

Hearth and Country

The Bases of Women's Power in an Aboriginal Community on Cape York Peninsula

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The work presented in this thesis is, to the best of my knowledge and belief, original and my own work, except as acknowledged in the text. This material has not been submitted, either in whole or part, for a degree at this or any other University.

Abstract

This thesis addresses the status and power of Aboriginal women in the town of Coen on Cape York Peninsula, Australia in the early 1990s. It seeks to explain how women in this setting could be forceful and respected political actors despite their apparently spending the majority of their time at their hearths. This contradicted previous anthropological analyses that suggested that identification with the domestic domain rather than the public one resulted in reduced power and prestige for women generally, and that Aboriginal women in particular needed to be active in the religious domain to gain power and prestige in other aspects of life. The aim here is to answer the question “Where do Aboriginal women of East Central Cape York Peninsula get their power?” Although fieldwork in the town of Coen gave the author the opportunity to interact with a number of different Aboriginal groups, the main focus of the thesis is the social organisation of the Lamalama of Princess Charlotte Bay.

Review of previous theoretical discussion reveals inadequacies in the concepts public, private and domestic, owing to ethnocentric assumptions at their base. It is argued here that debates about the degree to which space, activities and access to resources is gendered, and the consequences of any such gendering for actors’ access to power and prestige, need to proceed from a well-established delineation of locally significant domains of action. At the same time it is demonstrated that the assumption that social life can be understood as having public and private domains, that public is always valued over private and that the public domain is invariably the domain of men, has informed both anthropological and state dealings with Aboriginal cultures, and must be taken into account. Aboriginal responses to state intervention in the shape of settlers and goldminers as well as policemen and government functionaries, have brought about changes in and between Aboriginal groups. In the contemporary political climate Aboriginal people here as elsewhere are having to take part in political processes dictated by government and they are having to take part collectively.

The formation of that collectivity is deeply informed by the way these cultures understand matters of access to space, interaction and resources, the way they delegate agency with respect to such access, and the way they limit notions of common interest. Instead of public and private domains, the primary points of reference here are country, hearth and mob. Individuals inherit rights in land from their mother and father which they bring in marriage to the formation of a new hearth group. Co-resident hearth groups have, as a whole, intersecting sets of interests in country which are reinforced and limited by the extent of marriage between them. Such collections of related, co-resident hearth groups are referred to locally as mobs. The acquisition of personal power and prestige within both hearth groups and mobs depends on inherited rights, acquired knowledge and skills and the performance of acts of nurturance to other members of either hearth group or mob. There is no evidence that gender makes any difference to any individual's ability to access power in this manner. The bases of women's power lie exactly where the bases of men's power lie, in hearth and country.

Hearth group and mob distinctions persist in town living for all groups in Coen. They are evident in people's use of space, sharing of services, information and resources and, most clearly in the way they undermine action in the sphere constituted as collectively Aboriginal by the state. Men and women appeared to be equal actors in this domain in 1990-91, but it seems likely that increased activity in this domain consequent on the granting of title to land to local groups will mean increased pressure to operate according to norms that privilege the public domain and men as actors in it. The study concludes that analysis of political action at varying levels of inclusiveness is best accomplished with the concept of "multiple publics" rather than a public/private contrast, and that the fashioning of a democracy of multiple publics will only be accomplished through some measure of cultural change on the part of both indigenous and non-indigenous Australia.

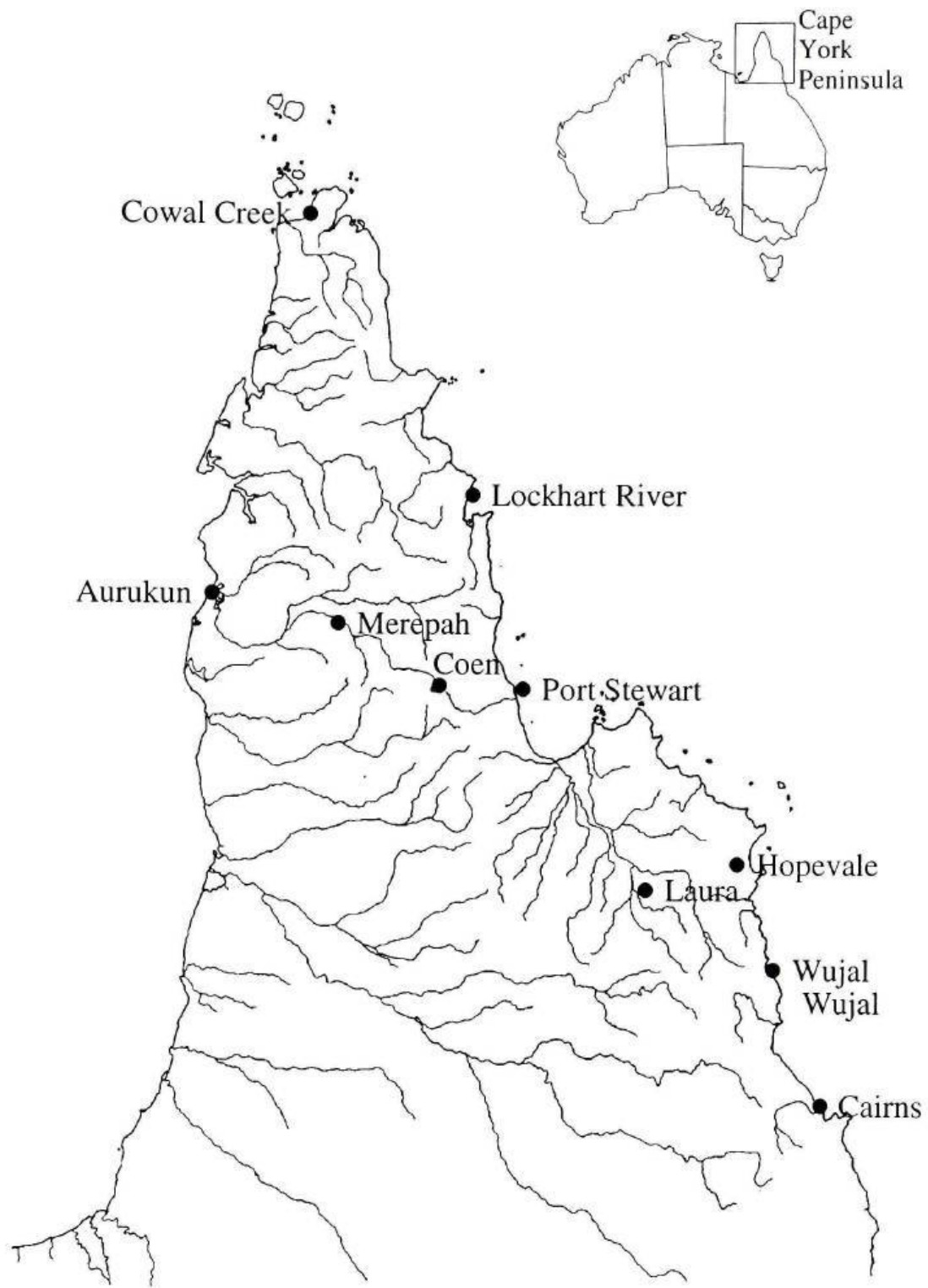


Figure 1: Area of study showing major locations mentioned in text

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Introduction

This study centres on the small town of Coen on Cape York Peninsula, nearly 600 kilometres by road north of Cairns. Coen began life as “The Coen” goldfield in the 1870s, only becoming a town about 1887 when alluvial gold began to be mined there. It has waxed and waned in population ever since according to the prosperity of the mining and pastoral industries it services. By the early 1990s the population also fluctuated greatly over the course of the year. In the April to December Dry season several thousand tourists pass through on their way to Cape York, but most of these spend a few hours at most in Coen. At the time of this study, 1990-91, the permanent population numbered about 150, of whom 120 were Aboriginal people. This Aboriginal population included Wik-speaking people from the country to the west of Coen, Kaanju people from the north, and Lamalama people from the hinterland of Princess Charlotte Bay to the east. All of these groups had outstations on their homelands, but still maintained houses in Coen where there is a school and other infrastructure and where most people spent the Wet season. After three generations of living in the same town, the various Aboriginal groups maintained their separate identities, and although this study takes account of the interaction of groups in Coen, it focuses mainly on the Lamalama.

I first visited Coen, in January 1989 with Professor Bruce Rigsby, who had known the Lamalama for nearly 20 years and who suggested I consider Coen as a fieldsite for linguistic and anthropological research. The languages of Princess Charlotte Bay spoken by the Lamalama people have many interesting features and have never been fully described linguistically. A relatively large number of Lamalama people were then living in Coen although they had established an outstation at a spot on the Stewart River called Theethinji, near Port Stewart. Pastoral, mining and timber leases had been granted by successive governments over Lamalama country around the hinterland of Princess Charlotte Bay. Over the years the Lamalama had been removed from their own territories into centres such as Coen where they could more conveniently be administered

by succeeding state native affairs departments and were available to work for local pastoralists and business people. This process had culminated in the removal of the last bush-living Lamalama from Port Stewart to Cowal Creek near Bamaga in 1961. By the mid-1970s some of those who had been removed had returned to the area and others, who had been working on cattle stations or in Coen at the time of the 1961 removal, had never left. In the mid-1980s Lamalama people started to spend extended periods of time at Port Stewart again. By 1989 they had established a Dry-season camp at Theethinji which they used as an outstation from Coen. A social world that included other language groups in Coen, the widespread use of English or a Creole variety, and the likelihood that return to country would stimulate use of Lamalama languages made this an interesting research opportunity for someone just beginning postgraduate work in anthropological linguistics. With the approval of Lamalama people, I decided to return in 1990 for an extended period of work on the Lamalama languages. Partly as a result of the historical moment when I began fieldwork, the focus of my work changed.

During 1989 I applied to the Coen community, through individuals and through Moomba Corporation, for permission to return to Coen and do language work, with particular emphasis on the languages of the Lamalama women. My initial interest was in language codes, though I had developed an interest in language as discourse by the time I returned. The community agreed that my family and I could live among them and I then applied to the Australian Institute for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies (AIATSIS) for funding for fieldwork towards a PhD with the working title "Port Stewart Lamalama Women and Language". My application was worded in terms of examining women's use of language to understand how they attained their political prominence. It said "this project aims to examine the choice among and the use of a repertoire of several languages as political action, particularly by women. Specifically, women's prominent place in emerging community organisations and the sociolinguistic aspects of the political processes involved will be the focus of study". It soon became apparent to me that the local languages were used much less often in daily life than I had

expected. When they were used, the etiquette prevailing among the Lamalama meant that each speaker used their own language. This meant that conversations might be carried on in three or four quite distinctly different varieties. The comparative rarity of instances of language use, and their complexity when they did occur, meant that a study of the use of a number of languages would not be possible. Nevertheless, I still expected to focus more on purely formal linguistic issues than turned out to be possible. At the time I was working with the hypothesis that for women to be so calmly self-assertive as I had seen them to be, there would be an enabling discourse, an ideology, a world constituted in talk, that described the conditions and limits of women's lives in a way that I could examine sociolinguistically. This turned out to be only partly true, and true in ways that I did not expect.

As it happened, the period of my fieldwork, June 1990 to June 1991, saw the beginning of great changes for the Aboriginal people of Coen. Early in June 1990 the Aboriginal Development Corporation, part of what was then the Commonwealth Department of Aboriginal Affairs, purchased Merepah station for the Wik¹ people then resident in Coen for their outstation. This was the first official recognition of local peoples' desire to return to their own countries after generations of centralisation by paternalistic administrations. Although the Lamalama had established their own outstation at Port Stewart, they did not have legal tenure of any sort. When I first met them, they were diffident about agitating for title to any part of their country, preferring to work quietly through personal contacts and always ready to compromise. I attribute this diffidence in part to the experience of the 1961 removal, a traumatic event that had affected all the Lamalama. Although they were quietly establishing themselves on their land in 1990, they were preoccupied with negotiations with local landowners, Cook Shire, the Division of Aboriginal and Islander Affairs and support organisations such as

1 As with many other groups within the broad Wik culture area, these people sometimes identified themselves as Wik Mungkan. At least one elder of this group insisted that they were properly Wik Iyanh. In the context of Coen, I refer to them simply as Wik.

the new Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Corporation, in order to be able to maintain their presence without provoking a display of government power such as they had experienced in 1961. Over the course of 1990-91 these negotiations intensified, particularly after the Queensland government's announcement that it would bring in land rights legislation in February 1991.

Although I had been given permission to come and do linguistic work, it was often hard for me to find someone who was willing to actually sit down and answer my questions. Although writing the languages down was considered to be a good thing to get done, everyone hoped someone else would do it. This was particularly true early in my fieldwork when the outstation at Port Stewart was just getting going again after the Wet, which had confined people to Coen. Camps that had been disturbed by cyclones were being remade and the whole outstation was expanding. Nor was it easy to make recordings of people as they went about their daily business. Received wisdom holds that if you ask whether you can turn the recorder on, people gradually get used to it and ignore its presence. This I found not to work with the Lamalama. When asked, people invariably gave me permission to record but most of those present would then find something else to do on the other side of camp. Either that or most people would be hushed while I recorded someone who by then was thoroughly embarrassed and whose speech was stilted. Pulling out a notebook was almost as intrusive where the recording of ordinary conversation was concerned. While everyone could understand my interest in "that culture stuff", detailed attention to the words of an ordinary conversation immediately created unease. Eventually I was able to tape record sessions of formal linguistic elicitation, some conversation and meetings, but only quite late in my fieldtrip.

Meanwhile, my husband and I soon became involved in the work of digging wells and installing solar panels, but for the Lamalama themselves the primary occupation was fishing with line or spear. This was serious business and was done with great concentration. Anyone who did not go out fishing on any particular day was asked whether they were having a holiday. It was not possible to try to do linguistic elicitation

while people were fishing, even to elicit the names of the fish. Finally I agreed with my hosts that we would defer linguistic work until the next Wet season when there would be fewer distractions. Moomba Corporation and the individual outstation groups also called on the help my husband and I could provide in writing letters, drafting reports and making submissions to various government instrumentalities. Eventually we were asked to prepare a management plan for the organisation (Jolly and Jolly 1991). As a result, I was gaining many opportunities to observe the politics of the Corporation, outstations and town and women's place in it.

From my first contact with the people of Coen, I had been interested by the strong personalities and social importance of women, both black and white, in the town, and I wondered, given the kind of world they were living in, how this could be so. On my first Sunday in Coen in 1989 I was invited to attend church (whose entire congregation was Aboriginal) and stay for a cup of tea and a chat afterwards. The church shared its name with the Moomba Aboriginal Corporation, to which most of the Lamalama, Wik, and other local groups belonged, and it housed the office of the Corporation. As a result, the informal get-together after the church service often turned to the discussion of Moomba Corporation business. At this time, Moomba was concerned mainly with establishing the various groups on outstations and getting legal title to land. After this particular service, the pastor's wife, Thelma McIvor, introduced me to two women whom she described as leaders of their respective outstation groups. They both spoke to me about their aspirations for their country with authority and a determination that was impressive.

Later, when I was planning an extended fieldtrip it was women such as these who kept coming to mind as likely informants and friends. Even with respect to the local European population, when I thought about who to negotiate with over accommodation, consult about local history or just plain observe, it was usually a woman whose name came to mind. All the businesses in Coen at that time were owned by women (and their husbands) who were descendants of two families who had been among the first immigrants to the Peninsula in the late nineteenth century. One set of three sisters owned

the pub, one shop and the cafe. The guesthouse was run by a mother/daughter team. Across the street, the remaining shop and caravan station was owned by their niece/cousin. While the husbands of two of these women had independent businesses, they were very much “in-marriers” with relatively little influence in community affairs. How could women in a “frontier” environment gain such social prominence? More particularly, how could Aboriginal women, who I understood to suffer from both gender and racial discrimination, enjoy the degree of political participation it appeared they had? This question gradually became the focus of my research.

While I had expected to see “gender” at work to produce these politically active women I was living with, it proved to be rather hard to pinpoint. There was no obvious expression of anything that looked like gender structuring people's daily lives. What, then, were women doing? Where did their authority come from? A pivotal observation for me here, though I was not fully aware of it at the time, was that women were always present. They spent a good part of their time together around fires and on verandahs, and this was not merely passive. They were performing a very important surveillance role, a role locally referred to as “witness”. Men sometimes also played this role, but a variety of factors, including the rare availability of work on a station, were more likely to remove the men than the women from the hearth. A large part of women's influence, I thought, came from the locally specialised knowledge such continuous presence gave them. But this contradicts a long-standing argument in feminist and anthropological discussions of gender that equates women's confinement to the domestic sphere with subordination. How to explain this seeming contradiction?

It soon became apparent to me that Aboriginal people in Coen did not regard that part of their lives we might label “domestic” in the same way as non-Aboriginal Australia did. Chapter 1 discusses in detail the problems of using labels such as “domestic” in contrast with others such as “public”. A major part of the work of this thesis has been to delineate what the locally significant spheres of social action are. I argue that the domain I have referred to above as the “domestic” is more usefully thought of as the domain of

the hearth group and that this domain is of primary importance in Lamalama life. In other words, Lamalama society does not denigrate (Strathern 1984) what outsiders might perceive as the domestic domain, and this could be seen as instrumental in enhancing women's power and prestige. However, it also soon became apparent that women's presence at the hearth, or in the case of the local white women their presence in town, was a result of historical factors such as the gradually increasing pressure to make Aboriginal children go to school, and the tendency for women to lose their jobs before men did when Award wages were introduced to the cattle industry. These factors are discussed in Chapter 2.

While the continuity of women's presence had given them access to locally valued knowledge and thus added to their influence, this was not their only source of prestige. As well as asking what the significant spheres of action were (Chapter 3), I had also to ask how individuals gain access to and prominence in them (Chapter 4). Here gender proved not to be very significant in the local system. While descent and rights in land are important principles and there is an ideology of patrilineality, uterine links are as significant in people's political actions as agnatic ones. The other significant factor in gaining power and prestige is the ability to provide goods and services to a group of supporters, and here too women were able to be successful. However, the provision of services is precisely where the local system meets the patriarchal, capitalist Australian State and the gendered assumptions it embodies do impinge on the women's ability to be politically effective. Chapters 5 and 6 of this thesis examine some of the consequences of the local organisation of spheres of action, and the role of gender within them, in the context of the multi-mob Aboriginal world of Coen and its dealings with non-indigenous Australia.

Despite my growing preoccupation with the status and power of women during the course of my fieldwork, I did accomplish some linguistic work. Moomba Corporation had received a grant under the National Aboriginal Languages Programme just before we arrived for work on literacy in Creole, and I was asked to organise that work. I ran

schoolchildren's classes once a week in Coen; worked with a group of young women at Merepah, the Wik outstation, who were interested in the project; had individual classes with two older women; and trained two young local women as literacy tutors, hoping to give all of them skills that could be transferred to English literacy. When the Wet season came I did 30 hours of linguistic elicitation of Umpithamu and lesser amounts of Umbuygamu and Lamalama. However, there was never a great deal of enthusiasm for this work. Most younger people had passive competence at best in their indigenous languages, and a history of local and educational denigration of these languages and the relatively recent arrival of TV and videos led to apathy about keeping them alive. Instead emphasis was laid on acquiring skills such as computer literacy. There was some local opposition to the Creole literacy scheme on the grounds that Creole wasn't a 'proper' language, just a bad kind of English which people shouldn't be encouraged to use. When representatives of the State Education Department came to discuss the possibility of outstation schools, they were told that use of indigenous language was not a priority compared to getting the same standard of education available in any other Queensland school. This is not to say that such attitudes will always obtain, and for that reason alone it will be necessary to write up the linguistic data that I have recorded. However, I have not been able to include it in this thesis and feel that local attitudes at the time I was in the field justify my deferring this work to a later date. But the question of local attitudes with respect to issues such as language maintenance raises another point that needs to be made about the specificity of the historical moment, June 1990 to June 1991, when this study was undertaken.

At the time my fieldwork commenced, a newly-elected Labor government was beginning to show itself to be more sympathetic to Aboriginal aspirations than its predecessors. By June 1991 the Queensland Government had passed the *Aboriginal Land Act 1991*, which recognised Aboriginal relationships to land and set up procedures for claims to be made. A year later the Lamalama were among the first groups to gain title under the Act. Although, by a legal nicety, the history of the tenure of the land

surrounding the Lamalama outstation at Port Stewart meant that legal title could be “transferred” directly to the Lamalama, they perceived it as an act of simple justice, returning their own country where they had always lived, to them. In subsequent claims such as those over the Cliff Islands and Lakefield National Park, the Lamalama have had to argue their traditional association with the country in question. Whereas in 1961 being Aboriginal had meant that the government could remove them from their land, now they had to assert their Aboriginality to regain title to it. This has led to a change in the way the Lamalama talk about themselves that is relevant for the topics discussed in this thesis.

At the beginning of my fieldwork the Lamalama were just at the end of a period of almost total exclusion from most of their ancestral territory. When, with the assistance of Professor Rigsby, we organised a trip to the countries around Running Creek in the lower part of the Bay in November 1991 it was the first time in 30 years that some of the older people had been there. Permission had to be sought from two local pastoralists to visit country and one declined. It was as a result of such niggardly attitudes that the Lamalama had tended to focus on the area around Port Stewart where their presence was unlikely to be challenged. Although knowledge of country and individual links to country were still strong, especially in the generation that had suffered the removal, long-term exile from country meant that the Lamalama tended to describe themselves as a descent group rather than in terms of their interests in interrelated estates of land. The land claims process emphasises individuals' relationships to land and the relationship of estates to each other, and this has had an effect on the way the Lamalama describe themselves.

Towards the end of my stay I heard some of the younger people praise the moves then just beginning to visit more of their ancestral country and asking for the older generation to pass on their knowledge of it. It seems that in the process of preparing land claims to the Cliff Islands, Lakefield National Park and elsewhere since 1991, the Lamalama have become more ready to affirm their ancestral connections to land and pass on knowledge. A repeat of this study under today's conditions would probably result in

more emphasis being given to relationships to land but I don't believe that the main factors described here as being important for group composition and leadership would be different. In any case, this thesis describes the way the Lamalama were just before the *Aboriginal Land Act 1991* created the opportunity for them to reaffirm connections with land that had never been lost, but which they had been intimidated into often remaining silent about. Because I am aware that I am writing here about a moment now past, I have eschewed the ethnographic present. This is to celebrate the Lamalama future rather than to relegate them to an anthropological past tense.

Ethical Issues

A number of ethical issues deserve comment, not least the fact that the thesis that resulted from my fieldwork is of so different a kind from the language work I went to Coen expecting to do and had permission to do. As I explained above, our day-to-day role in the community was negotiated in response to the urgent needs of the moment and, as far as we were aware, met with the approval of the community. As I became interested in writing about women's lives and the role of gender, I did my best to make clear to everyone that I was going to write a book and what incidents I would like to put in it. It became habitual with me to say "You know I'm going to write that book? Can I talk about X/put Y in it?", since I was concerned to have local approval for what I was doing. Finally, one uncle said to me "You only writing one book?", implying that I'd done enough asking. This is not to say, of course, that people realised what the finished product would be or what the implications of putting things in print will be. None of us knows that. With that in mind, I have tried to be as sensitive as possible to the rights of my informants, while being consistent with a objective discussion of the data. Pseudonyms are commonly used in such situations but, for reasons I discuss below, I have not sought to obscure either the exact locale of the study nor, in all instances, the identities of individual actors.

Confidentiality and the Use of Names

In considering what measures to take to preserve confidentiality, Jay Szklut and Robert Reed suggest that “the fundamental question is, What is being hidden from whom and for what purpose?” (Szklut and Reed 1991:109). Amongst the Lamalama there is nothing that could be considered to be in the realm of the secret-sacred as that is commonly understood elsewhere in Australia. That is to say, there are no songs, rituals or objects that are held sacred and access to which is limited to the initiates. There are Stories relating the creation of the land and society by animating spirits—which elsewhere would be called Dreamings—and although people prefer to talk about these Stories when they are at the locations relevant to them, I was not made aware of any restrictions on who can hear the ones I was told. What is being hidden, then, is not anything to do with this kind of hidden knowledge. Nor is it to do with illegal activities since I did not encounter any. Rather, the kind of information I wish to obscure here is that which might be embarrassing to people through allowing others, both inside and outside the community, to pass negative moral judgements on them, or that which may promote tension in the Coen community by reference to old disputes.

One way to deal with such situations would be to give the community a pseudonym and/or obscure its exact location. Since I make extensive use of archival material, and argue for the significance of a specifically local history, this was not feasible. The fact, for instance that Coen, almost alone of the communities of Cape York Peninsula, was never a mission, is significant for gender relations there and would help to identify the place even without naming it. Added to this is the fact that much of what I have to say redounds to the credit of the people involved, who naturally want their achievements celebrated.

The desire of local people to be identified, at least in some instances, also means that personal pseudonyms cannot always be used. Nevertheless, there are situations in which individuals would not wish to be clearly identified. Some of these are general

knowledge, or at least the subject of general speculation, in the community and so to use pseudonyms here is to seek to hide what everyone knows anyway. Even reference to well-known events may be embarrassing or liable to reopen old wounds, however, and where I judge or have been told that this is likely I have used pseudonyms. Yet the use of the same pseudonym throughout for the same person is not always enough to obscure an identity where the population under discussion is so small, so some individuals appear variously under their own name and sometimes more than one pseudonym. This obviously tends to give the impression of a much larger group of people than actually exists, so at times I have avoided using names at all, referring to people in terms of their relationship to each other, for instance.

Despite all these precautions it is still true that anyone who knows the community will no doubt be able to identify actors. Since anyone with that degree of knowledge will usually have insider's knowledge of the events anyway, it is obviously outsiders from whom details need to be hidden. In the Australian context the significant outsiders who might use intimate knowledge of the people of Coen to their detriment include representatives of service sectors such as health and education authorities, and organisations that are potential sources of funding. The Aboriginal people of Coen, although numerically dominant locally, depend on non-Aboriginal people who are not necessarily sympathetic to them for jobs, health care, schooling and a range of other services. In the past these non-Aboriginal others have sought their own advantage by publicising aspects of Aboriginal life that governments and funding bodies might see negatively. The question therefore arises whether it might not be better to omit mention of any such potentially sensitive material altogether.

Joseph Jorgensen (1971:332) has urged that anthropologists have a responsibility to publish the whole truth, as long as we present it within a socially explanatory setting, or refrain from the research. I have aimed here only to include those events that are absolutely necessary to an understanding of the facets of social organisation and the role of gender that I am examining. One such issue that I have had to discuss to some extent

is male-to-female violence. A number of scholarly discussions of this topic exist and have not created controversy (Atkinson 1990, Bolger 1991, Brady 1990). However, when Diane Bell and Topsy Nelson (1989) sought to draw attention to intra-racial rape in order to generate informed discussion about just ways of dealing with it, a number of academic Aboriginal women were highly offended. They said “We don't need white anthropologists reporting business which can be abused and misinterpreted by racists in the wider community” (Huggins *et al.* 1991:506). Precisely because this thesis examines women's role in the “domestic” sphere it has been necessary to include some discussion of “domestic violence” and other manifestations of male-to-female violence. White Australian society has nothing to be proud of in regard to its own rates of domestic violence and I would hope that the mention of Aboriginal domestic violence is not seen as food for racists. Discussion of this and related topics here has been restricted in consideration of the sensitivity of the topic but not ignored, since local strategies for dealing with it are relevant, I believe, both to the subject of the thesis and wider debate on the issue. Obviously, it is an area in which I have used pseudonyms, teknonyms and other devices to obscure individual identity most extensively.

One strategy for balancing the demand for confidentiality and the need to discuss sensitive topics that was suggested to me was fictionalization. Some postmodernists also suggest it as a way for anthropologists to introduce a kind of polyvocality into their texts which would, it is claimed, help equalise the power relations between ethnographer and subject. However this might be, it was not for purposes of polyvocality that I experimented with the technique in my account of the “young girl” group (Chapter 4). Rather I wished to increase confidentiality while capturing the important actions of the group as I understood them by reducing the number of actors and altering the time frame of events. In the end I could not feel comfortable with a fictionalized account. However evocative such a strategy might be, I agree with Margery Wolf (1992:59) that we owe it to the discipline to maintain a certain level of verifiable truth, as opposed to plausibility, in our accounts. I also felt that fictionalization did not really gain enough in the way of

enhancing confidentiality to justify the loss of credibility. In the end I used pseudonyms, kin terms and a reduction of detail to the absolutely necessary for this group as for others discussed here.

A final point that remains to be discussed in an introduction is a terminological one. A great deal has been written about the correct way to refer to Aboriginal people in speech and print in order to avoid derogatory and racist terminology. In Queensland it is usually acceptable to refer to Aboriginal people as Murris, though one hears this more commonly than one reads it. In the past, Bobby Sykes (1975, 1989) for instance, has suggested the use of the term Black, capitalised, on the American model. I have contented myself here with the name Aborigine, except where I quote other usages. There has been less discussion of what to call non-Aboriginal inhabitants of Australia. The term European is commonly used in scholarly literature but non-Aboriginal people in Cape York Peninsula scoff at the term, insisting they are Australian, not European. I have therefore adopted the Aboriginal practice of referring to those of European descent as whitefellas.

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1 Public and Private in Anthropological Debate

The focus of this study is the mutual relation between spheres of social life that for now I will call the public and the private. This interest was prompted by my twin observations that the women of Coen had both status and power in a number of domains and that they spent a lot of their time guarding, as it were, their homes, often sitting around a hearth. I did not notice that they were “domestic” in the sense of being markedly housewifely. They seemed to feel no particular pressure to keep their houses clean and neat all of the time and the dishes were more likely to be done just before a meal than after one. This was particularly true where there were young adults who could be called on to do housework when it became necessary. But the women I perceived to be influential worked at maintaining an active presence at their hearths and in their hearth groups. Here I pursue some of the relevant analytical issues that made my observations seem paradoxical to me, but which also helped to elucidate them.

This chapter begins with a review of anthropological writings concerning, or influenced by, the debate over the relationship between the status of women and their identification with the private realm. The terms “public” and “private” prove difficult to define although the contrast they embody deeply informs the Western intellectual tradition. As writers such as Elshtain (1981) and Pateman (1988) demonstrate, such a distinction has informed political and philosophical thought from at least the time of Plato and Aristotle, and has passed from the philosophy of writers such as Locke, Hobbes and Rousseau into jurisprudence (Naffine 1990:57-9). As a result, the public/private distinction is one which is basic to Western presuppositions of social organisation. The second half of this chapter then examines the ways in which the

intellectual habits and assumptions involved in the public/private contrast have affected writing on Aboriginal Australia, particularly that concerned with women.

The Problem of “Public” and “Private”

In the wake of the resurgence of the Women's Movement in the Western world in the 1960s, anthropologists started to question whether their discipline's representation of foreign cultures reflected the biases of predominantly male researchers and their predominantly male informants. More and more anthropologists, particularly female anthropologists, turned their attention to what women were doing. This resulted in a number of studies that added women's perspectives to existing accounts and thereby generated new insights. In a deservedly famous example, Annette Weiner, in her *Women of Value, Men of Renown* (1977), added women and their activities and perspectives to Malinowski's (1922) classic study of exchange in the Trobriands to come up with a richer understanding of exchange in Trobriand culture. Michelle Rosaldo and Louise Lamphere's *Woman, Culture and Society* (1974) was widely credited with inspiring a significant body of theoretical work relating to the position of women in culture.

Both the preface and the introduction to Rosaldo and Lamphere (1974) make it clear that the editors were prompted to consider the position of women in other cultures as a way of thinking about their own. They declare that “we are trying to understand our position and to change it. We have become increasingly aware of sexual inequities in economic, social, and political institutions and are seeking ways to fight them” (Rosaldo and Lamphere 1974:1). I will demonstrate that this concern with Western society's inequities blinded them to some of their own assumptions about the experience of other women. As a result, when they mention “women's position” it is sometimes not clear whether they have the position of Western women in mind or whether they are making more universalist claims. However, my observation of this bias is not point-scoring or

political correctness. I recognise that it is easy now to look back, after the development of a body of work emphasising the variety within the category “woman” (Spelman 1988), and point out where the pioneers in the field allowed themselves to project their preoccupations onto others. But close attention to the movement of their thought throughout the Introduction of *Woman, Culture and Society* reveals that their use of terms like “public” and “private” arises from a basic assumption about society rather than being a product of empirical, observation. Such an exercise is all the more necessary because Rosaldo and Lamphere are not alone in assuming that women everywhere operate in a social world made up of contrasting and mutually exclusive public and private spheres.

Rosaldo and Lamphere's Introduction (1974:1) is concerned with the question “Are women universally the ‘second sex’?”, and they understand this to be a question about the exercise of power: “How do women help to shape, create and change the private and public worlds in which they live?” (Rosaldo and Lamphere 1974:2). Although they say that their role is to question the previously taken-for-granted, they do not debate the universal existence of a public/private contrast as a significant structure of power in social life. They assume that everywhere the public realm will have the higher status when they ask whether “there are societies, unlike our own, in which women are publicly recognised as equal to or more powerful than men” (Rosaldo and Lamphere 1974:2). Since they find no anthropological accounts of societies where women enjoy *publicly* recognized power and authority, they conclude that “all contemporary societies are to some extent male-dominated” (Rosaldo and Lamphere 1974:3).

The extent and consequences of this conviction of universal male domination can be seen in Lamphere's (1974:101-104) own work later in the book. Her short description of the developmental cycle in Navajo groups demonstrates that women in that society have considerable authority and power. However, because their power and authority derive from and are wielded in the domestic sphere it cannot be counted as true power within this theoretical framework, a framework that sees the public as the only significant

site of power and prestige. Rosaldo and Lamphere do not consider how concepts of “public” or “private” might vary across cultures or whether they are valued the same way everywhere they are found to exist. It is precisely the point of the present thesis that it cannot be assumed that everyone's private or public life is constituted in the same way or that the public sphere is necessarily valued over the private, however we define these spheres.

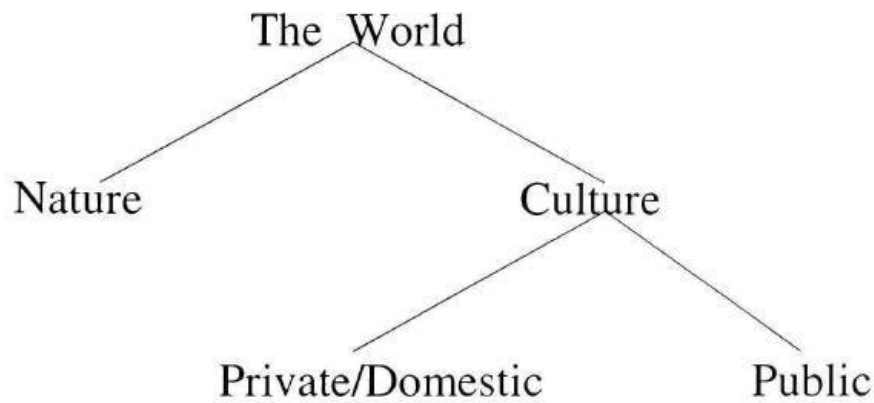


Figure 2: Rosaldo's (1974) Public/Private Contrast

Rosaldo and Lamphere argue that the private is the domain of women and that women everywhere are confined to the private, or rather domestic domain. They argue this to be the case on the grounds that, although biological factors “do not *determine* the relations and evaluations of the sexes in contemporary forms of social life” (Rosaldo and Lamphere 1974:6), women's necessary role in bearing children is often extended into an association with child rearing and the responsibilities of the home (1974:7). The conflation of “private” with “domestic” evident here is discussed in more detail below.

The biological basis for the disempowerment of women is used again by Sherry Ortner, who argues that culture is everywhere valued over nature and that women's reproductive physiology is one factor in their being identified more closely with nature than men, the culture-bearers, are (Ortner 1974:73). Furthermore, women's role in mediating between nature and culture through the socialisation of children means that they are never as free of nature as men can be. Ortner thus understands childcare and

domestic work, and by extension the women who are assumed to do these jobs, as universally denigrated because of an association with the “natural” in contrast to the “cultural” (Ortner 1974:84-86). This position was later criticised for ethnocentricity (MacCormack 1980:16; Strathern 1980). But the most influential paper from the collection under consideration is Rosaldo's own contribution, “Woman, Culture, and Society: A Theoretical Overview”. I turn now to consider this paper and its sequelae.

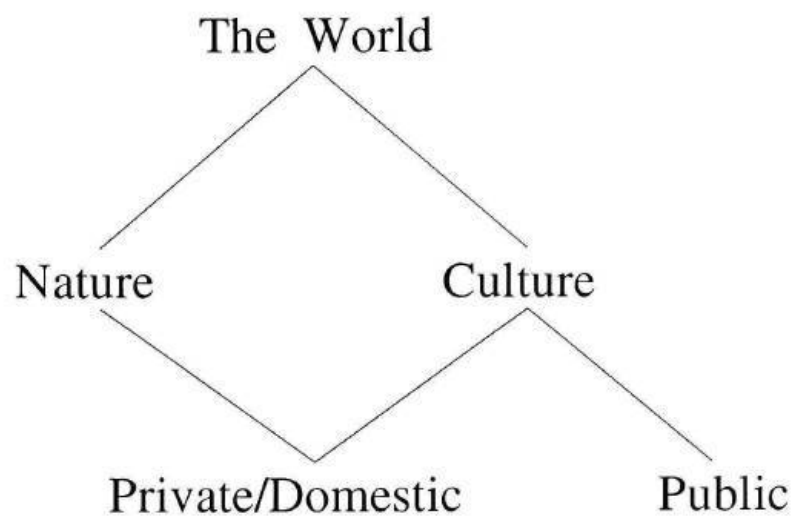


Figure 3: Ortner's (1974) Nature/Culture Contrast

Rosaldo and After

Rosaldo sought to offer a theoretical rationale for what she saw as the universal subordination of women to men. Her argument arises out of her conviction, with Margaret Mead, that no matter what women and men actually *do*, “the prestige values always attach to the activities of men” (Mead 1935:302 cited in Rosaldo 1974:19). Although she argues, with Mead, that “cultures everywhere have given Man, as a

category opposed to Woman, social value and moral worth” (Rosaldo 1974:22), *regardless of the nature of their activities*, Rosaldo still holds that it is women's domestic *roles* that result in their lower *status*. Nor is it clear how she thinks women may be other than domestic, since she defines the domestic domain as: “those minimal institutions and modes of activity that are organised immediately around one or more mothers and their children” (Rosaldo 1974:23). This, she contrasts with a public domain that is constituted of “activities, institutions, and forms of association that link, rank, organize or subsume particular mother-child groups” (Rosaldo 1974:23). Since she points out that in most non-industrial societies a woman is giving birth to and raising children for most of her life, it seems that anything a woman does is domestic.

The domestic is argued to be of low status because it is particularistic (Rosaldo 1974:24) and concerned with “the messy chores” (Rosaldo 1974:27) of childcare, and women are tainted by association with this realm. Not, she argues, through any biological necessity, but because of the “nurturant capacities of women” (Rosaldo 1974:24). It is, however, the case that societies may, and often do, construct a distinct male role as equally nurturant. This has been described for some Aboriginal societies where male control of many rituals, a prime example of “public” life, expresses their adulthood through nurturance of succeeding generations and of country (Myers 1986a).

However, Rosaldo herself provides evidence that suggests that the domestic is neither universally a female domain nor necessarily a demeaning one. Late in the article she provides a thumbnail sketch of the Ilongot of the Philippines who, she says, provide an example of a society that is egalitarian in terms of sex roles because it “do[es] not elaborate the opposition of male and female and place[s] positive value on the conjugal relationship and the involvement of both men and women in the home” (Rosaldo 1974:39). One could as easily say that a society that is egalitarian in terms of sex roles is, by definition, one that does not elaborate the opposition of male and female, but Rosaldo wants to see a causal relationship between men's participation in the domestic domain and an egalitarian ethos (Rosaldo 1974:41).

It is important to note that the domestic is no longer being seen as inherently demeaning in the Ilongot case. This alerts us to the necessity to ask what value any particular society puts on spheres of action and categories of actors, rather than to assume that any particular sphere of action always has the same status. The Ilongot case also warns us against making the assumption that the domestic sphere is always and exclusively the domain of women. While it is true that Ilongot couples could share the domestic domain and women could still be thought of as “more domestic” than men, there is nothing in Rosaldo's account to suggest this is the case. As a general principle, Rosaldo (1974:36) concludes that “women's status will be lowest in those societies where there is a firm differentiation between domestic and public spheres of activity”. It is easy to see the relevance of this to Western women in the 1970s, but for it to be true elsewhere the domestic would have to be the exclusive or predominant domain of women, and it would have to be considered to be of relatively low value. In the Ilongot case, although she notes that a man's hunting is valued over a woman's gardening, the overall picture she draws is one of sex-role complementarity (Rosaldo 1974:39). The status of a certain activity or its products does not in this case extend across the whole of social life. How pertinent then are questions about status, especially universalising ones?

Rosaldo herself later suggested that such questions are “probably conceptually misguided” (Rosaldo 1980:401), and other scholars subsequently found many of the questions asked about women's status “naive and inappropriate” (Mukhopadhyay and Higgins 1988:462). I suggest that it is more useful to examine women's roles, power and influence in particular situations. The utility of the public/domestic distinction in such an examination is still a matter of debate (Mukhopadhyay and Higgins 1988; Ortner 1990). Rosaldo's paper has been very influential in setting the terms of this debate although many commentators (*inter alia* Rapp 1979; Strathern 1984; Yanagisako 1979) have taken issue with it, including Rosaldo (1980) herself. It has been pointed out that the use of the public/domestic distinction has been useful in prompting close examination of the internal dynamics of household groups (Moore 1988). In her review of anthropological

discussion of the family and household, Yanagisako (1979:166) noted that both are commonly assumed to have some connection to domestic functions and activities, although one of the problems of using these labels is that they prove hard to define.

Yanagisako concludes that the domestic is usually the realm of the preparation and consumption of food and the raising of children, but also, following Fortes (1978), the realm where social action is governed by affective and moral norms, as opposed to a public realm governed by jural norms and “external” sanctions (Yanagisako 1979:187). However, she also points to a number of studies that show not only that action in the domestic sphere may have politico-jural consequences, but that it is misleading to separate the two since “domestic relationships are part and parcel of the political structure of a society” (Yanagisako 1979:191). The Coen community is a good example of this since there it was hearth group relationships and the norms and sanctions governing them that set the pattern for action in other social spheres, as I show in chapter 4. Yanagisako concludes that the domestic/public distinction is “analytically unproductive and empirically unfounded” (Yanagisako 1979:191) but it is nevertheless so ingrained in the Western intellectual tradition as still to influence, explicitly or implicitly, the thought of many scholars.

More recently, Comaroff (1987) has used the contrast to explain cyclical changes in social organisation amongst the Tshidi of South Africa. Like Yanagisako, he rejects classical conceptions of public and private/domestic domains and points out that: “Domestic relations are always affected by the exigencies of political economy, just as wider political and economic structures are predicated on the division of labour and the production of value within the household.” (Comaroff 1987:83). He goes on to point out that the manner in which the two domains are woven together in making the social whole is historically distinct and “determines the ideological and social content of each domain” (Comaroff 1987:83). Again we are alerted to take cognisance of the specificity of instances.

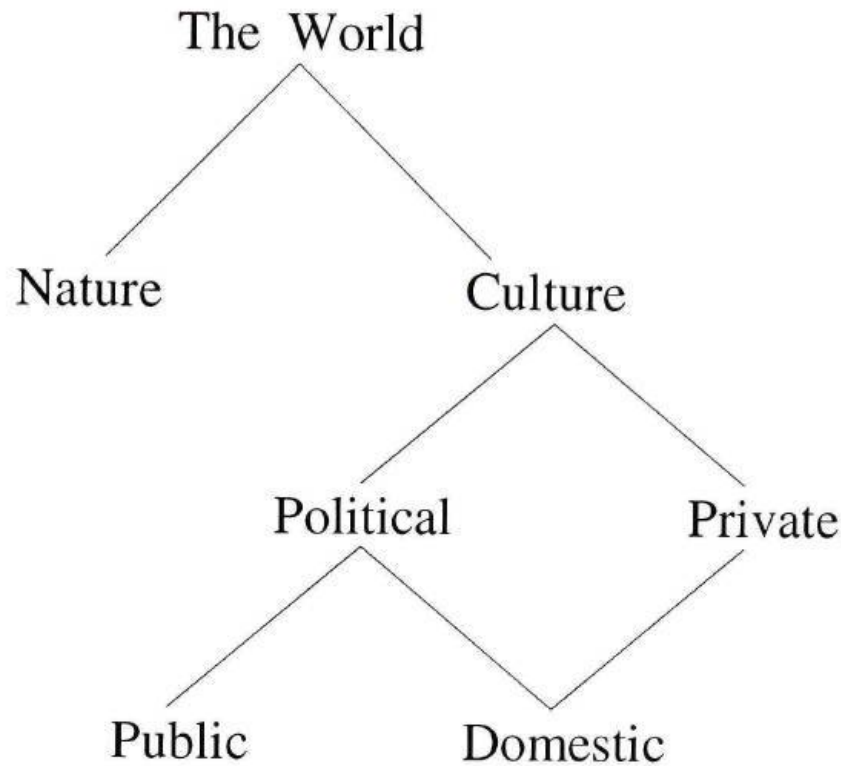


Figure 4: Yanagisako's (1979) Public/Domestic Contrast

Rosaldo herself (1980) responded to these and other criticisms in a paper in which she modified but did not substantially change her former views. She maintained her position that women were everywhere associated with reproduction and childcare but pointed to the need to ask what the local evaluation of this fact was in each case (Rosaldo 1980:392). She adds a similar caveat to her assertion that male dominance is universal when she says it has “almost infinite variation in its contents and its forms” (Rosaldo 1980:395). Yet it is clear that she still measures dominance as access to public roles, influence and prestige (Rosaldo 1980:394). Although she notes the fact that the higher value placed on public activities can be traced back to Plato at least, that is, has a culturally specific genesis, she does not question whether this valuation applies in non-Western traditions. On the assumption of universality, then, she finds that “domestic/public is as telling as any explanation yet put forth” (Rosaldo 1980:399). However, she concedes that in particular cases the distinction assumes too much.

Her solution is to pay more attention to the creation of gender in social process and the position of women as constituted in social relationships. She still understands gender relations as matters of inequality of power, as her call for a better theoretical perspective on inequality and hierarchy in which to “analyze the relationships of women and men as aspects of a wider social context” (Rosaldo 1980:414) makes clear. Her insistence that sexual difference is always also sexual hierarchy, and one that disadvantages women, means it is hard for her to escape a formulation of the problem that does not make reference to opposition. She does, however, conclude with an appeal not to locate women's “problem” in a separate domain but to seek to understand “how men and women both participate in and help to reproduce the institutional forms that may oppress, liberate, join, or divide them” (Rosaldo 1980:417). It seems that Rosaldo (1980:416) thinks that the domestic sphere of the family is one such institutional form, itself needing social explication and not to be taken as an explicand.

Anna Yeatman (1984) cites Rosaldo's work as innovatory in allowing the domestic realm to be included in an understanding of what constitutes society, and thus making the domestic susceptible to sociological analysis. But she takes her to task for what she sees as Rosaldo's privileging of the public domain so that “The specificity of domestic sociality is lost, and its social determination is represented as an external imposition” (Yeatman 1984:44). Yeatman's thesis is that, traditionally, social science has equated the social with public life, where public is understood very much as Rosaldo defined it, as transcending smaller groups and individual interests. She sees the public/domestic distinction's potential to allow for a new understanding of social life as including and created by both public and domestic. However, she cautions that these should be thought of as “modes of interaction between socially constituted persons and not necessarily, or even at all, a distinction between the household and the rest of society” (Yeatman 1984:34). Thus, the domestic, discernible as a mode of interaction, might be seen at work in public domains. Although “domestic” is not just a label for a living space and the tasks peculiar to it, different types of interaction may articulate space in particular ways.

Consequently, in this work I focus not on the tasks associated with hearth spaces and the status of those tasks and those who do them, but rather on how hearth spaces are defined and distinguished.

Although the use of space is a concern of this thesis, I also explore the consequences of domestic mode of sociality. It must be said that Yeatman does not propose any guidelines for recognising domestic sociality when we see it, if we are not to equate it with the household and associated structures such as kinship. Nor are there many illuminating studies of domestic sociality to act as examples (Hamilton 1986:6). Yanagisako (1979:189), for instance, complains of a certain “thinness” in accounts of domestic life which, she says, arises from an anthropological tendency to start analysis with the presumed simpler domestic sphere and to move rapidly from there to consideration of a more complex public sphere. Marilyn Strathern (1984) has characterised this attitude as the denigration of the domestic, and she attributes it to Western notions of the relationship between nature and culture (Strathern 1984:13).

For Strathern, the major impediment to analysis of gender relations in other cultures is the risk of importing “our categories and relationships in the interpretation of other systems of thought” (Strathern 1984: 17). In a complicated and subtle argument she describes the situation in Mt Hagen (Papua New Guinea) where there is a prestigious public domain of exchange which women do not participate in, and a domestic domain where both men and women are expected to contribute to the perpetuation of the domestic unit and the raising of the next generation. Hageners acknowledge a domestic/public contrast, but women use it to enhance their authority:

They remind men that prestigious transactions rest on domestic production. They remind men of the constant balance that men must keep between social and personal ends . . . The framework set up by the ‘prestige/rubbish’ or public/private matrix gives Hagen women the terms of reference through which they pursue their own autonomy (Strathern 1984:25).

Strathern rejects the kind of argument that would merely re-arrange our categories and assumptions, such as a claim that the domestic sphere is the prestigious one in this

instance. She shows that Hageners' prestige exchanges are matters of individual ambition, although carried out in non-domestic space. Domestic responsibilities, on the other hand, serve social ends by the production of properly socialised cultural actors, and through the economic production that underwrites 'social' action such as large-scale exchanges. It is time now to consider how to come to a clearer definition of the public, private and domestic domains.

Definitional Problems

As noted above, there is a persistent tendency in Western thought to conflate concepts of "private" with those of "domestic". Although both terms contrast with "public", they do so in different senses. In common understandings, public is free/open/uncontrolled in contrast to private's boundedness. On the other hand, public is common/impersonal/rule-bound in contrast to the particularistic/bodily/unregulated nature of the domestic. Further confusion arises from the fact that there is overlap between some aspects of "private" (a concept which I wish for clarity's sake to restrict to questions of control) and the "domestic" (a category of activities and mode of social interaction). I argue that in elaborating a contrast between public and other domains, Western culture thereby created a boundary which could be used to control access to certain kinds of services, resources and associations.

Arguments about public and private spheres and the role of the individual in each run through much liberal and feminist philosophy. Carol Pateman (1983, 1988) is one feminist who follows the liberal tradition in tracing the ways in which the public/private distinction is used at various levels of analysis to result in a tripartite division which could be thought of as domestic/private/political. According to her analysis, ideas of liberal individualism that granted equality to individuals specifically excepted the "natural" relationship that gave men sovereignty in the domestic sphere. This private sphere of the domestic contrasts with a public, civil sphere where individuals, who are defined as equal in each owning property in their persons, compete to maximise their

access to society's goods. But within this public, civil world the public/private distinction could be brought to bear again to create a distinction between the political (public) and the civil or social (private). The competition of individuals in the civil sphere needs to be regulated, in liberal thought, by a public umpire in order to maintain what has come to be called the level playing field. In this sense of the terms, the public/political sphere dominates the others and the domestic is ignored altogether, treated as outside social life (cf. Yeatman 1984:32).

It is Pateman's thesis that the social contract that creates the civil domain in complex societies presupposes a sexual contract (Pateman 1988:110) that has subordinated women to men and made it possible for women to partake of culture only in the restricted domain of the domestic, at least in those societies. She notes: "Traditional societies are structured by kinship relations, but the move from the state of nature . . . to *civil* society is a move into a social order in which 'kinship' is sloughed off into its own private sphere and reconstituted as the modern family" (Pateman 1988:112). This view of "traditional" societies as structured by kinship relations neglects the fact that such societies contain numbers of entities (be they groups defined by kinship or some other relation, or individuals) in relationships of competition and co-operation. Although the idioms of kinship may be found throughout such societies, they still contain numbers of groups, such as clans and totemic groups, who must order their mutual relations. Although Aboriginal groups such as those in the Coen area are still very much kin-ordered societies, they are increasingly having to adjust their internal organisation to the demands of the nation state. For instance, as I discuss further below, funding for support groups such as local Aboriginal corporations was available only to single corporations that represented the region as a whole. This meant that groups which conceived of themselves as radically distinct, in that they came from different countries and had different histories, had to find ways to co-operate to pursue their disparate ends. Although everyone used the terminology of kinship to each other, it would be simplistic to think of the whole region as organised by structures of kinship. It is necessary, then,

to come to some understanding of how public and private concerns might be articulated in such circumstances.

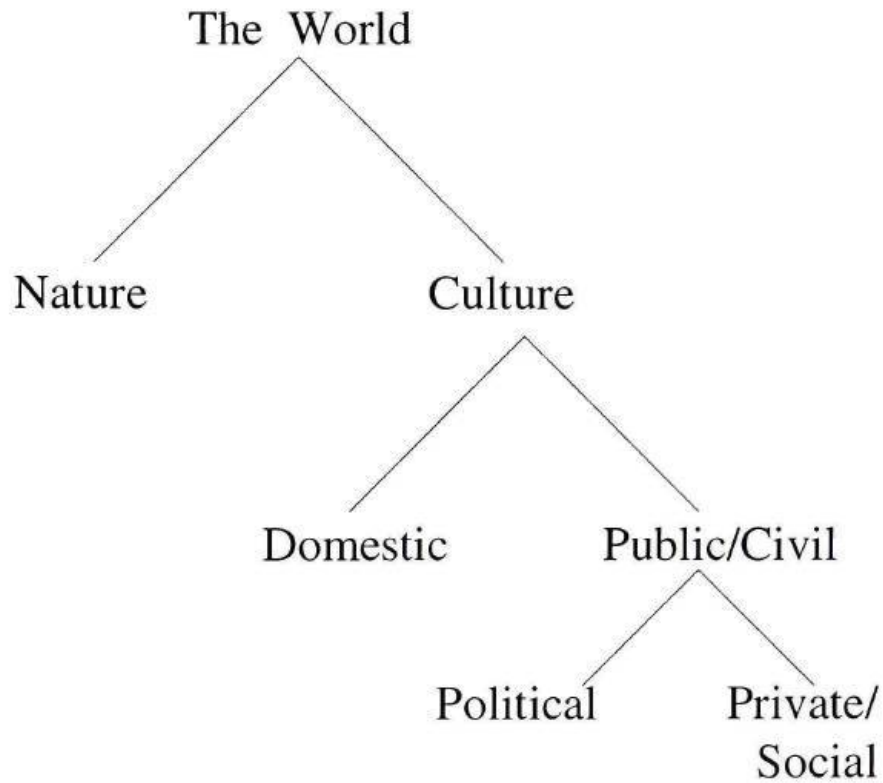


Figure 5: Pateman's (1988) Civil/Domestic Contrast

The last few years have seen renewed interest, especially in America, in analyses of complex societies in terms of public and private domains, and particularly the mutual negotiation between small-group concerns and State or civil domains. Nancy Fraser (1993) offers a rethinking of Habermas' theory of the public sphere that is helpful in understanding the contribution of social domains to the much smaller society centered on Coen.

Fraser (1993:110) notes that feminist writers often operate with conceptions of the public sphere that conflate notions of the State, an economy of paid employment and arenas of public discourse. She takes up Habermas' definition of the public sphere as “a theater . . . in which political participation is enacted through the realm of talk” (Fraser 1993:110). That is, she envisages public life as the pursuit of interests. She makes a case

for recognising that society includes multiple publics rather than a single overarching one, each public offering the opportunity for those who conceive themselves as having common interests to articulate and pursue those interests (Fraser 1993:122). Within each such public participants do not operate equally and the nature of “common” interests emerges only in contestation and discourse. Interests historically labelled private cannot thus be excluded from these domains.

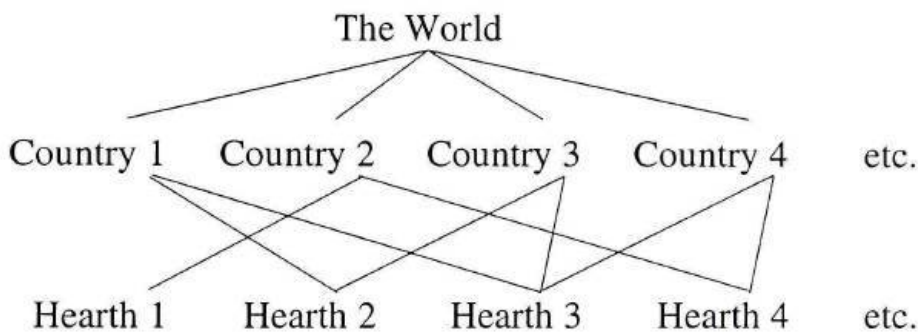


Figure 6: Relationship between Hearth and Country

Other scholars (such as Yeatman and Comaroff, quoted above) have called for a theorisation of the interdependence of public and private domains and Fraser's analysis is interesting for the way in which it advances this aim through deconstructing monolithic public and private categories. It is also useful for understanding the Aboriginal societies of the Coen region because the concept of multiple publics best approximates what I seek to show is their analysis of the organisation of social life. Subsequent chapters of this thesis demonstrate that these societies do not operate with the dichotomies common to all the analyses previously discussed. Rather, they see the world as divided into countries (which include places, people, other species, origin Stories and so on). People from different countries marry and form hearth groups while never losing connection with their own country. This situation is represented diagrammatically above. The constitution of groups, their relative social power and the power wielded by members of these groups are shown to arise from these twin concepts of country and hearth and their

ability to generate multiple and overlapping publics which yet can be seen to pursue private interests.

Another theoretical deconstruction of the public/private distinction that is useful in my consideration of significant spheres of action in the Coen case is that of Stanley Benn and Gerald Gaus in their *The Public and The Private: Concepts and Action* (1983). Benn and Gaus (1983:3) note the central importance the public/private distinction has in Western culture and suggest that something analogous can be found in other cultures (Benn and Gaus 1983:23). They suggest that this can be done by treating the terms “public” and “private” as “. . . complex-structured concepts . . . [by which members of a culture can] recognise, discuss, explain or justify the allocation of *access* to information, resources etc., the capacities in which *agents* enjoyed that access, and in whose *interest* it was used” (Benn and Gaus 1983:7). These parameters of access, agency and interest do not need to be used to label any social domain either public or private. Fraser's analysis suggests this is misguided, given that private interests can be pursued in common with others. Instead, the aspects of access, agency and interest can be used to delineate domains of action that are locally meaningful. If access to conversations, resources, space and so on is systematically restricted, that can be taken as a clue to the importance of the phenomenon. Where access, agency and interest all cohere about a common theme or setting, this can be understood to have cultural significance. And if gender is a factor in either access, agency or interest, observation should reveal the fact.

A great deal of the debate over gender and the public/private distinction has concerned women's access to space, information, resources and interactions, their ability to hold certain kinds of office, or act as certain kinds of agent, and their ability to make decisions for, and speak as representatives of, and in the interests of, others outside the immediate family. As I have shown above, it has been widely perceived that women in all cultures are socially disadvantaged to the extent that they are excluded from public roles and responsibilities. Attempts to explain this perception have foundered mainly on

inadequate conceptualisations of “public” and “private” as well as universalistic assumptions about the role and status of women.

My original question, for instance, was how women could be powerful *and* spend their time in the private or domestic sphere. Such a question presupposes the identity of private and domestic, the mutual exclusivity of domesticity and power, the prestige of non-domestic or public domains, and female identification with the non-public. Benn and Gaus' deconstruction of “public” and “private”, however, allows me to ask what ordering of social relations allocates access to locally valued activities, resources, interactions and so on, what factors define individuals as agents with such access, and what defines an agent's limits of action. If gender is a factor in the allocation of access and attainment of agency, it can now emerge without being presupposed. Similarly, the relative prestige or status of locally significant domains of social action (where “domain” may include space, activities and/or personnel) can emerge without making assumptions about the existence of entities comparable to our public and private domains or their mutual ranking.

But cultures are neither static in time nor isolated from each other. A question that has preoccupied discussions of Aboriginal gender relations has been the extent to which they have changed since first contact and how that contact has influenced the changes (Berndt 1978; Bell 1983). Part of my concern here in describing the sources of women's power in Coen is, similarly, to describe the changes that have happened over time. I am particularly concerned with the impact that Western gender ideologies, rooted as they are in the ethos of the public/private distinction, have had on local societies. The importance of an historical viewpoint also emerges from recent work by Sherry Ortner in her *Gender Hegemonies* (1990).

In that work Ortner has teased out some of the conceptual confusions that have been part of the debate since the publication of Rosaldo and Lamphere's *Woman, Culture and Society* (1974). She is mainly concerned with the assertion that men had superior status over and dominated women in all cultures, an assertion she had supported in her

contribution to the 1974 volume. She points out that questions of status, domination, and female power are conceptually distinct although they may intermingle in any empirical situation. Furthermore, “no society or culture is totally consistent. Every society/culture has some axes of male prestige, some of gender equality, and some (sometimes many) axes of prestige that have nothing to do with gender at all” (Ortner 1990:45). She explores the relative dominance of some meanings and practices using Raymond Williams' concept of “hegemony”, but emphasising its cultural rather than its political connotations. She notes that hegemony goes beyond ideology in including “not only the conscious system of ideas and beliefs, but the whole lived social process as practically organised by specific and dominant meanings and values” (Williams 1976:109 cited in Ortner 1990:44). Dominant meanings and values may, in Ortner's view, be egalitarian (thus contradicting the usual association of hegemony with a single group's use of power), but the whole lived social process includes dominated meanings and values. Even in cultures where the dominant hegemony is egalitarian, then, there may be instances of domination and such points of contradiction provide the potential for historical transformation of dominant hegemonies. She finds that hegemonic transformation is more likely to be possible where the contradiction is acted out in the public, or as she prefers, “encompassing” domain.

This terminology is a development of an earlier proposition (Ortner and Whitehead 1981) that all the contrasts such as domestic/public, nature/culture, self-interest/social good, commonly invoked in explanations of gender asymmetry, could be subsumed under a more general distinction between the encompassed and the encompassing. It is interesting that Ortner uses one of Benn and Gaus' dimensions of public/private, that of interest, in defining this new distinction. She characterises it as a distinction between “sites of social life that are ‘encompassing’—that make claims (often untrue) of operating in the interests of the whole—and sites that are ‘encompassed’—that operate with respect to more local and particular interests” (Ortner 1990: 56). In passing I note that it is difficult to see how such a definition fits, for instance, the nature/culture contrast.

Nevertheless, it is one way of restating the public/private terminology, although it embodies a view of the ways in which particular and general interests will relate to each other which, I will argue, cannot be assumed in all contexts. This caveat aside, the following quotation could stand as a plan of the present thesis:

The point is always to ask how encompassing and encompassed sites and projects of social life are distinguished, organised, and interrelated in a given society, to enquire into the underlying politics of these distinctions and interrelations, to ask whether a given culture does or does not fuse a gender opposition to these more abstract dimensions of social value, and finally, and very importantly, to examine the ways in which such fusions are used, contested, and sometimes effectively shifted over time (Ortner 1990:56).

Insofar as the historical sources permit, I will be looking for evidence of pressure from non-indigenous presumptions of public and private on the gender hegemonies of the Coen region.

One of the sources of the apparent paradox in my initial observations of women's behaviour in Coen is now clear. A body of scholarly work that I was familiar with had been arguing (a) that women were everywhere dominated by men, and (b) that this domination came about through women's confinement to or primary identification with the domestic sphere, its spaces and tasks. In Coen I was seeing women who spent most of their time around their hearths act with authority and purpose in both "domestic" and "public" spaces and tasks. This thesis sets out to explore what the local domains of social action were by asking where access to space, activities, information and resources was restricted, on what grounds access was admitted (that is, what are the local understandings of legitimate agents), and in whose interest access was used (Benn and Gaus 1983:7).

In many ways the entire social life of the Lamalama and the other Aboriginal groups in Coen (except for most of their relations with Whites) can be said to be a domestic sociality. I suggest that the hearth group can be seen as the pattern for all social organisation in terms of access, agency and interest. Women who were important in their

hearth groups therefore had a role to play in “encompassing” domains. But this cannot be seen as a mere reversal of Western denigration of the domestic and therefore of women. The women of Coen could attain prominence in their hearth groups, but they did not have it just as an extension of their childbearing role. Men, too, had prominence in hearth groups and they attained it on the same bases that women did, namely by being born into a set of rights and responsibilities in country, and through being able to live up to those rights and responsibilities. My observation that it was predominantly women who spent time at the hearth proved to be an artefact of historical circumstances and not part of local understandings of who had access and agency there. It had happened that various forces, described in the next chapter, had conspired to remove Aboriginal men from their hearths into other domains more often, in recent years, than Aboriginal women had been so removed.

