

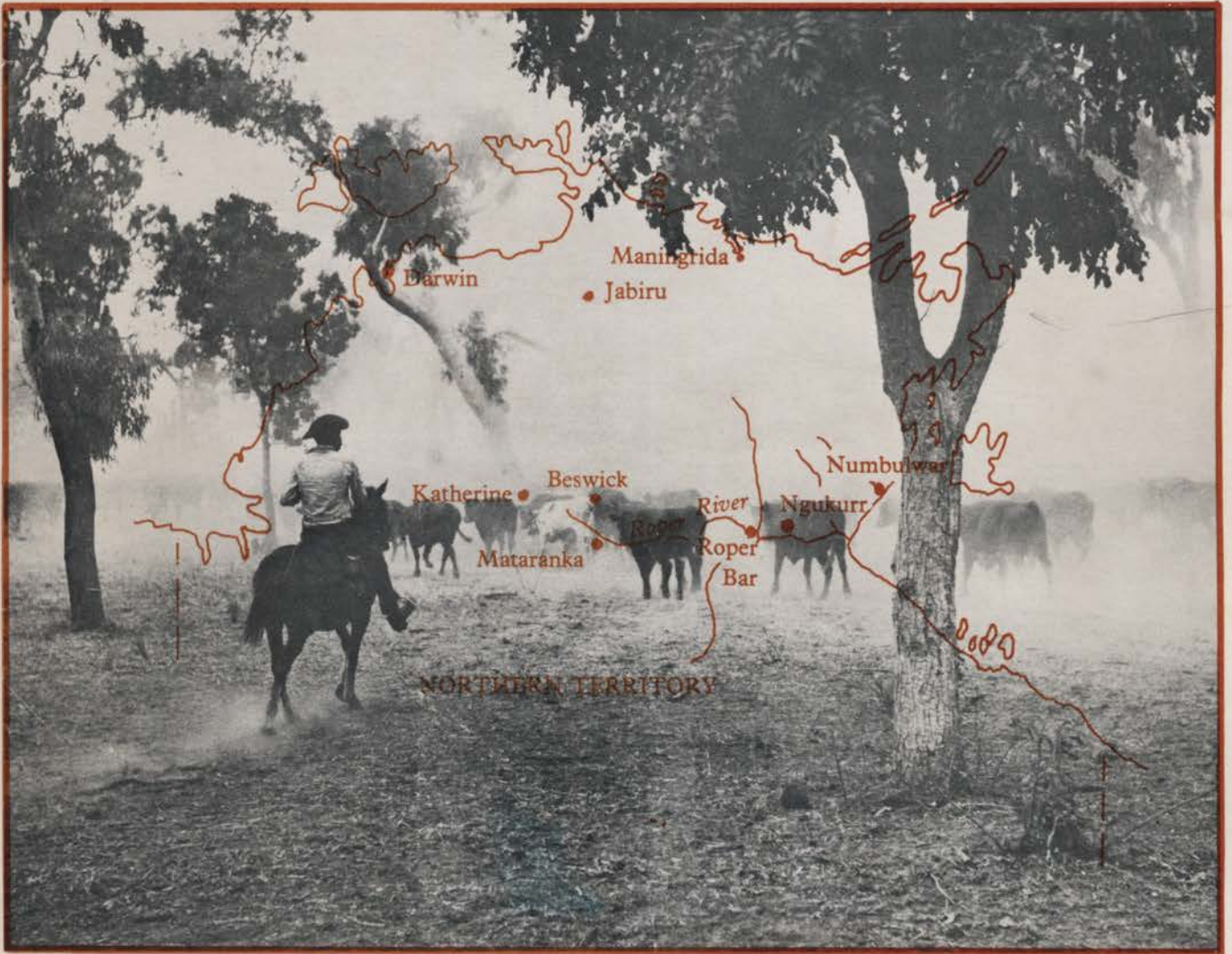
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YUGUL

An Arnhem Land Cattle Station

Steven Thiele



The Australian National University North Australia Research Unit

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An Arnhem Land Cattle Station



The Australian National University North Australia Research Unit
Monograph
Darwin 1982



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Dedication

To Duke who saw his dream collapse.

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Preface

This is a study of the formation and collapse of the Yugul Cattle Company (YCC), an Aboriginal-owned pastoral company set up at Ngukurr in south-eastern Arnhem Land. The involvement of remote Aborigines in a non-traditional enterprise has been little studied with the result that this important area of Aboriginal activity has been neglected in many current explanations and descriptions of the Aborigines' society and their position in Australia.

The scope of this work is strongly influenced by the belief that what happens on settlements can only be adequately explained by reference to Aboriginal-European relations in Australia as a whole, and especially to the role of governments which have played such a major part in determining the lives of Aborigines living in remote settlements. I have shown that the formation, establishment and collapse of the YCC were all heavily influenced by factors external to Ngukurr.

My introduction to Ngukurr and the YCC began in 1972 when I participated in a study of the pastoral potential of that area of Arnhem Land over which the YCC had applied for a pastoral lease. At that time I was working as an agronomist with the Animal Industry and Agriculture Branch of the Department of the Northern Territory. This involvement kindled my interest in Aboriginal studies in general and the role of pastoral ventures in settlement development in particular, and in 1974 I began an examination of the YCC. After being delayed by cyclone Tracy I arrived in Darwin in late May and at Ngukurr on 14 June 1975. My field work in the Northern Territory ended in March 1976.

Most of my field work was an active involvement in the daily routine of the YCC. On about half the working days I was at Ngukurr I acted as a stockman-cum-labourer, spending time mustering, fencing, going away from the settlement to get 'killers' (killing and butchering cattle) and doing many odd jobs around the YCC headquarters. Most of my time was spent with Aborigines with no other Europeans present.

My principal informant, here named Duke, was the driving force behind the establishment of the YCC and the most important traditional figure at Ngukurr. The close personal relationship established with him enabled me to cope with field work and to begin to enjoy living in an Aboriginal community.

My thesis took the description of the YCC only up to the time I left Ngukurr in February 1976. At this time the community was on the edge of major change, but I was unable to maintain sufficient contact with Ngukurr to know what was happening. In July 1981 I was able to visit Darwin for five weeks and, during this period, Ngukurr for eleven days to find out what had occurred in the final three years of the YCC. But I have retained the present tense, for example in chapter 4 where the principal reference is to events in the seventies, even though the past might now be more appropriate in some instances.

I have decided to use pseudonyms for most individuals and groups or simply to use titles. I have also discussed only those people whose impact on the YCC was such that to leave them out would have severely undermined the quality of my argument. While a detailed examination or exposure of the actions and attitudes of a variety of individuals, groups and organisations would have both added spice and been interesting in sociological terms, it would not have added anything substantial to my main task, an examination of the YCC. This omission was also in line with my attempt to preserve privacy as much as possible. It is also my opinion that the desire of many who write about Aborigines to tailor their work to further the 'Aborigines' cause' has been a major limitation to the description and analysis of contemporary Aboriginal life in Australia. I trust that this work escapes this drawback without adding to the many problems faced by Aborigines.

The YCC is only one of a number of Aboriginal-owned cattle projects in Australia. Others, such as those at Willowra, Pulumpa, Beswick, Bulman and Mt Allan all function with varying degrees of European involvement, financial success and Aboriginal interest and satisfaction. This work does not pretend to make any generalisations about Aboriginal cattle enterprises in particular or about Aboriginal enterprises in general. It is simply a study of the YCC.

In many places I have used the terms European and Aboriginal to refer to people and things. 'European' refers to non-Aboriginal Australians, and 'Aboriginal' means all Aborigines in Australia except where the context indicates otherwise. In some instances I talk only about remote or Ngukurr Aborigines. References to people as either European or Aboriginal do not imply that these categories are solidaristic. Both are heterogeneous and stratified. Further,

some Aborigines and some Europeans share a variety of interests; for example, support for political parties, adherence to Christianity, support for ways of life characteristic of small businessmen or public servants, the desire to raise wage levels and support for land rights and the maintenance of Aboriginal traditions. It follows that phrases like 'Europeans dominating Aborigines' or 'European control' should not be taken at face value. Some Europeans do not dominate Aborigines, some Aborigines are clearly aligned with European groupings that dominate both Aborigines and Europeans and some Aborigines align themselves with Europeans in order to better dominate other Aborigines.

When referring to things I have used the term Aboriginal or European tradition to refer to matters that stem essentially from either Western society or pre-contact Aboriginal society. The term Aboriginal refers to things that Aborigines now do, think about or possess. It follows that Councils, for example, may have their origins in European traditions, but, where Aborigines operate their Councils actively within these traditions, then these Councils must be seen as Aboriginal. I am not suggesting that these are the best definitions to use in all situations, but they do work here to clear up a confusion resulting from the differing meanings given the word Aboriginal.

Acknowledgements

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Thanks are due to my supervisors, Professor Nalson and Dr Raja Jayaraman, as well as other members of the Sociology and Politics departments of the University of New England who gave of their time.

Officers of the Department of Aboriginal Affairs helped me with information and advice. Ian Pitman and Len Richardson can be singled out in this respect.

Acknowledgement is due to the North Australia Research Unit which funded me to revisit Ngukurr, provided transport, living expenses and secretarial facilities.

A special thanks is due to Peter Loveday, Field Director of NARU, who suggested turning my thesis into a monograph.

Thanks are also due to Margrit Sedlacek and Debbie Hill for their patient typing.

Finally, Sue and Brian provided me with consistent support during the whole of this operation.

Abbreviations

AACM	Australian Agricultural Consulting and Management Company
ABTF	Aboriginal Benefit Trust Fund
ACF	Aboriginal Capital Fund
AIAS	Australian Institute of Aboriginal Studies
ALP	Australian Labor Party
BAE	Bureau of Agricultural Economics
CMS	Church Missionary Society
DAA	Department of Aboriginal Affairs
NT	Northern Territory
OAA	Office of Aboriginal Affairs
YCC	Yugul Cattle Company

1 Yugul and Ngukurr

Yugul cattle station was the earliest in the Northern Territory to be owned and operated by Aborigines and the first to collapse. Since then others have started, have struggled and survived. Although no one saw it at the time, Yugul seemed doomed almost from the outset. Its brief life began formally when it was incorporated in July 1971 under the ownership of Aborigines based at Ngukurr, a settlement on the Roper River which had been started many years before by the Anglican Church Missionary Society. The new company (YCC) started with funds provided by the Commonwealth government in October 1972 and work commenced on the station at the beginning of the dry season in 1973. Two years later, after two promising seasons, the enterprise began to fall to pieces. To understand its failure it is necessary to take into account the impact on it of the social arrangements of Ngukurr, the history of the settlement and factors external to the town, especially government policy and actions. It is indicative of much that happened in Aboriginal communities as the assimilationist policies of the preceding three decades were being replaced by policies of self-determination and self-management. The changes stimulated by these new policies are still taking place and the ambiguities and contradictions confronting and dividing many Aboriginal communities and their European helpers today were foreshadowed in the Yugul enterprise.

Ngukurr is a settlement of Aborigines in the south-eastern part of Arnhem Land. In the seventies the Aboriginal population of about 450 was variable, depending on seasonal movements of people in and out of the settlement, while about half of the people were under 15 years of age. A changing number of Europeans, but about 50 or 60 people in 1975-76, also lived in the settlement. It is approximately 325 km from Katherine by road and 677 km from Darwin. The settlement stands on the northern bank of the Roper River about 32 km downstream from Roper Bar police station, and about 120 km from its mouth. The only road access is impassable in the wet season because it crosses the Roper and Wilton Rivers.

The area immediately around Ngukurr is open woodland of the kind often found in the dry tropics of northern Australia. Further away, there are large areas of lancewood scrub, salt pans and ti-tree and paperbark swamps. The rainfall of 725 mm per annum makes it only marginal country for improved pasture and agriculture.

In physical terms, Ngukurr is similar to a small, isolated European town. Some things had changed by the time of my visit in 1981. A new shop, for instance, had been constructed, but the character of the town had stayed much the same. It has a hospital, a school, a church, an airstrip, a municipal office block, housing on streets laid out in a pattern, a general store, an oval and a basketball court, a power station, a sewerage system and reticulated electricity and water. Ngukurr's residents are employed to do many of the jobs that Europeans do in small towns. For example, there are teachers and teachers' aides, lay preachers and a minister, shopkeepers, nurses' aides, garbage collectors, plumbers and councillors. But the poverty of its inhabitants and the poor standard of many facilities distinguish it from most European towns. Many houses are iron shacks, there are few cars, no roads are sealed or kerbed, the shop is a rusty, leaking Nissen hut, and, in general, maintenance is minimal. Few houses are equipped with stoves, refrigerators, washing machines or toilets. Lawns and gardens are almost completely absent. Even though the areas inhabited by the fifty-odd Europeans on the settlement do not show signs of similar poverty they often present a picture of untidiness.

Another characteristic of Ngukurr is its economic 'artificiality'. In one sense, Ngukurr is an historical accident. Aborigines moved there for various reasons and were trapped. They could not return to a traditional way of life, and nor could they enter the wider Australian society. In another sense, it is more than just a part of Australia's past surviving in the present. It continues to exist, at least in part, because of the contemporary domination of Aborigines of which it is itself a part. In these terms, Ngukurr is obviously real, but in terms of the wider capitalist-orientated economy it is artificial. If it was not for the 'Aboriginal problem' in Australia it is doubtful if Ngukurr would continue to exist, at least in its present form. It is maintained by the government for essentially political reasons.

Its artificiality is first evident to a visitor in the lack of economic activity based on the utilisation of local natural resources. The impression is that if Ngukurr had been set up anywhere else in Australia its economy need not have been greatly different. There are no mining, tourist or fishing ventures, no agriculture or horticulture and no manufacturing or processing industries. And Ngukurr is not a financial, shopping or administrative centre for the whole Roper River region. The one exception to this was the cattle project run by the YCC. This enterprise was established by the government in a vain attempt to establish conditions conducive to self-sustaining economic growth at Ngukurr.

The ostensible aim of the project was the promotion of economic development at Ngukurr through the provision of wages, meat and profits. Many Aborigines and also the Europeans involved, hoped that in the long term the operation of the YCC, and proposed spinoff ventures such as barramundi fishing, would provide Ngukurr with a semi-independent economic base. Although this aim was sincerely held, some Aborigines and Europeans supported the YCC for reasons other than the economic and social development of the Ngukurr Aboriginal community as a whole. These reasons, and their consequences, are important factors in an explanation of the establishment and operation of the YCC.

The cattle venture began vigorously and generated considerable Aboriginal and European enthusiasm and support. The first two years of operation were productive and free from major problems and by the end of the 1974 dry season it looked as if the YCC would be moderately successful. However, this was not to be and in 1976 the project began to collapse slowly. By late 1976 it had almost reverted to a low key hunting-style operation of the kind that existed prior to 1968. In June 1979 it officially ceased to function.

Those involved with the YCC gave differing reasons for its collapse. The Aborigines blamed the Europeans, suggesting that if they had been prepared to allocate more money and had been willing to give them a chance to become more involved in planning and management, the company would have run smoothly. The Europeans, on the other hand, tended to find fault with the Aborigines, asserting that the major cause of failure was Aboriginal incompetence and inability to work hard. There was some truth in both of these explanations but the YCC failed for much deeper reasons. These lie in the history of contact between the two societies, European and Aboriginal, and the complex sets of relations that now exist within Aboriginal society and between Aborigines and Europeans.

2 Europeans and Aborigines

Three broad stages can be distinguished in the history of contact between Europeans and Aborigines, stages exemplified in the Northern Territory as in the rest of Australia. These stages are neglect, direct control and, more recently, indirect control. The first phase of contact was or, more accurately, ended with the conquest of various Aboriginal groupings and the control of their land by Europeans. European governments were then faced with the demoralised remnants of Aboriginal civilisation (Rowley, 1972b; Evans, Saunders and Cronin, 1975). Even where conquest through violent means did not occur the conditions leading to demoralisation were present. Having allowed the European pioneers to force the Aborigines into submission, governments then neglected to address themselves to the problems that dispossession of land and maltreatment produced (Stanner, 1969, 18-29). However, this neglect was conditional upon Aboriginal docility. Where Aborigines demonstrated that they were not prepared to accept European authority and control over land, the governments adopted, or turned a blind eye to, punitive expeditions. As Rowley writes:

What was involved and of long custom was not merely the killing of Aborigines by settlers, but killing by police, an 'administrative method' known to their superiors but condoned (Rowley, 1972b, 288; also Stanner, 1969, 13; Robinson and York, 1977; Reynolds, 1972).

This conditional neglect of Aborigines is an important feature of early Australian history (see Hasluck, 1970, 121). When land usurpation was complete and many Aborigines had been 'settled' in isolated areas and institutions, they became, in general, economically and politically unimportant to the capitalist development of Australia. They came or were made to depend upon government handouts or the largesse of various missionary bodies. In these circumstances the government could, by and large, afford to neglect the problems of the Aborigines.

However, while neglect may have been the dominant characteristic of the approach of governments to the Aborigines, there were other more positive factors which structured Aboriginal-European relations. For instance, governments and other European organisations often attempted to destroy the remaining elements of Aboriginal society and culture and to resocialise Aborigines so that they would become Christians or be able to enter the wider Australian capitalist economy as workers (Hartwig, 1976, 24; Rowley, 1972b, 86-107). On the other hand, where pastoralists could readily utilise Aboriginal labour, for example, in the cattle industry, they often benefitted by maintaining the Aborigines' traditional economy that helped produce and reproduce a supply of cheap labour.

The initial phase of Aboriginal-European contact in the remote northern areas of Australia cannot be simply categorised as one of conquest by force. Vast tracts of Arnhem Land were occupied by European pastoralists for only a short period after the 1870s and many areas were not settled at all (Duncan, 1967). Settlements were often established by missionaries, and in many cases Aborigines were not openly forced to live on them. It appears that Aborigines drifted into, settled on or moved away from settlements for a variety of reasons, such as fear of European settlers, attraction to goods, to meet kin or in submission to missionary influence and power. In some instances Aborigines may even have had a say in the siting and operation of settlements.

However, the general nature of the relationship that developed between Europeans and Aborigines on settlements is clear. Settlements were planned and operated by Europeans largely for their own purposes. Certainly, Europeans were always in a superordinate power position and many of them had strict ideas about 'civilising' and Christianising Aborigines. Further, the power of Europeans on settlements depended, in part, upon factors external to the settlements, such as, the Aborigines' fear of European settlers or European police.

Even though the ostensible aim of many Europeans may have been philanthropic, they also acted, consciously or unknowingly, as agents of social control. They attempted to pacify and settle Aborigines and to promote the legitimisation of the European governments, their instrumentalities, especially the police, and other institutions relating to such things as education, religion and the law.

While many remote Aborigines were not conquered militarily in the same fashion as those in the southern areas of Australia, they were certainly neglected in a similar way by governments. It was not until the 1950s, when the policy of assimilation was vigorously promoted, that government neglect finally came to an end.

From the late 1930s, assimilation became the dominant policy of governments in Australia (Elkin, 1974, 369). However, it was not until the 1950s that the Commonwealth and State governments committed many resources towards achieving their stated policies (Hartwig, 1976, 29).

During this phase, which ended in the late 1960s, the Aboriginal traditional economy was further broken down under pressure from institutionalisation, enforced European schooling, cultural domination and manipulation and economic dependency. Many Aborigines in urban areas moved into the Australian working class, often 'passing' into European society. In as far as this has happened, any analysis of the position of urban Aborigines in Australia must take into account their class as well as their racial status.

At the same time, and partly as a result of the above changes, Aborigines became more vocal and politically active. With the support of some European groups, including many anthropologists, Aborigines began to demand equal rights (see, for example, R.M. Berndt and C. Berndt, 1965; Elkin, 1944; Horner, 1974). It became difficult for governments to neglect Aborigines.

The government could counter and defuse such political agitation, actual or potential, at little political or economic cost by granting Aborigines legal equality. In the Northern Territory, discriminatory legislation ended in 1964 with the adoption of a new Social Welfare Ordinance which, according to Rowley (1972c, 406), resulted in the 'withdrawal of the whole superstructure of quite rigid controls'. The exploitation of Aborigines - the usurpation of land and the exploitation of labour - was completed or no longer necessary and legal inequalities were not needed to maintain European dominance. The government could propose that Aborigines were free to assimilate (or later integrate) into European society on equal terms with Europeans. For many Europeans, political ideologies, especially the myth of equal opportunity, masked past injustice and the class and racist nature of the society into which Aborigines were supposed to move.

In the 1950s the Commonwealth government began to take an active role in the running of remote Aboriginal settlements in the Northern Territory (Cole, 1975b, 68-89). Settlements were developed into institutions that were supposed to prepare Aborigines for assimilation (DAA, 1974, 4). Most government-sponsored activities, especially European schooling and training of various kinds, were directed towards this end. Control of Aboriginal activities was direct: that is, by Europeans for non-Aboriginal purposes, according to the dominant Australian legal system and administrative rules. There was little delegation of authority to traditional Aboriginal leaders; they and their laws were largely ignored. The small amount of responsibility given to Aborigines was in line with the view that this was a prerequisite for assimilation.

Despite clear intentions and actions, assimilation did not take place. The reasons given by scholars for this failure range from cultural incompatibility to the self-perpetuating nature of institutional arrangements and poverty. All have some merit. What has been overlooked is that the nature of the wider Australian society prevents both mobility off settlements and assimilation. At first glance, remote Aborigines may seem as remote from the stratification system of the wider Australian society as they do from Australia's major urban centres. This is not so. For most remote Aborigines, the alternative to settlement or outstation life is to become a worker, often underemployed or unemployed in an urban area. This is an unsatisfactory and traumatic experience even for those Aborigines who are well educated in a European sense (see Rowley, 1972c; Gilbert, 1973; Lippman, 1973). Just as negroes in America are locked into ghetto life and are forced to accept the most menial occupations (Anderson, 1974, 290-6), so are Aborigines in Australia locked into ghettos such as those in the suburb of Redfern in Sydney. Although Aborigines have strong attachments to 'place' their settlements can be seen to some extent as ghettos in remote areas. Aborigines cannot be said to choose to live on settlements (see, e.g., Sandall, 1973, 3), which must be viewed, at least in part, as situations of class and racial domination by 'remote control'.

In December 1972, a new phase of Aboriginal-European relations was announced, though not started, by the self-determination policy of the newly elected Australian Labor party (Cavanagh, 1974, 12). While this new phase became evident with the election of the ALP at the commonwealth level, it did not result directly from this change in the political party in power. Before December 1972, the Liberal-Country party had been moving slowly in a similar direction. For example, in January 1972, the prime minister (Liberal leader William McMahon) stated that:

The Government recognises the rights of individual Aborigines to

effective choice about the degree to which and the pace at which they come to identify themselves with that (Australian) society,

and that

The role of governments should increasingly be to enable them (Aborigines) to achieve their goals by their own efforts (Quoted in Coombs, 1972, 1).

As Coombs notes: 'These are important changes in the stated philosophy and objectives of policy'. Indeed, they are a good indication that the LCP government was abandoning its policy of assimilation in favour of allowing Aborigines to lead a life separate from other Australians. The parties never openly acknowledged this change, but T.C. Lovegrove from the DAA notes that 'In the early 1970s the policies of the day were beginning to be questioned more and more' (1978, 10). This is supported by the fact that, when the Liberal and National parties were returned to power in 1975, they continued to promote a policy somewhat similar to that of the ALP, though the label for policy was carefully changed to 'self-management' to satisfy the new interests now influential in government.

The goal of separate development for Aborigines has not been acknowledged by either political party, but it is clearly a consequence of the policies of self-determination and self-management. Now, although these policies are quite recent innovations, the notion of separate development can be said to be implied in the very idea of the establishment of remote settlements like Ngukurr. Recent policy changes have simply brought policy into line with reality.

Hence, after years of neglect and attempts to assimilate or integrate Aborigines into the wider Australian society, the Commonwealth government officially proposed that Aborigines should be allowed to determine or manage their own future, a policy that many Aborigines, and some Europeans, have been demanding for many years. It would appear then, that the Commonwealth government, the Aborigines and many Europeans are in basic agreement on this issue. This is a conjunction that requires critical attention.

Now, rather than accept this policy as an altruistic gesture of the government stemming from some newly acquired knowledge about the desire of Aborigines for a separate life-style and identity, it is pertinent to look at changes in the social situation that have been responsible for such a policy. Such changes have indeed occurred and the recent changes in policy by both major political parties have been in response to them.

Government policy appears to be designed to serve three main interests: first, to maintain full access to mineral deposits in areas where remote Aborigines live; second, to minimise overseas criticism of the treatment and status of Aborigines; and, finally, to reduce the potential for conflict that is inherent in the Aborigines' position in Australian society, a question of social control.

Despite the Commonwealth government's recognition of both the right of Aborigines to determine many aspects of their lives and future, and of rights to land through the Aboriginal Land Rights Act 1976, it has reserved the final say on mining matters. The relevant section of this act which perpetuates this situation is the so-called 'national interest' clause (Section 40, 1(16)). Under the Land Rights Act, Aborigines do have increased bargaining power, especially in relation to royalties and covenants, and they can delay mining ventures at a number of stages, such as exploration (Sections 40, 45, 46). However, the Commonwealth government retains the right to override Aboriginal objections if it feels that the 'national interest' is threatened.

The Commonwealth government is sensitive to overseas criticism of the treatment of Aborigines, especially since it has taken a strong (verbal) stand against racial oppression in Africa. The government can rebut overseas criticism by pointing to improvements in the Aborigines' situation. In reality these changes may amount to little more than improvements in the physical living standard, that is, more and better houses, hospitals and sewerage, and paying lip service to a policy of self-determination or self-management. But it is doubtful whether the government gains much by responding to overseas criticism or suffers from ignoring it. The situation in South Africa shows that international criticism may not be successful in promoting racial equality if important economic interests are threatened. Ironically, changes in the Aborigines' position in Australian society do not necessarily threaten powerful vested interests. Given their peripheral economic position and their relatively small numbers, improvements to their situation do not necessarily threaten the interests of those in power, although some taxpayers and mining companies may object to the rising contributions expected from them. In this situation, elite liberalism, though rather 'wishy-washy' and often based on

guilt feelings, is an important factor in shaping policy for the treatment of Aborigines.

The question of the social control of Aborigines is complex and incorporates matters pertaining to mineral development and overseas criticism. I argue that Aborigines are no longer politically irrelevant to the functioning of Australian society and, although it is true that the Aborigines have only limited direct political and economic power, a combination of factors has forced the government to deal with the 'Aboriginal problem' in a new way. Besides overseas criticism, these factors include the Aboriginal vote in marginal rural electorates, increasing Aboriginal political sophistication and changes in the balance of power in the European political system.

The importance of the issue of social control in the new policy changes is demonstrated by the following quotation from Justice Woodward. He notes that one aim of the land rights legislation, a central component of the new government approach, is 'the promotion of social harmony and stability within the wider Australian community by removing, so far as possible, the legitimate causes of complaint of an important minority group within that community' (Woodward, 1974, 2). A relevant question here is why has the government only acted recently to give land rights, when the lack of them has been a 'legitimate cause of complaint' for a century or more?

The change in policy was facilitated by a decline in the power of the rural political lobby in the Commonwealth government, a product of changes in terms of trade, growth of other sectors of the Australian economy and a relative decline in the rural-urban population ratio. This lobby lost its power at the Commonwealth level to dictate the terms on which issues relating to rural land ownership and control and the use of Aboriginal labour would be decided (Aitkin, 1972, 318; Mauldon and Schapper, 1974, 29).

The new policies of self-determination and self-management can be seen, in part, as a rationalization and a justification for unequal development. In this sense, the promotion of these new policies is an implicit acceptance on the part of the government that the integration of Aborigines, especially those in remote areas, into the wider European-dominated social and economic system is not possible or at best, likely to take a very long time. Some effects of this recent approach are: that the geographic isolation of remote Aborigines can be maintained, that conflict arising from political and cultural divisions within the Australian Aboriginal population as a whole, and between Aborigines and Europeans, will be minimised and that the political conflict which results from direct government administration can be reduced as Aborigines accept more responsibility for the operation of settlements and European staff are withdrawn.

By raising physical living standards on settlements, promoting an ideology of self-determination and separate development and influencing Aborigines to accept that separate development will bring benefits, the government reduces the likelihood of large-scale migration to towns and cities. Keeping Aborigines on settlements serves two major purposes. First, it prevents social conflict in those urban centres where settlement and perhaps some integration of Aborigines would otherwise occur. Second, it minimises the growth of class and racial consciousness that would flow from living in an urban area. That is, it separates remote Aborigines from the oppressed European groupings and urban Aborigines in geographic, ideological and political ways. For example, Aboriginal claims to land under the Land Rights Act require that Aborigines establish traditional links to that land. Those Aborigines who gain control of land under this Act distinguish their interests from those of urban Aborigines. Remote Aborigines tend to focus on tradition and separate development and see urban Aborigines, at least in part, as aliens.

Recent policies not only operate to keep Aborigines on settlements and to prevent the possibility of Aboriginal solidarity, they also have an impact at the settlement level. When remote Aborigines fully accept the notion of separate development, their interests and energy will be confined to issues internal to settlements or outstations, rather than being brought to bear on the wider Australian society, or on issues at that level which affect their situation. Further, Aborigines can be blamed for the failure of any enterprises, facilities or services for which they accept, or have been given, responsibility.

