager of a dress-selling business at the Methodist Mission at Galiwin'ku during Mission Time. Her responsibilities included ordering stock and recording and monitoring daily transactions. I also know from personal experience that her numeracy and mental arithmetic is better than my own. Batumbil was more than aware that she was selling the girri at a monetary loss and yet, she was running what she and other kin considered or perceived to be a 'successful' girri business.

What is going on in this case? It is clear, on the one hand that Batumbil knows that she is running the business at a monetary loss. However, it is also clear that there is some other measure or accumulation of value at play.

This case study draws together and exemplifies two key themes in the case studies of material exchange already. These may be summarised as: the moral imperative to maintain an 'open' state of relations, and also an open, ongoing state of exchange.

Discussion

*Open state of exchange*

Firstly, this case study illustrates the fact that, rather than contrasting emphases on relatedness and 'egalitarian autonomy' as in the prevailing model of the domestic moral economy, the primary concern in this case is the maintenance of an ongoing, open state of exchange. Case D in particular, and the material in this chapter more generally,
suggests that the ‘reckoning’ or ‘balance’ of accounts is less about any particular or discrete instance or act of reciprocity or exchange and more about particular ‘states of exchange’; it is the maintenance of a more or less open ‘state of exchange’ that is significant in all these cases.

Balance and value as a measure of ηaŋaju

Perhaps most importantly we see that value is foremost and primarily a measure of ηaŋaju – before and over and above any monetary or market value. Emotion concepts not only comprise a moral system that articulates and informs a particular view of the self and social life for Yolŋu people, but comprise a system or template of value. Thus, we see the template of emotion and morality illustrated in Chapter 3 (see Figure 10) emerges as a local template of value in non-material and material instances, context or forms of exchange. This case, and especially Batumbil’s remark, ‘I make it easy for people. Yaka making it hard, I’m a kind-heart woman, I allow my things’ exemplifies the realisation of value in more or less ‘open’ forms of exchange as contrasted with those that are more or less ‘closed’. Being ‘hard’ (dāl) is contrasted with ensuring ηaŋaju manymak (good, healthy, nice state of feeling). People who do not ‘share one another, share something one another’ delimit or foreclose the state of relations. Such people are stricted or gumurr-dāl (hard chested). Being stricted has a sense of both ‘restricted’ as in limited or confined within bounds and ‘restrained’ as held back or drawn tight. These are forms of exchange or social relations that are considered to effect distance, division and separation – they are examples of djāl gāŋaju-mirri rom (law or manner of doing things that has the quality of wanting or desiring to be separate, different alone). People who are ‘stricted’ or ‘gumurr-dāl’ are more or less ‘closed [off]’ or ‘closed to feeling.’ To be ‘hard’ is to be insensate, not to ‘recognise or understand one another,’ which is to ‘block’ or ‘reject’ one another, which affronts or
assaults the state of feeling, which makes it hard for people, which makes them feel alienated and isolated, which makes them heavy and potentially weak and susceptible to becoming ill.

Positive value – in material and/or non-material exchange – is realised in more or less ‘open’ states of exchange, which are characterised by mutual interdependence and dynamic reciprocity. This will be further elaborated and discussed in the next chapter.

Conclusion

Drawing on the body of key terms and concepts associated with emotion in Yolŋu-matha (introduced in Chapter 3), this Chapter has explored the way people consider value and engage in exchange relations (involving material goods), through a number of ethnographic case studies.

We have seen that there exists a robust local/regional economy characterised by salient, culturally recognised forms of exchange and local forms of value. Only one of the key features of the ‘domestic moral economy’ resonates strongly with these local/regional forms. Rather than an ‘ethic of generosity’ (Hiatt 1965) we see that the flow of goods in exchange is unmarked and unremarkable states of yân gurrupan (just giving) (Thomson 1949); unmarked and unremarkable forms or states of exchange are those in which people are ‘sharing one another, sharing something one another,’ in which people are rrambahji (close, level, together, at one/the same), which is when there is a state or sense of nayanju wangany. The latter is a marker of balance and equilibrium rather than positive value or ‘generosity’; it is a basic aspect of what it is or ‘means’ to be and behave like kin, it is, as it were, the ‘norm.’
Rather than maintaining a tension between relatedness and ‘egalitarian autonomy’ the primary concern in the Yolŋu case is the maintenance of an ongoing, open state of exchange. The material in this chapter suggests that the ‘reckoning’ or ‘balance’ of accounts is less about any particular or discrete instance or act of reciprocity or exchange and more about particular ‘states of exchange’; it is the maintenance of a more or less open ‘state of exchange’ that is significant. Instances or acts of foreclosure limit or delimit the potential for accommodating nayanyu waygany, threaten to dhal’yura (close [up], block [off]) the state of feeling/state of relations, and thus so threaten to nayanyu wut-thun (affront or assault the state or sense of feeling [among and between those involved]). That is to say, instances or acts of foreclosure negate the possibility of maintaining normative ideal relationships characterised by mutual interdependent and dynamic reciprocity. We also see that variable or differential access to resources is realised as a value; it forms the basis for the ongoing relationships of interdependence and reciprocity. Valued difference creates an opportunity to ‘carry’ and ‘hold’ one another (gāma, nayathama), to ‘assist or help one other’ (gunggay yun-mirri) or ‘care for and look after one another’ (djāka-mirri), which are all important aspects of what it means to be gurrutu-mirri (to have kin, possess the quality of kinship).

While exchange is organised by relations and networks of kinship, moral obligation and commitment are not construed in terms of responding positively to demands, but as an obligation and commitment not to allow ‘things’ or material goods to become napunγaŋura (in the middle, in between) and thus upset or affront the state of feeling and/or state of relations.

Forms of exchange that may be empirically observed to reflect those described as ‘demand-sharing’ (Peterson 1993) take on a different meaning when cast in
local/regional terms associated with emotion and morality. In Chapter 4 we saw that, with the exception of exchanges involving material goods it is generally the case that moral expectations hold that ‘indirect is straight/correct’ (dhunupa) and ‘direct is crooked/wrong’ (djarrpi). Indirect speech acts leave open the state of relations and accommodate a shared sense of feeling (ŋayaju wangiŋamu). Certain direct speech acts foreclose the state of relations, threaten to ‘cut’ strings of relatedness, and delimit the potential of a shared sense of feeling. Withholding coming forward maximises the potential for an equable and equitable state of relations. This reflects the primacy accorded to the state of interpersonal relationships; the moral value attributed to the regulation and restraint of one’s private feelings, motives and desires. It further reflects the cultural value of maintaining ŋayaju wangiŋamu. This general rule is maintained in forms of exchange that involve material goods. We see that ‘direct’ forms of exchange are not crooked when material goods are at issue because the ‘directness’ is a form of levelling that serves to ensure that strings of relatedness are not alienated (and potentially made crooked) by the presence or flow of material goods. This is not an abstract notion but a practical one that is worked out in the micro-economy of social exchange in everyday life. Similarly, we see that ‘things’ or material goods (including bank-cards and telephones) that threaten to become ‘napunga’-ŋura’ (in the middle, in between) people are hidden, destroyed or otherwise removed from the immediate setting or exchange in cases where it serves to maintain ŋayaju wangiŋamu.

The one feature of the domestic moral economy model (Peterson 2003) that does resonate with aspects of this case, is how intensive sociality imposes stress on the flow and dynamics of exchange. In the third case study in this chapter we observe the variable or differential articulation of ganydjarr (power, strength) as it affects the
relative capacity of persons to regulate the elicitation, yield and/or circulation of ‘things’ or material goods in the township setting.

An associated point is that people do not refrain from openly refusing others because polite indirectness makes it difficult, but because openly refusing people makes a person feel bad – about themselves as much as anything else. This is particularly so if/when refusing others upsets the state of feeling and/or state of relations between those involved.

Most importantly, this material suggests that for Yolŋu, value is foremost and primarily a measure of ḫayajyu. Emotion concepts not only comprise a moral system that articulates and informs a particular view of the self and social life for Yolŋu people, but comprise a system or template of value.
Chapter 7: Towards a local Indigenous theory and model of exchange.

In previous Chapters I have explored how concepts of affect play out in everyday social relations; how they shape the way people consider issues of morality, and motivate certain culturally recognised and recognisable forms of interpersonal and social exchange. In this chapter I consider the interplay between forms, material conditions and social relations of exchange as a model or theory of exchange in its own right. I employ Sahlins’ general scheme of reciprocity as a heuristic, overlaying it with Yolŋu terms and concepts, to clarify what I see as the basic Yolŋu theory of exchange. My argument is that ḳayanja wangany (one feeling) is a fundamental value in both material and non-material exchange.

While I make use of Sahlins’ continuum of reciprocities, I need to elucidate how his theoretical presuppositions and scheme ultimately differ from those I require to account for the Yolŋu material. Specifically, what I seek to account for is an apparent lack of correlation between the material, moral and political dimensions of Sahlins’ scheme when overlaid with the Yolŋu material. Based on empirically observable criteria, certain cultural forms of exchange described in previous chapters can be confidently placed at certain points along Sahlins’ continuum. However, when we consider the moral and social dimensions more closely, there appears to be a mismatch between the moral and political entailments and the way these forms are locally conceived. As this material suggests, there are large differences in what-counts-as-what when it comes to the way people consider and experience balance and value in social exchange. We cannot, based on empirical observations alone, assume or deduce the moral entailments
of exchange – whether the exchanges observed are considered and felt to be normative and balanced, positive and good, or negative and bad. Nor can we assume or deduce the political entailments – the nature and degree of solidarity that these forms of exchange result in or effect. In order to understand these dimensions of exchange, I argue that it is necessary to understand the terms and concepts that people draw on themselves to interpret, frame and talk about such relations. In the Yolnu case these are the key body of terms and concepts associated with affect and morality, introduced in Chapter 3. They describe or denote shared understandings about the normal, proper state of relations between one’s self and others – as well as shared understandings about those that are positive, good and desirable, and those that are negative, bad, and otherwise undesirable. In this manner, they adumbrate the cultural understandings associated with balance, value and negative value respectively. In the Yolnu case, this associative body of knowledge pivots around the concept of $\eta$ayunu.