However, the layers of paradox here had another dimension, that of my expectations of Aboriginal gender relations based on my reading of the anthropological literature. I turn now to examine the anthropological literature on Aboriginal women and gender relations and I argue that it exhibits the same kind of confusions I found in the more general debate. Role and status are not clearly distinguished in many analyses and the usual Western assumptions about the nature and articulation of public and private domains are present although they remain largely unexamined. This has led to a very persistent impression of Aboriginal society as male-dominated, despite the existence of contrary evidence dating from the earliest records of explorers and missionaries, and sometimes to be found embedded in the same reports that minimised the contribution and status of women.

Public/Private Assumptions in Aboriginalist Literature

As Anna Yeatman (1984) pointed out, there has been a tendency until very recently for social scientists to privilege those activities that “transcend” the so-called natural ties of the domestic domain to create a larger and more complex entity, society. As we have seen, Rosaldo thought of these public domains as “subsuming” domestic groups, while Ortner calls them “encompassing”. The terminology used itself suggests hierarchical organisation, with the domestic contained within and dominated by the public. Fascination with the “social” in the sense of public has been evident in the Australianist literature's preoccupation with aspects of Aboriginal social life such as the elaborate “skin” or section/subsection systems of social classification and the extensive ritual complexes that are found in some parts of the continent. Although women have a role in both kinship and ritual, until recently Aboriginal women hardly figured in the literature at all, except as tokens to be exchanged in the complicated calculus of kinship and sociality and as the beasts of burden whose hard labour underwrites men's intellectual pursuits. In the realm of the most transcendent, highest social value available to this culture, religious ritual, this literature has largely depicted women as subsidiary and excluded, hardly social beings at all.

With the exception of Phyllis Kaberry's important study of Aboriginal women's lives, *Aboriginal Woman, Sacred and Profane* (1939), it was not until the 1970s that concentrated attention began to be paid to them. Since that time there has been a great deal of work in the field and it is not my purpose here to review all of it. Instead, I want to trace the way in which unexamined assumptions about public and private have informed some of the analyses, even those responding to some of the literature reviewed in the preceding sections.

The Early Literature

The representations of Aborigines provided by the nineteenth century observers was, of course, heavily influenced by those commentators' own culture and their position in it, as has been pointed out before (Malinowski 1913; Rohrlach-Leavitt *et al.* 1975; Gale 1978, 1989; Bell and Ditton 1980; C.H. Berndt 1981; Bell 1983; Rowell 1983; Brock 1989; Williams and Jolly 1992; de Lepervanche 1993, *inter alia*). Malinowski's summation of the problems inherent in the use of such evidence may usefully be quoted here:

To sum up briefly: criticism of statements has in the first place to ascertain the exact and correct verbal meaning of each of them. In the second place many general but sure hints are afforded by a detailed analysis of the conditions under which the evidence was obtained and set forth by the author. The important points here are: quality of the material under observation; modes in which evidence was obtained (by inquiries from natives, by immediate observation, etc.); character, profession, and training of the informant, including possible bias, theoretical, moral and personal (Malinowski 1913:25.).

While Malinowski was alive to the fact that the testimony of policemen and missionaries could be coloured by their professional interests, we have become aware today of the limitations of the sociologically trained observer too. One problem arises from the difference Malinowski alludes to between observation and report. Fay Gale (1989) has noted the contradictions that are sometimes evident between what early observers describe of Aboriginal life and their interpretive commentary on their observations. One source of this contradiction is the tendency for any observer's assumptions and preoccupations to blind them to some of the facts. Another is that in the move from observation to analysis the *etic* categories being described have to be accommodated to the *emic* categories of scholarly debate. One way of mitigating this problem is to avoid the use of ready-coined analytic labels such as public and private, which have everyday connotations that may cloud the issue. I will try to do this here through the use of Benn and Gaus' parameters of access, agency and interest. My

extended discussion of the terminology has also doubtless revealed my own biases of understanding which readers will be able to take into account.

All scholars follow the driving questions of their own intellectual tradition. The nineteenth century scholars who recorded Aboriginal society were working with ideas of social evolution that found Australian cultures interesting as examples of primitive social forms. Writers such as Spencer and Gillen (1899) or Fison and Howitt (1880) were concerned to describe the structure rather than the process of society and they understood the important structures to be those that their own intellectual tradition recognised: law, religion, medicine, and so on. Their own society privileged these “public” domains over “private” or “domestic” activities and so it was what these scholars could recognise as public life that was their object of study. Even when they describe what we might think of as the private domain of marriage, it is in the terms of a debate over whether Australians recognised individual marriage and kinship or merely group marriage (Fison and Howitt 1991, first published 1880). They saw marriage as linking groups or as creating kinship structures rather than as the basis for a kind of sociality, and this preoccupation extended to the few female writers such as Daisy Bates (1938), as well as the male scholars. They all reflected the values of their times, values that prompted them to see the ritual and religious life as the most significant domain of Aboriginal existence. In this they were also following their informants, at least in part (Merlan 1988: 59). But they sometimes ignored other areas of social life and over-emphasised women's “exclusion” from many important rituals.

Others have pointed out that female exclusion was not as complete as some writers would have us believe, and that their absence from some stages of ritual was compensated for by the necessity of their participation elsewhere (Spencer and Gillen 1966:100; Howitt 1904:515; C.H. Berndt 1970:45; 1965:276-8). If we look again at some of these early reports of ritual business, we can also see a certain amount of slippage between what the writers tell us of events and what they show us. For instance, consider the following description from Spencer and Gillen's *The Arunta* of part of the

sub-incision ceremony, the culmination of the ritual cycle and involving, they claim, the most stringent exclusion of women:

At the moment when the Arakurta [initiate] is seized for the purpose of having the rite of Arilta performed upon him the men set up a loud shout of "pirr-rr"—loud enough to be heard by the women in their camp—and the Mia [classificatory mother] of the boy cuts the Unchalkulkna woman [own mother] across the stomach and shoulders, and then makes similar cuts upon women who are the boy's Mura [wife's mother] and elder and younger sisters, as well as upon those who are her own elder sisters. While making the cuts she imitates the sound made by the Arilta party. These cuts, which generally leave behind them a definite series of cicatrices, are called urpma, and are often represented by definite lines on the Churinga (Spencer and Gillen 1966:211).

The text goes on to describe the way the boys are later presented to the women at a ground specially prepared by them. At the moment when the men operate on the initiates, the women perform their own operations, making the same noises. A parallel seems to be being drawn. Furthermore, the cuts made on the women (but not the boys) match the lines drawn on the Churinga, highly sacred wooden boards symbolising the animating spirits of the country and the local group's connections both to those spirits and the land. While women were certainly separate, it does not seem reasonable to say they were excluded from such ritual. Repeatedly, the nineteenth century observers painted a picture of Aboriginal society in which women were second-class citizens, excluded from the important (because public, transcendent) ritual sphere. The few accounts of domestic life depict Aboriginal women as being forced to do all the hard, repetitive labour of food gathering, their sexuality at the disposal of their male kin. The first serious consideration of the role of the private or domestic in Aboriginal society comes only in 1913.

When Malinowski wrote his *The Family Amongst Australian Aborigines* (1913), he was summarising the nineteenth century reports, and still engaging in the debate over whether Aborigines had an institution we could recognise as an individual family. Although he notes the need to handle his sources critically (Malinowski 1913:25), he

repeats many of the prejudices of his own and earlier days (Berndt 1981:174) in being unable to transcend the apparent “naturalness” of the male-headed nuclear family. Curiously, such problems bedevil studies of the family even today (Collier *et al* 1982; de Lepervanche 1991). This privileging of the male role in marriage led Malinowski into some errors of logic in his analysis of the institution. Thus, although he acknowledges that infant betrothal was as constraining to the husband as the wife (Malinowski 1913:48,60), he still sees it as a matter of a man's right to a woman. He says:

The female, when promised in infancy, belonged to a certain man, who afterwards took possession of her. Neither he nor she had a choice; she belonged to him by the title of obligation; he had no choice, for all the other females were already distributed. Thus as infant betrothal was prevalent in the majority of the tribes, there was a status in which everybody belonged to somebody or other. At least there were no free females. That such a state of things is indicative of a deeply-rooted idea of personal, individual rights over a woman seems clear (Malinowski 1913:60).

What Malinowski fails to note here is that the title of obligation applied to the promised husband as much as to the wife. Once promised, he was obliged to fulfil the contract, and that contract usually entailed his providing game to his prospective parents in law, and observing the proper forms of behaviour such as avoiding speech with his mother-in-law. Examples could be multiplied at length of the male-dominated anthropology of the day finding a reflection of its own position in nineteenth century European culture in the studied people. More important for the purpose of this thesis is the emphasis in the early literature on the public sphere of life that led not only to a gender bias in the record but to distortion of the whole picture of Aboriginal society. Malinowski can once again be seen to be summarising and repeating many of the earlier views in this.

Given the conclusion I draw in this thesis that the hearth group forms the pattern for all social interaction, it is interesting that Malinowski recognised the hearth as the basis of family organisation: “These rules show clearly that each hut, each fire-place, was reserved for one family, and that this *status* had its customary form and sanction”

(Malinowski 1913:166) He goes on to say this is in accord with sexual practice and territorial organisation, as he had derived it from the records he was using. But he was not interested in exploring the possible consequences of hearth-based organisation. For Malinowski, as for many other writers, family life and marriage was the business of “obtaining a wife” by legal means, and legality, hence the institution of marriage as he defined it, could only be guaranteed by *public* acknowledgment of the event (Malinowski 1913:57).

Furthermore, he considered family life to be important only to the extent that it was part of a wider social whole. He quotes Durkheim to the effect that the family cannot exist other than as a social institution: “à la fois juridique et morale, placée sous la sauvegarde de la collectivité ambiante” and concurs in stressing “the importance of the social regulation of the individual family” (Malinowski 1913:301). Even where he is forced to admit other than jural ties between family members, he insists on “The importance of the economic features of family life, and of the common affection for children [in defining marriage]” (Malinowski 1913:300). He frequently recognises ties of affection between husband and wife, but he appears to consider that these are cancelled out by what he saw as the injustice of women's unequal economic contribution. He says “The woman's work is on the whole much heavier than that done by the man; her work is much more regular; it is compulsory, and it forms the chief support of the household” (Malinowski 1913:287), and he concludes that women only do such work as a result of violent compulsion by men.

I propose that this discounting of private feelings and domestic organisation is one of the consequences of the privileging of the domain of life that observers of this time understood to be public/transcendent/social, and hence worthy of their attention. Other consequences include a skewing of accounts of the ritual life. They took what the men were doing to be not only on behalf of the whole society, but *uniquely* on behalf of all. Because they were men themselves they were denied access to much female activity in this sphere and were incapable of appreciating that there was the possibility of separate,

equally private and mutually beneficial spheres of activity for men and women. It was this blindness to women as social actors that Kaberry (1939) was challenging in her study of *Aboriginal Woman, Sacred and Profane*.

Kaberry presents ample evidence to justify her conclusion that “Aboriginal woman like aboriginal [*sic*] man is both sacred and profane. By virtue of her procreative, sexual, economic and social functions, she claims certain privileges and fulfils certain duties in the community. She has value as a social personality, and takes her place in the profane activities of the tribe. But she has also her spiritual affiliations” (Kaberry 1939:277). Kaberry demonstrates that women co-operate with their husbands in economic pursuits, rather than merely submit to coercion (Kaberry 1939:27), and that their skills in providing for their families made them desirable marriage partners and gave them considerable authority and prestige (Kaberry 1939: 143, 159, 181). As far as the ritual life goes, she points out that if women are profane and uninitiated with respect to men's ceremonies, so are men with respect to women's (Kaberry 1939:277).

The one point on which she grants men domination is, significantly, in aspects of “public” life. She says: “Warfare and judicial functions in cases of death are the prerogatives of the men. Political control is vested in the hands of the headmen and elders . . . [except where it] . . . is delegated amongst the older men and women in the kinship groups” (Kaberry 1939:272). Elsewhere (Kaberry 1939:185), she characterises men's fights as warfare, but women's as private quarrels, without defining what difference there might be between them, besides the sex of the participants. I suggest that it is precisely the fact that men are the main participants that constitute their quarrels as “public” matters, while anything women do is by definition “private”. The judicial functions she mentions were concerned with infringements of the separateness of men's business, that is offences against men's privacy. What Kaberry perceives to be the “public” nature of such decisions again seems to proceed only from the sex of the participants.

Kaberry's depiction of Aboriginal women's lives was one that emphasised complementarity in sex roles and a high prestige for women, compared with earlier accounts. However, it was not enough to override the impression of Aboriginal women as subordinate to their menfolk. The only major study of Aboriginal women's lives to be undertaken in the next three decades was Jane Goodale's study of Tiwi women, *Tiwi Wives* (1971, although based on fieldwork carried out largely in 1954). In that work, she was still responding to assertions that women were economically inferior and without ritual importance (Goodale 1971:xxii), a position that she convincingly demonstrates to be untenable. When the first really concentrated body of work to examine Aboriginal women's lives began to appear in the 1970s, Goodale's study had not been published and Kaberry's work had not modified the gender blindness of the anthropological literature. Scholars of this later generation were still responding to the debate very much in the terms that Malinowski had understood it.

A Concern with Role

An important collection of essays that took up the issue of the invisibility of women in the Aboriginalist literature was Fay Gale's *Woman's Role in Aboriginal Society* (1970). In her preface to the first edition Gale notes "It has been hard to reconcile the apparently important historic role of women in much of the mythology with the seemingly insignificant role in present religious practice" (Gale 1970:1). Gale attributes lack of attention to women's important economic role to the fact that they are "so dramatically subordinated to men in the sphere of sacred ritual" (Gale 1970:1). That is, women's apparently low status in the over-arching, public, religious sphere has made commentators blind to other important social roles women have. The assumption is that women are ritually negligible, but that their economic independence means they have a role distinctively different from but not inferior to that of men. In 1970, then, the parameters of discussion were just beginning to change. Women were still being perceived as ritually (and therefore publicly) dominated by men, and Gale (1970)

represents a concentrated effort to address the consequences of that perceived domination. It is therefore interesting to note the changes Gale made in her Introduction for the revised third edition of 1978.

The reference to women's insignificant role in "present religious practice" becomes "traditional religious practice". There is mention of the previous academic unacceptability of studies of women's lives and the bias of male anthropologists, including their ignorance of "important female rituals" (Gale 1978:1), and the way these factors have skewed the record. Gale also now refers to women's *maintenance* of an important role in family and economic affairs under colonisation. The earlier edition of this collection itself had been a factor in the growing appreciation of Aboriginal women's social roles, apart from the public religious one. I am deliberately avoiding reference to status here. Re-studies of some Melanesian societies (e.g. Weiner 1977; Errington and Gewertz 1987) have illustrated that we cannot assume that economic independence has the same social value in other cultures. This is perhaps true only for cultures such as our own that measure social worth by income. This is another instance of Rosaldo's argument (1980) that evaluations of status are so contingent as to be "conceptually misguided". In fact, status may be said to be in the eye of the beholder.

Nevertheless, many of the papers here are concerned with status or economics or both. The most economically centered are those of Betty Hiatt, Nicolas Peterson and Catherine Berndt. Hiatt's paper compares societies across the world in terms of the amount of the diet that is provided by women's subsistence activities. She translates contribution directly into "importance", finding that ". . . as food providers in hunting societies, women are more important than men in the tropical areas where gatherable foods occur in abundance; they are less important than men in the arctic regions where gatherable foods are scarce" (Hiatt 1970:7). She measures this importance by the incidence of female infanticide and speculates that infanticide in tropical areas will not be biased towards either sex. The point here, however, is not whether an economic factor enters into calculations made about infanticide. The point is the way in which the authors

represented in this collection strain to find a role for women that can be constructed as prestige-earning, and which does not involve the quintessentially domestic tasks of food preparation and consumption and child-rearing. Nor will they consider the affective norms for conduct said to be typical of the domestic realm, as Peterson's article shows. He examines group composition in terms of men's "culturally prescribed ideal . . . that they should be living on their own clan land" (Peterson 1970:14). Although he expresses this as an imperative, a rule, he fails to mention women's preferences or the fact that the group he describes as focussed on three male landowners also included four land-owning women.

The two papers in the collection that attempt an overview of Aboriginal's women's role, those of Isobel White and Catherine Berndt, show an interesting contrast. White, who relies heavily on consideration of the jural power of women versus men, concludes that "Aboriginal women are partners, rather than pawns or chattels of the men, but their status is everywhere that of *junior* partner" (White 1970:21). She finds this conclusion to be substantiated in the relative status ascribed to women's and men's rituals and the role women are ascribed in myth (an interpretation that was later challenged by Berndt in her 1983 paper, *Mythical Women, Past and Present*). Berndt's paper in the 1970 volume emphasises men's and women's "interdependent independence". While recognising that in classical Australian society "the most important source of explanation and rules, and ultimate sanctions is the dimension of the non-empirical . . . [which is] the especial province of fully initiated men" (Berndt 1970:40), she also points out that this is far from encompassing all aspects even of religious life, and that in everyday life "neither sex is consistently dominant" (Berndt 1970:40). In an appendix to the 1978 edition, Berndt notes that "In contra-distinction to many other peoples, [Aborigines] (both men and women) were domestically oriented; family-centered, not merely kin-oriented" (Berndt 1978:83) and that interdependence on a domestic plane was mirrored by interdependence on the ritual plane. She had already found that the contact situation had reinforced this domestic orientation by discouraging the kind of corporate activity carried out in the

interests of the whole community, represented most clearly by men's ceremony (Berndt 1970:41).

Like many others (see, for instance, the review by Merlan 1988), Berndt saw men's ceremony as giving them access to something that both men and women conceded was of paramount social value, which men mediated and in which they exercised authority (Berndt 1970:45). She wanted to emphasise women's authority in other spheres, such as marriage arrangements, domestic life and some aspects of ceremony and ritual. Other theorists have argued that men's dominance in the most highly valued parts of religion gave them the status almost of a ruling class. The best known example of this argument is that of John Bern (1979). He gives an overview of a number of earlier writers including Maddock, Berndt, L. Hiatt, Meggitt and Stanner and subsumes their analyses under a Marxist framework. He notes the importance to men of successfully completing initiation and gaining ritual knowledge. In many parts of Australia in classical Aboriginal times, it was only the men who had gained seniority in ritual spheres who could marry, and, through their influence with others, bestow wives on other men. As husbands they were then generally older than their wives, whose economic production and distribution Bern, following his sources, considers them to control. This allows him to conclude that:

Men's control of the reproduction of the relations of production is elaborated in the structure of religion, and based on their control of women's labour power. The elaborate structure of men's cults and the control over the access of 'growing men' to secular knowledge, ritual knowledge and wives effectively deprives women of political equality and economic autonomy (Bern 1979:131).

Bern seems to see a reciprocal relation between men's appropriation of women's labour and the ideological superstructure that justifies and requires it. He does not elaborate on that appropriation in this article, although in a later one (Bern 1988) he argues that the fact that men can take time off subsistence activities for ceremony is a mark of their control over the labour of others, including wives. Wealth, then, consists in control of the productive and reproductive power of women (Bern 1979:123). Thanks to

the mutual support given by men united by ritual classification and kinship, such control is distributed through marriage among the mature men, to the benefit of their common interests (Bern 1979:127). Even where older women play a role in the bestowal of younger women, Bern sees them as acting as agents of the system of male domination, rather than expressing any opposition to it (Bern 1979:130). Since women's exclusion from ritual has been understood to render women inferior to men, writers such as Phyllis Kaberry (1939) have argued that the existence of women's ritual proves that they partake of the sacred and hence have social value. But for Bern, women's ritual is incapable of expressing structural opposition to male domination because it is "for them alone" (Bern 1979:129). In the terms of Sherry Ortner's argument, the ritual life can be seen as a mechanism that produces a male-dominant gender hegemony. However, Bern denies that women's ritual can be a potential node of transformation of that hegemony because it does not, in Bern's view, serve common, public interests.

Diane Bell's (1983) work challenges this view, holding that, in Central Australia at least, women's ritual expressed their control over relations of production and operated on behalf of the whole society. She saw this as the basis for women's autonomy and hence freedom from gender domination. "The structuring principles of women's ritual, their content and focus on the maintenance of social harmony, link the ritual worlds of men and women . . . Under the Law, men and women have distinctive roles to play but each has recourse to certain checks and balances which ensure that neither sex can enjoy unrivalled supremacy over the other" (Bell 1983:182). Bell sees an egalitarian hegemony. Annette Hamilton (1980:4) also observed women's participation in a separate ritual domain in the Western Desert and concluded that it gave women power, "not on account of any coherent ideological opposition expressed within it, but rather because its mode of organisation provides a structural impediment to the consolidation of male dominance" (Hamilton 1980:4). That is, women's performance of their own rituals prevented men's manipulation of time and female labour for their own benefit. For Hamilton it is not an egalitarian hegemony as much as two separate systems. But neither of these analyses

convincingly challenge the existence of a sphere of men's ritual that constructs these societies as being ultimately dependent for their reproduction on the category of fully initiated males. Bell hints as much when she discusses the extreme respect in which men's ritual business was held: "During initiation time I was often alerted to women's precise knowledge of male rituals but it was not for open discussion. The information was transmitted in signs or in the songs, dances and designs of rituals at which I was present. Women did not speak of these matters in public and although I was permitted to attend, I was warned not to ask questions" (Bell 1983:36-7). The implication would seem to be that where men's business is so valued it is at least a strong factor in making male dominance possible.

Although Bell wants to argue that men's and women's ritual has equal status, other writers (e.g. Merlan 1988, Hamilton 1980) have insisted that men's business is pre-eminent for everyone, and as Bern says, women's participation in structures of male power merely confirms and does not undermine their subordination by such structures. Merlan makes this point when she says "Women in these respects are structurally disadvantaged, not as individuals, for particular rights and claims to country, kin and so on are recognised, but as members of a gender category which is more thoroughly excluded than excluding from domains accorded the highest social value" (Merlan 1988:59). The argument, then, is, at least in part, about personal autonomy versus structural domination. The structures of religion may be potent sources of power, but they can never guarantee social pre-eminence in power or prestige for all men of the dominant class. "The multiplicity of estates, the variation in the size of estate groups, and the flexibility of inheritance rules ensure that some are better placed than others to occupy positions of leadership" (Bern 1979:128). But, as Merlan's comment above indicates, the rights deriving from inheritance of important or well-endowed countries, and the support of kin, are recognised for women as well as men. This might be what Bern means when he says that women can only subvert male dominance "where they can pose a mundane interpretation of a significant event in opposition to the dominant ritual

one put forward by men” (Bern 1979:129). That is, that structures of domination can only be opposed from without, by other structures.

If the power derived from ritual authority can be thought of as public (in that it relates to the interests of the whole community), can we look for a structural opposition in the realm of the domestic, or as Bern says, the mundane? Catherine Berndt's 1970 paper suggested, as we have seen, that women could gain authority in economic, domestic and ritual or ceremonial spheres. Australianist anthropology has been slow to take up this hint to explore the value accorded to the domestic in Aboriginal societies. It has been far more common for writers to seek to demonstrate that women could have power and authority equal to men's through their control of the “public” realms of ritual and knowledge of law (Berndt 1983; Ellis and Barwick 1989; Payne 1989). Annette Hamilton, on the other hand, has suggested that the relevant alternative to public sources of power can be found, not in the domestic sphere, but in the institution of homosociality. This she defines as the situation “where people turn to one another for their primary social and political relationships, and personal respect and affection, strictly according to criteria of gender” (Hamilton 1981:82). She finds this to be a fundamental form of sociality capable of rendering “each sex powerful to itself” (Hamilton 1981:69) and allowing resistance to gender domination. It is a phenomenon well-attested in Aboriginalist literature (Merlan 1992) and can be seen at work in Catherine Berndt's description (1970) of Aboriginal gender relations as characterised by “interdependent independence”. Rather than a domestic sphere or domain of activity opposing a public domain, homosociality constructs, as it were, two private entities, or multiple publics, depending on one's point of view, in what Hamilton calls a “Dual Social System”. The articulation of these two systems must then be explained, a point that is discussed further below.

Enough evidence of female personal autonomy has now been accumulated to justify commentators' questioning of the historically accepted position that women in Aboriginal society are or were dominated by men owing to the greater social value

ascribed to men through their participation in ritual activity that was said to be for the benefit of the whole society (hence public). The most common explanations offered by anthropologists have been (a) that women also had important roles to play alongside men in public life, which gave them power and prestige (Bell's position), or (b) that women and men occupied separate, differently constituted but socially equal worlds which were not in competition (Hamilton's position), or (c) that the public roles of men and the private roles of women were both of social value and were interdependent (Berndt's position). Another alternative has been offered more recently by Aboriginal women, one that questions not only the use of the public/private distinction implicit or explicit in these theories, but the use of the gender distinction itself.

The Contemporary Position

Discussion of gender issues has been enriched in recent years by the contribution of what the American literature calls "women of color". Numerous Black and Hispanic theorists have pointed out that the category woman is insufficient to capture the diversity of female experience, constructed as it is within frameworks of class and race, as well as gender. Australian Aboriginal women, too, have contributed to this debate. As early as 1976, Pat O'Shane was asking "Is there any relevance in the women's movement for Aboriginal women?" (O'Shane 1976). Like others after her (Eatock 1987; Huggins 1987, 1994; Watson 1987; E. Williams 1987), she found that common gender was not enough to unite women in the face of racism that is not only the historical experience of Aboriginal women, but an ongoing reality. The role of White women in perpetuating this racism has led to some Aboriginal women's angry repudiation of any association on the basis of gender². They argue that, not only do White and Aboriginal women have different social aims (Huggins 1987), but the concept of gender loses much of its salience

2 There are, however, some Aboriginal women who themselves have appealed to common sisterhood (Langton 1988).

where race is the primary determinant of people's daily lives. As Elizabeth Williams says, it is very much a case of "Aboriginal first, woman second." (E. Williams 1987).

Perhaps the strongest expression of this point of view came in 1991 when a group of Aboriginal women protested vehemently in a letter to the editor of a feminist journal against a White woman anthropologist's right to raise the issue of intra-racial rape in Aboriginal communities (Huggins *et al* 1991. This letter had been in circulation since at least 1990). They saw the appeal to a common gender as a divisive move, tending to create fighting and separation between Aboriginal men and women, a situation they deplored. They concluded "Sexism does not and will never prevail over racial domination in this country" (Huggins *et al* 1991:507), thus rejecting gender as a politically unifying concept. More broadly, Jackie Huggins (1994:70) has recently suggested that "Western theory . . . [is a] foreign construct in which Aboriginal women do not fit". This accords with the experience of other non-White/non-Western women across the globe, who have found the assumption that "women" are "somehow socially constituted as a homogenous group identified prior to the process of analysis" (Mohanty 1991:56) to be, not only offensive, but inadequate to explain the specificities of their experience. Must we then abandon gender as a theoretical tool?

There are a number of reasons for answering 'no'. The first is that it obviously has reality and explanatory power for some societies, such as our own. Moreover, it can be shown to have more than trivial significance even in other societies where it is claimed by some to be less salient, such as Aboriginal Australia. Mention has already been made (p50) of an important form of sociality in Aboriginal Australia that relies on/constructs a gender distinction, that of homosociality. Francesca Merlan has also considered gender separation in Aboriginal sociality and finds it to be widely attested (Merlan 1992:171). However, she criticises both classical and more recent accounts for their preoccupation with separation as an aspect of structure at the expense of social action. As she says: "there is not simply separation between men and women in real life, but there is also interaction between them; and . . . it is both in moments of separation, and of direct

interaction between men and women, that aspects of intersexual relationships are reproduced” (Merlan 1992:170). Merlan demonstrates that in Aboriginal society gender separation is a principle that constructs and reproduces gender, but that each gender exists always in relation to the other (Merlan 1992:189). Gender, then, cannot be understood as a pre-existent difference between males and females but “must be understood as one of the dimensions or moments of action in which such social differentiation is constantly reproduced and altered” (Merlan 1992:170). So gender can be said to be a significant social principle in Aboriginal Australia, even if we have to examine very closely what we understand by the term. But this is not the only reason for continuing to use it as analytical device.

Social analyses informed by feminism and the use of gender as an analytical construct have been of enormous significance, not only in exposing sex-based discrimination, but in questioning the epistemologies and methodologies of all knowledges in the Western tradition (Grosz 1988, 1994). As inheritors and critics of that tradition we cannot simply abandon such a powerful tool. Furthermore, contemporary Aboriginal society is embedded in, and to a large degree dominated by, a White society in which gender, and ideas closely associated with it such as the public/private distinction, is highly influential. Whatever the Aboriginal understanding of gender, the Western concept is likely to be applied unreflectively by the dominant society in its dealings with Aborigines. Bell and Ditton's (1980) study of Aboriginal women's views on law revealed that they were systematically excluded from consultation on major social issues, thanks both to the sex-segregated nature of Aboriginal society and the gender bias of much research (see also Gale 1983; Jacobs 1989). The problem, then, is to respond to Aboriginal women who have seen gender analyses as inadequate, without abandoning the concept (Russo 1991). What is needed is a grounded analysis that “generates theoretical categories from within the situation and context being analysed” (Mohanty 1991:65). That is what this study seeks to do.

Conclusion

This chapter began with a consideration of the theoretical proposition that women were universally subordinated to men as a result of their identification with a “domestic” or “private” sphere of life. It proved hard to define precisely what was meant by those terms but they both seem to imply some association with messy and menial housekeeping and child-rearing tasks, or tasks that served the immediate interests of individuals and family groups, rather than those associated with larger social groupings. The assumption that association with the “public” sphere is more highly valued than “domestic” or “private” orientation is, I have argued, an artefact of Western social organisation, and not a principle that can be assumed to operate in other cultures. In fact, the very existence of domains of social action that we might recognise as either “public” or “private” remains to be established.

In order to investigate what the relevant “sites and projects of social life” (Ortner 1990:56) and their relative social values in other cultures might be, I propose to use a framework suggested by Benn and Gaus (1983). They avoid the use of the public/private distinction by asking instead how domains of social action are structured by questions of access, agency and interest: “For even a culture without that distinction would still require *some* way of so ordering its relations and activities that it could recognise, discuss, explain or justify the allocation of *access* to information, resources etc., the capacities in which *agents* enjoyed that access, and in whose *interest* it was used” (Benn and Gaus 1983:7) Insofar as this is a set of questions about status, it allows the analysis to specify the local bases and evaluations of that status. Much more saliently for present purposes, questions about the allocation of rights and responsibilities are direct questions about power and its sources and distribution.

The second part of this chapter dealt with the way an assumption of the existence of a public/private distinction, structured in the same way and carrying the same social weight as our own, has been apparent in much of the literature on Aboriginal Australia,

and especially that on Aboriginal women. The difficulty here for a modern commentator is to distinguish what is inherent in Aboriginal social organisation and gender relations, what is distortion from our own intellectual tradition and what is the effect of colonial processes imposing European forms on indigenous communities. Once again, the only way forward is to let the analytical categories be influenced by the situation being analysed. While some Aboriginal women have protested that an analysis in terms of gender is theoretically flawed in the Aboriginal setting, I have chosen to retain the concept, but to use it in a processual, rather than a structural way, as Merlan (1992) suggests.

Merlan's insistence that gender must be understood as social action is reminiscent of Rosaldo's (1980:414) position that women and men together in their social interrelations create gender categories. But what can be said of gender as a social category can also be said of all other categories; namely, that they emerge in social action. Gender is not ignored here, but it is not assumed to be relevant for the social action under consideration just because the people involved are able to be classified according to gender in other social interactions.

Another point made by Merlan bears mention here. She points out that because categories such as gender are the product of social action, they are subject to contestation, the contradictions among sets of practices leading to instability and change (Merlan 1992:1898). Again, this concurs with another analysis: Ortner's argument that every hegemony contains points of contradiction (Ortner 1990:46), and that it is from these points that historical transformations are likely to emerge (Ortner 1990:49). Ortner explained historical transformations in gender relations in Hawaii and the Andaman Islands as not merely the product of the imposition of Western ideas in the moment of colonisation, but as the emergence, under new social conditions, of possibilities contained in the indigenous systems. Translated to an Aboriginal context, this would mean arguing neither that Aboriginal women were dominated by men before colonisation, nor that they necessarily enjoyed equality with, or domination of their men.

Rather it means investigating each instance for evidence of the way individuals and groups have exploited the contradictions of social process. I begin in the next chapter with a consideration of the recorded history of the Coen region. Evidence of the strategies available to people in their construction of gender relations recoverable from this history will then be able to be compared with those observed during the period of my fieldwork.

2 Aboriginal Responses to Colonization in the Area of Study

This chapter considers the historical record in the Coen and Princess Charlotte Bay areas with two aims in mind. One is straightforwardly historical: to describe those aspects of the written history that impinge on the concerns of this thesis. The history of this part of Cape York Peninsula has been different in some ways from that of surrounding regions. Unlike settlements such as Aurukun, Pormpurraaw and Lockhart River, Coen has always been a town rather than a mission station. The dominance of commercial rather than proselytizing interests has had many consequences for local people, not least in the realm of gender relations. I describe the gradual emergence of the Lamalama as a social group primarily associated with Port Stewart, but having extensive relationships with other Aboriginal groups in East Central Cape York Peninsula (hereafter ECCYP) and the non-Aboriginal world.

The second aim of this chapter is to discover what Ortner (1990:58) has called “nodes of historical transformation”, that is, points at which changing circumstances work on existing institutions and practices to transform them. We cannot know exactly what the institutions and practices of social life among the Lamalama were before contact, nor what gender hegemonies those practices produced. Ethnographic and historical evidence from other parts of Australia suggests that practices such as male initiation and the sexual division of labour need to be taken into consideration. In what follows I will be seeking not only to reconstruct those practices for ECCYP, but to examine the effect on them of the different practices of the colonizers. Ortner's (1990) examination of the Andamese and the Hawaiian cases is my model here. Ortner borrows Raymond Williams' notion of “hegemony” to define sets of ideas and practices that may

be “culturally dominant and relatively deeply embedded but nonetheless historically emergent, politically constructed and nontotalistic” (Ortner 1990:46). That is to say that although there may be a prevailing hegemony, there are likely to be practices of prestige and power that stand outside or counter to it. In the Andaman case Ortner argues for an egalitarian gender hegemony which yet included men's monopolization of certain rituals understood to be beneficial to the wider social welfare. This ritual role for men was balanced by the value placed on women's reproductive and nurturant roles and thus produced an egalitarian situation. It was only when exposed to a set of Western ideas which construct public and male as superior to reproductive and female that the existence of Andamese men's ritual roles could become a way for them to dominate women in non-ritual settings (Ortner 1990:61). The men's ritual role became a node of transformation of the Andamese gender hegemony because of the way in which it fitted the suppositions of the new ruling order. In examining the historical record for ECCYP I will be looking for evidence of such transformations.

As I noted in the previous chapter, there has been much debate over the nature of the gender hegemony in pre-contact Aboriginal Australia. Many writers have described it as male-dominant on the basis of men's role in ritual. As we have seen, John Bern's (1979) analysis discounted the potential of women's ritual practice to oppose men's and produce an egalitarian hegemony. This is not to say, however, that changing circumstances could not bring about a re-evaluation of these practices. That is, women's ritual practice may have provided a potential node of transformation. Other writers vary in the degree to which they observe male dominance and suggest potential counter-hegemonic practices in the realm of family organization and productive labour (Berndt 1970; White 1970). That is not the position taken up by Bell (1983), however, who argues for an original egalitarian hegemony, that valued men's and women's ritual equally. Her position is that the male-dominant colonizing culture used the fact of men's ritual activity, and its own ignorance of women's roles, to bring about such male-dominance as exists. But colonization has many facets, each of which can have different

effects in different circumstances. For instance, Jeff Collman (1979, 1988a) describes the effects of welfare payments to Central Australian Aboriginal women as producing much greater autonomy for the women involved, to the point where women were not only household heads but heads of lineages as well. On the other hand, Julie Finlayson (1989; 1991) suggests that in other places the receipt of welfare reduced women's autonomy owing to their responsibility to care for adult, unemployed sons. These examples illustrate the point that one cannot construct monolithic arguments about the effects of colonization. Rather, each case must be considered in its historical specificity (Anderson 1983).

The purpose of this chapter, then, will be to examine the historical record for any clues as to the gender hegemony in ECCYP close to contact and any changes it may have undergone. Although there is evidence that the men's rituals, among the Lamalama at least, were suppressed in part through non-indigenous interference, I will not be arguing that this removed a practice that constructed male dominance. Instead, I concentrate on the strongly male-dominant tendencies of the colonists, tendencies that were significantly expressed in their ordering of the world into male, public domains which dominated and encompassed female, private or domestic ones. The explicit controls that had to be invoked to make Aboriginal people conform to this ideology, and the partial success of such controls, suggests that the Aboriginal societies of ECCYP understood gender relations differently.

Earliest Responses

Other studies have described Aboriginal social organization and responses to colonization elsewhere on Cape York Peninsula (Anderson 1984; Chase 1980; Hale and Tindale 1933-34; McConnel 1934; Sutton 1978; Sutton and Rigsby 1982; Sutton and Chase 1981; Rigsby 1980, 1992; Thomson 1932, 1934; von Sturmer 1978 *inter alia*).

Many of these studies provide useful points of comparison and corroboration for this description of the history and contemporary organization among Aboriginal people of the central Peninsula. However, none of them focussed on gender relations and there are some important historical specificities for the study region. I concentrate here on the details of European incursions into the hinterland of Princess Charlotte Bay, the area associated with the Lamalama, my principal reference group in ECCYP.

Indirect Contact

Long before white people actually appeared in the Peninsula, Aborigines were using materials and objects from the periphery of the white world. Frequently these things were traded (McCarthy 1939), and for coastal peoples of Cape York Peninsula, flotsam and jetsam provided useful bits and pieces. Bottle glass was collected for ornament or small tools (Jack 1922:220), scraps of iron were fashioned into axes (Jack 1922:529), torn canvas or copper sheathing from boats were used in building shelters (Jack 1922:486,568). At this time Aboriginal peoples of ECCYP were incorporating material aspects of European culture into their lives on their own terms. It is a relationship that continues today. The town dump in Coen remains a frequently used source of this kind of material acquisition, and European cast offs are recycled to good effect in the construction of camps and buildings. More spectacularly, the Lamalama sail an aluminium dinghy which they dug out of the sand on the beach after a storm in the late 1980s.

But if the Aboriginal response to the material detritus of white culture was and is one of opportunistic enthusiasm, the response to white people themselves was much more mixed. The very first records show Aborigines in control of contact situations. The records of Edmund Kennedy's disastrous expedition into the region, in 1848, are sketchy but indicate a variety of responses from the Aboriginal people encountered. One day while the explorers were on the western shore of Princess Charlotte Bay, and therefore in modern Lamalama country, their camp was visited by a large group of men and

women who had been gathering nondas (a plum-like fruit). Carron's diary of the expedition records that, when Kennedy's group resumed their march, this party followed them throwing spears and the explorers fired upon them (Jack 1922:221). However, the next day, while camped where there was no water, "the travellers were visited by NATIVES, who, in exchange for fish-hooks, brought water in bark vessels, and left quietly" (Jack 1922:221). Something clearly made the Aborigines uneasy on the first occasion and it may be that the presence of women was significant. Jack notes that inappropriate treatment of Aboriginal women by white men was ever "a fruitful cause of trouble between whites and blacks" (Jack 1922:483). However that may be, on another day we see Aboriginal people choosing to act quite differently in pursuit of their own material interests—calmly exchanging water, something the explorers lacked and did not know how to find, for fish-hooks.

However, the power of Aboriginal people to regulate contact was doomed not to last. While the numbers of whitefellas remained small, a matter of a few prospectors and explorers, Aboriginal people could largely choose the terms of their interaction with them and the effect of the relatively small quantities of introduced goods was probably minimal. There were at first no costs to adopting some of the whitefella technology. Gradually, however, more difficult accommodations had to be made. Even before their first direct contact with whitefellas, Aboriginal groups in Princess Charlotte Bay and the Coen area would undoubtedly have had to cope with the effect of the Palmer goldrush on the groups immediately to the south of them. The pressure was indirect, but there is linguistic and ethnohistorical evidence that it was quite intense, as the next sections discuss.

The Aftershocks of the Palmer Goldrush

Thousands of European and Chinese miners flocked to the diggings in 1873 after gold was discovered on the Palmer. This meant wholesale dispossession for the Aborigines in the immediate vicinity of the goldfield and along the route between the Palmer and the newly established port of Cooktown, a dispossession that was ruthless on the part of the invaders and fiercely contested by the Aborigines. The situation is well summed up by the following contemporary newspaper report:

For four years a war of extermination has been waged against the blacks. Not only the native troopers, but each white man carrying a rifle, tries its range on every blackfellow he sees. But the blacks are in no way intimidated. They constantly spear cattle and horses within a few miles of Cooktown up to the present time, and if an opportunity offers itself to kill and eat a white man, they never fail to avail themselves of it. Perhaps the determination they show may be the courage of despair. The country is not fertile, is poorly stocked with game, and the whites have taken possession of all the main watercourses. Native police officers say that most of the Palmer blacks seem half-starved, and recent advice from the Hodgkinson describes the aboriginals there as suffering from famine. The white men occupy their only hunting-grounds, and in default of the fish, roots, and game of the waterholes and creek 'bottoms', they are in a manner compelled to eat horses and bullock (*Queenslander*, 8 December 1877:16., cited in Johnston 1988:89).

While it was mainly Aboriginal men who died in open combat, women and children were killed in raids on camps, were abducted by miners or starved for lack of access to game and water. But armed resistance was not the only strategy adopted by the Palmer Aborigines. Some chose to join whitefellas as workers or fringe-dwellers (Anderson 1984:16), while others fled to their relatives to the north. A tradition persists amongst present day Lamalama that native troopers hunted people into the lower part of Princess Charlotte Bay, where they hid by digging underground dwellings out of the sandy soil. It is said that, being Aborigines themselves, the troopers knew to look for wisps of smoke from the smoldering fires used in these dwellings, and so many refugees were caught and killed. Others doubtless activated kinship ties to create places for themselves amongst the peoples of Princess Charlotte Bay. The resultant increase in population may have

caused difficulties for the more northern groups, but there is no direct evidence for this. However, it is interesting to speculate on possible correlations between some peculiarities of social organization and language in the hinterland of Princess Charlotte Bay, and events to the south immediately before the first arrival of whitefellas in the area. The following section uses early reports of group and language names to begin to locate the Lamalama in the landscape and trace their relationships with surrounding groups. More recent detailed linguistic analysis is also summarized in the next section. The full detail of the linguistic argument can be found in Appendix 1.

Linguistic Evidence

All of the published sources date from after the Palmer goldrush and there is nothing to indicate when the linguistic relationships I will describe for the Princess Charlotte Bay peoples emerged. However, these early sources locate a group that bears a name cognate with Lamalama in the hinterland of the lower Bay and provide a point at which we can begin to trace the location and composition of the Lamalama group.

The published source closest in time to the first European appearance in the area is Curr's Australia-wide survey, which includes 22 words from "Princess Charlotte Bay" (Curr 1886 Vol II:389-391). The actual language is not identified and the transcription is not good enough for linguistic comparison to provide any certainty, although Rigsby (pers. comm.) considers it likely to be a non-initial dropping (see p274) coastal Ayapathu variety. Many of the early wordlists such as Curr's were made by people with no extensive knowledge of the languages they reported and no linguistic training. Comparison with later and more systematic transcriptions often shows them to be heavily influenced by English phonotactics. Hale and Tindale (1933) were of the opinion that Curr's list agreed best with the vocabulary they collected from a group they labelled Barungan, comprising all the people of the western coasts of the Bay. The first list to give group names comes from a report by Parry-Okeden, the Commissioner of Police, about a journey he made around Cape York Peninsula in 1896. His map and

transcriptions of local names are probably approximations only, but in the hinterland of Princess Charlotte Bay he mentions a number of groups that could be cognate with today's Lamalama. From the head of the Lukin River, eastwards to the southwest corner of Princess Charlotte Bay, he designates as the territory of the Bombilla³ (perhaps Umpila), south of that he places the Kokahiabilo (perhaps Ayapathu), east of them and along the southern margin of the Bay he names the Kokakulamaka, and south of these last two the Kokadalamalma. The two latter names are probably corruptions of the name Lamalama. In 1898 Walter Roth visited the area in his capacity as Chief Protector of Aboriginals for northern Queensland. Roth's report (1898) placed the main Lamalama camp "in the vicinity of the mouth of the Bizant River and Jeanette's Tableland" (Roth 1898:8), and he does not mention any groups living further north than this. These early sources, then, place the Lamalama in the lower Bay area with other groups occupying the western coasts of the Bay and hinterland.

It is not clear from these accounts how the groups related to each other. Parry-Okeden (1897:16) notes a distinction between "inland" and "coastal" groups (a distinction which persists today) with further internal sub-divisions within these two areas. He claims that "one language may be common to many [named groups], and one dialect will often cover a large area of country" (Parry-Okeden 1897:16). Parry-Okeden's names would seem to relate to social groups rather than languages. Roth's labels, on the other hand, seem to designate languages, each language including a number of more or less mutually-intelligible dialects (Roth 1898:7). He appears to have considered the language groups, but not the dialect groups, to have been socially independent of each other.

The first modern and fairly reliable description of the distribution and composition of groups in the area and their languages begins with the report (Hale and Tindale 1933,

3 The location and extent of territories are described in a manuscript version of this report in QSA file POL/J14, Batch 381M. There Parry-Okeden also estimates the population of these Princess Charlotte Bay peoples as around 1300.

1934) of an expedition to Princess Charlotte Bay led by Herbert Hale and Norman Tindale on behalf of the South Australian Museum. They spent January and February of 1927 in the area and visited Port Stewart and Silver Plains Station, among other places. They agree with earlier sources in locating the Lamalama in the southern part of the hinterland of the Bay, explicitly “the banks of the Normanby and North Kennedy Rivers [not] beyond the tidal limits” (Hale and Tindale 1933:69). The peoples of the western coasts of the Bay, however, are grouped together as the Barunguan (a name that is not recognized in the region today).

The Barunguan tribe extends along the coast from Running Creek in the south nearly to Cape Direction . . . There are at least five local groups or clans who claim this tribal name. The southernmost is the Yuinbata, who frequent the country south of the Stewart River . . . The Entjinga live along the banks of the Stewart River, the mouth of which is also known as Entjinga. Formerly they ranged inland, in search of honey and small game, for some thirty miles, but since the stocking of the main range with cattle they have been compelled to confine themselves to the relatively infertile sand beaches, coastal swamps, and mangrove-lined foreshores (Hale and Tindale 1933:70).

They mention dialectical variation within the group they call Barunguan (Hale and Tindale 1933:70) and imply that it is rather slight. However, in their vocabulary lists (Hale and Tindale 1934:160-171) they add Ompela variants separately, perhaps suggesting a consciousness that the language of this northern group was significantly different. Although they record trade and travel between the groups of the region (Hale and Tindale 1934:122) and some degree of inter-marriage (Hale and Tindale 1933:80), they were of the opinion that boundaries between named groups were fairly constant (Hale and Tindale 1933:77). The picture that emerges from their report, then is one in which the coastal peoples of the Bay hinterland fall into two groups, one to the north of Running Creek and the other south and east of there. The vocabulary lists they provide, which are too extensive to be included here, certainly suggest a discontinuity between these groups.

The anthropologist Donald Thomson also visited Port Stewart in 1928. He too noted (Thomson 1934:237) the inland/sandbeach distinction drawn by the people of the area. He calls the people he met at Port Stewart “Yintjingga”, but this is actually the name of the area in Ayapathu. He distinguishes this coastal group from the inland Kanju and Ai'ebadu (Ayapathu), on the one hand, and the northerly Ompela, Koko Ya'o and Wutati (Thomson 1934:237,240). In several of his publications Thomson notes the closeness of language and culture of Ompela and Koko Ya'o groups (Thomson 1933, 1935, 1939, 1972) within the “sandbeach” group. In many respects he treated all the coastal peoples of Eastern Cape York Peninsula as similar, but there are several hints of cultural discontinuities between groups living north and south of Port Stewart. Southern groups used a single-outrigger, as opposed to the northern double outrigger canoe, for instance (Thomson 1952:2). Thomson appears not to have any significant contact with groups from south of Port Stewart and the name Lamalama does not appear in his work.

The distinction appearing in these early writings between inland and coastal groups and between northern and southern hinterland groups, recurs in the later linguistic work. Don Laycock based his short paper (Laycock 1969) on fragmentary material collected in 1964 from mainly elderly informants, some of whom had been born in the last century. He divides what he calls the Lamalamic group of languages into three sub-groups: a northern one including Umbuykamu and Umbindhamu, a central one comprising Wurungung and Parimankutinma and a southern one which on his map includes not only Tableland Lamalama, but also what are now known to be the territories of inland groups speaking Kuku Thaypan, Aghu Tharrnggala and other languages (Rigsby 1992; Jolly 1989). In calling all of these languages “Lamalamic”, Laycock was recording not only a linguistic relationship, but also his informants' sense of the members of these groups as a single social group (Laycock 1969:72). In what follows I examine the modern composition of that group and how linguistic evidence can contribute to our understanding of how the group has changed over time.

In the 1990s, Lamalama is the name given to a language of the lower Bay area in the vicinity of Jane Table Hill, a prominent landmark in this low-lying region. It is also the name given by their neighbours and themselves to all those Aboriginal peoples who come from the coasts of Princess Charlotte Bay, from the Tableland to just north of the Stewart River (Laycock 1969:72; Rigsby 1992). “The Lamalama mob” in this larger sense includes people who speak dialects of Lamalama proper (abbreviated here LL), Rimanggudinhma (sometimes called Barimangudinma or Parimankutinma, Rim), Umbuygamu (Uby) and Umpithamu (Umbindhamu, Ump). The status of the Umpithamu language to membership within the Lamalamic linguistic group is not so certain owing to the fact that Umpithamu does not share some of the more unusual phonological features of the other Lamalamic languages. In Appendix 1, I present a detailed analysis of the distribution of certain phonological features of the region’s languages. These features were produced by regular sound changes which appear to have been more extensive in Lamalama, Umbuygamu and Rimanggudinhma than in Umpithamu. I argue that the correlation between the sound change and social features such as maternal totemism and four-section systems suggest a slightly different pattern of contact with other groups for the Umpithamu than the rest of the Lamalama. Similarities suggest a degree of social contact between Umpithamu speakers and their southern neighbours; but differences imply that their more northern location sheltered Umpithamu speakers somewhat from changes moving through the area at or just before the time when records begin to appear, including perhaps the effect of refugees fleeing from the Palmer. However that may be, there is some further evidence to suggest that the composition of the Lamalama mob has not always been as we see it today.

Direct Pressures

Sites around Port Stewart, and particularly Theethinji, where the outstation was at the time of my fieldwork, were acknowledged Umpithamu places. But in August 1897

when Acting Sergeant Smith was on patrol at Port Stewart⁴, the 64 people he found there were all “Iabitha”. This is presumably his rendering of the language name Ayapathu (Ayabadhu on Alpher's map). No linguistic study of this language has been published although tape recordings exist. It seems to be more closely related to the Wik languages than to Umpithamu (Rigsby pers. comm.). In the light of Thomson's (1934:240) evidence that his Yintjingga and Ai'ebadu groups were in both co-operative and competitive relations with each other, this might be thought to reflect the normal distinction between “sandbeach” and “inside” people (Thomson 1972:3; Sutton 1978:25). Linguistically, the distinction between Umpithamu and Ayapathu lies largely in the lack of initial softening or dropping in Ayapathu. Although this group was thought to have been confined to the interior, as Alpher's map shows, it is now known (Rigsby 1992:357) to have owned sites near the coast as far south as Running Creek. In 1929, Thomson reported that the Port Stewart people and the Ayapathu had ‘formerly’ been friendly (Thomson cited in Rigsby 1992:357f.n.), although the current position was one of mutual distrust (Thomson 1934:240), and it may be that pressure from southern Lamalama groups was one factor in increasing tension between the two groups. A shift of focus northward on the part of the Lamalama is suggested by the following story of the loss of Dinner Hole initiation ground near Annie River.

This site had long been an important site for male initiation for the whole Lamalama group and large gatherings happened there from time to time. However, in the early teens of this century the station lessee at nearby Violet Vale considered himself to be threatened by the proximity of such a large group of Aborigines. They were also camped near to a major water source and thus in competition with his cattle, and, moreover, unwilling to work while concerned with ritual business. For a number of reasons, then, he did not look on these gatherings with favour. It is said by today's Lamalama that on one occasion he broke up such a gathering and drove people off the

4 A/Sgt Smith to Inspector Lamond, Cooktown, 16 August 1897 (QSA file POL/J19). See also Rigsby (1992).

ground. After that, initiation ceremonies were moved to a site just to the south of Port Stewart, where, by this time, European presence had declined to almost nothing. Thomson photographed men prepared for initiation ceremonies there during his stay at Port Stewart in 1928. This was among the last, if not the last, occasion on which any such initiation took place among the Lamalama.

Thomson (1934:238) identified the people he lived with at Port Stewart as the “Yintjingga” and distinguished them from the Ai'ebadu (Ayapathu), Koko Ompindamo (Umpithamu) and Ompela (Umpila). But Yintjingga is a place name, used to refer to a boxwood grove near the river mouth, and also to the wider Port Stewart area. So Lamalama people in Coen will talk about going to Yintjingga for the weekend, meaning that they will camp at Theethinji and go fishing up and down the coast from there. In fact, they use the name Yintjingga as the name Port Stewart is used in English—to refer to a particular location, but also to the whole coastal plain in the vicinity of the mouth of the Stewart river. The group Thomson met would, like any local group, have contained speakers of a number of languages, although both Thomson and Tindale recorded Umpila there (Rigsby 1992:359). Use of the term Yintjingga, then, would have been a way of identifying them(selves) as the group living in that area, whatever their clan/language associations. In fact Thomson discusses the dugong hunting techniques of the group using terms that are common to Koko Ya'o and Umpila (Thomson 1934:243), both languages from north of Port Stewart. It may be that the languages he heard at Port Stewart were all of the northern type. They were clearly not the unusual languages of the lower Princess Charlotte Bay, and it is possible that the people of this southern area only gravitated to become part of the Port Stewart mob after this time. Some of the reasons for this shift are suggested by the story of the Violet Vale pastoralist, but the possibility of work on stations and in Coen probably also played a part in attracting people north. I turn now to consider these direct pressures of colonization in more detail.

Working with Whites

Despite some sporadic mining in the Coen area in the 1870s, Aborigines saw very little of whites in the inland areas of the Peninsula during that decade. However, along the coast Aborigines already knew enough of Europeans to have acquired some fluency in English. During his expedition along the eastern coast in 1880, Jack met two Aborigines who were familiar with the use of tobacco and spoke English “at least as well as the average Cleveland Bay [Townsville] blacks” (Jack 1922:569). In this case Jack records that the knowledge had been acquired in contact with *bêche-de-mer* fishermen, but other Europeans also worked these coasts.

By the mid 1870s there was enough traffic inside the reefs to justify the establishment of lightships off the Piper Islands, Claremont Islands and the Channel Rock (Harbours and Marine 1986:178). While the authorities were sufficiently concerned about the possibility of Aboriginal attack to increase staffing levels on these vessels (Harbours and Marine 1986:169), no such attacks were ever recorded, and the active way in which Aboriginal people adopted European technology elsewhere entitles us to suppose that some trade probably occurred between local Aboriginal people and the staff of the lightships. But the most significant foreign contact by sea came from the *bêche-de-mer* and pearling industries. The Aboriginal role in these industries offers insight into the sexual division of labour and gender relations close to first contact.

The Marine Industries

Bêche-de-mer had been gathered in commercial quantities on the Barrier Reef since at least the early 1860s (Loos 1982:118; Mullins 1994:58), but pearling did not extend south of the Torres Strait until the middle of that decade. Aborigines were employed in both these industries, a fact that White commentators consistently deplored, particularly in the case of Aboriginal women. For some years the industries operated

beyond the knowledge and control of the government and it is clear that this lack of control, plus a need for cheap labour, particularly in the bêche-de-mer industry (Loos 1982:139), led to abuses such as kidnapping of Aboriginal workers and non-payment of wages. An early report drawing the government's attention to these abuses was written by Brinsley Sheridan, Land Commissioner at Cardwell, in 1877. He mentions that some vessels engaged in both industries were guilty of kidnapping Aborigines and forcing them to work as divers, etc. He also notes that the presence of Aboriginal women on the vessels was likely to cause trouble between Aboriginal men and their employers, but that women were frequently engaged in the industries "as I am told they make the best divers" (Sheridan 1877:1245).

Although later commentators have emphasized the abuses, it was never claimed that all Aboriginal labour was shanghaied, and several incidents indicate that Aborigines soon learned of the possible dangers of proximity to the industries (Loos 1982:156). Despite known dangers, then, Aboriginal people of both sexes went on joining and acquiring skills in the industries. Saville-Kent, who had been Commissioner of Fisheries, noted "the persistence with which the same families, or individuals, will year after year seek re-engagement at the hands of honest employers" (Saville-Kent 1893 cited in Loos 1982:154). Official reports tended to emphasise the abuses attendant on the marine industries and used them as an argument for increasing government control, particularly of the recruitment of labour. The pearlshell fishery in particular was very lucrative and soon became one of Queensland's major exports (Loos 1982:120), and the State wanted access to this income. The arguments advanced in support of State control were tinged with social attitudes that are relevant to this study and will be examined in more detail.

Noel Loos has extensively discussed the impact of what he calls "The Sea Frontier" in his 1982 book *Invasion and Resistance*. He documents a tense give and take between employers and their Aboriginal workforce and wider labour pool. He describes abuses such as forced recruitment, non-return of workers to their own countries on expiry of contract, non-payment of wages and sexual interference with Aboriginal

women (Loos 1982: 128-137). But he also notes that the Aborigines affected by these industries were reacting intelligently to the new situation (Loos 1982:141). They resisted forced recruiting and sometimes signed on with the intention of absconding with the boat (Loos 1982:147), a course of action also adopted when captains refused to return crew to their home country. Some Aborigines went to the boats in exchange for food, absconded at the first opportunity and returned home, sometimes to sign up on another boat for a similar payment (Loos 1982:148). Indeed, Loos notes (1982:148) "some Aborigines were obviously exploiting the exploiters." Life on the boats offered excitement and access to European goods (Chase 1981:11), as well as freedom from some traditional restraints, such as strictly regulated marriages. The attractions of the industries probably grew as the appearance of more and more Europeans in the north meant less and less access for Aboriginal people to their home countries. But official interpretations of Aboriginal involvement in the industries were blind to the fact that Aboriginal people might actively pursue this way of life.

Contemporary commentators such as Saville-Kent, Roth, the missionary Nicholas Hey and the Government Resident at Thursday Island, Douglas, judged all Aboriginal actions against their own conceptions of them as helpless savages corrupted by contact with "unspeakably squalid and dirty" industries (Douglas cited in Loos 1982:150) which were, in their opinion, operated by the dregs of white society. Such disdain for the labour and labourers of the industries justified the extension of official control not only over the industries but over the Aboriginal people themselves. They were deemed to need protection from the physical and moral contamination of such an occupation. While Hey admitted that approximately 50% of Aboriginal recruits volunteered willingly, increasing governmental control of Aborigines meant this choice was less and less open to them. Both Northern and Southern Protectors of Aborigines opposed their employment in the marine industries (Loos 1982:153), although the only alternative offered was usually confinement to a reserve. Here we see the reflection of middle-class attitudes to work as well as race in official concern for Aborigines in these industries. The extra concerns

raised by the employment of women were similarly shaped by the attitudes of the official class towards women generally, namely, that they would be economically dependant on men, rather than be workers in their own right. For instance, in Roth's list of marriages between Aboriginal women and non-Aboriginal men during 1901, the occupation of the husbands are recorded, but only the degree of Aboriginal descent of the wives (Roth 1902:9).

After Sheridan's mention of women's skills as divers in his 1877 report, we hear very little of their role as labourers. Instead, they are mentioned almost exclusively as victims of sexual abuse or as prostitutes. While it was deplored that rough seamen kidnapped Aboriginal women, sometimes very young women, and boasted of having sexual relations with them, it also became accepted wisdom among Whites that Aboriginal men sold their women "for such cheap considerations as appeal to the cupidity of savages" (Jack 1922:679). The women were deemed to have no say in the matter and there was no consideration that attitudes to sexual matters might be different in another society. Loos notes that "prostitution" in Aboriginal society was an extension of the "Practice of proffering the sexual services of selected women as a means of ending or averting hostility with another group" (Loos 1982:149; see also Tonkinson 1990:129; Williams and Jolly 1992:18).

Most of the trouble in the industries attributed to the presence of women (Roth 1902:5) seems to have arisen out of cases where Aboriginal men objected to their wives being taken from them without their consent and used sexually by White men. It is impossible now to know how willingly any of these women went with their White lovers, but some probably did (Anderson 1983:494). However illusory the material benefits of such unions to Aboriginal women (Evans 1982:15), people do make decisions on the basis of short term advantage. However, individual women are usually spoken of in the passive voice as "having been taken away to the fisheries and not returned" (Loos 1982:150), or as having been "debauched and appropriated" (Douglas, cited in Loos 1982:150). On the other hand, Anderson is of the opinion that in southeastern Cape

York Peninsula “Women's actions [in establishing relationships with white men and evading promised marriage partners] seemed to contribute to a general decrease in the power of old men to control marriage” (Anderson 1983:495). It is necessary, then, to admit that Aboriginal women as well as men might be attracted by the adventure and freedom from customary restrictions offered by the arrival of new industries.

For the nineteenth century observers, the whole industry was “squalid”, beyond the laws and moral order of the State. The conventional idea, though often not the reality, of womanhood was concerned with home and children, self-effacing submission to the natural leadership of men. Aboriginal women who chose to go, alone or with their husbands, to work in these industries hardly fitted such an ideal. Instead the authorities represented their involvement, except for a few women admitted to be following their husbands into the industries (Roth 1902:5), as the product of either coercion or debauchery. Aboriginal women were thus understandable in terms of what was “known” about women, while put in a position of needing White men to regulate their employment, marriages and place of habitation, for their own protection. The abuses, the stealing of wives from their husbands, kidnapping of young girls and so on undoubtedly happened, but *families* still chose to work in the industry. Facets of the pre-contact division of labour in which women as well as men were economically productive seem to have persisted here, not without demographic and probably social effect on the home communities.

Loos (1982:150-1) provides some demographic facts about Aboriginal employment on the fisheries. Quoting figures for the west coast of the peninsula provided by the Mapoon missionary, Hay, he finds a sexual imbalance, with men outnumbering women, and suggests that the women were away on the fisheries. The men who remained were mainly too old for work on the boats. There was also a small number of children, and Loos attributes this to social upheaval. It has been suggested that Aboriginal fertility rates were always rather low (Cowlshaw 1979:238), however, and it is hard to assess the population figure for Mapoon. Loos argues (1982:151) that

the absence of young men led to a decline in the prestige of the ritual life. According to Bern's argument, rehearsed in the last chapter, this would have tended to equalize gender relations, especially as women now had an economic independence that could not be appropriated to support ritual business. However, it should be noted that initiation ceremonies were still being carried out among the Lamalama in the late 1920s, and thus the potential for this to be used as a mechanism that engendered male domination persisted until that time.

Bureaucratic control gradually limited all Aboriginal involvement in the fisheries, but particularly female involvement, due to European ideas about the suitability of this life for women and the likelihood of their presence causing trouble amongst men. For instance, Roth and Bennett were in accord that "such employment will prove detrimental to the women . . . on the other hand, since women have been out of the boats, serious crimes by aboriginals employed in the fisheries has been infrequent" (Roth 1902:5). When the last pearling boats were visiting Port Stewart just before the Second World War, an agreement existed between some of the Lamalama men and their Japanese captains that they would be picked up by their regular captain at the beginning of every season and dropped home again at the end. None of these men is now alive but their children report the arrangement as having been satisfactory, even enjoyable, although it is admitted that crewmen occasionally had to walk home from distant ports at the end of the season. Chase (1981) describes a similar situation between seamen and Aborigines further north in Lloyd Bay. There is, however, no memory of women's going away on the boats among the Lamalama. By the middle of this century it was considered to be a man's job—an attitude that had been learnt from Europeans.

In many ways, it had been easy for Aboriginal people to engage with the marine industries. There were cultural continuities in the kinds of exchange set up with outsiders, and people going away from their home country expected to return to it. The land, the backbone of Aboriginal social groupings, was not in contention. Pressure from mining and pastoralism soon made access to land problematic, and may account for some

Aborigines' willingness to go away to sea, where an independent life on the fisheries was the alternative to a highly regulated life on a mission or reserve or in the service of a White employer. I turn now to examine the ways in which people of the Princess Charlotte Bay hinterland, and the Coen region generally, coped with competition over land.

