

## CONFLICT IN NORTHERN ARNHAM LAND

by

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### PRECIS

The thesis is a study of disputes among the Gidjingali and neighbouring peoples of northern Arnhem Land. Chapter 1 outlines the demographic, ecological, and historical background, and I follow this with a brief account of the conditions under which I carried out fieldwork. Chapters 2, 3, and 4 present the main features of Gidjingali social organization: land-owning units and residential associations are dealt with in Chapter 2, organization for ritual purposes in Chapter 3, and the system of kinship and marriage in Chapter 4. Chapters 5 and 6 give a classification and analysis of conflict - in the former those relating to the acquisition of wives; in the latter those over property, adultery, insult, and injury. Chapter 7 is an analysis of social control among the Gidjingali considered in the light of statements that have been made about Aboriginal government and political organization.

The main points I try to establish are the following. First, Radcliffe-Brown's generalizations about Aboriginal local organization did not apply to the Gidjingali. These people lived not in separate patrilineal patrilocal hordes but in communities whose male members belonged to from four to eleven patrilineal descent groups. Second, there was a chronic disproportion between the demand for wives and the supply of suitable women as defined by the marriage rule; in consequence, disputes were frequent and often serious. Third, patrilineal groups were not units in wife-exchange systems of the kind implied by Levi-Strauss's theory on kinship and marriage. Fourth, despite Radcliffe-Brown's statement that the patrilineal group was throughout Australia the political unit, among the Gidjingali this was not so. Inter-community fights often aroused some degree of community solidarity, and men of different patrilineal groups in the same community often acted together in them. Within the community patrilineal groups never opposed each other as corporate units. Men had obligations to support close uterine and affinal relatives as well as close agnates, and there was always the possibility that members of the same patrilineal group would behave differently from one conflict situation to another, depending on their relationships to those concerned. Finally, the Gidjingali had no formal apparatus of government or recognized political leaders of the kind described by Elkin and others among Aboriginal groups elsewhere in Australia.

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This thesis is my original work.

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**CHAPTER 1**

**INTRODUCTION**

Until a few years ago anthropologists working among Aborigines paid little attention to conflict. Elkin's main contribution to Australian ethnography was in the field of kinship and totemism, and he said little more than that headmen settled quarrels. Warner, Kaberry, Berndt, and Worsley gave some information but only incidental to investigations of such matters as magic and religion, the status of women, sexual behaviour, and social change. More recently Meggitt presented details of a variety of disputes in his account of Walbiri social organization, and Hart and Pilling described competition for wives among the Tiwi. But it would be a safe generalization that far more is known about the social organization of Aboriginal society than about clashes of interest within it.

This thesis is a study of disputes among the Gidjingali and neighbouring peoples of northern Arnhem Land. Chapter 1 outlines the demographic, ecological, and historical background, and I follow this with a brief account of the conditions under which I carried out fieldwork. Chapters 2, 3, and 4 present the main features of Gidjingali social organization: land-owning units and residential associations are dealt with in Chapter 2, organization for ritual purposes in Chapter 3, and the system of kinship and marriage in Chapter 4. Chapters 5 and 6 give a classification and analysis of conflict - in the former those relating to the acquisition of wives; in the latter those over property, adultery, insult, and injury. Chapter 7 is an analysis of social control among the Gidjingali considered in the light of statements that have been made about Aboriginal government and political organization.

The main points I hope to establish are the following. First, Radcliffe-Brown's generalizations about Aboriginal local organization did

not apply to the Gidjingali. These people lived not in separate patrilineal patrilocal hordes but in communities whose male members belonged to from four to eleven patrilineal descent groups. Second, there was a chronic disproportion between the demand for wives and the supply of suitable women as defined by the marriage rule; in consequence, disputes were frequent and often serious. Third, patrilineal groups were not units in wife-exchange systems of the kind implied by Levi-Strauss's theory on kinship and marriage. Fourth, despite Radcliffe-Brown's statement that the patrilineal group was throughout Australia the political unit, among the Gidjingali this was not so. Inter-community fights often aroused some degree of community solidarity, and men of different patrilineal groups in the same community often acted together in them. Within the community, patrilineal groups never opposed each other as corporate units. Men had obligations to support close uterine and affinal relatives as well as close agnates, and there was always the possibility that members of the same patrilineal group would behave differently from one conflict situation to another, depending on their relationships to those concerned. Finally, the Gidjingali had no formal apparatus of government or recognized political leaders of the kind described by Elkin and others among Aboriginal groups elsewhere in Australia.

#### THE GIDJINGALI AND THEIR NEIGHBOURS

Gidjingali is the term for the language spoken by people who lived south of Cape Stewart and around the mouth of the Blyth River (Map 1). They referred to themselves collectively as "we" and never by any name. I shall call them the Gidjingali for the sake of convenience.

Neighbouring groups were the Janjango and Djinang to the east;

the Gunadba to the south; the Nagara and Gungoragoni to the west; and the Gunwinggu, Gunavidji, and Gunbalang further west around the Liverpool River.<sup>1</sup> (Strictly speaking these also are the names of languages.) The Gidjingali speech is similar to Gunadba, and eastern neighbours referred to them both as Burera (a term used by Warner 1937; Capell 1942<sup>2</sup>). The other languages were markedly different from these two and from each other (Capell 1942), but many natives were bi-lingual and some tri-lingual.

In 1960 the Gidjingali numbered 294, the Nagara 71, and the Gunavidji 102. There were fewer Gunadba and Gungoragoni, but I did not make accurate counts of them or the remaining groups.

Warner (1937:15,36) included the Burera as one of the eight tribes of north-eastern Arnhem Land that he referred to collectively as the Murngin, though he admitted that they had the most divergent tongue and were affiliated linguistically with tribes further to the west (p.37). In this thesis I do not intend to discuss structural and cultural differences between the Gidjingali and the other so-called Murngin tribes or, on a wider scale, between eastern and western Arnhem Land (see Elkin 1950). But it is necessary to state that the Gidjingali had an Aranda-type kinship system based on marriage

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1. Unless stated otherwise, the letters ng in native words are pronounced as in the English word "sing"; j is equivalent to the English y.
  2. Capell (p.374) listed Gudjalavia and Gunaidba as close dialects of Burera. This, as I have said, is an eastern term for both Gidjingali (a name he did not record) and Gunadba (cf. Gunaidba). Gudjalavia is a western term for Gidjingali.  
The Gunangarawuraba language was also similar to Gidjingali and Gunadba. But by 1960 it was extinct as a language of everyday discourse, and only a few old people remembered its dialectical peculiarities. The Gunangarawuraba people lived between the Gidjingali and Gunadba.

between certain kinds of second cousin (MFZDS-MMBDD<sup>1</sup>, etc.) and not a system based on matrilateral cross-cousin marriage of the kind described by Warner (p.56 ff.). The Gidjingali themselves recognized this difference, as did their neighbours to the east.

#### ECOLOGY

The climate of Arnhem Land is part of the Asiatic monsoonal system. The north-west monsoon, arriving about October, introduces a period of rising temperature and humidity, with occasional thunder thorns. Torrential down-pours and high winds occur frequently from December to March. During April and May the rains ease, the humidity falls, and the wind changes to the south-east. From June to September little or no rain falls, the humidity is low, and the temperature mild. The wind becomes stronger and cooler during July and August, but the temperature never drops to freezing point. The Gidjingali had terms for the wet and dry seasons and for the two transitional periods.

The average annual rainfall for the years 1958-59-60 at Milingimbi Mission, about 20 miles from the Blyth River, was 3423 points. The highest monthly average was for January (850 points), the lowest July (0 points). Over the same period the average daily temperature at 3.0 p.m. for December (the hottest month) was 91.4° F, for July (the coolest) 80.5° F.

Long beaches stretch between the Liverpool River and Cape Stewart. Dense stands of mangrove trees line the Blyth River estuary and its tributaries,

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1. I shall use the following abbreviations when more than one kinship term is required to state a relationship: B = brother (EB = elder brother, YB = younger brother); D = daughter; F = father; H = husband; M = mother; S = son; W = wife; Z = sister. Therefore MFZDS = mother's father's sister's daughter's son.

and sand dunes run inland for various distances, enclosing mud flats and swamps that are regularly flooded by high tides and heavy rains. Eucalyptus forests and sporadic stands of monsoonal bushland occupy the higher ground.

Before Europeans arrived the natives obtained their food from the land, sea, creeks, and swamps. Men speared and trapped fish and harpooned turtle and dugong from dug-out canoes. They knocked geese and flying foxes out of trees with long sticks; caught goannas, lizards, and bush rats; and speared wallabies, jungle fowl, and bush turkeys. Women gathered shell fish, small reptiles, and many different kinds of plant food. Fresh water came from springs, lagoons, and swamps. Particular sources failed late in the dry season or became brackish after tidal inundations, but alternative supplies were always adequate.<sup>1</sup>

#### ALIEN INFLUENCES

##### Indonesian and Japanese sailors

Probably Indonesians visited the Arnhem Land coast from the 16th Century onwards. They sailed down with the north-west monsoons in October and returned about six months later with the south-east trade winds. Their objective was trepang for the Chinese merchants at Macassar (Map 2). They employed Aborigines to help with the work of collection and preservation, and they also bought local food, turtle shell, and pearls. They paid in rice, tobacco, alcohol, cloth, and knives.

In the second half of the 19th Century Australian trepang fishermen

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1. For more detailed accounts of ecology in coastal parts of Arnhem Land see Tindale 1925-6:76-84; Warner 1937:140-5; Thomson 1948-9:55-8; Worsley 1954:29-59, 1961; Specht 1958:chs.13,15; McCarthy and McArthur 1960; and Bower 1961.

entered the area but had difficulty in procuring cheap labour as the Aborigines preferred to work for the Indonesians. In 1882 the Inspector of Police in the Northern Territory reported that the Indonesians "demoralize the natives and make them untractable by the amount of drink and disease they distribute, and so effectively crush out the white man who may be trepanging or employing native labour in any other way. The European trepanger on this coast may do fairly well for about four months, but as soon as he gets into full swing, down come the praus and away go all your men and the Europeans must shut up till the Malays go away again" (quoted in R. and C. Berndt 1954:77). In the previous year the Administration had appointed an official to collect custom duties and licence fees from the captain of each visiting boat. Finally, in 1907, the Commonwealth Government passed legislation to prohibit Indonesian voyagers entering Australian waters.

The Indonesians worked mainly in eastern Arnhem Land, probably because the trepang beds were richer there than further west. Old Gidjingali men remember them, but I gather from the accounts that the fishermen did not come regularly to the Blyth River. There is no obvious evidence of Indonesian ancestry among present-day Gidjingali or of changes in social life attributable to Indonesian influences. Yet at some stage several cultural changes occurred. Gidjingali now make canoes from tree trunks instead of from bark and smoke tobacco in long Indonesian-style pipes; they use a representation of an Indonesian mast in one of their ceremonies and refer to the visitors in songs; and the vocabulary includes perhaps a dozen words of Indonesian origin. As these innovations are widespread in eastern Arnhem Land, it is possible that the Gidjingali adopted them from neighbours who had closer contacts with the

voyagers.<sup>1</sup>

Japanese pearl fishing in the Arafura Sea began not long after Indonesian trepang fishing ceased. The luggers frequently came to shore for water or safe anchorage in rough weather, and on these occasions crew members sought native women. Although the Australian Government in 1931 declared Arnhem Land an Aboriginal Reserve and made it an offence to enter the area without a permit the law was not strictly enforced and seamen continued to have access to the women. Japanese pearling in Australian waters stopped during World War II but began again in 1953. Nowadays naval vessels police the coast, and most of the natives live under supervision on missions or Government settlements. Contact between Japanese and Aborigines is therefore negligible.

The people dislike the Japanese and compare them unfavourably with the Indonesians. As the latter were primarily interested in acquiring labour, they took pains to maintain harmonious relationships; the old men said they paid generously and did not molest the women. By contrast, the Japanese were primarily interested in sexual gratification. They regarded the Aborigines as an inferior species and, although they usually paid the women, were unconcerned about the goodwill of the men.

Several Gunavidji men worked on luggers, and two Gidjingali have Japanese genitors. Contact with Japanese caused no noticeable social or cultural changes.<sup>2</sup>

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1. For detailed accounts of Indonesian influences in Arnhem Land see Warner 1937:453-68; R. and C. Berndt 1954:chs.3-10,12; Worsley 1954:9-19,74-81.
  2. Thomson (1939) and R. and C. Berndt (1954:chs.3,4,15) have described relationships between Japanese and Aborigines in Arnhem Land at length.



Europeans before 1940

Little exploration had been done before Sweeney's survey in 1939. King discovered the Liverpool River in 1819, Cadell the Blyth in 1867 (he later recommended the estuary of the Liverpool as the site for the capital of the Northern Territory). Robinson reported that Aborigines at Cape Stewart frightened his prospecting party on its way to the Gulf of Carpentaria in 1875, Lindsay crossed both rivers during his explorations in 1883, Carrington sailed up them in 1884, Cuthbertson explored the upper reaches of the Liverpool towards the end of the century, Searcy camped on an island near its mouth in 1907, and Strangman entered the estuary in 1908 but saw no natives.<sup>1</sup> In later years crocodile hunters and pearl fishermen visited the area.

The Methodist Overseas Mission established stations at Goulburn Island and Milingimbi in 1916 and 1925, and the Church Missionary Society a station at Oenpelli in 1925. Each mission concentrated its meagre resources on local natives but bought turtle and baler shells from others and occasionally gave them food and clothing. Liverpool-River natives made periodic visits to Oenpelli and Goulburn Island, and some became regular members of the mission communities. Blyth-River people visited Milingimbi but, as they were not on good terms with the local natives, usually left as soon as they had completed their transactions at the trade store.

In 1936-37 Thomson visited Cape Stewart during his investigations carried out at the request of the Australian Government into conditions on the Reserve (Thomson 1939), and in 1939 Sweeney, an employee of the Methodist

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1. Sources are given in R. and C. Berndt (1954) and Bower (1961).

Mission, made a survey of the coastal area between the Blyth River and slightly west of the Liverpool. He reported (1939) that the ceremonial life and tribal authorities of groups between the two rivers were still intact, the food resources adequate, and the health good, but that groups to the west were in various stages of detribalisation, with much disease and a declining birthrate. Sweeney attributed the changes to associations with Europeans in buffalo and timber camps further west and on pearling luggers.

In concluding his report Sweeney recommended that missionaries from Goulburn Island should make regular patrols and, if possible, establish bases where medical and evangelical work could be carried out. World War II broke out shortly afterwards, and the Mission was forced to abandon any plans that might have been prepared.

#### Establishment of Maningrida Government Settlement

Just before the war some of the young bachelors (mostly Gidjingali) set out for Darwin by canoe or on foot.<sup>1</sup> The leaders appear to have been two men who had been there while working on a pearling lugger. A demand for native labour in military and naval establishments increased the rate of migration shortly afterwards, but it was not until hostilities ceased that married men began taking their families.

Between 1946 and 1949 Patrol-Officer Kyle-Little of the Native Affairs Branch led three expeditions to investigate alleged tribal murders in the area. He said in his report of the last patrol: "The war has brought about big changes in the native economic life and has tended to accelerate

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1. I am indebted to E.C. Evans and J. Long of the Northern Territory Administration for some of the data in this section.

contact with our culture. Natives throughout the Arnhem Land reserve - many of whom worked with the services during the war - now desire to participate in our economic and social life, and unless the latter activities are advanced and some attractions made in the reserve, the Native Affairs Branch will be unable to cope with the already ever-increasing drift of natives from the reserve to Darwin and other settlements along the north-south highway" (1957: 156-7). He also mentioned that missionaries felt the only suitable place for a Government settlement was near the Liverpool River, as the natives there did not come directly under mission influence. Finally he recommended that the Branch establish a trading post where European commodities could be acquired in exchange for crocodile skins, shells, and woven mats and baskets (loc.cit.).

In 1949 the Director of Native Affairs instructed Kyle-Little to arrange the repatriation of about 60 immigrants and to set up the trading post. Kyle-Little left Darwin by boat in June with a junior officer named Doolan, the 60 natives, and supplies for a year. On arrival at the Liverpool River the two men built a rough shelter near a spring called Maningrida (n and g pronounced separately). Over the next few months they announced their intention of developing a trading post and medical centre and encouraged the people to bring in goods for eventual sale in Darwin. There was an enthusiastic response, and by September Kyle-Little and Doolan sent the first shipment on a vessel owned by the Methodist Mission. The Native Affairs Branch sold the goods for £110 and later sent back European commodities worth this amount to be distributed among the native producers. Further shipments realised a total of £118.

In November the Branch decided to close the post for the wet season and instructed Kyle-Little and Doolan to return. Partly because of a shortage

in staff and funds, it was not re-opened in 1950. In January of that year the Acting-Director recommended that the Government take over the administration of Oenpelli mission, which had made little material progress over the previous 25 years, and that Maningrida be developed as an outpost. This proposal was rejected, but in 1951 the Branch helped the Methodist Mission to purchase a small vessel on the understanding that missionaries at Goulburn Island would use it to make regular contact with the Liverpool-Blyth-River people and later establish a trading post or mission. Lack of staff prevented the Mission from meeting the obligation, and the future of Maningrida remained an unsolved problem.

The migration to Darwin continued, and in 1955 a census revealed that there were about 155 Liverpool-Blyth-River natives there and in neighbouring centres. Many worked for wages or received Government rations, and none seemed anxious to go home. The Native Affairs Branch on several occasions sent boatloads back to the Liverpool River, but many of the passengers set out on the 200-mile return journey as soon as they had visited their aged relatives.

It is illegal for Aborigines in the Northern Territory to drink alcohol. The Darwin crime registers record a steady increase in the number of Liverpool-Blyth-River men charged with offences of this kind from 1948 until 1955. In that year 48 appeared in court.

In 1955 the Welfare Branch (previously Native Affairs Branch) sent Sweeney, who had transferred to the Government some years earlier, to carry out a census in the Liverpool area and report on the causes of migration. His findings and recommendations were similar to those of Kyle-Little. In 1956 he returned to tell the people that the Government intended to re-open the trading post at Maningrida the following year. On the 5th May, 1957 three Welfare-

Branch officers set out for the Liverpool River with 30 tons of building equipment and stores, a motor-driven dinghy, and a radio transceiver.

Development of Maningrida Settlement from 1957 to 1960

About 15 Gunavidji were living near Maningrida when the boat arrived. A week later, Patrol-Officer Egan set out to locate people in other parts of the region and explain to them the function of the new settlement. An official document describing Egan's patrol stated the aim of the Welfare Branch in this way: "The concept of the settlement was not that of a compound into which all the natives of the area would move. On the contrary, the natives were to be left in their tribal areas with a minimum disruption, initially, of their tribal patterns. The function of the settlement at this early stage was primarily to provide trading and medical services for the area as a whole."

The concept was never realised. From the beginning the settlement staff employed members of outlying groups as well as local people in developmental and other work. When I arrived in May 1958 there were 57 natives on the payroll (53 men, 4 women), comprising 29 Gidjingali and Gunadba, 18 Gunavidji, 7 Nagara, 1 Gungoragoni, 1 Gunwinggu, and 1 Djinang. Each male employee received £1 per week and three ample meals a day for himself and his family, a female 10/- per week and meals. Other men living on the settlement sold crocodile skins and native artifacts at the trade store, and women sold woven mats and baskets. In addition, all aged and infirm were entitled to regular food rations. By September 1958 there were about 330 natives in permanent residence, all obtaining sufficient European commodities for their needs.

The staff changed the work force regularly to provide as many as possible with the opportunity to earn wages. They also tried to persuade men

to leave the settlement temporarily when unemployed, but with little success; natives on the payroll supported idle kinsfolk and expected to be supported when out of work themselves. During a journey on foot to the Blyth River in June 1958 I met only a few people still living in the bush. They said everyone else was living at Maningrida, on a mission, or in Darwin.

In the first year of the settlement whites and natives almost finished clearing an airstrip from upland forest, erected four corrugated iron buildings (staff residence, storeroom, trade store, native kitchen), reticulated water from the spring, established an orchard and vegetable garden, and provided medical services. The 57 natives employed in May 1958 comprised 39 men on the airstrip, 5 gardeners, 2 wood-cutters, 2 cooks, 1 medical assistant, 1 mechanic, 1 baker, 1 storeman, 1 builder's labourer, and 4 female domestic servants. In the same year (May 1957-May 1958) native producers sold over £1000 worth of goods at the trade store. These included crocodile skins worth £400, woven mats and baskets that women had learnt to make during visits to neighbouring missions, weapons and ritual objects, and food for the kitchen such as fish, turtle, dugong, and crab.

In the next two and a half years the airstrip was extended, more buildings erected, the garden enlarged, and medical services improved. In November 1960 a private contractor began work on an administration building, staff residences, native bathrooms, a hospital, and a school. He brought white workers from Darwin but employed local natives as well.

The original staff consisted of a manager, and assistant manager, and a patrol officer. Later the manager's wife was appointed as a part-time matron. At the end of 1960 the staff comprised an acting-superintendent, an assistant manager, a carpenter, ganger, clerk, and two nursing sisters.

The establishment of the settlement reduced the migration to Darwin, and some of those living away from the area began to return. Increased allocations of money for native labour enabled the staff to employ more workers and increase the wages of those in occupations requiring special skills. In May 1960 there were some 480 natives at Maningrida. About 46% were Gidjingali, 15% Gunavidji, 13% Nagara, 8% Gunadba, 6% Djinang, 4% Gungoragoni, 3% Gunwinggu, 3% Janjango, and 2% Gunbalang. The Djinang and Janjango came from Milingimbi mission. They began to arrive in increasing numbers towards the end of 1959, offering as an explanation that conditions at Maningrida were better.

In the first year the staff gave corrugated iron to a few native employees and helped them build small huts with timber frames, bark walls, and iron roofs. Others copied the buildings on their own initiative, using bark instead of iron for roofing. Within a few years most people in the native village were living in dwellings of this kind. The rest were content with traditional wet season shelters fashioned from a few sheets of bark.

In 1958 the Methodist Mission sought permission from the Welfare Branch to post a native preacher at Maningrida. This was refused. Between 1958 and 1960 a Salvation Army officer made several brief visits. His film evenings were well attended, though most members of the audience were indifferent to the accompanying services. A few individuals reared on missions were nominal Christians, and many others had some knowledge of Christian principles.

#### Native leaders at Maningrida

As most of the women and children and many of the men did not understand English, settlement officers needed interpreters. They relied mainly on six men (three Gidjingali, two Gunavidji, one Nagara) who had been in contact with whites since about 1940, spoke fairly good broken English, and were aged

between 35 and 40. I shall describe some aspects of the history and personality of one of them.<sup>1</sup>

Harry, a Gidjingali, arrived in Darwin just before the war as a youth of about eighteen. His first job was storeman in the native compound. In about 1940, when working in a Chinese laundry, he heard that his mother had died. He returned to the Blyth River but, after a brief stay, went back to Darwin with a large party of young bachelors, of whom only he and another had been there before.

During the war Harry worked in the laundry at the Naval base, at Vestey's meatworks, and as an employee of the Army. He said the sergeant-major put him in charge of all natives in the unit because he spoke good English. After 1945 he joined a white buffalo hunter near Oenpelli but returned to Darwin where the Native Affairs Branch appointed him a patrol assistant. He told me his duty was "to look after all native people". Later still the Police Department employed him as a tracker.

A white official on board a boat repatriating Blyth-River natives saw some of them smoking in the engine room. He ordered them to come out and then, as they did so, hit them on the head with a spanner. Harry, who had not been among the offenders, abused the official for assaulting his countrymen and was about to throw him overboard when white crew members intervened. Later he threatened the official in the following words: "Some day I'll kill you, even though you are a white man. I've been a police boy myself."

Some time after Harry went back to Darwin. Probably in the early 'fifties the Native Affairs Branch instructed him to assemble his countrymen

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1. My account of his life before the establishment of the settlement is based entirely on what he and other natives told me.



for repatriation. He informed them: "I am taking you all back home. If I leave you here in Darwin, you might be killed." After the boat arrived at the Liverpool River, he told Gunavidji people that he represented the Government and that his job was to look after everyone in the area. Subsequently he went on to the Blyth River and stayed with his own people until Maningrida settlement was established. He told me that he visited Milingimbi several times during the intervening period and that the mission superintendent had given him the title "King of the Blyth River".

When I arrived, Harry was in charge of one of the gangs working on the airstrip. His career was temporarily halted when he stole methylated spirits and was found drunk with several friends in the native village. The manager expelled him from the settlement for three months but subsequently took him back into favour.

Late in 1959 two staff members started a recreation club for the natives. One of the founders became the president, the other secretary-treasurer, and seven natives, including Harry and his younger "brother" Boris,<sup>1</sup> formed the rest of the committee. The manager approved of the organization but did not wish to be an office-bearer. The club built a sports oval and arranged football matches.

On several occasions Harry advised people to settle their differences peacefully, and once he and Boris harangued their own folk about several adoles-

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1. Inverted commas indicate a classificatory relationship, in this case FBS (see ch.4).  
I have given many individuals fictitious Christian names, partly to conceal their identities, partly to avoid native names unfamiliar to the reader.

cent girls who, for various reasons, were still living with their parents. They said there would be trouble if husbands were not found for the girls soon. Although Boris expected to receive one of them, he and his "brother" spoke less as interested parties than as "committee men" concerned with keeping the peace. Another time Boris, who once told me he knew all about trade unions, informed the assistant manager that the aged and infirm were starving and ought to receive better rations. The assistant manager warned him not to be insolent and threatened to take him to the manager. Boris then apologized and explained that he was only doing his duty as a committee man. The assistant manager pointed out to him that his obligations in this capacity were confined to the sphere of sport.

Eventually some of the Gidjingali began to complain among themselves. One of them remarked to me, "We're sick and tired of those two committee men. Every day they want to have a meeting about something". But another defended them, saying they were saving lives by telling people not to fight. He thought they were doing a good job.

Harry, on hearing about the complaints, made several emotional speeches in different parts of the village. He described himself as a committee man working for the Welfare Branch and told his audience that, if they wanted to behave like bush blackfellows, they had better go back to the bush. He went on to describe his long association with the Government and mentioned the missionary who had called him "King of the Blyth River".

News of all these activities eventually reached the manager, who called a meeting of the Gidjingali. He announced to the gathering that Harry and Boris were helping him to keep peace in the settlement and acquaint those in residence with the white man's law. He asked the people not to be critical

when incidents were reported to him but added that he would listen to complaints about the two men if they abused their authority.

Although Harry and Boris had assumed the role largely on their own initiative, the manager was pleased to encourage them once the matter was brought to his notice. But despite his backing the two men became less assertive. Probably the antagonism towards them had left its mark. It should also be mentioned that the officers who had founded the recreation club were less sympathetic than the manager. Although eager to be kept in touch with happenings in the village, they were uneasy about encouraging natives to carry tales; and they also felt that the two men had become self-important.

Harry and Boris had more forceful personalities than the other leaders. The two Gunavidji had been patrol assistants and personal friends of Kyle-Little. The Nagara was a voluble man who led one of the early gangs on the airstrip and was known among the natives (though not among the whites) as Ganger. The third Gidjingali was the leader of a small team of crocodile-hunters.

Apart from their special relationships with settlement officers, the six men were neither more nor less outstanding than others of their own age and held no indigenous titles or badges of office. But as a result of their experiences in Darwin, they realised that social status among whites is connected with occupation and that bureaucracy is a system of specialised named functions in a hierarchy of power and prestige. They knew, for example, that the manager was in charge of the staff at Maningrida, the Director in Darwin was superior to the manager, and the Minister in Canberra superior to the Director. (Once, after the Honourable Paul Hasluck had visited the settlement, I heard Boris address the manager as "Minister" when seeking some favour from him.) They prided themselves on their knowledge of English and of European ways and

liked white people to think well of them. They were obviously pleased at being given special responsibilities, even though not all of them were as ambitious as Harry and Boris.

#### Beliefs about the ownership of Maningrida

The settlement was built at Maningrida because this site was most suitable. The land belonged to Gunavidji, but, despite the avowed policy of encouraging outlying groups to visit the post for trading purposes only, Gidjingali in residence outnumbered all others from the beginning. Some of them seem to have been under the impression that the Government had established the settlement primarily for their benefit. In discussing the origin of the belief I shall refer to Gidjingali and Gunadba as Burera, as officials were unaware of the distinction and applied this term to both.

Early in 1958 the Wanderers Australian Rules Football Club won the Darwin A Grade premiership for the first time. The team was composed mainly of Aborigines, several of whom were Burera. A month or so later a group of young Blyth River natives left Darwin by boat for Maningrida, which had then been established for about ten months. Soon after arriving one man, Robert, aged about 26, announced that the Director of Welfare had presented the settlement to the Burera because the Wanderers had won the football premiership. He said he had written authority (which he referred to as a permit) to act as head native. From now on those in residence were to take orders from him instead of the local white officials.

He went on to say that a second member of the group had been appointed patrol officer for the district. Later this man, whom the Welfare Branch had once employed as a patrol assistant, would be taken to all capital cities in Australia and eventually presented to the Queen. Six others were to take

command of the ss Temora, a privately-owned vessel then under contract to carry supplies to Maningrida.

Robert made these announcements one night at a public meeting attended by most natives in residence. He implied that the Gunavidji (who had not been represented in the Wanderers football team) would have no positions of importance on the settlement. The Gunavidji told him to take his permit to the Blyth River. About a fortnight later Robert walked back to Darwin. He said he was worried about his mother, who was still living there. Before leaving he told people he had left his permit with the manager to hold until his return.

The incident occurred shortly before I arrived. About three months later a Gunavidji man told the story to the assistant manager, who then told me. Until this time the Europeans had been unaware of what had happened. The assistant manager told the Gunavidji that Robert's assertions were nonsense.

Gunavidji men spoke readily about the incident when I questioned them; but because Burera understandably refused, I am unable to explain satisfactorily how the scheme to take control came into being. The following facts seem worth mentioning.

Darwin townfolk referred to all immigrants from the Liverpool-Blyth-River region as Liverpool-River natives, probably because the Liverpool River is bigger and better known than the Blyth. When Burera men appeared in court, played football, or sought employment, people referred to them as Liverpool-River natives. One even went by the name of Joe Liverpool.

When I arrived in Darwin in April 1958 many Burera were still living there, but I did not encounter any Gunavidji. Welfare-Branch officers agree that officials addressing groups composed exclusively of Burera may have made

such statements as, "You people must return to your own country at the Liverpool River" or, "Why don't you people go back to the Liverpool River? You've got your own settlement there now". If so, those addressed may have inferred that the settlement had been established for them and their tribesmen.

The fact that Welfare-Branch officers took about a dozen Burera natives from Darwin to help found the settlement probably confirmed this belief. Some of these were assigned to occupations requiring special skills (tractor driver, baker, medical orderly), and for perhaps the first six months of the settlement the Burera occupied an ascendant position in the general work force. But as other people moved into the village and, in particular, as Gunavidji and western Nagara returned from Goulburn Island, officers distributed jobs more widely.

If the Burera at Maningrida initially thought that the settlement had been established for them, they must have been well on the way to disillusionment by the time Robert arrived early in 1958.

The belief persisted much longer in Darwin. During a short stay there about six months after Robert visited Maningrida, I asked a Burera man I had not seen before what was the name of his country. He replied: "Liverpool". When I pointed out that this was Gunavidji territory, he said: "Not any longer. The Gunavidji are finished. The Burera own that country now."

I have suggested that this belief may have arisen as a mistaken inference from statements made by officials who failed to distinguish Blyth-River from Liverpool-River natives.<sup>1</sup> I assume that the belief was Robert's

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1. I am grateful to Mr. E. C. Evans, Chief Welfare Officer of the N.T.A., who first proposed this hypothesis. I am not implying that officials in Darwin should have exercised more care. The distinction would not have seemed important at that distance, and they could hardly have foreseen the consequences of failing to make it.

starting-point, but I do not know the additional factors responsible for his imaginative take-over bid. Although he was not a member of the winning football team, the idea may have come to him after the final match. Australian Rules has a big following in Darwin, and white people interested in native progress hailed the victory of the only predominantly Aboriginal team in the competition as a significant step forward.

I met Robert in Darwin in August 1958 and found him surly and uncommunicative. He returned to Maningrida in 1960 but did nothing remarkable until he hit an official who tried to take him into custody for throwing a spear during a fight. It was the only time I saw a native hit a European.

Although the Gidjingali accepted official classification with the Gunadba and even used the term Bureru themselves when speaking to whites, they admitted that in the past they were on worse terms with this group than with the Gunavidji. I recorded several serious fights between Gidjingali and Gunadba natives but none between Gidjingali and Gunavidji. At the same time, Gidjingali men who had been to Darwin derided the Gunavidji behind their backs for lack of sophistication and made jokes about their solecisms. I myself could see little difference between the two peoples; indeed, several mission-trained Gunavidji spoke better English than any other native on the settlement.

In football matches Gidjingali and Gunadba usually combined against Gunavidji and Nagara. Supporters stood on opposite sides of the ground, and the games were not always played in the spirit of "let the best team win". Nevertheless, by 1960 people understood that they were expected to live together in harmony and that the settlement was for the benefit of all.

## CONDITIONS OF FIELDWORK

I obtained my data during twenty months between 1958 and 1960. I lived for most of that time at Maningrida but twice accompanied natives leaving the settlement to carry out ceremonies near the Blyth River, and, on a third occasion, I spent a month mapping totemic sites in the same area.

I chose the Gidjingali because they constituted the largest group. The main aim was to investigate certain aspects of their traditional life. I obtained my information by observing day-to-day events and by questioning people about events that occurred in the past. During the first few months I became friendly with a number of men who taught me the language, helped me obtain genealogies, and later explained many aspects of social organization and individual motivation. As I lived right in the village, I was able to observe what went on as a matter of course, and I tried to extend my personal contacts as far and as profitably as possible.

Officials had not interfered with marriage arrangements or religious practices. But they objected to spear fights and on several occasions expelled men from the settlement for taking part. One individual served a short gaol sentence in Darwin for assaulting his wife. Quarrels occurred frequently, and I questioned as many people as possible. But to obtain the kind of information I wanted about the past, I had to rely heavily on two men with whom I developed a close friendship. I have no reason for doubting the honesty of their testimony but, beyond pointing out that gossiping was a favourite pastime and that everyone appeared to know everyone else's business, I cannot vouch for its reliability. In describing disputes I shall therefore indicate which I observed at first-hand.



**CHAPTER 2**

**LOCAL ORGANIZATION**

This chapter deals primarily with land ownership, the structure of land-owning units, and residential associations.

#### OWNERSHIP

In 1960 the Gidjingali were divided into nineteen groups each owning a cluster of named sites and the surrounding countryside. I shall call these groups "land-owning units" and their territorial possessions "estates". Most sites were distinct natural features, such as a spring, a small beach, or the mouth of a creek. Many were totemic (Frog-is-here, Yam-lives-here), but some were not (~~Where-the-rain-water-collects, Where-the-shady-plum-tree-stands~~).

The people indicated a unit's estate by the name of one of the sites, though they could not explain why this name rather than another was customarily used. They referred to the unit as "the people from X", where X was the representative site, and employed possessive pronouns to indicate ownership ("Y is ours", "Z is theirs", where Y and Z were sites, representative or otherwise). Individuals often displayed marked affection for their country.

Every unit had more than one totem. Some totems were exclusive to a particular unit, others were shared. Frog created a single site owned by one unit, but Barramundi made several, each owned by a different unit. All units had exclusive associations with particular totems and exercised rights over the symbols representing them. Some but not all shared totems, and people said that in such cases the members should help each other in fights. In practice this did not often appear to happen.

The various totems of the same unit all belonged to either one or

the other of two patri-moieties called Dua and Jiridja. In theory, the moiety of the land and its owners accorded with that of the totem creators, though irregular marriages had led to several units containing members of both moieties. The moiety associations of the land in these cases had not changed.

The clusters of sites were not circumscribed by boundaries. Disputes over land did not arise, and it was therefore difficult to discover the attitudes of owners towards their estates. I judged that they had an intimate knowledge of their sites and the country included by them but that proprietorial interest outside this central core progressively weakened. My travelling companions announced the transition from one estate to another when we had reached the first new site.

Map 3 shows the sites of five land-owning units near the Blyth River. I visited each of these and was able to plot them fairly accurately with the aid of an aerial photograph. I shall describe only the sites of the Djunawunja unit.

1. Djunawunja (the representative site). A line of springs created by Water Goanna on his way to Site 2.

2. Djindjinganda A spring created by Water Goanna, who lives beneath it.

3. Meilaba A lagoon created by small human-like creatures known as the Marawal men.

4. Djanbi-madjiraba A clump of trees where the Marawal men live. Djanbi is the term for an unidentified species of tree, and Djanbi-madjiraba means Where-the-djanbi-trees-stand. (I should point out that the people did not know the meanings of many names.) Marawal are troublesome creatures who enjoy sneaking up behind and knocking people down with a stick.

5. Bulgabulga A sand ridge formed by Fishnet, who lives under the sea nearby. Natives described the site as a boundary between Dua and Jiridja moieties and related how Fishnet (Dua) said to Dog (Jiridja), who lives on an adjacent estate: "This side is mine, the other yours". It was the only boundary I recorded in the course of plotting some 50 sites in the Blyth-River area.

6. Mumodongidj A mud flat created by Fishnet.
7. Djunawinba A tidal channel also made by Fishnet.
8. Mananamira-adjiraba A sand dune created by Mananamira, an unidentified fish. Men of the Djunawunja unit thought the site may once have belonged to a now-extinct unit of the same moiety. It is separated from the other Djunawunja sites by those of a contemporary Jiridja unit.
9. Gawarawuda A narrow tidal creek in which Water Snake lives.
10. Djon-djindjiraba Springs created by Kookaburra, who lives beneath them. The name means Kookaburra-is-here.
11. Gagalbur A small fresh-water swamp created by Kookaburra.

The Djunawunja unit had exclusive affiliations with Fishnet, Water Snake, Mananamira, and the Marawal men but shared Water Goanna and Kookaburra with others.

The Djunawunja and one other western unit contained a few people who named Nagara as their primary language. I have not counted these individuals as Gidjingali, though I have counted a few Gidjingali-speakers who belonged to a predominantly Djinang unit. (I shall discuss later the transmission of language from one generation to the next.) The mean membership of the nineteen Gidjingali units, including the two with Nagara-speakers, in 1960 was 15.6 (range 2 to 61, median 10). The total area of the nineteen estates was about 150 square miles, giving a population density of approximately two to the square mile.<sup>1</sup>

Several units recently became extinct. People of the same moiety who owned neighbouring estates spoke of themselves as caretakers and in time

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1. Specht (1958:482) stated that the population of Arnhem Land was concentrated in the coastal areas because food supplies in the interior were poor. For population densities in other parts of Australia see Meggitt 1962b; Hiatt 1962:286. I have since revised my figure for the Gidjingali.

may come to regard the sites as theirs. It is significant that old men told me Lala-gadjiraba unit now looks after sites of the Waigubuda unit, which in 1960 comprised one old waman. A young man of the former showed me certain sites that he said belonged to his unit, but I later discovered they belonged to the old woman's. (See also Djunawunja site 8 mentioned above.)

### STRUCTURE

Each unit consisted of one or more named patrilineal descent groups with genealogical structures three to five generations in depth. Thirteen units each comprised one, three each comprised two, and three each comprised three patrilineal groups. The mean membership of the 28 groups was 10.6 (range 2 to 29, median 8).

Although people were usually unable to explain why certain units comprised more than one descent group, I established that several within living memory had abandoned their estates and each become permanently associated with a unit in another locality. The descendants retained their group identity but displayed little interest in the land of their migrant forbears. They regarded themselves as joint owners of sites in the area where they now lived and were regarded as such by descendants of the original owners. Similar events may have led to other instances where the circumstances of migration and amalgamation have been forgotten. The people have adopted the English word "company" as a translation of their concept of joint ownership; they made no distinction in rights or prestige among patrilineal groups forming a unit even if they knew that one was the original owner and the rest migrants. I shall return to this subject later.

The name of each patrilineal group was an untranslatable proper

noun. For example, the Djunawunja unit comprised Galamagondija, Garabam, and Milingawa. The names were employed in special ritual contexts and in discussing rights to women (see Chs. 3,4, and 5).

Table 1 lists the representative sites of the Gidjingali land-owning units, their membership in 1960, the patrilineal groups that composed them, and the moiety. I shall explain the significance of the last column in the next section. Map 4 shows the location of each site.

Babaru was the general term for patrilineal group.<sup>1</sup> "Gunnga babaru ngula?" meant "What patrilineal group do you belong to?", whereas "Gunnga rawa ngula?" meant "What is your representative site?". Members of different groups in one land-owning unit thus gave different answers to the first question but the same answer to the second. One native compared babaru with football teams in Darwin (Wanderers, Waratahs, St. Mary's). Diagram 1 is the genealogy of a typical patrilineal group (Galamagondija, Table 1, No.1a). It gives the ages of individuals in 1960 and the kinship terms applied by a man C5 to living and deceased members.

Within the land-owning unit, whether of one or several patrilineal groups, an individual referred to all males older than himself who were of his genealogical generation and generations alternating with it as "elder brother"; and all males younger than himself of these generations as "younger brother". Thus, in theory, he called a man of his FF's genealogical generation younger than himself "younger brother" and a man of his SS's genealogical generation older than himself "elder brother". Such cases were rare, but note that C15 in Diagram 1 is only four years older than his "SS" E1; and fifteen years older than his FFSSSS E6. I should point out here that, in constructing pedi-

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1. People in north-east Arnhem Land used the same term (Berndt 1955:85).

**TABLE 1** Gidjingali land-owning units, patrilineal groups, and communities.

| Representative site                       | Membership | Patrilineal group                              | Patri-moiety | Community          |
|---|------------|--|--------------|--------------------|
| 1. Djunawunja                             | 35         | a. Galamagondija<br>b. Garabam<br>c. Milingawa | Dua          | Anbara             |
| 2. Gunadjangga                            | 25         | Mararagidj                                     | Jiridja      | "                  |
| 3. Anmalanda-ajura                        | 9          | Angawa-anabama                                 | Jiridja      | "                  |
| 4. Gubanga                                | 61         | a. Anagolgaba<br>b. Anawuldja<br>c. Waladja    | Dua          | "                  |
| 5. Lala-gadjiraba                         | 12         | Manamalandara                                  | Jiridja      | "                  |
| 6. Madang-adjira                          | 7          | a. Gawowura<br>b. Geibanija                    | Dua          | "                  |
| 7. Diradira-adjiraba                      | 3          | Mainguba                                       | Dua          | Marawuraba         |
| 8. Managudog-adjira                       | 8          | Djeragala                                      | Dua          | "                  |
| 9. Mbudja                                 | 4          | Anmadjolgawa                                   | Dua          | "                  |
| 10. Djamalnga                             | 12         | a. Bulgaranga<br>b. Midalanga                  | Jiridja      | "                  |
| 11. Ariguda-burindja                      | 6          | Liralira                                       | Dua          | "                  |
| 12. Gununa                                | 13         | Ngoridjongga                                   | Dua          | Madai              |
| 13. Djigubija                             | 9          | Ganawulanija                                   | Jiridja      | "                  |
| 14. Malagara                              | 8          | Balgaranga                                     | Jiridja      | "                  |
| 15. Gawula-gajura                         | 2          | Djanjara                                       | Dua          | "                  |
| 16. Gamara-gajura                         | 25         | a. Muleimulei<br>b. Warawara                   | Jiridja      | Maringa            |
| 17. Guridjara-adjira                      | 19         | a. Jimara<br>b. Laninga<br>c. Maldjigara       | Dua          | "                  |
| 18. Bunbuwa                               | 29         | Gamal  | Jiridja      | "                  |
| 19. Mananguramba                          | 10         | Bindarara                                      | Jiridja      | "                  |
| Total membership .....                    |            |  |              | 297                |
| Mean membership of land-owning units .... |            |  |              | 15.6               |
| Mean membership of patrilineal groups ... |            |  |              | 10.6               |
| Ratio of moiety affiliations .....        |            |  |              | 10 Dua : 9 Jiridja |

gree charts, my decision to correlate certain generations between segments in patrilineal groups without apical ancestors was arbitrary. For example, C5 called A2 "elder brother" and C12 "younger brother", so that a decision to assign A2 to generation C and his sons' children to generation E would have still been in accordance with existing terminological relationships. My preference was determined solely by the fact that A2 had been dead for many years and C5 and C12 were roughly contemporary.

A man referred to adult members of the unit who were of his father's genealogical generation and generations alternating with it as "father" or "father's sister", and to children of these generations as "son" or "daughter". Thus he applied the terms "son" (nanja) and "daughter" (bababa) to his offspring until they reached adulthood; from that time he called them "father" (anja) and "father's sister" (baba). Again, a man applied the term "son" to a younger actual or classificatory brother of his father if this person was still a child.

An individual referred to all female members of the unit who were of his own genealogical generation and generations alternating with it as "sister", regardless of their ages. A woman employed the same kinship terms as her approximately contemporary brother.

Genealogical memory was short. The natives had difficulty in recalling the name of anyone they had not seen, and few could go back further than members of the grandparental generation. I collected no genealogy in which all living members were descended from a man in the great-grandparental generation of the oldest living member.<sup>1</sup> In some genealogies there were several

1. Cf. Berndt (1955:88), who stated that in north-east Arnhem Land the "line of patrilineal descent consists of all males and all females descended from a common forefather of the third ascending generation".



men in the grandparental generation of the oldest living member, in others only one. Some of these latter were the only genealogies with an apical structure. Female ancestors were forgotten more quickly than male ancestors; the highest ascending generation in most genealogies did not include women.

Fathers usually named their children after deceased agnates in the offspring's FF's or own genealogical generation. Occasionally folk gave names of deceased agnates to members of other units in the same moiety as a friendly gesture.

The Gidjingali believed that conception occurred when a spirit entered a woman's womb. This happened usually, but not necessarily, near the sites of the husband's unit. They did not believe that the spirits of members of a patrilineal group came from its totemic sites, nor that the living were reincarnations of dead members (cf. Warner 1937:21). Spirit children existed in the form of fish; they lived in the sea or in estuaries but were not confined to specific localities. Adults always said they had been born at their representative sites, though further questioning often indicated that they were not certain.

Ideally, the father dreamt of his wife's conception before it occurred. Some men said they had in fact had such dreams, others admitted they had not. Although the people seemed unaware of the physiological function of semen (one man said it gave women pleasure during intercourse), they recognized a connection between conception and copulation. Folk gossiping about an unmarried girl who became pregnant wondered who her lover was, or they speculated about the physical paternity of children whose mothers had been committing adultery. But no one suggested that sexual intercourse established necessary conditions for the spirit's entry, and my impression was that they had no explicit views

about a possible connection between them.<sup>1</sup>

Uncertainty about a child's patrilineal group arose only when the mother was a widow at the time of birth or living apart from her husband. I recorded a case in which a woman gave birth to a boy about six months after her first husband had died and a month or so after she had married a long-standing lover. This man told me that, even though he was the genitor, he would bring the boy up as a member of the group of the mother's previous husband, which was different from his own. In another case, a woman deserted her husband in favour of a lover and took her infant son with her. The new husband informed me that he was the genitor and that the boy belonged to his group regardless of its not being the same as that of the mother's previous husband.

Personality seems to have been the determining factor in these two cases. The man who married the widow had a quiet friendly disposition, and, in assigning the child to the group of its mother's former husband, he acted generously and properly. The other man was often surly and aggressive. People shrugged their shoulders when I questioned them about his action, but I gathered that they regarded it as selfish and discourteous.

#### RESIDENTIAL ASSOCIATIONS

##### Before the establishment of Maningrida

I use the term "community" for the group of people who customarily moved about together. The Gidjingali were divided into four loosely-knit communities called the Anbara, Marawuraba, Madai, and Maringa. The regular members were (a) men of four or more land-owning units whose estates formed a

1. For references to other discussions about procreation see R. and C. Berndt 1951:80.

continuous area, (b) their wives, and (c) their unmarried children. A community camp consisted of a number of hearth groups, each with its own fire and, at certain times of the year, its own shelter. Ordinarily it included a man, his wife or wives, and their young children.<sup>1</sup>

Although only one of the community names is translatable (Anbara means river mouth), they seem comparable with regional expressions like "the Lake District" or "the North Coast" and provide a convenient if loose way of referring collectively to the people of a broad locality. Thus the Anbara were from around the mouth of the Blyth River, the Maringa from Cape Stewart, and the Marawuraba and Madai inlanders from the south-west and south of Cape Stewart. I have indicated the four localities in Map 5 and the land-owning units forming the basis of the communities in Table 1.

The Nagara, Gunavidji, Gunadba, and Gungoragoni, being fewer than the Gidjingali, were not divided into regional sub-groups. Each formed the basis of a single community. Marriages within and between communities were equally acceptable, and both types occurred. Most inter-community marriages were between neighbouring peoples, and residence was patri-virilocal. Table 2 gives the number of women who, in marrying the men who were the husbands in May 1960, had married within, out of, or into the Anbara and Nagara communities. I have included the Nagara figures to stress that difference in language was no barrier to marriage.

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1. Hart and Pilling (1960:13) referred to similar units among the Tiwi as "households", although they admitted that the "houses" were nothing more than a few piled-up tree branches used as a shelter for several nights and then abandoned. I prefer the term "hearth group" for that reason.