The above discussion shows how the government benefits by the maintenance of settlements in the contemporary context. In this sense, settlements are more than relics of a by-gone colonial era or sites where 'primitive' culture exists, for they are being maintained, in part, by government for the protection of European interests. In this sense, settlements are an integral part of contemporary Australian society.

Separate development can be a mystifying aim if remote Aborigines are not aware that their desire to be separate stems, in part, from the fact that the major alternative to living in settlements - entry into the dominant European economy - is blocked. Many have reacted by moving from the settlements to homeland centres (or outstations as they are also called) dependent on the settlements for basic services, but often physically distant from them and supporting only small numbers of closely related people. Aborigines, in social structural and social psychological terms, are rejected by European society and it is therefore only to be expected that they will respond to this by tending to see their future in terms of separate development.

Aboriginal feelings that separation is in their interests also flow from the very nature and existence of settlements themselves. Although settlements were intended to promote assimilation, they tended to have the opposite effect. Some scholars have suggested that settlements produced institutionalised 'settlement people' whose aims, aspirations and ideologies are relevant to settlement life, not to entry into a competitive capitalistic society.

Emphasis on aspects of traditional culture is a striking feature of scholarly writings and the commonly held view of both Aborigines and Europeans on the question of remote settlements. Some anthropologists seem to take special pride in reporting that Aboriginal culture is still 'alive and kicking'. For instance, this is the underlying theme of Tonkinson's monograph Jigalong Mob (Tonkinson, 1974).

Further, there is a powerful reluctance on the part of many Aborigines and Europeans to suggest anything about Aboriginal traditions that is in the least critical. Indeed, there is a growing romanticism and sentimentality towards Aboriginal traditions. It is this state of affairs that has led Sandall to comment: 'The suspicious thing about [Aboriginal] culture in Australia is that everyone is for it' (Sandall, 1973, 4).

Aborigines retain or cling to traditions for a variety of reasons related to their contact with Europeans, some positive and some negative. Some Aborigines focus on tradition because of their psychological condition. Attempts to ameliorate an 'identity crisis' that stems from their subordinate position in Australia often take the form of a 'return' to tradition. An example of this point is provided by a poster issued for National Aboriginal Week, 1978, by the National Aborigines' Day Observance Committee which is titled: 'Cultural Revival is Survival'. In this sense, the Aborigines' focus on tradition is negative.

On the other hand, where Aborigines benefit, or think that they benefit, by accentuating or promoting traditions, then they do so for positive reasons. Land rights illustrates this point. The granting of these rights is justified in terms of the special links Aborigines have with specific tracts of land. Control over land is conditional upon Aborigines demonstrating that their traditional affiliations with it are intact. But such control entails access to economic resources such as pastures, minerals and tourist attractions. That this motivates Aborigines to emphasise tradition is obvious. Recent changes in Commonwealth government policy which stress the notions of self-determination and self-management encourage Aborigines further in this regard. But it is not yet clear whether the traditional styles of living associated with outstations as distinct from the larger settlement communities are being actively promoted by the Commonwealth government. It appears to be dubious about the long term implications of the outstation movement. In a recent annual report, the Department of Aboriginal Affairs noted only the following policy direction under the heading 'Decentralized communities':

'The Department provides assistance to these groups, in support of Aboriginal initiatives, rather than itself promoting decentralization' (DAA, 1978, 14).

The importance of non-traditional economic and social activities is much greater on large settlements than on outstations. Here new political institutions have arisen which operate on formal lines, such as settlement Councils and Progress Associations. These institutions organise a great range of activities to do with such things as settlement beautification, sewerage, garbage collection, shops, maintenance and repair, housing and office work. Ownership and control of settlement resources tends to be along communal lines and is administered by a freely elected settlement Council. It is clear that the Commonwealth government actively promotes this style of development, its important feature being that it is neither modern and capitalist nor traditional and subsistence. The consequence of changing from a policy of assimilation to one of self-determination is that Aborigines who were prevented from developing new authority structures to handle modern-sector activities in the assimilationist period and from adapting traditional authority structures for that purpose have

been left with a weakened leadership and have no strong settlement institutions for making the decisions that are now thrust upon them by the self-determination and self-managing policies.

3 Ngukurr and the CMS

Ngukurr was established by Europeans as a consequence of pastoral settlement in the Roper River area. Cattle from Queensland were overlanded through this area in 1872 and by the 1880s a number of cattle stations were established both south and north of the Roper River. These caused great destruction of Aboriginal life and social organisation in the area.

In 1906 the Bishop of North Queensland recommended that churches in Australia take a more active role in Aboriginal affairs. He said:

A previous speaker at this [Australian Church] Congress has said that the 'British were put by God into Australia to preach the Gospel to the heathen ...'. I have never heard a more complete condemnation of the stewardship of the Australian people. We have developed the country, and we have civilised it, but we have certainly done very little to preach the Gospel to the people we have dispossessed. The blacks have been shot and poisoned while they were wild and dangerous. They are now left to kill themselves with white vices where they have been 'tamed' .. but very few have received at our hands, either justice or consideration ... (Cole, 1977, 181).

Partly as a result of the bishop's words, the Church Missionary Society (CMS), an organisation associated with the Church of England, established a number of settlements in Arnhem Land. Ngukurr, or Roper River Mission as it was then called, was the first to be established in 1908, and Oenpelli, Mumbulwar and Emerald River (on Groote Eylandt) were set up later. The prime motives for establishing Ngukurr were humanitarian and evangelical.

As soon as Ngukurr was established, many Aborigines moved there from a wide area around the settlement (Cole, n.d. 6). The Aboriginal population then fluctuated as Aborigines moved to and from Ngukurr for a variety of reasons. First, the Aborigines used Ngukurr as a refuge from European settlers (Bern, 1974, 79). Second, by 1908, Aboriginal society in this region was so affected that those who moved to Ngukurr could be referred to as detribalised. Such a state of social disorganisation further prompted the Aborigines to travel to Ngukurr. Third, the CMS made efforts to attract and to settle Aborigines. Cole notes that the 'basic policy adopted by the CMS ...for the accomplishment of its aims was institutionalization' (Cole, 1977, 182). Lastly, the Aborigines gathered at Ngukurr voluntarily because they had kinfolk there or because they sought European food and goods.

The CMS maintained direct and strict control over all modern sector affairs. C. Berndt has summarised the general approach of the CMS. She writes:

In contrast [to the Methodist missionaries], the Church Missionary Society stations at Oenpelli and Groote Eylandt adopted a more rigid policy from the start, ... Aboriginal culture was negatively valued, and the Aborigines encouraged to model their behaviour in all respects fundamentally on that of European missionaries: they could not change their physical appearance, but they could, and should, change all the rest (Berndt, C., 1961, 23).

Specifically in regard to Ngukurr, Bern writes, that the Ngukurr mission had a strict discipline, which it enforced by a variety of sanctions including fines, removal of privileges and expulsion. Church attendance was compulsory, and the missionaries controlled the amount of money people received, and the amount and type of labour available. They interfered in all aspects of daily life from personal hygiene to child rearing (Bern, 1976, 213).

Stories told to me by Aborigines about this period support the view that control by the CMS was strict and encompassing and that their method of solving almost all disputes involved reference to Christian scripture.

This domination was eased in the 1960s, but the CMS continued to maintain a strong direct and indirect influence over settlement affairs. In 1968, the CMS handed control of Ngukurr to the Commonwealth government, but the new administrators were neither willing nor well enough prepared to impose the same type of rigid discipline as the CMS. For this reason, 1968 can be taken as the end of the period of direct European control at Ngukurr. It was at this time, and not in 1972, that federal government policy began to swing away from an assimilationist and integrationist line.

The CMS followed a pattern of operation at Ngukurr similar to that adopted by Europeans on many other remote Aboriginal settlements. For example, its representatives were keen to promote change at the level of individual Aborigines. Rowley discussed this generally in an examination of the Bleakely Report of 1929. He writes:

The Aboriginal was the pupil; he would have to learn, and have to earn, in some not very clear manner, his civic rights. In fact, the document provided that individual Aborigines would move from Aboriginal into non-Aboriginal society (Rowley, 1972b, 330).

Cole's short history of Ngukurr, published by the Church Missionary Historical Publications Trust clearly demonstrates this point. The only mention of Aborigines in this publication is to individuals who were baptised, confirmed, or married in the CMS church or who worked closely with the missionaries. There is no discussion of Aborigines in terms of their membership of tribal or language groupings. Cole's writing on the general situation faced by the Aborigines is limited to the CMS's opinions about the progress, or reversal, of its attempts to pacify and convert Aborigines and to get them to become diligent and permanent settlement dwellers. To the CMS, all Ngukurr Aborigines were characterised in terms of their being residents at Ngukurr. They were the flock, the CMS was the shepherd. The traditional status of Aborigines was largely disregarded (Cole, 1977, 191).

Cole is aware of the lack of attention given by the CMS to the promotion of change at other than the level of the individual. He noted:

Sociological development, however, has not been the primary aim of the Church Missionary Society at Roper River [Ngukurr]. Its main objective has been the winning of Aborigines for Christ and building them up within the community of the Church with their mutual responsibilities to God and to their fellows (Cole, n.d., 28).

Indeed, the CMS at Ngukurr was not even aware of the social changes it was inadvertently promoting. As Cole stated:

While it was obvious that acculturation was taking place at the material level, the deeper implications of settled life on the social patterns of the Aborigines were not apparent to the Anglican missionaries working in Arnhem Land (Cole, 1977, 192).

It is not surprising, therefore, to find that the CMS made little attempt to develop any settlement-wide Aboriginal authority structures at Ngukurr. The CMS was quite clear about the direction social change ought to be taking. Not only should individuals have their souls saved from the Devil they also had to be trained to enter European society, or at least changed to the point where they had a 'choice' in this regard. Any Aboriginal authority structures could only have operated to thwart these plans.

The Aborigines could do little to prevent their domination by the CMS, for they not only came from a diversity of backgrounds - for instance, ten different language groupings were represented at Ngukurr - but their societies had been greatly disrupted by European settlement prior to their coming to Ngukurr. Under these circumstances they had great difficulty in organising to oppose the control of the CMS. These factors are summed up in the following quotation from Bern. He writes:

The traditional beliefs, practices, norms, and sanctions of Aboriginal society do not, on the whole, support the autonomy of Ngukurr politics or its polity (Bern, 1974, 29).

Because of the conviction of the CMS and the lack of Aboriginal opposition, the influence of the missionaries penetrated to quite petty levels in the lives of the Aborigines. For example, Dyer, a CMS missionary who worked at both Oenpelli and Ngukurr, wrote:

I have settled many and stopped plenty of fights, and at their [the Aborigines'] request have judged, and administered punishment, and they have generally been satisfied with it (Cole, 1975a, 34).

Through actions of this kind, the missionaries at Ngukurr became involved in the minutiae of settlement life. They initiated and managed all modern sector activities and they rewarded or sanctioned Aboriginal behaviour in this sector. In time, many Aborigines accepted this role of the CMS as legitimate and they turned to the CMS to solve many of the mundane problems they faced in their day-to-day lives on the settlement.

The period of CMS control at Ngukurr is best examined in two parts - one before and the other after the 1950s. Before the 1950s many Ngukurr Aborigines had a semi-permanent residence, spending the wet season on the settlement and travelling back to their own country for hunting and cult activities in the dry season (this and three following paragraphs based on

interviews with Leske, Cole, n.d.). Various tribal groupings moved to Ngukurr at different times while some shifted away when new settlements were formed. For example, in the 1940s some Ritharrngu and Balamumu people came to Ngukurr and stayed and Aborigines from the Rose River moved to Ngukurr in 1949. In 1952 the latter group moved to the newly established Numbulwar settlement.

As a result of these movements, the population of Ngukurr changed markedly on both a seasonal and a year-to-year basis. In 1909 the CMS reported that the number of Aboriginal residents fluctuated from 70 to 200. In 1939 only 93 Aborigines were living at Ngukurr, but this had risen to 250 by 1957. The population in June 1967, just prior to the departure of the CMS, was 227.

An important feature of Ngukurr Aboriginal demography was that despite the marked fluctuations in population a small number of Aborigines lived more or less permanently on the settlement almost from the time it was established. These Aborigines, some of whom were important traditional figures, worked very closely with the missionaries and were deeply influenced by them. Many were baptised and married in the Ngukurr church and some became lay preachers and Sunday school teachers. They became the permanent settlement workforce and were trained as, for example, mechanics, carpenters and cooks. Their descendants spent many of their early years in the settlement dormitory and were educated by CMS teachers. Bern, who did field work at Ngukurr in 1970, called these descendants the core group and its members play an important part in contemporary Ngukurr society.

Prior to the 1950s, the missionaries kept strict control over all modern sector activities at Ngukurr. The Aborigines had no official say in modern sector affairs and little unofficial influence. However, missionary domination was tempered by benevolence, paternalism and the logistical, financial and staffing problems associated with managing a remote settlement. Ngukurr was understaffed, underprovisioned and underequipped and the staff argued strongly and often amongst themselves. Nevertheless, their impact on the Aborigines, especially the core group, was considerable.

In the 1950s a number of factors combined to bring about extensive changes at Ngukurr. First, the assimilation policy adopted by the Commonwealth government in the 1930s, began to have an impact at the level of remote Aboriginal settlements. As a result, the CMS became closely involved in promoting government initiatives designed to educate and train Aborigines so that they would (hopefully) be able to enter wider Australian society. Cole suggests that the major impetus for this change began in 1947 and his comments indicate that the CMS had few hesitations in backing the government's new approach. He writes:

The year 1947 was a landmark in the progress of Missions in the Northern Territory, including C.M.S. Roper River [Ngukurr]. In that year Professor A.P. Elkin ... was instrumental in calling a conference of representatives of the missions and urging them to help implement the new Government plan for the assimilation of Aborigines into the Australian way of life. Work should be provided for the people, wages paid, and shops should be opened so that the Aborigines in the Reserves would learn to run their own lives and that of their own communities within the framework of the Mission. Larger Government grants for capital buildings and for approved personnel were promised (Cole, n.d., 22-3).

As a consequence of these positive government initiatives, CMS staff at Ngukurr increased and a building program was instituted. The CMS concentrated on educating and training Aborigines, so it was not surprising to find, for instance, that by 1957 Ngukurr 'had one of the most modern engineering workshops to be found in the Territory outside Darwin where Aborigines were trained as carpenters and mechanics ...' (Cole, n.d., 25).

In 1956 a shop was opened, electricity was reticulated to the homes of Aborigines and moving pictures began to be regularly shown. A water reticulation service had already been constructed. In 1951 the CMS began paying five shillings per week for Aboriginal workers and over the next few years Ngukurr began to operate on a cash economy. This gave the Aborigines a measure of independence and, in general, the control of the CMS began to diminish, especially in relation to the mundane day-to-day affairs of the Aborigines. But, as Bern notes of this period:

The policy changes had less effect on the overall management of the settlements. Those who staffed the settlements continued to see their role as primarily regulatory and retained their paternal orientation

(Bern, 1976, 213).

The CMS could not easily withdraw from its position of authority and domination even if it had wanted to do so because the Aborigines still depended on mission staff and could not easily fill this role themselves.

The changes to the settlement that resulted from the assimilation policy influenced the Aborigines to stay permanently at Ngukurr. By the late 1950s most had become used to settlement life and had come to see many features of it as desirable, even necessary. In 1956, for the first time, the majority of the Aborigines decided to stay at Ngukurr over the dry season. In the words of the CMS Superintendent at that time, the Aborigines were 'trapped'. They had become permanent settlement dwellers unable to move easily back to a traditional way of life and found it extremely difficult to move into European dominated towns.

This permanency resulted in a strengthening of the European-orientated activities and beliefs of the Aborigines that had been slowly developing at Ngukurr since 1908. It also heralded a series of events culminating in the withdrawal of the CMS from Ngukurr in 1968.

First, the legal power of the CMS was curtailed, especially by the 1964 Social Welfare Ordinance granting Aborigines legal equality with Europeans. The CMS could no longer evict Aborigines from the settlement and were prohibited from holding their own courts. Second, the economic independence of the Aborigines increased. For instance, in 1960, social service benefits were paid to Aborigines although the settlement authorities still received the biggest share. According to Cole: 'In 1965 the Roper River Mission pioneered a new experiment by paying all the Social Services Department Age Pensions, Child Endowment and some Welfare Branch allowances direct to the Aborigines' (Cole n.d., 26). In that same year the communal kitchens were closed. Cole notes that this policy imposed a severe financial burden on the CMS, leading to its decision to withdraw in 1968. However, there were other reasons for this decision, which leads me to the third matter to be discussed.

Partly because of increasing economic independence and legal equality, and because of a new-found political vociferousness and activism, the Aborigines at Ngukurr became increasingly unwilling to give the CMS the authority it needed to run Ngukurr. This was especially the case among the younger Aborigines.

For all of the above reasons, the CMS began planning, as early as 1965, to leave Ngukurr and in July 1968 the Commonwealth government took control. When it took over, the period of direct European domination at Ngukurr also came to an end.

The sixty-year period of CMS control produced profound social changes. There is much evidence to show that by the end of this period the Aborigines at Ngukurr were European-orientated in many ways. It was also the case that many traditional social practices and beliefs were vigorously retained.

Scholars have generally not closely examined the activities of Aborigines in the modern sector of settlements. They have tended to assume that this sector was alien to the Aborigines, who became involved there only under duress, and who, when their work in this sector was finished, returned to their 'real' life in the traditional sector. A good example of this can be found in Elkin's writings. He notes that the Aborigines played two distinct roles, one in their camp life and cult activities, and the other when they were working for Europeans. He continues:

Moreover, their world of thought and values and that of the white man remained both distinct and parallel. The Aborigines passed superficially and temporarily from theirs to his, ... (Elkin, 1974, 377-8).

Concentration on the traditional sector was exacerbated by the fact that many of the scholars studying Aborigines were anthropologists interested primarily in reconstructing this sector, not in examining the development of Aboriginal-European relations. Stanner, for instance, writes:

The young anthropologist ... wanted to understand ... the 'functional system' of social life, Where a society was breaking down (as with most of the aborigines) we thought it our task to salvage pieces of information and from them try to work out the traditional social forms. Such were my interests. They help to explain why an interest in 'living actuality' scarcely extended to the

actual life-conditions of the aborigines, ... (Stanner, 1969, 14).

Where scholars examine Aboriginal activity and culture in the traditional sector only, the reason for their neglect of certain aspects of change becomes clear. In the traditional sector, change is indeed characterised by continuity, and European dominance has not been institutionalised there. Where Aboriginal incorporation into the modern sector is closely analysed, a different perspective can be obtained.

Aborigines did not change as a settlement society confronting a new social situation, but, rather, change occurred primarily in response to a situation that faced individuals as they became involved in modern sector activities under the total control of Europeans. As the contribution of traditional economic activities declined, Aborigines became more and more dependent on the modern sector. In time, the settlement economy became fully contained within this sector, and, to survive, Aborigines could not avoid prolonged and regular participation in it. They eventually became economically locked into the modern sector. In recognition of this, Schapper notes that the Aborigines were 'transformed from semi-nomadic hunters to sedentary unskilled labourers' (Schapper, 1970, 141). Maddock writes of the Beswick Reserve that 'Blackfellow law has been displaced almost entirely from the productive economy' (Maddock, 1977, 27). In time, the Aborigines became locked into the modern sector in a cultural and social, as well as an economic, sense. That is, the modern sector became, at least partly, Aboriginal. New patterns of intra-Aboriginal, and Aboriginal-European relations were gradually institutionalised as they became a part of both the Aborigines' daily routine and their method of earning a living.

These aspects of Aboriginal activity have rarely been examined. One exception is K. Wilson's examination of a conscious attempt by a group of Aborigines, the Pindan Mob, to establish and formalise non-traditional relations in the sphere of economic activity. She writes:

There is a feeling that in the realm of work organization, mining arrangements, and any other points of contact with White civilization, that one must follow White law (Wilson, 1970, 335).

However, to my knowledge there are no detailed studies of the way Aborigines on settlements unconsciously adopt non-traditional patterns of interaction amongst themselves in the modern sector. Where Europeans are directly in control of all aspects of the modern sector I suggest that Aborigines do interact in non-traditional ways in this sector, but that they often do so unconsciously, or explain it away as part of their compulsory participation in that sector. This point will be raised again later.

Aboriginal involvement in the modern sector also promotes changes in beliefs and attitudes. For example, as Rowley notes: 'There must be many Aborigines for whom there is only a Christian identity' (Rowley, 1972b, 325). Aborigines came to accept many modern sector activities, facilities and services as desirable, useful and necessary. Turner makes the following assessment of the Aborigines of Groote Eylandt. He writes:

What were luxuries for the previous generation are now more or less taken for granted necessities, and tastes are now developing for the kinds of goods and services considered necessities by most Whites (Turner, 1974, 182).

I suggest that this adoption of European culture has also been underestimated, in part, because it has rarely been the sole focus of any study of remote Aborigines.

Some Aborigines had become committed Christians and many others internalised various aspects of mission morality. Sixty years of intense evangelistic activity had a big impact. For example, a fully ordained Aborigine was in charge of the church at Ngukurr and this man was a candidate for the first Council election. On the 1976 election day, a number of Aborigines wanted his name taken off the ballot sheet because they felt that he should be selected automatically on the grounds of his position in the church. This probably would have happened had not the settlement Adviser (a DAA appointee) ruled it unconstitutional. This incident gives a good indication of the impact of the CMS on the Ngukurr Aborigines. There is a good deal of truth in Cole's statement that:

Quite a number of the Aborigines from the Roper River have made their mark on the life of the Northern Territory and there seems little doubt that one main reason for this is to be found in the long background of faithful and sacrificial service which has been given by missionaries and staunch Aboriginal Christians who have served faithfully over many years (Cole, n.d., 3).

The languages most commonly used by the Aborigines are English and Kriol, their preferred clothing is similar to that worn by European cattlemen, their favoured foods are mainly beef, flour and sugar, and their most popular music is country and western. The Aborigines under 30 years of age, about 70 per cent of the Ngukurr population, have a life style somewhat similar to that of many young Europeans or Aborigines from working-class suburbs in Australian cities. This parallel can easily be taken too far but it is instructive in drawing attention to the depth of social change at Ngukurr. Many of the younger Aborigines at Ngukurr have known only an urban, settled existence and European schooling (including dormitory life) had a big impact on their lives. As for working class youths in the city, many of the actions and attitudes of the young Aborigines can be explained by reference to unemployment, low education levels, lack of skills and the social and psychological demoralisation of their parents.

In general, the Aborigines at Ngukurr would like to see the settlement remain in the same physical form while many want it to grow into a European-style town with similar work and leisure opportunities and services and facilities. Limited notions of progress and growth are evident in their statements about what should happen at Ngukurr. For instance, one local figure said that he would like to see Ngukurr grow into a town like Katherine.

Many Aborigines regard a 'nine-to-five' job as acceptable, even normal, and occasionally view those who do not work with disdain. Bern described these attitudes as they are expressed by Aborigines at village meetings. He writes:

In nearly every meeting the speeches of leading spokesmen contain references to an ideal pattern of village behaviour, whose breach should be censured and whose attainment should be pursued. These references have a persistent negative content, being directed against gambling, work absenteeism, neglect of houses and hygiene ... On the positive side the stress is on the village's commitment to its own development (Bern, 1977, 120).

These same sentiments were actively presented at meetings I attended and often by individuals who held steady jobs.

A number of European social institutions and practices, such as those related to education, law and health, have been legitimised to some degree. This is only to be expected, because these institutions stand at the centre of settlement life. For example, during a strike of Aborigines at Ngukurr in 1970, many parents wanted to keep sending their children to school so they would not have their education disrupted.

Another new cultural element is the existence of a common feeling of being Ngukurr people. This consciousness of community identity rests, in part, on their shared experience of and their dependency on the CMS and the settlement, and also on a shared sense of Aboriginal identity derived from opposition to European domination.

In summary, it can be said that in terms of their housing, diet, clothing, language, recreational and day-to-day activities and hopes for the future, the majority of Aborigines at Ngukurr have become orientated towards European traditions to some extent.

Patterns of Aboriginal relations have also altered drastically, if not as completely as Turner implied in commenting that the Ngukurr Aborigines 'have altered the bases on which their social organization previously rested' (Turner, 1974, 197).

The Aborigines' activities in the modern sector of Ngukurr often were, and still are, opposed to traditional patterns of relations. The CMS forced or cajoled the Aborigines into continuing with these activities which in time became an institutionalised part of their normal day-to-day existence. In many instances Aborigines entered willingly into non-traditional activities in order to obtain goods or, through an association with the CMS, to maintain or develop a position of power in relation to other Aborigines. Aborigines began to relate to each other on the basis of their different roles in the modern sector, rather than in ways in accordance with traditional kinship structures. This applied, for example, to shop assistants and shoppers, Sunday school teachers and pupils and lay preachers and their congregation. Similarly, Aborigines started to interact in a manner consistent with some common roles, such as the interaction within groups of worshippers, pupils or workers. However, in general, these new patterns of relations were followed only in the modern sector where the CMS directly dominated activities. As long as the missionaries were present, the Aborigines could interact with each other in non-traditional ways. New patterns of Aboriginal relations were institutionalised, but only in parallel with the institutionalisation of Aboriginal-European relations of a subordinate-superordinate nature.

European influence on settlement society has tended to be viewed as somehow external to that society. Most scholars have neglected to examine either the way in which Aboriginal-European relations of a subordinate-superordinate kind have been institutionalised to become an integral part of settlements, or how this has influenced the structure of contemporary Aboriginal societies.

New Aboriginal social groupings and categories also developed at Ngukurr. For example, Bern describes four categories of Aborigines: women, young men, middle-aged men, and the 'old mission mob' (Bern, 1974, ch. 4). At times, these categories became active political groupings. Three instances are provided by Bern. First, he suggests that one effect of European domination at Ngukurr was that the women were partially freed from the domination of the Aboriginal men. Women become a political group when they feel that their freedom of movement or freedom from having to gather bush food is threatened. The political consciousness of women is still developing, and by 1981 they had established a women's centre at Ngukurr. Second, the young men could organise politically to combat European dominance. For instance, they helped to organise and maintain a strike at Ngukurr in 1970. Third, in opposition to the demands of the young men, the 'old mission mob', a conservative force with regard to European control and presence, could form a weak political grouping.

All of the groupings mentioned above are a product of the Aborigines' life at Ngukurr and are primarily modern sector groupings.

Bern was also able to divide the Aboriginal population at Ngukurr into two major groups, the core group and the outsiders. The differences between these two groups resulted from the members of the former having closer links with the CMS, a longer period of permanent residence at Ngukurr and a common participation in two traditional cults. The forbears of the core group settled early at Ngukurr and became intimately associated with the CMS and modern sector activities. By comparison with the outsiders, the core group had higher European education levels, a higher use of English in conversation, better physical living conditions, access to a reliable supply of food and medicines and a higher percentage of 'wrong' marriages. They monopolised control over public affairs and were dominant in all positions created by the CMS for Aborigines, such as those on the Station Council.

The forbears of the core group were advantaged by both their close relations with the CMS and their permanent residence at Ngukurr. Although they came from different tribes, these Aborigines came to interact closely through their participation in CMS dominated activities. The common influences in their lives, especially Christian teachings, gave them reason to feel well-disposed towards each other, a feeling that was strengthened (or perhaps more accurately, not undermined) by their common association with two cults, the Yabaduruwa and Gunabibi. Later, when ceremonies were localised at Ngukurr, cult activities came to play a much stronger role in core group solidarity. The relations that developed between the early Aboriginal settlers at Ngukurr had a big impact on the Aboriginal society that developed on Ngukurr.

The development of the core group at Ngukurr is particularly interesting because the members of this group are important in both the modern and the traditional sectors. It shows how the two sectors can become associated or linked.

The most important Aboriginal social groupings at Ngukurr were the families that made up the core group. Bern notes that there are eight families in the core, but that a number were so closely linked through marriage, or ceremony, that it was possible to reduce the number of important groupings to only three.

The families of this small group of Aborigines were large and each family became known by the surname of its main patriline. Two closely interrelated happenings linked these families into what Bern called the core group. One was that the marriage of core group members came to be viewed in terms of the resulting affinal links between the families, rather than in traditional terms. The other was a concentration of ritual property associated with the Yabaduruwa and Gunabibi cults. This property came to be held by only three of these families which together comprised about two-thirds of the Ngukurr population at the time of the departure of the CMS. The members of this group dominated Aboriginal affairs in the modern sector.

It can be seen from the above discussion that a satisfactory analysis of the core group must include an examination of the activities of its members in both the modern and the traditional sectors. The establishment of the core group can only be understood in terms of the roles of its members, and their social alignments, in both sectors of Ngukurr. The core

group is neither just a modern, nor a traditional, sector phenomenon. It is both, and, in this sense, it should be seen as a settlement phenomenon.

The core group at Ngukurr is unique because other settlements do not appear to have produced similar institutionalised relations between tribal or ceremonial groupings. This helps to explain a number of things at Ngukurr, one being that the outstations established there are not strongly independent.

The remaining one-third of the Aborigines, the outsiders, had moved late to Ngukurr and did not become involved to any great extent in public affairs. Many were involved with Madaian and Balgin cults. Other categories, namely women, young men, middle-aged men and the 'old mission mob', could occasionally become political groupings whose activities cut across family and core group allegiances.

Although the Aborigines who settled at Ngukurr were incorporated into the modern sector, in a number of ways this incorporation was extremely limited. For one thing, the Aborigines remained ignorant of or misunderstood a great many aspects of the modern sector. For instance, they did not understand European economics, accounting procedures, business management practices or the relationships between Europeans which were the social bases of many settlement activities. For another thing, they developed no settlement-wide authority structures capable of running this sector, so many aspects of which they had adopted as their own.

