UNCONTAINED SUBJECTS: 'POPULATION' AND 'HOUSEHOLD' IN REMOTE ABORIGINAL AUSTRALIA

Frances Morphy,[†] The Australian National University

The particular abstractions represented by the terms 'population' and 'household' are central categories in modern demographic analysis. They form the organizing principles of national censuses in Western liberal democracies such as Australia, and profoundly influence both the collection methodology and the content of the collection instrument. This paper argues that these categories are founded on a particular metaphor, the 'bounded container', that broadly reflects the population and household structures of sedentary societies such as mainstream Australia. Bounded discrete categories are conducive to the collection of reliable census data in such societies, since 'unbounded' behaviours can be controlled for by statistical means. However, remote Aboriginal populations behave in radically unbounded ways. This paper proposes that the dominant metaphor underlying Yolngu (and much remote Aboriginal) sociality is, instead, the nodal network. It then explores the consequences of attempting to 'capture' nodal network societies in terms of models based on the bounded container.

A recent paper (Morphy 2006) critiqued the census approach to the family structure of remote Australian Aboriginal households, arguing that where two incommensurable kinship systems exist, and an attempt is made to capture data on the one through questions deriving from a model that is based on the other, the results are potentially incoherent and uninterpretable. That paper was based on data from a study of Australia's 2001 National Census of Population and Housing. The present paper revisits the modelling issue from a different angle, using data from the 2006 Census, as a contribution to the potentially fruitful debate between demographers and anthropologists about the nature of analytic categories.[1]

This debate has been going on in other parts of the world for some time (e.g. Greenhalgh 1990, 1995; Kertzer and Fricke 1997; Kertzer and Arel 2001; Riley and McCarthy 2003; Szreter, Sholkamy and Dharmalingam 2004). In his foreword to Szreter *et al.*, Kertzer summarizes the anthropological viewpoint, somewhat bluntly:

> The conundrum of sophisticated demographic research [is that] comparative research and theory-building would appear to require the construction of standard categories for analysis, yet the categories actually employed in demography are for the most part western folk categories dressed in scientific garb (Kertzer 2004: v).

[†] Address for correspondence: Frances Morphy, Centre for Aboriginal Economic Policy Research, The Australian National University, Acton ACT 0200, Australia. Email: Frances.Morphy@anu.edu.au.

The recent dialogue about categories can be seen as the latest development in quite a long history of interaction between demographers and anthropologists, in which anthropologists have argued for a more socioculturally sophisticated demographic approach, where 'culture' is not just an extraneous variable to be introduced into the analysis when other explanations fail.[2] Rather, they argue, culture is deeply implicated in the construction of categories, in Western societies no less than in any other. There is a need, therefore, to examine critically the categories that frame the discipline of demography, and also to take into account the categories and contexts of the society or societies that are the object of demographic research (see Greenhalgh 1995; Bledsoe 2002). For their part, some demographers, prominent among them J.C. Caldwell of the Australian National University, have championed the virtues of 'micro-demography' and the importance of attention to social and cultural contexts (Caldwell, Caldwell and Caldwell 1987; Caldwell, Hill and Hull 1988).

Yet, ironically, despite the prominence of Caldwell in the demographic landscape, this debate has scarcely impinged at all on the demography of Aboriginal Australians.[2] The anthropological demographers whose work is mentioned above draw for their examples on their work in Africa, India, South America, Europe and Asia (almost everywhere except Australia). Diane Smith's chapter on the cultural appropriateness of existing survey questions and concepts in Altman (1992) is one of the very few pieces by an anthropologist that explicitly tackles this debate about categories in the Australian context, and to this can be added other more recent work which, while not explicitly linking itself to the international debate, nevertheless is concerned with the question of demographic categories and the 'capturing' of information about Aboriginal Australians. The work of John Taylor is prominent: he is an editor of, or an author in, most of the books and articles in question (Martin and Taylor 1995, 1996; Martin *et al.* 2002; Memmott *et al.* 2004; Taylor and Bell 2004b; see also Rowse 1988; Finlayson and Auld 1999; Morphy 2004; Memmott, Long and Thomson 2006).

The debate about categories is both necessary and desirable in the Australian context because it concerns the public representation of Aboriginal Australian populations: the way in which they are made 'legible' to the state (Scott 1998). On such representations, in turn, hang the planning and implementation of policy, and often the allocation and distribution of government funding.[3] This paper draws on research on the 2006 Census in remote Aboriginal communities to argue that the kinds of data that can be collected in a national census have severe limitations, and that other kinds of data, specifically data framed according to categories derived from anthropological research and insights, are necessary to inform the policy debate.

The bounded container metaphor and its limitations

The particular abstractions represented by the terms 'population' and 'household' are central categories in modern demographic analysis. They form the organizing principles of national censuses in Western liberal democracies such as Australia, and profoundly influence both the collection method and the content of the collection instrument. The defining characteristics of the demographic 'population' as measured by a national census are that it is notionally bounded, as in 'the population of Australia'; notionally discrete, with no overlapping boundaries; and notionally sedentary, that is, dwelling-based, or 'household'-based.

Thus the model sets up 'bounded containers' (Adams and Kasakoff 2004) consist-

Figure 1   The bounded container model
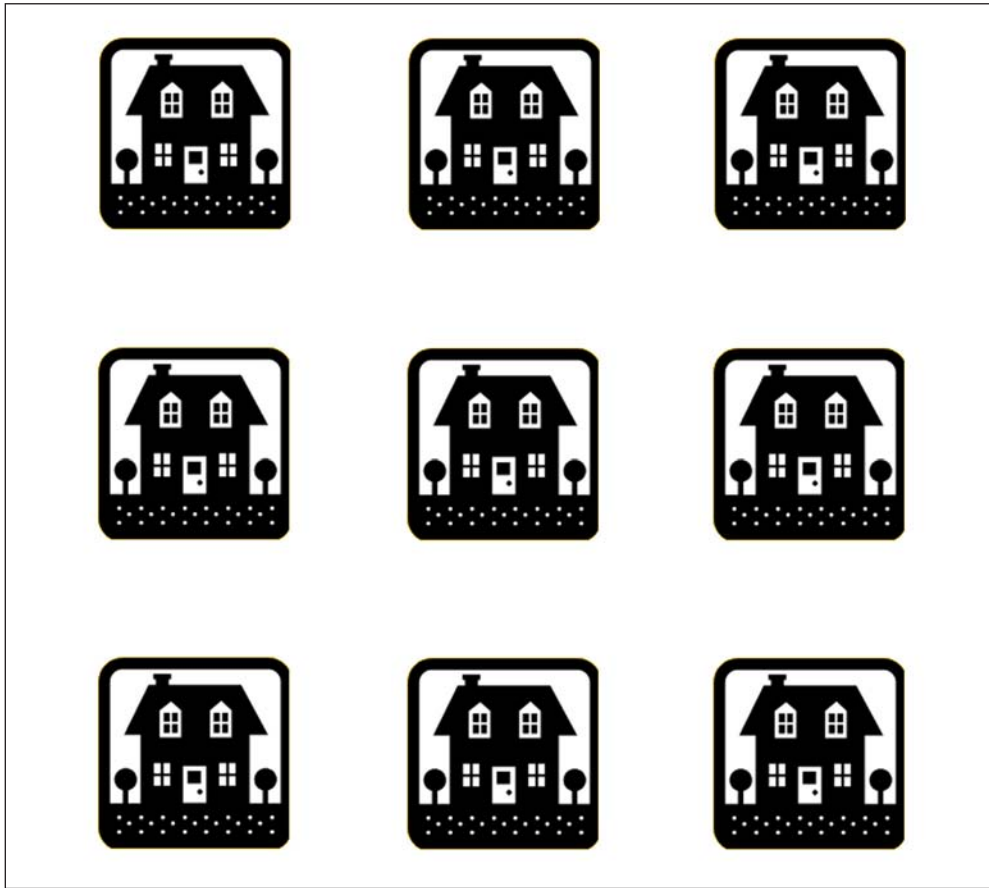
ing of dwellings or households nested within larger bounded containers: Collection Districts, Statistical Local Areas, and so on up to the national boundary itself (see Figure 1).