TABLE 2 Intra- and inter-community marriages

| Community | Women married within | Women married outside | Women married into |
|-----------|----------------------|-----------------------|--------------------|
| Anbara    | 19                   | 13 (i)                | 7 (ii)             |
| Nagara    | 8                    | 16 (iii)              | 12 (iv)            |

Notes

(i) 5 to Maringa, 4 to Nagara, 2 to Djinang, 1 to Madai, and 1 to Gungoragoni.

(ii) 4 Nagara, 2 Gunadba, 1 Maringa.

(iii) 8 to Gunavidji, 4 to Anbara, 2 to Marawuraba, 1 to Gungoragoni, and 1 to Gunbalang.

(iv) 4 Anbara, 3 Gunavidji, 2 Rembaranga (south of Gungoragoni), 1 Gunadba, 1 Gunwinggu, 1 Gunbalang.

I tried to discover the typical movements of the Anbara (about 135 regular members) over the course of a year. From January to April they camped at Lala-gadjiraba (Table 1, No.5), a spring near a barren sandy point at the river mouth. The point was frequently swept by high winds that kept the mosquitoes away, and at this time of the year the Anbara often acted as hosts to people from the mosquito-infested interior.

The men fished with spears along the coast and tidal creeks and occasionally hunted wallaby and other land creatures. Women gathered various plant foods and shell fish. Neither sex was restricted by territorial boundaries, and the camp seems to have been a base from which they ranged over the whole Anbara region (approximately twenty square miles). It was taken for granted that men built fish traps (brush weirs) across creeks running through their own estates; but they left the camp to visit them and brought back part of the catch.

The main rituals were held during the dry season. From time to time the people acted as hosts to members of neighbouring communities and on other occasions were guests at ceremonies held elsewhere. Between ceremonies, small groups of close kinsmen and their families often retired to their own estates or elsewhere and enjoyed a short isolation from the main community. (Maningrida was sometimes criticised because it was too crowded.)

In August or thereabouts the Anbara crossed the river and joined the Marawuraba. With these folk they picked the Cycad palm nut, which grew only on the east side. A few months later, accompanied by their hosts, they re-crossed and made their way to a large inland swamp where the Spike rush grew in abundance. Here also great flocks of geese gathered as the smaller waterholes dried up. Ownership of the swamp was divided among units of three different communities - Nagara, Gunadba, and Gungoragoni. During October and November five or six communities gathered around the edges. By December the mosquitoes had become intolerable, and people began moving back to the coast.

As I mentioned earlier, hardly anyone was living in the bush when I arrived. But in 1960 about 50 Anbara voluntarily left the settlement and spent a month at the Blyth River. They camped along a beach in eight hearth groups whose male heads were members of four different land-owning units. One of the units owned the beach, and two were of one moiety, the other two of the opposite.

A community's home locality comprised the totemic sites of its constituent units. There were zones between these localities, but no boundaries. If I asked somebody to indicate the end of Anbara country and the beginning of Nagara, he named the last Anbara site and the first Nagara site. People did not seek formal permission before entering the locality of a neighbouring

community; rather, they expected to be made welcome. They normally sought out the residents who greeted them warmly and invited them to join their camp. Men sometimes entered the area of another community furtively to attack some of its members but never to raid its food resources.

If every land-owning unit had had to depend solely upon the resources of its own estate, some would certainly have perished (during the major tidal inundations salt water alone was available on the estate of one unit and on that of another there was never fresh water at any time). The diets of many others would have been monotonous and, at times, meagre. But the inhabitants did not suffer such hardships because they took open access to food and water for granted. People maintained a roughly uniform standard of living by moving over one another's estates and freely exploiting the resources. The region was rich in natural products. When a community exhausted the food supply in one place, it moved to another. On occasions the members visited neighbouring communities, and at other times acted as their hosts. Sharing deprived no one of basic requirements, and land owners from time to time had the satisfaction of fulfilling expectations of generosity.<sup>1</sup>

Radcliffe-Brown (1930) called the residential unit among Aborigines "the horde", which he described as a small group of people owning a defined stretch of land upon which they were dependent for survival. A child belonged to the horde of its father and could not be naturalized elsewhere. Generally husband and wife came from different hordes, and residence was patri-virilocal.

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1. Cf. Meggitt 1962a:52. Communities of the desert Walbiri, although similar in structure to Gidjingali communities, were larger and also lived in territories limited by mythologically-defined boundaries. In bad seasons members of one community occasionally sought permission from those of another to live with them until conditions improved. The visitors were usually made welcome, even though the hosts suffered hardship as a result of their presence.

Thus at any given time the horde consisted of the males and unmarried females who were members by birth, together with the wives of the male members. Each horde territory contained one or more totemic sites.

Such a unit was unknown among the Gidjingali. First, the people who commonly lived together were members of from four to eleven patrilineal groups of both moieties. Second, although the members of each land-owning unit had certain totemic sites, they did not depend for survival on the land round about. There were no territorial boundaries, and individuals moved freely over the various estates forming the locality occupied by their community. The only exclusive relationship between a unit and its estate was in the ritual sphere (cf. Meggitt 1962a:64). From time to time each community journeyed further afield and enjoyed the hospitality of others.<sup>1</sup>

#### Amalgamation of patrilineal groups

I referred earlier to members of several patrilineal groups who abandoned their estates and joined groups in other localities. I shall now describe two of these cases in detail.

Diagram 2 includes an abbreviated genealogy of Galamagondija patrilineal group (the full genealogy is in Diagram 1) and full genealogies of Garabam and Milingawa patrilineal groups. The three together constituted the Djunawunja land-owning unit (Dua moiety, Table 1, No.1).

The original sites of Garabam group (Dua) were in the northern part of the area occupied by the Gunadba community (Map 1). A3 married a

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1. Elsewhere I have presented evidence suggesting that Radcliffe-Brown's account did not apply to Aborigines in other parts of Australia as well (1962).

Nagara woman who returned to her own community after he died. Her children (B12, B13) grew up as members of the Djunawunja land-owning unit<sup>1</sup> and, although present-day members thought the genitor may have been a Djunawunja man, no one was sure whether the mother had re-married or whether they had been born before or after A3's death. No one could remember the Mother's name.

Thus it seems likely that some member of the original Djunawunja unit (Galamagondija patrilineal group) married A3's widow and brought up her two boys as members of the previous husband's patrilineal group. It so happened that the only recent members of the group were the agnatic descendants of one of them. It is of interest that C17 married a Gunadba woman and often visited her community, which was once his FF's.

The original totemic sites of Milingawa group (Dua) were near Cape Stewart. B14 of the Maringa community married a Nagara woman who, like the wife of A3 in the previous case, returned to her own community after her husband died. Her two sons (C19, C20) married Anbara women, lived with the Anbara community, and became members of the Djunawunja unit. Although descendants of B14 (who were the only known members of Milingawa) did not live in the Cape Stewart region, they retained rights over designs associated with the totemic sites of their agnatic forbears and shared them with the other two patrilineal groups in the Djunawunja unit. (I assume the same applied to designs associated with the original Garabam sites, but I did not see them used and neglected to inquire about them.)

It is relevant to consider here the case of C16 (Galamagondija).

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1. Djunawunja unit included both Anbara and Nagara (see next section).



His father and the father of C12 belonged to different communities (Gunadba and Nagara respectively), but their mothers were sisters of the Anbara community. The two families often visited each other, and C12 became C16's guardian after his father and FB died. C12 lived from that time with the Anbara; and later he occupied a hut next to C12's at Maningrida.

For many years C16 has regarded himself, and has been regarded by others, as a member of Galamagondija group. In 1960 there were four living members of his father's patrilineal group, but he took no special interest in them and, on occasions, spoke disparagingly of his father's community. At the same time, he continued to exercise ritual rights as though still a member of his father's group, as well as exercising rights as a member of his adopted group. This did not appear to arouse ill-feeling, although it should be noted that the remaining members of his father's group were women and children only.

Changes in patrilineal group membership, as distinct from group amalgamation, were rare. I recorded only one other case.

#### Transmission of language

Although many individuals spoke two or three tongues fluently and understood several others, they named one as really their language when asked "What do you speak?". I shall refer to this as a primary language.

Offspring of intra-community marriages named as their primary language the speech of their parents. But, although residence was normally patrilocal, not all children of parents whose primary languages were different named that of the father. Often this was because the mother had re-married within her own community after the death of her first husband, taking his children with her; or because children of a marriage within the community

had accompanied their mother when she re-married out of it. In a sample of 26 marriages in which husband and wife spoke different languages, offspring of seventeen regarded the father's tongue as theirs, the offspring of nine the mother's.

In 1960 twenty-two members of the Djunawunja unit (see previous section) named Gidjingali as their primary language and regarded themselves as belonging to the Anbara community; the remaining thirteen named Nagara and regarded themselves as belonging to the Nagara community. Galamagondija, the original patrilineal group, once consisted exclusively of Nagara. By 1960 it comprised eighteen whose primary tongue was Gidjingali, seven whose primary tongue was Nagara. Gidjingali had been the language of mothers of all who had not followed their fathers. The six members of Garabam group spoke Nagara, the four members of Milingawa group Gidjingali.<sup>1</sup>

#### Primary residential groupings at Maningrida

Map 6 shows Maningrida native village and settlement buildings at the end of the wet season in 1960. The people were all living in bark dwellings (modern or traditional), and head-high Spear grass divided the village into clusters of buildings in separate clearings. I have assigned dwellings to linguistic groups (Gidjingali, Nagara, etc.) according to the primary language

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1. R. and C. Berndt (1951:33) stated that: "The Liverpool groups too have been gradually displaced, within recent years, by westward pressure of people from Cape Stewart and south of Milingimbi, and many of them forced to fluctuate between Goulburn Island, Oempelli, and the Buffalo camps". The small westward extension of the Gidjingali language area I have just described occurred when people whose forbears were Nagara accepted a few Gidjingali as joint owners of their totemic sites, and when some of them chose to live with the Anbara. I found no evidence whatsoever of territorial displacement and suggest that people who fluctuated between white centres did so voluntarily.

of the owner. Ordinarily he was a man occupying the dwelling with his wife or wives and their unmarried children. It should be mentioned that officials allowed people to build where they liked provided there was no encroachment on the European section.

The earliest arrivals built along the beach head (the large clearing in the north-west corner of Map 6). Western Gidjingali, mostly Abara, occupied the eastern section, Gunavidji the western, and Nagara the middle. Later some of the Gidjingali moved elsewhere. Gunadba, eastern Gidjingali, Djinang, and Janjango arrived in that order and settled to the south-east of those already in residence. A Gungoragoni settled in the middle of the Gunavidji section, and a Gunwinggu and Gunbalang at the western end.

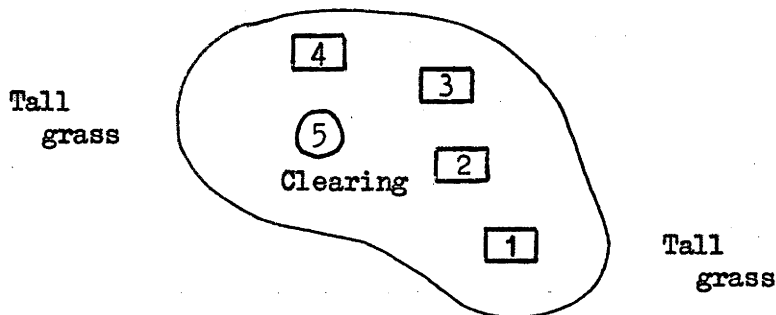
New arrivals settled near their traditional neighbours with the result that, on a reduced scale, the residential pattern roughly corresponded with spatial relationships among language areas in the Liverpool-Blyth-River region (cf. Maps 1 and 6). The Gunavidji, Nagara, Gunadba, Djinang, and Gidjingali lived in five distinguishable neighbourhoods, though the last were considerably dispersed.

The four traditional Gidjingali communities did not form separate neighbourhoods, though many clusters of dwellings included more individuals of one than of any other. But as membership had always been flexible, intermingling on the settlement required no special explanation. Even when speaking of the past, people rarely listed members of a community consistently and often referred to certain land-owning units as "half-Marawuraba, half-Madai" or "Anbara, Marawuraba mixed". The assignment of a few units to particular communities in Table 1 was therefore arbitrary.

Composition of residential clusters at Maningrida

By residential cluster I mean a number of dwellings in a clearing separated from others by tall grass. In none were all the owners members of the same land-owning unit, and they were as often related through women as through men. Thus men lived near patrilineal relatives, matrilineal relatives, or affines. I shall illustrate this by describing the formation and composition of one cluster in detail.

In 1958 Shorty owned a hut in the large north-west clearing. The following year, after his son died from a jelly-fish sting, he built a new hut on unoccupied ground in the western section and moved there with his two wives and remaining child (dwelling No.1).



Barney, who with his three wives and numerous children, had been living with Shorty, accompanied him to the new area, where he built his own hut (No.3). Two of his wives were mothers of Shorty's two wives, and Shorty (a steady worker on the settlement) regularly gave them food.

Frank, who had previously lived near Shorty and Barney, followed them to the new site and built dwelling No.4. Barney was the MB of his two wives and Shorty their brother.

Shorty, Barney, and Frank were Anbara. Michael, of the Maringa community and an unmarried son of Frank's senior wife by a previous husband, built dwelling No.2. He was subsequently joined by a younger paternal half-brother,

also unmarried.

The next arrival was an old man named Ted, of the Marawuraba community. He left his own folk after a quarrel over the marriage of his eldest daughter and established himself and his family at No.5. He had no close genealogical connection with the others but was on friendly terms with them. He went back to his previous dwelling about six months later when the trouble was over.

During Ted's residence at No.5, three unmarried members of his patrilineal group (his son, "son", and "brother") joined Michael and his half-brother at No.2. Early in 1960 Michael and one of the newcomers went to Darwin, and the others gradually drifted to other parts of the village. Jacob, an elder paternal half-brother of Michael, moved into the vacant building with his wife and infant daughter.

Frank was often visited by Les, a patrilineal group "elder brother" and a MZS. (The two men were C16 and C12, whose association I referred to in the section on amalgamation of patrilineal groups.) Les moved into No.5 with his family shortly after Ted left. A person had no proprietary interest in a hut once he abandoned it.

Table 3 lists the owners of dwellings in the new area, their affiliations, and their relationships. All residents were Gidjingali, and owners are listed in order of arrival over a period of about eighteen months. I judged that changes in residential association were less frequent at Maningrida than in the past because of the labour people invested in the construction of modern bark huts.

TABLE 3 Owners of dwellings in a single clearing.

| Dwelling | Owner   | Land-owning unit | Community  | Connection with established residents |
|----------|---------|------------------|------------|---------------------------------------|
| No.1     | Shorty  | Madang-adjira    | Anbara     | First builder                         |
| No.3     | Barney  | Gunadjangga      | Anbara     | WF (also MB) of Shorty                |
| No.4     | Frank   | Djunawunja       | Anbara     | ZDH of Barney; ZH of Shorty.          |
| No.2     | Michael | Bunbuwa          | Maringa    | Step-son of Frank                     |
| No.5     | Ted     | Managudog-adjira | Marawuraba | A friend                              |
| No.2     | Jacob   | Bunbuwa          | Maringa    | Paternal half-brother of Michael      |
| No.5     | Les     | Djunawunja       | Anbara     | "Brother" (MZS) of Frank              |

Composition of households at Maningrida

By a household I mean people who lived in the same dwelling. The most common was a single elementary or polygynous family. A few comprised two families, and many included additional relatives. Others consisted exclusively of bachelors or widows. Table 4 classifies Gidjingali households and indicates the frequency and mean membership of each type.

TABLE 4 Gidjingali households at Maningrida

| Household type   | Frequency | Mean membership      |
|--|-----------|----------------------|
| One elementary family                                  | 9         | 3.7 (range 2 to 6)   |
| One elementary family plus relatives                   | 5         | 5.0 (range 4 to 8)   |
| One polygynous family                                  | 7         | 6.4 (range 4 to 9)   |
| One polygynous family plus relatives                   | 2         | 10.0 (range 8 to 12) |
| Two families (elementary or polygynous)                | 3         | 9.0 (range 7 to 10)  |
| Two families (elementary or polygynous) plus relatives | 2         | 14.0 (range 8 to 20) |
| Bachelors  | 6         | 5.5 (range 3 to 8)   |
| Widows   | 2         | 2.0 (range 2 to 2)   |
| Total number of households .... 36                     |           |                      |
| Mean membership ..... 6.0 (range 2 to 20)              |           |                      |
| Mean wives per husband ..... 1.5 (range 1 to 3)        |           |                      |

The relationships between the male heads in four of the five households comprising or including two families were father - son, elder brother - younger brother, sister's co-wife's son ("ZS") - mother's co-wife's brother ("MB"), and maternal half-sister's husband ("ZH") - wife's maternal half-brother ("WB"). The male heads in the fifth case were trading partners of different communities (see Ch.4). Links between families and twenty relatives included in the household comprised eight patrilineal relationships (widower father, widow FZ, unmarried brother, etc.), eight matrilineal relationships (widower MB, widow mother, unmarried ZD, etc.), and four affinal relationships

(widow WM, unmarried WB, etc.). Relationships in four cases were distant.

Four of the six bachelor households each included Marawuraba and Madai men, one consisted exclusively of Anbara, and one of Maringa. Most widows were living with agnatic, uterine, or affinal relatives, but four occupied two separate dwellings.



CHAPTER 3

RITUAL ORGANIZATION

In the previous chapter I asserted that the relationship between a land-owning unit and its estate was primarily religious. I shall now support the statement by describing the organization of mortuary and circumcision rites and, though these are less relevant, gunabibi and maraian ceremonies. The first two were public transition rites, the last two secret rites performed by men only. I shall omit extensive references to mythology and symbolism, as detailed knowledge of such matters is not necessary to an understanding of roles and relationships among the actors.

#### MORTUARY RITES

The Gidjingali disposed of their dead in a complicated fashion, and I shall begin with a brief summary. First they buried the corpse in a shallow grave or exposed it on a tree platform. A few hours later men brushed those who had been near the body with leaves, a ceremony called mandjar. Then after a week or so members of the community of the deceased burned some of his possessions and poured water over his close relatives. This ceremony was known as dada. Months later folk recovered the desiccated bones and brought them back into the community in the bogabod ceremony. A close relative retained the bones for several years but at length allowed them to be put in a final resting-place during the laragan ceremony.

#### Totemic designs

Each land-owning unit had its own totemic designs, as I mentioned earlier, but the members were not allowed to draw them and for this service had to depend upon the adult sons of female members, known collectively as ngamonbeninga. Men whose MM's belonged to the unit could assist, but their

special role was to inspect the work on its completion. They were referred to as aburamari. To avoid using the vernacular, I shall translate ngamonbeninga as the "ZS group" and aburamari as the "ZDS group". Strictly-speaking, females (ZD and ZDD) and male children belonged to these groups, but only the adult males exercised ritual prerogatives.

At particular points in mortuary rites, close agnates of the deceased formally asked the ZS group to draw one or other of the designs of his unit; and from time to time members of one unit requested the drawing of their designs as a mark of respect for deceased members of others of the same moiety. Each unit had the sole right to decide when its designs could be employed. Men spoke with relish of the serious action they would take against anyone who acted without permission but could not cite instances of such infringements. Indeed, there seemed to be no reason why any should have occurred.

Designs represented totemic sites and were of two kinds - those drawn on the ground and those painted on persons and coffins. The people painted designs of the second type on the chests of youths about to be circumcised but not on corpses (cf. Warner 1937:415-6). They used ground designs only in mortuary rites. The decision of men on a given occasion to use a design representing one rather than another of their various sites seemed arbitrary.

It was believed that some of each unit's totems were harmful. These might attack anyone coming within reach except members of the ZS and ZDS groups, who were not merely safe themselves but could protect others in their company by telling the dangerous totem to go away or by appealing to deceased members of the totemic group to restrain it. Thus the dead of Djunawunja lived under the sea near the unit's estate with Fishnet, a monster that trapped passing canoes and dragged them down to its den. But if the crew included a member of

the ZS group he appealed to his dead "mothers" and "MB's" to save him and his companions. The dead people heard his cries and forcibly restrained Fishnet from attacking. If Djunawunja men happened to be travelling alone, the ancestors would not intervene because they welcomed new arrivals.

Late one afternoon I was crossing the Blyth River by canoe when one of the five natives with me uttered a cry of alarm. The paddlers increased their speed and told me to hang on as Bubuga the giant Yam (a Gubanga totem) was about to attack us. While I looked in vain for a sign of the monster, the man who gave the alarm stood up and spat in the water. He said loudly that he was a son of a woman of the Gubanga unit and ordered Bubuga to leave us alone. A few minutes later my companions assured me that we were out of danger.

It is worth noting that the man who saved his friends was the man who sounded the alarm. I have already said that men of a unit liked to proclaim their ownership of totemic designs. The present incident suggests that the ZS's of such men enjoyed demonstrating their ability to constrain their uncles' dangerous totems.

Less was made of the power of the ZDS group to control these malicious creatures. The people regularly referred to the ZS group when discussing the topic but included the ZDS group when I asked whether their statements applied to both. As they believed that constraint could be achieved indirectly through appeals to deceased relatives, the difference may reflect the expectation of more effective aid from a MB than from an older MMB in the natural world (see Ch.4).

Certain close cognates and affines of the deceased, such as the father, mother, or spouse, made gifts of food at the end of a rite to members of the ZS and ZDS groups who had drawn or inspected the design. But they did

not offer anything to the owners. Men of a land-owning unit seemed to feel that, in requesting the drawing of a design, they had fulfilled a responsibility to a deceased member or had paid respect to a deceased member of another. ZS's and ZDS's, on the other hand, considered that they had provided an essential service and expected compensation. People said that fights occurred in the past because the gifts were inadequate or had been handed to the wrong men; but they could not remember any details. Although normally prepared to describe disputes at length, they seemed less concerned here with particular incidents (that probably were trivial and infrequent) than with drawing my attention to jealously-guarded ritual prerogatives. On several occasions I heard men complain bitterly about alleged infringements that seemed either imaginary or unintentional, and my impression was that they were simply making a public affirmation of their rights (cf. Meggitt 1962a:118-9, 230).

Each ZS and ZDS group commonly comprised people of several land-owning units. Table 5 gives the adult male membership in 1960 of the six Anbara units and the adult membership and number of units represented in their ZS and ZDS groups. The last set of figures reflects the extent to which female members were dispersed in marriage among other units (see Ch.5).

TABLE 5 ZS and ZDS groups of six land-owning units.

| Unit            | Adult male membership | Adult membership of ZS group | Number of units in ZS group | Adult membership of ZDS group | Number of units in ZDS group |
|-----------------|-----------------------|------------------------------|-----------------------------|-------------------------------|------------------------------|
| Djunawunja      | 11                    | 16                           | 4                           | 3                             | 2                            |
| Gunadjangga     | 10                    | 4                            | 3                           | 6                             | 2                            |
| Armalamda-ajura | 2                     | 7                            | 2                           | 5                             | 3                            |
| Gubanga         | 21                    | 10                           | 7                           | 11                            | 6                            |
| Lala-gadjiraba  | 3                     | 7                            | 3                           | 4                             | 2                            |
| Madang-adjira   | 2                     | 4                            | 1                           | 0                             | -                            |
| Mean            | 8.2                   | 8.0                          | 3.3                         | 3.6                           | 3.0                          |

### Songs

People of the Liverpool-Blyth-River region knew seven song cycles (manigai) that they believed ghosts of the dead had composed for performance at mortuary rites. Each cycle had a different name, set of verses, and melodic structure. The words did not occur in everyday discourse and were referred to as language of the dead. It was thought that the songs had been learnt during dreams in which the sleeper's spirit visited his deceased relatives, but nobody was able to say whereabouts this had happened.

Every Gidjingali land-owning unit shared, with certain others, one and one only of the seven cycles. The joint owners belonged to the same moiety and in every case included people other than Gidjingali. Thus four Gidjingali units of Dua moiety shared the Djambidj song cycle with certain Gunbalang, Gunavidji, Nagara, and Janjango units, and possibly others further east. The

joint owners saw themselves as having a common bond (manngadaba manigai arab-irawo meant "we have the one mortuary song"), and were often trading partners (see Ch.4). Table 6 gives the name and moiety of each song, the Gidjingali joint owners, and the languages of other joint owners. The evidence indicates that the songs spread westward from north-eastern Arnhem Land.<sup>1</sup>

TABLE 6 Mortuary songs

| Song      | Moiety  | Serial numbers of Gidjingali joint owners (Table 1) | Languages of other joint owners        |
|-----------|---------|---|--|
| Djambidj  | Dua     | 1, 7, 8, 12   | Janjango, Nagara, Gunavidji, Gunbalang |
| Gojulan   | "       | 4, 6  | Janjango                               |
| Gada      | "       | 9, 15, 17   | Djinang                                |
| Djobog    | "       | 11  | Djinang                                |
| Bugula    | Jiridja | 2, 3, 5, 14, 16                                     | Janjango, Nagara, Gunavidji            |
| Gabangora | "       | 10, 13  | Djinang, Gunadba                       |
| Wulumunga | "       | 18, 19  | Janjango                               |

Each song had 20 to 40 verses about different totems. A few were totems that had created sites on estates of some of the joint owners (White Cockatoo, Crocodile, etc.), but most were not associated with any locality (North-west Monsoon, Evening Star, etc.). Some verses in different songs of the same moiety referred to the same totems but in different words.

1. Manigai appears to be a species of the north-east Arnhem Land bunggal. See Elkin 1953-6 (1953:97, 1955:134).

The performers necessarily comprised a singer accompanied by a didjeridu player but normally included several men singing in unison with a leader. The people acknowledged one individual as the foremost exponent of each cycle and sought his services even if he belonged to a distant community. But there were others who could take his place, and most men knew their own songs well enough to give support. A few, considering themselves to have little musical talent, preferred to beat time or simply listen.

The seven outstanding song leaders were old men with good voices who had applied themselves to the task of learning perfectly the words, melodies, and rhythms. Several were Gidjingali, the rest men from further east. When they visited other communities, younger local leaders deferred to them, but here I am not concerned with differences in prestige and shall use the term leader to mean whoever occupied the role on a particular occasion. The position was not hereditary, and consecutive occupants did not necessarily belong to the same land-owning units.

Throughout mortuary rites people sang the deceased's song cycle, and at the end of each phase the leader (who in many cases did not belong to the deceased's land-owning unit) intoned the names of all the owning patrilineal groups. The supporting singers were mostly owners but often included others of the same moiety who knew the song almost as well as their own and wished to pay their respects. Men were far less possessive about songs than about designs and made concessions to non-owners on the basis of common moiety associations with the totems, most of which, as I mentioned, were not connected with territorial sites. Songs of one moiety were never sung by men of the other, nor performed during their mortuary rites.

Women danced but did not sing. They tended to be best acquainted



with movements appropriate to the song of their own unit but were familiar with others and were allowed to dance to songs of either moiety.

#### Disposal of the corpse

Shortly after a death occurred, the leader of the deceased's song took up a position near the body and sang for long periods over the next few days. Others supported him, and from time to time women danced, especially close cognates and affines of the deceased. The singing continued as the body was laid to rest and ceased climactically with the leader intoning the names of all patrilineal-group owners.

Close relatives, such as the spouse, mother, and father, slept alongside the body until it was taken to the grave or tree platform, addressing it sorrowfully and occasionally embracing it. Wailing and self-mutilation were most pronounced immediately after death and as the body was laid to rest.

#### Preliminary separation

At dusk after disposal of the corpse, a close uterine or affinal relative of the deceased (ZS, WB, etc., but it did not especially matter which) dug a small hole in the camping area. The leader sat nearby and began to sing again. When all who had been to the funeral were gathered, someone lit a fire in the hole. Then, while the leader intoned the group names, several men (again their relationship did not matter) passed leafy branches through the flames and brushed the assembly. The ceremony, called mandjar, ended when everybody had been treated and the earth replaced in the hole. Afterwards close relatives of the deceased offered food to the singers and didjeridu player, who, if they were members of the deceased's unit, usually refused.

The people said that the leaves warmed the survivors and kept away

the ghost. The significance of the hole is obscure. It was referred to simply as a hole in the ground and apparently did not represent anything.

### Separation and purification

Relatives of the deceased began collecting food for the second rite (dada), held about a week later and attended by members of other communities. On the day of the ceremony members of the ZS group drew a design of the deceased's unit on the ground while singers performed nearby. By dusk the whole camp had gathered. The design contained two holes representing specific sites, usually fresh-water springs. Into a fire lit in one of them, those present threw pieces of the deceased's belongings, such as his spears, firestick, and public covering. Then close cognates and affines stood in the other while men poured water over them. The leader intoned the group names during both stages. At the end of the ceremony women rubbed out the design by dancing through it, and bereaved relatives presented food to the ZS and ZDS groups and to the singers.

The people believed that the ghost of a dead person lingered on the outskirts of the camp until it saw its property being destroyed. It then withdrew from human society and lived alone in the bush. After a death the immediate kin avoided physical contact with others and did not make gifts of food. They resumed normal relations after washing in the design, a procedure referred to by the word for ordinary bathing.

### Recovery of the bones

Close cognates and affines of the deceased collected his bones when the flesh had disappeared, wrapped them in paper bark, and took them to a bough

shade on the outskirts of the camp. That night others brushed these folk with leaves held over a flame, as in the ceremony after the funeral.

A few days later men of the community assembled in the shade. Close relatives cleaned the bones, re-wrapped them, and placed the bundle on a design drawn by members of the ZS group. The song leader then called the names over them.

The men, after daubing themselves with white clay, danced from the bough shade into the camp where the women and children waited. One of the dancers (it did not seem to matter which) carried the bones and, at the climax of the performance, placed them at the feet of the widow or widower or, alternatively, a close cognate such as the mother, father, or MB. Bereaved relatives distributed food among the ZS and ZDS groups and other performers who were prepared to accept it.

The rite celebrated the return of the deceased to the community of the living. One man remarked: "It is as though we are welcoming back someone who has been to Darwin". Bogabod was the name of the ceremony, a word that also meant the deceased in his new physical form. Thus when the dancers brought the bones into the camp, onlookers said, "The bogabod has arrived".

During the next year or so the keeper of the bones spoke to them, offered food, and slept with them. In a text I obtained describing mortuary customs, a widow said to the deceased's ZS: "Because he was my husband and I cared for him, his bones are mine and I shall care for them. From now on you may think of your uncle as though he were alive". A dead person's ghost did not accompany the bones. It watched with amusement as the people recovered them, wondering, "Who is the dead man they are busy with? It can't be me because I'm still alive". When the remains had been taken away, the ghost re-

sumed its lonely existence in the bush. Occasionally it visited the widow, who wept when it left.

Although the people merely said they practised temporary disposal because it was customary, I judged that the aim was to reduce the corpse to a manageable size without suffering the unpleasant effects of decomposition and that the main motive was to prolong physical relations with the deceased. It is significant that the bodies of small children were neither buried nor placed on a platform. Instead the entrails were removed, the corpse wrapped in paper bark, and the bundle placed on a platform near the parents' camp. From time to time the father changed the wrapping, and the mother occasionally nursed or slept with the bundle. They kept the remains for several years and finally placed them in a hollow-log coffin.

The reason for the special treatment becomes clear if we assume that bereaved relatives wished both to keep the remains and to avoid the inconvenience and unpleasantness of carrying them around. The disadvantages in the case of a small child were minimal and so the body was retained, whereas larger corpses were temporarily set apart. No ritual attended the disembowelling; one man remarked that Europeans perform a similar operation before they put poultry or fish into a refrigerator.<sup>1</sup>

### Final disposal

When bereaved relatives decided that it was time for the laragan

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1. In an unpublished paper I have argued against the view of Hertz (1907) that the purpose of reducing the corpse to bones is to release the soul from the contamination of decaying flesh, thus fitting it for a ritually-contrived incorporation into the community of the dead. Warner (1937:412-50) and Elkin (1938:295-320) have given relevant information, but the issue is outside the scope of this thesis.

ceremony, members of the ZS group found a suitable hollow log and took it to a bough shade on the outskirts of the camp. While the singers performed, they painted a design on the log and then put the bones inside, carefully packing wads of bark into both ends to keep everything in place.

The men daubed themselves with white clay. Then, while several carried the coffin, the rest danced from the shade to where the women and children waited at an arranged site some distance from the camp. They placed the coffin upright in the ground and danced around it until the song leader called the names. Food was distributed as in the previous ceremonies.

No one disturbed the remains again. The ghost still wandered about by itself and was occasionally heard moving about inside the coffin. But as time passed survivors more often dreamt they saw it living under the water with the ancestors.

#### CIRCUMCISION RITES

Every patrilineal group had a relationship called djarawara with at least one other. When a boy reached the age of about fifteen his father notified one of the djarawara relatives that it was time the youth was circumcised. At a ceremony soon afterwards this man seized the youth by the arm and took him from his parents. The next day the novice and the djarawara set out on a tour to invite guests to the circumcision ceremony (unless, as often happened, several communities were already camped together). The operation took place about a fortnight later.

### The djarawara relationship

Two patrilineal groups related in this way belonged to the same moiety. Members of each addressed members of the other as "MMB", "ZDS", "MM", or "ZDD", but were not close relatives. I shall discuss genealogical aspects of the relationship further in Chapter 4. Adult members of each made stereotyped jokes with adult members of the other, seized each other's youths to mark the beginning of their circumcision rites, and, in the past, carried out autopsies on each other's dead. Although different individuals performed these services from one occasion to another, the relationship was defined as corporate. Thus people said that patrilineal group p had a djarawara relationship with patrilineal group q. Patrilineal groups of the same land-owning did not necessarily have the same djarawara relationships.

Men often seemed reluctant to suggest to their wives that their sons were old enough to be circumcised. In several cases women quarrelled bitterly with their husbands for several days before consenting. The novice's close female cognates (mother, sister, FZ, MM) made a mock attack on the djarawara as he seized the lad, and they wept as the boy was led away. The novice's male agnates, especially his father and elder brother, regretted the women's distress but saw themselves as discharging a responsibility and looked forward to the time after the rite when the son or younger brother would take his place in the secret religious life of the men. Given this opposition of the sexes (cf. Elkin 1938:171), I suggest that in symbolically separating the lad from his family the djarawara acted as a scapegoat for the male agnates.

Joking between djarawara relatives consisted of allegations of abnormally large sexual organs or appetites and occurred both in ritual contexts and everyday encounters. It was always good-natured and appeared to be

a recognized way of demonstrating friendly relations between two groups whose members performed unpleasant duties for each other. To avoid the continual use of the native term, I shall refer to djarawara as "jokers".

### The circumciser

There was a small number of professional circumcisers among the Gidjingali (two in 1960) who had learned the art by watching and assisting an experienced operator closely related to them. A father asked a circumciser to operate on his son and later payed him for his services.

Frank, a man of about 36, was one of the best-known circumcisers in the Liverpool-Blyth-River region. He learnt from a classificatory father of his own unit who, after an operation used to rub fragments of foreskin into Frank's hair when he was a child. Later Frank became his assistant and began making incisions while still a young man. He believed that his young son would follow in his footsteps. This boy recently woke from a dream crying: "I'm cutting him, I'm cutting him...." Frank had similar dreams when he was a lad.

Frank complained to me several times that people were not paying him as much as they should. He derived great satisfaction from his reputation as a skilful operator and had circumcised so many men he could not remember all their names.

Among Aborigines elsewhere the role was defined genealogically, hence the circumciser was a different man from one occasion to the next (Roheim 1945:ch.3). Possibly professional circumcision among the Gidjingali was connected with the apparently recent adoption of the practice - Gunavidji and other people to the west did not have the custom (cf. Berndt 1952).

Seizing the novice

Initiation began with a separation rite that combined some features of those held after a death. If possible the father obtained something belonging to a dead person, but any personal item would do. On the chosen day owners of the novice's mortuary song started singing in the camp. At dusk, while the leader called the group names, those assembled threw pieces of the personal item into a fire lit in a small hole.

The father had instructed his son to wait on the outskirts of the crowd. Immediately after the ceremony ended, one of their joking relatives took the boy by the arm and led him away. Close female cognates of the novice pretended to throw spears at the joker and wailed as the pair left. Close male uterine relatives, such as the MF and MMB of the boy, also wept but did not join in the attack.

The joker and the novice retired briefly to the dwelling of the former. They returned about ten minutes later and sat near the singers. The youth's senior MB was directly behind him and his father, mother, MM, and MMB's close by. By this time the solemnity of previous events had given way to festivity. The singing and dancing continued for several hours, and visitors were often invited to perform.

At the end of the celebration the joker and the novice returned to the joker's dwelling. People referred to the youth as "deceased one" (gagaga) from the time he left his family until the bandage was removed from his penis.

Circumcision

After the joker and the novice returned from their tour of neighbouring communities, the boy's close agnates made arrangements for the oper-



ation. Early on the chosen day men gathered in a bough shade on the outskirts of the camp. Members of the ZS group painted the novice's chest with one of the designs of his unit. Then the men, led by the singers and dancers, ushered him towards a platform previously built in the camp. The women, who had been circling it in a shuffling dance, threatened the men with spears as they approached. As soon as the boy arrived at the platform, his close female relatives went away so as not to hear him cry.

The joker lay on his back full length on the platform beneath the novice. The rest of the men formed a tight circle around them so that the women and children could not see what was happening. The joker held the youth firmly during the operation, and the men made a roaring sound to drown his cries, though some stoical youths suffered in silence. The joker carried the youth away as soon as the circumciser finished.

The youth's close cognates gave food to the joker, the circumciser, members of the ZS and ZDS groups, and the singers and dancers. Celebrations continued for several hours after the operation.

#### Revelation of secrets

The next day men took the youth into the bush away from the women and children. One of his MB's sat holding him from behind while someone (it did not matter who) scraped his tongue with a piece of string. The same man then gave him the secret name of water and told him to repeat it. He offered him fresh water and, as he sipped, asked him whether it was salty. When the youth replied that it was, the man said that once the sea had been everywhere (cf. Warner 1937:287-8). The youth sipped again and this time said it was fresh water.

Later the youth stood astride stones placed on a dying fire. A man threw water on them and, as the steam rose, gave him water to drink. He spat out the first mouthful, saying: "It is hot". He then took a long draught and said: "It is cool". The man gave him the secret name of fire and told him to repeat it. (Sometimes this rite replaced that of water.)

These simple rites were a prelude to subsequent revelations of the rich complex of male secrets. The youth's tongue was scraped to ensure that he never disclosed them.

#### GUNABIBI

The Gidjingali admitted that this ceremony was new to them. Special head-dresses from southern Arnhem Land were necessary for a performance, and only a few men in the area had acquired them, either through trading partners or in Darwin. Several old men had never bothered to seek admission and stayed away when a ceremony was in progress.

Gunabibi is the name of a mythological female creator. I shall describe the organization of the last of four gunabibi ceremonies performed at Maningrida between 1958 and 1960. It began in April 1960 and finished five months later. As the first occurred shortly after my arrival, I did not make satisfactory observations, and unfortunately the following two occurred between field trips. Warner (1937:290-311) and Berndt (1951a) have described many aspects of the ceremony as it occurred further east.

The outstanding organizational feature was a division of specialized functions between the two moieties. The Dua men were the actors, the Jiridja men technicians and stagehands. The Jiridja decorated the Dua performers, tied leafy sprays to their arms, transferred accessories from one performer to

another between acts, and manufactured all the ritual objects. Preparations took place during the day. At dusk the Dua performers enacted the ritual, which consisted mainly of miming various Dua totems. Afterwards Dua and Jiridja men sang together till late in the night.

During the 1960 ritual eleven young unmarried men, referred to as wori, lived in seclusion at the ceremonial ground. Occasionally they went on hunting trips, when people said "Gunabibi has gone hunting", but they always took care never to be seen by women and children. They included members of both moieties and constituted an active core for the duration of the ceremony. Some had not participated in a gunabibi before and passed through a brief initiation rite. The others volunteered for service because it was an experience they enjoyed.

The owner of the head-dress was the man C16 (Diagrams 1 and 2) who, as I mentioned earlier, had transferred his primary allegiance from his dead father's land-owning unit to that of his guardian and MZS (C12). His father's estate included portion of a large swamp that, according to natives further south, Gunabibi had once visited. C16 had received the head-dress from a trading partner.

The outstanding figure was a close classificatory younger brother of C16 (their MM's had been sisters). This man, to whom I shall refer as the head organizer, asked C16's permission to use the head-dress and subsequently took the leading part in arranging and directing the ceremony. He consulted C16 and C12 before announcing decisions, and the three men, all of Dua moiety, referred to the ceremony as "ours". The head organizer was a Nagara aged about 35; the head-dress owner, about a year older, a Gidjingali (though his father had been Gunadba); and the owner's ex-guardian a Gidjingali of about

Although the head organizer acted in a general co-ordinating capacity, in certain matters he could not over-ride decisions reached by men of the opposite moiety. The person with the final say was the oldest member of the ZS group connected with the estate of the head-dress owner's original unit. As there was no known association between Gunabibi and the estate of the owner's adopted unit, on this occasion the ZS group connected with it had no special prerogatives.

Members of the ZDS group (Dua) of the head-dress owner's original unit had no special role in the affairs of either moiety. But an old man whose wife belonged to this unit acted as a spokesman for the Jiridja leader. The most active Jiridja man was a young ZS of the oldest of the three Dua organizers. He spent much time acquiring materials for ritual objects, organizing food supplies to the bachelors in seclusion, and in general acting as an intermediary between Dua and Jiridja.

Several Gunadba acted as song leaders during the preliminary stages but deferred to a visitor from eastern Arnhem Land at the climax. The Gidjingali regarded them all as experts and admitted they had no one to match them. One of the Gunadba song leaders was responsible for the boomerangs that came from the south and were used in the ceremony as rhythm instruments. In Table 7 I have set out the main roles and the affiliations and relationships of the occupants.

TABLE 7 Organization of a gunabibi ceremony

| Role   | Moiety          | Language   | Significant relationship   |
|--|-----------------|--|--|
| 1. Owner of head-dress and Dua assistant organizer | Dua             | Gidjingali   |  |
| 2. Dua head organizer                              | Dua             | Nagara   | MMZDS ("YB") of No.1   |
| 3. Dua assistant organizer                         | Dua             | Gidjingali   | MZS ("EB") of No. 1  |
| 4. Jiridja leader                                  | Jiridja         | Gidjingali   | Oldest member of ZS group connected with estate of No.1's original unit. |
| 5. Spokesman for Jiridja leader                    | Jiridja         | Gunadba  | Husband of female member of No.1's original unit.                        |
| 6. Intermediary between Dua and Jiridja            | Jiridja         | Gidjingali   | ZS of No.3   |
| 7. Song leaders                                    | Jiridja and Dua | Gunadba and Djambarabwingo (N.E. Arnhem Land)          | -  |
| 8. Bachelors in seclusion                          | Jiridja and Dua | Gidjingali (4), Nagara (3), Gunadba (3), Gunavidji (1) | -  |

The preliminary rituals were held at Maningrida over a period of four and a half months. The regular participants were Gidjingali, Nagara, and Gunadba, but others attended, and on occasions over a hundred men were present.

The organizers planned to hold the climax on the estate of the head-dress owner's original unit, about twenty miles from Maningrida. Just before

the agreed date a party of Europeans arrived at the settlement to collect bark paintings and asked if they could go along. As they had to leave within a week, it was necessary to know the date of the final night. I established this as best I could with the Dua head organizer and the Jiridja intermediary, and the visitors decided to set out with us.

On the morning of the appointed day the head organizer told me the Jiridja men had not finished their preparations and had postponed the climax until the following night. I explained to the men in the Dua camp that the delay meant the Europeans would have to return to the settlement without seeing anything. The reply was that they themselves would be happy to finish the ceremony as planned but had no say in the matter; the decision lay entirely with the Jiridja.

An old Jiridja man happened to be present during this conversation. After a long discussion with the Dua, he expressed the opinion that there was an obligation to the white people to finish the ceremony quickly and that this should be met. He returned to the Jiridja camp about a quarter of a mile away to discuss the matter further.

About an hour later the young intermediary invited me to the Jiridja camp, and I explained the position again. One man said it was all very well for the whites to hurry things up, but hasty and incomplete preparations meant supernatural reprisals for the blacks. Many others appeared to be in sympathy with this view. I replied that the decision was of no consequence to me and that this was their affair and they must decide as they saw fit. At that point all eyes turned to the old man whose wife came from the estate on which the ceremony was being held. He said simply: "We shall finish tonight". There was no further discussion and the ceremony did finish that night. Men

told me later that the Jiridja leader had made the decision and that the old man who spoke for him was like a lawyer.

During the final rite the head organizer led the Dua men through a trench dug by the Jiridja. This act, as he told me later, ratified the status of himself and his two classificatory brothers as the initiators and organizers of the ceremony. He alone wept when the representation of Gunabibi was allowed to fall across the trench, signifying that the rite had ended. He had saved most of his wages for several months before the gunabibi started and invested more money in it than anyone else. He told me that for his efforts his name would be known far and wide.

Throughout the ceremony Dua men had supplied Jiridja participants with food and tobacco. About a week after the concluding rite Jiridja men made a token payment to the Dua. The natives spoke of a ceremony in which Dua and Jiridja reversed roles but said they had never performed it. Probably this is the southern Arnhem Land yabuduruwa described by Elkin (1961a).

#### MARAIAN

The maraian was the main secret ritual among the Gidjingali until the gunabibi displaced it in popularity. The only maraian performed at Maningrida between 1958 and 1960 began shortly after my arrival and ended a few months later when an independently-organized gunabibi commenced. Older men occasionally expressed concern over current neglect of the maraian, but younger men said the music of the gunabibi was too sweet to be resisted.

Men translated maraian as "secret" or "Sunday business". The moiety division was the central feature of the organization, but the ritual was not connected with a single creator comparable with Gunabibi. The ceremonial

ground was divided into two halves, one Dua, the other Jiridja, and men performed dances associated with totems of their own moiety. Carved and painted wooden objects representing the totems were kept in two bough shades, one for each moiety.

Although maraian mythology recorded the journeys of totems in the area, land-owning units did not have exclusive rights over any of the representations, and there did not appear to be a clearly-defined connection between particular totems and territorial sites. The representations were common property of the moiety, and any member might make them once he had been initiated into the ceremony and taught how. In practice, men specialised in a few ritual objects only. Mostly they had learnt about these from their fathers, especially if the totem had passed through his estate, and often from trading partners in other communities. Anyone could, on his own initiative, organize a maraian ceremony. On such an occasion the men of his community and visitors from others participated, and some of both moieties prepared their totemic specialties. I have no information about the roles, if any, of the ZS and ZDS groups in the maraian.

Warner (1937:340-70), Worsley (1954:122-139), and Elkin (1961b) have described maraian or similar rituals in other parts of Arnhem Land. It is apparent that, among the Gidjingali, the dominant feature of both the gunabibi and maraian ceremonies was a common relationship between the totems celebrated and the men of their respective moieties. In contrast, the emphasis in mortuary and circumcision rites was on the exclusive religious link between an individual's descent group and its estate.



CHAPTER 4

KINSHIP AND MARRIAGE

In Chapter 2 I said that the Gidjingali were divided into nineteen land-owning units, each consisting of one or more patrilineal descent groups, and that an individual had a relationship stated in the idiom of kinship with each member of his unit. He applied the same term to all men of his father's and son's genealogical generations, another term to all women of his FZ's and daughter's genealogical generations, and so on. I shall now indicate that these relationships were merely parts of a wider system in which each individual applied a kinship term to every person he met. To understand the form and distribution of the relationships it is necessary to know how the Gidjingali defined marriage rights.

#### MARRIAGE RIGHTS

A man's right to marry certain women was defined by specifying the kinship category and patrilineal groups of their mothers. The patrilineal group affiliations of the potential brides were irrelevant.

Potential brides' mothers were of two kinds. One comprised all women who (a) belonged to the same patrilineal group as the groom's MM and who (b) were in the genealogical generation of his MMBD or a generation alternating with it. Diagram 3 shows a hypothetical relationship between a man Ego and the patrilineal group of his MM. All female members of the group in MMBD's and MMBSSD's genealogical generations are actual or classificatory sisters and address one another as djala. Ego applies the term djabur to these women and has rights to their daughters.

The other kind comprised all women whose MM's (a) belonged to the groom's patrilineal group and (b) were in the genealogical generation of his FZ or a generation alternating with it. Diagram 4 shows hypothetical relation-

ships between potential brides' mothers of this kind and Ego's own patrilineal group. Ego applies the term djabur to FZDD, "FZDD", DDD, and "DDD", and has rights to their daughters (although I recorded no case in which a man had an available DDDD or "DDDD").

In Diagrams 3 and 4 I have indicated only the rights of one man in each case. I should now add that, in Diagram 3, all DS's of Ego's MM, "MM", MMBSD, and "MMBSD" have rights to the daughters of Ego's MMBD, "MMBD", MMBSSD, and "MMBSSD"; and that, in Diagram 4, all men in Ego's patrilineal group whom he calls brother have rights to the daughters of FZDD, "FZDD", DDD, and "DDD". I shall discuss priorities later.

A woman and her brothers had a joint right to bestow her daughters in marriage. A man who had given a wife to another man could expect him to offer a girl in return. I shall refer to a pair of bestowals of this kind as niece exchange, but it is to be understood that mothers shared equal rights of bestowal with uncles.

