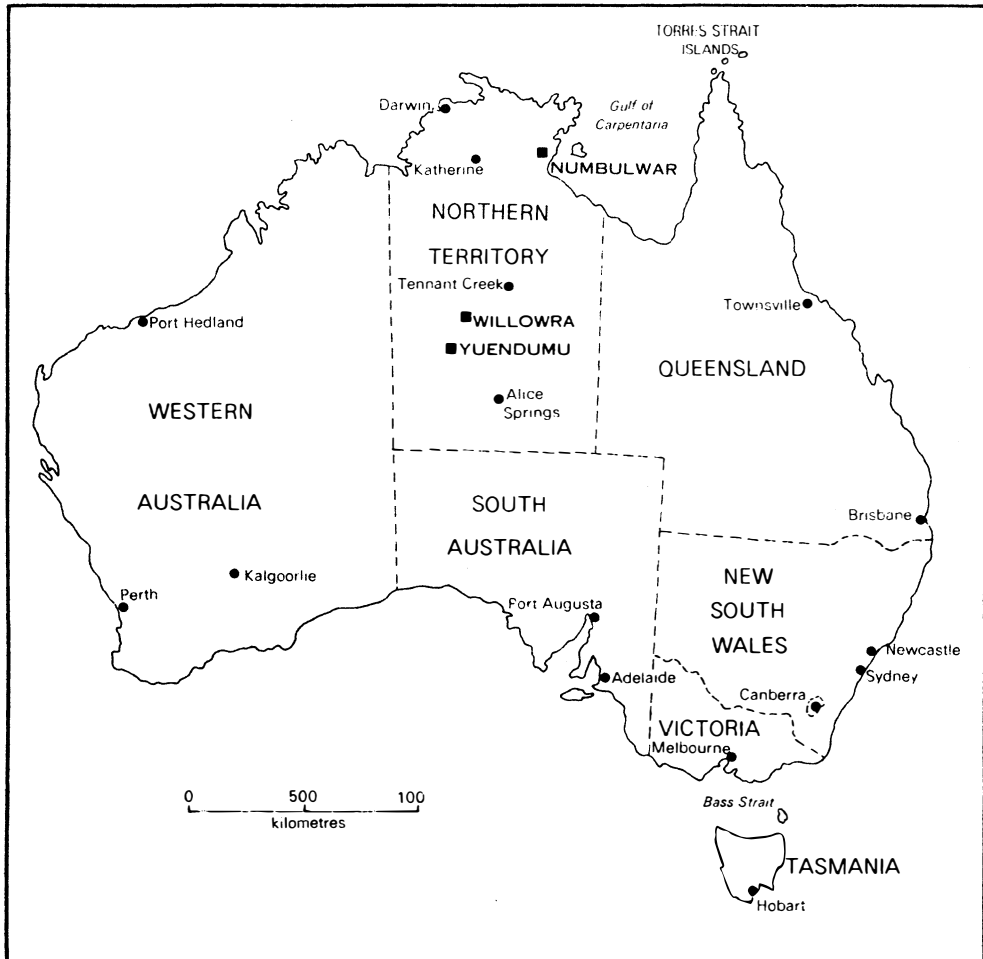


Tribal communities in rural areas



Location of case-study communities

1

The Aboriginal Component
in the Australian Economy

Tribal communities in rural areas

Elsbeth Young

Development Studies Centre
The Australian National University
Canberra, Australia and Miami, Florida 1981

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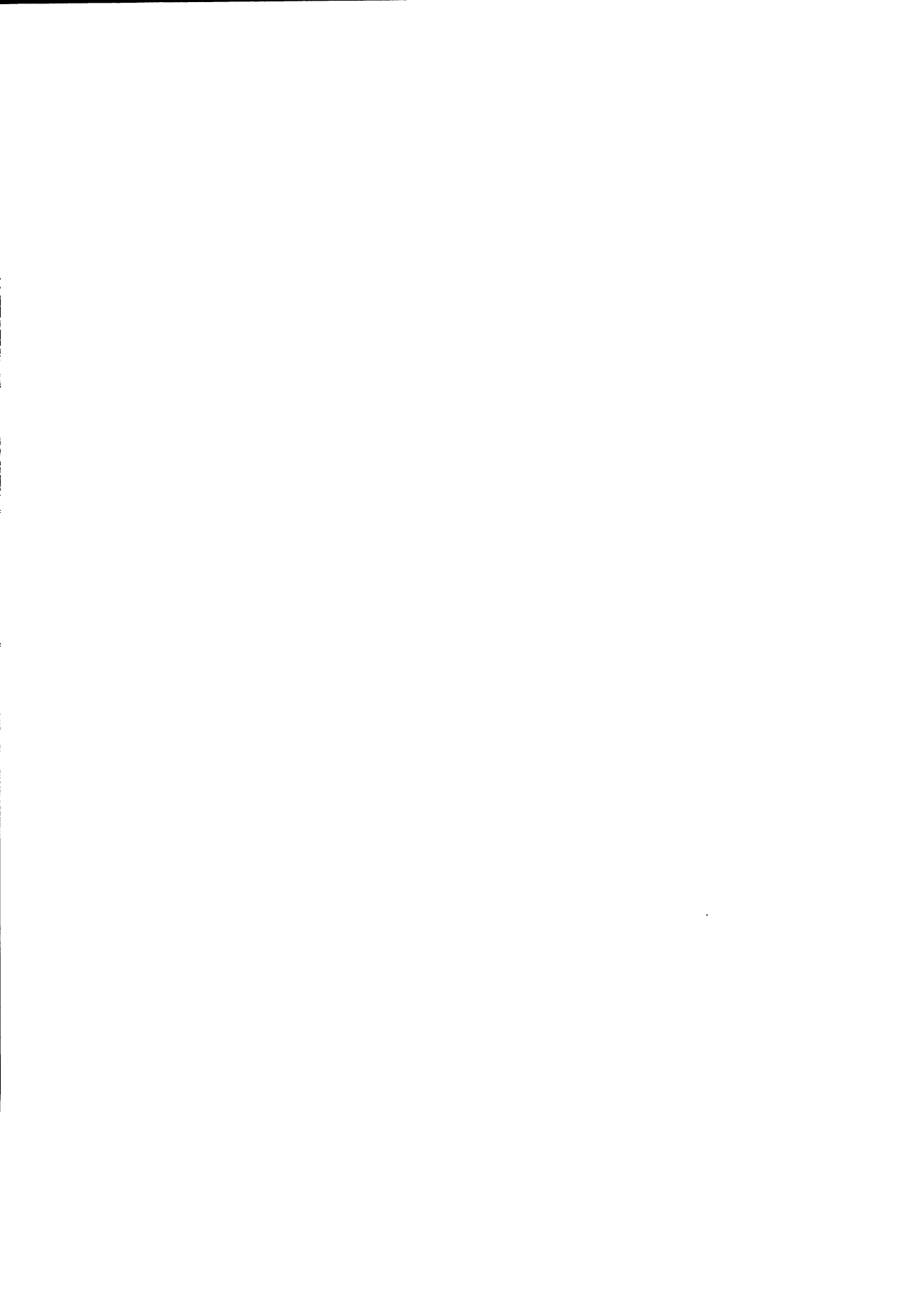
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Summary

This monograph discusses the main socio-economic components of the contemporary lifestyle of Aboriginal people living in tribal communities in Australia. Using information obtained in the course of fieldwork in three Northern Territory Communities - Yuendumu, Willowra and Numbulwar - in 1978-79, it examines the resources available for the maintenance of Aboriginal social and material life. Difference in Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal attitudes towards these resources help to explain why attempts to foster wage employment and services such as formal schooling and health care have met with only limited success. A greater degree of economic independence, a basic component of self-management and determination, can only be achieved if Aboriginal attitudes and aspirations are taken into account, a measure which may require greater flexibility in administrative procedures.



Foreword

This is the first volume of a series to be published by the Development Studies Centre of the Australian National University on The Aboriginal Component in the Australian Economy. The series presents a part of the results of a research program directed by the writer which commenced at the request of the Department of Aboriginal Affairs in 1977. A substantial part of the program was financed by a grant to the Australian National University from the Department of Aboriginal Affairs.

The object of the program was to study the economic activity of the Aboriginal population, examining both the internal economic activity exclusive to Aborigines, and also the flows of goods and services between them and the remainder of the Australian economy. In addition, at the request of Sir David Hay, an attempt is to be made at the conclusion of the project to interpret the significance of the findings and to suggest some policy implications. This will be in the final volume of the series.

The ultimate aim of the project has been to build up a picture of Aboriginal economic activity of all kinds in Australia. To this end, it was first necessary to settle two definitions. One is the definition of economic activity, and the second is the definition of Aboriginal.

When a group of Aborigines hunt, gather, cook and consume goods such as lizards, grubs and ants, they are certainly engaging in economic activity. However, it is economic activity that is not readily quantifiable in monetary terms, and cannot readily be observed through the market-type operations that are the source of most economic statistics. In order to make it clear that all such activities are included in the subject of this research program, economic activity for our purposes is defined as all acts of production, collection, preparation, storage, distribution and consumption of goods and services by Aboriginal people. Some of these economic activities cannot usefully be measured in terms of monetary values, but they are economic activities, and merit inclusion in our data, despite that limitation.

The definition of 'Aboriginal' used by government in the 1976 census, and in assessing eligibility for special services and benefits provided for Aboriginal people, includes Torres Strait Islanders as well as the Aboriginal people of mainland origin. As the cultural background of the Torres Strait Islanders is different from that of the mainland Aborigines in certain important respects for example, their cultural background derived originally from a society of settled gardeners and fishermen, and not from a society of nomadic hunter-gatherers, the Islander community has not been specifically studied in this program. Moreover, as a similar, but separate, study of the economic situation of the Torres Strait Islander communities, both in the Islands and on the mainland, was made and published in the early 1970s, it was felt that to repeat this coverage in the present research program was neither necessary nor desirable. Therefore, although it is not possible to separate the Islanders from the mainland Aboriginal people in some of the aggregated statistics, most of the micro studies attempt to make this separation. The purpose has been to study the economic activity of the Aboriginal people of mainland origin, and to exclude where possible the Torres Strait Islander component. Apart from this, the program has accepted the government definition that an Aborigine is a person who claims to be wholly or partly of Aboriginal descent, and who is accepted as such by the Aboriginal community.

Within this definition, many different sub-divisions of the group are relevant for this research program. The community so defined ranges from full-blood descendants of the original pre-contact tribes, to part Aborigines whose physical appearance may not reflect their Aboriginal descent. In another dimension, the Aboriginal community includes people living a semi-nomadic existence with a substantial hunting and gathering component in their livelihood, as well as city dwellers; some of the latter hold senior and well paid government posts and have a way of life that is in most respects not greatly different from that of other affluent Australians in similar employment.

With this diversity, and as the data available do not take adequate account of these differences, it has not been possible to cover the whole range of such Aboriginal economic activity. Reliance has been placed on such macro data as have been available from the 1976 census, from the Hay report, and from other major studies that cover specific

aspects of Aboriginal economic affairs such as the Turnbull report of 1980, and the relevant sections of the Henderson report on Poverty in Australia.

Use has been made also of a large body of published material deriving from studies by anthropologists, sociologists, educationists and people of other non-economic disciplines. This has been examined and used as background information to enlighten our study. Finally, a great deal of value has been found in the few more economically oriented studies such as those of J.C. Altman and J. Nieuwenhuysen, H.C. Coombs, Fay Gale, Fred Gruen, Roger Lawrence, D.H. Penny, N. Peterson, Owen Stanley and H.C. Schapper.

All this, however, was not sufficient to provide an adequate overall picture of Aboriginal economic activity. To fill out the most important gaps, special case studies were undertaken covering a number of important fields.

The major component in this was the series of three case studies undertaken by Dr Elspeth Young, who was employed by the project from mid-1977 to the end of 1980. She studied three examples of isolated Aboriginal communities in Central and Northern Australia, and the report of her findings is published in this volume.

For other components reliance was placed mainly on work by researchers operating under different sponsorship. Where communities of special interest to our project were being examined for other purposes, the researchers were contacted by Dr Young and asked to produce, and write up, some of the economic information we needed. This has been successful in a number of cases, and the resultant studies are being prepared for publication in subsequent volumes in this series.

The second volume, which is now in the final editing stage, will contain case studies of Aboriginal communities in small urban situations, including Alice Springs in Central Australia, Carnarvon in the West, and Robinvale in Victoria. A third volume, nearing completion, contains case studies of other rural communities, such as Maningrida outstations in Arnhem Land, an Aboriginal pastoral station in the West, and an ex-mission station in a mining region. There are also some fairly comprehensive studies of New South Wales small-town communities, and of the part-Aboriginal urban community of Port Adelaide in South

Australia. Finally, there is in preparation a macro-economic study of the Aboriginal sector by Professor Malcolm Treadgold of the University of New England, and an overview of the results of the whole program to be provided by this writer. It is anticipated that the whole series will eventually comprise five or six volumes.

E.K.Fisk
Australian National University
June 1981

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Elsbeth Young
Canberra
March 1981

Glossary

- Aborigine Any person of Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander descent who identifies as an Aborigine or Torres Strait Islander, and is regarded as being such by the community of which he or she is a member.
- Clan A group of people of unilineal descent which may or may not be exogamous and may associate themselves with a specific territory.
- Community A body of persons in the same locality. The term normally refers to the Aboriginal community, although it also could include non-Aboriginal members. Where appropriate, this is specified.
- Consultation A process of deliberation, aimed at reaching a decision which is as satisfactory as possible for all concerned. Consultation can be adequate where the greatest possible effort has been made to allow for cultural differences in decision-making (here Aboriginal/non-Aboriginal) or, conversely, inadequate.
- Contact The period when, through frequent meetings, Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people observed elements of each other's society, later to use and/or adapt these as they felt necessary.
- Education The process of learning experienced throughout the lifetime of any individual. It may or may not include formal instruction.
- Employment Occupation of people as labourers. Wage employment is labour for the reward of wages; non-wage employment is labour for other forms of reward, e.g. enhancement of

status. Unemployment occurs where individuals who desire wage employment are unable to find such opportunities.

- Family A group of people, predominantly of common ancestry, who usually function as a unit for economic purposes. The group may be nuclear or extended.
- Income Means of providing the support necessary for the chosen lifestyle. It can be derived from monetary sources (e.g. wages, interest from investments) or non-monetary sources (e.g. food obtained through subsistence activity). Together these form the total income.
- Kin A group of people who trace descent from common ancestry.
- Lifestyle The total way of life, including all social and economic elements which form its fabric.
- Needs Requirements seen by the people concerned as desirable for individual or group provision. Basic needs are those which they feel to be essential (e.g. food, wherewithal to provide warmth).
- Non-traditional/
Modern Elements or customs in contemporary Aboriginal society which primarily are introductions from non-Aboriginal society (e.g. formal education, power and water reticulation systems).
- Self-
determination The opportunity to decide on the preferred lifestyle for oneself and, collectively, the group with which one identifies.

Self- management	Organisation and control of a group by the members of that group. In Aboriginal terms it implies the opportunity to carry out such organisation by methods felt to be appropriate by Aboriginal people.
Self- sufficiency	The possibility of providing all needs from one's own or the group's productive activities.
Settlement	A population grouping. This term is less appropriate than 'community' in the Aboriginal context because of its association with former government and mission groupings on reserves specifically designed for separate Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal living.
Skin-group	The term used by the Warlpiri for the sub-sections into which their tribe is divided.
Subsistence	The means of living which can be obtained from the natural resources of the environment accessible to the group concerned.
Traditional	Elements or customs in contemporary Aboriginal society which exhibit obvious linkage with those which existed before contact with Europeans was established (e.g. gathering bush foods, carrying out initiation ceremonies).
Tribe/ Tribal	A society or group of people for which the bonds of belonging to a common territory, and sharing a common language and culture remain of supreme importance.

Introduction

Selection of case-studies and fieldwork methodology

The socio-economic situations of Aboriginal groups vary widely according to the physical environment in which they live; their degree of isolation relative to urban centres; the extent to which the elements of their tribal background have been preserved; their history of contact with non-Aboriginal society, and, linked to this, the type of settlement in which they live: the resource potential of their immediate area and the extent to which they themselves can control the development of these resources. Interaction between these factors has resulted in vastly differing responses to opportunity, and hence has led to differences in lifestyle. The case-studies which follow were purposively selected to highlight many of these broader variations and, while not necessarily representative of other members of their general group, describe some important basic characteristics of present day Aboriginal society.

Case-studies included are as follows (frontispiece)

1. Yuendumu - settlement (ex-government), population approximately 1200; limited outstation development of recent origin; restricted economic potential; desert subsistence; strong tribal background (Warlpiri) and recent, but close contact with non-Aborigines (about fifty years); nearest town (Alice Springs), linked by all-weather gravel road, approximately four hours drive.
2. Willowra - Aboriginal-owned pastoral station, population approximately 270; no outstations; considerable economic potential (cattle); desert subsistence; strong tribal background (Warlpiri) and recent, still limited contact with non-Aborigines (fifty years); nearest town (Alice Springs), linked by rough dirt road, approximately five hours drive.
3. Numbulwar - settlement (ex-mission), population approximately 500; considerable recent outstation development; few resources for income generation; varied subsistence from savannah/coastal environment; strong tribal

background (largely Nunggubuyu), changed due to mission influence; frequent contact with a limited group of non-Aborigines; nearest towns Nhulunbuy (linked by air), Katherine (linked by rough dry season road or by air), Darwin (rough dry season road or by air).

Each study investigated the economic functioning of each community within their social and cultural setting. This involved assessment of the flow of economic resources into communities from external sources, how these were used by the inhabitants of communities, what these inhabitants produced themselves, and to what extent their products were redistributed to the broader Australian economy. Data collection took place over a period which was sufficiently long for me to gain a detailed understanding of the socio-cultural setting of the community, a process which was greatly aided by working along with Aboriginal interviewers and interpreters. In Yuendumu, Numbulwar and Willowra, I spent approximately four months in each community and, as far as possible, tried to integrate myself with the Aboriginal group. Where possible, I lived with a family or with a number of single women, and, in addition to formal data collection, took part in all the activities of the camp. Thus I was taught about hunting and gathering, and at the same time learned many stories about the country and customs of my travelling companions; I was invited to watch ceremonies, and again was taught some of the beliefs and practices basic to their performance. In some cases these ceremonies involved the movement of the entire community to another settlement, e.g. from Willowra to Warrabri, and I then accompanied my fellow campers. Participant observation of this type enabled me to carry out interviews in a much more meaningful way than would otherwise have been possible. Interviews, which were conducted as a sample in larger communities, but were comprehensive in smaller groups, almost always took place in the camp of the respondent, and were conducted in a relaxed fashion, with plenty of time available for lengthy discussion of related topics. Structured questionnaires were not used, although I had a basic list of necessary data which I used as an interview framework. Additional interviews were conducted with community officials (Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal) responsible for health, education, employment, social security, etc., and these provided the basic economic data on the entire community. This formed the foundation of quantifiable evidence from these studies.

The basic data collected in all case-studies were as follows:

- Socio-demographic characteristics, including place of origin
- Health and nutrition
- Employment, and cash earning from sources other than wages; employment history
- Income and expenditure
- Subsistence activities
- Shelter
- Mobility
- Education
- Social organisations - councils, church, cooperatives, etc.
- Retailing/wholesale
- Social services, including pensions and benefits
- Cultural background to community - land, language, religion, law etc.
- Aboriginal/non-Aboriginal interaction.

Quantifiable data were analysed to provide simple cross-tabulations to illustrate specific points. Otherwise much of the information is presented descriptively with the aim of isolating general factors and principles which could help to explain aspects of the contemporary Aboriginal socio-economy.

Where possible, draft reports were circulated widely to give interested people the opportunity to comment. Preliminary reports were sent back to many people in Willowra, Yuendumu and Numbulwar and to others, such as government officials based in regional and head offices of DAA, who had been consulted. I was fortunate in being able to make return visits to both Yuendumu and Willowra after the report had been received, and heard some useful comments which I was subsequently able to take account of. Other people sent written comments, all of which were considered in producing the final case-studies. While such a process cannot provide a complete check on the facts published, it has at least ensured that some people in each Aboriginal community have been kept informed on the progress of the study.

Chapter 1

The Aboriginal economy and its place in the Australian economy

The contemporary Aboriginal lifestyle¹ is distinct from that of the remainder of the Australian population because of its unique combination of elements derived from the tribal system of pre-contact times with elements adopted from, and sometimes imposed by, non-Aboriginal society. Many problems which affect both the physical and social well-being of Aboriginal people, for example high mortality, poor health and poverty, alcoholism and adolescent violence, can be directly attributed to conflict between these two basic components. Failure to recognize the significance of this conflict has contributed to unsympathetic and racist attitudes within non-Aboriginal Australia and has hindered the formulation of policies which can effectively aid the process of socio-cultural adjustment essential for both Aborigines and non-Aborigines. For example, Aboriginal attitudes to participation in wage earning are harshly criticized by some non-Aborigines, and cited as evidence of Aboriginal inadequacy; rarely is there any attempt to examine the reasons behind such differences. Such a lack of mutual comprehension can be partially explained by the scarcity and poor quality of basic information on Aboriginal use and response to the many non-Aboriginal components now fundamental to their way of life.

Unfortunately the major focus of research in Aboriginal communities - anthropological analysis of kinship structure, religion, ceremonial practice and economy from pre-contact times (e.g. Elkin 1938; Strehlow 1947; Meggitt 1962 - has largely excluded consideration of social and economic change following contact with non-Aboriginal

¹ 'Lifestyle', as used here and subsequently, is a general term which encompasses all social and economic elements within the way of life of Aboriginal people. Aboriginal use of these elements normally distinguishes this lifestyle from that of non-Aborigines. The term 'Aborigine' is defined as any person of Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander descent who identifies as an Aborigine or Torres Strait Islander, and is regarded as being such by the community of which he or she is a member.

settlers. Discussion of these topics, mostly confined to reports of government and mission organizations, and others concerned with implementing the assimilationist policies of the 1938 to 1972 period, emphasize the conspicuous lack of success achieved by Aborigines in spheres such as the non-Aboriginal business world, and fail to demonstrate that, as Barwick (1972) has shown, this can often be attributed to administrative inflexibility and lack of official support for Aboriginal enterprise. Even today, when the official policy is one of self-determination, studies such as the Environmental Survey of Aboriginal Communities in the Northern Territory (Northern Territory (NT), 1979) judge Aboriginal living conditions largely according to non-Aboriginal criteria, and hence recommend changes which may not accord with Aboriginal aspirations; in other words, the practical policy remains one of assimilation, and conformity to the non-Aboriginal lifestyle.

While within the last two decades some studies have examined many aspects of Aboriginal life both at general and more specific levels (e.g. Gale 1964; Rowley 1970, 1971a and b; Tonkinson 1974), few have focused on socio-economic issues. Yet, for administrators in departments such as Aboriginal Affairs, Social Security and Employment and Youth Affairs, all of whom play vital parts in the lives of Aboriginal communities, this must be the most relevant field of inquiry. Rowley (1976) pointed out that economists and other social scientists have shown little interest in examining the Aboriginal economy, and although recent studies by Hay (1976), Altman and Niewenhuysen (1978) and Turnbull (1980) have gone some way towards filling this gap, knowledge on this topic is still insufficient for planning and policy making. For example, both of the latter studies present an overview, based primarily on quantifiable information for which secondary data are available, using social and economic indicators of limited value for assessment of the Aboriginal situation. They largely ignore the Aboriginal contribution to and interpretation of the economy. Consideration of both aspects requires micro-study, where fieldwork is of sufficiently long duration to consult with and learn from Aboriginal people.

This study attempts to meet some of these shortcomings by examining, through a series of case-studies placed within the macro framework of the national context, the contemporary socio-economic situation in a variety of

Aboriginal communities.² These range from Central Desert Warlpiri living in settlements, outstations and on an Aboriginal-owned pastoral property, to South Australian Aborigines living in the metropolitan community of Port Adelaide. Although coverage of all types of Aboriginal community was not possible, and the case-studies are not necessarily representative of others in their category, the comparative evidence available does permit formulation of some general concepts about the present Aboriginal economic scene. While the characteristics of these concepts would inevitably vary according to the physical and socio-cultural differences between Aboriginal groups, it is to be hoped that some of the ideas presented here will help in bringing about the development of lifestyles closer to those which Aborigines desire.

The Aboriginal economy: theoretical considerations

Inequality between the socio-economic situation of Aborigines and non-Aborigines has been most commonly demonstrated by comparison of monetary incomes. According to the 1976 census the annual Aboriginal income per head was only \$1859, approximately one-half of that of the Australian population as a whole. Recognition of this inequality resulted in a marked increase of government funding during the early part of the 1970s (Figure 1.1), on the apparent assumption that improvement in the socio-economic infrastructure of Aboriginal communities would reduce the discrepancy. While actual funding levels have recently declined, the aim apparently remains the same. Major items of expenditure in 1978-79 were housing, town services, health and education (30 per cent, 17 per cent, 13 per cent and 7 per cent of the Department of Aboriginal Affairs (DAA) budget respectively), with the emphasis on capital rather than current investment. Analysis of specific components, such as housing (e.g. Heppell 1977) has indicated that many elements of the expensive infrastructure paid for by the Australian government are either little used or are abused by Aborigines, i.e. they are considered to be of little

2. 'Community', defined as a body of persons in the same locality, is the collective term now preferred by Aboriginal groupings. It lacks the connotations of 'settlement', the term formerly used by administrative bodies, particularly with reference to people living in reserves and camps specifically designed to maintain distance between Aborigines and non-Aborigines.