Of course, individuals in a population can and do behave in uncontained ways. They get born, die, go on holiday at census time, move house, leave home and form new households, migrate in, migrate out, and so on. Some are more radically uncontained: for example the homeless. But demographers and statisticians have devised ways of capturing and measuring such uncontained behaviours, and they do not threaten the status of the dominant spatial metaphor, the bounded container, that underlies the model.

However, the container metaphor is an inadequate basis for modelling the characteristics of the Aboriginal populations of remote Australia. Instead, these are characterized by nodal points in space, connected by extensive, overlapping kinship networks, within which individuals are highly — but not randomly — mobile.

There is a localized component to this model, but it is not the household. Instead, in many parts of Australia including the Yolngu-speaking area of northeast Arnhem Land which provides the data for this paper, it is the patrilineal clan estate, often the

Figure 2   The nodal network model
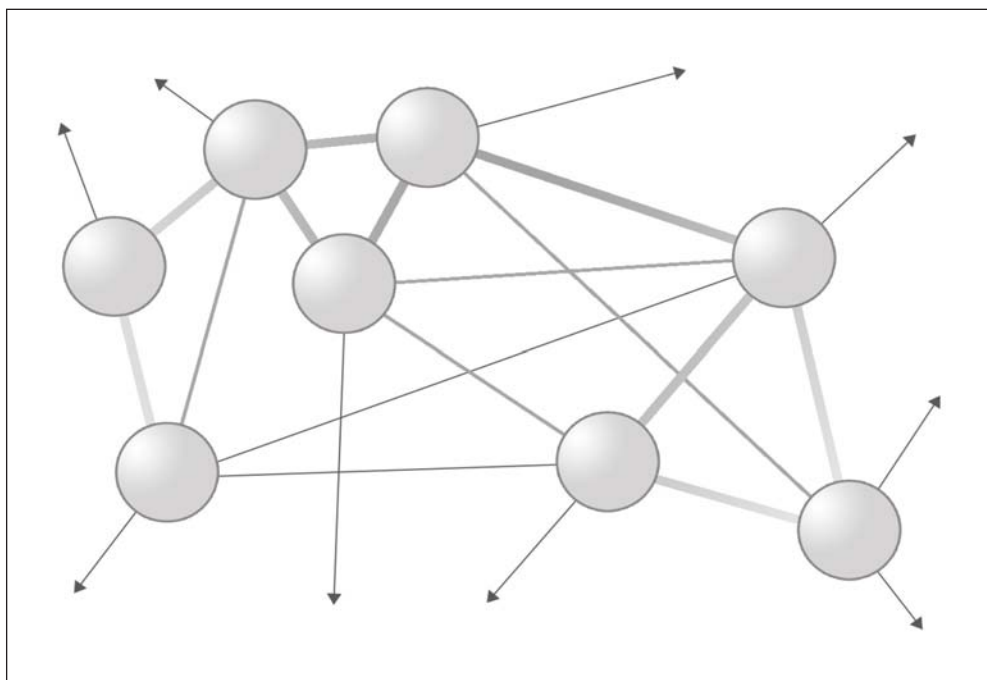
site these days of a small homeland settlement, on which there are permanent dwell-ings.[4] It is this last fact which makes it tempting to think that the container model might apply, but these dwellings are also best conceptualized as nodal sites with their own networks.[5]

Figure 2 shows the type of model that best fits both remote contemporary Abo-riginal populations and the settlements where they live.[6] The circles represent nodal persons or localities and the different weights of line represent the relative densities of connection, with the thick solid lines symbolizing the densest degrees of connec-tion and the thinnest lines the most attenuated. Density is potentially measurable in terms of the frequency of movement by individuals between nodes, reflecting the closeness and density of kinship and ceremonial ties, and in terms of residence pat-terns of individuals over time. Another factor contributing today to the patterning of networks is the location of service centres in relation to satellite settlements (see Young and Doohan 1989; Taylor and Bell 2004a: 21–25; Memmott *et al.* 2006). Just as the container model operates at several levels in the mainstream, so too does the nodal network model for Aboriginal populations.

This type of model for Aboriginal populations is not entirely new; it suggests an internal structure for one instance of what has been termed a 'mobility region' in the literature on mobility, particularly with reference to indigenous populations encapsulated in nation states, including Australia (Young and Doohan 1989; Young 1990; Memmott *et al.* 2006). But the question at issue is: what is the effect of trying to model nodal networks in terms of bounded containers? For this is what the census methodology attempts.

Patterned mobility as uncontained behaviour

One immediate effect is on the logistics of the count itself. One site for the observation of 2006 Census enumeration consisted of a hub settlement and its surrounding homelands in the Yolngu-speaking area. The Census Field Officer (CFO) responsible for this area, and a large region surrounding it, was hoping to finish the count in these places within a week, and then move on to the next big community in his sphere of responsibility.[7] Ten weeks later the count was still not complete.

In the Yolngu area, funeral ceremonies are a major cause of movement around kinship networks, and it is logistically impossible and inappropriate to enumerate at a place where a funeral is happening. The ceremonies connected with any one funeral commonly last up to a month, and for some the period is longer. During the course of a funeral, close relatives of the deceased person will go and camp at the site of the funeral for the duration. Others will come and go, usually making sure that they attend certain important points of the ceremony, particularly the last few days leading up to the burial itself.

When the CFO arrived at the hub settlement there were four funerals under way in the immediate region: one at the hub settlement, one at one of the homelands, and two at other large settlements in the vicinity. The CFO had difficulty in recruiting local collector–interviewers, but found and trained a few, and got the count under way in sections of the main settlement which were not affected directly by the funeral. Then, accompanied by the author, he set off down the track to the homelands. We drove into one small homeland towards evening. It was empty; everyone was back at the funeral at the main settlement. The next day we called in at a second, larger homeland, with a usual population of around 80.[8] It too was totally deserted; everyone was at the large funeral happening in the next-door homeland.[9] We drove on to the largest homeland of the group, where the usual population is around 170. As the collector–interviewers, having received their training, began going from house to house, it became evident that at least one-third of the population was away, at four different funerals. But there were at least 20 'visitors' present, visiting their kin from other nearby communities.[10]

The success or otherwise of the Indigenous Enumeration Strategy as a device for achieving an accurate head count will not be discussed here.[11] The point to be noted is that, to the extent that it does succeed in 'capturing' the Indigenous population and situating them as either residents of or visitors to particular dwellings, it also creates the illusion that the structure and dynamics of that population can be captured by the bounded container model. But whereas the rest of the population is counted on a single night, it takes many weeks to achieve the illusion of a dwelling-bound Yolngu population.

'Households' and families: an anthropological perspective

In the Australian National Census, households are conflated with dwellings so that they, too, are modelled as bounded containers, within which are nested further bounded containers: archetypally the self-contained nuclear family. In the following discussion the term 'household' is used in this sense. As will become clear from the analysis, however, this model for the household and its relationship to the 'family' does not sit comfortably with the reality of Yolngu co-residence patterns.