Access to Land

The first Whites to arrive in any numbers in ECCYP were miners, but the arrival of miners in any locality meant that cattlemen would not be long in coming to supply the needs of the goldfields (see map on p77). The Palmer was opened in 1873 and in 1874 Harry Jones took up Boralga (now on Olive Vale), near Laura, extending his holdings to include Koolburra in 1883 (Lack 1961-2:975). In 1876 Sefton's party found payable gold at Coen and the next year Nicholas Armbrust drove a mob of cattle to the field.⁵ The first permanent source of beef in the Coen area was provided by the establishment of Lalla Rookh by the Massey brothers in 1882. They later also took on Rokeby to the north of Coen (Lack 1961-2:965). For many years the pastoralists were very few in number and can have presented no great threat in themselves to the local Aborigines, although their stock had an effect on the native wildlife, competing for fodder and disrupting waterholes. In the immediate vicinity of the Palmer Aborigines soon learned to fear and fight whitefellas, as we have seen, but on the stations an uneasy accommodation was soon reached. Some of the forces at play are illustrated in the following story of a "stick-up" at Koolburra in 1897.

5 According to an obituary of his widow, Mrs Rebecca Armbrust, in the *Northern Herald*, Saturday, 16 August 1930.

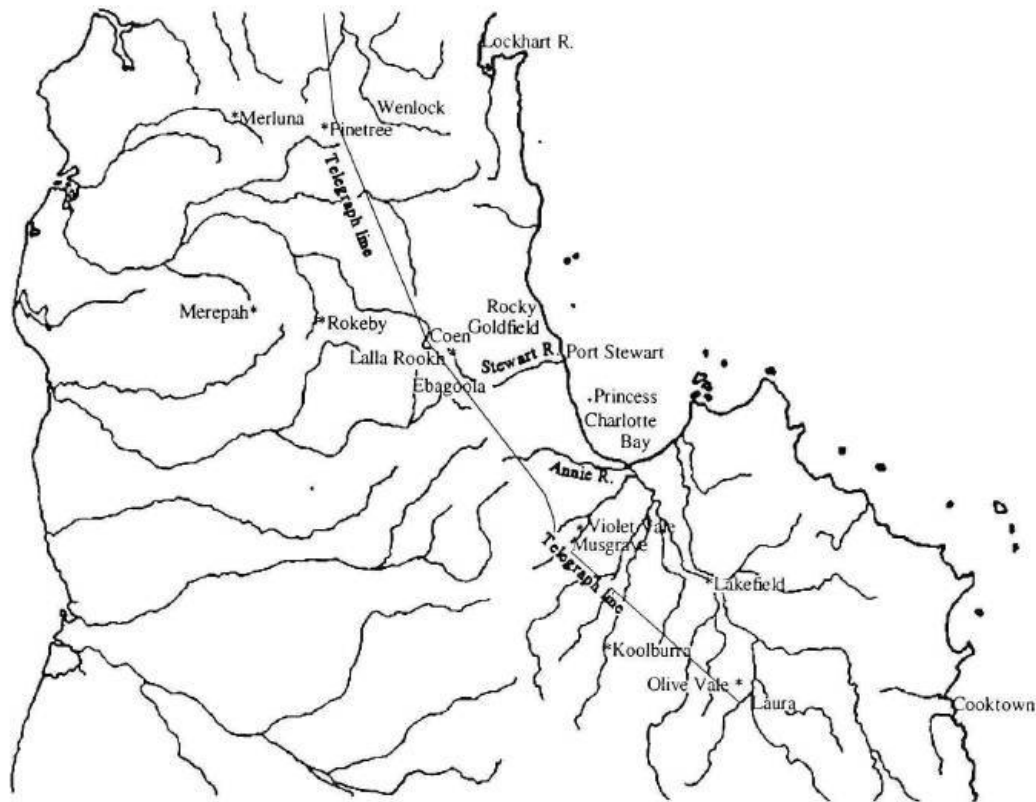


Figure 7: European sites in Central Cape York Peninsula

Coen	1876/1892	Telegraph Line	1883-86
Olive Vale	1877	Port Stewart	1887/8(?)
Lalla Rookh	1882	Lakefield	1882
Merluna	1883	Koolburra	1883
Rokeby	1884	Pinetree	1887
Wenlock	1892	Rocky Goldfield	1893
Ebagoola	1899	Violet Vale	1908

In April of that year Mr Collings of Koolburra complained that seven “Blacks” had held up his station whilst the local Police had been away on patrol. Inspector Lamond of Cooktown investigated and this is his account of the incident:

[Mrs Collings] stated that seven blacks had come to the station during Mr Collings absence. Mrs Collings when she saw the blacks approaching the station got frightened and locked herself and children in the house, the blacks asked Mrs Collings for flour and tobacco. Mrs Collings told them that Mr Collings would be back directly and fortunately Mr Collings did return to the station before the blacks were long there, as soon as they saw Mr Collings

coming they cleared. The blacks did not touch anything but walked around the place looking in at the kitchen and store room.⁶

Collings himself claimed the Aborigines struck the kitchen walls with their “murderous weapons” and he complained of previous occasions when cattle and horses had been killed and pleaded with the police for more protection or he would have to “abandon the country”.⁷ The local sergeant of police was of the opinion that the Aborigines had gone to the station for rations and work and very much blamed Collings for leaving his family alone. Inspector Lamond of Cooktown wired his superiors in Brisbane that “some settlers do not take ordinary precautions and expect the police to do everything”⁸.

This incident illustrates some of the strategies Aboriginal people used to minimize the impact of the cattle industry. As Collings complains, cattle and horses were often speared. The cattle drove native wildlife off the waterholes and competed for forage, to the detriment of indigenous species. As a result Aboriginal people's livelihood was affected and they may have been spearing the stock in this case simply for food. The seriousness of the threat of violence cannot be taken simply at face value, however. By this date Aboriginal people in the region would have been well aware of the likely penalty for any violent action, not only in retaliatory raids on their camps but in terms of their exclusion from their own territories. After Aborigines tried to throw the first settlers off Merluna station, north of Coen, in 1888, killing the owner Watson, Aborigines were kept off the station for 20 years (Boyd 1963). In fact very few white deaths are documented for the pastoral industry in this region. Loos' (1982:232-247) list for the years 1885 to 1896 identifies only six deaths (out of a total on all frontiers of 120) attributable to Aboriginal violence. On the other hand, the first owner of Koolburra, Jones, had in fact been murdered by an Aborigine said to belong to one of the Princess

6 Inspector Lamond to Police Commissioner, 4 May 1897 (QSA file COL/140).

7 Collings to Inspector Lamond, 19 April 1897, (in COL/140).

8 Inspector Lamond to Police Commissioner, 26 April 1897 (in COL/140).

Charlotte Bay tribes (Pike 1983:95). In this case, however serious the threat of violence may have become had not the armed Collings returned, when the sergeant later interviewed a nearby encampment of Aborigines about the incident they told him they had only asked for work. A more successful strategy than open conflict by which Aboriginal people could retain access to their own territory and whitefella goods was to work for the settler who occupied their land. This response turned out to have different consequences for Aboriginal women as opposed to their menfolk, again, as in the marine industries, because of European assumptions about the kinds of work women should do and the way work was organized.

The early cattle runs were vast and isolated and needed cheap labour to be economically viable. Since it was hard to get White workers to go to the more remote areas, station owners had to utilize Aboriginal labour. The actual working of the cattle has always been the most desirable job amongst station workers, providing the best wages, least supervision and most prestige. Especially in the early days, both Aboriginal men and women took part in stockwork despite the physical demands of the job. In some areas, the coming of more White women to the stations often meant restrictions in the employment of Aboriginal women (McGrath 1987:58; Huggins and Blake 1992:52). But here again, as in the marine industries, it was very often the sexual abuse of female Aboriginal workers and official attitudes to proper female behaviour that combined to restrict women's opportunities for employment.

Roth (1902:1,2) records that on some stations women workers were kept away from their husbands and forced into sexual relations with white workers, they were not always paid, even if their husbands were, and if the husband was sacked, his wife was sometimes expected to stay with the employer. Roth used such abuses to argue that anyone who employed Aboriginal labour in any capacity should register their employment with the local Protector.

The insistence upon agreements is conducive to a great deal of good, not only in enabling the blacks to get redress where necessary, but also in tending

to destroy the long-cherished and still-prevalent idea amongst many Europeans of their having any 'vested interests' in the aboriginals (Roth 1902:2).

Although Roth and others were genuinely concerned to protect Aborigines, the necessity to register workers gave the authorities a great deal of control in matters such as where and when Aboriginal people could work, including the kinds of work that women could be employed to do. There is nothing in Aboriginal responses, however, to suggest that they looked on certain kinds of station work as unacceptable for women.

Those few women still alive in the period of my fieldwork who had worked on the cattle in their youth were proud of the skills they learned and their physical toughness, but acknowledged that such a life was particularly hard on women. The relentless work schedule of the muster and the cattle drive made no allowance for other demands on workers. One elderly Aboriginal woman recalled that she was riding stock in the Laura area when she went into labour with her first child. She was in difficulties and had to ride back to the township for attention. By the time she got there and the air ambulance had been summoned it was too late to save the child, and she herself nearly died. "After that, nomo then." She returned to stockwork but never had another child. This incident, far from an uncommon one, occurred before the Second World War, but even much later than that Aboriginal women were losing children because of their station jobs. Another woman told of how, in the mid-1960s, while working as stock-camp cook on a station north of Coen, she lost a sick baby when she had to accompany the stockmen away from the station on a muster, leaving her child unattended. Although stockwork was prestigious and enjoyed by Aboriginal women, it had its costs.

On the other hand, work around the station house was physically easier and gave the same access to European goods. Advantageous alliances could sometimes be set up with the station lessees, most of whom were single men, or men with wives in distant towns. Robert Tonkinson (1990:128-131) has documented how, at least in Mardujarra experience, women who worked in bachelor pastoral homesteads became the major

conduit for the flow of goods and services between pastoralists and Aboriginal groups. Tonkinson further argues that this meant a relative rise in status for women, who now controlled resources in a way not possible in pre-contact societies. In the terms being used here, we could call this moment in colonial history a potential “node of transformation”, where an existing practice, the role of women as ambassadors between potentially hostile groups, caused a shift in power relations under different circumstances. Tonkinson notes that Mardujarra men “traditionally claimed strong rights to the appropriation of female sexuality. These rights were sometimes exercised in cementing ties with, discharging debts to, or atoning for crimes against, other men” (Tonkinson 1990:129). In Tonkinson's analysis, relationships between Mardujarra women and European men were condoned by local men as a way of incorporating Europeans and their goods into local networks of reciprocal obligations.

Closer to ECCYP, Anderson (1983) has documented how Aboriginal people in southeast Cape York Peninsula negotiated a place for themselves within the newly arrived capitalist system in a similar fashion, by seeking to set up reciprocal obligations with the newcomers. It is not clear now to what extent women working in station houses actively sought to ameliorate their own and their people's relationships with the whitefellas, nor to what extent the prevailing gender hegemony might have been influenced by such changes. Unlike the Mardujarra case, in ECCYP men and women of the same family were usually employed on the same station, so that men were not dependant on women for access to their own country. However station-house work may have situated ECCYP women with respect to their menfolk, it had several advantages over stockwork. Older relatives were allowed to accompany station workers and were given rations, sometimes in return for some light duties around the station house. There was thus always someone to look after children and provide company for the house workers in their leisure time. Although such workers did not have such free access to country as those working on the stock, they usually had a period to themselves during the day when they could get away from European supervision. Employers typically were

not concerned with what their workers did in their free hours, as long as they conformed to expectations when “on duty”. A typical set of duties for ECCYP station house workers is described by a former ‘missus’ thus:

The girls were all trained to cook, they could make bread and cook a meal as well as I could. When I was living at [the station] I even trained them to perm my hair . . . There was a policy that every afternoon they had to have their bath and put on clean dresses and clean clothes, and they would wash the kitchen dishes after the evening meal.⁹

Aboriginal men who worked for this same woman remember and resent being made to carry her on their backs across the river that ran by the station house. Work around the station house was thus highly regulated and full of petty irritations.

The major disadvantage of this kind of work, however, was the way it restricted access to country. Although the few hours off in the afternoon allowed houseworkers to go fishing and pursue other bush activities, the necessity to be back on duty the same afternoon necessarily restricted the range of country they could visit. Aboriginal men nowadays boast of knowing all their country because they rode over it in their days as stockmen. Another thing that added to the prestige of stockwork was the fact that, where initiation rites had ceased being practiced, the transition to adulthood was marked by employment on the cattle (McGrath 1987:167). When today's older generation of Lamalama men were young, cattle were being driven to abattoirs at Mareeba, an arduous trip of six weeks. Being allowed to work on such a cattle drive is remembered by some as the event that marked their acceptance into adult society. Elsewhere, working in the marine industries was regarded in the same light (Chase 1981:13). The pattern of extensive travel, physical ordeal, prestige and gender exclusivity involved in droving, as practiced by whites, mirrored aspects of initiation and made it easier for Aboriginal people latterly to support the White view that women should not do such work. Jacobs (1989) has pointed out that Aboriginal men have sometimes taken advantage of

9 Eileen Wassell in interview with Bruce Rigsby.

European constructions of their role as custodians of country to gain political advantage over Aboriginal women. Here, too, men have capitalised on a European construction of the role of the stockworker and the male, first, to gain access to and knowledge of land, and then to assert their right to speak for country over that of their womenfolk. As we shall see, this strategy has had limited benefits for the men of ECCYP. One reason for this is the shift of power locally away from the failing beef industry and towards the town-based service industries. Before considering that shift, we must unravel the interplay of domesticity, gender relations and the town.

Gendered White Domesticity

I have been arguing above that the incorporation of Aboriginal women into the work of the new frontier industries is indicative of an assumption on the part of Aboriginal people that women as well as men had a role to play in production, reflecting their position of independent producer in the indigenous economy. What then of the role and impact of White women on the frontier? Although some historians would like to exempt women of the dominant group from responsibility for colonization (Bulbeck 1992), others have called for a more careful consideration of their contribution to the process (Lake 1981; McGrath 1987; Huggins and Blake 1992; Curthoys 1993). Despite the rhetoric about the proper role of women from the colonial officials, White women were in fact working hard on the frontier and their work helped to ensure the success of the colonial project. Their work could be overlooked in official accounts because it fell largely into the domestic sphere, but as I shall argue below, it was the precisely the provision of domesticity that turned the frontier into permanent settlement.

The role of Mrs Collings in the affair recounted above is in many ways emblematic of that of many other women on the White frontier. While her husband went away to work his stock, she was left at the station house with the children. Moreover, she was

deemed, by herself and others, to be incapable of defending herself—it required the presence of her husband, and beyond him the state, to do that. Mr Collings used her vulnerability as a lever to attempt to get more state support, in the shape of the continuous presence of the police. This was a matter of great concern to Collings, who, two years later, wrote direct to his member of Parliament once again threatening to abandon the country,¹⁰ in protest against plans to move the police camp from Musgrave to Coen. Over the years, successive governments used the safety of the White population as one justification for increasing State control of Aborigines¹¹, and appeals such as Collings' were influential in creating a climate of opinion that made this possible. When the policeman grumbled that some squatters expected the police to do everything, he was acknowledging the current belief that homesteads that contained women and children needed extra protective measures.

It was common for the lives of women on stations to revolve around house and children, probably including the tending of a kitchen garden that provided much needed vitamins and roughage in the frontier diet. Peter Bell (1991:176) has pointed out that amongst alluvial miners (where there were very few domestic groups), malnutrition was a major contributor to European miners' morbidity and mortality. On some goldfields the dietary deficiencies of the usual salt beef and damper diet were in part made good by the market gardens and eating houses of the Chinese. On cattle stations “. . . where there is a good woman, there is always a good vegetable garden with the happiest results” (MacQuarrie 1929:188). The domestic duties of the white missus, then, were directly contributing to the work of colonization by ensuring the continuing health of the colonists.

But there was not always a White woman on these isolated stations, even when the (invariably male) squatter was married. In ECCYP it was very common during the first

10 Letter from J.S. Collings to J. Hamilton, M.L.A., 15 May 1899 (QSA file HOM/A23).

11 See, for instance, Sub-Inspector Garraway of Coen as quoted in Roth (1900).

two or three generations of colonization for married women to run their own separate business. Typically, they would manage some sedentary business in the town or at Port Stewart while their husbands ran stations or carting businesses. Thus, in the last decade of the last century and early this century, Charlie Bassani carted goods from Port Stewart to Coen while his wife, Charlotte, managed a hotel at Port Stewart; Charlie Silver ran Silver Plains station while his wife ran a milkrun and served teas to travellers, and Herb Thompson managed Pine Tree Station while his wife ran the Exchange Hotel in Coen. The Thompsons' daughter, Eileen Wassell, has said, "In the early days the women didn't live on the station, they lived in Coen, the men went on the stations and just made their trips in and out of Coen."¹² Later, Mrs Wassell herself ran the hotel in town while her husband did office work and pursued his entomological research on Silver Plains station. The kinds of quasi-domestic services provided by businesses such as the hotel make it tempting, though inaccurate, to describe Coen as the domestic dimension of the stations. In fact, the businesses carried on there were often more productive in economic terms than the stations. But Coen was a service centre, and those services were provided largely by women, so that it did indeed stand in somewhat of a domestic contrast to the working ambience of the stations.

Although these business women were working as hard as their men for the European development of the region, traditional gender ideologies can be seen reflected in the sedentary and domestic nature of their businesses compared to the travelling entailed in the men's work. Much of the women's work was similar in kind to the taken-for granted, unpaid housework that all White women were expected to do. Mrs May Armbrust ran the hotel and then the guesthouse for many years from the 1920s until her death in the 60s, and was simultaneously cook, chambermaid, bookkeeper and barmaid. Despite such heavy workloads, the quasi-domestic nature of these occupations allowed the women to maintain an image of themselves as primarily ladylike creatures of home and hearth. Mrs Armbrust's daughter denied that having all these jobs at once meant her

12 Interview with Bruce Rigsby, 3 March 1990.

mother worked hard, since she “would never so much as have chopped a stick in her life.”¹³ Such “rough” work was carried out by Aboriginal servants and this appropriation of labour is of course the most obvious way in which White women contributed to the impact of colonization on Aboriginal people. It gave economic advantage and allowed for a direct exercise of power that is still bitterly resented by some Aboriginal people. It also indicates that Aboriginal women were not conceived of as being in quite the same category as White women. Colonial authorities might have considered that they had no place in the squalor of the marine industries, but neither were they considered to be ladylike, civilizing presences, as White women were.

The separation of women's work into the domestic or quasi-domestic chores of hotel management versus “unladylike” physical labour purveyed a culturally-specific ideology of men's and women's place. White attitudes to women's work are well summarized in the following passage from a book describing the journey of the first motor car to Cape York in 1928. The description is of Mrs May Armbrust, who was running the hotel in Coen at that time. The author, Hector Macquarrie, described her as “the best of Coen”:

About thirty-five, with brick-red hair—thinking often of the two daughters at school South—keeping their room pretty like a doll's house, all pale blue with cream curtains and snowy mosquito nets—a marvellous housekeeper and a superb cook—and a great gardener—does not know she is clever—not humble, not belligerently modest, but most attractive when she does not realize what that clean sweet bedroom and that excellent cool meal with the tomato salads and green vegetables mean to tired travellers . . . (MacQuarrie 1929:208).

The world portrayed here is one in which men travel and get tired while women care about children, prettiness, cleanliness and achieve their goals, it is implied, by innate and unconscious daintiness rather than sheer hard work. In a manner that is common in discussions of European gender relations, women's contributions are at once

13 Author's interview with Irene Taylor, June 1992.

acknowledged and trivialized. Confined to the domestic, no matter what they actually do, they are forever isolated from the prestigious productive worlds of men. Here the operative contrast is not between a public world that is male and a private world that is female. Rather, there is, on the one hand, the capitalist world of the frontier industries which opened up new territories, always deemed to be economically profitable, or on the brink of productivity. On the other hand, there was the domain that was conceived of as existing to support and service those industries, represented by hotels and households. This latter domain stood in the same relation to the frontier industries as the domestic always does in the capitalist world—necessary to the maintenance and reproduction of industry, but rarely included in its book-keeping.

Aboriginal women's position in such a scheme of things was to some extent anomalous. Debarred from the same participation in marine and pastoral industries that men enjoyed, their "domestic" labour often included extremely heavy physical labour (Huggins and Blake 1992:52; McGrath 1987:52-3). Gradually, the classical non-Aboriginal association of women and the domestic realm and the subordination of those two categories to men and to men's work came to be considered appropriate for Aboriginal people too. This can be seen most clearly in the history of the Coen town reserves (p93), where Aboriginal families came to be confined while (mostly male) station workers were away on the cattle. Paradoxically, this had advantages for Aboriginal women in ECCYP in the long run, as I shall argue, in placing them closer to the emerging centres of administrative power. But even in the White world, despite expressed attitudes, the domestic realm was important in creating the town. Coen began life as a goldfield, but it was the presence of the domestic, service realm that kept it alive after the gold ran out. Insofar as the town was in some ways a domestic centre in contrast to the "working" world of the stations, so it represented the domestic side of mining, and ultimately it came to be a service centre for the administration of Aboriginal affairs.

The Domestic Realm, Aborigines and Coen

In the early days, miners were always the most transient part of the population, ever chasing El Dorado in each new report of workable gold in some recently discovered creek. It was only with the establishment of the more capital-intensive reef mining that the mining population started to settle down. In 1893 the Mining Warden reported the population of Coen as 50 miners, six carters, five merchants, 37 women and children and 27 Chinese gardeners¹⁴, that is, 37 women and children out of a total of 125. The gender of the Chinese gardeners is not known, but they are presumed to be male. It is not known whether there were any Chinese women on the field. Numbers peaked in 1907 when the total population reached 273, of whom 140 were women and children. Women and children were always counted as a single category in the mining warden's reports and this probably reflects women's roles and status in the mining community. No woman ever registered a mining claim and doubtless most of the European women on the field would have had their hands full keeping house and rearing children under rough bush conditions. The town declined rapidly as the gold ran out, but the proportion of women and children increased until in 1918 women and children accounted for 40 out of a total population of 67.¹⁵ The presence of women and children, as much as that of the traders and pastoralists, is a significant feature of the permanent township in comparison with the transient goldfield. Their presence helped consolidate the colonization of the region. It not only indicated the intention to stay but also increased the scope for various expressions of state power, such as the maintenance of a permanent police station. The police were the agents of state power most often encountered by Aboriginal people, whether police were keeping them away from the town or, later, forcing them to live there.

14 Queensland Department of Mines Report, 1893.

15 Queensland Department of Mines Report, 1918:70.

Exclusion

As with station owners such as Collings, safety was the excuse police used to keep Aborigines out of the town initially, although in this instance the safety of the Aborigines was said also to be a factor. In the report of his journey to the region in 1896, the Police Commissioner, Parry-Okeden lamented of Coen that “Though it is not long ago since the miners decided by vote that the blacks should be ‘allowed in’, already I noticed signs among them of the evil habits and diseases that invariably follow the adoption of the vicious habits of the whites” (Parry-Okeden 1897:3). Despite the miners’ decision to allow the Aborigines to have access to the town, the police seem to have preferred to keep them out if possible. In July 1897, Acting Sergeant Smith reported that he had patrolled from Coen towards the head of the Stewart River, where he met the Coen “Blacks”. He said they were “. . . keeping out of town now and appear to be quite contented and happy, with the exception of four gins who are suffering from syphilis, The others appeared to be in fairly good health [and he expected] no difficulty now in keeping them out of town . . .”¹⁶

The spread of syphilis through contact between Aboriginal people and sailors, stockworkers and miners was a preoccupation of many officials, especially Roth, the first Protector of Aborigines. As a doctor of medicine, he was better placed to diagnose the disease than most people, but it is remarkable how consistently he reports it to be more widespread than people such as A/Sgt Smith perceived. Roth’s report for 1899 states that the Aboriginal people of the eastern coast of the Peninsula were “suffer[ing] markedly with venereal disease” (Roth 1900:583), yet Smith reports¹⁷ seeing only one individual with syphilis while patrolling from Stewart River to the Massey. As a result of prevailing attitudes to sex, race and gender, the remedy for sexually contracted diseases

16 Report to Inspector Lamond, Cooktown from A/Sgt Smith, Coen, 21 July 1897 (QSA file POL/J19, batch 410).

17 Report number 127/97, 16 August 1897, previously quoted (in POL/J19, batch 410).

was considered to be control of only one partner to its transmission—in this case the Aborigines. Suffering from syphilis was the reason given for many removal orders, allowing Aboriginal people to be taken by force to reserves such as Palm Island. Sexual relations between whitefellas and Aboriginal women brought in their wake death, sterility and forced removal to the extent that significant population decline among Aborigines probably resulted (Roth 1900:3). Furthermore, control of disease could be used by authorities as an excuse to confine and restrict Aboriginal populations.

Other diseases besides syphilis came with the Whites and doubtless had their effect on the Aboriginal population, although strictly local reports are silent. It is known that in other parts of the State, for instance, in the Burnett region in southern Queensland, smallpox preceded the settlers by some years (Curr 1887 Vol III:121). Introduced diseases such as measles decimated Aboriginal populations on the northern Peninsula (Mullins 1988: 183, 387) and Roth (1902:9) reports consumption and influenza on the western Peninsula. The only evidence that exists for the demography of Aboriginal groups in ECCYP in the late nineteenth century is indirect. For instance, Protectors reports included numbers of blankets distributed yearly to Aboriginal people. Roth thought these statistics to be a good guide to real population numbers (Roth 1902:3) but the possible effect of disease and Aboriginal fear of police that kept them away from distribution centres must be borne in mind when considering this evidence.

In 1900 at Coen, blankets were given to 95 males, 91 females and 2 children (Roth 1901:1331). No other centre in the list records this very low proportion of children. The figures are even stranger the next year when blankets were distributed to 123 men, 57 women and 3 children (Roth 1902:4), again a disproportion that stands out in comparison with other centres in the table. It seems unlikely that the numbers of children in the area were really as low as this unless an epidemic affecting only children had occurred. The rise in numbers of men getting blankets, and the fact that diseases considered to be childhood afflictions in our society, such as measles, usually affect everyone in a population with no acquired immunity, suggest that disease was not

responsible for the absence of children in Coen. Nor does the generally low fertility rate (Roth 1902:14, Cowlshaw 1979:238) seem sufficient to account for it.

The remaining possibility is that the children were kept away from the whitefellas, left in camp, and if this is true, the decrease in numbers of women collecting blankets may also be seen to be significant. While the police thought the town was too dangerous for the Aborigines, the Aborigines may have thought the police were too dangerous for them. The town was an ambivalent place for Aboriginal people. As on the stations, working in town provided a livelihood and protection from random “dispersals”, but also meant stricter supervision by White authorities. Aboriginal people had to juggle the benefits and costs of association with Whites dexterously if they were to retain any autonomy.

Inclusion

One way in which Aboriginal people in this as in other regions managed some autonomy for themselves was through exploiting the various power struggles and contradictions within White frontier society. For instance, individual employers were supposed to register all their Aboriginal employees with the local Protector who was responsible for supervising working conditions. While there are stories of employers and police acting in collusion to take advantage of workers in various ways, there were also cases of disagreement between police and employers over the control of workers.

Roth (1900:581) noted that in 1899, 112 permits to employ Aborigines had been issued in Coen and surrounding districts. In the same report Roth quotes the local Sub-Inspector as saying that many Aborigines and employers objected to work agreements being enforced and that they were often waived by local Protectors, “especially in dealing with ‘casual’ (e.g. cutting a little firewood etc.) as compared with ‘permanent’ employment” (Roth 1900:581). One can easily imagine that the kinds of work that were most readily dismissed as ‘casual’ labour were of a domestic nature and likely to be

carried out by Aboriginal women. When questioned about the tasks performed by Aboriginal servants in the past, older White settlers today talk about “a little bit of raking” or washing, and so on. In any case, such leeway in the enforcement of measures that were meant to protect Aboriginal people's interests soon led to abuses, the most persistent being that people were not registered in the proper way and so not paid. When Sub-Inspector Collyer investigated reports of such abuses in Coen in 1937, he found that people were working at the pub, for the butcher, and elsewhere without agreement, they were being cheated on the goods given at the store in lieu of wages, and that domestic help who should have been employed for two hours daily were being worked from six in the morning until eight at night.¹⁸

The struggle between the police and other employers to control Aboriginal labour is foreshadowed in contrasting attitudes held by police and settler in the Collings incident. The policeman in that instance found the Aborigines concerned to be tractable and reasonable, while Collings demanded police presence as protection from their “murderous weapons”. In the early days, settlers who complained of Aborigines disturbing their cattle¹⁹ or robbing the stationhouses²⁰ were likely to get very deflating answers from local police and magistrates, who often took the Aborigines' part against appeals for more control²¹.

Sometimes Aboriginal people were able to play these forces off against each other. When an employer wanted to assign someone to a job they didn't want, or one which wasn't well enough paid, they could appeal to the local Protector, who was usually the policeman. Thus, in 1955, a dispute arose between the Coen Protector and the lessees of Silver Plains station. The settlers wanted the remaining Lamalama camp at Port Stewart

18 Series of reports from Collyer to Inspector of Police, Cairns, throughout June, 1937 (in POL/J19).

19 Mr Thomas of Fairview to Police Commissioner, 15 April 1897 (QSA file POL/J14).

20 Sam Byrnes of Olive Vale to Cooktown Police Magistrate, 23 June 1893 (QSA file COL/139).

21 See official replies in the same files.

removed, claiming cattle were being killed. The local Protector denied this allegation²², claiming that the complaint arose from the refusal of some of the old men to work on the station. Initially, the Lamalama benefited from this situation as they were allowed to remain on their country without having to work on the station. Eventually, however, the conflict between the local policeman and the lessees of the station escalated until higher authorities intervened and the Lamalama were forcibly removed to Cowal Creek in 1961. Conflict between authorities gave them some breathing space, but ultimately the state extended its control. The gradual expansion of White control over Aborigines is perhaps best exemplified by the pattern of living accommodation available to Aboriginal people in the town itself. The history of the town reserves is a good example of the unthinking application of Western understandings of domesticity and gender to Aboriginal people, and the unexpected transformations that can result.

The Reserves

When Aborigines first started to live in Coen they might have one of two forms of accommodation. If they were signed on to work for someone in town accommodation was usually provided. The Armbrusts, for instance, built a large building on lot 19 on the town plan which housed all of their workers. Others, including pensioners and those not registered for permanent employment camped in their own style, for most of the year in the dry sandy bed of the river (see figure, p94). In 1937 the local Protector started appealing for reserve housing to be provided to get rid of this camp. Some people had previously been removed to the Uniting Church mission at Lockhart to the north of Coen, but that was foreign country and very much feared²³. Either they had returned or more people had drifted towards Coen, since the camp population remained a concern. Finally the policemen and trackers, with financial contributions from the Protector's

22 Letter to Deputy Director of Native Affairs, 13 July 1955.

23 A.M. Cooper, Coen Protector to Blakely, Chief Protector, 17 December 1940.

department and the Aborigines themselves, put up a building on what is commonly called the Old Reserve²⁴.



Figure 8: Aboriginal Camp, Coen, 1936 (Collection: John Oxley Library, Brisbane)

There are currently two Aboriginal reserves in Coen. The Old Reserve is the more southerly one (R10 Res 6851), near the junction of Oscar Creek and Coen River, and it was first gazetted on 6 April 1940. In May 1944 it was augmented by the inclusion of some vacant Crown land to its present size of 5.670ha. The resultant irregularly shaped block conforms to the shaded area on the 1897 surveyor's map, left over after certain

24 Coen Protector's annual report, 19 December 1941.

Aboriginal Responses to Colonization in the Area of Study

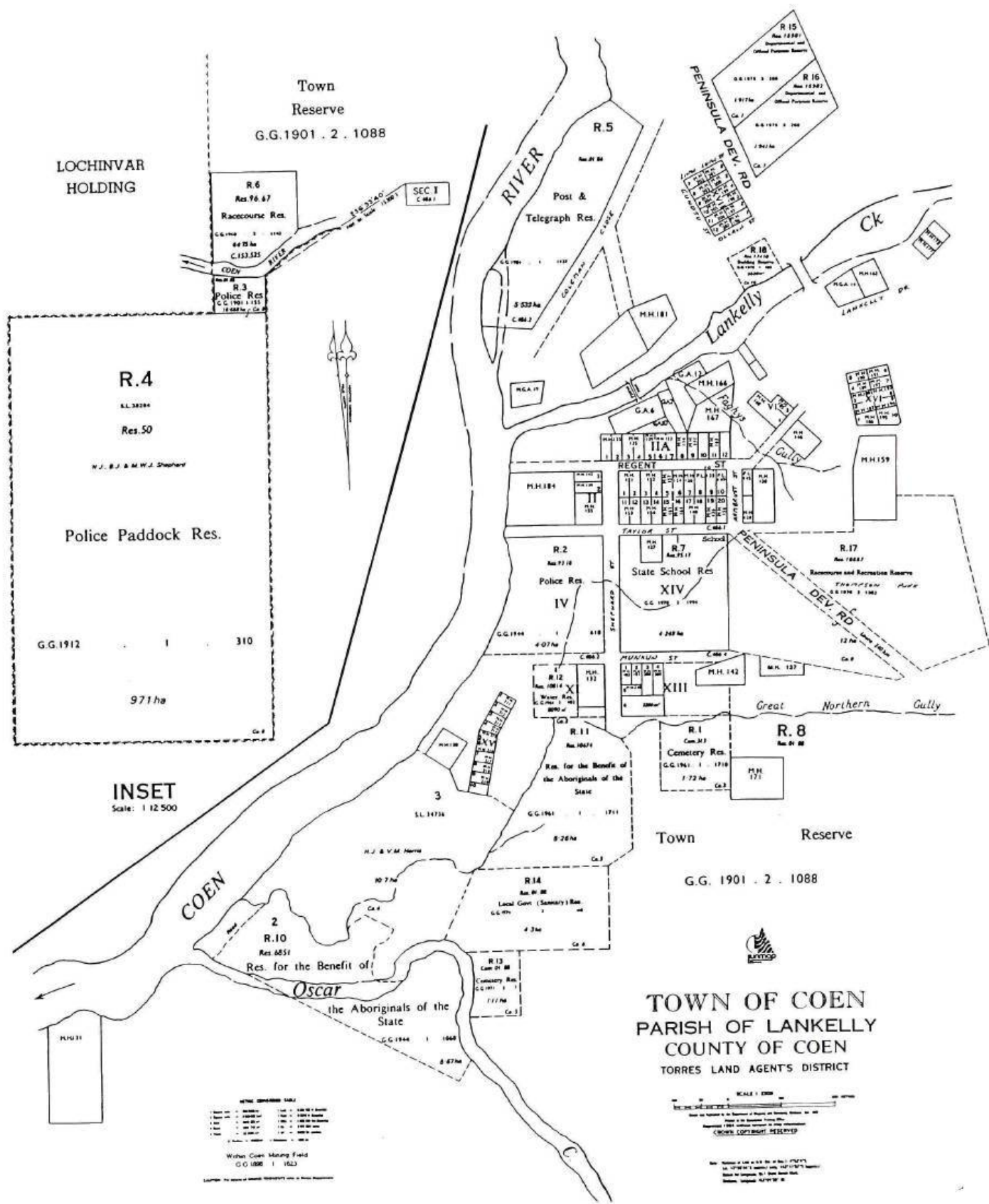


Figure 9: Town Plan, Coen

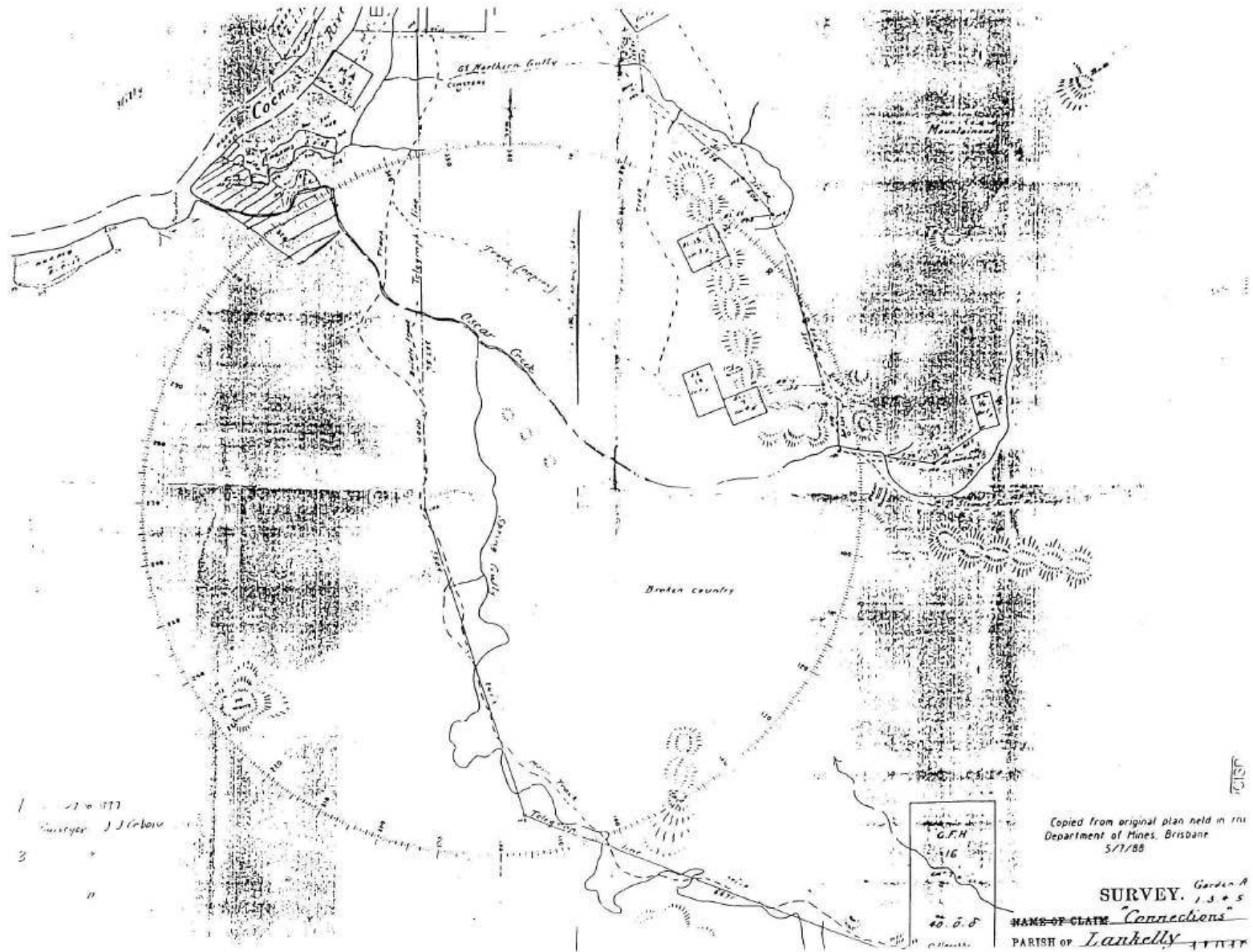


Figure 10: Surveyors Map, 1897

areas had been designated market gardens. This is where the building referred to above was erected. It was a large building and people remember it as having been divided into separate areas for separate families. It was destroyed in the cyclone of 16/17 December 1943 and nothing remains of it. While the legal status of the land has not been changed the area of the reserve has effectively been reduced by the encroachments of the leaseholders of special lease number 34736 on the northern border, and Lochinvar station on the south-eastern border. After the cyclone it was decided to move people closer to town to a site near where the old telegraph line crossed the Great Northern Gully. Judging from the 1897 map there was always a track near this point although the gully is remembered as being impassable in the wet season. This new site was on the side of the hill nearer to town than the old one, and within sight of the Police reserve. Aboriginal people were thus brought under closer supervision by European authorities while still being isolated from the town to some extent. Work was begun on new housing in 1944 and today's buildings are what remain of that construction.

Originally there were two rows of houses facing each other and identical in plan. The house at the top of the hill was twice as large as the others in the row which are small square cement floored fibro buildings. Cement was used for the flooring so that people could have fires beside them at night. The status of the land at this time is in doubt as the first gazetting traceable for it dates from 1961 when 5.260ha were set aside for the benefit of the Aboriginals of the State as R11 Res 10674. Some of this land was resumed in 1986 when the Peninsula Development Road was re-routed through the reserve. The eastern row of houses was lost and the area of the reserve reduced to 4.280ha. The gully was bridged at this time. During the 1970s the Department of Community Services began to provide housing in the town itself for Aboriginal people and in 1990-91 there were very few people living on Reserve 10674 and none on Reserve 6851.

Traditionally, the land enclosed by the Reserves belonged to Ayapathu people, but the proximity of Mungkanh and Kaanju countries meant that various groups might camp

along the river at various times and this practice continues, as people occasionally leave their houses during the Dry to camp in the riverbed. In the past, when the wet season made work on the stations impossible, people would be laid off and sent to live in town at the reserve. The Lamalama were lucky in having maintained a community on their own land that they could go to at such times. The immediate vicinity of the Stewart estuary was legally designated Public Purposes Reserve with the Township of Moojeeba slightly upstream, though after the early years of the century there was no permanent white presence there. The local grazier ran cattle in the area, but had no legal control over the land. In 1940 the local Protector²⁵ reported that there was a group of about 55 people permanently in the vicinity of Port Stewart, and eight old people always on the coast near Violet Vale. Lamalama people who worked on stations such as Silver Plains were able to return to relatives and a bush life during the Wet until the Port Stewart camp was destroyed in 1961.

Workers from other groups inland were not always so lucky, however, and the reserve was the only place for many of them to go when the station owner stood them down. After the introduction of Award wages in the 1960s, more people came on to the reserve, as stations that would previously have allowed dependents and unemployed workers to remain on the land now forced them off. Dependents came to include women at this time, as employers were more willing to pay award rates to men than to women. Workers who got too old for the job, and the sick, were also laid off to stay at the reserve. Aboriginal people who came into town for a holiday, such as the annual Races, also camped at the reserve, so that at times it was very crowded indeed. A letter from the Director of Native Affairs to the Director of Local Government, dated 14.10.1966, mentions 500 people staying there.

The history of the reserves is that of a gradual increase in centralized supervision of Aborigines by the State. From coming and going at will, camping along the river bank,

25 Annual report of Coen Protector, 26 January 1940.

Aboriginal people were first restricted to a small area out of sight of town near the junction of Oscar Creek and Coen River. They were then moved into regimented boxes in sight of the Police reserve but isolated from the town by the Great Northern gully, which was unbridged. This physical isolation was matched by social isolation for those living on the reserve: cut off from their traditional lands, they were also denied free access to the town. Aboriginal people working in Coen, and housed there by their employers, had to seek police permission to visit their relatives on the reserve. Reserve dwellers who appeared in town were liable to be questioned as to their purposes.

In short, from the whitefella point of view, the reserve functioned as a barracks for Aboriginal labour, and this is clearly expressed in the physical form of the remaining buildings. It was also a segregated area for Aborigines who were not employed in town but whose money was there. By 1969, the total Aboriginal income handled by the Coen Sergeant-Protector was in the vicinity of \$85 000, and people complained of not being able to get access to it²⁶. Without the Aboriginal population, not only would the stations and businesses have lacked labour, they would have lacked customers. From the Aboriginal point of view, the reserve provided some security, as well as proximity to the material advantages of town. The local policeman might come and break up a corroboree that he thought had been going on too long, but people were not able to be driven away to make room for cattle as happened at times on some stations. However, the increasing tendency for only men to be employed on stations, meant that as time went by, it was mainly women who lived continuously at the reserve. As Aboriginal children began to be accepted into the school, this pattern was reinforced.

26 Letter from Pastor Pohlner of Hopevale to Director of Aboriginal and Islander Affairs, 8 July 1969.

Table 1: Population of Coen Reserve²⁷

Year	Men	Women	Total adults	Children
1938	14	12	28	8
1965	8	11	19	15
1969			35	31
1970			41	32
1985	1	6	7	5
1990	2	4	6	4

Coen has had a school, from time to time as population allowed, since 1895²⁸, but it was not until 1947 that the first Aboriginal pupil was enrolled. At this time the numbers of children in town were once more low and a school was provided only intermittently in subsequent years. Early in the 1960s appeals were made by townspeople to the Education authorities to provide a permanent school again and more encouragement was given to Aboriginal people to send their children there, since without them the numbers would not have been enough to satisfy the Education Department. In families where there were children at school someone had to be in town to look after them. This was usually a mother, grandmother or aunt, especially after the introduction of Award wages, since women tended to be the first to lose their jobs. No official census of the reserve population is known to exist, but the table showing *Population of Coen Reserve* (p100) is based on occasional estimations of the population by Protectors and others. Residents are spoken of mainly as pensioners or the unemployed and it is not certain that all the men mentioned in the 1965 figures were actually resident on the reserve at the time. Noteworthy is the steadily increasing proportion of children there,

27 This table has been composed from various casual records from the Department of Aboriginal and Islander Affairs and a census made by the author in July 1990.

28 Queensland Department of Mines Annual Report, 1895:70.

until in 1970 there were 41 adults and 32 children living on the reserve²⁹. One of the inhabitants of the reserve in 1990-91 first came there in the 1960s so that her children could go to school. She now looks after her grandchildren while they attend the school and their parents are away on their outstation.

The reserve, then, stood in much the same relation to the town as White domesticity did to White productive labour. Although work went on there, it was a place people went to when they weren't working (i.e. employed). It provided services to those workers, but also to the wider society in providing casual labour. But important as the services Aboriginal people provided were, the fact that they formed a clientele for other services was probably more important in ensuring the survival of Coen as a town, especially following the Second World War. Aboriginal workers were paid mainly in goods from the local store. Their monetary income was banked for them by the local Protector in the local bank agency, the Post Office. The role of Protector of Aborigines was a major duty of the policeman, and the school could only be maintained when Aboriginal children swelled the numbers. Since Aborigines have been allowed access to alcohol as they choose in 1973, the pub has benefited. No Aboriginal person, however, has ever been storekeeper, postmaster, Protector, schoolteacher³⁰ or publican.

A declining beef industry and increasing bureaucratic concern with Aborigines has consolidated the power base of the region in the town. The Aboriginal people who had the longest and most continuous association with the town, the families who had always been employed there and the domestic groups on the reserve, thus had an advantage in some ways over their kin who had stayed on stations or bush camps through their familiarity with the town and its workings. Where access to ancestral territories was denied, the town provided the only political opportunities that existed for local Aboriginal people. For the Lamalama, however, who maintained a community largely on

29 According to a Health Department report, 21 July 1970.

30 Since my 1990-91 fieldwork the school has employed a qualified Aboriginal teacher.

their own terms until 1961, the importance of country and the knowledge and skills pertaining to country have always been particularly acute.

Lamalama Cultural Persistence and Transformation

A modern map of the Princess Charlotte Bay area will show that all the traditional Lamalama country, with the exception of one or two patches of Crown land, is under timber or grazing lease or has been converted to National Park, and this has largely been so since the beginning of colonization. When graziers first came to the area, they took up runs of nominally vast extent over which it was difficult for them to establish a permanent presence. Away from the immediate vicinity of the station house or the mustering camp, nothing much changed. The isolation of much of this country was increased by the nature of the soil and the climate. The coastal strip is low and sandy with large stretches of saltpan. It floods extensively in the wet season and water runs only below the river beds during the dry, making it difficult country for cattle. Northwest monsoons keep boats away from the coast for much of the wet season, and the only mining centre of any size in the area was the short lived Rocky River field of 1893, north of Port Stewart in Umpila territory. The coastal strip, then, was a place where foreign intrusion has always been minimal and at times it formed a recognized refuge for Aboriginal people. One elderly Thaypan-speaking woman in Laura in 1989 remembered being sent to be brought up by relatives living a bush life in the coastal area in the 1920s, probably before the removal of the main Lamalama camp to Port Stewart. As we have seen (p98), there was a camp of older people near Ngawal and Dinner Hole in the Violet Vale area at least until the Second World War, though the main camp was at Port Stewart by that time.

Lamalama people benefited from their isolation and the lack of White interest in their country to preserve their own style of living, but they had engaged with outsiders

from the first. As noted above, they bartered with Kennedy's expedition (p61) and had extensive traffic with the marine industries before those industries, and the workers they employed, were regulated by government (Roth 1900:583). They also worked for sandalwood gatherers, cutting trees, grubbing roots, hauling and stacking wood which was shipped from Port Stewart. Men, women and children all did such work and it should have been under regular work agreements with the local protector. The trade died away early in the lives of the present senior generation and they are uncertain about payment and regulation, remembering only that it was not work that people enjoyed much as it was physically hard and limited their movements too much. It was preferable to work the cattle and this many Lamalama did, mostly on Silver Plains station but also on Yarraden (which straddles Ayapathu and Lamalama country) and elsewhere. All of these occupations became impossible in the wet season and workers were routinely laid off then. They returned at these times to the camps and lifestyle of their relatives.

Donald Thomson visited Port Stewart in 1928 and 1929 and depicted the Lamalama as still living a wholly "traditional" bush-oriented lifestyle, hunting dugong and moving in a social world defined by their relationships with other Aboriginal groups. This was neither romanticism nor inaccuracy on Thomson's part since he saw the Lamalama when they were laid off from their work on the boats or the stations. Some of the young men depicted in his photographs later became the fathers of the present senior generation. They were already mature men when they started their families since traditional marriage practices such as mother-in-law bestowal and polygyny were still observed. So, for instance, the children of one of these men do not remember him going away to work on the pearling boats, though he spoke of it often as something he did for years in his younger days. In their lifetimes he worked mainly at the Port Stewart wharf or, after World War Two, with the carters who worked the road between the Annie River Landing and Coen. While he worked on the road his family travelled up and down the coast, living in the camps that their ancestors had always used and adapting their lifestyle to non-Aboriginal norms only so far as they had to or as suited them.

This man's eldest daughter remembered her mother scolding her to give up her string apron for a dress. She was then about sixteen years of age and it was about the early 1950s. She resisted the idea because a dress was so awkward if she had to swim a creek, and anyway, she objected to her mother, no White person was likely to see her in her string apron. She had, however, adopted sandshoes which she found very useful protection against heat and snakes. This pragmatism, maintaining their own ways of doing things until given a very good reason to change, has been characteristic of the Lamalama and might be assumed to characterize their attitude to gender relations too, although there is very little direct evidence for this. Whether it was out of continuing cultural practice or an adaptation to change, it is clear that their maintenance of a bush home allowed for the transmission of traditional cultural knowledge—to both male and female alike.

One area of knowledge in which gender plays a rather surprising role among the Lamalama is that concerning initiation ceremonies. It seems likely that, as Anderson has suggested, Aboriginal society in the region of Princess Charlotte Bay was relatively secular with “few major ceremonies [and] no totemic cults with ritual leaders” (Anderson 1983:478). Amongst the Lamalama, as we have seen, there were ceremonies of male initiation which were last performed in the late 1920s or early 1930s. There is no tradition that there was ever any female initiation ritual. However, when I have asked, or heard others ask, for information about such details as the shape of the huts the initiates used, their location in the scrub, the size and disposition of camps around the ceremonial dance grounds, and so on, it has invariably been women who grew up in the bush who spoke out on these issues. It may have been that men felt uncomfortable talking about initiation, but the Lamalama are usually relaxed about such matters, as the following story illustrates.

In 1989 some of the older people visited the Thomson ethnographic collection in Melbourne, and they came back with a photograph of men in ceremonial dress from the 1928 Bora. It was decided at that time that only the older male Lamalama should see it

or have copies of it, but when they returned home the photograph was handed round freely and some people suggested having it enlarged and hanging it on a wall. The likelihood, then, is that these women told me about ceremonial matters because they were the ones who knew. And if they knew it was because their elders had told them. They could not have seen a ceremony for themselves as none of them is old enough. Furthermore, amongst the Lamalama women are as likely as men to “know country” in both the quotidian and spiritual senses. Occasionally one of the senior men's authority would be challenged on the basis that “He grew up in town. He only knows country because [his wife] told him”. The wife in this case was a woman who had enjoyed a bush life until 1961.

Those who worked the cattle had opportunities for travelling over country and gaining knowledge of it that is still valued, but the country they worked was not always their own. Stations were not bounded according to Aboriginal ideas of place, and workers might be shifted from station to station. Amongst the Lamalama, the stockworkers of the older generation had often been raised in bush camps, and all stockworkers had the yearly opportunity to return home. Their knowledge of country, language and stories is second only to that of those who stayed in the bush camp until the final dispersal of 1961. It might be mentioned here that this dispersal had profound consequences for the transmission of cultural knowledge. The government moved the Lamalama to a settlement at Cowal Creek, several hundred kilometres away at the tip of Cape York, where a creole was the daily vernacular. Their children consequently usually have at most a passive understanding of their ancestral languages. Initial requests to return even to Coen, if not Port Stewart, were firmly rejected by the Director of Native Affairs³¹ and it was some years before any Lamalama again had free access to their country. It would seem that in their desire not to draw attention to themselves they were reluctant to make overt display of their cultural knowledge. Certainly the younger generation at the period of my initial fieldwork complained that the old people never told

31 Letter from Director of Native Affairs to Coen Protector, T.J. Newman, 12 November 1963.

them much, even when they once again had (limited) access to their land. One of the most positive outcomes of the recent granting of Aboriginal land title to the Lamalama has been encouragement for people to use and transmit detailed knowledge of land and sea territories and a style of life that is, in the words of one informant, “proper Aborigine way, proper Lamalama way”.

Those with the least opportunity to gain traditional knowledge were those who went to work in town. Instead, these people acquired knowledge of and skills in interacting with the other Aboriginal groups and the whitefellas they met there. There were never many Lamalama people on the reserves as they tended to be employed generation after generation by the same families. When Charlie Bassani had his business at Port Stewart early this century, Lamalama people worked for him. As the Port declined, his sons moved up to Coen and their Lamalama employees moved with them, eventually to work for the Armbrusts in their guesthouse and butchering businesses as well as on Mt Croll station. Their children continued in the employment of the same family until 1991. Other Lamalama came to work in the town when the owners of Silver Plains were running the Exchange Hotel. While these families lost proficiency in language use and detailed knowledge of country, they gained an intimate knowledge of whitefella ways and built relationships of mutual respect with Whites.

For others, their association with Coen dates only from after the removal of 1961. At the time it happened, some of the younger people were away working on the stations. Later, when they were laid off they came home expecting the camp to be there and had no explanation why it wasn't. They had nowhere to go then except back to the station or into Coen, where they had relatives. Over the years some Lamalama attempted to get back home and local whitefellas and even the local protector supported their desire to return, at least for a visit³². When displaced Lamalama did start to return they were frightened to go near Silver Plains and so they lodged with relatives in Coen, most of

32 Letter from Coen Protector, T.J. Newman, to Director of Native Affairs, 14 October 1963.

whom were then working for the Armbrusts. Their town-based relatives were important to them too in being in a position to borrow cars and other goods for extended stays in the bush for their families. The knowledge of European people and their culture and the ability to exploit them became more important still in the gradually liberalizing climate that started in the 1980s and allowed for the exercise of Aboriginal politics on a wider stage. However, this politics was intimately tied up with aspirations to lead a distinctively Lamalama lifestyle on Lamalama land, and thus was dependent on the knowledge associated with bush life. As a result, at the time of this study, Lamalama people acknowledged sources of power and authority that derived from both bush and town, from the pre-contact past and from the interaction of peoples in the post-contact period. This is considered in more detail in subsequent chapters.

Summary

This chapter has considered the impact of colonization on the Aboriginal peoples of ECCYP. Initially the impact was indirect as Aboriginal groups to the south of the region coped with sudden violent influxes of miners and pastoralists, sometimes by taking refuge in the less affected districts. I have argued that traces of this pressure from the south can be detected in the shifting focus and composition of the Lamalama. Their first appearance in the written record is as a group belonging to the tidal reaches of the large rivers draining into the southern part of Princess Charlotte Bay, having social links to the offshore islands and easterly groups but apparently distinct in a number of ways from the peoples of the western shore of the Bay. This pattern appears to have changed as the pressure of colonization became more direct. The necessity to work for pastoralists and others moved people into new areas. Appropriation of land and an important waterhole by one pastoralist meant that important aspects of Lamalama life began to take place at Port Stewart rather than at the southern Bay hinterland. As the town of Coen grew as an administrative and service centre for the region members of

both coastal and inland Aboriginal groups found themselves living and working together in a social world defined largely by whitefellas. Finally, in 1961 the last of the Lamalama to have maintained bush camps in the coastal fringe were removed to Cowal Creek at the tip of Cape York. Those who returned in the 1970s and 1980s lived in Coen with few opportunities for protracted stays in the bush nearby. It was not until the late 1980s that they started establishing informal camps again at Port Stewart. At the time of my fieldwork, these camps had consolidated into the Port Stewart outstation.

I have considered the gender hegemonies at work in this history. The whitefella hegemony is very clear. Ideologically, White men were the workers, enduring rough dangerous bush conditions that were ameliorated by the civilizing presence of White women and their domestic concerns. In fact, White women in the region have been independently entrepreneurial, quite apart from the necessary support their domestic services provided to other colonists. The whitefella hegemony could be characterized as one in which men monopolized outdoor pursuits and those involving extremes of physical labour such as stockwork and mining, while women provided the indoor services that made those pursuits possible in the long term but confined women to shop, hotel or stationhouse. As long as we do not scrutinise the terms too closely this could be understood as the familiar Western male:public::female:private style of social organization. There is abundant evidence that the colonists' dealings with Aboriginal people were based on the assumption that their social world was organized in the same way. However, the fact that only legislation and regulation brought this about indicate that this assumption was misplaced.

Aboriginal women had to be officially discouraged from employment in the marine industries and, despite the physical and reproductive costs, some of them took on jobs on the cattle that were routinely male for whitefellas. In pre-contact times, as in bush pursuits today, the Aboriginal sexual division of labour was not patterned on a domestic/productive contrast. Aboriginal women expect and expected to contribute to the subsistence of the group, and this attitude seems to have persisted with regard to the

new types of employment that arrived with the whitefellas. In assigning work to Aboriginal people the whitefellas usually operated within their own norms, of course, and so Aboriginal work patterns came to resemble those of the invaders. This tendency was enhanced as more and more Aboriginal people from the surrounding region came or were forced to live in Coen. The granting of award wages to Aboriginal workers meant that greater numbers of women than men lost their jobs, thanks to the gender assumptions of the White employers. It came to be common for men to work on the stations and women to stay in town and look after children who attended school there. How did these imposed changes affect the indigenous gender hegemony?

As was discussed in the last chapter, there are two factors which have been singled out as significant in general discussions of gender relations in Aboriginal societies: the sexual division of labour and the existence of a ritual life that has the potential to construct men as a class of special significance and prestige. There has been great debate about the significance of each of these factors and the kind of hegemony that they produced in particular instances. In particular it has been argued that equal productive roles tended to produce an egalitarian hegemony and I have argued that equal productive roles for men and women was the norm in pre-contact ECCYP. Assuming that to be the case, we would expect that the imposition of gendered status differentials in employment which happened here would tend to transform an egalitarian hegemony into a male dominant one.

The evidence about the pre-contact ritual life in the hinterland of Princess Charlotte Bay is inferential but, such as it is, does not argue for ritual as a mechanism that constructed male dominance. This area was beyond the spread of the four-section system and that system usually carried some degree of ritual elaboration with it. Had it existed, one would have expected that the arrival of invaders with a male-dominant hegemony would have tended to strengthen its position, as Diane Bell and Sherry Ortner find for the Warlbiri and Andamese, respectively. But the Lamalama ceased practising their Bora ceremonies in the 1930s and substantial knowledge about them is nowadays

held by women. Once again there seems to be a case for an egalitarian hegemony. Did invasion make no difference, then, to Aboriginal gender relations? Was the evidence I saw of strong female autonomy just a continuation of previous practices?

In fact, subsequent chapters show that Aboriginal people of ECCYP were never as fully dominated by and integrated into whitefella social organization as may at first appear. There were some changes, however. Paradoxically, the European insistence on domestic roles for women, combined with a downturn in the pastoral industry that greatly decreased employment on stations by the 1980s, advantaged Aboriginal women in a number of ways in the social circumstances of 1990-91.

3 Significant Spheres

In the previous chapter I have argued that when White colonists came to ECCYP they applied their own ideas about the separation of public and private, and women's place in that dichotomy, to their dealings with Aboriginal people. We might therefore expect to find some evidence of the non-indigenous contrast between private, domestic, non-productive, female spheres of action and public, productive, male spheres of action in modern Aboriginal life. However, as the theoretical discussion in Chapter One demonstrated, the terms public and private carry too much baggage to be used without constant modification. Instead of searching for ideas of "public" and "private" in ECCYP, it is more revealing to elucidate indigenous concepts of significant spheres of action and scrutinise those for any gender inflections they may carry. At times in what follows it is necessary to use the terminology of the public/private debate, but the sense in which it is used is always made clear.

This chapter focuses on the Lamalama in a search for local orderings of social life in terms of access to space, activities, resources and so on, the capacities in which agents function and whose interests are being pursued. I argue that the hearth is central to social organization, both practically and metaphorically. Although there are some similarities between hearth groups and European ideas of domesticity, for the Lamalama the hearth is not a gendered sphere. On the contrary, the union of a man and a woman that is recognized as marriage is both created by and enacted through the sharing of a hearth. The hearth is the place where men and women come together after each has carried out their subsistence and other tasks separately elsewhere. Unlike European domesticity which, stereotypically is the prime and most important sphere for women, the Aboriginal hearth is not the only significant sphere for either sex. Rigsby (1980:92) has already noted for the Lamalama that "The smallest residential groups are the household or hearth

groups that share a common cooking fire”. I have decided to use the term hearth group rather than household. This seems to me to capture the indigenous metaphorical and physical organizational principle and to avoid the connotations of European domesticity contained in the word ‘household’. There is also an economic aspect to the common understanding of the term household that is not of interest here. Instead I wish to capture the symbolic significance of fire and the fireplace in Lamalama cultural understandings. There is early evidence for this in an article by Donald Thomson (1932).

The Hearth Group

Thomson was one of the first ethnographers to describe the Aboriginal people of Port Stewart, and he called them by the name of the place where he found them, Yintjingga. He was there in 1928 and again in 1929 and published several articles based on that experience (Thomson 1932; 1933; 1934; 1939; 1952; 1972). The work of immediate interest here is his 1932 article in *MAN*, “Ceremonial presentation of fire in North Queensland”. There he stated:

The sharing of a common fire establishes or affirms a bond of solidarity between individuals or within a group.

Each family, by which is understood the group consisting of a man and his wife or wives, and their children, own or adopted, in a camp or horde, lives as a separate unit. Each has its own fire at which its food is cooked and about which its life centres. Again, the two camps consisting of the single men and the single women respectively have their own fires at which the cooking is carried out and around which their life is centered. Except on rare ceremonial occasions there are no communal meals in which both sexes take part . . .

No man, married or single, ever approaches close to the fireside of another family when the women folk are present. Even the long discussions that take place at night are carried on by shouting from fireside to fireside, or at fires at which the men only foregather. The fire is therefore essentially the centre

of family life, shared only by those between whom a special bond exists (Thomson 1932:162-3).

Separate hearths, then, marked separate social units. While gender was sometimes relevant, in that single people had sex-segregated camps and men did not approach family hearths where women were, this is not gendering of the type associated with European domesticity, where women have to struggle to find a role in other spheres. Although Thomson does not record whether women were as constrained as men were in approaching other families' hearths, the behaviour of present-day Lamalama would suggest they probably were (see p129). Ursula McConnel (1934:336) recorded that on Western Cape York Peninsula there were strict taboos about approaching other fires within the same camps, particularly among in-laws. The significant distinction here is not gender but membership of a social unit—only those who belong may enter the hearth space, and, except for “rare ceremonial occasions” when, presumably, groups were constituted according to other, religious criteria, there were no conditions under which hearths were shared among families or unmarried adults. How far, then, was hearth group organization evident in other social interaction? Thomson recounted an incident that happened while travelling from Princess Charlotte Bay to Lloyd Bay.

We travelled with two men, one single, the other accompanied by his wife. All were on good terms and there were no strict *kintja* (tabu) restricting speech or behaviour between them. The woman cooked the food for both men but they never sat down to eat together: at each meal time two fires were lighted some yards apart, at one of which the man and his wife sat, while the single man ate his food alone at the other (Thomson 1932:163).