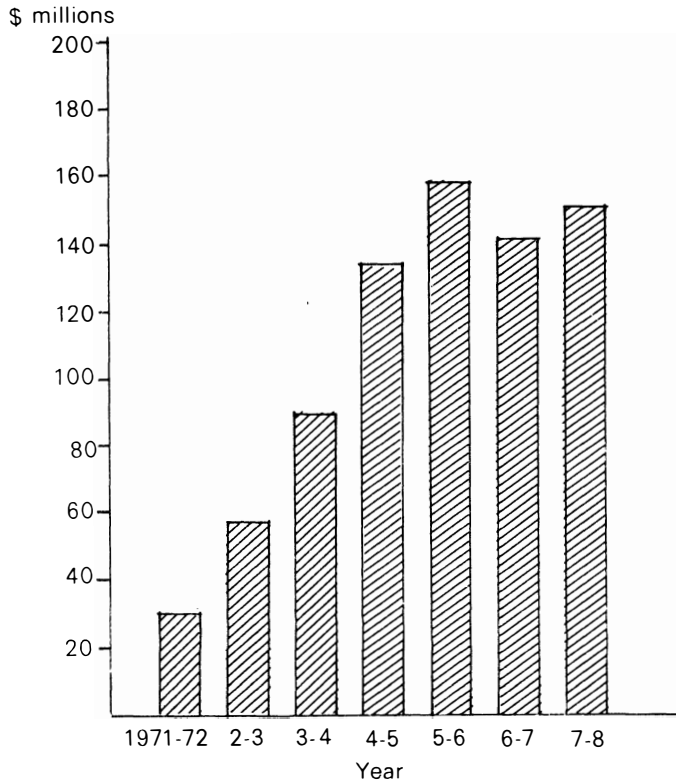


Fig 1.1 Funding allocated by Government for Aboriginal support, 1970-79.

relevance to their lifestyle. In other words, increased government funding does not necessarily improve the economic situation of Aborigines. Not only does this suggest that indicators such as income disparities are not wholly appropriate as measures of Aboriginal disadvantage, but also that Aborigines and non-Aborigines interpret their socio-economic needs in different ways. While this discrepancy could be partly bridged through meaningful mutual consultation, a process which rarely occurs,

understanding of its nature requires some assessment of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal concepts of economics.

Economics, defined as the study of how people allocate scarce resources to satisfy their wants through production, distribution and consumption, is essentially a social science in which the human element occupies a central place. It should not, therefore, focus only on those mechanisms by which processes such as production occur, for example the monetary or market system, or on the technology by which they operate, but must consider their place within society as a whole. In any society social and economic components of the lifestyle are inextricably mixed but, as Polanyi (1957) has suggested, they are perhaps more strongly 'embedded' in tribal society than in that which belongs to the modern industrial group. While acknowledging this fact, Herskovits (1952) prefers not to make clear-cut distinctions between modern and tribal³ society on the basis of the 'embeddedness' of the economy but rather considers that all economies form part of a continuum in which their various members seek to maximize satisfactions at minimal cost to themselves. The methods which they choose to achieve maximization depend on their own specific viewpoint; thus, in a non-monetary economy, economic satisfactions may be achieved mainly through an elaborate system of exchange within which obligations are honoured and created, but in a monetary economy returns may be more significantly measured in capital accumulation and other conspicuous forms of investment. Herskovits emphasizes the place of the individual in exercising the ultimate choice in operating economic processes within society, while Sahlins (1969) feels that the society itself is the major factor. Individual aims and efforts then go to support the whole fabric of society. While this study does not attempt to address these theoretical considerations in detail, it is based on the concept that in the Aboriginal economy, cultural components of the lifestyle strongly influence methods of production and distribution of goods and services and hence it examines the economy within the total social structure, rather than as a separate entity. Such an approach, which accords with that already suggested by Penny and Moriarty (1978) and Stanner (1979), contrasts with that often adopted for assessment of economic issues in

3. 'Tribal' here applies to a society for which the bonds of belonging to a common territory, and sharing a common language and culture remain of supreme importance. This is the sense in which the term is used in this volume.

non-Aboriginal societies.

Monetary and non-monetary systems both play important parts in the contemporary Aboriginal economy. While non-monetary systems, in which redistribution and exchange of necessities and valuables are the essential elements, are significant in all tribally-oriented and many other communities, all Aboriginal groups now depend on some form of monetary income for survival. Money is used as a medium of exchange, to buy food, clothing and necessities; it also provides a measurement of comparative value, a characteristic of which rural-dwelling Aborigines, forced to pay high prices for basic commodities, are well aware. However, its significance as a form of wealth storage, a means of investment, appears to be of little importance to many Aboriginal people; this feature is perceived as being peculiarly non-Aboriginal. A report (DAA, 1977:106) quotes the comment of an Aboriginal leader who, in the course of a discussion on totems, said 'We reckon [Europeans] have only one [totem] - money'. While urban-dwelling Aborigines are, like their non-Aboriginal counterparts, forced through their financial commitments to consider saving cash for future requirements, both they and those in rural areas tend to consume most of their income soon after receipt, either to purchase immediate necessities or to support dependent friends and kin. Surplus funds may be used for gambling, but, since most winnings are eventually spent on food or consumer goods, or later given to others, this is essentially a form of resource redistribution. It could therefore be said that Aborigines regard social relationships, maintained through exchange of resources derived from both monetary and non-monetary systems, as their main form of investment. Proper analysis of the Aboriginal economy obviously must, as Fisk (forthcoming) has argued for all part-subsistence societies, cover both monetary and non-monetary components, and, if possible take the 'social' value of money into account.

In non-Aboriginal terms the Aboriginal economy forms an almost totally dependent sector within the Australian economy, producing virtually none of the basic goods and services such as food, clothing, vehicles, machinery, construction materials and facilities for the provision of education, health care etc. However Aborigines also make use of goods produced within their own society - food obtained through subsistence gathering and hunting, natural raw materials used for making implements, weapons, ceremonial

artefacts and shelter. Their services include the education of their young in the customs and practices of the group, care of the sick through traditional medical practices and the execution of various ceremonies and rites necessary for the maintenance of their cultural solidarity. As with other aspects of the Aboriginal lifestyle, non-Aborigines often have difficulty in understanding the significance of these Aboriginal components and often see them as hindrances to the acceptance of Aborigines into the wider Australian society. Moreover they observe that non-Aboriginal goods and services which are provided for Aborigines are used in a distinctively Aboriginal way, frequently with results of which they disapprove. Thus, as Kesteven (1978:27-32) describes for Yuendumu, blankets perform the function of overcoats in addition to their role as bed-coverings, while the non-Aboriginal style of house, with its restricted view and lack of facilities for providing adequate warmth, is used for storage and the family living space is transferred to the outside. Although such adaptations may be less apparent in urbanized communities, they still occur. A major reason why a non-Aboriginal group in Alice Springs, the 'Citizens for Civilised Living', recently raised objections to the construction of homes for Aborigines in hitherto 'white' areas of the town was that these houses would be continually overcrowded, and hence that the value of neighbouring property would drop. While there is no guarantee that such an assumption is justified, and the racism inherent in such attitudes is not to be condoned, there is no doubt that Aborigines do adapt their living space to fit their own needs - in this case lack of adequate shelter as well as the need to fulfil kinship obligations. Mutual understanding of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal needs must occur if the potential for social conflict is to be reduced.

The main components of economic production have been defined as land, labour, capital and enterprise. Land has received the greatest emphasis in consideration of the Aboriginal economy, because it is the loss of that commodity which has been largely responsible for the disruption of Aboriginal society. Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal concepts of land-use and ownership are sharply divergent. Stanner (1979:230) says:

No English words are good enough to give a sense of the links between an Aboriginal group and its homeland. Our word 'home' ... does not match

the Aboriginal word that may mean 'camp', 'hearth', 'country', 'ever-lasting home', 'totem place', 'life source', 'spirit centre' ... Our word 'land' is too spare and meagre [and almost always has] economic overtones. ... When we took what we call 'land' we took what to them meant hearth, home, the source and focus of life, and everlastingness of spirit.

For Aborigines the home environment provided the basic elements for physical and cultural survival - water, food, materials to construct shelter, and the spiritual reason for their being. As Maddock (1974:27) says, the relationship was not one of parasitism but of interdependence - 'It would be as correct to speak of the land possessing men as of men possessing land'.

Although most Aborigines have been forcibly removed from the land which they formerly occupied, and lack access to it, a common situation for many who live in towns and cities of south and east Australia, they retain their feeling for that place, and that feeling has often been transmitted to the present representatives of the group. It is obvious, as the case-studies will show, that proper access to the ancestral land is of unparalleled importance in the maintenance of the social structure of the Aboriginal community. It is a major reason why Aborigines who have been displaced to alien environments, and have lost their contact with the land, suffer from severe social deprivation which shows itself in all elements of their lifestyle. Morice (1976) has shown that movement to outstations has had distinct psychological benefits for the people concerned. It is only necessary to compare the solidarity and sense of purpose which supports the Warlpiri community on Willowra, an Aboriginal-owned cattle station, with the feelings of insecurity which dominate Warlpiri life in the fringe camps of Alice Springs, to understand the significance of appropriate access to land. In contrast, while many non-Aborigines undoubtedly do feel emotionally attached to the land under their control, they tend to value it largely as a material resource, available for exploitation and exchange within a monetary system. Such an emphasis is foreign to the Aboriginal viewpoint.

Land comprises not only the physical territory under consideration but also its natural resources - soils, vegetation, minerals etc. Use of these has caused further conflict between Aborigines and non-Aborigines. For example, the territory of the desert-dwelling Warlpiri provided the people with food, water and the raw materials necessary to support them. The first Europeans to lay claim to and settle on Warlpiri land also made use of these elements. However, they did not depend on them. From the beginning they desired to import other elements produced elsewhere, and thus regarded desert resources as potential avenues for exploitation for the purpose of earning money to satisfy their wants. Water and vegetation, the obvious resources to be used in this way, were thus assessed according to the appropriate form of exploitation - the pastoral industry. The inevitable conflict with Warlpiri use of these elements was a major factor behind the Coniston Massacre of 1928, and ultimately led to widespread disruption of Warlpiri life. While in other parts of Australia minerals have been a greater source of conflict, land alienation for agriculture and settlement must have been the most significant factor in the disruption of the pre-contact Aboriginal economy. Minerals were only of minor importance as Aboriginal resources, but modern mining techniques, which physically change the earth's surface in substantial ways, have disturbed not only the natural resources of the land but also many places of great spiritual significance to Aborigines. Such disturbances range from the excavation of Aboriginal burial grounds to disruption of sites from which ancestral beings sprang. In Aboriginal eyes these desecrations can rarely be tolerated, even if the wealth to be obtained could provide the owners of the sites with incomes large enough to make a marked impact on their level of living. While as the case-study of Willowra cattle station community (Chapter 3) shows, it is no longer true to say that Aborigines do not understand that land can be used to provide money, or that they never want to use it in this way, use of land for that purpose is normally acceptable only if it does not substantially interfere with its perceived spiritual value.

The incorporation of non-Aboriginal elements into the economy has changed the use and value of labour in contemporary Aboriginal society. In pre-contact times, Aborigines, as Sahlins (1972:14-20) has discussed, did not have to hunt and gather continuously in order to provide the necessities of life. He attributes their prodigality with

food to the fact that they knew that more could almost always be obtained when required. Men and women played complementary parts in the food quest with the women in general providing the staple part of the diet (mostly vegetables, except from coastal regions such as Arnhem Land where shell-fishing was important), while the men provided larger and more prestigious game. Distribution of these products took place according to kinship laws which linked affinal relations. Women, to a large extent, remained economically independent of their menfolk. Leisure time, i.e. time not needed for food seeking, was often used for discussion and execution of ceremonies - in other words too fulfil religious practices; it was also used to transmit the traditions of the group. All of these activities could be termed 'work' within the Aboriginal context. To non-Aborigines they appeared to signify an excess of leisure and an inherent propensity to laziness.

After contact with non-Aboriginal settlers, Aborigines were introduced to the work ethic - that people should work not only to satisfy their individual requirements but also to accumulate a surplus which can then be used for investment purposes. While non-Aborigines interpret this investment in terms of money, Aborigines, as noted earlier, place greater value on social relationships as a form of future insurance, and hence it is not surprising that they have often failed to subscribe to the non-Aboriginal concept of the purpose of work. Coombs (1972:10), in listing the reasons behind this incompatibility, says that 'it is hard to imagine another society whose values were as inappropriate to the demands of the industrialised economy'. As he points out, Aborigines who have been forced to resettle on reserves or in towns where their own types of economic activity has become impossible have not readily accepted non-Aboriginal ideas about work. In addition to their differing attitude to investment, he attributes this to the creation of an overwhelming feeling of dependence on the products of, and services provided by, non-Aboriginal Australians. Other evidence, which indicates that, where Aborigines have been able to exert control over their situation, they willingly put in whatever labour is required, supports this assumption. Barwick's (1972) analysis of the economies of Corranderk and Cumeroogunga in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries demonstrates this clearly, as do the more recent experiences connected with the establishment of homeland centres Coombs, (1978:183-214) and Aboriginal-owned cattle stations (Chapter 3). Thus the

problem is not simply an inability on the part of both Aborigines and non-Aborigines to comprehend each other's concepts of labour, but also that Aborigines have rarely been given the responsibility for running monetary enterprises, and hence cannot see the obvious rewards for their labour. Theoretically, self-management of Aboriginal communities should provide a remedy but, unless it is associated with control over an economic resource (e.g. land, mineral rights) adequate to provide an income for the population, it will never succeed in practice.

To many non-Aboriginal employers the stereotype of the Aboriginal worker is one who is unreliable and slow. Belief in these characteristics, attributed to cultural and, in the past, genetic factors as well, has led to underpayment of Aboriginal workers (e.g. non-Award wages, and classification of labourers under the slow workers clause), and discrimination in provision of job opportunities. Rowley (1966) has pointed out that discrimination and lack of opportunity have the effect of reinforcing these very attributes which cause them - thus seasonal work was considered suitable for Aborigines because it left time for 'walkabout', whereas those who could only get seasonal jobs were in fact forced to 'walkabout', that is move frequently for economic reasons. Studies which have attempted to compare the reliability (measured in terms of job stability and absenteeism) of the Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal workforce are inconclusive. Rogers (1973) found that employers in the mining industry in general considered Aboriginal workers to be unreliable and to lack work motivation, but that figures indicated that Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal rates of labour turnover were in fact approximately equal. There is ample evidence of complete lack of understanding by employers of the need for Aboriginal workers to absent themselves from work in order to fulfil tribal obligations, e.g attend mortuary rites (Davey, 1966). Absenteeism for such reasons has in some cases led to discrimination against the employment of workers from the immediate area in favour of those, such as Torres Straits Islanders in the case of Weipa, from places too distant for frequent participation in ceremonies.

Aboriginal adaptation to non-Aboriginal labour systems has also been hampered because non-Aboriginal society works on the assumption that the nuclear rather than the extended family is the norm, and that women are dependent on their menfolk. Such an assumption, as Hamilton (1975) has

suggested, completely undermines the economic independence of Aboriginal women and, since there is no guarantee that the men will conform to their assigned roles as breadwinners, women may be left with little means of support. This difficulty has certainly arisen in the case of social security payments, where unemployment benefits are normally only made available to the husband and there is no guarantee that he will subsequently share his cheque with his wife. Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal attitudes towards achievement also diverge, in that Aborigines tend to be much less competitive on an individual basis. This obviously influences the level of success, measured in non-Aboriginal terms, which they reach in all spheres including education and employment. Altogether there is a clear need for increased mutual understanding of the function of labour according to Aborigines and non-Aborigines, a pre-requisite for the promotion of appropriate Aboriginal economic development.

Capital, defined as the stock of goods used for production, is also variously interpreted by Aborigines and non-Aborigines. In the Aboriginal economy of pre-contact times essential capital equipment was extremely simple and had to be portable. Items which were readily available, e.g. materials for constructing basic shelters, were discarded and reacquired when necessary. Capital needed for non-Aboriginal elements of production within the Aboriginal economy is usually much more complex, has high monetary value and is normally non-portable. Moreover it includes components such as power supplies which, although essential for the maintenance of services such as telecommunications and, in many cases, reticulated water supplies, are only of limited value to individual Aborigines whose lifestyle may preclude them from using such services. If these items are not highly valued they may be abused or abandoned, practices which non-Aborigines find hard to comprehend, condemn as a sign of wastefulness and interpret as yet another indication of the inability of Aborigines to adapt to other values. Smaller capital items, such as cooking equipment or water containers may also be frequently discarded because, if people have access to money, replacements can easily be bought when they arrive in another place. Capital in the form of large-scale investment has only affected the Aboriginal economy since the growth of its non-Aboriginal component. Until recently much of this type of capital came directly from funds allocated by the Australian government. However access to mining royalties now offers some

Aboriginal communities the opportunity to escape from this dependence. Royalties have, on the advice of the government, so far been invested in Trust Funds, for example the Aboriginal Benefit Trust Account (ABTA), which are then made available to applicants according to assessment of their request. In the future individual communities such as Oenpelli will receive large sums in compensation for mining carried out on adjacent traditional land. Methods of use and distribution of these payments are still under discussion, and great concern has been expressed (Coombs, 1980; Kesteven, 1980) about whether Aboriginal groups have been effectively consulted or advised. Similar problems have arisen with some Aboriginal-owned cattle stations which, with recent high beef prices, have earned large sums of money but have not had much advice on the advantages of the different types of investment which are possible.

Capital can also be human - the knowledge and skills held by individual members of society. Non-Aborigines assess this resource largely in terms of formal educational qualifications, or demonstrated ability through accumulated experience, and, on that basis, find Aborigines singularly ill-equipped to occupy positions of responsibility in the monetary economy. While it is true that Aboriginal human capital has a different emphasis, frequently inappropriate to the demands of modern society, there has been little attempt to use those Aboriginal skills which are appropriate to the needs of their contemporary society. Thus Aboriginal knowledge of environmental resources has, until recently, not been regarded as useful in the management of parks and wildlife in both desert and tropical areas. Similarly, the emphasis on formal educational qualifications has prevented Aborigines from demonstrating their management skills, a resource which they undoubtedly employed to great advantage within their own pre-contact economy, and still do today in the organization of complex ceremonial activities, involving large numbers of people, and in the organization of outstation communities. Their dependence on non-Aboriginal management expertise has prevented the growth of economic motivation, a problem which should be approached through more effective consultation in the course of project planning and implementation. While Aboriginal decision-making processes, which involve prolonged discussion between all interested parties, may be difficult to follow in the non-Aboriginal business world, consultation should aim to include these methods as far as possible.

This brief discussion of some elements of economics as they are understood by Aborigines and non-Aborigines highlights the major problem in carrying out a study of the Aboriginal economy. Even when we accept that that economy cannot be examined in a meaningful way without considering its place within society, we are confronted at every turn with differences in interpretation of basic components. As Stanner (1979:370-1) has pointed out, we still attempt to analyse these components from an ethnocentric viewpoint, and understand very little of the Aboriginal principles of economics, or how these are affected by their social structure. Calley's description of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal attitudes to life - in the former case, life is a 'process' and in the latter a 'progress' (1956:207-9) - pinpoints an important distinction. An additional problem is that, while Aborigines themselves identify as one group with a cultural background distinct from other Australians, enormous variations, the result of differences in contact history and in environmental circumstances, exist within that group. These variations are particularly obvious with regard to the socio-economic situation; most Aborigines in urban and metropolitan communities aspire closely to equality of living standards and employment opportunities with non-Aborigines while those in rural areas, particularly where the tribal background remains strong, do not necessarily value these material needs as highly. Thus generalizations on Aboriginal economic goals disguise a wealth of different feelings within the population. While the present study cannot hope to present these differences comprehensively, it will at least attempt to consider some of the broader issues from the outlook of Aboriginal as well as non-Aboriginal society. Further consideration of these points is left to the conclusion, following the evidence provided by past investigations and the present case-studies.

COMPONENTS OF THE ABORIGINAL ECONOMY: PRESENT EVIDENCE

The preceding discussion has highlighted some of the main differences in Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal interpretation of basic socio-economic elements. Evidence for these differences can be drawn from a variety of sources, both general (e.g. statistics from the 1976 census) and specific (anthropological and sociological case-studies of particular communities). General data sources such as the census are of limited value because the

demographic and socio-economic characteristics described are defined according to non-Aboriginal criteria; many specific studies are also of limited use because few are set within the framework of a socio-economic investigation. However they do demonstrate that the economic gulf between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Australians, most clearly apparent in the discrepancy in monetary incomes, can be attributed to a complex intermixture of social, demographic and environmental factors. The following section presents some of the existing evidence for these factors.

DEMOGRAPHIC CHARACTERISTICS

Size, distribution and structure of the population.

At the time of the 1976 Census Aborigines, with a total population of 144,382, formed one per cent of the Australian population. As Table 1.1 shows, New South Wales had the largest number of Aborigines but the Northern Territory, where they accounted for almost a quarter of the population, had by far the largest proportion. Comparison with the 1971 population indicates an inter-censal growth rate of 36 per cent, approximately twice that of the Australian population during the same period. Although this discrepancy can mostly be attributed to people identifying as Aborigines for the first time in 1976,⁴ it also reflects a high rate of natural increase in the Aboriginal population. Smith (National Population Inquiry (NPI), 1975:487) suggests that the population was growing at approximately 2.25 per cent per annum in 1971, while the rate for the Australian population was only about 1.0 per cent. This can be attributed to high rates of fertility and declining mortality. As Fig.1.2 shows, the 1976 Aboriginal population had a much more youthful structure than the non-Aboriginal population, with more than 43 per cent below the age of 15. The Aboriginal child-woman ratio was almost twice that of non-Aborigines, despite the evidence for recent fertility decline apparent through comparison of the relative sizes of the 0-4 and 5-9 age cohorts (Fig.1.2; NPI, 1978:129). Estimates from state statistics (Queensland, South Australia, Western Australia and Northern Territory) indicate a crude birth rate for 1976 of 29.7 per

4. Especially in New South Wales and Victoria where the inter-censal growth rates were 63 per cent and 119 per cent respectively.

thousand. The crude death rate for that year was 18.0 per thousand, high compared to that of the Australian population (8.3), but certainly lower than in the past. Smith (1980:14-15), using all data sources available, has shown that the average rate of Aboriginal infant mortality fell from 138 per thousand to 53 per thousand between 1965 and 1978. Comparison of Aboriginal populations in Northern Territory and New South Wales (Table 1.2) suggests no marked fertility differential between those who lived in rural and urban areas, or between those with tribal and non-tribal backgrounds.

Table 1.1
Aboriginal population, 1976
(excluding Torres Strait Islanders)

State	Males	Females	Total	Abor.pop/ Total pop.
	No.	No.		
Northern Territory	11,784	11,751	23,536	24.2
W.Australia	12,848	12,717	25,565	2.2
Queensland	15,996	15,952	31,948	1.5
New South Wales (incl. A.C.T.)	19,563	18,894	38,456	0.8
South Australia	5,029	4,911	9,941	0.8
Tasmania	1,319	1,203	2,522	0.6
Victoria	6,285	6,130	12,414	0.3
Total	72,824	71,558	144,382	100.0

Source: Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS), Population Census, 1976.

Because of the difference in structure the Aboriginal population had a much higher dependency ratio than the non-Aboriginal population (0.92 compared to 0.68) (Fig. 1.2), but, while approximately one-third of non-Aboriginal dependents were elderly people, more than 90 per cent of Aboriginal dependents were children. Dependency ratios for New South Wales and Northern Territory were almost equal, but some minor rural/urban differentials existed. In the Northern Territory rural communities had

more older people and fewer children than Aboriginal groups in towns while in New South Wales the metropolitan areas had fewer children and more adults in the productive age groups. These slight differences may be due to selective population movement although their insignificance suggests that as yet, trends in Aboriginal rural/urban mobility do not conform to those of most other population groups.

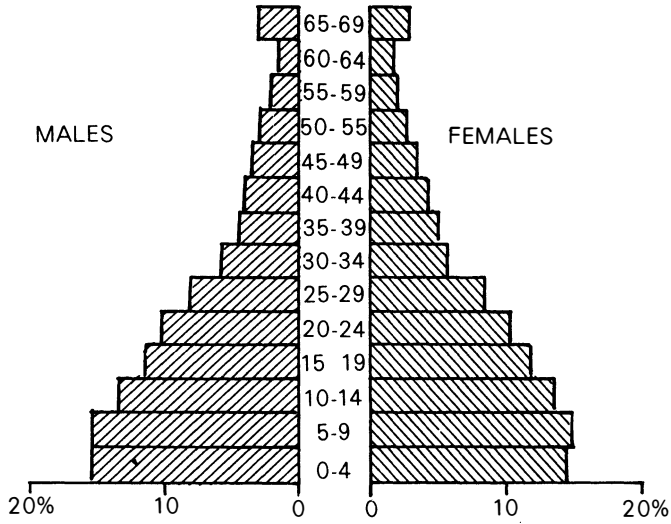
Table 1.2
Aboriginal populations in New South Wales and
Northern Territory, 1976

	New South Wales				Northern Territory		
	Metrop.	Urban	Rural	Total	Urban	Rural	Total
	%				%		
Age group							
0-14 (%)	43.7	48.1	48.3	46.8	47.7	42.8	43.7
15-60	53.7	48.8	47.9	50.1	48.6	50.6	50.2
60+	2.6	3.1	3.8	3.1	3.7	6.6	6.0
Depend.ratio	0.86	1.05	1.09	1.00	1.06	0.98	0.99
Mascul.ratio	0.98	1.00	1.05	1.04	0.98	1.01	1.00
Child/woman	0.63	0.67	0.68	0.66	0.67	0.68	0.68
Dependency ratio	= $\frac{\text{Children 0-14} + \text{Adults 60+}}{\text{Adults 15-59}}$						
Masculinity ratio	= Males/Females						
Child/Woman ratio	= $\frac{\text{Children 0-4}}{\text{Women 15-49}}$						

Source: Aboriginal Summary Data File, ABS, Population census 1976, special tabulations.