**Sahlins’ continuum of forms**

Sahlins’ scheme of reciprocity is something of a classic in cultural anthropology as a framework for the study and analysis of reciprocity and exchange. Sahlins’ *Stone Age Economics* (1972) is in many respects a detailed exploration of certain key themes that Marcel Mauss addresses in *The Gift* (1954). *The Gift* was, as much as anything, an exploration of the types and forms of the ‘social contract’ in non-state societies – ‘archaic forms of contract’ in societies with ‘systems of total prestation’ as Mauss put it (1954, p. 3). Mauss considered non-alienated forms of exchange to be a type or kind of social contract in systems of total prestation. Sahlins recognises this, writing, for example that ‘the primitive analogue of social contract is not the State, but the gift’ (1972, p. 169). Sahlins emphasises the fact that Mauss discovered non-alienated forms...
of the social contract (1972, see pp. 169–183). To give a sense of how Sahlins views Mauss, he writes, in part thus:

But as gift exchange, the contract would have a completely new political realisation, unforeseen and unimagined in the received philosophy and constituting neither society nor State. For Rousseau, Locke, Spinoza, Hobbes, the social contract had been first of all a pact of society. It was an agreement of incorporation: to form a community out of previously separate and antagonistic parts, a superperson of the individual persons, that would exercise the power subtracted from each in the benefit of all. . . . That is to say, all had to insist on the alienation by agreement of one right in particular: private force. . . . The gift, however, would not organise society in a corporate sense, only in a segmentary sense. Reciprocity is a ‘between’ relation. It does not dissolve the separate parties within a higher unity, but on the contrary, in correlating their opposition, perpetuates it. (Sahlins 1972, pp. 169–170)

And all this, writes Sahlins, ‘comes in turn all the basic principles of an economics properly anthropological, including the one in particular at the heart of the succeeding chapters: that every exchange, as it embodies some coefficient of sociability, cannot be understood in its material terms apart from its social terms’ (1972, p. 183). The following chapters of *Stone Age Economics* make suggestions about ‘the interplay in primitive communities between forms, material conditions, and social relations of exchange’ (Sahlins 1972, p. 185) as they effect relatively more or less solidary relations – as they effect archaic forms of the social contract, as Mauss would say.

Sahlins’ continuum of reciprocities is thus a model of the interplay between forms, material conditions and social relations of exchange in non-state societies. It is intended as a general model of reciprocity, ‘based on the vice-versa nature of exchanges, along which empirical instances encountered in the particular ethnographic case can be
placed' (Sahlins 1972, p. 193). There are three dimensions to this continuum – moral, economic and social. The first dimension refers to certain ‘obvious objective criteria’ derived from the ‘sided-ness’ of exchange, the toleration of material imbalance and leeway of delay. The second dimension is the correlative qualitative, moral dimension. ‘The extremes are notably positive and negative in a moral sense,’ Sahlins writes, ‘and the intervals between them are not merely so many gradations of material balance in exchange, they are intervals of sociability’ (1972, p. 191). The third dimension refers to correlative forms of social relations along a spectrum of solidarity, that is, more or less solidary relations. Generalised reciprocity is associated with the solidary extreme, Balanced reciprocity is associated with more formal compacts but which nevertheless result in ‘interdependence and mutuality against the context of pre-existing separateness’ (Sahlins 1972). Negative reciprocity is associated with types of reciprocity or forms of exchange that work against social solidarity, which negate or disrupt solidary relations. This is the all important dimension of social order, which parallels Mauss’ notion of the non-state social contract. Where Mauss treated solidarity as an umbrella social fact, however, Sahlins considers it as a continuum or spectrum of solidarity – that is, in a more detailed, critical and exploratory way. The continuum is, in an important sense, an exploration of the types or kinds of material and social relations that effect solidarity and ultimately social order in non-state societies. This is, after all, what the social contract is, as Sahlins well recognises:

The Gift transposes the classic alternatives of war and trade from the periphery to the very center of social life, and from the occasional episode to the continuous presence. This is the supreme importance of Mauss’ return to nature, from which it follows that primitive society is at war with Warre, and that all their dealings are treaties of peace. All
the exchanges, that is to say, must bear in their material design some political burden of reconciliation. (1972, p. 182)

With regard to the interplay of correlative criteria (material, moral and social), solidary relations are predicated on certain material conditions and associated forms of reciprocity or exchange. The empirically observable 'obvious' material criterion is not just associated with the particular qualitative, moral and socio-political entailments in this model, but one results in or effects the other. Based on empirical observations we can, therefore, assume or deduce the moral entailments: whether the exchanges that we observed are considered or felt to be positive and 'good' or negative and 'bad.' We can also assume or deduce the socio-political entailments: the nature and degree of solidarity that these forms of exchange result in, or effect. With these three correlative dimensions in mind, the following is a brief overview of the key features of extremes and midpoint of this scheme (Figure 12).

**Figure 12: Sahlin's scheme of reciprocities**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Negative</th>
<th>Balanced Reciprocity</th>
<th>Positive</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Negative Reciprocity</td>
<td>Direct Exchange</td>
<td>Generalised Reciprocity</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Sahlins' Scheme of Reciprocities*

**Generalised reciprocity**

Generalised reciprocity, at the positive end of the continuum, is aligned with the positive moral extreme as well as the extreme of solidary relations. The correlative
Sahlins parallels generalised reciprocity with Malinowski's 'pure gift' citing similar ethnographic formulas such as 'sharing,' 'hospitality,' 'free gift,' 'help' and 'generosity' (1972, p. 194). Less sociable, but tending towards the same pole are what he refers to as 'kinship dues,' 'chiefly dues,' and 'noblesse oblige' characterised by the 'vagueness of the obligation to reciprocate' (1972, p. 194). What characterises this extreme of sociability according to Sahlins is that the expectation of a direct material return is 'unseemly' (1972, p. 194). Further, 'failure to reciprocate does not cause the giver of stuff to stop giving: the goods move one way, in favour of the have-not, for a very long period' (1972, p. 194).

Figure 13: Generalised reciprocity (Sahlins 1972, p. 193)

\[ \text{A} \rightarrow \text{B} \rightarrow \text{A} \]

Figure 13 is intended to represent the relationship between persons or transactors in the case of generalised reciprocity. The solid arrow indicates material goods given from person 'A' to person 'B.' The return arrow represents the eventual delayed reciprocation of material goods, not materially equivalent, from person 'B' to person 'A.'

Generalised reciprocity finds instrumental employments as a starting mechanism of rank distinction and in the form of hospitality as a mediator of relations between persons of different communities (1972, p. 219). Reciprocity is inclined toward this generalised pole where 'kinship morality and kinship community prevail' (1972, 211), i.e. when social distance is at a minimum. One further key variable is the relative
durability of goods, thus ‘the sphere of generalised exchange in food is sometimes wider than the sphere of generalised exchange in other things (1972, p. 217). The moral dimension remains exemplary in all these instances or forms even where esteem accrues to the generous party and a shadow of indebtedness cast over the beneficiary.

**Negative Reciprocity**

At the opposite end of the continuum is Negative reciprocity, which is aligned with the immoral or unsociable extreme. This negative type refers to attempts to ‘get something for nothing with impunity, the several forms of appropriation, transactions opened and conducted toward net utilitarian advantage. Indicative ethnographic terms include ‘haggling’ or ‘barter,’ ‘gambling,’ ‘chicanery,’ ‘theft’ and other varieties of seizure’ (1972, p. 195). The correlative mechanistic dimension refers to a one way transaction; the reciprocal aspect is conditional as a ‘matter of defense of self-interest’ so the flow may be one-way with reciprocation contingent upon mustering countervailing pressure or guile’ (1972, p. 195). Another notable characteristic of Negative reciprocity is that ‘the participants confront each other as opposed interests, each looking to maximize utility at the other’s expense’ (1972, p. 195).

**Figure 14: Negative reciprocity (Sahlins 1972, p. 195)**

Figure 14 is intended to represent the relationship between persons or transactors in the case of Negative reciprocity. The solid arrow refers to the self-interested seizure or acquisition of material goods by the active party, ‘A’, from the passive or defensive party, ‘B.’ The dotted arrow represents the reciprocal aspect in cases where this occurs.
This reciprocal aspect is conditional as a ‘matter of defense of self-interest.’ Negative reciprocity and associated forms thus work against and/or negate the possibility of solidary social relations.