The Aborigines did have a community meeting which operated as a political forum. As Bern notes:

The village meeting which is the principal context of public discussion occupies a pivotal place in the community's political organisation. It is the most inclusive continuing forum, enfranchising all the adults of the community (Bern, 1977, 103).

However, Bern also points out that the authority and power of the village meeting is very limited.

No issue has its birth there and none is resolved there. In this sense the meeting is not a decision-making body. Its resolutions are largely rhetorical and it has no mechanism for implementing its decisions, nor can it apply sanctions against their breach (Bern, 1977, 120).

My own examination of village meetings supports Bern's position.

The core group is too weak to provide Ngukurr with an active political elite which could enforce its will on the community as a whole, and the core group families, the most cohesive of the groups at Ngukurr, are incapable of dominating each other, let alone the outsiders.

Prior to its departure, the CMS did make an attempt to help the Aborigines take control of their own affairs. In 1962, for instance, the Aborigines were given eight out of sixteen positions on the Ngukurr Station Council, a situation that was maintained up to the time of the departure of the CMS. However, these moves were both naive and too late. The CMS had either opposed or neglected similar moves in the past, and its dominating and dogmatic approach had deeply entrenched its own management role in Ngukurr affairs. Co-opting Aborigines to serve on the Station Council was tackling the issue of increasing Aboriginal control at a mere surface level because the bias of the Ngukurr social system militated against the Aborigines on this Council taking any meaningful political action.

This brings me to the final point about social change at Ngukurr, namely, the development of social dichotomy. While it is clear that the Aborigines at Ngukurr are European-orientated in many of their activities and beliefs, it is just as obvious that many of their traditions have been maintained. Bern could write of the situation in 1970 at Ngukurr that 'Blackfella law ... subsumes the content and consciousness of Ngukurr society' (Bern, 1974, 26).

Now, this statement does not coincide with Turner's view that the Ngukurr Aborigines 'have altered the bases on which their social organisation previously rested'. These views can be reconciled only if, as a result of change, Aboriginal society at Ngukurr had become dichotomous. Bern gives most attention to 'Blackfella law', stressing its strength and its relevance to the Aborigines. Turner, on the other hand, does not fully take into account the retention of tradition at Ngukurr, even though he is well aware of the profound social changes that have occurred there. There is, in other words, no mixing or blending of both the modern and the traditional at Ngukurr. This social dichotomy has important repercussions when the Ngukurr Aborigines as a community attempt to take control of any activities.

In the study of social change, no scholars have denied that social change has occurred, and all accept that some traditions have decayed, and that new elements have been adopted. However, I part company with those scholars who have stressed continuity as a basic characteristic of this change. In opposition to this point of view, I suggest that Aboriginal culture (and social organisation) tends to be dichotomous. Maddock is one of the few scholars whose writings accord with this idea.

Maddock studied the Beswick Reserve Aboriginal community, noting that they consciously wished to preserve 'blackfellow law' and learn more about 'whitefellow law' (Maddock, 1977, 22). He states that at Beswick whitefellow law cannot be seen simply as a facade covering blackfellow law, because the former has 'deep roots in Aboriginal conduct' and because the latter is expressed on the surface of life (Maddock, 1977, 22). Further, Maddock suggests that the two laws have not been blended into a new way of life, and he concludes that 'It looks from this as though Aborigines want to live in accord with two laws kept apart in thought and action' (my emphasis).

I propose that a similar situation exists on most settlements, although the Aborigines may not be conscious of it. The reason is that Aborigines could develop and maintain a modern culture and social organisation in the modern sector of settlements, and at the same time preserve many elements of traditional Aboriginal society. This dichotomy shows clearly in the way Aborigines act. As Long notes; 'The behaviour of Aborigines is full of contradictions and paradoxes' (Long, 1970, 330). Where this is the case, it is easy to see why many studies of Aboriginal change on settlements have tended to emphasise tradition only. Where scholars attempting such studies assume that Aboriginal involvement in the modern sector is not important to an examination of Aboriginal change, then their focus will automatically shift to the traditional sector. On many settlements, the Aborigines themselves tend to focus on tradition, because of psychological, political and economic factors. Where this is the case, the tendency for scholars to also concentrate on tradition will be exacerbated.

The question of immediate significance is how could these contradictions develop and be maintained on settlements. How was it possible for Aborigines to develop a modern culture without being forced to reject their traditions? Alternatively, what influenced Aborigines to adopt new patterns of relations when traditional kinship structures were still in existence? The answer, in short, is that the contradictions which arose during this process of change remained 'hidden' from the Aborigines by the dominance of Europeans. This can be shown to be the case at a cultural, a social and an economic level.

Where Aborigines hold to different value systems, or relate to each other in an inconsistent fashion, it could be expected that this would eventually promote social change. Indeed, Turner has suggested that an awareness of cultural contradictions by Aborigines is a driving force behind social change on Groote Eylandt. He writes:

Face to face with Whites and their possessions and standards ... [Aborigines] were, in a sense, 'forced' to re-evaluate what was true, what was false; what was good, what was bad; what was right, what was wrong; and what was of value and what was not. Where they decided in favour of the alien point of view, or at least against the traditional one, the seeds of social change were sown (Turner, 1974, 188).

I suggest that Aborigines on settlements can adopt the 'alien point of view' without having to reject the traditional one. It is not a matter of Aborigines voluntarily deciding one way or the other. Aboriginal social change should not be analysed simply by reference to the actors' definitions of their own situation, for these very definitions require analysis.

Aborigines on settlements may not acknowledge that they are European-orientated in any important ways, and, instead, may focus largely on tradition. Notions like 'identity crisis' are relevant here, because they point to a psychological or cultural basis for this phenomenon. Aborigines are influenced by their rejection from mainstream Australian society to search for a more satisfying identity in their past. Even in those instances where they are obviously adopting some European ways and values, Aborigines can continue to see themselves as essentially traditional, thereby evading the necessity to confront contradictions in their own activities and beliefs (see C.H. Berndt, 1961, pp. 16-33).

Fanon describes the same psychological phenomena in the colonised African. He writes: Because he feels he is becoming estranged, that is to say because he feels that he is the living haunt of contradictions which run the risk

of becoming insurmountable, the native tears himself away from the swamp that may suck him down and accepts everything [about tradition], decides to take all for granted and confirms everything. ... He ... turns himself into the defender of his people's past; ... (Fanon, 1967, 175)

On the other hand, the point made by Maddock that Aborigines may consciously want to retain both 'whitefella' and 'blackfella' law indicates that social change need not occur as a result of Aborigines choosing between the two. For, in many instances, the Aborigines already hold to both. How this could occur is discussed below.

The contradictions within Aboriginal society are unproblematical for Aborigines at the social level, because they developed, and are maintained, under an umbrella of European authority and power. Deviations from traditional behaviour can be 'explained' for Aborigines by reference to the demands of Europeans, while Aboriginal activities can be socially separated on this basis. Aborigines interact in the modern sector in non-traditional ways, and, in time, these new patterns of interaction, along with new Aboriginal-European relations, become institutionalised. At the same time, Aborigines can continue to relate to each other in traditional ways when they are outside the sphere of European control. In sociological terms, however, their involvement in the modern sector is just as important as their involvement in the traditional sector.

The economy of settlements can be divided into two sectors: the traditional sector containing a hunting and gathering economy, and the modern sector containing an economy stemming from European traditions which produces and distributes money, food (some of which is produced locally), and goods. Over time, the traditional economy becomes defunct, and the settlement economy is then coterminous with the modern sector economy.

Aborigines, at least during the period of direct European domination, have no control over this economy. For them to participate in this economy they must become involved in it according to criteria set out by Europeans. This kind of involvement results in the development of modern culture and social relations, but whether or not Aborigines maintain their traditional beliefs and practices is economically irrelevant, because this has few economic consequences for the Aborigines or for the settlement as a whole.

New Aboriginal culture and social organisation that arises under European control does not, obviously enough, reflect Aboriginal control over production and distribution processes. What Aborigines do or think is, in the main, economically irrelevant. Therefore, there are few economic forces in Aboriginal settlement societies that operate to promote social change in a way that would reduce contradictions and inconsistencies in these societies. For example, there is no requirement for Aboriginal individuals, or groups, to justify, or mystify, their control over new economic resources. Aborigines had neither the opportunity, nor the incentive, to dominate each other in the modern sector prior to new policies that gave them a measure of control.

The existence of this dichotomy is closely associated with the lack of Aboriginal authority structures at the settlement level. The same factors, but especially European control, are involved in both sectors. Lacking authority structures the Aborigines are unable to take control of settlement affairs. The Aborigines simply have no social organisations with the strength to take control.

Some scholars have suggested that Aboriginal decision-making structures were destroyed (Rowley, 1972a, 355); others that these structures were not likely to have existed in the first place. In relation to the latter argument, the following quotation of Stanner's is relevant. He writes that the formation of settlements 'meant unifying heterogeneous and accidental collections of people, who usually felt no reciprocal obligations to each other, for ends few can have seen clearly and by means no one really commanded' (Stanner, 1969, 46). That is, even if traditional Aboriginal society had contained strong authority structures, the way in which settlements were formed would have made them largely unworkable.

Some scholars have also suggested that the system of authority that did exist in traditional Aboriginal society was not applicable to events in secular life. For instance, Meggitt writes:

But, no matter how much authority [Aboriginal] people conceded to a ritual leader in the sacred sphere, it did not as a rule extend at all into secular affairs (Meggitt, 1962).

Stanner apparently agrees with this general view noting that:

The idea of a man of authority with right and title to command them over a wide range of many things is foreign to their [Aborigines'] idea of social life. In this respect their tradition left them very exposed to leaderlessness (Stanner, 1969, 46).

Whether Europeans destroyed Aboriginal secular authority structures, or whether they never existed, is not of central concern. What is of concern is that Europeans were not forced either to relinquish at least a measure of control, or to deal with Aborigines in a way that took their traditional social organisation into account.

The extent of European domination is one of the features of settlements that sets them apart from other colonial situations, and recognition of this point is necessary in a study of social change on settlements.

When European control is relinquished, the remaining traditional allegiances and authority structures, even if very weak, come to the fore because there are no other Aboriginal authority structures to oppose them. On some settlements, this has been the major cause of the outstation movement. At Ngukurr, this had not occurred, at least by 1976, because of the extent of acculturation and the existence of a strong sense of community identity and linkages that cut across clan or family divisions. However, the traditional alliances at Ngukurr operate to undermine any attempts to set up and legitimise settlement-wide organisations, such as the Ngukurr Council. It is mainly in this sense that tradition can be said to be a barrier to economic development at the level of large remote Aboriginal settlements.

4 Local government and control

The move by the Commonwealth government to relinquish direct control of Aboriginal settlements became obvious in December 1972 with the election of the Australian Labor party (ALP). The policy of self-determination adopted by the ALP implied that a form of separate development for Aborigines was thought acceptable. Steps in this general direction had, however, already been taken by the Liberal-Country party prior to December 1972. Perhaps the most obvious of these was the decision to allow only Aborigines to lease Crown land within Aboriginal Reserves. The immediate future of Ngukurr was shaped not only by the long term past but by both the transfer from the control of the CMS to the Commonwealth and by the change of Commonwealth policy.

An important component of this new approach to remote Aborigines is the emphasis on 'Aboriginality' in official policy statements. This is because the rationale for separate development rests on the assumption that Aborigines are ethnically different and should therefore be allowed, even encouraged, to pursue a separate path of development that is supposedly more in line with their culture. The DAA annual report for 1977-78 provides a good example. Under the heading of 'Recognition of "Aboriginality"', it says that

Government policy recognises that Aborigines have the right to retain, modify or develop their languages, culture, customs, traditions and lifestyles in their own way. It can be expected that Aboriginal people will be concerned to promote, manage and develop special interests arising out of their Aboriginality (DAA, 1978, 61).

But 'Aboriginality' is an artificial construct, as von Sturmer shows when he writes that it is a 'fiction which takes on meaning only in terms of white ethnocentrism' (von Sturmer, 1973, 16). There is no core of culture common to all Aborigines. The strength of the concept of Aboriginality is a product of pervasiveness of European domination. The potential of this concept to mystify is greatly enhanced by the fact that many Aborigines, and some of their European supporters, have also adopted the notion of Aboriginality as a part of political ideology and practice ostensibly designed to increase the political power of Aborigines in Australia (e.g. Tatz, 1979, 82-9). If Aboriginality is what Aborigines do and think then there must be many different and contradictory kinds of Aboriginality!

The direct and visible control of settlements by Europeans has greatly diminished, but the opportunities of remote Aborigines are still controlled by the economic activities and class structure of Australian society. Aboriginal attempts at separate development can only be successful where they are irrelevant to, or positively benefit, ruling class or elite interests. In short, the problem to be faced by Aborigines who want to be self-determining is that of developing within a capitalist system a different, perhaps antagonistic, type of society.

Control of settlements may have become less direct, but it has not disappeared. The government maintains indirect control through its control of settlement finances. This gives Aborigines a clear indication that their own control is very limited. It is not surprising, therefore, to see that official policy stresses the need for government consultation with Aboriginal communities (DAA, 1978, 59-60). Rhetoric about consultation and associated activities allows Aborigines to feel that they have an important say in determining the priorities of settlements. Even where consultation is effective from the Aborigines' point of view, the reality of the situation is that the government has the final say. When there is a conflict of interest over fundamental matters, the decision can still be made unilaterally by the government. For instance, the DAA only funds those outstations where the occupants have demonstrated that they are willing to shift more or less permanently to their outstation. This may or may not be a good policy, but it does not accord closely with notions of self-determination or self-management. Moreover different government departments seem to be applying different limits to Aboriginal control. Such variability, coupled with interpretation of policy at the level of the departmental field officer, requires much further examination before the impact of governments in the contemporary situation can be assessed.

The only way Aborigines can avoid this form of control is to become economically independent, an enormously difficult thing to achieve on many settlements. This point has been recognised by a number of scholars, such as Rowley and Schapper (Rowley, 1972a, 132-5; Schapper, 1970, 32-4). One part of the problem is neatly summed up by Sandall (1973, 3) who writes:

One hundred men, women, and children permanently settled on a patch of sand in central Australia constitute a bizarre ecological anomaly.

Remoteness, difficulties of access and poverty of natural resources make settlements very unpromising places on which to promote economic development. The enterprises generally proposed for settlements include cattle stations, vegetable gardens, piggeries and fishing (see e.g. DAA, 1971, 74). These are the same industries which form the economic base of many Australian country towns which, in recent years, have been steadily declining in population and wealth as the terms of trade for primary industries have become increasingly unfavourable (Mauldon & Schapper, 1974; Rural Policy, 1974). This indicates that economic development on settlements where there is little existing infrastructure and where the population is usually growing rapidly would be very difficult (cf. Fisk, 1975, 6, 96-7). This would even be the case where social conditions were conducive to such development.

If Aborigines were willing to accept a very low physical standard of living, it is just possible that they might be able to establish a degree of economic independence sufficient to keep government interference to a minimum. To build such an assumption into planning, however, would seem to be objectionable and to fly in the face of years of Aboriginal involvement in activities designed to bring them general equality with Europeans. A further point in this regard is that it is government policy to pay Aboriginal workers on settlements award wages and to provide them with full social security benefits. This effectively sets the wage structure on settlements which means that economic enterprises established there have to carry the same wage burden as enterprises in the wider Australian society.

Where the government does go ahead and establish projects on settlements, it is highly likely that they will increase Aboriginal economic dependency. There are very few projects set up on settlements that have operated without the need for permanent subsidies which can be withdrawn at the whim of government agencies.

In addition the government insists that economic ventures be owned and operated by Aboriginal communities on a kind of co-operative or community-owned basis (DAA, 1978, 63-4). That is, the government discourages groups within settlements from trying to manage projects for their own benefit and requires that any benefits be widely spread. This is made clear in a ministerial directive to DAA field officers which states that

Aboriginal communities have the central place in all aid programs,
that
Care must be taken to ensure that the needs of the whole community are
taken into account
and that

Where an organization is accumulating large holdings of assets to the extent that these might enable it to wield an undue influence within a community or group of communities, this should be reported to the Minister (DAA, 1978, 57, 59, 64).

Stanner has commented on the problems involved in attempting community ventures of a co-operative nature. He writes:

Then there are others who advocate community development or co-operatives in the belief that joint enterprises are especially suited to the aborigines. I do not discount these ideas but some theorists are not at all troubled by the known facts that the record of experiment with such schemes is not impressive, and that aboriginal groups, for all their ideals, are usually made up of factions. This divisiveness is supposed, somehow, to be certain to vanish within any joint enterprise. There is, certainly, a field for experiment, but the community scheme and the co-operative are not sovereign remedies, ... (Stanner, 1969, 57-8; cf Schapper, 1970, 68-9).

It is instructive to compare the government's approach to the economic development of Aboriginal settlements with its efforts to promote capitalist-orientated growth in the Australian economy as a whole. In the latter, private ownership is encouraged and protected and economic competition, rather than co-operation, is held in high esteem.

Up to the present time, Aboriginal control of settlement affairs has mainly meant control over municipal affairs. Responsibility for garbage disposal, water and electricity reticulation, parks, gardens and roads may bring some benefits to the Aborigines, but these are likely to be very limited.

On settlements, two of the major changes arising from policies of self-determination and self-management have been the withdrawal of European staff, both physically and from positions of control, and the establishment of settlement Councils. Councils are the organisations that Aborigines are expected to use to take control of settlement affairs and, in an extremely limited way, this is what has happened.

To a minor degree, Councils have accumulated both power and authority over modern sector affairs on settlements. The Commonwealth government provides considerable support to Councils by channelling funds and information through them. The Aboriginal Councils and Associations Act 1976 was passed to enable Councils to become legal entities which could act on behalf of communities and receive government grants and loans and it has since been added to in the Northern Territory by similar local legislation.

Councils also derive power and authority from their control over settlement resources. They have responsibility for such things as motor vehicles, the allocation of Council jobs and in some cases housing. The operation of Councils has resulted in both the generation of new sectional economic interests on settlements, and the authorisation of these operations where they enhance or protect these interests.

Support for Councils comes from those Aborigines who are conscious of being members of a settlement community and who wish to promote development at that level. These people recognise the Council as the only settlement organisation potentially capable of reflecting the wishes of the whole community and as the best body through which their aspirations for community development can be fulfilled. In general, Aborigines will support any moves that appear to them to have the prospect of replacing European domination with local responsibility.

Despite all the factors which give some power and authority to Councils, they tend to be very weak organisations because other allegiances and interests constantly undermine them. The most important of these are orientated towards tradition. Traditional groupings are not prepared to authorise Councils to act on their behalf. For instance, Wallace explains that Councils, committees, appointment of delegates and representatives to speak on behalf of the whole community, are all European concepts. Not only have they no place in Aboriginal thinking ..., but they must inevitably destroy the traditional culture.

and that

Under these circumstances the older men, who were in the past the strength of the 'tribe', have their authority eroded. They lodge no protests; they simply withdraw, ignoring the council and its decisions, and unhappily long for a return to traditional law (Wallace, 1977, 126-7).

Yet, it is a mistake to see this conflict simply in terms of 'old versus new', although this is an important component of it. In many ways it is also a result of Aboriginal political conflict over modern sector resources. Aboriginal groupings that could be viewed as essentially traditional at the time of settlement establishment, must now be also seen as political pressure groups in the modern sector. Because of this, an examination of Aboriginal conflict, competition and division must include an analysis of the social allegiances and interests of Aborigines in both sectors. This is especially so in relation to land control.

Aboriginal conflict has developed over the allocation and control of resources that are now passing into their hands. An important point here is that in this conflict, traditional culture and allegiances can be mobilised and used as a political resource. But the conflict may be about control over newly available, not traditional, resources.

Aboriginal groups in conflict on settlements may have their origin in tradition, for example, in clan or dialect groups, but these groups may now function as political pressure groups with the aim of retaining, or acquiring, economic interests and political power in the modern sector. Tradition is a basic political resource in the conflict between these pressure groups, but the conflict itself may not be a traditional one. That is, the idiom of contemporary Aboriginal conflict is usually traditional, but its content is not.

It is a feature of some settlements that the Aboriginal group which controls the Council is the same group which traditionally owned the land on which the settlement stands (Gray, 1977, 116). There is little point in denying that traditional links with settlement land is a central matter in this control, but it is also the case that the local land owners are greatly benefitted by their control over the Council. In this instance, traditional relationship to

land is a political resource that can be used for the purpose of acquiring modern sector resources.

The establishment of outstations has generally been assumed to be the result of Aborigines returning to their country for spiritual or psychological reasons. It has been said that Aborigines are returning to find the 'fulfilment and contentment that comes from close association with one's own country' (Wallace, 1977, 124). I suggest that there are other, perhaps more important, factors involved. One of these is the increase in Aboriginal conflict that develops after the withdrawal of Europeans from settlements. This conflict, as I have already indicated, is partly between the newly formed Councils and Aboriginal elders who wish to maintain their authority. But it is also between political pressure groups (which may also be traditional groups) attempting to gain control of modern sector resources. The issue of land rights has greatly enhanced the solidarity of traditional groups because these rights also include control over economic resources, such as pastures, minerals (or more accurately, mining royalties) and potential tourist attractions.

In some circumstances, Aborigines have become so closely associated with a settlement that any strong decentralisation movement has been partially thwarted by centralising forces, for example, community consciousness, acceptance of settlement life and relations that have developed between traditional groupings. This has occurred at Ngukurr. In this situation tradition-orientated Aboriginal groups compete for control of the Council through an election process and, as such, are also modern sector political pressure groups.

Traditional group identity and cohesion has survived the period of European dominance both because of the relatively short period of time that some settlements have existed and because it has been protected by the separation of control of modern and traditional affairs. Aborigines have become modern in many aspects, but, at the same time, they have retained many of their traditions. When Europeans withdraw and no Aboriginal settlement-wide authority structures fill the role vacated by them, traditional alliances are reinvigorated. As I have suggested, the reason for this reinvigoration is related to both traditional and modern sector interests. It is in this sense that it can be said that tradition provides a structural barrier to economic development at the level of large settlement.

In many instances, this change is sufficient to fragment settlements. In others, the period of direct European control changed Aboriginal society sufficiently to prevent this occurring. However, even in those cases where decentralisation has not happened, Councils have not functioned particularly well. The factors that keep Aborigines on the settlement are not sufficiently supportive of Councils to enable them to cut across other group allegiances. Under these conditions, the Aboriginal community may be stable in a demographic sense but any attempts at community development are undermined by conflicts, divisions and confusion.

Without Europeans in positions of power and authority, Aborigines are forced to confront the obvious contradictions in their divided cultural inheritance. As Maddock suggests, in this situation the Aborigines 'have to face their own problems and come to terms with competing models of conduct in a way they are spared while controlled by whites' (Maddock, 1977, 24).

Individuals and groups have great difficulty in working out the most appropriate direction in which to promote change. Similarly, non-traditional behaviour patterns cannot be explained away by reference to European domination and social contradictions begin to have economic consequences. For instance, Aborigines may wish to maintain and operate a settlement shop which they may have used and worked in for many years. Any attempt at this, however, is likely to soon confront the problem of having to refuse credit to Aborigines who demand this by invoking traditional norms. Maddock suggests that this could be a future problem for the Aborigines at Bamyili near Ngukurr. He writes:

A conflict which might come up at once should the Bamyili people ever get their cattle station or tin mine, would arise from the tension between their traditional economic attitudes and the demands of capital maintenance and accumulation (Maddock, 1977, 23).

It is in this sense that tradition can be said to provide a cultural barrier to economic development on settlements.

This problem seems to have been partially solved by Aborigines who consciously decide to adopt European ways, but only in relation to their economic activities. Where this is not done, Aboriginal attempts to maintain or initiate non-traditional economic projects usually fail dismally. This is exceedingly frustrating for the Aborigines, especially where they have set out with the best of intentions and have heavily invested their time, energy and emotion.

Even if all the necessary skills are possessed by the Aborigines, projects may collapse in a very short space of time.

One other factor that becomes apparent when Aborigines attempt to take over settlement affairs is their ignorance and misunderstanding of many aspects of the modern sector. Aborigines have become locked into this sector, but they have not been involved in it in a way that would have enabled or forced them to become familiar with such matters as accounting and book-keeping procedures, maintenance routines, management practices and underlying economic principles. The Aborigines might wish to maintain the form of the modern sector but they often have an insufficient grasp of its content to easily maintain it by themselves. Given the factors that undermine the strength of settlement Councils: the effect of social and cultural dichotomy in Aboriginal society, Aborigines' ignorance and misinterpretation of various areas of the modern sector as well as their inability to utilise skills that are available within their own communities, they find it very hard to maintain settlements, let alone promote economic development.

What this amounts to is the fact that Europeans are still required to keep the modern sector of settlements operational. They are needed to supply skills, advice, managerial services and, most important, to carry out a variety of functions Aborigines view as necessary yet are unable or unwilling to do themselves. Examples may include the hiring and firing of Council employees, delegating responsibilities and issuing orders to Aborigines and preventing tradition-orientated patterns of obligations from undermining modern sector activities.

It is not inevitable that the presence of Europeans on settlements will be unsatisfactory, but for a number of reasons this is often the case. The first point is that Aborigines strongly resent their presence, an understandable reaction given the past domination by Europeans. Second, Aborigines do not clearly understand why Europeans are still required. The young people tend to explain this in terms of a conspiracy theory while other Aborigines often resort to explanations containing the notion that elements incompatible with European activities are inherent in Aboriginal psychology. For the younger Aborigines, the presence of Europeans in important positions is a constant reminder of their subordinate status and is therefore a source of anger and frustration. At one level, Aborigines realise that Europeans are required and they welcome their assistance but, at another level, they deeply resent their residence and importance on settlements. A third point is that Europeans on settlements become involved in activities without understanding the roles that they may be forced or drawn into. Where Europeans step in to organise or maintain settlement activities that are failing, they may unknowingly be inviting an angry Aboriginal reaction. This may occur even where some Aborigines initially supported their moves.

For the Aborigines at Ngukurr, some local control began as early as 1965 when the CMS began planning to leave. Not only was the overall control of Ngukurr becoming too difficult to sustain, it was not possible for the missionaries to remain as the sole European presence with their control so diminished.

From 1965, the CMS allowed Ngukurr to run down in physical terms because it was not prepared to invest resources in a settlement it was soon to leave. The market gardens and the cattle enterprise stagnated and general maintenance was badly neglected. By 1968, the Aborigines were frustrated and annoyed because the settlement appeared to be going backwards. The Aborigines looked forward to government control for they believed that it would lead to a considerable improvement in their situation in terms of such things as jobs, housing, and general facilities. However, they found themselves dealing with an ill-prepared, at times reluctant, and remote bureaucracy whose Ngukurr representatives tended to only stay for short periods of time. Because of administrative guidelines and a measure of inefficiency, the government only began organising staff, finances and other resources after it took control. As a result, Ngukurr remained in a state of disorganisation for a year or more after 1968.

In protest, the Aborigines called a settlement-wide strike on 9 March 1970. On the surface, this was a strike by a community of politically sophisticated Aborigines against a continuation of European domination. In large measure this was indeed the case, but the strike can also be explained as a response to a decline in European domination at the local level.

Just prior to its departure, the CMS had been attempting to get the Aborigines to accept some responsibility for settlement affairs. This move may have appeared to the CMS and the Aborigines to have been partially successful, but the CMS maintained a pivotal, and essential, behind-the-scenes role at Ngukurr right up to its departure. This role was obscured by the close relations that developed between the missionaries and the Aborigines who were now

involved in carrying out many settlement activities. The missionaries continued to integrate the community and to co-ordinate activities.

When the CMS left, the government was not prepared to fill and probably could not have filled the role the CMS vacated. By 1968, government policy had begun to swing away from enforced assimilation to the kind of approach later called self-determination or self-management. When the government took over Ngukurr, the Aborigines were waiting for it to act positively and decisively, but the government was no longer prepared to take the responsibilities that such action demanded. It was becoming more acceptable and beneficial to the government to give Aborigines responsibility for settlement affairs. But in 1968 this policy had yet to be formulated, so the government action on Ngukurr was characterised by vacillation and procrastination.

From the Aborigines' point of view, the government appeared to be disinterested in Ngukurr. Because the close consultation that had existed between the Aborigines and the CMS was not recreated by the government representatives, the Aborigines assumed that the government was increasing its control over settlement affairs. Consequently, the Aborigines went on strike.

Bern describes and analyses this strike in some detail, but one point he does not mention is that the Aborigines were officially offered full control of Ngukurr affairs after the strike finished. According to a government official, this offer was made a number of times, but the Aborigines did not respond. This surprised the official who had assumed that the Aborigines were being offered exactly what they wanted.

While it is true that most Aborigines at Ngukurr did want to take full responsibility for settlement affairs, the government offer could not have been easily accepted by them. The Aborigines had no leaders or organisations that were authorised, or powerful enough, to respond on behalf of the Aboriginal community as a whole, or an elite. They were well enough organised to strike against European domination, but not to respond to an offer of local control.

The above incident clearly demonstrates two important points. First, it shows the impact of the lack of Aboriginal settlement-wide authority structures at Ngukurr on their ability to control settlement affairs. Second, it points to the change in government policy that was just beginning to occur in the late 1960s. The offer made to the Aborigines indicates that the government was moving away from a policy of direct administrative control of settlements towards a policy promoting Aboriginal responsibility for settlement affairs.