If the first bestowal in an exchange of nieces resulted in the marriage of a man to his MMBDD, the second resulted in the marriage of a man to his FZDDD. In Diagram 5 B1 and B2 have given C1 to C2; C2 and C3 have given D2 to B1. Thus C2 has married his MMBDD, B1 his FZDDD. I should also point out that, as a result of this exchange, D1 (the son of the first recipient) has a right to F1 (the grand-daughter of the second), and that this woman is both his MMBDD and FZDDD. Sequences of this kind were rare and did not persist.

An- and djin- were male and female prefixes. A man's potential brides' mothers were indicated, first, by saying that he was ammari to a particular patrilineal group; second, by referring to particular women as

djirmari to his own patrilineal group. To say that a man Ego of group p was ammari to q meant that q was his MM's patrilineal group and that he had rights to daughters of those women of the group to whom he applied the term djabur. To say that a woman of any group was djirmari to p meant that p was her MM's patrilineal group and that men of this group who called her djabur had rights to her daughters. A woman could be both djirmari to p and a member of q, the group to which Ego was ammari, but this did not often happen.

In Gidjingali terms an orthodox bestowal was one in which a woman gave her daughter to a man who called the bestower djabur and was ammari to her patrilineal group; or to a man who called the bestower djabur and was a member of the patrilineal group to which she was djirmari; or to a man related to the bestower in both these ways. The three relationships are indicated in Diagram 6. C1 is D1's MMBD, E2 his FZDD, and E1 both his MMBD and FZDD.

In Chapter 3 I translated aburamari as the "ZDS group". Abura- was the 3rd person plural prefix attached to the stem -mari, and, for the purpose of defining ritual prerogatives, the relationship was stated as between the ZDS's and the land-owning unit of their MM's. For the purpose of defining marriage rights, the ammari and djirmari relationships were stated as between individuals and the patrilineal groups of their MM's. A man did not have rights to the daughters of those women who belonged to his MM's land-owning unit but not to her patrilineal group. Moreover, there appeared to be no socially-significant connection between ritual prerogatives and marriage rights.

For brevity of exposition I shall use (a) the abbreviation MMBD to mean male Ego's true MMBD or any member of her patrilineal group classified as her sister; (b) the abbreviation FZDD to mean male Ego's true FZDD or any

other female classified as her sister whose MM belonged to his patrilineal group; and (c) the abbreviation MMBD/FZDD to mean any woman related to male Ego both as indicated in (a) and in (b). I shall refer to the daughters of these women as MMBDD, FZDDD, and MMBDD/FZDDD respectively. The abbreviations may include true relatives and, within the specified limits, classificatory relatives of Ego.

A woman could bestow her daughter as early as the crawling stage. If she had brothers, the future husband was chosen in consultation with them and perhaps also with the sisters. They usually reached a decision harmoniously. People seemed to feel that the wishes of the mother and the senior MB were to be accorded equal respect and that both took precedence over the wishes of other brothers and sisters of the mother. They also maintained that a woman should co-operate in meeting her brother's obligations or in advancing his interests, as, for instance, by agreeing to give her daughter to someone from whom he had received or hoped to receive a spouse. I recorded an example in which a woman successfully opposed her brother's wish and another in which a man successfully opposed his sister's wish. Probably because some women had no brothers, people discussing rules of bestowal often referred only to the girl's mother. I am following this practice.

A father did not share the right to give his daughter. He often tried to influence his wife, but she was not obliged to heed him. The Gidjingali said that on this occasion "the father is nothing".

If there was no adult male with a right to a girl when she was old enough to be bestowed, her mother could promise her to somebody else. There was no bestowal or wedding ceremony. When a girl was about fourteen years of age her mother told her it was time to go to her husband. The young wife

often divided her time between his camp and her mother's until accustomed to the new status.

Polygyny was approved. One man had four wives, but few had more than two.

#### KINSHIP TERMINOLOGY

The kinship system was of the Aranda type (Elkin 1938:67), with separate terms for four male and four female relatives in Ego's grandparental generation and a total of 23 categories. I shall present the terms by considering a hypothetical closed system of relationships among four patrilineal groups p, q, r, and s, but I should stress from the outset that no system of this kind was proposed by the people as an ideal, nor, as I shall demonstrate in later chapters, did it occur in practice.

Let us suppose that men of p marry only daughters of women of q, and men of q marry only daughters of women of p; that men of r marry only daughters of women of s, and men of s marry only daughters of women of r; and that women of p, q, r, and s do not marry outside these four groups or within their own groups. Diagram 7 shows the disposition of wives in accordance with the marriage rules just stated. Circles enclose patrilineal groups, and rectangles the male or female members of alternating generations within patrilineal groups. The arrows proceeding from one rectangle to another through an intermediate rectangle indicate bestowal of ZD's. Thus men of Ego's group and his genealogical generation or generations alternating with it give women of Ego's ZD's group and her genealogical generation or generations alternating with it to men of Ego's MMBS's group and his generation or generations alternating with it.

Diagram 8 shows sixteen terms of address that, leaving aside age differences, Ego would apply to members of the sixteen categories indicated in Diagram 7. Terms of reference were formed by adding male or female prefixes. I have already discussed three of the seven additional terms based on age differences between the speaker and the person addressed (Ego applied the term gurora to his actual and classificatory younger brothers and the terms nanja and bababa to children classified as brothers and sisters of his son). As well, he employed male or female prefixes with the term gangguda when referring to children classified as brothers or sisters of his MM. Occasionally people applied the term marmunga to old or deceased classificatory brothers, especially FF, and the term maga to old or deceased classificatory sisters of their MMBDD, especially FM.

By comparing Diagram 8 with Diagram 7 we can see the distribution of Ego's relatives among the four patrilineal groups and the kinship terms he would apply to members of sixteen of the categories into which they fall. The conventional kinship diagram (Diagram 9) is a convenient way of summarising the results of such an inquiry. Columns 1 and 4 correspond to patrilineal group p and columns 5 and 8 to patrilineal group q. Patrilineal groups r and s zig-zag through columns 2 and 3, 6 and 7. It is to be understood that the diagram is merely a guide to ideal terminological usage and has nothing to do with residence (Leach 1961:56ff). Moreover, it is not a genealogy giving all marriage relationships that accord with the rules already stated. As I explained, a man has rights to various female relatives besides the one shown as his wife in Diagram 9 (MMBDD).

## SUBSECTIONS

Disregarding terminological distinctions based on age differences, we may regard Ego's relatives as members of one or other of sixteen kinship categories (younger brother belongs to the same category as older brother, immature son to the same category as adult father, and so on). In the hypothetical system considered in the previous section, each category comprises the male or female members of alternate generations within a patrilineal group. In relation to any member of the four groups, a man belongs to the same category as his FF, B, and SS, and a woman to the same category as her FFZ, Z, and BSD.

In the wider system to be discussed shortly, the natives accorded independent status to these sixteen relational categories by giving them invariable names and recognizing objective principles of recruitment. Anthropologists refer to such categories as subsections. The Gidjingali system could be presented by substituting subsection names for the sixteen kinship categories in Diagram 7. Diagram 10 is a re-arrangement of the same facts in accordance with conventional presentations. Male and female subsection names are in capital and small letters respectively, and rectangles enclose brother-sister subsection pairs. Crosses indicate marriage between members of subsections, and arrows show the affiliations of a woman's children. Thus the male and female offspring of Wamudjan women are NGARIDJ and Ngaridjan respectively.

Although the Gidjingali said they had always had subsections, evidence from elsewhere suggests that the concept spread fairly recently into Arnhem Land (Elkin 1950). Probably it is significant that some men attributed the creation of the system to Gunabibi, whose ritual they admitted to be new to them. Dua subsections were associated with particular gunabibi symbols,



and at certain stages of the ceremony individuals acted in accordance with their subsection affiliations.

Subsections had no corporate functions in secular life. People sometimes used the names as terms of address and occasionally mentioned subsection affiliations when discussing the propriety or impropriety of marriages (a distinction I shall describe later). But more often they used kinship terms for these purposes and recognized that, as an index to social relationships, the subsection system duplicated many of the functions of the terminology and served no additional uses. They seemed to regard it as a fascinating toy.<sup>1</sup>

#### TERMINOLOGY AND TERRITORIAL GROUPS

I have expounded the terminological and subsection systems by considering a hypothetical system confined to four patrilineal groups. Although such systems did not occur in practice, many individuals distinguished terminologically between four male relatives in their grandparents' genealogical generation belonging to different patrilineal groups. They applied the four basic sets of terms shown in Diagram 8 to members of these four groups.

A man addressed a woman as djabur (MMBD, etc.) only if he had a right to her daughter and a man as djabur (MMBS, etc.) only if the speaker had a right to this individual's ZD. He addressed other women classified as sisters of his potential brides' mothers as mununa, the term for MM, and other

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1. I have dealt briefly with this subject as my findings are in accordance with those recently reported by Meggitt in his detailed account of the Walbiri subsection system (1962a:ch.X).

men classified as brothers of his potential brides' MB's as djeda, the term for MMB. Thus in Diagram 11 Ego makes a terminological distinction between adjacent genealogical generations in patrilineal group q; he makes no such distinction in group p; and he makes the distinction for some members of group r but not others. A man who had not received a wife from a woman he called djabur might begin to address her as mununa when she passed child-bearing age; or he might change terms earlier to indicate resentment if he felt she had evaded her obligation.

Ideally, each individual applied to members of every patrilineal group he encountered one or other of the sets of terms for F-B-FZ-Z, ZS-WB-ZD-W, MB-MBS-M-MBD, and with exceptions of the kind just indicated, MMB-MM. The following case illustrates the extent and distribution of relationships in Liverpool-Blyth-River society. Les, a man of about 60 belonging to the Djunawunja unit (Table 1, No.1), was a distinguished song leader. In the course of my fieldwork he gave me the terms he used for about 950 living and dead Gidjingali, Nagara, and Gunavidji. Because of irregularities it is not possible to summarize these accurately as sets of terminological relationships between this man and the 33 Gidjingali, Nagara, and Gunavidji land-owning units. But it will serve as an approximation to say that he applied the F-B-FZ-Z set of terms to ten units, the ZS-WB-ZD-W set to eight, the MB-MBS-M-MBD set to six, and the MMB-MM or MMB-MMBS-MM-MMBD set to nine. He was also related to people in other communities and gave me altogether the terms he used for about 1200 living and dead. I judged that, although he had a wider genealogical knowledge than most, he was not unique among his contemporaries.

Each set of four terms, as I have indicated, was correlated with two male and two female subsections. Thus, ideally, the male members of a land-owning unit belonged to one or other of four father-son subsection pairs WAMUD-GELA, GAMARANG-BALANG, BANGADI-NGARIDJ, and GODJOG-BULEIN, and the female members to one or other of the four corresponding FZ-FD pairs. Table 8 shows the two male subsections that predominated in each of the nineteen Gidjingali land-owning units. Because of irregular marriages, many units included members belonging to different father-son or FZ-FD subsection pairs (Gubanga included men of GAMARANG-BALANG, BANGADI-NGARIDJ, and GODJOG-BULEIN).

TABLE 8 Subsections and land-owning units

|                                  | DUA MOIETY       |                 | JIRIDJA MOIETY  |                   |
|----------------------------------|------------------|-----------------|-----------------|-------------------|
|                                  | WAMUD-GELA       | GAMARANG-BALANG | BANGADI-NGARIDJ | GODJOG-BULEIN     |
| Serial number of unit in Table 1 | 1, 7, 12, 15, 17 | 6, 8, 9, 11     | 2, 3, 4, 14, 19 | 5, 10, 13, 16, 18 |
| Total                            | 5                | 4               | 5               | 5                 |

#### ROLES

Although an individual applied a kinship term to everyone in his social universe, he was not expected to behave in the same way towards all members of the one category. In practice, his affective and jural relationships differed considerably. In certain situations terminology was a sufficient guide to conduct, and often people acted in accordance with, or appealed to, an embracing kinship ethic ("A man should not utter the name of anyone he calls sister", "A man should not marry anyone he calls mother"). But for the

main part an individual's roles and expectations were more narrowly defined. I shall discuss these under five headings: economic, ritual, sexual, educational, and sustaining.

### Economic roles

A man had responsibilities to provide for his wife and young children and to make gifts of food regularly to the mother and MB's of his wife or betrothed. From time to time he distributed goods informally among close uterine and other agnatic and affinal relatives, and on the occasion of a circumcision or mortuary rite for a close agnate he helped compensate particular individuals for their services. A woman shared with her husband the task of obtaining daily nourishment for the hearth group and of meeting his obligations to others.

A hunter sometimes named spears after totems associated with sites of his land-owning unit in the belief that he would thereby be more successful. He felt obliged to share game or fish killed by such a spear with at least some members of the ZS group. But if one of the ZS's borrowed the spear, he was not obliged to share anything it killed with the owner.

Certain durable objects passed from hand to hand over long distances. The Gidjingali manufactured dilly bags, spear shafts, and some of the ritual objects used in maraian ceremonies; to them from the west and south came bamboo spear shafts, hair belts, dilly bags, red ochre, other maraian objects, and head-dresses and boomerangs for the gunabibi ceremony; and from the east stone spear- and axe-heads, food-grinding stones, dilly bags, and still more maraian objects.<sup>1</sup>

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1. For a more detailed inventory see Thomson 1949: ch.5.

These goods passed between individuals connected primarily by kinship, special trading partnerships, or common ritual affiliations. I recorded portions of chains composed of the first kind of link by asking individuals to name those who often transmitted trade goods to each other or to tell me where particular objects had come from. In the following examples the first person is named, the arrows indicate transmission of goods, and the abbreviations stand for the relationship of each individual to the one previous. Goods also travelled in the reverse direction.

(a) Malgoda → close "ZD" → H → other W → MB → S → EB → → close "F" → WB. (The seven men in this portion of the chain belonged to three different land-owning units, one Nagara, two Anbara.)

(b) Bongowoi → BW → MB → close "ZS" → MB → ZD → H. (The five men belonged to five different land-owning units, one of a community east of the Janjango, one Maringa, three Anbara.)

(c) Guramanamana → WMB → MBS → S → close "MB". (The six men belonged to four land-owning units, three Anbara, one Nagara.)

Chains of this kind were flexible and numerous. They were composed of patrilateral, matrilateral, and affinal links in many different combinations (cf. Falkenberg 1962:152-7). Those who formed them were close kin who gave perishable commodities to each other as well as trade goods.

Many individuals had formal trading relationships with men of other communities. A person could initiate such a partnership by giving someone a maraian object or his son's umbilical cord; and he might collaborate in and eventually take over his father's partnerships. The partners, usually related as distant classificatory brothers or father and son, traded when together for ceremonies, sent goods through a third person, or made special visits to each other. Chains formed by associations of this kind, for which I shall reserve

the term "trading partnership", consisted of fewer links than those of the previous type but extended over long distances.

The third kind of trading chain comprised men who owned the same mortuary song. From time to time some of the owners travelled from one community to another, performing in each a ceremony called maradjura or rom. Although not connected with anyone's death, the ritual was based on the song and helped to maintain links between owners in different communities. The hosts and visitors traded goods on such occasions but not, in my experience, as part of the ceremony (cf. Berndt 1951b).

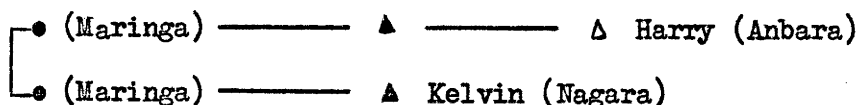
Trade goods received through one kind of link (kinship, trading, or ritual) were sometimes passed on through another; so, for example, a man receiving something from a trading partner might give it to a close kinsman who in turn might give it to a co-owner of his mortuary song. Individuals passed on some objects within a short time but retained others for longer periods or until they became unserviceable. Sometimes only a few people handled the goods, which travelled quickly from one community to another; but it often happened that objects passed through many hands and diffused slowly. Some traders were more enterprising than others and participated keenly in existing relationships and made efforts to form new ones. At Maningrida most trade goods, nowadays including articles such as iron spearheads and cloth, passed along links between close kin.

### Ritual roles

In Chapter 3 I presented the main ritual prerogatives and duties. Although these were regularly exercised and fulfilled, the system was more flexible than descriptions suggested. Here I shall give some examples of the exten-

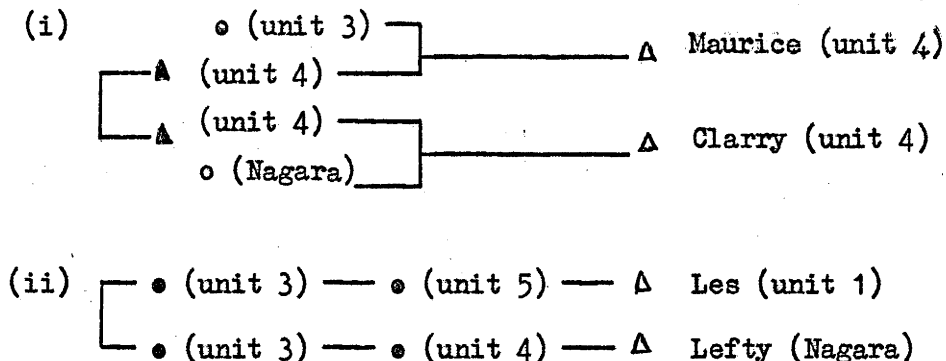
sion of privileges and services through kinship and other links and the organization of ritual roles to meet special circumstances.

A land-owning unit's totemic designs were always used for dead members, but, as I mentioned, the owners sometimes asked the ZS group to draw one after the death of an individual of another unit. In 1960 an aged Nagara named Kelvin died. About a week later members of the ZS group drew a design of his unit for the separation and purification rite. Simultaneously men of another ZS group drew a design of a different unit at the request of one of its members, a man called Harry. Those present performed the rite first in the design of Kelvin's unit and then in the design of Harry's.



Harry's FM and Kelvin's mother were sisters of the Maringa community, and Harry had regarded Kelvin as an especially close classificatory father ever since his true father died. A few days later members of a third ZS group drew a design belonging to a Djinang unit at the request of one of its members. The man who asked them was a trading partner and distant classificatory son of Kelvin.

If a unit had no ZS's or ZDS's, its designs could be drawn by men whose wives or ZH's belonged to it. Members of an existing ZS group sometimes invited such men to assist in the drawing and afterwards shared the food payments with them. ZS's also invited close patrilineal and matrilineal relatives to assist. Thus (i) Maurice and Clarry extended privileges to each other, as did (ii) Les and Lefty (unit numbers as in Table 1).



Earlier I described a joking relationship between patrilineal groups whose members seized each other's youths for circumcision and performed autopsies on each other's dead. I shall now discuss the genealogical aspects of the relationship.

As a man was expected to act with reserve towards his WM and potential WM's, he could not have joking relationships with these women or other members of their patrilineal groups. Such relationships existed only between people who called each other djeda (MMB, etc.), mununa (MM, etc.), or gang-guda (ZDS, etc., ZDD, etc.). Thus in Diagram 11 Ego might have a joking relationship with male and female members of group p, but not with those of groups q or s.

Many marriages, as I shall demonstrate later, did not result from orthodox bestowals. If, as sometimes happened, a man married a woman whose mother belonged to a group that had a joking relationship with his own, he immediately stopped participating and began to call his WM djabur. Joking between her group and the other members of his own continued as before, though offspring of the marriage were not allowed to take part because their FWM's group included their own MMBD's.

Most patrilineal groups had joking relationships with several others, usually in different communities. People spoke of these as traditional and



did not know how they had begun. In Diagram 12 group r has joking relationships with both p and s. Because Ego's WM belongs to s, he and his children must not joke with members of that group but may with members of p. Ego's SS and SD may joke with group s because their MM is not a member.

If a man had already seized a youth for circumcision, he usually invited a close agnate of that person to seize his own son. Otherwise he might ask anyone from groups with which he joked. Once I observed a woman seize a boy, but probably this did not often happen.

### Sexual roles

In the next chapter I shall demonstrate that many men married women to whom they did not have marriage rights. Table 9 indicates that such marriages were not necessarily improper. Men had rights to a small percentage only of the women they called mangga (MMBDD, etc.); yet marriages between men and any women to whom they applied this term were respectable. Marriages between men and women they called aragudja (FZD, etc.) were equally respectable. But the people regarded marriages, or the idea of marriages, between men and women of other kinship categories with various degrees of disapproval.

**TABLE 9** Moral attitudes to marriages between men and eight categories of female kin

| Classificatory kinship term applied by Ego | Moiety   | Conventional attitude to marriage   |
|--|----------|---|
| <u>mangga</u> (MMBDD, etc.)                | Opposite | Approval  |
| <u>aragudja</u> (FZD, etc.)                | "        | Approval  |
| <u>ama</u> (M, etc.)                       | "        | Mild disapproval increasing with closeness of relationship; marriage with actual mother unthinkable   |
| <u>ngalinga</u> (ZD, etc.)                 | "        | Mild disapproval increasing with closeness of relationship.   |
| <u>mununa</u> (MM, etc.)                   | Same     | Disapproval increasing with closeness of relationship   |
| <u>baba</u> (FZ, etc.)                     | "        | Disapproval increasing with closeness of relationship   |
| <u>djabur</u> (MMBD, etc.)                 | "        | Disapproval increasing with closeness of relationship   |
| <u>djala</u> (Z, etc.)                     | "        | Strong disapproval increasing with closeness of relationship; marriage with actual sister unthinkable |

A man's FZ or any other woman of her patrilineal group and genealogical generation might give her daughter to him if he had no prospects of receiving a wife through orthodox bestowal. People said she did so out of pity for her BS, and they insisted that men did not have formal rights to their cross-cousins. I shall use the abbreviation FZD to mean the daughter of a woman classified as Ego's FZ and of his patrilineal group.

I mentioned that there were special restrictions on social intercourse between a man and his WM or potential WM's. The one exception was when a person married his FZD. The relationship between a man and his FZ was familiar and affectionate, and it did not change if he married her daughter. He con-

tinued to address his WM as baba.

An individual was not supposed to utter the name of any woman he called djabur (MMBD, etc.). He might speak to her from a distance with eyes averted; but he did not joke or swear in her presence and was embarrassed if he heard others do so. A woman did not tell a man that she and her brother had decided to give her daughter to him but asked her husband to convey the information. The groom made gifts to the bestowers through a third person.

The strongest restrictions on social and sexual intercourse were those affecting the relationships of men with their actual and classificatory sisters. I shall discuss these presently.

#### Educational roles

Both parents taught the children to walk, talk, and behave in appropriate ways, but fathers were the chief technical educators of their sons, mothers of their daughters. A father taught his son to hunt, fish, and make weapons and instructed him in local topography and mythology. If the man were an outstanding singer or a professional circumciser, he encouraged the boy to acquire the same specialist skill. A mother taught her daughter where to find food, how to collect and prepare it, and how to make dilly bags from tree fibre. Fathers tended to teach sexual morality to their sons, mothers to their daughters.

Many others participated in a child's training. Boys learnt from close male agnatic and uterine relatives, girls from close female agnatic and uterine relatives. Senior male agnates were prominent among those who contributed to a man's religious education. But individuals who had a superior knowledge of particular secret rites or who were merely more voluble than others

| ROLE   | RELATIVE   |
|--|--|
| <u>Economic</u>  |  |
| a. A man gave food mainly to his ..  | Wife and children<br>WM, WMB; WF, WB<br>Close patrilineal and matrilineal kin  |
| b. A man gave trade goods mainly to his .....  | Above relatives, trading partners, and joint owners of his mortuary song   |
| <u>Ritual</u>  |  |
| a. A man was responsible for the circumcision of his .....                               | Son  |
| b. A man was responsible for mortuary rites of his .....                                 | Close agnates  |
| c. A man had a right to draw totemic designs of his .....                                | Mother's land-owning unit  |
| d. A man had a right to supervise the drawing of totemic designs of .....                | MM's land-owning unit  |
| e. A man might be invited to seize for circumcision his .....                            | Joking relatives   |
| <u>Sexual</u>  |  |
| a. A man had marriage rights to ...  | The daughters of all women who belonged to the same patrilineal group as his MM and who were in the genealogical generation of his MMBD or a generation alternating with it; and to the daughters of all women whose MM's belonged to his own patrilineal group and were in the genealogical generation of his FZ or a generation alternating with it. |
| b. A man might marry with propriety any woman to whom he applied the kinship terms ..... | <u>Mangga</u> (MMBDD and all classified with her) and <u>aragudja</u> (FZD and all classified with her)  |
| c. A man observed special restrictions on social intercourse with his .....              | Actual and classificatory sisters; WM unless also FZ; potential WM's   |
| <u>Educational</u>   |  |
| a. A child received general education from its .....                                     | Parents<br>Close patrilineal and matrilineal kin   |
| b. A boy received technical education mainly from his .....                              | Father   |
| <u>Sustaining</u>  |  |
| a. A man had obligations to support in quarrels his .....                                | MB, ZS<br>Close agnates, WMB, WB, MMB, joking relatives, trading partners, close matrilineal kinsmen<br>Members of his own community   |
| b. A man felt some responsibility towards his .....                                      | Daughter, ZD, WM   |

TABLE 10 Kinship roles

lectured novices irrespective of their relationship.

Fathers did not beat a child and took to task mothers who occasionally lost patience. Children ridiculed non-conformity among themselves, and older boys and girls occasionally hit their younger siblings.

### Sustaining roles

By this expression I mean obligations to defend, support, or avenge certain relatives. The Gidjingali regarded mutual aid as the dominant aspect of the MB-ZS relationship. A man told me: "If a man's sister gives birth to a girl, she provides him with a niece to bestow in marriage; if she gives birth to a boy, well never mind, she provides him with a nephew to fight for him". The role was taken seriously, and I recorded many instances in which it was carried out.

An individual also had loyalties to men of his land-owning unit, his WMB, WB, MMB, joking relatives, and trading partners; and to his MBS, FZS, and matrilateral classificatory brothers (MZS) not in his own unit. Indeed, my evidence suggests that active antagonists in fights within the community were regularly outnumbered by people with divided loyalties who tried to bring the conflict under control. Men often supported members of their own community regardless of relationship in fights with members of others. They felt some responsibility for their daughters, ZD's, and WM's, but were reluctant to intervene in quarrels between such women and their husbands.

CHAPTER 5

DISPUTES OVER THE ACQUISITION OF WIVES

Most of the really serious disputes were over the acquisition of wives. In this chapter I shall discuss the cause and outcome.

Only a small percentage of marriages resulted from orthodox bestowal (unions between men and their MMBDD or FZDDD as defined in the previous chapter). To understand the context in which disputes occurred, it is necessary to know why this was so and how else men acquired wives. I shall limit my analysis to the six Anbara land-owning units (Table 1, Nos.1-6), which in 1960 had combined totals of 48 adult males and 47 adult females (by "adult" I mean over the age of about fourteen).

#### DISTRIBUTION OF RIGHTS

Five men were married to at least one MMBDD or FZDDD. Nineteen did not have a MMBDD or FZDDD of marriageable age. Twenty-nine had a total of 27 mature MMBDD's or FZDDD's, but the distribution of relationships was such that only 21 male-female pairs could be formed (for example, as four men had only two MMBDD's and no FZDDD, two of them could not be matched). Thus an absence or shortage of women of the appropriate relationships was sufficient to account for the fact that over half the men were not married to women acquired through orthodox bestowal.

I examined the histories of the 27 women to discover why only five of the 29 men with rights succeeded in acquiring such a small percentage of them as wives (six altogether). I shall briefly summarise the results. (a) The women related as MMBDD or FZDDD to sixteen individuals were all married to older men, some of whom did not have rights to them. Many of the sixteen would not have been born or would still have been children when their MMBDD's or FZDDD's were old enough to be promised. (b) Three men shared a single

FZDDD who, because of marriage irregularities in previous generations, belonged to their moiety. She was married to a man from the opposite moiety who did not have a right to her. (c) Three men had MMBDD's or FZDDD's but, by the time these were old enough to be bestowed, had married other women. It appears either that the bestowers did not offer the girls, giving as a reason that the men were already married, or that the men waived their rights. (d) Two men had MMBDD's who were given to individuals without rights to them. Although the men with rights were about the same age as the husbands, they did not oppose the marriages. I was unable to discover the reason.

Of the five men married to a MMBDD or FZDDD, two had married each other's ZD, two had promised young ZD's to their respective WMB, and one had married the ZD of a dead man who had been the husband of the first man's ZD.

#### ORTHODOX AND NON-ORTHODOX MARRIAGES

By an "orthodox" marriage I mean one in which the husband had a right to the wife. As I explained earlier, certain kinds of non-orthodox marriage were quite proper.

Tables 11 and 12 relate the incidence of orthodox marriage, non-orthodox marriage, and unmarried status to the possession of rights. Of the eight unmarried women in Table 12, four were widows, three young girls whose marriages had been delayed by arguments, and one a woman whose future husband had not returned from Darwin. Their inclusion makes up the totals but is of no significance for the analysis.



TABLE 11 Men: marriages and rights

| Marital status                         | Men with at least one mature MMBDD or FZDDD | Men without any mature MMBDD or FZDDD | Totals |
|--|---|---------------------------------------|--------|
| Married to at least one MMBDD or FZDDD | 5   | -                                     | 5      |
| Married but not to any MMBDD or FZDDD  | 9   | 9                                     | 18     |
| Not married                            | 15  | 10                                    | 25     |
| Totals                                 | 29  | 19                                    | 48     |

TABLE 12 Women: marriages and men's rights

| Marital status                                       | Women related to at least one man as MMBDD or FZDDD | Women not related to any man as MMBDD or FZDDD | Totals |
|--|---|--|--------|
| Married and related to husband as MMBDD or FZDDD     | 10  | -  | 10     |
| Married but not related to husband as MMBDD or FZDDD | 12  | 17   | 29     |
| Spinster or widow                                    | 1   | 7  | 8      |
| Totals   | 23  | 24   | 47     |

Table 13 indicates the number of men in each of five roughly-determined age groups who had 0, 1, 2, or 3 wives in 1960. It does not include previous wives who had died or left their husbands.

TABLE 13 Distribution of wives among men of five age groups

| Age of husband | 0 wife | 1 wife | 2 wives | 3 wives | Total |
|----------------|--------|--------|---------|---------|-------|
| 15 - 24 years  | 14     | 1      | 0       | 0       | 15    |
| 25 - 34 years  | 7      | 4      | 1       | 0       | 12    |
| 35 - 44 years  | 0      | 2      | 3       | 1       | 6     |
| 45 - 54 years  | 0      | 2      | 0       | 2       | 4     |
| Over 55 years  | 4      | 5      | 2       | 0       | 11    |
| Total          | 25     | 14     | 6       | 3       | 48    |

Twenty-five men were unmarried, and the other 23 had a total of 35 wives. Table 14 classifies the 35 marriages according to the relationship of wife to husband. The only men with rights to their wives were those married to the six women in class A (one of the five men mentioned earlier had two MMBDD's as wives). I have distinguished class B from the others because giving a man his FZD was a recognized subsidiary to orthodox bestowal (Chapter 4). In distinguishing close from distant relationships I have assigned marriages to classes C or D if, as well as having the appropriate classificatory relationship, the partners were linked as cognates (MFZDD, MBD, etc.) This corresponds roughly with a distinction made by the natives themselves, who spoke of "close" and "distant" connections but did not apply any strict criterion.

TABLE 14 Classification of 35 marriages

| Relationship of wife to husband                                      | Kinship term applied by husband           | Right or no right to wife | Proper or improper marriage | Frequency |
|--|---|---------------------------|-----------------------------|-----------|
| A. MMBDD or FZDDD (actual or classificatory as defined in Chapter 4) | <u>mangga</u>                             | right                     | proper                      | 6         |
| B. FZD (actual or classificatory as defined in Chapter 4)            | <u>aragudja</u>                           | no right                  | proper                      | 3         |
| C. Other close classificatory MMBDD, FZDDD                           | <u>mangga</u>                             | no right                  | proper                      | 7         |
| D. Other close classificatory FZD                                    | <u>aragudja</u>                           | no right                  | proper                      | 9         |
| E. Distant classificatory MMBDD or FZD                               | <u>mangga</u> or <u>aragudja</u>          | no right                  | proper                      | 6         |
| F. Relationships other than classes A, B, C, D, or E                 | neither <u>mangga</u> nor <u>aragudja</u> | no right                  | improper                    | 2         |
| G. Relationship not determined                                       | ?   | no right                  | ?                           | 2         |
|  |   |                           | Total                       | 35        |

The husband in one of the two improper marriages (class F) was married to a classificatory mother, the other to a classificatory ZD. Several other unions were irregular if the relationship between the partners is traced in one way but not if traced in another. As little, if any, approbrium attached to these, I have assigned them to one or other of the first four classes.

The two women in class G came from outside the Liverpool-Blyth-River

region and were wed in Darwin. If we omit them from the analysis, it is apparent that husbands had rights to six wives but not to the remaining 27. Examination of genealogical and age data disclosed that there were no mature males with rights to eighteen of the 27 women at the time of marriage. That is, in order to marry upon reaching an appropriate age, these eighteen women had to wed men without rights to them. The remaining nine married men who did not have rights to them, even though others did. I shall discuss this point later. The figures indicate that a small percentage of men married women to whom they had rights, more married women to whom not they but other men had rights, and an even larger number married women to whom neither they nor others had rights.

To demonstrate how this kind of distribution came about, I shall first examine the initial bestowals of fifteen Anbara women in the original sample to whom no mature males had rights at the time. I revert to the original sample because I investigated the marriages of the women in it. Some of the 27 wives just considered were non-Anbara whose marital histories I did not record.

Table 15 classifies the relationship of each of the fifteen women to the man upon whom she was first bestowed. He was not necessarily her husband in 1960 - in some cases he had died after the bestowal or she had deserted him.

TABLE 15 First bestowals of fifteen women to whom no men had rights at the time

| Relationship as classified in Table 14 of woman to man upon whom initially bestowed | Frequency |
|---|-----------|
| B. FZD  | 1         |
| C. Close classificatory MMBDD   | 6         |
| D. Close classificatory FZD   | 7         |
| E. Distant classificatory MMBDD or FZD  | 1         |

The fifteen women were promised to thirteen men (two men were each promised two women). At the time of bestowal roughly half the men had acquired at least one wife, though not through orthodox bestowal (in which, as distinct from the kind now being considered, a girl was given to a man with a right to her). Some unmarried men had at least one unmarried MMBDD or FZDDD, the others had not. The analysis indicates that bestowers of girls to whom no men had rights promised them to married or unmarried men, and to men with or without the prospects of obtaining wives through orthodox bestowal. Examination of a wider range of cases supports these inferences.

I shall now examine the initial bestowals of nineteen Anbara women in the original sample to whom men did have rights at the time. Table 16 classifies the relationship between each woman and the man to whom she was first promised (not necessarily her present husband).

TABLE 16 First bestowals of nineteen women  
to whom men had rights at the time

| Relationship as classified in Table 14 of woman to man upon whom initially bestowed | Frequency                |
|---|--------------------------|
| A. MMBDD or FZDDD   | 11<br>(7 MMBDD, 4 FZDDD) |
| B. FZD  | 1                        |
| C. Close classificatory MMBDD   | 1                        |
| D. Close classificatory FZD   | 4                        |
| E. Distant classificatory MMBDD or FZD  | 2                        |

The nineteen women were promised to sixteen men - eleven to ten men who had rights to them, eight to eight men who had not (two men were promised several women and belonged to both categories). Five of the men with rights were already married, and seven of those without rights had acquired at least one wife, though not through orthodox bestowal. The analysis indicates that bestowers of girls to whom men had rights promised them to these individuals or to others, and to married men or bachelors. Examination of a wider range of cases supports these inferences.

So far I have demonstrated that the distribution of genealogical connections among males and females was such that, at any given time, many men were without rights to any woman of marriageable age. Likewise, many women were without men who had rights to them. Men without rights married women to whom no one else had rights; but they also married women to whom others actually had rights. Men with rights to women married only some of them. They also married women to whom no one had rights and women to whom not they but others had rights.

## POLITICS OF BESTOWAL

I shall now consider how bestowers and seekers advanced their interests in a context in which there was a chronic disproportion between the demand for wives and the supply of female relatives of the kind specified by the rule. Those with rights to give a girl in marriage (her mother and MB) stood to gain in three ways: (a) the recipient began making gifts to them from the time of bestowal and continued as long as the woman remained his betrothed or wife; (b) he had an obligation to support them in quarrels; (c) he was expected to give a niece to his WMB.

Because a single bestowal was sufficient to entail all these obligations, bestowers tried to maximize their gains by promising girls at an early age to different men. But they did not have complete freedom of choice. First, in some instances they had obligations to men to whom they were related as MMBD and MMBS or FZDD and FZDS. The oldest of a number of individuals who shared several MMBDD's or FZDDD's had a prior right to all of them, but he was expected to act generously towards the younger men. Having received one woman, he allowed his unmarried brother or "brothers" to wed others. In practice, married men, even if they had not acquired their wives through orthodox bestowal, waived rights to women in favour of individuals both with and without rights to them. Although most adult males desired at least one spouse, many seemed more anxious to display their generosity than to acquire a second or third. This attitude enabled bestowers to distribute girls widely and was a significant factor in many of the cases mentioned earlier in which women married men who did not have rights to them even though there were others who did.

Second, if there were no mature males to whom the bestowers had

genealogically-defined obligations, they sought others. They did not have to withhold the girls until someone with a right grew up. Here the range of choice was limited by rules stating the kinship relations and moiety affiliations appropriate to marriage.

Third, men sometimes pressed claims on grounds other than the possession of an orthodox right. Thus an individual might demand a wife in return for a niece previously bestowed, or he might see himself as the rightful husband of a woman because she was his brother's widow or the younger sister of a wife prematurely deceased. Again, if the bestowers revoked their promise to him in favour of someone with a prior right, he might assert that the prestations he had made since the bestowal gave him precedence over everyone else. Such arguments might be advanced alone or in conjunction with claims based on orthodox rights.

Fourth, there was the question of the relative ages of potential husbands. Bestowers preferred men in their prime and tended to ignore youths, even those with rights to the girls. At the same time they accorded no special privileges to men of advanced age and occasionally dismissed a demand with the remark that it was ludicrous for such an old man to be seeking a new wife.

I want now to consider the disposal of women from the point of view of those seeking wives. An individual promised a young MMBDD or FZDDD soon after his initiation would have been roughly 25 to 30 years old when he married her. Few men acquired their first wives like this. Of the many who did not, some, as youths, had had MMBDD's or FZDDD's, but these were already promised or married to older men; and others had not had such relatives.

Most men's prospects of acquiring wives through orthodox bestowal improved as they grew older. But from early adulthood they paid attention to



other opportunities. They might inherit widows; or they might acquire girls to whom no one had rights or when those who did have acted generously and waived them. They might even try to get women already promised or married to other men. The demographic facts were such that all aims could not be achieved by a rigid adherence to the rules, which, accordingly, were often ignored. This in turn reduced the number of orthodox marriages.<sup>1</sup>

### CASE HISTORIES

Omitting class G, I shall discuss under three headings the occurrence of 33 marriages classified in Table 14: (a) between a man and a woman to whom he had a right; (b) between a man and a woman to whom not he but at least one other had a right at the time; and (c) between a man and a woman to whom neither he nor anyone else had a right at the time. Disputes arose in connection with eleven.

#### Marriages between a man and a woman to whom he had a right

Three of the six marriages in this class took place peacefully. In one, the husband, previously unmarried, was the oldest of several men with rights. In the second, the husband, already married, was the oldest of those with rights and had previously given a niece to the woman's MB. In the third,

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1. There are some interesting similarities and differences between Gidjingali marriage arrangements and those of the Tiwi (Hart and Pilling 1960: ch.3), but I do not intend to discuss them here.

the husband was the second oldest of several men with rights; the oldest, who was already married, sanctioned the union and later received a younger sister of the woman as a second wife.

Disputes arose in the other three. Above the following accounts I have indicated the names and approximate ages (1960) of husband and wife.

Case 1 Harry (38) and Nancy (20); Diagram 13

Isobel (C1) gave her daughter Margaret to Harry (D4).

Neither he nor anyone else had a right to her, but Isobel was a close classificatory sister of Harry's MMBD, Sybil (C3).

Later Sybil promised her daughter Nancy to Tommy (D6). Nancy was Tommy's MMBDD, but Harry was the oldest of those with rights to her. Tommy was the second oldest, and Sybil bestowed her daughter on him presumably because her "sister" had already promised Margaret to Harry. Both men were unmarried.

Tommy went to Darwin before Nancy was old enough to marry and stayed there a long time. Harry married Margaret and when Tommy still did not return took Nancy as his second wife. Neither her mother nor MB objected. They were tired of waiting for Tommy and glad to have a son-in-law regularly making gifts. People gossiping about the marriage at the time remarked that even though Nancy had not been bestowed on Harry he had a right to her. He was, they said, annari to her mother's patrilineal group.

Tommy returned several years later. He was angry and threatened to cut off all social relationships with Nancy's bestowers. Later he apologized, and subsequently Isobel promised him Margaret's younger sister (D2).

Harry promised his ZD, Peggy (E1), to Nancy's MB, Jerry (C2).

Peggy became Jerry's wife in 1960.

Case 2 Shorty (35) and Mary (25); Diagram 14

Sebastian (C3) was the oldest of men with rights to Judy (C1) and Mary (C2), Shorty (C4) the second oldest. Both women were their MMBDD's.

B1 gave Judy to Sebastian, and later B3 gave Mary, a younger "sister" of Judy, to Shorty. Sebastian died just after marrying Judy, and at the end of the mourning period she married Shorty.

Mary reached marriageable age soon after. Instead of joining Judy as the second wife of Shorty, she began living with Clarry (C5), with whom she had been having an affair. Clarry had no right to her, but she was his close "MMBDD" (his MMZ and Mary's MFZ were married to the same man).

One night Shorty and two relatives went to Clarry's camp and took Mary. Although Clarry offered no resistance and allowed her to stay with Shorty, his desire for revenge became the main factor in an extended dispute that had not been resolved by the end of 1960. It concerned one of Clarry's ZD's (D1), whom he and his sister had promised to Mary's MB (B4). Clarry revoked the bestowal after he lost Mary.

Shorty had a right to Mary but in Clarry's view was unreasonable in pressing it. First, after Mary had been promised to Shorty, Shorty had acquired a wife through the death of his older brother; Clarry was unmarried and had not been promised a wife. Although Clarry had no right to Mary, he was a close classificatory younger brother of Shorty (their respective MMZ's had been married to the same man) and in the circumstances expected Shorty to act generously. Second, Clarry and his sister had previously promised her daughter to Mary's MB (he had no right to her, but neither did anyone else). Clarry expected him to give a niece in return.

Case 3 Johnny (27) and Barbara (17); Diagram 15

Johnny (B2) was the oldest of several men with rights to Barbara (D4), his FZDDD (A1 was a member of his own patrilineal group). He was about ten years her senior and thus still a boy when she had reached the age for bestowal. Barbara had spent most of her childhood in Darwin with her parents and returned with her father to Maningrida in 1960. Her mother, who had earlier deserted her father and married another man, stayed in Darwin.

After Barbara's arrival Charlie (D3) demanded that her father's promise of her to him, made some years before, be honoured. Barbara was a close "MBD" of Charlie (her father and Charlie's mother belonged to the same patrilineal group). He did not have a right to her and was already married.

I do not know why Barbara's father promised her to Charlie. Fathers sometimes promised their daughters to men who did not have rights to them and then tried to persuade the bestowers, especially the mother, to agree to the arrangement. They did so out of friendship (as when, for example, a man promised his daughter to his ZS) or for political and economic advantage.

A second man, Roland (D2), now said that Barbara's mother (C4) had promised her to him. He was not closely related to Barbara (she was a classificatory MBD) but had married her older close classificatory sister (D1) and for some time in Darwin provided food and lodging for Barbara's mother (his WMZ). It was during this period that the bestowal occurred.

Barbara's three MB's (C5, C6, C7) ignored Charlie's and Roland's claims. About a year earlier Johnny's half-sister (B3) had promised her daughter to Alan (C6), one of Barbara's MB's and an age mate of Johnny. Alan wished to give Barbara to Johnny in return. Her mother was still in Darwin, and her father remained non-committal throughout the dispute.

Johnny, still a bachelor, was in a stronger position than either

Charlie or Roland. Although these two were about 50 years of age and thus considerably older than Johnny, they were married and did not have rights to the girl. Johnny was the oldest of those who did, and his half-sister had promised her daughter to Barbara's MB. To offset his disadvantage Charlie tried to persuade his sister to give her daughter to another of Barbara's MB's, but she had already bestowed her upon another man and refused to revoke her promise. Roland did not have an available ZD.

Barbara's mother sent word from Darwin confirming that she wished her daughter to marry Roland, but her brothers took no notice and said the bestowal should never have been made. Barbara, who probably favoured the youngest of the three contenders, moved into Johnny's camp one day and became his acknowledged wife. Neither Charlie nor Roland challenged the union. But Roland declared he had been cheated and later made a determined bid to acquire another daughter of C1. He fought with several of her close relatives (see Chapter 7).

Marriages between a man and a woman to whom not he but at least one other at the time had a right

Four of the six marriages in this class were unopposed. In two, the wives were previously widows, and men with rights to them were either married or had been promised a wife. In the third, the only man with a right already had two wives. In the fourth, the wife was related to several men as FZDDD, but because of a marriage irregularity in a previous generation they addressed her as "mother". Quarrels occurred over the other two, but not between the husband and a man with a right.

Benjamin's marriages to the two sisters Iris and Delma (C5, C7) were irregular. The only persons with rights to them were his sons by a previous marriage. These treated the two women as "mothers" and did not press claims to them after their father's death. The older sister, Iris, was the wife in the fourth union just discussed.

Barney (B3), the MB of Iris and Delma, sanctioned their marriages to Frank (C1), previously a bachelor, who had no right to them, though they were his close "MMBDD" (actual MFZDD).

Not long after the marriages, David (C2) complained that Delma should have been given to him. He was a bachelor, about ten years younger than Frank and six years younger than Delma. His father was Barney, Delma's MB, and Delma was both his MFZDD and FZD. He had no right to her but felt he was as entitled as Frank, especially as Frank had acquired both sisters. Also, his own sister (C3) was married to Delma's brother (C4).

Frank asked Barney how he regarded David's complaint. Barney replied: "You are the older 'brother'. She is yours. When the time comes, your 'daughter' will give my son a wife." He was referring to Gillian (D1), the daughter of Delma and her previous husband. Gillian, aged about twelve, was djirmari to David's patrilineal group; her daughter would be his FZDDD, and he would have a right to her. Barney's suggestion that she be given to David appeased him, and he made no further complaint.

Case 5 Jackie (34) and Mamie (23); Diagram 17

Mamie (F1) was the FZDDD of Neville (D2), aged about 60 and the oldest of those with rights to her. Many years before he had murdered his brother and eloped with the wife, whom an avenger subsequently killed. Neville was crippled from an old spear wound and had never married.

When Louise (E1) offered Mamie to Neville, he declined, saying he was too old to assume the responsibility of a wife and make adequate gifts to a mother-in-law. He suggested to Louise that she give the girl to Jackie (D1). Although of a different land-owning unit, Jackie was Neville's MZS and closest "brother".

Strictly speaking, Jackie had no right to Mamie. Louise's father Brutus (D4) died soon after Louise was born, and her mother (D3) married Julius (B1). Brutus was a Gunadba, Julius a Nagara. Louise was reared in her step-father's community, and people associated her with it rather than with her father's. She regarded herself as a member of her step-father's patrilineal group.

Jackie's MM belonged to this group. As he had neither a MMBDD nor a FZDDD, he wished to regard Louise as a de facto member and thus as a woman to whose daughter he had a right. Considered as the DD of Julius instead of Brutus, Mamie was his MMBDD.

Several men (F2 to F5) were amari to Brutus's patrilineal group, and Mamie was their MMBDD. Probably because of the ambiguity of her affiliation, Louise did not promise Mamie to anyone after Neville refused. It should be noted that this man had a right to the girl irrespective of which group her mother was a member (in one case she was his FZDDD, in the other both FZDDD and MMBDD). Wallace had a right to her only in so far as her mother belonged to Brutus's group, Jackie only in so far as her mother belonged to Julius's. Louise's aim in not bestowing her daughter might have been to postpone or avoid bringing the conflicting interests to a head. Men who considered themselves cheated of a bestowal sometimes attacked the bestowers.

Although Jackie had acquired a wife in the meantime, he asked for

Mamie when she became old enough to marry. The mother refused, and the father told him that until his wife decided who Mamie's husband was to be, the girl would stay in his household. Wallace and his brothers were either in Darwin or took no part in the argument.

Jackie persisted in his attempts and at last fought her father, who split his head open. To compensate for the injury, the father said that Jackie could marry Mamie. Louise agreed, and Jackie took the girl as his second wife. Wallace had not returned from Darwin by the end of 1960, and none of his brothers made trouble.

Marriages between a man and a woman to whom neither he nor anyone else at the time had a right

Fifteen of the 21 marriages in this class occurred peacefully. Eleven followed bestowals, three took place when men married an elder actual or classificatory brother's widow, and one when a man whose wife deserted him for another said he was too old to worry about it. Disputes arose in connection with the other six.