Figure 3   Household 1
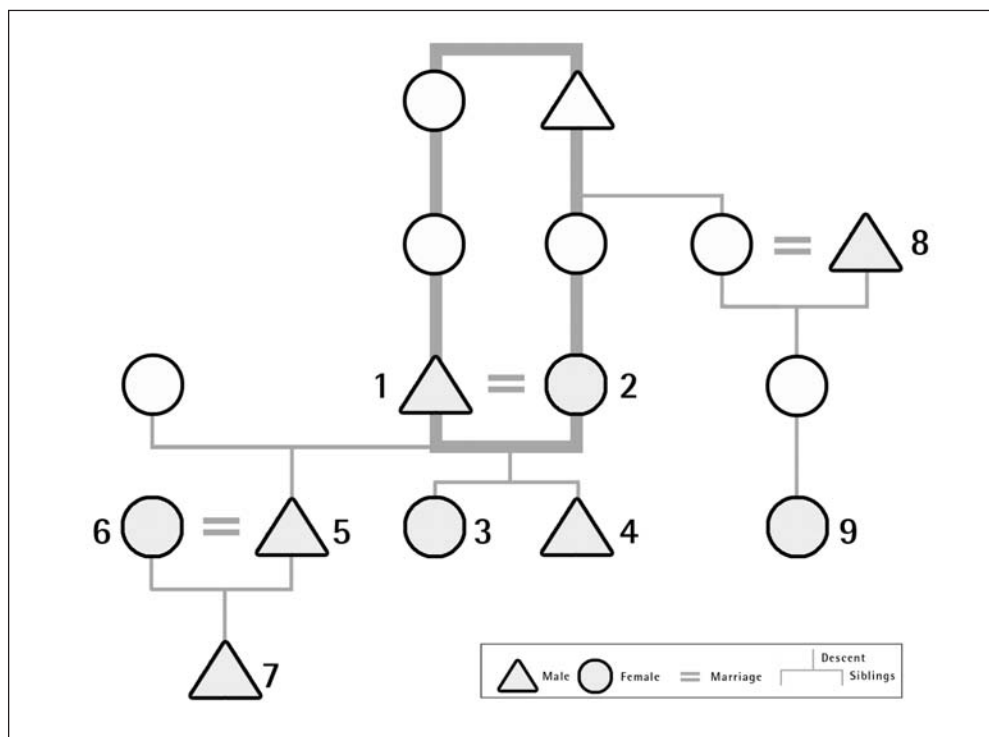
Figures 3, 4 and 5 show the people present at the 2006 Census enumeration at three dwellings from one homeland in the region, somewhat doctored to preserve confidentiality. In all the Figures the numbered circles and triangles represent the people who were present at the count. Circles are females and triangles are males. The un-numbered circles and triangles represent absent kinsfolk through whom people in the dwelling are connected to one another; they are 'absent' because they are no longer living or because they have been counted as residents elsewhere. The thick grey lines trace the kinship connections between people who have married according to the classical Yolngu bestowal system.

There are some crucial differences between the Yolngu kinship system and that of the Australian Anglo-Celtic mainstream. This is a classificatory system in which people marry kin of a particular category. A man marries his actual or classificatory mother's mother's brother's daughter's daughter (MMBDD). So, in Figure 3, persons (1) and (2) are married according to the bestowal system.[12] These Figures are simplified diagrams that abstract a core principle of family formation, focusing on a particular nexus of relationships. An attempt to draw in all the genealogical relationships that hold between the members of these households would resemble a plate of spaghetti. The pivotal kin category in this particular system is mother's mother's brother (MMB), a person who is often not co-resident (and may be deceased), and who, in the Anglo-Celtic kinship system, is merely a 'great-uncle', and not a core relative.

Figure 4 shows a second household in the same community. The thick grey lines

Figure 4   Household 2
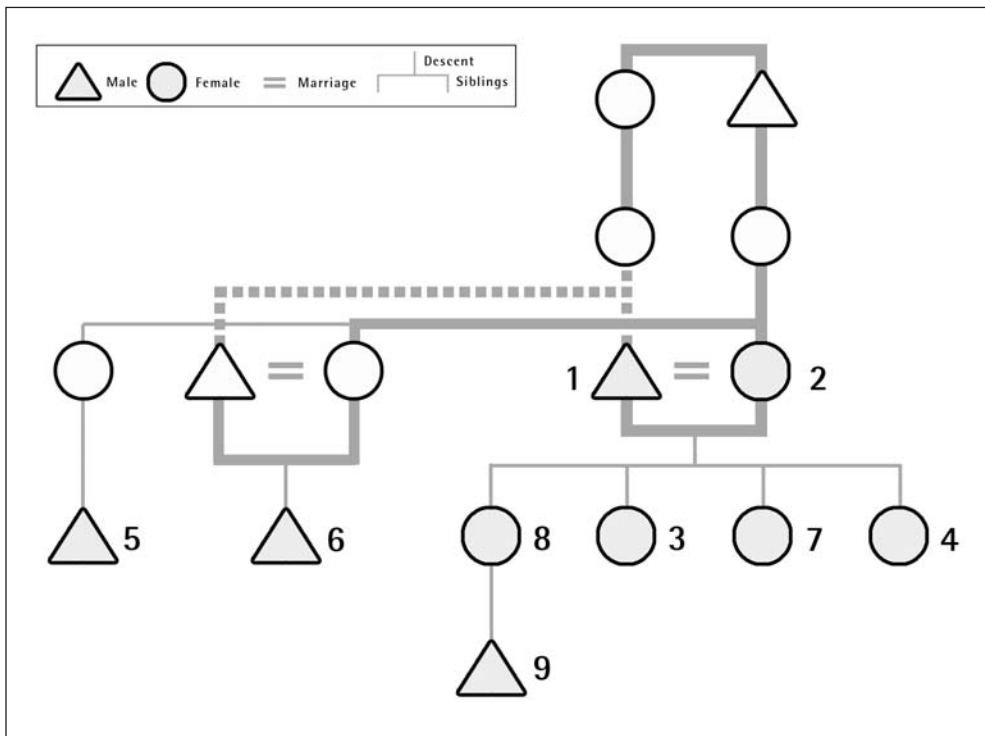
trace the same nexus of relationships as in Figure 3. Once again there is a man and his wife, who is his actual MMBDD, and their children, including their eldest daughter (8) and her son (9). This young woman and the father of the boy (9) sometimes live together, and they are considered married, but both at this stage of their relationship are highly, and independently, mobile, as is the six-year-old boy (9).[13] As in the first household there are 'non-nuclear' relatives present, in Anglo-Celtic kin terminology. (1)'s older brother is married to (2)'s older sister. These two are currently living else-where, but their unmarried son (6), who was present at the count, lives sufficiently often in this household to be considered a resident. (5), in the same category, is the son of (2)'s eldest sister. (1) and (2) call (5) and (6) by the same kin terms as they do their own children.