**Balanced Reciprocity**

Balanced reciprocity represents the ‘midpoint’ in terms of both moral and social dimensions. The ‘mechanistic dimension’ refers to exchanges of material equivalence and returns within a specified, definite period of time. As Sahlins explains:

> In precise balance, the reciprocation is the customary equivalent of the thing received and is without delay. Perfectly balanced reciprocity, the simultaneous exchange of the same types of goods to the same amounts, is not only conceivable but ethnographically attested in certain marital transactions. ‘Balanced reciprocity’ may be more loosely applied to transactions which stipulate returns of commensurate worth or utility within a finite and narrow period. (1972, pp. 194-195)

Balanced reciprocity is ‘less personal’ than Generalised reciprocity in the sense that the material side of the transaction is at least as critical as the social: there is more of less precise reckoning, as the things given must be covered within some short term (1972). The pragmatic test of Balanced reciprocity is the inability to tolerate one-way flow; the relations between people are disrupted by a failure to reciprocate within limited time and equivalence leeways (1972). Balanced reciprocity finds instrumental employment as formal social compacts, as a classic vehicle of peace and alliance contracts (1972). As Sahlins explains:

> Balanced reciprocity is willingness to give for that which is received. Therein seems to be its efficacy as social compact. The striking of equivalence, or at least some approach to balance, is a demonstrable foregoing of self-interest on each side, some renunciation
of hostile intent or of indifference in favour of mutuality. Against the preexisting context of separateness, the material balance signifies a new state of affairs. (1972, p. 220)

The most common contracts of this kind include formal compacts of friendship or kinship, affirmation of corporate alliances, peace-making and marital alliance (1972). The moral dimension of Balanced reciprocity is thus formal and positive, resulting in mutuality and interdependence against the preexisting context of separateness.

In the following section I will place the empirical instances encountered in the Yolŋu case along Sahlins’ continuum of reciprocities.67

Placing empirical instances from Yolŋu case

Most instances of exchange described in cases in the previous chapters can, based on empirically observable criteria, be confidently placed at the generalised end of Sahlins’ continuum: there is no expectation of direct or equivalent material returns; failure to reciprocate does not cause the giver to stop giving, and the social side of exchange is just as if not more important than the material. In Chapter 6, for example, recall – in addition to the most quotidian give-and-take of food and tobacco – the brief shopping trip to town, in which gutharra Jessica gānjala (carried, brought) waku Terence’s bank-card to town; yapa Yethun gave me her wallet to nayathama (carry, hold); wōwa Terry gave Batumbil approximately $800 to nayathama (carry, hold) after their visit the bank, and; waku Terence’s bank-card was used interchangeably with that of wōwa Terry’s as part of one big shop. This kind of ‘openness’ or ‘state of sharing’ is characteristic of relations between close kin with regard to money, bank accounts, bankcards and

67 This discussion pertains only to non-madayin goods and objects.
material goods. Recall also, the description of general exchange between Homeland Communities:

Every Homeland community has access to and is thus plentiful in certain foods and resources, which others are not. It would be unusual to be visited by or to visit people from another community and not exchange, share, give or take resources of some kind. Family in Camp, for example, have comparatively easy access to plenty of gunga (Pandanus\(^{68}\)), which is used for weaving, man’ka (white clay), which is used for painting and also a mineral supplement and also mewana – a reed-like plant used for basket weaving.\(^{69}\) When visiting kin at nearby communities or expecting a visit people will often harvest or collect one or more of these resources and prepare them in some way if necessary. Which resources and how much depends on seasonal availability and, as one would expect, on perceived need or desire. Neighbouring and nearby communities, in turn, regularly provide Family in Camp with resources they would otherwise not have access to or at least difficulty accessing. With regard to the brief case study above, for example, we saw Yethun give Batumbil and me shells to make necklaces (which are then sold to the local art-centre for cash). These shells are plentiful along the coast near the communities of Rrorru and Nyinyikay but nowhere within the vicinity of Camp.

Based on these empirical observations both examples seem well placed at the generalised pole. Can other empirical instances encountered in the Yolŋu case be placed elsewhere along Sahlins’ continuum? Perhaps not as confidently as those in the previous discussion, but the answer must surely be ‘yes.’ Recall, for example, the case

\(^{68}\) Pandanus yirrkalaensis
\(^{69}\) Cyperus conicus, C. javanicus
study from Chapter 1 in which visiting Service Providers expected an equivalent material return within a finite period. This well describes Balanced reciprocity. According to Sahlins’ continuum this instance should thus be positive in a moral and ‘solidary’ sense. Recall, to consider in more detail, the following from Chapter 1:

The Service Provision Agency has a policy that Homeland residents pay $30 for each seat on returning service planes. Privately chartered planes, in contrast, cost ~$375 one-way and seat 5 people. This has been a longstanding policy and one with which family throughout the Homeland network are more than familiar. However, because there’s almost always spare seats and almost never cash in camp, it’s inevitable that someone in camp will have their feelings affronted. Oft times the workers don’t out-right refuse people but simply name the cost, and this is enough for family turn away in a ‘state of shame/ing’. On other occasions workers preempt requests to hitch a ride with explicit, public reiterations of the need for money up front. Whichever form it takes the exchange plays out the same in the sense that, when the Service workers remind family of the cost or the policy, family feel hurt, rejected, (a)shamed and angry. Privately, family express their outrage, shame or frustration in terms very similar to the following transcription from a discussion about this these exchanges,

Dayanju wuthuna-mirri walala dhāwu wekama ḫanaparruy-gu.
(That story affronts/assaults our state or sense of feeling.

Yaka ḫayi ḫunhi rom yukurra ḫorra gunga ’yunara-mirri
that law or manner of doing things doesn’t is not helpful or assisting.

흐ayaju yolju-wu. Dayanngu wuthun ḫanapurru-nha.
for the state or sense of feeling for Yolju people.

Gumurr dāl ḫayi ḫunhi rom!
That law/manner of doing things is hard chested/difficult!
As may be obvious by this stage, there is a lack of correlation between the 'objective criteria' (of material returns, and leeway of delay), and the moral and social dimensions. In this case, for example, the empirical instances of exchange are well placed at the midpoint of Sahlins' continuum; what was expected was an equivalent material return within a finite period. This well describes Balanced reciprocity. While formal, it should nonetheless be positive in a moral and social sense. However, this is clearly not the case. Indeed, it is not just in this particular instance that we find this lack of correlation. If we revisit the empirical instances already placed along the continuum at the generalised pole, we find a similar lack of correlation. They are well placed in terms of objective criteria, but what of the spirit of exchange, the qualitative moral dimension and the dimension of solidarity?

I began this section suggesting that, based on empirically observable criteria, most instances of exchange described in cases in the previous chapters can be confidently placed at the generalised end of Sahlins' continuum. This was based on the fact that there is no expectation of direct or equivalent material returns; failure to reciprocate does not cause the giver to stop giving, and the social side of exchange is just as if not more important than the material. The illustrative examples given were the empirical instances of exchange on a shopping trip to the nearby township, and also exchange between Homeland Communities.

With regard to the first case and the shopping trip to the nearby township, as discussed in Chapter 6, rather than this being attributable to an 'ethic of generosity,' the flow of goods in such cases is unmarked and unremarkable states of yän gurrupan (just giving)
Thomson 1949 p.49); unmarked and unremarkable forms or states of exchange are those in which people are rrambatji (close, level, together, at one), which creates a state or sense of njayatju wangany (one state or sense of feeling). This is an unmarked state or sense of balance and equilibrium, rather than marked instances or examples of positive value or 'generosity.' It is simply part of what it is or 'means' to be and behave like kin – to be gurrutu-mirri.

With regard to the description of exchange between Homeland Communities and similar cases, we see that variable or differential access to resources is considered a source of value, as it forms the basis for ongoing relationships characterised by mutual interdependence and dynamic reciprocity – an ongoing 'state of exchange' or 'sharing' between respective Homelands. Such valued difference affords an opportunity to 'carry and hold' one another (gāma, njayathama), to 'assist or help one other' (gungay'yun-mirri), to 'care for and look after one another' (djakamirri) – which are all important aspects of what it means to be and behave like kin. These are unmarked and unremarkable 'states' of exchange rather than marked instances or examples 'generosity' and altruism (Hiatt 1965). They are unmarked states of balance and equilibrium in social exchange. They denote or example a general state of social order – a state or sense of njayatju wangany.

To return then, to the empirical instance of Balanced reciprocity involving the Service Providers. These types or forms of reciprocity should be positive in a moral and social sense according to Sahlin's scheme, however, they tend farther toward the negative pole of sociability when cast in local terms – certainly far more than they do reflect any midpoint of balance. Balance and value are realised in more or less 'open' states of exchange characterised by ongoing relationships of mutual interdependence and dynamic reciprocity, in the Yolgu case. Instances or acts of foreclosure are considered
to delimit the potential for accommodating 'one state of feeling (ŋayaju wanyangany) and
threaten to 'close up, block off' (dhal'yura) the state of relations among and between
people. Instances or acts of foreclosure, that is, limit or delimit the potential for
accommodating 'one state or sense of feeling (ŋayaju wanyangany), threaten to 'close up'
or 'block off' (dhal'yura) the state of feeling/state of relations and thus so threaten to
'affront/assault the state or sense of feeling' (ŋayaju wut'-thun) among and between
those involved. They negate the possibility of maintaining normative ideal relationships
characterised by mutual interdependent and dynamic reciprocity. Accordingly, 'things'
or material goods (including bank-cards and telephones) that threaten to become
napungga'-yura (in the middle, in between) are – or should – be hidden, destroyed or
otherwise removed from the immediate setting as or where it serves to maintain or
realise the normative-ideal and primary value of ŋayaju wanyangany. In the intercultural
exchange above, ŋayaju was clearly considered of secondary importance to those
Balanda involved. The rule or policy about paying for seats on returning flights was
clearly considered to be of primary importance. That is, ṛrupiya (money) and/or djorra
(paper’ [as per 'policy’ written down on paper somewhere in this case]) were
considered or regarded as legitimately napungga'-yura (in the middle, in between). This
empirical instance was not only considered but felt to be ŋayaju wut-thunha-mirri rom
(a law or manner of doing things that affronts or assaults the state or sense of feeling).
Such instances tend to be closer to the negative pole when cast in local terms –
certainly far more than they do reflect any midpoint of balance. They do not effect
solidary relations but, in fact, negate or work against this possibility.