It is implied here that there was no separation of the married couple and the single man, or of the men and the woman during the day's travel. It is only when food was to be consumed that the usual separation of single adult and family group was embodied in the lighting of separate fires. It may be, then, that hearth groups should be thought of as commensal groups or “consumption units” (Rigsby 1980:92). While this is certainly one function of the hearth group, Thomson (1932:165) provides evidence that the hearth has

more than economic significance in his discussion of the mourning rites and the ceremonial extinction of fire.

This discussion is a brief description of the finale to a mourning process that may last two or three years. During this time the relatives of the deceased were required to refrain from certain foods and cutting their hair and they had to wear strings called *mola*, and clay or charcoal paint, “*according to relationship*” (Thomson 1932:165, my emphasis). In this final ceremony the remains of the deceased were laid out with a fire and a bark trough of water at their head. Thomson described the ceremony as follows:

Immediately around the body the women perform a mourning dance, and a few feet away the men squatted raising their voices in loud lamentation.

At the conclusion of the ceremony all present washed the mourning paint from their bodies in the vessel of water placed beside the mummy for this purpose, finally extinguishing the fire by throwing this water upon it. Immediately the fire had been put out, all present redoubled their wailing, beating themselves with their hands and throwing themselves violently upon the ground in a paroxysm of grief (Thomson 1932:165).

Thomson interpreted the placing of fire and food near the corpse as an expression of the bond people feel between themselves and the deceased. While he noted that the wearing of *mola* and mourning paint and the cutting of hair in the vicinity of the body expressed people's regard for the dead, it should also be noted that such obligations were laid on people strictly *according to relationship*, that is, that such observances marked the precise social relations between deceased and mourners, the place the deceased occupied in the society. Thomson (1932:166) further noted that “The washing off of the paint and the final act of extinguishing the fire, serve to express their sense of loss and the disruption that they have suffered by his death.” But the fact that paint and uncut hair marked particular relationships to the deceased give further meaning to their removal. While the remains were carried around with the people for two or three years those relationships persisted. By cutting off the hair beside the body and washing off the paint in the water placed near the corpse's head, the mourners marked the end of their interaction with the deceased. With the water which has removed the marks of kinship

they then doused the fire at the corpse's head and this brought on the most violent expressions of grief. The violence of the reaction signals that it is at this moment, with the final extinction of the fire, that social death occurred. Without the fire, the person had no social place, nor social being.

This contention is supported by the use of fires at other times. Thomson (1932:163) also recorded that at critical times in a person's life—widowhood, first menstruation, while caring for a drying corpse—individuals might be removed from the society of others for a time. But they invariably had their own fire. Although today's Lamalama do not practice these separations, the older people remember them and add that, in the case of one who was caring for the newly-dead, that person had to stay close to their separate fire but not use it for cooking. They were not allowed to touch food, which was brought to them from the main camp and they were fed by hand. The fire in this case, at least, is not merely a utilitarian cooking fire and place of consumption, but a place of safety. The newly dead are dangerous, inclined to come back to frighten their living relatives and bring sickness on them. Separating the corpse and its carer isolated this danger, while the provision of a fire and uncontaminated food from the main camp ensured the bodily health and social integration of the carer.

As to membership of a hearth group under normal circumstances, Thomson (1932:163) specifically mentioned that sharing a fire, and not sexual intercourse, was what created a marriage. Once again McConnel, working on the western Peninsula among the Wik Monkan [*sic*] at about the same time, saw a similar situation. She said “the sharing of the camp fire is the symbol of married life, as the words for husband—*pam tuma* (man of the fire), and wife—*wantya tuma* (woman of the fire), denote” (McConnel 1934:316, see also Sutton 1994:35). The family centering on a mature married pair is Thomson's prototypical hearth group, although he also mentioned single men's and women's camps. Unfortunately, he gives us no detail about the composition of these camps and so we cannot say whether, for instance, women who were widowed but out of mourning or women who wanted a respite from family life used the women's

camp, as Bell's (1983) work describes for Central Australia. For the Wik Monkan, McConnel mentioned that there were no women's camps, rather "single and widowed women attach themselves to the camp fires of their parents, brother or sons. Each will have her own fire, however, beside which she sleeps and will not directly share the fire of the family to which she is attached" (McConnel 1934:336). We also have no information on how the life-cycle of the domestic group may have related to hearth group composition in ECCYP. In order to explore such issues further we must turn to the memory of living Lamalama and the way they structure their contemporary camps. Since many other ethnographers (Hallam 1975:43; Sansom 1980:110; Myers 1986a:54-7; N. Williams 1987:19; Martin 1993:130 *inter alia*) have commented on the centrality of hearth areas to Aboriginal living arrangements, it is no surprise to find that they are a major organizational principle in Lamalama camps.

Hearth Groups and the Organization of Camps

The memories of older Lamalama suggest that the status of hearth as basic social unit that I have argued for from Thomson's work has been a continuous feature of local social organization for this group. As mentioned in Chapter 2, some Lamalama maintained a bush existence in the coastal region around Princess Charlotte Bay, and especially in the vicinity of Port Stewart, until forcibly removed in 1961. The camp from which the removal took place is of course remembered by those who were present at the time. It was near a place known as *Warokuthal* at a bend in the Stewart River a couple of kilometres from the river mouth. I was told that this camp had always been important to Lamalama people as it is on a slight ridge above most floods and had a reliable well. At the time of the removal, lemons, sweet potato, pawpaw and bananas were growing there. The coconut tree in the figure below marks the vicinity of the Liddy family camp.



Figure 11: The Camp at Warokuthal

The ridge was also shared by the Jealous and Kulla Kulla families and at least six children were born to the three families there in the years prior to the removal. The family camps were strung out along the ridge, with the fold of the ground and the slope to the river keeping each camp to some extent hidden from the others, although they were in close proximity. This pattern of several families camping near but not immediately adjacent to each other seems to have obtained at a number of camps. At Manulkunuma (Joe's Lagoon) in the years before the removal, what is now dense scrub (see figure below) was cleared away near the waterhole by burning. Once again, a number of families might be camped near the lagoon but the ridge to one side and falling ground elsewhere allowed each individual family camp to remain out of sight of its



Figure 12: Manulkunuma in 1991

neighbours. Moreover, although perfectly cordial relations were the rule among them, no two families would come to get water from the lagoon at the same time. In both these cases the large camp consisted of a number of family groups who hunted and fished together, but whose hearths were kept very separate. This is a pattern that persists today among the present Port Stewart mob, many of whom are descendants of these three families. Its persistence suggests that the domains of “hearth” and “group of associated hearths” may be the locally significant domains of action I am looking for. It is therefore helpful to consider how membership of or access to such domains is achieved and what if anything distinguishes them.

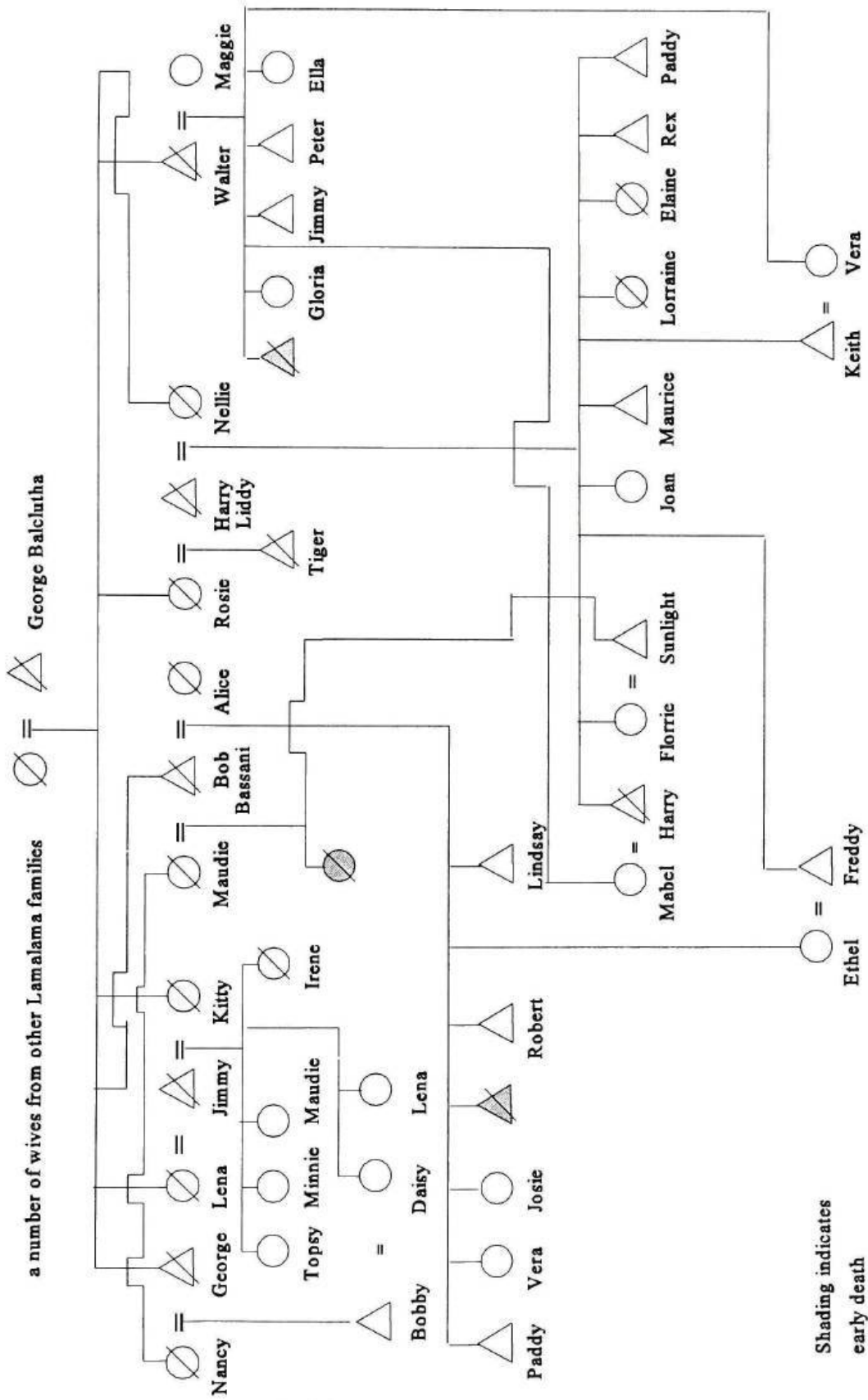


Figure 13: The Port Stewart Mob

All three families living at Manulkunuma were part of the one “mob”, in local Aboriginal English, as all the Port Stewart people are referred to as “that Port Stewart mob” or “that Lamalama mob” today. When I asked how these families came to live together, and how it was that they still formed the nucleus of the Port Stewart Mob in 1990, I was told that it was because they “all come from that old fella George”. The genealogical links being invoked are shown in the figure on p121 and will be discussed in more detail in the next chapter. Here it is sufficient to note that the mob is a descent group in Scheffler's (1966:546) sense of a group for whose members it is salient that they “conceive of themselves as sharing a common ancestry and as being variously obligated to each other by virtue of that fact”. Another factor that contributed to group cohesion was the frequency of marriage between its members. In 65% of the marriages undertaken by descendants of old George, both partners could trace descent from him either matrilineally or patrilineally. Despite the density of kinship relations thus generated, however, each family maintained a physical and social distance from the others. The descendants of the three families who were the primary residents at Port Stewart throughout the 1950s and at the time of the removal all identified as being of different language groups. Language, with its connotations of belonging to specific countries, turns out to be a significant marker of group membership and group rights.

Language was the label used in the context of my investigations of 1990/91. In the succeeding years, land claim investigations with their focus on particular countries and continuity with the past, elicited accounts of group membership in terms of clans or unilineal descent groups with corporate rights and responsibilities in land. Even in that context, however, it was noted that few even of the old and knowledgeable people knew the old clan organisation (Neate, Dillon and Perel 1996b: 137). Furthermore, it was noted that:

all of the claimants today regard themselves as owning or being associated with one of the regional indigenous languages and they also believe these to be associated or connected with the land under Aboriginal Law. So, for a claimant to say that his or her indigenous

language is such-and-such is also to assert a connection with the land to which it belongs (Neate, Dillon and Perel 1996a:73).

Clan language names appear to have been used on occasion during such hearings but they were never mentioned to me and I did not pursue any enquiries about their existence. I was identified as someone with an interest in Lamalama languages and that probably influenced the way people explained their relationships to me. In addition, a generation of very restricted access to territory had reduced the significance of clan membership. In what follows, I use the terminology of language group and family while aware that for other purposes other kinds of organisation exist.

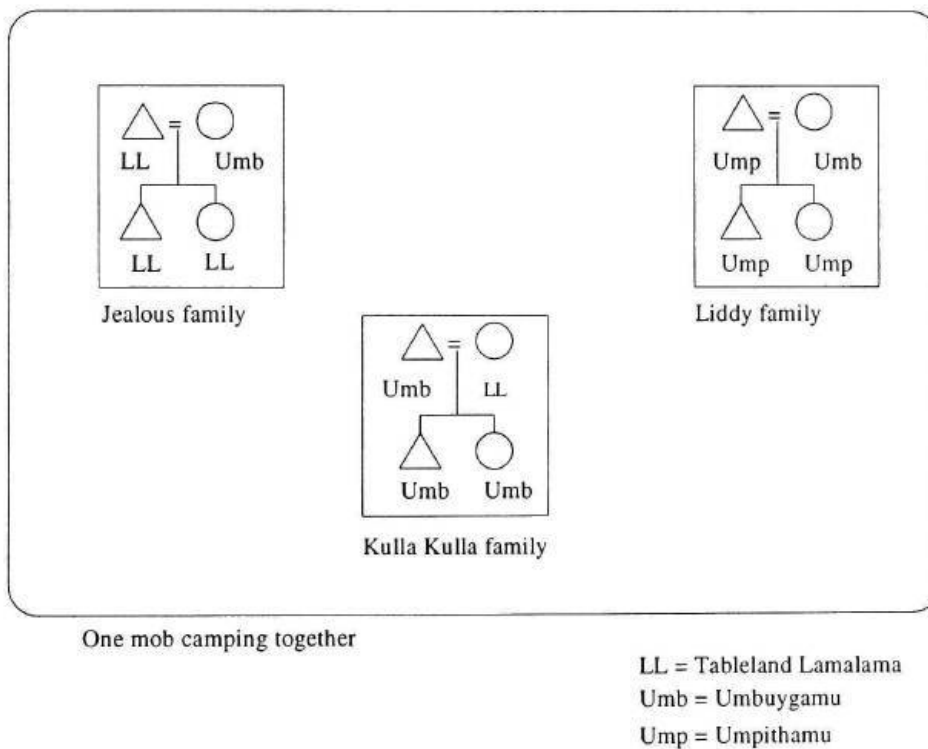


Figure 14: Relationships within a Camp

Harry Liddy, head of the Liddy family at the time, was an Umpithamu speaker who was married to two sisters who were Umbuygamu speakers. Their children learnt the language of their mother and aunt as well as that of their father very thoroughly but

identified as Umpithamu. They did not consider themselves to have primary rights in Umbuygamu, and would not act as language informants for it, for instance. The Kulla Kulla family were (and are) Umbuygamu speakers while the Jealous family spoke a language variety associated with the lower Princess Charlotte Bay area. As was discussed in Chapter 2, there are substantial differences between all these languages and the situation of those growing up in a camp hearing all of them spoken was one of true personal multilingualism (Sutton and Rigsby 1979:717). Local etiquette requires everyone to speak their own (patrilineally inherited) language, and thus several varieties might be heard even around a single family's hearth. Children learnt their mother's language as well as their father's, at least, and some individuals might choose for a number of reasons (Sutton and Rigsby 1982) to identify with their mothers rather than their fathers, and this might mean using the mother's language in daily life. The assertion that each family was of one particular language does not reflect actual usage, but it is consonant with the separation of family groups into separate hearths within the camp. It is also revealing of the constitution of the Lamalama mob.

For today's Lamalama, both language and country come from *puula*, father's father, ideally. In this ideal case there is an isomorphism between language group and land-owning group that allows us to say that the speakers of each Lamalama language own distinct countries that are scattered throughout the whole Lamalama range (see Chapter 2, also Sutton and Rigsby 1979:715; Sutton and Rigsby 1982:167). I use 'range' here in a sense akin to Stanner's (1965) classic formulation as the tract over which a group, including nucleus and adherents, may hunt or forage to maintain life. I will also invoke Stanner to use the term 'estate' to refer to the locus, country or home of a patrilineal descent group. For the Lamalama there are in addition to the estates of the various groups in the mob some areas of "company land" to which any member of the inclusive Lamalama mob has access, and these are usually either areas traditionally used by everyone for ritual purposes in the past or as access corridors between estates. Owners have use-rights of the products of their countries such as fish, tree gum and

water and can refuse permission for other people to enter and use these products. Owners are also the ones whose right and responsibility it is to relate the stories belonging to their countries.

At the time of my research language names were being given to groups with ownership rights, as the Land Tribunal noted, but this can be seen as a result of historical forces rather than as reflecting the basis of any claim on land. Sutton and Rigsby (1979) point out that it is conceptually possible and theoretically necessary to separate descent group/language relationships from site/language relationships, and they “reject the notion of the primacy of linguistic groupings in structuring and ordering the Aboriginal social/geographic landscape” (Sutton and Rigsby 1979:722). This is all the more true in the light of the historical forces outlined in the last chapter that have resulted in extensive reorganization of group composition and use of land as well as reduced use of language. The children of Harry Liddy's generation are now the elders of the Lamalama mob and theirs is the only generation with command of the whole range of Lamalama languages. Younger people have a range of competencies but most of those who have been through the Queensland education system have passive competence at best in their indigenous varieties. Nevertheless, language names are used to explain past and present organizations of the Lamalama mob. The way it is explained by today's generation, rights in language are congruent with rights in land and assertions of linguistic distinctiveness of hearths therefore are political acts. Even while sharing a camp with other families, the use of one's own language reminds others of one's rights to particular tracts of country.

Camps are usually on sites primarily associated with one particular language group, although members of other families within the camp may have rights there also. So, for instance, to project current ways of reckoning group membership onto the mob as it was just before the removal of 1961, if a particular campsite were in Umbuygamu country, the Kulla Kulla family (Umbuygamu by rule of patrilineal descent) would enjoy some prominence while the mob camped there. But Harry Liddy's wives, also Umbuygamu, would have rights in that country and so, consequently would their children. But the

whole Liddy family identified as Umpithamu and maintained a certain distance from their close relatives of the other families while in camp. Their presence is dependent on rights inherited from their mothers in the actual campsite and ties of kinship, mutual service and affection with the other families. But their separation into a separate hearth and language group respects Umbuygamu rights while at the same time asserting their own claim to other, Umpithamu, countries. Access to the mob and its range depends on descent or on marrying into the descent group. Access to particular resources is on a similar basis. Access to hearths is through marriage and relationship to married pair. Individuals doubtless acted in the capacity of kin, that is on the basis of personal relationships, but they could also act as landowners. Benn and Gaus' interest factor is not yet clear but a framework begins to emerge for examining the contemporary position. People still identify as belonging to this or that language group but family names and hearth-based groupings are more salient these days in locating individuals within the Lamalama mob. The following section focuses on the composition of the Port Stewart outstation during the period of my fieldwork in 1990-91.

Port Stewart Outstation

During 1990-91 a total of 43 adults and 20 children used the Port Stewart outstation, for varying amounts of time and with varying regularity as shown in the table below.

Table 2: Population of Port Stewart Outstation

	Adults	Children
Permanent residents	7	1
Regular weekend use	4	8
Seasonal visitors	14	4
Infrequent visitors	18	7

The most consistent inhabitants were at the outstation throughout the Dry season more or less continuously, barring visits to town for events such as the annual races. Those who were regular weekend users of the outstation had jobs in town or were caring for children who had to go to school there. Some of the people in this category would sometimes take the mail down to the outstation on a Wednesday night, take the permanent residents' orders for shopping and return to Coen the next day. Seasonal visitors had jobs on stations or elsewhere that kept them out of reach of the outstation for weeks at a time and the children in this category were away at high school in Herberton in term time. Infrequent visitors were Lamalama people who lived in distant settlements and visited the outstation only when an event such as a funeral brought them into the region. The age distribution of these 63 people with access to the outstation is given in the following graph (Jolly and Jolly 1990:8):

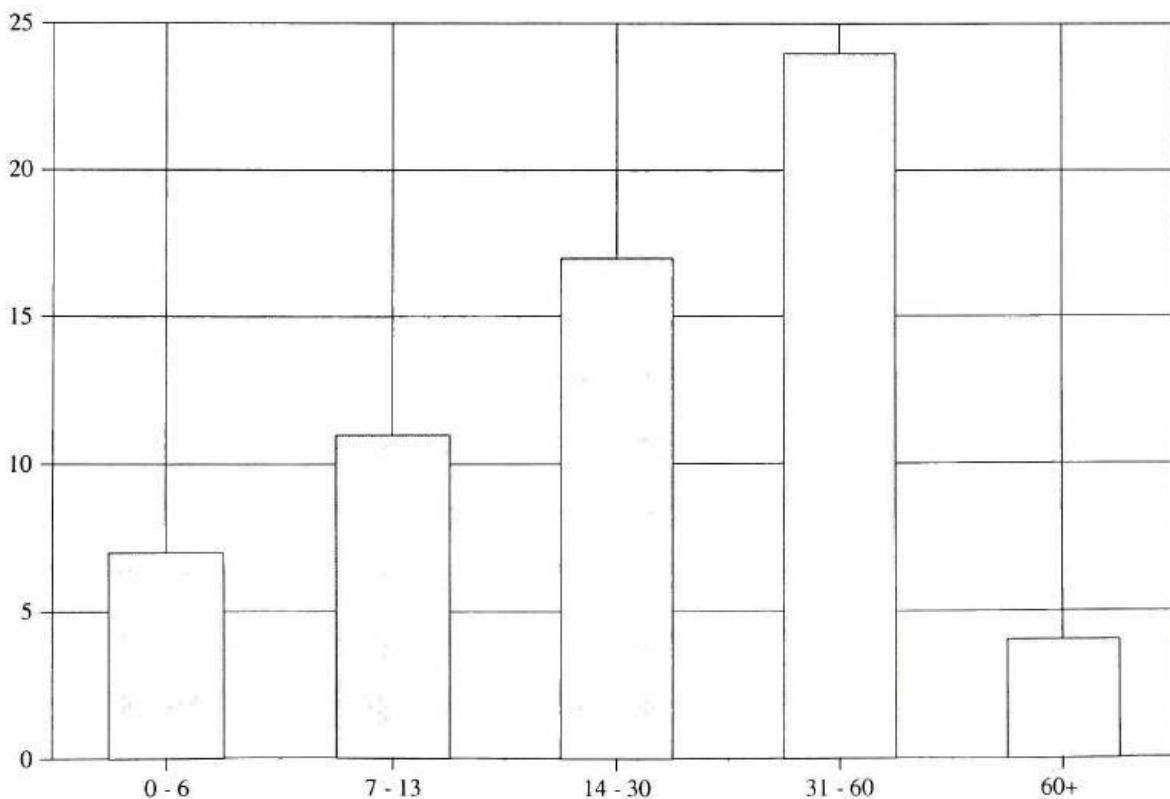


Figure 15: Age distribution of outstation population

This is similar to the age profile for the Aboriginal population in general, according to the 1991 census, in its low proportion of people over 60 (6% in both cases) and its high proportion of children (30% against a national average for indigenous people of 40%), but shows a higher than average number of adults in the productive age group 14-60 (65% against a national average for indigenous people of 39%). However, many of these able-bodied adults were seasonal or infrequent visitors since they had employment elsewhere. In what follows I concentrate on the core members of the outstation group, the permanent and weekend inhabitants.

The figure on p127 is a sketch map (not to scale) of the Port Stewart outstation camp during 1990-91. The camps of Bobby Stewart (B) and Joan Liddy (J) were the nucleus of the outstation during this period. Joan in particular spent most of her time there, rarely coming to town except for social events such as the annual races and visiting entertainers. She was accompanied by a toddler she was “growing up” for her brother's daughter. Another of her brothers, Maurice, was usually also in camp although he maintained a separate hearth, marked Mo. Bobby and his wife Daisy also spent a great deal of time in camp, particularly after the Wet in 1991. They shared their camp with Bobby's sister, Maggie Gibb, and two toddlers they were rearing for Maggie's deceased sister's daughter. They all also shared a house in Coen. Thanks to his being the eldest son of the eldest son of the apical ancestor of the group, Bobby, an Umbuygamu speaker, occupied a potentially powerful structural position within the Lamalama kinship network. His camp was more elaborate than some others and when he was in town he often spoke of his desire to get back there to look after it and his dogs, as well as community goods such as the solar generator. The prominence of his camp and his responsibilities were mechanisms by which he attained and maintained authority. He could claim a right by descent to his place in camp, but, as we shall see in the next chapter, where he failed to provide services such as care for the camp, his authority and rights could be challenged.

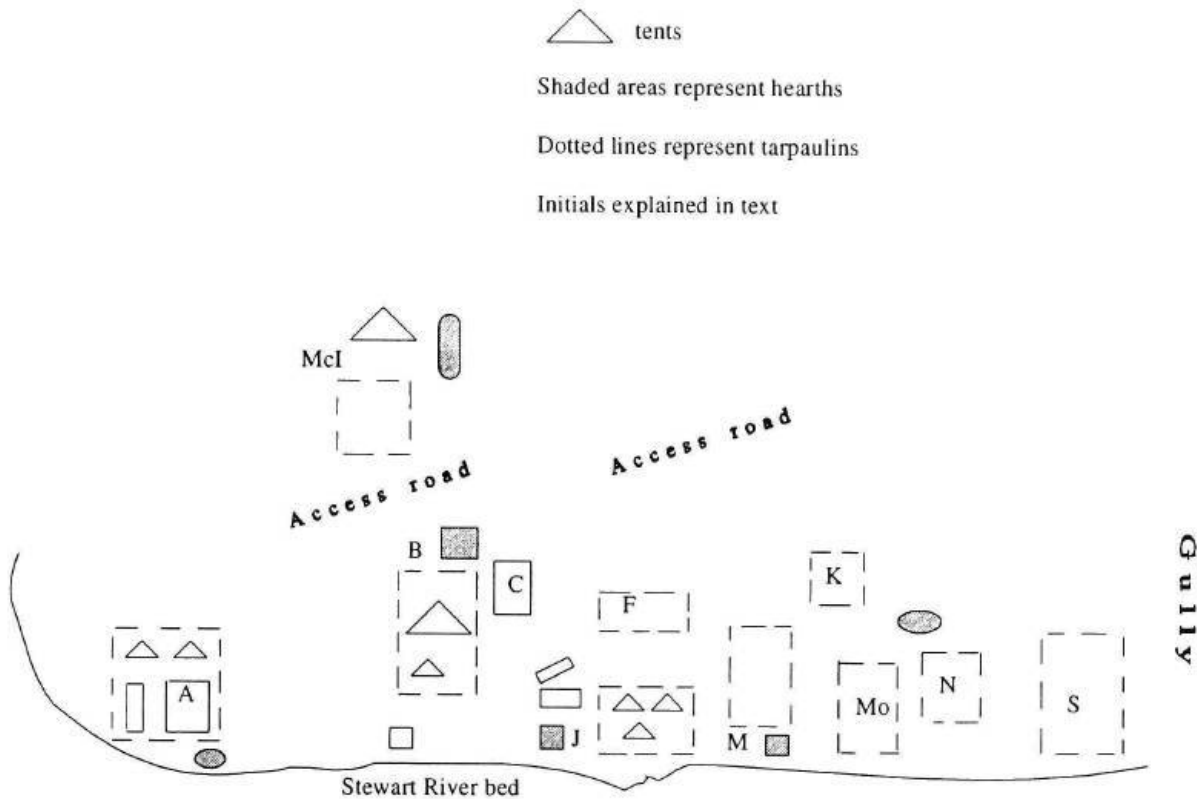


Figure 16: Port Stewart Outstation Camp, 1990-91

The actual site of the camp, Theethinji, was acknowledged to be “Liddy family country” and this fact modified the rights Bobby and others could claim. When an Umbuygamu speaking wife of one of the Liddy men had been beaten up by her husband, and came to me for shelter and advice, I suggested she go to the outstation for a while. She refused with the words “That’s his country. We all one mob together but that’s still his country”. Had none of the Liddys been in residence in the camp, however, their influence would have been less. The presence of Joan and Maurice, who were often said to be “looking after” camp confirmed Liddy family rights of access by acting them out. As we shall see, the fact that they were present meant that when others wished to assert themselves on the basis of rights they felt they had earned through service to the group, such claims could be denied (see Chapter 4).

Joan's elder sister Florrie is married to Bobby's parallel cousin or "brother", Sunlight, and they were central members of the Lamalama mob that used the outstation at this period. Sunlight worked in Coen and had access to goods and whitefella services through his wages and long-standing relationships with local whitefellas. So, for instance, his family had a private vehicle which was often at the disposal of other outstation members in addition to the official outstation truck. Florrie had been an adult woman at the time of the 1961 removal and was widely regarded as an authority on country, language and culture. This couple also were well known for their care of children. Although they only have one daughter of their own, with Joan's help they have raised 14, mainly the children and grandchildren of Ethel Bassani and Freddy Liddy (Florrie's brother and Sunlight's sister). In 1990, Rex Liddy sent his daughter Maxine from Bamaga to live with Florrie and Sunlight because he knew she would be well cared for with them and made to go to school. The demands of work and child-care meant that Florrie and Sunlight were tied to town for much of the week. However, they still spent every available spare moment at Theethinji, often making trips down on Wednesday nights with the mail as well as regular weekend and school holiday visits. Despite the fact that they had marked out a camp for themselves at the far end of the available ground (S), they invariably camped with Joan and used her hearth as their own. This was convenient and was in keeping with their living arrangements in Coen, where the two small houses occupied by Joan and her dependent children and Florrie and Sunlight and theirs, were on the same block of land and shared the same outdoor areas. However, in using Joan's hearth, Florrie and Sunlight were also positioning themselves in the conceptual and political centre of camp life.

When the camp was provided with three solar-powered lights they were all concentrated in the central area: over Joan's kitchen table, at C, and just beyond Freddy's tent, F. When the lights first arrived, Bobby had Paul Jolly build him a table and bench arrangement over which his light was hung (C on map). A tarpaulin made a roof for the arrangement, which quickly became known as "the cafe". People would gather there to

chat and play cards in the evening. Although others would wait until Bobby or Daisy turned the light on at the cafe or sat down at the table, they would approach and sit down quite informally. On the other hand, Bobby's own hearth remained in darkness and was approached in the more circumspect style common when joining another hearth group. Usually people coming to another hearth, whether male or female, would approach slowly and stand on the outskirts of the group for a short time. A chair might be pulled out from the group around the hearth and the visitor might sit on that at a little distance for a while, sometimes turned slightly away from the hearth group as though to minimize their presence. They might wait until they had been addressed, often in a phrase such as "tea there, look", to come right into the group. Sometimes their gradual incorporation was silent, but it was never abrupt. There was very definitely the sense that no-one could assume the right of acceptance at a hearth except those whose hearth it was. The cafe was different in being a place of relatively free access.



Figure 17: A view through the camp at Theethinji, 1990

It is also significant that the creation of the cafe added to the difficulty of seeing each of the main hearths (B and J) from the other. Bobby's hearth faced out over the road (in the sense that people sat around it most commonly with their backs to the rest of camp and the tents under the tarpaulin opened in that direction). Joan's hearth was often obscured by people, particularly children, but surrounding tables (rectangles on plan) and the truck, when it was in camp, broke up the sightlines. In this, the previous pattern of keeping camps just out of sight of each other was preserved and we may see this as a way of maintaining some "privacy", or at least distinctness.

I use quotation marks here because I am wary of applying the terms private and public without some evidence that they are locally meaningful. It is common for writers to refer to the lack of walls and other concealing devices in Aboriginal camps and take that to mean that the whole camp is a "public" space or that there is lack of privacy within it. According to Sansom (1976:1) "Within the camp there is very little chance of concealment and camp life is, in sum, highly visible." As a result he sees privacy as an attribute of whole camps (Sansom 1976:1). Williams (nd) also refers to the public character of Aboriginal society "in the sense of being open to general observation". Such analyses might lead one to expect more open behaviour within the Lamalama camp than is in fact the case. But everyone in camp does not enjoy open access to everything that goes on at the other hearths. Williams says that "when Aborigines make the attribution private they indicate at the same time the range of rights to participation that individuals may exercise in making a decision relevant to what has been declared private" (Williams nd). The deliberate partial seclusion of hearths within a camp, then, is an assertion that hearth membership marks a boundary to individual's rights. The fact that the seclusion is only partial is also important in that it indicates an acknowledgment of fellow campers' rights to a limited amount of knowledge about the whole camp. It is also an expression of trust in fellow campers. Who, then, are the members by right, that is those who need not go through any tacit or explicit process of seeking permission to enter the various Port Stewart hearth groups?



Figure 18: Hearth at camp B

In the case of camp B, that was Bobby, Daisy and Maggie and the children they intermittently had charge of. When Maggie's "daughter" (ZD) was in camp, she camped with her "mother" and also used that hearth. Joan's hearth was used not only by herself and her children, but also by Florrie and Sunlight and the children and young people currently living with them. When Sunlight's single brothers were in camp, they camped with the other single men. The way in which Bobby's and Joan's camps formed the physical nucleus of the whole outstation and the personnel admitted to those camps thus expresses the political realities of Lamalama life. Bobby's strong structural position in the kin network, and Joan's position as a primary owner of the actual site were just two ways in which they were important to the continuity of the group. The maintenance of these camps is not only a reflection of political relationships but is instrumental in constituting them. Those who did not maintain a permanent presence at Theethinji, such

as Freddy, found it hard to compete politically with those who did in settings such as the Coen-based Moomba Aboriginal Corporation.



Figure 19: Hearth at camp J

Both Joan's and Bobby's camps were fairly substantial structures. Timber frames supported tarpaulins over zip-up tents that were valued for the protection they gave from snakes. In these two camps the actual hearth was also quite elaborate (see figures on pp131 & 132). In both cases slender logs marked out an area on the ground which was covered in fine white sand brought up from the river bed. Both hearths had bough covers which provided a storage place for food and kitchen goods out of reach of the dogs, and both hearths had some permanent arrangement to support boilers and billies. The substantial nature of these hearths is partly a function of the permanence of their owners' residence in camp, in contrast to those who were only able to visit at weekends and holidays. But Maurice was just as permanent, although he kept a much less substantial

hearth. His tent was covered by a tarpaulin like the others but his hearth was just a scrape in the ground where he did his cooking and sat with his tea. His sister did not cook for him, nor did he spend time sitting at her hearth as others did. Once, while I was in Joan's kitchen with some of the rest of the family, Maurice brought over a damper he had made. This was eagerly snatched up by the children, who told me that he made good damper, although Joan said he didn't share them very often. Maurice was, however, always very generous with the fish that he caught. On occasions when he had a particularly large catch, one which could be distributed beyond the family group to friends and connections in Coen, he would ask Florrie to distribute it.

The other camps marked on the plan on p127 were occupied by people who were prevented by work or child-care from spending a lot of time in camp. Proximity to the central camps B and J was, however, roughly correlated with political prominence within the Lamalama mob. Ethel and Freddy did not spend a lot of time in camp, but when they did so, they always camped (camp F) near to Freddy's sister Joan, and usually shared her hearth, despite the fact that relations between them were not always good. Freddy abused alcohol and was prone to argue with his sisters about it. Since the outstation was alcohol-free, he drank only in town where, when thwarted in demands for money, he would go and camp with non-Lamalama people of an opposing political faction. He occasionally agitated for a larger role in decision-making regarding mob business on account of his position as next eldest sibling to Florrie. He would claim to know more about language, country and history than she did, a claim he was never able to substantiate in performance, due largely to his drinking. When drunk he would loudly proclaim that Sunlight didn't know anything about country, except what Florrie had taught him, while he, Freddy, had been a stockman and knew the country "right through". On one occasion when I was visiting members of Moomba Corporation to talk about Corporation business, I was warned not to speak to Freddy because "he sits down at too many fires", referring to his habit of taking up residence with the opposing faction. This is perhaps the strongest indication of local perceptions of the way hearth group

membership is commensurate with a kind of privacy, namely, control over the flow of information and access to activities.

Despite his delinquencies, Freddy could claim the rights due to him by his relationship to Florrie and Joan. When in camp he pitched his tent as close to the camp nucleus as possible, despite the fact that people complained that it made it hard to get the truck in close to “Aunt Joan's kitchen”. The fact that the outstation truck was always parked near to the core camps is another indication of their political prominence. When other families got a lift to the outstation in the truck, they had to carry their belongings from this central position to their own hearths. The truck never pulled up anywhere else.

The position of Ethel and Freddy's camp was also close to Bobby's hearth and it should be noted that Ethel called Bobby “brother” (their fathers were brothers). However, positioning themselves there did not seem to be a matter of aligning themselves with another potential power-broker since Ethel never exploited this relationship to enhance her own position. In fact, she would sometimes refuse to sit too close to Bobby on account of “he's my big brother”, a reflection of what would have been an avoidance relationship in former times. All the other Lamalama I questioned about this recognized that in their grandparents' time strict *kintya* obtained to prevent brothers and sisters from associating with each other from quite early childhood, but I was told that such taboos were not observed today. Whatever the reason for Ethel's occasional avoidance of Bobby, Ethel and Freddy spent little or no time at Bobby and Daisy's hearth and their proximity to the centre of the camp can be taken as proximity to Joan, Sunlight and Florrie and a bid to be their equals in Lamalama affairs. This was evident on other occasions when Freddy challenged Florrie's right to speak on behalf of the family.

The single men, Norman (camp N), Kevin (camp K) and Maurice, camped near each other and shared a hearth, reflecting perhaps the traditional practice of having single men's camps. Kevin was Ethel and Freddy's son, although he had been raised by Joan,

and Maurice was his FB. Norman was more distantly related. Kevin would come to Aunt Joan's hearth for food and company but Norman never did. When all three men were in camp, it was common to see them together around their fire with their backs to the camp nucleus. They were also partly screened from view by Mabel's camp, which was in between. Mabel was FBD to both Bobby and Sunlight and was the widow of Florrie's elder brother, but she was a rare visitor to camp owing to the fact that at various times she had between two and five children to look after and send to school and her partner Victor was often employed in Coen. Her camp was used at times by her mother, Maggie Tableland, and her sister, Vera, and brother-in-law Keith, a younger brother of Joan. It may be significant here that the kin who used this one hearth were all related through women: Mabel, Maggie and Vera. Keith was of course near his brother Maurice and nephew Kevin although he used his wife's relations' hearth. His daughter, however, shared Joan's camp with her cross-cousins of a similar age when they were all home on holiday from high school.

The last camp (S) to the east along the riverbank was marked out, but never completed. It was meant for the use of Sunlight and Florrie, and Sunlight would sometimes say that "That's our camp really", although in the whole period of my fieldwork they never used it, preferring to share Joan's camp when at Port Stewart. Since they spent every weekend there and often came down mid-week with the mail and stayed overnight, this was a considerable amount of time. At the weekends they would be accompanied by their daughter Seppi and all the other children they were "growing up", which ranged from three to eight over the year. Kevin's two unmarried sisters and Seppi were all young women in their late teens and early twenties, but they never set up a separate women's camp, preferring to camp together in Joan's camp and use her hearth. The only time I experienced anything like a "women's camp" was on one occasion when I drove into Theethinji late one evening when only the core groups were in residence.

Daisy and Joan had made a low fire in the middle of the access road, away from all the hearths, and Maggie Gibb, her "daughter" Cindy and I joined them there. The

evening passed in quiet conversation, some of it in language, with Maggie, Daisy and Joan each speaking their own varieties. These were women who had grown up together and their talk was chat about the ordinary things of life such as children's illnesses and events that had happened in the past. They were interacting very much as good friends do, without needing to say much at all. It is interesting, then, that they made a separate fire for themselves, not only apart from the family hearths but in the most neutral spot in the whole camp, the road, prototypical "company land" (von Sturmer 1978:275; Rigsby 1992:355). Although this arrangement seems to be an expression of the temporary irrelevance of normal hearth-based mob composition, they did not use the *lingua franca*, English, except in deference to me when I couldn't follow the conversation. Hearth-based distinctions may have been set aside, but linguistic (and hence territorial) ones weren't.

It would be unwise to build too much on this incident and it may be that the women concerned were merely interacting with each other in a habitual way, the way they learned in their childhood together. For most of their adult lives they had been unable to visit most of their ancestral countries and Daisy told me that although her language was "from Tableland", she had never been there. The link between language and land had not therefore been acted out for many in this generation, the way it had been for their elders. Linguistic differences were at this time perhaps more salient as markers of the speaker's family of origin rather than territorial affiliation. Rather than suggesting that territorial affiliations were still in evidence on this occasion, it may be more relevant to investigate the link between natal family and language. Although the usual hearth-based organization had been set aside on this all-female occasion, natal families were still in evidence. It would be possible to point here to kinship as the basic principle behind, or in this case overriding, hearth group composition, but this is too vague in light of the fact that all the people present were related to each other in a number of ways. Rather than just kinship, the organizing principle seems to be

patrification, (acquired) primary identification with the father's group. I explore below the implications of this fact for group composition and gender relations.

The camp ultimately assigned to myself and my family (A) was separated from the others along the riverbank by a space that had been occupied by a sister of Daisy's who had recently died. We had initially been told to camp in that space, although as a dead person's camp none of the Lamalama would use it. No mention was made to us at first of its previous owners but on our first night there the children tried to spook us by sneaking around making moaning noises and talking about *awu*, "malevolent spirit". We did not realise the significance of these pranks at the time, but the next day Sunlight suggested we might be better further along the riverbank. The empty camp space was thereafter used to park cars, do washing and for children's games, but no-one camped there and when I returned in 1992, it was still vacant, despite the fact that the camp had greatly enlarged and bush had been cleared for a further 50 metres or so in all directions. Putting us beyond this unused space demonstrated quite clearly that there was an etiquette to be observed before we could, as it were, jump the gap into another camp, as well as giving the families in the camp nucleus some privacy. By the second half of my stay, when my family had returned to Brisbane, I was using my own camp for sleeping only and approaching Joan's hearth in the manner of the other single women who were core members, without needing to be given permission.

The remaining camp (McI) belonged to the Lutheran pastor and his wife, Roy and Thelma McIvor. They had been in Coen for nine years and were intimately involved in Lamalama affairs through their managerial roles in Moomba Aboriginal Corporation. When the McIvors made a permanent camp at the outstation in 1991, they were put on a ridge on the other side of the access road. That is, they were also somewhat isolated from the main body of the camp inhabited by closely related Lamalama. The height of the ridge, however, was enough to make it possible to see (but not see into) all of the other camps strung out along the riverbank. In 1992 this site was taken over by the Bassani family although their camp extended closer to the others, narrowing the road. Sunlight

and Florrie thus established a camp for themselves and their dependents separate from Joan but within the physical nucleus of the outstation. At that time two of Sunlight's married sisters, Vera and Josie, had joined the group and they, their partners and dependent children, camped near to this new Bassani camp but on the side distant from Joan's hearth. Sunlight's third sister, Ethel, who was married to Florrie's brother Freddy, was involved in a dispute with the Liddy family at this time and was sharing Vera's hearth. Since her brother Sunlight was married to Florrie Liddy, he was perforce involved in the dispute, and in fact was inclined to agree with his in-laws. It is interesting that Ethel still had a home with her siblings even under these conditions. Much has been written about the tendency for people to arrange their camps according to the direction in which their country of primary affiliation lay (von Sturmer 1978:80; Biernoff 1979:170; Chase 1980:233; Trigger 1987:227-229; Tonkinson 1991:165), but here on home country it seems as if the closeness of sibling ties were most relevant in orienting people's living arrangements. Florrie and Sunlight still spent most of their time at Joan's hearth, even when their tents were on the ridge, and it was still in discussions that took place around Joan's hearth that family business was transacted. The nature of such discussions reveals much about the nature of agency within the hearth group, as the following incident illustrates.

Doing Business—the Worry for Jim

Early in 1992 a Lamalama man whom I will call Jim had a stroke that left him bedridden and in need of almost constant nursing. When he was initially evacuated to hospital in Cairns, it was expected that he would die, and everyone in his immediate family visited him, although he was unable to recognise them and his few snatches of coherent speech were in his “father tongue”, Umpithamu. At first his wife May had stayed close to him in Cairns, but as time wore on and it became clear that he would neither die nor become completely well, this became more difficult for her. She had no means of support nor kin to live with while in Cairns and felt helpless but responsible in

the face of Jim's condition. The health authorities offered accommodation for Jim in a nursing home on the Atherton Tablelands. This would have provided good medical care but was far from home with no kin dwelling nearby and so was unacceptable to the family. Jim was also offered accommodation in the Hopevale Old Folks' Home on the condition that a member of the family lived there with him to help in his care. Most of the family thought that May should go there with him, but she didn't want to go. Not only would she have no access to alcohol there, she was scared of the responsibility. She told me that he needed bed-baths, tablets and injections and she didn't feel qualified to give such care. She also feared being blamed by the family if, or when, Jim finally died. Both her own and Jim's siblings, and even some of her own children eventually refused to have anything to do with May, even refusing to pay her bus fare back to Coen from Cairns. They were, however, left with the problem of what to do about Jim's care, and this prompted a discussion which I relate here because it is typical of the way decisions are made in a hearth group.

I was present when this issue was raised with the family by another anthropologist, Di Hafner, who was working in the community at the time. Also present were Jim's elder sister and her husband (who was also May's brother), his younger sister, and his youngest daughter Lyn. Hafner had been involved in the discussions with social workers and hospital staff, and had brought May home from Cairns. She was concerned that May had signed papers allowing Jim to be put in the distant nursing home against what she understood to be the family's wishes and started the discussion by explaining this to everyone. It had previously been suggested to Hafner by the aunts that Lyn should accompany her mother to Hopevale. Lyn's name was not mentioned on this occasion and throughout the ensuing discussion she sat silent with her arms folded, staring at the fire. Each of the others made a statement of their understanding of the situation, namely, that Jim shouldn't go too far away where the family couldn't visit him. Since the Hopevale Old Folks' Home wouldn't take him unless a member of the family accompanied him, they thought that May should go too. Jim's younger sister said with emphasis "He *gotta*

go Hopevale". When Hafner suggested that May thought it would be too hard to look after Jim, they said that she would have help and that she could do it. They then each expressed the opinion that *someone* (implicitly someone of the family) should go to look after Jim, and Lyn got some sidelong glances but retained her silence. The others clearly resented the whole situation, feeling that there was a responsibility on the family to look after Jim but no-one wanting to be the one to do it. As Jim's youngest child, with no children or partner of her own and not being tied to employment, Lyn was most free and therefore was most susceptible to coercion. Her only way of avoiding that was to remain silent, as she did. In the event, no-one went to look after Jim, who remained in professional care for a considerable time until his condition had improved enough for him to return to the care of his sisters in Coen.

A significant feature of this discussion was the way in which arguments were not addressed to anyone in particular. Within the group of adults about the hearth everyone had the opportunity to express their opinion of what should happen according to local understandings of the responsibilities of kinship and marriage. But people are free to refuse their responsibilities, directly as May did, or merely by refusing to express an opinion that could be challenged. The power of silence was brought home to me on another occasion when a Lamalama man complained to me that his wife and daughter wanted to be taken fishing, but he didn't want to go. These two women were the only others present, but they made no comment. The ensuing silence lasted 20 minutes before the man's resolve broke and he reluctantly got the truck ready to go. In the worry for Jim, Lyn could refuse to enter into the argument because she knew from experience that her aunts were unlikely to do more than keep dropping hints in her hearing. Lyn had been raised by these women and shared their hearths to a much greater extent than May had. These two women were the ones who worried about Lyn when she was away at college, phoned her urging her to come home and sent her money. Lyn's responsibility to her elders was in tension with their desire to keep her happy and close to home. May's responsibility for Jim was also felt to be greater than anyone else's (despite the fact that

their relations had often been bad and he beat her up on occasion). The sanction of exclusion from the hearth group was therefore much easier to bring to bear against May than against Lyn. If the aunts had told Lyn to go to her father and she had refused, they would not have been able to do anything about it and so would have lost face.

This conversation exhibits some of the features said by some analysts (Walsh 1991; Eades 1983, 1988, 1991) to be characteristic of a distinctively Aboriginal conversational style. In Walsh's view, Aboriginal conversation is typically "broadcast" and "continuous". That is to say, utterances are offered to the hearers at large rather than addressed directly to one person, and the response doesn't have to come at once. Conversations may be resumed "in the middle", as it were, at any time without misunderstanding. Once opened, Walsh says (1991:4), the communication channel stays open. In this case, no-one addressed their comments about needing someone to care for Jim directly to Lyn, although they were undoubtedly aimed at her. Diana Eades (1988) characterizes such strategies as indirection. For instance, she says that a typically Aboriginal way of seeking information is that "the speaker contributes some of their own knowledge on a topic and then leaves a silence, to lead the person with the knowledge to impart information" (Eades 1988:107) and she finds the same strategy is used when seeking agreement or confirmation. Here, the older people expressed their opinion that someone had to look after Jim and left a gap for Lyn to fill if she would. They depended on her participation in ongoing discussions of what was due to her father to prompt her to fill that gap. Walsh himself (1991:3) notes that such strategies are sometimes found outside of Aboriginal domains, especially in situations of high intimacy, as between husband and wife in White Australian society. Is this conversational style indicative of Aboriginality, specifically Aboriginal ways of interacting, or something more general?

Bill McGregor (1991:21) has criticized such analyses as over-generalizations from, at best, predominant patterns of interaction. He has suggested that it would be more fruitful "to go beyond statistical correlations within particular environments, and attempt . . . to understand the functions and costs associated with particular discourse patterns or

strategies” (McGregor 1991:21). I suggested above that the costs of direct confrontation with Lyn may have been loss of face for the aunts. Had she refused as forcefully as her mother did, the authority of the aunts would have been weakened unless they were prepared to proceed to punitive measures against her. The benefit of indirection here suggests that the interlocutors were concerned with group processes. In addition, “continuous” conversation, which takes up a discussion in mid-point with no overt reference to what has gone before, happens between people who are frequent interlocutors and saves them a lot of conversational redundancy.

These types of conversation, then, may be characteristic of intimacy, as much as of Aboriginality, and its occurrence may help us define the membership of intimate groups or the scope of locally significant spheres of interaction. As usual, I want to avoid the use of the term ‘private’, although Walsh claims that the broadcast and continuous pattern he discerns in Aboriginal conversation “enables an individual to opt for privacy but preserve the option to re-engage at any time” (Walsh 1991:4). Eades, too, claims that “the Aboriginal way of interacting indirectly preserves a considerable degree of personal privacy” (Eades 1988:105). In contrast, Nancy Fraser’s (1993:126) discussion of multiple publics suggests that a distinctive style of communication can be constitutive of a domain in which common interests can be pursued. It is my contention that the worry for Jim, in its reliance on unspoken assumptions about the responsibilities and rights of hearth group members, illustrates this point. At the same time it is clear that those concerned are negotiating individual autonomy against a background of group membership, an issue that Walsh and Eades may have in mind when they invoke “privacy”. I go on now to a further consideration of how individual agency and interests are related to access to, agency in and the interests of the group.

May told me at about the time of the conversation recounted above that she had quarrelled with her cousins (Jim’s sisters) and that they wouldn’t talk to her any more because she wouldn’t go to Hopevale with him. Unlike most White Australians they did not feel that the state or health care professionals had significant rights in or

responsibilities for Jim's care. In their opinion, May, as his wife, had the primary responsibility, thus reinforcing the importance of the husband-wife relationship in local social life. Had Jim and May had a normal hearth-based marriage, they would have been able to depend on their children for support, as others routinely did. In fact, at times Jim and May did share a house and other resources with some of their children, but this relationship was compromised by the patchy and unreliable nature of Jim and May's parenting. They had both worked the cattle in the early days of their marriage and then had both abused alcohol, so that their children had been raised by Jim's sisters and were much more part of those hearth groups than their parents'. Although the children were still felt to have some responsibility for Jim it was not as great as it might have been. In Basil Sansom's (1980:139) terminology, Lyn had "consociate identity" as a member of her aunts' hearth groups as a result of her continuous presence there and her parents' dereliction of parental duty. Open confrontation with May could not make her take up her responsibilities, but the aunts could at least bar her from their hearth and company. No effective sanction could be brought to bear against Lyn because she stood in relationship of daughter to them as a result of being raised by them. That is, she had the same rights to hearth group membership as one born to the married pair whose hearth it was.

Like Sansom, Fred Myers (1986a) has described how acts of nurturance can create ties that override or replace biological kin relations for another Aboriginal group, the Pintupi. "A man becomes 'really father' therefore when he looks after you" (Myers 1986a:212). Myers (1986a:191-211) also emphasizes the importance of generational differences in allocating rights and duties generally. In the present case we seem to see an unwillingness on the aunts' part to use the same sanctions against a young woman they had raised, albeit she was now adult, that they felt free to use against a woman of their own generation. Although both May and Lyn acted autonomously, only Lyn preserved or was granted her right to re-engage, as Walsh suggests should have happened. This

was possible in part through the indirect nature of the discussion, but also depended on the fact that Lyn was a member of the same hearth group as her aunts and May was not.

Meanwhile, the question of Jim's care remained undecided. While it was never, to my knowledge, explicitly decided that no-one would go to Jim, he remained in professional care for at least two years. Eades (1988:105) may claim that minimizing open confrontation "leaves open the possibility for further comfortable discussion", but only at the cost of postponing resolution of the issue at hand. But what counts as a resolution? Nancy Williams (1985) has described how decision making among the Yolngu proceeds "on the assumption that they can and will achieve a consensus and that time is integral to its formation" (Williams 1985:246). Among the features that Williams describes as necessary to the formation of consensus, the following two are relevant in the present case: "(a) all relevant persons have had an opportunity to contribute as decision-makers; (b) all active participants believe they know the current forms of proposals and their likelihood of prevailing and one seems near adoption" (Williams 1985:258). Consensus, in such a formulation, may be a decision to agree to disagree, at least until circumstances change and the likelihood of one proposal's prevailing increases. This is in fact what happened in the case of Jim. Eventually the family were able to argue that he was well enough to be released from hospital into their care. But another significant strand in Williams' formulation is that concerning "relevant persons" and "active participants". Those who were present at this discussion were people who habitually shared the hearth where the discussion took place. Jim's other siblings and children who did not share the same hearth were never asked for their opinion of how his case should be managed.

Most hearth-side discussion was not as consequential as this, of course, but the discreteness of the hearth group as a significant sphere for discussion and decision making was always apparent. When issues arose that concerned the whole camp, they were never settled in general discussion. Even a decision about how to organize people into vehicles for a day's fishing was reached by one person going from camp to camp,

making announcements about where their vehicle would be going, or alternatively, suggestions about where it might be good to go. The listeners were then able to respond by getting ready to go or suggesting a reason why another place might be better. This was also an indirect way of asking permission to go to a particular country (Williams 1982, 1987:71; Myers 1982). In the absence of an objection, usually expressed indirectly in the form of a suggestion that some other place might be better, it could be assumed that permission was given. When the vehicle was ready to leave, those who wished to go to the announced destination had only to be aboard without further discussion.

When common business was more formal, the procedure adopted for relaying it to everyone still took notice of hearth groups. During a period when I had been asked by the members to write a development plan for Coen's Moomba Aboriginal Corporation, an Annual General Meeting became necessary. Advance notices were sent out to all members, advising them of the agenda, in accordance with the requirements of the relevant Act. It had not been local practice to be so formal but, since several changes to the constitution were being proposed and some opposition was expected, I advised following strict meeting procedure on that occasion. I also urged Sunlight, president of the Corporation, to make sure that everyone understood what the notices meant and to encourage them to attend the meeting. His response was to visit all of the separate hearths in camp, rather than to gather everyone together. However, although hearths formed the basis of both physical and social organization in the camp, there were occasions on which business was raised in ways that transcended hearths.

Doing Inter-Hearth Business

One kind of transaction between hearths that I witnessed at Theethinji was referred to by the Lamalama as a "shout" or "singaut". Liberman (1985:4) calls this kind of airing of grievances the Morning Discourse. These events sometimes happened the morning after someone arrived in camp still suffering the effects of the drinking they had been doing in town. Sometimes they would begin in the middle of the night, but it would more

usually happen just after dawn, while everyone was still in their tents. A loud voice would shatter the calm with extended and repetitive statements of their grievances. Bobby was one who would often “singaut” and his complaints would usually begin with the ban on alcohol at the outstation, which he blamed on Sunlight. He would then proceed to berate Sunlight for acting like a boss although he, Bobby, was the elder. Depending on current circumstances, the particular grievance might be that Sunlight wouldn't lend Bobby the vehicle, or that Bobby was never told about “business” (by which he meant Moomba business). He also frequently referred to his successful past as head stockman on Silver Plains, winner of boxing matches as far away as Mareeba, and inmate of Stuart Creek prison, all prestigious activities that Sunlight had not achieved. The recurrent theme was that Sunlight had wronged Bobby by usurpation of his senior status and these shouts were a way in which Bobby reminded everyone of his claims and status. No-one ever responded and at other times Bobby himself repudiated the opinions he expressed in his shouts, telling me, for instance, that Sunlight, although the younger, was “still boss for Port Stewart”.

Lieberman (1985:4) has described such “Morning Discourses” in terms reminiscent of Eades' and Walsh's discussion of Aboriginal conversation and Williams' discussion of the forming of consensus:

In the Morning Discourse as well as in much group discourse during the day, the speakers' comments are addressed to all persons present. They have a public nature which minimises personal interests—one speaks to the public matter as it stands before the community of speakers. Conversation proceeds not by paired addressors-addressees but in a serial fashion, with each contributor building upon the public formulations of previous contributors and thus assisting the participants to arrive at a final account which becomes the consensus of the associating parties (Lieberman 1985:4).

Both the discussion over Jim and Bobby's shouts had a broadcast quality, but both of them produced consensus only in the sense of all parties agreeing to disagree. In both cases, although the remarks could be heard by everyone present, they were not addressed to all hearers equally. Silence, especially the silence of the particular person

targeted by the remarks, meant that the speakers could not develop their original proposals or make them prevail. Liberman characterizes events such as “shouts” as “public” events because they minimize personal interests, but this was not so at Theethinji. The eight “shouts” I heard at Theethinji during my year’s fieldwork all concerned the speaker’s dissatisfaction with the way others in camp were treating them or making them behave. Leaving aside the problematic label “public”, these events could be seen as constituting the whole camp as a significant sphere in which to do business. The complicated mixture of hearth and camp as significant spheres of action can be illuminated by considering a more protracted shout in some detail.

The most successful shout that I witnessed, in the sense of eliciting a direct response, was initiated by a young woman who was visiting the camp on the occasion of the official handover of title to the land in 1992. I use the pseudonym Betty to identify this woman for the purposes of this account. Betty was a Lamalama woman directly related to the Jealous and Stewart families, who usually lived in another community where she worked in the council office. She occasionally visited Coen, but preferred Cairns and complained while in camp of being bored and not liking the bush. On this occasion she had been in camp for a couple of days along with many other visitors from around the Peninsula. There had been a large gathering to celebrate the fact that the Lamalama had just received Title to the Port Stewart Public Purposes Reserve under Queensland’s *Aboriginal Land Act 1991*. After most of the visitors had left, Betty and some of her Lamalama cousins went out of camp to the boat ramp at the river mouth a few kilometres away. This area was on a public purposes reserve used by all the local whitefellas and tourists, where they camped, launched their boats and enjoyed a few beers after fishing. During the late afternoon I had seen Florrie and Sunlight go out in their car for a while and it emerged that they had been to talk to “Betty and them” at the wharf. Florrie and Sunlight articulated their concern as being for the cars which they complained the “young fellas weren’t taking care of”. Sunlight said “Car just like your mother. When we little, mother bin carry us. Now we gotta look after car same way. Car

carry us now.” It appeared that Betty and her cousins had been drinking and driving recklessly.

When Betty herself returned, she strode around the cafe area shouting in a high pitched voice that carried over the whole camp. Her complaint was that she wasn't welcome at Port Stewart, that she had been excluded, as she saw it, from the handover ceremony and “growled” for drinking at the wharf. She announced her intention to leave the next morning and never come back. These complaints all mirror those regularly voiced in other shouts, including the threat to withdraw forever from the outstation. Running under all these events is a contest over power and authority. For a while Sunlight and Florrie just sat still in the darkness at Joan's hearth, although Florrie muttered to herself “You just wait till tomorrow, my girl. I talk to you.”. Betty went on and on, reiterating her complaints, criticizing her Port Stewart relatives and becoming highly excited. Many people, including some of the remaining visitors, got out of bed to come closer and listen, although no-one else said anything. Finally, Sunlight and Florrie went over and joined in. Sunlight started by trying to explain to Betty in a calm voice that it was only the fact of her living at a distance from Port Stewart that meant she wasn't included in meetings and other business. This direct discussion of the issues raised constituted a recognition of Betty's right to a voice in business, presumably thanks to her considerable education in and experience of community administration as well as her structural position in the kinship network. Her parents were present, but said nothing. The challenge was to Florrie and Sunlight.

The argument dragged on with Betty becoming more and more abusive to her seniors. Sunlight finally lost his temper and said “Yes, I myall but I bin talk up longtime for this country”, thus asserting his right to make rules for Port Stewart owing to his long service to it. He went on to tell her that she should have talked up yesterday, not now when she was drunk. The argument was thus shifted from a quarrel over access to group “business” to the rule about the outstation being dry, which Florrie said Betty should respect since “You sensible girl, Betty”. Betty argued that she had not brought

drink into camp but only to the wharf, which was public land. She challenged Florrie and Sunlight “You gonna stop tourists drinking down there?” Her elders had no answer to this since they were well aware that they had no authority over the Public Purposes reserve or the non-Lamalama who frequented it. The argument was deflected by a male cousin from Lockhart taking Betty's part about drinking at the wharf. Several voices, including Florrie's and Betty's told him to shut up “You not Lamalama”. The issue was thus recognized by everyone to be appropriately discussed between Lamalama only. Furthermore, Betty added “She not talking to you, talking to me.” Not everyone was to take part in the debate, no matter how generally accessible or impersonal the issues or the setting. The argument petered out shortly after with someone telling the cousin “You name not Betty, you manwan [you're a man]”. Banter over his interference allowed the protagonists to separate. Betty camped in the bed of the river that night, away from all her senior relatives, and left early next morning without talking to anyone.

As with Bobby's shouts, this whole interchange can be seen as a challenge to the authority of Florrie and Sunlight. Betty started to broadcast her grievances at a time when most other people in camp had retired for the night, placing herself centre stage under the light in the cafe. Florrie and Sunlight's response to her is consistent with their habitual recognition of her position in the Lamalama network and the usefulness of her particular training and skills. They had mentioned to me on occasion that it would be good if she could come and work for the outstation instead of for the council and they therefore did not want to alienate her. However, the presence of visitors from Lockhart, Hopevale and elsewhere may have prompted them to answer her complaints on this occasion, to try to quieten her down and reduce their embarrassment. It is perhaps significant in this respect that they did not respond by shouting from their own hearthside, but went to where she was and talked, initially in quiet voices. In terms of the immediate effect, whether a response was given, as here, or not, as with Bobby, it could not be claimed that any verbal consensus was reached. However, the conscience of the addressee may be pricked on such occasions. Late in my initial extended period of

fieldwork, Sunlight asked me to take Bobby to a Land Rights meeting as the Lamalama representative, although Bobby himself protested that he wasn't told enough about business to be able to do it. Sunlight's request may have been an indirect response to Bobby's shouts claiming he should have more of a role in outstation business. Betty, too, may be able to go away and mull over the reasons given for her exclusion from local business. If she decides that participation is important to her, she knows that she can have it if she moves closer to Port Stewart. For their part, Florrie and Sunlight will have to consider the point Betty raised about the use of alcohol at the wharf in their future management of the outstation.

None of the criteria Liberman uses to characterize such debates as "public" seem to be applicable here. Although everyone present could hear and was meant to hear the debate, they were not able to take part. Personal as well as community interests were in play and, although such shouts wound down eventually, an agreed resolution was rarely reached. Nevertheless, such conversations can help delineate significant domains of action among the Lamalama, if, I suggest, we apply Benn and Gaus' (1983:7, see Chapter 1) criteria of access, agency and interest.