Case 6 Bob (30) and Alison (32); Diagram 18

Eva (C2) had promised her daughter Alison to a man with a right to her who died before the girl reached puberty. The only other person with a right was already married, and, in addition, Eva had promised him Alison's younger sister. He raised no objection when Eva bestowed Alison on Malcolm (B1) but died not long afterwards.

Alison was Malcolm's ZSD, and his sister (A2) had been the wife of Alison's "elder brother" (FF). Some time after Alison married Malcolm, a man some 25 years her senior, she eloped with her contemporary "MBS" Jackie (her



mother and his father belonged to the same patrilineal group). For a time they lived with the Gunavidji. When they returned to the Blyth River, Malcolm took up his spears and swore at them ("You pair of adulterers, you are wet from sexual intercourse"). Eva quickly escorted her daughter to where she and the father were living and stood ready to protect her. Malcolm approached, brandishing his spears and still swearing, but he did not attack anyone and eventually went away.

Afterwards Jackie said: "It was her idea to elope, not mine. If I had really wanted her, I would have taken her for good". He discontinued the relationship.

Eva told Alison to return to Malcolm, but she would not do so and proceeded to have several other affairs. Her mother rebuked her many times for her immorality. At length she began to live openly with one of her lovers, a man named Bob (D3). Eva opposed the union, but Malcolm, who had another wife, merely told Bob that he expected compensation. He informed Eva that he would rather not have a woman who was so interested in other men.

Alison was a FZD of Bob, who was unmarried and had neither MMBDD nor FZDDD. People came to accept them as man and wife, and from time to time Bob gave presents to Malcolm.

Case 7 Tom (27) and Joyce (21); Diagram 19

Beth's mother (B3) promised her daughter to Jerry (C1), who had a right to her (A1 and A4 belonged to the same patrilineal group). Not long after becoming Jerry's wife, Beth eloped with a much younger man Billy (D3), to whom she was related as a distant classificatory mother. Beth and Billy were Gunadba, Jerry Anbara.

Jerry pursued the elopers but could not find them. Several months later he met Billy's older brother Alfred (D4) at a gunabibi ceremony. Jerry's close classificatory sister Sandra (C2) had bestowed her daughter Joyce on this man, but neither he nor anyone else had a right to her. Jerry made a show of attacking him but then said: "Your brother has wronged me. But I shall not hurt you, for you are an old man". He hinted that if Beth remained with Billy, Alfred would not get Joyce.

Alfred was indignant. He said that he had been giving presents to Joyce's mother for years. Jerry replied: "That's all very well, but what about me? Your brother has stolen my wife. If he does not return her, I shall see that you do not marry my niece". Sandra did not have a true brother, and Jerry was her closest relative of this kind.

Maningrida was established about a year later. There Jerry and men of his community tried to take Beth by force. Billy, with the aid of Gunadba relatives, successfully resisted the attempt, and Beth stayed with him.

In 1958 Joyce began living with Tom (D1), the son of her "MB" Jerry. Alfred, who was already married, did not oppose the match. He lived in the bush and rarely visited the settlement.

Joyce had been having sexual relations with Tom before living openly with him. She did not wish to marry Alfred, a much older man, and knew that her "MB" was against the arrangement. Although Sandra had not openly revoked her promise to Alfred, she did not raise any objection when Joyce married Tom. To do so would have meant quarrelling with her "brother"; in addition, she had acquired a young son-in-law regularly employed on the settlement.

Case 8 Cecil (46) and Nora (42); Diagram 20

The mothers of Sarah (D1) and Elaine (D2) gave their daughters to Cassius (D4). Sarah and Elaine were his classificatory FZD's.

Elaine's mother promised her second daughter Nora (D3) to Douglas (D5), a classificatory younger brother of Cassius. The two men belonged to different patrilineal groups of the same land-owning unit. By this time Sarah had died, and Cassius, who had one wife remaining, said Nora should be given to him. He had an aggressive personality and at last fought Douglas, who injured him badly. Afterwards Douglas said: "I have given you a beating. Take the woman and let us live in peace". Cassius went ahead and married her.

Some time later Nora eloped with Cecil (D6), a younger classificatory brother of Cassius and of the same land-owning unit. Cassius and his son Maurice pursued the elopers, who had joined the Nagara. They seized Nora and took her back to the Blyth River. Cecil did not try to stop them but later fought Cassius with spears and clubs. Neither injured the other seriously, but afterwards Nora said she wanted to be Cecil's wife and moved into his camp. Maurice announced that if his two "fathers" continued to fight, he would kill Nora.

Cassius and Cecil did not clash again, but Cassius assaulted his wife Elaine because her sister had deserted him. One of Elaine's close classificatory brothers (MZS) intervened and told Cassius he would kill him if he did that again.

Cecil was unmarried when he eloped with Nora and had no MMBDD or FZDDD of marriageable age. Nora remained his wife.

Case 9 Willie (30) and Daphne (28); Diagram 21

Daphne (E2) was married first to an old man named Claude (C1), who

died in 1958. By that time her mother and MB were already dead, and the only remaining member of their patrilineal group was a decrepit half-sister. She played no apparent part in Daphne's re-marriage. The acknowledged bestowers were two brothers, Roland (D2) and Cecil (D3), whose mother belonged to the same land-owning unit as Daphne's MM. They were the oldest classificatory MB's of Daphne who belonged to the ZS group of her mother's unit. Roland, the older of the two, was in Darwin when Claude died and did not return to Maningrida until after Daphne re-married.

Three days after Claude's death his close classificatory brother Kelvin (C2) tried to extract a guarantee from Cecil that Daphne would be given to him. Cecil said it was too soon after the death to discuss the matter. A week later Kelvin spoke again, and this time a fight broke out. Settlement officers intervened as people prepared to throw spears.

Kelvin, a man of about 60, was married to Daphne's older sister (E1) but had no right to her or Daphne, both classificatory FZDDD's. Several times over the next few months he claimed the widow publicly, but the declamations evoked no response. Early in 1959, five months after the death, Daphne married Willie (E3).

Daphne was Willie's classificatory MMBDD, but he had no right to her. He had been having sexual relations with her for about a year and told me that he was the father of a child born to Daphne just after he married her.

Not long before the marriage took place, Willie's close classificatory sister (MMZDD) had promised her small daughter Mabel (F1) to Cecil. He had a right to her (she was his FZDDD), but so had two older men. Although Willie did not share rights of disposal over Mabel, her mother and MB's agreed, for complicated reasons I shall not describe here, to bestow her in Willie's

interest. People said that Mabel had been given to Cecil because he had given Daphne to Willie.

When Daphne married Willie, Kelvin warned her publicly that she would die from sorcery if she persisted in the relationship. Daphne replied that she was not afraid and invited him to come up and kill her immediately if that was his wish. But if he did, someone else would kill him. She added that she had no intention of marrying him: he was too old and, in any case, was married to her sister. He should be satisfied with that. Kelvin made further threats over the next few months but eventually became reconciled.

Although Kelvin did not have a right to Daphne, no one else did, and his claim to her on the ground that she was his classificatory brother's widow was reasonable. Willie likewise did not have a right, but he possessed several advantages. First, he had managed to arrange the bestowal of his classificatory ZD on the bestower of Daphne, whereas Kelvin had no niece available. Second, he was a young man in steady employment at the settlement, whereas Kelvin received only a pensioner's rations. Third, he was a bachelor, and, fourth Daphne wished to marry him. Probably Kelvin raised the question of the widow's re-marriage so soon after the death because he was already aware of Willie's interest in her and of her bestower's intentions. The impropriety of his action weakened his claim even further.

Case 10 Toby (23) and Mary (20); no diagram

Mary was about seventeen years old when she and Toby began to have a sexual relationship. Toby, to whom she was related as distant classificatory MMBDD, had no right to her, but neither had anyone else. Some time later she moved into Toby's camp. Her bestowers opposed the union until Toby promised one of his ZD's to Mary's MB.

Case 11 Jerry (55) and Marion (55); Diagram 22

Marion's first husband Ivan (D2) was a bad-tempered man who often beat her. She complained of his cruelty and after several years of marriage eloped with Jerry, a bachelor contemporary of her husband. He addressed her as "ZD" but was not a close relative.

Ivan pursued the elopers, who had joined the Gunadba, and, when he found them, speared Marion through the thigh. She refused when he insisted that she return and stayed with Jerry among the Gunadba (his mother's people).

Ivan went back to the Anbara and said to several members of his patrilineal group: "We brothers should bring that woman back". He pointed out that she had done wrong not only by deserting him but by living with a "MB". Soon afterwards he set out with a party of warriors and, when they found the couple, attacked Jerry. The two fought with spears and gradually moved closer together. Instead of taking sides, Gunadba men and members of Ivan's party (some closely related to his opponent) urged the antagonists to stand further apart. When it became evident that the struggle was in deadly earnest, an Anbara named Harry (D3) ran to where Marion was lying weeping and plunged a spear into her buttock. Ivan and Jerry immediately stopped fighting.

Harry was a member of Ivan's patrilineal group and also a potential ZDH of Jerry (who was his MMBS). He joined the warriors out of obligation to his "brother" but knew that supporting this man meant opposing an individual from whom he hoped to receive a wife. Therefore when the fight became serious he resolved his conflicting interests by attacking the woman and bringing the combat to an end. Some years later he married Jerry's niece.

Relatives of Marion looked after her until the wound healed. She

still refused to return to Ivan and insisted on staying with Jerry whatever the consequences. When she began living with him again, Harry persuaded all concerned to come together for a discussion. At the meeting, which took place among the Anbara, Jerry asserted that Ivan's continual mistreatment of Marion was sufficient ground for her desertion. Ivan replied that he was no longer interested in the woman and that Jerry could keep her.

#### CONFLICT

The cases indicate that, although disputes over the acquisition of wives occurred in a context of scarce resources, the precipitating causes differed widely. A man who was promised a woman to whom he had a right resented losing her to an older man who also had a right (Case 1). An unmarried man who had no right to a woman felt injured when she was taken from him by a married man who had (Case 2). In several instances men became angry when women to whom they had no rights were promised to, or acquired by, others who also did not have rights. The aggrieved individual challenged the arrangement on grounds such as that the woman was the widow of his older brother (Case 9), her brother was married to his sister (C4), or she was a sister of his deceased wife (Case 8). Men protested when promises of wives were not fulfilled (Cases 3, 7) and attacked, or attempted to recover, spouses who deserted (Cases 8, 11). Bestowers or someone acting for them attempted to prevent marriages they had not sanctioned (Cases 5, 6, 10).

Not all women accepted the passive role imposed on them by the method of bestowal (Cases 2, 6, 8, 9, 11). Occasionally disputes arose because a woman refused to marry a man to whom she had been promised, especially if he was many years her senior, or when she had deserted her husband for someone

else. Most women accepted plural marriage, but some objected to the husband taking an extra wife or resisted marrying a man who already had a wife. Husbands remarked that a second wife brings trouble and, as mentioned earlier, often displayed their generosity by waiving rights or not pressing other claims. But there were exceptions (Cases 1, 2, 3, 4, 8, 9).

As well as variation in the factors initiating or contributing to disputes there were differences in the relationships between antagonists. Quarrels occurred between the bestowers of a woman and the man seeking to marry her (Cases 1, 3, 4, 5, 7, 9, 10), between two men seeking to marry the same woman (Cases 2, 8, 11), between a woman and her bestowers (Case 6), and between a man and the woman he sought to acquire or retain as his wife (Cases 6, 9, 11).

Antagonists regularly appealed to different rules or norms, or their behaviour and the comments of others indicated that each believed himself to have justice on his side (cf. Meggitt 1962a:178-9). A bachelor with no right to a woman felt that a man with a right acted selfishly when he took her as his second wife (Case 2). A MB, after revoking the promise of his niece to a man without a right, argued that his sister should never have made the bestowal and that the girl must go to a man with a right who was now old enough to be her husband (Case 3). Another individual influenced his classificatory sister against a contracted union between her daughter and the brother of a man who had stolen his wife (Case 7). In each case the recipient of the bestowal protested that he had been making gifts for some time and demanded that the promise be honoured. A man felt justified in trying to regain his wife who had deserted him for another, but she accused him of cruelty (Case 11). The usual defence of the wife-stealer was to represent



himself as a victim of the woman's desire (Case 6).

Men often withdrew their grievances when offered some form of compensation. Individuals ceased to oppose marriages when promised someone else (cf. Cases 1, 4), and a MB sanctioned a union when the husband offered him a niece in return (Case 10). A man whose wife deserted him demanded compensation in goods from the new husband (Case 6). Sometimes a person dropped his opposition after injuring his opponent or a close relative (Cases 5, 7, 8), or he withdrew from the dispute when resistance was too strong or his own case too weak to arouse much sympathy (Cases 3, 9, 11). The quarrel that began after Shorty dispossessed Clarry (Case 2) was not settled only because Clarry stubbornly refused to accept compensation. I shall discuss the resolution of disputes further in Chapter 7.

CHAPTER 6

DISPUTES OVER PROPERTY, ADULTERY, INSULT, AND INJURY

## PROPERTY

Disputes over property were rare and usually trivial. Yet it is important in the analysis of conflict to know why.

The word translated by natives as "good" was in one of its senses synonymous with "generous". It was never used to qualify sexual or religious conduct. Expressions such as "he has a soft heart" or simply "he is soft" also denoted a generous nature. A selfish person was described as "worthless", "deaf" (meaning that he ignored requests), or "one whose mouth is hard and dry" (meaning that he never offered to share).

Although an individual was expected to give willingly, he distributed goods within formal or informal systems of reciprocity and normally did not regard the obligation as a hardship. Gaining at the expense of others was not approved, but making gifts provided insurance against times of need and was a necessary condition of obtaining a wife by bestowal.

The region was rich in natural products, and, as stated earlier, land-owning units freely exploited the resources of one another's estates. People offered hospitality as a matter of course and never quarrelled over land. Often an individual, with moderate industry, skill, and luck, could produce more than he and his family needed. As most foodstuffs could not be kept for longer than a few days, he readily distributed the surplus among others.

In the dry season of 1960 I spent a month at the Blyth River. For a few hours each day about six fishermen used spears from canoes or in the shallows and usually produced enough fish for the whole camp of about 50 people. Normally the catch was distributed from person to person, but on one occasion, after an especially successful morning, the fishermen laid the haul

out on the beach, and people helped themselves at leisure. Different men fished each day, but there was no formal organization. Those who were not working spent the time sleeping, chatting, or participating in ritual (cf. McCarthy and McArthur 1960).

Individuals did not always act generously when commodities were scarce, and settlement workers sometimes remarked privately to me that their relatives continually pestered them for food and tobacco. The same men, when unemployed, complained of the selfishness of those they had previously supported. Occasionally an individual falsely stated that he did not have something in order to avoid sharing, though he never refused a request for an article known to be in his possession.

Once, when the settlement's tobacco supply was failing, numerous men wished to buy from me. At first I said I had none but relented when the shortage became acute. To distribute the few tins as widely as possible, I called up representatives from various parts of the village and divided the tobacco among them. Afterwards one of the men who had come earlier accused me of deception. He said I should have secretly sold everything to him.

The term golg meant trade goods, and angolg balawa, which natives translated as "rich man", indicated a successful trader (literally, "he-trade-goods much"). Magolg aradja (literally, "for-trade-goods he-speared-him") was a phrase sometimes used to explain death by sorcery. The people believed that the possession of dried human blood brought success in trading, and that, to obtain it, a sorcerer selected a victim, drained blood from his heart, and left him, apparently in good health, only to die a few days later. It followed that, if an individual drew attention to the success of his trading by retaining large quantities, he might be suspected as the sorcerer responsible

for some previous death. Prudent men accordingly passed on most of the objects they handled.<sup>1</sup>

Tension developed in exchange relationships when one partner failed to meet his obligations. Although people said that often disputes between trading associates arose in the past, they could not remember the details. I infer that the squabbles were not serious.

The word ann gumuda meant thief. Folk sometimes complained that some article had been stolen when it had merely been borrowed without the owner's permission. The outbursts were short-lived and inconsequential. I did not record any real theft.

#### ADULTERY

Sexual relations were private acts, and outside marriage they were furtive as well. For these reasons it is impossible to make reliable statements about the frequency of adultery. The most that can be said is that from time to time supposed instances were topics of gossip or grounds for disputes and that there was often reason for believing the suppositions might be true.

Children knew the main facts of sex from an early age and probably began experimenting as they approached puberty. A man named Frank recounted the following experience: "One night I saw Edgar and Wallace take Dora and Charlotte into the bush. There was a bright moon shining. I followed and

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1. Cf. Roheim (1933:208): "It is well known that there is no society which carried altruism so far as that of the Australian native. He will literally give the last bit ... of meat to his neighbour....But this does not prove that he really wants to do so. The mere fact that there are expressions in the language for selfishness and for liberality shows that there is such a thing as greed amongst them, but social pressure is very strong on this point...".

watched them playing. The boys used saliva to lubricate the girls' vaginas. They couldn't get the penis in. Edgar called Dora 'mother', and Wallace called Charlotte 'ZD', but we were too young to care much about the wrong kinship categories. We just copulated with anyone. But I thought to myself, 'The mothers of those girls will be very angry when they find out what they've been up to.'

The account suggests that adolescents frequently engaged in unregulated sexual play, although recognizing it as improper, and that their elders were likely to chastise them if they found out. When Frank was about eight years old, his mother told him not to play with girls but with boys of his own age. His father told him to follow the "old straight way" in sex and religion.

The same man told how he forcibly rejected the advances of a slightly older girl: "When I was about thirteen, a girl grabbed my arm and tried to force me to copulate. I picked up a stick and hit her. She cried and ran back to the camp. My father asked me what was the trouble, and I told him. Later my friend Wallace said, 'Why did you hit her? You should have copulated with her. It's a very sweet sensation'. I replied, 'I'm too young for that sort of thing. When I'm bigger, all right'."

On another occasion Frank went hunting with a distant classificatory father: "My 'father' Lex threw spears at several wallabies but missed. Then he called out to Cecily, the wife of his 'brother', who joined us in eating some fish we'd found in a trap nearby. When we'd finished, Lex told me he was going to copulate with Cecily and would ask her about me. I sneaked up to watch them. When Lex asked, she replied, 'Goodness no, he's too young. If I let him try, I'd probably swallow him up'. I ran away to where my mother was

gathering lily bulbs. Later I told my friends, and we had a big laugh."

The three incidents demonstrate conflicting pressures that formed the mature approach to adultery. On the one hand, parents told a lad that sexual relations outside marriage were improper; and, on the other, slightly older children and distant senior relatives encouraged him to have them and if he refused even tried to make him feel naive. Consequently, in later years he both accepted the moral view that adultery was wrong and also followed the practice of forming adulterous relationships.

In every case of alleged adultery recorded the man was a bachelor. This does not mean that married men never offended, but it is consistent with the view that young single men were the main culprits. I assume that the desire among bachelors to avoid or terminate a period of sexual deprivation was stronger than the wish among husbands for sexual variety (partly satisfied by polygyny). A married man also had to contend with a watchful and potentially jealous wife.

Considerations of kinship and moiety affiliations to some extent regulated extra-marital intercourse among adults, married or not. Men tended to have liaisons with women they addressed as mangga (MMBDD, etc.) or aragudja (FZD, etc.). Affairs with other females of the opposite moiety seemed less common, though they had an added piquancy. Initiated men revealing representations to novices in the maraian ceremony told the lads that these supernatural beings would punish them for sexual misconduct, particularly with women of the same moiety.

Reactions to infidelity differed. The aggrieved husband or wife might revile or attack the lover, and the husband might also abuse or beat his erring wife. A wife, too, might berate an unfaithful husband, though, as

she was at a physical and social disadvantage, she seldom hit him. The following case indicates the reaction she could expect.

At Darwin in 1960 a Daly River native, Moses, was found guilty of a criminal offence, but the court, instead of giving him a gaol sentence, sent him for six months to Maningrida. Some months after his arrival his wife attacked one of the local girls, whom she thought was having an affair with Moses. The girl's father, Jerry, came to his daughter's aid but was quickly put out of action when Moses's wife hit him on the head with a piece of angle iron. For this she paid dearly. Within five minutes seven close male relatives of Jerry had struck her, and two hours later a plane of the medical service took her to Darwin suffering from injuries and shock.

Jerry, in his late fifties, was reputed to have been a great fighter and had killed several men. His relatives were appalled by the woman's attacking him, and one of them said to me, accounting for their violence, "This is the first time in his life that old man has been hit by a woman".

I have already explained how the ethic of generosity modified behaviour in the distribution of wives and natural resources. It was also a factor in determining attitudes to adultery. The text below, given to me by a native as part of a general exposition of bestowal and marriage, describes a struggle between jealousy and magnanimity. The actors and events were imaginary and the account unsolicited.

The actors: A married man (EB)

His wife (W)

His younger unmarried brother (YB)



Dialogue 1 The wife and her husband's younger brother, with whom she is having an affair.

W: Your brother is very jealous of you. Soon you will be fighting.

YB: Yes, I've been watching him.

W: There's going to be trouble for you.

YB: I agree. I think I'll talk it over with him.

Dialogue 2 The husband and wife.

EB: You two are always laughing together.

W: You're very jealous, aren't you?

EB: Look, just say the word and I'll let him have you. You're both causing me a lot of trouble.

Dialogue 3 The husband and his younger brother.

EB: You know this woman wasn't given to you.

YB: I thought you were a reasonable man.

EB: If you'd like to spear me, say so.

YB: You know I wouldn't do that. She said she wanted me. It was not my wish to hurt you.

EB: You two have deceived me. But I am your elder brother, and I must not spear you. It would cause me too much grief.

Dialogue 4 The husband and wife.

EB: I can no longer sleep at night.

W: I thought you were a tolerant man and would sleep while I was away with him.

Dialogue 5 The husband, who has overcome his jealousy, to the wife and younger brother.

EB (to W): I'm all right now. Sleep with him today.

EB (later, to YB): You and I must not quarrel. Whenever I go away, it is you who should sleep with her. She is ours, given to us both by her mother. Her father will be angry if we fight

over her.

The text describes a man torn between a desire to insist on his exclusive sexual right and a wish to be unselfish. Each attitude accorded was a different part of the same value system in which there was both disapproval of adultery and approval of generosity. In this instance the conflict was resolved in a display of generosity, but a study of actual cases revealed that the resolution might be made in either way. A further point of interest is that, although the lover charged his older brother with behaviour that fell short of the ideal, he felt guilty about his own conduct and blamed the woman. He seemed to feel more concern over his brother's distress than contrition at a breach of the moral code.

Some individuals said they were not in favour of adultery with the wife of a true brother or MMB and addressed such women as "mother" or "ZD" to demonstrate an absence of sexual interest. At the same time they admitted that there was no objection if the husband consented. They admired a close relative who was not jealous but thought it wrong to upset one who was.

Men expected sexual privileges from those joking relatives whose wives they addressed as "FZD" or "MMBDDD". I assume this was part of the formal demonstration of friendly relations, though the following case suggested that it might also increase latent hostility.

Case 12: Diagram 23. One Sunday morning in 1960 seven young women set out from the settlement to gather food at a fresh-water swamp several miles away. Later two bachelors, Clarry (E1) and George (D4), left in the same direction, ostensibly to hunt but actually, as it emerged later, bent upon sexual adventure. On arriving at the swamp, Clarry invited Peggy (C4)

to have intercourse, and George asked Teresa (D2). The men became aggressive when they found their offers rejected, and in an ensuing scuffle they tore some of the women's clothing. Other members of the foraging party arrived on the scene, and at some point Clarry, frustrated and angry, threw a spear. Although this did not hit anyone (and probably was not meant to), it passed close to Trevor (E2), the infant son of Daisy.

Late in the afternoon of the same day, after all concerned had returned to the settlement, Bandy (D5) threw spears at Clarry and George. His complaint was that their action had endangered his "ZS", Trevor. George threw in reply, but Clarry quickly left and took no part in subsequent developments. At this point Jerry (C2) ran in to throw at George, ostensibly because a spear had landed in his camp. Rocky (D3) joined George against Bandy and Jerry, but numerous others effectively hampered the antagonists. Nobody was injured, and, by the time settlement officers arrived about ten minutes later, the fight was under control.

The incident had several puzzling features. First, although people regarded the behaviour of the two adventurers as deplorable, no one took them to task. The MB's of both girls were present during the fight at the settlement, but neither played any part. Afterwards they and several others abused George for throwing spears at his "MB" Jerry, not for his attempted seduction of Teresa. Second, the clash apparently had nothing to do with the attempt at seduction (it started when Bandy attacked Clarry and George for endangering his nephew). Jerry joined Bandy when a spear fell in his camp, yet my inquiry disclosed that Bandy had thrown it.

Jerry might have been angered by the attempted seductions for two reasons: George had approached his daughter, Clarry his wife. As he had not

clashed with Clarry, I suggested to several people that he had really wanted to attack George. Their reply was, "Perhaps. We don't know." Considering that it was proper for a man to defend his daughter, the response indicated another motive. If the misdirected spear had been the only cause of Jerry's anger, I would have expected him to attack the person who threw it; and, if he had acted as an outraged father, he would not have needed an additional excuse.

Jerry, as one of Clarry's joking relatives, had seized him for circumcision and lain beneath him during the operation. The best explanation I can offer is that the attempted seduction of his wife aroused strong feelings of jealousy that he wished to conceal. The accidental landing of the spear in the camp gave him a pretext for releasing his aggression in a roughly appropriate direction.

It is perhaps significant that Clarry withdrew from the fight when Jerry entered. It also seems important that folk were reluctant to agree with my suggestion that Jerry acted on behalf of his daughter. Probably they knew his real motive but preferred not to discuss it because they felt sympathetic to a man who had tried unsuccessfully to cope with his jealousy. In any case they clearly thought that it was his private affair and not a suitable topic for gossip. (In general, I found that people readily discussed most sexual behaviour but were reticent about motives.)

In another dispute a woman accused her husband of adultery. A few days later their small child burnt itself while the father was somewhere else playing cards. When he returned, his wife abused him for being away from home so much and neglecting the infant. A heated argument followed, and

eventually the wife hit the husband with a stick. He retired briefly and returned with two older brothers, all of them carrying weapons. Their first spear, though aimed at the wife, fell near her paternal grandmother. The old woman's son immediately attacked his daughter's assailants and within minutes had the support of several close relatives. From that point the quarrel was about the misdirected spear, and no one mentioned the domestic squabble again.

I observed only seven disputes, none serious, in which adultery was actually alleged. One was between husband and lover, two between husband and unfaithful wife, one between father and erring daughter, one between wife and unfaithful husband, and two between wife and lover. Considering the frequent rumours of liaisons, this small number indicates that many married people either ignored the affairs of their partners or did not discover them.

#### INSULT

Insult was usually a feature of conflict rather than a cause. But there was one exception: a man might attack his true or classificatory sister if he heard someone swear at her. Unless he inflicted serious injury, no one regarded the reaction as erratic or unreasonable. A father might say to his jealous son-in-law: "Stop swearing at your wife. Sooner or later her brother will hear you. Then he will spear her because you have speared him through the ear with your words. I ask you not to swear at her in his presence."

Warner (1937) observed a similar practice in eastern Arnhem Land and gave an explanation based on the assumption that the person most likely to swear at a woman was her husband. The brother's procedure, according to Warner, was a way of "saving the structure from destruction because of social

actions" (p.109). A man had an emotional attachment to his sister as a member of his immediate family and a sense of responsibility towards her as a member of his patrilineal clan. When he heard her husband swear at her, he became angry and wished to avenge the insult. But he wanted neither to precipitate a serious rift between the sister and her husband, nor to start a fight between the two clans that might lead to a general re-exchange of women. To give vent to his anger without endangering the "whole lateral structure of his clan's kinship with the rest of the tribe" (p.112), he treated the sister as though she were the culprit. The adoption of this alternative as a safety-valve indicated great brilliance in social engineering (p.93).

Warner's hypothesis failed to explain several important facts. First, he stated that a brother threw spears at his sister if he heard her husband or anyone else swear at her (p.110). Therefore, in order to account for all possibilities, it would be necessary to give special reasons for instances in which the swearer was not the husband; or, to assert that an individual placed less importance on avenging an insult to his sister than on preserving friendly relations between his own and any clan.

Second, Warner did not explain why the behaviour was peculiar to a brother. He made it clear that a father's emotional attachment and sense of responsibility to his daughter were just as strong as those of a brother to his sister, and that both men were equally concerned to maintain good relations with her husband and his clansmen (pp.110-11). As the alleged crucial factors were common to father and son, the implication was that a father attacked his daughter if he heard someone swear at her. This did not happen (p.67, fn.).

A similar objection can be made to a subsidiary hypothesis. A brother spoke of his sister as "worthless" or "rubbish" because, according

to Warner, women at marriage were lost to the clans of their husbands (p.111). Yet a man never referred in this way to his FZ or daughter.

Third, Warner stated in a different context that a brother would attack his sister if he happened to see her copulating with her husband (p.65). Apparently Warner did not think this raised a difficulty for his view that a man threw spears at his sister to avoid disrupting her relationship with the husband.

Finally, a person's desire to preserve friendly relations between his own clan and another seems rational and respectable. It is therefore odd that Warner's informants did not give it as the explanation. Instead, when questioned on the subject, they replied: "It is silly, but when I hear those words at my sister I must do something. I throw spears at her" (p.111); or, "It is just the same as if I had been hit on the head with a club when I hear that" (p.66); or again, "My heart jumps and stops, jumps and stops ..." (p.66). Warner said he made his discovery alone, while seeking the real meaning of customs that appeared inexplicable (p.109).

I studied the ordinary relationship between brother and sister in an attempt to find a better explanation. No special restraints were placed on the behaviour of a male infant towards his sister. When he reached the age of six or seven, his father told him that he must no longer sleep next to her; bathe, urinate, or defecate in her presence; or utter her name. The following case is of interest.

Sam and Albert were brothers, aged about seven and five. They had an older half-sister Gillian, about twelve, and a baby sister. In 1960 Sam's father told him he must stop sleeping near the two girls. "You rest on my arm", he said, "and leave your sisters to sleep with their mother." The boy

began to urinate and defecate in private, ceased bathing with Gillian, and would not drink from her cup. Once he told his brother to stop kissing the baby sister - a reprimand that amused the adults, for Albert was still at an age of innocence. Nevertheless, the father told both boys that they must never swear in front of their sisters.

A man did not discuss anything connected with his sister's sexual functions, and people never mentioned such matters in his presence. One evening I asked a man to describe events leading to the marriage of one of his classificatory sisters. He became unusually reticent and changed the subject to tell me how, a few weeks earlier, I had unwittingly embarrassed another individual by asking whether his sister had given birth to her child. I recalled that he had mumbled an unintelligible response and that others present immediately began to talk about something else. Apparently my question upset him so much that he was unable to finish his meal.

A youth for a short period after circumcision was not allowed to speak in the presence of his brother-in-law, though the brother-in-law could speak to, or near, him. The older man ended the formal prohibition by stroking the lad's jaws with sweat or by touching his tongue with a burning stick, but the two of them never acted together with complete freedom. No doubt this reserve was part of the general avoidance of things connected with the sister's sexual behaviour. But I cannot explain the specific practice of enforcing a period of silence on an unmarried man in the presence of his ZH, beyond suggesting that it impressed on him the requirement of constraint. People said simply that the older man would be embarrassed if he heard the lad speak.

The relationship between a man and his sister was not one of total avoidance. At Maningrida individuals married to each other's sister some-



times built huts side by side. Brothers were not supposed to look at their sisters but spoke to them from a distance with eyes averted. When I showed one native a photograph of patients in the Darwin leprosarium, he quickly looked away and thrust it back at me. Others present explained that a girl in the photograph was his classificatory sister.

When I asked men why they behaved in these special ways, they always answered that their sisters aroused feelings of shame. (They used the term ngguragadja, which denoted either shame or fear, or possibly both; cf. Meggitt 1962a:190.) Women did not say this about their brothers, although they co-operated in the prohibitions. They uttered and heard their brothers' names without embarrassment.

Some restrictions were relaxed when the brother was old and the sister very young. A man of about fifty told me that he occasionally mentioned by name his five-year-old classificatory sister and did not feel embarrassed if she urinated or defecated in his presence. He admitted that he would become more circumspect as she grew older but, unlike his younger brothers, would never feel obliged to throw spears on hearing someone swear at her.

I did not ask individuals why their sisters aroused feelings of shame because such a question would have been too disconcerting. Men disliked discussing the relationship even in general terms. I had difficulty in obtaining statements about incest, though the following data are of interest.

(a) When asked if irresponsible persons ever had sexual intercourse with their sisters, a man exclaimed: "It goes on all the time!" He added that the practice did not occur in his own community but was rife in others.

(b) On his way through the bush one day a man, Cyril, saw a woman being offered food by her brother. As she accepted, he took her in his arms.

She cried: "Let me go, brother, let me go". He then heard Cyril approaching and ran away. When Cyril asked the woman why she had cried out, she said she had seen a snake.

(c) At Maningrida in 1958 there was a quarrel over a girl's refusal to marry the man to whom she had been promised. Rumour had it that she was copulating with a slightly older classificatory brother. In 1960 a girl of about twelve bled from the vagina. When asked about it, she said her brother had tried to have intercourse. Neither incident was discussed in public.

(d) Two brothers, aged about eight and three, were frequent visitors to my tent. When I asked the older boy who was his brother's girl friend, he named their two-year-old sister.

After the age of about six, males stopped addressing their sisters by the kinship term djala (though they continued to employ it as a term of reference) and instead used a word meaning a disfiguring disease or someone suffering from it (ririgmin). As most women were not deformed, apparently the expression in this context was metaphorical - "I wish to communicate with you but find you repulsive". Possibly the term Warner translated as "rubbish" was applied to sisters in a similar sense (p.66).

Although most boys first modified their behaviour towards true sisters, they soon learnt that the prohibitions applied to classificatory sisters as well. I recorded six cases of a man attacking a woman, classified as sister, on hearing insults directed at her. In two, she was a true sister, in three a close classificatory sister, and in one a distant classificatory sister. One true sister was about eight years younger than the brother, the other about ten years older; two classificatory sisters were between 20 and 30 years younger, another a contemporary, and in a case that occurred many years

ago I did not determine the ages. Four women belonged to different land-owning units from the brothers (a further difficulty for Warner's structural hypothesis), and, as infants, five men had never had an intimate family association with the sisters.

It was evident that most men abhorred the thought of sexual intercourse between people classified as brother and sister. Their fathers and others had impressed on them from an early age that such an act was contemptible, the behaviour of dogs, and encouraged them to think of their sisters as sexless and unattractive. Yet folk believed that there were some who committed the deed. One native told me there were clean men and dirty men. A clean man felt shame towards his sister, a dirty man felt none, had intercourse with her, and did not throw spears when someone swore at her.

Swearing at a woman meant making insulting remarks about her sexual organs and appetite. Such words caused the brother immediate anguish, and he groaned, "I have been speared through the ear". It is my belief that he attacked the sister to show his revulsion. It was as though he thought, "People assume that because I have heard those words I am now thinking about my sister's genital organs. To prove I have no interest in her, I shall kill her". Given this motive, his relationship to the person who uttered the words was irrelevant.

On this view the important aspect of the brother's behaviour was his public demonstration. Usually he merely threw spears in his sister's direction, and, on one occasion when an individual speared the woman through the leg, a relative told him he had gone too far. Some men might have been more prone than others to react. Considering the small number of instances recorded, it is possible that brothers sometimes failed to respond, though no doubt

in many cases they had taken the precaution of leaving the camp when they realised a quarrel was brewing.

I had no way of telling whether the belief about dirty men who copulated with sisters was well-founded. Psycho-analytic inquiry might have shown that many who held the view had repressed incestuous wishes themselves. But the important point is that the prohibition was against an active sexual relationship that might be formed in childhood. A man did not feel shame towards his mother, and, although he would be revolted by the thought of intercourse, never threw spears when he heard someone swear at her. He did not feel impelled to demonstrate his innocence publicly because no one believed that incest between true mother and son ever occurred.

The only other female relatives towards whom a man felt shame were his actual and potential mothers-in-law, but he did not attack them on hearing insults. A significant fact was that the prohibitions were less stringent and came into operation later in his life. As stated earlier, individuals occasionally renounced the formalities when their hopes were not fulfilled, or they began to act with reserve towards a WM with whom they had previously joked. Also, a person might be especially reluctant to attack a woman from whom he hoped to receive a wife or to whom he was already under an obligation.

The people deplored incest between father and daughter but seemed to find it less offensive. I recorded two cases of fathers allegedly copulating with true daughters and two of men married to step-daughters. The active opposition came from individuals seeking the women as wives.

Sisters did not feel shame towards their brothers and did not attack them on hearing insults. My impression was that, in general, fathers imposed

a more rigid sexual morality on their sons than did mothers on their daughters.<sup>1</sup>

I have named two conditions in attempting to explain why a man threw spears at women classified as his sister: that his training instilled a feeling of revulsion from sexual relations with them and that people believed some individuals had incestuous inclinations. But they are not necessary and sufficient; it is likely that the conditions, though not the phenomenon, occurred with the same or other categories of kin elsewhere. I do not know why men of eastern Arnhem Land seized on this particular way of behaving when others subject to the same stimuli did not.

#### INJURY

The Gidjingali blamed sorcery for all serious illnesses and for all deaths that were not the result of physical violence. They even believed that sorcerers made people susceptible to wounds received in fights and murderous attacks by night. Sickness, injury, and death often provoked retaliation from the sufferer or someone acting on his behalf.

I have already described the technique in which a sorcerer supposedly pierced his victim's heart. Another method depended on burning something the victim owned or had used. Anyone could practise sorcery, though it was believed that women used only the second type.

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1. Roheim (1933:209), speaking of food distribution in Central Australia, stated that "the stronger development of the super-ego is always on the side of the male, but in the female the distributive attitude is in closer touch with Id-strivings, as it develops on the basis of maternal love".

Sickness and non-violent death

When a person fell seriously ill, his close kin appealed publicly to the sorcerer, without naming him or pretending to know who he was, and asked him to stop working his harmful magic. If the condition persisted, they accused someone directly, but allegations rarely led to fights unless the patient succumbed, and not always then.

When an old woman died in 1960, people said she had weakened her resistance to sorcery by smoking a pipe that had lain near a gunabibi head-dress. The pipe belonged to Jerry, but no one blamed him. An unknown stranger was held responsible.

A few months later Jerry's wife fell ill. He believed that someone was retaliating for the old woman's death and, in a public outburst, made insinuations about some of her close relatives. One, Joe, immediately challenged him to a fight. Jerry replied that he did not want violence but wished the magician, whoever he might be, to stop. Joe, who was married to Jerry's ZD, proclaimed his innocence. Jerry then abused him for having failed to offer a niece in return (Joe, in fact, had no sister). Jerry's wife recovered, and the matter was dropped.

When someone died, his age and possible motives for killing him were important in determining what action was taken and who was blamed. The following cases illustrate the variety of events.

(a) Jirangga was a very old man when he died, No one made an accusation of sorcery, but his son told me he supposed somebody did it, possibly a stranger.

(b) An old man Oscar of the Marawuraba community died several years

before Maningrida was established. His wife later married a Maringa called Archie. A member of the dead man's land-owning unit told me that Archie had used sorcery against Oscar in order to acquire his wife. Nobody, he said, had made an open accusation, but people knew all about it, and sooner or later someone would use sorcery against Archie to even up the score.

(c) A Janjango man and his wife, aged about twenty, arrived at Maningrida in 1960. The wife died after a short illness. Several hours after the death ten eastern Gidjingali attacked the husband, who stood near the body and made no attempt to retaliate. Many others hindered the attackers, who were mostly classificatory MB's of the dead woman, and none of the spears found its mark. Settlement officers stopped the fight. Later one of the avengers told me the husband had used sorcery because he was jealous.

(d) In 1946 a Janjango native at Milingimbi showed signs of insanity and eventually died. His brother, Jim, accused a man of sorcery and sent word to a young Gidjingali named Sebastian. Jim was the outstanding leader of Sebastian's mortuary song and had had a long association with his land-owning unit in that capacity and as a trading partner. Sebastian arrived at the mission with a party of warriors and, in an ensuing battle, wounded the accused. The next day a countryman of the wounded man killed Sebastian, and a few days later a native from eastern Arnhem Land murdered a "brother" of the native who had killed Sebastian. At this point the Native Affairs Branch intervened (Kyle-Little 1957:ch.1). Sebastian's avenger had no close kinship ties with the Gidjingali, and I did not discover his motive.

Joking relatives opened up the body to allow recognized inquest specialists to inspect the heart. Other techniques were also used, such as releasing twisted hair and observing the direction in which it pointed, although

none was regarded as infallible. Settlement officers did not allow autopsies, but relatives continued to make accusations, often with bewildering rapidity as one person after another protested innocence.

### Violent death

Between 1940 and 1960 only three Anbara men died as a result of physical injuries. Two were murdered by members of other communities; one death (that of Sebastian) was avenged by a further killing, the other was a retaliation for a previous killing. The third, who died fighting a member of his own community over a woman, was avenged when a relative murdered the woman (I shall describe this case presently). During the same period Anbara killed several men of other communities whose deaths, like that of the individual in the following case, were not avenged.

Case 13: Diagram 24 Patrick (C4) married Ruby (C3), the ZD of Alf (B4). He was Gungoragoni; his wife Gunadba, and his WMB Anbara. He and Ruby periodically lived with the Anbara, and he supplied his wife's matri-kin with trade goods from the south. Anbara spoke of him as a good friend of the community. Several years after marrying Patrick, Ruby eloped with Dick (C5), another Gungoragoni. Her husband tried to recover her, but she refused to return.

Some time later Alf died. Prior to the death there had been some trouble over a totemic design. A man had asked his ZS, Barney (C2), to draw a design on one of his hunting spears. Barney did so and later borrowed the weapon. Alf, his "father", borrowed it from him and subsequently gave it to several Gunadba. When the owner discovered what had happened, he demanded the spear back. Barney retrieved it and broke the shaft so there would be no more



trouble.

Patrick was living with the Anbara at the time of Alf's death and, having the reputation of an inquest specialist, examined his heart. He later told Barney that his "father" had been killed by Dick. He said the Gunadba to whom Alf had given the spear had been annoyed when it was taken back and had asked Dick to perform sorcery.

Shortly afterwards Barney visited the Gunadba community, in which Dick and Ruby had been living since the elopement. He told Dick he did not know who had killed Alf, but he secretly sent a message to his matrilinear "brother", Mervyn (C1), informing him of Dick's whereabouts. Mervyn formed a revenge party of eight Anbara warriors and set out with them for the place indicated. After several days they found Dick hunting alone, killed him, and returned to the coast.

The murderers expected a counter-revenge expedition, but none came. Possibly this was because the Anbara was a much bigger community than the Gungoragoni and, also, because of the part Patrick had played. By that time it was widely rumoured that he had performed sorcery against Dick, who was thus as good as dead by the time the warriors reached him.

After it became evident that there was not going to be an attack, those who had taken part in the murder submitted themselves to a formal punishment (magarada) in which other members of their community threw spears at them (see Warner 1937:174-6). When Dick's relatives heard about it, they said they would let the matter finish there. Ruby did not return to Patrick, who was killed a few years later for reasons apparently not connected with the events just described.

Several Anbara, including one of the avengers, told me that Barney

had organized the attack because Dick had "killed" his FB, Alf. Yet Patrick's desire to injure his dispossessor was obviously the crucial factor, and it is interesting that when I asked Patrick's son why the Anbara warriors had murdered Dick, he replied: "They were helping my father".

Disputes over the acquisition of wives, adultery, insult, and injury occurred within communities and between members of neighbouring communities, but alleged sorcery appears to have been the main cause of fights between widely separated peoples. (Blyth River natives rarely fought groups not shown on Map 1.) Abduction of wives by men of different communities did not happen in the recent past. People said they had heard their elders speak about woman-stealing expeditions but had not witnessed them.

The inter-community killings I recorded had three kinds of outcome. (i) Several murderers submitted to the punishment in which members of the victim's community threw spears at them. Mostly this brought the affair to a close, but in one case the throwers tried to inflict serious injury, and the occasion developed into a fight between them and the murderer's community. No one was hurt, but the murderer did not volunteer for a second punishment, and the death was not avenged. (ii) In one instance (the murder of Dick) no one sought revenge, but members of the murderers' own community put them through the spear-throwing punishment. In another the murderer stood while members of his own community threw at him and, on a second occasion, while those of the victim's community threw. (iii) In two instances someone killed the murderer. One avenger was a trading partner of the original victim and belonged neither to his community nor to that of the murderer. The other was the native of eastern Arnhem Land mentioned earlier, whose connections and motive I did not determine. Counter-revenge was not attempted in either case, and my impression

was that, in the Blyth River region at least, feuds leading to more than two deaths were rare (cf. Warner 1937:ch.6). Relatives of an unavenged victim generally attributed the death of the murderer, or some other member of his community, to an anonymous sorcerer working on their behalf.

I recorded two cases in which a man murdered another of his own community. Both killings were over women. Those wishing to avenge the deaths were as closely related to the murderer as to his victim, and in both instances they killed the woman instead. I give an account of one of these cases.

Case 14: Diagram 25 Adolf (D4) was born into a Nagara land-owning unit called Waigubuda. After the father's death in Adolf's childhood, his mother subsequently married an Anbara of the Gubanga unit. Strictly-speaking, the boy was still a member of Waigubuda, but he grew up with the Anbara, and people generally associated him with his step-father's unit. The diagram includes two of his Waigubuda classificatory brothers and four of his Gubanga classificatory brothers.

Adolf married Penelope (D3) after the death of his "brother" Arnold (D2). She had already promised her daughter, Charlotte (E1), to a Nagara named Arthur (not in the diagram), but, when the time came, the girl rejected the match. She remained with her parents, and before long it was rumoured that Adolf was having intercourse with her. Arthur challenged him to a fight, and each injured the other. But Charlotte still refused to marry and some time later gave birth to a child, of which her step-father was assumed to be the genitor.

A few years afterwards Wallace (D8) and Charlotte eloped. They had been lovers from childhood (see "Adultery"). Wallace was a classificatory brother of her step-father but, because of marriage irregularities in an

earlier generation, addressed her as "ZD".

Adolf overtook the pair and fought with Wallace, who fatally wounded him. As usual, people maintained that a sorcerer had "killed" the murdered man before he set out, but no one made a specific accusation. When the elopers returned, two "brothers" of the victim, Douglas (D5) and Slim (D6), attacked Charlotte. Slim's spear went through both her thighs. She had barely recovered when Tod (D1) speared her in the buttock. Finally, a few months later, Boris (D7) speared her through the back, and she died.

Earlier Wallace had submitted to the formal punishment, when members of his own community threw spears at him. At no time did anyone try to kill him. Charlotte's closest matri-kinsman, a Nagara, said he would take no action over her death; he admitted that Boris had acted justifiably in avenging his "brother". It was supposed that a sorcerer had "killed" Charlotte, but no one was accused.

#### Non-fatal injury

Men injured in inter-community fights often sought revenge, but when the quarrel occurred within the community they normally accepted compensation. (a) In one instance a Maringa wounded an Anbara, who later killed him as he slept. In another an Anbara injured a Gunwinggu, and several years later warriors of the two communities fought a battle lasting most of one morning. It ended when an Anbara received a minor head wound. (b) I have already described occasions when an individual accepted compensation from a member of his own community (Cases 5 and 8).

People were reluctant to interfere in quarrels between a man and his wife. If a man injured his wife in the course of a squabble over adultery or

failure to provide food, no one was likely to retaliate on her behalf unless the husband had been frequently maltreating her. Then her father or MB might remonstrate with him and possibly attack him if he persisted. No one ever avenged a woman whose brother had inflicted a wound after hearing a person swear at her. In general, injuries to women were less likely to be avenged or compensated than injuries to men.

I observed only three fights between women. In one, a woman attacked her husband's paramour, but men standing close by separated them before either had inflicted serious injury. In another, an old woman fought her daughter, whom she accused of mistreating the grandchild. Neither damaged the other, and bystanders watched with amusement. In the third, the older of two co-wives hit the younger in a domestic quarrel. The husband threatened to spear her but never did so.

**CHAPTER 7**

**CONCLUSION**

Having classified disputes according to their causes, I now propose to explain why clashes of interest did not lead to permanent breaches between individuals and groups. The main point I wish to establish is that, although opportunism over women gave rise to conflicts, it also limited them by creating cross-cutting genealogical ties. Discussion of this question requires a consideration of the dispersal of female agnates by marriage. Some reference to Levi-Strauss's view that patrilineal groups functioned as units of wife exchange is relevant here.

But the subject is of wider significance in that the facts throw light on methods of social control in Aboriginal society. In the final sections therefore I shall place my data in a broader perspective and relate them to such statements as those of Radcliffe-Brown that throughout Australia the political unit was the horde and of Elkin that the Aborigines had political leaders. It is my conviction, as I hope to demonstrate, that these writers were incorrect: at least, the Gidjingali lacked any formal system of government and their patrilineal groups were not political units.