People explicitly identify these kinds or forms of exchange with Balanda (non-
Indigenous Australians of Anglo-European descent), as the opening quote from wäwa
Dhakaliny in Chapter 6 suggests, and explicitly contrast this Balanda norm with local
norms and moral sensibilities: ‘Balanda-wu rom wiripu rom . . . like if I give you something, you have to give it straight back. Yolŋu, if we give something, even a big thing, it’s a gift, bayju making people give it straight back-nha.’ As Carrier writes, stipulating returns of commensurate worth within a finite and narrow period is a strategy or means to foreclose any ongoing relationship of interdependence and reciprocity – they ‘ought to dissolve the obligations that link the parties’ (Carrier 1991, p. 124).

Overlaying Yolngu terms and concepts

Is there scope within Sahlins’ model to account for this lack of correlation between material forms of exchange, on the one hand, and the moral and social on the other? How might we begin to explain these differences? If we consider the correlative qualitative moral and social dimensions more closely the reasons for these differences may become clear. I will henceforth transpose the body of terms and concepts from Chapter 3 onto a generic continuum.
Figure 15: The Yolngu template of emotion/morality as exchange/value

\[ \text{Yayaju wangi} \]n [\text{wurray}] \\
'[at] one state of feeling'

\[ \text{Yayaju manapan-mirri} \]

State of feeling [that is] joined, linked, connected together [to each other]'

\[ \text{Gungga'-yun-mirri} \]

'assisting, carrying, sharing [one another]'

\[ \text{Rrampaŋi} \]

'close, together, level, at one'

\[ \text{Yan gurrupan} \]

'just giving'

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>negative</th>
<th>Balanced Reciprocity</th>
<th>positive</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>From the midpoint toward the negative extreme</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>From the mid-point towards the positive extreme</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>[ \text{Yayaju-wut'-thun-nha-mirri} ]n</td>
<td>'law, manner of doing things, which affronts or assaults the state of feeling'</td>
<td>NB: Almost always evoked in the context of 'getting together' (i.e. contexts of more heightened sociality than the norm)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>[ \text{Gumurr-dål} ]</td>
<td>'hard, difficult chested'</td>
<td>[ \text{Yayaju ŋama-thinya-nha} ]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>[ \text{Stricted: [loan word from English]} ]</td>
<td>'restricted, restrained, strict, drawn tight'</td>
<td>[ \text{Bala-rali'-yun-mirri} ]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>[ \text{Gāna} ]</td>
<td>'separate, distinct, alone'</td>
<td>[ \text{Galga djulga-thirri} ]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>[ \text{Djāl gānaŋu-mirri} ]</td>
<td>'wanting, desirous of being separate, distinct, alone'</td>
<td>[ \text{Galga-walga-thirri} ]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>[ \text{Shaving-mirri[LN]} ]</td>
<td>'without/lacking the quality of sharing [with one another]'</td>
<td>[ \text{Wangany manapan-mirri} ]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>[ \text{Dharangan-mirri} ]</td>
<td>'without/lacking the quality of recognising, understanding [one another]'</td>
<td>[ \text{Mārr ŋama-thinya-nha} ]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>[ \text{yaka'-yun} ]</td>
<td>'no, refuse, deny'</td>
<td>[ \text{dhal'-yurra} ]</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

NB: relative to and qualified by social distance (spatially & socially)

When considered in local terms we see that the midpoint of balance is defined by the normative ideal and primary value of \[ \text{yayaju wangi} \] (one state or sense of feeling), which is associated with 'just giving.' The negative pole is defined by the unsociable
and undesirable state or practice of *jayaju-wut*-thun-nha-mirri rom (law, manner of doing things that affronts or assault the state of feeling), which is associated with exchanges in which transactors are 'hard, difficult chested,' 'without or lacking the quality of sharing,' 'closed or blocked off' and/or 'separate, distinct and alone.' The opposite pole is defined by positive notion or state of affairs, *jayaju yama-thinya-nha* (making well or good the state or sense of feeling), which is typically associated with contexts of 'getting together' for ceremony and the dynamic reciprocity and 'closeness' that entails. This scheme is, importantly, relative to and qualified by social distance or proximal relatedness (socially and spatially).

**Differences between these two schemes**

The first notable difference between schemes is the immediately obvious difference of correlation between the material forms of exchange, and the moral and social criteria. Where the midpoint is defined by an equivalent material return within a finite period in Sahlins case, here it is defined by *jayaju waggany* (one feeling), which is associated with 'just giving.' Where the positive extreme is defined by the absence of expectations of direct or equivalent material returns, here it is defined by *jayaju yama-thinya-nha* (making well or good the state or sense of feeling) and dynamic reciprocity. Where the negative extreme is defined by attempts to 'get something for nothing with impunity' in Sahlins scheme (1972), here it is defined by *jayaju-wut-thun-nha-mirri rom* (law, manner of doing things that affronts or assaults the state of feeling), which is associated with exchanges in which transactors are 'without or lacking the quality of sharing.'

The second related point of difference concerns the determinative criteria in each scheme. For Sahlins, the crucial determinative criterion is the material – the 'obvious objective criteria.' We are not invited, that is, to place empirical instances along the
continuum based primarily on moral or social criterion. In the Yolŋu case, however, it is affect or tjayatju that is formative and determines where one might place any given instance or act of reciprocity or exchange. This is not to suggest that the Yolŋu scheme is not also grounded in materiality, but that the measure of balance and value is foremost and primarily a measure of tjayatju. To the degree that certain forms or states of material exchange are understood to typically elicit certain emotions or affective experiences – and they are, as the scheme with overlaid terms and concepts shows – they may be understood as eliciting scenarios that (typically) result in or effect particular states of tjayatju. That is, particular forms or states of moral and social exchange. This is not dramatically different from Sahlins’ understanding of the interplay between the material, moral and social forms of exchange. The notable difference is the formative or determinative criteria.

The third difference is perhaps the most significant. The midpoint of Balance is not a matter of any particular instance or act of exchange in the Yolŋu case, but rather, an ongoing state of exchange. The midpoint of Balance in which equilibrium and order are realised is an ongoing state of exchange in the Yolŋu case. This state of exchange, moreover, is maintained in and by the everyday give-and-take of sociality in everyday life. Balance is not established fleetingly or intermittently in discrete instances or acts of exchange that are somehow set apart from the everyday flow of sociality.

The fourth follows on from the third, and points to a difference in the relationship between transactors presupposed in, or underlying these schemes. For Sahlins, balance and value are a comparative measure relative to each individual, balance and value are considered in terms of the relationship between people in the Yolŋu case. Recall the diagrammatic representation of the relationship between transactors in Sahlins’ scheme, which – it is worth noting, is similar to the diagrammatic representation of the
relationship between transactors in most anthropological studies of exchange (see, for example, Gregory 1982).  

Figure 16: The relationship between transactors in Sahlins' scheme

![Diagram of relationship between transactors in Sahlins' scheme]

In contrast, I suggest that the most accurate way to represent the relationship between transactors in the Yolŋu case, is thus:

Figure 17: Dyadic exchange: The relationship between transactors in the Yolngu case

![Diagram of dyadic exchange]

This notion 'dyadic exchange' or 'dyadic reciprocity' is modeled on a linguistic concept of dyadic kinship terms, which denote a reciprocal relationship between two people. The idea of 'dyadic reciprocity' or 'dyadic exchange' offers a way of talking about exchange relations and forms of exchange based on (and in terms of) the

70 Compare those taken from Sahlins' study with the following by Chris Gregory in his best known work, *Gifts and Commodities* (1982).
relationship that they share. The dyadic exchange ‘R’ here refers to the mutual or reciprocal relationship between ‘A’ and ‘B.’ The significance and value of the exchange in which ‘A’ gives ‘x’ to ‘B’ and ‘B’ gives ‘y’ to ‘A’ is foremost a measure of nyaya (the state or sense of feeling) relative to ‘R’ – the relationship that they share.

The significant point at issue in this case is not a measure or balance of the respective objects nor is it any comparative value; what is significant in this case is the state of exchange itself in which balance and value are realised – it is the ongoing state of exchange that is midpoint of balance and a precondition for the realisation of value in this case. Where the reciprocity model focuses on the actions of each individual involved, this model is concerned with states of exchange – the state of exchange between them. This view, I suggest, is similar in many ways to Mauss’ vision or notion of ‘the enduring contract’ (1954, p. 5), a point I will return to in the conclusion.

Figure 18: Balance in dyadic exchange

nyaya [ngi] - [ngu]
‘at one state of feeling’

manapari [mirri]
‘joined, linked, connected together [to each other]’

Balance is realised in unmarked states of exchange between ‘A’ and ‘B,’ which are ongoing relationships characterised by mutual interdependence and dynamic
reciprocity. Key evaluative concepts associated with this state of relations notably include *gayanyu wanyangany*, *rramba* (together, close, level, the same), *gurrutu-mirri* - and on a socio-centric level ‘*manapan-mirri*’ (linked, joined, connected to one another). Value is realised in forms or states of exchange in which the relationship between ‘A’ and ‘B’ is increasingly close (socially and spatially) and reciprocity increasingly dynamic and vital – as associated with terms or concepts like *bala-raliyun-mirri* (giving and taking between one another). Negative value or negative states of exchange are realised in forms or states of exchange in which the relationship between ‘A’ and ‘B’ is increasingly ‘distant, differentiated and discrete,’ in which transactors are ‘hard, difficult chested,’ ‘without or lacking the quality of sharing’ – associated with concepts such as *gayanyu-wut*'-*thun-nha-mirh mm:* (law, manner of doing things that affronts or assaults the state of feeling). Recall, for example, *wāwa* Don’s expressed concerns when we heard that a maintenance crew had graded the road access to nearby Homelands, when it appeared that they had overlooked ‘us’ and the access road to Camp from the common turnoff. Everyone seemed introspective and concerned and at some stage *wāwa* remarked thus: ‘They’re stopping it there because we didn’t go to *jandi*’s funeral. *Dhal*’yurra *walala njilmurrung-gu, yuwalk* (they are blocking it off, closing it up for us, true).’