When the ALP came to power at the federal level in December 1972 it adopted a policy of self-determination for Aborigines. For Ngukurr, this meant many changes, including a withdrawal of European staff. The Council took responsibility for many of the vacated positions and hired Aborigines to fill them. Remaining Europeans either worked directly for the Council, filled advisory positions or worked in the DAA's office at Ngukurr.

The government also began a substantial construction program, and by the end of 1975 the following had been finished: a sewerage works, an administration block, a hospital, a new water reticulation system, four new classrooms, and a number of houses and flats. Funds had been allocated for a new shop, a new airstrip, and a cattle project. In a two-year period beginning 1974 the government had either spent or allocated approximately five million dollars at Ngukurr.

The Ngukurr Council began to receive increasing government support. For example, over the 1974-75 period it was allocated \$245 000. It became an all-Aboriginal body, freely elected by the community. By the beginning of 1976, its responsibilities included parks and gardens, hygiene and garbage, housing and general maintenance. The Council was becoming a very important organisation through its association with the government, and its increasing control of settlement affairs and resources.

Aboriginal support for the Council came from a number of areas within the Ngukurr Aboriginal society. First, the Aborigines had developed a strong sense of 'Ngukurrness'. This consciousness of community developed mainly from common settlement experience and a sense of Aboriginality that had developed in response to European domination. Many accepted that the Council was the only organisation capable of controlling the modern sector of Ngukurr on behalf of the community, and for this reason they supported it.

Those Aborigines who have begun to benefit by the operations of the Council have also begun to legitimise its activities. This applies, for example, to Aborigines who work for, and are paid by, the Council and to its President who has the opportunity to practice favouritism and nepotism, and the chance to increase his personal power and prestige.

The Ngukurr Council was, however, a very weak organisation because it was undermined by sectional interests and alliances. This applied especially to the activities of the primary social groups at Ngukurr, the core group families. Bern notes that in 1970, the families could only be regarded as social groupings with regard to activities associated with traditional cults. This was not the case in 1975, when the major families had become political pressure groups competing for control of modern sector affairs, especially the Council. This point is supported by a government document prepared in July 1974 by officials from the DAA, the Department of Social Security and the Department of Labour. This report noted that one Ngukurr family controlled the YCC and the Council, and that another controlled the Housing Association. It was quite factual and non-inflammatory, reading in part:

Ngukurr is an extremely heterogeneous Community both tribally and socially and organizationally. It appears ... that social and inter-tribal problems are not over serious. They flare up on occasions, but are largely worked out if for no other reason than the sheer necessity of preserving harmony in a large and centrally located community.

Yet it caused considerable Aboriginal anger and consternation because it clearly demonstrated that Aboriginal ideology concerning community control was not reflected in their political practice.

The conflict between these two families was a complex one, involving competition for resources in both the modern and the traditional sector. An understanding of this conflict is important to an analysis of both Ngukurr and the YCC. I will call one the Simon family and the other Duke's family. As most core group Aborigines including those of the third core group aligned themselves with one or the other of these two families this social division was the most important one at Ngukurr.

In the traditional sector, conflict had been heightened by the recent death of three main elders of the Simon family. This placed Duke, the head of the other family, in a powerful and unique position because he claimed both the managerial and the ownership rights to a particular ritual estate. The Simon family vigorously disputed these rights and accused Duke of killing the three elders.

In the modern sector, the Simon family controlled the Housing Association while Duke's family controlled the YCC. Neither family, however, had a monopoly on the Council. During my field work I witnessed two Council elections. The Simon family won the first and Duke's family the second. On both occasions the two families adopted a conscious 'we and they' approach to the election which was approached in a serious vein. To win meant the control of various valued resources, but especially motor vehicles.

In these elections, it did not seem to matter which family got a majority on the Council simply because the Presidency was the key position. In the first election I observed, a member of the Simon family was voted in as President, causing Duke to withdraw his nomination for the Vice-Presidency. He told me that he wanted to give 'them' a fair go at running Ngukurr, but it was suggested to me by other Aborigines that he did not want to be involved with a Council controlled by the Simon family. No institutionalised system of political opposition exists in the Ngukurr Council.

The Land Rights movement greatly strengthened the internal solidarity of the two Ngukurr families, as well as other traditional land-owning groups. By the end of my stay at Ngukurr, although a number of groups had begun to talk about establishing outstations, no action was taken at that time. Consequently, the importance of the development of Ngukurr as a whole diminished in proportion to the strength of the Aborigines' desires to decentralise. This was an important factor in the failure of the YCC.

The move to give Aborigines responsibility for settlement affairs arises out of the same social conditions that cause increasing settlement fragmentation. Hence, the promotion of local control is paralleled by, and itself exacerbates, intra-Aboriginal conflict and social divisiveness. Mechanisms of social control are therefore very weak at Ngukurr which is reflected in such things as Aboriginal delinquency rates, an alcohol problem and work absenteeism.

The weakness of the Council is indicated by the continuation of public Aboriginal meetings that discuss the same sorts of issues raised in the Council. These meetings constitute an alternative settlement-wide political forum controlled by the core group men (especially those from Duke's family). The fact that they are still held points to the limited authority that has been given to the Council to deal with settlement affairs.

The Council also has limited opportunity to acquire power by gaining control of the Ngukurr economy. Many Aborigines are economically independent of the Council, because they work for the government in the areas of, for example, education and health. All social service benefits are paid directly to eligible individuals, insulating them from Council influence.

Another problem faced by the Council is its dependence on the government for funds. The control of municipal affairs generates no moneys that are available for the Council to spend as it pleases. As a result, the Council has few resources with which to promote the legitimisation of its own activities. Council dependency is increased by the isolation of Ngukurr and the poverty of its natural resources.

When the Aborigines at Ngukurr attempt to take control of settlement affairs, they are forced to confront contradictions that exist in their society. Julian, one of the men who was Council President during my field work, explained to me that he was being forced to live two lives. When he was working on Council affairs, he tried to follow European ways. He said that he was 'hard' on relations who asked him for favours, and that he was willing to make decisions without consulting the elders, or the community as a whole, because in many instances a quick decision was necessary. When he was not working for the Council, however, he adopted a different, more traditional approach to life. This is a good example of the problems faced by one man who had become closely involved in those modern sector affairs that had become the responsibility of the Aborigines. He was one of the few people at Ngukurr who was conscious of this dichotomy and who attempted to cope with it by leading two distinct lives. Most of the Aborigines were unaware of this issue, though not of the psychological and social problems caused by it. They continued to demand Aboriginal control of the modern sector and at the same time supported the retention of all tradition. This put Julian under considerable stress. He continually complained about not receiving backing from the community when he was attempting to run Ngukurr on their behalf. He told me that the pressure on him was so great that he could only work as President for a few months at a time.

Under these conditions, the potential for social change is obviously great. On many settlements, this pressure for change has been released by the decentralisation process, but on Ngukurr this has yet to occur. Whether it is possible for the Council to become a central authority structure at Ngukurr that is capable of controlling the modern sector is an interesting question but it cannot be pursued here.

Because of the weakness of the Council, Europeans are still required on Ngukurr to maintain those areas of Ngukurr affairs that the Aborigines themselves wish to keep going. For example, this applies to the shop. The Ngukurr shop is a central feature of the settlement. It supplies such things as food, clothing, ammunition, petrol, soft drinks and banking facilities. The Aborigines view it as an important, useful and necessary facility that they would like to control and expand. Many have worked there serving customers, cleaning, stocking the shelves and helping with the book work. Shopping has become an integral part of the contemporary life of the Ngukurr Aborigines. Despite this, they cannot operate the shop without a European manager. In part, this is because they lack necessary skills, but these skills could be gained very quickly if this was the only problem.

Shortly after the CMS left Ngukurr, the Aborigines did attempt to run the shop, and three young European-educated Aborigines were given the task. One of them, Julian, told me that they had failed dismally. The main reason was the fact that they could not stop relatives from 'booking up' at the store. His view was that Aborigines could only run the shop if they could isolate its operation from the traditional kinship system. He went on to suggest that the best way to do this would be to give Aborigines full control of it. In this way either they would have to come to a permanent arrangement about its operation or do without it.

The Aborigines' need for Europeans under certain conditions is demonstrated in a minor way in the following incident. A number of Aborigines employed by the Council decided to set up their own beer drinking 'school'. Normally, all the Aborigines who wanted to drink would gather after work on an old concrete slab where they would receive their ration of three or four cans of beer. Some Aborigines, mainly those not working, who could not afford to pay for a week's supply in advance, which was the normal procedure, would hang about on the fringes of

the drinking group calling to their kin and friends for a beer. This annoyed the Council workers who suggested that those out of work were lazy and, therefore, did not deserve to drink and, furthermore, should not bludge from those who did. They approached a European, who was employed by the Council as their overseer, to help them set up a separate drinking 'school' so that they could escape these demands. The European agreed, promising them the use of his fridges while refusing to handle any money.

The Aborigines found this a satisfactory arrangement, and they started a book-keeping system to keep track of those who had, or had not, paid. All the Aborigines involved were working for the Council, so it was not difficult for them to find the necessary money. On pay day, the first money spent was for beer for the next fortnight. Everyone involved was very pleased with the atmosphere of the new 'school', for there were no fights and little drunkenness over the first week or so of its short-lived operation. Then the problems began, not from within the school, but from the rest of the settlement and, most vehemently, from those unemployed who had lost their only access to beer. When the Council employees were drinking one evening an Aboriginal elder came to the school and, in a tirade, attacked the European involved for initiating the move and for splitting the settlement into two camps over the issue of drink. The European was astounded, then angry and finally downcast at this criticism which he regarded, and rightfully so, as unwarranted.

The point I wish to make here is that the Council employees knew, consciously or unconsciously, that they had no hope of breaking away from the main group of drinkers by themselves. Wherever they went, their friends and kin would follow to demand a share of beer. Therefore, they approached a European who, unknown to him, was needed to stand between them and the settlement unemployed. When public discontent grew to such a level that Duke decided to act, rather than directly criticise the Aborigines involved, he attacked the European who had been drawn unknowingly into a pivotal role in the dispute.

The Aborigines at Ngukurr may need Europeans for the reasons set out above but their presence is greatly disliked. During my field work it was a consistent complaint of the Aborigines that there were too many Europeans at Ngukurr and it was often suggested that things would markedly improve if all of them left. I asked Julian, who strongly held to this view, to list those Europeans whom he thought were doing a useful job at Ngukurr. He named all the school teachers, the sisters at the hospital, the mechanic, the shop manager, the cattle station manager, the Housing Association manager, the Council secretary and the European employed by the Council as advisor-cum-manager-cum-mechanic. The only Europeans he did not list were DAA staff. That is, despite his belief that there were too many Europeans, he could think of only a handful who were easily replaceable by Aborigines. This indicates the dependence of the Ngukurr Aborigines on Europeans to maintain and develop areas of the modern sector that the Aborigines themselves wish to retain but cannot easily operate. It was in this social environment that the Yugul Cattle Company was established.

5 Cattle at Ngukurr and the initiation of Yugul

In 1872 cattle were overlanded by Cox and Ure from Queensland to the Top End of the Northern Territory and the disruption of Aboriginal life in the Roper River area began. The route the drovers followed went from Burketown in Queensland to Borroloola in the Territory, on to Leichardt's (now Roper) Bar on the Roper River and then along the Roper through Eelsey station to the Top End or to the Victoria River district. Roper Bar is only a few kilometres from Ngukurr, so it is not surprising that the overlanding of cattle and the setting up of cattle stations had a big impact on the Aborigines who moved to Ngukurr after its establishment in 1908. The impact of one group of European pioneers in the Roper River district has been described as 'most damaging'.

In retaliation for cattle spearing, the Eastern and African Cold Storage Company, with callous indifference to human life, from time to time employed two gangs of from ten to fourteen Aborigines, led by a European or 'half-caste', systematically to hunt and shoot at sight any Arnhemlander, man, woman or child, whom they encountered. The older Aborigines of ... [Ngukurr] tell vivid tales of those terrible times (Cole, 1977, 179).

In the 1880s a number of stations were established in or near the Roper River valley: Hodgson Downs (1884), Nutwood Downs (early 1890s), Valley of Springs (1884), Bauhinia Downs (1883), Eelsey (1882) and Florida (1885) (Duncan, 1967, 161). Valley of Springs station was established south of the Roper River but one of its outstations, Wangalara, was started in the area of Arnhem Land to be occupied by the Yugul Cattle Company (see also Costello, 1930).

Pastoral expansion was brought to a halt in the 1890s and by 1895 the area of land leased in the Territory was less than half that leased in 1890. This was due to the combined effects of various factors, such as the cattle disease Redwater fever, Aboriginal raids on stockmen and cattle, physical isolation, low prices for cattle and poor quality pastures. Duncan notes that the 'decade of the nineties was catastrophic' and that the overland route from Queensland was not used again regularly until 1902 (Duncan, 1967, 46, 58). By 1895, the only two stations that had begun operating within what later became Arnhem Land had forfeited their leases. In 1904 the Roper Concessions Syndicate Ltd, a land speculation organisation stimulated by extravagant promotional material (McMinn and Rendle, 1901), leased 5000 square miles in the Roper area, but the lease was forfeited in 1909 without being stocked. No other land was leased in Arnhem Land for pastoral purposes until the Aborigines were given the opportunity in the 1970s.

1908-1968 - the CMS at Ngukurr

The period of pastoral activity in the late 1800s had a large impact on the Aborigines in the Roper area and when the CMS set up the Roper River Mission in 1908 many Aborigines moved there for protection and food. Soon after they arrived, the CMS bought some cattle from Urupunga, a European cattle station neighbouring Arnhem Land. In 1961, the CMS bought another 800 head, the last cattle acquired by them. It is likely, however, that a number of cattle would have been left in the area after the Valley of Springs and Florida cattle operations ceased while some cattle would have walked into Arnhem Land from adjoining properties.

Despite the early acquisition of cattle by the CMS, the Roper River Mission (Ngukurr) cattle project remained badly neglected until the 1950s. Cattle numbers were always grossly overestimated, a consequence of the CMS's inexperience in cattle work. For example, in 1937 the CMS suggested that 1000 head of cattle were in the Ngukurr area and by 1947 the estimate had risen to 2000. It was not until 1959, when the CMS appointed a competent European stockman, that it was forced to face the fact that there were hardly any cattle available. Prior to 1955, mustering outside the CMS lease (518 sq. kms) had been illegal and the CMS had simply assumed that thousands of head of cattle roamed the interior of Arnhem Land.

Mustering, even on the small CMS lease, was very irregular. For example, a CMS record of a muster in 1950 noted that the last general muster at Ngukurr had occurred as far back as 1934. The productivity of the cattle enterprise, in terms of meat supplied to the mission, was low. In 1937 the numbers of cattle were said by the CMS to be 'just sufficient' and Aborigines had to be sent away from Ngukurr in 1948 to hunt for food because the supply of meat was too low. Even by 1954 the CMS was still seriously concerned about the state of the cattle herd and the difficulty in securing necessary supplies of meat. The Aboriginal Committee of the CMS commented:

The cattle industry, just doesn't exist. The Government is requiring

that we provide the native population with continuous supplies of fresh beef, but the drought of 1952 wiped out the bulk of the cattle and breeding cattle cannot be purchased in the Territory, even if the cash were available. All we can do is send the native stockmen into Arnhem Land to search for cattle, so that occasionally we are able to provide the people with meat ... Their daily issue consists of ground wheat (porridge), pearl wheat or rice, occasionally bran and pollard, flour, tea, sugar and golden syrup; in addition there is meat when available and a little garden produce (CMS files, Darwin).

For the first fifty years of CMS control, very few resources were allocated to the cattle enterprise. For instance, the first holding paddock was built only in 1950. The highest priority of the CMS was the religious conversion of the Aborigines. Low staff numbers, physical isolation and lack of resources in general meant that the mission was run on a day-to-day basis where staff dealt with one crisis after another.

In the late 1950s this situation began to slowly change as the assimilationist policy of the Commonwealth government began to have an impact on remote Aboriginal settlements. Money was provided for extra staff and improvements, especially in relation to training activities. Cole, the CMS historian, called this period the 'welfare era' (1975a). Fences and yards were built and roads were constructed which gave access to outlying areas. In 1960 the CMS reported that there were 77 km of road and 96 km of firebreaks, and that 64 square kilometres of land had been fenced. It also reported that cattle numbers were still too low to supply beef to Ngukurr in any quantity.

According to Percy Leske, the superintendent of Ngukurr from the early 1950s to 1968, a small group of Aborigines had proved themselves capable of running a cattle operation by 1967 and the physical involvement of the CMS after 1961 in this operation was minimal. During the latter part of this period, approximately 700 kg of meat (3 to 4 bullocks) a week were being supplied to Ngukurr, a barely sufficient supply.

Most of those in this small group of Aborigines were middle-aged men, all of whom had considerable experience on European-owned cattle stations. They possessed most of the skills required for stockwork such as yard building, horse tailing, leather work and horsemanship. Their work was apparently sustained and well organised and much of it could be carried on without the need of an immediate boss.

Although a direct boss was not needed, there was indirect control. The CMS played a central supervisory role in the cattle project, but its influence was very indirect and obscured from the Aborigines by a number of factors. First, the enterprise was very small, production was low and there was no need for the CMS, or the Aborigines, to worry about increasing profitability or efficiency. For instance, when the enterprise first began wages were not paid at all and it was not until the 1950s that the CMS began to make minor payments to workers. By the late 1960s Aboriginal stockmen had started to receive the Training Allowance, but this was paid directly to the Aboriginal recipients by the government and was not related to productivity. Further, meat was only supplied for Ngukurr consumption, meaning that the infrastructure and organisation required to supply meat to a distant abattoir was not needed at Ngukurr.

Under these conditions, the Aborigines involved in the cattle industry at Ngukurr were free to carry out their tasks in a manner and at a speed which suited them. According to the CMS superintendent of the time this was about a half to three-quarters as efficient as work on a European-owned cattle station. The major activity was a hunting-type operation where one man would sit in a tree with a gun and a few stockmen would bring and hold a small number of cattle under the same tree. A beast would be selected, shot and then skinned and cut up. In order to continue this practice, the stockmen had only to keep sufficient cattle in holding paddocks close to Ngukurr. This meant that occasional musters had to be held and fences had to be maintained.

In short, the Ngukurr cattle enterprise was a very simple one which did not involve the strict routines and management practices associated with a large profit-making venture. Many of the activities on the Ngukurr project, such as yard building, fence maintenance, leather work and horse breaking, could be managed by one or two men. Where a number of men were required, such as for mustering or killing, there was little need for speed or efficiency. Therefore, the small group of Aborigines involved with the venture could handle the tasks required by simply doing what they had been well trained to do. No rigid or strict authority

system was necessary to carry out the essential day-to-day activities.

On the face of it, the CMS had little to do with the cattle work. But this was not the case; its presence was essential to the continuation of the operation. For example, it was the CMS, not the Aborigines, who distributed the meat which was the end product of the cattle operation. This meant that no Aboriginal organisation was required for this purpose and, further, that no Aboriginal groups or individual could gain control over the meat supply. This meant that there was little reason for, or possibility of, Aborigines being in conflict over this issue. The same applied to the control over opportunities for employment and other cattle enterprise resources, such as horses and especially land. In the case of opportunities for employment, jobs in the cattle venture received little remuneration. Control over these opportunities was therefore of little value to Aborigines. In the case of other resources, the CMS remained in strict control. For instance, the land around Ngukurr was leased from the government by the CMS and the horses, other stock and buildings were owned by the CMS. The Aborigines had good reason to object to CMS control, but had no reason to be in conflict with each other. Further, Aborigines employed in other areas of Ngukurr, such as the vegetable gardens or the school, were paid no more than the stockmen and under these conditions there was little reason for the stockmen to try to obtain other employment. The CMS also intervened in the cattle enterprise at crucial times to ensure that certain activities, such as fence maintenance, were completed within a reasonable time. In all of the above areas the role of the CMS was crucial.

The Aborigines were not, however, fully aware of the important social position that the CMS held at Ngukurr. Many assumed that if the CMS left, most of the modern sector activities could be easily taken over by Aborigines. Some Aborigines, especially the older long term residents, were dubious about the ability of the Aboriginal community to continue to run Ngukurr. However, they did not view this as a problem involving authority and power; rather, they tended to explain their feelings in terms of Aboriginal ignorance and stupidity. The younger Aborigines did not share the feelings of the 'old mission mob' and they generally wanted Aborigines to take control of everything at Ngukurr. They were also unaware of the importance of the lack of any community social structures that were appropriate to the tasks they wanted the community to take responsibility for.

After 1968: the formation of the YCC

When the CMS handed control of Ngukurr to the Commonwealth government in 1968 the settlement entered a chaotic period that culminated in a strike by the Aborigines in 1970. During this period, the cattle enterprise virtually ceased operations, although the Aborigines did, at one stage, set out to trap brumbies for stock work but failed. The Aborigines blamed this state of affairs on the government but this view was only partly correct. The government was perhaps negligent in not supplying vehicles, or money for wages to allow the Aborigines to continue with cattle work but it did not actively prevent the Aborigines from working on the project. With some difficulty they could have kept the project going. For instance, a good deal of fencing material was available which could have been put to use.

Without apportioning blame for the cessation of the cattle venture after 1968, it can be said that the Ngukurr Aborigines had become locked into a position where they were dependent on European initiative and management. Their inability as a community to take political and economic action was a considerable source of confusion and frustration for them with regard to the settlement in general and the cattle enterprise in particular.

In February 1970, the government placed a ban on the mustering of cattle at Ngukurr. According to Bern, this was because the government thought that the river frontage would have begun to erode if more stock had been mustered into the holding paddocks along the river (1976, 216). This may have been a contributing reason, but the main reason behind the ban was that unbranded cattle in Arnhem Land belonged to the Crown (NT Administration, 1971, 49). Accordingly, the Aborigines could not legally brand these cattle until they were transferred from Crown ownership to a legally constituted Aboriginal organisation. This mustering ban was bitterly resented by the Aborigines and had two significant effects. First, it was the final cause of the 1970 strike and second, it prompted the Aborigines to apply for a pastoral lease over a huge area around Ngukurr in the name of the Ngukurr community. To understand this latter action, it is necessary to look at legislation introduced into the Legislative Council in 1965.

In that year the activities of the Integration Committee of the Northern Territory Legislative Council resulted in the introduction of a private member's bill into the Council that proposed to enable Aborigines and Europeans to lease reserve land for agricultural and pastoral purposes. Aborigines and Europeans could already lease land within reserves under a Special Purpose Lease Ordinance but the areas involved were small, and often just for missionary activities. The aim of this bill was quite clear, namely, that 'Ultimately there should be free entry from reserves into non-reserve areas and from non-reserve areas into reserved areas, in fact reserves should be revoked completely'. This Aboriginal Land Titles Bill was passed at the first reading and was then 'in committee'. It had therefore become the policy of the Council.

Spurred by public opinion, the Commonwealth government then presented its own Bill as an amendment to the Crown Lands Ordinance. This Bill allowed a seven-year period before leases could be transferred to Europeans and an Aboriginal majority on a special Land Board. Both Bills were still outstanding in the Council to May 1968 when the Integration Committee decided to withdraw its Bill in return for special consideration of another Crown Land Bill. This is indicative of the interests supported by this Committee. This legislative action prompted the Welfare and Primary Industry Branches of the Department of the Northern Territory to conduct a review in 1965 of the pastoral potential of the land around Ngukurr. Four areas were designated by the investigative team as suitable for development and the CMS had visions of establishing a series of 'family farms' on these areas. At this stage, a number of traditional Aboriginal land owning groups applied to lease land from the Crown in the hope that the new legislation would allow these applications to be heard. Nothing came of these Aboriginal initiatives because legislation remained unchanged until 1970 when the Commonwealth government introduced its own bill into the Legislative Council to provide appropriate amendments to the Crown Lands Ordinance and the Special Purpose Lease Ordinance. This bill was passed and came into effect on 31 December 1970. For the first time Aborigines were able to lease Aboriginal Reserve land from the Crown. However, there was a provision in the legislation requiring that any proposed pastoral venture to be established on the leases be profitable. For the Aborigines at Ngukurr this meant that a lease of around 5000 sq. kms was needed, a far greater area of land than that being applied for by each traditional land owning group.

Now, these groups were reluctant to join together, but the need to establish financial viability before a lease would be granted began to override the jealousies and conflicts that existed between them. When the government prevented the Aborigines from mustering around Ngukurr in 1970, these groups finally decided, though not wholeheartedly, to amalgamate their lease applications. This action by the government had driven home to the Aborigines just how little say they had over what they considered to be their land. It not only resulted in a joint lease application, but it was the final cause of the 1970 strike.

In order to apply for the 'community' lease and to receive the hoped-for funding, it was decided to form the Yugul Cattle Company. The first action was to apply for a lease on the 8th October 1970. Two directors and a secretary were nominated in June 1971, and in the following month the company was incorporated under the N.T. Companies Ordinance 1963.

The structure of the YCC was set out in its Memorandum and Articles of Association (NT Company Register). In broad terms the company was to be initially involved in primary production but was authorised

to carry on any other business, whether of the nature of farming,
fishing, mining, construction, carrying, ... manufacturing, trading,
financing, or performing services of any other nature whatsoever ...

The original share capital was \$10 000 divided into 10 000 shares of \$1 each. The number of shareholders was not to exceed 50 but only seven Aborigines held shares. Shares were under control of the Directors who did not have to be shareholders themselves. The company, by ordinary resolution, could sack and appoint Directors. The Board of Directors was to include both Directors plus a representative from the agricultural consultants (and later DAA) who had no voting rights.

The Ngukurr Aborigines were advised of this incorporation of the company in September 1971 and they immediately applied for development funds from two sources, namely the Aboriginal Benefit Trust Fund (ABTF) and the Aboriginal Capital Fund (ACF), so that their lease application would have a greater chance of success. In November 1971 the ACF advised the YCC that it would fund the project if their lease application was successful and if it was shown to be financially viable. This advice was immediately handed to the Territory Land Board hearing the lease application at Ngukurr. On 6 December 1971, the Northern Territory Administrator wrote to the YCC noting that a lease had been approved in principle over 5460 square kms

'subject to finance being available and to other specific conditions which the Minister may direct' (Ngukurr Council Files, Yugul Cattle Co. Pty Ltd, 28).

The project then hinged on funding from the ACF, which had yet to be convinced of its financial viability. This meant that a feasibility study had to be commissioned. It was not until six months later, in July 1972, that this study commenced. In the meantime, the Aborigines became impatient and, in December, they wrote to the ABTF, to the ACF and to the Groote Eylandt Trust Fund requesting \$45000 to allow them to start working. For six months nothing eventuated and on 16 June 1972 a telegram was sent by the YCC to the ACF asking for advice on the availability of funding. The ACF replied, stating that a study team was being sent to Ngukurr in July 1972. It duly came but after it had left Ngukurr the Aborigines were still no wiser as to funding. Finally, on 25 October 1972, but not before another enquiring telegram to ACF, the Ngukurr people were informed that finance had been allocated, that a manager had been found and that the lease was being granted. This message came during the wet season and therefore work could not start until the dry season in 1973. This meant that two and a half years had passed from the time of the lease application to the time work actually commenced on the project.

Shortly after the announcement that funds were available for the project, the Australian Labor Party was elected to power at the Commonwealth level in December 1972. It commissioned Justice Woodward to carry out an inquiry into the question of land rights for Aborigines. Pending the outcome of this inquiry all applications by Aborigines for leases over Aboriginal Reserves were shelved. Consequently, the YCC was advised on 13 February 1973 that the offer of a lease had been withdrawn. The YCC was never to have secure tenure over the land on which it operated.

Feasibility Studies

The first of a series of investigations was carried out in October 1965 by officers of the Northern Territory Administration. Their report gave an indication of the poor quality of the pastoral resources of this area and suggested that it was not surprising that the Europeans who had the opportunity to settle there did not do so (NT Administration File, Animal Industry and Agriculture Branch, Roper River Settlement, RR7). The government officers reported that:

The landscape of the area is dominated by dissected sandstone plateaus and hilly country. The soils are often only shallow and skeletal overlying hardened (silicified) sandstone outcrops

and:

from a pastoral point of view the dominating impression is the amount of worthless country.

This useless country included, for example, areas of lancewood scrub, paperbark swamps, sand dunes, salt pans and spinifex country. Only four tracts of land (about half the total area) were considered as having some potential and, with their suggested stocking rate of approximately 2 beasts per 5 square kms, the carrying capacity of the area in an undeveloped state was estimated at only 1 000.

This lack of pastoral potential is, of course, one of the main reasons why Arnhem Land exists as an Aboriginal reserve today. The other major reason is the difficulty of access. If pastoral activity in this region had been even marginally profitable, Europeans would have taken out leases or maintained the leases that were granted in the late 1800s. It is ironic, therefore, that it was necessary for the Aborigines to demonstrate that their cattle project would be financially viable before they could get a lease.

In 1969, two further studies were carried out, again by Territory Administration officials, the first in July and the second, and most intensive, in November. The latter study was commissioned by the Welfare Branch which had taken Ngukurr over from the CMS in 1968. It had taken more than a year for this Branch to even begin to take action about the prospect of promoting a cattle operation. Notwithstanding the two previous studies in 1965 and early 1969, this party again examined the potential of a number of areas, but this time went further by proposing a two year development plan to begin in 1970. However, it was not until September 1970 that a European manager was appointed. It was too late to take advantage of the 1970 dry season and in 1971 only a small amount of work (fencing and mustering) was done because of a lack of horses, equipment and vehicles. The European manager left in September 1971 and was not replaced because it was assumed that the YCC would soon be operational. However, it was not until July 1972 that the final feasibility study began, and the Aborigines had to endure another unproductive dry season before money was allocated.