#### TERRITORIAL GROUPS AND MARRIAGE

In his interpretation of Levi-Strauss's work Les Structures Elementaires de la Parente (1949), de Jong<sup>1</sup> distinguished four kinds of local

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1. J.P.B. de Josselin de Jong, Levi-Strauss's Theory on Kinship and Marriage (1952). My aim is to highlight certain facts of Gidjingali kinship and marriage by contrasting them with a theoretical model that seems to have at least some features in common with the one proposed by Levi-Strauss. I am giving de Jong's statements about Aranda kinship systems because they seem more explicit than those of Levi-Strauss himself.

group in an Aranda-type kinship system - one comprising those whose members belonged to a particular "father-son" subsection pair, another those whose members belonged to a different pair, and so on (pp.42-3). He spoke of direct and indirect exchanges of women between men representing local patrilineal groups (p.46) and, in discussing a variant of Aranda kinship, of marriage regulations fully concordant with a system of four patrilineal groups (p.43). The Aranda system, he went on, combined direct exchange in the same generation with two long cycles in opposite directions from generation to generation (p.46). By this I understand him to mean that men of the same generation in inter-marrying subsections exchanged sisters and that men four generations apart in them exchanged ZDDDD for FFFFZ. Thus the wives of Wamud in the Gidjingali system (Diagram 10) would be sisters of Bangadi but also ZDDDD of Bangadi men who married sisters of Wamud's FFFF.

I have represented in Diagram 26 a system of wife exchange that seems to be implied by such statements. P, q, r, and s are patrilineal groups, and arrows indicate direct exchange of sisters between men of the same generations and, also, two exchange cycles over four generations. Men of generations 1,3,5 in p and s marry each other's sisters. Also, Ego's sister in p may marry a man of s, whose ZDDDD in s may later marry Ego's SSSS in p. Viewed in this way, Ego's SSSS would receive a wife in return for his FFFFZ.

Firth (1954:12) made a statement that has a crucial bearing on this view. He drew attention to evidence indicating that often in Aranda kinship systems men did not have female relatives of the kind they were expected to marry. He then made the point that, although observers had described in theory how the varieties of Australian kinship system worked and the kinds of adjustment required to meet shortages of appropriate marriage partners, no one had presented quantitative information about the practical details.



In Chapter 5 I gave figures indicating that in the Anbara community there was a chronic disproportion between the demand for wives and the supply of female relatives of the kind specified by the rule. I described how men often obtained, or tried to obtain, women to whom they did not have rights, and how their efforts sometimes gave rise to disputes. Neither Levi-Strauss nor de Jong appear to have been concerned with demographic factors of this magnitude, and they took no note of the opportunism connected with them. I shall now present more data demonstrating that, for this reason, the model represented in Diagram 26 has no bearing on the realities of kinship and marriage among the Gidjingali.

When de Jong spoke of "sister exchange", it is not clear whether he meant that men of two groups merely married each other's sisters or actually gave them to each other. As the latter view would be incompatible with Gidjingali rules of bestowal, I shall modify the interpretation of Diagram 26 to relate it to a system in which men had rights of disposal over their ZD's. The arrows are to be understood as indicating sister exchange in the first of the senses mentioned above and, also, niece exchange. Thus, on this view, men of generations 2,4,6 in p and r married each other's sisters, but received them from bestowers in generations 1,3,5 in q and s respectively. Interpreted in this way, the diagram represents a system in which the men of any one of the four patrilineal groups exchanged nieces with the men of one other only (p and q; r and s), and in which the men and women of alternate generations in any one group married the men and women of the same generations in one other group only (generations 2,4,6 in p and r, etc.).

I shall now compare this model with the marriages of men in four actual patrilineal groups - Galamagondija, Angawa-anabama, Mararagidj, and

Anawuldja, abbreviated to Galam, Anga, Mara, and Ana, and compared with p, q, r, and s respectively in Diagram 26. The data are contained in Tables 17 and 18.

TABLE 17 Affiliations of mothers-in-law of men in four patrilineal groups

| Patrilineal group of DS's | Total number of VM-DS relationships | Patrilineal group of VM specified by Diagram 26 | Number of VM's in the specified patrilineal group | Number of VM's in other patrilineal groups |
|---------------------------|-------------------------------------|---|---|--|
| Galam (p)                 | 16                                  | Anga (q)  | 5   | 11 (in 5 groups)                           |
| Anga (q)                  | 5                                   | Galam (p)                                       | 4   | 1  |
| Mara (r)                  | 10                                  | Ana (s)   | 1   | 9 (in 4 groups)                            |
| Ana (s)                   | 18                                  | Mara (r)  | 3   | 15 (in 11 groups)                          |
| Totals                    | 49                                  | -   | 13 (27%)  | 36 (73%)                                   |

My procedure in selecting four patrilineal groups was as follows. Taking Galam (Table 1, No.1a) as a starting point, I discovered that Anga (Table 1, No.3) contained more VM's of Galam men than any other patrilineal group. Treating Galam as p and Anga as q and assuming niece exchange between men of generations 1,3,5 and 2,4,6 respectively, I established that Ana (Table 1, No.4b) contained more of their ZD's than any other patrilineal group. Treating Ana accordingly as s, I found that Mara (Table 1, No.2) contained more VM's of Ana men than any other patrilineal group. In arriving at the figures in Tables 17 and 18 I counted all the known VM's and wives of dead members as well as living. Mothers of dead wives in sixteen cases had been forgotten, which accounts for the discrepancy between totals in the two tables.

TABLE 18 Affiliations of wives of men  
in four patrilineal groups

| Patrilineal group and generation of husbands | Total number of W-H relationships | Patrilineal group of wife specified by Diagram 26 | Number of wives in the specified patrilineal group | Number of wives in other patrilineal groups |
|--|-----------------------------------|---|--|---|
| Galam (p)                                    |                                   |   |  |   |
| gens. 2,4,6                                  | 11                                | Mara (r)  | 1  | 10 (in 4 groups)                            |
| gens. 1,3,5                                  | 8                                 | Ana (s)   | 2  | 6 (in 4 groups)                             |
| Anga (q)                                     |                                   |   |  |   |
| gens. 2,4,6                                  | 3                                 | Ana (s)   | 1  | 2 (in 2 groups)                             |
| gens. 1,3,5                                  | 3                                 | Mara (r)  | 2  | 1   |
| Mara (r)                                     |                                   |   |  |   |
| gens. 2,4,6                                  | 12                                | Galam (p)   | 5  | 7 (in 5 groups)                             |
| gens. 1,3,5                                  | 7                                 | Anga (q)  | 0  | 7 (in 2 groups)                             |
| Ana (s)                                      |                                   |   |  |   |
| gens. 2,4,6                                  | 10                                | Anga (q)  | 2  | 8 (in 7 groups)                             |
| gens. 1,3,5                                  | 11                                | Galam (p)   | 1  | 10 (in 6 groups)                            |
| Totals                                       | 65                                | -   | 14 (22%)   | 51 (78%)                                    |

The totems of Galam and Ana were Dua, those of Anga and Mara were Jiridja. Regarded as groups exchanging nieces in marriage, Galam and Anga should have been of the same moiety, and Ana and Mara of the same moiety. The observed irregularities were the results of improper marriages in previous

generations. In 1960 most of the men of Ana regarded themselves as Jiridja, but affiliations of the few surviving Anga men remained unchanged. I shall not describe the improper marriages or the complications and attempts at adjustment that followed them. The significant point is that, despite the irregularity in moiety affiliations, these four groups in relation to each other came closer to the hypothetical system than any other four for which I have the relevant data.

Although in practice niece exchanges occurred between particular men, Gidjingali sometimes spoke of an exchange relationship of this kind between two patrilineal groups. When I asked a Galam man whether certain deceased men of his group had exchanged nieces with certain deceased Anga, he replied that he did not know the exact circumstances but the two groups had always exchanged nieces. Again, an Ana man, wishing to justify a disputed exchange between a member of his own group and a Mara, told me that the two groups had a tradition of exchange. Table 17 indicates that, if there had ever been such a practice in the past, it had by then broken down. Because people knew that wives were widely dispersed among patrilineal groups, they did not take seriously statements about traditional exchange relationships.

But they took seriously genealogically-defined marriage rights. In Diagram 27 I have constructed a hypothetical situation in order to discuss two rival claims to a woman. Suppose a man B4 of Anga married a woman whose mother was not of Galam, and that a man B1 not of Anga married a woman whose mother was of Galam. C1 would have a right to the daughter of B3, and C2 to the daughter of B6. An alleged tradition of niece exchange between Galam and Anga would not give C2 any right to the daughter of B3, and no one would pay any attention to him if he claimed her against C1 on this ground. I did not hear

of anyone ever making such a claim.

When I questioned people about traditions of niece exchange between patrilineal groups, it became apparent that, in answering, they were thinking about existing rather than ideal relationships. In a few cases, when asked with whom did group x exchange nieces, they named group y. Subsequent investigation revealed that, in fact, there had been a few exchanges between members of the groups named, or that exchanges were expected to occur in the near future. But in most cases people replied that members of group x married all over the place. No one ever spoke of an exchange of sisters between two patrilineal groups.<sup>1</sup>

It might be suggested that, although there were no closed systems comprising only four patrilineal groups, possibly there were systems including a large number. The system of niece exchange,  $p \begin{matrix} \leftarrow \\ \uparrow \\ \downarrow \\ \rightarrow \\ \leftarrow \\ \uparrow \\ \downarrow \\ \rightarrow \end{matrix} q$ , might be elaborated to include sequences such as  $p \rightarrow t \rightarrow u \rightarrow q$ . But an examination of the data discloses that the known married ZD's of Galam (p) wedded men of five patrilineal groups ( $t_1 - t_5$ ) besides Anga (q), the known married ZD's of these five groups wedded men of at least seventeen groups ( $u_1 - u_{17}$ ), and the known married ZD's of these seventeen groups wedded men of at least 27 groups, including Anga (q).

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1. Rose (1960:ch.14) argued that, because of age inequalities, Aranda-type kinship systems based on bilateral second cousin marriage (sister exchange) never existed and that expositions of them are false theoretical constructs. It is outside the scope of this thesis to consider Rose's arguments, but I should point out that, although the Gidjingali system had formal features in common with the Aranda system, it was not based on an exchange of sisters and that the conventional Aranda kinship diagram, as I have interpreted it, was consistent with Gidjingali marriage rules.

It is true that the people said men of Dua moiety should marry women of Jiridja, and men of Jiridja women of Dua. They also said that men of Wamud subsection should marry women of Bangadidjan, men of Bangadi women of Wamudjan, and so on for the other inter-marrying pairs (Diagram 10). But moieties and subsections classified people primarily for ritual purposes and included most of the natives in eastern Arnhem Land. Any notion of wife exchange connected with these categories had no bearing at all on the distribution of wives among local descent groups.

If a Gidjingali g married the ZDDDD of a man who had once been married to g's FFFFZ, I doubt that he would have known it. I did not obtain any genealogy that contained both a male and his FFFFZ or a woman of her generation and patrilineal group. The people did not have a notion of delayed exchange over four generations, and it is impossible to know whether marriages of the kind implied by de Jong's statement ever took place.

To sum up, patrilineal groups were not units in systems of wife exchange of the type represented in Diagram 26, nor did the people have a conception of such systems as an ideal. Alleged traditions of niece exchange between particular patrilineal groups were not taken seriously, and demographic inequalities helped to prevent them from ever becoming realities. Niece exchange between particular men was the only kind that was significant in practice, and even this was infrequent.

The following hypothetical case illustrates the processes that caused the actual distribution of wives among patrilineal groups. Three brothers, B1, B2, and B3, each had a wife. B1 had married a woman to whom he had a right, whose mother belonged to group x; B2 a classificatory MMBDD, whose mother belonged to y; and B3 a classificatory FZD, whose mother belonged to

z. B1's son accordingly had rights to the daughters of certain women of x, B2's son to those of certain women of y, and B3's son to those of certain women of z. The sons might or might not succeed in marrying some of these. Examination of genealogies disclosed many cases of true and classificatory brothers in the same patrilineal group with rights to women whose mothers were distributed among different patrilineal groups; and of true and classificatory sisters in the same patrilineal group with obligations to give their daughters to men distributed among different patrilineal groups.

#### SOCIAL STRUCTURE AND SOCIAL CONTROL

Radcliffe-Brown (1930:37) asserted that throughout Australia the political unit was the patrilineal patrilocal horde. Warner (1937:17) stated that in north-east Arnhem Land the patrilineal clan was the war-making group and that fighting within it never occurred and would be considered an unnatural act. Berndt (1955:101) referred to the patrilineal descent group in this same region as the body politic. Its male members hunted together and shared the catch; and they also acted as a unit in rituals and feuds. Each group had a headman who made decisions and maintained order.

Among the Gidjingali the political unit (if it can be so called) was also the community of people who regularly lived together. But this comprised the male members of not one, but from four to six land-owing units (four to eleven patrilineal groups).<sup>1</sup> People spoke of opposition between two

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1. Cf. Meggitt (1962a:243), who stated that: "The four localized communities that made up the tribe were the largest groups with political and administrative functions. Although they were linked together by ties of friendship, marriage and ritual obligation and possessed the same laws and customs, each was nevertheless autonomous in its everyday affairs."

communities in pitched battles and on occasions organized for the formal punishment of murderers, and not merely of disputes between particular individuals of different communities. Revenge expeditions included men of different land-owning units within the community. Thus the eight members of the party that avenged the death of Alf (Case 13) belonged to three Anbara units of both moieties. Barney, who sent the message about Dick's whereabouts, was Alf's BS, but none of the warriors was a member of the dead man's unit. The leader was Barney's MZS, two others were classificatory sons of Alf, three were his classificatory ZS's, one his DS, and one his ZSS.

Close agnates often helped each other in disputes within the community, but neither patrilineal groups nor land-owning units ever opposed each other as corporate groups. When Jerry eloped with Ivan's wife (Case 11), the aggrieved husband said to several members of his unit: "We brothers should bring that woman back". Jerry and Ivan belonged to different units, and all directly concerned were Anbara. The party that set out to find the elopers included Ivan and four members of his unit but, also, the son of a female member and a classificatory MB of a different unit. In addition, Ivan's companions did not actively support him in his subsequent clash with Jerry. Instead, they tried to persuade the two to stand further apart, and the fight ended when a member of the party with loyalties to both speared the woman.

Another dispute illustrating that descent groups were not political units occurred at Maningrida. It is also a good example of how people in this leaderless society prevented antagonists in intra-community fights from inflicting serious injury.

Case 15: Diagram 28 Towards the end of 1960 Roland (D8) told a woman that he wanted to marry her daughter Doris (D4). He had no right to her



(she was his "MBD"), but her mother had previously given him an older sister Mabel (D2), and Roland felt she should now give him a second wife. He was a man about 50 years old, whereas Doris was about fifteen. The mother refused the request because she had already promised the girl to another man.

About a fortnight later Roland told Mabel (who had borne him three children) to go back to her parents. He said he wanted a young wife and, if he could not have Doris, he did not want Mabel. She moved to her parents' dwelling in anger but, after a few days, returned to her husband.

A week later Roland hit Mabel and again told her he did not want her. Her parents and MB realised that he was behaving badly out of spite and perhaps hoping his attitude would force the bestowers to change their minds. They were very angry but, on this occasion, took no action. But Roland's younger classificatory brother Harry (D7), who was married to another of Mabel's sisters (D3), warned him that, if he persisted, he would find himself in serious trouble.

A fortnight later Roland hit Mabel again. A quarrel started, and, when I arrived, Roland and Mabel's MB Clarry (C5) were standing about twenty yards apart, flourishing spears and uttering abuse. Others joined the argument, and at one point Harry said to Roland: "Mabel's mother originally promised her to my dead older brother. She would have given her to me when he died, but I let you have her while I remained single. You make me feel ashamed when you demand another wife. Clarry has given me one, and I don't keep asking him for a second. Let us stop this continual arguing." Eventually tempers cooled, and the crowd dispersed.

The next morning George (D6) tried to hit Doris with a stick because she was the cause of all the trouble. Six women prevented the attack by hold-

ing his arms or standing between him and the girl. The defenders included agnates, uterines, and affines: her mother, mother's co-wife, sister, sister's co-wife, FZ, and paternal half-brother's wife.

Immediately afterwards Mabel's father, unable to contain himself any longer, set out for Roland's camp with three nephews, Harry, George, and Tommy (D5), and challenged him to a fight at a place away from the settlement. The four men headed for the spot, but Roland did not follow. When the challengers saw he had no intention of coming, they made back towards his dwelling. On the way Tommy tried to spear Doris, but was restrained by a man who happened to be near at hand.

In the ensuing conflict three active groups were discernible - two sets of men opposing each other and a number of men and women successfully preventing them from throwing their spears. The antagonists, all Anbara, were as follows:

|             |        |               |
|-------------|--------|---------------|
| Les (C2)    |        | Roland (D8)   |
| Harry (D7)  | versus | Cecil (D9)    |
| Tommy (D5)  |        | Malcolm (C11) |
| George (D6) |        |               |
| Frank (C1)  |        |               |
| Bob (D1)    |        |               |
| Albert (C7) |        |               |

The action was so rapid that I was unable to note all those who kept the men in check, but it was evident that most were Anbara. Prominent among those hampering Les's side were his sister, two wives, "ZH", and two "WB's"; and Cecil's wife was among those obstructing Roland's side.

The struggle was over within a few minutes without one spear being cleanly thrown, and then there began a violent exchange of abuse. Harry acted like a man in a terrible rage. Gesturing wildly and contorting his face, he made his way closer and closer to Roland, until finally they stood a few yards

apart with spears at each other's throats. They eventually parted, and, as no one had intervened, I assumed people sensed that by this time neither intended to inflict an injury.

On the night after the fight Mabel went into an apparent coma and for the next few days resisted all attempts her relatives made to force food and water upon her. The trained nurse decided that she was not organically ill and, with patient effort, finally persuaded her to eat a large meal. During the next few weeks Mabel was in a state of acute depression. She stayed with her parents, but Roland visited her regularly and treated her with kindness. At length she went back to live with him. Doris was still unmarried when my fieldwork ended.

It is true that several members of one patrilineal group were united here against several of another (Les, Frank, and Bob versus Roland, Cecil, and Malcolm). But other men of both groups took no part in the fight. Of greater significance are the facts that Harry supported his classificatory MB Les (the closest relative of this kind he had) against a classificatory brother of his own land-owning unit, and that Les's supporters comprised agnates, uterines, and affines from three different units. Roland might have received more support had his case been stronger.

There was probably less likelihood of fighting within the patrilineal group, because of closer kinship links, than between patrilineal groups of the same land-owning unit. But the difference was not sufficiently important to justify distinguishing single patrilineal groups as political units and amalgamated patrilineal groups as land-owning and ritual units. I recorded a case in which a man murdered his paternal half-brother and several in which men of the same patrilineal group fought or took opposing sides in serious

quarrels. All were fights over women. Also, one of the men who helped take the woman from Clarry (Case 2) was a member of his patrilineal group (he was a potential niece's husband of the man he aided); and Bandy clashed with his paternal half-brothers George and Rocky (Case 12). Men rebuked George for fighting his "MB" Jerry, but no one expressed dismay because members of the same patrilineal group had quarrelled. I assume the precedence given to the uterine link for defensive purposes was a result of the competition for wives among certain agnates.<sup>1</sup>

Several of the disputes described clearly demonstrate that, although women were in short supply as wives, their jural status was inferior to that of men. In fights within the community, often men whose loyalties were divided, instead of taking sides, attacked the woman about whom the antagonists were quarrelling. In this way they not only showed publicly how angry they were at being placed in an invidious position but threatened to bring the conflict to an end by removing its object. Harry speared Marion during the fight between Ivan and Jerry (Case 11); Tommy and George tried to assault Doris just before her father led an attack on the man who wanted to marry her (Case 15); and Maurice said he would spear Nora if Douglas and Cecil would not stop quarrelling over her (Case 8). When Wallace fatally wounded his "brother" Adolf over Charlotte, other "brothers" avenged the death by attacking and finally killing the woman (Case 14). Another intra-community murder had a similar outcome. The inference is that male opinion regarded it as better to attack a woman, and perhaps cause her death, than allow men to fight over her. In general, men were reluctant to support female interests against male interests. But there

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1. A settlement officer heard a radio message reporting a murder in another part of Arnhem Land. When I told one of the local natives, he replied: "I suppose someone has killed his brother over a woman".

were limits. Cassius assaulted his wife because her sister had deserted him, but her "brother" intervened and warned him never to do it again (Case 8); Les was so incensed by Roland's repeated attacks on his daughter that he challenged him to a fight (Case 15); and, in another case, a man attacked his ZDH for continually mistreating her.<sup>1</sup>

Although I have distinguished between inter- and intra-community conflict, I should point out that some fights between members of neighbouring communities were similar in form to those within the community. This was particularly so where the totemic sites of the antagonists were close together and where considerable inter-marriage had taken place. Also, as communities were only loose residential associations that often included affines and matrilateral relatives of male members, outsiders sometimes became involved in what I have classified as intra-community disputes.

In this and the preceding section I have argued that the patrilineal group among the Gidjingali was neither a political unit nor a unit in a system of wife exchange. Because of the dispersal of female agnates in marriage, members of the same patrilineal group, or of alternate generations in the same group, did not have all their actual non-agnatic relatives of any one kind in one other patrilineal group. For example, the WM's of men in p were not all in q, the MB's of people in generations 2,4,6 of p were not all in r, and so on. As the affiliations of such relatives were various, and the rights and obligations defined genealogically, there was a widespread possibility that men of the same patrilineal group would behave differently towards each other

1. R. and C. Berndt (1951:52-7) stated that in each of the many Aboriginal communities they had visited, women maintained themselves in equality with men. Describing attitudes to punishment, they wrote: "But however many beatings she may endure, she does not on this account restrict or cut short her sexual activities ..." (p.53); and, "She may in rare cases be subject to the penalty of death, but not to social degradation" (p.55).

from one conflict situation to another, depending on their relationships to the people directly concerned.<sup>1</sup> There were no rules that prescribed certain kinds of behaviour between descent groups as a whole, or between portions of them, except in ritual activities (and it is worth noting that the ZS and ZDS groups regularly included men of various land-owning units). Finally, the dispersal of wives between communities as well as within them caused some fights between members of different communities to proceed like intra-community conflicts, and it probably limited the magnitude of others.

#### GOVERNMENT

Broadly-speaking, opinions on Aboriginal government have turned a full circle in the course of a little over a century. Eyre (1845) asserted that the natives recognized no authority and had no form of government; Dawson (1881) said that every tribe had its chief, whose power was supreme; Elkin (1938) attributed governmental functions to informal councils of elders whose influence depended on knowledge, ritual status, and personal respect; and Meggitt (1962b) stated that the tribes had no formal apparatus of government, no enduring hierarchy of authority, and no recognized political leaders. Each of the first three views was compatible with others stated in the same period, the fourth has not yet been published. I shall try to demonstrate that there is good evidence to support it.

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1. Harry opposed Roland and Cecil in the dispute over Doris (Case 15), but some years earlier the three men, all of the same land-owning unit, supported Harry's older brother in a fight over a different woman.

Eyre (1845:315) wrote that: "Among none of the tribes yet known have chiefs ever been found to be acknowledged, though in all there are always some men who take the lead, and whose opinions and wishes have great weight with the others". He thought that, although a man's authority and influence increased with age, they depended mainly on his personal strength, courage, energy, prudence, and skill, and perhaps upon his family connections (p.317). Flanagan (1853-4) was more extreme. He said that, "... among the aborigines authority of a fixed and definite character, whether centred in individuals of the body or contained in some well-known and well-established laws, is altogether wanting. The mere suggestion of instinct and the most palpable laws of nature alone seem to have weight with them" (p.17).

Smyth, Taplin, Howitt, and Dawson were among the first to present a different view. Smyth (1878:129) mentioned headmen in Victoria who investigated disputes, decided who was at fault, and punished them. Taplin (1879:32-4) said each tribe of the Narrinyeri in South Australia had an elected chief who led his warriors and acted as a spokesman and negotiator in inter-tribal disputes. Each clan within the tribe had a tribunal, presided over by a local chieftain, that passed judgment on offenders. Howitt (1880:211-2) emphasised the gerontocratic aspect of government. The heads of clans among the Kurnai of Victoria were the old men, although younger men with exceptional qualifications, such as intelligence, cunning, and bravery, sometimes had considerable influence. Authority attached to age, a principle Howitt believed "to be not peculiar to the Kurnai, but to be general to the whole Australian race" (p.212). Dawson (1881) asserted that every tribe had its chief (p.5), who judged disputes and gave or refused permission for betrothals and marriages (p.28). A chief consulted the best men of his tribe, but when he announced his decision no one dared disobey (p.5).

By the end of the century observers were attributing less power to Aboriginal leaders. Spencer and Gillen (1899:10-15) stated that there was no chief of the Aranda tribe of Central Australia, nor any individual within it to whom the term could be applied. Each local group had a headman who called together the elders to discuss arrangements for sacred ceremonies or breaches of tribal custom, but his authority was "of a somewhat vague nature" (p.10). He was not necessarily the most important member of the council and had no definite power over the members of his group, though he might be a man of considerable influence if old, distinguished, and able. Public opinion helped to maintain law and order, but, if someone broke a marriage rule, the headmen of the groups concerned consulted together with the elders to decide on a penalty. If the sentence was death, they appointed men to carry it out.

In the same year Mathew (1899:93-4) wrote that there were no recognized heads or definite ruling bodies among the Aborigines and that the cohesion of a community depended entirely upon consanguinity. But he also said that the elders, in conjunction with men distinguished for courage, strength, and force of character, gave advice in matters of public importance, settled internal disputes, and enforced obedience to traditional law.

Books about Aborigines written in the 19th Century usually devoted a chapter, or at least a special section, to government. Elkin (1938) in his general study dealt with the subject in two paragraphs. He stated that each local group had a headman who unofficially presided at meetings, settled quarrels, and made decisions on economic, social, and ceremonial matters (p.82). He was usually the oldest man in the group, and his influence depended on knowledge, ritual status, and personal respect. Other elders also expressed opinions. The headmen of the local groups making up a tribe constituted an inform-



al council that discussed matters of common interest whenever the groups were together (p.45).

Warner (1937) described government in north-east Arnhem Land as gerontocratic and said that the elders controlled younger men by prohibiting, or threatening to prohibit, their initiation into certain ceremonies (p.131). He stated that each clan had a ceremonial leader (p.17), who was considered head man and who, if physically able and of sufficient talent, was also a war leader. But his secular power was slight, and it was in the field of ritual rather than government that he exercised his leadership (p.389).

Warner described six types of conflict (ch.6). First, there were camp fights, which occurred frequently and were usually over adultery. The antagonists fought with spears and were often supported by male relatives. Women held their husbands and brothers by the arms to prevent the fight becoming too serious, but sometimes aided them with digging sticks or clubs. In none of the actual disputes of this kind that Warner described did a headman or council of elders intervene or attempt to effect a settlement.

The second and third types were surprise attacks made at night. In one kind, an individual or several close relatives set out to kill someone of another clan. They were normally young warriors acting on their own initiative or carrying out the wish of an older man. In neither case were they obliged to seek permission from the elders beforehand. In the other kind, a large party of warriors set out to avenge the death of a clansman. These expeditions required the sanction of the elders and were led by the oldest relatives of the deceased. But in the one actual case that Warner described the younger members of the party disobeyed the leader's explicit instruction not to attack certain people. He made no attempt to punish them (pp.183-4).

The fourth and fifth types were pitched battles between clans. Warner did not make any statement about elders, headmen, or any other kind of leader in his description of them. The sixth type was an organized punishment (magarada) in which a murderer allowed his victim's relatives to throw spears at him, on the understanding that they would try to wound but not kill. His own clansmen stood close by to see fair play, and old men of both sides did their best to restrain hotheads. When the elders of the injured clan decided that the punishment had gone on long enough, they told their warriors to stop.

Warner's data indicate that male elders had no collective or defined role in disputes that occurred between members of the same community. In conflict between clans, they offered advice and sometimes led revenge expeditions. Sometimes they incited younger men to commit acts of violence and sometimes tried to restrain them, but even here their directions were often unacceptable. They appear to have been more like diplomats than gerontocrats.

Kaberry (1939:178-9) stated that authority in the Kimberley region was vested in the headman and elders of each local group, who had the right to assemble people for initiation and mourning ceremonies, to conduct the proceedings, and to deal with cases of death by sorcery. Although intelligence and high ritual status were important qualifications for headmanship, the office tended to pass from father to son. Kaberry described the political organization as "an aristocracy, a government by the best, by those who are fitted for the task by their knowledge, experience, and personality" (p.178).

In discussing disputes over women, Kaberry said: "If the headman intervenes at all, it is not in his official capacity, but as a blood or affinal relative. Authority, when wielded, is in the hands of those who are closely

connected with the individuals, and who have a more comprehensive knowledge of the facts of the situation" (p.149). When someone died, the elders decided by divination who was responsible and appointed an avenger. But as the elders concerned were relatives of the victim (p.179), it appears that in the only secular sphere in which old men exercised authority, they did so as kinsmen and not as members of a governmental body.

R. and C. Berndt (1952:115) said that Aboriginal Australia had, as a rule, no formal gatherings comparable to our courts of law. Trivial offences committed by adults or children were handled by the immediate family or kin. Ceremonial leaders decided on punishment for serious ritual offences and carried it out without consulting anyone else.

Worsley (1954:314-22) mentioned that legal institutions were lacking among the people of Groote Eylandt. He added that there was not even a formal council of elders in which disputes could be raised. When serious fights broke out between members of different groups, old men tried to restrain quick-tempered warriors and to bring about a settlement.

Finally, Meggitt (1962a:242-51) insisted that, among the Walbiri of central Australia, government was not gerontocratic. Old men had considerable prestige, especially in matters of religion, but they did not stand out as general leaders, nor did they constitute a formal body exercising power over others. Particular men organized circumcision ceremonies and revenge expeditions, but their special roles depended on genealogical connections with the key individuals on each occasion, such as the novice or the victim, and not on age. Different persons therefore acted as organizers at different times, and there was nobody with permanent authority. Men of high ritual status played no special part in settling disputes; they were not even exempt from

attacks by a person who felt he had a legitimate grievance.

I came to similar conclusions about the Gidjingali. In the quest for food, men and women usually worked as individuals; when they co-operated in making a fish trap across a creek or in setting fire to grass to drive game into the open, they did so by mutual consent. Members of a community decided to move to a new area by common agreement, though each one was free to come and go as he pleased. In ritual affairs individuals fulfilled obligations by organizing and performing initiation and mortuary rites. As among the Walbiri, a person's role at such times depended on his relationship to the novice or the deceased and changed from one occasion to another. Secret ceremonies allowed more scope for individual enterprise; some men, not necessarily those advanced in age, achieved recognition for their ability to direct certain rituals and their expert knowledge of the associated mythology.

Although the ethic of generosity was important in regulating access to both food and women, conflicts over women frequently occurred.<sup>1</sup> As I have demonstrated, many Gidjingali men did not have female relatives of the kind defined by the marriage rule; and, although the sex ratio was roughly equal, many men wanted more than one wife. In these conditions, where demand commonly exceeded supply, quarrels occurred over the acquisition of unmarried girls, adultery, and wife-stealing. There was no institution with authority to deal with such disputes; but there was a community of people with a set of common values and a system of formally-defined rights and obligations. On rare occasions, individuals achieved their ends in defiance of the code of good

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1. R. and C. Berndt (1951:22) stated that the majority of arguments in an Aboriginal society were directly or indirectly brought about through trouble over women.

conduct and without regard for the legitimate interests of others. But usually they attempted to justify their actions or demands by appealing to an acknowledged right or value. As both antagonists could often produce acceptable but opposed arguments (for example, insistence on a right, accusation of meanness), a quarrel was seldom an obvious clash between right and wrong. Nevertheless, public opinion about the merits of the cases clearly influenced the behaviour of people concerned - disputants as well as those with obligations to support them - and was a factor in determining its outcome.

There would be little point in putting forward Meggitt's and my account of government in two localized groups as a generalization for Aboriginal Australia. It is probably too late to test this by further investigation elsewhere, and there is certainly no way of telling whether observers like Taplin were mistaken or whether there were in fact regional differences of Aboriginal social organization. The available data may be summarized by saying that observers in the middle of the last century denied that Aborigines had governmental institutions but did not indicate satisfactorily how affairs were conducted despite the lack. Observers later in the century asserted that Aborigines had governmental institutions but did not explain in any detail how these functioned. Observers in the first half of the present century described Aboriginal government as gerontocratic, but the evidence they themselves supplied indicates that the old men had little authority outside the sphere of ritual. Finally, in recent years Meggitt and I found no governmental institutions in two different areas and have described how, nevertheless, the people organized and controlled their activities.

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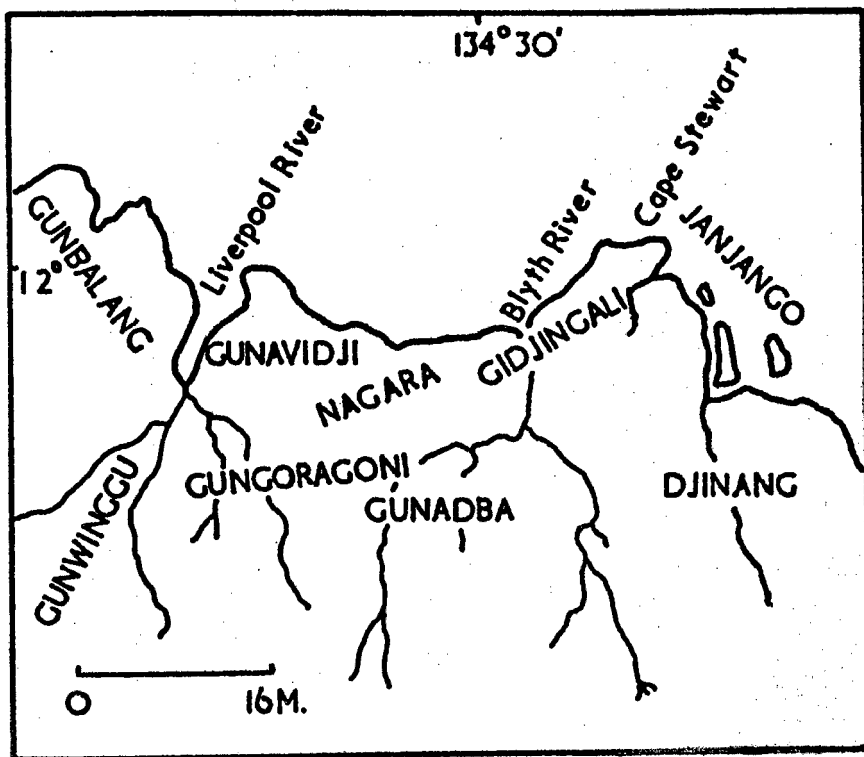
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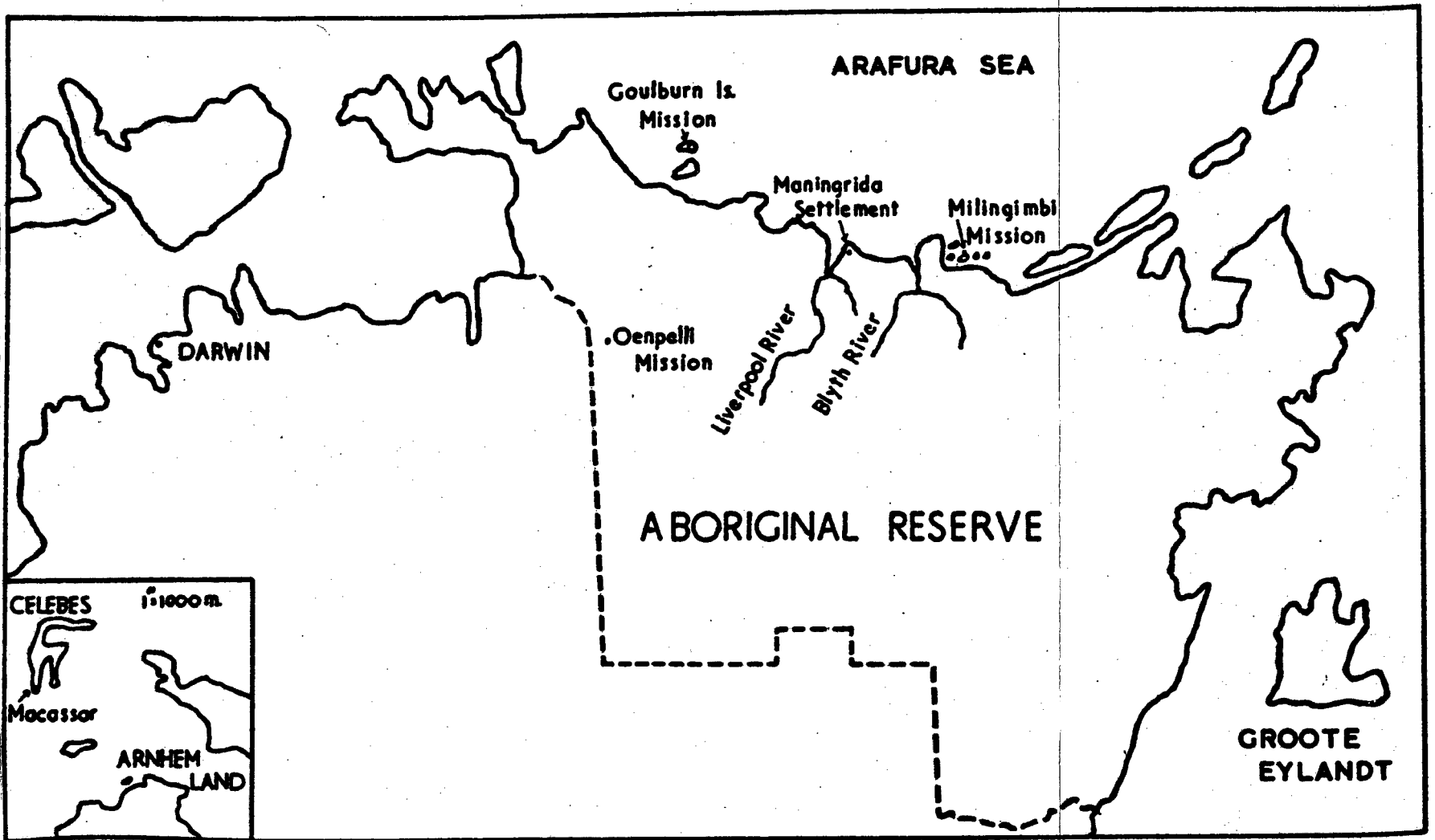


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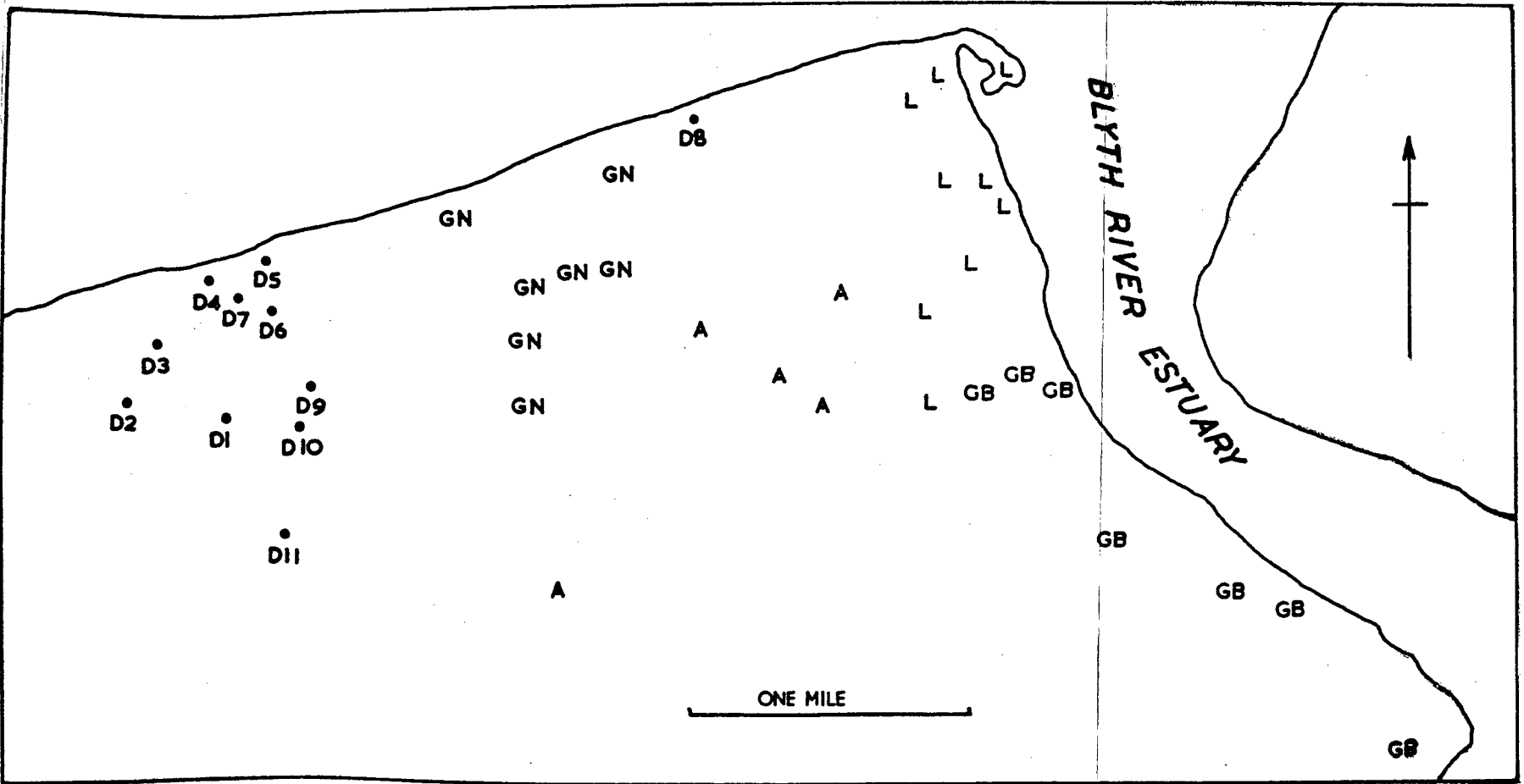
MAPS 1 - 6



MAP 1      The Gidjingali and their neighbours



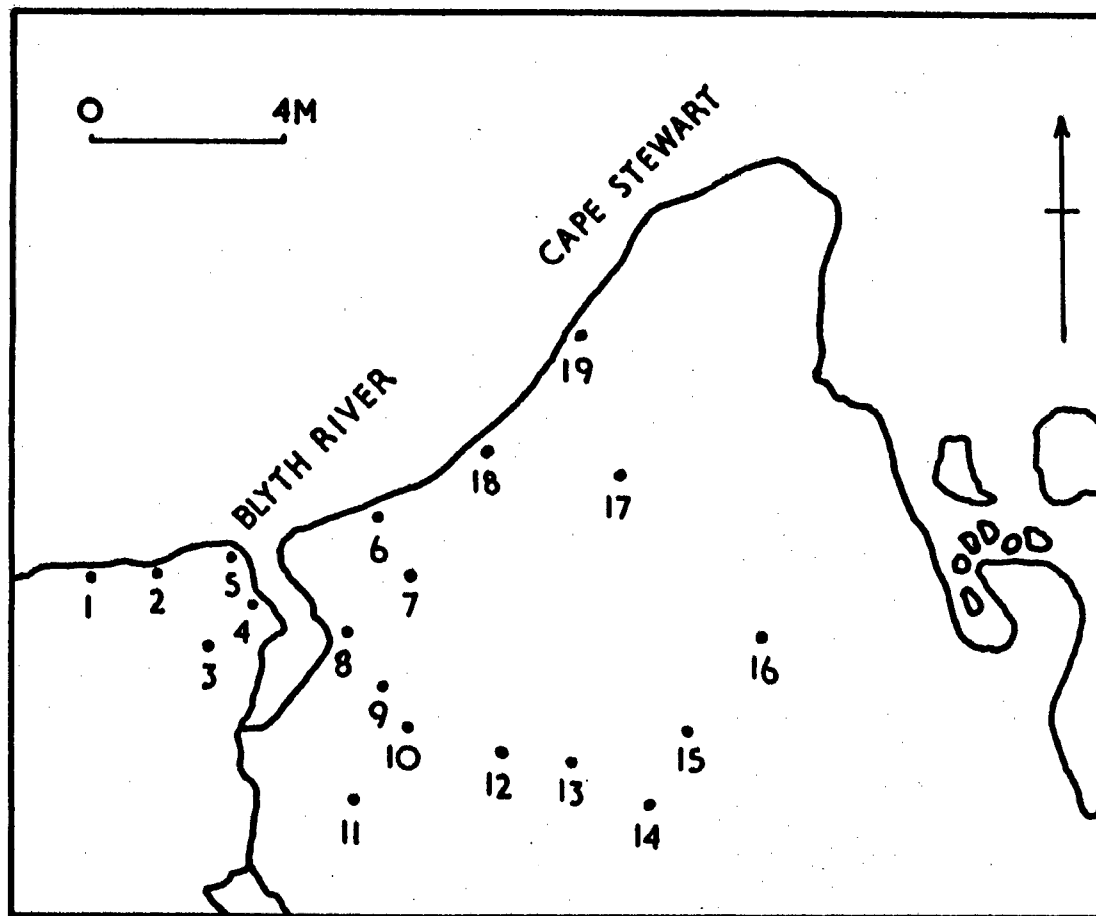
MAP 2 Arnhem Land



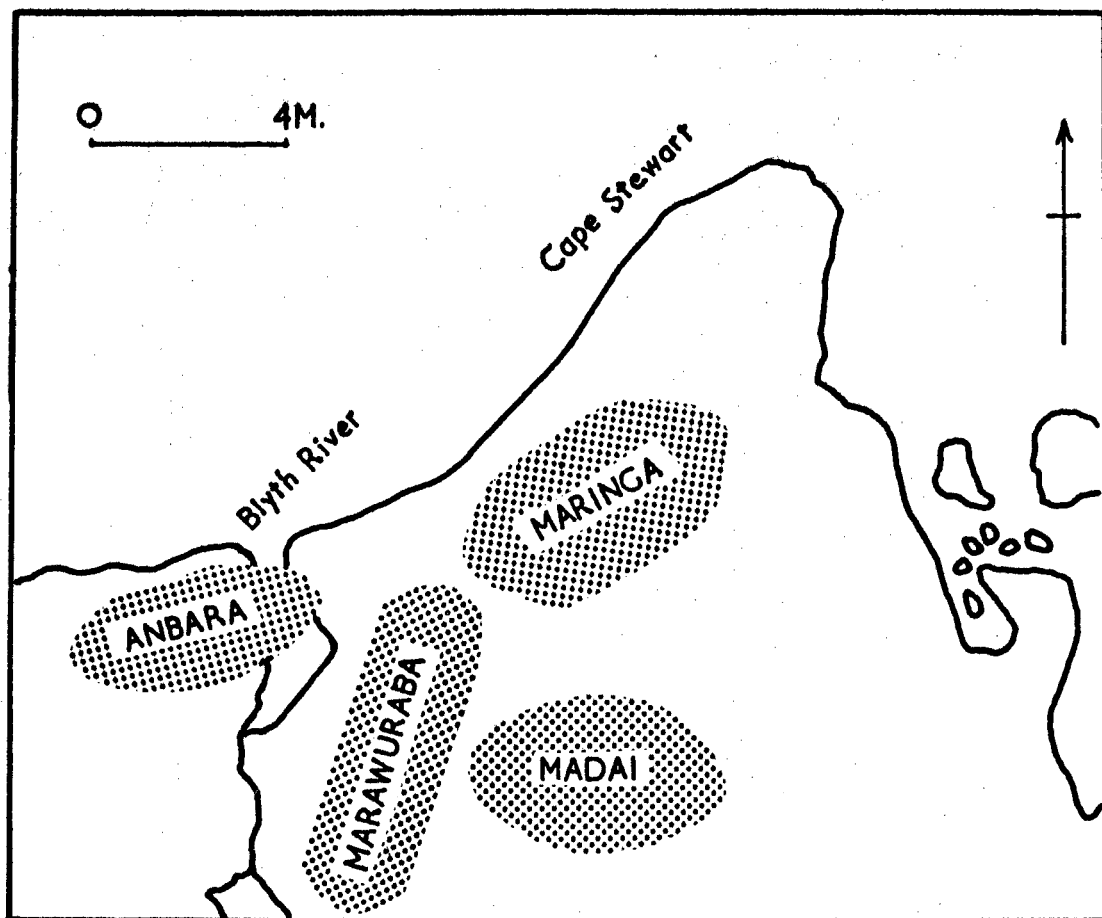
MAP 3

Named sites of five Gidjingali land-owning units

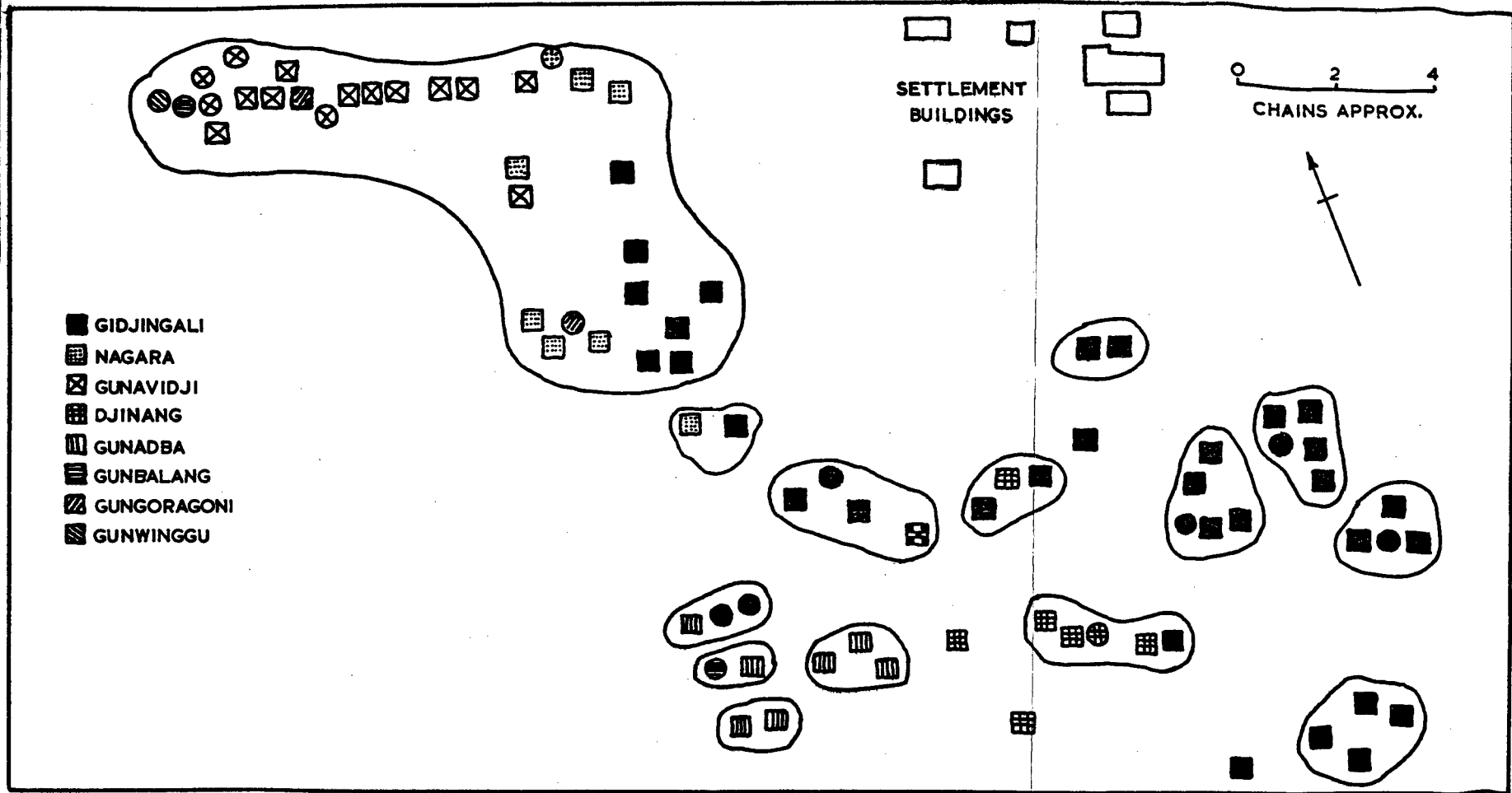
|          |   |          |            |                 |      |
|----------|---|----------|------------|-----------------|------|
| D1, etc. | = | Sites of | Djunawunja | land-owning     | unit |
| GN       | = | "        | "          | Gunadjangga     | "    |
| A        | = | "        | "          | Anmalanda-ajura | "    |
| GB       | = | "        | "          | Gubanga         | "    |
| L        | = | "        | "          | Lala-gadjiraba  | "    |