**Conclusion**

Rather than ‘generalised,’ negative, or ‘balanced’ reciprocity it might be better to think of reciprocity as relatively ‘open’ or ‘closed’ – a model David Graeber proposed in his reworking of Sahlins’ typology (2000). Graeber proposes this model on account of his reconsideration of material forms of exchange described as Balanced reciprocity in Sahlins scheme. The ‘classic gift-countergift scenario’ he argues ‘has a lot more in
common with market exchange than we normally assume: at least, in comparison with
the sort of open-ended communism Mauss took as his starting point. Where the latter is
all about maintaining a permanent sense of mutual obligation, the former is about the
denial of obligation and a maximum assertion of individual autonomy’ (Graeber 2000,
p. 219). Insofar as they are about creating social relations, they are ‘really about
creating relations of the most minimal, temporary kind: ones that can be completely
cancelled out’ (2000, p. 219). This is, of course, similar to Carrier’s point, that ‘the
stipulating returns of commensurate worth within a finite and narrow period is a
strategy or means to foreclose any ongoing relationship of interdependence and
reciprocity’ (Carrier 1991, p. 124). In any case, rather than ‘generalised’ or ‘balanced’
reciprocity, Graeber argues, ‘it might be better to think of reciprocity as relatively
‘open’ or ‘closed’:

[O]pen reciprocity keeps no accounts, because it implies a relation of permanent mutual
commitment; It becomes ‘closed reciprocity’ when a balancing of accounts closes the
relationship off, or at least maintains the constant possibility of doing so. Phrasing it this
way also makes it easier to see the relation as a matter of degree and not of kind: closed
relations can become more open, open ones more closed. (Graeber 2001, p. 220)

This model certainly reflects the Yolŋu scheme more closely, though a number of
issues and questions remain. Firstly, in the Yolŋu case, it is not so much that ‘no
accounts are kept,’ but rather, that the reckoning of accounts is foremost a measure of
ŋayanja\footnote{relative to or qualified by social distance}. Dayanu waŋany is the fundamental value in both material and non-material
exchange, marking balance in the former and equilibrium in the latter.
Secondly, it is important to stress that in the Yolŋu case the relationship between transactors is not that between creditors and debtors obligated to loan and repay. The overarching obligation is the obligation or responsibility not to foreclose the state of exchange or the state of relations. As we saw in previous chapters, foreclosure delimits or precludes the possibility of maintaining *ŋayantu wagany*, and in doing so disrupts the state of relations, which may threaten disorder, conflict or violence. This is the antithesis of value; the antithesis of being *ŋayantu wagany*. On a socio-centric level this is the obligation and responsibility not to ‘cut or sever’ (*gulk-thun*) the string of relatedness among and between *bąpurru* involved. Recall, as we saw in Chapter 5, in situations where the state of relations becomes upset and social order is threatened, a process of reparation is set in motion, aimed at ‘straightening out relations,’ with a goal of re-establishing *ŋayantu wagany* (one state or sense of feeling) and thus social order.

Thirdly, given the forms of exchange previously describing or pertaining to the midpoint are now placed at the ‘closed’ end of the continuum, the question remains as to what type or form of exchange is denoted by the midpoint of this scheme. As we saw in the case involving the Service Providers, ‘balance’ can be variously conceived and felt by different people even in the same moment of transaction or exchange. One of the most important conclusions to be drawn from this material, in my mind, is that there are large differences in what-counts-as-what when it comes to the way people consider and experience balance and value in social exchange. We cannot, based on empirical observations alone, assume or deduce the moral entailments of exchange – whether exchanges are normative and balanced, positive and good, or negative and bad. Nor can or should we assume the political entailments – the nature and degree of solidarity that these forms of exchange result in or effect. In order to understand these dimensions of exchange, I argue that it is first necessary to understand the terms and concepts that
people draw on themselves to interpret, frame and talk about such relations. In the Yolŋu case these are the key body of terms and concepts associated with affect and morality, introduced in Chapter 3. They describe or denote shared understandings about the normal, proper state of relations between one’s self and others – as well as shared understandings about those that are positive, good and desirable, and those that are negative, bad, and otherwise undesirable. In this manner, they adumbrate the cultural understandings associated with balance, value and negative value respectively. In the Yolŋu case, this associative body of knowledge pivots around the concept of ijayaju.

One final point: while the distance of relatedness and spatial distance are certainly a qualifying factor in the Yolŋu scheme, in my experience, Yolŋu foreground the value and significance of kinship as an attribute or quality of persons and relations, which is created and sustained as a process – as a state of relations among and between people. This is reflected, in part, by the common practice of adopting non-Yolŋu individuals who spend a great deal of time in Yolŋu communities (situating them within the kinship system). This practice is not only desirable but also necessary (as people will say quite openly) if such individuals are to recognise and understand what it is – what it means – to be gurrutu-mirri (to have or possess the quality of kin[ship]) (Blakeman 2012, p. 682). Thus, I would not state as definitively as Sahlins (1972), that reciprocity and exchange are inclined toward the generalised – or ‘open’ pole in this case – where kinship morality and kinship community prevail (Sahlins 1972, p. 211). People can always ‘make’ or create the attribute or quality of kinship for one another and thus so make good/well the state or sense of feeling between them.
Chapter 8: Towards a local theory of value

I began this thesis with a puzzle about an evident margin of misunderstanding evident in social exchanges between Yolŋu and Balanda which I termed ‘moral misrecognition.’ This initial puzzle led me to ask a series of basic questions: How do people consider and critically evaluate the morality and value of everyday social exchanges or social relations? What shared understandings underlie or underwrite ideas and expectations about what is normal and normative, what is good and desirable, and what is bad and undesirable in everyday social life? In the following chapters I outlined the local model of social organisation and introduced part of the key body of terms and concepts associated with affect and morality. In the core chapters I analysed a series of ethnographic case studies and observations from various aspects of everyday life. This was done drawing on the terms and concepts introduced in succeeding chapters. I showed that these terms and concepts – and the shared understandings comprising them – not only inform the way people consider and evaluate morality and value in everyday relations, but they motivate and shape culturally recognised and culturally recognisable forms of social exchange and patterns of sociality more broadly.

Knowledge of the self, others and the relationship between them.

Chapter 2 contributes to the body of literature on Yolŋu social organisation with a slightly unconventional approach. The chapter was structured around a series of five drawings, drawn by my close yapap (Z) and waku (wC) to help me to understand why my questions about social organisation were always met with further questions – rhetorical about raki’ (‘strings’), luku (‘foot[print], anchor, root of a tree’) gamunuygu (‘white clay’) and lirrwi’ (‘ashes, shade’). This series of drawings, together with the
considered exegesis offered by *yapa* and *waku*, introduce and describe the regional system of social organisation in local terms.

The shape or form of this model is familiar in the anthropological record, and key aspects of the material resonate strongly with particular insights and descriptions in the literature. What is unique about this model is the description or representation of socio-political forms as collective social bodies of a particular 'cultural self' - these are shared, substantive understandings about the self, others and the relationship between them – 'who I am, what I am [like] and how I relate to others.' The *luku* of the individual social body is the anchor or 'root' of self-understanding – 'where I originate from/pertain to.' The discrete corpus of *madayin*, here represented as the *luku* and the *rumbal* 'body, trunk or torso' of the individual social body, are attributes or qualities that are proper or true to the self. The *raki* ('strings, ropes') of the individual social body are aspects of the self that are shaped or defined through one's relationship to significant others – they are specific close, reciprocal *gurrutu* relations.

These individual and shared understandings have motivational force – the sites referred to as *luku* or *luku wāna* ('footprint/anchor places') are sites of residence, and *raki* ('strings, ropes') closely reflect patterns of mobility when mapped onto place. This material suggests that emotion or 'affect' is critical to understanding the link between cultural understandings of the self and structures or patterns of social and local organisation. This is a point that has been made by a number of psychological anthropologists (D'Andrade 1984, Spiro 1961, Markus and Kitayama 1994), who suggest that the nature of the 'lock and key' arrangement between affective responses and the social order can be further understood with the idea of a self that provides a meeting point and a framework for the relation between the individual and the social world. The key factor here is the 'link' of affective, motivational and directive force.
Affect, emotion and morality

Chapter 3 introduced part of the key body of terms and concepts comprising the emotion lexicon in Yolŋu-matha and includes transcripts from digitally recorded conversations about emotion to contextualise these terms and the way they are used in everyday talk.

The body of Yolŋu concepts describes emotion and affective experience as fundamentally relational and contingent upon the state of relations between people. If we were to ‘consider emotional meaning like any other semiotic practice, as a product of signification,’ as Myers suggests (1988, p. 591), most Yolŋu concepts associated with emotion and morality signify a particular state or sense of feeling among and between people. Yolŋu place emphasis not on the individual nor necessarily on the self-in-relation to others, but on the state of that relationship in the context of any given situation or event. The cultural self, as a moral and political actor, recognises the state of their reciprocal or dyadic relationship to/with significant others.