These two are smallish households by local standards. Figure 5 shows a bigger one, from the same homeland. Here are found an elderly woman (16) and three of her children (1), (7) and (13). Her two sons (1) and (13) are linked to their spouses, (2) and (14) respectively, by two instances of the thick grey 'bestowal' line; in this system a MMBDD may also be simultaneously a MBD, both belonging to the cat-egory *galay* 'matrilateral cross-cousin'. There are other relatives present, including children, who are not part of any nuclear family, but who are close relatives in this classificatory system: (1) calls (11) and (12) by the same terms as he calls his own son's children because their paternal grandfather is his brother, and indeed they have been called his 'grandchildren' on the census form (see Table 3). Their presence can only be motivated by appeal to the principles of classificatory kinship. In this society, many

Figure 5   Household 3
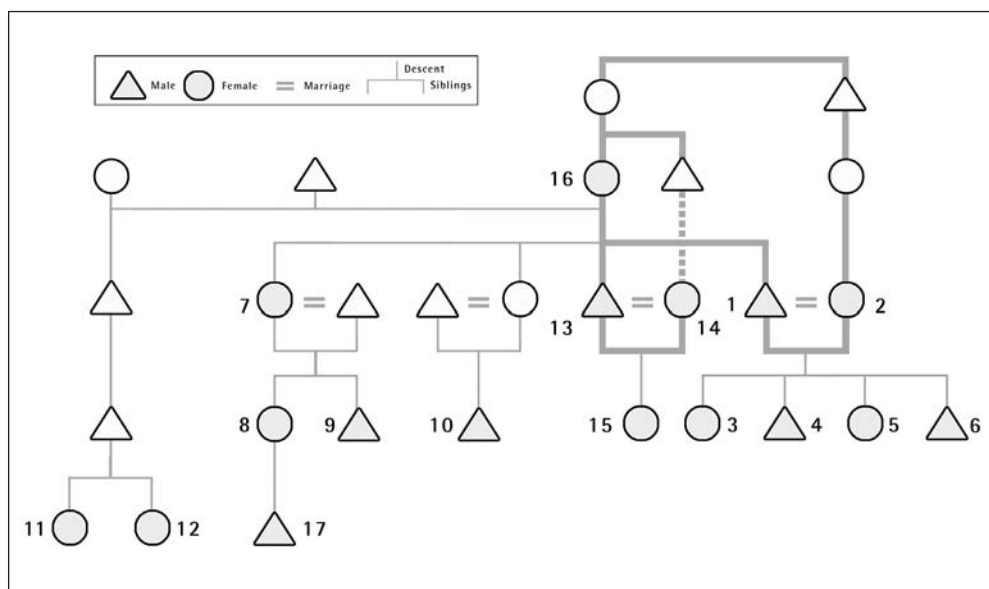
children are highly mobile, spending periods of time with different relatives; child (9) from the household in Figure 4 is one of these. This is considered desirable, because it means they are activating the networks that will be the basis of their adult sociality. Children as young as five or six can exercise a considerable degree of autonomy in their choice of residence, and those that choose mobility receive approbation rather than being a cause for concern.

Figure 6 shows how these three households are, in turn, genealogically related. Once again, the thick lines trace marriage bestowal relationships extending several generations into the past that, together with patrilineal clan relationships, continue to influence patterns of co-residence in the present. The persons (1) of households 1 and 2 are full brothers, whose mother and father were married according to the Yolngu bestowal system (shown in the upper part of the Figure). Person (1) of household 3 is, in Yolngu terms, also their brother. He is descended from the same father but a different mother. That parental marriage is also according to the bestowal system. It is no accident that these 'households' are found in the same homeland.

Note particularly the presence of (11) and (12) in household 3. As with (5) in household 1 and (5) and (6) in household 2, these children are living with close classificatory relatives, rather than in what would be considered 'closer' family in Anglo-Celtic terms, that is, in household 1 or 2. Nuclear 'families' do occur within these households but they are not the core structure on which households are built. In this community there are as many 'nuclear families' whose members are spread between closely related households as there are 'nuclear families' contained within households (see also Martin 2002: 22, Fig. 2.1 for relationships between linked households at Aurukun, Cape York Peninsula).

William Skinner, in a paper on stem and joint families in agrarian societies in Europe and Asia, makes a useful terminological distinction:

Figure 6   Households 1, 2 and 3
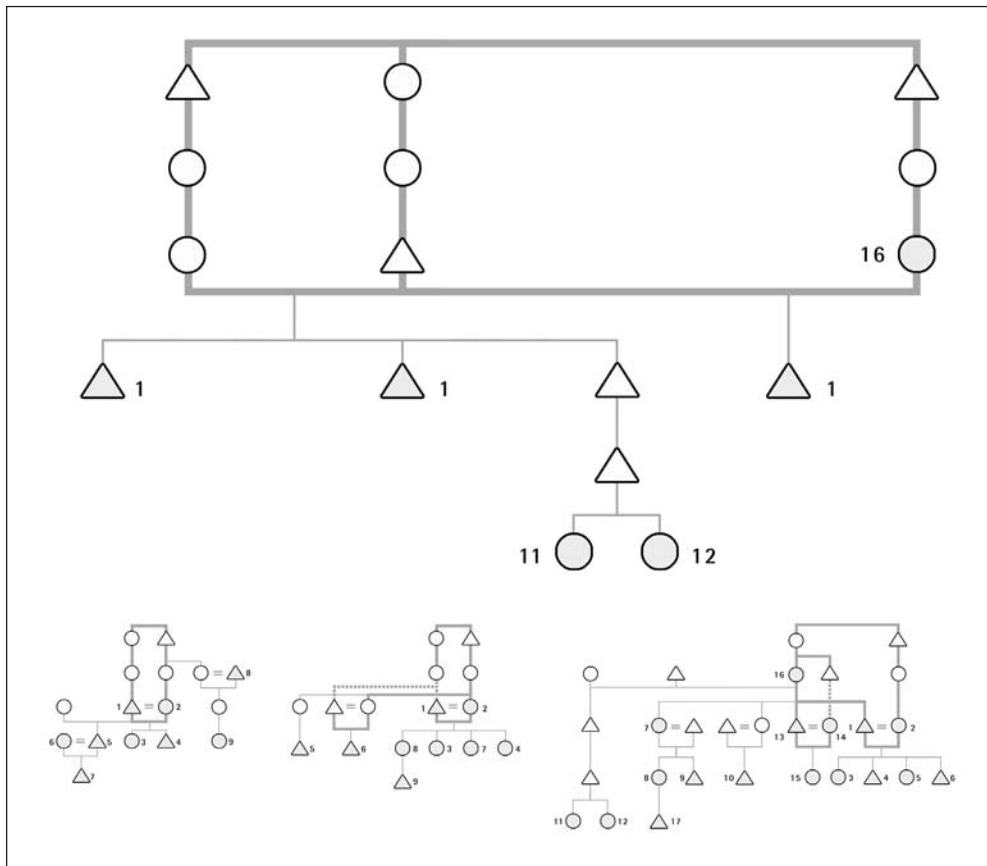
> I take 'family' to refer to coresiding kin who participate in a single domestic economy…*it is important to avoid using 'family' to refer to what are merely subsystems of the family as defined*. It is all too common in the literature to find conjugal units within a stem or joint family referred to as 'conjugal or nuclear families' or 'family units' or 'component families'…These sloppy terminological practices, which conflate the family and its subsystems, are to be eschewed as confusing and often misleading (Skinner 1997: 56; emphasis added).

Skinner's definition of 'family' is in need of some modification in the Indigenous Australian context to allow for aspects of the domestic economy that transcend the residential unit, but his untangling of subsystems from the 'family' terminology seems a universally useful clarification.

It is only fair to say that Figure 6 is a distillation of many years' genealogical research. It is not being suggested that the census should be aiming to replicate this result. But arguably these kinds of data, and the structures that they reveal, are a better guide to policy-making directed at 'families' than the output of the census. They indicate, for example, that it will not be a simple matter to socially engineer people from homelands communities like this one into the mainstream by 'encouraging' them to migrate as individuals, or as conjugal units 'normalized' under the term 'nuclear family', to population centres where there is a mainstream labour market.