In terms of economic involvement, the high growth rates and dependency ratios of the Aboriginal population must affect both the distribution of resources and potential participation in the labour force. The proportion of young Aboriginal adults will not decline rapidly, and hence the problem of youth unemployment is likely to increase rather than decrease. Moreover, in most Aboriginal families, scarce resources, whether they are derived from monetary or non-monetary activity, must support a larger number of dependents than in non-Aboriginal families. As Treadgold

ABORIGINAL POPULATION, 1976



NON-ABORIGINAL POPULATION, 1976

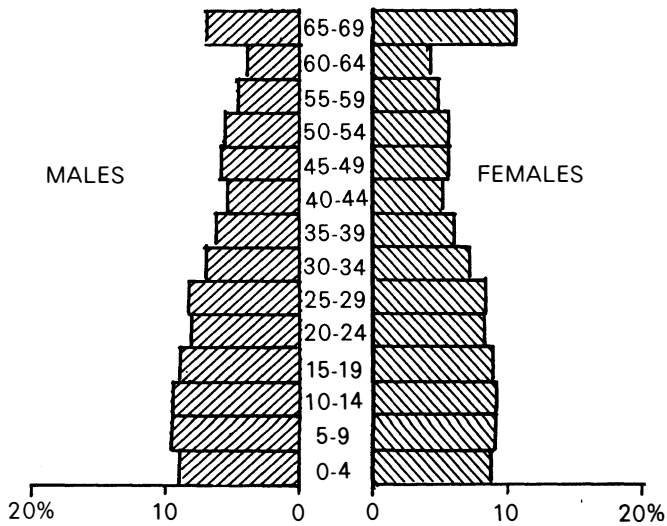


Fig 1.2 Aboriginal and non-aboriginal population structure, 1976

(1980) has shown, this difference explains why the gap between per capita Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal incomes for the whole population exceeds that between incomes of the adult age groups alone.

Population mobility

Low incomes suggest restricted access to wage earning opportunities but Aborigines, more so than non-Aborigines, seem to be reluctant to seek a solution to this problem by moving to alternative locations. For many the maintenance of close links with kin and, where possible, with the land previously occupied by their tribal group, is more important than possible material advancement.

Census data provide little useful evidence of this characteristic of stability, although they do indicate that, on an inter-state basis, the Aboriginal population has been marginally less mobile than the non-Aboriginal population between 1971 and 1976. Other studies show that tribal Aborigines have, as far as possible, remained on or close to the land which they occupied before European settlement and that non-tribal people, after widespread dislocation and enforced resettlement following land alienation, still identify themselves closely with their original group. Thus, as Gale (1980) has described, the history of Aboriginal migration in South Australia reveals initial nucleation of people from the Lower Murray and Spencer Gulf regions into mission settlements at Point Pearce and Point Macleay, followed by subsequent movement to urban centres and the city of Adelaide. In the contemporary metropolitan community these groupings are perpetuated, and even young people, born and bred in the city, identify themselves with the two missions and regions of former tribal settlement. These patterns are paralleled, as Kamien (1978) and Mitchell (1978) have shown, by those described for Aborigines in New South Wales.

Although Aborigines do not appear to have a strong propensity to migrate on a permanent basis, transitory forms of movement are common. Aboriginal groups frequently visit each other both formally, to carry out ceremonies, and informally, to see friends and family and exchange news, and, with population relocation following land alienation, such visits can involve journeys of several hundred kilometres. The custom of periodically gathering together for formal meetings dates back to pre-contact times and was

probably associated also with the exchange of valuable commodities such as stone axes, coloured ochres, shell objects and pituri (native tobacco) (Mulvaney, 1976). In all cases the act of giving, and the mutual obligations established, were considered to be more important than the objects exchanged. It is probable that this belief, along with the strong sense of obligation to perform customary rites for one's family, explains why many Aborigines today still feel that their duty to attend these meetings is more important than their duty to a non-Aboriginal employer. As mentioned earlier, this has been a common bone of contention between the two groups.

A third type of mobility, also closely related to the strong kinship networks within an Aboriginal group, is relocation of residence. In metropolitan and urban communities this takes the form of frequent movement of individuals or families within a conventional permanent settlement system, as can be seen by the rapid turnover of house occupancy. In rural communities, where many families occupy temporary shelters, the entire home may be shifted to ensure that related families can maintain their own customary linkages and also remain distant from groups with whom they should not associate. Provision of non-relocatable services, such as power, water and sewerage, for such settlements poses a severe problem since, as O'Connell (1979) describes for the Utopia cattle station community (Central Australia), people often prefer to establish their camps on their own land rather than live close to the area where facilities are available. The growth of outstations, as at Hermannsburg (Stoll *et al.*, 1979), provides further examples of this type of movement, and has resulted in the relocation of Aboriginal groups 'remote' from modern health and educational facilities, retail stores, entertainment and job opportunities. Concern expressed by non-Aborigines over these recent developments ignores the fact that to Aborigines these outstations are not remote, but central to the place where they wish to live; they place limited value on the infrastructure which others consider to be essential.

Aboriginal population mobility affects their participation in the non-Aboriginal economy in that many prefer to remain in parts of Australia where the potential for development is low; they are heavily committed to customary practices which require transitory movement, and hence may provide an unreliable workforce; and the need for

residential mobility disrupts the education of their children and the care of their health. All of these are important problems, hard to solve in terms of the broader framework of Australian society.

Family composition and households

Census data demonstrate (Fig.1.3) that Aboriginal households are generally larger than non-Aboriginal households, although those in urban and metropolitan area are of similar size to those of others in their income group. While this supports previous suggestions that, for Aborigines, economic resources must be distributed over a larger population than for non-Aborigines, the comparison provides no information on detailed family composition or on the socio-cultural linkages between family groups. In effect, Aboriginal communities consist of a series of camps, internally strongly linked but variously related to one another. Resource distribution takes place according to these linkages, and hence the wages on material possessions available within one household may in fact be widely spread. In the hypothetical example shown in Fig.1.4a, some families in Camps A, B and C (G and H) are linked only to others in their own camp, but others (X and Y) are linked to families in both camps, a feature described by Eckermann (1977:290-4). In the non-Aboriginal system, families are more likely to remain as individual units, outside a camp system, and to distribute resources mainly within these units (P,Q,R and S, Fig.1.4b). They are physically separated by intervening groups with whom they may have little contact, and are under little pressure from the community to continually contribute for mutual support. Thus, analysis of actual variations in household income, a common method of indicating differences in access to resources among the non-Aboriginal population may be quite irrelevant for the Aboriginal population.

Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal families also differ in their marriage patterns. According to the census (Table 1.3), a higher proportion of Aborigines than non-Aborigines had either never married or were separated. However the definitions used take little account of interpretations of marital status, certainly likely to deviate in tribal communities from the conventional definition. Nevertheless other studies (Gale, 1980) do suggest that in southern and eastern Australia many Aboriginal couples have a de facto relationship and in other cases the woman has become the

sole provider. Such a situation would clearly have economic repercussions. In tribal areas most marriages still conform to proscribed customary laws (Bell and Ditton, 1980:90-94), and, through strong social controls, are usually stable. Serious contravention of these laws often ends in violence.

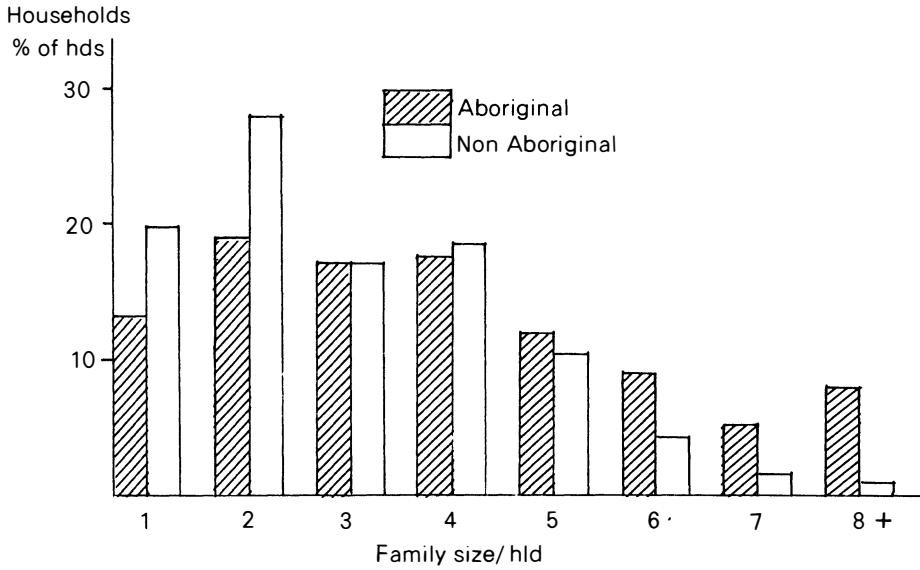


Fig 1.3 Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal family size, 1976.

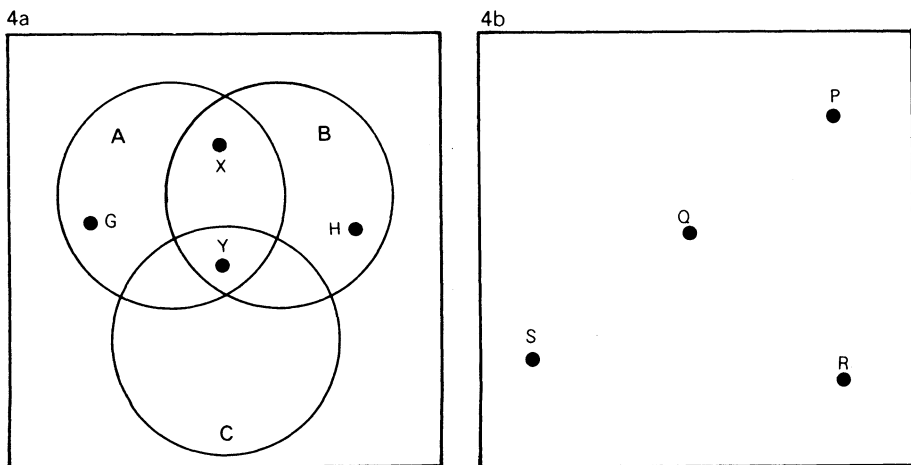


Fig 1.4 Family linkages, Aborigines and non-Aborigines.

Among older people polygyny is still practiced and young widows still often remarry into polygynous families. Hence one man may be expected to contribute to several family units.⁵ As with other features of households, these marital characteristics cause monetary resources devised by non-Aboriginal administrators for allocation to the nuclear family (e.g. social security payments) to be spread over wider groups within the Aboriginal community.

Table 1.3
Marital status, 1976
(population aged 15+, % of total)

	Aborigines		Non-Aborigines	
	Males	Females	Males	Females
Never married	46.8	34.9	28.9	20.9
Now married	44.3	48.7	64.2	62.8
Separated	4.3	6.5	2.2	2.7
Divorced	1.4	1.4	1.9	2.4
Widowed	3.2	8.4	2.6	11.1
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

Source: ABS, Population Census, 1976.

The strength and complexity of the Aboriginal kinship system, and its significance in providing basic needs from both monetary and non-monetary resources, has been well recognized in non-Aboriginal Australia, and has perhaps been used as an excuse for lack of effort in making the welfare system more relevant. Many authorities can assume that, while the total resources are low, it is unlikely that Aboriginal families will become destitute, because they can always ask their kin for support. However such an assumption ignores the possibility that reliance on redistribution of resources may be needful for survival. Both Rowley (1971a:Ch.14) and Gale (1977:326-31) argue that urban people preserve their kinship ties mainly because of economic necessity. While these kinship ties provide

5. Although, as noted earlier, there is no guarantee that he will actually do so in monetary terms, since the concept of male and female economic independence remains strong.

important basic social support, they should not be a necessity for economic survival in the present day. More effort is needed to ensure that Aboriginal families receive enough money to cover their basic needs.

SOCIO-ECONOMIC CHARACTERISTICS

Settlement and shelter

Aboriginal communities today range from outstations with less than ten permanent residents to centralised settlements of more than 1000 people, and scattered communities in urban and metropolitan situations. As Rowley (1970) has described in detail, the present location and composition of these communities owes much to enforced resettlement under dispossession and dispersal. While the Australian population as a whole is one of the most highly urbanised in the world (85.8 per cent lived in urban centres with more than 1000 people in 1976), the Aboriginal population is split almost equally between rural and urban localities (50.9 per cent urban). The greatest concentrations of Aborigines are in New South Wales, Queensland, Western Australia and Northern Territory (Fig.1.5). The geographic distribution of the Aboriginal population varies by state (Table 1.4). In Victoria over 90 per cent of Aborigines are urban dwellers while over 80 per cent of those in the Northern Territory live in rural localities.

In metropolitan communities such as Sydney or Adelaide the Aboriginal population is partly dispersed, but tends to concentrate in a few local government areas, for example, Redfern and Port Adelaide. Most residents are not of full descent and have a lifestyle in which non-Aboriginal economic components are predominant - they live in conventional houses, form part of the urban labour force, and make use of normal urban facilities such as schools, hospitals, and retail stores. Aboriginal groups in smaller towns such as Bourke or Moree in New South Wales or Alice Springs in the Northern Territory, are more varied. They include people of both part and full Aboriginal descent, their lifestyle apparently has a more significant Aboriginal component, and in many cases they do not have the same standards of housing or services as other Australians.

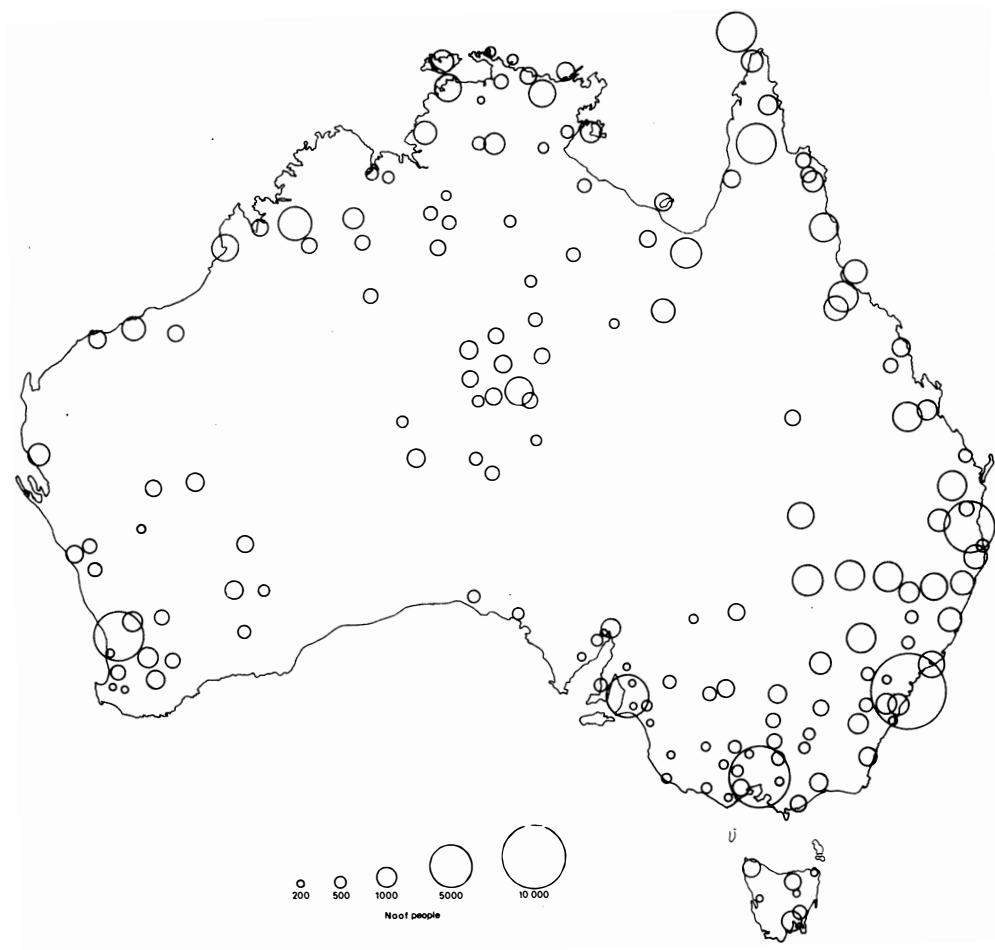


Fig 1.5 Aboriginal population distribution, 1976

Table 1.4
Geographic distribution of Aboriginal population, 1976
(% of total)

State	Large Urban (10000+)	Other Urban (1000-99999)	Bounded Rural (200-999)	Other Rural (0-199)
Northern Territory	-	19.0	49.0	32.0
Western Australia	16.3	39.7	17.9	26.1
Queensland	9.3	42.0	9.5	39.3
New South Wales	29.9	52.1	6.2	11.8
South Australia	24.9	25.9	7.5	41.6
Tasmania	16.9	49.1	10.1	23.9
Victoria	53.6	37.3	2.5	6.6
Australian Capital Territory	57.9	-	-	42.1
Total	15.3	35.6	16.7	32.4

Source: Abor. Collection District Summary Files (ACDSF),
 ABS Population census, 1976, special tabulations.

Thus, in Bourke for example, some Aborigines live on the 'Town Reserve', a settlement especially constructed for Aborigines on a small piece of land approximately 2 kms from town; their dwellings consist of conventionally constructed corrugated iron sheds or temporary shelters of timber and loose iron sheets. The rest of the Aboriginal community in Bourke live in Housing Commission or private dwellings inside the urban area. Aboriginal communities in Alice Springs include temporary camps in the sandy river bed, tent encampments and permanent houses in camp areas, Housing Commission homes and privately purchased residences.

Rural communities include nucleated groups of considerable size (bounded rural localities) and small dispersed populations. Many people in the first category live in groupings established as settlements on reserved land by government and mission agencies during and following the main periods of land alienation. While many such settlements in southern and eastern Australia have subsequently disappeared under pressure from neighbouring

non-Aboriginal groups supported by government (e.g. Corranderk, Barwick, 1972), those in the Northern Territory and in parts of Western Australia, where they are located on land of little apparent economic value in non-Aboriginal terms, remain. Settlement dwellers in those two states, northern Queensland and to a limited extent South Australia are almost all fully Aboriginal by descent. Many still retain access to their land and maintain their tribal laws and customs. Their living quarters range from temporary shelters to transitional one-room dwellings and conventional government housing. They are only peripherally involved in the workforce but have access to basic modern services such as education, health, retailing and telecommunications.

The remainder of the rural population (other rural) consists of groups on pastoral properties or small leases excised from these properties, small settlements (less than 200 people) on reserves, and outstations.⁶ While many pastoral station communities are settled on properties which are leased and managed by non-Aborigines, a considerable number now control their own leases, purchased on their behalf by the Aboriginal Land Fund Commission or related bodies.⁷ Groups on non-Aboriginal properties and those on small excisions, areas of land granted after the recommendations of the Gibb Committee (Gibb, 1972), have little opportunity to participate directly in the pastoral industry, although some provide seasonal labour as required, but Aboriginal owned cattle stations have considerable income earning potential. In all such cases, however, the population far exceeds the labour force needed by the industry and, since employment is predominantly seasonal, even those who are working are not permanent wage earners. Outstations, or homeland centres, which are most common in the Northern Territory and in the northern parts of Queensland, South Australia and Western Australia, are small population groupings which have developed in the course of a significant decentralization of the Aboriginal population in the past two decades. They can only be established where people have the right to camp on that land, i.e. where the land is unalienated or the people control the lease or hold a freehold title.

6. The population classified in this category in 1976 is underestimated because some outstations were enumerated as part of larger settlements.

7. Now grouped together as the Aboriginal Development Commission.

Normally, Aboriginal occupation of land owned or leased by non-Aborigines is confined to spasmodic hunting and foraging and precludes any semi-permanent settlement, such as occurs at outstations. In general the outstation movement has been most significant among the tribal groups of the Arnhem Land reserve, many of whom have never become permanent settlement dwellers; in the Central Desert, where the Pitjantjatjara and Pintubi people have shown a strong commitment to outstation life, the movement is less universal and, because of physical limitations, such as drought, less stable, particularly in the early stages of development. Few outstation dwellers are wage earners and, like some of the people in the pastoral communities, their access to the modern health and education facilities which many of them now desire is often severely restricted.⁸

One of the major changes experienced by Aborigines in the course of establishment of the contemporary settlement pattern has been the provision of shelter. Housing, of a more or less conventional nature by non-Aboriginal standards, has been seen as a first pre-requisite in the achievement of socio-economic advancement - 'a consequence of progress towards assimilation and a necessary condition for further progress' (Collmann, 1979:385). By providing housing, supervisory organizations, whether government or mission, also felt that they were providing tangible proof that they were improving the living standards of Aboriginal people. Thus tribal Aborigines were to learn the requirements for assimilation by moving progressively to houses which offered facilities considered essential in non-Aboriginal society. Similarly, non-tribal groups in towns were offered conventional houses on the understanding that they would use them in conventional ways, regardless of the fact that their poverty might prevent them from providing furniture and the necessary equipment for cleaning and cooking. Today the blocks of empty Transitional houses, nick-named 'dog-boxes', surrounded by encampments of corrugated iron, cardboard, canvas and timber shelters, typical of many rural settlements in tribal areas, and the dilapidated dwellings of urban Aboriginal residents

8. There is a wealth of literature describing these different types of community; e.g. Metropolitan/large urban - Gale, 1972; Gale and Binnion, 1975: small town - Kamien, 1978; Drakakis-Smith, 1980: settlement - Long, 1970; DAA, 1978b; pastoral station - Stevens, 1973; Stanley, 1976: outstation - Coombs, 1978; Meehan, 1975.

demonstrate that the implementation of housing policy has substantially misfired.

Assessment of Aboriginal housing needs has almost always been based on non-Aboriginal standards. Thus, although the 1976 census shows that Aboriginal dwelling conditions are of lower standard than those of non-Aborigines (a higher proportion of Aboriginal homes were improvised, fewer had piped water or adequate toilet facilities, and family sizes per dwelling were larger (Table 1.5), it indicates nothing about how Aborigines view these conditions. Similarly the 1977/78 Environmental Survey in Northern Territory (NT, 1979) equates the terms 'permanent' and 'temporary' with 'adequate' and 'sub-standard' as categories of shelter, but does not raise the question of whether some Aboriginal groups might prefer temporary accommodation to permanent structures which restrict mobility and hinder the maintenance of custom. The 1978 DAA survey, which asked communities to assess their own housing conditions, made some concession to the Aboriginal viewpoint. In that survey, 65 per cent of dwellings were said to be adequate and in the most highly urbanised states (Tasmania and Victoria) over 95 per cent came into this category (DAA, 1979a). A high proportion of inadequate dwellings were self-built and, it may be assumed, temporary. Intra-state variations can be considerable. In the Northern Territory (NT, 1979) housing provision in Arnhem Land and the north was far superior to that in rural Aboriginal communities in Central Australia. In the former area over three-quarters of dwellings were permanent and more than half had piped water, electricity and private toilet facilities; in the latter region the equivalent percentages were 35, 23, 20 and 20 respectively.

Such analyses show that, according to these criteria, the main deficiencies in Aboriginal shelter lie in rural areas. Other studies indicate that the solution to the problem does not necessarily lie in providing expensive urban-type housing for rural communities. Descriptions of communities such as Numbulwar (Biernoff, 1979) or Utopia (O'Connell, 1979) indicate that most Aboriginal families prefer to spend their waking, and often their sleeping hours, outside, where they can participate in various types of social contact, and that they like to be able to preserve the nucleus of their kinship structure within the settlement. In outstation communities such as at Maningrida (Gillespie *et al.*, 1977) and in urban camps like those in

Table 1.5
Housing conditions and facilities, 1976
(% of total)

	Aborigines	Non-Aborigines
Type of dwelling:		
Self-contained	86.9	98.0
Not self-contained	3.0	1.2
Improvised	8.0	0.3
Mobile	1.8	0.4
Other	0.2	0.0
Total	100.0	100.0
Facilities:		
Piped water	93.9	99.6
No piped water	6.1	0.4
Total	100.0	100.0
Flush toilet	80.7	95.8
Sanitary pan	9.8	2.7
Total	100.0	100.0
Family size:		
1/2 people	32.1	47.8
3/5 people	46.1	45.4
6+ people	21.8	6.7
Total	100.0	100.0

Source: ABS, Population Census, 1976.

Darwin (Sansom, 1980) similar customs prevail. In general these conventions are not compatible with conventional non-Aboriginal housing. Recognition of this problem led in 1972 to the setting up of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Housing Panel, a quasi-government body of architects and anthropologists who attempted to devise appropriate housing on the basis of close consultation with rural groups. They became one of the few groups recognised by Aborigines as planning relevant to their needs and their closure in 1978, due to a complex mixture of political and administrative factors, was much regretted. Their work in the urban camps of Alice Springs was particularly valuable (Heppell, 1979). Their role was taken over by personnel from the Department of Housing and Construction, unfortunately much less experienced in conducting discussions on housing needs with the Aboriginal groups concerned.