Access

Who has access to what in the "shout"? Clearly everyone present could hear what was going on and in that sense formed a public, or better, acted as "witness" (Sansom 1976,1980; Williams 1985). Sansom equates this kind of witnessing with recognition: "noting the cues and signs that provide information about the doings of others without making any move to make the business of those watched one's own" (Sansom 1980:83). Williams has described witnesses as those who "have observed negotiations and heard the position of active decision-makers, and will in future act as keepers of the standing account" (Williams 1985:258). For both these authors, then, witnesses may constitute a public in the sense of an audience, but there are strict limits to their participation in the events they witness. They act as recorders of events they can later testify to. On one

occasion when I was visiting another, non-Lamalama outstation, a young man returned from Coen where he had gone to report the fact that a whitefella had come onto the station and threatened him with a gun. The sergeant had not believed the story. On hearing this, some of the women present said “He can't say that. We got plenty witness for that.” No-one had intervened at the time or gone to Coen as corroborating witness. It was the young man's business, but later everyone could testify that it had in fact happened. This was an instance of that kind of witness in which, Sansom (1980:101) says “Observed details are externalised through utterance and the details of witnessed action are thereby given an objective existence . . . In possession of the detail, witnesses can ‘take’ the detail to the settlement of trouble”.

Betty very clearly set up her encounter with Florrie and Sunlight in such a way that the rest of the camp could act as witness in this way. She stood under the light and shouted out things that got more and more provocative until Florrie and Sunlight answered her. But she would not accept support from any of the onlookers. They were not permitted to bring their opinions to the settlement of the trouble, which was defined as being between Betty and Florrie. They were witness for Betty's fight with Florrie, not witness for the issues the fight was about. Some people later talked about the fact that the fight had happened, but there was no discussion to my knowledge of Betty's grievances. The same is true of Bobby's shouts. The listeners had access to the event of Bobby's criticisms of Sunlight, but not to the bases of those criticisms, which only Sunlight could respond to. People sometimes complained of Bobby's shouts saying “We got that mouth here again, waking us up early”, but I never heard discussion of the points Bobby raised.

Those points, like the ones Betty raised, also touched on issues of access—individual access to information and resources. Sunlight explained to me “We don't want to stop them drinking, just don't bring it down here.” In his view, they could have access to drink and access to the outstation, but not both together. Access to the first was on the basis of individual choice and the second through relationships with hearth groups.

However, Sunlight's position as defender of rules controlling access to the outstation indicates another level of organization, that of the outstation group. This group is similar to the group called "one mob camping together" in the figure on p121. At any one time this mob comprised mainly members of the wider Lamalama mob, defined according to descent from acknowledged Lamalama ancestors and affiliation to land recognized as belonging within the Lamalama ambit, as described in the previous chapter. The mob also included those visiting non-Lamalama with ties to particular hearths through affines or friends. In the modern context of restricted access to country there were very few places where Aboriginal people of the region could be "one mob camping together". Port Stewart was one such place and its value, and the limitation of access to it, are revealed by the attempts of others to assert their right to be there.

From time to time, remote kin, people who lived in Coen but were usually vehement in dissociating themselves from the Lamalama, tried to force their way into the outstation while drunk. It was Sunlight who quietly approached them and asked them to respect the local rule about alcohol, which, after hurling some abuse, they did. Their kin connections were unarguable, but they could be asked to leave for their failure to conform to local rules for behaviour. That is to say, kinship alone did not guarantee access to mob space and interaction, but had to be reinforced (like kin roles) by the proper behaviour. This performative dimension seems to have been particularly strong for the Lamalama. When I was taken to visit the ancestral country of some non-Lamalama people I was "given smell" so that the guardian spirits of the place would recognize me and do me no harm. The Lamalama never did this and when I asked about it, I was told that there was no need for smell if I behaved in the right way.

Mob membership could be gained in a number of ways but what access to space and resources did entrance to the sociality of the mob grant? Firstly, there was the outstation space itself, a clean, well-kept and peaceful place in the bush away from the noise and stress of town. From there it was possible to visit surrounding country and perform some of the responsibilities of ownership. From the Lamalama point of view,

living on their own land guaranteed its health, the sweetness of its waterholes and the abundance of food. They also took a more active role in managing country at times in activities such as burning back undergrowth and clearing tracks. But access to country was restricted by other considerations than strictly Aboriginal rules about who were appropriate visitors and how to gain permission. Most of the Lamalama territory was under pastoral lease or timber reserve and the degree to which the holders of such leases were willing to ignore Lamalama presence was a factor in where they would go and what they would do there. The interrelation of place, behaviour and group membership is further illustrated by the incident of the use of alcohol at the wharf. Although the wharf lay on Lamalama land, it had been designated as available for “public” use by whitefella law. Lamalama as well as whitefellas camped, fished and launched their boat there, but their access to this area was not dependent on being a member of the Lamalama mob. In fact, as “Betty and them” demonstrated, the wharf was a place where Lamalama group members could, by their behaviour, step outside of mob membership and its constraints. The management of non-indigenously constituted spheres of social significance such as this are explored further in subsequent chapters.

Agency

In what capacity do agents enjoy access to resources, information and events? Marriage, birth and adoption, that is, kinship however acquired, gives access to hearth groups which are significant spheres of action, at base because of their members' rights in country and its products. As Bern (1979, quoted above; 1988:563,568) pointed out, inequalities in the natural endowments of countries creates inequalities between landowners. Are there other factors, such as age and gender (Sansom 1978) that differentiate between agents, all of whom enjoy access to the same space, sociality and resources? As far as the hearth group is concerned, I suggested above that age and mutual responsibility modified agency within the group. In what follows I concentrate on

the “mob”³³ level of organization, emphasizing the importance of overlapping claims to discrete countries inherited from both parents and the way this pattern of land affiliation underlies the “mob” concept.

When a new hearth is created by and creates marriage, the partners concerned are just that, partners. Neither becomes one of the other's group, loses their rights in land inherited through mother and father, or claims rights in the other's country (although long-married spouses may do this on occasion). On the contrary, both retain their natal birthrights in land and language. Because most marriages are within the Lamalama mob, neither partner is moving out of known territory on marriage, or into the company of strangers. They may well, in fact, have “mother-right” in their spouse's country. As we have seen, the location of any particular campsite is related to the status of those camping there and, in an argument to be discussed in detail in the next chapter, Florrie claimed precedence among the Port Stewart mob because of having both “mother-right” *and* “father-right” there, among other reasons, none of which had reference to her husband. The importance of rights in land inherited through mothers was brought home to me one day when some of the Lamalama were criticizing another mob for not being the right people to be active in negotiations over land rights because “they don't even know where their mother country is”. There is an obligation on everyone to retain knowledge of and responsibility for their mother's country, even while identifying as members of their father's group. This does not necessarily translate to an egalitarian gender hegemony, either on the ideological or the personal level, however. Quite apart from the fact that whether rights are inherited through mothers or fathers has no necessary connection to the power or status of actual men or women, there is the fact that when people invoke their mother's rights, they are most often invoking her patrilineal inheritance.

33 As discussed below, the term mob can be used at various levels of social organisation. Here I use it with reference to the group of Lamalama families who conceive of themselves as having common descent and contiguous countries.

Scheffler (1966) long ago pointed out that descent principles may be variously pervasive within and between societies. From my observation, it seems that for the Lamalama, the patrilineal principle is most commonly invoked with respect to ownership of country rather than, for instance, group membership. Also, the more remote in time, the more the patrilineal principle is likely to be invoked. There is a site near Running Creek which was pointed out to me as an Ayapathu place whose last owners had died childless. Although some Ayapathu places had been inherited by Umpithamu people, they were unwilling to claim this one because “that place used to be other mob. Those two old fellas not really Ayapathu, they just follow the mother.” That is, these men should have identified as “other mob” according to rules of patrilineal succession, but had chosen to identify with and speak the language of their mother's group, Ayapathu. The persistence of this ability to “follow the mother” illustrates the relative weakness of patrilineal principles in determining group membership. The name of the “other mob” was not remembered, just the fact that they were from “inside” and spoke “real deep”, that is, they came from the interior and spoke a language unrelated to or unfamiliar to the Lamalama. In the absence of children who might have carried on their fathers' identification with Ayapathu and thus re-assigned ownership of the site (cf Sutton and Rigsby 1982), the patrilineal principle was invoked in reckoning ownership, as it were in the abstract. It is particularly noteworthy here that individuals invoke their rights through mothers, but for circumstances remote in space and time the more sociocentric patrilineal principle is likely to come into play. In the ongoing process of daily, life factors that might generate inequality are more numerous than any single principle and any given factor does not always carry the same weight.

Age is another factor which has been credited with generating inequality with senior generations generally having greater power over juniors than contrariwise. This factor could be significant in hearth groups where husbands were much older than wives, a pattern that existed amongst previous generations of Lamalama, though it is not true of those alive today. When the Lamalama were removed to Cowal Creek in 1961, it was

estimated by functionaries of the Department of Native Affairs³⁴ that Jimmy Kulla Kulla was 79 to his wife's 61 years. Jimmy Jealous was said to be 71, while his wife Kitty was recorded to be 46, an even greater age gap. The children of that generation all married people close in age to themselves and it is not now possible to say what the effect of a large difference in age between spouses might have been, though it seems fair to guess that the men may have enjoyed some advantage over their younger and less experienced wives. On the other hand, the women all had close kin nearby to protect their interests. Kitty Jealous, for instance, was sister to the two wives of Harry Liddy, and the Liddy and Jealous families routinely camped near each other before the removal. As a general rule, when children were born they would normally identify as primarily members of their father's group but it was by no mean unheard of for children to "follow the mother", either in earlier times or the present day.

Today, to "follow the mother", usually involves living close to the mother's people as well as identifying with her group or talking her language. One of Maggie Tableland's daughters has children in their early twenties whose father was a Thaypan-speaking Olkolo man, now deceased. These young people should be considered Olkolo if strictly patrilineal principles were applied, but at the time of my fieldwork they all lived with the Lamalama, worked on the outstation when necessary and wished to be known as Lamalama people. In fact, the company of their relatives, the chance to live at Port Stewart and find work there were the reasons they gave for "following the mother"³⁵. In other cases, children followed the mother by default when their fathers didn't acknowledge them, died, or stopped living with their mothers. There is one Lamalama woman whose children are by a number of fathers, including non-Lamalama men. All of these children have been raised by her relatives, both paternal and maternal, at Port

34 Letter from Deputy Director of Native Affairs, Thursday Island to head office in Brisbane, 11 October 1961.

35 These children have since been included in lists of those with rights in Olkolo country, illustrating that individuals can identify with more than one group depending on circumstances (Rigsby pers. comm.).

Stewart and in Coen. They are all considered to be Lamalama because “they bin grow up here”. I never heard any of them speak a language other than English, so it is not certain whether they identify with any particular land-owning group within the Lamalama, but they are given the surname of the family that “grows them up”, which suggests they do. This may not be on strictly patrilineal principles, however. One son of the woman in question was raised by her aunt, a woman who had been married to a Lockhart man but had returned to live with her Lamalama relatives on his death. The boy took the aunt's married surname, which would suggest an identification with the Lockhart family of the aunt's husband, but since she lived with and identified as Lamalama, he also was Lamalama. Residence in a hearth group helps to affiliate one to its loyalties and guarantees acceptance by the wider Lamalama mob, but residence alone is not enough to gain Lamalama identity. The long-term partner of one middle-aged Lamalama woman retained his “westside” (Wik) identity despite his residence with the Lamalama. The difference here would seem to be that this man had no descent ties at all with the Lamalama.

The creation of marriages by use of a common hearth, and the separation of hearths within a “one mob” camp, are mechanisms of patrification. But the fact that the child inherits both its mother's and father's affiliations and can exploit either at need modulates this picture. The rights in country of both male and female children with the same mother and father are equal, and we have seen that rights in country are important sources of power. The contrast between Bobby and Sunlight on the one hand, and Florrie and Freddy on the other indicate that neither age nor gender necessarily allows one sibling to dominate another, nor one hearth group to dominate another. Joan's camp is no less prominent in the outstation for being the camp of a single woman. It is the fact that Theethinji is her family's country that is most significant. Hearths are places where various rights in and responsibilities for country, and these days sometimes more saliently, family, are negotiated. The relevant agents in such negotiations act in the capacity of parents, siblings, children and so on.

Where negotiations concern more than one hearth group the agents refer to their individual position in terms of kinship, co-residence, knowledge, experience and service. Bobby claims precedence on all these grounds except service. Betty claimed a right to be consulted on matters pertaining to Port Stewart as a central member of the Port Stewart Lamalama and as an educated and experienced worker. Others hoped to get service out of her. People with access to negotiations not confined to the hearth group, other than protagonists, only act as “witness” in the sense used above. They recognize that a dispute exists and, by their non-interference, recognize that it is the business of the protagonists.

Interest

Benn and Gaus (1983:7) ask in whose interest access to information, space or resources is used, and they define *public* interest or concern as being that which affects the well-being of everyone in the society (Benn and Gaus 1983:25). This is one way in which they seek to understand the more encompassing term in the public/private duality. In individual cases it is possible to see how the limits of encompassment, or the inclusiveness of a sphere of action, can be defined by asking “Who is ‘everyone’ in this sphere?” Insofar as banning alcohol from the outstation is in the interests of everyone there by reducing noise and conflict, Sunlight and Florrie act in the ‘public’ interest in enforcing the rule. But this ‘public’ can be further defined. It refers only to those with right of residence on the outstation. The direct benefit is to those actually in residence, but anyone with the appropriate rights can decide to take advantage of the outstation’s peace and quiet at any time. ‘Public’ in this case means “all those people having patrilineal or matrilineal links to the traditional owners of the Port Stewart area and their adoptive dependents and/or friends actually living with them.” It is this group whose interests are addressed by enforcement of the no alcohol rule.

But clearly Florrie and Sunlight also act in their own interests when they seek to enforce this rule on Betty and others. They never drink at all and are vocal in their

condemnation of alcohol. They are thus personally identified with sobriety. But their enforcement of the rule on others' behalf is a service they perform for the outstation group—their own hearth and the hearths of those they camp with. They perform many such services for their mob including raising children, maintaining the camp infrastructure, providing transport and negotiating with governments and others over land, and the next chapter discusses how the performance of these services contributes to their prominence within the mob. Here we should note that it is the personal performance of service that gives them the right to act in the interests of others. When, in the course of their argument, Sunlight told Betty “I bin talk up longtime for this country”, he was alluding to the fact that his continuous service gave him some rights to set and enforce group norms. This sort of role cannot be performed by some impersonal ‘public’ agent. Florrie and Sunlight’s interference, then, is very much in their personal interests in maintaining their power within the group.

Lieberman claims that discourse patterns such as the ‘shouts’ described above are “addressed to all persons present. They have a public nature which minimises personal interests—one speaks to the public matter as it stands before the community of speakers” (Lieberman 1985:4). This cannot be said to be true in the Lamalama case. Both Bobby and Betty raised issues of their own status and access to resources. Neither of them ever suggested it would be better for the group at large for them to gain the access and status they claimed. That is, they did not appeal to some idea of ‘public’ or group interest in their bids for power. In fact, although the outstation group can be seen as a significant sphere of action for people and could be thought of as the domain that encompassed the individual hearth groups, this aspect of mob organization is rarely salient to those at the outstation. For instance, on several occasions advisers urged that everyone should pool resources to provide infrastructure such as solar-powered refrigerators or permanent shelter that could be used by everyone at the Port Stewart camp. Such suggestions were never taken up and it was explained to me that although “We all one family alright”, it would cause trouble to share things like a fridge. “See,

might be that olman thinking he put lots of fish in the fridge, it's his fridge now. He boss for that fridge." In other words, inter-hearth rivalries would come into play, making use of claims to have provided more than others in a bid to control resources. In terms of common interests, then, the outstation group might be argued to be not a very significant sphere of social action for Lamalama people. A distinction could be made here between the Lamalama mob, comprising all those reckoned by descent to be Lamalama, and the Port Stewart mob comprising all those using the Theethinji outstation. However, the importance of the outstation and the Port Stewart mob as significant spheres of social action becomes obvious in the following chapters when contrasted with other similarly-constituted groups, such as the Merepah mob or non-Aboriginal groups or categories of persons.

Work and Gender

The preceding discussion has built up a picture of the internal organization of the Port Stewart Lamalama mob with particular reference to the way they live together in their outstation. It was demonstrated that the hearth group, usually, but not exclusively, focussed on a married pair and dependent relatives, is the basic unit in the mob and that this organizational principle can be projected as far back in history as oral and other sources stretch. While clans may have been more salient in the past, that past can still be understood according to these currently important distinctions. I have argued that in camps made up of people considering themselves to belong to "one mob" but having ownership of particular parts of the mob's estate, the hearth group and identification with patrilineally inherited languages are important mechanisms of patrification. I deliberately use the term patrification here because I want to emphasize that there is an element of choice in group membership depending on whether one chooses to activate rights inherited through women or those inherited through men (Sutton and Rigsby 1982:167). My suggestion so far has been that within the hearth group, age plays a more influential

role in discriminating agents than gender. In inter-hearth business, too, factors other than gender, such as service and co-residence, seem to be more significant. But individuals do not spend all of their time in camp and around the hearth. I turn now to consider other significant spheres of action in everyday life for the Port Stewart Lamalama, particularly the performance of work.

The sexual division of labour whereby men prototypically hunt large game and women gather vegetable food and small animals has been thoroughly institutionalized in accounts of Aboriginal social life. Catherine Berndt (1970/78) has suggested that the very distinction between the sexes in Aboriginal Australia can be symbolized by the digging-stick of women's labour, on the one hand, and the spear that men use in the chase, on the other. Berndt herself was at pains to point out that despite this symbolic dramatization of sexual difference "much, perhaps most of what people did and said took place in mixed-sex groups, or across sex lines" (Berndt 1982:42) and that the contrast itself was set "firmly within a framework of interdependence" (Berndt 1982:48). Diane Bell's (1983:110-36; 1993:36) work also examines the interdependence of men's and women's activity in the ritual and other spheres, but she emphasizes women's capacity for separate and independent existence in the women's camps, a separation that can generate a significant power base for Aboriginal women (Bell 1983:240).

Annette Hamilton has gone even further, describing the separation of the sexes, and particularly the sexual division of labour, in the Western Desert as "so thoroughgoing and complete that it can better be understood as two separate systems" (Hamilton 1980:12). Hamilton also suggests that these two separate systems are underpinned by a set of social relationships she calls homosociality. She uses this concept "to refer to the situation where people turn to one another for their primary social and political relationships, and personal respect and affection, strictly according to criteria of gender" (Hamilton 1981:82). Furthermore, she finds that homosociality is likely to be a particularly relevant organizational principle in a society that lacks the kind of public/private (by which she means domestic/non-domestic) dichotomy that Western

society has (Hamilton 1981:83). Francesca Merlan (1992) seems to accept that gender separation exists, but argues that the fact that it is “jointly enacted” indicates that there are sets of interrelations of male and female domains that need to be understood. She finds (Merlan 1992:185), with Marilyn Strathern (1984), that male-female separation is always relational, that one set of agents acts always with the other in mind. Analyses such as these would lead one to expect that, no matter what role gender played in the organization of activity in a Lamalama camp, once people left it in pursuit of subsistence activities, gender ought to become more salient. In fact, single-sex subsistence expeditions were rather rare for the Lamalama.

During the months of October and November 1990 I was in camp at Port Stewart (rather than in Coen or elsewhere) for 18 days, but I observed only one occasion on which groups formed according to gender. One Sunday four women loaded the dinghy onto the truck one of them owned, drove to the wharf and rowed out to the sandbar to fish for the day. On the same day five men took their guns, spears and dogs and went hunting near a lagoon called Three-mile. Three adult women, two men and my family and myself remained in camp, and one man went fishing on his own with a spear. On another occasion, when I was part of an all-female fishing party, the composition of the group was remarkable enough for the woman rowing the dinghy to stop suddenly in mid-stream and start to laugh, because it had just occurred to her “We all women, even that dog”. But in the vast majority of cases, especially when a vehicle was available, parties consisting of men, women and children would leave camp together on fishing expeditions, the major subsistence activity for the Lamalama. This is not to say that the whole group would stay together when fishing grounds had been reached, but even then the composition of work groups was rarely single-sex.

A favourite fishing place was a well-established site on the southern bank of the Stewart River near its mouth, known as Dinner Camp. It was most conveniently reached by dinghy from the wharf, a distance of perhaps half a kilometre. When there was a large party, small children and elderly women would be loaded into the dinghy with the gear

while everyone else waded the estuary. Once at Dinner Camp, a billy would be set to boil over a low fire, the babies settled in the shade and everyone would look around for the spot likely to yield the best catch, depending on the season, the state of the tide and so on. Maurice invariably took his spear and hunted alone, and Norman frequently did likewise. Some of the party might take the boat and cross the estuary or try their hand up a side-stream. Invariably, however, a string of people of both sexes would range themselves along the bank or the nearby sand spit for line fishing. Married couples frequently acted in concert to the extent that a young woman could be teased about not accompanying her husband and retort: "Don't hafta follow a man ola time".

Both men and women used both line and spear, although they used them differently. Skilled spear fishermen could go into the mangroves alone and return with an impressive catch of barramundi. Women never did this. They were much more inclined to use a line, although they all had spears which they used on crabs and stingrays in the shallows. Although individual women might remove themselves a short distance from the distracting noise of children or other people's chatter while they were fishing, they were rarely so far away that a "coo-ee" wouldn't reach them. Men, on the other hand might travel several kilometres on their own and some of them were reputed to know especially productive fishing places in remote spots. Two sisters who were particularly keen fisherwomen liked to spend the night fishing on the sandbar when the tide was right, but neither of them would go alone. Although there were some sex differences in the way fishing was carried out, then, it was not an activity that was reserved to either gender. The only people in the mob who ever told me they didn't like fishing much, because they were no good at it, were both middle-aged men. As a result they carried out a greater share of childcare duties.

This is not to say, however, that there were no sex-specific activities, nor an idea among some people at least of what was proper work for each sex. When I helped build a camp, or helped dispose of the garbage or old toilet structures, it was common for one of my older female Lamalama relatives to comment on the fact that I was working "just

like a man”. In the end, one of the aunts took me aside and told me that “You know, *muka*, Lamalama ladies don't do that kind of work”. This same woman seemed not to see the work that Lamalama men did. After bushfires, a large tree had fallen over the main road at one point and for several weeks we all detoured around it. This woman commented “My brother's lazy. That tree will lie there till [my niece] snigs it out”. Her brother was in fact a tireless worker, providing much of the infrastructural support that made life at the outstation possible, such as removing garbage and building shades. It was her brother who eventually removed the tree, too.

The table below (*Sexual Division of Labour*, p164) gives a summary of activities observed in camp and the surrounding area, but cannot capture the interrelatedness of many tasks:

Table 3: Sexual Division of Labour

Activities performed only by women	Activities performed only by men	Activities performed by both sexes
Making dilly bags	Maintaining vehicles	Fishing
Washing clothes	Cooking in <i>kopmari</i>	Making/mending spears
Hunting yams	Using a gun	Driving vehicles
Hunting turkey eggs	Hunting turtle	Fetching wood/water
Posting/collecting mail	Butchering turtle	Baking damper
Filling in DSS forms	Digging well	Raking camp
Office work	Building work	Tending hearth/cooking
	Pig hunting	Childcare
		Hunting goanna
		Playing cards

The story of a trip “to get *akandya*” is emblematic of the subtle nature of this interrelatedness. Florrie wanted to make a trip into the bush to gather materials for

basket-making. She told me to come along because she would be going to an important Story (Dreaming) place. Also accompanying us were her husband Sunlight, daughter Seppi, niece Alison, three children between three and ten years old and my own family and three dogs. Along the way, we visited the old (then derelict) station house and former camping places of the Lamalama. Florrie and Sunlight both spoke of the parts of the history of these places that they each knew and their joint aspirations for the future of Lamalama occupation of their lands. When we reached the Story places it was mainly Florrie who recounted the Stories, which concerned a cycle of events in the Flying Fox Story. The *akandya* palm grove figures in this cycle and is, moreover, a place particularly associated with women. Sunlight claimed that in the old days only old women could go there, but Florrie said “No, all women”. In these activities Florrie and Sunlight acted in concert, according to their knowledge and authority.

Having told us the Story of the place, Florrie and the girls set about cutting leaves from the palms to make fibre. Elsewhere on the trip the women dug for yams and pulled grass for baskets. The two younger women who accompanied us took turns in carrying a gun, but when we thought we were about to be charged by a pig, they were unable to use it. On the other hand, Sunlight made no move to take it over and I never saw him use a gun on any occasion. On the way home, we passed a tree that Florrie pointed out as housing “sugarbag”, bush honey. As she was confirming “Sugarbag here, look”, Sunlight was muttering to himself “Hey, Sunlight”. Sure enough, they were the next words she said and he grumbled “I knew it” as he reluctantly came forward to chop down the tree for her. As he carried it home on his shoulder, he joked about how he had earned this honey and how he didn't mind carrying it, but Florrie refused to respond to his jibes or to share the burden. Chopping down palm leaves was a hot, physically demanding job she had done alone, but she was not prepared to chop down the tree or help carry it. Once in camp all those of us who had been of the party soon polished off the honey, while telling each other that we should save some to share with the others who were away fishing.

The interrelatedness shown here is not that of the production line. Rather, it is a matter of independent agents keeping each other company and sharing labour where necessary and appropriate. In order to understand the significant factors in such a situation, it is useful to turn once again to Catherine Berndt:

Within the overall perspective of interdependence both men and women had relative independence in a wide range of tasks and obligations, rights and privileges. It was not a matter of members of each sex following their own interests or looking to their own welfare (Berndt 1982:49).

If we apply the criteria of access, agency and interest here, as Berndt's words remind us to do, we see gender taking its place as just one factor, and a rather minor one, in the interaction. Hearth group composition is once again evident in the personnel involved in this trip, but it is probably not hearth group membership alone that allows access. The country we ranged over was all Lamalama land, although a pastoral lease was in effect over nearly all of it at the time. Access here was on the basis of being part of the Lamalama mob. The places where we were told Stories, however, were all places belonging to Umpithamu speakers, that is, Florrie's family, and it was her ownership of those countries that gave her the authority to tell the Stories. Sunlight contributed where he had the kind of knowledge anyone might have, but he was particularly informative about the history of the old homestead buildings. His early life, after all, had not been spent on Lamalama country as much as Florrie's had. In the matter of the work tasks undertaken, gender can be seen to be at work in determining who did what, but it is less clearly relevant if we ask the question, "In whose interests were these tasks done?" The fibre would be made into bags, some of which were later sold, some used to prepare *karol* (a root vegetable) for the family. The yams were cooked and shared around the hearth. These tasks were in the individual's and the hearth group's interests. The honey that Sunlight made available (although Florrie found it) was consumed by all of us who had been present. Is this, like the heavy labour of construction mentioned above, an instance of male labour being at the service of the more encompassing, greater-than-domestic sphere? If so, does that fact give us any information about the relative power

and status of men and women in ECCYP? In order to explore these questions further, the next chapter turns to consider the role of women (and men) in their various mobs, that is, at a level of organization above the hearth group. The point was made above that the mob is most obvious as a type of social organization where there are a number of mobs distinguishing themselves from one another or from some other kind of social organization such as the State. It is appropriate, then, to consider at this point social action in the town of Coen where several mobs spent much of their time and where the State presence was most vividly felt.

4 Women and Power in Coen 1990-1991

It was my perception of women's importance in local affairs that prompted my interest in Coen in the first place, but a number of questions need to be asked of this perception. Are women indeed “important”, and how? Do they enjoy a high status only, or do they have power? If they have power, where does it come from? Does their gender have anything to do with the power any individual has?

In what follows, discussion of the nature and sources of power is followed by a detailed consideration of the people of outstanding power in Coen in 1990-91, identified by local reputation. Some of these people are women. However, to prove that one woman, or a thousand, has power is immaterial if a single man gains power because of his gender - at least as far as discussions of the influence of gender go. For gender is a quality of classes of persons, but power is operated by individuals, sometimes in despite of potentially disabling conditions. My discussion will focus on the ways in which a few outstanding people attain and retain power and it will be seen that gender is largely inconsequential in attaining social prominence.

Origins and indices of power

Weber defines power as “ the probability that one actor within a social relationship will be in a position to carry out his own will despite resistance, regardless of the basis on which this probability rests” (Weber 1947:152). This definition is particularly useful for present purposes since I want to examine gender as a factor, amongst others, in the probability that any individual will have power. Such a definition also allows one to see power as contingent, able to be wielded variously by individuals in particular situations,

rather than a matter of predictable relationships vested in institutions or ascribed status. This is particularly appropriate for situations such as that of Coen, where, it is likely that in the absence of institutions such as non-Christian ritualised religious practice, the exercise of power was often understated and elusive.

Much of the anthropological discussion of power in Aboriginal societies has tended to locate its origins in the religious sphere, particularly in the cycles of male initiation rituals which gave greatest power to mature fully-initiated men. In an earlier chapter I discussed the ways in which European preoccupation with this sphere of action that corresponded to a public, institutional source of power familiar to the observers, led to a relative blindness to ways in which Aboriginal women might wield power. Religious practice is still seen as the fount of power in all social spheres in the analyses of Bell and others who argue that it was women's religious/ritual roles that rendered them powerful to themselves and others. One suggestion of how religious knowledge translates into practical power is to be found in A. P. Elkin's famous monograph *Aboriginal Men of High Degree* (1945). There, Elkin suggested that religious knowledge was instrumentalised rather as other types of knowledge were instrumentalised in another European institution, the University. He likened Aboriginal shamans, nowadays colloquially called 'Murri doctors', to professionals with higher education, specialists in powerful areas of knowledge, acquiring their degrees through initiation into the world of Dreamtime spirits. He says:

This world [of creative powers] is believed to be the source of life in man and nature, and all fully initiated men are links with it. But only men of high degree, men who in their special initiation have been admitted to this world in the sky and on earth—only these men can exercise that power to prevent death, to restore life, to recapture the soul, to converse with the dead, and to understand in some measure the workings of the human mind (Elkin 1945:44-45).

Although the ethnographic record includes mention of female shamans (Spencer and Gillen 1966: 394,413,485; Roth 1897:158), Elkin's description implies that they are as excluded from high knowledge as they are from religious prominence, and for the same reason, because only initiated men could be admitted to the mysteries.

At first glance it would appear that discussions of religious power were irrelevant to the people I worked with in ECCYP, who practiced very little in the way of traditional ritual and, in particular, male initiation. In fact, none even of the oldest Lamalama men had been "put through" (initiated). Nevertheless, many people, some of them women, still had extensive knowledge of Stories and countries, and I argue that this knowledge is important in the exercise of power, irrespective of ritual manifestations. In the last chapter I suggested that the constitution of hearth and mob groups not only generated spheres of social life in which power could be seen to be exerted, but that the principles that structured those spheres, such as descent, kin ties made manifest in nurturance, seniority and so on, were the same principles that governed the use of power within the groups. I go on here to consider what these forms of power might have in common with religiously derived power by examining what Merlan (1988:30) calls "the articulation(s) of Aboriginal institutions and practices", that is, the ways in which religious knowledge has been described as translating into secular power.

I borrow from the work of Fred Myers (1986a), Ian Keen (1994), Erich Kolig (1989) and others to argue that underlying both religious practice and hearth- and mob-based social organisation, there is a principle of nurturance which is basic to the exercise of power. In many societies, religion provides what Annette Weiner (1992:100) has called a cosmological authentication of power by grounding it in eternal verities. In Aboriginal Australia, religion has been concerned with land and the relationship between people and land. Mutual nurturance is at the heart of this relationship and I argue that although rituals such as male initiation express special instances of nurturance, knowledge of country, including its cosmology, is an important source of power even

without ritual expression, and is available to both sexes. In the modern setting, as I indicate below, knowledge of country translates very directly into the likelihood that one actor will prevail over others.

The concept of nurturance, expressed locally as “looking after”, is discussed at length in Fred Myers' (1986a) ethnography of the Pintupi of the Western Desert. For the Pintupi, “being an adult is defined by the capacity to “look after” others” (Myers 1986a:213), whether by raising them as children, supporting them politically, or initiating them into the Law. This care must be repaid in service and obedience, but can never be totally recompensed, except through nurturing later generations. The physical care of children and young people is important, especially for women (Myers 1986a:249), but Myers finds the most consequential instances of nurturance in the extended cycles of ritual activity associated with male initiation, where young men depend on senior initiated kin for access to sacred knowledge and performance of the ceremonies. He says male initiation is:

. . . the premier cultural event in Western Desert life. Directed to the 'making' of individual men, at the same time the ceremony symbolically constitutes the society as a structure of reproduction . . . The production of the social person involves an elaboration of the ties of relatedness to others, the creation of a public self that takes priority over its private qualities, and the development of the ability to 'look after' others (Myers 1986a:228).

The population of the Western Desert is scattered thinly over a wide area and the ritual cycles involve people from the whole region. For this reason, initiation establishes relationships of inclusiveness among men from distant places (Myers 1986a:252), a “relatedness” that extends beyond the immediate family group. This relatedness not only constitutes a larger social grouping, it offers some protection against male violence and the difficulties of existence in the desert. Myers seems here to be in agreement with Ortner's conclusion that “encompassing domains”, that is “positions from which statements and practices of social encompassment, of universalising concern [are] enacted” (Ortner 1990:75) carry more prestige and power than “encompassed” domains.

Certainly, older Pintupi men's care for country and their younger generations is held to be one factor that guarantees the reproduction of society internally and externally (Myers 1986a:253). However, although Myers tells us that the public self has priority over the private one, he also notes that, since it is only after being initiated that men can marry, "The private (or intrafamilial) can only be pursued within the framework of a prior commitment to the extrafamilial relations among men" (Myers 1986a:238). In some sense, then, men must perform their "public" part in order to win a role in the private domain. Women also have ritual roles to play "in the reproduction of social persons" (Myers 1986a:251), but their domestic status is not dependant on their ritual performance. In fact, there are hints that men's ritual is symbolically homologous to motherhood (Myers 1986a: 307n). The emphasis is clearly the continuation of society, but a society that depends on the individual and is not just to be found in the encompassing domain.

However much importance the Pintupi might give to this widespread relatedness generated among men in ritual, there are clearly other factors at work in rendering the religious domain powerful. Myers (1986a:267) himself notes that, at the "encompassing" level, the authority generated by nurturance without religious reference, such as the authority of the village council, lacks legitimacy and decision-making power. In modern settings, one Pintupi might become "boss for" another "only insofar as he or she acts like a 'boss' by 'looking after' individuals. Pintupi understand authority as a right that corresponds to the duty to 'look after', to 'grow up', and to transform ego" (Myers 1986a:223; see also Anderson 1984 for a parallel situation in North Queensland). This kind of nurturance was evident in Coen, as well as the responsibility people felt to "look after" country by living on it and speaking up for it. But the nurturance relationship between individuals is not readily generalisable to public authority in the encompassing domain. In the encompassing domain of ritual relatedness, ritual leaders wield power and authority, as novices' references to initiation as "prison" or "high school" (Myers 1986a:238) indicate, thanks to their access to the transcendent authority of the Dreaming

(Myers 1986a:266). A useful analysis of the connection between power and religion such as this is provided by Annette Weiner's (1992) *Inalienable Possessions*.

In her analyses of some societies in the Pacific, Annette Weiner (1992) characterised the problem of gaining and holding power as “the paradox of keeping-while-giving”, a matter of exchange. For the Polynesian and Melanesian societies she is mainly concerned with, supreme power is held to reside in the gods or ancestors. Some of their procreative power, or mana, passes into goods such as bark cloths so that “to own these possessions is to participate directly in this power” (Weiner 1992:52), and to be able to exercise power over others. She calls these goods “inalienable”, for although they can be lost in conflict or forced into exchange, their loss means the loss of power, and their owners therefore seek to represent them as inalienable in an attempt to hold on to the power they confer. While goods flow to the owners of these inalienable possessions as others seek access to the source of power, goods and services must also be recirculated among supporters to avoid actually relinquishing the inalienable possessions—hence the paradox that one must give in order to be able to keep that which is of higher value.

In the Australian context, Weiner (1992:101-2) notes that knowledge of the Dreaming, expressed in names, myths, songs, ceremonies and sacred objects, is the relevant inalienable possession. Because Dreaming stories refer to particular tracts of country, “The Dreaming authenticates itself by identification with the geographic immobility of the [landscape]” (Weiner 1992:105). As Deborah Bird Rose has it:

In this sense, Dreaming is quite literally 'grounded'. The earth is the repository of blood from Dreaming births and deaths, sexual excretions from Dreaming activities, charcoal and ashes from their fires. Dreaming life has this quality which defies change: those things which come from Dreaming—country, boundaries, Law, relationships, the conditions of human life—endure (Rose 1992:57).

Access to such inalienable possessions is by birth, which brings rights in particular tracts of land, and therefore rights to certain stories, ceremonies, songs and so on. Such rights are inalienable in that they are not readily transferable to someone of different descent, but the full extent of such rights can only be acquired after a lifetime of political action and nurturance that demonstrates one's fitness to have them. The profoundest Dreamtime knowledge is widely desired but only those who have it can decide how much they will divulge and to whom (N. Williams 1987:46). As in the Pintupi case described by Myers, those who control rituals which give access to this knowledge are therefore powerful people in a society where they are seen as participating directly in transcendent power. But what of societies like those of ECCYP where ritual practice is negligible or absent? And is such religious knowledge still powerful in interaction with the non-Aboriginal world and its values? Erich Kolig (1989) supplies an interesting example of an Aboriginal society in transition between exclusively traditional power structures and accommodation with the non-Aboriginal culture.

The Kimberleys community described by Kolig (1989) had a history not unlike that of ECCYP except that the religious life has changed less in the Kimberleys.

Traditionally, it would appear, religious knowledge was the major legitimation for authority; its accumulation or relative absence provided a social hierarchy . . . Possession of religious knowledge seemed to entail not only considerable powers in processes of decision-making, but also the enjoyment of tangible privileges. The enjoyment of personal access to women in the form of polygynous arrangements is, of course, a very obvious privilege as opposed to the enforced celibacy of younger, religiously ignorant men. In addition, religiously knowledgeable men at least potentially, become recipients of a flow of gifts of goods and services with which the religiously ignorant have to buy access to religious information . . . Not the smallest privilege is to be master over life and death, as the instructors were in the ritual sphere. Any kind of ritual and initiation contained the possibility for the men in charge either to execute openly under the pretext of sacrilege . . . or to act more covertly by botching a young man's physical operation so as to ensure sepsis and subsequent death . . . Thus either by direct threat or by the

mere hint of it, religiously knowledgeable men could keep young men, women and children enthralled (Kolig 1989:51).

Kolig discusses only men's access to power and gives great weight to the legitimating potential of religious knowledge available only to men. Their power can be seen in their ability to make decisions for others, to take a wife or wives and in a degree of material wealth that both indicates and reinforces their position. Kolig here also raises the issue of the role of physical violence in the operation of power, a factor that is more familiar in the non-religious domain, but that has been commented on as necessary to the operation of power in other Aboriginal societies (Sutton and Rigsby 1982:165). In the modern setting, where so much of the goods, cash payments and other benefits come from outside the Aboriginal polity, Kolig finds that power also depends on the ability to successfully manipulate material resources and negotiate with official authorities (Kolig 1989:49, see also Keen 1994:129 for a comparable description of the modern Yolngu of Arnhem Land), an ability that is also dependent on the ownership of certain kinds of knowledge. If such knowledge were general, having it would not make any actor more likely to prevail over any other. It therefore needs to be managed, if power is to be retained.

Weiner does not comment on it, but knowledge is even more implicated in the paradox of keeping-while-giving than more tangible assets. Unlike a bark cloth, it cannot easily be displayed yet retained by its owner. This is probably part of the reason why, as Kolig (1989:56) notes, Aboriginal people of outstanding reputation are often obscure to outsiders, adopting a subdued and relaxed mien. To flaunt knowledge is to lose it. One must earn a reputation as a knowledgeable person, but like the keepers of the sacred tapa cloths, one must repay the prestations of those who aspire to knowledge with something less than knowledge itself. In ECCYP, those who knew how to get money, goods and support from whitefellas, including whitefella governments, had to share these benefits to retain powerful positions, but they rarely shared the knowledge of how to get them. Weiner's framework is useful in allowing us to see this management in terms of

exchange, and also, as in the following example, helps reveal the kinds of negotiation of traditional and non-traditional authenticating principles that happen in the modern Aboriginal context.

The leaders of the outstations of ECCYP all experienced some difference of opinion with some of their supporters over appropriate future directions that the outstations should go in, as well as over present policy. The very outstation movement itself did not enjoy universal and unmodified approval in the community but had to be argued for. In 1990 some members of one of the outstations paid a visit to the Thomson Collection in Melbourne where there are artifacts and photographs of their forebears, collected in 1928. When they returned home, they brought copies of many of the photographs showing people fishing, cooking, mourning their dead and dressed for ritual business, all in the vicinity of the present outstation. I was told by one of the leaders of this group that it was useful to have these photographs to impress on the young people that the stories they had been told of the old days were really true, “them old fellas really live like that”. In this way, the younger ones would be encouraged to spend more time at the outstation and consider it their home, since this was the “proper Aborigine” way to live. Since he had been raised in town himself, this man could not claim extensive knowledge of the lifestyle of “them old fellas” and their traditions to make his point—he needed photographs, that is, access to whitefella resources.

He and his group were able to get this access through their mobilisation of anthropologists and government departments. At the museum, only the men of the group were allowed to see and get copies of photographs of men dressed for ritual business, on the basis of restrictions dictated by the original collector and the museum staff's understanding of “Aboriginal” norms. Back home these nominally restricted photographs were handed round freely and there was even talk of having one of them enlarged and hung on the wall. For this group, then, the particularities of ritual practice had ceased to carry their former importance, while the trappings were still important as markers of an

identity whose assertion was just beginning to be beneficial to local people. In the context of recently emerging Aboriginal claims on land, older long-term whitefella inhabitants of ECCYP often argued that all the old “true” Aborigines had died out and that adoption of modern lifestyles, including the use of motor cars and videos, debarred people from making special claims on land on the basis of their Aboriginality. The leader who wanted to encourage others to support his outstation by utilising his ability to access external resources, therefore also needed to demonstrate his status as a “true” Aborigine to maintain the reputation that gave him that access.

Kolig notes that differences can be created between nominally equal ritual leaders by the fact that: “The result of successful reputation management is that quality of thought is measured against the complex background of a man's repute to the effect that his exegesis of Dreamtime law prevails over that of others, without there being any objective qualitative superiority in the information itself” (Kolig 1989:63). Those with a reputation as a knowledgeable person have the power to mould the picture of their culture held by others both within and without that culture, as the example just quoted illustrates. However, reputation must be continuously maintained by successful performance of nurturance and exchange. Because the leader referred to above could call on the support of his kin in demands to return to live permanently on their outstation, and because such a move fits with mainstream perceptions of Aboriginal life, he enjoyed a reputation that allowed him to call on outside institutions for funding and political support. These resources he could then deploy amongst his followers to ensure their continued support. His power was authenticated for whitefellas by other Aboriginal people's recognition of his leadership. For his kin it was authenticated by the way he manipulated whitefella resources to their benefit.

Certain factors emerge from the foregoing discussion as central to the operations of power in modern Aboriginal communities. Most basic of all is the ownership of knowledge. One important kind of knowledge is religious—the names, songs, law and

ritual that enacted and maintained the inherited order through connecting people to the numinous land. While the enactment of ritual has disappeared in ECCYP, land-related knowledge of stories, names, language and tradition still gives power. Since nowadays resources are often controlled by whitefellas, access to and the knowledge of how to extract resources from whitefellas is also important, not least for the way such resources (including ownership of the very land itself) can serve Aboriginal interests in land. The principle of nurturance is what allows this knowledge to be turned into power. Those with knowledge use it to “look after” others from whom they then expect support. Ian Keen seems to be describing this situation when he says of claims to country amongst the Yolngu of Arnhem Land:

what counted was being able to act on one's version of ownership - to enact the prerogatives due to land-holder or *dja:gamirri* (one who 'looks after') which include control of access to the land and use of the country, such as to establish an outstation, and performance of the related ceremonies. The size of the group was important for such abilities but so was one's place of residence. Those who lived at or near a disputed country, who had the more detailed knowledge of it, and could muster the most support, were at an advantage. Sheer physical force, related to group size and demographic structure may also have been a factor. Under more recent conditions relations with external agencies may also have been crucial, such as representation on the Northern Land Council (Keen 1994:129).

Where access to ritual is an important source of power, and where that access is restricted to males, there is obviously the potential for a power differential between men and women. No other factor seems to allow for gender to influence the operation of power, except perhaps the use of violence. In Aboriginal Australia, women, as well as men are expected to fight (Burbank 1994; Collmann 1988b). I once watched two grandmothers in Coen stand by while their charges, two girls of about 2 years old, fought with sticks. The grandmothers' only comment was “Look there. They're fighting like real women.” Nevertheless, statistics suggest that Aboriginal women suffer disproportionately from violence, particularly within the family (Bolger 1991:3).

Violence and the threat of violence are certainly brought into play in the politics of ECCYP, and it is a factor which carries a gender inflection, to be discussed further below.

Local factors in the exercise of power

Previous ethnographies from Cape York Peninsula have revealed many of the same factors in the operation of power there that the previous discussion has revealed. Chris Anderson (1984:383-389) describes the attainment of power in southeast Cape York Peninsula as being dependent on claims to and knowledge and control of country, knowledge and skills in the traditional sphere, an ability to deal successfully with Europeans, and large numbers of supporters (usually kin) who had to be encouraged in their support by services rendered. Although he does not use the word 'nurturance' Anderson's account is particularly reminiscent of Myers' when he says: "a boss's role was to look after people, to ensure a steady supply of needed resources, to undertake distribution of goods and to act as a social and residential focus point" (Anderson 1984:227). In the 1984 work, Anderson explicitly denies that any but the most exceptional women could gain power (Anderson 1984:386), although subsequently he notes that in other parts of Cape York Peninsula women seemed more likely to be powerful than they were in the Wujal Wujal area. (Anderson 1988:520n).

Another study from northern Queensland which raises issues of both nurturance and gender is Julie Finlayson's (1989, 1991) of an ex-mission community she calls Rubyville. There, she says, nurturance is "more commonly seen as a woman's quality or role than a male one . . . a feminised praxis" (Finlayson 1989:103). Men are able to invoke nurturance to draw on women's goods and services, without, it seems, having to reciprocate. As in the cases described by Myers and Anderson, the idiom of nurturance is extended to whitefellas, and Finlayson argues that its successful use allows the extraction of goods and services that would not otherwise be obtainable. She concludes that "the

'boss' is not dominant over the other half of the partnership. The position of actual power, as power to command, is with the dependant" (Finlayson 1989:113). Since in Rubyville men are dependent on women, this logic leads her to the position that men have power over women in a way that women don't have over men. This seems to me to be an overstatement since it is clear from Anderson's study (1984:314) and Finlayson's own that the idiom of nurturance can only be successfully invoked with the consent of the "boss", so that this person always has control over the relationship, even if the dependent is not completely powerless.

However that might be in any particular case, the studies of Anderson and Finlayson indicate that the idiom of nurturance alone is not enough to guarantee gender equality in access to power. Closer to ECCYP, Sutton and Rigsby's catalogue of factors necessary for political success in western Cape York Peninsula includes gender:

“. . . personal will and ability . . . structural position and the solidarity of one's supporters. It is structurally advantageous to be an adult male descended from a senior lineage segment, to have many siblings with the same mother (and preferably the same father), and to have many children, daughters to give in marriage and sons who could help in fighting. In former times it was apparently a great advantage to have a reputation as a killer" (Sutton and Rigsby 1982:165).

At the time of writing, these authors were rather hesitant about applying the same criteria to the eastern part of the region (Sutton and Rigsby 1982:167), but the principles appealed to by the protagonists in the argument discussed below suggest that most of them do in fact apply. The only doubt hovers over the issue of the advantage of being a senior male.

Access to motor vehicles has often been described as a fertile source of disputes in Aboriginal communities (Gerrard 1989; Myers 1989), and it was over access to a vehicle that the argument in question began. It happened a day or two after the funeral of the Kuuku Ya'u (Lockhart) husband of a Lamalama woman had taken place in Coen. The

inevitable tensions surrounding a funeral had been exacerbated on this occasion by the relationship between the Lamalama and the Lockhart groups. It is relevant to the argument that around this time Lamalama people were being encouraged to go to a land rights meeting at Lockhart which they were reluctant to attend. They attributed sorcery and excessive drunken violence to Lockhart people, and the tensions between the two groups had been raised further by competition over the management of the recent funeral and the balancing of Lockhart and Lamalama rights in the body. The protagonists in the argument in question were a man who I will call Bill³⁶ and his sister-in-law Nancy. Bill was a man who could be considered structurally senior, in Sutton and Rigsby's terms, but who had no full siblings nor any children. Nancy was the wife of his younger half-brother Frank and she had three brothers and a sister currently living with the mob and could depend on the support of a daughter, three nieces and two nephews, at least, among the young adults.

I had brought Bill into town from the outstation for the funeral in my truck and had offered him a lift home the same day. He would neither join in the family feast after the funeral nor return to the outstation because he was drinking. Nancy and Frank controlled the outstation vehicle as well as having one of their own, and they disapproved of his behaviour. Frank and his daughter were the designated drivers of the communal vehicle. Two days later, when the argument erupted, Bill was still drinking but had decided to go home. However, a football carnival was in progress that day and everyone wanted to stay and watch it rather than drive to the outstation. As soon as I arrived in Frank and Nancy's yard that morning, I was told by one of Frank's sisters that Bill had been shouting about how no-one would take him home. I pointed out that I had offered but he didn't want to go. Nancy said he had been telling everyone that she had told me not to take him and so he was stuck in town. When he turned up he immediately told me in a loud and aggressive voice that I should drive him home right away because he wanted to

36 All names used in the subsequent story are pseudonyms.

pack his bags and go live in Cooktown because he was “sick of taking orders from a pack of women”. I concluded that Nancy had told him he couldn't be driven home that day, or that he was expecting her to.

Nancy immediately retaliated that he could go to Cooktown if he wanted, that she didn't need him. She said “You don't look after my camp. I got my sister there, I got my brother there. You don't look after my camp.” When Bill threatened violence to her dogs, she was not daunted, replying “All right you shoot my dogs. We got a big gun here too.” She went on to berate him with his uselessness in not being able to drive the vehicle himself, so that when ATSIC had provided the vehicle it had been registered as in Frank's care. Bill tried to raise the issue of his seniority over Frank within the mob, but Nancy accused him of just being jealous and added “But when we at meeting you don't talk up.” Nancy argued that she had more rights in the Port Stewart outstation than Bill had because “that my mother blood, my father blood, that country.” Bill's mother had been an Umpila-speaking³⁷ woman, that is, from outside the Lamalama mob, defined territorially.

Two of Bill's half-sisters and two of his wife's sisters were present at this exchange, but no-one else joined in. After Nancy's reference to rights in country, Bill fell silent and drifted away from the group, out of the yard. Nancy was still agitated and concerned to explain to me how things were between Frank and Bill. According to her, Frank was just trying to look after his older brother, but that Bill had started to get jealous when the outstation vehicle arrived and he wanted to drive it. I asked if he could drive and she said “No! He don't know nothing!” She went on to say that when they had all been at land-related meetings in Brisbane and elsewhere, he had just sat with his arms folded. “I gotta talk all the time. But when he drunk, he open his mouth WIDE.” Later that day and intermittently over the next few days Bill was referred to by Nancy, Frank and others as

37 Although I was told that Bill's mother was Umpila, and she definitely spoke that language, there are suggestions that she was regarded by some as Lamalama (B. Rigsby: pers. comm.).

“that Japaneer man”. When I asked what that meant I was told “Must be he Japaneer man. He won't talk up for Port Stewart”.

Bill's announcement of his intention to withdraw from the vicinity at the beginning of this argument can be taken as a token of the seriousness of his grievance (N. Williams 1987:87). Nancy's response didn't immediately take up the putative cause of the argument, access to resources. Instead she focussed on Bill's responsibilities, which she considered he wasn't living up to, and the extent to which his services were needed or not. The whole argument raised all the factors identified as significant in the acquisition of power in the previous analysis: descent, rights in land, the support of kin and the responsibility to care for people and country. Bill's lack of skills and resources was in some measure compensated for by his knowledge of country, which was respected by his kin. But his unwillingness to share this knowledge or even trade on it to take on some of the work for country, seriously weakened his position. Frank was contrasted with his brother in having skills which he put at the service of the community and he was described as just wanting to look after him. Any services Bill could provide, such as looking after the camp, were being taken care of by Nancy's kin, who all had strong descent rights in the country. Threats of violence were unsuccessful and the issue of the gender of those with the right to allocate resources and make decisions affecting others simply disappeared.

The same parameters and indices of power emerge from this argument as were common in the wider literature. These could be listed as follows:

- Descent rights in land
- Land related knowledge
- Large numbers of siblings and children
- Seniority over others in the group
- Performance of nurturant responsibilities
- Relations with external agencies
- Use of violence

With the exception of the last two, all of these factors relate directly to hearth membership and mob composition. Very particular rights in land and knowledge related to it belong to patrifilial hearth groups, though such rights are not distributed evenly within them. The support of siblings and their numerical strength allow some hearths to dominate others within the mob, a domain that is also relevant to the performance of nurturant responsibilities. I argue that it is only where hearth and mob organisation break down that gender becomes relevant.

Local Mobs

Aboriginal people in Coen distinguish local groups as “mobs”, as happens elsewhere in Australia (e.g. Sansom 1980; Anderson 1984,1989). Such mobs may be identified through a common territorial affiliation, as in “that Port Stewart mob”, language (“that Mungkan mob”) or kinship relations (“the Smith mob”). Occasionally mobs will be distinguished by the name of a focal individual (Rigsby 1980:92) as in “Mabel and them”. Rigsby (1980:92; 1992:358) has noted that amongst the Lamalama local groups, those who actually live together, have always been composed of members of a number of language speaking and land-owning groups. He says:

Within a local band, there are always one or more mature adult focal males who exercise leadership in making decisions regarding movement and other activities. They are focal because other adult males will be in the band because of their relationships of kinship, marriage or even friendship with them. Aboriginal people often refer to a local band as 'So-and-so mob' after a focal male (Rigsby 1980:92).

This parallels Anderson's observation that only very exceptional women could ever be powerful amongst the groups he studied. During the period of my fieldwork, the labelling of a group by its focal member was common to all groups in Coen, and, in

contrast to the classical situation described by Rigsby, the focal person did not have to be male. Groups were referred to as 'Margaret's mob' or 'Mabel and them' and these women were indeed focal, not only in drawing other people to them, but in their ability to make decisions for those others. I will describe some of the decision-making further below, but here I note that the use of a woman's name in a mob's name can be taken as an indication that women, as well as men, were indeed important in these domains.

Mobs may be short-term entities, constituted for a single season's stock work, perhaps, and named for the station they work on. More enduring mobs take their identity from enduring principles—kinship and descent from country. Where mobs are identified by a focal individual's name it is most probably because this is the individual who has most successfully exploited the principle of nurturance to tie people to them. The strength of that individual's claim to power will be reflected in the permanence of the group. Three generations ago the bush-living Lamalama of the coastal plain might be referred to by other Aboriginal people as “the Balclutha mob”, or “Balclutha and them”, making it unclear whether the name derived from Balclutha Creek, in the area, or George Balclutha, senior man in the group. Some of the descendants of that mob are today's “Port Stewart mob”, the change of name reflecting the shift in the geographical centre of the mob's activities, as well as the loss of the focal individual. Since the constitution of this group is based on kinship and descent, it has an enduring identity. “Mabel's mob”, on the other hand, although including people who were related to Mabel, was held together by Mabel's provision of food, shelter and household services to (mainly) young people. One can expect that if these people set up households of their own, or if it became impossible for Mabel to supply goods and services, this mob would dissipate.

I use genealogies to describe the ECCYP mobs because kinship is an important metaphor in local understandings of the composition of mobs. However, it is not possible to look at a genealogy and decide who the politically important people are likely to be, nor how various actors will necessarily relate to each other. Everyone is related to others

in a number of ways, and mobs may include people who are strictly unrelated or only distantly related. This may not be obvious from the genealogies given here, which enshrine actors' descriptions of their current relationships to each other at the time I gathered the information. Nor are there any hard and fast correlations between factors such as birth order or gender and power. Birth gives one a structural position that may be exploited and exploitable in a variety of ways, but the actions of the individual are also relevant, as we have seen in the discussion of the argument over the truck above. Elder siblings may have a structural potential for dominance, but if they are absent from the scene because of work or the abuse of alcohol, they cannot exploit that potential.

The issue of relevance to current politics must also be kept in mind when considering the following genealogies. For instance, genealogies included in a report to Cook Shire Council about the use of the Port Stewart outstation (Jolly and Jolly 1991) were acknowledged to be incomplete. Since the point at issue was the current composition of the Port Stewart mob, families who had moved out of the area were omitted. At the same time, it was explicitly stated in the report that other Lamalama people could lay claim to inclusion in the mob by right of descent. These genealogies, without in any way being deliberate falsifications, were statements of the politics among the families concerned at the time they were elicited. The same applies to all of the genealogies I use here. At another time or for another purpose it is possible that different sets of relatives may have been given more prominence, depending on their degree of involvement in local affairs.

The Bassani Mob

The Bassani mob and Mabel's mob formed the core of the Lamalama group in ECCYP, in Coen and at the outstation at Port Stewart in 1990-91. The marriage of Sunlight Bassani and Florrie Liddy was central to it in every way, joining as it does two large and important Lamalama families. As well as their structural prominence, Sunlight

and Florrie actively maintained the mob through support for and influence over their kin. As can be seen from the genealogy presented on page 120, the present day Lamalama associated with Port Stewart describe themselves as descending from a single apical ancestor, George Balclutha, who was grandfather to the present senior generation. It is acknowledged that he had several wives and it may be that other families not currently living in the area, such as the Salts and the Kulla Kullas, may be able to claim a place on this genealogy. On the other hand, the relationship between some of the families represented here might not be as close as this table suggests, since some of the children of “Old Man George” had different mothers.

Rights in land are held locally to descend from *puula*, father's father, a term also used to refer to the ancestral owners of an estate and its animating Stories. The figure on page 120 represents the relationship of a number of Lamalama families to a particular (Umbuygamu-speaking) set of estate owners. Harry Liddy (Umpithamu) and Jimmy Jealous (Tableland Lamalama) both married two sisters who were daughters of George Balclutha. Daughters of these marriages married grandsons (SS) of George Balclutha and such first cross-cousin marriage is or was common. In fact this feature—that they marry “too close”—is recognised by neighbouring inland peoples as characteristic of the Lamalama. It thus contributes to their distinctiveness as a group as well as maintaining group cohesion through endogamy.

The grandsons referred to above are Bobby Stewart and Sunlight Bassani, who stand in the relationship of cousin-brother to each other, that is, they are brothers according to local systems. Bobby is the elder and thus in a structurally dominant position, but it was in fact Sunlight who was the politically dominant brother during the course of my fieldwork. Bobby sometimes acknowledged it, saying “no matter he my younger brother, he still boss for that country [Port Stewart]”. At other times he complained that although he was the elder, Sunlight didn't keep him informed about what was going on. Bobby and his wife Daisy, one of the daughters of Jimmy Jealous

mentioned above, had no children and this limited their ability to build up a network of their own. Daisy's sisters were either deceased or spent most of their time outside the region and this further limited the scope of influence this couple enjoyed.

The marriage of Sunlight to Florrie, then, was politically important in a number of ways. Both parties descend from important people of the *puula* generation, with rights in Umbuygamu estates, on one hand, and Umpithamu estates, on the other. Both had large numbers of siblings living in their vicinity, and though they have had only one daughter of their own, they have raised fourteen of their nephews and nieces. Their mob thus had the important feature of large numbers of closely-related personnel who they had bound to them by nurturance. But their power within the network was ensured by the fact that between them they commanded the two essential types of knowledge—knowledge of country, language and tradition on Florrie's part, and knowledge of whitefellas and how to use them on Sunlight's part, a situation that arose from their very different life histories.

Florrie was probably born in 1934, and her childhood and young adulthood was spent in the bush with her parents and siblings. Her father worked as caretaker on the Annie River-Coen road after the Second World War, and during that time the family occupied a number of traditional camping places on their own territory at various places close to the road. Later, they spent more time at Port Stewart, although they did still visit their other countries. In 1961, for instance, just weeks before their final removal from Port Stewart, they spent time at *Wontoymuka* and other places near Running Creek.

Florrie's knowledge of country and its associated Stories is acknowledged by everyone to be extensive and to be politically important to her husband, too. One way in which Sunlight's power was sometimes challenged was for others to say: "He only know about country because Florrie bin show im", a contention he always denied by referring to his period as a stockman when his father was able to teach him about country.

Although her brothers all worked on cattle stations as soon as they were old enough, Florrie lived an almost entirely bush existence until forcibly removed from it and thus was able to gather much knowledge of country in spiritual and practical senses. She is fluent in both her mother's and father's languages (Umbuygamu and Umpithamu, respectively), and "hears" (can understand) others. She is a renowned fisherwoman and an expert hunter of goanna and vegetable food, and these skills are well appreciated by the rest of the mob. But most importantly her social prominence can be seen in the respect others hold for her as a custodian of knowledge relating to country.

Sunlight, on the other hand, identifies and is identified much more with Coen. His father had worked for the Bassani family at Port Stewart in his younger days. When this family moved into Coen, Sunlight's father went with them and the rest of his life was spent working for European employers based there, first as a stockman and then, as he got older, as gardener and handyman. Sunlight's mother was employed in domestic work by the same Europeans in Coen that employed his father. She died shortly after giving birth to her son, in 1938. When a new school was opened in Coen in 1947, Sunlight's name was one of the first on the register, but he didn't like school and was unhappy there. He was "mad for horses" and couldn't wait to join his father in stockwork. When his employers gave up their stock interests he worked for them in other capacities, mainly in their shop. Over his lifetime he has built up a reputation with local whitefellas as a good and reliable worker and an important member of the Lamalama. This means he is able to call on these people for various kinds of support, moral and practical. Local whitefellas were less inclined to criticise the Bassani mob and their outstation pretensions than some other groups, and this sometimes reduced the amount of bureaucratic interference they had to suffer. On one occasion when the Bassani mob were being incited to fight by another family with whom they had long-standing differences, Sunlight's (female) employer arrived on the scene just at the same moment as the new policeman. She went out of her way to praise the Bassanis' handling of this incident in the policeman's hearing and turned to Sunlight and Florrie's daughter and said "I hope

God's got a big golden throne for your mother and father because they deserve it. I tell people I'd rather be without my old man than without Sunlight Bassani, I couldn't do without him." The policeman did not pursue the matter further.

On a more material plane, Sunlight's connections with whitefellas and his access to their resources were instrumental in helping the Lamalama re-establish a presence at Port Stewart. After Florrie had been in Bamaga a few years after the removal of 1961, she was allowed to return to Coen to visit her brother Freddy. Freddy had not been removed since he was working on a station at the time. Sunlight followed her back to Bamaga, they were married and their daughter was born there. Several years later when they returned to Coen, Sunlight returned to his old employers. At this time the family had no vehicle and so when they wanted to go away for the weekend or on holidays into the bush they would have to walk, unless they could get a lift from a friendly whitefella. Sunlight could sometimes arrange this and even on occasion was able to borrow a car so that relatives and more equipment could be carried. At first most such trips had to be in the vicinity of Coen, but occasional visits were made to the coastal homelands. When the family obtained a vehicle in the mid 1980s, it became possible to make more frequent visits to Port Stewart for weekends and holidays and relatives could be invited along. While other of the Port Stewart Lamalama also claim to have been central in the establishment of the outstation, Sunlight, Florrie and their vehicle were certainly important.