MAP 4 Representative sites of all Gidjingali land-owning units  
(I am indebted to Patrol-Officer Peter Mackey for information about some sites east of the Blyth River)



MAP 5 Gidjingali communities



MAP 6 Maningrida native village and settlement buildings (1960)

Enclosing lines indicate clearings surrounded by tall grass



Modern bark hut



Traditional bark shade



DIAGRAMS 1 - 28

DIAGRAM 1 Genealogy of Galamagondija patrilineal group

Generation A      Generation B      Generation C      Generation D      Generation E

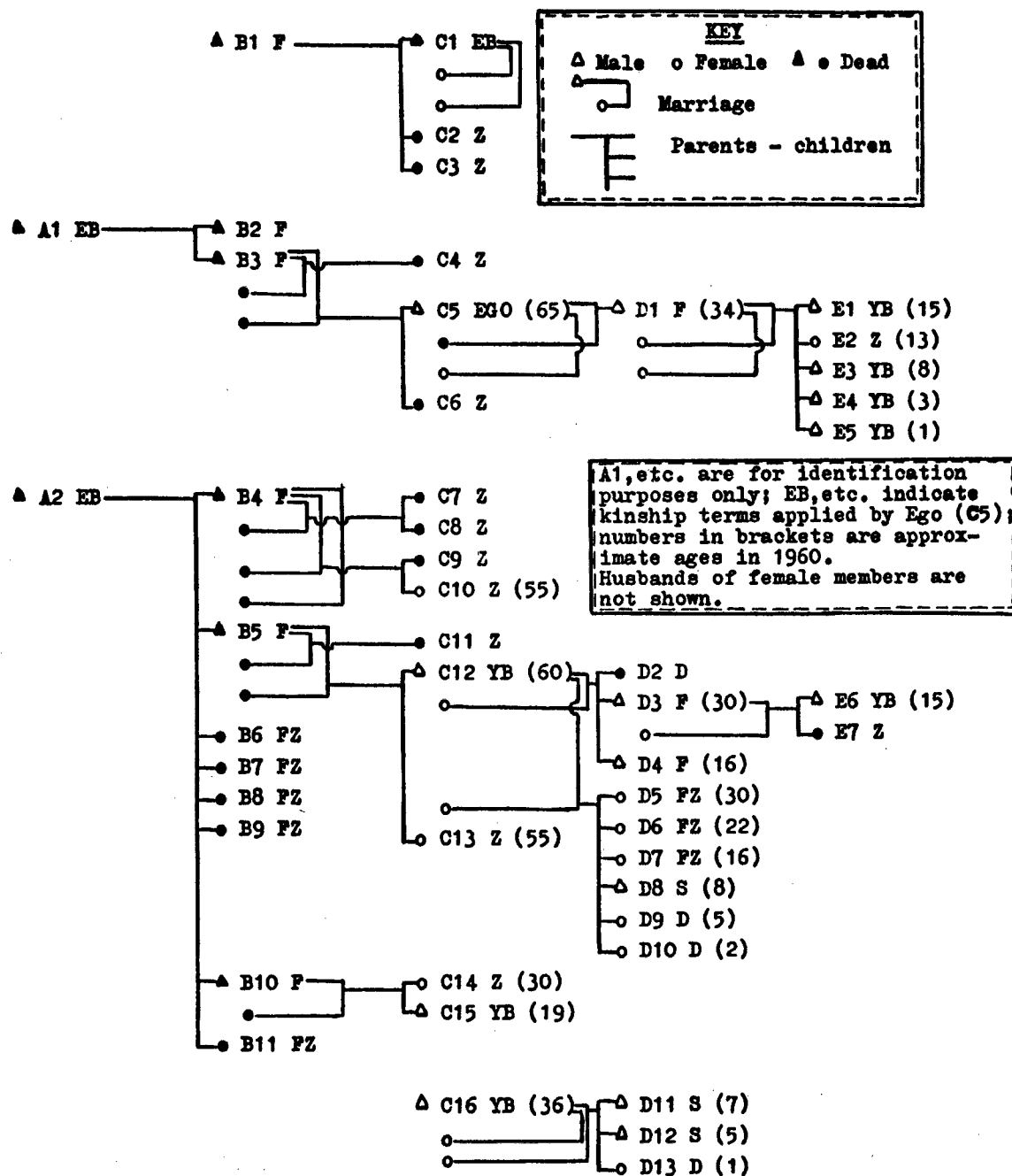
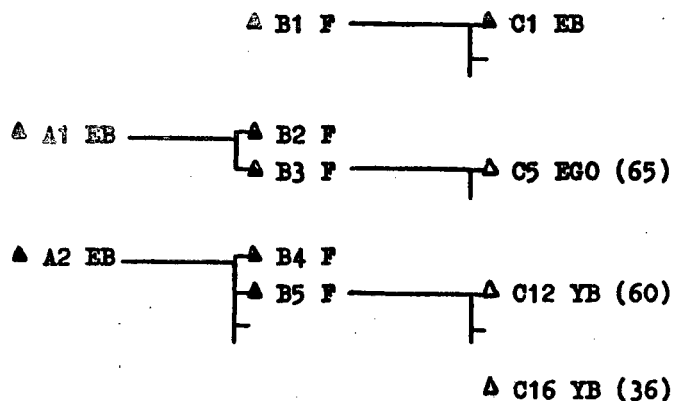


DIAGRAM 2 Skeleton genealogy of Djunawunja land-owning unit

Generation A      Generation B      Generation C      Generation D      Generation E

Galamagondiya patrilineal group



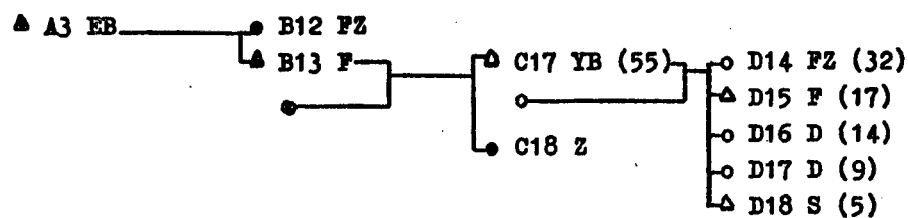
KEY  
As for Diagram 1, the full skeleton genealogy of Galamagondiya group.

etc.

etc.

etc.

Garabam patrilineal group



Milingawa patrilineal group

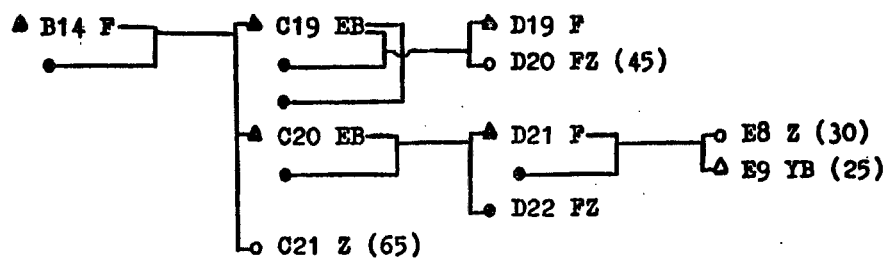
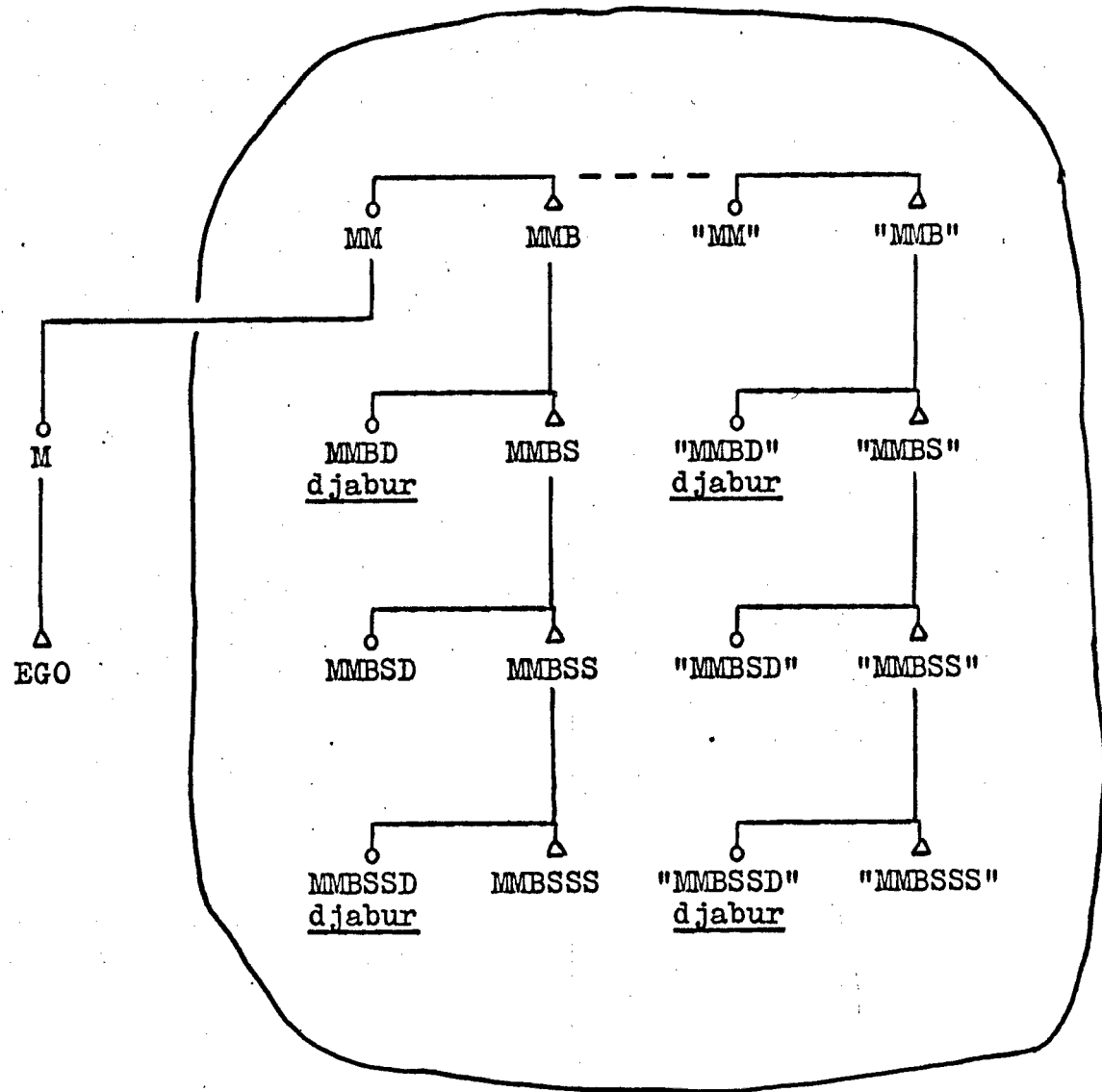


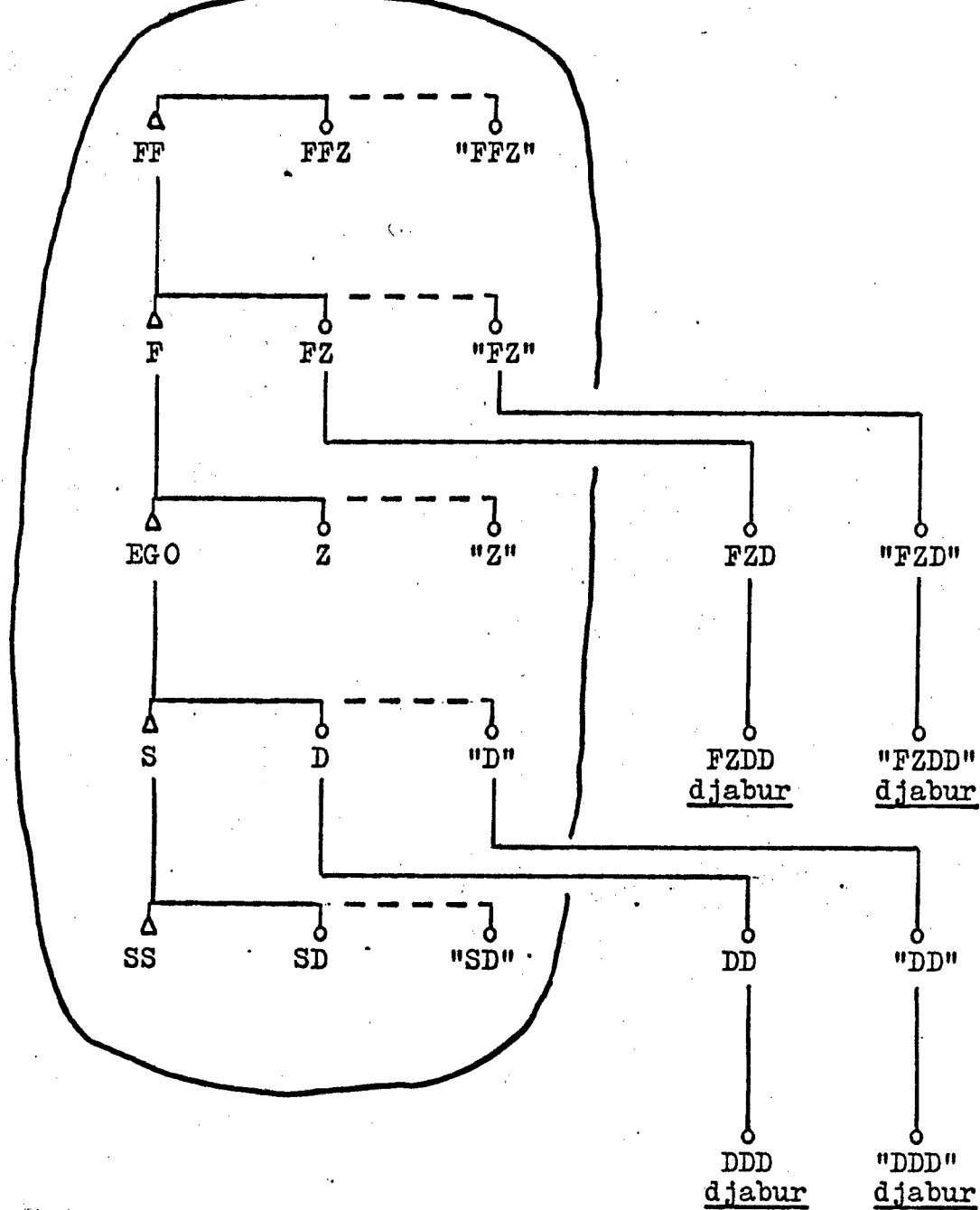
DIAGRAM 3

Potential brides' mothers in  
patrilineal group of Ego's MM



KEY

- (a) Enclosing line indicates patrilineal group of Ego's MM.
- (b) Ego's potential brides' mothers are MMBD, "MMBD", MMBSSD, and "MMBSSD", to each of whom he applies the kinship term djabur.
- (c) Men not shown in diagram who also have rights to the daughters of women listed in (b) are other DS's of Ego's MM and DS's of his "MM", MMBSD, and "MMBSD".



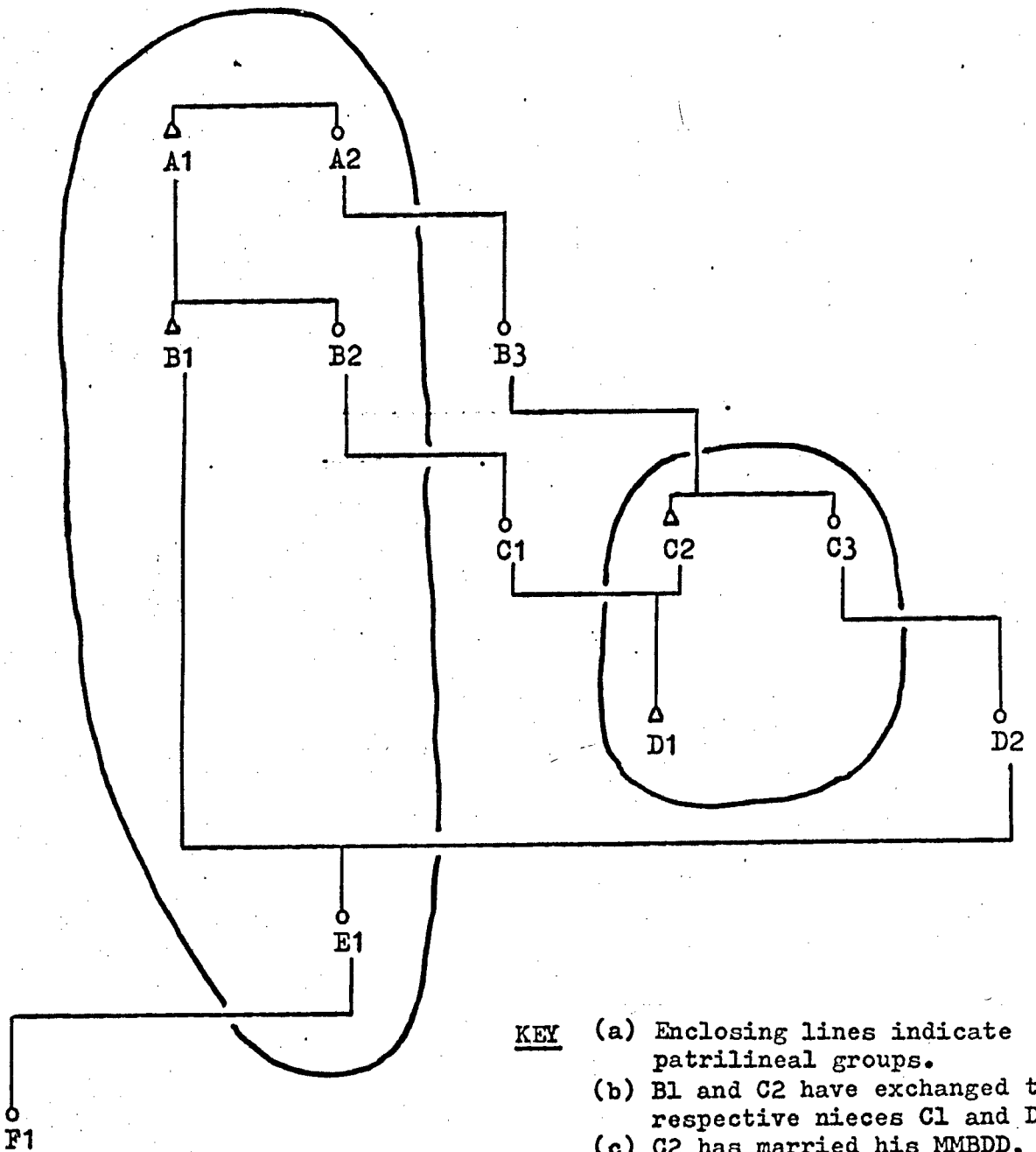
KEY

- (a) Enclosing line indicates Ego's patrilineal group.  
 (b) Ego's potential brides' mothers are FZDD, "FZDD", DDD, and "DDD", to each of whom he applies the kinship term djabur.  
 (c) Other men who also have rights to the daughters of women listed in (b) are those in Ego's group whom he calls brother.

DIAGRAM 4

Potential brides' mothers whose MM's are in Ego's own patrilineal group

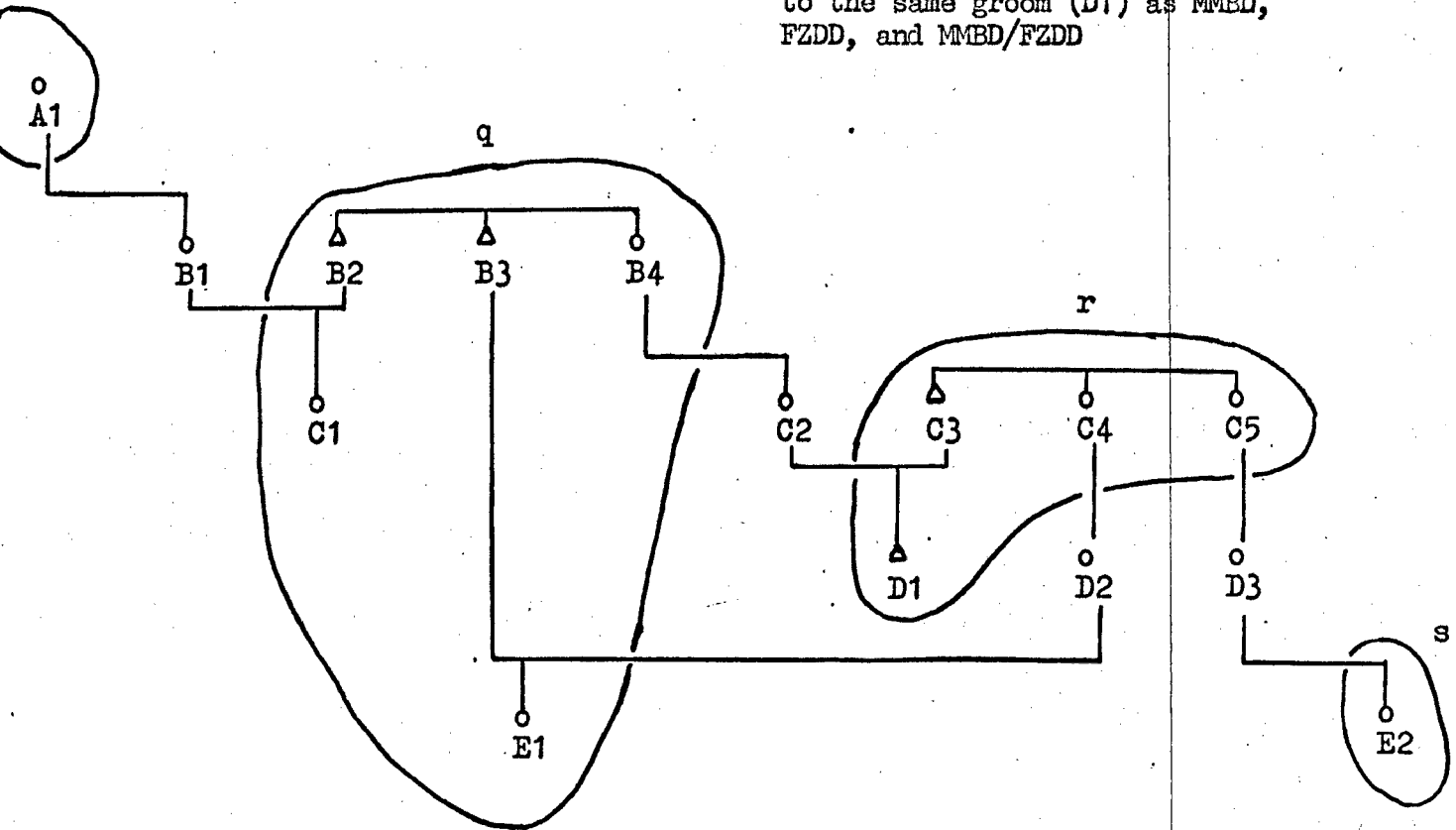
DIAGRAM 5 Niece exchange



- KEY
- (a) Enclosing lines indicate patrilineal groups.
  - (b) B1 and C2 have exchanged their respective nieces C1 and D2.
  - (c) C2 has married his MMBDD, B1 his FZDDD.
  - (d) D1 has a right to F1, who is MMBDD and FZDDD.

DIAGRAM 6

Potential brides' mothers related to the same groom (D1) as MMBD, FZDD, and MMBD/FZDD



KEY

- (a) Enclosing lines indicate patrilineal groups p, q, r, and s.
- (b) D1 has rights to the daughters of C1 (his MMBD), E2 (his FZDD), and E1 (his MMBD/FZDD).
- (c) D1 is anmari to C1's patrilineal group, but she is not djinmari to his. E2 is djinmari to D1's patrilineal group, but he is not anmari to hers. D1 is anmari to E1's patrilineal group, and she is djinmari to his (B3 and C3 have exchanged nieces).

DIAGRAM 7  
(see inside)

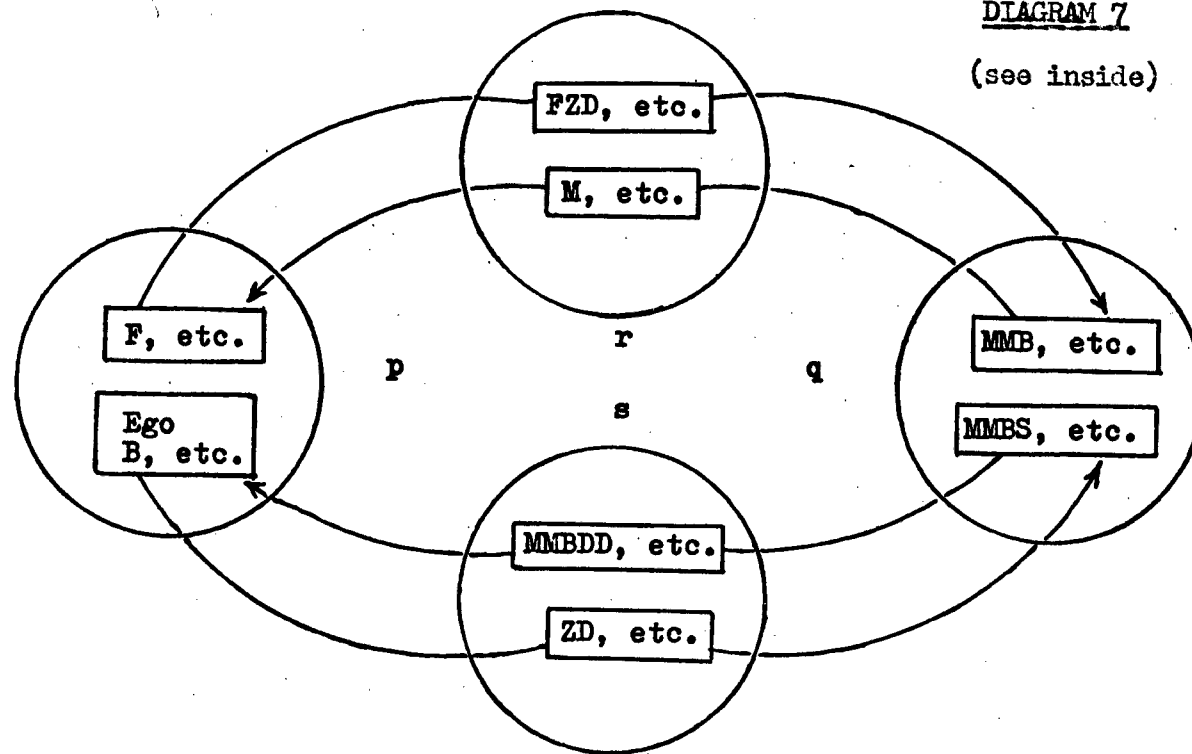


DIAGRAM 7 Hypothetical closed system of relationships among four patrilineal groups

(I have presented the system in two parts for the sake of clarity)

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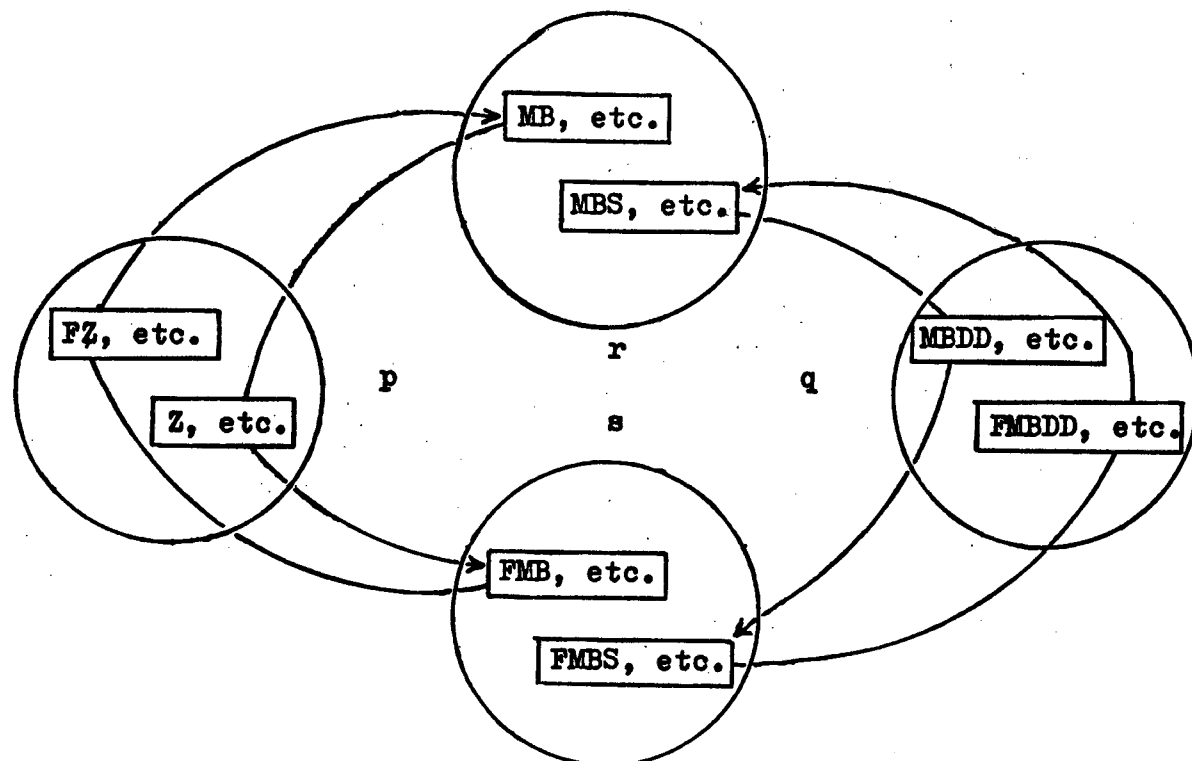




DIAGRAM 8

Sixteen kinship terms applied within a hypothetical closed system of four patrilineal groups

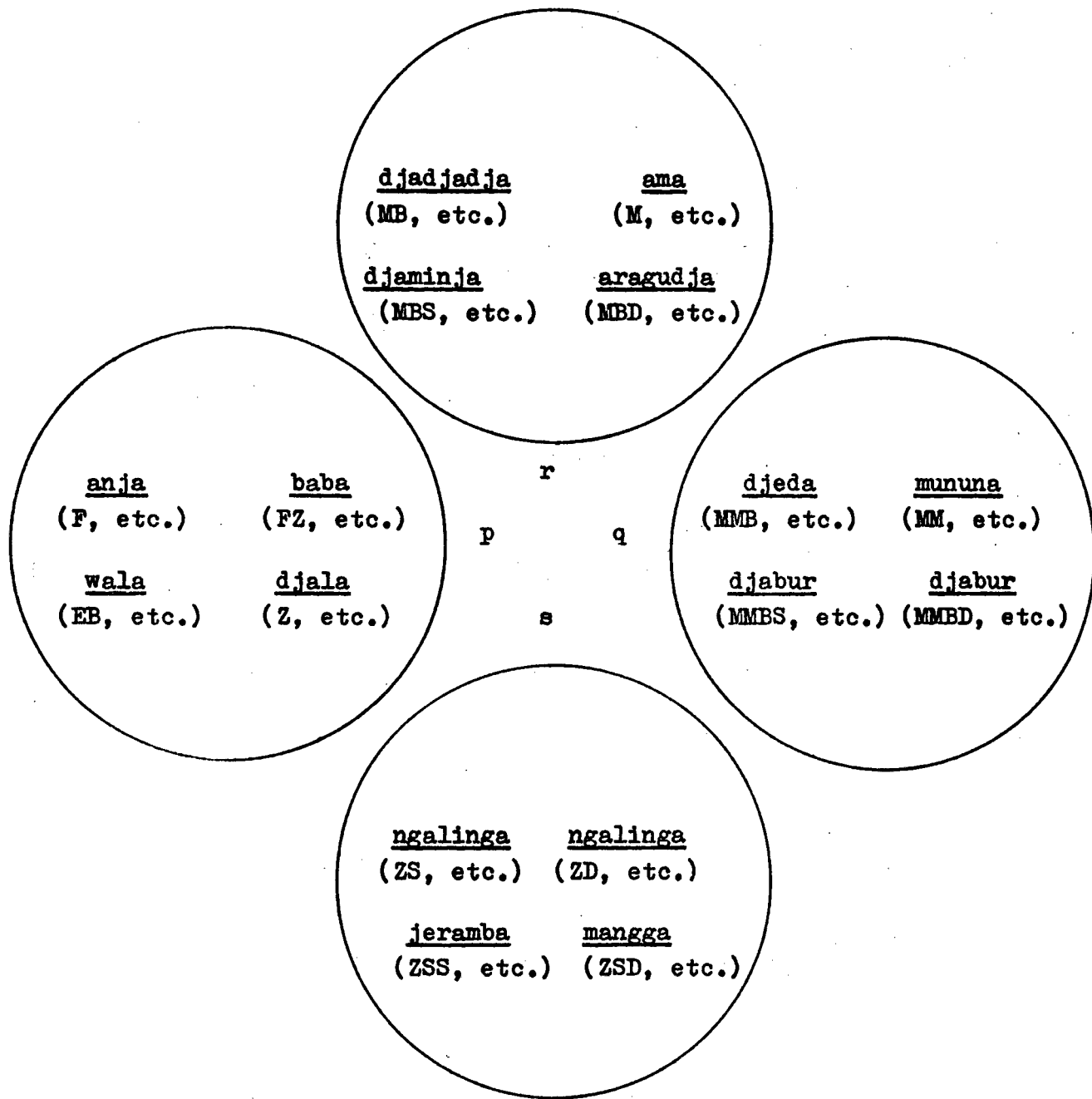


DIAGRAM 9 Gidjingali kinship terms

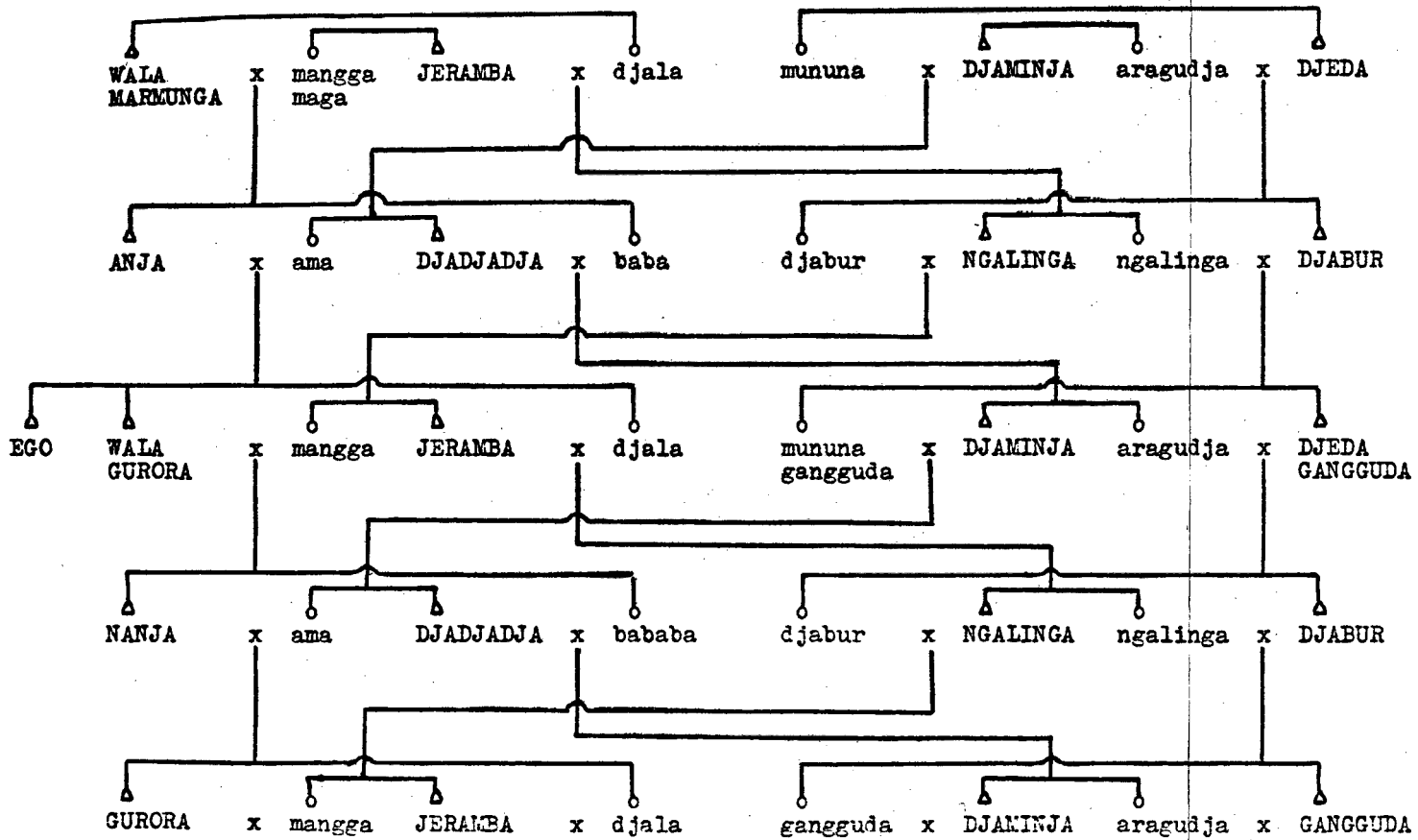
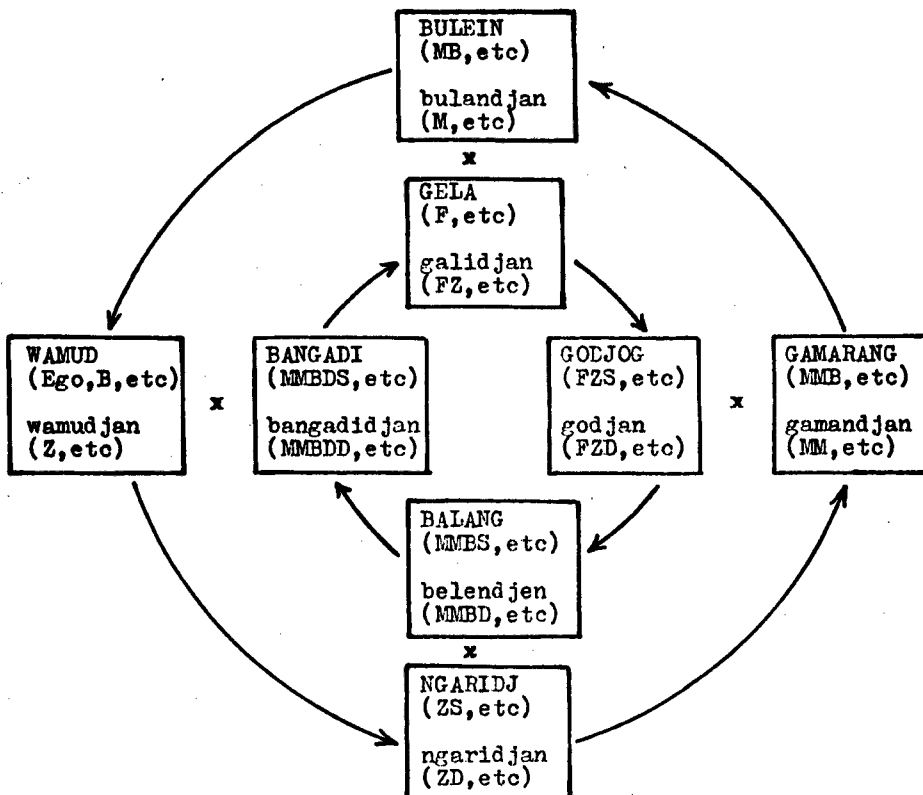
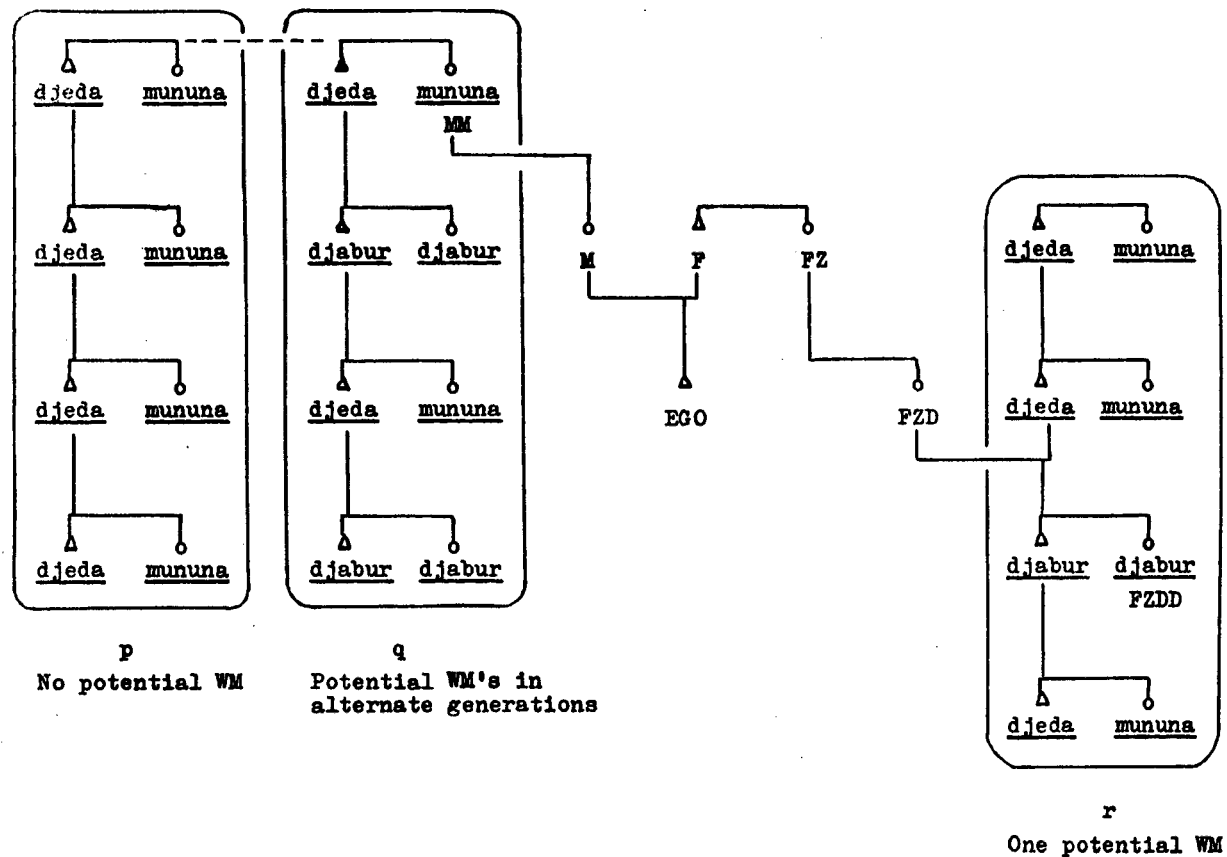


DIAGRAM 10 Gidjingali subsections



Dua moiety: Wamud, Gamarang, Gela, Balang  
 Jiridja moiety: Bangadi, Godjog, Bulein, Ngaridj

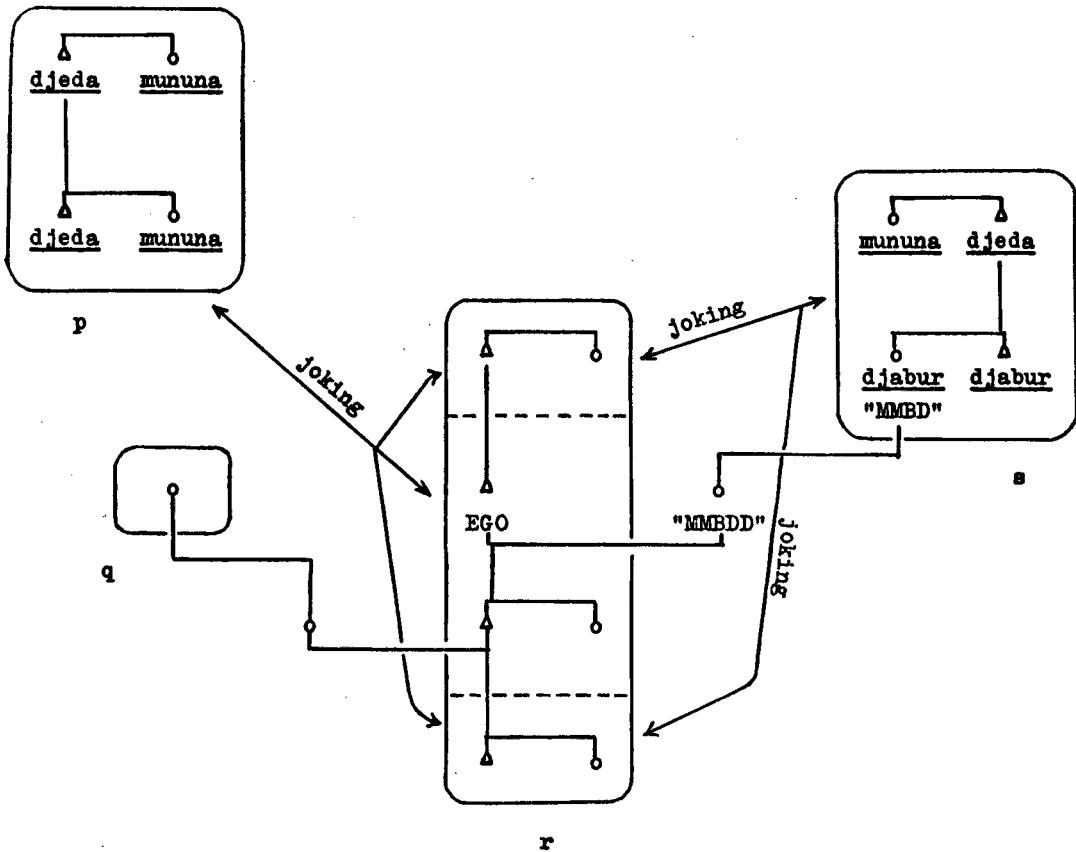
DIAGRAM 11 Terminological distinction between potential wife-givers and others classified as their brothers and sisters



