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# **WE ALL ONE MOB BUT DIFFERENT**

## **GROUPS, GROUPING AND IDENTITY IN A KIMBERLEY ABORIGINAL VILLAGE**

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

October 1991



## DECLARATION

Except where otherwise indicated  
this thesis is my own work.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'B. Moizo', written in a cursive style with a large loop at the end.

Bernard R. MOIZO

October 1991





## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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Initial research towards this thesis started in 1980 at the Department of Anthropology, University of Sydney. I was then a postgraduate student from the Departement d'Ethnologie et de Sociologie Comparative, Universite Paris X Nanterre, and I had been offered a Postgraduate scholarship from The Australian Department of Education under the European Award Program scheme. The year I spent at Sydney University has influenced my future research in Aboriginal Studies and I would like to take this opportunity to express my gratitude to all the members of the Sydney Department for their encouragement, support, and friendship at the time, in particularly Richard Wright, Peter White, Les Hiatt, Donald Gardner, Douglas Miles, Peter Hinton, Paul Gorecki, Paul Alexander and Francesca Merlan; I have to thank Alan Rumsey for drawing my attention to Fitzroy Crossing as a stimulating research area.

The first fieldwork I carried out in late 1980 and early 1981 at Fitzroy Crossing, West Kimberley, Western Australia, was made possible by a grant from the New South Wales Department of Education. This field trip inspired me to come back for further research in the same area.

In mid-1980 I visited the Australian National University for the first time. During my stay in Canberra I had the opportunity to meet Howard Morphy and Nicolas Peterson from the Department of Prehistory and Anthropology, Faculty of Arts. I also conducted library work at the then Australian Institute of Aboriginal Studies, where I met Myrna and Robert Tonkinson, and Penny Taylor. Despite the shivering experience of my first winter in Canberra, the warmth of their welcome convinced me to choose Canberra if I were able to return to Australia.

In 1985 I was granted a Ph.D. Scholarship from the Australian National University and joined the Department of Prehistory and Anthropology for 3 years. From the day we arrived my family and I have been taken care of in such a way that we always felt almost at home, and many of the Department staff became friends, making it a difficult time when we left.

I carried out extensive fieldwork supported by the Faculty of Arts, Australian National University and a grant from the Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies.

During fieldwork many people contributed to making our stay in Fitzroy Crossing a memorable one and almost as many supported me in my field research. It would be too long to list all those whose friendship played a major role during those 16 months, but they all should be thanked here and more particularly Rob Imber, Julie McCarthy, Wayne Jeffrey, David and Christine Wilson, Wayne Howard and the School staff.

All Junjuwa residents have been at one stage or another involved with my family or myself, either during leisure or work activities. I valued above all the friendship, kindness and patience of some of them to whom I was very close, mainly the Brooking family, the Andrews family, the Oscar family, the Green family, the Brown family, the Marr family, the Williams family, the Holloway family and the Middleton family. Without them this thesis would not be, and like the words in the song 'Fitzroy Crossing' of the Warumpi Band: 'I am sure I will be back again some day...'

In writing this thesis I am primarily indebted to Nicolas Peterson, my supervisor, for a close and stimulating supervision that followed me everywhere: I tried unsuccessfully to get away from it in New Caledonia, France, Thailand and the black and cold corridor of Childers Street. Nicolas Peterson extends his responsibilities as a supervisor far beyond the A.D. Hope building and his concerns for the well-being of my family and the kindness he displayed to us on many occasions has been mostly appreciated.

Debbie Rose and Howard Morphy were both my advisers but unfortunately, for different reasons and above all because of the delays in writing up, could not remain with it up until now. Howard Morphy's insightful comments and criticism on my pre-fieldwork research proposal helped me to clarify and expand my argument at the time. Debbie Rose's answers to my field reports were extremely valuable and helped me a lot in collecting the right type of information. Later, her encouragement in convincing me what I had to say was a thesis worth writing were crucial.

During the critical and sometimes traumatic moments of writing up over the years I benefited from the support of many fellow students. I am particularly grateful to Françoise Dussart always ready to cheer me up; to David Martin who introduced me to the mysterious world of computers and shared much information from his own fieldwork; to Julie Finlayson for her moral support; to Libi Gneccchi-Ruscione for her help during the latest stage, and finally to Margaret Burns for her careful proof-reading on the final draft done in record time.