In towns, where Aborigines are a minority, low income group, the provision of shelter is affected by the ability to pay for accommodation, and by the attitudes of the dominant non-Aboriginal community towards Aboriginal residents. Gale's description of the Adelaide community (1972:Ch.7) shows that, because of low income, Aborigines often have to resort to squalid housing with insufficient space for their needs; discrimination, as has recently been highlighted in Alice Springs, also limits their choice of accommodation. Because of these problems special organizations have been established to deal with the needs of Aboriginal clients - the South Australian Aboriginal Housing Board in Adelaide and, in smaller towns like Bourke and Robinvale, Aboriginal housing co-operatives. While these organizations provide invaluable services in buying and maintaining property at fair rental, and advising customers on the procedures of rental agreements, they cannot supply sufficient shelter to keep up with demand and, as a consequence, many urban Aborigines are forced into the private rental market. There, as Brown *et al.* (1974) report, rentals and bonds charged to Aboriginal families often exceed those demanded from non-Aborigines, presumably because their custom is unwelcome and they have the reputation of being careless of property.

Health and nutrition

The environment within which Aboriginal people live today undoubtedly affects their health. The creation of large, centralized communities, which require organized methods of sewage and garbage disposal and water supplies and where people are, compared to their pre-contact living situation, forced to live in close proximity, has helped the transmission of infectious diseases. Moreover, Aboriginal difficulties in coping with the complexity of modern non-Aboriginal hygiene systems have aggravated the situation. While statistical sources are limited, those available show that Aboriginal hospital morbidity in 1976 exceeded that of non-Aborigines, particularly in certain conditions - infective and parasitic diseases, endocrinal and nutritional problems, respiratory diseases and, in Western Australia, accidents (Table 1.6). As the Aboriginal

Table 1.6
Hospital morbidity, selected conditions, 1976
(rate/1000 population)(a)

	Aborigines		Non-Aborigines	
	N.T.	W.A.	N.T.	W.A.
Infective/parasitic	18	95	4	8
Endocrinal/nutrition	8	13	3	2
Circulatory	7	18	9	14
Respiratory	30	137	17	22
Genito/urinary	-	27	-	22
Accidents	32	97	32	25
Total	205	663	204	213

(a) These figures refer to cases; one individual may have been admitted several times, either with the same or different complaints.

Source: Department of Aboriginal Affairs (DAA), 1978a.

Health Report (1979) points out, most of these complaints are environmentally related. Neoplasms and circulatory disorders are the only major categories in which

non-Aboriginal morbidity approached or exceeded that of Aborigines, although there are signs that the Aboriginal incidence of these disorders has risen in recent years.

Other major Aboriginal health problems are eye, ear and skin infections, sexually transmitted diseases, and illnesses related to excessive consumption of alcohol. Between 1976 and 1978 the National Trachoma and Eye Health Program (NTEHP) surveyed approximately 50 per cent of the Aboriginal population of Australia in a sample drawn from all types of physical environment. Almost 40 per cent of those examined had some form of trachoma, while the incidence among non-Aborigines in the same regions was only 1.7 per cent (NTEHP, 1980) (Table 1.7). Similarly, Aboriginal incidence of otitis media and skin diseases was much greater than that for non-Aborigines. Comparison of the relative significance of these complaints shows that certain parts of Australia, notably the Central desert (Red Centre) have higher levels of prevalence than others (Table 1.7), probably due to environmental factors such as aridity, long hours of sunshine, and lack of water for washing.

Table 1.7
Incidence of trachoma and other diseases, 1976-78
(% of total sample)

	Aborigines			Non-Aborigines		
	Trachoma	Otitis media	Skin	Trachoma	Otitis media	Skin
Red Centre	77.0	20.9	n.a.	4.0	2.0	n.a.
Coastal WA	46.9	8.1	n.a.	1.9	1.3	n.a.
Top End, NT	34.1	13.4	n.a.	1.0	0.7	n.a.
Coastal NSW	7.7	16.6	n.a.	0.2	3.4	n.a.
Total	38.3	11.0	3.8	1.7	1.7	0.6

Source: NTEHP, 1980.

Recognition of Aboriginal health problems led to provision of special first aid and nursing facilities from early periods of contact. Today these services are available even in the most isolated areas, as was shown in

the 1978 survey of non-metropolitan Aboriginal communities in which about 90 per cent of the respondent population lived within easy reach of a hospital and could take advantage of regular visits by doctors and nurses (DAA, 1979a:104-9). The remaining 10 per cent, most of whom lived in settlements or pastoral properties in central and northern Australia, received more limited services and still depended heavily on aerial and terrestrial communication links in times of emergency. Urban and metropolitan communities, for the most part, use the same health services as the non-Aboriginal population. However the impact of these provisions on Aboriginal health has been less significant than anticipated. Until recently this has been attributed almost entirely to the physical conditions within which Aborigines live. It is now acknowledged that the type of health care provided - treating patients with non-Aboriginal medicines, in clinics run by non-Aboriginal staff - is not entirely appropriate, and that the employment of Aboriginal staff should be encouraged. The health worker training program, which has now involved about 200 Aboriginal trainees in Northern Territory, is a result of this recognition. By 1978, 81 people had completed their basic training, and more than half of these were continuing, with the hope that they would eventually assume much of the responsibility for health care in their communities (Aboriginal Health Report, 1979:84-6). Community based health services, such as these operated through the Central Australian Aboriginal Congress (CAAC) in Alice Springs and at Papunya and Utopia (CAAC, 1975), and the health unit at Redfern in Sydney also aim to provide more appropriate health care, less restricted by the regulations and procedures of Federal and State services. As Kamien (1978) points out, a major advantage of these services is that, through their Aboriginal liaison staff, information links between medical personnel and patients are greatly improved. While emphasis for the most part remains on training Aborigines to dispense non-Aboriginal remedies, it has also been recognised that, for many tribal people, traditional⁹ healers perform an essential role. It is not uncommon for some with those skills to work together with official health staff.

9. The terms 'traditional' and 'non-traditional' as used in this volume, distinguish between those elements or customs in contemporary Aboriginal society which exhibit obvious linkage with those of pre-contact times, and those which have been introduced following contact. The distinction is not absolute, as traditions are everywhere subject to adaptation and change.

Many Aboriginal health problems are nutritionally related. While evidence for the incidence of child malnutrition is sparse, comparison of weight for age shows that most Aboriginal children fall well below the Harvard standard (e.g. Middleton and Francis, 1976:20; Kamien, 1978:108-9) which, although the standard used may not be entirely appropriate to the Aboriginal population, suggests some shortfall in food intake. Aboriginal diets have changed radically since the introduction of processed foods following European contact. The main foods purchased are bread, flour, sugar and meat; fresh fruit and vegetables, often excessively expensive and of poor quality in remote areas, are eaten only in small quantities, and thus the diet is high in protein and carbohydrate but deficient in certain vitamins. Taylor, in an analysis of the consumption of foods bought in stores by the Mitchell River community in Queensland, shows that the actual intakes of calcium, iron, riboflavin, ascorbic acid and Vitamin A were all well below that which that community would apparently need for a balanced diet (1972:20). Lack of variety and deficiencies in the Aboriginal diet do not necessarily reflect the choice of consumers; low incomes in general force people to buy cheap staples and lack of adequate storage facilities means that foods must be rapidly consumed or kept without refrigeration. Poor nutrition can also be attributed to Aboriginal ignorance of the value of non-Aboriginal foods (Kamien, 1975:155). Taylor (1977) also suggests that attitudes to European food are conditioned by the fact that none of the taboos imposed on the consumption of some Aboriginal foods by some members of the community exist. Hence all European food is good, and Aborigines fail to realise that some may be more nutritious than others. He thus suggests that there is no guarantee that a rise in income will automatically lead to improvements in nutrition.

Subsistence gathering and hunting can provide important dietary supplements. There is ample evidence that, where Aborigines still have access to vegetables and meat from the land, they will make considerable efforts to use these resources. Meehan (1977:493-520) has shown that, in a coastal community in Arnhem Land in 1972-73, the proportion of food from the store in the diet varied seasonally. In surveys conducted during four separate months, selected to represent major periodicity in rainfall regime, she found that bought food accounted for between 35 and 58 per cent of consumption, according to changing availability of bush foods. Products obtained from

subsistence included fish, meat and vegetables. While this community, with unlimited access to the resources of the sea, is much more likely to be able to provide a large part of its sustenance from subsistence than, say, a Central Desert community, the figures nonetheless demonstrate that the contribution to the diet can be of great value.

Education and schooling

A relatively large proportion of Aborigines have either never received formal education or have left school after only a few years of training. According to the 1976 census, few Aboriginal youngsters then attending schools and colleges had reached tertiary level, but about 20 per cent of non-Aboriginal students were at tertiary institutions (Table 1.8). Altogether, while 76 per cent of non-Aborigines in the 5-19 age group were attending educational institutions, only 57 per cent of their Aboriginal counterparts were still being educated. Thus, although the introduction of special allowance schemes at secondary (ABSEG) and post secondary levels (ASGS) has enabled many young Aborigines to continue their education, the difference between the formal educational attainments of Aborigines and non-Aborigines is still significant, and few Aborigines are qualified to occupy professional positions or to hold jobs as skilled tradesmen. By 1976 a negligible proportion had graduated from higher educational establishments or obtained any other recognised qualifications (Table 1.9). Educational disadvantage experienced by Aborigines is a major reason for failure to participate in the wage-earning sector. As with other non-Aboriginal components of the socio-economic structure, education has not provided adequately for the needs of its Aboriginal clients.

Three main factors explain the lack of Aboriginal progress in formal non-Aboriginal educational systems: - problems of providing facilities in remote regions; discrimination against Aboriginal children in school; and the inappropriate nature of curricula for Aborigines, particularly when English is not the first language of communication. In sparsely populated parts of Australia post-primary educational services are strongly centralised; thus secondary school children must either leave home to become boarders, usually in a town-based institution, or receive their education by correspondence, relayed through the radio network. Either method poses problems, especially

Table 1.8
Educational institutions currently attended, 1976
(% of total)

	Aborigines		Non-Aborigines	
	M	F	M	F
Primary	53.8	54.3	42.9	46.7
Secondary	19.0	20.6	27.4	29.3
Primary/Secondary(a)	11.3	10.9	7.0	7.0
Other School(b)	10.5	9.9	0.7	0.5
Tertiary	5.2	4.4	22.1	16.5

(a) Primary and secondary combined.

(b) Other schools include those following a syllabus specifically designed for Aboriginal children, a category to which many community schools in Northern Territory belong.

Source: ABS, Population Census, 1976.

Table 1.9
Formal qualifications, 1976
(population 15+, excluding not stated)

	Aborigines		Non-Aborigines	
	M	F	M	F
Higher degree	0.0	0.0	0.7	0.1
Grad. diploma	0.0	0.0	0.5	0.5
Bachelors degree	0.1	0.0	3.3	1.1
Diploma	0.4	0.6	3.7	3.4
Technical	0.7	1.4	4.5	4.8
Trade	6.6	1.2	19.7	2.6
No qualifications	92.0	96.8	68.1	72.8
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

Source: ABS, Population Census, 1976.

for Aborigines. To leave family and friends is a traumatic experience for any child, but for tribal Aboriginal children it also means severance of spiritual bonds to the land and in most cases 'exile' to the country belonging to an alien tribal group. In addition, the contrast between life in a camp in a remote cattle station or settlement and life in a town boarding school creates many social pressures, and it is hardly surprising that, as Sommerlad (1976) describes for Kormilda, few students succeed in completing their courses. Moreover, many Aboriginal youngsters and their parents must doubt, in the light of past and present experience, whether advanced schooling will really achieve a rise in status, or even whether such a rise is compatible with their aim in life. Education by radio and correspondence is also unlikely to achieve much success with young Aborigines because few have access to the necessary technology, and because the programs demand facility with English. This system also expects that students will have the ability to communicate effectively by radio, even when the other party is an unknown entity, a situation which many Aborigines find awkward. Most Aboriginal community primary schools are also centrally located in main settlements, and hence may not be accessible to small isolated groups. In some communities, where the decentralization movement has stabilized, outstation schools, periodically serviced by supervisory teachers, have been established and staffed by members of the local community. Other communities, whose outstation populations continually fluctuate, do not have this facility, but, as they point out, since lack of schooling prevents younger families from moving away from the central settlement, its absence hinders the entire decentralization process.

Discrimination is more likely to affect Aboriginal children in urban communities where they form a minority group. Their relative disadvantage, shown by their poor health, poor clothing, lack of facilities to do homework or care for books or other materials, low levels of literacy, and lack of help from parents with limited experience of academic study, exposes them to social ridicule from others, and such pressures can be sufficiently strong to cause Aboriginal children to leave school at the first opportunity.

Thirdly, Aborigines do not necessarily feel that generally accepted educational curricula are appropriate to their pattern of life. Those in urban and metropolitan areas, for whom wage earning employment will be the main form of economic support, may feel that basic training in numeracy and literacy, with the added opportunity to acquire some more specific skills, will meet their requirements. However, those in rural areas, where Aboriginal values are more significant, have other ideas. Since assimilation is no longer the official policy, schooling in languages other than English is permitted and the encouragement of bilingual education has done much to strengthen the bonds between the people in remote communities and the schools provided for them. Bilingual teaching necessarily depends on the employment of Aboriginal teachers and teacher aides within their own communities, and uses now books and materials, based on local legends and traditions related to literacy workers by older people. Thus, even older community leaders to whom school is an unknown entity become involved in the formal educational experiences of their children and grandchildren. Coombs (1978:23-6), referring to changes in schooling at Hermannsburg, shows how the current system allows Aborigines to take from white teachers those skills which they cannot provide themselves, and to teach their children those other skills which they consider essential to their lives as Aborigines. Adult education also demonstrates the need for full consultation on the content of instruction courses; Aboriginal adults show little interest in learning skills not obviously related to their lifestyle (e.g. cooking elaborate meals), but participate keenly when they perceive a direct benefit. In effect, Aborigines see education as an integral part of the socialization process, rather than a separate component, a topic that is currently being investigated in the Aboriginal Children's and Families' Heritage Project (Brandl and Snowden, 1980).

The preceding discussion has considered education only in its formal sense, a basis for Aboriginal/non-Aboriginal comparison which is, like others which are culture related, of only limited value. There is no doubt that Aborigines still learn much informally within their own acculturation process. However, in contrast to informal education within non-Aboriginal society, this knowledge does not readily complement that which they acquire formally. Aboriginal teachers, literacy workers and story tellers are performing a vital role in making the two systems more compatible.

Material support

Assessment of the part played by Aborigines in the Australian economy, based on their success and participation in monetary spheres, indicates that their contribution has been slight. This can be attributed to all of the above factors - high rate of population growth and high dependency ratios, poor health and low nutritional status, low levels of literacy and of formal educational attainment and low standard of living. Additional factors are that many Aborigines identify strongly with areas physically isolated from the mainstream of development and, unable to compete for scarce opportunities, are not members of the labour force. Others in general hold low status occupations and earn low incomes. Such an assessment does not take non-monetary activity into account, nor does it consider the economy as part of the total social structure, the approach taken in this study. Non-Aborigines sometimes justify Aboriginal monetary disadvantage by assuming that products obtained through non-monetary activity, i.e. subsistence provided from hunting and gathering, will be sufficient to cover any deficit in the necessities which can be purchased with money. This assumption ignores the contemporary situation of most Aborigines - those in urban and metropolitan areas no longer have access to the resources of the land nor do they have the skills to exploit them; most of those in rural areas now live in centralized communities, frequently in locations where the natural resources have already been significantly depleted. Thus most Aboriginal families must derive their basic material support from the monetary sector.

Non-monetary activity

Although few Aboriginal groups are now dependent to any real extent on subsistence activities, hunting and gathering are still very popular. They not only provide valuable and much sought after dietary supplements, but also enable people to express their identification with the land, to practice skills at which their proficiency clearly exceeds that of non-Aborigines, and to continue the informal training of their young. The significance of subsistence activity for any group varies according to the physical environment, demographic structure, settlement type, access to land and access to certain material possessions, such as vehicles and rifles, now essential components for successful expeditions. In general, for Aboriginal groups in southern

and eastern Australia, hunting and gathering has become a weekend recreational activity, perhaps similar to fishing and game shooting carried out by non-Aborigines. In tribal communities, on which the following discussion is focused, it is still distinctively Aboriginal in character.

Such detailed evidence on subsistence productivity as is available concerns Aboriginal groups in contact with non-Aboriginal society, and hence accustomed to a diet which would normally include some non-Aboriginal foods. However, in many cases, these were not prominent and thus the variations in type and quantity of food obtained can be attributed largely to other factors. In general, Aborigines in northern parts of the Northern Territory and, presumably, others in the tropical rainforest and savannah area, derived much of their sustenance from animal products, while those from the arid centre depended more heavily on fruit and vegetables. McArthur's brief Arnhem Land study in the late 1940s (1960b:127) shows that animal foods, predominantly fish and other seafoods, accounted for over three quarters of the bulk and 93 per cent of the protein. Meehan (1977) in her early 1970s study of a coastal Arnhem Land community, confirms these findings and shows that during four separate monthly periods, vegetable foods, including grains and tubers, contributed only between 7 and 25 per cent of the bulk of the food obtained. Her study also reveals the significance of seasonal variations; shellfish were a more important element in the diet of wet season months, January and April, while vegetables, mostly procured from inland sites, were more important during September, in the dry season. Peterson's (1971) account of Arnhem Land hunting and gathering brings out a similar seasonal contrast.

Seasonal variations also affect the abundance of desert staples. Meggitt (1957:143) estimated that 80 per cent of Warlpiri food obtained from the Tanami Desert and Lake Mackay region of Northern Territory, came from vegetable products, and Gould (1968:260), describing the western desert area, confirms that these accounted for over half of the foods procured. Products such as *Solanum* species, grass seeds and fruits were abundant only at certain seasons but the yam (*ipomoea* sp.) could be found at any time, and as Sweeney (1947:298) points out, was a valuable source of moisture during drought periods. The physical environment, in particular the availability of ground water, also has a marked influence on the productivity of subsistence activity in the desert. Larger

game such as kangaroo, wallaby, emu and plain turkey (bustard) range widely in times of abundant food and water but are concentrated during dry periods, and reptiles also concentrate in specific places and at specific times. As Kimber (1975) notes, Aborigines have detailed knowledge of these variations and others which affect their chances of finding other valued products such as witchetty grubs, honey ants and seasonal fruits.

Subsistence activity is affected by the population structure of the group. In general, women procured most of the vegetable foods, shellfish and small game, while men obtained large game and, in former times, most of the fish by spearing and trapping. While the distinction was never absolute, the basic labour division by sex has persisted, except with regard to fishing where women, using nylon handlines, are now keen and skilled producers. As a result, women provided the basic daily needs of a group while men provided large quantities of meat at less predictable intervals. Information on the amount of time spent on subsistence activity by different population sectors is scanty but Gould (1968:263) calculated that women spent 30 per cent more time gathering than their menfolk did hunting. Age must also have affected subsistence because elderly people and children would find the rigours of food collection severe, or might lack the skills to procure available products. This factor affects the contemporary establishment of outstations, whose elderly core population may lack the ability to use the resources of the surrounding bush to the full.

Settlement type and access to land are linked factors which affect subsistence. Outstation dwellers, who in many cases have selected their sites for their water and food supplies as well as for their religious significance, can often provide a high proportion of their sustenance from subsistence. Those in larger settlements located in Aboriginal reserve land can also use the natural resources as they wish although, in practice, their activities may be limited by depletion of food supplies in the adjacent area. A further factor is that, as McArthur (1960a) found in Groote Eylandt, some settlements are located in regions which have few natural resources, and, since they have drawn their populations from considerable distances, some residents cannot visit their own tribal areas to obtain food. Hunting and gathering on pastoral leases is often restricted by the non-Aboriginal owner or manager, who,

among other things, is often very apprehensive of the effects of fire on his property. Where possible, Aborigines overcome access problems of this type by travelling to regions where food can be procured without interference, but this solution is only possible when people have vehicles or, in coastal communities, seaworthy dinghies with outboard motors. Hence these assets are much prized and people use both their own and those belonging to kin and community to the full.

Finally, subsistence is affected by access to non-Aboriginal settlements. Aboriginal groups linked by all-weather roads to towns can obtain bought foods easily, and also tend to be more heavily involved in wage earning and with activities such as drinking than do their more isolated counterparts. For them, as for those in urban and metropolitan communities, hunting and gathering is a recreational pursuit. While the products obtained occasionally provide vital support (as, for example, when the store is closed or when people have no money)¹⁰ they are valued mainly as a preferred type of food.

Money activity and sources of income

Although most Aboriginal families now depend on a monetary income for basic support, their level of labour participation remains considerably lower than that of non-Aborigines (Table 1.10). In addition a smaller proportion of Aborigines classified as members of the labour force in 1976 actually had jobs. Those who were employed were disproportionately represented in lower status occupational groups - farming and fishing, processing industries and, for women domestic service (Table 1.11). Conversely, comparatively few Aborigines held professional, technical, administrative or clerical jobs, a clear reflection of their lower level of formal education, and also of lack of effect by administrative organizations in promoting training of Aborigines for managerial posts. Their absence from these types of positions has hindered progress towards self-management because dependence on non-Aboriginal administrators continues. Government funds

10. In former times mission settlements, who often lacked sufficient funding for continual support, told Aboriginal residents that they would have to depend on subsistence at weekends and sometimes at other periods of need (Taylor, 1977).

Table 1.10
Employment status, 1976
(Population aged 15+) (% of total)

	Aboriginal		Non-Aboriginal	
	M	F	M	F
Employed	56.2	25.1	76.3	41.8
Unemployed(a)	12.6	5.1	3.1	2.2
Not in labour force	31.2	69.8	20.6	56.0
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

(a) Defined as 'looking for work', the criterion which those who are registered with the Commonwealth Employment Service must satisfy.

Source: ABS, Population Census, 1976.

Table 1.11
Major occupational groups 1976
(Employed adults, 15+) (% of total)

	Aboriginal		Non-Aboriginal	
	M	F	M	F
Professional/tech	2.9	10.8	10.1	15.0
Administrative	1.8	1.1	8.8	2.7
Clerical	3.6	18.2	8.4	31.1
Sales	1.9	6.7	6.0	11.0
Farming/fishing	17.5	3.1	8.1	6.1
Miners	1.5	0.1	0.8	0.0
Transport/communication	8.1	2.0	6.9	1.9
Production/process	49.4	11.5	40.5	10.7
Service/sport	4.1	28.6	4.6	13.5
Armed forces	1.2	0.3	1.6	0.2
Other	7.8	17.7	4.2	7.6
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

Source: ABS, Population Census, 1976.

allocated for the support of Aboriginal communities are then diverted to pay these non-Aboriginal employees some of whom, as Rowley (1978:100-01) describes, have knowingly exploited the situation, sometimes when, through previous contact with members of the Aboriginal community, they have occupied positions of trust. Furthermore it is often difficult for Aborigines to check the qualifications of non-Aboriginal job applicants, and some of those who have been engaged as financial and administrative managers for Aboriginal Councils have proved incompetent and, in some cases, dishonest. Problems such as these, coupled with the need to reduce overhead costs for these services, led to the establishment of centralized organizations such as Yulngu in Katherine, an Aboriginal controlled body concerned with accountancy, investment and business advice for neighbouring communities.

The participation and occupational structures of Aborigines in the labour force also vary between states. The highest rates of participation in 1976 were in Victoria and the ACT, where almost three quarters of Aboriginal men were employed, and the lowest in Western Australia and Northern Territory, where over 40 per cent were not even members of the labour force. This reflects the lack of employment opportunities in the isolated regions where many Aborigines live. A high percentage of Aboriginal workers in the two latter states were employed in the pastoral industry or fishing while in southern and eastern states most Aboriginal employees worked in manufacturing industry. The ACT, with its concentration of government departments, was the only region where Aboriginal professional and technical employment approached the non-Aboriginal level for Australia.

Census data, by recording employment status at a single point in time, conceal an important feature of the Aboriginal labour force - many of its members only have seasonal or part-time jobs. Thus, the census would record a relatively large Aboriginal workforce in the pastoral industry because enumeration coincided with the main mustering period; conversely, few would be enumerated as workers in fruit and vegetable production in New South Wales because June is a slack season. Income fluctuations caused by seasonal employment are yet another problem with which many Aboriginal families must deal. Stanley's analysis of Aboriginal pastoral communities in Central Australia (1976) shows that only half of the workforce were employed for at

least nine months of the year, and the remainder could rely on only a few months work. Seasonal employment is also socially disruptive, leading to the absence of the men or uprooting of entire families for part of each year. However, it is a major form of support for Aborigines and declining opportunities in this field are a cause for concern. The introduction of pastoral Award wages for Aborigines, followed by the use of new technology such as helicopter mustering and road trains as a replacement for overland droving, has greatly reduced the demand for labour in that sector, and similar advances are likely in fruit and vegetable production.

Lack of qualifications and training opportunities inevitably mean that few Aborigines are classified as employers, and, in addition, their chances of establishing their own businesses are limited by lack of capital. Numbers of self-employed are also small, although in some isolated communities the artefact industry has made a significant and increasing contribution to monetary earnings. The Morphys (1975) record that annual earnings from craft sales at Yirrkala (Arnhem Land) rose from \$173 in 1954 to at least \$30,000 in 1974, principally due to rising demand both locally and in other parts of Australia, and to a more efficient marketing organization. However the future success of even this operation is not assured. Even although the manufacturing process was entirely under Aboriginal control, marketing remained the responsibility of outsiders, usually temporary members of the community. Lack of continuity can easily undermine such an industry at its source. Another difficulty with the Aboriginal artefact industry is that the religious significance of many designs prevents their use in public display and hence stops commercial production; outside organizers need to be sensitive to this issue to ensure that no resentment is aroused.