Table 1   2006 Census data for household 1

Person no.	Sex	Age	Relationship to Person 1/2	Married?	Person no. of mother	Person no. of father	No. of children ever born	Resident/ Visitor
1	m	54		yes				resident
2	f	37	Wife	yes			2	resident
3	f	15	Child of 1 and 2	never	2	1		resident
4	m	11	Child of 1 and 2	never	2	1		resident
5	m	26	Child of 1	yes		1		resident
6	f	24	Other relative	yes			2	resident
7	m	6	Grandchild of 1	never	6	5		resident
8	m	61	Other relative	widower				resident
9	f	15	Other relative	never				resident

Coding households and families: the bounded container model

The Indigenous Household Form (IHF) elicits the relationships of all people present to person 1 (and in some cases to person 2), including visitors, but not the relationships of people temporarily or otherwise absent. For the purposes of family coding at the ABS Data Processing Centre (DPC), visitors are not included in the household, although information about their relationships to non-visitors may be used for coding the family relationships between the usual residents. For example, in household 3, (16) was a visitor, so was not included as a member of the household. But it was possible to use data collected on her relationship (as mother) to (1), (13), and (7), to cross-check that these three were, indeed, siblings.

Table 1 shows the data collected from Household 1 in response to the questions on the IHF that the coder at the DPC can draw upon to construct the 'families' in the household. These are: person number, sex, age, relationship to Person 1 and/or 2, married status, whether the person's mother and/or father is present in the household, the number of children ever born (women only) and whether the person is a resident or visitor.

Figure 7 refers also to household 1. On the top left is the anthropologist's genealogy (as shown in Fig. 3), and below it the coder's solution to identifying the constituent 'families' in the household. In all the chosen examples, the data collected was reasonably coherent. This condition does not always hold, but that is the subject of a different discussion (see Morphy 2002, 2004, 2006). The coder's primary task is to identify nuclear families within the household. These too have been marked with thick grey lines, like the bestowal relationship in the genealogical representations. But whereas the grey lines in the genealogical representations mark connections, those in the coder's representation mark enclosure. Enclosure is a structuring principle belonging to the Anglo-Celtic system, not to the local system: it is the bounded container once again.

Note that (6), described on the IHF as an 'other relative' can be linked as wife of (5) because they are stated to be the parents of (7) and both are said to be married (see
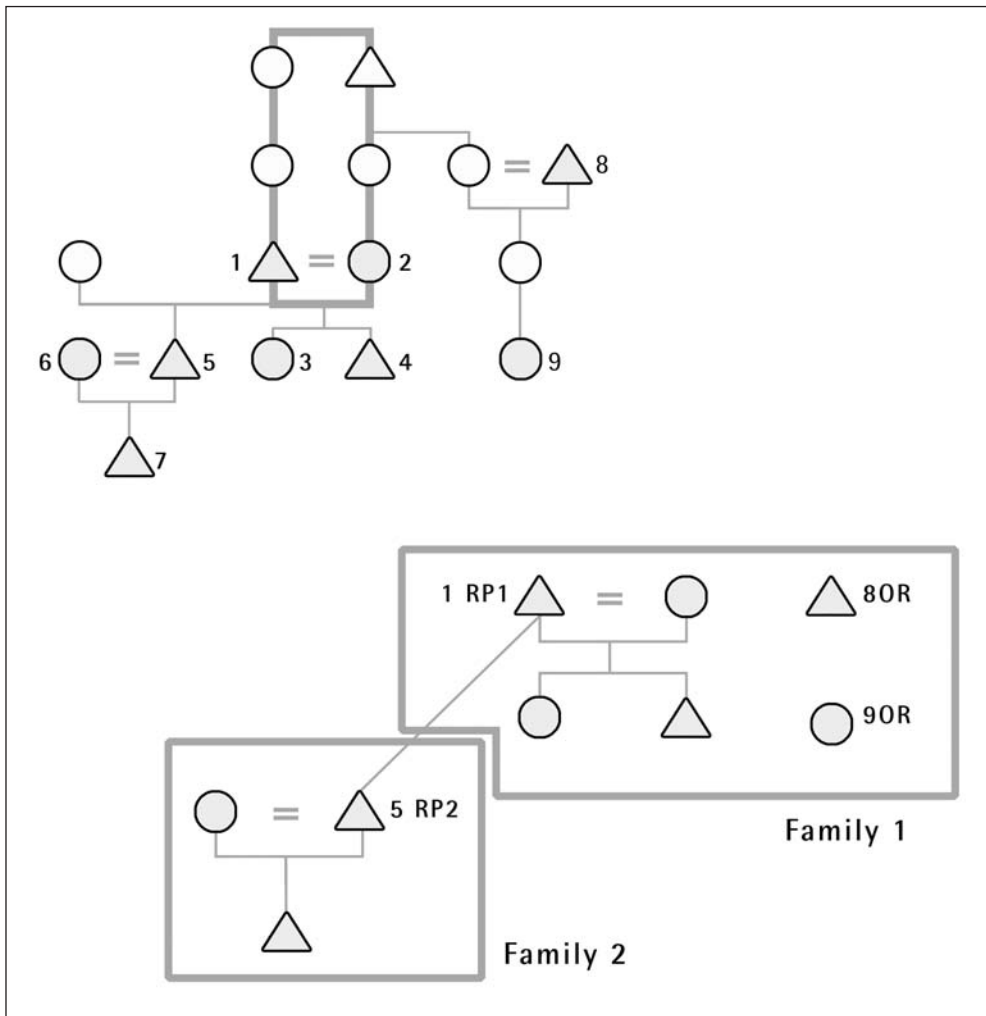
Figure 7   Household 1: family coding

But persons (8) and (9) have to float in unstructured space as 'other relatives' of (1), who has been selected as the reference person (RP) for the primary family. In the Yolngu system, (2) calls (8) by the same kin term as her own father, and (9) by the same kin term as her own daughter.

Table 2 and Figure 8 show the census data and the coding solution for household 2 (see also Figure 4). (9) is floating as an 'unrelated child' because the collector–interviewer forgot to record relationship information for him (see Table 2), and he does not share a surname with anyone else in the household. He will be automatically assigned as a dependant at a later stage in the processing of the data. Although the collector–interviewers have been conscientious in calling (5) and (6) 'other relative', it goes against the local grain. As noted above, (1) and (2) call these two young men by the same kinship terms as their own children, and other collector–interviewers who had not absorbed so well the version of the Anglo-Celtic principles that they were