This is not unique in the ethnographic literature; emotions are typically experienced and conceived of relationally, interpersonally in the many places and cultures where an interdependent view of the self prevails (Markus & Kitayama 1994, Geoffrey White 1994, D’Andrade 2008). The intersubjectivity that results from interdependence and connection receives a relatively elaborated and privileged place in the behavioural process of the interdependent view of the self (Markus and Kitayama 1994). Key features of this intersubjectivity include a heightened sense of the other and of the nature of one’s relation to the other and the expectation of some mutuality in this regard. The goal is not individual awareness, experience and expression, but rather, attunement or alignment of one’s reactions and actions with those of another. This
tendency toward interdependence between the self and others requires and fosters the relationship, social emotions – sympathy, modesty (i.e. humility), agreeableness (i.e. harmony, balance, restraint). These emotions promote the felt interdependence of self and others, and such engagement feels ‘natural,’ ‘right,’ and ‘good.’ The most common negative emotions, as characteristic of the interdependent view of the self others (see Markus and Kitayama 1994, p. 102), are those that accompany a faltering of interdependence and a perceived disengagement of the self from others.

The relationship between cultural conceptions of the self, emotions, and eliciting scenarios is now broadly recognised; conceptions or views of the self strongly shape if not determine what kinds of experiences will feel ‘good’ and what social behaviour will be coded as ‘positive,’ and what kinds of experiences will produce ‘bad’ feelings and will accompany ‘negative’ social behaviour (Markus and Kitayama 1994). These are encoded or reflected in cultural schemas or templates such as that comprised by/of the key Yolŋu terms and concepts introduced in this chapter.

Sociality and sociability

Drawing on the body of emotion-terms and concepts introduced in Chapter 3, Chapter 4 explored everyday forms of sociality in a series of ethnographic case studies. While many of the forms and patterns of interpersonal exchange reflect many of those described by Myers as characteristic of Pintupi sociality, there are also a number of key differences. Rather than the individual autonomy or any self-referential state or sense of feeling, it is the state of relations and the state of feeling among and between people that is of primary concern. As with the interdependent view of the self in other places and cultures, the value or goal is not individual expression but attunement or alignment of one’s reactions and actions with those another or others more generally.
As Liberman (1985) writes of social consensus in the Western desert – we see that any ‘orderliness’ that exists is the collaborative product of a great deal of social and moral work and there are culturally recognised forms or patterns of sociability aimed at maintaining this order. In the Yolŋu case, for example, as the analysis in this chapter suggests, there is a pervasive expectation that a person will or should withhold coming forward with their private, inner thoughts and feelings, to maintain or realise the normative ideal state of relations, *ŋayaju waŋgany*. There is an associated moral expectation that a person’s actions (including speech acts), are, or should be contingent upon and to a large extent organised by the state of feeling (‘*ŋayaju*’) or state of relations with others (particularly as it serves to maintain the normative ideal state of *ŋayaju waŋgany*). We also see that there is significant value attributed to dynamic mobility and a characteristic ease with social contingencies. These forms and patterns of sociality give shape and character to everyday life on the Homelands and contribute to the maintenance of social equilibrium, to *ŋayaju waŋgany*.

**Responsibility and accountability**

Drawing on key Yolŋu-matha terms and concepts associated with morality and value, chapter 5 explored the way people consider issues of blame and responsibility in a number of ethnographic case studies.

In the extended case study of conflict we see that responsibility and accountability are considered as, or in terms of, a ‘string’ or chain of interpersonal influence; the closer the relation, the more valent the ‘string’ or chain of influence, the more salient the chain of responsibility by means of which people may be held to account. ‘Affect’ and influence are just as significant as ‘action’ as key points at issue when considering issues of responsibility and holding people to account. Feeling is something someone
has, but it is also something that people can do to one another – something that people can give or take, which can not only affect one another but can affect them in such a way that it effects action and/or as well as physical states of health and wellbeing.

As Liberman writes of the Western Desert, the production and maintenance of a community of ‘feelings’ is considered to be something very serious, and much of the social activity is addressed toward the active production of such collective solidarity (1985, p. 15). We also see that people are less concerned with any particular, discrete acts or actions when making judgments of responsibility and more with the way actions affect nyaynu, and thus state of relations. Accordingly, the process through which people are held to account is not directed toward arriving at any ‘truth’ (of fact, intention or opinion), nor is it directed toward the goal of ‘personal accountability.’ On a socio-centric level, the responsibility process and the process through which people are held to account - are directed toward dhunupa-kuma nyai raki'-nha (‘straightening out the strings [of relatedness’), and thus – again - reestablishing the normative ideal of nyaynu wargany.

Perhaps more than any other chapter the material in this chapter illustrates that any orderliness that exists is the collaborative product of a great deal of social and moral work, and that culturally recognised forms of interpersonal exchange comprising this ‘work’ and broader salient patterns of sociality, can only be understood with reference to local terms and concepts associated with affect/emotion and morality.

Things ‘in between’: Money and material goods

Drawing on the body of key terms and concepts associated with emotion in Yolŋu-matha (introduced in Chapter 3), Chapter 6 explored the way people consider value and
engage in exchange relations (involving material goods), through a number of ethnographic case studies. In this chapter we see that there exists a robust local/regional economy characterised by salient, culturally recognised forms of exchange and local forms of value. Only one of the key features of the ‘domestic moral economy’ resonate strongly with these local/regional forms.

Rather than contrasting emphases on relatedness and ‘egalitarian autonomy’ the primary concern in this case is the maintenance of an ongoing, open state of exchange; the material in this chapter suggests that the ‘reckoning’ or ‘balance’ of accounts is less about any particular or discrete instance or act of reciprocity or exchange and more about particular ‘states of exchange’; it is the maintenance of a more or less open ‘state of exchange’ that is significant in these cases.

We see that the flow of goods in exchange is unmarked and unremarkable states of yän gurrupan (‘just giving’) (Thomson 1949); unmarked and unremarkable forms or states of exchange are those in which people are ‘sharing one another, sharing something one another,’ in which people are rrambanj i (‘close, level, together, at one/the same’), which is when there is a state or sense of ṅayanaŋ wargany. The latter is a marker of balance and equilibrium rather than positive value or ‘generosity’; it is a basic aspect of what it is or ‘means’ to be and behave like kin. We also see that variable or differential access to resources is realised as a value, as it forms the basis for the ongoing relationships of interdependence and reciprocity; valued difference creates an opportunity to ‘carry’ and ‘hold’ one another (gäma, ṅayathama), to ‘assist or help one other’ (gunggay’yun-mirri) or ‘care for and look after one another’ (djäka-mirri), which are all important aspects of what it means to be gurrutji-mirri (‘to have kin, possess the quality of kinship’).
While exchange is organised by relations and networks of kinship, moral obligation and commitment not construed in terms of responding positively to demands (Peterson 1993), but as an obligation and commitment not to allow ‘things’ or material goods to become *napunja-njura* (‘in the middle, in between’) and thus upset or affront the state of feeling and/or state of relations. ‘Things’ or material goods (including bank-cards and telephones) that threaten to become ‘*napunja’njura*’ (‘in the middle, in between’) are (or should be) hidden, destroyed or otherwise removed from the immediate setting or exchange in cases where it serves to maintain *nymajnu waŋgany*.

This material suggests that value is foremost and primarily a measure of *nymajnu* in the Yoljku case. Emotion concepts not only comprise a moral system that articulates and informs a particular view of the self and social life for Yoljku people, but comprise a system or template of value.

**The local theory of exchange**

In Chapter 7 I considered the interplay between forms, material conditions and social relations of exchange as a model or theory of exchange in its own right. I employed Sahlins’ general scheme of reciprocity as a heuristic, overlaying it with Yoljku terms and concepts, to clarify what I see as the basic Yoljku theory of exchange. My argument is that *nymajnu waŋgany* is a fundamental value in both material and non-material exchange.

I suggested that rather than ‘generalised,’ negative, or ‘balanced’ reciprocity it might be better to think of reciprocity as relatively ‘open’ or ‘closed’ – a model David Graeber proposed in his reworking of Sahlins’ typology (2000):
Open reciprocity keeps no accounts, because it implies a relation of permanent mutual commitment; it becomes ‘closed reciprocity’ when a balancing of accounts closes the relationship off, or at least maintains the constant possibility of doing so. Phrasing it this way also makes it easier to see the relation as a matter of degree and not of kind: closed relations can become more open, open ones more closed. (Graeber 2001, p. 220)

Graeber proposes this model on account of his reconsideration of material forms of exchange described as Balanced Reciprocity in Sahlins scheme. Graeber’s model certainly reflects the Yolŋu scheme more closely, though a number of issues and questions remain.

Firstly, in the Yolŋu case, it is not so much that ‘no accounts are kept,’ but rather, that the reckoning of accounts is foremost a measure of *ŋayangu*, relative to or qualified by social distance. *ŋayangu wanyanyi* is the fundamental value in both material and non-material exchange, marking balance in the former and equilibrium in the latter.

It is also important to stress that in the Yolŋu case the relationship between transactors is not that between creditors and debtors obligated to loan and repay. The overarching obligation is the obligation or responsibility not to foreclose the state of exchange and hence the state of relations. As we saw in previous chapters, foreclosure delimits or precludes the possibility of maintaining *ŋayangu wanyanyi* and in doing so disrupts the state of relations, which may threaten disorder, conflict or violence. This is the antithesis of value; the antithesis of being *ŋayangu wanyanyi*. On a socio-centric level this is the obligation and responsibility not to ‘cut or sever’ (*gulk-thun*) the string of relatedness among and between bãpurru involved.