As Table 1.10 shows, a high proportion of Aboriginal members of the workforce were unemployed in 1976. Figures issued by the Commonwealth Employment Service (CES) confirm this, and show (Fig.1.6) that the numbers of Aborigines registered in this category have increased dramatically during the 1970s. Growth in unemployment registration reflects not only the decline in the demand for Aboriginal labour in the pastoral industry but also improvement in the delivery of social security services. In the early 1970s Aborigines living in isolated mission and government

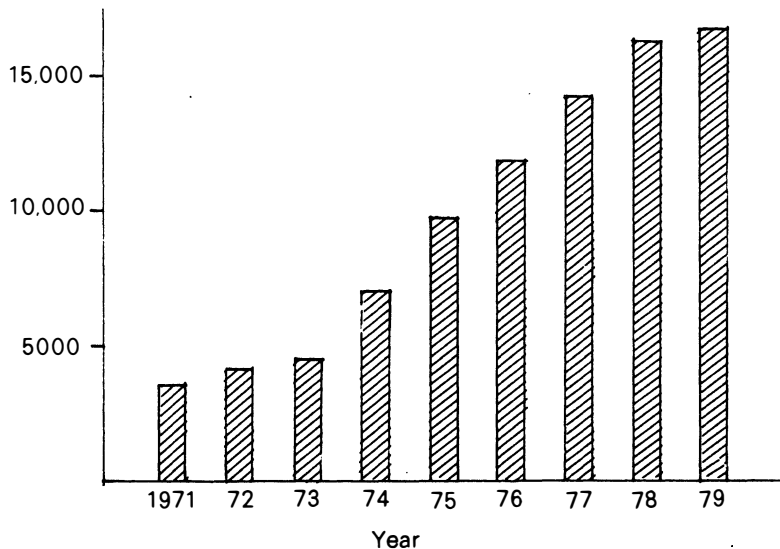


Fig 1.6 Aborigines registered with the Commonwealth Employment Service, 1970-78.

settlements, where little work was available, could not apply for unemployment benefits and others were not eligible because, having formerly been recompensed for their labour in kind, they could not fulfil the terms of the work test. Regulations such as these have now been relaxed but case-studies still indicate widespread variations in the application of unemployment benefits to Aborigines (Bell and Brandl, 1980). Thus, in the Northern Territory, outstation dwellers in Arnhem Land have until recently not received benefits because it has been assumed, in some cases wrongly, that they can earn sufficient income from selling artefacts to provide for that part of their sustenance not available from subsistence; their counterparts in central Australia, where self employment is less well developed and natural resources scarce, have been able to make successful applications for benefits. Similarly, within a community, older men sometimes prevent the unemployed young from applying because they consider that, lacking responsibilities, they do not need the money. Basic problems in communication between government officers in the Department of Social Security and their Aboriginal clients

still prevent the service from reaching everyone, and many Aborigines not in the labour force in 1976 must in fact be eligible for unemployment benefits.

Recognition of the problems of access to unemployment benefit and the social problems which receipt of such money might cause, led to suggestions of alternative sources of income for communities with few employment opportunities. These have taken the form of bulk funding of social security payments, and establishment of Community Development Employment Projects (CDEP). The latter, financed through the Department of Aboriginal Affairs, has involved setting up community devised work schemes, in which each worker receives the requisite cash payment for his labour, from a fund granted to the community on the basis of the total unemployment benefit entitlement of the group. These can only be implemented after full consultation with, and a specific request from, the community concerned, and agreement on the unemployment entitlement of the whole community. Initially ten communities were involved - Bamyili and Galiwinku in the Northern Territory and a group of smaller Central Desert Communities in South and Western Australia. A progress report (DAA, 1978c) after less than a year's operation, indicated that the scheme had generally improved conditions, although in most places the complexities of management had hindered Aboriginal organizers from assuming full responsibility for its implementation. It recommended continuation and extension of the pilot scheme, which in 1979/80 was carried to further groups.

Because of limited involvement in wage earning, Aborigines derive a high proportion of their monetary income from social security payments. In 1976 the percentage of Aborigines receiving some form of pension or benefit greatly exceeded that of non-Aborigines (Table 1.12), except for war and repatriation and superannuation payments, categories for which few Aborigines would be eligible. Age pensions were also less significant for Aborigines because a smaller proportion of their population belong to those age groups. Although it is true that social security payments make a more significant contribution to Aboriginal than to non-Aboriginal incomes, rough comparison of Tables 1.10 and 1.12 shows that, while most non-Aboriginal men were either working or received benefits, 17 per cent of Aboriginal men received nothing. Hence the contribution of social security payments to Aboriginal support could be much greater.

Table 1.12
Pensions and benefits received, 1976
(ex child endowment) (recipient as % of population aged 15+)

Type of Benefit	Aborigines		Non-Aborigines			
	M	F	M	F		
Age	4.6	6.6	5.6	7.3	14.8	11.1
Widow	0.1	13.3	6.7	-	3.4	1.7
War/Repatriation	1.4	1.1	1.2	4.9	4.1	4.5
Superannuation	1.6	0.5	1.0	3.4	1.6	2.5
Unemployment benefit	12.4	5.8	9.0	2.0	1.1	1.5
Other(a)	7.0	6.4	6.7	3.0	2.5	2.7
None	66.9	60.2	63.4	77.7	71.1	74.4
Not stated	6.4	6.7	6.5	4.2	3.7	4.0

(a) Invalid, supporting mother, etc.

Source: ABS, Population Census, 1976.

Case-studies show that the relative significance of wages and social security payments varies widely between different Aboriginal communities. In ten studies of Northern Territory communities made during the 1970s, social security accounted for between 15 and 87 per cent of the total disposable money income (Table 1.13). In general, the large government settlements (Yuendumu, Papunya, Docker River, Amata), which received funding for employment of urban service workers, derived a higher percentage of their income from wages than mission stations (Warburton), groups on pastoral properties (Willowra, Cattle Station group), outstations (Maningrida) or fringe camps (Alice Springs). Incomes of most communities came almost entirely from government funds, although artefact manufacture made significant contributions in Ernabella, Papunya and some Maningrida outstations. Willowra, an Aboriginal-owned pastoral station, had a potential source of earnings through cattle sales, but the amount obtained from that source in 1974-75 was small owing to the poor state of the beef cattle market. Surprisingly, in view of the oft repeated assertion that Aborigines from rural areas are still flocking to town to find work, Alice Springs fringe camps in 1979 were more dependent on social security than wages. This highlights

Table 1.13
Sources of income, selected Aboriginal communities
 (% of total money income)

	Population at time of survey	Wage/ earnings	Social security/ other	Income/ cap./fnt. (actual)	(Standardized to monetary values at June, 1979)
Amata (1970) (a)	339	69	31	12.0	29.0
Docker River (1970) (a)	322	77	23	14.5	35.0
Ernabella (1970) (a)	516	64	36	8.5	20.5
Warburton (1970) (a)	453	13	87	4.5	10.9
Cattle stations (1973) (b)	1195	47	53	20.0	41.5
Willowra (1974/5) (c)	240	60	40	23.7	35.1
Papunya (1974/5) (c)	830	15		42.1	62.4
Yuendumu (1975) (d)	1150	84	16	30.0	44.5
Maningrida Outstations (1976/7) (e)	668	34	66	15.0	18.1
Alice Springs Camps (1979) (f)	51	33	67	54.0	54.0
Brisbane (1973) (g)	406	70	30	34.0	70.4

Sources: (a) Peterson, 1977; (b) Stanley, 1976; (c) Penny, 1976; (d) Anderson, 1976;
 (e) Gillespie *et al.*, 1977; (f) Beck, 1980; (g) Brown *et al.*, 1975.

the general employment problem in the Central Australian region - Alice Springs, the only town in the area, has extremely limited employment opportunities, especially for unskilled workers, and hence few Aborigines who move there can find jobs. Inevitably, many do not remain permanently and it is probable that some of the people included in this small sample (only 51 people altogether) should be labelled transients; they might even have been receiving their social security payments from their home communities. In the metropolitan sample, Brisbane, 70 per cent of the monetary income in 1973 came from wages, probably because of the greater stability of a big city population, with more employment opportunities and a higher proportion of people with prolonged job experience.

Community per capita incomes are also extremely variable (Table 1.13). When standardized to eliminate time differences, they range from \$10.9 to \$70.4 per fortnight, variations which can be explained by differing access to wage employment and to social security payments. Although some poorer communities, such as the Maningrida outstations probably provided substantial additional sustenance through subsistence, urban groups and those in large settlements such as Yuendumu and Papunya would obtain only a very limited supplement from non-monetary sources. Thus, for many, these incomes are the sole means of support. All are below 50 per cent of the national average. Further variations, caused by seasonality in employment and fluctuations in amounts received from unemployment benefit, are not revealed in these studies, most of which cover very limited time periods. These fluctuations are a major cause for concern in the basic economy of any community.

Wealth and expenditure

Non-Aborigines have frequently criticized Aborigines for the way in which they use their monetary resources. Apparent Aboriginal unconcern with the monetary value of material possessions, shown by their carelessness and by their willingness to buy desired items apparently regardless of excessive price, is both irritating and incomprehensible to people from other cultures. However it must be remembered that money is not the main means by which Aborigines assess wealth; instead they measure it in terms of a complex series of mutual obligations, a store to be drawn on whenever wealth is to be visibly demonstrated. Nowadays money is often used to create this store. For

example, Sansom (1980:225-31) describes how, in a Darwin fringe camp community, residents force newcomers into debt so that, subsequently, the income of these newcomers must be shared. To non-Aborigines use of money for these and other purposes, such as financing ceremonies, is a sign of wastage and an indication that Aborigines have larger incomes than they require. In fact, this type of expenditure is vital for maintenance of the social structure, and hence may be as important as expenditure on basic needs such as food, clothing and shelter. As Heppell (1979:20) has said, wealth or poverty must be assessed in Aboriginal rather than non-Aboriginal terms.

The cost of basic necessities (food, clothing and shelter), varies between different types of Aboriginal community. Thus the provision of shelter is a major drain on the resources of urban and metropolitan Aboriginal families, but costs very little for tribal families in isolated communities. As mentioned earlier, the establishment of Aboriginal housing co-operatives and use of the services of state housing commissions has brought the cost of urban shelter within the means of many Aboriginal families but failure to meet the demand has pushed many others into the private rental market. Drakakis-Smith (1980) reports that in Alice Springs private rents in 1979 were double those paid in housing commission dwellings.

Food, in contrast, usually costs more in rural communities, where freight expenses add considerably to the normal retail price, than in urban centres, but is a major item of expenditure for all groups. According to Taylor, food accounted for between 35 and 40 per cent of expenditure in Mitchell and Edward River settlements in 1972 (1972:22; 1977:148-9), and in neither community was there a significant contribution from hunting and gathering; Calley (1956:10) cites food as the main living cost in a small town community in New South Wales; and Anderson (1976:11) found that in 1975 food accounted for 55 per cent and 59 per cent of expenditure in the March and September quarters in Yuendumu.

Other needs, some of which are more important than others, include clothing, consumer goods, and petrol and vehicles. In general goods such as furniture, electrical appliances, crockery and cutlery are more needed by people in towns, with conventional types of shelter but, as Taylor (1977) points out, can also absorb much of the income in

rural communities such as Edward River where the mission has encouraged people to live in permanent housing. Other needs, for example cooking equipment, buckets, blankets, tarpaulins, axes and knives are more significant among those who live in humpy camps. The amount spent on purchasing vehicles and petrol has risen along with increase in incomes during the 1970s. Peterson (1977:144) cites this as evidence that 'Aborigines were earning more money than they thought necessary for subsistence needs'. Such a supposition ignores the fact that vehicles, for hunting and gathering, travelling to take part in ceremonies and maintaining links with outstations, have virtually become a 'subsistence' need in contemporary society.¹¹

Money which remains after main costs have been met is used to buy alcohol, to gamble at card games and to make gifts and payments within the network of social reciprocity. All three items contribute to the establishment of wealth in the Aboriginal sense. Estimates of the amounts spent on alcohol vary and are generally unreliable. Kamien (1978:150) suggests that the Bourke community spent 25 per cent of their income on that commodity in 1972, and Hempel (1975) calculated that 30 per cent of the Garden Point income was used to buy alcohol in 1975. Expenditure varies according to access; Hempel records that sales at Garden Point increased markedly after rules governing alcohol distribution were relaxed, and, while there are no data available, it is clear that communities within easy reach of liquor outlets consume greater amounts. Current agitation by Aboriginal community leaders to restrict take away sales in hotels on the Stuart Highway in the Northern Territory aims at control of this process. In isolated centres, less alcohol is obtained for the cash spent because costs, particularly on the 'black market' are prohibitive. Middleton and Francis (1976:94) record that a half gallon flagon of sherry could cost \$10 in Yuendumu in 1970, about five times its normal retail price.

Gambling, an important activity in Aboriginal communities, is essentially a form of investment, a means of accumulating large sums of cash which can then be used for major items of expenditure such as purchasing a car or throwing a party. It also gives those with little cash the opportunity to win small amounts to meet basic living expenses. As Sansom (1980:236) states, small winnings can

11. La Rusic (1979:113-14) notes a similar need for modern forms of transport for Cree hunters and trappers, in their case snow-mobiles.

be very important to the impecunious. Stakes vary according to the resources of the participants and, when no cash is available, may be paid in kind, in the form of clothes, blankets and cooking equipment.

The use of cash for ceremonial payments has, according to Meggitt (1962:308) existed for some time. He records that in 1955 Warlpiri circumcisors received gifts of red ochre, hairstring, boomerangs, spears, shields, clothes from the store and occasionally some money. Today money would occupy a more prominent position, and considerable amounts would change hands when a new ceremony is introduced from one tribal group to another. That, combined with the need to provide food and, often, subsidize the travel costs for visiting groups, can absorb a high proportion of the community income for short periods.

Redistribution of income, either in cash or kind, is a dominant feature in Aboriginal expenditure. This characteristic, with which most people comply, enables individuals and families to survive from one pay period to the next, even although their actual cash has gone. They are in fact investing their cash in creating debts, which they know will be paid back as required. The main sources on which they rely - wages and social security payments - are framed to fit the non-Aboriginal rather than Aboriginal family structure, the individual or nuclear as opposed to the extended unit. Aborigines who receive income must, according to their concept of communalism, share their money with those who have nothing. Limited opportunities to earn wages and inadequate access to social security thus place a strain on those with money, a burden which can only be lightened by ensuring that all Aborigines receive sufficient basic income support. While a current review of this problem by the Department of Social Security is a welcome step, such a move appears to have been instigated by rising unemployment in all sectors of the Australian population rather than by recognition of the special needs of Aborigines.

This brief summary has shown that, in social and economic spheres, Aborigines and non-Aborigines place different interpretations on those elements which they perceive as essential to their way of life. Many other important components, such as the administration of law and justice, which have been omitted would show similar conflicts in attitude and understanding. Thus the whole

question of the assessment of Aboriginal needs and desires hangs in balance - it must be based not only on those standards generally used in non-Aboriginal society but also according to Aboriginal standards. Moreover, it must take into account variations which exist within the Aboriginal population, differences which will make it impossible to implement any single policy successfully. While it is probably true to assume that Aborigines all want the opportunity to use those elements of the non-Aboriginal world now essential to them in their own way, the extent to which they change and adopt these introduced elements will differ. The significance of traditional forms of Aboriginal behaviour and activities in their lifestyles will also differ. However the contemporary Aboriginal socio-economic scene is still characterized, for every group or community, by fusion of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal cultures.

Chapter 2

Yuendumu: Aboriginal outback town

Yuendumu, a town of approximately 1300 people on the edge of the Tanami Desert in Central Australia, is, by Northern Territory standards, a large concentration of population. However, several characteristics distinguish it from other such places in either the desert or the north. First, over 90 per cent of its population is of Aboriginal origin, whereas in small towns such as Tennant Creek or Katherine Aborigines are in the minority. Secondly, Yuendumu is essentially a service centre for Aborigines rather than for non-Aboriginal pastoralists, miners and government workers. Although some of the facilities offered are only partially relevant to the present needs and desires of the Aboriginal population, most aim to accommodate their wants rather than those of incomers. Thirdly, since most of the Aboriginal residents of Yuendumu are Warlpiri speakers with traditional rights to land there and in the surrounding region, the town has a relatively stable population in the long term. Other outback towns, whose non-Aboriginal residents have moved in from elsewhere, have very high rates of population turnover. Finally, the town has virtually no economic rationale. It is neither a market town, a mining centre, nor a centre for communications - functions which have been responsible for the growth of other towns in the Territory. It remains dependent on the rest of Australia for almost every cent its community spends, and every article consumed.

In non-Aboriginal terms, these characteristics give rise to pessimism over the future development of Yuendumu. With high rates of population growth unlikely to be alleviated through outmigration, the gap between the size of the potential labour force and the local job market will increase. Thus community dependence on government funding, which currently provides most of the necessary financial support, will also increase. If restrictions are placed on such funding, Yuendumu can hardly survive. Yet there are sound social reasons for its survival. With the recent (1978) changeover from DAA to Aboriginal political control, the strong independent spirit of the Warlpiri people has

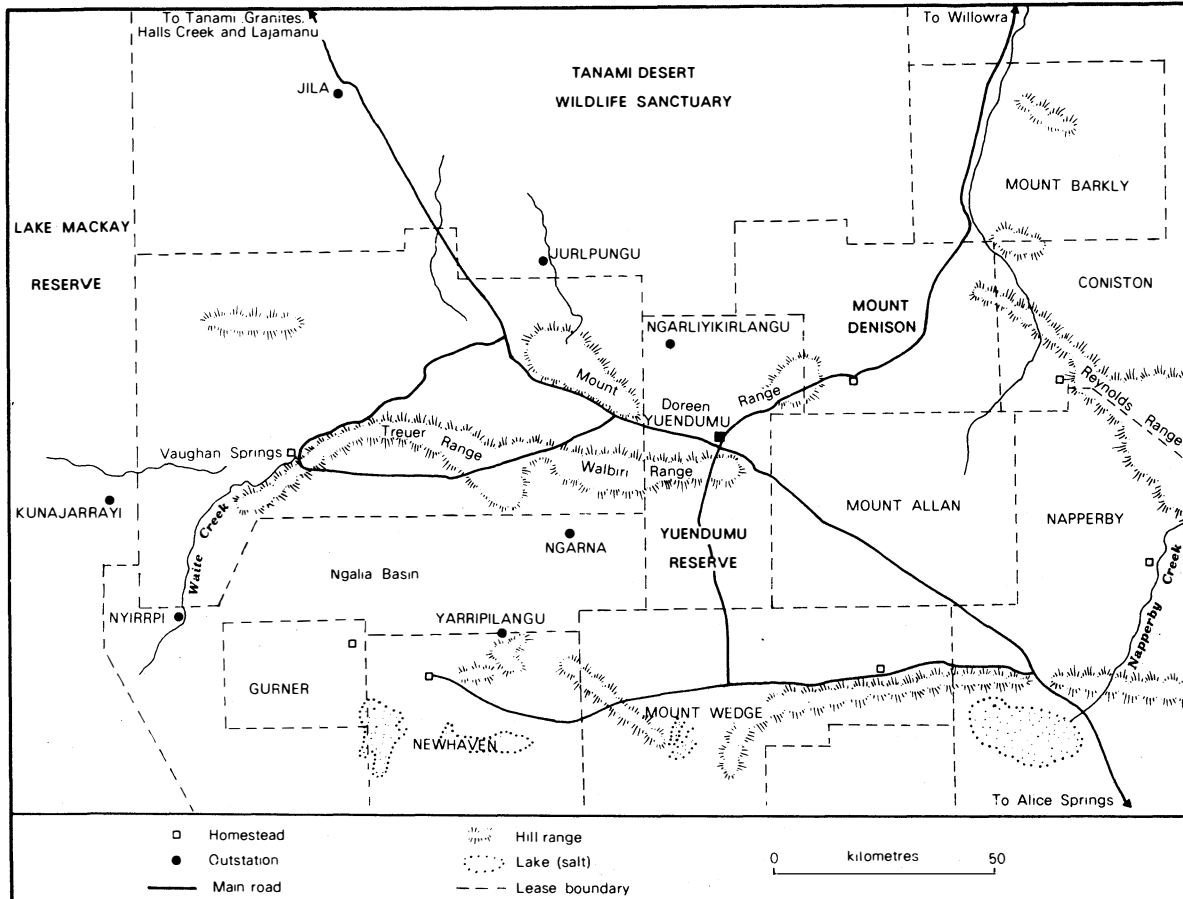


Fig 2.1 Yuendumu and its environs

begun to show itself again in many aspects of community life. Although its size and alien living conditions have been responsible for the growth of social problems such as violence and delinquency, these difficulties are now less acute than in many other large Aboriginal communities such as Warrabri. Yuendumu's inhabitants now identify with the place and wish to preserve its character as an Aboriginal town. While their aspirations for economic independence, expressed through dissatisfaction with the present dependency on external support, are unlikely ever to be realized, their goals of social and political control, based on continuing contact with their tribal land, can be reached, provided they receive sympathetic economic assistance from government agencies.

COMMUNITY LOCATION AND DEVELOPMENT

Yuendumu lies 300 km to the north-west of Alice Springs, in the centre of a 2200 sq.km lease, designated as an Aboriginal Reserve in the early 1950s. The settlement site is a basin of red earths which overlie the pre-Cambrian igneous and metamorphic shield of the Central Australian plateau. The rocks which form this shield contain deposits of copper and wolfram, some of which have been exploited where outcrops occur in the Mount Doreen/Reynolds Range to the north (Fig.2.1).¹ To the south these are covered by younger sedimentary deposits, subsequently weathered to form the spectacular ridges of the Walbiri, Treuer and Stuart Bluff Ranges.

This basin and ridge topography merges on both northern and southern sides into extensive level plains of aeolian sand-dunes, the Tanami Desert and Ngalia Basin. The entire region has a uniform semi-arid climate, with an annual average rainfall of around 280 mm. Over 80 per cent of the precipitation falls in the period October to March and that, combined with the unpredictability of rainfall (it is not uncommon for over 150 mm. to fall in 24 hours), results in long periods of pronounced aridity. Warlpiri use of the land depends on water availability, ranging from ephemeral lakes in clay pans, small water holes in rocky outcrops, and soakages and wells in creek beds to permanent supplies such as Pikilyi, a large spring adjacent to Vaughan

1. See Perry (1962) for more detailed physical description of the region.

Springs homestead, and bores and tanks. Temperatures also affect Warlpiri land use; in the summer months, with daytime maxima frequently exceeding 40 C and occasional high humidity, people are less willing to travel long distances on hunting and gathering expeditions than they are in winter.

The country around Yuendumu carries a scrubby vegetation which consists of acacia species, particularly mulga and witchetty bush, desert oak (*Casuarina decaisneana*), and spinifex grasses (*Triodia* and *Plectrachne* sp.). Large eucalypts, such as the red river gum (*Eucalyptus camaldulensis*) occur only in creek beds like Waite Creek or Napperby Creek, but ghost gums (*E. papuana*) and bloodwood (*E. terminalis*) are more widespread. Intensive cattle grazing, which has affected most areas, has changed the original vegetation, and allowed some species to become dominant. However the environment still yields a variety of vegetable and animal foods, for example yam (*Ipomoea* sp.), bush tomatoes (*Solanum* sp.), witchetty grub (*Cossidae* larvae), honey ant, goanna, kangaroo and emu, which are avidly sought by Yuendumu residents. Since the resources of the country adjacent to the settlement have been depleted through constant foraging and firewood collection by a large population, most hunting and gathering expeditions travel considerable distances, and thus require access to vehicles.

Prior to contact with Europeans, the Warlpiri people had roamed over an extensive region, including the Tanami Desert and areas to the west and south of Yuendumu settlement. Until the 1920s their experience of Europeans was limited to sporadic meetings with explorers such as Stuart (1862), Gosse (1873) and Warburton (1873). In 1917 a pastoral lease was granted at Coniston, near the eastern boundary of Warlpiri territory (Fig.2.1), and thereafter interaction was more constant. Conflict between cattlemen and Aborigines was inevitable, particularly when drought forced people to make intensive use of the same limited water sources; in 1928 this flared with the murder of Brooks,² a Coniston stockman (see Chapter 3). Reprisals

2. The reasons for the murder are complex - competition for water resources, Brooks' cohabitation with Aboriginal women, desire for food kept in the European camp (see Japangardi and Jampijinpa, 1978; Meggitt, 1962:24-5).

which followed this murder, in which between 60 and 100 Warlpiri and Anmatjirra were killed by police, caused the Aborigines to disperse from eastern Warlpiri country and take refuge with their neighbours to the west and north. At the same time others were becoming involved in the activities of gold prospectors in the Tanami Desert, and, after Mount Doreen lease was taken out by Mr W. Braitling in 1926, an increasing number of Warlpiri were involved in stock work. Mrs Doreen Braitling, the widow of the original lessee, reported that within a few years of settlement the Aboriginal population adjacent to the homestead numbered at least 50 (Central Land Council, 1978). They earned rations of flour, tea, sugar and meat, along with clothing and blankets, by collecting wolfram from deposits in the neighbouring ranges. For most Warlpiri, this was their first exposure to European materials and artefacts.