Table 2   2006 Census data for household 2

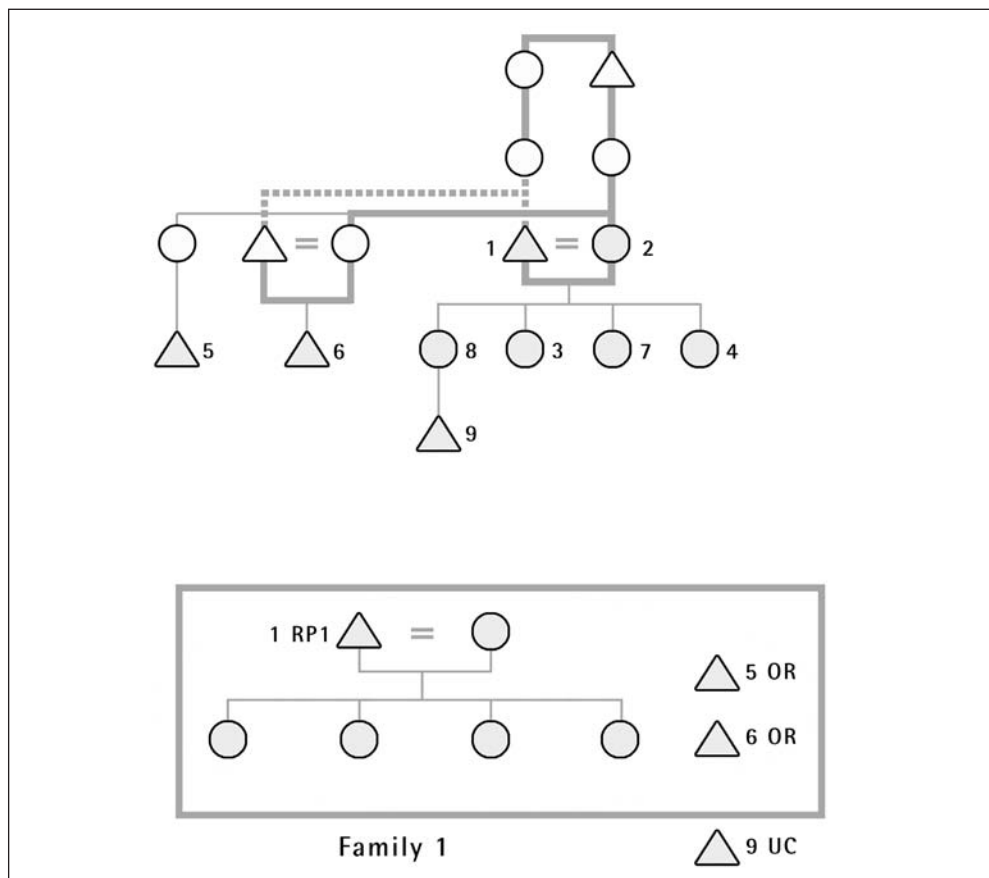| Person no.	Sex	Age	Relationship to Person 1/2	Married?	Person no. of mother	Person no. of father	No. of children ever born	Resident/ Visitor
1	m	43		yes				resident
2	f	36	Wife	yes			5	resident
3	f	16	Child of 1 and 2	never	2	1		resident
4	f	6	Child of 1 and 2	never	2	1		resident
5	m	30	Other relative	never				resident
6	m	31	Other relative	never				resident
7	f	14	Child of 1 and 2	never	2	1		resident
8	f	21	Child of 1 and 2	never	2	1		resident
9	m	6						resident

**Figure 8   Household 2: family coding**

Table 3   2006 Census data for household 3

Person no.	Sex	Age	Relationship to Person 1/2	Married?	Person no. of mother	Person no. of father	No. of children ever born	Resident/ Visitor
1	m	43		yes	16			resident
2	f	39	Wife	yes			4	resident
3	f	13	Child of 1 and 2	never	2	1		resident
4	m	11	Child of 1 and 2	never	2	1		resident
5	f	6	Child of 1 and 2	never	2	1		resident
6	m	4	Child of 1 and 2	never	2	1		resident
7	f	49	Sister	yes	16		7	resident
8	f	22	Sister's daughter	never	7		1	resident
9	m	13	Daughter of 7	never	7			resident
10	m	13	Sister's son of 7	never	7			resident
11	f	8	Grandchild	never				resident
12	f	6	Grandchild	never				resident
13	m	39	Brother	yes	16			resident
14	f	26	Mother's brother's daughter	yes			1	resident
15	f	6	Niece	never	13	14		resident
16	f	64	Mother	widow				visitor
17	f	6	Other relative	never	8			resident

asked to apply, might equally well have put them down as 'sons' of (1) and (2) (see Morphy 2006).

The data coder at the DPC operates according to a complex set of ordered rules. It is imperative to form couple and single-parent families within the household, to choose one family as the primary family, to which 'other relatives' are attached, and to relate the families within a household to the primary family, using a single reference person for each family. The model allows, arbitrarily, for a maximum of three 'families' per household, and for a maximum of three generations. Households that fall outside these parameters, such as household 3 (Table 3 and Figure 9; see also Figure 5) are subject to merging, again according to a defined set of ordered rules. Here the 'family' represented by the two hatched circles (Figure 9) has been dismembered and (17) has been attached as an 'other relative' to the primary family. (16) does not figure at all because she is a visitor, so the coder did not have to solve the four-generation problem in this instance. But this is at the price of eliminating the person who connects the 'nuclear families' (or in Skinner's terms the conjugal units) to one another.

At the DPC in Melbourne one training session on family coding was observed. Great respect is due for the intellectual effort, analytical prowess and sheer ingenuity that had been expended in devising the family coding procedures, and the ability demonstrated by the coders in remembering and implementing what they had

Figure 9   Household 3: family coding
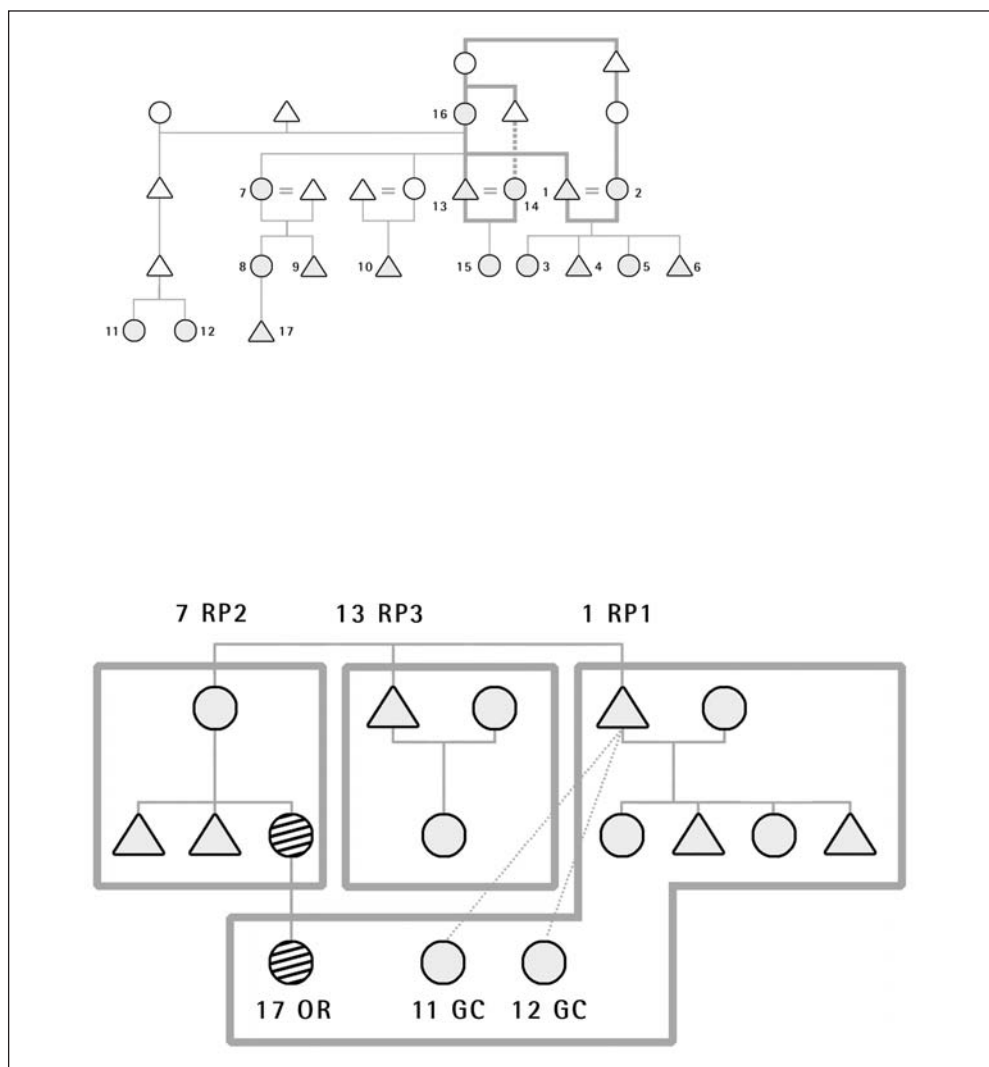
learned was also impressive. But Occam's razor should be invoked here. If 'capturing' the structure of Indigenous households requires such a complex set of ordered and arbitrary rules, then there is something wrong with the premises on which the analysis is based. The wrong categories are being invoked.