Given the forms of exchange previously describing or pertaining to the midpoint are now placed at the ‘closed’ end of the continuum, the question remains as to what type
or form of exchange is denoted by the midpoint of this scheme. As we saw in the case involving the Service Providers, 'balance' can be variously conceived and felt by different people even in the same moment of transaction or exchange. One of the most important conclusions to be drawn from this material, in my mind, is that there are large differences in what-counts-as-what when it comes to the way people consider and experience balance and value in social exchange. We cannot, based on empirical observations alone, assume or deduce the moral entailments of exchange - whether exchanges are normative and balanced, positive and good, or negative and bad. Nor can or should we assume the political entailments - the nature and degree of solidarity that these forms of exchange result in or effect. In order to understand these dimensions of exchange it is first necessary to understand the evaluative terms and concepts that people draw on themselves to interpret, frame and talk about such relations.

Towards a local theory of value

The types of reciprocity or interaction associated with each point on the continuum of forms of reciprocity or exchange, I suggest, are not only 'typical' eliciting situations/scenarios for particular emotions or affective experiences but they can be rightly considered as 'typical' types of forms of exchange that 'transform' value (in Munn's words). That is, the local model of exchange can also, I argue, be considered a local theory or template of value. When considered this way, balance (of value) is realised or reproduced as or 'in' the unmarked affective experience of equilibrium in social relations (or social exchange); positive value is realised or produced along a dimension of positive, 'good' and otherwise desirable affective experiences, while negative value is realised or produced along a dimension of negative, 'bad' and otherwise undesirable affective experiences.
This basic approach is compatible, if not consistent, with most all contemporary anthropological concepts of value. Consider, for example, the three streams of thought David Graeber (2001) identifies in the present use of the term value in anthropology: 1) values in the sociological sense as ‘conceptions of what is ultimately good, proper, or desirable’; 2) value in the economic sense as ‘the degree to which objects are desired, particularly, as measured by how much others are willing to give up to get them,’ and; 3) value in the linguistic sense, as meaningful difference.’ It is also consistent with the approach or definition Graeber finally subscribes to (derived from/based on the work of Nancy Munn)—as the importance of actions (2001, pp. 49-89).

Where Munn analyses the production of value production at the level of symbols and meanings, however, the inclusion and recognition of role of affect allows us to consider the value in terms of individual and shared experience - *affective experience* of reciprocity and social exchange. Where Graeber favours Munn’s approach characterised as a labour theory of value – value as ‘the way people represent the importance of their own actions to themselves’ (2001, p. 45) - the inclusion and recognition of role of affect lends explanatory force to the relationship between value and actions – with an account of the role of motivation.

To feel in a certain way is ‘to subscribe to a specific kind of appraisal of prior events and a specific type of culturally constituted response. In other words, emotions are a moral rhetoric that implicates both descriptions of the world and recommendations for acting upon it’ (White 1994, pp. 226-227). Emotion words are always valenced, signifying an evaluation of events and a desire to maintain or adjust some state of affairs. ‘Whereas positive emotions express an acceptance or willingness to maintain a situation, negative emotions often function as signs of moral discontent, signifying a desire to change the situation, the self, or both’ (White, G. 1994, p. 226). For example,
interactions or exchanges which are *gumurr-däl* (hard, difficult chested) are those that typically *ŋayaju-wut-thun* (affront or assault the state of feeling [among and between people]), and given that people generally avoid situations that elicit negative, unpleasant or ‘bad’ feelings, we can assume that this cultural association serves as a broadly influential motivation for avoiding such situations. Similarly, interactions or exchanges which have the character or quality of *bala-räli-yun-mirri* (ongoing mutual reciprocity) are those that typically elicit a state or sense of *ŋayaju wangany* (‘one state or sense of feeling’) or more positive ‘good’ feelings such as *galja walja-thirri* (becoming happy, vital, in high spirits). Given people are generally drawn to situations that elicit positive, pleasant or ‘good’ feelings, we can assume that this cultural association serves as a broadly influential motivation for seeking out such situation.

**Countering moral misrecognition**

Yolŋu people conceive of and consider persons to be fundamentally and necessarily interdependent. This is reflected in key cultural concepts which are elaborated at various social levels, such as *manapan-mirri, raki*, and *ŋayaju*. The qualitative state or sense of balance between the self and others is considered fundamentally relational, relative to the normative ideal of *ŋayaju wangany*, qualified by social distance. As regards affect, the social concern is not with any one person’s private inner thoughts and feelings but with the state or sense of feeling among and between people. With regard to morality, social attention is not paid to the morality of any particular ‘types’ or ‘kinds’ of acts or actions but rather, if, when, and what social exchanges disrupt, upset and/or otherwise threaten the state or sense of feeling between people. With regard to exchange, balance and value are a measure of *ŋayaju* and rather than being concerned with particular or discrete instances or acts of exchange. The concern is with
particular states of exchange between people. Finally, social order is not a relationship between autonomous individuals and socio-political entities but a balanced state of relations between persons and entities that are conceived of, considered, and felt to be fundamentally and necessarily interdependent. In what is effectively an example of non-State sociability, we see that the relative distribution of energy, intelligence and social concern is geared towards the realisation and maintenance of social order - the primary and paramount value - *nyayanyu wanygany*; from the regulation and withholding of private inner thoughts and feelings to the openness displayed in the flow of material goods and the mutual responsibility that people expect of each other *and act on* in instances or conflict and disorder. As in the Western Desert, ‘congenial sociability’ and social consensus is the collaborative product of a great deal of social and moral work and, as the material in this thesis shows, there are culturally recognised – and recognisable - forms or patterns of sociability aimed at maintaining this order. This socio-moral work can only be understood and appreciated if and when it is cast in the evaluative terms that motivate and shape it.

The initial puzzlement about ‘moral misrecognition’ has guided me to an understanding that there are large cultural differences in what-counts-as-what when it comes to the way people conceive of, consider *and experience* balance and value in social exchange. We cannot, based on empirical observations alone, assume or deduce the moral entailments of exchange - whether exchanges are felt and considered to be normative and balanced, positive and good, or negative and bad. Nor can or should we assume the political entailments - the nature and degree of solidarity that these forms result in or effect. In order to understand these dimensions of exchange, it is first necessary to understand the evaluative terms and concepts that people draw on themselves to
interpret, frame and talk about such relations. Only this way can we minimise and perhaps avoid the phenomenon of moral misrecognition.


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Appendix 1: Mobility Data

I collected the following quantitative data over a twelve month period, noting who went in and/or out of camp each day, by what means, and where they were going to or from. I then broke this data down into gender and age sets. As regards the units of measurement used: if an individual went either in or out of camp during the day, I counted it as 1 movement. If an individual went out and came back in - or visa versa - in the same day, it is still only counted as 1 movement.

Figure 19: Annual daily movements per month
Figure 20: Vehicles and mobility

VEHICLES AND MOVEMENT

CAR  PLANE  BOAT  FOOT  HELICOPTER
Figure 22: Age groups and mobility

Age Group Movements

Age Group
Appendix 2: Glossary of terms

*bala*, movement away from speaker, over there, then

*bala-råli-yunf-mirri*, from *bala* — ‘away from the speaker, *råli* — ‘toward the speaker,’
the suffix *-yun* which derives a performative verb, and the suffix *-mirri*, which here
denotes the reflexive reciprocal form of the verb. I am confident that the term is
accurately represented by the idea of reciprocity.

*Balanda*, white person, European

*balanyara*, like this, thus so, such like

*bambay*, blind

*bäpurru*, patri-filial kin group, ‘clan’

*barrku*, distant, far away

*barrku-wetj*, separate, different, each

*barrkuwatj-thirri*, become separate, different, each

*bäru*, crocodile

*bawa-yun*, do something crazy, do anything

*bäy*, nevermind, could be, isn’t it . . . ?

*Bayini*, proper name of a Yirritja ancestral figure, ext: term used to refer to Gumatj
women

*bayju*, none, nothing
bili, because, since; and [then]

bilmma, clap sticks

bilyun, turn [around], about face, change direction

birka’yun, try, test, taste

bitjan, thus, like this

biyapul (and another [thing])

buku-bak-thun[-marama], lit. to break one’s forehead or will into pieces; refers to a form or state of exchange in which two or more people mutually accede to one another (or yield to one another in the case of material exchange).

buku-djulji, beloved, dear

bulu, again, more [of the same], too, also; then [again], but

bundurr, knee, joint; ext: important ceremonial names

bunjawa’thirri, become boss [for], become bossy

bungul, ceremony

Burarrwanga, proper name of lineage of Gumatj; surname

buthurra dhumuk, blocked, closed, blunt ears

däl, strong, hard, firm, difficult, steady

darrtjalk, clean, clear; good, not spoilt

Dätiwuy, proper name of clan group, bapurru
dhākay, taste, flavour or feeling

dhākay-birkay'-yun, try or test the taste, flavor or feeling

dhākay-ŋōma, experience or feel a taste or feeling

dhal'-yurra, close [up], block [off]

dhaŋŋay', full, many lots, plenty [of]

dharajānn-miriw, lit. ‘lacking or without recognising/understanding [something or someone’].

dharajānn-mirri, recognising, understanding one another

dharpa, tree, bush [generic]; [piece of] wood, stick

dhārup, language, speech,

dhawar'-yun, finish [off], cease, end, disappear

dhāwū, story, word, news, information

dhiika', somewhere, something [around here]

dhirramu, man, male person

dhiyānu, with this, using this

dhukarr, path, road, trail

dhukun-mirri, soiled, messy, in a state of disarray

dhukun', rubbish, litter, trash

dhulaj', clan design [sacra], painting
dhunupa, straight, correct

dhuya, ignorant, unaware

dhurrwara, mouth, lips, opening; ext: door, lid, end of a string or rope

Dhuwa, proper name of a moiety

dhuwala, this here

dhuwali, that there

dhuway, [kinship term] FZC [husband]

dhuyu, secret, sacred, taboo

dhuyu wāya, secret, sacred place

djäka, care for, look after

djäl, want, desire

djäl gānaṇju-mirri, want, desire to be alone, separate, singular, lonely

djäl gānaṇju-mirri rom (law or manner of doing things that has the quality of wanting or desiring to be separate, different alone).