During the Second World War a considerable number of Warlpiri men worked on the construction of the Stuart Highway between Alice Springs and Darwin. For the first time they were absent from their families and their tribal country for a lengthy period. They learnt several new skills, met Europeans and other Aborigines with whom they would otherwise have had little contact, and were paid wages. After the War they were repatriated, but the disruption which they and their families had already experienced discouraged a return to the traditional subsistence hunting and gathering life-style. Ration depots were set up to provide food and services at points where Warlpiri had gathered, and Yuendumu settlement eventually came into being as a central point for people who had been living at depots at Tanami and Granites, to the north-west, and Bullocky Soak, near Tea-Tree to the east.³

Yuendumu, which takes its name from Yurntumu, a honey-ant dreaming site in the Walbiri Ranges to the south of the settlement, is located in a reserve, finally designated in May 1952. Although this is traditional Warlpiri land, and includes some important sacred sites, it is not the heartland of their territory. Many Yuendumu residents associate themselves with country now included within the Mount Doreen lease, land to which they now have only limited access; others have moved from the Tanami Desert and the edges of the Lake Mackay Reserve to the

3. Meggitt (1962:Ch 3) and Middleton and Francis (1976:Ch.2) give detailed accounts of Warlpiri contact history.

west.⁴ In 1978 the Warlpiri people lodged a claim for those parts of their tribal land which were still unalienated, and their rights were recognized in toto. They have now been granted control of approximately 100,000 sq.km., mostly within the Tanami Desert.⁵

Although established and financed by the government (Native Affairs Bureau), the settlement was originally staffed by mission workers. The Baptist Mission, who had expressed interest to the administration in establishing a centre among the Warlpiri as early as 1944, finally began operations in 1947. By 1950 they were, in addition to their evangelical duties, running a store, a school (partly staffed by government employed teachers) and a clinic and teaching skills such as carpentry and dressmaking to adults (Baptist Mission, 1975). The mission has continued to exert an important influence on Yuendumu up to the present day.

In the early years, Yuendumu contained only Warlpiri, but a few Anmatjirra, whose country lies to the east, moved into the community to join their relatives by marriage. The population in the early period was extremely mobile, partly because many residents still retained close contact with their own lands, and frequently returned there for ceremonies, and partly because of government attempts to relieve pressure on the limited resources of early Yuendumu by relocating some of the Warlpiri at Hooker Creek (now Lajamanu) a settlement on the northern side of the Tanami Desert. Groups of people were taken in trucks from Yuendumu in 1954, 1958 and finally in 1965, and although many subsequently returned, some have settled permanently. Nowadays visitors move freely between the two settlements, but in the past the intervening barrier of over 600 km of rough road must have inhibited contact between family members living in the two locations. In 1957 Thomson's expedition into the desert to the west of Mount Doreen made contact with Pintubi people who were still living as nomadic hunter/gatherers at Labbi Labbi, between Lakes Mackay and

4. Peterson *et al.* (1978:17-20) describe how earlier plans to reserve land around Vaughan Springs, within the present Mount Doreen boundary (Fig 2.1), were scrapped following disagreement with the owner of Mount Doreen.

5. See Peterson *et al.*, (1978) and Aboriginal Land Commissioner (1978) for details of the Warlpiri and Kartangarurru-Kurintji claim and the court's assessment of the evidence.

Hazlett (Thomson, 1975). Later, Pintubi families moved eastwards to Mount Doreen and around 1964 they were brought by truck to Yuendumu. Warlpiri today clearly remember the arrival of these 'bush' people, who expressed astonishment and fear at so many aspects of settlement life and who, in Warlpiri terms, were 'people from the past'. That image to some extent still applies - Pintubi are the poorest, least sophisticated group in Yuendumu and are looked down upon by the Warlpiri in all fields apart from religion and sorcery. In these spheres they are respected and their skills are used both by Yuendumu residents and by visitors from elsewhere. A current resurgence of ceremonial activity in the Western Desert has now extended via the Pintubi at Balgo Mission to the Yuendumu Pintubi and, through them, to the Warlpiri.

Contact with Europeans has given Yuendumu people some of the sorts of skills necessary to participate as wage earners in the Australian economy. Many men have worked on pastoral stations as stockmen, fencers and builders and have driven animals to market in Alice Springs and also through Sandover country to Queensland; they have also worked as miners and prospectors. Within the settlement they have filled a variety of service jobs - cleaning, painting, house construction, gardening, baking - and their wives have found work in domestic fields. These experiences have increased their long distance mobility and, although most continue to regard Warlpiri country and Yuendumu as home, most have visited Alice Springs and some have been to Darwin, Adelaide and even, as seasonal labourers, to the fruit and vegetable farms of New South Wales. Today, they continually encounter European values and aspirations, European codes and laws and European institutions and artefacts. Yet because they have been able to remain close to their traditional country and, as a result, practice their ceremonies and hand down their lore and legends to successive generations, their life is still underpinned by Warlpiri tradition. It is this which gives strength to the Yuendumu Aboriginal community and which enables its members to regard the future with some optimism.

POPULATION AND SETTLEMENT

It is extremely difficult to estimate the past Aboriginal population of Yuendumu with any accuracy, but information from a variety of sources⁶ suggests an initial period of very slow growth with rapid increase within the last 15 years. Meggitt (1962:29) states that by the end of 1946 there were around 400 Warlpiri living at Yuendumu. By 1955 his estimates show that the population had decreased to 353 (1962:31), mainly through the transfer of some Yuendumu residents to Lajamanu (see above). Welfare Branch records indicate that by 1960 the population was 459, but by 1970 this had doubled to over 900 (File 76/813, DAA, Darwin). Health Centre records show that in 1978 the Aboriginal population of Yuendumu was 1170 which, with approximately 100 Europeans, gives a total settlement population of around 1300.

Yuendumu's Aboriginal population is characterised by a high proportion of children and low proportion of elderly people (Table 2.1, Fig 2.2). This structure suggests a potentially high rate of population growth. However the child/woman ratio (0.5) is considerably lower than that of Willowra (0.8, Ch.3), and of the Aboriginal population of the Northern Territory at the time of the 1976 census (0.7). Thus it appears that the decrease in fertility, for which Middleton and Francis (1976:39) present some evidence in 1969, has occurred. Although the small sample size and data inaccuracies prevent exact measurement of Yuendumu's fertility, the present total fertility rate seems to be

6. Welfare Branch figures are taken from three monthly returns submitted by the settlement administration. These are only head counts at a single point in time and would include short term visitors. Census figures suffer from similar disadvantages because of the extreme mobility of the people. Enumeration in 1976 apparently coincided with ceremonies and a prolonged period of drinking with many people absent (K.Kingston, pers.comm.). My analysis uses Department of Health records, and includes everyone normally resident in Yuendumu, although I acknowledge that at any one point in time the actual population of the settlement may be considerably larger or smaller.

between 3.4 and 4.1.⁷

Table 2.1
Yuendumu Population, 1978

Age group	Male		Aboriginal Female		Total		Non-Aboriginal		
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	Male	Female	Total
0 - 14	234	40.8	204	34.2	434	37.4	14	17	31
15- 59	303	52.8	356	59.7	659	56.3	30	31	61
60+	37	6.4	36	6.0	73	6.2	-	-	-
Total	574	100.0	596	100.0	1170	100.0	44	48	92

Dependency ratio = 0.78

Child/Woman ratio = 0.5

Masculinity ratio = 0.96

Source: Department of Health records, Yuendumu Health Centre.

Recent decreases in fertility have been accompanied by continuing decreases in child mortality. Records at Yuendumu show that in the 1950s 38 per cent of those who died were infants less than 12 months old and a further 25 per cent were children below the age of five. In the 1970s the corresponding figures were 31 per cent and 4 per cent, which suggests a marked decline in toddler mortality. In the first nine months of 1978 no Yuendumu infants born alive had subsequently died. Estimates based on family histories confirm that the infant mortality rate has shown a marked decline during the last decade. These changes can mainly be attributed to improvements in access to health services, and in settlement sanitation and water supplies (although these are still sub-standard). Therefore it may be assumed that Yuendumu still has a relatively high rate of population growth, a cause for concern since the resources of the community are so limited.

7. These figures were calculated using estimation procedures based on the ratio between the parities of women in the 2-24, 25-29 and 30-34 age groups (Brass, 1975). The variation is due mainly to the small size of the sample.

The dependency ratio (0.78), although not high by Aboriginal standards,⁸ is also considerably above the national level (0.67 in 1976) and well above that of non-Aboriginal residents in Yuendumu (0.51), a further indication that in non-Aboriginal terms, the scarce potential of Yuendumu is under considerable pressure. Possible solutions to these problems, such as increased outmigration, intensive family planning schemes or increased income to support dependents, are unlikely to have any immediate effect. Yuendumu people still place high value on children, and their strong attachment to family and country, coupled with the knowledge of the social and cultural problems which they would face elsewhere, make them unwilling to leave except on a temporary basis. Yet their chances of economic development at home remain slim.

Although young people from Yuendumu are much more mobile than their parents, and have the opportunity to meet people from other Aboriginal groups, most of them still marry within the prescribed kinship structures of their own group. Some intermarriage has occurred between Warlpiri, Pintubi and Anmatjirra, and this has been an important means of breaking down inter-tribal barriers within the settlement. While most young men are monogamous, a considerable number of older men still support several wives and have followed customary law by contracting their first marriages with older women, sometimes already widowed, and subsequent marriages with younger women, often promised to them in childhood. In previous times a young widow was usually obliged to remarry for support, but today this is seen to be, and is in fact unnecessary because she is eligible for a pension from the Department of Social Security. Young widows now sometimes deliberately and successfully withstand kin pressure to remarry. Continuation of polygyny may explain why the masculinity ratio, close to unity for the whole population, is lower for the 15 to 59 age group.

8. See note to Table 1.2, Chapter 1.

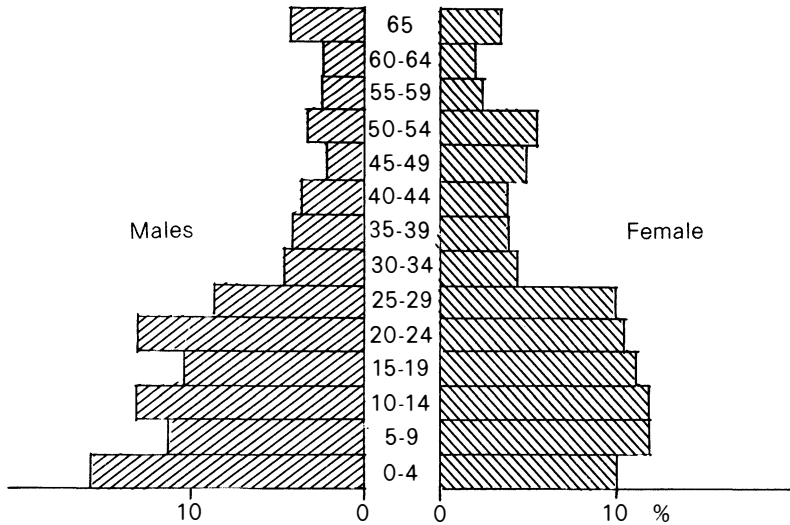


Fig 2.2 Yuendumu: age/sex structure 1978.

Yuendumu settlement is essentially a town, with urban services and facilities. It consists of a core of permanent buildings flanked by camps of temporary structures (Fig.2.3). In addition to conventional weatherboard houses, the core contains administrative and service buildings - the Council office and workshop, power station, school, health clinic, social club centre (shop, post office/bank, reading room, assembly hall), church and YMCA. All Europeans live in the core. In recent years a number of Aboriginal families have been allocated houses in this area because some of their members hold important administrative and political positions in the community, and the resultant improvement in social contact has had a marked effect on European-Aboriginal relationships. Middleton and Francis (1976:193-194) describe a social situation which was formalized, constrained and, on the part of most Europeans, dominated by paternalistic attitudes, while now, a decade later, Europeans and Aborigines frequently meet in a relaxed setting - at parties, on the volley ball courts, at barbecues and on hunting expeditions.

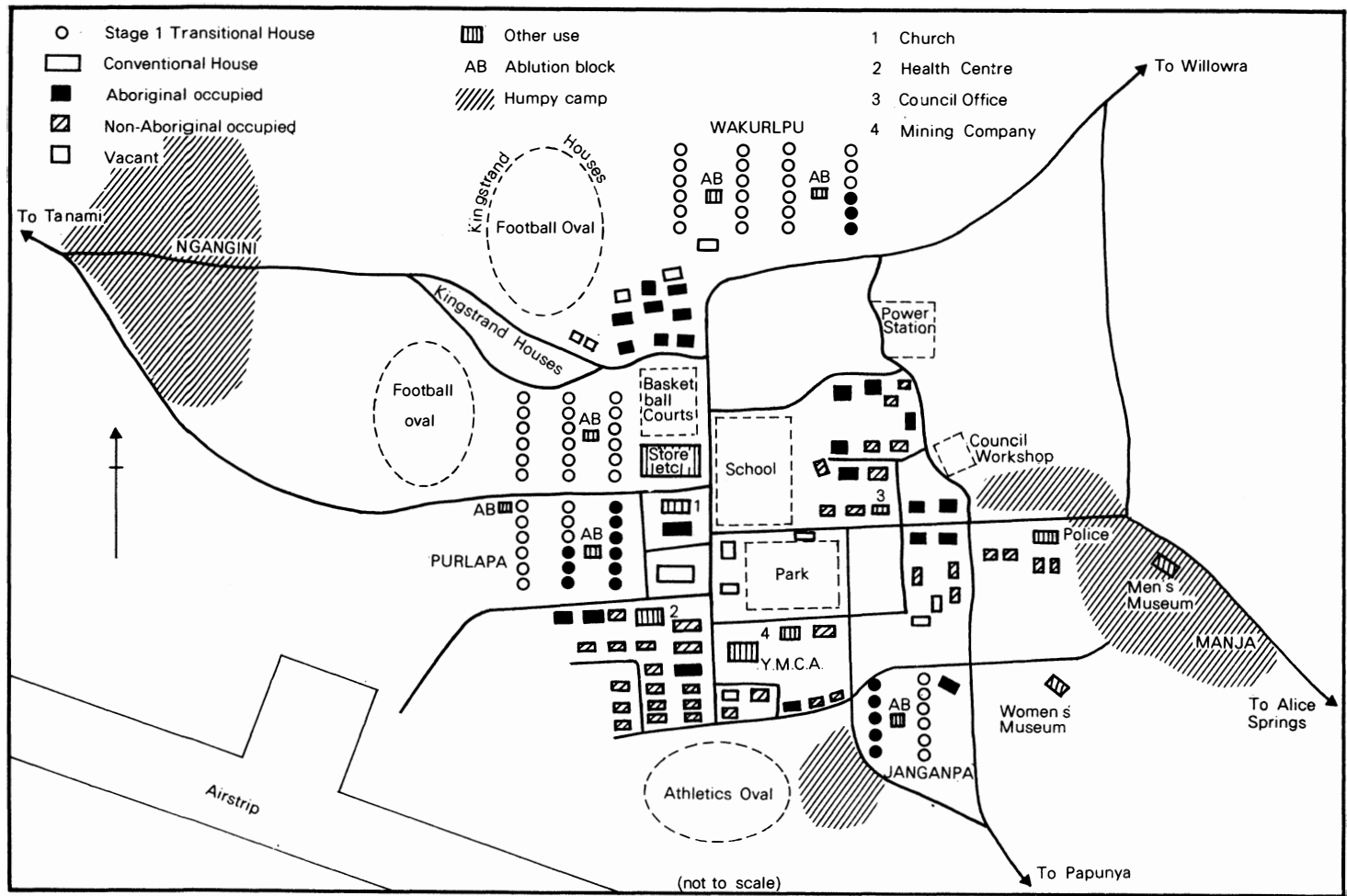


Fig 2.3 Yuendumu settlement, 1978

Aboriginal housing in Yuendumu encompasses a wide variety of structures - windbreaks, humpies made from timber, sheets of iron and old car bodies, one room concrete dwellings of the Stage 1 Transitional type, experimental architect designed houses with patios, flats, and standard three or four bedroom government dwellings. These vary in access to basic services such as water, power and sewage. Windbreaks and humpies, either concentrated into large camps such as Manja or Ngangini or in small groups adjacent to permanent houses such as those in Janganpa camp (Fig.2.3) are, theoretically, close to piped water obtained from standpipes. They also have some street lights. However, because of high levels of residential mobility, their access to these services may at times be quite limited. A hygiene report compiled in late 1978 revealed that only 33 per cent of the residents of Manja camp were within 20 metres of a tap; 44 per cent were at least 50 metres from water supplies and the nearest ablution and toilet block was over 200 metres away (Rallings, 1978). Transitional houses also lack amenities, although all are close to piped water and within a short distance of the ablution blocks, constructed as integral parts of these residential complexes. The remaining houses all have basic amenities. Although the type of accommodation has a marked effect on living standards, the people in each situation do not remain distinct but move freely according to the location of their close kin and friends. A large permanent house can shelter over twenty people during one week, and be occupied by a single nuclear family the next. This continual mobility makes it impossible to assess accurately how many of Yuendumu's Aborigines have permanent houses, or the density of occupation in permanent or temporary accommodation. At any one time approximately one third of Aboriginal residents are probably in permanent structures,⁹ about ten people per house. Occupation density in temporary housing is lower (approximately eight per house), but highly variable. Large elongated humpies used by widows, unmarried women and children might shelter over 20 people while small structures might house a nuclear family of only three or four.

Regardless of the type of housing which they occupy, most Aboriginal families in Yuendumu preserve the essence of their traditional life-style. Where possible, they group themselves according to their family relationships and humpy camps are to some extent located in sites oriented to the

9. The Northern Territory Environmental Health Survey, 1978, gives a figure of 31 per cent (Northern Territory, 1979:200).

tribal country of the inhabitants. Thus most Pintubi live in Ngangini camp, on the road which leads out of Yuendumu to Tanami and the west, while Anmatjirra live in Manja camp on the eastern side of the settlement (Fig.2.3). This feature, which has been noted in other large Aboriginal communities where people are living away from their tribal country (e.g. Warrabri, Bell (1978)), is less marked in camps such as Purlapa, Janganpa and Wakurlpu which are less peripheral and which contain both permanent and temporary housing. For example, many of the families in Janganpa camp, on the southern side, have strong links both with Willowra, to the north east and Mount Doreen to the west. Houses in this camp, mainly renovated transitional structures and new houses, with power and water supplies, are deliberately allocated to members of the Council and Housing Association workforce who, it is assumed, can afford to pay the rent. The diversity of the population reflects this factor. Nevertheless, even in that camp, most families are related to one another, with the Mount Doreen/Willowra link forged through marriage. Thus the basic elements of the traditional settlement structure are maintained.

A striking feature of Yuendumu is that although a large number of people live in humpies, many permanent shelters are vacant. This reflects the unsuitability of some house styles and the persistence of certain traditional customary practices. Aluminium Kingstrand houses, built in Yuendumu in the 1960s, are unsuited to desert climatic extremes¹⁰ and to the social customs of the people. None are occupied today. The Stage 1 Transitional houses, built in 1966/1967, are marginally better, in that they include large verandahs, but most people who are still using them prefer to sleep, eat and cook outside and keep the central single room for storage. Deaths, disagreements and ceremonies are also major reasons why people abandon houses. Temporary structures and transitional houses are not reoccupied quickly, although other families may eventually move into them, but new or renovated houses are usually reallocated within a few weeks or months, invariably to families whom tribal leaders recommend as belonging to the correct kinship group. Deaths of important people cause high intra-settlement mobility, while the death of a child would

10. Heppell (1979:16) quotes an experiment made by Tatz (1965) which showed that the concrete floor of a Kingstrand house at 11 p.m. on a summer night was 10 C higher than the outside temperature and 13 C higher than the temperature inside a spinifex humpy.

probably only result in the movement of members of the immediate family. For example, after the death of a very important man in late 1978, his mourning relatives moved from Manja camp to a site adjacent to the Women's Museum, where they were joined by most people from Wakurlpu and Purlapa camps and many from Ngangini. While the majority of those more distant relatives only remained for the few days of intense initial mourning ceremonies, some stayed for several weeks. Ten days after this event, an important ceremony, in which all Aborigines in Yuendumu were involved, was held in Ngangini camp and every other camp in the settlement was vacated for approximately a week.

Within recent years, several groups of Yuendumu Warlpiri have been planning outstations on their own tribal territory. By late 1979 six of these centres had been established, all on land now under Warlpiri control. Other plans have not yet been realised, either through difficulties over water supply (three bores drilled at Ethel Creek on the Lake Mackay Reserve for a Jungarrayi/Japaljarri group produced only highly mineralised and undrinkable water), transport (some projected outstation sites are over 150 km from Yuendumu), land (some sites are within the Mount Doreen pastoral lease) and finance.

All existing outstations lie to the south, west and north of Yuendumu (Fig.2.1). Most outstation families live in the open, with only windbreak shelters, or in humpies built in traditional style largely from bush materials, and their access to the services available in the central settlement - health, education, social activities, shopping and paid employment - is limited or non-existent. As a consequence the move to an outstation involves a deliberate decision which has a marked effect on material living standards, and only those who are really committed will remain for any length of time. Their stated motives for going are the wish to resettle on their tribal land and protect significant sites, ready access to bush foods and other resources, and escape from fighting, drinking and other social problems which beset people in Yuendumu. The permanent outstation populations are small but are augmented at weekends by an influx of kin who, for a variety of reasons, prefer to reside in Yuendumu but wish to escape the frustrations and pressures of settlement life for a brief sojourn in the bush.

Table 2.2 summarizes the main characteristics of outstations, settled before the end of 1978. Nyirрпи, on Waite Creek to the south west of Vaughan Springs homestead (Fig.2.1), was established in 1975. A bore and water tank were completed in 1977 and the Aboriginal Housing Panel constructed several collapsible plywood and metal frame houses. In late 1978 the Nyirрпи people were living about ten miles from their tank and bore, which were then unserviceable through the breakdown of some vital parts of the machinery, near a water soakage in the creek bed. Their shelters were bush material and iron sheet humpies, and structures made from the Housing Panel materials, salvaged after the original houses were destroyed in a freak whirlwind. They had no permanent access to transport, a severe problem considering their distance from Yuendumu. Jila, an outstation established on the former Chilla Well pastoral lease which was bought for \$26,000 by the Aboriginal Land Fund Commission, started about two years later, in 1977. The people who were living there had access to both the original natural well and the bore and tank which was one of the major staging points on the government stock route from Halls Creek, and also had the iron shack which was formerly the homestead. They also had a Toyota, bought with funds allocated by the Aboriginal Benefit Trust Fund (ABTF).¹¹ Yarripilangu, Ngarna and Jurlpungu outstations all started in 1978. While the Jurlpungu people have been able to make use of a government bore and tank, another staging point on the route from Western Australia, the groups at Ngarna and Yarripilangu have had to rely on natural sources of water, in the first case an ephemeral clay pan and in the second a spring. When these sources became insufficient, water drums and small tanks were transported from Yuendumu. None of these outstations had permanent housing, although Yarripilangu families used canvas tent sheets to make their bush humpies more waterproof. Since no decision had yet been made on their applications for funds for vehicles, they relied on their kin in Yuendumu for transport. This was normally available only at weekends, although the Council was occasionally able to release a vehicle for outstation purposes.

Under these circumstances it is hardly surprising that the outstations have population structures which differ markedly from that of the Yuendumu community as a whole. Almost 20 per cent of those living permanently in

¹¹. Now known as the Aboriginal Benefit Trust Account (ABTA).

outstations in 1978 were over 60, and only 27 per cent were under the age of 15 (corresponding figures for Yuendumu are 6 per cent and 37 per cent) (Table 2.1). Older residents are people who have grown up in the vicinity of the outstation location, and who are the main owners and guardians of the religious sites in the area. They clearly derive great satisfaction from living back in their tribal land. However, in outstations such as Ngarna and Yarripilangu they are vulnerable because there are no younger adults who can obtain help in case of sudden sickness or other problems. For example, few old men use rifles and thus they have to rely on obtaining yams, fruits and goannas if other food sources fail. Ngarna people have described graphically the frustrations of sitting behind their windbreak and watching kangaroo and emu coming to drink at the claypan, but being unable to take advantage of this food source.

The lack of children at outstations reflects the lack of formal educational facilities. Most outstation children are below school age, and those adult residents who have older children leave them to board with friends in Yuendumu. This is seen as an unsatisfactory situation, as parents continually worry about whether their children are being properly fed and treated, and is a major reason why some younger adults will not resettle permanently away from Yuendumu. Although Nyirрпи people have expressed interest in establishing a school, action over this is unlikely until other outstations are also in need of this facility. Other reasons for remaining in the centre are employment and the wages associated with it, lack of access to services and facilities and to the social attractions of Yuendumu, such as sport, films etc., and the fact that people have grown up in the central settlement and have always been accustomed to many elements of this essentially non-traditional life-style.