In July, three officers (including me) from the Primary Industry Branch of the Department of the Northern Territory and one representative from each of the Office of Aboriginal Affairs (OAA), Department of the Interior and the Australian Agricultural Consulting and Management Company (AACM), visited Ngukurr to prepare definite and detailed proposals for the development of the YCC's lease. The party travelled extensively over the lease and on the final day held a meeting with interested Aborigines to find out what type of development they wanted. AACM compiled a report of this visit which came to two major conclusions about the views of the Aborigines. First, the Aborigines did indeed want a cattle station, but one that would begin in a small way, with an initial phase of mustering, culling, marking and minor improvements to roads, yards and fences. After this phase, the Aborigines envisaged the introduction of improved pasture species and brahmin cattle. The second conclusion was that the Aborigines wanted a community-owned and operated venture that would benefit everyone at Ngukurr. The ideas expressed by AACM derived from a surface impression of both Ngukurr society and Aboriginal feelings regarding the YCC. The AACM report also suggested a three stage development programme that included a flexible time scale for the move from one stage to the next (AACM, 1972, 9, 12).

Following AACM's report, the Aboriginal Capital Fund announced that it was funding the YCC on the basis of the report and AACM were appointed management consultants to the YCC.

On the 25 September 1972, a further visit was made to Ngukurr to inform the Aborigines that money had finally been allocated and that the YCC could begin operations. I was also present on this occasion. The proposed European manager was introduced to the principals of the YCC who accepted him as suitable. The YCC venture was finally launched.

6 Early promise, hidden problems

The change in government policy which resulted in the setting up of the cattle venture at Ngukurr had subtle but far-reaching implications for the relations of Europeans and Aborigines and the success of the venture. This venture was part of an attempt to promote a form of separate development at Ngukurr through community-orientated economic enterprises. It was taxed from the beginning by external constraints which not only set the general context within which it worked but also defined important features of the venture itself, especially its management structure.

The first two years of operation gave little indication of the problems that would later arise at Ngukurr for the 1973 and 1974 dry seasons were productive and money was readily available for plant, maintenance and employment. Many Aborigines wanted to work in their new venture and the first manager was an active man who consulted regularly with the Aborigines and established good relations with them.

Most people involved in the YCC were pleased with the progress made. For instance, Duke, the central figure in the YCC and Ngukurr politics, felt that he had a degree of control over development plans and day-to-day activities and that he was well informed about what was going on. He also had access to vehicles, petrol, a boat with an outboard motor and credit at the shop. The manager invited him to his house for meals and work breaks and treated him as the principal of the YCC. His status and control of resources at Ngukurr had been enhanced by involvement in the YCC.

The YCC employees were paid award wages, were well supplied with rations and were enthusiastic about using the new equipment and facilities. As well, the cattle station activities were very visible to the Ngukurr population. For example, meat was supplied to the community, bulls were sold to the Katherine meatworks, vehicles and horses carried stockmen around the settlement, the YCC grader was used to smooth the Ngukurr streets and a helicopter was hired to help muster cattle. Even those Aborigines who were antagonistic to the YCC or apathetic about it could not help but be impressed by the fact that an Aboriginal-owned cattle station was apparently functioning successfully at Ngukurr. The Europeans involved, namely those from AACM and the DAA, began to feel somewhat optimistic about the YCC's long term success. It would guarantee profit and prestige for AACM while, at the same time, would provide a part-solution to DAA's problems at Ngukurr.

For those Aborigines who were interested in the general economic and social well-being of the Ngukurr community, the YCC provided evidence that progress in this direction was a possibility. Hence, the YCC received support from Aborigines who had a sense of community and, in turn, its operations fostered this feeling. Older Aborigines who had worked in their youth on European cattle stations had reason to be proud of their past and to recount and boast about bygone, often apocryphal, deeds.

However, the first two years of operation were abnormal. The deeply rooted problems that would later destroy the YCC were pushed into the background by the burst of activity and enthusiasm that marked the start of this new venture. These problems were of several kinds: some arose from Aboriginal culture and society at Ngukurr; others from European activities and institutional practices and yet others from the physical environment. As this suggests, some were rooted in the community itself and others were external to it.

External influences

A proposal to establish an Aboriginal-owned and controlled cattle venture at Ngukurr was supported by some of the Aborigines right from the time the CMS left in 1968. However, nothing could happen without government support and that began to develop only in the early 1970s. At this time government policy was in a state of flux. The assimilationist approach was being questioned but the policies that were later to be announced under the rubric of self-determination (and later still, self-management) had not yet been formulated. The YCC venture was established when the government was making its first tentative moves away from policies and actions designed to incorporate Aborigines into European society to policies that began to support separate development.

One of these moves was to allow Aborigines and only Aborigines to lease land within Arnhem Land (and other Aboriginal Reserves) for pastoral or agricultural purposes. The Ngukurr Aborigines were interested in taking advantage of this legislative initiative. To do so

however, they had to satisfy the government that the pastoral venture to be established would be economically viable. The upshot of this was that they had to apply for a lease on behalf of the whole community, rather than in the name of traditional land owning groups.

Other government regulations were also influential in shaping the nature of the cattle venture. For instance, the government would grant money only to a legally incorporated body, but in the early 1970s no such body existed at Ngukurr. Under these circumstances it was necessary, as we have seen, for the Aborigines to form the Yugul Cattle Company if they were to apply for the lease and to receive government funds. The fact that a company rather than the Ngukurr Council controlled the cattle venture had a big impact. For example, it allowed one Aborigine to dominate the YCC, a situation that led to many problems.

Later, when the Aboriginal Land Rights (NT) Act (1976) and the Aboriginal Councils and Associations Act (1976) were mooted (and later passed), the legal restrictions that had helped determine the structure of the cattle venture were removed. One result was that Aborigines had no need to lease land as a means of controlling it when they believed they could gain legal title to it under the Land Rights Act. These legal changes had the effect of undermining support for the YCC.

Besides external influences, several features of settlement organisation also helped to undermine the cattle company, notably local European influence and control and division and conflict within the community.

European control

In general, European control became an integral part of remote settlement social organisation as Aboriginal-European relations were institutionalised. Aborigines did not develop any authority or power structures at the settlement level or at the level of the work place. This was the case at Ngukurr. A lack of strong authority structures meant that the Aborigines could not easily run the YCC as a community venture. They had no way to draw the cattle venture into an overall community development plan that involved community organisation of production (including manpower allocation and training) and distribution of products or profits. In this sense, the cattle operation was not a community venture at all. Rather, it was attached in a geographic rather than in a social sense to a particular community.

Further, the Aborigines had great difficulty in organising themselves at the level of the work place. Few Aborigines at Ngukurr had authority or power to allocate tasks or to sanction workers who did not perform their tasks. The result was that work was usually carried out in a haphazard and inefficient manner, a point which the Aborigines realized. Their inability to organise and delegate authority was a source of great frustration and annoyance to them. Many had worked on European-owned cattle stations and wanted to operate the YCC in a similar fashion. In short, while the Aborigines were pleased that direct European control of Ngukurr was being rapidly phased out, they could not easily take control of the settlement since a legacy of that direct control was the absence of appropriate Aboriginal authority structures.

This does not mean that European control at Ngukurr had disappeared altogether. The YCC, like almost all activities at Ngukurr, required a continuous supply of funds from the government to keep it going. This provided the government with the ability to influence the YCC directly. For instance, when the Aborigines sacked the consulting company working for the YCC, the government (through the Department of Aboriginal Affairs) immediately withdrew most funds and brought the YCC almost to a standstill. While the YCC was operating, this form of government interference was kept to a minimum, although, at the very beginning the government made it clear that funds were only to be spent by the YCC in accordance with the development plan devised by European consultants. This effectively denied the right of the YCC to determine new development priorities and led the consultants to view themselves as responsible to the government rather than the Aborigines.

Incorporation into the modern sector

The incorporation of Aborigines into the modern sector of Ngukurr had been intensive and when Yugul was started they were culturally, socially and economically locked into this sector. The very existence of a cattle operation at Ngukurr reflected the involvement of the Aborigines in cattle work, both on and off Ngukurr. They wanted an essentially European-style venture that would provide meat, employment and wages, profits and an impetus to general economic

development at Ngukurr. Further, their view of how best to organise cattle station activities was largely determined by their experience on European stations. Some Aborigines were well aware of this fact. For instance, one man insisted that there was no such thing as an 'Aboriginal way' to run a cattle station. The Aborigines' involvement in and support for the YCC reflected, and was itself an example of, their intensive incorporation into the modern sector.

However, this incorporation was extremely limited in scope, as the lack of settlement-wide Aboriginal authority structures at Ngukurr demonstrated. Further, the Ngukurr Aborigines had a very shallow understanding of the modern sector because until quite recently their involvement in it had not necessitated their participation in matters of management and control. As a result, the Ngukurr Aborigines misunderstood a number of issues connected with the YCC, such as accounting and office procedures, the limits of available skills and economic potential.

Another consequence of their limited incorporation in the modern sector was the development of a contemporary Aboriginal culture and social organisation both of which exhibited a dichotomous character. The Aborigines at Ngukurr had become European orientated in many respects, both culturally and socially. Yet, many traditions were also retained producing a number of contradictions and inconsistencies in contemporary Aboriginal society at Ngukurr. When the Aborigines attempted to control an enterprise like the YCC these contradictions and inconsistencies caused a number of problems. For example, any attempts to develop new authority structures were undermined by existing patterns of traditional social relations and obligations.

Conflict and division within the community

The tension and conflicts at Ngukurr had their effect on the venture. Although not directly relevant to the operation of the YCC, they tended to overshadow it and to undermine Aboriginal support for it. The YCC was drawn into the conflict between the two main families at Ngukurr, especially when Duke, the elder from one of them, attempted to maintain and enhance his social position in Ngukurr by gaining control of the YCC. Because Duke was the most influential figure in one of the families, his actions exacerbated the family conflict.

An explanation of the operation of the YCC must also take into account the division at Ngukurr between Aborigines in the core group and the outsiders. The former never intended the YCC to be a true community venture, but, rather, were interested in the YCC as a means of controlling the land around Ngukurr traditionally owned by the families that made up the core group. Members of the core group talked of the YCC as if they wanted it to be a community venture but their actions suggested otherwise.

Lastly, it is necessary to examine the role of the Ngukurr Council. When the Council became legally incorporated it was supposed to take control of the YCC. There are three reasons why this did not occur. First, the Council was too weak to take over the YCC. Second, with the support of Europeans, Duke acted to prevent this. And third, because Duke's family controlled the Council other Aborigines were not interested in forcing this issue.

7 Aboriginal support for Yugul

There was widespread support for the cattle venture among the Aborigines at Ngukurr even though, in order to get the lease, some groups had come together only reluctantly and tension between them might have been expected. There were some who kept aloof from the venture. These may be described first.

Some Aborigines were not particularly interested in a cattle station and seemed indifferent to its success or failure. These included those Aborigines with well paid secure government jobs, such as teachers and teachers' aides, whose livelihood did not depend on the economic development of Ngukurr and others whose income was largely derived from direct government funding to the Council and the welfare system. Government policy was that all Aborigines employed on settlements should receive award wages which meant that as long as the government was prepared to fund a reasonable number of positions at Ngukurr, its economy was largely independent of internal economic development.

Other indifferent Aborigines were those whose traditional lands were outside the boundaries of the YCC. These people often seemed more interested in controlling and developing their own land than in the development of Ngukurr. Some elders also appeared more interested in traditional activities or peace of mind than in becoming involved in conflict-producing settlement activities.

Support at the level of the community

Perhaps the most general and least substantial support for the YCC came from the Aborigines' sense of being Ngukurr people. This form of community consciousness was based on a shared settlement experience and a feeling of Aboriginality shaped by common subjection to European domination. Traditional Aboriginal culture and social structure tended to undermine rather than sustain this sense of community while Aboriginal social structure in the modern sector gave it little support.

Many Aborigines expressed hope that Ngukurr would develop into a place where they and their children could enjoy the services, facilities and job opportunities available in a European town. Their wish reflected both the high level of acculturation at Ngukurr and general Aboriginal feelings that Ngukurr should be an economically autonomous town controlled by Aborigines (Bern, 1976, 216). In some instances, this wish was replaced by desires to establish outstations, apathy or satisfaction with things as they were, resulting from assured wages and welfare benefits. Nevertheless, at various times and places many Aborigines genuinely supported community development at Ngukurr.

It was a general feeling among the Aborigines at Ngukurr that all non-traditional activities should be controlled by the Council. Despite its short existence at Ngukurr, the fully elected Council had already gained much legitimacy. It was felt that it was the only organisation capable of representing the community as a whole. Hence, many community-conscious Ngukurr Aborigines wanted the new cattle enterprise to come under the Council.

For those people wanting economic development at Ngukurr the YCC represented a step in the right direction. It employed Aborigines, supplied meat, promised profits, was ostensibly community controlled and many of its activities gave the impression that at last something of long term economic consequence was happening at Ngukurr.

General Aboriginal support for the YCC also came from those Aborigines who had been involved in the cattle industry in the past. Many old stockmen were nostalgic about the days when they worked on surrounding cattle stations and often talked of their prowess and ability with stock. They felt that they could play a role in the YCC, advising and training young stockmen. For many of the young men at Ngukurr stockwork had a glamorous appeal, for the image of a well-dressed stockman riding a high spirited horse was a most attractive one. Many aspects of station life, especially dress and music, had become a part of everyday life for the Ngukurr Aborigines, a fact which enhanced their feelings that a Ngukurr cattle station would be in their interests. Their belief that they had virtually run a cattle enterprise themselves during the days of the OMS was used as evidence for their faith in their ability to do the same with regard to the YCC.

When the YCC started operations in 1973, many Aborigines applied to work for it. It was a new and exciting project, award wages were being paid and the European manager was a good man to work under. In the first year, 25 men were employed, 13 of whom worked for more than six months. Their pay was around \$50 a week and, on top of that, they were fully rationed. If rations are calculated at \$10 per man per week, then, at those admittedly few times when the 25 employees were all working, the effective Aboriginal income from the YCC was around \$1500 per week. This income was of benefit to Aborigines who had to buy all their food and clothing from the local store at prices usually above those charged in Darwin. By the end of 1975, a total of 44 different men had worked for the YCC.

For these reasons the Aboriginal community was generally proud of the YCC, at least in its initial phase.

Support at the level of the core group

The core group comprised approximately two-thirds of the Ngukurr population. It was divided into families which are the most important social groups at Ngukurr and its members dominated both the modern and traditional sectors of Ngukurr. Its constituent families had independent ritual positions, but a sense of core group solidarity had been developed through common participation in, and alteration of, Jabaduruwa and Gunabibi cults. Bern notes that by the late 1950s a 'separate Ngukurr ritual complex' had formed (1974, 114). In part, this was due to a consolidation of control over ritual property in the hands of three main core families. Further, marriage of core group members came to be seen in terms of the resulting affinal links between the families, rather than in traditional terms. Non-core group residents at Ngukurr were recent arrivals, compared with core members, from other areas of Arnhem Land (for example, the Ritharngu and Balamumu), or from neighbouring cattle stations (such as Elsey and Roper Valley). These residents tended to be involved in Maddain or Balgin cults.

Members of the core group also dominated the modern sector of Ngukurr or, more accurately, that part not controlled by Europeans. They filled most positions on the Council, they dominated settlement meetings and their level of acculturation was higher than that of non-core group people.

One of the most important reasons why the Aborigines wanted to apply for a pastoral lease was to gain control of land. For many Aborigines the desire to establish a cattle station was also important, but often secondary. Land control was desired for traditional reasons and because the Aborigines believed that this was the best way to achieve a measure of autonomy and economic independence. Bern notes that the Ngukurr Aborigines' claim for land was 'not so much for rights over a particular territory, ... but rather for the restoration of economic and political autonomy' (1974, 441). Of course, the establishment of a cattle station is in line with the Aborigines' desire for independence, but land control also meant control of both traditional and mineral resources considered by them to be just as important, if not more so.

As the YCC lease was mainly on core group land, a sense of core group solidarity was the main reason why an 'umbrella' lease was applied for. Had it not been for the existence of the core group, the claims of traditional land-owning groups would have prevented the Aborigines from agreeing on a combined application. This point is supported by the fact that on other settlements, where a group similar to the Ngukurr core group does not exist, the dominant tendency has been for settlements to fragment into outstation communities (cf. Wallace, 1977; Gray, 1977).

Members of the core group often talked about and supported the idea of community ownership of the YCC and a community lease. For instance, Bern lists the demands made by a core group dominated Aboriginal meeting in 1970 just before they went on strike. The first of these demands was:

Main thing is get lease of land covering the area of the old Mission lease, ... (and maybe) extending eastward to Rose River. Lease is to be for everybody, not for each man to ask for his tribal land [sic] (1976, 217).

However, the core group acted as if community was coterminous with core group. They had no plans to allow non-core Aborigines to have any say in the use of land that traditionally belonged to the constituent families of the core group. The following incident supports this view. When the YCC was first mooted, it was suggested by the Aborigines, including members of the core group, that it be run as a community venture by shareholders representing all groups at Ngukurr. However, after the YCC was incorporated, a letter written by Duke advised the YCC

solicitors that the 22 shareholders to be appointed would be representative of only those families to whom the land to be leased by the company was traditionally important (Letter 18 October 1971, Ngukurr Council Files, YCC, 5).

Because the core group was so dominant at Ngukurr, it is important to make a clear distinction between what its members said about community control and what happened with regard to any proposed community ventures.

Many members of the core group also wanted the new project to be controlled by the Council to prevent it being dominated by any section of that group. This was not inconsistent with their unwillingness to allow non-core group Aborigines a say in the project. Even though the Council was freely elected, it was heavily dominated by the core group which always supplied the president.

Support at the level of core group families

The relations between the core group families were strong enough to allow them to apply for an 'umbrella' lease. However, the family divisions and conflicts also ran deep and fiercely at Ngukurr, both in the modern sector where they competed for control of the Council and in the traditional sector, where they were in conflict over the control of ritual estates. Antagonism between two of the three dominant families was intense.

Some of the elders of these families were always opposed to the YCC and the idea of an 'umbrella' lease. For example, as late as December 1971, a year after the lease application and five months after the incorporation of the YCC, an elder of one of the families wrote to the DAA expressing his opposition to the lease (DAA file no 71/734, Yugul Cattle Co, R.R., N.T., Capital Fund). He noted that at least two land owning groups, Gurrurugul and Wanmuri, were not in the YCC and suggested that their lease applications be heard first since they had applied before the YCC. Other groups from the core wished to maintain their independence by a system of mustering royalties or rents.

Had the YCC been controlled in equal measure by the various core group families, the family division may have played little role in its operation. However, this was not to be. The head of one of these families, Duke, gained control over the YCC, a fact that generated considerable conflict and contributed to the collapse of the company.

The effect of European control on core group solidarity was also important. As long as Europeans remained in control of Ngukurr, the Aborigines tended to think of themselves as a community, partly in reaction to this control. But, when direct European control ended and separate-development-orientated policies were introduced, the divisions within the Ngukurr population were reactivated. This process was exacerbated by the land rights issue. Under these conditions the core group families began to focus on their traditional lands (although no outstations were formed) and support for the YCC was weakened.

Most of the core group families also wanted the Council to take responsibility for the cattle venture, but their support for the Council tended to rise and fall according to which family was in control.

Support from individual Aborigines

A number of Aborigines had personal reasons for backing the formation of the YCC. Some saw it as an opportunity to re-employ their hard-earned cattle station skills and others hoped to find work there. One Aborigine, Duke, had a considerable interest.

Prior to the departure of the CMS, Duke had been a very important figure in the modern sector and had growing influence in the traditional sector. When the CMS left, his position with regard to traditional activities was strengthened, but his role in the modern sector was weakened by the formation of the Ngukurr Council which received considerable government support.

Duke gradually withdrew from all modern sector activities until by 1975 the only position he held there was that of a director of the YCC. He put a good deal of time and energy into this project because he was convinced that it would provide Ngukurr with a supply of meat, employment for the young men and eventually profits that could be used for the advantage of the

community as a whole. To varying degrees he was also interested in the YCC as a vehicle for the control of core group land and as an organisation that would benefit his family and those closely associated with it. Duke's close involvement with the YCC resulted primarily from his declining authority in the modern sector. By taking control of the YCC he was able to improve his position at Ngukurr without having to become involved in the Council or in the Council election process which he disliked so much.

Duke's control of the YCC brought him many benefits. First, he had access to vehicles that could be used for such purposes as gathering firewood (an important resource at Ngukurr where there were few electric stoves and little wood within easy walking distance from the houses), visiting the Roper Bar store (some 30 km away) or travelling to outlying areas on matters not connected with the YCC. Second, he received a wage and food rations according to the award for head stockmen in the NT cattle industry. Third, when cattle were killed in the bush, the offal (head, stomach, heart, liver) could be used by Duke and his family or redistributed by him to other Aborigines. Fourth, he had the right to hire and fire YCC employees, giving him the potential to control the allocation of jobs and, therefore, wages. The final advantage to Duke was the status involved in being the principal figure in the first Aboriginal-owned cattle venture in the Top End.

Prior to 1968, Duke had been head stockman for the small cattle operation started by the CMS. According to the European who was Superintendent of Ngukurr at that time, Duke had played the major role in this operation and, just prior to the departure of the CMS, had assumed control of it. Hence, his interest in the YCC also stemmed from his past close association with cattle work at Ngukurr.

In short, Duke had many strong personal reasons for supporting the establishment of the YCC. Indeed without his support it may not have been formed at all. Right from the time of the departure of the CMS, Duke pushed systematically for the formation of a Ngukurr cattle station. In 1967 he had applied for a pastoral lease on behalf of two of the major families. His constant advocacy and his ability to generate widespread support were important factors. By appealing to feelings of 'Ngukurrness' and other issues with general community support, such as Aboriginal autonomy and control, and the generation of employment, he gained the backing of both core and non-core Aborigines. As a core group member, he could discuss the YCC and the need for an 'umbrella' lease without promoting immediate opposition of traditional land-owning groups. It helped that he had strong traditional attachments to more than half the land applied for in the name of the YCC. He was also a competent stockman who was regarded by the Ngukurr people as having a good knowledge of things European. Further, since he had been in charge of the Ngukurr cattle venture when the CMS was at Ngukurr, he gave the impression that he had the knowledge and ability to do the same in regard to the YCC.

Despite Duke's widespread support and his own lobbying, it is doubtful if the YCC would have been formed or an 'umbrella' lease applied for if it had not been for two intervening factors. First, government guidelines made it impossible for the Aborigines to gain a lease unless they applied for around 5000 sq. kms, the area required for a profitable venture. Traditional land owning groups, namely the core group families, were willing to combine as long as they were not being asked to relinquish traditional rights and as long as the YCC was controlled by core group members. Duke's influence ensured that the latter would be the case.

The second intervening factor was the 1970 Aboriginal strike at Ngukurr or, more accurately, Aboriginal reaction (of which the strike was only the final emotive act) against European dominance and inactivity. One of the specific factors causing the strike was a government ban on branding cattle in the area around Ngukurr. This ban, and the subsequent strike, strengthened the tendencies supportive of the YCC and an 'umbrella' lease. Anti-European feelings and community consciousness were mobilised, along with Aboriginal wishes for autonomy and local economic development. The mustering ban focused Aboriginal attention on the need to have some degree of control over land and on feelings supportive of a cattle enterprise.

In the emotional environment that existed prior to and during the strike, the community came to a consensus over the need to form the YCC and apply for an 'umbrella' lease. In part, this agreement was influenced by resident Europeans who supported the concept of a pastoral lease and who convinced the Aborigines that no lease would be granted unless they decided to lodge a joint application (Bern, 1976, 216 and I. Pitman, pers. comm.).

Once the Aborigines had reached a consensus on this issue, the processes that were duly instituted did not require any further decisions to be made by the community as a whole. With minimal correspondence with Ngukurr, various Darwin-based European organisations, such as the DAA, the Registrar of Companies, the YCC solicitors and the NT Lands Board, processed the necessary documents. The few pieces of correspondence that were sent to Ngukurr were handled by Duke and a young Aborigine who acted for a short time as company secretary.

Duke's dominance over YCC affairs was demonstrated even before the company was incorporated. When the pastoral lease was applied for on the 8 October 1970, eight Aborigines were signatories. All of them were associated with Duke's family, and the only elders involved were Duke and two of his brothers. One important Aboriginal family, the Simon family, whose elders opposed the 'umbrella' lease, was not represented at all.

Just prior to the incorporation of the company, a letter was sent to the firm of solicitors acting for the Aborigines telling them that Duke and his brother-in-law were to be the directors. While this decision was apparently taken at a community meeting, by 1975-76 it was opposed by many Aborigines who wanted more say in the YCC.

After the incorporation of the YCC, Duke again wrote to the firm of solicitors handling the incorporation, advising them that 22 Aborigines were to hold shares, and that these people were representative of all of the families to whom the Yugul land was important. However, when the list of shareholders was made official in a letter from the YCC to the Registrar of Companies in September 1974, only five Aborigines were included other than the two Directors. The only one of these five (who were all core group members) not closely associated with Duke was a member of the Simon family. Even though all the elders of that family had died a younger member had consented to hold a share. However, beyond this, neither he nor his family had anything further to do with the YCC.

Duke ran the YCC, or at least that part of it not controlled by Europeans, in an autocratic fashion. Those involved with the company were in, or closely aligned to, his family and were in no position to oppose him. Once he had assumed control, other groupings did not wish to become involved, even where this was possible.

Duke's dominance is indicated by the following example. The YCC had two directors, both of whom had an important say over company affairs. At least that was the legal position. In all issues, however, the two men who had at different times filled the other directorships deferred to Duke. One of these, Duke's brother-in-law, began to spend a considerable time away from Ngukurr and when he was home his drinking interfered with his responsibilities in the YCC. As a result he was replaced by a young man who lived with Duke's sister's family. The normal procedure for replacing a director would be to have his position declared vacant at a meeting of shareholders which would then elect his replacement. In this case, Duke declared the position vacant and nominated a successor at a public meeting. This meeting did not oppose his initiative and the change in directors was finalised.

According to long term plans the YCC should have become the Council's responsibility after the Council was legally incorporated (DAA file 74/539, 16 January 1974). This did not occur, because neither Duke nor AACM wanted it. One reason given by them for keeping the cattle enterprise outside of Council control was that it would run much more efficiently if it could be separated from the political and social environment of the settlement. The elements of this environment considered detrimental to the YCC were Aboriginal conflict, the influence of Europeans, the effects of alcohol consumption and the disruptive impact of Aborigines who were seen as lazy no-hopers by both AACM and Duke. Those closely involved with the YCC were not content with their control of it; they also saw it as desirable that the headquarters of the YCC be shifted away from the settlement. In line with this view, AACM presented a submission to DAA asking for \$265 000 to shift the YCC away from Ngukurr.

Aboriginal misunderstandings concerning the YCC

Many of the older Ngukurr Aborigines had worked as stockmen, camp cooks, horse tailers, yard builders and 'odd-job men' on European cattle stations around Arnhem Land. They learned many skills and, in a narrow sense, were allowed to compete equally with Europeans as stockmen and rough riders. And they assimilated many aspects of station culture and life-style such as clothing, musical tastes and certain attitudes to work. It is clear that the Ngukurr Aborigines wanted their cattle station to be essentially similar to the ones on which they had worked. For these reasons it is not surprising that a cattle venture was considered, by both Aborigines and Europeans, to be appropriate for Ngukurr.

The involvement of Aborigines in the cattle industry was, however, of a particular kind. Their labour was often exploited, wages were low or non-existent and, in the off-season, Aborigines either had to support themselves by traditional means or return to Ngukurr to live off the largesse of the CMS. Further, the Ngukurr Aborigines only knew about the out-of-doors physical operations of a cattle enterprise and were almost always under the direct supervision and control of Europeans. They developed the necessary skills for their position, but not the related work authority systems. They neither understood, nor did they often even know about, the financial, organisational and cultural factors underlying the operations of a cattle enterprise. Kolig has recognised this point in his work in Western Australia. He writes:

Naturally, Aborigines' first-hand experience of Western economic functions is based on the (erroneous) comprehension of these [pastoral] enterprises. Even Aborigines employed in this industry, let alone those outside it, are only vaguely aware of economic and commercial functions other than those immediately observable by them (Kolig, 1972, 13).

As a result it is not surprising that the Aborigines grossly misunderstood a number of matters concerning the YCC. The most important matters were related to organisation, economics and available skills.

The Aborigines assumed that the best way for the YCC to start would be along the same lines as Europeans had developed their stations. One particular station was used as a model both because some Ngukurr Aborigines (including a YCC director) had worked there and because it had recently been developed by an American-owned multi-national company into a show-place of the Top End. The Aborigines hoped that one day the YCC would be like this station, and to achieve this end they felt it was necessary to follow the same path of development.

The procedure used by many Europeans to build up their properties was a product of the marginal profitability of beef production in the Top End of the Northern Territory. Low wages or none at all were paid to Aboriginal stockmen, who sometimes received only food and tobacco and perhaps a pair of boots. The standard of living of the Europeans was also very low, in many instances not much better than that of their employees. Cattle were mustered once a year and the return from the sales of stock was often just sufficient for the purchase of stores and equipment for the next mustering season. Many Europeans managed to build up their cattle numbers by poddy dodging, that is, stealing unbranded stock from neighboring properties or Crown land. This procedure could not be copied at Ngukurr for a number of reasons.