Figure 10 juxtaposes the complexity of the relationships within and between these three Yolngu households — modelled on Yolngu kin categories elucidated through anthropology's genealogical method — with the census representation of the same households as a set of bounded nuclear families. The latter is an impoverished representation: the result, nevertheless, of considerable intellectual effort on the part of the data analyst and the data coder. It is also a misleading representation because it

Figure 10   The extended and nuclear family models compared
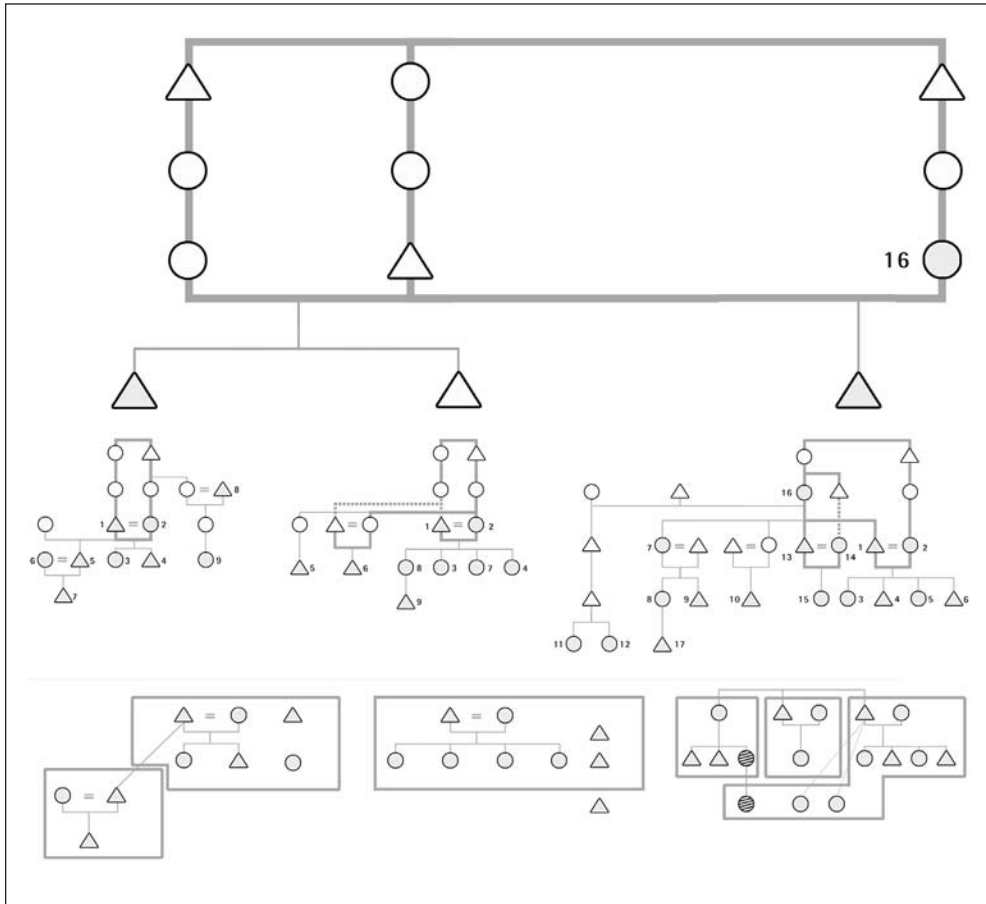
masks the structure of the social dynamics that lead to the formation of these com-
munities and households.

These structural principles can be stated briefly thus. First there is the principle
of patrilineally inherited, clan-based land ownership. Yolngu homelands settlements
tend to have a core population of some senior men of the estate-owning clan, together
with their current wife or wives and some of their children. Other core members are
likely to include senior male *waku* (children of women of the clan), who have a *djung-
gayarr* (translated into English as 'caretaker' or 'manager') role with respect to their
mother's clan. For these people the homeland settlement is, unambiguously, their
usual place of residence, although they may frequently be absent at ceremonies, vis-
iting relatives, or shopping in the nearest service centre. In Martin's terms these are
'focal individuals' (2002: 21). In the terminology of this paper they are the nodes in
the networks.

Secondly there is the bestowal system which links individuals from different clans
together, and links sets of clans over time. This brings individuals into the community
in predictable ways; spouses are not randomly selected, and a conjugal unit, far from

being a nuclear family, or the beginnings of one, is rather a particular instance of an ongoing relationship between lineages of different clans. It is important to note that these first two principles of the system are quantifiable (with a lot of hard work) in terms of longitudinal studies of residence patterns of individuals and percentages of marriages that occur according to the bestowal system. So it is not that such systems are unamenable to quantitative analysis. It is, rather, that they are not recognized as systems by mainstream categories.

Finally there is the classificatory kinship system in which those people called by the same kin terms as one's own biological kin are viewed in many important respects as being no different from one's 'actual' father, mother, son or daughter. The behaviour that flows from this is harder to capture in quantitative terms, but unlike the Anglo-Celtic terminological system there are no separate terms for 'nuclear' kin in this system, and this is just a plain fact (see Morphy 2002, 2004, 2006).

Around the stable core of the nodal individuals there is constant flux. The most radically mobile are young adults, particularly unmarried young men. The latter are sometimes referred to as *dhukarrpuyngu,* 'people of the track', but their movement is nevertheless patterned along networks of kinship. They are not homeless; rather they have many potential 'homes'. Over the course of a lifetime, an individual may be a *dhukarrpuyngu* in young adulthood, but a nodal individual in middle age.

Conclusion

This paper is not fundamentally a critique of the ABS, or of the national census. Rather it is a cautionary tale for those who would use census data uncritically. As in all nation-states, the National Census is a broad-brush instrument, and there are limits to the possibilities for using it to model degrees of difference.

The ABS cannot abandon the bounded container as the structuring principle for the national census. Whatever its limitations, it models the mainstream population sufficiently well to allow reliable results, and speaking statistically the model incorporates well-formulated checks and balances that allow statements about the relative reliability of the data. However, in a sedentary settler society such as Australia, the bounded container is more than just a modelling device for devising statistical categories. It is also a powerful meta-metaphor that structures much of settler thinking about sociality and spatial organization. Whether it is reified as the neat suburban house with its delimited yard, or as the nuclear family, or even as the 'individual', the bounded container symbolizes security and social order. That which is unbounded and uncontained is perceived as chaotic, disordered and even threatening.

Aboriginal societies also have their structuring meta-metaphors, but these are predominantly metaphors of networked connectedness.[14] Settler Australians tend to be blind to the social orders sustained and underpinned by such metaphors, seeing only apparent disorder and chaos. This in turn leads to the kind of thinking which places private ownership of bounded parcels of land, 'home ownership' and 'individualism' at the centre of 'redemption' for remote Aboriginal populations.

For people who cannot think outside their own meta-metaphorical square, the bounded container appears as the only possible model for coherent sociality. The apparent capturing of Aboriginal sociality within the bounded container model of census data provides a basis for believing that Aboriginal people are just not very good at being contained: their households are too big and they move around too

much; and it is government's job to formulate policies that help them to become better contained citizens. What has been argued here is that, instead, the census information, in the way it is collected and then processed according to the bounded container model, is radically transforming. It does not reflect the reality of Aboriginal sociality, which is founded on a very different meta-metaphor.[15] Much social policy directed at Aboriginal Australians founders, or produces 'unexpected' results, because this goes unrecognized.