As Table 2.2 indicates, the population structure of outstations varies. Nyirрпи, the oldest settlement, has a more balanced age structure than more recent communities such as Jila, Ngarna and Yarripilangu. Jurlpungu was unusual in 1978; the group had suffered a series of unexpected deaths, in two case of young men in motor

Table 2.2
Yuendumu outstations, 1978

	Nyirрпи	Jila	Yarripilangu	Ngarna	Jurlpungu
Location (dist. from Yuendumu)	160 km	160 km	100 km	65 km	100 km
Date established	1975	1977	1978	1978	1978
Type of country	sand plain/ creek bed	sand hill	edge of scarp	sand plain	sand plain/ creek bed
Water sources	creek soakage, bore and tank	well, bore and tank	spring, water drum	claypan, water drum	creek soakage, bore and tank
Communications	rough track	main road (dirt)	rough track	rough track	rough track
Ownership group (a)	Jangala/Jampijinpa Jakamarra/Jupurrula	Jungarrayi/ Japaljarri	Jungarrayi/ Japaljarri	Jangala/ Jampijinpa	Jungarrayi/Japaljarri Japangka/Japangardi
Population (1978)					
(excl. visitors)	21	4	6	5	30
Male/female ratio	1.1	1.0	1.0	4.0	0.66
% age					
0-14	28.6	-	-	-	40.0
15-59	57.1	50.0	33.3	60.0	53.3
60+	14.3	50.0	66.7	40.0	6.7
Subsistence products	Rabbit, kangaroo, emu, goanna, turkey, solanum	Kangaroo, emu, goanna, turkey, solanum	Kangaroo, emu, goanna, turkey, yams, solanum	Kangaroo, emu, goanna, turkey, yams, solanum	Rabbit, kangaroo, emu, turkey, goanna, solanum
Housing	Bush humpy, iron humpy	Tin shed, bush humpy, tent	Bush humpy, tent sheet	Windbreak	Windbreak
Finance (Social Sec. payment/fortnight)	\$1,900	\$200	\$172	\$280	\$1,200
Cash income/capita	\$ 90	\$ 50	\$ 29	\$ 56	\$ 40
Transport	Nissan (broken down) weekend cars/ Toyota	Toyota	Weekend cars, Toyota	Occasional Toyota	Council truck
Land classification	Unalienated Crown Land (Warlpiri)	Pastoral lease, ABTF purchase (Warlpiri)	Unalienated Crown Land (Warlpiri), Pastoral lease, European	Unalienated Crown Land (Warlpiri)	Unalienated Crown Land/ Tanami Wildlife Reserve (Warlpiri)

(a) See Appendix to Chapter 2 for Walpiri kinship system

Source: Young, fieldwork 1978.

accidents, and the widows, young children and some other relatives had ultimately made the move because they believed that these events showed that Yuendumu was 'no good for them'. Jila, because of its location on the main road between Yuendumu and Lajamanu or Balgo, has never stabilized; the people were almost continually on the move and spent more time in other centres than in Jila.

The outstation movement from Yuendumu has developed more recently than that from other large settlements in the Centre, for example Papunya or Hermannsburg. This is because the Yuendumu population, although large and unwieldy by Aboriginal standards, is relatively homogeneous, and most people have some access to their tribal country. Lack of water supplies and of adequate systems of transport and communications, essential for maintenance of contact with the central settlement, are other factors preventing the establishment of outstations. However, in an economically dependent community such as Yuendumu, these facilities must be financed through government funding, and officials are unwilling to sanction such grants without assurance that the outstation groups are committed to the move. While such a reluctance to waste public money is understandable, it does create severe frustrations for the Aboriginal groups concerned, and it is hardly surprising that the outstation movement at Yuendumu remains in a state of flux. Much apparent wastage of previous grants can be explained by inadequate consultation with the Aboriginal groups concerned. A brief catalogue of recent events at Yuendumu demonstrates the problems faced both by those intending to move out, and those responsible for providing the necessary supporting resources.

During 1979, the five existing outstations were maintained and one further centre, Kunajarrayi, was established by the Jungarrayi/Japaljarri land-owning group near Mt Nicker, beyond the western boundary of Mount Doreen (Fig.2.1). Another project, to set up an outstation at Ngarliykirlangu, west of Wakurlpu, did not eventuate although the stockworkers and other shareholders in the Ngarliykirlangu Cattle Company, the chief instigators of the move, purchased an old caravan with the intention of moving it to the site. Water supply problems continued to hamper outstation development. Drilling for water, programmed by DDA to take place early in 1979, did not occur until 1980 because the Northern Territory Water Resources Board, the only organization who would charge only for

successful drilling (as opposed to bores which fail to find water), had a heavy program. Water was not located at Ngarliyikirlangu and Ngarna.¹² Ngarna residents, who originally wished to settle several kilometres to the north, inside the Mount Doreen boundary, either have to obtain permission from Mr Braitling to move to that site (where water supplies are assured), abandon Ngarna or remain at Ngarna and continue to transport water by tank and drum from Yuendumu. Nyirrpi, Jurlpungu and Jila, with access to bores and tanks, have been more fortunate but have encountered the usual frustrations over delays in the repair of pumping and storage equipment. The transport problem has been alleviated through the allocation of ABTA funds for the purchase of five four-wheel-drive vehicles, but outstation radios, funded by DDA, have not yet been received. Provision of this facility has now been under discussion for several years but decisions have been delayed pending examination of new types of sets (using solar powered batteries), and, more recently, the need to allocate a radio frequency. The latter problem has yet to be overcome. The causes of frustrations such as these lie in the operation of the government bureaucracy rather than in inefficiency and lack of effort on the part of those responsible for dealing with the process of application. However Aborigines who are waiting to move to outstations are rarely properly informed on the reasons for delay, and, even then, find it hard to comprehend why such difficulties should occur.

Despite these experiences, the Yuendumu outstation movement has stabilised since 1978. Some younger families have moved out to join their parents, and services have improved. Four women from four separate outstations have joined the Health Worker Training Scheme as part-time employees of the Department of Health, and the Social Club is considering the re-establishment of a mobile store service (see below). The Yuendumu Housing Association has helped by erecting disused water tanks, at outstations, and providing obsolete building materials for outstation groups, and DAA have provided funds for the purchase of tents and tools. It appears that a core of outstation residents, who may now account for about ten per cent of Yuendumu's population, intend to remain on their tribal land.¹³

12. Water had been located adjacent to both sites by late 1980.

13. Kesteven (1978:48-73) gives a more detailed account of Yuendumu outstations in 1978.

TRADITIONAL ACTIVITIES

Hunting and gathering

Most Yuendumu Aborigines are still skilled hunters and gatherers, but for all except outstation residents, this has become a weekend recreational occupation rather than a daily activity. Since productive areas are all beyond easy walking distance from the settlement, expeditions require transport, and thus men, who usually control both the use and users of vehicles (even when these have been bought by the women), have more opportunities than their wives to go hunting. The Women's Museum truck, restricted to female usage, has provided a valuable means of transport, but unfortunately at the time of writing it was unserviceable and, because of lack of funds, unlikely to be repaired immediately. People generally go hunting on or near their own tribal country, where they have better knowledge of the environmental resources and, as owners, unrestricted rights of access. Those like the Pintubi, whose land is too distant for brief visits, can hunt in other people's country, although they would usually inform owners first and would also take great care not to visit sacred sites without permission.

The country around Yuendumu provides a wide variety of animal and vegetable foods (Table 2.3). The distinction between products obtained by men and by women is not absolute. Men gather anything of value in the course of stalking game, and on other occasions will help the women to dig for yams, grubs and goannas. All products are consumed (as opposed to being killed for sport), although the mountain devils were taken back to camp as pets. Meggitt (1962:14) records that these were never eaten, but both Warlpiri and Pintubi at Yuendumu say that they would eat them in times of great scarcity.

Trips from Yuendumu in general fall into two separate categories - those undertaken specifically for hunting and/or gathering, and those undertaken for another purpose but with the necessary equipment for hunting (i.e. rifles, crowbars, billycans). Specific hunting trips aim for a particular piece of country, known to be productive. During the journey, passengers observe the road and the surrounding bush closely and stop the vehicle whenever they sight game or recent tracks. Large game, such as kangaroos, emus or plain turkeys are often shot from stationary trucks although

men also spend a long time tracking their quarries through the bush, particularly if they are accompanied by their wives and have made an extended stop to allow the women to gather vegetable foods, insects and small game. Much of the large game sighted escapes unharmed (78 per cent on the trips in which I participated and 88 per cent in those recorded by Kesteven (1978:30-31). Rifles are often in a bad state of repair through constant use without proper maintenance and, in addition, men rarely persist in chasing animals that flee in fright; they know that, with a truck, there is a good chance of sighting some more.

Table 2.3
Main products from hunting/gathering trips,
August-December, 1978

	Mulga apple, conkerberry, solanum sp., wild yams (<i>ipomoea</i> sp.), Bush banana, mistletoe berries, grevillea nectar, wild honey,
Women	Bloodwood gall, beans (acacia seeds). Witchetty grubs, honey ants Goannas, blue-tongue lizard, mountain devil (not eaten) Rabbits Pitjuri and ashes (for native tobacco chewing)
<hr/>	
Men	Kangaroo, plain turkey (bustard), rabbits, perenty (large lizard), Emu, euro, goanna, blue-tongue lizard, carpet snake Pitjuri

Source: Young, fieldwork, 1978.

When the destination is reached, women and older children disperse, usually within two or three kms. of the car, collecting and digging as they go. Small fruits such as conkerberry and mistletoe berries, and some varieties of solanum, are eaten immediately; witchetty grubs, goannas, yams and honey ants, all of which can be obtained only by digging, sometimes for an hour or two, are usually brought back to the car where a temporary camp is established for the young children and those adults who are looking after them. Grubs, goannas and a few yams are then cooked and eaten and honey ants are shared among the children. When the men return, they also cook their catch, provided the

camp is on a suitable site (soft sand for digging a pit and an abundance of firewood). Some meat and the offal is then consumed and the remainder is cut up and distributed. When the party returns to Yuendumu, participants share this food with family and friends who have stayed at home.

Trips for purposes other than hunting, for example visits to Alice Springs or to outstations, usually only obtain products and game visible from the road. Most of the game is large, but in the hot dry period, when goannas frequently bask on the road or on the trunks of nearby trees, reptiles are often caught after a vigorous chase by all the passengers in the truck.

The limited scope of this study makes it impossible to assess fully the total significance of subsistence production in the Yuendumu community. First, the productivity of hunting and gathering varies according to seasonal and diurnal climatic change, but the information presented here was collected over a period of only four months, in late winter and spring. Prolonged daytime expeditions became uncommon towards the end of that period because of the heat which affected both the activities of game and hunters. Secondly, detailed data cover only a limited number of expeditions, usually involving Aboriginal groups with whom I had a specific relationship; trips made by others went unrecorded. Finally, some hunting trips occurred only because I was able to provide transport. The bias introduced by these factors is apparent when Kesteven's figures are compared with mine. On my trips women outnumbered men by over 2 to 1, while on Kesteven's the ratio was 1.3 to 1; hence, we gathered far more vegetable, reptile and insect foods (four times as many honey ants and goannas as on Kesteven's expeditions - all the ants, which together yielded approximately one kilo of honey, were collected by women). Nevertheless, although total production cannot be quantified, it is clear that outstation dwellers derive more of their sustenance from bush tucker and game than do their kin in Yuendumu. As Table 2.2 shows, several Yuendumu outstation groups can obtain supplies of wild yams, an important staple, and in season all would be able to find a variety of edible solanum fruits. Goannas and snakes abound at most times, but large game is not always easy to obtain because of the need for transport and rifles. Weekend visitors often play an important part in providing meat, especially when outstation inhabitants are elderly.

Despite the problems of access to bush resources for many Yuendumu dwellers, people still value traditional foods far more highly than products which they can buy in the store. In their eyes these foods taste better, the prestige to be gained by distributing them to others is greater than with European foods, and the excitement and enjoyment gained in hunting and gathering is well worth the effort involved. They do not consciously weigh up these values in monetary terms, but the continued use of this resource adds much to Aboriginal social and cultural well-being.

Ceremonial activities

Yuendumu people still take part in a variety of ceremonies which mark special stages in their life-cycles and their relationship with their tribal country. Since the community is so large, these celebrations rarely involve all kinship groups at the same time, and thus the normal daily routines of the settlement continue, although individuals with prominent ceremonial roles may be absent for extended periods. An exceptional situation arose in late 1978 when people from Balgo Mission in Western Australia introduced a ceremony which involved every Aboriginal resident of Yuendumu, with the result that every non-traditional activity in the settlement, for example providing service in the store or council office, was disrupted. That particular meeting was also unusual in that the Yuendumu ceremonial leaders were Pintubi rather than Warlpiri. In previous times Yuendumu Pintubi have only been able to maintain their ceremonial life by travelling to join other Pintubi groups elsewhere, or by combining with the Warlpiri in a subordinate role.

In most ceremonies, particularly those connected with initiation, leaders are elderly and younger people remain in the background for a considerable time. This, combined with difficulties associated with adapting traditional processes to the increasingly Europeanized life-style of the young, has led to some decline in the involvement of younger adults in ceremonies. Coombs and Stanner (1974:14) note that even then some boys appeared to be unwilling to go through the full Warlpiri initiation ceremonies. Nevertheless, young boys and girls are still enthusiastic about learning and participating in dances and songs. When the 'Purlapa Wiri' (Big Corroborree) was held at Warrabri in October 1978, approximately 200 adults and children from Yuendumu attended as participants. The Christian Corroborrees, traditional

re-enactments of Biblical stories by Yuendumu Aborigines who attend the Baptist Mission, are also carried out by both adults and children, and the Balgo ceremonies mentioned above have included adults of all ages on an equal footing.

Since many Yuendumu residents now live a long way from their tribal country they are unable to safeguard the sacred objects stored at their dreaming sites and have difficulty in carrying out all appropriate ceremonies. This has been a cause for concern for some time. In 1964, a drought period, some tribal leaders collected sacred stones from a site near Jila and brought them to Yuendumu to carry out rain-making ceremonies. This aroused interest in establishing a centre at Yuendumu where such valuables could be stored, and led to the construction of the Men's Museum, financed by community contributions and money granted through ABTF. This building was opened in 1971 and, in 1976, Yuendumu women obtained a similar centre. Both museums act not only as storage houses for sacred objects and more recently manufactured artefacts designed for ceremonial use, but also provide foci for ceremonial organization. In this way Yuendumu people have been able to carry out many of their religious practices even although they can no longer maintain frequent physical contact with their country. Other Aboriginal groups in large settlements have frequently expressed their approval of this solution.

Artefact manufacture remains important at Yuendumu, although mainly for private rather than commercial use. Men make boomerangs, spears, woomeras, coolamons, nulla-nullas and hair-string ropes while women make necklaces and other objects for use in dancing. Both groups are skilled in body painting and artefact decoration and, to a large extent, still use locally obtained ochres for this purpose. Some men do produce artefacts for sale, either to Europeans resident in Yuendumu or to outlets in Alice Springs, but, since the marketing of these products is in general poorly organized, this type of activity contributes little to the community income.

Altogether, traditional activities are still the central basis of Yuendumu life. Despite the difficulties which have arisen through population concentration, and the inevitable changes through contact with the non-Aboriginal world, the people have maintained Aboriginal law and customs, and will clearly continue to make a determined effort to do so. The outstation movement, which has allowed

physical reidentification with several important Warlpiri sites, has reinforced this feeling. This characteristic distinguishes Yuendumu from many other large Aboriginal townships, such as Warrabri, where the disruptive forces of European culture have made a greater impact.

NON-TRADITIONAL ACTIVITIES AND ORGANIZATIONS

External funding sources

Although Yuendumu Aborigines are strongly committed to traditional ways, they are also involved in many non-traditional activities, most of which, as the sole means of earning money, are now necessary for survival. Through participation in these, people come into contact with many European institutions which are foreign to their former way of life and to which they have to adapt. Because of Yuendumu's poor material resource base, almost all non-traditional activities and institutions are generated and supported from the outside. Most of the funds granted for these purposes come directly from government departments, both Federal and, since mid-1978, under the control of the Northern Territory administration.

Grants are allocated to four incorporated bodies - the Community Council, the Housing Association, the Mining Company and the Ngarliyikirlangu Cattle Company. Additional recipients are outstation groups, incorporated for funding purposes. Yuendumu also receives indirect funding in the form of wages, salaries and money for recurrent and capital expenditure from the Departments of Education, Health, Building and Construction, Public Works and, on a minor scale, bodies such as the Aboriginal Arts Board and ABTA. Table 2.4 summarises the distribution of funds from the primary source, DAA, in 1977/78.

The Community Council, the main recipient of DAA funds, has received approximately \$2.5 million since 1974. This money is used for the wages and salaries of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal employees, a component which accounted for almost three-quarters of the total allocation in 1977/78, necessary replacement of capital equipment and recurrent costs for repairs and maintenance. Thus the bulk of the DAA grant reaches the pockets of Yuendumu residents, and over 80 per cent of this component is paid to Aborigines. As the main employer of Aboriginal labour (50

per cent of the workforce in late 1978) Yuendumu Council is directly responsible for a high percentage of the income used for individual family support, and hence financial problems which result in retrenchment of staff have serious repercussions throughout the settlement. Such a situation arose at the end of 1979.

Table 2.4

DAA funding, Yuendumu, 1977-78

	Total grant	Wages/Salaries
Yuendumu Community Council	\$644,621	73%
Yuendumu Housing Assocn.	\$182,800	74%
Yuendumu Mining Co.	\$ 20,000	n.a.
Yuendumu (Ngarliiyikirlangu) Cattle Co.	n.a.	n.a.

Source: DAA records, Alice Springs.

The Housing Association also uses about three-quarters of its grant to pay wages and salaries, although the Aboriginal component in the wage bill is lower than for the Council (54 per cent). This is because the Housing Association employs several skilled non-Aborigines as supervisors in the various trades, while most of the work carried out by the Council does not require training in specific skills. The remainder of the Housing Association grant was used for building materials, insurance and other incidentals. While the Council has few additional sources of income, the Housing Association supplements its grant through rents charged on its property and through carrying out specific contracts for other organizations in the settlement. However, the amounts earned through these sources are small compared to the DAA grant, its main source of support (only 13 per cent in 1977/78). Rent collection on substandard property such as the transitional houses is not enforced, and is difficult to monitor elsewhere because of frequent changes in the incomes of occupants.

Yuendumu Mining Company, an Aboriginal-owned company incorporated in 1970 to exploit copper deposits at Mount Hardy, to the north-west of Yuendumu, was reorganized in 1974 to operate a quarry to provide road and building materials for the settlement. DAA allocated \$271,000 to establish the gravel operation, and between 1975 and 1977 gave an additional \$132,476 to cover recurrent and capital costs. Unfortunately, the venture has not been wholly successful, and funding in recent years has been cut. The grant for 1977/78 was \$20,000, most of which went towards the payment of outstanding debts. DAA, understandably reluctant to continue to finance an apparently unproductive business with public money, have indicated that the Company must demonstrate its determination to succeed before support will be increased. It can do this only by winning contracts, which is highly unlikely when it lacks the funds to repair its bull-dozers and trucks. However, in 1979/80, the Mining Company made a successful tender for a \$28,800 contract to supply gravel for resurfacing Yuendumu airstrip to make it serviceable in all weathers, and has been able to increase the Aboriginal sector of its payroll (negligible in 1978, see below) about two fold. DAA have responded by continuing financial support. It is to be hoped that this success is repeated as the survival of an Aboriginal-owned business organization in a community as economically dependent as Yuendumu is important for the realization of some Aboriginal autonomy.

Yuendumu Cattle Company, the government controlled organization in charge of pastoral operations on the Yuendumu Reserve, came into existence in the mid-1950s. In 1978 it was still under government ownership and its employees, then 11 stock workers and a non-Aboriginal manager, were paid directly by DAA. The annual Aboriginal wage bill for 1977/78 was approximately \$80,000 but, since other costs formed part of the total government support for Yuendumu, the complete funding is unknown. Prolonged negotiations for the transfer of the Company to an Aboriginal corporation, the Ngarliyikirlangu Cattle Company, were not resolved until August 1979. DAA agreed to allocate \$55,000 for 1979/80 for payment of the salaries of non-Aboriginal employees, and essential recurrent expenditure on maintenance of bores, fences and other equipment. Wages for Aboriginal employees were to be met by the profits from cattle sales. In the period preceding the transfer, few beasts were sold because the government, still responsible for all commercial operations of the Cattle

Company, would not permit mustering while negotiations were in progress. During the remaining months of the 1979 season the Ngarliyikirlangu Cattle Company, taking advantage of the buoyant state of the market at that time, turned off about 750 stock and obtained about \$200,000. One shipment achieved the top price at the Adelaide cattle market.

Yuendumu's outstations also receive funding from DAA but grants are allocated for specific needs rather than for recurrent support. Funding in general depends on proof that the group concerned are determined to make an effort to carry out their plans. As mentioned earlier, problems of isolation and access to water make it difficult for many Warlpiri groups to establish outstations without initial financial support, and hence the policy with regard to funding cannot be easily reconciled with the actual situation. After a brief visit to Yuendumu in 1974, Coombs and Stanner (1974:21) listed nine sites where Warlpiri would like to settle, five within neighbouring pastoral leases, and hence unlikely to be permitted. Three of the four groups whose proposed sites lay either within the Lake MacKay Reserve (Nyirrpi, Ethel Creek) or the Tanami Wild Life Sanctuary (Mt.Theo), received grants for the purchase of four-wheel drive vehicles in late 1974. However none of these sites were linked to Yuendumu by road and, because of delay in establishing the vital communication links, most of those who had intended to leave remained in the central settlement. Inevitably their vehicles were used for many other purposes, unconnected with the outstations,¹⁴ and DAA officers became reluctant to release further funds. After further discussion, it was admitted that the initial priorities had been wrong, and that money should have been given for water resources and road construction before vehicles were purchased. Hence in 1976/77, Nyirrpi received a grant of over \$68,000 to drill and equip a bore. Neither Ethel Creek nor Mt.Theo were ever settled, although attempts, unfortunately unsuccessful, were made to locate potable water at the former site.

In 1976 the ALFC purchased Corrandirk Station (Chilla Well), a small pastoral property to the north of Mount Doreen, for \$26,000. The property was bought 'bare' (i.e. with no stock, equipment or materials) and existing bores

14. Somewhat surprisingly, considering the hard usage of vehicles in Yuendumu, the Ethel Creek truck was still operating intermittently in late 1978.

and sheds were in poor repair. The sale was not finalised until 1978 because of disagreement with the owner of Mount Doreen over the position of the unfenced boundary separating the two properties. DAA then allocated \$18,200 to a Warlpiri group to establish an outstation at Jila (Chilla). This grant included \$7,700 for the purchase of stock, to be run as a killer herd. This plan has never eventuated, mainly because the people regard Jila simply as an outstation. Even if they were interested in its potential as a pastoral property, their chances of success would be severely limited because of lack of water and isolation. Before it was purchased by ALFC, Corrandirk employed only two stockmen for about two months per year and otherwise was used as a holding property during the movement of cattle from Halls Creek to Alice Springs.

No other Yuendumu outstation received funding prior to 1978. Since then, as mentioned earlier, DAA have granted funds for the purchase of tents, tools and radios, and for water drilling and bore equipment as required. Vehicles have been bought with funds granted by ABTA. Present practice is to ensure that the grant is used for the purpose for which it is intended, and hence funds alone are not distributed to outstation groups.

Although DAA is not responsible for the financial support of Yuendumu Social Club, established in 1970 as a community run, non-profit making organization responsible for the settlement store, it did provide a loan of \$170,000 for the construction of new premises in 1976/77. The club is still repaying this loan from profits made from its annual turnover of over \$1 million.

Non-DAA funding for the support of Yuendumu is hard to determine because the community is not responsible for its distribution. In 1977/78 the Departments of Health and Education paid Aboriginal wage bills of around \$40,000 and \$130,000 respectively. The Department of Health also funded the clinic and its services, paid for the maintenance of houses built for health employees and funded other facilities such as the Flying Doctor Service. Similarly, the Education Department maintained the school and ancillary services. During 1979 it also paid for the renovation of existing school buildings and construction of new classrooms, at a cost of around \$700,000. Public Works and Construction Departments have in recent years been responsible for the building of a new sewage system and of

new houses for the Department of Education. None of these recent projects have made a direct impact on the Aboriginal income of Yuendumu. All have been carried out using non-Aboriginal labour from outside, despite the fact that a considerable pool of this type of skill exists within Yuendumu. This experience, a continual source of frustration, is similar to that which has periodically confronted the Mining Company, which would like to be able to tender for construction projects in Yuendumu, but cannot compete because it lacks the resources.

The Aboriginal Arts Board provides funds for the support of the Men's and Women's Museums, principally for the payment of wages for the two custodians (approximately \$5,000 per year). In 1979 they allocated a special grant of \$6,000 for painting and repairs to the fence surrounding the Women's Museum, work which was carried out on contract by the Housing Association. Prior to April 1979 Yuendumu had received over \$115,000 from ABTA, mainly for community purposes such as support for its Sports Weekend, educational excursions, vehicles (Jila outstation received a vehicle from this source in 1977), and business ventures. Since then the community has received funds for five outstation vehicles, approximate cost \$50,000.

As this brief analysis indicates, Yuendumu's monetary support comes almost entirely from outside funding channelled through government departments. For the most part this money is of direct benefit to the Aboriginal residents of the community, either through the income which they receive as wage earners or the services which are provided. However, as in other Aboriginal communities, some facilities at Yuendumu have stemmed from plans made by external agencies with little understanding of the cultural context of Warlpiri society. Thus power, water and sewage systems, installed and maintained at considerable cost, may benefit only a few people (see above), and the value of expensive new facilities at the school will be doubtful when unemployment among the educated young men runs at 90 per cent. These are the essential considerations for the future.

The school.

Yuendumu school, with a current enrolment of about 200 pupils, was started by the Baptist Mission over 20 years ago. It now caters for children and young people from pre-school to post-primary levels and since 1974 has been operating a bi-lingual system with much instruction carried out in Warlpiri. Warlpiri teaching materials and books are compiled by a group of Aboriginal literacy workers, aided by a European linguist who, after four years residence in the community, is very familiar with local life and customs. Many of the stories which the centre illustrates and translates are related by older Aborigines and thus traditional lore is being passed on to the schoolchildren. This, combined with the use of Warlpiri, the lingua franca, as a written language and the resultant additional responsibility shouldered by Aboriginal teachers and teaching aides, has led to increased integration of Yuendumu school with the community. In 1978 European staff at the school participated in a variety of activities organized by the Aboriginal community, for example the visit to Warrabri Purlapa Wiri in October 1978, and local hunting and gathering trips. The relatively high level of attendance (approximately 75 per cent) was a further indication that Yuendumu people regarded the school as an institution with some relevance to their way of life.