First, the number of 'scrub', or wild, cattle around Ngukurr was not sufficient to provide the nucleus of the large herd required by the YCC. It was not possible to wait for natural increases and poddy dodging was out of the question. The YCC had to purchase breeders if it was to develop at the rate set by the AACM report.

Second, while there was no legal or union reason why the Aborigines could not accept low wages when working for their own company, such a policy could not be introduced at Ngukurr. The Aborigines working for the YCC had no wish to accept low wages when the rest of the community was receiving award wages working for the Council or the government. The Aborigines thought it reasonable, necessary and a right that they should have a standard of living similar to Europeans. Further, the Aborigines had no way of surmounting the social barriers to such a move even if they wished to do so. There was no overall economic and social plan for Ngukurr development approved by the Aborigines, nor had they considered formulating one. Even if one had been developed, there was no dominant authority structure to impose and carry it out. As a result, the community as a whole could not organise to build up the YCC in a low-cost fashion, nor could it impose this task on any section of the settlement.

Third, the Aborigines reasoned that all European ventures were necessarily profitable and thought that if only they could start a European-style cattle station they could make money too. One consequence of this misunderstanding was that the Aborigines had great difficulty in accepting that financial stringencies imposed on the YCC in 1975 were the result of anything other than European stinginess and lack of sympathy for the Aborigines' position. When I showed a small group of Aborigines a Bureau of Agricultural Economics report on the economics of new cattle ventures in Arnhem Land, they were shocked to learn that no profit could be expected, even if all development money was provided as a grant. Some of the Aborigines present had been planning to set up outstations where they hoped to make a living selling only a few head of scrub bulls each year. They suggested that I keep the BAE report quiet because other Aborigines might become apathetic if they knew that the YCC could never make much money. The Aborigines' misunderstanding of economic matters is also indicated by the following minor incidents. The European shop manager at Ngukurr told me that an Aborigine had asked him if everything in the shop had been paid for. The manager, who had difficulty getting credit from wholesalers in Darwin and Townsville, replied that this was indeed the case. The Aborigine then angrily demanded to know why the Ngukurr people had to pay for it again when they bought goods from the shop. The second incident occurred when I was out fencing with a group of Aborigines. No wire strainer was available so a Toyota 4x4 was used to haul the wires tight. In the process the clutch was being badly damaged due to the amount of 'clutch slip' that was required to pull the wires to about the correct tension. I suggested to the Aborigines that a normal wire strainer should be obtained, even if this caused some delay, because it was very expensive to replace clutch plates and thrust bearings. One of the Aborigines replied that in this case there was no cause for concern. He knew that there were plenty of spare parts in the YCC store and therefore no expense was involved in replacing anything worn out.

Another aspect of European cattle stations not fully comprehended by Aborigines relates to the authority system that is an integral part of these stations. The Aborigines were of course aware of the form of this system, many having been forced to work within and at the bottom of it for long periods of time. However, on the one hand, many Aborigines were ignorant of the cultural and social factors that underpin the European authority system and did not fully understand that tradition-orientated patterns of culture and social relations are not only incompatible with this system but positively make it unworkable. On the other hand, even where Aborigines were fully aware of this incompatibility, they were ignorant of the radical changes in Ngukurr society required to develop a European-orientated or any other non-traditional authority structure capable of operating a cattle station.

Even when no Europeans were present, the Aborigines carried out YCC tasks in a similar manner to the way cattle work in the Top End is generally conducted. This meant creating the form of a European work hierarchy, though obviously not its content. For example, the Aborigines appointed a head stockman to run their mustering camps, but they took no more notice of the views of the appointee than of any of the other stockmen. The result was that little cattle station work was carried out by the Aborigines. Even though individuals and sometimes small groups would work extremely hard, productivity, as measured by general cattle industry standards, was generally low because tasks were neither organised nor coordinated on a consistent basis. In effect, there was no set pattern of work organisation which meant that work relations were anarchistic. Aborigines worked when they wanted to and coordinated their activities on an ad hoc basis.

This raises the question of whether there might be an 'Aboriginal way' to run a cattle station, an idea which had some support among Aborigines and Europeans, notwithstanding the radical social change required for Aborigines to adjust to any pastoral economy. But the important question is: given that the Ngukurr Aborigines have been encapsulated and acculturated within an industrial capitalist society to some extent, that their only contact with cattle raising has been as stockmen within capitalist cattle enterprises, and that there is no settlement-wide authority system, whether there was any possibility that the YCC venture could have been run in a different, and non-European, fashion. The Europeans involved wanted to establish and fund only a European-style operation and the Aborigines were guided by a similar model. Further, the settlement environment tends to prevent experimentation with such things as wage rates and new forms of economic and work organisation. From its very inception, the YCC was locked into a European-style of development.

I asked a number of Aborigines associated with the YCC what they considered to be the 'Aboriginal way' to run a cattle station. Some answered that this was the 'old style' way that they had learned from the European pioneers. Most suggested that it simply meant that Aborigines were in control. None indicated that they envisaged anything other than minor variations from the cattle stations on which they had worked themselves. The clearest response

came from an ex-President of the Ngukurr Council who stated that it was obvious that there was no such thing as an 'Aboriginal way' to run a cattle station simply because, before the arrival of Europeans the Aborigines had not even heard of cattle stations. He asserted that everything Aborigines knew about cattle stations they had learned from Europeans and he concurred with the view that the only thing that could be meant by an 'Aboriginal way' was Aboriginal control.

The final misunderstanding on the part of Aborigines relates to the existence of appropriate cattle station skills at Ngukurr. The Aborigines simply assumed that within the Ngukurr community the necessary number of skilled stockmen, fencers and so on could be found to continue YCC development. This was not the case. Many of the older men were highly trained and competent stockmen, but many were too old for the relatively harsh conditions of the stockcamp. Most younger people had not worked with cattle at all and, while stockwork was regarded by them as a glamorous style of life, they had no inclination to spend a few years of consistent involvement to learn the trade thoroughly. In other conditions, for example, on a cattle station, some of the young men may well have decided on this course, but the attractions of the settlement, the lack of older men to help train them, their own lack of any past consistent work experience and their refusal to be dominated by Europeans or older Aborigines meant that the amount of training in the YCC was negligible.

A few young men had managed to become competent at stockwork, but a number of these had well-paid settlement jobs and, further, most did not want to leave their families or the settlement for extended periods of mustering. On occasions, some had ceremonial matters to attend to.

According to the second European manager, only three good stockmen were available. Though his estimate was perhaps too pessimistic, it certainly would have been very difficult to maintain a competent team of ten or more men for a full dry season of mustering, even allowing for the fact that some of these would be learners. The initial AACM report indicated that up to 50 men and women would be involved in the initial development and operation of the cattle company. Of these, it was expected that about 15 would be mustering, five fencing and five bull catching. That is, 25 competent station hands were to be required, a number well in excess of those actually available. When it became clear to the AACM that there was, in fact, a serious lack of skilled men prepared to work for the YCC it proposed that a head stockman and a few competent stockmen be appointed from outside Ngukurr. This proposal angered the Aborigines who felt that there were already too many outsiders at Ngukurr.

8 European organisations and Yugul

The two major European organisations involved in the YCC were the Department of Aboriginal Affairs (DAA) and the Australian Agricultural Consulting and Management Company (AACM). While other Europeans had some effect on the company, it was minimal compared with that of these two organisations.

The DAA

Before self-government began in the Northern Territory in 1978, the DAA was an important organisation on all government settlements because it put policy into effect. One specific result of the change from an assimilationist to a separate development policy was the announcement by the Commonwealth government in 1970 that Aborigines could lease land within Aboriginal reserves for agricultural or pastoral pursuits. Prior to this, Aborigines could lease Crown land for pastoral purposes but only outside reserves and on the same basis as Europeans. This was in line with government policy that aimed to draw Aborigines into European society within one European-orientated legal framework in which ostensibly avoided both positive and negative discrimination.

The announcement in 1970 that Aborigines could lease land in reserves was the result of initiatives which began in the Territory Legislative Council in 1965. In 1967 the Commonwealth government introduced its own compromise legislation into the Council, designed to give Aborigines more say, but this bill was withdrawn. In 1970 another bill was presented and passed which allowed only Aborigines to lease reserve land. By permitting this, the government was discriminating in favour of Aborigines by sanctioning and supporting the setting up of economic ventures under conditions that excluded Europeans. This is, perhaps, the first clear indication of the change in government policy that was officially introduced by the Australian Labor Party in 1972 under the rubric of self-determination.

Initially, one criterion for granting pastoral leases to Aborigines was whether or not the proposed pastoral venture would be economic. That is, this criterion was the same as that which applied to Europeans who wanted to lease Crown land for pastoral purposes. Later, however, the guidelines for leasing reserve land to Aborigines were relaxed. The Northern Territory Administration's Welfare Branch in its 1971-72 Annual Report notes:

But Aborigines, because of the nature of their social activities, will be permitted to take out a lease of land for mixed purposes regarded as incompatible elsewhere, for example, for economic and cultural purposes (NT Administration, 1973, 12).

The official justification for the different treatment of Aborigines had come to be clearly expressed in 'ethnic' terms. The YCC was a result of this change in general policy orientation and the specific legislation regarding land control that paralleled this change. That is, the YCC was established for largely political reasons. Indeed, were it not for these political reasons, it is doubtful if the YCC would have been formed. In pastoral and economic terms, a cattle enterprise in south-eastern Arnhem Land is marginal at best (BAE, 1971).

Further, and more important, the decision to go ahead with the YCC was made without any sociological analysis. Vague suggestions were made by the DAA and AACM about the likely beneficial consequences of a cattle venture at Ngukurr, but no in-depth analysis was made of either the likely effects of the settlement organisation on the YCC or the possible impact of the YCC on Ngukurr. There was no discussion of the nature and future role of settlements in general or Ngukurr in particular. It is also interesting that the promotion of settlement development should have taken place just at the time when a number of scholars, such as Rowley, Long, Schapper and Broom and Jones, were suggesting that this approach was likely to be fruitless. Some DAA officers, especially those who had considerable experience of the cycle of initiation, establishment and failure of settlement enterprises, acknowledged, even if only obliquely, that the YCC was largely supported for political reasons. These officers could not present any reasons why the YCC should be any more successful than the many settlement ventures that had collapsed in the past. Some DAA officials indicated that there was considerable pessimism in the DAA about the likely success of the YCC and that the occasional, always guarded, expression of optimism stemmed only from wishful thinking. The DAA helped set up the YCC and funded it without any reason to believe that it would be successful, even in terms of sheer survival.

Yet, what else could the DAA do at Ngukurr? Past policies had failed and the Commonwealth government was developing a new approach. The DAA had to be seen to be doing something. Given the Ngukurr Aborigines' past involvement in the cattle industry and their open support for such a venture, it was to be expected that a cattle company be formed and funded. The DAA simply hoped, that for some unforeseen reason, things would work out. Unfortunately, and obviously, they did not.

The ostensible aim of the DAA with regard to the cattle enterprise at Ngukurr was to remain in the background allowing the YCC and AACM to operate it with as little interference as possible. While this aim may have been admirable, it was also naive. Given the DAA's experience with settlements they could have been expected to know that they would be drawn into the problems that the YCC would generate at Ngukurr, especially since the DAA kept ultimate control of YCC funds. The first grant of money was paid directly to the YCC (or more accurately, AACM), but when it ran out, the DAA was responsible for allocating further funds. The second grant by the DAA was tightly administered by the DAA by apportioning it in small amounts on a regular basis.

This control of funding gave the DAA the potential to dominate the YCC. It also meant that the AACM was more concerned about what the DAA thought of it than with what the Aborigines thought. This caused considerable concern among the Aborigines, for they felt that important decisions, including those concerning the very existence of the YCC, were being made by the DAA in consultation with AACM alone.

The consultants

The Australian Agricultural Consulting and Management Company (AACM) is deservedly well respected in both Australia and overseas. The discussion of some aspects of AACM's behaviour should be kept in perspective. For one thing, the quality of AACM's technical advice and its managerial services were satisfactory. In general, it is doubtful if its actions could have been improved upon by any other agricultural consulting firm. Further, it acted in the same efficient and business-like manner towards the YCC that it adopted towards all its other clients in the pastoral industry.

AACM wanted and expected the YCC to operate along the same lines as any European company engaged in pastoral activities. Accordingly, AACM felt that the YCC should divorce itself from the community and get on with the task of developing the cattle project. In taking this approach, it misunderstood the hopes and desires of the Aborigines as well as the origins of the YCC while demonstrating its unwillingness, or perhaps its inability, to deviate from its customary approach to management consultancy.

The Aborigines were strongly opposed to the separation of the project from the community (or more accurately, the core group). One of the major reasons why the YCC was formed in the first place was that the Aborigines felt that this was the only way they could both get some control over land and funds to start a cattle project. The legal structure of the company was alien to them. Many believed that having a company militated against everyone being able to have a say in its operation, a belief sustained by Duke's control of it. For most Aborigines, the Council was the only acceptable organisation for the control of community ventures.

When AACM attempted to separate the YCC from what it saw as the detrimental influence of the settlement, the Aborigines withdrew their support. The AACM had no visions at all of the YCC being the focal point or the catalyst of community social change; it tackled its task at Ngukurr in the same proficient, but narrow, way in which it approached all of its business ventures. In doing so it appeared to be, and in some instances probably was, ignorant, insensitive and apathetic about the impact of the YCC on the Aboriginal community, except for such obvious matters as employment prospects, a supply of meat and the impact of the community on the company.

AACM became involved in Aboriginal cattle enterprises in the early 1970s when the government began to provide funds and leases for Aboriginal groupings which wished to start cattle stations. Its association with the YCC began in July 1972 when it was commissioned by the then Office of Aboriginal Affairs (later the DAA) to make a general appraisal of the YCC lease. The terms of reference were to

- (1) Ascertain the wishes of the local people.
- (2) Evaluate in broad terms the potential of the lease for commercial cattle development.

- (3) Make a first-hand examination of the areas utilised in the report prepared by the Bureau of Agricultural Economics.
- (4) Determine approximate value of assets reported to be on the lease and the immediate utility of these assets.
- (5) Ascertain the need for any immediate assistance for the purchase of essential equipment (AACM, 1972, 1).

Only the first of these terms of reference required AACM to look at other than technical or economic factors, a reasonable bias considering that a company like AACM could hardly have been expected to produce a sociological analysis of Ngukurr. AACM did make an attempt to find out the wishes of the Aborigines at Ngukurr, but, because of a lack of time its enquiries were cursory and limited. Its information was drawn from one short meeting with only those Aborigines interested in the YCC and from discussions with Duke. No attempt could be made by AACM to discover if there were other people at Ngukurr who disagreed with the views put forward by this group. AACM had neither the time (that is, the OAA provided limited money for the feasibility study), the expertise nor the inclination to look further than the principals of the YCC to assess what the Aborigines at Ngukurr wanted. These principals, especially Duke's family, had a special interest in the YCC and could not speak on behalf of the whole settlement. Further, the AACM report was not shown to the Aboriginal community as a whole at Ngukurr before funding was allocated to the YCC on the basis of the development program set out in it.

From a sociological point of view, the AACM report was limited in other ways too. It made no mention of social factors that could have affected the operations of the YCC. For instance, it did not examine the social organisation of Ngukurr (or the way in which it had developed), the relations of Aboriginal groupings to land, the extent of conflict over land, traditional cults and other settlement resources or the nature of Duke's position at Ngukurr. Further, the AACM report did not look into the reasons why many ventures, such as fishing and gardening, had failed at Ngukurr in the past and why similar enterprises (on many remote settlements) had almost invariably collapsed when the European initiators left. The impact of the YCC on Ngukurr was examined by AACM only in terms of the assumed beneficial effects of opportunities for employment and hoped-for spin-off ventures, such as fishing and gardening.

AACM's report suggested a three phase development program with a flexible approach to the movement from one phase to the next, depending on whether 'the Aborigines have demonstrated a capacity to perform'. The three phases were '... a simple cattle-harvesting stage, a cattle purchasing stage, and a pasture improvement stage'. Included in the report was a recommendation that a 'pastoral house' be contracted to supply technical, economic, and managerial advice and a European manager (AACM, 1972, i, 22).

Despite the sociological deficiencies inherent in AACM's report, the YCC was funded, at least ostensibly, on the basis of this report. The OAA directed that the \$336 000 granted 'be generally used in accordance with the budgets prepared by AACM for the first phase of the development program' (DAA file no 72/825, part II Yugul Cattle Co, capital fund). AACM was appointed as management consultants to the YCC with the responsibility to appoint a European manager.

While AACM's feasibility study was more than adequate in a technical sense, it was inadequate as a sole basis on which to begin the YCC venture, a point AACM seemed partially aware of when it indicated that there was a need for a sociological study. It wrote:

Since the Yugul Cattle Company will be one of the first aboriginal cattle projects in Australia, it can be expected to provide useful guidelines for other similar projects in the future. To enable a satisfactory evaluation of the project to be made, it is recommended that consideration be given to appointing a suitably qualified person to study its sociological aspects and the reactions and attitudes of the aboriginal group involved (AACM, 1972, 24).

Despite this acknowledgement, it was not suggested by the OAA or AACM that a sociological study be made before the establishment of the YCC. This is an indication of the official optimism that surrounded the YCC. None of the Europeans involved were prepared to carefully and fully examine the consequences or likely benefits of the establishment of the YCC. Had they done so, it might never have been funded.

All the Europeans had much to gain if by some chance the cattle project at Ngukurr actually worked. AACM, for instance, had the chance to procure a number of long term contracts with Aboriginal-owned cattle stations in the Territory and other parts of Australia. A number of optimistic assumptions about the YCC were made by AACM. For example, studies by the Bureau of Agricultural Economics (BAE) had raised a number of depressing predictions concerning pastoral development in Arnhem Land. One such study that examined three different projects concludes:

The analyses showed that all three enterprise types could be expected to provide relatively small annual surpluses over costs after a maturation period varying from some 8 years for the small property up to 13 years for the large properties. These surpluses, however, would be insufficient to repay over a 50 year period the cost of development, even if interest was not charged on the capital involved (BAE, 1971, 56).

The report goes on to note that an 8000 head property with no improved pasture, which is similar to AACM's proposal for stage two of the YCC project, would require a grant of \$1.03 million dollars out of a total cost of \$1.12 million. After full development the annual surplus of such a project was expected to be only \$7099 (BAE, 1971, 40). Hence, any factors having even a minimal impact on profitability would have meant that a project like the YCC would have required continual government subsidies: a case of economic development increasing Aboriginal dependency. The same BAE report also notes:

Another conclusion which arises from the analysis is that the low labour requirement of cattle properties offers little employment prospects for Aborigines in these [Arnhem Land] areas (BAE, 1971, 57).

AACM was aware of these BAE reports, but seemed to gloss over their implications. For instance, with regard to financial matters, AACM simply noted that the studies 'show the relative unprofitability of a cattle project of this [the YCC] type' (AACM, 1972, 18). In relation to employment prospects, AACM made no long-term estimates, concentrating instead on its estimate that up to 50 Aborigines would find jobs in the initial phase of development.

AACM made a number of other wrong assumptions about the YCC. First, they assumed that Duke had a high degree of authority in the modern sector of Ngukurr in general and the YCC in particular. In its report AACM states that the Aborigines involved with the YCC recognised Duke as their leader. Now, while Duke had experience and considerable respect at Ngukurr, he did not have the authority to order about or to sanction YCC employees. His position carried a certain power to veto, but he could not initiate anything without the full support of other Aborigines. Further, Duke had no wish to be a boss. Hence, AACM was wrong in its assessment that Duke could function as a European-style overseer who would keep the employees in line.

Another assumption implicit in AACM's report was that the Ngukurr Aborigines were a socially cohesive community fully behind the YCC and its operations. The report states:

The Aborigines are quite emphatic on the point that they initially wish to operate as one group, and not as several small groups. The question of sub-dividing the lease into several smaller areas is quite unacceptable to them .. (AACM, 1972, 9).

AACM also underestimated the desire of most Aborigines to control all settlement matters, including the YCC. The AACM report rightly pointed out that the Aborigines felt they had the necessary skills and experience to run a small-scale cattle operation and that they 'admit their inability to keep proper records and to handle finance and indicate they will also need assistance in these matters' (AACM, 1972, 9). But the Aborigines, especially Duke, did not want a European manager, only an office worker. Duke gave in only when it seemed that the YCC would not start unless he agreed to the appointment of a European manager. While the Aborigines wanted the YCC to slowly become a more sophisticated operation, they knew that to do so too quickly would mean an increase in the involvement of Europeans and an increase in European control. AACM was not sensitive to this issue and, without recognising it, seriously offended Duke by appointing a manager rather than bookkeeper. That is, AACM did not give the Aborigines the chance to run the YCC because it assumed that they supported the appointment of a European manager.

Having made all of the above assumptions, AACM tended to be optimistic about the success of the YCC venture. It did note that from 1966, when the CMS began its withdrawal from Ngukurr, the small cattle venture then in existence began to deteriorate. However, AACM

reasoned that this was due to lack of financial support, community incentive and European advice. The report argued that now these matters had been rectified the YCC should be successful (AACM, 1972, 10-12).

However, while AACM officially expressed an optimistic view of the prospects of the YCC, it may well have become involved with this company and other Aboriginal cattle projects with a degree of apprehension. While these Aboriginal projects were not highly lucrative, a number of them would probably have provided a welcome 'bread and butter' income in the highly competitive field of the Australian and international agricultural consultancy business.

The AACM was primarily concerned about the open-ended nature of its contract with the YCC. It wanted written into the contract a clear description of its obligations, rights and responsibilities. It felt that without such a contract it was taking too many legal, business and professional risks, and that the failure of the YCC could bring accusations of impropriety that could not be easily refuted. Further, AACM wanted termination compensation built into its contract.

AACM turned to the DAA rather than to the YCC to correct the deficiency but could not get the DAA to act. Without security built into its contract, AACM tied itself very closely to the DAA in the hope that the DAA would protect it against allegations of malpractice or arbitrary sacking by the Aborigines. As a result, AACM acted as if it was responsible to the DAA rather than the YCC. Other reasons for this action were, first, that the DAA decided which agricultural consultants were appointed to manage newly funded cattle projects and, second, that when AACM could not easily handle problems of working for Aborigines, it turned to the DAA for advice and support.

The Aborigines viewed AACM as an arm of the DAA. They guessed correctly that these two organisations were not including the YCC in discussions on various matters of vital concern to the company. It is interesting that the Aborigines from Willowra viewed AACM's involvement with their cattle station in the same light and dispensed with AACM in 1977. But before that Stumpy Martin Jambadjimba, an important figure at Willowra, stated:

The community is well aware that it owns the property but is equally certain that AACM and its resident manager have been engaged by the Government as its agent to manage the cattle enterprise. It is convinced that the Government appointed AACM and selected the resident manager and it can see no basis for believing that AACM is the community's agent and the resident manager responsible to it, the community (talk by Jambadjimba to DAA Research section, 4 March 1976).

As a result the Aborigines at Ngukurr were never frank with AACM. For instance, Duke never told AACM that to shift the YCC headquarters was out of the question as long as the land on which it was to be built did not belong to his family. Almost everything Duke told AACM was heavily influenced by his belief that it would be discussed later with the DAA. This mistrust undermined the relationship between AACM and the YCC and contributed to the company's collapse.

European managerial presence

In line with its report, AACM appointed managers to the YCC on the basis that it would help them gain employment after they left or were fired from the YCC (AACM, 1972, 22). If no job could be found, AACM guaranteed the YCC managers six months salary. AACM felt that this would attract managers of reasonable ability, a matter it saw as important, for it had noted in its report that the efforts of the Aborigines would 'be largely ineffective unless they are properly directed by an understanding, patient and properly trained cattle adviser' (AACM, 1972, 12). It will be shown later that AACM partly failed in its attempt to attract managers with these attributes, a failure that probably contributed to the speed of the collapse of the YCC. This system of appointing managers also led to the problem that the managers saw themselves as entirely responsible to AACM rather than to the YCC. Because AACM acted as if it was employed by the DAA, this meant that none of the Europeans directly involved with the YCC saw themselves as responsible to it.

Further, the duties of the manager and Duke in relation to YCC activities were never clarified. The clearest statement was made by AACM in the YCC Annual Report (1973-74) where the duties of Duke were listed as employee discipline, hiring, dismissal and the supervision of contractors (AACM, 1974). The manager was to run the day-to-day work and to implement the development plan. This meant, of course, that the manager had the problem of working with men

whom he could neither sack nor discipline, except through Duke.

However, the situation was even more complex as AACM pointed out in its initial report which stated:

..[Duke] as head stockman will be an employee of the Company and responsible to the project manager, but as Director of the Board of Management, he will also be an employer capable of over-ruling the project manager (AACM, 1972, 21).

It is not known what was supposed to happen when both men engaged in the same activity. Apparently Duke was prepared to defer to the first manager, but he told me that he felt he should always have the final say because he was the Chairman of the Board of Directors.

One of the consequences of this mix-up was that both Duke and the manager had reason to blame each other for lack of initiative and to sit back and wait for the other to act.

Visits by AACM's consultants

These visits were made on a regular basis to speak with the manager, Duke, shareholders and employees about the state of the YCC. They were short, often lasting only a few hours, and the consultants would generally meet with the manager first. Duke took this as an affront to his dignity because he felt that they should confer initially with the head of the YCC. This is another example of AACM's insensitivity to issues that were considered by the Aborigines to be very important.

When addressing the Aborigines, the AACM representatives were sometimes condescending. Rather than just explaining the situation in factual terms, they often scolded the Aborigines and gave them a pep talk. On one occasion, a consultant criticised the Aborigines about the length of time they were taking to build a fence. He finished by saying, 'This is just not good enough'. The Aborigines, especially Duke, were furious at being spoken to like children, but they kept their feelings hidden.

9 The Collapse of the Yugul Cattle Company

The first two years of operation were characterised by vigour and productivity. The YCC employees were kept busy on normal cattle station tasks such as mustering, marking, culling, shifting portable yards, loading cattle for market, supplying meat to the Ngukurr shop, breaking in horses, grading roads and fencing.

But towards the end of the 1974 dry, the second season of activity, the first clear indication that conflicts and divisions within the Ngukurr community were going to influence the cattle project occurred.

Families, Europeans and Stock

In 1974, a European, whom I shall call Mr Bush, came to Ngukurr to live with an Aboriginal woman who was a member of the Simon family, a major core group family. He was employed by the Ngukurr Housing Association, an autonomous body, that was largely controlled by this family.

Not long after he arrived, the YCC began mustering an area of land traditionally owned by the Simons, without their permission. In protest, Bush set fire to an area of dry grass. The fire surrounded a YCC truck immobilised with a fuel blockage and eleven scrub bulls which had been caught and tied up waiting to be loaded on the truck. The YCC stockmen tried to hastily load the bulls onto the truck but, after breaking the leg of one and having to shoot it, they cut the other bulls loose. The European manager was incensed at this action so he followed a fleeing Mr Bush in a helicopter that had been hired by the YCC to muster cattle. Bush threw rocks at the helicopter as it landed, almost causing a disaster, and fought vigorously with the manager when confronted.

A public meeting was called over the issue. Both the manager and Duke called for Bush to be expelled from Ngukurr. No agreement was reached at this meeting, indicating that Bush had a degree of Aboriginal support. The manager then announced that if Bush did not go, he would. Despite further meetings, the Aborigines could not reach a decision until Duke threatened to resign from the YCC and the Council (of which he was then Vice-President). His nephew, who was later to play a major role in the final years of the YCC, also made it known he was prepared to resign as President of the Council if Bush was not evicted. Further, Duke threatened to take direct control over all the land that his father had owned, leaving the rest of the community with little area for a cattle project. The Simon family vigorously disputed both his claim to fully control such a large area and his ability to carry out his threat. Nevertheless, Bush was forced to leave, although he camped for some time on the southern bank of the Roper River just opposite the settlement.

Despite Bush's departure, the manager of the YCC still resigned for he felt that he could no longer operate effectively at Ngukurr when a group of Aborigines had demonstrated their opposition to his attempts to protect YCC and, according to him, community interests.

This incident was the subject of a report by the DAA and AACM. Both considered that Bush was simply a trouble-stirrer of the worst type, acting to further his own interests. This was far from the case, as was clearly pointed out by a member of the Simon family. According to this man, Bush was acting on behalf of the Simon family that was angry over Duke's control of the YCC and the mustering of its land so soon after the death of two Simon elders (Independent confirmation of many of the details of this incident has been given in a book by an Aboriginal author published in 1978, reporting an interview with a member of the Simon family, but to preserve the pseudonyms in the present account the reference has not been given).

Duke was at first adamant that Bush was acting on his own behalf, but he later told me that the Simon family was against the YCC because it wanted to start its own cattle station on its own land. That is, he acknowledged that the Simon family was attempting to undermine the YCC.

Perhaps the most important evidence for family divisions came from a discussion with one of the elders of the Simon family. This man did not live at Ngukurr, preferring Numbulwar, where he played a key role in community politics. Towards the end of my field work, he took me aside, chiding me for spending most of my time with Duke. He was concerned that I might leave Ngukurr with only Duke's side of the story. I was informed that the conflict between the families was deep and long-lasting, and that it involved both ceremonial and secular matters. The Simons were angry about Duke's control of the YCC and about what they saw as his attempts

to usurp their control of ritual estates. I was not given a chance to pursue this uniquely frank discussion for this man departed the following day for Numbulwar.