djäma, work make, do

djarrpi, crooked, wrong

djaw'yun, snatch, steal

djawaryun, tired, exhausted; sad, depressed

djorra', paper, book, newspaper
djungaya, relationship of gutharra to māri; ext: boss, manager, lawyer

Djutarra, [proper name] Yirritja ancestral figure; ext: used to refer to Gumatj women

dol, mud, swamp [of fresh-water source]

ga, and

gakal, action [typified, habitual, stylised]

galay, [kinship term]

Galiwin’ku, place name

galka, sorcerer

galki, close, close by, near

galkurra, wait [for]

galja djuhja-thirri lit. ‘skin becoming dear, beloved’; ext: expression for ‘affectionately familiar, nice, happy, pleasurable.’

galja-walja-thirri, becoming happy, vital, in high spirits) which refers to an experience or feeling that makes one happy and lively with a sense of vitality, lightness and good health.

galja-wamathinya-mirri, feeling light, happy and well

Gälpu, proper name of a clan group, of a bāpurru

gāma, bring, take, pick up, carry

gaminyarr, [kin term] wSC/ZSC
gamunungu, white clay

gāna, different, separate, distinct, alone

gāna-gāna, one by one, each different, separate, distinct, alone

ganydjarr, power, strength

ganydjarr wikanjala, given the strength or power

ganyjarr-mirriw, without or lacking strength or power

gara, spear

garma, public, in the camp

gatapaja, buffalo

Gikal, [place name]

girri', things, goods, 'gear,' 'stuff'; clothes, belongings, possessions, personal effects

gora, shame, ashamed, embarrassment, shy

gorruru[-ma], lit. well, soak, womb, vessel. Often used to refers to the paramount source of fresh water located next to, or very near, each luku wāŋa

guku, honey, beehive, 'sugarbag'

gulk-thun, cut, sever

gulun', belly, stomach, womb, palm

Gumatj, [proper name] of a clan group, of a bapurru

gumurr, chest
gumurr djarrarrk, poor thing [expression of sympathy]

gumurr-dāl, hard-chested, difficult, unmoved, unmoving; ext: insensate, disassociated

gunga, Pandanus

gungay’yun-mirri ‘care for and look after one another’

gur’kur-yun, which is a transitive verb meaning ‘to push, incite or exert pressure.

gurrkurr (vein, artery, tendon; branch, root; strength)

gurrupan, give

gurrutu, kin, kinship

gurrutu-mirri, have or possess kin, the quality of kinship

gurtha, fire

gutha’, [kinship term] younger brother or sister

gutharra, [kinship term] wDC/ZDC

jealousing, from English, used as a gloss for mel-de’-yun

lakarama, tell [someone/something]

lap-thun, to open, come apart or loose

latjuwarr’-yun, spread out, scatter, disperse

lay-wata-miriw, without easement

lay-yun, relax, feel easier, get relief

laytju, nice, smooth, pleasant
likan (elbow, joint, corner; bay, inlet)

lingu, well then

lirrwi', ashes, shade, charcoal

litjalaij-gii, ours

luku (foot, feet, footprint; anchor; base of tree)

luku wiŋa, footprint, anchor place

luku-man'ka-mirri yolgu, people whose feet possess the quality of the clay; an expression for people who stay on and look after Country in what is deemed a ‘proper’ way, following rom

lundu, friends

lungu, turtle hunting harpoon

madayin, sacra: songs, designs, proper names, ceremonial forms, objects

mak, perhaps, maybe

mala, collective, collectivity, group

man'ka, white clay

manapan, link, join, connect

manda, they [two]; dual

manymak, nice, good, pleasant

maranydjalk, stingray
mari, fight, quarrel, trouble

mārī, [kinship term] MM, MMB

marggi, know, be knowledgable of or about

mārr, 1) [conjunctive] so that in order to, then [result]; 2) moderately, a bit, somewhat (like), relatively, quite, light (colour); 3) ancestral strength, power, vitality.

mārr-gaŋga, a little bit, so-so

mārrama, take, bring, carry

marrkap-mirri, dear, beloved

marrtji, go, come, walk

marthaŋay, boat

MaṭaMaṭa, place name

matha, tongue, language, dialect

mayali, meaning, significance [of something]

Mayikurr, place name

mess’d, from English, gloss for dhukun’-mirri

mewana, reed-like plant used for basket weaving Cyperus conicus, C. javanicus

milk’milk, sandfly

miny’tji, colour, pigment, design, painting
mirriri, avoidance relationship of brother/sister; behavioural rules for a man where his sister is concerned

mittji, collectivity, collective, group

mittji djarr’yun, lit. to choose or select a collective or group; expression used for ‘sorting things out’

miyalk, woman, female

miyapunu, Green Turtle

momu, [kinship term] FM

mulkurr, head

mulkuru, stranger, foreigner

mutika’, car, automobile, truck, motor vehicle

naku, dugout canoe

napunyka’-ŋura, in the middle or in between

nhä, what?

nhaltjan, what-do? how about it? how [is it done]? why? pardon?; what happened?

nhangu, his, her(s), its, to him or her

nhawi, whatchyamacallit?, whatsit?

nhe, you

nhepi, you yourself, only you
nherrat, place, put [down], put on [clothes]

nhina, sit, stay, stop [at a place]

Nhulunbuy, place name

nhunha, you, thee

Nyinyikay, place name

nyumukuniny, small, little, tiny; child, young [of an animal]

ŋāma, to experience or feel

ŋama-thirri, become good, improve, get better, become healthy, be ready

ŋama'ŋama'-yun, make

ŋamathirri, become good, become healthy, pleasurable

ŋan'ku (taste, flavour)

ŋan'ku-ŋāma, to experience or feel a taste or feeling; [syn: dhākay-ŋāma, dhākay
birkay'yun

ŋandi, [kinship term]

ŋāniti, alcohol

ŋāniti-mirri, drunk, intoxicated

ŋanya, him, her [object of action]

ŋanydjalar'-yun, turn [around, about face], turn [into], change, become [a new thing]

ŋāŋ'θun, ask [someone]
yapaki, white person, European

yapi, [kin term] MB

yarra, [pronoun] I

yatha, food

yathi, [kinship term] (MF)

yathili, before, previously

yayayu, state or sense of feeling [among and between people]

yayayu yama-thinya-nha. make well, make good the state or sense of feeling

yayayu waŋany, one state or sense of feeling

yayayu-wut’thuna-mirri rom, law or manner of doing things that affronts or assaults the state or sense of feeling

yayathama, carry, hold

yayi, [pronoun] he, she, it

yilimurru, [pronoun] we [all]

yorra, sleep, lay down, stay at

yoy, seat of the emotions [associated with lower abdomen]

yuli, usually always [continuous, habitual]

yunhi, that there

yurrigij, charcoal, black ashes
**ŋuthan-marrama**, raised [up] nurtured [by]

**raki**, string, fishing line, rope, roots

**rakuny-thirri**, lit. become dead; dying

**râli**, movement towards the speaker

**rapam**, ‘big name’ place

**raypirri-yun**, discipline, admonish, exhort, rebuke, reprimand

**ringij**, ceremonial group, place associated with ceremonial group

**rirrik-thun**, sick[ly], ill, unwell

**rom**, law, manner of doing things, habit, custom, ‘background history’

**rom-miriw**, without law, lacking sense, lacking discipline or moral guidance.

**ronji-yirri**, to return, go back

**rrambanji**, close, level, together, at one, the same

**Rroruwuy**, place name

**rrupiya**, money

**rumaru**, avoidance relationship, especially of son-in-law/mother-in-law

**rumbal**, body, torso; stem, trunk; true, truly, faithfully

**self-controlled**, from English used as a gloss for *djäl-gänanu-mirri*

**stricted**, from English, used as a gloss for *gumurr*

**tilip**, from English ‘tea leaf’; tea
wakingu, wild, belonging to no one, without kin

waku, [kinship term] wC, Zc

walala, they [plural]

wana (arm, front leg, wing)

wanha-mala, where to?

wā́ja, land, country, estate

wā́ja-wataju, country holders, estate owners

wayarr, ancestral forms, ancestral beings

waygany, one

Warramiri, proper name of a clan group, bāpurru

warwuyun, worry, grieve, be concerned [about]

watjū, dog [syn: wungan]

wekama, give

wiripu, different, of a different kind

wiripu’wiripu, [each] different, separate, of a different kind

wirrki, very [much so], more [intensely]

wo, or

wut’thun, affront, hit, assault

yaka, no, not
yaka-yun, to no or refuse [someone or something]

yän gurrupan, [expression] just giving

yapa [kinship term] Z

yaraju, ordinary, profane

yätj, bad, not good

yawarriny, initiated bachelors, unmarried young men

yidaki, didgeridoo

yindi, big

yindi-thirri, increase [in size, volume or weight]

yirralka, homeland, birth place

Yirritja, proper name of Moiety

yo, yes

Yolŋu, Aboriginal person from North East Arnhem Land

yolŋu'ylŋu, plural of Yolŋu

yukurra, [continuous progressive]

yurru, will, shall, should, must

yurru-yun, spat [out], [syn: yuduyun]

yutjuwala, small, little [bit]

yuwalk, true, body, torso, truly
Appendix 3: Genealogies

Figure 23: Genealogy Sheet 1
/End/