The research on the 2006 Census has a dual purpose. First, it contributes to the continuing critical evaluation of the categories that underlie the design of the National Census. The ABS can only go so far in response to such evaluations; it cannot dispense with the categories that seem to capture effectively the majority of the population. So perhaps more importantly this research points to the absolute limitations of census data as a platform for policy-making directed to subpopulations that diverge significantly in their characteristics from the mainstream. In the words of J.C. Caldwell:

> Despite, or perhaps because of, their care to improve their data and express them in the most appropriate measures, demographers' main failing is probably that they then equate these statistical categories, defined in the first place in order to make measurement possible, with the underlying social reality (Caldwell 1996: 312).

What this paper argues is that these categories are not simply 'statistical' but also culturally embedded. It is doubly problematic to make this equation when categories appropriate to one social reality have been used to obliterate those of another.

Notes

1   The research on which this paper is based was carried out as part of an Australia Research Council Linkage project 'The 2006 Census and Indigenous People in Remote Areas: Assessing the Quality of the Data and the Enumeration Process'. The project involves four researchers from the Centre for Aboriginal Economic Policy Research at the Australian National University (Frances Morphy, Will Sanders, John Taylor and Kathryn Thorburn), in collaboration with the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS). The census enumeration was observed at four different locations: three in the Northern Territory and one in Western Australia. In addition, Morphy undertook fieldwork at the Census Management Unit (CMU) in Darwin, attending the training of the Census Field Officers who were to manage the enumeration in discrete Indigenous communities in the Northern Territory and observing the post-count processing of the forms at the CMU before they were sent to the national Data Processing Centre (DPC) in Melbourne; she also observed aspects of the coding of the Indigenous census data at the DPC. All the researchers on the project thank the ABS for their whole-hearted co-operation, and for allowing us official observer status under the provisions of the *Census and Statistics Act 1905* (Cwlth).

2   The history of the interaction between the two disciplines is usefully summarized in the first chapters of Kertzer and Fricke (1997) and Szreter *et al.* (2004). In both cases the chapters are written by the editors of the volumes.

3   The terms 'Aboriginal' and 'Australian Aboriginal' are used throughout. The data concern a region where there are few or no Torres Strait Islanders in the population.

4   Numbering today between 5000 and 6000, the Yolngu-speaking people are one of the most intensively studied Aboriginal groups in Australia. They have been the subject of several significant anthropological monographs. Roughly in chronological order according to when the authors undertook their fieldwork, these include Warner(1958), Thomson (1949), Berndt (1951, 1952, 1962), Shapiro (1981), Peterson (1986), Williams (1986, 1987),

Reid (1983), H. Morphy (1984, 1991) and Keen (1994, 2003). The complex, asymmetrical Yolngu kinship system was the subject of the 'Murngin controversy' that occupied much space in anthropological journals in the 1960s (see Barnes 1967; Maddock 1970).

5   See Henry and Daly (2001) and Musharbash (2001) for comparable conclusions regarding dwellings and the structure of households at Yuendumu and Kuranda respectively. The Kuranda study suggests that the general point holds not only for remote Australia but for Aboriginal populations in parts of 'settled' Australia as well.

6   This model is derived from observation of mobility in the region under study since 1974, as a by-product of research on kinship networks and on the census observations in 2001 and 2006. Further, more targeted work is required to fill in the details in this particular region; however the model accords well with the observations of others both in desert regions (Young and Doohan 1989) and in the area around Mount Isa (Memmott *et al.* 2004). Indeed the model in Figure 2 bears a striking visual similarity to the regional model proposed by Young and Doohan (1989: 16, Figure 1.1), although it was derived completely independently.

7   For a concise summary of the history and development of the ABS Indigenous Enumeration Strategy, see Taylor (2002). Its major feature is the use of a special Interviewer Household Form which is administered by local collector–interviewers who are employed and trained by the Census Field Officer responsible for administering the count in a defined region. It is logistically impossible to count everyone by this method on a single night, so a 'rolling count' is used, over a period of (ideally) about six weeks.

8   It will become clear that 'usual population' is a rather elastic concept in the context of these homeland settlements.

9   At its height this funeral attracted over 400 people from a region the size of Wales. But in turn, members of the host community were themselves absent, at yet another funeral in the wider region.

10 The pattern of mobility captured here in snapshot was very similar to that observed at the same homeland during the 2001 census (see Morphy 2002).

11 This question is examined at length in Morphy (2007).

12 In the Anglo-Celtic terminological system, the term 'father' is applied only to a person's own biological father or, if adopted, to the adoptive father. The same principles apply to all core Anglo-Celtic kin terms. Australian Aboriginal systems are very different. The term that a person uses for 'father' is also the term that they use for their father's brother. A person's 'brothers' include every male child of anyone that they call 'father'. The principle also extends up the generations, so the term for 'father's father' is applied to the father's father's brother, and consequently the son of that person is a 'father' and his son is a brother, and so on. This same classificatory principle applies to a person's mother and her sisters, and indeed to all the other kin terms in a system. As a consequence, everyone in a person's social universe, no matter how distantly related they appear to be in Anglo-Celtic terms, is kin. The relationship is not lost if the precise biological relationships between ancestors are forgotten over time. People will say, for example, that 'they call each other "brother" because their fathers call each other "brother"'. Thus kin terms group people into categories with respect to one another. In the Yolngu system, siblings and parallel cousins are grouped into a single category as 'brother' or 'sister', as described above, whereas the Anglo-Celtic system distinguishes siblings from parallel cousins, and also distinguishes 'degrees' of cousinhood (first cousin, second cousin and so on). The Yolngu system distinguishes matrilateral cross-cousins (mother's brother's children and all others in the same category) and patrilateral cross-cousins (father's sister's children and all others in the same category) from one another and from the sibling category, whereas the Anglo-Celtic system categorizes all 'cousins' together, distinguishing them by 'degrees' of relatedness. In the Yolngu system a correct marriage is between a man and a woman from the category of people he calls *galay* 'matrilateral cross-cousin', and the most preferred marriage within

that category is with a MMBDD. The majority of Aboriginal kinship systems do not distinguish matrilateral from patrilateral cross-cousins: in so-called Arandic and Kariera kinship systems there is a single category of cross-cousin.

13 (8) and (9) were double-counted in the 2006 Census. The eldest of the three sisters shown in Fig. 4, one of (8)'s 'mothers', lives at the hub settlement, which was enumerated two weeks earlier. At that time (8) and (9) were living in her household, and were counted as 'residents' there. This example points to the difficulty of assigning a 'usual place of residence' to mobile individuals. (8) was not witness to either enumeration event: her details were given to the collector–interviewer by the person designated as 'person 1' or 'person 2' in each of the two households. She possibly did not know that she had been counted at all, let alone twice.

14 These societies also have container metaphors, but containment is associated not with that which is safe, ordered and secure, but rather with that which is sacred or dangerous.

15 Some years ago I assisted with a native title claim in the same region, and was responsible for preparing the maps showing clan estates and their 'boundaries'. Although I was careful in the accompanying documentation to spell out that these boundaries were not demarcated as lines across the landscape, it seemed unavoidable, for the purposes of the court, to represent them thus on the map. At one meeting of the native title applicants, a forceful old lady, commented on my efforts in disgust: 'What are all these lines? You've made us look like bullocks in a paddock. You've fenced us in'. In the densely named landscape that we were contemplating, the patterning of the ancestrally given names and the connections between them, told in song and narrative, gave it its structure. The bounded containers that I had manufactured were not just unnecessary; they were symbolic of an alien and undesirable social order.

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