Sunlight's nurturing role at Port Stewart was also tied up with his vehicle, which he used to fetch firewood and water for the camp and to clear away the garbage. His work at the outstation generally reflected the kinds of work he did in town for wages. He also did all the routine jobs like babysitting when the other adults were fishing (he himself was an indifferent fisherman). But his "caring for country" extended to his ability to represent Lamalama interests in land in negotiations with organisations such as ATSIC and whitefellas such as government advisers. Others were happy for him to take on such a

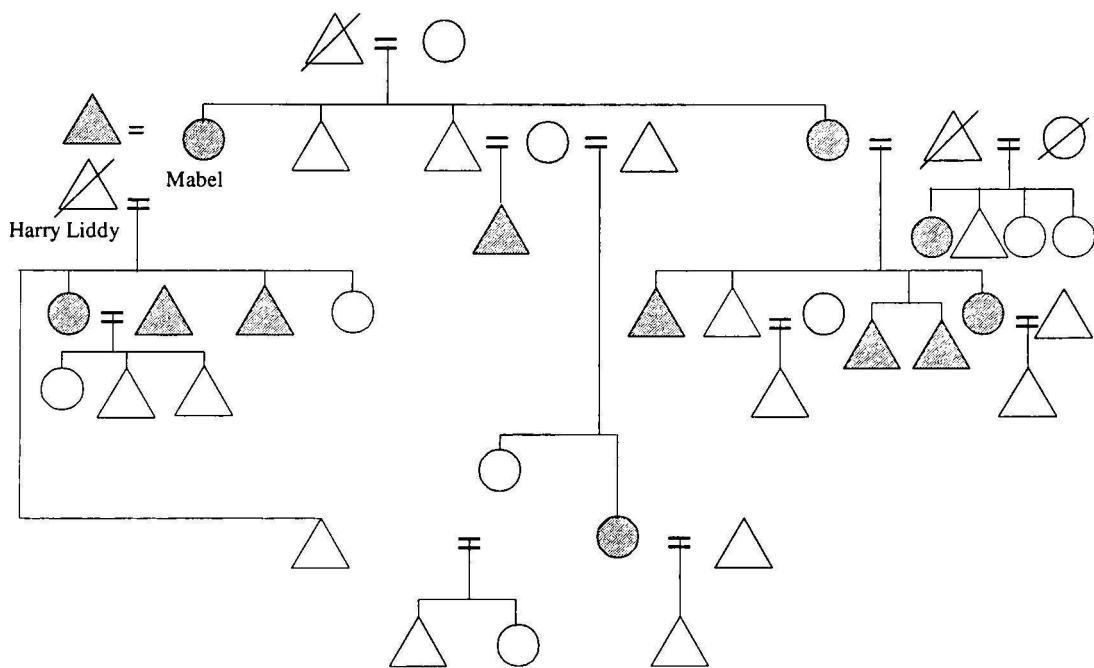
role because he “knows how to talk to whitefellas”, but his authority in land-related matters was greatly increased by the fact of his connection with Florrie.

Mabel's Mob

Mabel is a woman who gave shelter to and shared resources with a large number of young people in Coen, many of them young men. In return, they hunted for her, gave her lifts in their vehicles, helped her maintain some peace and also on occasion fought. Mabel's mob contained a great deal of potential in the upcoming generation following from their command of the two essential types of knowledge. Her oldest daughter is well-educated and fluent in whitefella ways, providing the kind of knowledge that is relevant in negotiation with the non-indigenous world. On the other hand, Mabel's deceased husband was Florrie's elder brother, a major landowner in the region of the group's outstation, and thus his children are in a good position to become major actors there by right of descent. At the time of my fieldwork some of these young people complained that they were not told enough about country by their elders. Following on the handover of title to the Port Stewart area in 1992, increasing access to country and mapping activities associated with land claims have made sure that young adults now are being instructed in knowledge of country (Hafner, pers. comm.). The labour power of the young people in Mabel's network was also in demand when there was stockwork on the surrounding stations or when there was work to be done on the outstation.

Although this group was always referred to as Mabel's mob, it is true that much of the cash that went through the group came from the wages of Mabel's partner. He was steadily employed by one of the local station owners, while Mabel's only income was the supporting parent's benefit she received for the three children she was raising for other people. Part of Mabel's prominence in this mob can be attributed to her position as one of the descendants of George Balclutha and so one with access to the Port Stewart outstation. Her partner, in contrast, was a west-side man with no interests in land in

common with the Lamalama. It was therefore through Mabel that her supporters could get access to the outstation. Like Sunlight, Mabel had grown up and spent much of her adult life in Coen, and part of the reason why her mob was less influential than his was her lack of detailed knowledge of country such as Florrie enjoyed, as well as the prominence of Umpithamu rights in the area. Mabel's sister was less focal than her, not just because she was younger, but also because she had been married to a non-Lamalama man and spent many years outside of the Lamalama group. Mabel's brothers both lived outside of the region, visiting only occasionally and playing no part in Lamalama business at this time.



Shading indicates active supporters

Figure 20: Mabel's Mob

Margaret's Mob

During my first visit to Coen in 1989 I was introduced to Margaret as someone of significance in the affairs of the local corporation and someone who was struggling to get land of her own. At that time she had no land. Throughout the period 1990-91 she was able to make great advances towards this goal. She had some areas mapped by an anthropologist and gained permission to set up an outstation within the Lockhart DOGIT by late 1990. She gradually established a presence in her chosen area, but this was not the area closest to her in terms of descent from *puula*. Much of her ancestral land straddled the Wenlock River and was occupied by a government-owned station used as a buffer zone for the control of tuberculosis and brucellosis in cattle. In 1990, Margaret was advised that there was no prospect of setting up an outstation there, and certainly no prospect of running cattle, as Margaret and her mob wished to do (Jolly and Jolly 1991:28). As a result, Margaret concentrated her efforts in establishing an outstation further up the Wenlock River in the "Western Water Area" of Lockhart River's DOGIT land where she had collateral descent rights. A change of council at Lockhart in 1990, when some of Margaret's relations took office, meant increased sympathy for her aims from that quarter.

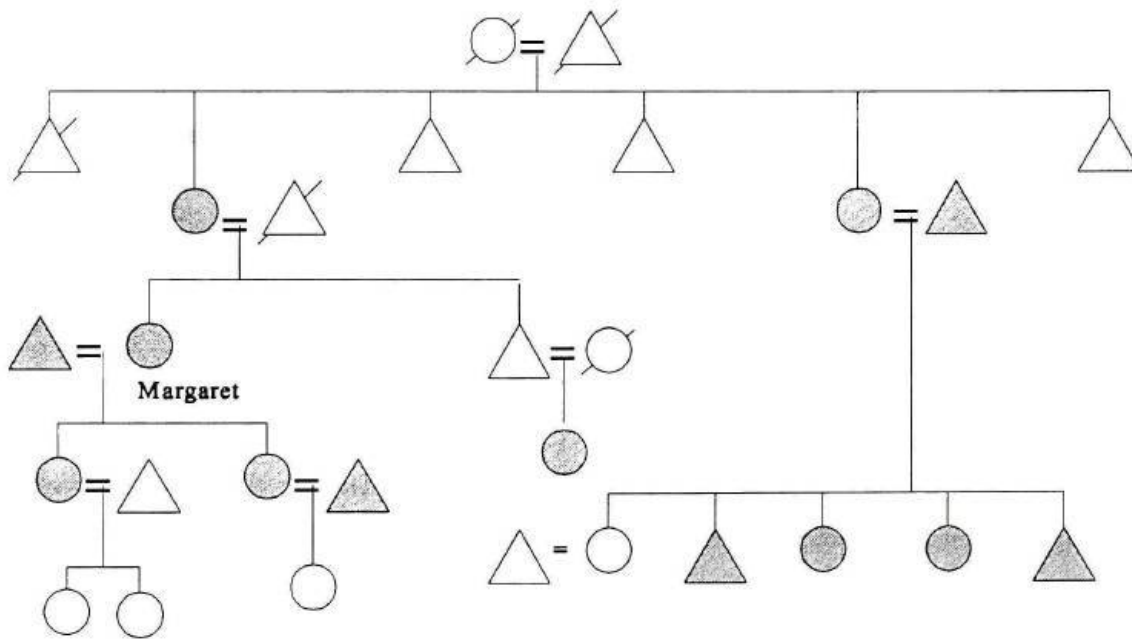
Two old men, Tommy Silver and Toby Horseboy, had closer claim than Margaret to this Western Water Area, but were unable even to visit it due to lack of transport. Margaret, on the other hand, was able to use the local Aboriginal corporation, church, anthropologists and government departments, as well as (distant) kin relations at Lockhart to negotiate residence rights for her group in the area and she was punctilious about taking the old men onto their country as often as they wished. Their (inalienable) rights in the land were the supreme authentication of power over it, but she was able to access this power by making it possible for them to live on the land and have some say in its future. Contrary to Kolig's (1989:50) assertion that modern conditions require powerful people to have sophisticated English and other communicative and

administrative skills, Margaret has made use, through her friendships, of those who have such skills rather than using them herself. Her command of English allowed her to communicate well with Europeans, but she had not had much education and could not deal with bureaucratic business unaided. This is where she used her personal contacts to mobilise official support.

Margaret is a woman of committed Christian belief and her support of the church in Coen has been repaid by its support of her. The local Moomba Aboriginal Corporation, established to help people set up outstations, was sponsored by the Lutheran Church, which made meeting and office space available, and whose personnel gave time and effort to the local outstation movement. The local pastor and his wife were active in petitioning various authorities for support for the outstations, Margaret's included. They helped Margaret write letters and apply for grants for vehicles and other support from Lockhart Council, the DAIA, ATSIC, anthropologists and others who could further the Wenlock outstation. They, and others in Moomba Corporation, acknowledged Margaret as the leader of the Wenlock group.

Like Sunlight, Margaret was also able to get support from whitefellas, thanks to her reputation as a good worker. She spent most of her life on cattle stations and she and her husband were both known as useful workers there, with a good knowledge of cattle. At the time of my fieldwork, Margaret had for some time been employed as part-time home help to the aged and infirm people living on the Coen reserve. Later she was employed in this capacity on the outstation and the nursing sisters spoke highly of her care, and supported her in arguing that the outstation was a healthier place for the old folk to live than the town, as long as they had Margaret to look after them. This was important, because Margaret needed to get as many people onto her outstation as possible, particularly the old men who had primary rights in the country. The one criticism that others in the local Aboriginal community levelled against Margaret's ambitions was that she lacked a "big mob" to make them work. It was sometimes

pointed out that her husband, an Olkolo man, was also working to establish an outstation on country of his own, far to the south of the Wenlock. Daughters, it was said, were liable to follow the father. Margaret depended heavily on her uterine kin for work on her outstation as well as numerical strength in her mob. The following diagram indicates her relationship with those who worked with her and acknowledged her authority over the Wenlock outstation in 1990-91.



Shading indicates Margaret's active supporters.

Figure 21: Margaret's Mob

As can be seen, Margaret's uterine kin were very important. They worked on the outstation infrastructure as well as providing the sheer numbers which tended to legitimate the enterprise in the eyes of others. These relations liked the bush life afforded by the outstation and enjoyed some access to Margaret's resources in town, not least of

which were her two vehicles. However, these relations were well known as good workers and were much in demand from other outstations and relatives at Laura. They worked on another outstation before Margaret got hers going, but complained that since they were not related to that group, they were given an unfair proportion of the work to do in return for poor housing and “bossing” by the outstation leader. This experience helped Margaret keep their support in the face of competition for their services, and their continuing presence was very important to her. As part of Margaret’s mob they felt they received fairer rewards for their work as well as enjoying the comfort of being “at home”. As well as the need for able-bodied workers, and the idea of nurturance, the importance of having a “mob” on an outstation probably also reflects Aboriginal ideas about ownership of land. For a single nuclear family to control an outstation would be to act “just like a whitefella” and outstation leaders all emphasised that they were doing things “proper Aborigine way”. Margaret therefore worked hard to maintain support, largely through the provision of resources.

She could offer these resources because she and her husband were in work and didn't drink (unlike her MZ and MZH who also worked but drank periodically). She also had access to the money brought in by her daughters, who were on Supporting Parents Benefit, and their partners, who were on the dole most of the time. As a result, Margaret had a small vehicle even before the DAIA provided a 4WD for outstation support. This vehicle was an old sedan which provided transport in and around Coen, but could not have been used off the bitumen. In town it was appreciated as saving people a long hot walk to and from the shops, church or hospital, and thus fulfilled the requirements of nurturance. On one occasion, Margaret's daughters had been beaten up on their way to the shops and after she bought the car, she said that they felt safer, since they now didn't have to walk past the houses of their assailants. The car was always spoken of as hers, although her daughters contributed to its cost and upkeep and her son-in-law drove it. But if her mother's kin wanted use of it, they had to ask Margaret.

These kin also applied to Margaret for loans of money and for advice when their children got into trouble. For instance, when Margaret's MZS seemed likely to go to jail, his parents asked Margaret to mobilise her links in Moomba and the church to get him a good lawyer. Her MZ's children spent a good part of their time in Margaret's house while in Coen and would often turn up there looking for a feed, which they rarely failed to find. They were, in everyone's estimation, part of "Margaret's mob", people she looked after and who supported her in return. However, their aims were not identical with hers. They wanted to spend some time in congenial surroundings in the bush, but had no special links to the land occupied by the Wenlock outstation. They also enjoyed the social amenities of the town and Margaret had to give of some of her own resources there and sometimes compromise her own ambitions to ensure their continued support.

For instance, although the outstation was nominally alcohol-free, Margaret let her mother's kin go to the outstation even when they had been drinking, in part as a demonstration of their continued support of her, but also because their presence attracted that of a couple of the whitefellas from Coen. These men had from time to time had sexual relationships with the young women who were MZD to Margaret and that is why they visited the outstation, often bringing alcohol with them. Margaret permitted this because they could be prevailed upon to do some work for her. She could therefore be seen as using control of access to women in her exercise of power as Kolig and others describe powerful men doing. It is not uncommon in Aboriginal society for older people to regulate access to young women (Merlan 1988:44) and the point is here that it was a woman who did so. Margaret's husband objected to the presence of these men on the grounds that the same blokes were "cheeky" to Aborigines in town and he mistrusted them. In this, as in other matters he expressed his disagreement with her administrative decision, but also added "That's your country Margaret, I can't tell you."

Although expressed in terms of kin relationships, the composition of Margaret's mob is not solely a function of kinship. Although mob members are kin, there are kin

who are not part of the network. At the time of my fieldwork, Margaret's brother was working on the cattle far from home and was not available to support her aims. He has since returned and, with his new partner, a Lamalama woman, is a major supporter of the outstation. Margaret's husband, on the other hand, although he did a lot of work in getting the Wenlock outstation established, has since set up his own outstation and that deprives Margaret of his presence most of the time. Margaret's mother's kin may choose at another time to throw in their lot with other relatives who are able to offer them more. Common, or at least not incompatible, aims are important in keeping people in the mob. In this case the development of Margaret's aspirations for an outstation made it possible for her to provide goods and services to her mother's kin. Their support made it easier for Margaret to further her aspirations. Their mutual association is a result of their mutual benefit. Although the personnel are recruited from kin, the mob crystallises out of converging purposes, around a common sphere of action.

The Merepah Mob

Another important group of people in Coen were referred to as “the Merepah mob”, after the name of the station which, in 1990, the then Aboriginal Development Corporation (ADC) had purchased on their behalf. The focal member and acknowledged leader of this group was Woompi Keppel, a Wik Iyanh man who had traditional ties to the country, had worked on the station under its original White owner, Fred Keppel, and had been a driving force behind the negotiations with ADC and the non-indigenous owners over the purchase of the property. As their language name, Wik Iyanh, suggests, this group's land lay to the west of Coen and they had many ties with the Wik Mungkanh and other groups of the west coast, most of whom lived at Aurukun. People in Coen would sometimes refer to those most closely associated with Merepah outstation as “Woompi's mob”, but the support of his brother Noble and his sister, Rosie Ahlers, both now deceased, were crucial in establishing and maintaining his leadership. The main

factor in Woompi's successful use of power was the way in which he was able to take advantage of the whitefella system to build up a reputation as an important man. Up until the purchase of the lease of Merepah on behalf of his group, his access to White power bases was through Coen. I will describe how his orientation and that of his group changed after they took up residence at Merepah and came within the Aurukun ambit.

Although he had worked as a stockman in his youth, and therefore had spent a lot of his time in the bush, Woompi's association with Coen was of long standing. By 1974 Woompi was unemployed but taking an active part in the management of the Aboriginal community in town, by acting as unofficial assistant to the Liaison Officer of the Department of Aboriginal and Islander Affairs³⁸. He appears to have begun by supervising hygiene and public health matters on the Reserve and controlling the use of alcohol there. Late in 1974 concerns were expressed about Woompi's authoritarian attitude.³⁹ It was alleged that he had forced people to work for local whitefellas without pay and had them locked up when they refused. As we have already seen (Chapter 2), whitefellas in the region have always assumed their right to appropriate Aboriginal labour in just this way. On this occasion the local police sergeant said that people had to be made to work when they were told to, even though no pay had been offered. It is significant that the people who complained on this occasion were visitors from outside Coen. The local Aboriginal people appear to have accepted Woompi's authority much more readily. According to Mrs Higgins, the Liaison Officer, Woompi later told her he had been doing too much police work and wanted to get back to working for the community. She urged her employers to put him on their payroll in order to retain his services, but also to define and restrict his exercise of authority. By March 1975

38 This department of the Queensland State Government has had many names over the years, including Department for Aboriginal and Islander Advancement and Department of Community Services.

39 Letter from D. Higgins, Coen Liaison Officer, to Cairns Regional Manager, Department of Aboriginal and Islander Affairs, 15 December 1974.

Woompi had been appointed as Assistant to the Liaison Officer employed by the DAIA in Coen, in recognition of his work for the community and to avoid his having to take up employment that would remove him from the community (presumably onto a station)⁴⁰. However, there is evidence that Woompi wasn't the only one to assume responsibility for Aboriginal conduct in Coen at this time.

On the 21st of October, 1974, his sister Rosie wrote to the Director of Aboriginal and Islander Affairs, Mr Killoran, thus:

Just to let you know that my brother Woompie and I are working for the community as leaders. We are to control drunken people. I stand all night to try to control people if they don't listen to me I just call the police and the police just take over. Some are very hard to control. The law is very strict up here. Do you think that we should wear uniform? We tell people for their own good but they just tell us to go and get: when they say that to us up they go in the jail. We get hard on these people too sometimes when they don't take our advice. The law has to come in full strength by you, just to show them that we do carry law in the settlement. I look after the settlement very well, I mean I help people from right to wrong reason. I tell them what's right and what's wrong. Some people are a bit thick-headed. Well that's all the news to tell, until I hear from you. Best regards, Rosie Ahlers.

Killoran's answer to this self-confident note suggests he didn't know quite what to make of it, but he advised Rosie that : "I am sure that Mr Keppel has a much clearer idea of the law relating to local conditions and should be in a position to advise you."⁴¹ Rosie here described herself as a powerful person by talking about the way she 'looked after' people, and was clearly seeking whitefella support for her authority. Her attempt was less successful than Woompi's perhaps because she was not so knowledgeable about the ways of the Department as he was. The history of bureaucratic dealings with Aboriginal women described in Chapter 2 also suggest that Killoran may not have been able to take

40 Director of DAIA to Regional Manager, Cairns, 5 March 1975.

41 Director of Aboriginal and Islander Affairs to Mrs R. Ahlers, Coen, 6 November 1974.

Rosie's authority seriously, simply because she was a woman. This has been a complaint in many other parts of Australia (Bell and Ditton 1980; Gale 1983; Jacobs 1989). In the 1970s control of Aboriginal affairs in the state of Queensland was almost completely in the hands of the Department of Aboriginal and Islander Affairs. In the next decade, Aboriginal people in Coen began to become aware of various Commonwealth government initiatives that could be of advantage to them, so that the whitefella sources of power that they had to learn to manage expanded beyond those of the police and the Queensland government DAIA.

In the 1980s, Woompi and Rosie were instrumental in setting up Malpa Kintya Aboriginal Corporation as a way of bringing funding into the community for schemes that had been mooted for many years, such as an old folks' home. However, in 1984 there was a major disagreement within the organisation and many members left. In 1985, Rosie and Woompi approached the Lutheran pastor, Roy McIvor, to set up another corporation, and permission was given by the Lutheran church to use a small office space in the church building. Significantly, this organisation was named, like the church itself, Moomba, a name that belonged to the Iyanh people and the Merepah area. It is the name of a Story belonging to that country who was associated with the Morning Star and invoked in burial ceremonies. According to Rosie, these ceremonies would entail all-night singing. They ended with the singing of the Moomba song when the morning star appeared in the sky. With that the soul of the deceased was considered to have departed. This star was equated by Rosie with the star of Bethlehem and, in her mind, Jesus and Moomba were "just the same one now". This syncretism was reinforced by the text over the altar in the church which quoted Jesus' saying of himself "I am the bright morning star". The fact that the church had adopted the Moomba name was indicative of Rosie and Woompi's involvement in the church and their establishment of a new power base.

When a new Aboriginal corporation was set up with offices on church premises and with the active involvement of the pastor and his wife, this setting and the active

involvement of several of the Merepah mob ensured that the Moomba name was adopted for the corporation too. This was a very important and complicated political move for the Merepah mob. They were using, thus asserting their right to, the name of a Story associated with a particular stretch of country on Merepah station. Their knowledge of this Story and its rites and dwelling places was an important source of power for them within their own mob, in the ways previously described. By syncretising this Story with the Christian one they were aligning themselves with the church and its resources and powers in ways that made sense both in Aboriginal and whitefella society. Furthermore, since it was their name that was on the church and corporation, they were asserting their rights in those institutions also. As I will show in the next chapter, this issue of the name of the organisation became a bone of contention among the Aboriginal population of Coen precisely because it was recognised that there was some truth in the Merepah mob's claim that "that's our name, that's our Corporation". While Woompi's administrative experience made him an important actor in these events, Rosie's powerful blending of Christianity and traditional beliefs meant that she was equally significant.

Until June 1990, then, the efforts and reputation of the Merepah mob were channelled through Coen. As far as possible, it was Moomba Corporation that coordinated negotiations over outstations and the welfare of its members in Coen, although some private negotiations took place with particular groups where appropriate. The preparations for the hand-over ceremony at Merepah, for instance, were all organised through Moomba and much of the work involved in getting local people and distinguished visitors to the remote site was carried out by non-Merepah Moomba members. In the early days of occupation of the former station by the Merepah mob some members of the other mobs went to Merepah to work. Margaret's husband and her mother's kin are cases in point. This was partly because Aurukun had extended its CDEP (work for the dole) scheme to include Merepah. As Wik people, the Merepah mob had extensive kin ties at Aurukun which they activated to be able to take advantage of government funding through their CDEP scheme. CDEP schemes allow communities to

pay workers and provide infrastructure, usually as a percentage of wages paid. It was therefore to Woompi's advantage to have as many workers registered as working at Merepah as possible, since that was the way to get maximum benefit from the scheme. Aurukun also had access to increased revenues the more workers they were servicing, but there were other benefits for them in having Merepah within their ambit. For instance, when some persistent juvenile offenders had to be dealt with again, authorities at Aurukun decided that a spell in the bush, away from the alcohol and other distractions of town would be good for them. Although Merepah was not their home country it was too far away from town for them to be able to walk back, so the Merepah mob were asked to look after these young men and put them to work "until they quietened down a bit". In return for such favours Merepah became part of the regular run of the community planes operating out of Aurukun. This was an important consideration in the Wet season when the Merepah-Coen road was cut, but it meant that ties with Aurukun were strengthened and those with Coen weakened.

While Woompi sought to represent himself as the linchpin of the Merepah mob, he was very dependent on his brother and sister. Merepah was isolated by at least a three-hour drive into Coen, and Woompi couldn't be everywhere at once. He was the designated driver for the vehicle provided to the outstation and that meant he spent a lot of time on the road. It also meant he was able to restrict others' access to town and places in the bush away from the station house by his control of transport, just as in the case cited above for the Lamalama. He was referred to satirically and respectfully as "olman boss". In his absence, his brother or, more often, his sister took on this "boss" role.

Rosie was much more assertive. When I first met her in 1989, she told me that she and her brother were fighting to get their land back at Merepah and that they had had a disagreement about what to do next so "he bin go Aurukun little while". Rosie was a woman of extensive traditional knowledge who could remember the times before the

missionaries came to the Wik people and this gave her considerable authority, which she was not slow to assert. She was hampered, however, in consolidating her power by lack of supporters of her own. Her husbands were dead and most of her children were only sporadically interested in Merepah. For example, her eldest son was chairman of Napranum council in 1990. She was not literate and suffered from the usual inadequacy of Whitefella institutions to deal with Aboriginal women of power, so that most representatives of government departments, funding bodies and so on would talk to Woompi in preference to her. Woompi never belittled her status or contribution, to my knowledge, but he never yielded to it either. Although Rosie was forced to accept a junior position with respect to Woompi, that was not entirely because of her gender. Noble had a junior role too. Woompi's pre-eminence arose out of his superior ability to exploit whitefella funding for the benefit of his supporters. The gender bias in access to such funding came primarily from the White providers rather than the Aboriginal recipients. Killoran's answer to Rosie's letter is a good example of the kind of attitudes that were relevant.

Gender and Mobs

The preceding discussion illustrates the fact that the same factors are significant in the distribution of power in the Coen mobs as were abstracted from the general anthropological literature. Descent gives one a place in the mob and rights in particular tracts of land. The eldest of a set of siblings is likely to have greatest authority, but is still dependent on the support of siblings, children and any others whose loyalty can be won by the practice of nurturance. In the contemporary setting, nurturance may involve the provision of employment and the ability to attract government funding, as well as the activation of knowledge of land and Stories that sustains indigenous culture and sets the norms for a "proper Aborigine" way of life.

Knowledge and its use is basic to the exercise of power also in the way it can be used to discriminate between mob members who might otherwise be considered equal. In the previous chapter I discussed the way in which the location of Lamalama camps was significant for the status of hearth members. Camping on one's own land gave one a certain dominance over one's co-residents, a position that was then reversed when camps were moved onto others' territories. With a more sedentary style of life there is even more at stake in issues such as the location of outstations and it is the use of knowledge of both whitefella and indigenous domains that affect the outcome. In Woompi's case, his lobbying of government departments was significant in bringing about the purchase of Merepah, but his and Rosie's knowledge of the Stories associated with the place gave them authority in the eyes of the rest of the mob, anthropologists and others. Rosie's identification of this traditional knowledge with the Moomba church and corporation in Coen created a power base there that will be more fully explored in the next chapter. Margaret is perhaps the outstanding example of the activation of whitefella knowledge in the creation of a power base. In the Lamalama mob, the marriage of Sunlight and Florrie brought together sets of rights in two important estates in the Port Stewart region as well as two sets of knowledge, indigenous and whitefella, in a partnership that was very successful in pursuing hearth and mob goals. While women have, as it happens, more often had less interrupted contact with kin and country, and so are often strong in indigenous knowledge, men have generally had more experience of working for and with whitefellas and so have had opportunity to gain knowledge in that domain. The following graph attempts to portray the difference between men's and women's access to the various parameters of power discussed above for the six men and nine women who were the adult population of the Lamalama mob in 1990:

Some of the values on the graph represent simple counts but others are relativities. All values are assigned so as to fit on a common set of axes. The category Generation measures the number of generations between an individual and the apical ancestor, George Balclutha and the maximum possible value is three generations. The axis labelled

Descent represents whether both parents or one or none came from within the Lamalama mob, territorially defined, with a maximum of two. Seniority measures the number of younger siblings each individual had and this was a large number in some cases. All of these values were adjusted so as to fit onto the axis but retain the proportionality between individuals. The categories of Dependants and Supporters were dealt with in the same way. On the other hand, non-indigenous knowledge rates individuals against each other, with the most knowledgeable being rated 3 and the least 0. Degrees of knowledgeability were assessed on my own observations of individuals and the opinions of others within the mob. Values for Indigenous Knowledge and Nurturance were arrived at in the same way. This graph clearly suggests that there was no systematic difference between individuals' access to power on the basis of gender. But this graph does not include a factor that was mentioned in the literature though it did not emerge in the preceding discussion of the Coen mobs—that of violence.

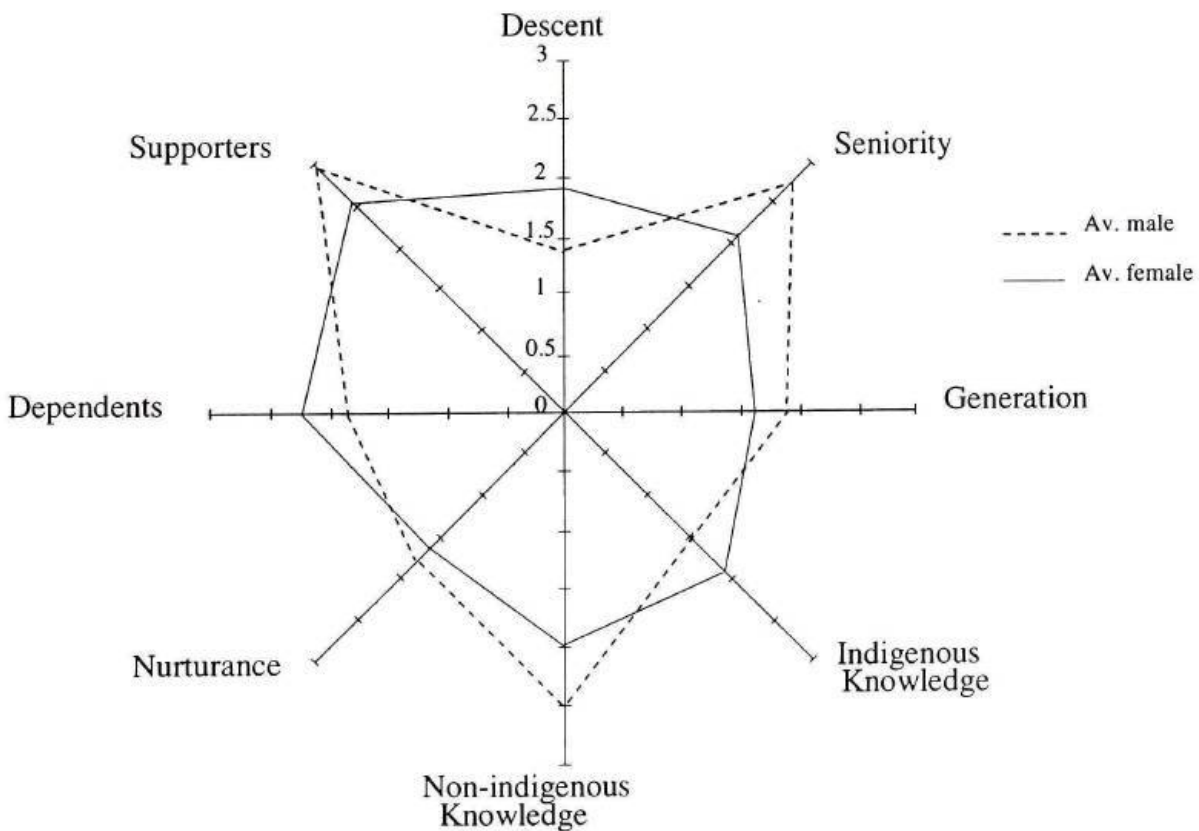


Figure 22: Male and female access to power

While there were certainly fights in Coen, violence was not so much in evidence there as it appears to be in some other communities (Martin 1993; Sansom 1980). In the vast majority of cases, alcohol was involved in the fights that did occur and was made an excuse for forgetting all about it in the morning. Alcohol was also implicated in the high rate of domestic violence. During 1990-91 there was at least one incident of domestic violence in every Lamalama household where the spouses were drinkers. There were no such incidents between non-drinking partners.⁴² Partners here means members of temporary liaisons as well as long-term couples, although people referred to domestic violence as “that husband-wife business”. Women were far more likely than men to suffer from such violence and this seems to contradict my previous argument that gender was relatively irrelevant in the politics of hearth and mob. In order to explore this matter further, it is useful to consider a mob that formed for a short time only during the wet season of 1991 and was referred to by others in the community as “them young girls”.

The Young Girl Mob

The designation “young girl” was sometimes used in Coen as a general term for an unmarried teenage girl, but in the case of the Young Girl Mob neither their age nor their married status was relevant. The group consisted of seven women between the ages of 20 and approximately 35, five of whom had children. They were called young girls because they “walked round free” ignoring their responsibilities, behaviour that was more typical of young men. One of the group had five children and occasionally helped her mother to care for them, but she was unique in this. Another group member had rented a house for herself and her three children but she gave up the house, gave away her belongings, including a television, and arranged for her children to be cared for by

42 As in many other Aboriginal communities people tended either to indulge in alcohol periodically to excess or never indulge in it at all. Even those who were drinkers spent periods of total abstinence, usually on the outstation.

elderly relatives and for them to receive the relevant welfare benefits, so that she could “walk round free”. Being free for these women included being sexually promiscuous, which they boasted about publicly. On one occasion when one of the Young Girl Mob was refused service in the pub she accused the publican of not serving her because she was black. She went on “Well, I might be black, but I've slept with every bugger there.” (indicating the row of men sitting at the bar, to their general embarrassment). On another occasion two members of the group were quarrelling and one swore the other for being “bony legs” (a deadly insult locally). The insulted party replied “Might be I got bony legs but they charmed a lot of men, them bony legs.”

Older women complained of the burden of looking after this group's children, but I never heard similar criticism of the fathers of the children, many of whom pursued very similar lifestyles to that of the Young Girl Mob. As to the sexual promiscuity, older people worried that because the women would not stick to one man, it would cause jealousy and trouble. The Young Girls avoided the worst effects of this trouble by going everywhere as a group and thus providing mutual protection. When relations became strained between the mob and the young Aboriginal men who supplied them with alcohol, they could also shift their attentions to a couple of middle aged whitefellas in town, from whom they also received grog and shelter. One morning the young girls arrived at an aunty's house after an all-night party with these whitefellas. The aunty provided food, but was scornful of the women for their “stupidity” in not getting so much as a feed out of their hosts, suggesting that she, at least, saw the relationship as legitimately predatory. The real benefit in such behaviour seemed to be that the Young Girls suffered much less physical abuse than other female drinkers. They seemed impervious to criticism from their older relatives and flaunted their freedom. On occasion they danced down the middle of the street singing and doing “shake-a-leg”, a men's dance. Being in the Young Girl Mob allowed them to rise above the usual gender hierarchy for female drinkers. At the end of the Wet season, when it became possible for

people to get back out onto country, the interest in drinking as a full-time activity lessened and the Young Girl Mob broke up.

Some married women drinkers (or those “just living” in an acknowledged relationship) had also divested themselves of the responsibilities of home and child care, but every one of these women suffered some physical abuse during this period. So conventional was the use of violence between these women and their partners that a man had only to curl his hand into a fist for his wife to desist from a proposed course of action, and I have seen women lie down protecting their stomachs in expectation of a kick as soon as their husbands started to shout at them. It is doubtless such couples that people have in mind when they refer to domestic violence as “that husband-wife business”.

Further light is thrown on the importance of the Young Girl Mob by the case of two unmarried women who pursued a way of life very similar to that group’s but without either joining it or entering into established spousal relationships. Both of these women had been in a number of semi-permanent relationships over the years and both were currently without an established partner. Neither appeared to have any financial support since the welfare payments they would have received for their children had been transferred to the relatives who were actually caring for them. Nevertheless both these women were still “chasing grog”. When they were beaten up, as they frequently were, neither nursing staff nor relatives showed much sympathy. While the Young Girls were looked on with tolerant amusement or mild exasperation, these women appeared to have worn out their welcome with everyone. In fact, both of them subsequently left the community to spend a period with street people in Cairns.

The contrast between the three groups of female drinkers (Young Girls, married women and single women) and married non-drinkers lends weight to the view that violence and inequality between men and women arises from alcohol abuse and not out of the nature of the sexual relationship. This view has often been put forward in

discussions of domestic violence both within and without the Aboriginal community (Atkinson 1990a, 1990b, 1990c; Bolger 1991; Brady 1990; Langton 1989, 1993; Lucashenko and Best 1995). But in the opinion of at least some of the people in Coen, alcohol's main role was as a disinhibitor, leading to behaviour that caused trouble or allowing for the blunt airing of grievances usually not alluded to. So, for instance, a woman who was drunk and calling out the name of her dead sister in contravention of the taboo on speaking the names of the dead was angrily threatened by her equally drunk husband. As he made to punch her, other relatives intervened and took her away, thus saving her a beating on this occasion. Others present were more closely related to the dead woman being named, but it was the husband who sought to control the drunk woman, and I suggest that "husband-wife business" is always the result of a struggle for dominance between these two primary members of the hearth group. I have argued earlier that there was no single factor that tended to give any individual power over another one on the basis of gender. Spouses are equally likely to have rights and responsibilities in land, to have useful knowledge that can be activated in nurturance and to have plentiful supporters, but they are not equally likely to use violence. The use of violence in order to influence others has always been associated with men and, although women in ECCYP did use violence against their spouses, they suffered far more than they inflicted. In the absence of religious or other structures that justified the dominance of women over men, it is unclear why this should continue to be the case. Although men have always been associated with spears in contrast to women's digging sticks (Berndt 1970), and are more likely than women to have guns, women can inflict quite a lot of damage on a man, especially a drunk man, with a digging stick or star picket. Whatever the cause of the gender imbalance here, the exclusivity of the hearth group certainly militated against intervention. During community discussion about the rise of violence in general, many people expressed the opinion that not even close kin could interfere in the "husband-wife business" and this certainly contributed to women's vulnerability. In contrast, the Young Girl Mob, formed in pursuit of common goals and interests, did not

isolate women from aid and in fact ensured that they were never unprotected. But the utility of forming a mob accentuates the fact that it was only with respect to sexual relationships that women expected to be less powerful than men. In other words, only where sex, or biology, was relevant, was gender implicated in access to power.

The sex/gender distinction has been a commonplace in academic writing in the western world for many years now. The connection between the two is argued to be so close that for some years now feminists have been questioning whether we need the distinction at all (Edwards 1989; Gatens 1983; Grosz 1994; Rubin 1975). While the idea that attributes and activities were proper to one or the other sex on the basis of biology was available to Lamalama people, they did not generalise this to an assumption that gender was always present just because people necessarily inhabit sexed bodies. For instance, I was once told by a senior Lamalama woman that I shouldn't get involved in helping the men in construction work at the outstation because "Lamalama ladies don't do that kind of work". On three occasions I heard men grumble about having to do something that they felt was women's work. However, as in the argument over the vehicle recounted above, appeals to gender were never successful in changing the state of affairs. Women did in fact do heavy physical labour, and men performed childcare and other domestic tasks. Gender remained weakly salient except where biology was directly important, in sexual relationships. When I first arrived in Coen I wondered how women could be politically active and important, thus perpetuating the assumption that gender is always relevant. But those female politicians were acting as land-owners and custodians of important knowledge and the fact of their sex was at most a minor consideration. This difference between Western academic and ECCYP configurations of the sex/gender distinction may help explain the unease of some Aboriginal writers (Huggins 1987, 1994; O'Shane 1976; E. Williams 1987) with gendered social analyses. They have objected to such analyses on the political grounds that they create divisions between Aboriginal men and women that help perpetuate the dominance of the invader culture. Perhaps they are also reacting to an over-generalisation of the gender concept.

In this chapter I have demonstrated that women are powerful within their own mobs. The case of the Young Girls demonstrates that mob solidarity can itself be powerful for women, especially in contrast to their vulnerable position within the sexual relationship that is at the heart of the hearth group. In the next chapter I turn to an examination of inter-mob politics and the articulation of mobs with various arms of the state, and once again I will be asking whether gender plays a role.

5 The Inter-Mob Sphere

Previous chapters established hearth and mob as significant spheres of action amongst Cape York Peninsula Aboriginal people. Birth is the most important recruitment criterion for membership of such groups, and intra-group prominence and power are negotiated on the basis of birth-related factors, such as sibling seniority and inherited interests in land, modulated by the ability to provide services to the rest of the group. The families that are at the centre of hearth groups maintain many of the attributes of former clan groups, such as identification with distinct languages and tracts of country within a given range (Rigsby 1992:354). The extent of that range was defined formerly by networks of association and intermarriage that were sufficiently enduring to be recognised by neighbouring people and given the name Lamalama. The Lamalama themselves had no name for this network of land-owning groups, although they recognised that the links between them made them distinct from their neighbours. While the present Port Stewart mob derives from that Lamalama entity it is not the whole of it. The Port Stewart mob has been constituted in response to historical conditions, but by indigenous mechanisms. The impact of colonisation in the region has been extreme in some ways, removing people bodily from their land and livelihood, and yet modes of organisation based on hearths and mobs persist.

One important form of association has been introduced as a result of colonisation, however. That is the prolonged daily interaction and sometimes interdependence of historically distinct mobs who may have had little opportunity to meet each other or whose relations were hostile in the past. There are early accounts of tension between groups in the region in the reports of colonial Police (as discussed in Chapter 2), and Thomson (1934:237) notes that in the late 1920s a distinction which he took to be ancient was still made locally between groups belonging to the coast (“Malnkanidji or

sandbeachmen”) and inland peoples (“Kanidji or inlanders”). Although trade between inlanders and coastal people occurred, Thomson (1934:240) reports a great deal of mutual fear and distrust between the two groups. But as we have seen, pressures of employment, unemployment and the appropriation of land by Whites has meant that Aboriginal people of the central peninsula have had to adapt to life in Coen and elsewhere in association with former opponents and strangers. This chapter examines their management of this new multi-mob situation in the town.

Chris Anderson (1983,1984, 1988, 1989) has described the processes of inter-mob interaction under conditions of imposed centralisation and sedentism at Wujal Wujal in southeast Cape York Peninsula, and that situation closely parallels the Coen case. Although Anderson discusses the composition of the settlement in terms of households, he mentions the existence of hearths as central congregating areas at each house (Anderson 1984:356). Anderson defines his households as economic units, but it is clear that the primary criterion for membership was kinship, most of the households being based on nuclear families (Anderson 1984:363,382). Mobs at Wujal Wujal were made up of clusters of households named for a focal family, place of origin or geographical feature (Anderson 1984:375). This is comparable to Coen usage of the “Margaret’s mob”/“Port Stewart mob”/“Sandbeach or inside mob” kind. It should be noted, however, that although the Bassani family were central to the Lamalama mob, it was not possible to refer to the Lamalama mob as the Bassani mob, in the way Anderson suggests would have been possible at Wujal Wujal. I explore the way in which the label mob can be used at several levels of organisation further below.

Anderson’s mobs are also similar to Coen mobs in criteria for membership. Since households are made up of close kin, it follows that mobs share descent from the same estate cluster. However, it was relationship to *currently significant country* that was important for mob identification and also formed the basis for possible mob fission (Anderson 1984:381,388). In the Coen context, there were mobs such as the Port

Stewart mob and the Merepah mob, named for country which because it was currently accessible was significant, though it did not encompass all the land in which people had interests. Margaret's mob, on the other hand, was threatened with fission if some of its members activated their kin links to other mobs and moved to Laura. Mobs in Wujal Wujal, as in Coen, depend on the ability of strong individuals to hold them together. Once again the bases of authority are similar, and Anderson (1984:388) notes that leaders needed "a personal history which meant that one had a combination of solid knowledge and skills in the traditional Kuku-Yalanji sphere and, at the same time, an ability to deal successfully with Europeans."

Anderson's mobs, then, seem to be very similar to those described here for Coen. In several works, Anderson (1984, 1988, 1989) has described inequalities and competition between mobs in the setting of enforced co-residence in the settlement. However, he has emphasised the "power of the local" (Anderson 1989:81) in determining the fortunes of individual mobs as at least as important as the changes wrought by centralisation and European capitalist domination. Thus, he points out that the fact that a certain mob has primary links to the country the settlement was actually built on privileges them over other mobs who have to live there. But he also asks what happens in places where there is no single group that could claim local land ownership (Anderson 1989:82). Coen seems to be such a case, where all the identifiable mobs in town have primary affiliation to land somewhere else.

This chapter demonstrates the existence of hearth and mob as the significant levels of social organisation in Coen and examines the articulation of various mobs where the most definitive claim to precedence, ownership of the land that is the site of inter-mob interaction, cannot be used. It will emerge that power nevertheless depended on ownership, in this case, of an institution rather than of land.

Anderson (1984:383, 384) records cases in which women's ownership of land and force of personality made them powerful and influential people to their mobs, even after

their deaths. He says that “only an exceptional woman gained positions of real power and focus” (Anderson 1984:386) and became focal members of their mobs. It might be thought that such an observation must apply to men too since his data demonstrate that it was by no means the case that all men of a certain age were equally focal. However, he draws a distinction between focal individuals and “real Bosses”, who had more influence than focal individuals, enough influence to affect those in other mobs. In his opinion (Anderson 1984:387), it was impossible for a young person or a woman of any age to be a boss at Wujal Wujal although he notes elsewhere (Anderson 1988:520 note) that his region may well be atypical of the rest of Cape York Peninsula in this respect. While there was very little evidence of members of one Coen mob influencing members of another, there was a struggle over changes to the name and constitution of the common Aboriginal Corporation which involved members of all the Coen mobs. While one mob strove to dominate others, and in the short term did so, eventually the organisation died and another, representing a different affiliation of mobs was created. Gender had little effect on participation either at general meetings or hearth group deliberations on the issue and although one man could be seen as trying to establish himself as “boss” for the organisation, this proved to be impossible. Anderson's “boss” category, one that overrides mob composition, was not to be found in Coen.

Hearths in Town

In Coen, as in camp, daily life centered around the hearth. This parallels the situation described by Sachiko Kubota (1992:122) for another Aboriginal town, Galiwin'ku, where “there were clear similarities with the hearth group formation in the traditional bush or outstation situation”. Although most houses are equipped with gas stoves, people often cooked on open fires outside the houses. If they didn't cook there they often spent time around a fire in the yard. In the Wet season, the verandah replaced

the hearth as a place where people gathered. There was some relaxation of the exclusivity of hearths under town conditions, and drinkers had their own rules for forming groups. The major varieties of the hearth were represented by arrangements on the Reserve, the Bassanis' place and what was called the DCS housing. I deal with each of these in turn.

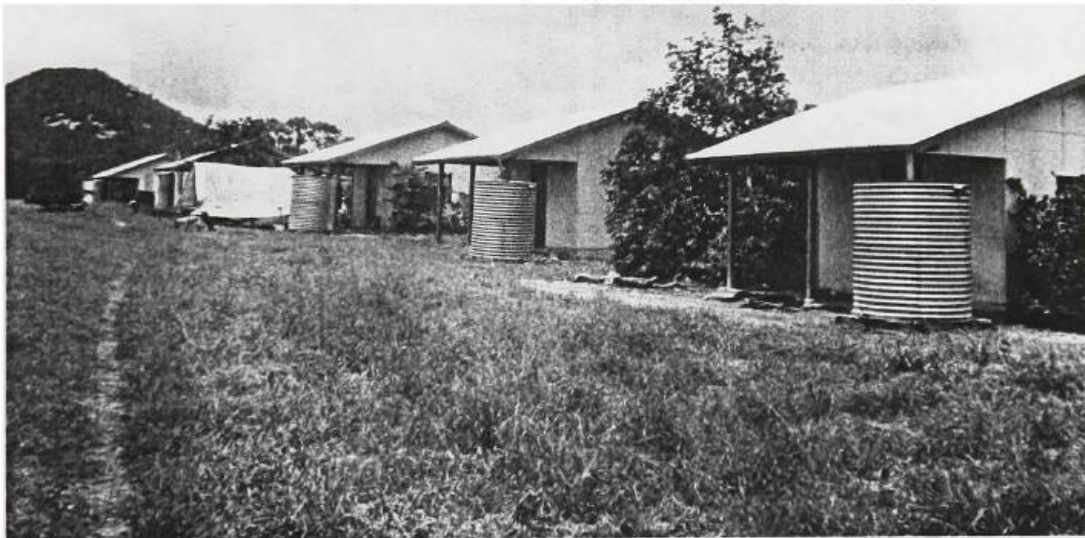


Figure 23: Looking South across the Reserve

The Reserve

The houses that remain on the Reserve stand in a row overlooking the re-routed Peninsula Development Road (see photograph above). They are connected to the town water and electricity supply, but have no gas and all the tenants cooked out of doors. The stove visible in the photograph below is hollow, used merely as a framework for

wood-fired cooking. The family who lived here kept a separate hearth for sitting around, at a spot closer to the road that gave a better view into town. The pallets and timber in the foreground of the photograph are a store of fuel, the collection of which posed severe problems for the residents, none of whom had a vehicle. In the Wet season, when the photograph was taken, grass grew through the wood, increasing its attractiveness to snakes. Storing large quantities of wood was therefore not practical, even if the friends and relatives who brought it were willing to make the effort. Despite this, woodfires were preferred for cooking and socialising.



Figure 24: Firewood outside a Reserve house

The photograph on p219 shows another house where the hearth took the form of a 44 gallon drum that was the centre of the cooking and socialising area. The resident of this house moved his bed outside under a tarpaulin close to the fire. In both this and the previous case, the fireplace was close to shelter so that the owners could use it and stay dry. The remaining photograph in this group is of the house occupied by a very old Wik

woman, since deceased, who did no cooking for herself. She was cared for and fed by her kin and an Aboriginal health worker, but she insisted on stopping in her own camp, which she had shared with her equally aged brother until he died in August 1990. The photograph on p220 illustrates the way in which over the years the shallow concrete of the verandah had been chipped away so that a small fire could be kept going and enjoyed even in the rain. This old lady also kept a low fire burning on the concrete floor of the house while she slept at night. Her carers told me it was more because she was afraid to sleep without it than for warmth.



Figure 25: Outside sleeping area, stove and woodpile

The hearths on the Reserve were all used as a place for family members to congregate as well as cooking places. They also had an important surveillance function. The houses are strung out along a ridge overlooking the road, which follows a gradual downhill gradient for the remaining kilometre between the Reserve and the main street of Coen (see map Chapter 2). Buildings between the Reserve and town are low and sparse,

and the Police and State School Reserves are largely vacant land. Across the road from the Aboriginal Reserve there is a wide unfenced paddock, the European graveyard and the church and pastor's residence. Sitting by the fire on the Reserve, then, meant that one had good sightlines over a large part of Coen. Tourists arriving in town, visitors to the church, the movements of people between the houses below the Reserve and the comings and goings of the police were all noted and commented on around the separate Reserve hearths. However, there was no communal Reserve hearth, and the only circumstance under which conversations went on from hearth to hearth was when the woman who lived in the most southerly house wanted to talk to her adult son who lived in the next house. When the same woman wanted to talk to the residents of the third house, she approached them slowly and called out loudly before she got near, to warn of her approach.



Figure 26: Hearth chipped out of concrete

These hearths are similar in composition to those described for the Port Stewart outstation in several important ways: they are the physical focus of daily life for their owners who use them as vantage point from which they can be “witness” for many events concerning others; access to hearths is controlled by a strict etiquette of approach except for very close kin; two of the hearth groups were constituted by marriage, and two of the others were owned by the son and the mother, respectively, of one of these married women; that is, there were close kin links between most of the residents. However, there was no 'Reserve mob'. The very old people took no active part in affairs beyond their own hearths. The married couple without children identified themselves as Kaanju people, but had no close kin to support them in any way and were themselves well past retirement age and less active. The husband of the remaining couple was a partner with his brother and sister in the Merepah outstation. His wife also claimed rights there, but estrangement in their relationship meant he was rarely in town and she rarely went to the outstation, preferring to identify herself with the Reserve, where she had lived most of her life. This identification was only relevant in the context of attempts by the pastor and others to have the lease of the Reserve transferred to Aboriginal control. No single group with interests in the Reserve ever formed to pursue the matter, and in 1991 the lease remained with the Department of Aboriginal and Islander Affairs. While mobs are constituted primarily on the basis of common descent and kinship, in the context of multi-mob affairs, working together to “get land” (usually access rather than title to land) was beginning to be a significant part of mob membership in 1990-91. In this sense there was no Reserve Mob.

Bassanis' Place

A similar surveillance function to that described for the hearth groupings on the Reserve obtained at the Bassani hearth. This hearth, understood as the organisational centre of daily life, was not just a fireplace but a large space situated behind the houses

on lots 18 and 19 on the town plan (page 95). The photograph on p222 shows how much this space was secluded from the gaze of passers by on Taylor Street, especially when a vehicle was parked in the space between the buildings. However, it was possible to look between the buildings to see whether, for instance, the pastor's car was outside his house, or whether he had visitors. To the north and east the view was relatively open and people could be seen passing along the road that ran between the houses across Faghy's Gully, past the hospital and into the main street. Since nearly everyone living on the north side of town passed along this road at least once a day, whether to visit the hospital or go to the shops, anyone sitting at the Bassani hearth could be well informed about most of their neighbours' movements.

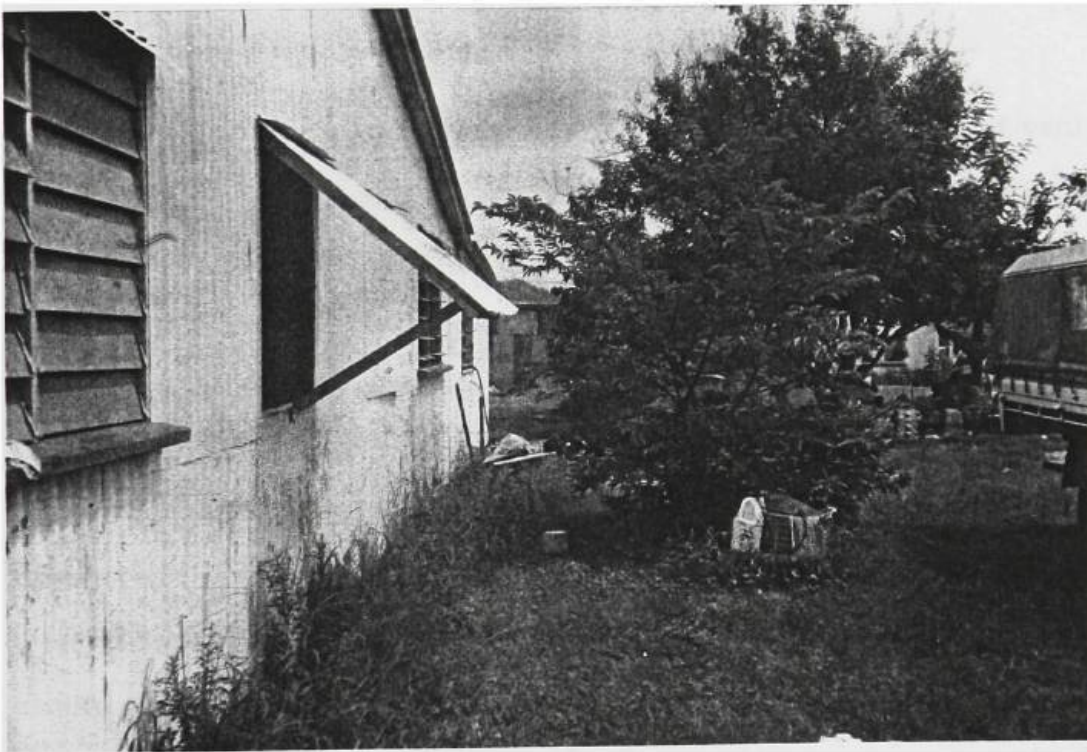


Figure 27: Looking into Bassanis' yard from Taylor Street

I have described this hearth as encompassing the whole of the space shown in the photograph on p224 because this was the area in which up to 20 people would often congregate. Although the norm for hearth group composition that limited membership to

a focal married pair and their dependents was evident in Coen as at Port Stewart, in town the circle of dependents was much larger. For instance, Sunlight's adult brothers, who formed part of the bachelor group in camp, stayed with him while in town, partly as a result of a shortage of housing and partly because they were in some ways more dependent on him in this setting. If they had a sweetheart for a while they might be absent, but such relationships were usually of short duration and then they would be 'home' again. They were often dependent on Florrie and Sunlight for food since their only income in town was Welfare payments. In camp at Port Stewart, of course, they could be more independent because they had the necessary subsistence skills and absence of alcohol meant they had enough money to meet their needs in terms of tobacco, tea and so on. While in town they also depended on Florrie to look after their finances, guarding their bankbook and any valuables they might have, since there was nowhere else for them to leave things and be sure they would be safe.

The Bassani place was in fact a complex of two houses and yard. One house belonged to Florrie and Sunlight and was inhabited primarily by them, their daughter and young people of all ages they had raised or were still "growing up". The other house was Aunt Joan's (Florrie's sister's) place, and likewise the primary residents were Joan herself and the children she was rearing or young adults she had reared. The population of the complex fluctuated over the year as young people went away to stay with relatives, children went away to high school and dependent relatives came to stay. During term time in the Dry season, sometimes only Florrie, Sunlight, Seppy and three schoolchildren were in residence. At the weekends or during school holidays, when people were free of school and work, the houses were still rarely empty. Usually one of the single adults stayed behind to look after the place. At the end of the school summer holidays in 1991, just before the older children returned to high school in Herberton, and with everyone returned from Port Stewart for the Wet, there were fifteen people of three generations in the combined household. When the husband of one of Sunlight's sisters was in his last illness, the whole of his family—five adults and three children—also came to stay. At

that time the actual fireplace was much closer to the house than is shown in the photograph above, and the sister's husband spent most of his time, day and night, lying near it. When he died, it was necessary to rake over the old fireplace, spread fresh sand and set up the trivet in a new spot. In the old days a camp was abandoned when a death occurred there, but this was not possible in town.



Figure 28: Shade and fireplace

The actual hearth space, then, in terms of the area where people gathered, had to be large to accommodate so many. The shade created by the bougainvillea tree to the east of the fireplace was very popular in the warmer months. The photograph on p225 illustrates the tendency to separate into male and female groups, but this separation was by no means strictly observed. More significant was the distinction between those with unquestioned right of access to the space and those who were “just visiting”. Visitors would often arrive after they had done their shopping at the nearby shops, approaching the hearth space slowly from its most open side until recognised. They would then hang

their shopping in the branches of the shade, as the photograph shows, and rest for a while. On other occasions, visitors would call out from the easterly fence before approaching. Anderson (1984:375) records that at Wujal Wujal most visiting occurred between mob-members, and non-members visited only on business. In the month of February 1991, when most people of all groups were in town because of the Wet, I recorded 10 visitors at the Bassani hearth who were not Lamalama people. These visitors from other mobs were usually visiting for a purpose, and the constant presence of people at the Bassani hearth not only facilitated business between mobs but enhanced the Bassani mob's position as focal mob for their outstation's business. I had originally observed that women spent a lot of time at their hearths in town and the connection between this fact and their political prominence is now clear. Their presence at the hearth meant that they were the individuals through whom such business was transacted.



Figure 29: Men and women sitting in separate groups

On one occasion when I was present and Sunlight's ZH was near death but still sitting at the hearth with the family, Rosie, a senior woman of the Merepah mob, called to visit. She approached without speaking, put her hands on the sick man and his wife and wept quietly for a few minutes. No-one spoke and most of the rest of the family turned their backs until she had dried her eyes. She then turned to me to tell me she had been looking for me and asked me to come and see her "when you finished here". Next, she asked Florrie whether a certain tree was "ripe". Florrie said "Yes, yes, he's ripe down there" and indicated the Port Stewart direction with a gesture of the chin. Rosie then said she could only get *ngathan* (strangler fig, used for string-making). Florrie evidently interpreted this as a request since she replied "Yes, you can get some." The subject was not pursued any further and Rosie left soon after. As noted above (Chapter 3), permission to gain access to another's space or resources is often sought in such an indirect manner. Here, Rosie expressed an interest in a resource she believed to be available, but did not directly ask for permission to harvest it. Had no-one been present at the Bassani hearth, Rosie could not have gained the permission she needed.

Through such interactions, hearths form nodes of connection between mobs. But this hearth was also focal for the wider Lamalama mob and there was another responsibility on its owners to maintain an obvious presence there. Florrie would not come to my house to do language work unless Aunt Joan or some other trusted adult could stay home to "look out for the place". If I offered to come to work there, I was put off with excuses such as that she was busy looking after the place or that kids would come and make noise. And yet many of Florrie's afternoons were spent sitting in the shade popping the bubbles in plastic packaging material. While it might look like "doing nothing", Florrie was fulfilling a necessary function. Her presence acted as a guard, but also maintained the "witness" function. From her hearth she could keep a discreet eye on the coming and goings of many of the local residents and as a result of its central position in the town, many significant inter-mob events took place in her vicinity. The following incident illustrates the importance of the witness function in inter-mob affairs.

When Sunlight's sister's husband died, many of his relatives and those of his Lamalama wife had come from Bamaga, Hopevale and Lockhart to attend the funeral. The two Bassani houses were full of visitors and there were two extra vehicles in the yard, parked for most of the day between the shade and the side fence. In the middle of the morning before the funeral the attention of this large crowd was called to a fight that was happening several hundred metres away on the road outside the kindergarten (Near section XVI on the town plan). Two young Olkolo women of Margaret's mob had been on their way to see the nursing sisters at the hospital with their babies when they had been set upon by members of an Aboriginal family I will call the Smiths. This family was not part of any of the mobs previously described and had a history of strained relationships with all of them.⁴³ Just before this time they had been carrying on a feud with the Bassani family, particularly Florrie, that had even gone to court. This attack was later said by the mother of the two Olkolo women to be a result of an argument her elder daughter had with the Smith family two years before.

When the people in the Bassani yard noticed the fight, everyone stopped what they were doing and gathered around the trucks parked in the yard, half-hidden, to watch. Distance made it difficult to see who was involved until one of the mob produced a pair of binoculars and identified the antagonists. We watched as the hospital vehicle came out of the hospital, picked up the two women and took them to the police station. Bob, the partner of one of the women, was still fighting the Smith family and the policeman soon drove up to break up this fight. While no-one in the Bassani yard moved to intervene in the fight, there was some discussion of whether it was appropriate for Bob to get involved in a woman's fight, despite the fact that at least one male member of the Smith family was involved.

43 They lived in section VI on the Town Plan and could, in fact, claim distant kinship with the Lamalama mob.

After seeing the police, the two Olkolo women came into the Bassani yard asking everyone if we had seen what had happened. They were naturally very upset and crying, but they did not name their antagonists or refer to the reason for the fight. Shortly afterwards, another fight broke out in the street beside the Bassani yard, this time between Bob and a male cousin of the two women who was at the time sweetheart to one of the Smith women. This time everyone did not pay such concentrated attention, but a row of men lined up against the fence quietly watching. Some of the Smith family were also watching from a distance and they attempted to escalate the fight by insulting Florrie to one of her brothers. Florrie herself and a sister-in-law calmed him down and prevented his fighting. Once again, whitefella residents intervened in the fight and summoned the police. This was bitterly resented by the mob in Bassanis' yard who made comments such as "What they want to come for? Nothing to do with them." People also commented that this was a necessary and proper fight because it "evened up" Bob's previous involvement in the women's fight. However, the incident was not felt to be resolved. Later, when some people wanted to go to the shops, Florrie warned them that the Smiths would still be looking out for a fight and they should "Walk one mob together."

Some very clear distinctions in agency (in Benn and Gaus' use of the word) emerge here. First, the actions of the Europeans who acted to stop the fights were seen to be illegitimate—it was "nothing to do with them". The nursing sister who interfered complained to me later that she got no thanks for doing so. Local people did not consider that the fact that two Aboriginal women with babies in their arms had been attacked and fought back was sufficient warrant for European intervention. There were also clearly limits to whose business it was within the Aboriginal world. The Smith family, who were at odds with most of the other Aboriginal people in town, had picked a fight with two Olkolo women. It was therefore a matter primarily concerning the Smiths and Olkolo people. The husband who intervened was from Yarrabah and this may have been another reason that people weren't entirely happy with his actions. Sansom

(1980:81) notes that “What is demanded of rightful witnesses is indifference and each witness must continue to be indifferent to the action he observes until he can give reason to be otherwise.” The Smiths tried to provide Florrie’s brother with enough provocation to justify his involvement, but his sisters stopped him. Surveillance by the mob thus acted to contain the fighting, but it also maintained the “standing account” (Ref Williams and “daily register” Sansom 1980:81) of the state of the dispute between a number of parties and the Smiths.

The surveillance function of hearths in this inter-mob domain is part of “witnessing” and thus the regulation of inter-mob as well as intra-mob interaction, and this function appears always to have been important in town life. Until at least the 1960s a strict separation was enforced between those Aboriginal people who were employed in town business and lived near their place of employment, and their relatives who were employed mainly on the surrounding stations but would stay on the Reserve on their visits to Coen. Town dwellers had to seek the permission of the police to visit the Reserve, and some women remember that in their youth they would visit the Reserve to watch a corroboree, but the sergeant would hide behind a tree to keep an eye on things and scare people back to town by drawing a gun at ten o'clock. Similarly, Reserve dwellers had to have what the police considered a legitimate excuse to go into town. Under such circumstances the ability to see other people's movements from a distance became an important source of information. While I have argued in a previous chapter that people always maintain some visibility between hearths, and the ability to have advance warning of others' approach has always been important, here the ability to see what was going on at a distance was sometimes the only way of getting news about close relatives as well as strangers. But there had to be someone always watching and after about the 1960s, and perhaps before, a number of factors operated to remove men from the hearth more frequently than women.

Probably from the post-war years on, married women were less likely to be involved in paid (or unpaid) employment than previously, especially if they had children. Men were more likely to be away on stations or working long hours in the butcher, shop or pub. It was therefore women who were at the hearth and keeping track of events on a daily basis and over longer stretches of time. In the early 1970s men started to be laid off from their jobs as a result of the introduction of Award wages and a declining cattle industry, and alcohol became legally accessible to Aboriginal people for the first time. At first it was mainly men who drank and although this was an aggravator of disputes, it also rendered drinkers ineligible to be “witness”. Even apart from disputes, the persistent presence of women, as opposed to the absence or incapacity of drinking husbands, gave them knowledge that could mean they had to be consulted in inter-mob affairs today, as the following series of events illustrates.