Being a long-timer in the Department of Prehistory and Anthropology I had many occasions to appreciate the ever readiness to help and consistent good mood of Debbie McGrath and David McGregor who have both become good friends.

All the maps and figures have been drawn up with remarkable skill by Khun Nayana. I have to thank the Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies for granting me permission to use some of the photographs from the 'After two hundred years' photographic project.

Finally, I want to dedicate this thesis to my wife Christine and my daughters, Elodie, Geraldine and Mathilde who had to undergo the very traumatic experience of having me doing a second Ph.D., I should apologise to them for being so selfish in doing so but their love was what eventually got me through.





## ABSTRACT

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This thesis examines the development and maintenance of a fragile group identity at the community level among Aboriginal people in the West Kimberley in Western Australia. It focuses on the town-based Aboriginal settlement of Junjuwa in Fitzroy Crossing.

With no indigenous political structures relevant to the permanent co-residence of several hundreds of people the development and maintenance of a community sentiment powerful enough to allow the effective operation of the community as an administrative unit is problematic. While the material constraints of successive government policies have been a key limitation on people, indigenous identities, groupings and associations which pose obstacles to sustaining a commitment to the community are always present and constantly threatening it.

This thesis explores the bases of cohesion at the community level and the constant tension with sub-community loyalties of one kind or another. It begins with a consideration of aspects of the historical background that are crucial to understanding the contemporary situation, paying particular attention to the transformations in residence patterns brought about by the pastoral industry. The emergence of Junjuwa is described in the context of the pastoral industry in the 1960s, which forced many Aboriginal people into Fitzroy Crossing. This is followed by an analysis of the community constitution, the physical structure and the resident population. In the subsequent Chapter, the bases of group sentiments and the circumstances in which these were expressed and operated are analysed. Chapters six and seven examine the sub-groupings, associations and identities that are in constant tension with the community identity. Chapter eight concentrates on the leadership in the community and Chapter nine on the consequences of external interventions. In the final Chapter I discuss why the factors that make the emergence of a community sentiment at the level of associations like Junjuwa are not, at present, expendable to a regional level.



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## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

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AAPA	Aboriginal Affairs Planning Authority
ADC	Aboriginal Development Commission
AIM	Australian Inland Mission
ALS	Aboriginal Legal Service
ALT	Aboriginal Land Trust
AMAX	An American Mining and Exploration Company
CDEP	Community Development Employment Projects
DAA	Department of Aboriginal Affairs
DCH	Department of Community Health
DCS	Department for Community Services
DCW	Department for Community Welfare
DNW	Department of Native Welfare
DSS	Department of Social Security
FCPA	Fitzroy Crossing Progress Association
JCCM	Junjuwa Community Council Minutes
KCF	Kimberley Christian Fellowship
KLC	Kimberley Land Council
KLCC	Kimberley Law and Culture Centre
MWW	Marra Worra Worra
NAC	National Aboriginal Conference
SHC	State Housing Commission
UB	Unemployment Benefit
UN	United Nations



## FOREWORD

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The short glimpse of fieldwork that I had during my first visit to Australia when I was working on a theoretically oriented library thesis in French on Aboriginal mortuary customs inspired me to return to do research based on my own ethnographic work.

Knowing from experience the strong Anglo-Saxon empirical tradition I knew I had little chance to be recognised prior to proving myself in the field. This is why I came to enrol in a second Ph.D.

The fieldwork experience I subsequently had was so powerful and intense that I decided to include in my thesis a lot of everyday ethnography in order to have the reader share some of it with me. Further, I have often been frustrated while reading anthropological works by finding that the raw material, upon which this research is based, has been smothered by jargon, something I have been determined to avoid.

Although many references have been made to Aboriginal people I have used pseudonyms to preserve their anonymity, for two reasons. First, because most of my informants did not wish to be identified; second, because Fitzroy Crossing is a small remote town and what the people said to me might conceivably be used against them if taken out of its particular context, although with the passing of time this becomes less and less likely. For this same reason I have used pseudonyms for non-Aboriginal people as well.

Finally, the way I have transcribed colloquial English spoken by the people in the Kimberley is not the standard form of 'Aboriginal English', but corresponds to the way I heard it then with the local expressions that give to this form of English a distinctive flavour.