The information received indicated that Duke had indeed stressed certain issues, while neglecting others. But, on the whole, Duke's descriptions of Ngukurr life were generally confirmed by my newly-gained knowledge. More details came to light during the latter part of my field work when Duke became dejected and ill. He felt that he would soon die, and his reticence about many matters dissolved as his despair about the YCC and his health mounted.

Another matter contributing to the Simon family's opposition to the YCC was a dispute over the distribution of mustering royalties. This dispute was difficult to examine because agreements supposedly made among the Aborigines about the need for, and the division of, royalties were themselves disputed. However, it is not necessary to know the exact nature of the dispute to understand its significance.

When the need for an 'umbrella' lease was first mooted at Ngukurr, some Aborigines felt that traditional ownership of land should continue to be recognised through a system of payment for mustering rights. It was suggested that the YCC should pay either a rental or a set amount of money for each beast mustered from a particular area of land. Other proposals were for the traditional owners to receive a share of any bullocks mustered from a particular area of land or to receive a share of any bullocks mustered on their land. According to members of the Simon family, the final agreement reached was for the YCC to allocate \$500 per year to pay for mustering rights, although only one traditional grouping was to receive funds each year. Duke's version of the agreement was different. He stated that \$500 was indeed the sum to be paid, but it was to go to the Council as an indication that the YCC was a community venture.

What happened was that the first \$500 was paid to a traditional land owning group whereas the second payment went directly to the Council. The Simon family regarded this as a betrayal of the initial agreement and their anger over this incident led indirectly to Bush's actions.

Up to the time of the fire, AACM had assumed that the major problems facing the YCC would probably be technical, economic or related to the Aborigines' capacity to work. Now, it was confronted by the fact that a section of the community was not fully behind either the YCC, Duke or the manager. Rather than attempting to examine the underlying causes of the incident, AACM simply assumed that it was the result of a mentally disturbed European who was irrationally supported by the Aborigines he was living with. The DAA report on the incident concurred with this view; a surprising fact considering that prior to this incident a DAA official wrote a lengthy report on the family divisions at Ngukurr. The opportunity for all parties concerned to have attempted to confront, and surmount, the social problems this incident so clearly highlighted was lost.

Other evidence for family divisions arising from the establishment of the YCC was hard to find. Almost all Aborigines were reluctant to discuss, or even mention, contemporary conflicts of this kind. In mid 1975, however, two Aborigines wrote to the DAA requesting assistance to start outstations. One letter read:

We intend setting up an outstation camp ... so that we can make a market garden and work under contract on fencing and mustering for the Yugal Cattle Co.

The other letter was written by an Aborigine working in Darwin as a DAA Liaison Officer. He was making representations on behalf of four families. He wrote:

They are thinking of working with the Yugal [sic] in the cattle industries but this thought has not yet eventuated.

Neither of these letters ask for cattle stations to be established separately from the YCC, but they indicate that a number of families did not see the YCC as representing their interests. They did not want to see the YCC abolished, but they wanted to control and carry out any pastoral activities on their own land.

One of the consequences of the Bush incident was the resignation of the first manager. The man who replaced him turned out to be most unsatisfactory from the Aborigines' point of view.

The first manager was enthusiastic, competent, hard working, fit, consulted regularly with Duke, treated the Aborigines with respect, hired plenty of men and kept them well rationed. Most Aborigines at Ngukurr were sorry to see him leave and often talked of him with respect and affection.

The second manager had a different approach to the Aborigines and to his job, partly because he managed the YCC in a different economic context, that of financial restraint. Aged about 28, he was, in many ways, a typical northern Australian cattle man. His childhood had been spent on the Cape York Peninsula in Queensland where he learned to handle cattle and horses at an early age. His grandfather used to tell him stories about shooting Aborigines and he told me that if his grandfather found out that he was working for them he would 'cut' him. He had spent much of his life in stock-camps where Europeans and Aborigines were rigidly separated, where the latter were trained with a whip handle and where their worth was measured by their obedience and ability to ride and work hard.

The manager appeared to know his job well and took pride in his work. He was recently married and had one child. A manager's job was difficult to get at that time because of the depressed state of the cattle market. He was worried that he would soon be too old to be an active cattle manager and, therefore, that he would not be acceptable as an 'armchair manager' later on. He thought of his job at Ngukurr as that of a normal manager and considered his employer to be AACM, not the YCC. He had worked on another of AACM's Aboriginal projects and AACM had paid his salary when he left, even though he was not working. As a result, he felt obligated to AACM.

But in carrying out his work he was at a disadvantage compared with the first manager. He thought Aborigines could not cope with a European way of life and kept himself at a distance from them and, in addition, he was in ill-health and had to spend some time in hospital during my stay on field work. The Aborigines felt sorry for him and thought of him as a sick man. Towards the end of his stay, he withdrew from active participation in the YCC and complained bitterly about the lack of Aboriginal initiative, not realising that he had been a contributing factor, especially when it became necessary for him to cut back costs in many areas when money began to run short in late 1975. His actions were heavy-handed and insensitive. For example, when the stockmen asked him to provide them with tinned butter, a basic component of stock-camp rations, he refused, asking them if they thought they were living in the 'bloody Hilton'. He was an ordinary man trapped into working at Ngukurr by his upbringing and a lack of employment opportunities in the only work he was trained to do.

After the first two years of intense activity in 1973 and 1974, the amount of work being done by the YCC diminished. The first phase of the development plan had been largely completed and the next phase, which involved the purchase of cattle, had not yet started in earnest.

The mustering in the initial years had shown that the number of cattle in the Ngukurr area was not sufficient to form the basis of the planned YCC herd, so AACM decided that the best thing to do would be to purchase a draft of heifers from Queensland. Before the purchase could be made however, a number of areas had to be fenced to prevent the heifers from straying into Arnhem Land. It was also necessary to have this fencing finished by the end of the 1975 dry season so that the cattle could then be trucked from Queensland before it became too hot.

Despite the need to make urgent preparations, the 1975 dry season began very slowly for the YCC. In June the Aborigines had already started to complain about the lack of activity in the cattle project, laying most of the blame at the feet of the new manager who had arrived in October 1974. In the first half of 1975, the only major tasks carried out by the YCC were a few short musters. This was borne out by the YCC employment figures. Only thirteen men had been employed in 1975, nine of these for less than two months and only one of them had been employed for the whole of the first six months of 1975. A mid-1975 AACM report on the YCC also discussed the lack of work done in the first half of that year. It is worth quoting at length from this report because it accurately portrays the problems faced by the YCC in mid 1975 and conveys the pessimism beginning to be felt by AACM. The report states:

The work planned for the [1975] season was as follows:-

Muster all fenced areas, tally all livestock and brand cleanskins and young calves. Time allowed 4 weeks. All available labour to then go on fencing to complete Turkey Lagoon and Wooden Duck paddocks ready to receive new breeders. Time allowed 10 men 4 - 6 weeks. Re-muster fenced areas and wean calves, and if necessary spray cattle. Time allowed 4 weeks. Handle and steady new breeders on delivery. If necessary remuster cattle late in season and spray for ticks.

It has been stressed on many occasions that the fencing program had to be completed by the end of July to permit the safe travelling of pregnant breeders.

To the middle of August only 179 cattle had been branded, and no paddocks completed although fencing has been done. There has to be a

concerted effort from all employees of Yugul if there is to be a successful result to this year's activities. In fact if the progress is not carried out there is very little reason to continue funding the project.

And:

It is now up to the Directors and employees of Yugul to make the effort to make their station a success. They have shown in the past, that they are able to do the work and they also demonstrated their loyalty on more than one occasion. What is now required is a sustained effort by the employees to carry out the work programmed, and much more attention to the care and maintenance of their equipment (AACM, 1975).

Despite the tone of this report, the eight men employed by the YCC in June were involved in light duties only. They mustered paddocks close to the settlement, unloaded horse feed, loaded empty petrol drums, went after a few 'killers', fixed a gate, shifted portable yards and carried out various other tasks in the YCC sheds. There were only odd days on which the men were kept busy.

Mustering and fencing

In mid-July a 15-day muster was held that involved eight Aborigines. Shortly after the start of this muster another group of Aborigines was given a contract to start building the fences that were needed before cattle for the YCC could be brought from Queensland.

This burst of activity tended to make the Aborigines think that YCC matters were beginning to improve, so they willingly set about preparing for the mustering and fencing camps. However, their enthusiasm was short lived for the muster was a shambles and the fences were not completed in time to buy cattle.

One of the things clearly demonstrated on these camps was the inability of the Aborigines involved to initiate, organise, coordinate and carry out the tasks associated with the running of the YCC. A number of incidents showing this are detailed below. They may seem extraordinary, even bizarre, but they cannot be explained away as isolated cases produced by special conditions. Most Europeans who have been closely associated with settlements could, and usually do, relate many similar stories, at least in private.

Many writings on Aboriginal situations have been biased. It is often assumed by Europeans who support Aborigines that certain features of settlement situations, such as drunkenness, fighting, vandalism, truancy, work absenteeism and wastage of materials, should not be mentioned or discussed, because to do so would be detrimental to the Aborigines' cause. However, by hiding, or playing down these aspects, the full consequences of settlement life, European domination of and government interference on the social and psychological life of remote Aborigines, also remains hidden.

Eight stockmen (including the writer) and one camp cook were involved in the 15-day muster. Only two of these people had much experience of stock work, one of them being a fourteen-year-old Aborigine from a neighbouring European-owned cattle station. The other, the head stockman, had considerable contact with the cattle industry, but his age and physical condition precluded vigorous stock work. Six of the stockmen were under twenty, most were not long out of school and few had held any permanent settlement jobs.

The head stockman was that in name only for he had little authority and no power over the stockmen. He would seldom order them to do anything and his suggestions were often ignored. He simply went about normal stock-camp activities while the rest of the Aborigines followed his example if and when they wanted to. Work was therefore carried out in a highly disorganised, inefficient and haphazard fashion. I asked the head stockman (with whom I spent a good deal of time in social activities) why this was the case. He replied that he knew how a good stock-camp should be run, but that there was little he could do about this one because the stockmen were too young and inexperienced. Besides, if he tried to tell them what to do they would walk out on him. A few of the stockmen made it plain to me that they would not be pushed around by anyone and would 'bail up' if tried.

It is usual procedure in a stock-camp for the stockmen to rise before first light so that they are ready to leave the camp at, or just after, dawn. Lunch is usually eaten away from the camp and the stockmen return around dusk. In this YCC stock-camp, mustering usually began only after 9.00 am and lunch was always eaten at the base camp. This meant that the distance that could be travelled from the camp was small, and that remote parts of the area being mustered were either untouched or mustered in a cursory fashion. It also meant that the area mustered at any one time was small, and that this area could easily be reoccupied by unmustered cattle from surrounding areas.

During the heat of the day the cattle would 'camp down' and would only begin feeding again in the early afternoon. The usual procedure at this time is to control their movements by placing stockmen all round the herd, to direct them at a slow pace towards areas of good grass. Rather than doing this, the stockmen at Ngukurr would remain in a group until some of the cattle were almost lost from sight, and then, in a session of furious galloping, the cattle would be regrouped in the same area from which they had moved. It was also difficult to find paddocks of palatable feed, for the stockmen had burned much of the grass on arrival at the camp.

Given the poor nutrition and high temperatures in the Territory, it is normal for stockmen to change their horses at least every day. Replacement horses are looked after by a horse taylor, who guides the horses to feed in the day and returns them to camp at night. Here they are hobbled and turned loose. The taylor leaves camp early in the morning to bring them back in time for the stockmen to select their horses for that day. Often, a high protein supplement is fed to the horses to help maintain their strength and condition.

In the stock-camp in question, the horses were badly treated and their control was poorly organised. Hobbles were left on some horses for days and, at times, horses were driven fast while still wearing them. As a result hobble sores developed on the legs of many horses. Because few of the stockmen were experienced with horses, the younger, recently broken-in horses, were not often ridden. When they were, the rider, too frightened to make the horse do what he wanted, merely sat on it, allowing the horse to follow the other stockmen at its own pace. This meant that the older, quieter horses were used day after day, with drastic consequences for their condition and strength. To make these older horses continue working, some of the stockmen began to use spurs. High protein food supplements were only provided towards the end of the mustering period.

After the stock-camp had been going for only 5 days, the stockmen wanted to return to the settlement for a visit. Despite the fact that their only means of transport was a seven ton truck and most of the 38 kilometres of road into Ngukurr was a rough, hilly bush track, on the next seven nights they visited the settlement six times. On the first occasion, the stockmen wanted to see the annual public performance of the school children and get something to drink. As an excuse, they told the European manager that they had come in for horse feed, a requirement that could have been brought out on other vehicles that had visited the camp in the previous five days. On the third night, the truck took all the stockmen in for the funeral of a long-serving European settlement manager. That afternoon a YCC 4x4 Toyota went out with the truck for no apparent reason connected with company activities, returning the next morning. Two days later, the truck was driven to Ngukurr so that the stockmen could get their pay, even though the camp was to end in four days. The following morning, the truck was loaded with fresh meat required at Ngukurr and all the stockmen went in and back out that afternoon. That night, the truck again travelled into Ngukurr, this time to hear Buddy Williams, a visiting country and western singer. When he decided to stay for a second performance, the stockmen came into Ngukurr the next evening. The few cattle mustered were branded and marked the following day and everyone returned to Ngukurr after spending one more evening at the stock-camp.

While the mustering described above was going on, a group of Aborigines had begun fencing. AACM, with the support of some Aborigines, including Duke, decided that the fences should be built on a contract basis. The underlying reason for this decision was that AACM assumed that it would be a cheaper method which would also provide an incentive to the Aborigines to work hard. This assumption proved to be wrong and very costly, considering that it meant that no cattle could be purchased in 1975.

The first contract was let to an Aborigine who other Aborigines suggested had considerable experience in fencing. He was to get the use of a 4x4 Toyota and be paid per kilometre of fencing fully constructed according to the specifications laid out by the manager. The contractor set up camp and many of his brothers, friends and their kin moved out with him. The

rate at which the fence was constructed was not even sufficient to cover the cost of the food bill of the fencing party, despite the fact that the contract rate was \$63 per kilometre and that fencing conditions should have permitted four men to put up not much less than a one and a half kilometres of fence a day. Further, the fence was not being built to the specifications that had been clearly written down. For instance, the strainers were far too close together and not far enough into the ground.

At about this time it became clear to AACM that the fences would not be built on time. AACM's response to this situation was to let another contract to those Aborigines who had just finished mustering. The man who had been nominal head stockman again assumed some responsibility for the group.

AACM pointed out at a meeting that there was little hope of the YCC being able to purchase cattle from Queensland unless the fences were built very quickly. However, it appeared that AACM had already decided that it was too late, but this was not made clear to the Aborigines who continued to work under the impression that the purchase was still possible. I do not know if the YCC directors were advised of this decision.

Before departing, the head stockman wisely decided that only four people should be involved so that tasks could be allocated efficiently. However, when the time came to leave Ngukurr, 8 people (including the writer) climbed aboard the YCC Toyota that had been lent to the fencing team.

As in the case of the stock-camp, work was done, but in a very disorganised fashion. Fencing is a simple task if the associated activities are coordinated effectively. Where this is not done, however, the amount of walking and 'double handling' can markedly increase the time taken to construct a given length of fence.

After four days of fencing only 1.7 km of fence had been partly constructed. The strainer holes had been dug and the star pickets knocked in, but the strainers had not been cemented and no wires had been run. The head of the team worked hard and, at times, so did the others, but to little effect. Again, the amount of money earned was not sufficient to cover even the food bill. Food supplies were not organised anyway. On one occasion when the Toyota had broken down we lived on fish alone for three days. The fencing team struggled on for a few weeks and when it was terminated only a few kilometres of fence had been constructed. When the YCC had paid the food bill at the shop there was no money left for wages.

By this time it was clear to everyone associated with the YCC that no breeders would be trucked to Ngukurr in 1975. AACM and the manager blamed only the Aborigines, a narrow-minded view considering that the late start to the fencing was partly their fault. Before fencing could begin, the YCC grader had to be fixed so that fencelines could be cleared and fencing materials had to be sent from Darwin. While the reason the grader required repairing was negligence on the part of the Aboriginal operator, it remained in the YCC shed for at least a month before a mechanic arrived in July to begin fixing it.

Further, when it became obvious that the fencing would not be finished on time by the Aboriginal contractors, the manager could have taken out a team of his own to ensure completion, but he did not do so. Having made the decision to build the fences on a contract basis, AACM appeared unwilling to alter it, despite the consequences.

Signs of disorientation

Unwillingness on the part of AACM and the manager to respond to the special circumstances surrounding the YCC venture was also exemplified by the way in which the company was prevented from supplying meat to the community. The YCC was stopped from sending meat to the shop when a health inspector invoked a law requiring that all meat sold for public consumption had to be prepared in a certified abattoir. The Aborigines not only found that they could not buy their own meat, but they were forced to pay exorbitant prices for frozen meat flown in from a European cattle station. This angered the Aborigines who reasoned that if their own cattle station could not even supply them with meat there was little purpose in having it. Duke also pointed out that the Aborigines could go out and kill a kangaroo and bring it back to Ngukurr to share around, but they could not do the same with a beast. The Aborigines' disgust was further strengthened by the fact that European building contractors at Ngukurr could continue to purchase bullocks directly from the YCC. This meant that the Aborigines were being sent out

to kill their own cattle for European consumption but could not eat it themselves.

While a ban on the sale of meat at the shop could not have been completely disregarded, it would have been a simple matter to circumvent it in the same way as the European contractors did. The Aborigines, with the YCC manager, only needed to work out a method that allowed the community, or groups within it, to buy whole carcasses from the YCC and cut it up and distribute it themselves. The problem only arose when YCC meat was sold in the Ngukurr shop. Despite the fact that the Aborigines were aware of this, they did nothing about it except privately abuse the manager who appeared not to be interested in their predicament.

1975 was the first year that financial restrictions were imposed on the YCC by AACM and the DAA. AACM had asked for an extra \$229 409 but the DAA had only allocated \$130 000. The manager, without closely consulting Duke, began to introduce a number of cost-saving measures, such as being careful not to waste rations, preventing YCC vehicles being used for non-company activities and reducing the number of employees. In general, these measures were justifiable given that the first phase of development had been all but completed.

By and large, the Aborigines agreed with the need to be careful with YCC money, but were not allowed to make the decisions nor were they consulted on the extent and nature of the cutbacks. The restrictions were also introduced in an insensitive, heavy-handed fashion which provoked considerable Aboriginal hostility. The manager had turned potential Aboriginal support for frugality into outright opposition.

The reduction in employment at Ngukurr that followed the imposition of financial restraint had a considerable economic impact on those Aborigines working for the YCC. This effect was worsened by the fact that many of the employees came from Duke's family. The use of YCC vehicles was also carefully scrutinised, thus preventing the Aborigines from gathering firewood, hunting or going to the Roper Bar store. As well the manager refused to let the YCC grader be used for community roads, but allowed it to be hired by European contractors who were building a new airstrip at Ngukurr. Further, he began to cut back on rations for the stockmen while they were mustering. When they were at Ngukurr he gave them nothing unless they asked him, which they seldom did. This was equivalent to reducing their wages by the \$22.40 per week that was judged by the award to be the value of providing rations. These restrictions brought home to the Aborigines their dependency on Europeans and demonstrated to them, for the first time, that the YCC venture was not a highly profitable one that could fulfil their continuous demand for meat, employment and vehicles. The Aborigines began to accept that the YCC was little different from the dozens of other community schemes that had been drawn up by Europeans since the arrival of the CMS in 1908. Slowly, the illusion of Aboriginal control of the YCC began to fade, along with Aboriginal support for it. Spurred on by the issue of land rights, a number of Ngukurr groups, including Duke's family, began to talk increasingly of establishing outstations and their own small cattle ventures.

AACM's response further exacerbated the Aborigines' withdrawal from the YCC. Rather than attempt to bolster the links between the community and the YCC in the hope of regenerating Aboriginal support, AACM tried to strengthen its control over the company by shifting its headquarters away from Ngukurr. The first proposal was submitted to the DAA in August 1974, giving a drinking problem at Ngukurr as the major reason.

As Aboriginal backing for the YCC declined, AACM saw it as more and more important that the headquarters be moved so that a 'normal' cattle company could be established. Along with this shift AACM also wanted to appoint a European head stockman and a number of competent European, or non-Ngukurr Aboriginal, stockmen. All of these moves would probably have been necessary to keep the YCC development on schedule. Many Aborigines, however, viewed these proposals as detrimental to their original view of the YCC as a catalyst for community development. Duke was against this move as well, because he could not have controlled the YCC if it had its headquarters on another family's territory. He did not tell AACM of his opposition.

Despite all this, the future existence, if not financial success, of the YCC seemed relatively secure as long as Duke maintained his support for it. The Europeans involved could carry on without worrying about what the community felt as long as they were isolated from it by Duke. However, towards the end of 1975 he also began to withdraw from the YCC as it became obvious to him that he had no control over its affairs at all. The manager had simply assumed control of the YCC and there was little Duke could do about it except withdraw. This in turn gave the manager the impression that, as no Aborigines were interested in the YCC, he was justified in taking command.

During 1975, Duke slowly came to realise that all along his power in the YCC had been dependent upon the whims and fancies of the Europeans involved. The first manager had been fastidious about consulting with Duke and had made him feel important and essential to the functioning of the YCC. The second manager did not bother to keep up this practice. He had little respect for Duke or his position and refused to even cooperate with him. When Duke wanted to see the manager he had to stand at the manager's front gate and call out. The manager would then emerge in his own good time.

A number of incidents greatly displeased and humiliated Duke. While the manager was away from Ngukurr over the 1974 Christmas break, Duke had bought an outboard motor and some petrol from the Ngukurr shop using YCC credit arrangements. The manager decided that this action could not be tolerated and sent his wife, who was a part-time bookkeeper for the YCC, to tell the shop manager, in public, that the bill would not be paid. Duke was furious that a woman who had no authority in the YCC could tell the shop manager in public that he, the principal of the YCC, would not have his bills met. He pointed out that he had used these purchases to go down the river to see if any cattle in the eastern paddocks had become bogged in the swampy areas that had developed during the wet season. It was not possible to drive there because the roads were too boggy and the creek crossings too deep at this time of the year. However, as Duke also pointed out, even if he had used them to go fishing, it was no business of the manager, or his wife, to tell the Director of the YCC what to do. This incident led to a general ban on Duke being able to book down goods to the YCC at the shop. The shop manager was embarrassed about this, but was in no position to refuse the restriction because he relied on AACM to pay him.

Another incident concerned a small four-wheel-drive YCC vehicle that was damaged when the manager backed into it with the YCC grader. The manager told Duke that another European had been driving the grader when the accident happened, but Duke knew that this was not the case for some Aborigines had seen what had occurred. These witnesses also said that the manager was drunk. Duke was very angry, not because of the damage but, first, because a person not associated with the YCC had been allowed to drive the grader (for this was also the case), and because the manager had blatantly lied to him.

A third matter that annoyed Duke was that after his house burned down AACM refused to build him one similar to the manager's dwelling. Duke, who felt that as the Chairman of Directors he was entitled to a good house, and had told many Aborigines that this had been promised him by AACM, was deeply hurt and shamed by the refusal.

Three further matters are relevant. First, the manager did not ask Duke's permission to hire the YCC grader to European contractors at Ngukurr. Second, Duke's ration supply was cut off and, third, whenever the manager left Ngukurr he would leave the keys to the YCC vehicles with a European friend of his who was not associated with the company.

By the beginning of 1976, Duke had finally realised that his plan to retain his status at Ngukurr by controlling a project that would also benefit the whole community had failed. In early January he told me that the YCC, at least in its present form, was finished and that he was going to resign. AACM and the manager were kept in the dark.

When Duke announced his intentions, the way was paved for all Aborigines, but especially the core group, to become involved in discussions about the future of the YCC. Consensus was quickly reached for Aboriginal support at all levels was by now minimal. The community had lost interest because the project no longer supplied meat or employment (except for a few positions) and hopes that it would generate general economic development at Ngukurr had diminished. The promise of land rights legislation had removed the need for a pastoral lease as a means of controlling land and had promoted family solidarity.

Duke initiated a number of public meetings that canvassed the possibility of sacking AACM and the manager and of putting the cattle project under Council control. In January a meeting decided on this course of action. It was only a matter of time before AACM and the manager would have their contracts terminated.

Despite this community decision to take action, Duke became increasingly morose and his complaints about feeling ill were more frequent. In February, he announced that he was leaving Ngukurr to live permanently at Numbulwar, but in the event, only his immediate family went. It was at this time that he started to explain to me a number of important matters, such as the split between his family and the Simons, his hopes for the YCC and Ngukurr and his enormous disappointment with the way things had turned out. He told me that he had never wanted

Europeans to become involved in the YCC and that he had pretended otherwise when he had come to the conclusion that the government might not fund the company without a European manager. Duke also said that he had not long to live, a statement I passed off at the time as no more than a reflection of his deep depression.

This was the situation of the YCC when I left Ngukurr in late February 1976. I did not keep in close touch with Ngukurr and knew only that Duke had died and that the YCC had collapsed.

Cattle station to outstations

In 1981 I returned to Ngukurr to find out in more detail what had happened in the final years of the company's activities. The changes were broadly those that might have been expected from the history of the YCC and from what various Aborigines had said would most likely occur.

The YCC is still registered but it has no assets and no functions. Its auditors declared that it had ceased to operate on 1 July 1979 due to lack of funds. The company had lasted for a little under seven years with a total investment of around \$500 000.

In 1976 the financial position of the YCC was still very strong. The consultants had planned to spend \$410 404 up to September of that year, and, in cash and assets, which they intended to sell as part of the move away from Ngukurr to a new headquarters, they had \$224 000. The DAA had already granted \$176 000 of the shortfall, leaving a deficit to be made up by cuts to be agreed to by AACM and the YCC. The problems faced by the YCC did not therefore stem from funding problems, except that AACM had begun to tighten up on funds for activities not strictly in accordance with the development plan.

When I left Ngukurr, many Aborigines were threatening (in private) to evict the manager, dispense with AACM's services and put the YCC under Council control. They were to take five more months to put their threats into practice.

On 31 March 1976, the YCC held its Annual General Meeting. At this meeting, the head of the Simon family, Harry, was elected as a Director of the YCC in place of one of Duke's appointees. This was a good indication of Duke's withdrawal from his active role in the enterprise (he resigned before he died) and the growing involvement of a wide sector of the Ngukurr community in discussions concerning the future of the YCC. Prior to my departure, it was Harry, not Duke, who had asked me if I would take control of the YCC if the Council withdrew the permit of the manager. In this instance he was conveying a decision taken at a community meeting about the YCC that I was unable to attend.

Harry was also allocated a share-holding in the YCC that was supposed to have gone to his deceased father, a man who, prior to his death, had begun to vigorously oppose the YCC having the right to operate on Simon land. The re-entry of the Simon family into an active involvement in the company was therefore very significant.

Also at this meeting Duke was questioned by the AACM representative about reports that the Aborigines were dissatisfied with their services. I assume that in some part this query stemmed from a letter I wrote to AACM pointing out the problems that existed at Ngukurr. In reply to AACM's questions Duke said that he had no complaints at all against the manager and that he was pleased with AACM's activities. This was, of course, quite untrue, but it was in line with Duke's habit of keeping AACM on side so that funding for the YCC would continue.

This general meeting was not completed and was reconvened in May. It was at this time that a number of important Aboriginal grievances were aired at a meeting where AACM was present. The problem of the YCC's tenure over the land on which it operated had at last been raised by the company's auditors. The YCC did not, and never did, have security of tenure. This meant that all its improvements were technically at risk. The issue of 'land rights' had finally caught up with the YCC, and, in the end, was to be the cause of its demise. Duke made light of this problem, suggesting that a lease could be drawn up and signed by the relevant traditional owners. While he had withdrawn from active participation in the YCC he did not want to see it fragment into many small projects.

More significantly, Duke's nephew, Julian, chose this meeting to challenge AACM on a number of points which the Aborigines had been talking about for months. Julian was a little over thirty years of age at the time, a politically astute and ambitious man with plenty of social energy who was not afraid to confront Europeans in a public forum. For a long time he had held that the Council was the best organisation to control all Ngukurr affairs. Julian had been President of the Council a number of times since his early twenties and the power of the Council was very important to his own position on the settlement. He was also actively involved in the discussions about the future of the YCC which the Aborigines had been holding.

Julian contradicted Duke by putting forward the opinion that the traditional owners would no longer be willing to sign over their land to the YCC. He also demanded that the Council should have a strong say in its management. It is not clear how Julian thought that the Council would overcome the problem of land tenure such that it would have a project to manage. He went on to present the following points on behalf of the Council:

- that the Council was not in favour of shifting the headquarters of the YCC away from Ngukurr. He saw this as a waste of resources;
- that the Council wanted a small project that the Aborigines could manage;
- that the Council wanted the manager removed;
- that the Council felt that AACM was too secretive.

It had taken six months from the time of active community discussion and discontent for these points to be made directly to AACM. Aborigines had been presenting the second point right from the time of the departure of the CMS. My letter of March 1976 to AACM had set out all of these points.