In 1990 I was asked to make a map of Coen’s Aboriginal graveyard, which had been first used about 1968. In accordance with local sensibilities about using the names of the dead, many of the graves were unmarked and it was decided that a private record should be kept so that it would not be forgotten who was buried where. I met with senior members of all the Coen mobs (but not the Smith family) at the graveyard. There is an unmarked but nonetheless real separation in the graveyard between areas of Lamalama, Kaanju and Wik graves and representatives of each of these groups had to decide on the proper attributions in their respective areas, despite the fact that a senior Wik man who was present had been caretaker of the graveyard for many years. Whenever an attribution was in doubt, men and women would confer together and the men very often told me “Aunt reckons such-and-such and she knows. I was away on the station that time.” Even within the Wik section the former caretaker was often quietly corrected by his sister-in-law, a long term and permanent resident of Coen. A typical exchange went:

Caretaker: That's so-and-so's grandfather.

Sister: No, remember we bin bury that old woman before him.

Caretaker: That's right, that's right. That's that old woman.

The point is that the women's continuous residence allowed them to place people and events in sequence. This became especially important when a land claim was in prospect.

One such case involved making a claim to the reserve on behalf of Moomba Aboriginal Corporation. In order to make the claim, it had to be established that it was the members of Moomba rather than those of the rival corporation, associated with the Smith family, who had the longest and most continuous association with the reserve. The person who had lived there longest was Elta, a middle aged women caring for dependent children and grandchildren. She is the sister-in-law of the caretaker referred to above. Two men had long term knowledge of the use of the reserve, one because of his lifetime of employment in the town and the other as a result of the length of time since he had been retired to the reserve. But whenever gaps in the record had to be filled or corroborating evidence was sought, I was always referred to Elta or Nanna Rosie or some other older woman. Anyone who had the knowledge had the right to speak, but the particular history of this group meant that women had been in the right place at the right time to have this kind of knowledge. This was undoubtedly a major factor in my original impression that the women of Coen were more active and important in community affairs than I had expected.

DCS Housing

The final example of the persistence of hearth groups in the town setting concerns what was called the DCS housing. These houses had been built under the auspices of the then Department of Community Services, one of the many avatars of the Queensland government department with responsibility for indigenous people. Construction began in 1974 and the houses were made of fibro or, later, metal siding. All are provided with

verandahs and, as the photograph on p233 indicates, the verandahs are places where people socialise, sleep, and hang their washing. The houses are fitted with gas stoves, but most people maintain an open hearth in the front yard which may be used for cooking, socialising or to sleep by. Although the renting policy of the department seems to be to treat all the houses as equivalent, local usage is to consider certain areas as belonging to one or another group. In particular, the houses behind the Reserve and in Section XIII of the town plan are always occupied by Wik people, while none of this group live in the other houses in Sections XVI or XVII. People in Section XVII were complaining of severe overcrowding at one time, but refused to consider moving to a vacant house behind the Reserve. This is mob distinction at the most inclusive level, based on people's land/language affiliations and subsuming smaller scale mob distinctions such as that between the Bassani mob and Mabel's mob. Although mob distinctions were not so clear cut in the northern part of town, there was a tendency for kin to live next door to each other and all but one of the houses in the Western half of Section XVII were occupied by members of Margaret's mob.

Of particular interest here is the relationship between the hearths at lots 1 and 2 in Section XVII. Lot 2 is where Mabel lived and in the previous chapter I have described how she maintained influence over a mob of mainly young people who intermittently lived with her or shared her hearth. Mabel would sometimes complain about "all them young fella making noise all the time." She and her partner often spent 2 or 3 hours, sometimes whole afternoons, after doing their shopping sitting by the Bassani hearth in order to get away from the noise, as well as for the companionship. However, in November 1991 Mabel's daughter Maureen, her Hopevale husband and their three children came back to Coen to live next door to Mabel at Lot 1. Maureen announced repeatedly and loudly that she was back on the condition that there was not too much fighting and that she and her mother would ensure quiet by keeping watch from their respective verandahs (about 4 metres apart). Drunk or belligerent people were likely to be shouted out of either of these two yards by whoever was "on duty" on one of the

verandahs. Maureen's commitment to keeping the peace extended to getting involved in fights when circumstances required it, but only to the extent of preventing 'doubling' or controlling the scope and proper conduct of a fight.

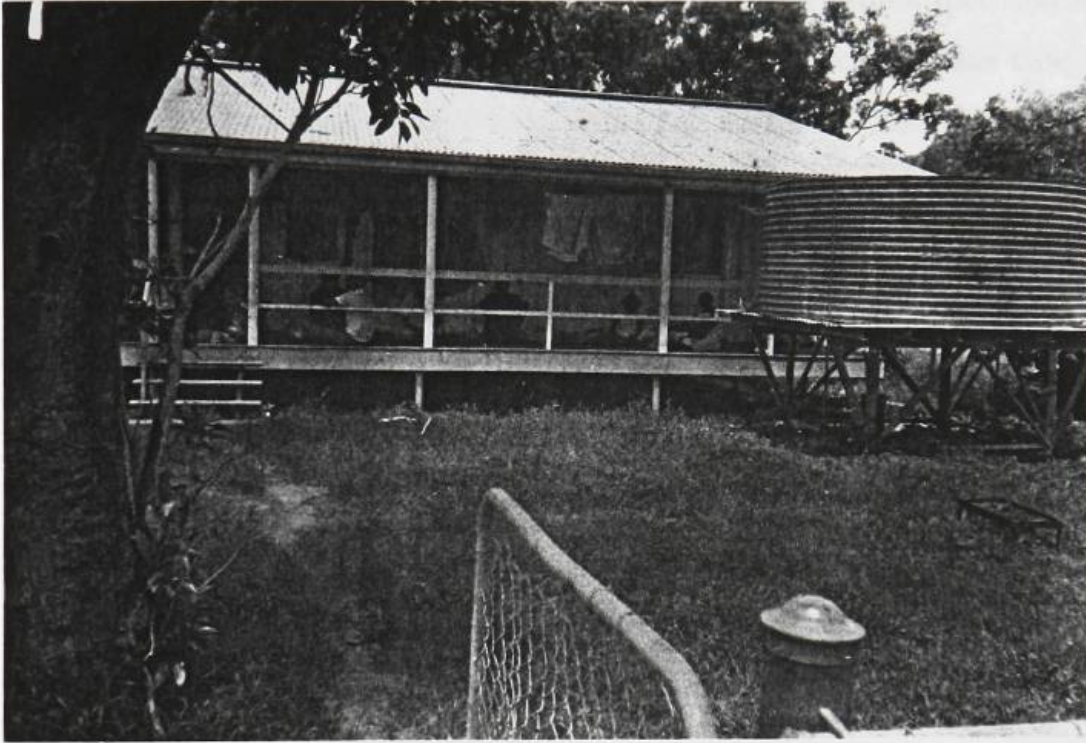


Figure 30: Wet season use of verandah as hearth

Once again, the 'hearth' and 'mob' domains are expressed in urban living conditions. Although in town 'hearths' may be verandahs or wider spaces as well as actual hearths, their functions are very similar. They are the primary sites of social interaction for family groups revolving around a focal married pair. In the bush, despite some patrifilial tendencies, the hearth was not gendered in the sense of being primarily associated with or the responsibility of one or the other gender. In town, as we have seen, historical factors tended to leave women rather than men in charge of the hearth space and its associated function of "witness". Although in the case described above it is women who seem to be taking on the responsibility of defence of the hearth, it may not be gender that is relevant. The partners of both these Lamalama women are men from

distant countries. Mabel's partner Victor is from the Rokeby area and Maureen's partner Desi is from Hopevale. Not only were these men not on their own land and without direct claim to Lamalama land, they did not have large numbers of kin locally to support them, and they both remained rather marginal to local mob politics during the term of my fieldwork. It was position by virtue of descent within a certain mob and the economic and physical power to impose sanctions that were significant in this case, as it was in Wujal Wujal mobs (Anderson 1984). Mabel had access to Child Endowment payments as well as other welfare income for the children she was rearing. At one time she had four school-age children and one toddler under her care. Her partner was in employment whenever the local landowner needed him and neither he nor Mabel were drinkers. Maureen was in full employment as a teacher and her partner got occasional work in the area. One significant index of Maureen's power was the fact that she could afford to maintain a vehicle. When she was displeased with people for drinking and making too much noise in her vicinity, she would refuse to take them to the shops or bring home their shopping in this vehicle. Her power to maintain peace and quiet tended to be confined to her own Lamalama mob, however, perhaps because that was who lived closest to her.

Hearths are thus demonstrably significant spheres of organisation in Coen although they do not always cluster neatly into mob groupings as they do at the outstations. The reserve hearths never combined to make a mob, owing to their lack of common territorial allegiance. On the other hand, the Bassani hearth was central to the daily lives of the Bassani mob and the larger Lamalama mobs, despite being isolated from other hearth areas. Accidents of history tended to place women at the hearth more frequently than men in Coen, and this meant that older women especially had a wealth of knowledge gained through continual witnessing. The use of knowledge for the benefit of mobs has already been shown to be an important factor in the gaining of power. A level of mob organisation based on territorial contiguity and linguistic grouping has emerged in this discussion of hearths in Coen and is explored further in the following section.

Mob Distinctiveness

I introduced above in chapter 4 (p185), the notion that the term 'mob' may be used in more than one sense. It can be used to designate groups that are more inclusive than hearth groups but still within what I have called territorial groupings. So, for instance, people referred to the Bassani mob meaning that subset of Lamalama people currently living with or dependent on Sunlight, Florrie and Joan. This mob centered on the Bassani hearth described above while in Coen but formed separate hearths in camp at Theethinji. Similarly, the "Port Stewart Mob" could be used by Lamalama and others to designate those currently using the Port Stewart outstation in contrast to the "whole Lamalama mob" which would include families currently living in Cooktown, Wujal Wujal, Bamaga and elsewhere.

In the case of the Bassani mob it is possible to label such a grouping as a household, as was done in anthropological submissions to the Tribunal hearing Lakefield Land Claim, for instance (Bruce Rigsby and Di Hafner, pers. comm.) and as Anderson (1984) does. There are, however, two reasons why I don't want to use the word 'household' here. The first is the problem, mentioned in Chapter 1, of the connotations of domesticity that the word carries. The second reason is that 'household' cannot be applied to all the groupings called 'mob' and thus cannot capture some commonalities between them. Whether it is used of groups such as the Bassani mob or of larger associations of people such "the Port Stewart mob" or "the Lamalama mob", the term 'mob' designates a group of people who share descent from particular countries or clusters of countries, joined in the pursuit of common aims, whether these are the reassertion of ownership over ancestral countries or daily business such as keeping the neighbourhood quiet. Margaret's mob was made up largely of her matrilineal kin and two older, more distantly related men, but what made them a mob was their common

association in the development of their outstation. Before the land became available, Margaret didn't have a mob. Mobs are not always groups of people currently living together, that is, local groups. In some contexts the Lamalama mob could be understood to include kinsmen currently living in Bamaga, Cairns, or indeed, Cherbourg.

While hearth groups have been shown to be significant spheres of action, I never heard anyone in Coen call them 'mob', marking a distinctive difference (The Bassani mob and the Bassani hearth group were often but not always coterminous). The salience of the most inclusive use of the term 'mob' only emerges in contrast to other high-level groups. Thus it only makes sense to talk of the Lamalama mob to distinguish them from other groups such as the Wik mob. However, in the Coen context the term "Wik mob" means that subset of people owning a Wik language and currently taking part in Coen life. It does not necessarily include the much larger "Wik mob" resident at Aurukun. In short, 'mob' is a contrastive term and its breadth of reference will depend on the circumstances of use. At base, at this level of contrast the concept mob rests on a common set of rights and responsibilities in contiguous clusters of estates. So the Lamalama mob were all those people with rights in the countries surrounding Princess Charlotte Bay agreed to be related. The extent of the total Lamalama territory has probably shifted over time, as was demonstrated above in Chapter 2. But this relationship between countries has been reinforced by an endogamous tendency that has ensured some continuity over time. Even now when previous rules about proper marriages have been relaxed, 14 of the last 19 unions (as at 1991) were between people who claim descent from the language groups held to make up the Lamalama entity: Umbuygamu, Umpithamu, Lamalama and Rimanggudinhma. In the town of Coen, mobs can be observed as organisational entities as well as linguistic and territorial ones.

For instance, in Coen as at Wujal Wujal (Anderson 1984:373), child-minding and food was shared within mobs, and mob distinctiveness was evident in store-buying behaviour. Each mob gave its patronage predominantly to one of the two stores in town

rather than the other. Long periods of waiting outside a store were common when people were waiting for mail and pay to arrive or just passing the time and witnessing. This brought members of various mobs into close proximity, but they still tended to maintain some physical distance and they would avoid actually making purchases when members of another mob were in the shop. Even when members of a single mob were present, they seemed to prefer to do their shopping separately from each other, one waiting until the other finished to enter the shop, unless other circumstances, such as the late arrival of the mail and pay cheques, meant they could not space out their shopping in this preferred manner. Although children often accompanied shoppers and were usually bought anything they pleaded for, the same children would be “growled” roughly away from the shopping bags around people’s feet outside the store and told it was none of their business what was inside. While shoppers were no doubt protecting their purchases from unlimited demand, there was also a sense in which information about the contents of the bag such as what was bought, how much money had been spent, how much was likely to remain and so on was being protected. In this case the information was restricted very narrowly, open to fellow hearth group members at most. But the kind of witnessing that took place outside the shop demonstrates the restriction of the flow of information within mobs, already hinted at in the incident of the Smith/Olkolo fight related above.

A clearer illustration is provided by an event that happened one Saturday morning after I did my shopping and joined the women of my Lamalama family outside the door of the store. Their attention was focussed on a house across the gully belonging to the Smith family. I came out of the shop to hear them point out “There’s ___ swinging her arms around.” When I asked what was going on I was told that there was big trouble over there and the police had just been there. I was told with apparent certainty that it was all because of a fight that had taken place the previous night. Members of other mobs were present and clearly taking an interest in what was going on but there was no general discussion of events. As the police went back and forth from the house to

various parts of town, a variety of explanations were propounded within the Lamalama group, always in the shape of “must be” stories: “Must be he's going to look for _(name of a relative)___” Seeing a Lamalama woman approach down the road that ran past the house in question, it was suggested that “Aunt will tell us what's happening”, but when she arrived she merely said “Big trouble there”. When people who had been seen to be involved in the trouble at the Smith house visited the shop everyone commented that they would know what was going on, but no-one asked them and they did not volunteer the information. None of them were people belonging to any of the mobs waiting outside the shop. Eventually everyone had to go home without finding out what had happened. Amongst Aboriginal groups in Coen information is not a free good and there is no concept of a public ‘right to know’ even the contents of a shopping bag. The persistence of mob distinctions complicates the situation where mobs are expected to come together as a single Aboriginal community distinct from the whitefella state and society surrounding them.

Whitefella Constructions of the Aboriginal Community

Although non-indigenous people in Coen, and particularly the older long-term residents, often have knowledge of the land-based mob distinctions that are relevant in the Aboriginal domain, the indigenous/non-indigenous distinction is most salient for them. Ever since the days of the 1897 *Restriction of the Sale of Opium and Protection of Aborigines Act*, whitefellas have tended to treat Aborigines as a homogenous category except in their economic aspect as workers assigned under legislation to one or another job in one or another place. Thus, the authorities tried to segregate the town-based workers from those on the Reserve who were not employed or had temporary absence from jobs elsewhere. Complete segregation was never possible for two reasons. One was the whitefellas' fluctuating need for labour. Periodic bursts of activity in mining

or the cattle industry meant that Aboriginal people repeatedly moved in and out of the workforce over the year and over their lifetimes. However, the major blurring of the work-based distinction was the result of Aboriginal people's insistence on being part of their own mob. Thus, town and Reserve dwellers did find opportunities to meet, and cattle workers ran away from jobs on stations that weren't on their own country. There was, however, one way in which whitefella law created a new kind of distinction among Aboriginal people, and that was in the possibility of exemption from the Act governing the daily lives of Aboriginal people in Queensland.

Those "under the Act" could have their labour appropriated, their place of abode specified and even their sexual relationships regulated by government-appointed officials such as Protector of Aboriginals or Mission Superintendent. Those exempt were not only free of these restrictions but had positive privileges such as, from 1965, the right to drink alcohol. Exemptions could be gained by those who were deemed acceptable by whitefella society (Wearne 1980:18). The character of those granted exemptions was decided by people such as Protectors and employers so there was pressure for people to act according to whitefella norms. Further, exemptees were banned from living on Reserves. In other words, the law required Aboriginal people to give up their primary reference groups and identifications.

It is easy to see how those still living under the provisions of the Act might resent their compatriots who sought exemption, and I was given accounts of past interaction that suggested this was at the base of the trouble between the Smiths and the other Aboriginal groups in Coen. The elder Mr and Mrs Smith had been exempt and seem to have made much of what they saw as their superior status. They made sure their daughters had whitefella education and these women on occasion claimed to be the only proper representatives of Aboriginal interests in Coen because "that other lot are just myalls, can't even read and write." I was told of the ways in which Mrs Smith had violently repudiated her Lamalama relatives in the past and although my informants

offered no explanation for her behaviour, it may have been linked to her unwillingness to be seen to be in association with “full-bloods” and thus jeopardise her exemption. However that may be, her attempts to activate her kin ties to get occasional access to the Port Stewart outstation were unavailing, although two of her brothers were regular visitors.

Electing to obey the conditions for exemption was a rational decision under a political regime that seemed for many years unlikely ever to grant land rights or any kind of political autonomy to Aboriginal people. Since it looked as though a return to country was never going to be possible, aligning oneself with the new whitefella sources of power was the best way of improving one's lot. Ties to country were not thereby lost, however, and no-one ever disparaged Mr Smith's interests in, and claims on, his country. As a result, although there was naturally an awareness of the distinction between whitefellas and Aborigines, there was very little sense of the “Aboriginal community” as a united political or affective whole amongst Aboriginal people in Coen. Nevertheless, whitefella institutions (including the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission) have, by and large, insisted on dealing with the Aboriginal people of Coen as though they were a single community, thus requiring the various groups to find ways of pursuing their various aims in concert. Despite this, mob-based distinctions (which are ultimately land-based distinctions) have remained important and can be seen very clearly in the formation, reformation and internal politics of local Aboriginal Corporations.

Aboriginal Corporations in Coen

Aboriginal contact with non-indigenous authority for decades after the passing of the 1897 Act was through Protectors (who were also policemen) and employers. These were almost the only channels for Aboriginal people of ECCYP to the economic

resources of the wider Australian society until the effects of Commonwealth intervention in Aboriginal affairs began to be felt in the 1970s. The only other body dealing with Aborigines as a group was the Lutheran Church, which supported a pastor in Coen between 1967 and 1976. The pastor was an Aboriginal man from Hopevale, George Rosendale, who was instrumental in improving living conditions on the Reserve, establishing a proper graveyard for Aboriginal people and other such welfare work. The Queensland state government department with responsibility for Aboriginal affairs maintained a liaison officer in Coen in the 1970s but that officer's role appears to have been mainly the administration of welfare payments. However, the increasing influence of the Commonwealth Department of Aboriginal Affairs and the monies they disbursed throughout the late 1970s and 1980s meant that "Aborigines were increasingly being provided for through a broad range of special Aboriginal assistance programs operating across a whole range of Commonwealth and State government departments; some provided services direct to Aborigines and some funded community-based service organisation" (Altman and Sanders 1991:8). In order to receive such funding, Aboriginal groups had to be incorporated, usually under the *Aboriginal Councils and Associations Act 1976*, but no-one in Coen knew that such support was available or how to go about getting it until the arrival of a new Lutheran pastor, Roy McIvor, and his wife Thelma from Hopevale in June 1983.

The McIvors identified alcohol abuse as the major social problem for Coen people and their interest in tapping into government funding was initially in order to combat this problem (Jolly and Jolly 1991:76). Early in 1984, Roy McIvor and the local liaison officer for the Department of Aboriginal and Islander Affairs, Len Leon, called a meeting to form an Aboriginal corporation. As a result, the Malpa Kincha Corporation was formed, and Roy McIvor was elected as chairman. Proposals were developed for an old folks' home, a community vehicle, drainage work on some of the houses and a community centre to give the Aboriginal population an alternative social outlet to the pub. Government promises, guarantees and money arrived in due course. At this stage,

Malpa Kincha represented all the Aboriginal groups in Coen but conflicts arose between the various Aboriginal groups in the Corporation and McIvor soon resigned as chairman. Others who felt they were not getting any benefits from Malpa Kincha followed, and in 1986, Woompi Keppel and Rosie Ahlers, both elders of the Wik Iyanh group, approached Roy McIvor to form another corporation. Moomba Aboriginal Corporation was officially incorporated in June 1987 with something like 100 members, representing Wik Iyanh (Merepah Mob), Lamalama (Port Stewart Mob), Kaanju (Wenlock Mob) and Olkolo residents of Coen (Jolly and Jolly 1991:4). Malpa Kincha continued in existence, but its membership was limited almost exclusively to the Smith family.

Woompi and Rosie were highly significant players in this whole process. As I have described above, Chapter 4, they had both taken on roles of authority within the Aboriginal society of Coen for many years and had represented that society to outsiders such as the Director of the Department of Aboriginal and Islander Advancement, Mr Killoran. Rosie was a particularly strong supporter of the church and it had been at her instigation that a new pastor had been sent to Coen. Mention has already been made of the fact that when the new church building was dedicated it was given the name "Moomba", the name of a Story associated with Woompi and Rosie's country. An alternate name was Dhunbi, another Wik Iyanh Story. The central role played by Woompi and Rosie and the McIvors in the development of a new corporation after the disintegration of Malpa Kincha reinforced the prominence of the Wik group in local inter-group affairs. This was symbolised by the adoption of the name Moomba for the new corporation. This name never became the property of the whole group, and Wik Iyanh people repeatedly said "That's our name, but we talk up for whole lot". Wik members sometimes spoke as if they had special rights in the corporation and its resources because of its use of a Wik name, but this only really became an issue as increasing possibilities of making claims to land and outstation support resulted in competition between mobs and tensions within the corporation. These came to a head

when constitutional changes to the corporation were suggested as part of the Development Plan proposed by myself and Paul Jolly in 1990-91.

We had been asked by the Executive Committee to prepare a Development Plan in November 1990, mainly in order to address some procedural problems the corporation was having. Because of the wording of its constitution it was denied tax relief and there was some concern over the ease with which small numbers of members could bring about major change under the existing rules. Added to this, member mobs were increasingly gaining access to outstations and looking forward to claiming title. This put great demands on the administration and created rivalries between mobs for the services of the corporation. Constitutional change was necessary to deal with the tax issue and, as we discussed the exact nature of the changes needed and future aspirations with members, concerns emerged about the name of the corporation. These became particularly acute when the McIvors and some of the Wik mob had a serious disagreement about the allocation of resources. The McIvors understood the Wik mob to be laying claim not only to an unfair proportion of the funding gained by the corporation, but also to the office and furnishings which were housed in a corner of the church building. Their concern soon spread to the other members of the Executive Committee and it was decided that a name change should be part of the proposed changes to the constitution of the corporation. The new proposal was the acronym CYCAD, for Cape York Central Aboriginal Development Corporation. This had been chosen by the Executive Committee (with some prompting by Mrs McIvor) as particularly suitable because the cycad tree was a local species which “been here forever” and grew back even after the fiercest bushfires (Jolly and Jolly 1991:2). This name thus identified Aborigines collectively as the membership by reference to their indigenous status and their survival of a violent contact history, without giving prominence to any particular mob.

In order for a change of name to be legal, according to the rules of the Corporation then in force, it had to be ratified by a majority vote at a general meeting of the Corporation. In the process of writing the Management Plan it became clear that some other changes needed to be made to the rules to suit the current aspirations and concerns of the members. At the time (April/May 1991), the Annual General Meeting was already well overdue, thanks to the isolation of a number of members at Merepah because of the Wet. The Committee therefore decided to combine the AGM with the meeting at which the proposed changes would be voted on. The Merepah mob, who were most closely involved in the change of name, could not be tied down to a date when they were willing to come in to town for the meeting. In fact, they were very reluctant to discuss the meeting at all. On one occasion when I phoned Merepah to talk to Woompi about nominations for offices, another man answered the phone and said he would get Woompi, but half an hour later no-one had come to the phone. This was a strategy I had seen used when I had been at Merepah. If someone phoned importunately, they would be left hanging in just this manner. Other people experienced this same rebuff when they tried phoning Merepah about the meeting and this failure to respond clearly signalled the Merepah mob's reluctance to negotiate on the issues under discussion. However, the committee insisted that the matter be addressed and they decided I should be asked to prepare notices about the coming meeting, setting a date and agenda, for circulation by post to all members. This was perfectly legal procedure according to Australian law, but defied local notions of the propriety of personal consultation with all interested parties, as well as the significance of the Merepah mob's nul response. The Merepah mob were very angry and several of them phoned the pastor's house and the Moomba office with abuse and threats. Nevertheless the committee insisted that the meeting would go ahead whether the Merepah mob came or not. Because of their ownership of the Moomba name and their interest in maintaining it, they could not afford to stay away and some of them hired a plane to bring them in from the outstation on the morning of the meeting. The road was in fact open and they did have a vehicle, but their hiring a plane illustrated

the serious nature of their concern to everyone, as well as reminding others of the genuine difficulties they had during the Wet in reaching Coen.

There was some apprehension about the meeting amongst the other members of Moomba, who were worried that the Merepah mob were going to start a fight. Not only did they feel they had been treated badly in the setting up of the meeting, one of the key issues to be discussed was the replacement of their name for the Corporation with another. Margaret was quite agitated and kept saying things like “They not boss for whole lot. If that olman make trouble, we just tell them”. The Lamalama Chairman was also worried and delayed his arrival until everyone else was present (a fact he could be sure of because of his ability to see the church hall and its surroundings from his backyard). As soon as he arrived and opened the meeting, he asked me to take the chair. This proved to be a significant strategic move. As the detailed discussion that follows demonstrates, the meeting began in a tense atmosphere and with indications that some of the Merepah mob were spoiling for an argument, if not a fight. However, there were two factors that allowed people to state their position, re-assert their unity, and avoid conflict. One was that fact that an outsider, myself, and not one of the members, chaired the meeting. The other was the constant reiteration that the changes to the Rules were being made to comply with governmental and legal (that is, external) requirements. The sixteen changes to the Rules that were proposed, including the change of name, were voted on and passed unanimously. Not one of them was subsequently carried out.

Under the provisions of the *Aboriginal Councils and Associations Act 1976*, under which Moomba was incorporated, changes to a corporation's rules, particularly a change of name, do not come into force until the Public Officer has served notice of the change and the Registrar has issued a certificate of incorporation in the new name. In this case, the minutes of the meeting detailing the proposed changes had to be sent, under the Rules then in operation, to the Registrar. Such minutes were prepared but never sent, and the proposed changes were never implemented. In White Australian culture and law

decisions such as these taken in “public” are held to be binding (until revoked in another public setting). Patrick Sullivan (n.d.: 4) has noted that such assumptions run contrary to Aboriginal systems of authority which “are devoid of all the assumptions that structure European administration, for instance, concepts such as those Weber identifies—office, contract, and the institution of public and private domains”. It is tempting therefore, in the context of this study, to use this example to point to the relative lack of salience of any concept of “public” as an encompassing domain relevant to Aboriginal people in Coen. However, I argue that rather than focus on an apparent lack of political force in the meeting, it is more revealing of significant spheres of action and the degree to which they are gendered, or not gendered, to examine what *was* accomplished in this case. In the short term, conflict was avoided, and the connections between and the common goals of the various outstation mobs were emphasised. The meeting permitted the expression of individual autonomy for each outstation mob under an ideology of “all come at one” (line 193 of the transcript). In the long term, the other mobs' dissatisfaction with Merepah dominance was resolved by virtual abandonment of Moomba Corporation and the formation of new alliances centered on Coen. I turn now to a detailed discussion of interaction at the general meeting which took place on 27 April 1991 in the Moomba Church at Coen.

Differentiation and Relatedness in a Meeting

Standard European meeting procedure assumes that sometimes opposing views will be expressed, discussed and a binding consensus will be reached that will be enshrined in the minutes, sometimes with legal effect. Although the relevant federal Act for the administration of Aboriginal incorporated groups or councils, *The Aboriginal Councils and Associations Act 1976*, allows that “The Rules of an association with respect to any matter may be based on Aboriginal custom” (Sub-section 43(4)), in fact

references in the Act to executive officers, public officers, governing committees and so on make clear that it is envisaged that European norms for the conduct of common business will apply. In fact, the Model Rules supplied by the Queensland Department of Justice and Corrective Services to help Aboriginal associations in that state to get started are exactly the same ones supplied to any other group seeking incorporation under Queensland laws. Such rules call for regular meetings of the management committee, and general meetings where decisions are to be made “by a majority of votes of the members present” (Rule 24(3)). Since Aboriginal groups need to be incorporated to access government funding, they are therefore committed to at least a show of regulating their affairs by means of meetings, and this has occurred across Australia (Bell and Ditton 1980; Gale 1983; Tonkinson 1991).

A number of writers (Myers 1986b; Sullivan n.d.; Sutton 1985) have commented on the way in which Aboriginal people and communities not only struggle to adapt to bureaucratic procedure, but also adapt those procedures to their own ends. In using the terms “differentiation” and “relatedness” to characterise what happens in such meetings I am following Myers (1986b:434), who uses the terms of an opposition that he sees as basic to the social life of the Pintupi of the Western Desert. He describes Pintupi social life as built on an extensive network of dyadic relations between autonomous individuals held together by an assumption of relatedness, “all one together” (Myers 1986b:435). Assertions of relatedness are the mechanism by which conflict is reduced. In such a setting the use of European forms of doing business such as the meeting are particularly problematic since open expression of disagreement signalled a rejection of overall relatedness, a situation the Pintupi could not tolerate. Since “the meeting does not *stand for* but *is* the polity” (Myers 1986b:438), it was therefore difficult for the Pintupi to directly address any conflict of interest between individuals or sub-groups of the corporation in a meeting (Myers 1986b:430). However, Myers distinguishes four tactics used for managing meetings so as to minimise the threat to relatedness: “(1) opening with oratorical self-deprecations, such as “I’m going to tell you a little story, nothing

really”; (2) depersonalization of an account, as in presenting one's own position as coming from outside; (3) indirectness in discussing the substance of conflict; and (4) noncontradiction of others” (Myers 1986b:437). All of these strategies were present in the Moomba meeting and were used as means of deflecting conflict and reasserting unity. But before considering the Coen data, another important issue raised by Myers must be discussed, the issue of what Myers (1986b:442) refers to as “the field to which this value [relatedness] may apply . . . that is, the way this value is situated in a larger structure.”

In the Western Desert, people are spread in small groups over vast distances, owing to the nature of the environment. Myers (1986a, 1986b) sees this as underlying the Pintupi social system, whose relevant spheres of action centre either on the individual or on the region. He suggests that amongst people who have a recognised intervening level of aggregation, such as a clan (for the Yolngu) or mob (in the Coen case), participants will use different strategies to reproduce these bases of action than Pintupi use, because Pintupi have constantly to recreate their relatedness (Myers 1986b:443). Myers seems to suggest that negotiations between clans or mobs will be dominated by issues of “difference and alliance” (Myers 1986b:443) that will preserve the group boundaries and that “overall relatedness” will not be invoked. Although the idiom in this example is not that of kinship, most of the rhetorical strategies Myers describes are used to paper over conflict with a veneer of unity. The connectedness of equals, if not relatedness, is certainly proposed. Myers’ other observation that “Agreement recognizes one's relatedness to those present but does not compromise autonomy outside the context” (Myers 1986b:439) applies directly here. The unanimity of the decisions briefly constituted a unified “Moomba mob”, but did not constitute commitment to carry out the decisions. In the end, connectedness was abandoned and each mob acted in their own interests.

Analysis of the Transcript

A broad transcription of the part of the meeting devoted to the constitutional changes appears in Appendix 2. The discussion here focusses on excerpts from early in the proceedings which have been given a closer transcription. At the time of the meeting, the Queensland *Aboriginal Land Act 1991* was in preparation and members of Moomba had attended meetings in Brisbane and at Elim, on the coast east Hopevale, concerned with the planning of that Act. In discussions with representatives of the Queensland Department of Aboriginal and Islander Affairs, I had been advised that those intending to claim land under the new legislation would have to form incorporated bodies expressly for the purpose of holding title to the claimed land. I was also advised that anything, such as a name change, that differentiated the corporation from such land-holding bodies would be a good idea. The first 100 lines of the transcript are taken up with my explanation of some of this background to Moomba members. The transcript has been somewhat Anglicised from the local Aboriginal English I used on this occasion. I suggested that it was a good idea to use English for the new name because that would avoid using a name that belonged more to one mob than another (line 84). The excerpt begins with my inviting discussion of the proposed new name from the floor.

- 100 L name by the people that we spoke to about it. But all you mob 'ere now, you
 101 can say what you think. You got better idea, or you don't like that name?
 102 You speak up and tell us now. Your turn to talk.
 103 W Excuse me through the chair, who made the decision to change that name,
 104 the state government or federal?
 105 L State.

W, one of the Merepah mob, begins in a very formal and whitefella manner, referring his comments through the chair. However, his comments make reference to a distinct but common Aboriginality when he groups the three outstations together (lines 115-6) as a group collectively denied their rights by government (line 131). He also

asserts his concern for “all Aborigine people” and constitutes himself spokesperson for them in opposition to me, the only whitefella present.

115 W I suggest this, say every, like Port Stewart and Lockhart, ah Wenlock I mean
 116 to say, and Merepah. Now I would say all Aborigine people with . . . my
 117 concern with all Aborigine people, if they wanna change their name, if they
 118 want to then put it in their language, say for example like a title for them,
 119 they can have it in their own language if they want to. And that should be left
 120 with

121 L Mm.

122 W Aborigine people, even Wenlock should be left with those mob . . .
 123 whichever way they want to go. Whichever way they want, to make an
 124 organisation, you know corporation or whatever they want to call it with
 125 their own language whatsoever . . . should be up to the Aborigine people.

126 A Yeah.

127 W You know, it shouldn't be State government, you know, give them (cough)
 128 orders give them . . . everything . . . it's up to the Aborigine. No, we're
 129 looking at today, should the, the Aborigine make their own decision what
 130 they want? What I think. Now if we're gonna use white man name all the
 131 time, well, we haven't got the rights.

He initially calls the Wenlock outstation Lockhart, a slip that echoes his repeated assertion elsewhere that the Wenlock outstation was not the primary country of those residing there (which no-one disputed) and that they were really only pensioners of the Lockhart Council. This bid for boss status is the opposite of the self-deprecating behaviour Myers' analysis leads one to expect, but it is moderated at line 130 where W says that his strongly voiced opinion is just “What I think”. His speech was designed to defeat the name change through representing it as a White denial of Aboriginal autonomy, but this backfired when K, a Lamalama man pointed out that outstation independence was not compromised by the existence of the corporation (lines 148-9).

140 W I reckon Aborigine people, let 'em take their own name with 'em, whichever
 141 they want it, for their own organisation.

142 L That, that's what the state government is saying, everybody take their own
 143 name, but you can't!

140 W |Excuse me, I'd just like to say, like with the Merepah
 141 mob now . . . we got our own tribal name now for Merepah see we
 142 L |Mm
 143 W got . . . that's ATSIC, see, ATSIC told us|
 144 K |Port Stewart got their own
 145 language but we still all come under CYCAD that's right?

W's invoking Aboriginal unity thus was reworked into expressions of corporation unity in expressions such as "we still come at one", and this was ultimately mentioned in the excerpt by 11 people, five of whom were women. Nevertheless mob distinctiveness was still able to be asserted and, as subsequent events showed, ultimately took precedence.

I had used Myers' tactics of depersonalization and indirectness in my preamble, by emphasising the advice given by lawyers, accountants and government officials and omitting to mention the local dispute over corporation resources. W had been able to use this temporarily to further his own position and the debate became one about Aboriginal groups' right to use their own names for their own countries, as W notes at line 165.

164 W Yeah, and ah, sounded like if you want it, down there, once you get full title
 165 of that land, whichever you want to call it is up to 'im.
 166 E Up to 'im.
 167 L Yeah, that's right.
 168 W And every|
 169 Ch |That's why he's talking about
 170 W Yeah.
 171 Ch That's why |
 172 S |She try to explain it to us but
 173 Ch | You blokes, you blokes got that| Moomba name, that's in your
 174 language, isn't it?

- 164 S IWE, LOOK NOW, YOU MAKE UP YOUR OWN, MAKE UP
 165 YOUR . . . YEAH PUT IT THAT WAY, BUT we still all come at one.
 166 Ch Yeah, we still come at one.

The Lamalama Chairman of the corporation puts assertions of connectedness in jeopardy by breaching the etiquette of both depersonalisation and indirectness with his reference at 173 to the actual source of the dispute in the Merepah mob's ownership of the corporation name. S, a man from the Merepah mob, acted quickly to heal this breach by talking loudly over the chairman. As Myers' analysis predicts, he does not contradict the chairman nor mention the point at issue directly. He speaks only to drown the chairman out, concluding quietly with the conciliatory words "we all come at one", a sentiment the chairman then echoes. M, the female leader of the Wenlock group is more successful in alluding to the real cause of dispute when, at line 190, she says "Merepah they got their own name, but this office for anybody".

- 185 M Yeah. Well, what he means then . . . that means . . . this office here for every
 186 people . . . Aborigine people | Wait. That outstation, he could be called
 187 C |Yeah that's right ***
 188 M under any thing, any organised . . . you know, Lamalama people they can call
 189 that separate, my place I callem separate, Merepah they got their own name,
 190 but this office for anybody. | All of us. That's why they got it CYCAD for
 191 Central people.
 192 W |They for the lot to come in here
 193 N |All of us

Once again the issue of the ownership of the name is not directly alluded to when M's point is taken up by R, a senior woman of the Merepah mob, at line 205.

- 205 R Ah, excuse me, ah, this office what's the Moomba office, 'a blong Merepah
 206 an' Wenlock an' Port Stewart. What ever come, mail, anything whatever,
 207 comesl through here
 208 L |Goes through that office
 209 S |sameway come through CYCAD
 210 R Yeah. We all in the one Yeah
 211 L Yeah

- 212 R Yeah . . . and might be mail come through here to go Wenlock and Port
 213 Stewart . . . () suppose to bin
 214 L Yeah
 215 R We had a meeting here before.
 216 L Yeah.
 217 E We bin all gree for that. We all in the one. Even the church. We're not gonna
 218 give away from l the church
 219 L |Yeah that's right. No
 220 R We're all in 'ere.
 221 L Yeah.
 222 R It's our church, gotta be stop ere forever, till another man come.

She emphasises the dependence of the other outstations on the central office, and although she repeatedly asserts that “we all in the one”, her inclusion of the church in that one could be seen as an argument for retaining the old name, given that the church and the organisation were both called Moomba. She goes on, “gotta be stop ere forever” but the only reply to this (Speaker Ro, line 229) does not take up the issue of the relationship with the church, but rather the relationship of mutual help between the various outstation mobs. Finally, when no-one has anything else to say about the issue at hand and consensus appears to have been reached, W orders everyone to vote in favour of the proposed name change.

- 229 Ro Excuse me, when we come under CYCAD name. Will we be helpin each
 230 other work out . . . you know?
 231 L Just same like before.
 232 M Same.
 233 Ro ***(unintelligible) I understand now.
 234 L Same as before.
 235 ? *** (lots of confused noise)
 236 L So everybody happy with that name?
 237 Many Yeah
 238 W Okay, everyone put a hand up.

The main topics addressed by the meeting could be outlined schematically thus:

Line	Construction
115-16	Aborigines as single group in opposition to whitefellas
140-41	Use of own language name distinguishes a mob
149	Mob distinctiveness compatible with unity under CYCAD
176-77	Mention of one mob's ownership of the Moomba name quickly countered by assertions that "all come at one"
185-86	Equal access to resources for all mobs
217-18	Identification of corporation with (Moomba) church
229-30	Continuing mutual support between mobs
249	"Nobody against" — unity achieved

The introductory argument about a common Aboriginality was complicated even for the speaker by the necessity to acknowledge mob distinctiveness. The connectedness finally proposed was not based on Aboriginality, but on membership of the corporation. The emphasis then shifted to the equal rights of the member mobs and the benefits to be gained. On that basis, connectedness was acceptable to everyone present, but this failed to address urgent and ongoing mob-based concerns, as subsequent events showed. The gender of speakers was insignificant in comparison to the importance of mob membership, and this was true of other public meetings in Coen. When whitefella and indigenous inhabitants combined to oppose proposed changes to shire boundaries, a public meeting was held to make community concerns known to politicians and the press. The Aboriginal speakers at the meeting, two men and two women, spoke as representatives of their mobs and one of the Aboriginal women gave an interview to a journalist from the Australian Broadcasting Commission.

Immediately after the meeting, W and others started to lobby vigorously against the new name amongst those who were not at the meeting on the grounds that "that was just Lesley Jolly's idea anyway". This argument gained enough adherents in the days following the meeting to cause considerable unease amongst the people who were most in favour of the changes. When the minutes of the meeting still had not been sent to the

Registrar of Aboriginal Corporations for ratification some time later, I was told it was because it might cause too much trouble between all the mobs in town. This procedure never was followed and so the changes never happened. This phenomenon has been noticed in other Aboriginal organisations. Edward Davis (1992:35) says that “decisions made outside the meeting are of more importance than those that might appear to be reached within.” This might be held not to be unique to Aboriginal organisations. However, in the eyes of White Australian law the meeting was procedurally correct and could be held to be binding, but locally people felt themselves free to ignore the motions they had voted for, and powerless to enforce the changes they desired. The administrative staff of the corporation, designated public officers who were members of the outstation group that wanted the changes, would not implement those changes in the face of ongoing opposition from other groups. What the meeting achieved was not a set of agreed decisions but an assertion, one might say a witnessing to the fact that all of the Coen mobs were independent entities who could agree to co-operate for their mutual benefit.

All of the tactics that Myers (1986b) identified as part of Pintupi construction of relatedness were present at this meeting. He argued that the use of these tactics constituted the Pintupi polity, which had no structures apart from such meetings in which to express itself. In fact, many of these discourse features have been identified elsewhere as characteristic of all Aboriginal interaction and decision making, as discussed in Chapter 3 above. There, I argued that such tactics were generally inadequate to constructing anything like a “public” in the sense of a group with common and equal rights in the matter at hand, capable of operating outside the constraints of mob structures. Myers (1986b:443) suggests that where intermediate structures, such as Yolngu clans, exist between the level of individual or hearth group and polity, participants at meetings will “seek to reproduce this basis of action; the strategy is different from recreating it anew.” The meeting described here demonstrates the tension between the need to reproduce mob distinctiveness and the need to create some kind of

common Aboriginal polity capable of responding to the demands of the encompassing state. Enough has been said in this chapter to demonstrate that mob distinctiveness was actively maintained in Coen. It was evident in people's living arrangements, their dispute management procedures, restrictions on information flow and the failure of attempts to assert personal or group dominance, or even representativeness, that transcended mob boundaries. Nevertheless, contact with arms of government were predicated on the assumption that there was a single Aboriginal polity in the ECCYP region centered on Coen. Such contact between Aborigines and the state was almost always through an agency charged with the provision of services to Aboriginal people in particular, rather than the population as a whole (Altman and Sanders 1991). Since they were set up by government, it is not surprising that such agencies tended to ignore local differences between groups of Aboriginal people and proceed according to routine non-indigenous bureaucratic practice. It was more disappointing to find that the then newly-created ATSIC (Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission) did likewise in requiring all of the Coen-based Aboriginal groups to unite in a single organisation for the purposes of CDEP.

ATSIC was formed out of the previous Commonwealth Department of Aboriginal Affairs in 1990, and was expected by many indigenous people to be a "Black Government". At the time of my fieldwork the regional council of ATSIC met in Cairns and the man identified as W in the meeting above was the representative for the people not only of Coen but of Laura and other places in the ECCYP region also. At the time, Coen people wanted ATSIC to provide a Community Development Employment Program (CDEP) and indigenous field officers of ATSIC were making regular trips to Coen to discuss the matter. They declared ATSIC to be willing to start the program in principle but they wanted Malpa Kincha and Moomba to amalgamate to administer it. The regulations governing CDEP specifically allowed for the possibility that there might be more than one scheme in any locality and did not require all the Aboriginal inhabitants of any one place to join a CDEP scheme. Nevertheless, ATSIC in this case insisted not

only that a single scheme was all that could be provided in Coen and that Moomba members and the Smith family would all have to agree to it. Bureaucratic convenience and the expense of providing capital investment for two schemes combined here to cut across well established modes of interaction. Nevertheless, Coen people held out for some time against these pressures and CDEP was not introduced until 1992. It is significant that a non-indigenous person was chosen as the manager of the program as often happens in such circumstances. This not only provided more administrative expertise than most local people had, it allowed for the vesting of responsibility for the common concerns of the organisation in someone who did not belong to any particular member mob (Sullivan n.d.:39). Such a move means that mob distinctiveness can be maintained and the blame for any infringement can be laid at an outsider's door. I have no information about how well this arrangement has been working, but the fact that it arose is significant for the concerns of this thesis. Although social organisation based on mobs is basic to Aboriginal life in ECCYP, there as elsewhere there are powerful pressures for change. In the next chapter I consider what the significance of hearth and mob based organisation may be in a climate of growing pressure to conform to quite other assumptions about social and political process. I also return to a consideration of the theoretical and practical analyses of gender relations with which I began.

6 Conclusion

This study was prompted by my original observation that Aboriginal women in Coen were authoritative and powerful actors in the political domain, despite their spending long periods of apparent inactivity by their hearths. This led me to consider the long tradition of anthropological writing about the gendering of space according to a public/private contrast. The debate has been a contentious one, dogged by definitional problems. Some of these problems have arisen because of a failure to distinguish the domestic domain from notions of privacy. Following Michelle Rosaldo (1974, 1980), many anthropologists have argued that an identification with the domestic domain has led to a universal loss of prestige for women and their interests. Arguments over the universality or otherwise of male domination have been refined in recent years in finer grained studies of such topics as the biological substrate of gender, and theories of gender as performance (Morris 1995; Worthman 1995). The argument about the universality of male domination is not one I wish to pursue here. However, it is impossible to ignore the fact that some variation on the public/private distinction is still considered helpful by some analysts in understanding particular cases of gender relations (Bodenhorn 1993; Edmunds 1996; Ortner 1990). There are still problems with the terminology. While there is some overlap between concepts of private and domestic, the former is most closely associated with control of access to space, information, activities and resources, while the latter prototypically refers to the domain of life associated with the raising of children and the preparation of food. Domestic domains are not denigrated in every culture but are often not coterminous with private domains, such as exclusive religious cults, which can often be quite powerful and prestigious. However, another problem arises in assigning the label private. Where access to space, activities and resources is restricted to a designated membership, it is normal to consider the domain private. But such private domains, whether they be Aboriginal religious complexes or

government departments, commonly gain much of their power and prestige from claims to work in the interests of the public, that is, of the whole society.

In an effort to avoid the problems associated with the words public and private, Ortner (1990) has reformulated the relevant conceptions as a distinction between encompassing domains which make claims to be acting in the interests of the whole, and of encompassed domains which “operate with respect to more local and particular interests” (Ortner 1990:56). She expects the encompassing domain always to carry more prestige than the encompassed and that change will be more effective when accomplished in the public domain (Ortner 1990:77). In order to explore the influence of such factors on the gender distinction in any given society, Ortner holds that it is necessary:

to ask how encompassing and encompassed sites and projects of social life are distinguished, organized and interrelated in a given society, to inquire into the underlying politics of these distinction and interrelations, to ask whether a given culture does or does not fuse a gender opposition to these more abstract dimensions of social value, and finally, and very importantly, to examine the ways in which such fusions are used, contested and sometimes effectively shifted over time (Ortner 1990:56).

This study has attempted to follow Ortner's program for the Aboriginal cultures of Coen and East Central Cape York Peninsula, especially for the Lamalama of Princess Charlotte Bay.

The historical records for the region are largely silent about the details of Aboriginal social organisation, but they are revealing about the extent to which Western assumptions of a contrast between female, domestic sites and projects of social life and male, non-domestic ones, influenced the invaders' relations with ECCYP Aborigines. This was most obvious in the area of work practices. On the frontier, work was divided into domestic and non-domestic kinds and gendered accordingly, and this gender distinction came to be expected of Aboriginal workers too, once the initial urgent

demand for labour had subsided and control of the Aboriginal workforce had been institutionalised. The fact that domestic labour was conceived of by whitefellas as encompassed by other kinds of production meant that prestige attached most to the work men did. Since Aboriginal men were allowed entry to this sphere through stockwork and labour on the marine industries, this should have helped create or consolidate their identification with the prestige domain. Aboriginal women were more likely to be given menial tasks in domestic settings, especially after the introduction of award wages in the early 1970s meant that station owners felt unable to support a large number of staff, and women were moved off stations and onto the town reserve in Coen. However, this actually produced a countervailing pressure on gender relations as women were thus brought into more constant contact with the growing industry around the administration of Aboriginal affairs in the region. In recent years it has been mainly women who have acquired the skills necessary to take up jobs in this industry, mainly as office workers, health workers and teachers' aides, so that women too were involved in the domain considered encompassing by the invaders. Mary Edmunds (1996:131) notes a similar public role for Aboriginal organisations in Central Australia. There "despite the presence of women on all the relevant councils and as employees or participants in the organisations, they have become to a significant though not exclusive extent the provenance of action by men" (Edmunds 1996:131). Davis (1993:40) records a similar phenomenon in Aboriginal organisations in New South Wales. At the time of my fieldwork, men had not yet appropriated organisational roles in this way to any significant extent.

Whether any of this changed pre-existing gender relations in the region is hard to establish in the absence of any clear idea of what those relations were. I have argued that, for the Lamalama at least, the question of the extent to which pre-contact religious practice constructed a male dominant gender hegemony is still open. The extent of the cults and their degree of exclusivity is not known but the degree to which it is women of the present senior generation who have knowledge of country and ritual is striking. It is

at least possible that "man-making" was a less exclusive affair here than in the parts of the continent where rituals of circumcision and subincision were practiced. Even if it was exclusive and laid claim to encompassing, public functions, that is not to say that men necessarily enjoyed prestige in non-religious domains of daily life. Despite the argument that Aboriginal men's association with the public domain has continued in various ways in the post-contact situation (Bell 1983; Edmunds 1996; Jacobs 1989), studies from other parts of the world alert us to the fact that we need to be cautious about assuming that a domain is gendered conceptually just because it is usually the province of one or another of the sexes (Bodenhorn 1993). The indigenously relevant domains of action need to be delineated for each case.

The centrality of the hearth group in Aboriginal social organisation generally has often been commented on and Thomson's (1932) description of the importance of fire in the traditions of the Aboriginal people of this region suggests that this importance is long-standing and deeply symbolic of the individual's position in the social fabric. Here, it is the sharing of a fire that creates a marriage and the married pair are the core of the hearth group. Both male and female partners brought inherited rights in land to the group and both contributed to the physical and social maintenance of the group. Children inherited rights and responsibilities in both mother's and father's country and mechanisms existed for them to activate one set of rights in preference to another. In all cases, rights in country were most salient where they were expressed in service either to the country or to others in the group. So, those who lived on their own land and hence maintained its health, helped garner its produce and shared that produce with kin, and used their knowledge of country, culture and the ways of the whitefellas to consolidate group presence on country had advantages over their peers in terms of power and prestige. The one case in which a gender inflection was discernible in hearth groups was where there was domestic violence. Where both male and female children are taught from an early age to be strong fighters, it is not clear why domestic violence should nearly always be a matter of men beating their wives. What is of interest here is that in

Coen relatives did not feel able to intervene directly in what they called “that husband-wife business”. The fact that the couple who exhibited the most severe and persistent domestic violence were both without close relatives in town suggests that the witness of relatives provided a brake on domestic violence, but clearly the hearth group of the married pair was considered a private domain with respect to who had access to the space and activities of the group. Although it was private, it was not necessarily therefore encompassed by higher level groups which might claim to act in its interests.

The term “mob” was used colloquially of certain collections of hearth groups and in this sense constituted a domain of social action that encompassed hearths. At their most encompassing, mobs were constituted relative to certain areas of country, not only because they reflected the land-related interests of their constituent hearths, but because of long-standing patterns of association between owners of various estates. The Lamalama mob, for instance, was composed of hearth groups owning clusters of estates in the hinterland of Princess Charlotte Bay which were scattered checkerboard-like across the whole Lamalama range. While members of these groups sometimes married people whose primary country was elsewhere, a tendency to endogamy within the range helped reinforce mob boundaries. In the past, clans probably formed an intermediate level of organisation, but these survive today mainly as groups identified with certain tracts of country and languages. Since the vernacular is now a mix of creole and Aboriginal English varieties and rights in particular detailed estates have been complicated by removal, mixed marriage and appropriation, clans are of little significance today. Modern mobs were most commonly built on relations to land in a more regional sense, on kinship and co-residence, and on mutual aid in the pursuit of common goals. In the case of the Young Girl mob this element of mutual aid was enough to constitute a mob, temporarily at least. However, most mobs were made up of a number of hearths and encompassed them in the sense of forming the limit of information flow, of mutual aid in regulating fights, sharing childminding and material resources. While hearth groups

and individuals sometimes threatened to go over to another mob, such threats were never treated seriously or lasted long.

Individual prominence within this encompassing domain was once again dependent on service to the group as a whole, and this was most often achieved through activating relevant knowledge and access to resources. Bodenhorn's (1990:200) comments that "it is the gendering of space—whether mental or physical—that creates exclusion from which difference leads to differential evaluation [and] gender-neutral ideas about knowledge likewise provide access to the public [encompassing] sphere" are relevant for Coen mobs (see also Edmunds 1996:121). Neither hearth nor mob space was gendered in being thought of or restricted to one or other sex. Similarly, it was the ability to activate knowledge in service that constituted leadership, and women were at least as prominent as men in leading Coen mobs. Of the three outstation groups that were active during 1990-91, one was led solely by a woman, one by a brother-sister pair and one by a husband-wife pair.

The only domains more encompassing than mobs for Aboriginal people of ECCYP in 1990-91 were generated through culture contact. These domains depended on the notion of a single Aboriginal community and the embedding of that community in the Australian nation state. It is easy to see how such domains are distinguished by the contrast between whitefellas and Aborigines, but the fact that they were organised according to whitefella norms and to meet whitefella expectations meant that their relationship with indigenously generated domains was problematic. The strong persistence of hearth and mob-based domains of organisation weakened the significance of their being encompassed by these higher level contrasts. They were domains that were predicated on the assumption of a set of interests and experiences common to all of the Aboriginal people of the region, that is, that the Aborigines of ECCYP formed an identifiable public for government policy and action. Although this was true, it was, at

the time I am writing about, largely irrelevant to the ways in which that public perceived and ordered their relationships.

The elaboration of the Aboriginal industry in Coen was still in its infancy in 1990-91 in comparison with later developments. While in the past protectionist policies had ensured a high degree of supervision of Aboriginal lives through interference from the police/Protectors, storekeepers who regulated access to goods and so on, this activity by and large happened without Aboriginal input. It was not until the 1970s that there are records of Aboriginal people starting to attempt to take an active role in community management. At that time government rarely listened to Aboriginal people and the appeals of Rosie to Mr Killoran for official standing, for instance, fell on deaf ears. Relations between ECCYP Aborigines and whitefellas continued to be mainly on the personal basis of bosses and employees. These might be amicable and endure over several generations of both families, as was the case with the Bassanis, a family name belonging to both employers and workers. However, such relations were never equal or equitable. The passing of the first substantial land rights legislation for the Northern Territory signalled a new political role for Aboriginal people and the first step towards Aboriginal self-determination, but the change was slow to come to ECCYP. In Coen it was not until the 1980s that the kind of structures began to put in place that would allow government to hear Aboriginal voices. Davis (1993:40) notes that governments always prefer to deal with higher levels of political organisation than the strictly local and quotidian. This is in part from a desire or need to simplify the process through talking to fewer people, in part from misplaced assumptions about the process of representation in Aboriginal communities, and in part from the expectation that structures that operate well in non-indigenous culture will co-ordinate with similar Aboriginal structures and be equally efficacious. That is, a small number of mostly male whitefellas who were elected or appointed to public office expect to do business with Aboriginal men similarly appointed or elected to represent their constituents. Despite appearances, this is not what they encountered in Coen. Both Malpa Kincha and Moomba were set up as

representative bodies under rules that embodied whitefella conceptions of corporate business, for the benefit of the Aborigines of Coen, but locally they were conceived of as bringing together the various mobs in town. People like the pastor might be elected to offices such as secretary or treasurer because of their education and office skills, but it was the elderly representatives of the various mobs who were the real decision makers, whether or not they were members of the Executive Committee at any given time.

There were not many employees of these Coen corporations, but, as has been noted elsewhere in Australia (Davis 1993; Edmunds 1996), the jobs that did exist tended to be held by women. Unemployment was high amongst Aborigines in Coen in 1990-91. Some men got intermittent work on surrounding stations when it was available, but that was not often. One Lamalama man had a full time job in one of the local stores and there was an Aboriginal ranger employed by the Queensland State government who was not strictly a local man, although he could trace one grandparent to Night Island, off the coast north of Coen. A few women also got temporary employment as camp cooks on cattle musters, but such employment as existed for women was mostly in town. One woman had a full time job as school cleaner, and another had two part-time jobs, one in a teachers' aide position and the other as an office worker. Another woman had a part-time job as Aboriginal health worker. Some of the Smith family women worked intermittently in the Malpa Kincha office, but this appeared to be very casual employment. The young men were less qualified for the administrative positions beginning to be created because they were more likely than the women to have left school early. Those who aspired to work dreamed of jobs on the cattle, not only for the pay but also for the initiatory experience this type of work represented. In a climate of poor beef prices and bad seasons, there was not the level of employment on stations there once had been. As a result, many young men had very little chance of ever realising their dream, and the high level of alcohol consumption amongst them in part reflected their resulting anomie. The younger generation of Lamalama women had undertaken some post-secondary training in 1990, but none of the young men had done so. Edmunds

(1990:20) has made the point that this pattern of gendered employment experience has implications for the future ability of men to take public roles in community affairs, since excessive drinking often becomes the only way in which they can construct identities for themselves.

The granting of title to land and the establishment of a CDEP scheme since 1990-91 has meant increased bureaucratic activity in Coen. This has provided more employment in office administration, market gardening and ranger training. Most positions have been taken up by young women, though some young men have been involved. Public office attaching to land corporations and community representation, on the other hand, is the preserve of the older generation, particularly the men. In this we see the competing pressures of female ability and training in management and whitefella expectations that such a role belongs to men. It is hard to say how this will be resolved in the future though studies such as those of Edmunds (1996) and Davis (1993) suggest that women will continue to wield power, even if the fact goes unrecognised. The period 1990-91 in Coen seems to have been a good time to examine locally significant domains of action before the pressures of external expectations became too great. It has certainly yielded a study with both theoretical and practical implications.

Theoretical Implications

I have described a set of encompassed and encompassing sites and projects of social life here, from hearth group to mob to Aboriginal commonality to state apparatus. I have argued that the first two are particularly salient for Aboriginal people in ECCYP, but that they do not always accept the encompassing status of the others. In the case of hearth group and mob, I have argued that no gender opposition is fused to local understandings of the nature of activities performed in these domains, nor access to

them, nor the right to make decisions about them. Insofar as gender distinctions are evident in the more encompassing domains, these are in line with the normal practice of the dominant culture and therefore their status in indigenous understanding comes in question. Previous studies of gender relations in Aboriginal Australia have argued that male predominance in the most encompassing domains is a continuation of pre-contact organisation in which men appropriated the prestigious public domain of religious ritual. If such analyses held good for ECCYP, it would be necessary to explain why men were not more dominant in the indigenously encompassing sphere of the mob. One answer might be that the cessation of indigenous ritual observance, at least amongst the Lamalama, had removed the mechanism by which male dominance was constructed and entrenched. That is, that gender relations underwent a shift that was successful because, as Ortner argues, it happened in the public domain. This does not adequately explain why male dominance appears again in still more encompassing domains. The fact that the usual explanation invokes the imposition of another culture's conceptions in the ordering of social life suggests that not only the encompassed/encompassing distinction must be taken into account but also the relations between such domains.

Nancy Fraser (1993) offers a further refinement of the concept of public which is helpful in understanding such relations. She argues against singular notions of "the public" understood as a culturally neutral and socially equal arena of discursive contestation, in favour of "multiple publics" where common interests can be defined in discourse and more readily pursued in opposition to other, especially dominant, sets of interests (Fraser 1993:122,137). In the cross-cultural context she suggests that such publics will share expressive modes which will allow some interests to emerge as common and not others (Fraser 1993: 126). This has been demonstrated to be true at both the hearth and mob level in Coen. At the level of common Aboriginality represented by the Moomba meeting, common expressive modes were in operation and common concerns were being contested (Fraser 1993:129), but without producing a 'public' with decision-making power. The meeting agreed that mobs were the absolute owners of the

right to name their own places and groups, but this common concern led to the disintegration of the public domain that made its expression possible. Fraser labels such publics that have opinion-forming powers but no decision-making powers *weak publics*. On the other hand, publics whose discourse includes both opinion-formation and decision-making, she calls *strong publics* (Fraser 1993:134). ATSIC is an institution with decision-making power and thus is a strong public in Fraser's scheme. But lower level domains such as mobs are only weak publics with respect to encompassing domains. They are strong publics with respect to themselves. The apparent contradiction of the importance of Aboriginal women in community organisations can now be explained without invoking a primary identification of women with family interests. In fact, in the case of ECCYP women and men both had the opportunity to take on leadership roles at mob and community levels. Both sexes did so on the same bases, their rights and responsibilities in country and kin, expressed in occasions of "looking after". While the expectations of stronger publics may result in Aboriginal men taking on public office, it is as yet uncertain how much men will predominate or how much actual power they will wield. Davis's (1993) analysis suggests that women may still be well represented in such offices and may be powerful figures even when they hold no office. It is worth noting the high proportion of Aboriginal women in the highest levels of public affairs across the country.

Gender distinctions may or may not be fused to encompassing and encompassed domains, but Fraser's theory of multiple publics allows us to understand how such fusions are valued. However, her contrast of weak and strong publics needs to be contextualised to take account of the fact that a public that has decision-making power in one instance has only opinion-making power in another. In other words, no public is inherently weak or strong except in relation to other publics. A final point made by Fraser is worthy of comment here. She argues (Fraser 1993:135) that democracy is better served where strong publics are accountable to weak ones. Further, she calls for conceptions that "can permit us to envision a greater role for (at least some) public

spheres than mere autonomous opinion formation removed from authoritative decision making [one which] enables us to think about strong *and* weak publics, as well as about various hybrid forms” (Fraser 1993:136). This matter of the relations between strong and weak publics and how they both might change arises in consideration of the practical implications of this study

Practical Implications

Perhaps the most extensive investigation of the conditions of Aboriginal existence in Australia and the relationships between Aboriginal people and the Australian state was the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody. As well as investigating the immediate details of each of the deaths in question, the Commission probed deeper into the underlying social and historical events that brought Aboriginal people into the hands of the police. In 1993 it handed down over 300 wide ranging recommendations on issues as diverse as educational policy and community infrastructure, most of which were aimed at reducing the likelihood that Aboriginal people would suffer arrest. Some of these recommendations, which are still only being considered for implementation years later, addressed issues such as the types of infringements of the law that most commonly put Aboriginal people in jail. Some of these, such as “public nuisance” and “public drunkenness” have obvious relevance for this thesis.

One remedy often recommended to reduce the large numbers of Aboriginal people in custody as a result of these offences, is the decriminalisation of the offense. Notions such as “public drunkenness” imply that it is the public exhibition of a drunken state that is deemed to be contrary to public interests and prompts the involvement of public officers, the police. The same drunkenness in a private setting does not incur the same response and indeed it is notoriously difficult to get police to interfere when drunkenness

within the home turns into violence against an individual. Decriminalisation amounts to a redefinition of public interest and public authority, and matches the ways in which there have been “substantial changes in the way in which public and private wrongs are distinguished” (Edmunds 1990:36) in Aboriginal culture. Mary Edmunds (1990:37), building on the work largely of Nancy Williams (1987), characterises these changes as being a shift from personal and informal exercises of authority to more reliance on corporate group identities and authority structures. However, she notes that the situation varies greatly between different regions in Australia (Edmunds 1990:36) and that the situation is far from satisfactorily resolved. The discussion here suggests that moves towards new authority structures need to take account not only of the differences between Aboriginal and whitefella conceptions of significant domains of action and the scope of actors’ rights and responsibilities within them, but also the relationships between these domains and the context-dependent nature of their salience.