Key

Enclosing lines indicate patrilineal groups p, q, r  
 Broken line indicates classificatory relationship

DIAGRAM 12 Joking relationships



Key Enclosing lines indicate patrilineal groups p, q, r, s

DIAGRAM 13 Case 1

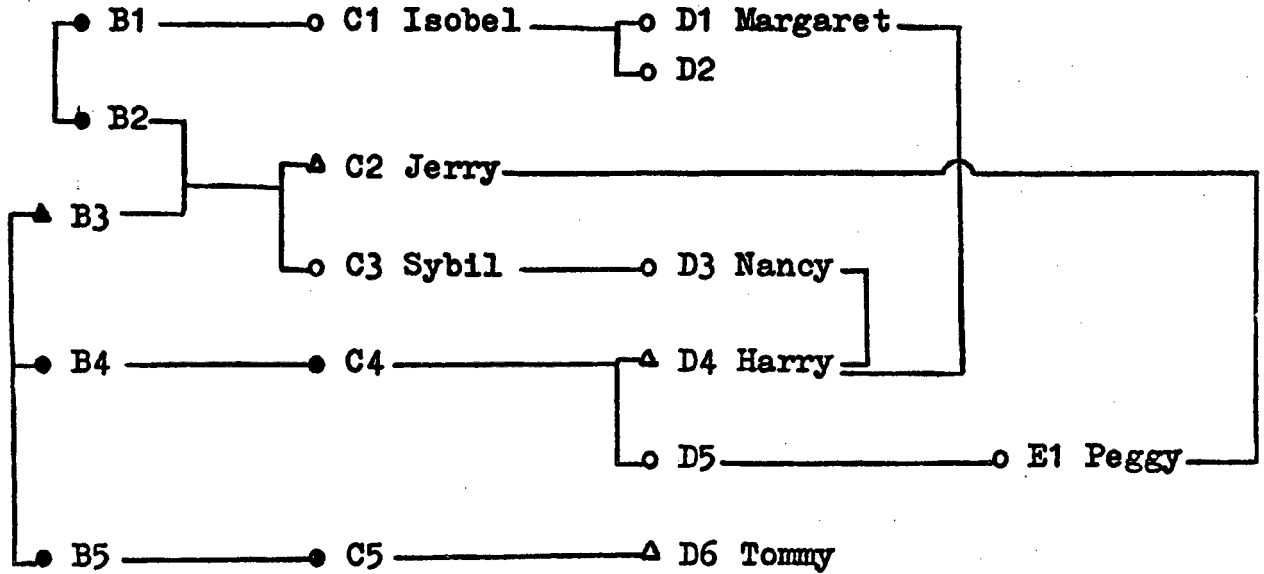


DIAGRAM 14 Case 2

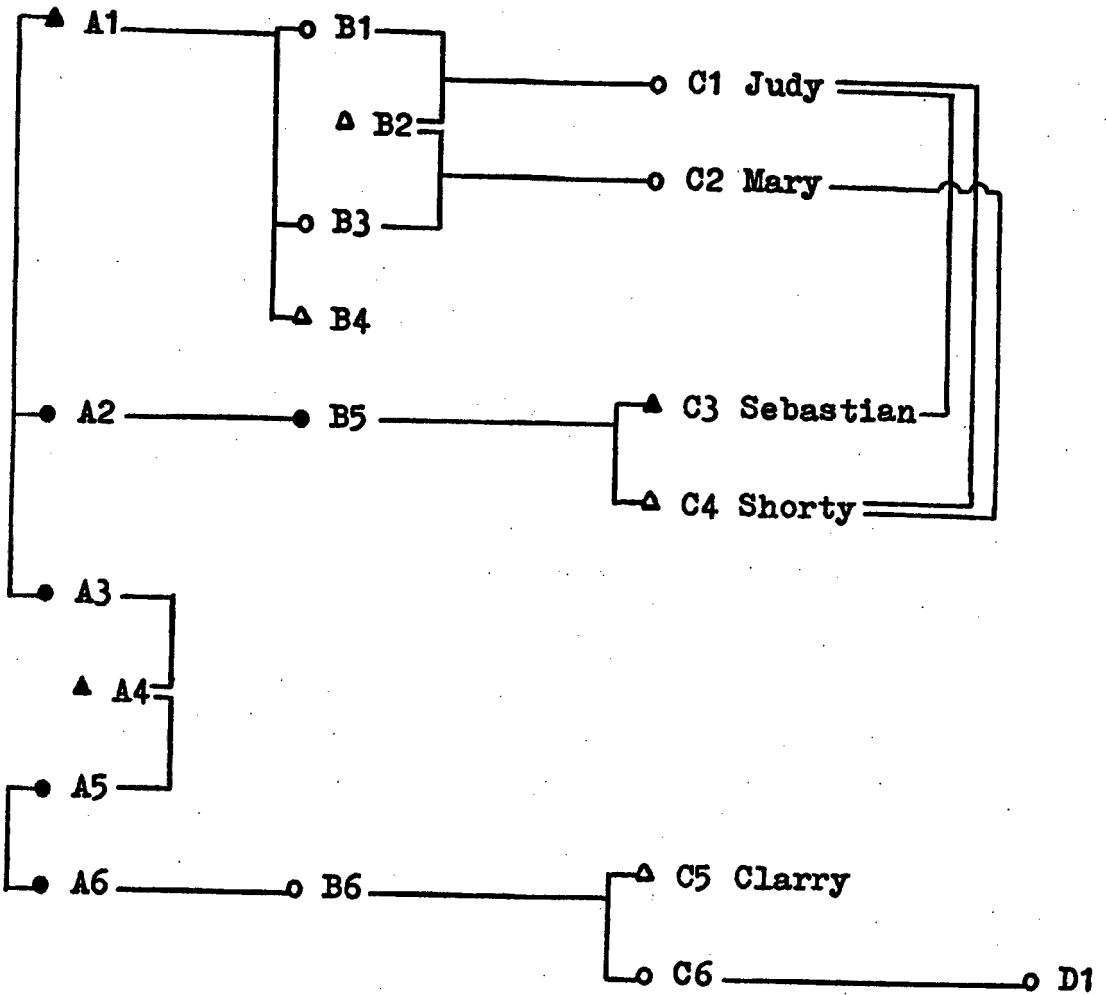


DIAGRAM 15 Case 3

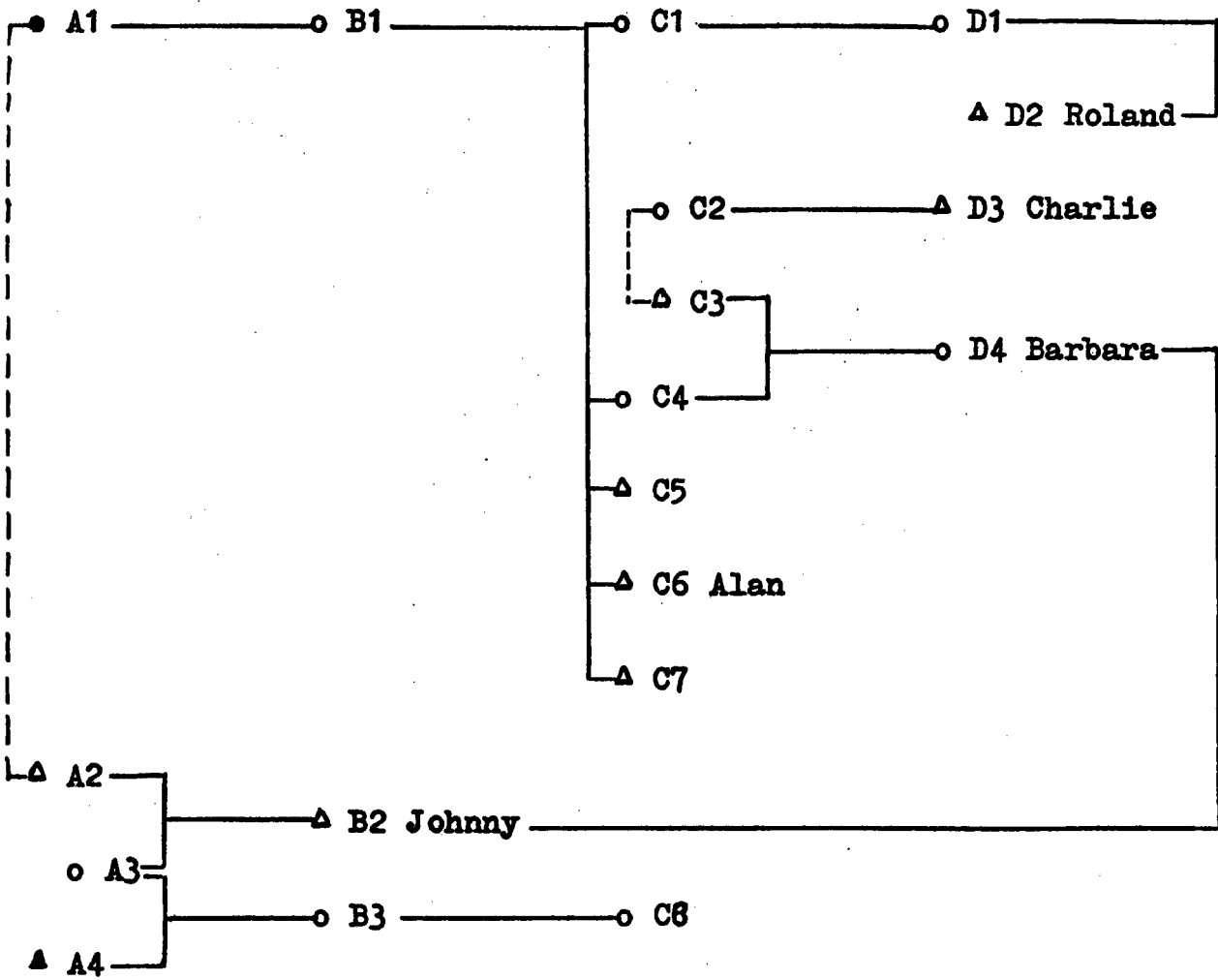




DIAGRAM 16 Case 4

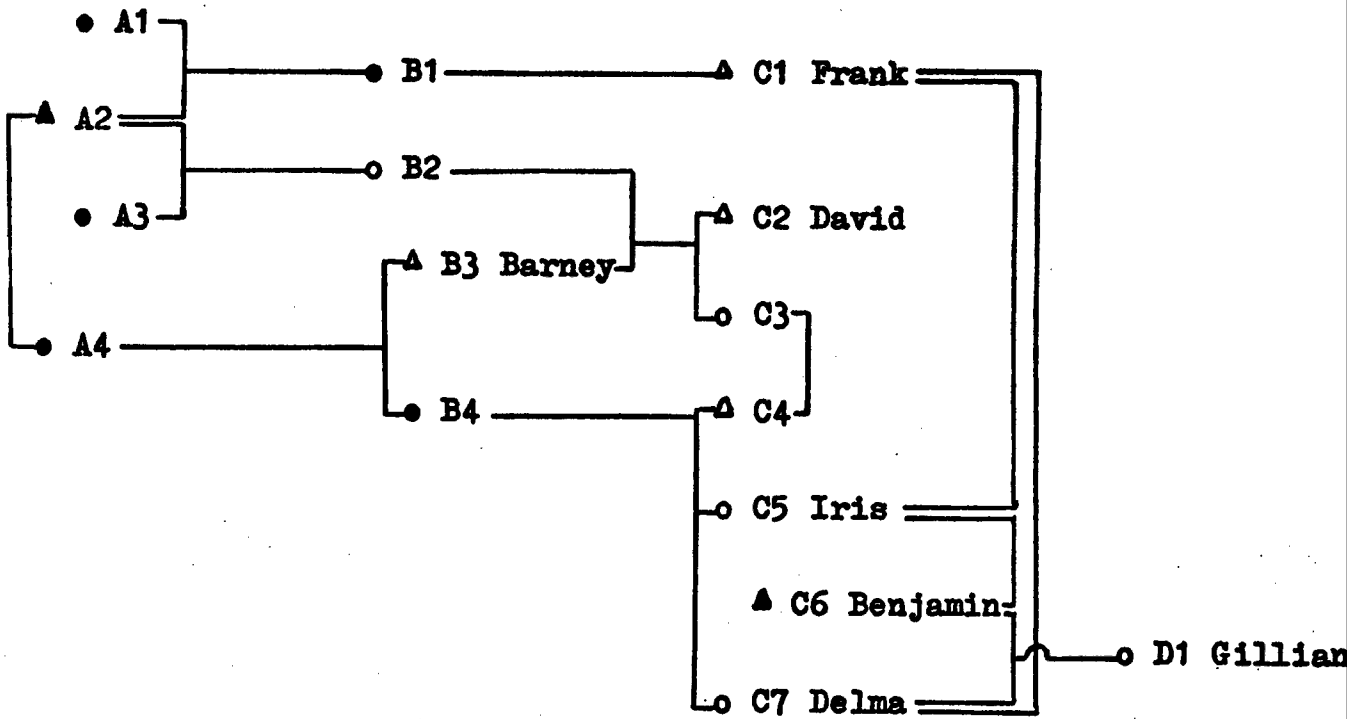


DIAGRAM 17 Case 5

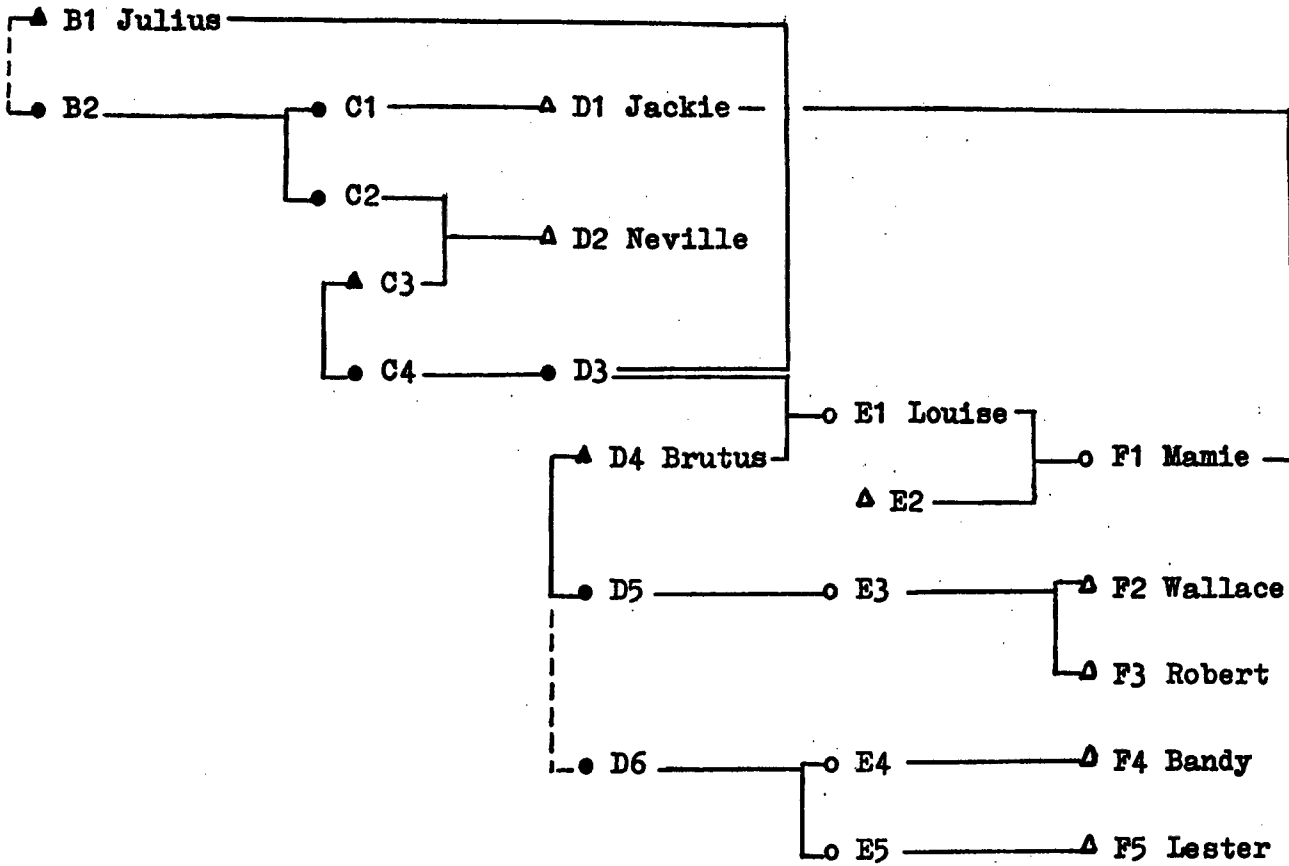


DIAGRAM 18 Case 6

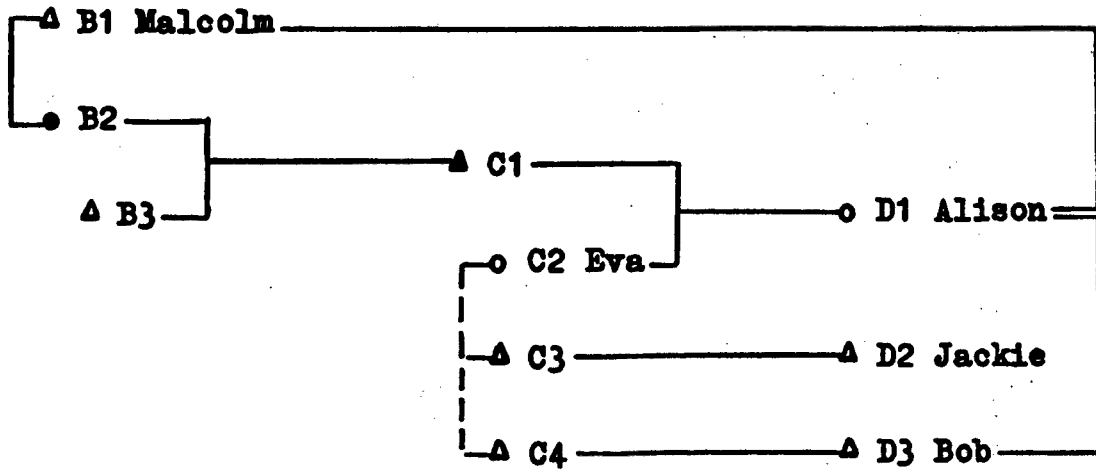


DIAGRAM 19 Case 7

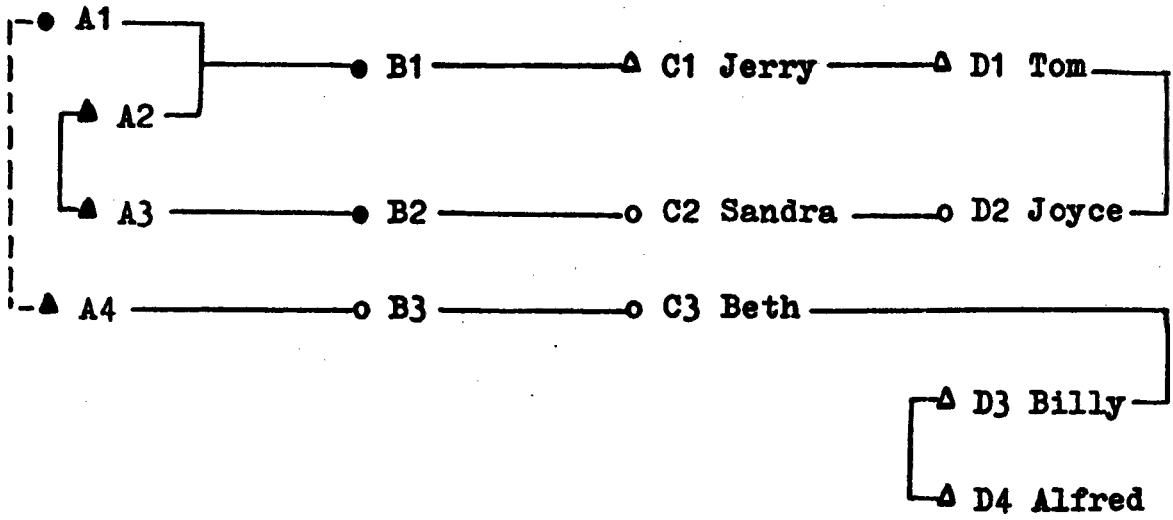


DIAGRAM 20 Case 8

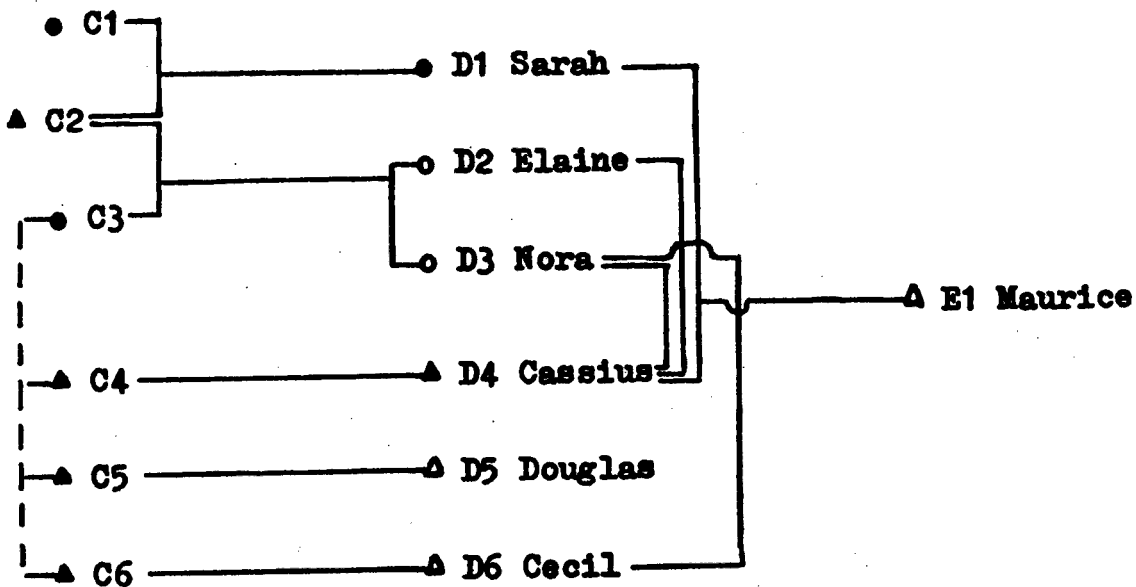


DIAGRAM 21 Case 9

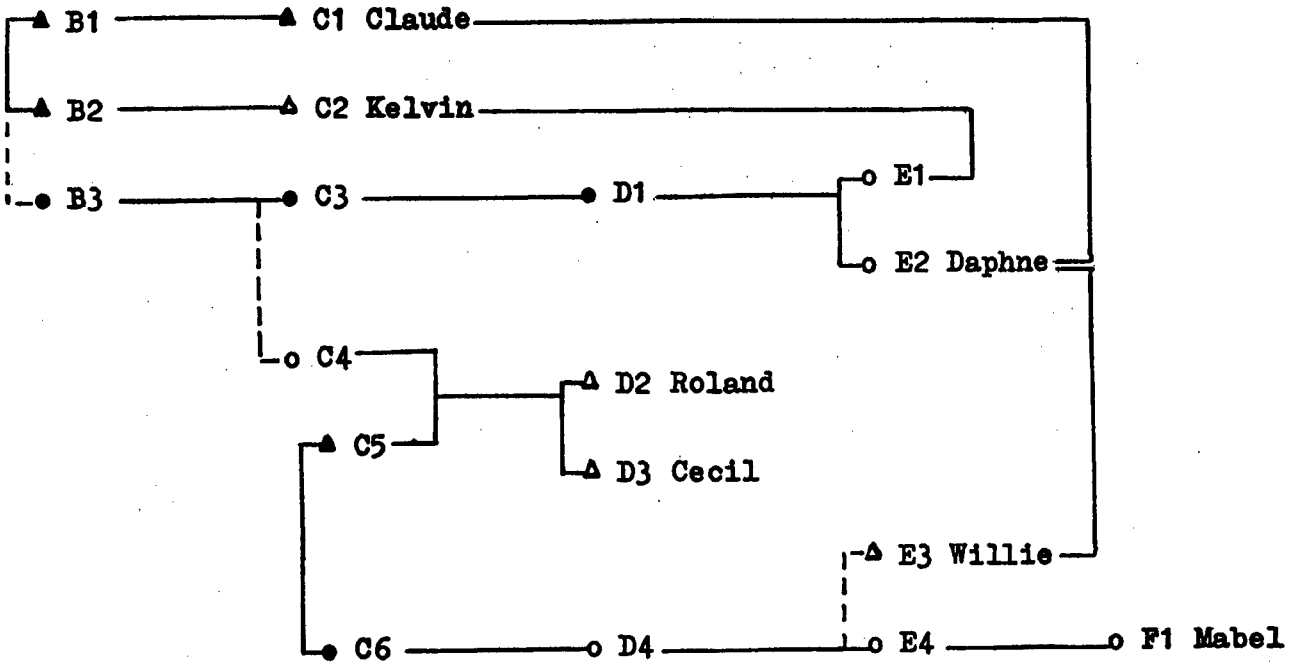


DIAGRAM 22 Case 11

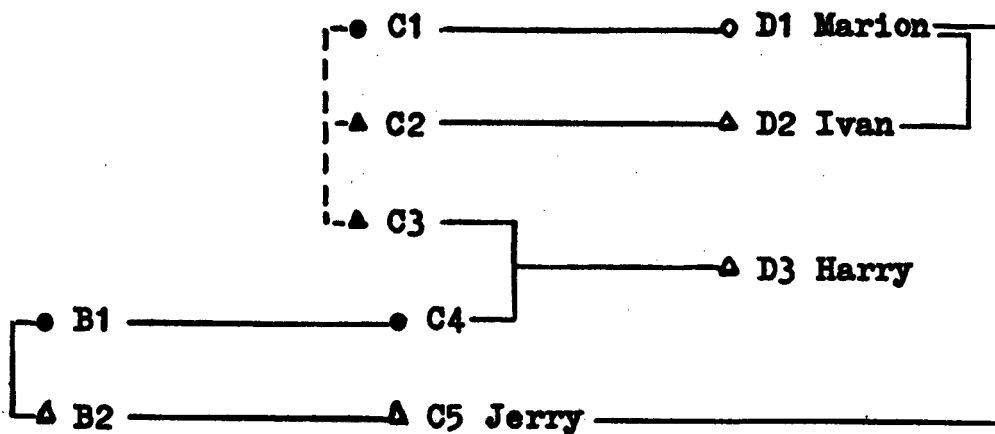


DIAGRAM 23 Case 12

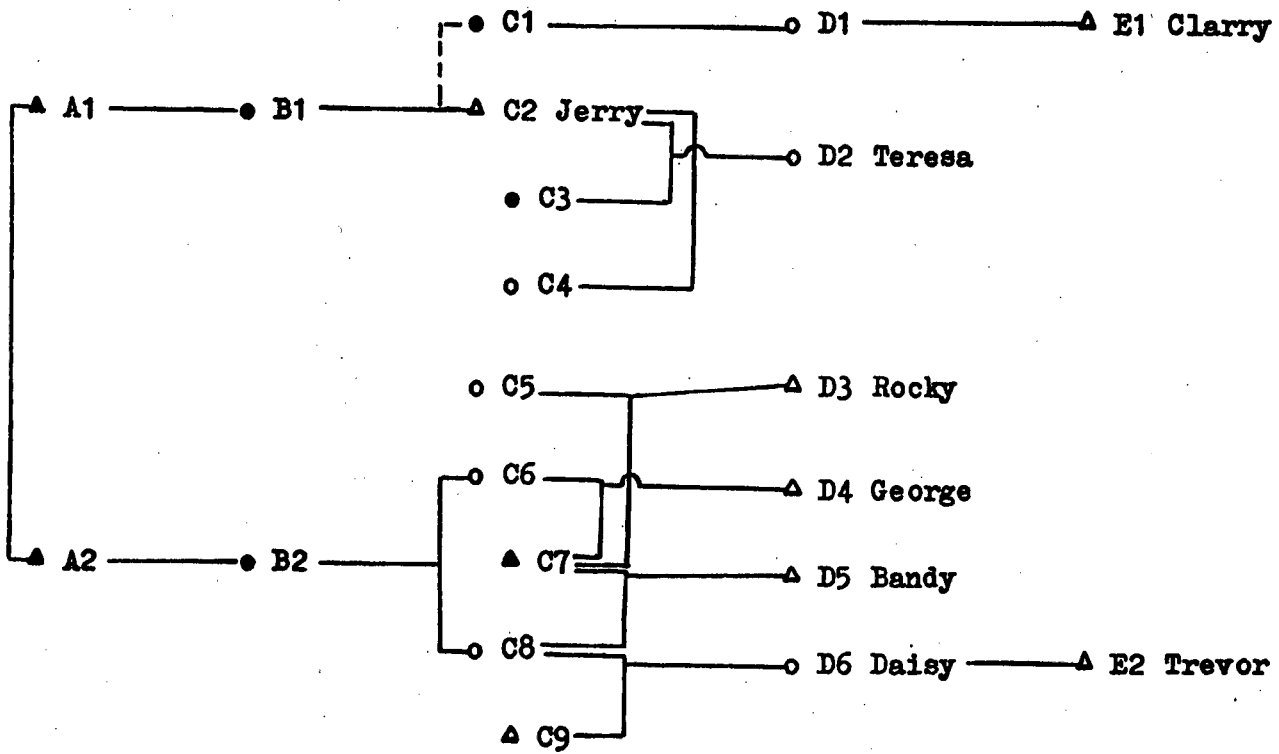
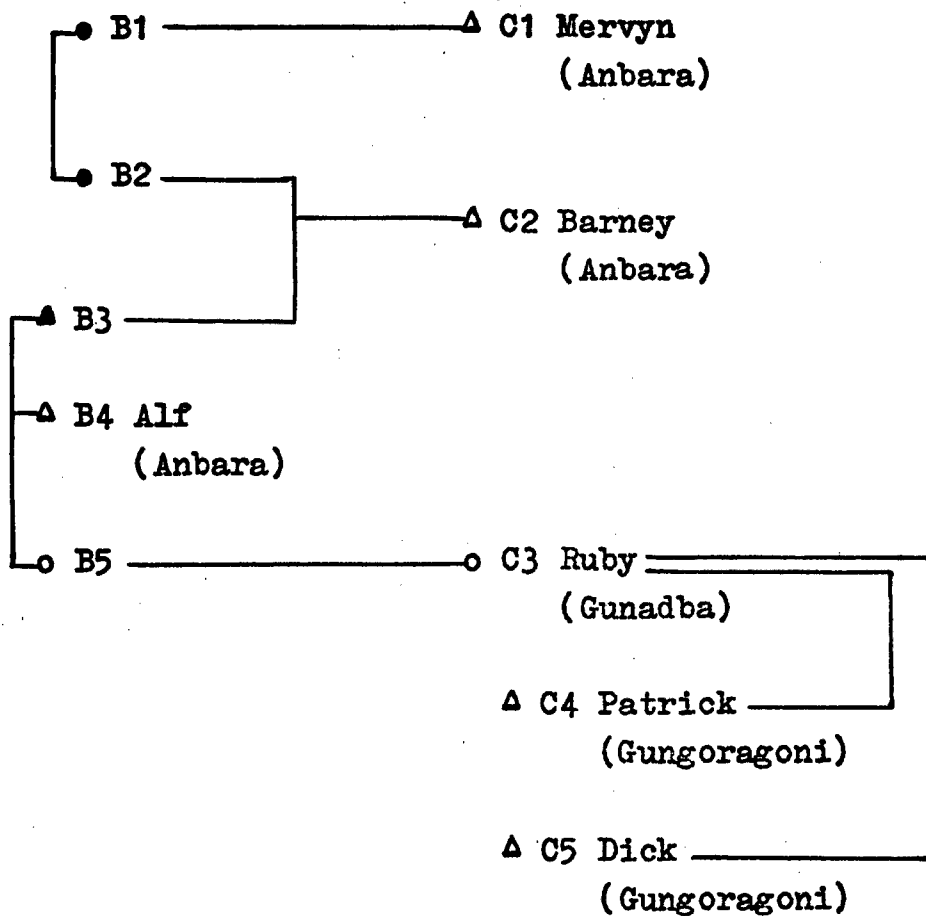


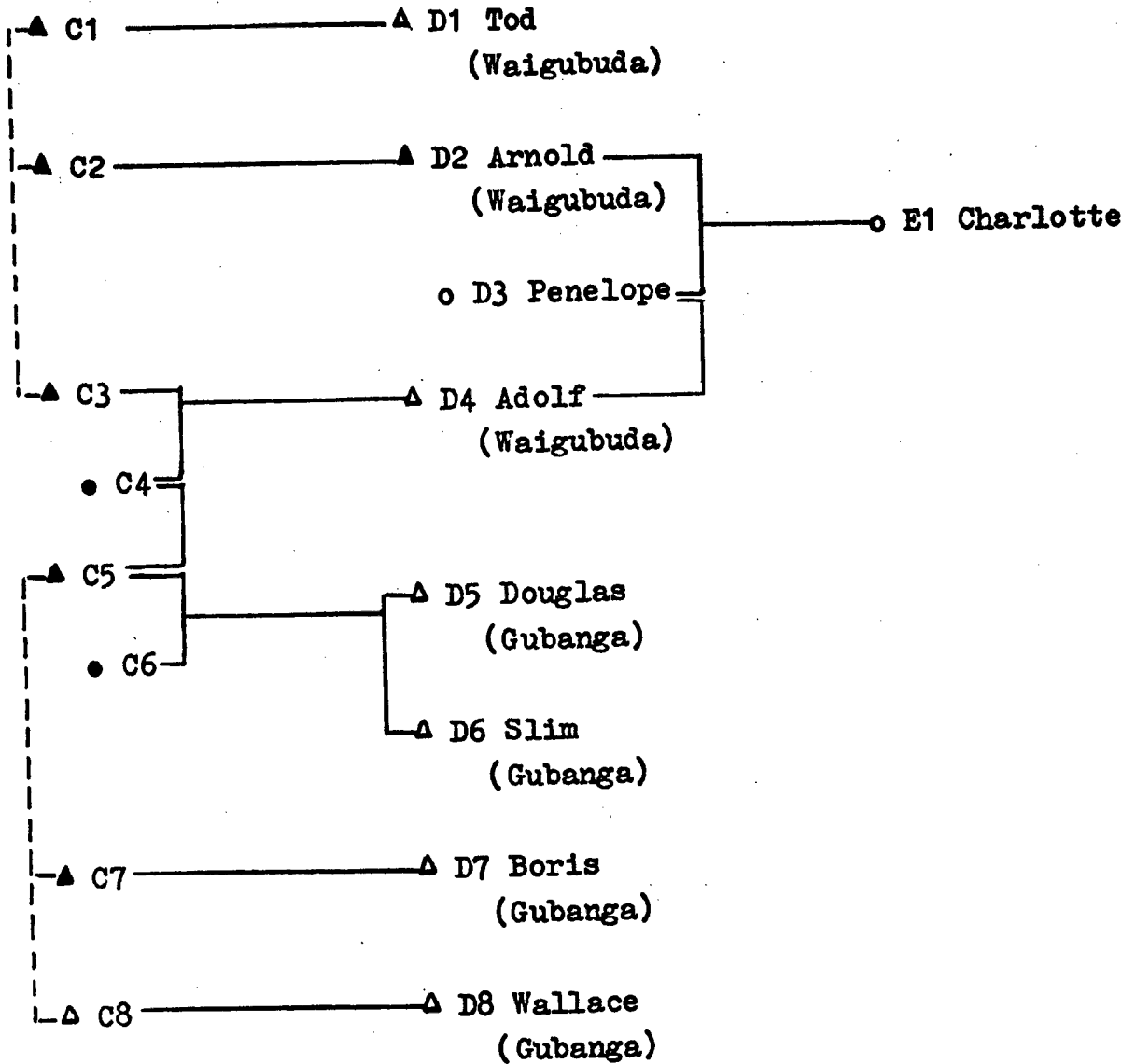


DIAGRAM 24 Case 13



Key Name in bracket indicates community

DIAGRAM 25 Case 14



Key Name in bracket indicates land-owning unit

DIAGRAM 26

Hypothetical system of wife exchange among four patrilineal groups

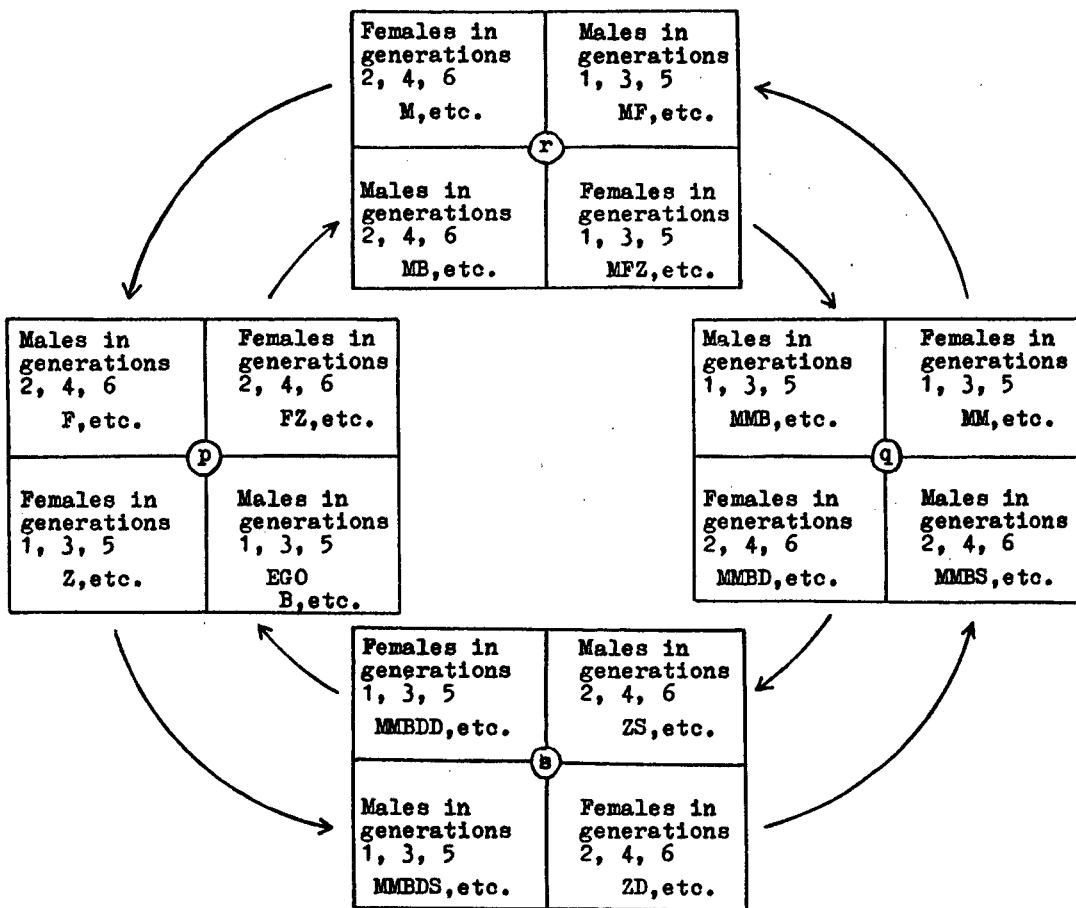


DIAGRAM 27

Precedence of genealogically-defined marriage right over claim based on alleged tradition of niece exchange

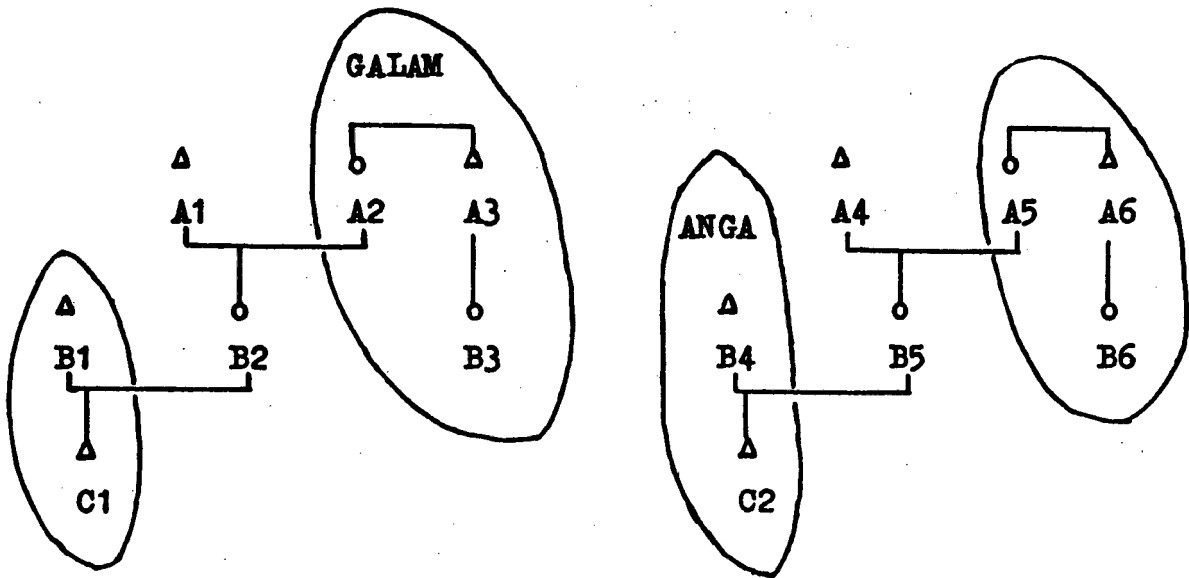
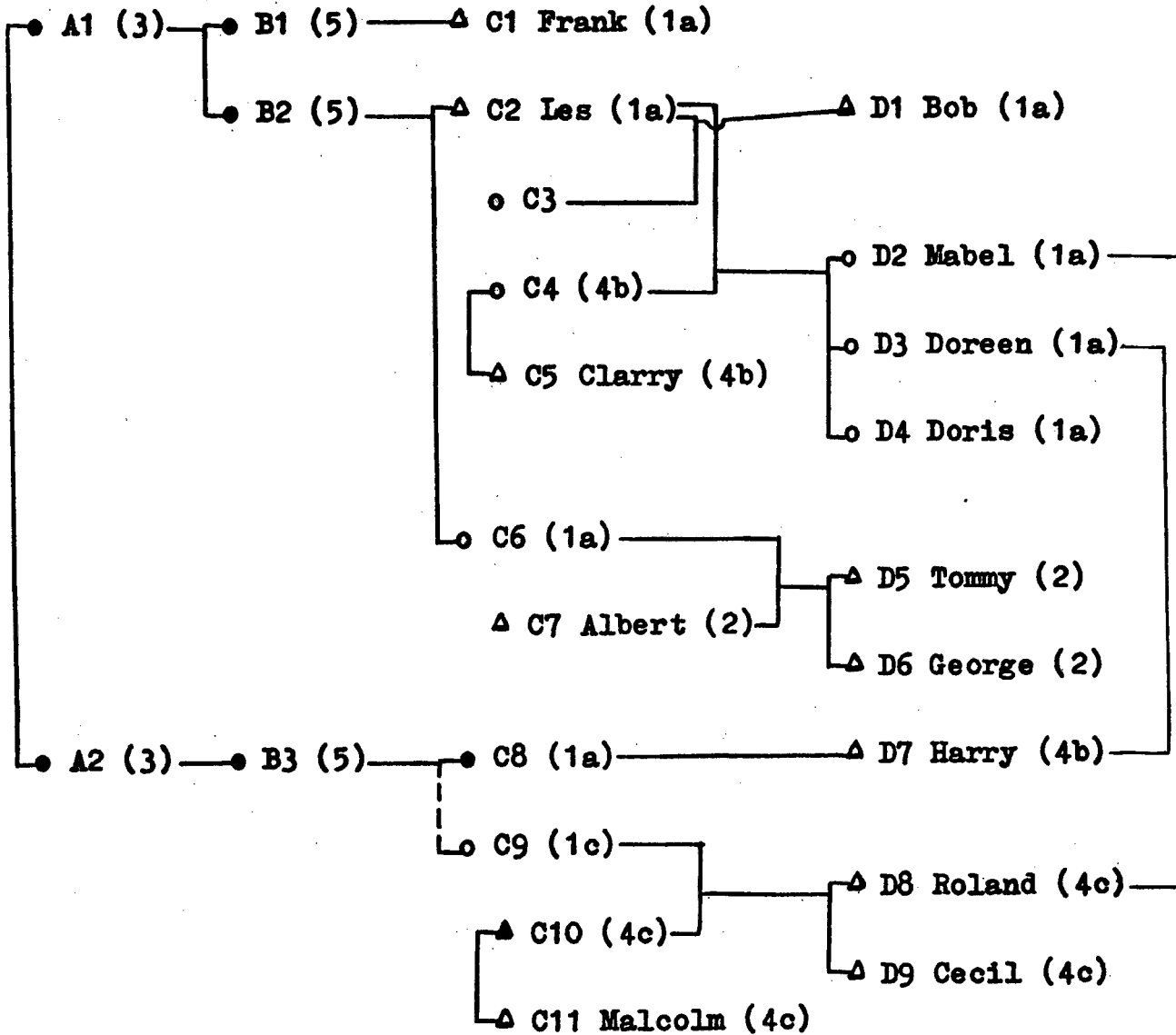


DIAGRAM 28 Case 15



Key Number in brackets indicates patrilineal group in Table 1

## LOCAL ORGANIZATION AMONG THE AUSTRALIAN ABORIGINES

By L. R. HIATT

WHEELER in 1910, after summarizing the data on Aboriginal local organization, concluded that the land-owning unit was the local group or "undivided family."<sup>1</sup> Howitt had used the latter expression to denote "a number of persons very closely related, and having a common descent from a known ancestor, together with their wives."<sup>2</sup> Wheeler found evidence suggesting that individuals and families had exclusive rights in land, and that the land rights of individuals, families and local groups were subject to tribal overrights (p. 45). His general conclusion to the chapter on tribal organization was that "the most important unit is not the tribe, but the smaller local group, several of which groups make up the tribe" (p. 55).

In 1913 Radcliffe-Brown described the local group among three tribes of Western Australia.<sup>3</sup> He later called this unit the "horde" (from Tartar *urdu*, a camp).<sup>4</sup> In 1918 he listed the defining characteristics of the horde "as it is found in the normal forms of Australian social organization."<sup>5</sup> In 1930 he referred to it as "the important local group throughout Australia" and described it in more detail than previously.<sup>6</sup> His main sources of information (in addition to some of those available to Wheeler) were his own field work in Western Australia, South Australia and New South Wales, and that of Elkin, Hart, McConnel, Piddington, Thomson and Warner.<sup>7</sup>

Radcliffe-Brown attributed to the horde the following characteristics<sup>8</sup>: (i) A child belongs to the horde of its father. (ii) In most cases marriage is outside the horde<sup>9</sup>; the woman, at marriage, leaves her horde and joins that of her husband. (iii) At any moment the horde consists of the males and unmarried females who are horde members by birth, and the wives of male members. (iv) The horde owns a

<sup>1</sup> G. C. Wheeler, *The Tribe, And Intertribal Relations in Australia*, London, 1910, p. 45.

<sup>2</sup> A. W. Howitt (1889), quoted in Wheeler, *ibid.*, pp. 24-5.

<sup>3</sup> A. R. Radcliffe-Brown, "Three Tribes of Western Australia," *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute*, Vol. XLIII, 1913.

<sup>4</sup> A. W. Howitt had previously used the term "horde," though in a somewhat different sense, *The Native Tribes of South-East Australia*, London, 1904, p. 43.

<sup>5</sup> A. R. Radcliffe-Brown, "Notes on the Social Organization of Australian Tribes," *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute*, Vol. XLVIII, 1918, pp. 222-3.