AACM replied to Julian's comments in a legalistic, official fashion, noting the following points: that the Council had no shares and therefore had no legal say in the YCC; that the movement to a new headquarters had already been agreed to by DAA and the YCC directors; that only a big project could make a profit and only a potentially profitable company would be funded; and that AACM had to do what the DAA told it to do. These were very revealing comments.

No attempt was made to ensure that all of these differences were worked out at that time or at some date in the immediate future. This was AACM's last chance to remain associated with the YCC. The following day, Julian wrote a blunt letter to AACM setting out the Council's position. He included the following words about the manager:

Feeling against this person is so strong amongst the people that his immediate removal is demanded. He is a racist of the most gross form, exercising a belligerence towards the people, my Council and myself which will no longer be tolerated

and

He is an alcoholic at the centre of hard core European drinkers which we are determined to drive away from this place, and unless we can obtain support in this, we will take the matter into our own hands.

AACM took no action in this regard.

Duke died on 27 May. His death removed the only man at Ngukurr capable of holding the various groups together in support of the YCC. However, even he probably would not have succeeded had he lived, as his withdrawal from the YCC indicates.

In June an informal meeting of the YCC was held. Julian was not present, so it was 'business as usual'. This meeting agreed that the YCC should shift out of Ngukurr to a place called Lake Costello to consolidate a small cattle enterprise. However, there was still confusion over the company's land tenure, and AACM also noted that a small project would only succeed if the DAA was prepared to put in an annual subsidy of the order of \$35 000.

A few days later the permit of the manager was withdrawn by the Council. He had not been sacked by the YCC, but the Council's action forced him to leave Ngukurr.

This action precipitated a number of meetings in mid-July between the Council, the YCC and its employees and high level DAA staff. An agreement was reached that included the following points:

- that DAA allow YCC assets to come under Council control;
- that DAA obtain the services of a book-keeper for the YCC;
- that no non-Aboriginal manager be employed;
- that the Council prepare a detailed statement about the future operation of the YCC.

The DAA report of this meeting noted that 'Rightly or wrongly, the community at Ngukurr feels that it has little real say in the management and future development of the cattle company and it feels "imposed upon" by both the government and the pastoral consultants'.

The Aborigines were now at the point where they had a chance to get what many of them had wanted in the first place, namely a low-key cattle operation that was fully controlled by Aborigines and which was capable of supplying enough meat to satisfy the Ngukurr community. Many Aborigines may have hoped that sometime in the future the YCC would be a large, profitable venture selling cattle to the Katherine abattoir, but few would not have been content to start with a small-scale enterprise.

Despite the actions of the Aborigines, AACM continued to be involved at the periphery of the YCC because it held funds in trust that had already been allocated for specific company projects. Until a formal decision was taken by DAA and the Ngukurr community to alter the organisation and direction of the YCC, moneys were supposed to be held by AACM and to be spent along the lines previously agreed to. An AACM representative remained as both an Advisory Director and an Assistant Secretary. Despite this, AACM played no further role of any importance in the YCC. In November, the AACM representative resigned from his positions with the YCC, and, in the following month, the \$227 577.30 held in trust was returned to DAA. The great bulk of this money was never used by the YCC.

With the dismissal of direct European management services the Aborigines were essentially on their own. They had the book-keeping facilities of the Council available to them and they could (and did) call on the then Animal Industry and Agriculture Branch of the Department of the Northern Territory. Money was made available for wages (\$35 000, \$28 000 and \$31 000 respectively for the three financial years beginning 1976-77) and management decisions were left to the Aborigines.

However, while the YCC continued to operate it did so at a very low level. Some work was done on such things as fencing, mustering, horse breaking, yard building and killing cattle for local consumption, but it was of little consequence except to those obtaining wages from the YCC. The final three dry seasons saw a slow and continuous deterioration in the state of the YCC. For example, by September 1977 the company had only one serviceable vehicle, while, by February of the next year, none were functional. Employment dropped from a peak of eighteen in late 1976 (only seven of these positions were being funded by the YCC budget, the rest coming directly from the Council vote) to one in early 1978.

I will examine the reasons for this continuing decline by looking at the actions of the Council (and Julian who was President for the early period), the YCC itself (and Nigel the new self-appointed manager), and those Aborigines who set out to establish outstations and the DAA.

The Council, led strongly by Julian, continued to press its claim to control the YCC. In August of 1976 in a letter to DAA setting out its plans for the YCC, the Council wrote:

Council feels that it must be in a position of influence to enable the workings of the cattle project to be assimilated into the programme of the whole community.

This neatly summarised Julian's approach, which had considerable support in the Council and in the community. The problem was, however, that the Council did not have the managerial capacity nor the authority to carry out any integrated development programme, especially one that went against the interests of the main traditional or contemporary social groupings at Ngukurr.

One way in which the YCC could have been made to work in the direction proposed by the Council would have been for the Council to construct an abattoir. This would have enabled meat to be sold through the shop and would have created a new avenue of employment. The DAA had allocated \$10 000 for the building of a simple killing facility at Ngukurr but the Council, which had been initially supportive of this move, did not use the money. It was then withdrawn by DAA. This was indicative of the Council's inability to quickly seize opportunities for local development that would enhance its own position.

By late 1978 the Council had agreed that the YCC should cease to function and that its assets should be transferred to the Outstation Resource Centre which had been formed to cater for the needs of newly formed outstations. The Council never legally controlled the YCC assets, nor did it ever assume managerial responsibility for the YCC. Its major role in YCC affairs was to voice the dissatisfaction of a large proportion of the community, and to act to dismiss the consultants in an attempt to overcome that discontent.

Shortly after this dismissal, Duke's oldest son, Nigel (Julian's cousin), assumed the position of YCC manager. He installed himself in the ex-manager's residence and was eventually accepted in this position by the Council and DAA. Neither Nigel nor the YCC employees were keen to be told what to do by the Council. So the two cousins clashed over this issue. Julian and the Council appeared to back down somewhat and offered to allow Nigel and the YCC a degree of managerial independence if they demonstrated an ability to work and to properly maintain the company's books. A major reason for this was that the ideal of Aboriginal control continued to be satisfied, and, anyway, the Council could always take over when it wanted to.

Nigel seemed to be trying to fill Duke's position for a somewhat similar set of reasons. However, he lacked the authority and power which Duke had (insufficient even for Duke to take full control of the YCC) so that his backing from YCC employees and the wider community was limited. Nigel admitted that he had little background in the cattle industry and that he needed a European to assist with technical and book-keeping matters. The Council's position on European influence ruled out this possibility, and Nigel did not seem to be very enthusiastic. He left the YCC early in 1978 at the time when he had become convinced that the outstation movement would fragment the company. This eventually happened.

In 1978 when the ground had dried out sufficiently after the wet season to enable easy travel by vehicle, the Ngukurr outstation movement began. The social forces that divided Ngukurr society had finally strengthened to the point where groups began to move away. The movement's character, however, continued to be heavily influenced by the ties that bound the groups together socially and geographically.

With the rise of the outstations, discussion about the YCC was limited largely to how its assets were to be distributed. There was no doubt that the outstations would eventually control their own small projects, for this had been a major reason in establishing outstations. All hoped to make money out of mustering and bull-catching and selling to the Katherine abattoir. One of the Aborigines who was active in the initiation of the YCC suggested that it was the failure of that company to utilise the available pastoral resources that actually led to the outstation movement. While there were a number of other reasons for this movement, his explanation gives support to the view that the Aborigines were serious about establishing some form of pastoral activity in the Ngukurr area. Their support for the YCC had been far from just a ruse to gain control of land and resources.

Four outstations started in the dry of 1978, none of which were permanently occupied. Most were used as weekend camps, while one was close enough to allow daily commuting to jobs at Ngukurr. All occupants moved back to town for the next wet season. At this early stage, the Council was still viewed by most Aborigines as the appropriate body to fund and support the outstations, and this was agreed to by the outstation members and DAA. The plan was for the YCC to become a part of an outstation resource centre controlled by the Council that was to act mainly as a selling agent for the outstations. The YCC brand, YCT, was to be retained and a system of mustering and distribution of resources and returns from sales was to be worked out.

This system soon proved unsatisfactory from the point of view of some outstation leaders who claimed that the Council was not giving equal treatment to all of them. After considerable discussion a decision was made in July 1979 to form Yugul Mangi, a resource centre for outstations, that was to operate independently of the Council - the fragmentation of Ngukurr had advanced another step. At this time, it was decided to incorporate the YCC into Yugul Mangi by transferring many of its assets to this new association. By this time the YCC, was no longer funded by DAA. Its assets were in the process of being reallocated and it played no

further role in Ngukurr affairs.

After the Council had dismissed AACM, the DAA moved quickly to consult with the Ngukurr community about the future of the YCC, and readily agreed to the Council taking nominal control. DAA, at this time, was itself in the process of withdrawing all of its staff from Ngukurr, also at the request of the Council. There was a growing tendency to allow the Council to make important decisions and to accept the consequences of those decisions. However, the DAA maintained a strong line when it came to funding the YCC, demanding that the company show an ability to manage and begin to develop the cattle project before more than holding finance would be allocated. DAA was not prepared to hand the Council, or the YCC, all the funds that had been held in trust by AACM and which had already been allocated to the company. The policy of 'self-management' obviously had fairly strict limits, indeed, there were some people in DAA who wanted an almost immediate cessation of funding shortly after the Council dismissed AACM.

In relation to outstations, DAA at first agreed that the Council should fund them and provide their resources because this would have been a tidy solution. When this became unworkable, DAA decided to support Yugul Mangi, hoping that a situation similar to that existing at Maningrida would develop. It should also be kept in mind that about this time the only area of Aboriginal affairs still controlled by DAA was outstations. At Maningrida the Council and the Outstation Resource Centre function as two independent organisations, partly because they are controlled by land-owning groups which reside on their own land. Further, the outstation people are not very interested in having a say in Council affairs, and do not strongly identify with Maningrida itself.

Things did not work out this way at Ngukurr. The long mission influence and residence created a strong sense of being Ngukurr people and this, coupled with the social ties that cut across traditional allegiances, made it impossible for two separate organisations to develop. The Ngukurr community was not prepared to relinquish control of the township to the traditional owners of that area, and the outstation groups retained a strong interest in Ngukurr affairs.

Many Aborigines claimed that they had helped to build up Ngukurr and that in earlier days the elders had all agreed that Ngukurr should be for everyone, not just for the traditional owners. The localisation of ceremonies at Ngukurr was pointed to as confirmation of this agreement. The issue of what role the traditional owners were to have in Ngukurr affairs is still being negotiated. At present their demands are appeased by receipt of the greatest share of the money paid by a Katherine company that now leases the Ngukurr shop. Eventually the Council hopes to lease the township area from the traditional owners who would then play no special role in the management of Ngukurr.

Those people who had started outstations also retain a continuing interest in Ngukurr politics. A number are still members of the Council and at the time of my visit in 1981 the President, Vice-President and a number of ordinary members of the Council, were the key figures in their respective outstations. This was understandable when the Council controlled the distribution of resources to outstations, but less so when the independent Yugul Mangi was formed. In March of 1980, Julian was elected President of Yugul Mangi and his policy was to make sure that it came under Council control. He was as adamant about this as he was about the YCC becoming a Council responsibility, even though he was no longer Council president. He did very little to promote Yugul Mangi and, for some time, prevented DAA officers from inspecting outstations so that they could prepare a case for funding them independently of the Council.

A number of outstation residents were angered by this stand and began to consider other avenues of support. As a result of this conflict, aided by poor management on the part of the Aborigines who ran the day-to-day affairs, Yugul Mangi collapsed. Its functions were taken over by a Katherine-based, Aboriginal-controlled resource organisation, Yulngu. Despite this, most outstation residents retained a strong interest in Ngukurr affairs. An example of this is the fact that one of the main supporters of Yulngu is a member of the Council who travels in regularly for meetings and general settlement activities.

Cattle work on the outstations

Almost all of the outstations that formed around Ngukurr from mid-1978 hoped (and still hope) to make a cattle venture the centre piece of their plans for economic development. One is placing its hopes on a big tourist venture, many produce some artifacts or dream of receiving royalties from minerals that might exist on their lands, but the building up of a

small pastoral project is an overwhelming passion for most outstations.

Four have already started on this task, doing such things as building yards to trap brumbies and hold cattle, constructing fences (especially home paddocks), registering new brands, breaking in horses, collecting saddles and bridles and other miscellaneous items and applying for funds to buy vehicles. One group did quite a lot of bull catching and sold about \$8 000 worth to the Katherine abattoir. Other outstations are about to make a start in this direction.

Unfortunately, they are all unlikely to make much money from cattle, and, in the long term, their enthusiasm is sure to be dulled by unprofitability. The pastoral work being planned and carried out on outstations is testimony to the Aborigines' ability to take economic initiatives and to maintain a development programme under social conditions differing from those existing on large settlements. It is probable that more cattle work has been done by Aborigines on the outstations in the few years since their establishment than was done during all the years of the YCC. This work would not be of a kind necessary to sustain a large unsubsidised venture that paid award wages. It could, however, sustain a project designed to provide a very small flow of capital into outstations if it provided a regular supply of meat to Ngukurr, and maybe to Numbulwar and Groote Eylandt. However, the Aborigines seem to be determined to sell cattle to Katherine, hoping to make sufficient money to build up whole outstation complexes. It is highly unlikely that this could be the case, as the following discussion shows.

There would appear to be little more than a thousand head of cattle in the region in question, namely that area of Arnhem Land cut off by a line running east-west through Numbulwar. This figure is based upon studies by officers of the NT administration, my own estimates, the lack of success of mustering in the early years of the YCC and a recent aerial survey which counted only three hundred head. An extremely optimistic estimate for the area would be two thousand head. Without intensive improvements to pastures, cattle quality and general husbandry the annual turnoff in this region is believed to be about ten per cent of total herd size. This seems to be low but it should be noted that less than half the breeders produce a calf every year, that a high proportion of females are required for replacements, that musters can never be clean and that steers need to be around five years old before they are saleable. In the short term it could be expected, therefore, that about two hundred head could be turned off each year, although with good management this figure would gradually increase. Incidentally, this figure is very similar to the number of cattle used as 'killers' each year by Ngukurr; about four per week.

The sale of two hundred head would gross about \$25 000 per year depending on market prices, meaning that each of the nine outstations in this area would receive only \$2 777. In the early years a bull-catching operation could provide added income. In this operation scrub or wild bulls, which make up a high proportion of the cattle, are chased in a vehicle, thrown to the ground, tied up and then trucked to the abattoirs. Gross income from this could be of the order of \$25 000 per year for two or three years, which would add \$2 777 to each outstation's gross income. The problem with bull catching is that unless costs are carefully controlled, net income can be negligible, or even negative. For example, a recent catch at Ngukurr grossed about \$8 000, but two Toyotas were badly damaged in the process. This operation could not have been profitable.

The granting of subsidies and finance for improvements, especially the buying of breeders, could produce a gross annual income from outstation cattle projects of considerably more than the \$5 500 indicated above. If these inputs are not made available it is likely that the Aborigines will be subsidising their cattle projects by using time, money and resources that could be better (in their own terms) spent on such things as artifact production, buildings, roads, gardens, water supplies or traditional activities. It is clear that the Aborigines are not aware of the limited economic returns that their present pastoral endeavours will bring. Their experience with the YCC does not seem to have affected their misunderstanding in this regard.

10 Summary and Implications of Yugul's collapse

The failure of Yugul, one of the first Aboriginal cattle stations in the Top End of the Territory, was the result of both local social and physical conditions at Ngukurr and factors external to the settlement - including some which were intended to maintain it.

The physical component may be briefly summarised. Poor pastures, distance from markets and difficult access make the south-east of Arnhem Land a marginal area for beef production even by conventional 'old style' methods. One consequence of this was that there was little possibility of long-term experimentation with the YCC if it had been recognised that a community-based, and perhaps non-capitalist venture called for new methods for the conduct and management of the company.

In general, the Europeans involved in the cattle project were not especially ignorant, prejudiced or unimaginative. The DAA officials were neither more nor less helpful and efficient than public servants in general, and AACM provided sound technical and managerial advice. Yet, their involvement tended to hasten the demise of the YCC.

The DAA, by keeping its 'finger in the pie', on the grounds that it was protecting the Australian taxpayers' interests, undermined the Aborigines' belief that the YCC was under their control. The knowledge that important decisions could be made without reference to the YCC resulted in a degree of Aboriginal withdrawal. This withdrawal was well-grounded, for when AACM was finally sacked by the Aborigines at Ngukurr the DAA had no hesitation in cutting off almost all funds, thereby almost closing down the YCC.

AACM did not understand and did not attempt to understand the social context within which the YCC operated. At the same time as it called for community support for the YCC, it attempted to separate it as far as possible from what it saw as detrimental community influences. AACM simply wanted to operate a European-style cattle station. It assumed that the major benefits for the Ngukurr Aborigines would be employment and a supply of meat, while the notion that the YCC could play a role in the social development of Ngukurr was alien to its approach. Similarly, AACM appeared to have no understanding of the fact that without social development, of a radical kind, at Ngukurr the YCC was doomed to fail. Of course, AACM could not have been expected to recognise this, and even if they had, they were in no position to do anything about it. I am not advocating radical change (Marxist or otherwise), nor am I suggesting (in a voluntaristic fashion) that such change could have occurred at Ngukurr.

AACM often treated the Aborigines somewhat like children, and had little faith in their capacity to understand and contribute to YCC development. Its general insensitivity and narrow business-like approach, exacerbated by the actions of the second manager, had a profound effect on the Aborigines' interest in the YCC and were important reasons for the sacking of AACM.

Local social circumstances were another major source of difficulty. These circumstances include a lack of skills, an absence of training schemes for young Aborigines, misunderstandings concerning the 'hidden' aspects of cattle stations, the lack of work experience, the existence of traditions that were incompatible with European-style community-owned ventures and, most important, a lack of authority or power structures at the level of both the settlement as a whole and the work place. This lack was most important because, if such structures had existed, most of the other factors would not have been of importance in themselves. Strong Aboriginal settlement-wide authority systems would have been able to correct many of the other problems, for example, by establishing training schemes, sanctioning workers or promoting social change. Indeed, if such systems had developed on settlements, many of the other weaknesses of the venture may not have arisen at all.

The Aborigines at Ngukurr, as a settlement society, had no means of controlling the productive resources involved in the YCC, for instance, land, or of controlling the distribution of its products and resources, such as meat and employment positions. There were also no means of establishing work-place hierarchies, training schemes, or a system of rewards and sanctions that were applicable to the YCC, as well as to Ngukurr in general. Hence, the relations of production tended to be anarchistic and, further, involved little voluntary cooperation. The mustering and fencing incidents demonstrate this. The underlying reason for this problem faced by the Aborigines was their inability to organise tasks, delegate responsibilities and sanction rule breakers, in relation to YCC activities in particular and settlement affairs in general.

While the lack of authority structures is important on settlements, the solution is not to simply create and foster them. This is clearly demonstrated by the failure of Councils to socially integrate settlements. For Councils to become the central authority organisation on settlements would require a successful programme of social change, a fact which neither the Aborigines nor the government seem to be even aware of, let alone prepared to introduce.

The Council is the organisation that is supposed to provide the Ngukurr Aboriginal community with the means to control Ngukurr affairs. In a rather limited way it succeeded, but its authority and power were and still are weak. Aboriginal support for the Council was demonstrated when the Aborigines wanted the YCC to come under Council control after the proposed sacking of AACM. Two elements of the situation must be emphasised. One is that the Council at Ngukurr does not represent the community as a whole, but rather the core group which controls it. The small amount of authority that the Council has is largely derived from a rather tenuous core group solidarity that is based on the participation of its members in common traditional cults and affinal links between its constituent families. The second is that the primary social groupings at Ngukurr are the families and, just as they tend to undermine core group solidarity, they also undermine Council authority. Because these families are groups in the traditional sector and are the primary land owning units at Ngukurr, they have been strengthened by recent developments that have given rise to government policies that promote separate development. Land rights is of central importance in this respect. This is the way in which tradition at Ngukurr weakens community-wide social organisation and, therefore, presents a barrier to the success of community-owned ventures.

One alternative for the development of large settlements, to expect Aborigines to be able to voluntarily initiate and maintain a programme of separate, perhaps non-capitalist, cooperative and unequal development, is sociologically naive. This expectation discounts the social organisation of settlements and the factors external to them that continue to influence and dominate remote Aborigines and make cooperative enterprises very difficult to initiate.

Continuation of some measure of dependency on Europeans was the only and the inevitable alternative. The Aborigines at Ngukurr remained dependent on European initiative, coordination and management. The community had no accumulated or bounteous natural resources of its own on which it could live without depending on Europeans while it went through a process of social and economic reconstruction. Mining royalties may allow some Aborigines this opportunity. One consequence of dependency was that Aborigines suffered from and were antagonised by European insensitivity, narrowmindedness, apathy and prejudice. Another was that the European institutions, DAA and AACM, continued to play a decisive role in the affairs of YCC - a dominance which undermined the official policy of fostering separate development and self-management.

Policy

In relation to remote Aborigines, Australian governments have tended to adopt policies that fall into two contradictory categories. On the one hand, they have called for the inclusion of Aborigines into mainstream Australian society and, on the other hand, they have proposed that Aborigines should be excluded from that society. Both types of policy have been present to varying degrees throughout European history in Australia.

Until quite recently, policies designed to exclude Aborigines have been submerged by the official doctrine of assimilation and integration. During this period, separate development was officially denounced but, nonetheless, it was the reality for remote Aborigines.

In the contemporary situation, the opposite is the case. New policies promote, though only implicitly, the separate development and exclusion of Aborigines and dependency continues. To continue with a policy of integration would be to invite a continuation, and perhaps a strengthening, of overseas criticism and Aboriginal political activity like the so-called Moree freedom rides, the setting up of the Aboriginal tent embassy in Canberra or the Aboriginal strike at Ngukurr in 1970. These Aboriginal protests were against inequality and discrimination. Aborigines had come to demand that the promise of equality integral to the policy of integration be fulfilled. But, integration was not occurring to any marked degree and Aboriginal inequality remained obviously profound.

The Commonwealth government's response was to change its policies in a way that tended to promote the exclusion of Aborigines from the wider Australian society. Enforced inclusion, or integration, came to be regarded as oppressive and unnecessary. These new policies can be seen as a justification and a rationalisation of Aboriginal inequality in Australia, although they should not be seen as the result of conscious attempts by politicians and public servants to explain this inequality away. Rather, this policy also results from 'collective forces and social arrangements', including class structure.

Nevertheless, policy has been implicitly, and at times explicitly, promoted by government officials as if it resulted from rational deliberations on the part of those who formulate policy in the last instance. Their argument is roughly as follows. Our policies of integration, they suggest, have not worked because Aborigines are different from Europeans. It was our ethnocentrism and ignorance that prevented us from taking this difference into account. Now that we are aware of this, we have decided that it is reasonable and just that Aborigines are given the opportunity to rectify the effects of our past ignorance. In order for this new approach to work, we will consult closely with the Aborigines, and supply any necessary resources.

Aborigines have uncritically accepted this policy, because it is in accord with their wishes to live apart from Europeans and to retain a social distinctiveness. They, and many Europeans, have not recognised that these wishes stem, at least in part, from Aboriginal social and economic inequality. By uncritically supporting the new government approach, the Aborigines are unknowingly accepting responsibility for their inequality. The government and other European groups can propose that Aborigines have now been given the opportunity to develop in any way they wish. Hence it can only be their fault if such development is unsuccessful. The question why Aborigines cannot get a reasonable share of existing wealth in Australia can be evaded.

Although policy is for Aborigines to have a say in their future, the government still defines the guidelines within which Aborigines are said to be 'self-managing'. This applies to direct or indirect control over settlement budgets and even to broader matters. For instance, settlement decentralisation has been discouraged until quite recently. The impact of government activities at the level of settlements has become much harder to determine as the NT progresses towards statehood and the functions of DAA are transferred to other departments with their own view of what self-management means. There is also an increasing variability in the background of the European staff who put these policies into practice.

By the time of the start of the YCC the government had invested considerable resources in an attempt to build up settlement infrastructure, facilities and services. Much of this investment flowed from its policies of assimilation and integration. It was understandable that the government was now reluctant to disband settlements and cope with the consequent demands of dozens of outstation communities for such things as schools, medical services, houses, shops, airstrips and electricity. Decentralisation could not be easily prevented for this would mean the imposition of provocative regulations. But, it could be partly controlled by the government through its control of the purse-strings. The shallowness of the government's offer of consultation is made clear in those instances where the Aborigines and the government are in basic disagreement or when the government wishes to cut funds for Aborigines.

Because the government was promoting separate development, but not outstations, its only option was to support development at the settlement level. This is what occurred at Ngukurr. The government was working with the assumption that, with some assistance and prodding, the Aborigines at Ngukurr would cooperate to develop Ngukurr in a way that would be in some way non-traditional and non-capitalist, but still in line with their culture. Further, the government hoped that such development would, in the long run, reduce the Aborigines' dependence on government funds. This was the reason for its support of the YCC.

Serious attempts to formulate policy for Aboriginal self-determination and self-management can only flow from an analysis of the place of Aborigines in Australian society as a whole. Such an analysis would be an integral part of a much broader study of inequality and social control in Australia. As a general point, policy cannot stem directly from description and analysis but must necessarily involve moral or ethical judgments, that is judgments about what is right and wrong or good and bad. As a result, analytical and descriptive work, such as this monograph, has no direct implications at all for policy. Further, this does not seem to be the place to attempt to establish an ethical basis for the generation of policy.

Therefore, in relation to Aboriginal involvement in the cattle industry, I will not indicate what kinds of cattle projects Aborigines ought to adopt or whether they ought or ought not to be funded or subsidised by governments or by such bodies as the Aboriginal Development Commission. Clearly, there will be many variables to take into account on these issues. I will, however, look at a few options that seem to be available to Aborigines who wish to establish cattle stations.

Aboriginal support for establishing or buying cattle stations can stem from a number of sources, one being a chance to gain such things as wages, control over land, motor vehicles and the pleasure of owning a station. Their interest in, and understanding of, the project may be extremely low, but their support could be high if they assume that this is their only way of getting things that are important to them. Under these circumstances, the funding of a cattle project will be an expensive way of providing for Aboriginal wants. At the same time, it would seem preferable to avoid the situation where Aborigines are told they can have a cattle enterprise or nothing at all.

Where Aborigines have a firm desire to establish a cattle station similar in fundamental respects to European-owned stations, then it will be necessary for them to work out ways to maintain its viability. If, for example, Aborigines wish to maintain profitability and the turnoff of cattle, they will probably need to follow the management and financial practices long established by Europeans. In short, there would seem to be no 'Aboriginal way' to run a station within these parameters. In the case of the YCC, for example, the Aborigines used European-owned cattle stations as their models for development. However, they were only interested in, or capable of, maintaining certain components of the models, which meant that they could not sustain the venture without considerable external support.

Any major departure from established practice is likely to see a marked and rapid decline in stock quality, turnoff and profitability. Arguments that the Aborigines should be subsidised because they receive social benefits from the continuation of a financially failing project may be true, but it is likely that these benefits could be met more cheaply and adequately in a direct fashion.

If the enterprise is not financially viable then someone must subsidise it. In principle this means that either the Aborigines divert scarce resources away from their other activities, or a government organisation funds them on a regular basis. Both of these alternatives have profound social implications, especially the second which leads to increasing economic dependency on governments.

Economic independence from Europeans, or the political power to extract subsidies from government without losing political independence, is a necessary condition for Aborigines who wish to make decisions without outside interference. Where strongly guaranteed moneys, for example, from old age pensions or child endowment or from wages received by such people as school teachers are not sufficient to meet the economic wants of Aborigines then, if they wish to escape from the profound impact of external economic control, they will need to operate profitable ventures.

One option for Aborigines who wish to copy European-owned enterprises is for them to allow Europeans to have managerial control over cattle projects set up on their lands. They would gain in employment and profits, and could allow development to proceed knowing that at any time they could evict the Europeans and take control. For many Aboriginal communities this is likely to be the only way they will be able to maintain a large and profitable venture.

Another option would be a hunting-style project where cattle are killed in the bush to supply meat for a community. The consequences of this would be that no wages could be paid (unless the meat was sold) and no profits would be made. If there was no cattle management at all, bulls would become a large proportion of the herd and the number of cattle suitable for killing would soon be small. To be self-sustaining this approach would need sufficient management to maintain a supply of steers in paddocks close to the community and accessible in all seasons. Contracts could be let to Aborigines or Europeans to regularly clean out the bulls, and maybe even to do all the mustering. In this way Aborigines could gain some income and a supply of beef without having Europeans permanently involved.

The outstations around Ngukurr seem to be taking another approach. Here, small cattle enterprises can be established and maintained because the social structure enables Aborigines to initiate and organise and to produce and distribute goods in a fashion seen as legitimate by the outstation members. They are intended to be more than hunting operations because it is

hoped to sell cattle. Survival, however, will only occur if the Aborigines work for low wages or none at all and derive considerable satisfaction from their labours. When (and if) these enterprises are established it should not be too difficult to introduce a measure of coordination to mustering and selling to nearby settlements and the Katherine abattoir. If this coordination were successful the resulting operation would begin to resemble some of the Aborigines' original views of what the YCC should have been. The chances of success here would probably be high because the project would be based on a successful Aboriginal initiative.

I assume that where Aborigines have the land, the desire, the skills and the capacity to establish and maintain their own large scale cattle ventures, they will begin to do so without any external assistance by diverting their own resources in this direction. Communities without the social structure that enables them to generate capital internally are unlikely to have a social structure compatible with the operation of a complex cattle station.

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