For instance, Edmunds points out that what is needed to address many of the problems of social control in Aboriginal communities is “a rethinking of legislation that relies on the problematic concept of ‘community’ and bases itself instead on the notion of competing Aboriginal interests for which regulating mechanisms within the organisation must be developed” (Edmunds 1990:51). She further points out that the *Aboriginal Councils and Associations Act (1976)* offers the principle of recognising the role of Aboriginal custom in doing business, even if this principle is more often honoured in the breach than in the observance (Edmunds 1990:52). Some of the tensions in the Moomba Corporation were generated by the necessity to operate within the provisions of this Act without paying due attention to the salience of various local publics. Some of the problems between ATSIC and the Aboriginal population of Coen generally were likewise a result of the higher level public’s insistence on dealing with a single Coen public. I suggest that more equitable and locally appropriate outcomes to some of these dilemmas could have been achieved if some accommodation had been made along the lines of acknowledging the existence of multiple publics and negotiating some means of

co-ordinating the needs of each of them. The discussions over CDEP are a case in point. It appeared from the local perspective that ATSIC made no attempt to investigate whether it was feasible to establish two separate schemes in Coen, as local people would have preferred in 1990-91. Instead, a form of association was enjoined on people which they have had to learn to live with or lose their CDEP program. Adaptation to this kind of organisation is likely also to entail adoption of some of the gender distinctions that are commonly found in it. A synthesis of existing multiple publics with bureaucratic necessity, on the other hand, has greater potential to leave room for indigenous authority structures which do not necessarily carry the same gender inflections.

This is not to say that simple recognition of multiple publics will generate new hybrid forms of association with more indigenous relevance. In the case of the Moomba meeting, contestation over naming rights explicitly acknowledged each mob's authority and the equality of mobs and therefore made it impossible to reach a decision. The strength of mob-based publics here weakened the commonality and it may be that conceiving of political situations as involving multiple publics will be most useful where weak and strong publics are in negotiation. Certainly it is a strategy that seems to have little to offer in the other instance of contested gender relations relevant here, that of domestic violence.

This study's finding that domestic violence is considered to be most private, resistant to intervention even by fellow mob members, has clear implications for practical problems designed to alleviate the problem. One strategy that has been tried by many communities in Australia (Atkinson 1990a) is to address the underlying social issues, those that also produce alcohol abuse and high rates of incarceration for Aboriginal people. In the short term there are very few interventions that are likely to be acceptable if the matter is considered to be "husband-wife business" only. In Coen in 1990-91, people would help women who had been bashed after they announced they wanted medical help, but there were very few circumstances in which anyone intervened to

prevent a bashing. Even the Young Girls relied on avoiding violence through charm rather than responding in kind. This suggests that, in most cases, it will be up to the woman concerned to seek help, and the only appropriate form of intervention would seem to be the provision of safe places for her to go. The exercise of authority to prevent further abuse would be most likely to succeed where it was negotiated between mob- and hearth-based publics, but for this to occur would mean changes to current attitudes to those publics.

What I am foreshadowing with respect to both the management of domestic violence and the establishment of more indigenously appropriate forms of community administration, is nothing less than cultural change. As already noted, this has been happening anyway in Aboriginal societies, which have had no choice but to adapt to the foreign rules imposed upon them. The challenge for the future will be for whitefella culture to change sufficiently to let its concepts and processes be modified by indigenous ones. This will include the abandonment of habits of mind that can question Aboriginal women's exercise of authority in any domain and generate instead opportunities by which such a vital resource can be put to the best use in building better futures.

7 Appendix 1: Linguistic History of the Lamalama Region

Some of the unusual phonological features of the languages of ECCYP may be seen in the following table (*Comparison of Lamalama Languages*, p274), most of which comes from Rigsby (n.d.), based on material collected from 1972 to the present. The last column represents tokens from the author's own elicitations of Umpithamu made during 1991-92, using the same informants as Rigsby. Rigsby's Umpithamu is phonemicised on a three vowel system, while mine is on five vowels. It will be noticed that there is very little difference in the wordlists collected 20 years apart. Some grammatical changes do appear to have taken place in Umpithamu, however, and perhaps in the other languages as well. For instance, there has been a reduction in the pronoun paradigm with the loss of locative and ablative pronouns, and an increased reliance on word order to mark grammatical relationships. This suggests that speakers' increased exposure to English in recent years has been influential. Lexical and phonological distinctions between languages in the group have been maintained, however.

Table 4: Comparison of Lamalama languages

English	LL	Uby	Rim	Ump _{BR}	Ump _{LJ}
belly	arrkaba	gaparr	mbul	umpuru	omporo
blood	thu	odha	olangarr	yaman	yaman
climb	talta-	dalda-	ta-	mathi-	mathi
dog	torr	otoa	ota	?iiliwin	Eluan
ear	lambuwariry	itna	azarr	wina	wina
eye	arr:adhanh	arr:atyanh	ika:nhdhoor	miilikan	miila

There are obviously great lexical differences between these four languages, and these differences would lead a linguist to categorise them as mutually unintelligible languages, that is, requiring conscious language learning. Phonologically they are also very different. The first three have unusual features such as, variously, voiced and voiceless fricative series, voiced and voiceless rhotics, prestopped nasals and prenasalised stops. Interestingly, Hale (cited in Godman 1993:15) notes that a contrast between voiced and voiceless stops, such as that found in Rimanggudinhma, is likely to be a recent change. Umpithamu has none of these unusual phonological features.

The Lamalamic group is phonetically so unusual amongst Aboriginal languages that it was thought for some time to be non-Australian (Hale 1964:250). The analyses of Ken Hale (1964; 1966), however, demonstrated how the languages of this group, and many other phonologically unusual languages of Cape York Peninsula, could be derived, by the application of a number of historical phonological rules, from a completely conservative Australian ancestor that he called Proto-Paman. So, for instance, the postulated Proto-Paman is conceived as having consonant-initial word structure and primary stress on the first syllable, as is usual for Australian languages. A shift of stress to the second syllable is suggested as the trigger which caused some languages of the Peninsula, including the Lamalamic group, to lose their initial consonant or syllable. This “initial-dropping” process removed phonemic distinctions in initial segments but not their residual phonotactic effects, such as fricativisation, in following ones, with the result that new phonemic distinctions were set up (Hale 1966:168). Thus languages such as those of the Lamalamic group developed their unusual phoneme inventories.

Alpher (1976:87) points out that stress shift cannot have prompted the instances of initial dropping that occur in Umpithamu. He classifies Umpithamu, along with several other languages as 'initial softening', in comparison with the 'initial dropping' group. Rigsby has studied the four Princess Charlotte Bay languages in question and concludes:

Lamalama and Umbuygamu share just under 50% resemblant forms, while each shares less than 20% with Mbarimanggudinhma. Umbindhamu lexical sharing with the others is also low, but it includes forms that are surely cognate. In fact, to judge from the phonological correspondences. . . I would say that Lamalama and Umbuygamu form a genetic subgrouping. Rimanggudinhma shares a fair bit of lexicon with its Thaypanic neighbours, which perhaps reflects a different genetic lineage or history. And for its part, Umbindhamu shares much more lexicon with Ayapathu and Umpila, its northern neighbours, than it does with its southern neighbours. (Rigsby n.d.:7)

The Thaypanic languages are those immediately to the south of the Lamalamic group. Rigsby points out that this divergent genetic heritage is overlaid by a common morphosyntax which he attributes to “actors participating in a more or less well-bounded social network of interaction patterns . . . whereas their lexical and phonological differences signify or index lower-level ‘ethnic’ differences among the constituent social segments” (Rigsby n.d.:13). The grammatical unity of the languages of the social group known as the Lamalama result, says Rigsby, from the fact that their speakers engaged in regular social interaction. The diversity within the group, on the other hand, comes from the different histories of the social sub-groups. Umpithamu stands out for its similarity to northern groups, and Rimanggudinhma for its southward connections. Rimanggudinhma is, however, much more like the other Lamalamic languages than Umpithamu is. The question that concerns us here is how groups whose languages suggest ties, if not origins, outside the Lamalama mob, come to be so well integrated into it today.

In an attempt to account for the distribution of these unusual linguistic traits, Barry Alpher (1976) suggested that they might correlate with sociocultural factors. He pointed out (Alpher 1976:88) that there was good correlation of the four-section marriage class system and the incidence of initial dropping in the southern Peninsula, with a few exceptions, including the Lamalamic group. This is illustrated in a map reproduced immediately below.

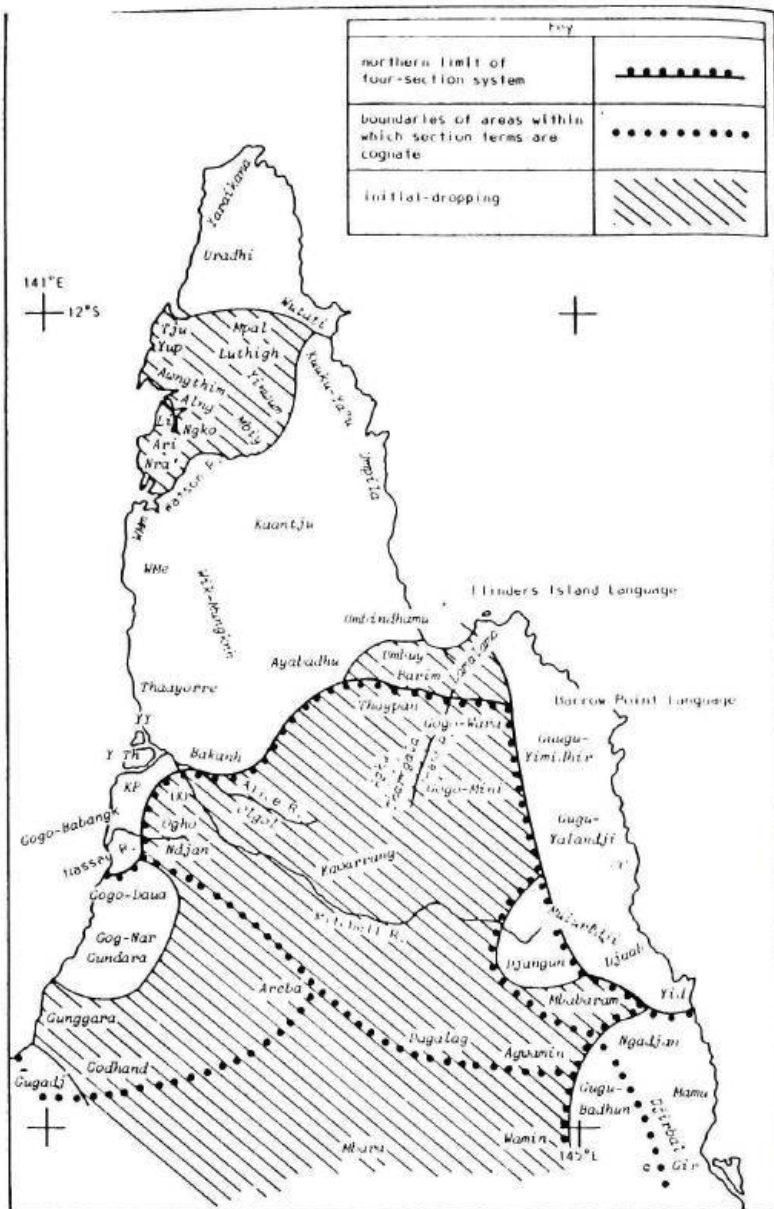


Figure 31: Map from Alpher 1976:100.

It can be seen that the Lamalamic group had initial dropping but no section system, and Umpithamu had neither. Alpher suggests that the four-section system was spread along trade routes from the south (Alpher 1976: 91) and adopted for the prestige it gave its users (Alpher 1976:89). The innovation of initial-dropping (or possibly stress-shift) common to the languages of these southern groups then followed. The neighbours of the Lamalama immediately to the south all had the four section system. We know that

Appendix 1: Linguistic History of the Lamalama Region

section systems, as a form of social organisation, were spreading across the country up until the time when White interference of various kinds prevented further transmission. This does not account, of course, for why the Lamalamic group had the linguistic innovation but not the social one. If the linguistic change preceded the social one in this case, but also came from the south, then it reinforces Rigsby's suggestion that linguistic patterns within the Lamalamic group reflect different patterns of social interaction.

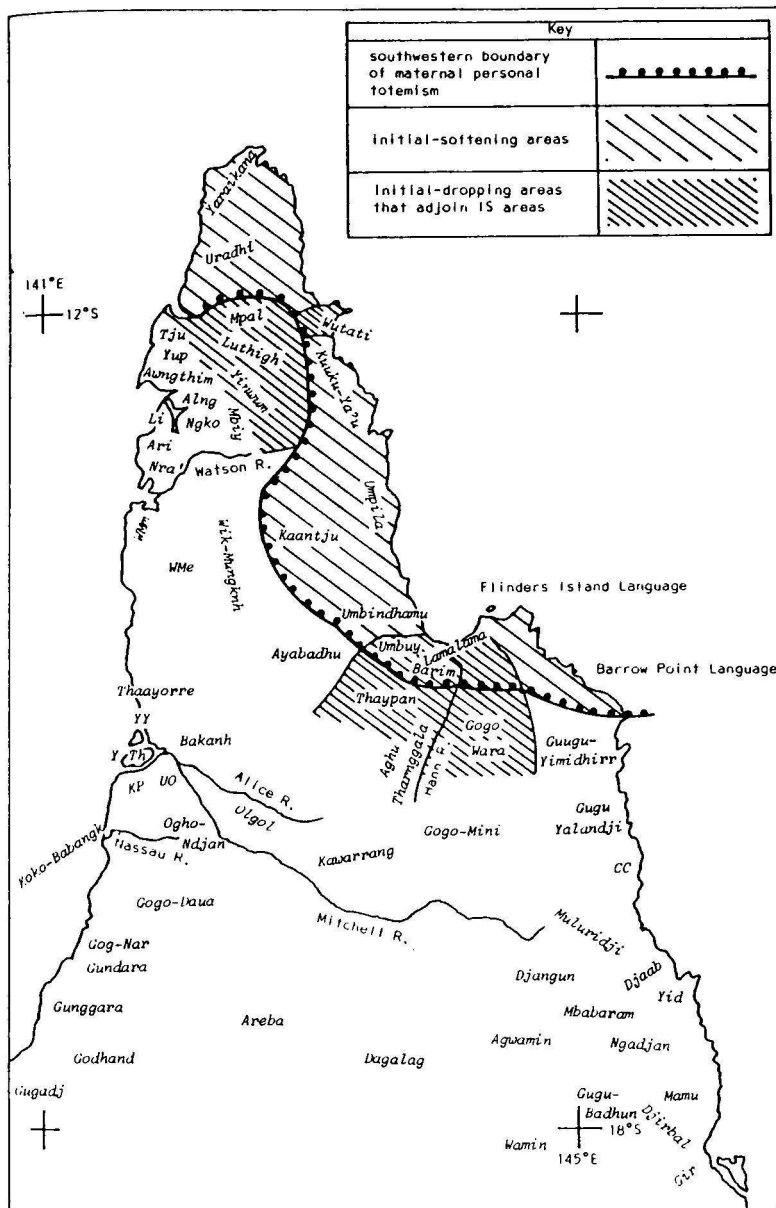


Figure 32: Map from Alpher 1976:101.

Further evidence for this can be seen in Alpher's (1976:101) other map (above) correlating initial-softening, such as Umpithamu displays, with maternal totemism. Alpher suggests (1976:93) that the Lamalamic group of languages were initial softening before initial dropping was adopted, which would make the correlation between initial softening and maternal totemism within the group perfect. If this is true, all the languages of the social group currently referred to as the Lamalama mob, would, before the arrival of initial-dropping from the south, have been more similar than they are today. These coastal groups also had other things in common, such as the use of outrigger canoes, which Alpher (1976:94) points out would have greatly facilitated communication amongst them. A picture now emerges of a much more cohesive social and linguistic network characterised by maternal totemism. This inheritance through women contrasts with the fact that section membership, where it occurred in the north, appears to have been expressed patrilineally (Hale in Jolly 1989:18). Could the history I trace here have any implications for gender relations or offer a potential "node of transformation" for Lamalama society?

It is, of course, impossible to argue directly from the existence of maternal totemism to any putative social status or role for women in a society. It is, however, true that one of the reasons for the popularity and prestige of section systems was the elaboration of ritual observances that went with them (Alpher 1976:89). As we have already seen, elaborate ritual performance is commonly held to imply the possibility at least of structures empowering men over women. The fact that the Lamalamic-speaking group of peoples did not adopt these structures perhaps provides evidence that it has always been important to them to recognise both "mother right" and "father right" (See chapter 4).

In terms of the composition of the Lamalama group, the geographical limitations of the linguistic innovation discussed above may reflect the fact that Lamalama, Umbuygamu and Rimanggudinhma speakers had closest ties with the more southerly

groups. On the other hand, the fact that Umpithamu did not adopt initial dropping may be a result of the intervention of colonisation processes that inhibited all indigenous language transmission. However, there is some evidence that the ties between this group and the rest of today's Lamalama were not the same just before contact as they are today. This is discussed further in Chapter 2.

8 Appendix 2: Moomba General Meeting 27 May 1991

- 1 L Anybody got a watch on them?
- 2 L What's the time?
- 3 X Half past nine.
- 4 L Half past nine.
- 5 X ??? half past eight.
- 6 P Some of you have been here at 8.
- 7 X (laughter)
- 8 P Good morning everybody, ladies and gentlemen, we open our meeting this
9 morning, sorry I been alate this morning along with everybody else. So we
10 open our meeting and this young lady over here, e gonna take over it that to
11 get done the business for us. Thank you.
- 12 L Ridio. Probably first I should ask I know there's some apologies from people
13 who couldn't get here, from Alison Liddy, Lane(?) Liddy, Benjamin Upton,
14 anybody else? That was the only ones we heard from? Right. I'm bein really
15 formal, really official today because what we're doin here is changin the laws
16 of this organisation, right? You've all had that bit of paper and it's all gotta be
17 written legal way and probably a lot of you looked at it and thought, you
18 know, what's all that about, so that's why Hook asked me to talk today about
19 you know, what this is all really for. You remember last time we had a
20 general meeting, the Annual General Meeting and I talked about doin that
21 development plan for Moomba to set Moomba up for the next 3, 5 years
22 goin good way. So the first thing I looked at was the rules of the
23 organisation because that says what you are, you know, what you can do,
24 what you can get away with. And ah there's a law in Australia for any mob
25 that comes together to do anything if you're a football club, a P&C
26 Association, whatever you are you gotta be incorporated—it's called
27 incorporation and there are different rules dependin on what kinda mob you
28 are and there's a special act. It's called the Aboriginal Councils and
29 Associations Act 1976 that sets down the rules for all kind of aboriginal
30 corporations. So we gotta go by that act. Now the rules you had before had

31 to, they were alright by that act, you know they were legal because you can't
32 be incorporated without there's this guy down in Canberra called the
33 Registrar of Aboriginal organisations and ah when you make up your own
34 rules for your own mob you gotta send those rules to him and he says, "Yeah
35 this is legal", or "No, you gotta change that bit". He said that those rules you
36 had before they were alright by the law. But when I looked at them I thought
37 "Gee there's some worries here, we could make this a bit better." And I've
38 talked to a lot of people about a lot of different things to do with Moomba.
39 I've talked to people in the Department of Aboriginal and Islander Affairs in
40 Brisbane, I've talked to people in ATSIC, we had Suzette Coates the lawyer
41 up here givin us advice about the law, and we've been in touch with the
42 accountants, Mr Myer, at Peat Marwick's who's a big accountant, has(?) to
43 do with a lot of the aboriginal organisations up and down the Cape, knows a
44 lot about it and they've given us a lot of advice. So all of that advice I put
45 together in these suggestions for changes to the rules to make Moomba more
46 stronger. Also we gotta make some changes because things changin here in
47 Queensland. You know there's little bitta talk, not enough talk but a little
48 bitta talk about givin some land back to aboriginal people and they gonna
49 change the laws about that so some things we gotta do because of those
50 other laws changin. We don't get a choice about that. But there's other things
51 we wanna change to make us stronger. Now I went through all of these
52 changes with the committee, Suzette Coates was here and talked to the
53 committee, and they have agreed that we should put these changes to you,
54 the members, and see what you think, you gonna agree for that or not. But I
55 just wanna tell you what all of these changes mean as we go along, OK? So
56 that's why I'm doin the talkin basically. So the first one is Section 1, that's
57 Section 1 of your rules. And ah I don't think anybody came and looked at the
58 rules but there are plenty of copies of em there in the office. There it says
59 Section 1 "The name of the association is" and you've gotta tell that registrar
60 fella in Canberra what your name is. Now before you had that Moomba
61 name but that name belongs to a particular mob and a particular place. It's a
62 special name eh? So because of those changes to

63 ? |Yeah(?)

64 L the law about givin aboriginal people land here in Queensland, the DIAA
65 advised us that you gotta change that name. If you gotta mob that's a mixed
66 up mob like this one, some people from here, some people from there, some
67 people from over there, you can't have a name belongs to just one mob.
68 Because later on all of those mobs gotta be incorporated, they gotta be
69 associations of their own, or they can't get their land, right? Like Merepah
70 mob, they're livin out there, they're livin like it's their land but the
71 Department's still got that title, and they gotta wait for all these laws to come

72 through um then they get incorporated, then they can get that bitta paper that
 73 says the law says this is your land. OK? So when Port Stewart's turn comes,
 74 when **'s turn comes, they're gonna have to make themselves into a little
 75 organisation and have a name of their own. They can pick whatever name
 76 but they can't pick somebody else's name. And they can still be in Moomba
 77 or whatever we're gonna call it, you know? They don't have to go away from
 78 Moomba just because they got their own organisation. It's not like that at all.
 79 But your gonna have to have your own organisations to get land. Alright so
 80 we gotta change that name, we got no choice. That's what the government's
 81 saying to us, we gotta change that name. Alright? Now the suggestion, and I
 82 think we discussed this at another meeting, was we wanted to talk about
 83 where we were, we're gonna use English, because if you pick any language
 84 word again that's something belongin to one mob not another mob, so we're
 85 gonna use English words, and we're gonna talk about where we are, Central
 86 Cape York peninsula here, that place where we are, and we've gotta talk
 87 about what we do. Now in this act ere, that Aboriginal Councils and
 88 Associations act, what it says and what Suzette tells us we gotta do is
 89 somewhere in our name we gotta have the words 'Aboriginal', and we've
 90 gotta have the word 'corporation'. So this was the suggestion: (writing it up)
 91 That was what we came up with. Talkin about Cape York Central, that's this
 92 area right? Aboriginal Development because we're on about helpin aboriginal
 93 people, developin outstations, pushin people forward, and we gotta have that
 94 word Corporation. Now if you take those first letters there you get the word
 95 "CYCAD". A cycad is a tree—I don't know what the local name for it is but
 96 it's a big, like a big fern tree. You see them in the scrub, and people tell me
 97 they're round here down that way on the range and up Wenlock way. I don't
 98 know about that inside country. But they're a tree that's very very old—been
 99 here for ever, just like aboriginal people, so that was thought to be a good
 100 name by the people that we spoke to about it. But all you mob 'ere now, you
 101 can say what you think. You got better idea, or you don't like that name?
 102 You speak up and tell us now. Your turn to talk.

103 W Excuse me through the chair, who made the decision to change that name,
 104 the state government or federal?

105 L State.

106 W State.

107 L Yeah because it's to do with the Land Rights legislation, the way they're
 108 setting that up. You've gotta be trust, an incorporated trust, to get your your
 109 land, you know? So they advised me . . . I don't really know if it's hard fast
 110 legal but _[name omitted]_ and other people in that department advise me
 111 that everybody ought to keep to their own names y'know because otherwise

- 112 there's just gonna be confusion later on. So that's why we talked about that
113 name change.
- 114 ? Well, I believe . . . (indistinct murmur)
- 115 W I suggest this, say every, like Port Stewart and Lockhart, ah Wenlock I mean to
116 say, and Merepah. Now I would say all Aborigine people with . . . my concern
117 with all Aborigine people, if they wanna change their name, if they want to then
118 put it in their language, say for example like a title for them, they can have it in
119 their own language if they want to. And that should be left with
- 120 L IMm.
- 121 W Aborigine people, even Wenlock should be left with those mob . . . whichever
122 way they want to go. Whichever way they want, to make an organisation, you
123 know corporation or whatever they want to call it with their own language
124 whatsoever . . . should be up to the Aborigine people.
- 125 A Yeah.
- 126 W You know, it shouldn't be State government, you know, give them (cough)
127 orders give them . . . everything . . . it's up to the Aborigine. No, we're looking
128 at today, should the the Aboriginee make their own decision what they want?
129 What I think. Now if we're gonna use white man name all the time, well, we
130 haven't got the rights.
- 131 M No.
- 132 W We still haven't got rights. See, government's sort of putting us back, you
133 know, putting through what not wanted . . . it should be left with Aborigine
134 people | whatever they want to call it.
- 135 L |Are you saying you don't want this name?
- 136 ? No.
- 137 ? No.
- 138 S I think it's a good name
- 139 L You like this name?
- 140 W I reckon Aborigine people, let 'em take their own name with 'em, whichever
141 they want it, for their own organisation.
- 142 L That, that's what the state government is saying, everybody take their own
143 name, but you can't|
- 144 W |Excuse me, I'd just like to say, like with the Merepah
145 mob now . . . we got our own tribal name now for Merepah see we

- 146 L Mm
- 147 W got . . . that's ATSIC, see, ATSIC told us
- 148 K Port Stewart got their own
149 language but we still all come under CYCAD that's right?
- 150 L Yeah, yeah.
- 151 W Yes.
- 152 L You still come under with this mob. All . . . you, you're not changin'
153 anything.
- 154 K Still come under CYCAD.
- 155 S I understand what you're talking about
- 156 L You're just changing the name right? You still can come under this
- 157 W Yeah, yeah.
- 158 L organisation! ah you just gotta change that name.
- 159 W Yeah
- 160 S yeah, that's right we got our own language name
- 161 L You got your own name there, you've got your own
162 organisation. Yours as well too. Everybody has.
- 163 S *** (confused noise) our own outside language name.
- 164 W Yeah, and ah, sounded like if you want it, down there, once you get full title
165 of that land, whichever you want to call it is up to 'im.
- 166 E Up to 'im.
- 167 L Yeah, that's right.
- 168 W And every
- 169 Ch That's why he's talking about
- 170 W Yeah.
- 171 Ch That's why
- 172 S She try to explain it to us but
- 173 Ch You blokes, you blokes got that Moomba name, that's in your
174 language, isn't it?

- 175 S IWE, LOOK NOW, YOU MAKE UP YOUR OWN, MAKE UP
176 YOUR . . . YEAH PUT IT THAT WAY, BUT we still all come at one.
- 177 Ch Yeah, we still come at one.
- 178 L or whatever you decide to do, okay?
- 179 S Yeah
- 180 Ch We don't really changing! it alltogether, we all the people
- 181 C |Yeah
- 182 L |Just the name.
- 183 S Yeah. I agree on that that's a good,| yeah, I agree.
- 184 L |M—, you wanted to say something
- 185 M Yeah. Well, what he means then . . . that means . . . this office here for every
186 people . . . Aborigine people | Wait. That outstation, he could be called
- 187 C |Yeah that's right ***
- 188 M under any thing, any organised . . . you know, Lamalama people they can call
189 that separate, my place I callem separate, Merepah they got their own name,
190 but this office for anybody. | All of us. That's why they got it CYCAD for
191 Central people.
- 192 W |They for the lot to come in here
- 193 N |All of us
- 194 L That's another reason why we talked about makin' it CYCAD. You!
- 195 M |Yeah
- 196 L know, the whole of this area . . . you don't know there might be mobs later
197 on that!
- 198 M |Yeah |Yeah
- 199 L want to join in here.| So if you make that name, you might get other mobs
200 joining in . . . | and the more people you got the stronger you are.
- 201 M |Yeah
- 202 W |Yeah, that's true.
- 203 W Better to make it stronger too.
- 204 L Mm. Anybody else got anything to say about this name?

- 205 R Ah, excuse me, ah, this office what's the Moomba office, 'a blong Merepah
206 an' Wenlock an' Port Stewart. What ever come, mail, anything whatever,
207 comes through here
- 208 L |Goes through that office
- 209 S |sameway come through CYCAD
- 210 R Yeah. We all in the one Yeah
- 211 L Yeah
- 212 R Yeah . . . and might be mail come through here to go Wenlock and Port
213 Stewart . . . () suppose to bin
- 214 L Yeah
- 215 R We had a meeting here before.
- 216 L Yeah.
- 217 E We bin all gree for that. We all in the one. Even the church. We're not gonna
218 give away from | the church
- 219 L |Yeah that's right. No
- 220 R We're all in 'ere.
- 221 L Yeah.
- 222 R It's our church, gotta be stop ere forever, till another man come.
- 223 L Yeah. Now, we gotta do everything today . . . [explanation of procedure for
224 moving motion omitted] . . . So now I gotta ask you, if nobody else got
225 anything to say about that name business . . . I gotta ask for somebody who
226 will move that the corporation, the name of the corporation, shall be
227 CYCAD Corporation. First off, anybody else got anything to say about a
228 name, you wanna think about that name?
- 229 Ro Excuse me, when we come under CYCAD name. Will we be helpin each
230 other work out . . . you know?
- 231 L Just same like before.
- 232 M Same.
- 233 Ro ***(unintelligible) I understand now.
- 234 L Same as before.
- 235 ? *** (lots of confused noise)

- 236 L So everybody happy with that name?
- 237 Many Yeah
- 238 W Okay, everyone put a hand up.
- 239 L No, wait a minute, wait a minute, wait a minute. (laughter) First off
240 somebody gotta say . . . that they move that name. It's called moving a
241 motion.
- 242 S Well, I move it, S—.
- 243 L Righteo, S— moves it. Somebody else wantl to second? Thank you
- 244 W I'll come second.
- 245 L W—. Now we gotta have a vote. How many people vote Yes, we have that
246 name? You gotta put your hand up if you vote yes, if you keep your hand
247 down you're saying No. (counting) 43. 44 out there. Maybe 45. Is anybody
248 against? You're allowed to vote against you know.
- 249 Ro Nobody against.
- 250 L Nobody against. The minutes will show that that motion was carried. I
- 251 ? I nobody.
- 252 L gotta say that. That's **. OK> Next section is about the objects of the
253 corporation. What we got this CYCAD corporation for. Now the difficult
254 part here was, some of these corporations, they get money back from the tax
255 man. You know they buy a vehicle and they you pay 30 000 for it or
256 whatever—they get 10, 15 000 back cos they don't pay tax because of the
257 way they've got the words written down about what that corporation for.
258 Now before, with these old rules we couldn't do that. So we gotta change
259 them. That's why we got advice from the accountant, what we gotta say here
260 to make sure we can get that money back. Once these rules come back from
261 Canberra and that mob say “Yeah that's alright” then we can go and say,
262 “Well look we bought that Lamalama car and whatever and we want that tax
263 money back.” You can go back 3 years. So we're alright, we can still get that
264 money but we gotta change these rules first. Now what the accountant
265 reckoned is that you gotta say that you're here to help people who are poor
266 or in social difficulties, that kinda thing, and you mustn't look like you're
267 runnin a business. So before we had an object there that said “To make and
268 sell artifacts” and the accountant said, his advice was, take that one out. He
269 said you can still make and sell artifacts as long as you haven't got a real big
270 business, you know go on with it, but he said if you got that written down in
271 your objects look like you're runnin a business and then the tax man says “Oh

272 know, you're business, you're not there for helpin people you know. So that's
273 what we did. We also made the objects a bit longer, spell it out a bit more, so
274 that when we write to ATSIC and DIAA and all these mob that do the
275 funding, we can say "Well look this is what we're all about, and we're lookin
276 money so that we can go on doing these things for our people. OK? Get the
277 story behind that one? So I'll read out to you now what the new objects are
278 gonna be under this suggestion. This is what the committee suggests **.
279 Number 1: "to relieve the poverty and social distress of the Aborigines of
280 central Cape York Peninsula by the development of homeland outstation
281 movements, commercial enterprise and any other scheme which the directors
282 consider will develop Aboriginal interests by the promotion of Aboriginal
283 self-management and growth in the whole region." Now the accountant said
284 that was a good one. He reckoned that that'll do it with the tax man. The
285 next one: "to pursue ownership and rights of access to their traditional
286 countries and reserves for its members and acquire and or take on lease any
287 such land or any other land with or without improvements." Again this has
288 all gotta be legal talk for this mob in Canberra. "To provide planning
289 support, housing and improvements on land acquired on behalf of the
290 society's members. To provide reasonably priced and appropriate housing
291 accommodation for Aborigines residing in Coen and for that purpose to
292 purchase and or take on lease any land with or without improvements
293 erected thereon. To erect and maintain in good condition houses and or
294 other buildings upon the land. To take such steps as may be necessary to
295 acquire control of and maintain in good condition part or all of the houses
296 currently ** by departments of government." That's your DCS houses in
297 town.(?) "To sell or let houses to members and their families." Now that
298 one's changed a bit from before because there was some talk about maybe
299 we'd get those DCS houses off of DCS and CYCAD gonna run those
300 houses. No more DCS but CYCAD. We're still lookin at that but we had to
301 have it in there that we wanted to do that to be able to push that argument
302 with the government. Number 5: "To provide and arrange for culturally
303 appropriate education facilities and medical welfare or other services or
304 facilities for the benefit of members and if necessary to acquire and maintain
305 buildings and or land to that purpose." That's to say we wanna have
306 outstation schools, we wanna look after old people properly out on the
307 outstations, we wanna have sisters comin out maybe or maybe have our own
308 people trained up to do medical stuff out on the outstations. Mainly there the
309 thing is about education, about gettin schools out there. Never I don't think
310 we had that one before, anyway we different before. Number 6: "To conduct
311 training courses for members which in the opinion of the directors will be of
312 social and or financial benefit to members and tend to promote the goal of
313 self management." That one we had to put in about social or financial benefit

314 to members again for the tax man so we can say "Look, all this stuff we're
315 doin it's all for the benefit of our members. We're not here to make money."
316 Alright it's all for our people. Number 7: "To institute and administer
317 projects which will provide employment for members, including the
318 administration of CDEP." We never had that one before but we gotta put
319 that one in. Number 8: "To make representations and or submit proposals to
320 the state and federal governments, municipal authorities and statutory or
321 other corporations and authorities for the benefit of members." That's just to
322 say all those um applications that go through this office for funding, for
323 training, kids goin away to high school, all that sort of thing, that's work and
324 somebody's gotta do it. We put that in so we could say "Look, we're doin
325 this work, you gotta pay us for doin that work, for ATSIIC **. Number 9:
326 "To act as liaison between homeland and outstation groups and any official
327 of any state or federal government, municipal authority, statutory or other
328 corporation or authority or any consultant, for the purposes of better
329 communication." We put that one in because sometimes there's been a bitta
330 trouble bout some of these government fellas specially comin in and they just
331 go out to an outstation and people there don't know what they're there for,
332 people up here in town that belong to that country don't know they been
333 there, and they don't you know everybody isn't sure what's goin on. That way
334 those government departments get to do what they like, you know. They go
335 down maybe to Port Stewart, might be one two people there one day and
336 they say "What about this?" And the people there you know got no one to
337 talk to, no time to think, get pushed into agreein to things. So what that rule
338 is sayin is that business, you know all those outstation got the chance to say
339 "Wait a minute. Business gotta go through CYCAD." They don't have to say
340 that you know if they wanna keep that business for themselves. Alright, so
341 until we're incorporated you can't get money. Money gotta come through
342 CYCAD until you got your own incorporation. So that's another thing why
343 we gotta have that one. Number 10: "To promote and carry out any
344 charitable undertakings for the benefit of members." Again that's for the tax
345 man to say you know, we're not makin money. Number 11: "To act as liaison
346 between individual members and any department or instrumentality of any
347 state or federal government, municipal authority, statutory or other
348 corporation or otherwise facilitate matters of business at the request of the
349 member." What that's talkin about is all those social forms, all those
350 ABSTUDY forms, all those million forms that Seppi and Thelma been fillin
351 in for people. They never get you know down in the ATSIIC office they're
352 only payin half wages because you know it's not written down anywhere that
353 this office doin all that business. Now we got it in there, we can say "Look
354 we're doin all of this. You gotta pay us full wages." Number 12: "The
355 association shall subject to the provisions of the act, have power to do all

- 356 such lawful things as may seem to the committee necessary to carry out the
357 objects of the association." You always gotta put that one in just in case later
358 on somethin happens that you haven't thought about before that you can say
359 "Oh well you know it comes under that one." So that's just like a little
360 safeguard on the end. Anybody wanna ask me any questions about those
361 objects of the association or say anything about them?
- 362 H Do we have to have a full time(?) schoolteacher go out there on the
363 outstations and do all the teachin?
- 364 L Well that's up to the outstation to work out or through CYCAD or on your
365 own it's up to you
- 366 H He not gonna come from CYCAD he gonna come from our own
367 corporation
- 368 L Once you're incorporated then you can get money to pay people
369 yourself but till you're incorporated you can't get money. That's the law of
370 the
- 371 H Why not?
- 372 L land you know.
- 373 H Oh.
- 374 L So also the other problem is the Education Department. They like to hang on
375 eh? They don't like to let go. They like to have a finger in there. And you're
376 gonna need their help. So probably what gonna happen this school here in
377 Coen, they'll send teachers out to might be you know, Port Stewart one
378 week and maybe Wenlock the next and Merepah the next and people out
379 there be helpin the kids. Like you know somebody be trained up out there to
380 help the kids
- 381 H Yeah
- 382 L to keep the work goin while they're out there and then the kids can come in
383 and join in this again any time they want and the teachers here know where
384 the kids at. You see that's a long way down the track and CYCAD got some
385 fights to do bout that. And havin that written there means you're just
386 stronger for that fight. You know you can say "Look this is what our
387 members want us to do. This is one of the things we gotta fight for, one of
388 the things they that we're about this organisation."
- 389 H It's very very political today gettin very political with the government,
- 390 L Oh I reckon

- 391 H state government and federal government. I been in many conferences and I
392 do understand about this what goin on in this country I do understand. It's
393 very political to us today I tell you now.
- 394 L They'll tie you in knots with the laws if you don't look out. That's why you
395 gotta get this real as straight as you can and then you always got these rules.
396 That's the only thing that holds this organisation together is those rules. You
397 gotta problem? You go look in the rules. What do the rules say you gotta do
398 about that. Go to the law. If you don't do that you got nothing.
- 399 ? |***
- 400 I Can I say something about the school.
- 401 H **
- 402 I The school eh they can have the school of the air eh? By radio?
- 403 L Yeah.
- 404 H Correspondence.
- 405 I And yeah.
- 406 L Yeah.
- 407 I Say the teachers divide em every station
- 408 L Yeah. Correspondence doesn't work real well.
- 409 I Yeah.
- 410 H No.
- 411 I I reckon it's better
- 412 H *****
- 413 J |Wait a minute. Just one person let one person say somethin. You
414 know *** when you're talkin together you can't understand what you talkin.
- 415 I Nah the school of the air I reckon is it's better than the teachers
- 416 J |***** talk first
- 417 I goin out to the stations.
- 418 L Well that's something for you to work out what you want and then you gotta
419 work it out with the education department. But that's later on. Right now we
420 just want you to say "Yes you agree for that's all the things you want Cycad
421 to do for you, any other things you want CYCAD to do for you or any those
422 things you think "No that shouldn't be CYCAD business" you speak up now.

- 423 K Ah excuse me, at the moment that school I got ** I got my little girl there
 424 you know too much problem I had on the air? All the time. If I leave them no
 425 one to be lookin after they might be frightened all this and that be no good
 426 I'll be keep comin back I don't want that. I wanna stay out there. I don't care
 427 what
- 428 L |Yeah.
 429 happen to me anyway I keep my little one out there. If they don't get the
 430 school out there then they come out there to teach my little one well that's
 431 alright, maybe. I don't bring em back ere to stay ere not goin I ** stay not
 432 goin anymore. *** when I come up when I move that house I stayin there
 433 *** he isn't
- 434 L |Well a lotta people
- 435 K here *** All I got my home I stay out there I got my ** I give my son. What
 436 my son told me "Why you here mum? Stay out ere. Don't go back to town
 437 again. ***
- 438 L |A lotta people got this problem with the kids. That's why we put in that
 439 stronger rule about wanting to work for outstation schools.
- 440 M |*****
- 441 K Huh?
- 442 L Outstation education, might not be schools might decide school of the air.
- 443 M |***** school *****
- 444 K Yeah.
- 445 L But we put that in the rules so CYCAD can help fight for that school.
 446 Anybody else got anything to say about that? (3.0) Alright I'll ask for
 447 somebody to move that we accept those changes to the objects.
- 448 ? I move it.
- 449 L Thank you. Will someone second that? Cecil. Can I have a vote? Who is for
 450 these changes?
- 451 W Same way.
- 452 L Those for the changes put your hands up. You agree for that.
- 453 W |Everyone put your hand up. I want everyone to put to put
 454 hand up please.

- 455 L (counting) Yeah unanimous. Everybody wants that one. OK the next one we
456 gotta talk about is just a small thing. In this section bout membership. that
457 was another worry that the lawyers had, that it wasn't real clear who can
458 join, how they join, how you can get rid of them if you don't want them that
459 kind of thing. So they said we should look at that and change that a bit and
460 they gave us advice about how to do it. So we're lookin at that membership
461 section now, section 8. The first one there it says "Membership of the
462 association shall be open to adult Aboriginal persons normally and
463 permanently resident in," and you gotta fill in where. Now before we just had
464 Coen. But look we're changin the name to Cape York Central so we wanna
465 change that from Coen to Central Cape York cos some a you are
466 permanently resident out on those outstations eh? That's where you live. Not
467 ere in Coen, you just come in ere sometimes. So um that kinda follows on
468 from that one. Anybody got any problem with that?
- 469 N Excuse but I didn't get your word properly.
- 470 L Uh huh. Well you gotta fill in, these are rules that come you know, and you
471 just fill in what suits your particular mob. Well we filled in there that our
472 members were all from Coen because a few years ago when you started this
473 organisation that was true. Not so many outstations then eh? But now you're
474 all livin out on the land at least some of the time, some of you out there all
475 the time just come into Coen. Also we changed the name to Cape York
476 Central so instead a sayin our members just live in Coen, we wanna say our
477 members live in Central Cape York in all this area, you know Port Stewart,
478 Merepah, Wenlock, whatever.
- 479 N Why what's my concern in that in that case I would say you know doesn't
480 matter how we live out there wherever still we're one.
- 481 L Mm oh yeah. But you see
- 482 N |** town. All in one.
- 483 L Yeah that's what it's saying. Our members come from all these places.
- 484 N |Yeah. Yes.
- 485 That's ***
- 486 L |Like now what it says is all our members come from Coen. So somebody
487 might come along and say "Oh what about you know Joe Whatsisname? He's
488 out there at Merepah all the time, he's at Wenlock all the time, he's at Port
489 Stewart all the time. He can't be a member of the CYCAD.
- 490 O *** anyway.

- 491 L |Well we gotta change that.
- 492 N Well I would say that ought to come from individuals you know?
- 493 O |Yeah
- 494 L Yeah if you wanna join or if you don't. But for the organisation we gotta say
495 we're takin our members from this whole area, not just one place.
- 496 O Most are from the one place anyway.
- 497 ? All in the one anyway.
- 498 L Yeah all in the one but from lotta different places.
- 499 ? |Yeah yeah.
- 500 L That's what that change says.
- 501 O Don't change it. It's all in the one.
- 502 N Well I dunno but another suggestion that should be like for ** Port Stewart,
503 Wenlock, Merepah. If we're not included with other station and that should
504 be included with this Queensland in the Central in Coen.
- 505 P We still we still come together in this place
- 506 N |Yeah that gonna like that *** Arakun and
507 whatever.
- 508 L Yeah.
- 509 N Not even ***
- 510 L Well I haven't said Arakun but I've said Central Cape York Peninsula.
- 511 N But that's bit difficult there to work this out. I'm not with you really.
- 512 L Look, all it's sayin is it's deliberately vague. You
513 N |like Lockhart and **
- 514 L know on purpose I haven't said this place n that place n that place cos if you
515 say that you might be shuttin out people you want. Right? But if you say
516 "Our members come from Central Cape York Peninsula" doesn't mean you
- 517 N |Yeah
- 518 L gotta take all them mobs cos later on I'm gonna read you another bit where it
519 talks about how somebody can join CYCAD. OK? And that's gonna make it
520 stronger and it's up to you mob to decide "Yes we have this person" or "No
521 we don't." But if you say "Our members come from Coen and somebody

522 from I don't know where somewhere outside of Coen wants to join, they
523 can't join. But if you make it that vague way Central Cape York Peninsula
524 then alla you mob can get together and think about whether you want this
525 Arakun fella or that Lockhart girl or whatever to join in. It's up to you then.

526 N What'd be the one answer in that case what you're sayin now by all means the
527 name. I don't know what the rest of the people think but my concern that
528 everyone like say if people from Lockhart, say people from Weipa or from
529 Arakun. Now if some of these smart fellas from another community they
530 might get a whole idea what to do on that community. They might bring
531 some you know good idea you know some of these young fellas what **
532 people agree you know to come to relationship as a friendship ** If they
533 doesn't agree no you're a mongrel(?) ** or you belong to Arakun or you
534 belong to **. We don't want you know **.

535 ? ***

536 S |What if Arakun *** like that.

537 N ***

538 S That's what that's what she talkin about.

539 N Yes but I'm just bringin that view. As you've seen Wait a minute Stanley.

540 S |You see *****

541 N what I'm sayin would be good idea or bad idea but my concern that I I'm
542 tryin to explain to you now Port Stewart, Wenlock and Merepah they gotta
543 wide member but should've been wide(?)

544 S Yeah.

545 L Yeah. That's what it's sayin.

546 S We don't want any outsiders.

547 N No.

548 S ***

549 N Now that we're round again (?) I can tell you we gettin people from outside
550 stirrin trouble they can spoil all things.

551 L Well that's gonna be in the next section I'm gonna read you is a long bit
552 about how you can say, and legally say, "No you mob can't be in our group.
553 We don't want you mob." I mean right now you can't. It's real hard right

554 ? |****

- 555 L now for you to stop people comin in.
- 556 N As I said to you *** more people from other community people ***. You
557 bring em in ere. And they try to take over them all *** so we don't want
558 that.
- 559 L IYeah that's what I
- 560 N We want people from ere you know better for us so we can work together.
561 But
- 562 L IYeah IYeah
- 563 N you bring more people from outside they gonna stir trouble and then people
564 always split up and walk out.
- 565 L OK.
- 566 N You know.
- 567 L Well let's just get back to this point here, Section 8.1: Do you agree to
568 change Coen to Central Cape York Peninsula?
- 569 A I Yeah
- 570 L OK well somebody move that change.
- 571 N ela ***
- 572 L Noela. Will somebody second it? Woompi. Um can I have a vote please? All
573 those for that change.
- 574 N Yes everyone.
- 575 L You think that's a good change put your hand up. Righteo. You don't get
576 two votes. (laughter) OK the next section's a long bit like I said and it's say
577 about how you can stop people comin in or how you can let them in if you
578 want to. And I'll read it through and I'll explain it as I go along cos it's a bit
579 complicated and it's gotta again have those special legal words in it for the
580 mob in Canberra or they'll throw it back. So this is what the lawyers and the
581 accountants told us is the kinda thing we gotta say. Um Section 8.2.a.1:
582 "Admission to ordinary membership," that's like alla you mob "shall be by
583 election of the committee or on request of the members." So the committee
584 can get together and say you know, so and so wants to join and talk about it
585 and vote yes or no. Or the members can say right, we want the committee to
586 think about lettin so and so join the CYCAD corporation. Alright so either
587 the committee can decide you know somebody can go straight to the
588 committee or somebody can come to some of you mob and then you gotta
589 ask the committee to think about it. That's called the application, alright? "At

590 the committee meeting following the application, the committee shall
591 consider the application of each applicant and shall elect or reject him or her
592 as a member." So say somebody I dunno say Geoff Bull wanted to join. He
593 can't join because he's not an Aboriginal but we'll forget about that for a
594 while. Um say he wanted to join and he went to the committee and said he
595 did and Shannon wanted to join too. So the committee sit around and they
596 talk about it now will we have Geoff and they say what they think about
597 Geoff and whether he's gonna be a good member or a bad member. Then
598 they vote. And they gotta think about Shannon separate. No more together
599 but everyone separate they gotta talk about and vote for. And again just like
600 we gotta be real careful with the minutes here that committee meeting gotta
601 be real careful with the minutes. And I'll tell you why about that just now.
602 "Any applicant who received a majority of the votes of the members of the
603 committee present at the meeting at which his or her application is being
604 considered shall be declared by the chairman as an ordinary member and their
605 name shall be added to the list of members." What that means is there are 5
606 people on the committee. Might be only 4, might be only 3 there when they
607 talk about Geoff and Shannon joinin CYCAD, right. So say there's only 3
608 there. The committee can still meet if there's only 3 people, that's legal. If 2
609 of them say yes and one says no he's in. If 2 of them say no and one says yes,
610 he's not in. He's gotta get the majority vote but it doesn't have to be of all 5,
611 it's whoever's there when they're talkin about it. Now after they've voted the
612 chairman has to say to the rest of the committee "OK Geoff is now a
613 member." And then might be Seppi or somebody they'll get im to put that
614 name down on that list of members. Now "Upon the election or rejection of
615 an application the secretary or such person as the committee appoints," like
616 it might be Seppi probably, "shall forthwith give to him or her notice in
617 writing of such an election or rejection." So the chairman gotta say "Yes that
618 bloke he's a member now" and he's gotta say to Seppi "Write that bloke a
619 letter and tell im." Same way if he's not a member, if they voted against im,
620 the committee gotta write to him and say "Your application was rejected."
621 You don't gotta give reasons, you just gotta say rejected. Next part: a person
622 whose application for membership has been rejected may within one month
623 of receiving written notification of such rejection appeal against the decision
624 of the committee to a special general meeting of the association held for the
625 purpose of determining that appeal. What all that means is you write to
626 Geoff and say "No we don't want [end of side A] a letter from the committee
627 sayin he's out, he's got one month to write back and say he wants to put his
628 case to the whole membership. Right all a special general meeting just like
629 this one is of the members of the association. He has to do that in writing. It
630 says "Notice in writing will be given to the secretary of his or her intention to
631 appeal. The committee shall call such a general meeting to be held within

- 632 three months of the date of receipt by the secretary of a notice of appeal at a
633 time suitable to the majority of members to attend the meeting." What that
634 means is, when Geoff writes in and says alright I'm appealing. I want all the
635 members to decide whether I can be in or out, then the committee gotta set a
636 date for that meeting, a meeting like this, and it's gotta be within three
637 months. These are all kinda legal rules about it that we really can't fiddle
638 about with too much. But three months is reasonable. And it's gotta be at a
639 time suitable to the majority of the the members. So the committee can't send
640 you all a letter sayin we're gonna have this meeting in the middle of the night
641 or at a time when it knows everybody gonna be outa town for the dance
642 festival or somethin like that. It's gotta be reasonable you know, reasonable
643 time. "At such a meeting the applicant should be given the opportunity to
644 fully present his case either in speech or writing or both and the committee or
645 the members of the committee who rejected the application shall also have
646 the opportunity of presenting their case." So Geoff can come up here an e
647 can have a written thing that everybody gets a copy of to read or he can
648 stand here and talk why he thinks you all oughta have im in here. Then the
649 committee gotta come up and say "Well reason why we said no was this and
650 this and this." And that's all gotta be in the minutes of that committee
651 meeting, why they knocked im back. "The appeal shall be determined by the
652 vote of the majority of members present at the meeting." So that's just like
653 we been doin today, everybody gets up, talks about what they think about
654 that business and then when nobody got anymore to say you vote. And if alla
655 you mob think "Yeah Geoff's alright, we'll have him" he's in. Not alla you,
656 just gotta be most of you. Right so if there's 40 people here and 21 say yes
657 and 19 say no, he's in. OK that's called the majority of the vote.
- 658 P Does excuse me does committee gotta elect a member outa *** for the
659 committee?
- 660 L For the committee? Yeah. We've already got a committee. That committee is
661 elected every year at the annual general meeting.
- 662 P lFor CYCAD now?
- 663 L No. You can continue with the same committee. I'll come to the committee
664 membership rules in a minute cos we do wanna change those a bit. But right
665 now you got 5 committee members and they can be anybody. Doesn't have
666 to be from each thing. But we'll come to that in a minute. Talk about that
667 soon. Anybody got any questions they wanna ask or anythin to say about
668 that membership business, how people can join. You understand how it's
669 gotta work? The committee gets the first say but if they're knocking that
670 person back then that person can come back and appeal to alla you. Hey
671 what about this, this committee they're pickin on me or whatever. You

- 672 know. So that way it means that CYCAD got control of who's comin in. And
673 CYCAD isn't just the committee, it's all you mob. You all got a say in who
674 can join and who can't join. Now all those words, more or less we took from
675 another mob's ah another Aboriginal organisation's rules. It was the um
676 Oongoombie(?) cooperative society in Kuranda. Um the accountant sent us
677 that advice and said they've got that rule and it's workin real well for them,
678 they got similar problems like we got here and he suggests we have that rule.
679 So that's why I took it out of there for us.
- 680 Q That's very political for everyone to understand about that, it's bit new you
681 know?
- 682 L Yeah.
- 683 Q Be very hard to ** Moomba that. Can you go over it once more?
- 684 L Sure thing. First off
- 685 Q I Cos people can't understand it because that's a new rule
- 686 L Yeah.
- 687 Q New for us anyway.
- 688 L New business yeah. I won't read out everythin I got written down here
689 in all these legal words. I'll just tell you what it says, is that OK?
- 690 Q I No.
- 691 R Yeah.
- 692 Q We gotta get to the right channel(?) you know.
- 693 L Yeah.
- 694 ? I So we can understand.
- 695 L Yeah. So if somebody wants to join they first off the first thing they gotta do
696 is ask the committee or get some of you mob to ask the committee to let
697 them join. The committee then has a meeting
- 698 Q I When how d'you mean? Anybody?
- 699 L The members. OK? So anybody wanna join, they gotta ask the committee
700 themselves or they've gotta ask some of the members to ask the committee
701 for them if they can join. OK? Um at the next committee meeting the
702 committee gotta sit and talk about that. Do we want this bloke or do we not
703 want im? They talk about it and then they vote. If they vote yes, he's in but if
704 they vote no he's gotta be able to come back, because the committees only
705 five people you know he's gotta be able to come back and say "That's not

- 706 fair. I want it I want all the members to decide whether I'm gonna be in or
707 out. So if, you gotta write im a letter. The committee gotta tell Seppi or
708 whoever's in the office "Alright you gotta
- 709 Q What the purpose of that? Excuse me what's the purpose of
710 that?
- 711 L Writing a letter?
- 712 Q Yeah.
- 713 L It's because so that you've got a legal record of the committee's decision.
714 Otherwise that bloke might come along and say "Well how do I know that
715 you you voted against me?"
- 716 Q To get on the legal. To get im legal
- 717 L It's just to satisfy the lawyers you know to get it
718 right that way. As you saying this is all getting
- 719 Q That's that's for the lawyer
- 720 L Yeah that's get it's gettin ah much tighter I think before organisations like
721 this everybody just kinda went along gettin things done but didn't worry too
722 much about the way you did it. But now they're gettin real tight about the
723 way you do things.
- 724 Q Um excuse me which lawyer put that?
- 725 L Well this one is taken from the Oongoombie cooperative society at Kuranda.
726 I dunno who wrote that for em but our lawyer Suzette Coates has said that
727 she agrees with the accountant that's a good way to go. So we've had two
728 different people tell us that this is a good way to go who know about that
729 kind of you know the exact words you gotta use and all that.
- 730 Q They should know if they're a lawyer eh?
- 731 L That's right yeah. OK so then the committee gotta write to that bloke. It
732 doesn't matter if that bloke can't read they still gotta write to that bloke.
733 That's committee business they gotta do. Um and send im a letter to say yes
734 you're in or no you're out. If he's out um then he's got one month to think
735 about it and write back. He gotta write a letter back or get somebody to
736 write for im back and say "That's no good. I want all the members to vote
737 for me, for or against me" right? Not just the committee, all the members.
- 738 T Ah excuse me one ?? say if I what that mean if someone want to be in. What
739 that for committee or what?
- 740 L No no just for to be a member.

- 741 U Oh a member.
- 742 L You know? See if you're not a member here you can't vote like I I'm here at
743 this meeting but I can't vote about any of this cos I'm not a member.
- 744 T I No no.
- 745 L Only members got say for CYCAD business. Alright? So that's why you
746 gotta be careful bit about who you're getting. Like you said some outside
747 mobs
- 748 T I Yeah
- 749 L might come start making trouble.
- 750 T I Yeah. No I got you now.
- 751 L Right yeah. Ordinary membership that means just here not member of the
- 752 T I Yeah yeah
- 753 L committee. Just here. OK so that guy comes and says alright I wanna be a
754 member like alla you mob. Alla you mob gotta decide yes or no. So then the
755 committee got three months. We put in that three months bit you know
756 people put in that three months bit because you know might be February that
757 guy gets knocked back, middle of the wet. People can't get in to have a
758 meeting and vote about it. So it gives you a bit of time you know to you
759 might have to put that meeting off a bit but you can't just keep puttin it off
760 and puttin it off and puttin it off. Gotta be some time. So three months
761 seemed like a fair thing. So then you have a meeting, they send out a letter
762 just like you've got a letter for this meeting today saying "We're gonna have
763 a special meeting to talk about whether we want this bloke for a member."
764 And then everybody comes in. He gets up then. He can come to the meeting
765 or he can send a letter, he doesn't have to come, he can send a letter,
766 somebody else read it out but probably he wanna come and talk, say his story
767 why he thinks he oughta be a member like all you mob and then the
768 committee gotta get up and say why they knocked im back. Now that might
769 be a bit embarrassing for the committee but you gotta do it. That's the law.
770 He's got the right to
- 771 Q I Yes.
- 772 L to hear why he got knocked back.
- 773 Q Well for instance that ah you know everybody got they got the right to ask a
774 question everybody ere in this conference like we are meeting now I would
775 say say conference, everybody that can't understand ask a question that's the

- 776 only way you can get through. If you don't ask a question you will never
777 know what happen.
- 778 L That's very true.
- 779 Q But you know I do understand this: Anything that you can't understand ask a
780 question don't frightened to ask im. You know
- 781 ? |***
- 782 Q That's the only way you can find out.
- 783 ? Just ** ask her you know. Just ***
- 784 ? |You can't get anywhere you don't ask question.
- 785 ? You can't understand what she talking about just get up or put your hand up
786 and ask her the question what that means.
- 787 Q |Yeah. |You know you don't have to say
- 788 L |Cos this
- 789 Q "Excuse me through the chair" you know it's like what we are now first
790 word you might say "Excuse me through the chair" ask that lady what she
791 talking about. So she can explain to you what she talking about what she
792 means.
- 793 ? |Anybody doesn't matter who young or old. Don't understand put your hand
794 up ask the question.
- 795 Q |And then ** if you can't understand ask her you know that's the only
796 way you can find out. If you don't ask a question well you don't know what
797 she's talkin about.
- 798 L And this is real important business for you. Might sound like a whole lotta
799 garbage you know but if you haven't got strong rules like this backing you
800 up, other people gonna push you around.
- 801 Q But one thing that ** your opinion all about, and I'm gonna bring this out
802 from this meetin from ATSIC meetin if you don't mind.
- 803 L Well under any other business at the end we'll talk about that ATSIC
804 business.
- 805 Q |Yeah.
- 806 L OK.
- 807 Q |At the end(?)

- 808 L Yeah yeah. That's Section 8.2. That's the changes we gotta make to that
809 section. Anybody got any more they wanna ask about that section or
810 something they don't agree with bout that or wanna change?
- 811 ? ** all well educated government **
- 812 ? |** Canberra.
- 813 ? We understand.
- 814 L OK will somebody move that we have those changes to the membership
815 rules?
- 816 ? ***
- 817 L Somebody move those changes?
- 818 W I'll move them.
- 819 L Thank you Woompi. Somebody second them?
- 820 C Second.
- 821 L Thank you Cedric. Now we have a show of hands. All those in favour of
822 makin those changes.
- 823 W put your hand up there. Come on please.
- 824 L You don't have to vote for them. We're not holding a gun to your head. OK
825 then the motion was unanimously carried. The next section is what Stanley
826 was sayin before about the committee. Right now your rules say you gotta
827 have five members on the committee. That's all they say. But people been
828 talkin about they think it's a more fair way to go on if they have one bloke
829 from each at least one bloke from each outstation. Right so that's like one
830 belonging to Merepah, one belonging to Port Stewart, one belong to
831 Wenlock, and then you got two other blokes. One of them gotta be what we
832 call "landless members", that's people who haven't got an outstation yet.
833 Maybe they'll get one later on but they haven't got one yet. So that was like
834 Roy before. You know he was just what you call an independent member.
835 He wasn't
- 836 tied to any um bitta land. So that makes four, with the three outstations you got
837 now and somebody who got no land and one more. So that might be like from another
838 one of those outstations, might be another town fella, that's just you know, depends.
839 You can't really go with less than 5 on the committee. You gotta have 5 but we're not
840 big enough I don't think to have more than 5, to have like 2 from every ah outstation or
841 anythin like that. There's just not enough people you know. People get busy and they go
842 away to work or they're outa town for this or that reason, too hard to get them all in for

843 a meetin is another thing. So we reckon we talked about this and reckoned we'd stick
844 with 5 and the lawyers and the accountant they said yeah that's that's OK but we just
845 wanna make that change that you should have at least one from every outstation. See the
846 way it is now, might be you know they have a meeting and for some reason other people
847 don't turn up and they gotta elect a committee, might be all Port Stewart people or it
848 might be all Wenlock people or it might be all Merepah people. Well that's not what
849 CYCAD about hey? CYCAD for everybody so we wanna have one from everywhere,
850 least one from everywhere and one for all those people in town who got no land yet. So
851 that's the reason for that change. Anybody got a question to ask for that one?

852 ? Like but do you have to elect like ***

853 L Not now. Later on we've gotta elect because Roy has resigned we've gotta
854 call for nominations for his place on the committee but the rest of the
855 committee like it is now um Sunlight, Margaret, Cecil and Elta, they stop.
856 We just need one more but we do that later on, that's a different bitta
857 business. This is just about the rules about about CYCAD, and I should
858 maybe say

859 ? ICYCAD

860 L I don't think I said before we're all here voting on these rules now but

861 ? |Yeah.

862 L those changes they don't happen until that bloke in Canberra says "Yes those
863 changes OK." He's gotta look at them, check that it's all legal, we're not doin
864 anythin wrong here, and then he's gotta write back and say "Yes." Not till
865 then that those changes happen. So right now if we all vote yes, we're gonna
866 have that change you know that change doesn't happen until that bloke in
867 Canberra writes back.(7.0) OK will somebody move that change if no one's
868 got anythin to say. Were you moving it or were you wavin your hand?

869 ? Movin.

870 L Cedric moves it. Someone second the change? Noela. Can we have a vote on
871 that one please? Raise your hands if you're in favour of that change. Right I
872 think we can count everyone on that one again Seppi. OK I know this is long
873 but we gotta get this all done. Next one's a little short one. Section 9.5 just
874 now it say s on your committee you gotta have a chairman, a secretary, a
875 treasurer. Well right now what happens about that treasury job, Seppi does it
876 all, the office do all that money business. You know. The treasurer you know
877 right now it's Margaret but she doesn't do that business. And we talked about
878 that and decided we didn't need a treasurer. So we wanna change it to say
879 "There shall be a chairman and secretary who shall be the office bearers." So
880 you've just got those two out of five who are office bearers. It's only a little

881 change just to make life a bit easier for the committee. Anybody want me to
882 talk a bit more about that, you wanna know more about that? It's a bit of
883 protection for the committee too. Right now the way the rules are read,
884 Margaret oughta be doing that money business. Well you know that's not
885 possible. Margaret got her own stuff to do and anyway you it's you gotta be
886 trained to do that. So um somebody might wanna make trouble and come
887 along and say "Well you know the secretary's not doing that, that's not
888 right." So that was just a bit of protection for the committee.

889 W You mean to say that somebody gotta be all the time?

890 L No. It's just that you know every organisation that handles money you gotta
891 put through monthly statements of the money you got in and the money you
892 spent and what you spent it on, where it came from, what you spent it on.

893 W |Yeah yeah I know what you mean.

L Now our rules right now say the treasurer gotta do that but the treasurer
doesn't do it and we don't really want the treasurer to do it, we want the
office to do it because you know you're just gonna get mixed up havin
somebody else come in and do it too.

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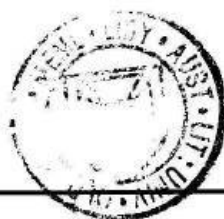
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