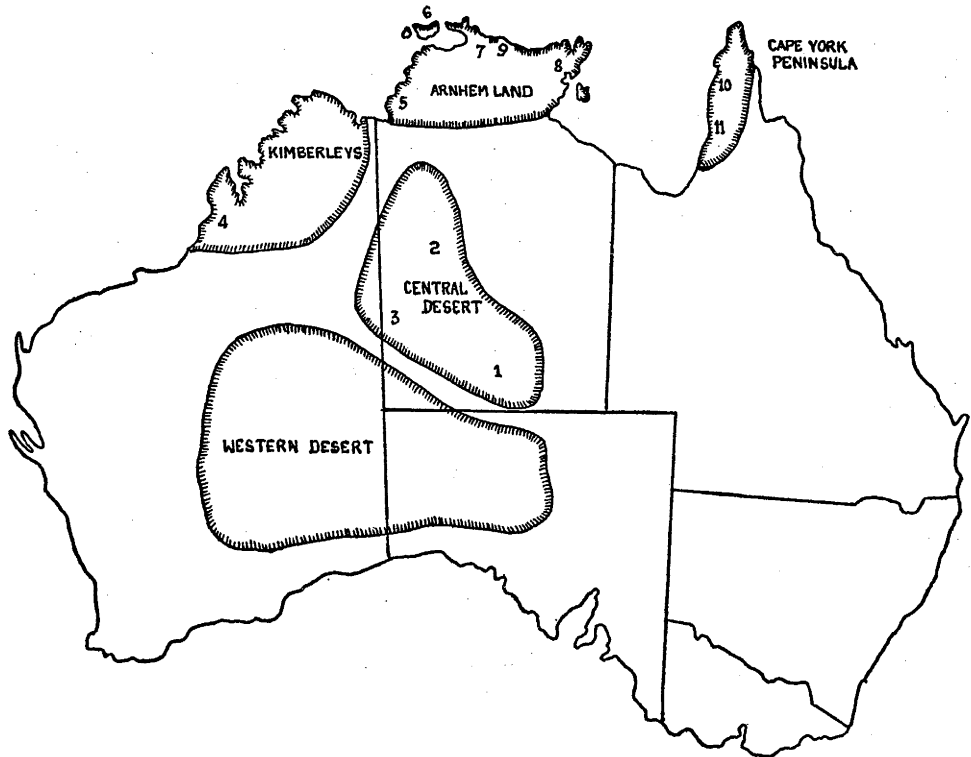
<sup>6</sup> A. R. Radcliffe-Brown, "The Social Organization of Australian Tribes," *Oceania*, Vol. I, 1930, p. 35.

<sup>7</sup> A. R. Radcliffe-Brown (1913) and (1918), also unpublished field notes; A. P. Elkin, unpublished field notes; C. W. M. Hart, "The Tiwi of Melville and Bathurst Islands," *Oceania*, Vol. I, 1930; U. McConnel, unpublished field notes; R. Piddington, unpublished field notes; D. F. Thomson, unpublished field notes; W. L. Warner, unpublished field notes.

<sup>8</sup> A. R. Radcliffe-Brown (1918), pp. 222-3; (1930), pp. 35-7, 61.

<sup>9</sup> Radcliffe-Brown (1930) stated: "In many regions the horde is exogamous. But even where there is not a strict rule against marriage within the horde, the great majority of marriages are outside the horde" (p. 35).

certain area of land, the boundaries of which are known, and the natural products of such land. (v) There is normally no provision by which a man can leave his own horde and be naturalized in another. (vi) Usually the horde possesses a number of different totem centres situated in its territory. (vii) The horde is independent and autonomous, managing its own affairs and acting as a unit in its relations with other hordes.



MAP I.—The five regions in which local organization has been studied or re-studied since 1930.

Radcliffe-Brown said that the horde is dependent for survival upon a stretch of land "normally more than one hundred square miles in area."<sup>10</sup> He stated that the Kariera horde consists of "probably not more than fifty persons"<sup>11</sup> and that a Kariera man may not hunt in the territories of hordes other than his own without the permission of the owners,<sup>12</sup> but did not generalize about the size of the horde

<sup>10</sup> 1930, p. 439.

<sup>11</sup> 1930, p. 446.

<sup>12</sup> 1913, p. 146. D. S. Davidson, reviewing the data on local organization in 1928, wrote: "Trespassing by outsiders on the territory of the local group is strictly prohibited unless permission is first granted," "The Family Hunting Territory in Australia," *American Anthropologist*, Vol. XXX, 1928, p. 619.

or about rights of entry to horde territory. He drew attention to the difficulty of investigating Aboriginal local organizations, especially when European influences have disrupted them. He himself did not observe an unchanged nomadic economy and neither has any field worker since. All descriptions of the dynamic aspects of local organization (in this century at least) are reconstructions.

This account of Aboriginal local organization gained wide acceptance among anthropologists. In 1950, however, Elkin questioned its universality. He contended that "the local organization in many tribes is not the clearcut patrilineal patrilocal exogamous group occupying a definite territory which some textbooks imply."<sup>13</sup> In 1953 he disputed Radcliffe-Brown's generalization that "everywhere in Australia the fundamental basis of social organization is a system of patrilineal local groups or clans of small size."<sup>14</sup> Elkin wished only to sound a cautionary note; he could produce little evidence to support his statements, and he admitted the difficulty of studying the subject in the field. In 1954 Radcliffe-Brown defended his sources of information, and said that the new information Elkin had submitted was not substantial enough to falsify the generalization in question. Radcliffe-Brown would not modify the proposition beyond confining it to "tribes about which we have at present adequate detailed knowledge."<sup>15</sup>

This paper reviews the data on local organization in all areas that have been studied or re-studied since 1930. These form five broad regions: the Central Desert, the Western Desert, the Kimberleys, Arnhem Land and Cape York Peninsula (see Map 1). The paper deals with the territorial aspects of Aboriginal social organization but not with related political aspects.

#### THE CENTRAL DESERT

Spencer and Gillen, Pink, and Strehlow have made field studies of the Aranda (Map 1, 1); Meggitt and Munn of the Walbiri (Map 1, 2); and Evans and Long (of the Northern Territory Administration) of the Pintubi (Map 1, 3).

##### *The Aranda*

Spencer and Gillen spoke of the "local group" and the "local totemic group" among the Aranda. The local group "occupies, and is supposed to possess, a given area of country, the boundaries of which are well known to the natives."<sup>16</sup> Natives refer to local groups by the names of the localities they occupy. The local totemic group consists of "individuals who describe themselves by the name of some one animal or plant" (*ibid.*, p. 8). The Aranda believe that human spirits reside in totemic sites and that conception occurs when a spirit leaves a site and enters the

<sup>13</sup> A. P. Elkin, "The Complexity of Social Organization in Arnhem Land," *Southwestern Journal of Anthropology*, Vol. VI, 1950, pp. 17-18.

<sup>14</sup> A. P. Elkin, "Murngin Kinship Re-examined and Remarks on Some Generalizations," *American Anthropologist*, Vol. LV, 1953, p. 417. The quotation is from A. R. Radcliffe-Brown, "Murngin Social Organization," *American Anthropologist*, Vol. LIII, 1951, p. 38.

<sup>15</sup> A. R. Radcliffe-Brown, "Australian Local Organization," *American Anthropologist*, Vol. LVI, 1954, p. 106.

<sup>16</sup> B. Spencer and F. J. Gillen, *The Arunta*, London, 1927, p. 8.



womb of a passing woman. An individual belongs to the local totemic group associated with the site from which his spirit is believed to have come.

The local group consists "largely, but not entirely" (p. 8) of people who belong to the one local totemic group. This is so because it is believed that most members of the local group were conceived at a totemic site in the local group's territory; it is believed that the remaining members were conceived at totemic sites in the territories of other local groups. Yet Spencer and Gillen did not specify the independent principle of recruitment to a local group that their account implies. In addition, they spoke of the area of country occupied by a local totemic group.<sup>21</sup> It is difficult to understand what this could mean as the local totemic group (with its recruitment by conception) would normally contain members of different local groups (each of which "occupies . . . a given area of country.")

Wheeler and Radcliffe-Brown<sup>17</sup> have noted that Spencer and Gillen did not satisfactorily explain the relationship between the local group and the local totemic group. Wheeler wrote: "The information given by Spencer and Gillen on this point is not perfectly clear or consistent . . . When they say that 'in every case the unit of division is the local totemic group,' it would seem that this only applies as regards ceremonial purposes . . . The unit for the purpose of territorial rights within the tribe would seem to be the lowest of these purely local groups, not the totem group."<sup>18</sup>

Pink stated that among the northern Aranda the land-owning group and the totemic group are co-extensive. An individual belongs to the land-owning group of his father and to the totemic group associated with a totemic site in his father's territory. If his mother believes that she has conceived him at a totemic site outside his father's territory, he is given two names—a "conceptional totemic name, establishing his place of 'finding'" and "his 'proper' one, associated with his own patrilineal totemic site."<sup>19</sup> The headman of the totemic group at whose site he was supposed to have been conceived may teach him some of the ritual of that group, but "he would never as a normal thing teach him much, for [it] belongs to others of his own clan . . ." (*ibid.*, p. 293).

Strehlow's evidence suggests that an individual who is supposed to have been conceived outside his father's territory is reared within it. Such a person participates in the ritual of his father's totemic clan. Although he is a rightful heir to the sacred *tjurunga* of the totemic clan at whose site he is supposed to have been conceived, the members of that clan are sometimes reluctant to recognize him as such.<sup>20</sup>

These accounts suggest that the Aranda land-owning group is a patrilineal descent group. Its members have a ritual association with a totemic site on the group's

<sup>17</sup> 1930, p. 325.

<sup>18</sup> *Op. cit.*, p. 32.

<sup>19</sup> O. Pink, "The Landowners in the Northern Division of the Aranda Tribe, Central Australia," *Oceania*, Vol. VI, 1935, p. 290.

<sup>20</sup> T. G. H. Strehlow, *Aranda Traditions*, Melbourne, 1947, pp. 128-9.

territory ; some of them (those who are thought to have been conceived elsewhere) have a ritual association with totemic sites on the territories of other groups.

Spencer and Gillen stated that : " The area of country which is occupied by these [local totemic groups] varies to a considerable extent, but is never large, the most extensive one with which we are acquainted being that of the witchetty grub people of the Alice Springs district. This group . . . was represented by exactly forty individuals . . . and the area of which they were recognized as the proprietors extended over about 100 square miles."<sup>21</sup> It is doubtful whether this area of land could have sustained its proprietors for any length of time ; such a population density (one person to approximately 2.5 square miles) would be significantly higher than some reported for more fertile coastal regions (for example, one person to approximately eight square miles among the Murngin of Arnhem Land.<sup>22</sup>)

Pink reported that, whereas natives know exactly the situation of totemic sites, the " outer boundaries of the clan estate fade into . . . 'no man's land'." This belongs to the tribe (it is " like our crown land, when the latter is inalienable.") It is usually poor country with no permanent water.<sup>23</sup>

Strehlow stated that the Aranda comprised five sub-groups, each with its own territory, peculiarities of dialect and custom, and traditions of hostility and friendship towards the others.<sup>24</sup> The major part of the territory of one of these sub-groups, the Northern Aranda, is a poorly watered plain whose limited resources forced the owners to undertake periodical wanderings in the quest for food and water. After heavy rains, " the men of Krantji, Ulamba and Rubuntja used to roam over the mulga expanse between Ulamba and Eritjakwata . . . For a few months after rain a large wandering horde of men, women and children revelled in an abundance of food . . . The Ilbalintja and Mborinka men made similar periodical excursions to the various soaks in their wide-flung, badly watered group territory."<sup>25</sup> After this brief period of abundance, the people gradually made their way back to the well-watered foothills of the Macdonnell Ranges, where they remained until after the next heavy rains.

Krantji, Ulamba, Rubuntja, Ilbalintja and Mborinka are names of totem centres ; the men of these places appear to be members of different totemic groups. From Strehlow's account it seems that several such groups customarily spent the year together, and that totemic groups sought food away from their homelands.

### *The Walbiri*

Meggitt<sup>26</sup> found that the Walbiri tribe consists of four major communities ranging in size from some 200 to 400 people. Before the arrival of Europeans each

<sup>21</sup> *Op. cit.*, pp. 8-9.

<sup>22</sup> W. L. Warner, *A Black Civilization*, Chicago, 1937, p. 16.

<sup>23</sup> *Op. cit.*, pp. 283-4.

<sup>24</sup> Strehlow does not indicate the size of these five sub-groups. Spencer and Gillen give the total Aranda population as about 2,000.

<sup>25</sup> *Op. cit.*, pp. 49-50.

<sup>26</sup> M. J. Meggitt, *Desert People* (in press), Sydney, 1962, Chapters 5 and 12.

community occupied a territory of some 7,000 to 15,000 square miles. The boundaries of the four territories are fixed, validated and remembered mainly through myths. Although the members of one community would not normally enter the territory of another without invitation, such invitations were freely offered.

Each major community includes some six to twelve patrilineal descent groups. The ten or so adult male members of each descent group constitute a totemic lodge. Each lodge is ritually linked with a different totemic site (or set of totemic sites). The totemic sites of the lodges in a community are located throughout the territory of the community. The members of a lodge do not necessarily, or even commonly, form the basis of a residential or food-seeking unit, and they do not occupy to the exclusion of others an area of land surrounding their totemic sites. They would not feel obliged to seek permission before hunting in the vicinity of the totemic sites of other lodges in the community.<sup>27</sup>

Roughly half the married men of a community are married to women from within it. All eight subsections and all categories of kin are represented in the one community.

During autumn and winter, when food and water supplies were comparatively plentiful, the several hundred members of each community lived together. They moved as a group from waterhole to waterhole as various edible plants matured and as game moved ahead of the hunters. As food and water became less plentiful, the single community-camp began to break up. The groups became progressively smaller until in the late spring and early summer the usual food-gathering unit consisted of a man, his wives and young unmarried children, with perhaps an aged widowed mother or father-in-law in their care. After the rains broke, the groups slowly converged until all were re-united around the large waterholes.

Agnatic links were only one of a number of considerations determining the composition of the smaller groups into which the community divided during the dry months. Young men still receiving instruction in lodge mysteries often accompanied their fathers and fathers' fathers; brothers often moved about together (partly because men allowed their brothers sexual access to their wives). But brothers-in-law and male cross-cousins were also appropriate and frequent hunting companions. Meggitt stated: "It is obviously misleading to regard these Walbiri food-gathering groups as simple patrilineal and patrilocal hordes. Their composition was too labile, too dependent on the changing seasons, the alternation of quarrels and reconciliations, the demands of non-agnatic relatives, and so on. From the point of view of the individual, the group at its greatest was the community that comprised all his countrymen and included most of his closer relatives. At its least, the group was his family of procreation or orientation. Between these extremes, the unit might perhaps be termed a horde, but it was one whose personnel were recruited on a number of different bases that varied from one occasion to the next. These

<sup>27</sup> In one area of some 1,000-1,200 square miles, Meggitt discovered 14 totemic centres. He asserted that 14 hordes could have survived in this area only if they had equal rights of access to its resources. *Ibid.*, p. 64.

might reflect consanguineal links, affinal ties, bonds of ritual friendship or obligation, the pull of temperamental compatibility or combinations of all of them."

Munn's observations of Walbiri local organization corroborate those of Meggitt. She wrote: "Thus, today, members of one community country may divide themselves according to the more narrowly defined sections of the country where they based themselves in the past. Groups linked with such regions were not, however, 'patrilocal hordes,' as they could include adult males united by various kinship ties and representing all sub-sections. . . . At its smallest the group which hunted and camped together could be a single family. A number of families moving together at any given time might be related by various kinship ties; i.e., the composition of the group was not patrilineally determined."<sup>28</sup> Munn added that the same pattern may be observed in residential associations on the Government settlement.

### *The Pintubi*

In recent years, officers of the Welfare Branch (Northern Territory Administration) have carried out census work among the remaining nomadic Pintubi.<sup>29</sup> Data on genealogical relationships in the groups encountered are slight, but two observations are worth noting. Evans encountered a group of 20 Pintubi located west of Mt. Doreen Station. In the course of his remarks, he said: "Two families were travelling together, and as one man now has two of the other family's daughters as wives, it can be safely assumed that they will continue to be a closely united family group."<sup>30</sup> Long concluded from the information on residence after marriage: "At least it is established that it is not unusual, possibly normal, that a young man lives with his wife's parents and in her country, at least for a time."<sup>31</sup>

### THE WESTERN DESERT

The "Western Desert" extends across western South Australia into eastern and north-eastern Western Australia, and includes part of northern South Australia and part of the Northern Territory (Map 1). Berndt distinguished five social units in the region: the local group, the religious cult (or lodge), the horde, the ceremonial seasonal unit, and the dialectal unit.<sup>32</sup>

The local group is a patrilineal descent group whose members have a common ritual association with a totemic site or constellation of totemic sites. It has rights in land (Berndt speaks of it as "the land-owning group"); but "the local group country is defined not by boundaries explicitly demarcating it from similar units, but by the actual sites connected with the ancestral being and his acts" (p. 98).

<sup>28</sup> N. D. Munn, *Walbiri Graphic Art and Sand Drawing*, unpublished Ph.D. thesis, Australian National University, Canberra, 1960, p. 2.

<sup>29</sup> In 1960 many Pintubi were living more or less permanently at Papunya Government Settlement. The Pintubi of the Lake Mackay area are probably the only Aborigines in Australia who are still nomadic.

<sup>30</sup> E. C. Evans (Chief Welfare Officer, N.T.A.), *Report on Overland Patrol to Lake Mackay and the Kintore Ranges*, N.T.A. pamphlet, 1960.

<sup>31</sup> J. Long (Senior Research Officer, N.T.A.), personal communication, 1961.

<sup>32</sup> R. M. Berndt, "The Concept of 'The Tribe' in the Western Desert of Australia," *Oceania*, Vol. XXX, 1959.

The religious cult consists of the adult male members of those local groups whose respective totemic sites lie along adjoining sections of the one ancestral route (that is, a route believed to have been taken by a mythical ancestor). The members of a cult are widely dispersed and all of them rarely (if ever) come together for ritual purposes. Members fulfil ritual responsibilities to totemic sites in their own neighbourhoods. It is felt that this is "of benefit to the larger religious unit generally" (p. 99).

The horde is the land-occupying group. It consists of the male and unmarried female members of a local group, and the wives of the male members. "It is a corporate body of some consistency and unity. . . It is (or was) politically independent, the rule of (customary) law exists within it, and embraces all its members; and its male members, and ideally their spouses, should co-operate not only in economic affairs but also (if necessary) in defending themselves against others. . . In contradistinction to the local group, the horde as such has no territorial claims. . ." (pp. 103-4). A horde probably contains no more than about 50 people.

The seasonal ceremonial unit consists of a number of hordes that come together when food and water are relatively plentiful. At such times, "the major rituals and ceremonies were held, the total group participating to varying degrees and in different contexts" (p. 103). Two or three hundred people may be present on such occasions.

The dialectal unit is a "constellation of more or less contiguous local groups" whose members speak the one dialect. It is not necessarily co-extensive with the "ephemeral gathering formed during composite meetings" (i.e. the ceremonial seasonal unit); and its adult male members are not necessarily members of the one religious cult. Its integrity probably depends on kin ties and social interaction. It is "territorially anchored only in relation to the local groups which compose it" (p. 102).

Berndt said that the Western Desert people customarily moved over a fairly large stretch of country. There was a "long range expectation, apparently not always fulfilled in the past and less so to-day. . . that such wanderers would return to country at least in the vicinity of their local group. Not all the members of local groups possessing a common dialect would move together; more usually one or more hordes, as food-collecting and hunting units, would be involved. Since there was no restriction on movement across the country and the exploitation of its natural resources (except in some cases where particularly sacred sites were concerned), it would be rare indeed to have found all members of each local group living permanently on, or moving wholly within the confines of, its own land; this would be the exception rather than the rule" (p. 103).

As we have seen, Berndt asserted that the local group's country is defined by its totemic sites and not by boundaries demarcating it from similar units. He added that "such territory is, ideally, unalienable; but members of other local groups are not debarred from entry, or from hunting game or collecting food within its precincts, although they may be defined access to a sacred site where objects of ritual use are

stored" (p. 98). A horde (or several hordes living together) commonly moved across the country in search of food within an undefined radius of the cult sites of male members.

#### THE KIMBERLEYS

Radcliffe-Brown,<sup>33</sup> Elkin,<sup>34</sup> Kaberry,<sup>35</sup> Hernandez,<sup>36</sup> and Piddington<sup>37</sup> have studied local organization among various tribes of the north-west region of Western Australia. The accounts of Elkin, Kaberry and Hernandez are consistent with Radcliffe-Brown's general account of Aboriginal local organization set out earlier in this paper. Piddington, however, concluded that the local organization of the tribe he studied (Map 1, 4) was atypical. He wrote: "The general Australian practice is that each horde owns a specified territory over which its members may hunt, but on which no members of other hordes may hunt or camp except with the permission or at the invitation of the owners. Throughout the entire Nadja territory this rule does not exist. Certain small exogamous groups exist, but they lack the solidarity which characterizes the normal Australian horde; small parties composed of less than a dozen individuals from any horde may go on hunting expeditions lasting several months, over the territory of any other horde, without asking the permission of the owners, who would not object" (p. 351).

The Nadja (a Karadjeri sub-tribe) state that a man may not marry a woman from his own district. Residence after marriage is usually virilocal.

Totemic groups are patrilineal and are ritually linked to specific sites.<sup>38</sup> Piddington doubted whether the Karadjeri "possessed a rigid clan associated with their local groups."<sup>39</sup> There was, however, "a general tendency for the majority of men of the one locality to belong to one or other of the two moieties. . ." (*ibid.*, p. 351). If "men of the one locality" are men of the one local group, the implication is that men of more than one patrilineal group often lived together.

#### ARNHEM LAND

The term Arnhem Land is used here to mean the roughly rhomboidal area enclosed by the Fitzmaurice and Roper Rivers, the Timor and Arafura Seas, and the Gulf of Carpentaria. It includes Bathurst and Melville Islands and Groote Eylandt. Investigations of local organization have been made by Stanner in the Daly River region (Map 1, 5); by Hart on Melville and Bathurst Islands (Map 1, 6); by R. and C. Berndt, and McCarthy and McArthur in the north-western area of the Arnhem Land

<sup>33</sup> A. R. Radcliffe-Brown (1930), pp. 339-40.

<sup>34</sup> A. P. Elkin, "Social Organization in the Kimberley Division, North-Western Australia," *Oceania*, Vol. II, 1932.

<sup>35</sup> P. M. Kaberry, "The Forrest River and Lyne River Tribes of North-West Australia," *Oceania*, Vol. V, 1935.

<sup>36</sup> T. Hernandez, "Social Organization of the Drysdale River Tribes, North-West Australia," *Oceania*, Vol. XI, 1941.

<sup>37</sup> M. and R. Piddington, "Report on Field Work in North-Western Australia," *Oceania*, Vol. II, 1932.

<sup>38</sup> R. Piddington, "Totemic System of the Karadjeri Tribe," *Oceania*, Vol. II, 1932, p. 376.

<sup>39</sup> R. and M. Piddington, 1932, p. 351.

Reserve (Map 1, 7); by Warner, Thomson, Berndt, Worsley, and McCarthy and McArthur in the north-eastern and eastern area of the Arnhem Land Reserve (Map 1, 8); and by me in the north-central area of the Arnhem Land Reserve (Map 1, 9).

#### *The Daly River*

In 1933 Stanner wrote that the local organization of the Daly River tribes "differed in some ways from what we are led to believe is, or was, characteristic of most tribes."<sup>40</sup> The horde countries were small, sometimes less than ten square miles. Their boundaries were uncertain and were not rigidly observed. The hunting and collecting rights of the horde over its territory were not absolute. Many stretches of country belonged to two or three hordes, and sometimes to as many tribes. Individuals passed between their own and neighbouring horde countries with great freedom and confidence, and there was considerable contact between hordes and tribes for food-gathering and ceremonial purposes.

In a later article, Stanner stated that each totemic site is the possession of a patrilineal local totemic clan. These clans, however, are too small to be local living groups. The hordes are "aggregates of contiguous local totemic clans."<sup>41</sup>

#### *Bathurst and Melville Islands*

Hart reported that the Tiwi of Bathurst and Melville Islands have a system of matrilineal totemic clans.<sup>42</sup> Each clan has a mythologically-defined relationship with one or more natural objects and is associated with a particular locality. A clan does not perform increase ceremonies connected with its site (or sites) and has little or no feeling of reverence towards it. The members are found in different hordes, and each horde contains members of different clans. The Tiwi do not have patrilineal totemic lodges.

The Tiwi were divided into nine bands, each occupying some 200 square miles of productive land and consisting of 100-300 people. The boundaries of band territories, which were transitional zones perhaps several miles wide, were well known to everyone.<sup>43</sup>

The band was the territorial group with which a man most closely identified himself. He referred to its territory as his country and to its members as his people. But although each "district . . . was a firm, fixed, known quality . . . the people who 'owned' the district . . . were a flexible and constantly shifting collection of individuals" (*ibid.*, p. 12). Post-marital residence was often virilocal, but men commonly spent long periods in the bands of their wives' fathers or prospective wives'

<sup>40</sup> W. E. H. Stanner, "The Daly River Tribes—A Report on Field Work in North Australia," *Oceania*, Vol. III, 1933, p. 403.

<sup>41</sup> W. E. H. Stanner, "Murinbata Kinship and Totemism," *Oceania*, Vol. VII, 1936, p. 187.

<sup>42</sup> C. W. M. Hart, "The Tiwi of Melville and Bathurst Islands," *Oceania*, Vol. I, 1930, pp. 176-7.

<sup>43</sup> C. W. M. Hart and A. R. Pilling, *The Tiwi of North Australia*, 1960. In his article of 1930, Hart used the term "horde"; in this book of 1960, he substituted "band."

fathers. Hart said that "even the faint prospect of a wife was sufficient to cause young men to change bands, and change of band residence by senior men was not at all rare" (p. 31). If widows changed bands upon re-marriage, their offspring (including young adult males) often went with them. Old men with young wives preferred their adult sons to be in other bands. Old women sometimes divided their time between their husband's household in one band and their son's household in another. Hart concluded: "The fluidity of band affiliation was so constant a feature of Tiwi life that almost the only firm generalization that can be made about it is that when 'a big man' with a large household had lived most of his adult life in the territory of a band, and had been up to the time of his death one of the dominating elders of that band, his children, both male and female, would be regarded as 'really' members of that band during their lifetimes, regardless of where marriage took the girls, or where their own life careers or the remarriages of their mothers took the boys" (p. 32).

*Arnhem Land Reserve (North-Western Area)*

Elkin and R. and C. Berndt<sup>44</sup> reported that the people of this area belong to matrilineal exogamous phratries, each of which is associated with several totems. There is a mythologically-defined link between each totem and a tract of country, but the phratry is not a land-owning unit and its members do not form the basis of a common residence grouping. The phratries are divided between two matri-moieties.

The land-owning unit is a small patrilineal descent group. It is patrilocal and exogamous. It has undisputed ownership of a small stretch of country. It has a cult significance in certain ceremonies (p. 294).

During 1948 McCarthy and McArthur studied the hunting and collecting activities of a small group of natives of this area.<sup>45</sup> The nine members of the group consisted of a man named Wilira and his wife; four brothers related to Wilira as M.B.S., and the wives of two of these; and a young unmarried man whose relationships to the others are not recorded. Thus male members of at least two patrilineal descent groups co-operated as members of the one food-seeking group.

*Arnhem Land Reserve (North-eastern and Eastern Area)*

Warner studied the Murngin of north-east Arnhem Land. He wrote: "The Murngin clan is an exogamic patrilineal group averaging forty or fifty individuals who possess a common territory which averages 360 square miles. This group possesses one or more sacred totemic water holes. . . . The male members of the clan who can be the permanent occupants of the group's land possess totemic emblems in common."<sup>46</sup>

<sup>44</sup> A. P. Elkin, R. M. Berndt and C. H. Berndt, "Social Organization of Arnhem Land," *Oceania*, Vol. XXI, 1951.

<sup>45</sup> F. D. McCarthy and M. McArthur, "The Food Quest and the Time Factor in Aboriginal Economic Life," in C. P. Mountford (ed.), *Records of the American-Australian Scientific Expedition to Arnhem Land*, Vol. II, pp. 147 ff.

<sup>46</sup> W. L. Warner, *op. cit.*, p. 16.



The land surrounding the clan waterhole is the core of clan territory. No exact boundary exists between two clan territories except where a river, lake or other body of water defines it.

Residence is patri-virilocal after the first year or two of marriage; women eventually go to their husbands' clans to live and rear their families. Friendly clans always live together during the seasons when food is plentiful in certain areas. They enter each other's territories without invitation (p. 19). Warner said: "The clan's so-called 'ownership' of the land has little of the economic about it. Friendly peoples wander over the food areas of others and, if their area happens to be poor in food production, possibly spend more of their lives on the territory of other clans than on their own. Exclusive use of the group's territory by the group is not part of the Murngin idea of land 'ownership'" (p. 389).

Berndt's account of local organization in this region differed slightly from that of Warner. Berndt described a corporate patrilineal descent group which has hunting and fishing rights over a specified tract of country.<sup>47</sup> The sacred sites and totemic centres of the group are located in this territory. The land-holding unit, however, is the linguistic group. This consists of from two to six linked, parallel patrilineal descent groups which "may separate and, at certain seasons with wives of male members, wander as local hordes over the lands of other linguistic groups: but for their ceremonies, for their burials, and for a greater part of the year, they will be located in their relevant linguistic groups" (p. 101). The territory of each patrilineal descent group (which forms part of a linguistic group territory) may be ill-defined. The boundaries of each linguistic group territory are fairly clearly defined and are never questioned.

Worsley investigated the nomadic economy of Groote Eylandt by observing the activities of the remaining nomads and part-nomads, and by questioning older men now settled on stations and reserves. He wrote: "But unlike many aboriginal societies, the hordes belonging to a particular clan were by no means limited to the territories of that clan. They possessed a more intimate knowledge of the resources of their own territories in general, and would appear to have spent more of their time in these areas than in any other for this reason, but they used to roam all over the main and outlying islands if they so desired, and there were no tribal rules against entering or exploiting the territory of another clan. Even the mainland would be visited from time to time for various purposes, including economic."<sup>48</sup>

McCarthy and McArthur studied the hunting and collecting activities of a small group of Groote Eylandt natives.<sup>49</sup> The group included a man called Kumbiala and his wife, and Kumbiala's W.B. and his wife. The two men presumably belonged to different patrilineal descent groups.

<sup>47</sup> R. M. Berndt, "Murngin (Wulamba) Social Organization," *American Anthropologist*, Vol. LVII, 1955.

<sup>48</sup> P. M. Worsley, "The Utilization of Food Resources by an Australian Aboriginal Tribe," *Acta Ethnographica*, Vol. X, 1961, p. 158.

<sup>49</sup> F. D. McCarthy and M. McArthur, *op. cit.*, pp. 180 ff.

Thomson's accounts of local organization in north-eastern Arnhem Land are consistent with Radcliffe-Brown's general account.<sup>50</sup>

*Arnhem Land Reserve (North-central Area)*

Between 1958 and 1960 I used the same methods as Worsley to investigate local organization in the Liverpool-Blyth River region.<sup>51</sup> My base was the Maningrida Government Settlement at the mouth of the Liverpool River. The Northern Territory Administration established the settlement in 1957, approximately one year before my arrival. By 1958 almost all inhabitants of the Liverpool-Blyth River region had taken up residence at Maningrida, at mission stations nearby, or in Darwin. Many of them had been leading a traditional (or near-traditional) life up to the time of the settlement's establishment.

Speakers of some eight or nine different languages lived at Maningrida at various times over the period of field work. I made detailed observations of the speakers of three of these—Gidjijali, Nagara and Gunavidji—and found common principles of local organization among them. I shall refer to those speaking the same language as a "linguistic group."

The land-owning unit is a small patrilineal descent group or several amalgamated patrilineal descent groups. Normally the members of such a unit speak the same language. Many people are bi-lingual but name one of the languages as their primary language. The members of a few land-owning units are divided into those who name one language as their primary language and those who name another. The territories of these units lie on the peripheries of language areas.

In 1960 there were 19 Gidjijali (or predominantly Gidjijali) land-owning units, 7 Nagara (or predominantly Nagara) land-owning units and 7 Gunavidji land-owning units. The mean membership of the 33 land-owning units was 13.8 persons (range 1-61).

Of the 33 Gidjijali, Nagara and Gunavidji land-owning units, 21 consisted of a single patrilineal group, 8 consisted of two patrilineal groups, and 4 consisted of three patrilineal groups. The mean membership of the 49 patrilineal groups was 9.3 persons (range 1-29).

Informants use the English term "company" to refer to the ownership of land by more than one patrilineal group. They are usually unable to explain how the association came about. It was established, however, that within living memory several patrilineal groups left the vicinity of their homelands as their numbers declined (or as the population of the linguistic group declined) and became permanent associates of patrilineal groups in other localities. Descendants of the original migrants have retained their patrilineal group identity but show little interest in the group's former

<sup>50</sup> D. F. Thomson, "Arnhem Land: Explorations among an Unknown People," *Geographical Journal*, Vols. CXII-CXIV, 1949, and *Economic Structure and the Ceremonial Exchange System in Arnhem Land*, 1949.

<sup>51</sup> This was part of a wider study undertaken as a Research Scholar at the Australian National University, Canberra. The present paper is largely a development of the work of A. P. Elkin and M. J. Meggitt, who taught me earlier at the University of Sydney.

locality. They regard themselves as joint owners of the sites with which their migrant forbears became associated, and are regarded as such by the descendants of the original owners. It is possible that similar events have led to other instances of joint ownership, and that the circumstances of migration and subsequent amalgamation have been forgotten. There is no distinction in rights or prestige among the several patrilineal groups of a land-owning unit. This is so even where it is known that one of the groups is the original owner and the other a migrant group.

The nucleus of each land-owning unit's territory is a cluster of named sites. Some of the sites are totemic and are named accordingly (for example, "Frog-is-here"); others are not totemic (for example, "Where-the-plum-tree-stands," "Where-the-rainwater-collects"). Most sites are distinct natural features (for example, a spring, small beach, mouth of a creek).

The name of one of the cluster of sites is regularly used to indicate the home of a land-owning unit. It is used with the preposition "from" to indicate an individual's place of origin. The land-owning unit as a whole may be referred to as "the people from X," where X is the unit's representative site. In contrast, the name of a patrilineal group is an untranslatable proper noun. A land-owning unit consisting of several patrilineal groups is referred to as "the people from X"; the component patrilineal groups are distinguished by the use of their proper names. A land-owning unit consisting of a single patrilineal group may be referred to as "the people from X" or by its proper name, depending on the context.

The land-owning unit owns totemic designs that represent features of its territory. Each territory belongs to one of two patri-moieties. The moiety affiliation of a territory and of the unit owning it accord with the moiety affiliations of the totemic figures who created some of the named sites upon it.

The named sites of a land-owning unit are not circumscribed by a territorial boundary. Because disputes over the ownership of land never arise, it is difficult to establish the attitudes of owners towards their property. It seems, however, that they have an intimate knowledge of, and affection for, the named sites and the country included by them. Their proprietorial interest in land outside this central core gradually weakens. Informants announced the transition from one territory to another when the first-named site of the new territory had been reached.

The Gidjinali numbered 294 persons in 1960. In the pre-settlement period, they were divided among four loose common residence groupings called the Anbara, Marinja, Marawuraba and Madai. Only Anbara is translatable (it means "river mouth people"), but each name has a regional connotation. They are roughly comparable with expressions like "the Eastern Suburbs" or "the Lake District," and provide a convenient if somewhat imprecise way of referring collectively to the people of a broad locality. In 1960 the Nagara numbered 71 persons, the Gunavidji 102 persons. Neither was divided into regional sub-groups, and each formed the basis of a single community.

The regular members of a community were the members of some four to six neighbouring land-owning units, minus female members who were married to men of

other communities, plus women of other communities married to male members. Marriages occurred both within the community and between members of different communities (e.g. 63% of Gunavidji married women were married in 1960 to Gunavidji men; 37% were married to men of other communities). The partners to an inter-community marriage probably lived most of the time with the husband's community and made occasional visits to the wife's community.

An attempt was made to discover the typical movements of the Anbara community over the course of a year. This community consisted largely of members of six land-owning units whose territories are situated near the mouth of the Blyth River. It may have contained some 150 regular members.

Towards the end of the wet season (perhaps from January to April) the Anbara camped at one of the sites of a constituent land-owning unit. The site is a barren sandy point at the river mouth. It is frequently swept by high winds, and the reason given for its popularity at this time of the year is that it is relatively free from mosquitoes. The Anbara often acted as hosts to people from the mosquito-infested interior during this period.

Over these months the community lived mainly on sea foods. Men either fished with spears along the coast or operated fish traps in the narrow tidal channels. At times they hunted wallaby and other land creatures. Women gathered shell fish, and various native fruits and vegetables as these ripened. The hunters and foragers were not restricted by territorial boundaries. The camp on the windy point seems to have been a base from which food seekers ranged over the entire Anbara region (approximately 5.5 square miles). Certain priorities, however, may have been exercised in the exploitation of food resources (for example, men probably operated fish traps in their own territories and returned to the main camp with their catches).

The major ceremonies were held during the dry season (from May to October). Over this period the Anbara moved as a group to ceremonies away from home and, with other visitors, were received as guests by the host community (for example, the Nagara, Gunavidji and other Gidjinali communities). After ceremonies, small groups of close kinsmen and their families often left the community and enjoyed short periods of isolation. (One of the criticisms men sometimes made of Maningrida Settlement was that there were "too many blackfeller" around.)

In August (or thereabouts), the Anbara crossed the Blyth River and joined the Marawuraba community. With these folk they picked the Cycad palm nut, which grows only on the east side of the Blyth River. A few months later, accompanied by the Marawuraba, they re-crossed the river and made their way to a large swamp where the Spike rush grows in abundance. Here also great flocks of geese gather as the smaller waterholes dry up. The ownership of the swamp is divided among land-owning units of three different communities (the Anbara is not one of them). During October and November perhaps five or six communities gathered around the edges.

By December, the mosquitoes had become intolerable and the Anbara (with many of the inhabitants of this inland region) began to move back to the coast.

If land-owning units had had to depend solely upon the food and water resources of their own territories, some of them would have perished (salt water alone is available in the territory of one Anbara unit during the major tidal inundations; and in the territory of another there is no source of fresh water). The diets of many others would have been monotonous and, at times, meagre. Such hardships were not suffered because open access to food and water resources was taken for granted. Land-owning units maintained a roughly uniform standard of living by moving freely over one another's territories and by freely exploiting the resources found upon them. The region is rich in natural products. When a community exhausted food supply at one location, it moved to another location. The sharing of resources deprived no one of the means of subsistence, and land owners from time to time had the satisfaction of fulfilling expectations of hospitality.

An analysis of data collected over a period of 20 months showed that patrilineal descent is not the only, or even the outstanding, determinant of residential associations at Maningrida Settlement or of the composition of hunting and foraging parties that occasionally left the settlement. The following are examples of the diversity of kinship links observed in the two forms of association.<sup>52</sup>

In 1958 a man abandoned his hut in the native village after his infant son died. He built a new hut on vacant land on the outskirts of the village. Certain relatives followed him and by 1960 his dwelling was one of five forming a distinct cluster.

The second man to build was the first man's M.B., the third the W.B. of the first man, the fourth man the son of the third man's wife by a previous husband. The older brother of this last man later occupied the hut while the owner was absent in Darwin. The fifth man to build was a classificatory father of the third man, but of a different community. He moved from his previous home after a series of arguments over the bestowal of his eldest daughter; he was followed by his son, his deceased brother's son, and a classificatory brother of his own patrilineal group. When he went back some six months later a close classificatory brother of the third man moved into the empty dwelling. The newcomer and the third man are members of the one patrilineal group.

What people said suggested that this residential group (or groups resembling it in genealogical structure) could have formed and persisted for short periods in the pre-settlement past. Genealogical links through both men and women were among the important determinants of its membership.

In 1960 about 50 natives voluntarily left the settlement and spent a month at the Blyth River. They were almost all members of the Anbara community. They camped along a beach in eight family groups. The eight male heads of these were members of four different Anbara land-owning units, one of which owned the beach. Two of the land-owning units represented were of one moiety, the other two of the opposite moiety.

<sup>52</sup> A full account of local organization in the Liverpool-Blyth River region, including an account of contemporary residential associations at Maningrida, will be given in my Ph.D. thesis (to be submitted shortly at the Australian National University, Canberra).

## CAPE YORK PENINSULA

McConnel has studied the local organization of the Wik-Munkan (Map 1, 10), Sharp that of the Yir-Yoront (Map 1, 11).

*The Wik-Munkan*

McConnel recorded some 30 patrilineal local clans making up the Wik-Munkan tribe.<sup>53</sup> The sizes of the clans when she made her inquiries ranged from one to about 50 members. The area of a clan territory is from about 50 to 100 square miles (1930, p. 181).

Each clan has hunting rights over its own territory; each horde lives most of the time within the appropriate clan territory. It is generally understood, however, that clans possessing "areas specially rich or unique in raw materials should send out word to relatives in other clans when the supply is ripe for consumption. The clan in charge must always initiate the first and ritualistic 'taking' of food, after which all are permitted to tap the supply" (1934, p. 335).

Two adjacent clans which regularly intermarry "form together a 'company,' and are as it were one ground with interchangeable hunting rights. That is, a man has the right to hunt on his wife's ground, and offers in return the hospitality and privileges of his own to his wife's people" (1934, p. 334).

*The Yir-Yoront*

Sharp recorded twenty-eight patrilineal clans among the Yir-Yoront, the largest numbering about 30 persons, while several were on the point of extinction.<sup>54</sup> Most clans own several areas of land. These are not adjacent and range in size from an acre or so up to several square miles. The Yir-Yoront have a "normal type of Australian cult totemism" (p. 19). Each clan is ritually linked with totemic sites on its territory (or territories).

Each clan has the right to exclude members of others from its territories but does so only in exceptional cases. Sharp did not record such a case. He said: "People gather and hunt, ordinarily, in whatever country they will. Thus there is practically a standing permission which opens a clan's countries to all, but this permission may be withdrawn by the clan for those who are *persona non grata*" (p. 23).

Sharp goes on to say: "The typical Australian horde hardly appears as a separate entity in the Yir-Yoront social pattern. It is most nearly approximated by the patrilineal clan, which is the autonomous land-owning unit, and exogamous. Because of factors resulting from the division of a clan's land into separate lots, and because an individual is not necessarily in his real father's clan [his parents may believe that he was conceived in the territory of another clan—L.R.H.], the Yir-Yoront clan-horde assumes a somewhat aberrant form. The camps comprise fragments of many

<sup>53</sup> U. McConnel, "The Wik-Munkan Tribe" (Parts I-III), *Oceania*, Vol. I, 1930, and Vol. IV, 1934.

<sup>54</sup> L. Sharp, "Ritual Life and Economics of the Yir-Yoront of Cape York Peninsula," *Oceania*, Vol. V, 1934.

different clans, the individual members of which shift about from one camp and country to another, some being associated with one large portion of the tribal territory which is considered their range, others with another. Even during the rainy season, when the community splits up into very small camps, the men of a clan are separated and do not live together in their own territory as a horde. This does not vitiate the sentimental ties which attach a clan to its own particular 'home' countries, which if not often or regularly lived in by a clan member, are frequently visited. In the arrangement of the larger dry season camps, tribes live separately if more than one are represented, but within the tribal grouping the clans are divided and mixed" (pp. 31-2).

#### CONCLUSION

In studying Aboriginal local organization, it is important to distinguish two kinds of relationship between people and land—ritual relationships and economic relationships. The ownership of land (if the term is to be used) must be understood in the light of this distinction.

Each of the inhabitants of the regions for which data have been given in this paper belongs to a descent group which has an exclusive relationship with one or more totemic sites. Among the peoples of Bathurst and Melville Islands and of the north-western area of the Arnhem Land Reserve the descent groups are matrilineal; among the peoples of the remaining regions they are patrilineal. The patrilineal descent groups, but apparently not the matrilineal descent groups, perform rituals which are directly connected with the totemic sites. In some areas (for example, the Central Desert) the totemic lodge, comprising the initiated males of a patrilineal descent group, is the most significant unit for ritual purposes; in other areas (for example, Arnhem Land) the ritual functions of the patrilineal descent group are less pronounced and may have been replaced to some extent by wider cult allegiances. In many (but not all) regions, the people believe that an individual's spirit comes from one of the totemic sites of his descent group.

Radcliffe-Brown stated that each patrilineal descent group owns not only one or more totemic sites, but an area of land with known boundaries including these sites. Spencer and Gillen (Central Desert),<sup>55</sup> Elkin (Kimberleys)<sup>56</sup> and Kaberry (Kimberleys),<sup>57</sup> as well as Radcliffe-Brown, have reported boundaries marking the territories of patrilineal descent groups. Pink (Central Desert), Stanner (Arnhem Land), Warner (Arnhem Land) and Berndt (north-eastern Arnhem Land) have asserted that the boundaries between such territories are uncertain or ill-defined. Meggitt (Central Desert), Berndt (Western Desert), and Hiatt (Arnhem Land) have denied that the totemic sites of a patrilineal descent group are enclosed by territorial boundaries. Strehlow (Central Desert), Meggitt (Central Desert), and Berndt

<sup>55</sup> B. Spencer and F. J. Gillen, *The Arunta*, p. 8.

<sup>56</sup> A. P. Elkin, "Social Organization in the Kimberley Division, North-Western Australia," *Oceania*, Vol. II, 1932, p. 298.

<sup>57</sup> P. Kaberry, *Aboriginal Woman*, 1939, p. 31.

(north-eastern Arnhem Land) have reported boundaries enclosing areas occupied by communities comprising several patrilineal descent groups.

There are no boundaries around the totemic sites of matrilineal descent groups. These groups are neither land-owning corporations nor food-seeking units.

Radcliffe-Brown stated that the people who commonly live together and cooperate in seeking food are the members of a horde (that is, the male and unmarried female members of a patrilineal descent group and the wives of male members). Strehlow (Central Desert), Meggitt (Central Desert), Berndt (Western Desert and north-eastern Arnhem Land), Piddington (Kimberleys), Stanner (Arnhem Land), Hiatt (Arnhem Land) and Sharp (Cape York Peninsula) have reported stable communities which included members of from two to twelve patrilineal descent groups. Hart (Bathurst and Melville Islands) has reported the absence of stable residential groupings; the composition of a community was not primarily determined by a principle of descent (either male or female), and it changed constantly. Most of these observers have reported that smaller food-seeking units which broke away from the larger community from time to time frequently contained men who were not members of the one patrilineal descent group. The food-seeking units seen by Evans and Long (Central Desert), and by McCarthy and McArthur (Arnhem Land), contained non-agnatic kinsmen.

Radcliffe-Brown suggested that each horde must obtain most of its food and water from its own territory.<sup>58</sup> A number of observers have reported the unrestricted movement of food-seekers over broad regions that include the totemic sites of many patrilineal descent groups. These observers are Meggitt (Central Desert), Berndt (Western Desert, north-eastern Arnhem Land), Piddington (Kimberleys), Stanner (Arnhem Land), Warner (Arnhem Land), Worsley (Arnhem Land), Hiatt (Arnhem Land), and Sharp (Cape York Peninsula).

Radcliffe-Brown stated that there is normally no provision by which a man can leave his horde and be naturalized in another. Data from the north-central area of the Arnhem Land Reserve indicate that patrilineal descent groups in this region may have adopted others as joint owners of their territories. This may have occurred when members of depopulated communities joined larger communities in other areas.

There is thus considerable evidence suggesting that the totemic sites of many patrilineal descent groups were not enclosed by territorial boundaries; that the usual common residence groups in many areas were communities that included up to twelve patrilineal descent groups; that smaller food-seeking units commonly contained non-agnatic kinsmen; and that food-seekers moved freely over broad regions that included the totemic sites of many patrilineal descent groups. The

<sup>58</sup> Several writers have noted that Radcliffe-Brown's definition of the horde as a land-owning corporation (1930, p. 35) implies that a woman acquires rights in her husband's territory upon marriage. They have stated that this implication does not accord with known facts. (See R. M. Berndt, 1959, p. 96.) In 1938 Elkin distinguished between the local patrilineal clan (a land-owning unit) and the horde (a residential and food-seeking unit)—A. P. Elkin, *The Australian Aborigines*, 1938, p. 40.



evidence suggests, moreover, that local organization in the arid, thinly-populated inland regions had much in common with local organization in the well-watered, more densely-populated coastal regions,<sup>59</sup> and that Radcliffe-Brown's general account of Aboriginal local organization would not hold for either.<sup>60</sup>

A field worker investigating an Aboriginal local organization that has ceased to function might make certain discoveries by questioning people who were once part of it. Firstly, he might establish that everyone in the area belongs to one of numerous small patrilineal descent groups. Secondly, he might discover that each patrilineal descent group has an exclusive relationship with one or more totemic sites. Some of his informants have probably used the English expression "my country" to refer to the locality in which their respective totemic sites are situated. Thirdly, he might discover that the patrilineal descent group is exogamous. Having established that a patrilineal descent group has an exclusive spiritual link with a "country," he might assume without further evidence that it had an exclusive material link with it. He might go on to conclude that the male and unmarried female members of a patrilineal descent group and the wives of male members constituted an autonomous food-seeking unit dependent for its survival upon the natural resources of the group's territory.

If he did make these inferences, he would probably be wrong. It is now clear that over a great deal of the continent the male members of totemic descent groups did not live together on separate pieces of land. They commonly lived in communities that contained male members of several totemic descent groups and regularly sought food over areas that included totemic sites other than their own. Investigators who failed to find the horde in particular tribes were not (as some of them thought) observing aberrant forms of local organization. They were probably looking for something that never existed in any tribe.

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<sup>59</sup> Observers have arrived at the following approximate figures for population density: Walbiri (Meggitt), 1 person to 35 square miles; Kariera (Radcliffe-Brown), 1 person to 5 square miles; Murngin (Warner), 1 person to 8 square miles; Wanindiljangwa (Worsley), 1 person to 3 square miles; Gidjijali (Hiatt), 1 person to 1 square mile; Wik-Munkan (McConnel), 1 person to 2 square miles.

<sup>60</sup> In 1953 Elkin believed that Radcliffe-Brown's generalization held for the arid regions of Central Australia and Western Australia (p. 418).