Comparison of the attitudes of Yuendumu Aborigines towards primary and secondary schooling emphasizes the importance of close contact between school and community. At Yuendumu parents have had unrestricted access to primary school grounds, (sometimes a disadvantage during fights when combatants clash between classroom blocks) and, through open days, concerts and other entertainments, have had frequent opportunities to learn about their children's activities. They also meet non-Aboriginal teachers both socially and formally, and no longer regard school as primarily an alien and potentially dangerous environment. In contrast Yirara College, the secondary school, is in Alice Springs, a place beyond Warlpiri territory where both pupils and visiting parents will encounter Aborigines from many other Central Australian tribes. Although the move to Yirara is an improvement on that of the past, when high school children had to attend boarding school in Darwin or even Adelaide, it still involves a marked break with families, and subjects youngsters to social and cultural pressures which are continual sources of anxiety to Yuendumu parents. While the

fact that the present headmaster of Yirara formerly worked in Yuendumu allays some of these fears, many Yuendumu youngsters still find that these pressures prevent them from completing their Yirara courses and return early to the settlement and join the ever-expanding group of unemployed Warlpiri youth. Neither they nor their fellows who have continued their schooling and acquired some qualifications are strongly motivated to enter the labour force in Alice Springs or elsewhere, partly because they are well aware of the problems which they would encounter, but also because of their strong ties to family and country. According to Yuendumu leaders, the community really needs a Warlpiri high school, based in the settlement, and with a flexible educational system that allows young people to participate in traditional as well as European learning patterns.

All primary schooling at Yuendumu is still based in the central settlement. People at Nyirrpi, the longest established outstation, have made enquiries about the establishment of a school in their community, but no definite steps have yet been taken, partly because Department of Education officials know that few school-age children are actually in permanent residence. This assessment is unreal because other families would probably move to outstations both at Nyirrpi and elsewhere if schooling were available. Yuendumu has a considerable pool of experienced teaching aides who would be able to organize these outlying schools with only sporadic help from the centre.

Adult education in Yuendumu covers a range of skills, some of which aim at general improvement in English literacy and numeracy and some of which are of more specific value. Teacher aides, health workers, and shop and clerical assistants have all been encouraged to attend English classes so that they can cope more easily with their jobs and with their training programs. Women have also improved their dressmaking skills, originally learnt from Baptist Mission personnel, and some have now been taught to drive cars. While the latter achievement is much sought after, there is no guarantee that those who are successful will be able to make use of their skill. Even cars owned by women are usually controlled by men. Recently people have expressed an interest in learning how to operate two-way radios, so that they can maintain the outstation links once they receive their sets. Adult educators have tried to teach these skills but have found that success has been

limited because people have little opportunity to use the equipment. When the Yuendumu network is set up, this situation will change. Other useful functions performed by adult educators include basic political education and help with completion of electoral enrolment and social security forms.

Although in general the formal education system at Yuendumu appears to be serving the needs of the Aboriginal community, and is relatively well integrated into the life-style, the future cannot be guaranteed. The maintenance of the bi-lingual program, on which much of Yuendumu's success rests, depends on Department of Education policy which may become less favourable. Moreover, school and community relationships depend heavily on the individuals involved, particularly the non-Aboriginal teachers. Staff turnover tends to be high and the replacement of several experienced people by young teachers with no previous experience of living in an Aboriginal community can result in a rapid loss of confidence on both sides. A further factor concerns the physical contact between school and community. Considerable concern was expressed by many people when it was revealed that the 1979 rebuilding program included provision for the erection of a fence to prevent free access into the school grounds.

Health services and the hospital

Yuendumu's modern clinic, staffed by European nursing sisters and Aboriginal health workers, and including in-patient accommodation, is intensively used by the whole community and provides important basic health care. When necessary, patients are referred to Alice Springs hospital, either via the Royal Flying Doctor Service or by Department of Health transport, and less urgent cases are examined by doctors on their periodic visits.

Table 2.5

Major reported illnesses, Nov. 1977-Oct. 1978
(% of new cases)

Age group	0-4	5-14	15+	Total
Malnutrition	9.5	n.a.	n.a.	5.3
Ears	17.2	33.0	16.3	20.7
Eyes	11.9	11.2	11.3	11.6
Chest infection	21.4	26.2	18.3	21.8
Diarrhoea	27.6	7.5	14.8	20.1
Scabies	11.6	18.4	23.3	15.6
Other	0.9	4.8	16.0	4.9
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
No. in sample	682	297	257	1236

Source: Health Centre monthly returns, 1977/78.

Although prompt and efficient diagnosis and treatment have done much to alleviate the effects of serious illness in Yuendumu, the Aboriginal community still has some chronic health problems, for example ear, and eye disease, respiratory ailments, diarrhoea and skin infections (Table 2.5). Otitis media and trachoma, the two main ear and eye ailments, are usually contracted in childhood and, if undiagnosed and untreated, can eventually lead to deafness and blindness. They affect all age groups. Respiratory complaints often develop through neglect of the effects of colds and other minor bronchial complaints. These usually occur in sporadic outbreaks, and are rapidly transmitted through the community. Diarrhoea, also an intermittent rather than continual problem, is particularly serious for infants. In past times it was a major cause of infant deaths but today, with rapid treatment, children usually recover. For example, six young infants, hospitalised in Alice Springs during a severe outbreak of diarrhoea in October 1978, all survived; in former times some would certainly have died. Scabies also remains serious, and minor skin complaints in general are a frequent reason for visiting the clinic. Superficial analysis of health worker

records indicates that, in 1978, sores and boils accounted for over half of the treatments administered by health workers at the Yuendumu clinic.

These major health problems owe their creation and persistence largely to the environmental conditions within which Yuendumu people live. As the Trachoma Report (National Trachoma and Eye Health Program, NTEHP, 1980) shows Yuendumu is situated within the zone which, on a national level, suffers the highest incidence of trachoma, otitis media, skin infection and other indicators of health problems such as nasal discharge. All of these illnesses can be related to characteristics of the physical environment - low humidity, pronounced aridity, long hours of bright sunshine and high ultra- violet exposure. They can also be related to living conditions - lack of water, poor hygiene, inadequate systems for sewage and waste disposal,¹⁵ and overcrowding - factors which encourage the spread of any type of infectious disease. Many of these conditions result from the enforced clustering of the Aboriginal population into relatively large communities such as Yuendumu. It has been suggested that the recent dispersal of population to outstations will have beneficial effects on community health. While the evidence for Yuendumu is not yet clear, it appears that many who have made this move are happier, and hence their mental state must be better.

Malnutrition, according to statistics (Table 2.5), is not a major problem, although it can be severe among young children. The incidence is extremely difficult to measure because malnutrition may be related to other illnesses (small babies who contract diarrhoea can lose weight very rapidly through dehydration and lack of nourishment), and because the measurement standards used are not necessarily appropriate to Aborigines. Comparison of weight with age for all Yuendumu Aboriginal children below the age of two years (Fig.2.4) shows that after an initial low birth weight they develop rapidly until approximately six months, but thereafter the growth rate declines. By the age of two they are around 80 per cent of the Harvard standard. This

15. An environmental Health Survey carried out in Yuendumu in 1978 showed that almost 80 per cent of Aboriginal occupied houses had to use communal water supplies and toilets, and for over half of these the tap was over 100 metres away (Northern Territory Department of Health, 1979:249-50).

pattern, also noted for infants in developing countries,¹⁶ suggests that breast milk, almost the only source of nutrition for infants, is sufficient for the first six months of life but should then be supplemented to maintain growth.¹⁷

The only major causes of illness which are unaffected by the physical environment are accidents and injuries following fights. Fractured fingers and arms often result from fights when the female combatants have been using heavy nulla-nullas. Injuries from knives and other such weapons are more common during drunken brawls involving the men. Violence of this type is intermittent as, since the nearest sources of take-away liquor are about 300 km distant, alcohol is not always available. Within recent years motor accidents have claimed several Yuendumu lives, and have caused other serious injuries.

Environmental living conditions at Yuendumu are not the only factors which have changed the health experience of residents. Changes in diet and life-style have also caused an increase in other diseases which were previously uncommon. In 1979 there were fifteen known cases of diabetes at Yuendumu, all of adults over the age of thirty five, and it is likely that the actual incidence of this disease, which often shows itself only through secondary infection, was much greater. Heart disease and cancer are also now recorded, although still at a relatively low level compared to the rest of Australian society. The stresses and strains faced by many young Aboriginal adults today is bound to lead to an increase in their significance. Venereal disease, primarily syphilis, is also a problem, although periodic checks help to keep it under control.

The main users of Yuendumu Health Centre are mothers and young children. As Table 2.5 shows, over half of the major illnesses reported in 1978 affected infants and young children, and almost 40 per cent of those who came to the clinic with minor ailments belonged to the same category. While this indicates that infant health is still in a precarious state, it also suggests that mothers are willing

16. For example, Shaw (1979: 5-7).

17. Middleton and Francis (1976:20-21) discuss the nutritional status of Yuendumu children in greater detail. 1978 patterns accord closely with those which they observed in 1969-70.

to seek advice when necessary. Their free use of the clinic facilities shows that they no longer regard the non-Aboriginal health service as something which should be used only in emergency. This is mainly due to the employment of Warlpiri health workers. Female Aboriginal Health workers now supervise almost all the activities of the infant clinic - regular weighing, measuring, bathing and discussion about feeding, as well as treatment of minor complaints.

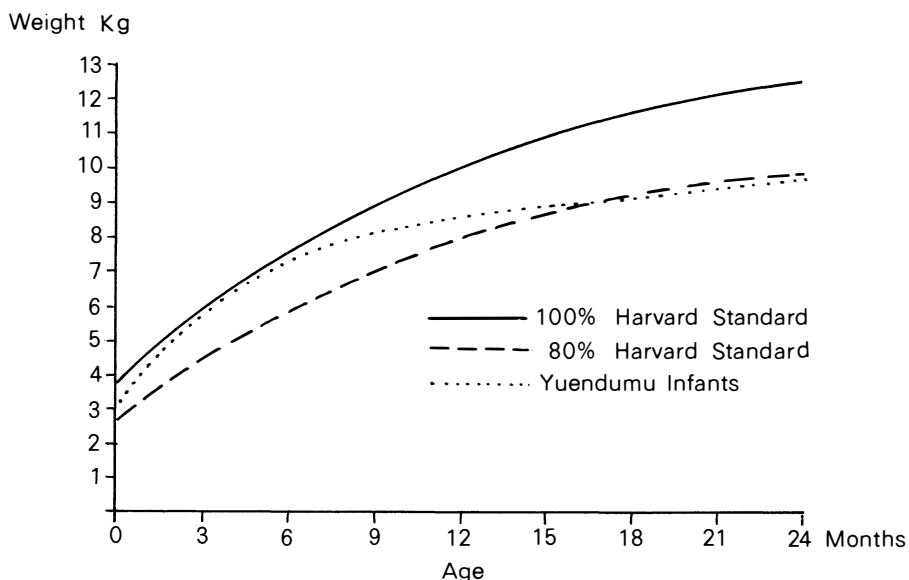


Fig 2.4 Yuendumu infants, 0-24 months: age by weight.

School children receive much of their treatment following large scale health inspections at school, often the only time that minor but chronic eye and ear infections and sores are detected, and health workers also pay regular visits to the camps, both to see those whom they know are sick and also to check the health of the elderly. The recent increase in the number of male Aboriginal health workers (three by late 1978) has improved contact between Health Clinic and Yuendumu men. It is now possible for the centre to run an all-male unit, where the men can come without fear of encountering women with whom all contact is taboo, and where they can discuss their problems with men. In general, Aboriginal health workers have made an invaluable contribution towards effective community health

care because their own family information networks transmit information about many problems which otherwise might never be reported until too late.

Due to the instability of outstation populations, Yuendumu health workers had not established a regular service to these centres in 1978. However each group was provided with a supply of basic medicines and first aid equipment which they could replenish on visits to Yuendumu, and these remained under the control of one person who could take responsibility for their use. Recent moves to train a worker for each outstation will certainly improve the quality of health care available and the establishment of radio links will provide added support.

Although most Aborigines at Yuendumu now use European health services, they believe strongly in traditional methods of healing. Men and women who are known to have these powers are much in demand and work both in the camps and, occasionally, at the health centre. Some of the Yuendumu Pintubi are famous for their skills and are visited by people from Willowra and other communities as well as by Warlpiri resident in the community.

The store

Since Yuendumu is a large isolated settlement, its community store has to provide a comprehensive service with sufficient stock for those periods when communications are disrupted. In former times the store was run by government or mission personnel who attempted to exercise some control over the dress and behaviour of Aboriginal customers (Middleton and Francis, 1976:93), and who also tried to improve nutritional standards in the community by carrying only certain items of stock. Today the store concentrates more on those items which people frequently demand. Since 1970 it has been run by the Yuendumu Social Club, a non-profit making organization which all members of the community are eligible to join and which not only aims to provide for all food, clothing and material needs but also funds a variety of other social organizations through store profits. The new counter-service store described by Middleton and Francis (1976:87-88) was replaced in 1970 by a modern supermarket, built with a loan from DAA. In the year 1977/78 the turnover was over \$1 million, and the profit was \$80,000 to \$90,000.

Nowadays, with no communal settlement kitchens, everyone¹⁸ in Yuendumu buys and cooks their own food, and thus depends on the services offered by the store. Like stores in Alice Springs, it keeps regular hours, and for most families shopping is a daily activity. This is partly because few people have access to refrigerators, and thus cannot store perishable foods, and also because most Aborigines still adhere to traditional patterns of consumption and use their purchases within a very short time. Shopping is also an important social event. Peak times are during morning 'smoko' (break), when school children, workers and other members of the family congregate to talk, consume soft drinks and crisps, and smoke cigarettes or chew tobacco, and in the afternoon when workers finish for the day. On a fortnightly basis, the store is busiest on the day on which pension or other cheques are paid (a Monday), and on pay day for council workers (a Friday). During September 1978 these two days accounted for over half of the takings. Between 3 and 5 p.m. on Fridays the store is full of women and children buying food to take on weekend camping trips to outstations, while their husbands wait outside, refuelling vehicles and assembling or borrowing hunting equipment.

Although the Social Club now has an all-Aboriginal committee, the store still has a European manager and assistant manager. Most of the remaining staff are Aboriginal although Europeans are also involved in running the 'Tummy Tavern', the fast food outlet. All Europeans are employees of the Social Club, and theoretically are under its control. In practice decisions on stocking, administration and pricing are left to the managers. Normally this works satisfactorily, provided that managers are willing to listen to suggestions made by members of the community. Price increases are sometimes a cause for concern, particularly when they affect staple items such as bread, flour, sugar and tinned meat. High freight costs to Yuendumu mean that shop prices are on average 17 per cent greater than in Alice Springs, lower than in a small community like Willowra (around 50 per cent greater), but still a significant problem considering the low money incomes in the township. Stock requirements for Yuendumu are sufficiently large for orders to be made direct to wholesalers in Adelaide, thus bypassing middlemen in Alice

18. In 1979 the Health Centre has been providing a meals-on-wheels service for elderly people.

Springs. Middleton and Francis (1976:94) suggest that the Social Club should reduce prices, and therefore profits, as lower food costs might be of greater benefit to the community than new social facilities. A similar suggestion might still be appropriate, although it must be acknowledged that a main reason for current levels of price is to pay off the DAA loan. Once this is achieved some changes might be contemplated. A partial solution, suggested both in the past and at present, is to supply stock to the store from local products.

The communal dining room at Yuendumu used to be supplied with eggs and vegetables from the government gardening project. However attempts to divert some of this produce for sale in the shop failed because, according to government interpretation, it had not been grown for that purpose. Recent discussions on restarting the garden, which was closed along with the dining room, have come to nothing. Discussions between the Social Club and Cattle Company on supplying fresh meat offer more hope. Meat from local sources would certainly be fresher and, presumably, cheaper than meat freighted from Adelaide, and the arrangement would provide an added incentive for Cattle Company business. Regulations controlling the slaughter and processing of meat for sale may impede the successful conclusion of negotiations.

The store complex incorporates the post office and sub-branch of the Commonwealth Savings Bank. Mail reaches Yuendumu by weekly plane from Alice Springs, and is also transported by road whenever those responsible are visiting town. Although the bank and post office provide a vital service for the community, there have been suggestions that, considering the size of the community, the status of the branch should be raised. At present the bank can only cash cheques by arrangement and for other transactions people must visit Alice Springs.

Yuendumu Mining Company also operates a small store which performs a very useful function as it is open at weekends when the main store is closed. It carries a limited stock but with an annual grocery turnover of about \$90,000 is clearly meeting a demand. Sunday morning immediately after church, when family groups assemble to go out to the bush, is usually the busiest time.

Towards the end of 1978 the Social Club store began a service for some outstations. Immediately after the day on which most Social Security cheques were paid, they took a truckload of food out to these communities, and also carried a cash float for cashing cheques. This service was much appreciated by outstation dwellers, but was unfortunately not stabilized mainly because of the mobility of clients. Due to important ceremonies held in Yuendumu at that time, many outstation people had returned to the settlement. Plans to re-establish a store run are now under discussion, and this service will obviously be another crucial factor in the stabilization of outstation communities.

The office and communications system

Day to day administration at Yuendumu is the responsibility of Council staff, who are based in two offices located at opposite ends of the settlement core. One office, the former DAA headquarters, deals with workforce supervision, wage and salary payments and book-keeping and is the official and unofficial meeting place for councillors and others. It provides the physical point of contact between visiting officials and those with whom they have appointments. While accountancy staff are still non-Aboriginal, most of the other responsibilities are now taken by Aborigines and thus other residents of the community feel able to come and go freely. When Yuendumu was still a government controlled settlement, office organization was more restricted. However, Aboriginal women rarely visit the office, principally because it is almost entirely male dominated.

The other office, adjacent to the store and post office, deals with social security administration. Its Warlpiri staff are responsible for the distribution of cheques and for providing advice and help in the completion of claims. Although all recognize that this work is essential for the support of many people in the community, it is not always possible to ensure it is effectively carried out. While Warlpiri staff provide much more accurate information and have more sympathetic rapport with claimants, they are also likely to come under severe social pressures from those who are their friends and relatives. In the past this has led to a high turnover of administrative staff, and on occasion cheques have remained in the office for a considerable time before distribution. This type of situation always gives rise to rumours,

frequently accusations of theft and other misdemeanours. More constant support from field officers based in the regional office of the Department of Social Security in Alice Springs would certainly boost the confidence of those in charge at Yuendumu.

The Council offices also act as the base for communications links between Yuendumu and all other centres.¹⁹ These are maintained by two-way radio and by radio-telephone. Council radios, currently three sets (one mobile) are tuned into the Royal Flying Doctor Base (VJD) in Alice Springs, the main centre for transmission of telegrams, and can also make contact directly with other Aboriginal communities. However, the schedules available for such direct contact are strictly limited - two half hours per day on VJD and one half hour to only five settlements (Papunya, Jay Creek, Docker River, Areyonga and Warrabri) on the former DAA network. Thus the radios are mainly used for official business and, in that capacity, provide a highly essential service. Mobile radios have so far been used mainly to maintain contact when people have been visiting remote area, but are clearly going to become much more vital when the outstation system is set up.

The radio-telephone provides an alternative to two-way radio contact but, unfortunately, since Yuendumu uses the most heavily loaded of the Alice Springs channels, actual contact is often impossible. Frustrated callers often abandon attempts to telephone and resort to sending telegrams, obviously a poor substitute for direct person-to-person communication. Many non-Aboriginal residents at Yuendumu prefer to make the 600 km round trip to Alice Springs, where they can be certain of making contact through the STD network, without having to contend with interference due to atmospheric conditions and other factors. Considering that Yuendumu depends so heavily on external resources, the present communications system is certainly wholly inadequate.

In 1979 the Council, supported by other organizations in Yuendumu, introduced a CB radio system for intra-settlement use. The creation of links between the Council and other service bodies - health, mission, police, housing, store, store workshop and power house - has been of

19. More detailed information is available in IMG,(1980: A5-A18).

great benefit in a settlement the size of Yuendumu, where the personal transmission of messages can otherwise be highly inconvenient. More extensive use of the CB network is limited by the short range (about 30 km) and the need for line of sight contact.

A survey conducted in late 1979 showed that at present the Aboriginal residents of Yuendumu make only limited use of the communications system. Most people are unfamiliar with the technology and find it difficult to deal with the telephone or telegram system in their secondary language, English. However, with Aboriginal residents assuming an increasing responsibility for the town's organization, their need to use the system will expand. As people become more accustomed to this process of communication, they are likely to use it also for social purposes, talking in Warlpiri. People see the establishment of the outstation radio system as a first step towards their ultimate aim - a Warlpiri frequency which would allow easy contact with other Warlpiri living in Lajamanu, Warrabri, Willowra, Papunya and Wave Hill.

Police

Yuendumu, with its relatively large population, has its own police station, located on the periphery of the central urban area. While officers in charge are European, the staff now includes a Warlpiri police aide and a tracker. The relationship between the police and the community, which varies according to the attitude of Europeans in charge, was in 1978 one of mutual respect. Police station staff were usually willing to listen to Warlpiri opinions and made determined efforts to understand appropriate Aboriginal customs. They only intervened in disputes when asked to do so by members of the community, and were not overtly bureaucratic in their administrative capacity. This satisfactory situation came into focus during the visit to Warrabri in October 1978 when, by comparison, the oppressive nature of police surveillance in that settlement was all too apparent.

The main Aboriginal law and order problems in Yuendumu are breaking and entering and car theft, usually the work of unemployed youths, and fights and disturbances arising from drunkenness. The former crimes are the work of only a few people, but, because of delay in hearing cases and difficulty in punishing people who belong to related kin

groups, they are hard to eradicate. Drunken fights rarely reach serious proportions, and occasionally community leaders enlist the help of the police in preventing the movement of alcohol into the settlement. Drinkers are intercepted at the Yuendumu boundary and are marooned in the bush until they have consumed their supplies. The police are rarely asked to intervene in fights of a more traditional nature, although these have a significant impact on community life. All other activity ceases when such a fight is in progress.

Other social organizations

Non traditional social organizations in Yuendumu include the YMCA and Yuendumu Social Club, which cater largely for the young, and the Baptist Mission. The YMCA, which now occupies the old Yuendumu hospital, provides a much needed meeting and amusement place for the unemployed young and schoolchildren. It also organizes sports activities and arranges travel and accommodation so that Yuendumu teams can compete in Alice Springs and in other communities in the Centre. Weekly film shows are also an extremely popular institution for young and old. The Social Club, in addition to giving substantial financial support to the annual August Sports Weekend, attended by groups from all over the Centre, runs a reading room where people can look at books, magazines and newspapers. Like the YMCA, this provides a very important service for the young unemployed who otherwise find it hard to fill in their time. Although the activities of the YMCA and Social Club are normally non-traditional (but not always as YMCA vehicles have occasionally been used to take women on gathering expeditions), young people who participate in these do not necessarily exclude themselves from traditional forms of entertainment and socialization, but also join in tribal ceremonies whenever their presence is required.

The Baptist Mission is still an important force in Yuendumu and now has a significant social and welfare role in addition to its original evangelistic function. The minister helps to administer both the Men's and Women's Museums, sells artefacts, and acts as a welfare liaison officer. Apart from conventional church meetings, which are attended by a core of around 100 Aborigines, the Yuendumu congregation have recently developed a series of traditionally performed corroborrees which portray biblical stories. These have been performed not only in Yuendumu but

also in other Warlpiri communities at Willowra, Warrabri and Lajamanu and as far away as Halls Creek and Darwin. Many participants are also important traditional ceremonial leaders, which suggests that the Yuendumu people have been able to fuse these two sets of beliefs, and, in the process, build a new religious basis for themselves.

Other business activities

Isolation, lack of resources and the creation of extreme feelings of dependency have inhibited the growth of independent business ventures in Yuendumu. Only three organizations, the Social Club, the Ngarliykirlangu Cattle Company and the Mining Company, generate an income, and none earn large profits. In all cases earnings are used primarily to pay wages and salaries of employees, and any surplus is spent on repair or replacement of equipment, improvement of facilities and other necessities. While most of the money earned by the Social Club comes directly from the pockets of Yuendumu residents, and hence only indirectly from government sources, both the Cattle Company and the Mining Company earn from external sources.

In the brief period since the takeover, Ngarliykirlangu Cattle Company has shown its determination to carry out its pastoral operations successfully. Ownership of the Company is vested in about 60 Aboriginal shareholders, most of whom are closely related to those men who, for years, have formed the backbone of the government stockcamp. This arrangement, which appears to be satisfactory from the point of view of Yuendumu residents, has been a cause for disagreement with DAA officials who consider that shares should be equally spread throughout the community. The desire by Company shareholders to base their operations at Ngarliykirlangu, an important site for some of their members, rather than Yuendumu suggests both that they wish to identify clearly with the traditional system of land ownership, and that they want to remove themselves from petty interferences which frequently arise in town. Location of a suitable source of water on the site should now enable this to happen.

Although the Company still employs a non-Aboriginal manager and part-time book-keeper (both formerly employed in these positions by DAA), its operation is primarily Aboriginal in character. The non-Aboriginal workers have spent several years at Yuendumu and neighbouring Mount

Doreen, and have established friendly and trustworthy relationships with Yuendumu people. They aim to provide help and advice as required, but not to dominate the decision-making process. Ultimately, as in surrounding properties (see Chapter 3) the stock on the Yuendumu Reserve is likely to level off at numbers considerably below those held in mid 1979 (about 2500 head), particularly as there has so far been little success in locating new water supplies.

Yuendumu Mining Company's original attempt to develop copper mining at Mount Hardy, north west of Yuendumu, proved unsuccessful because of the low quality of the ore and high costs of exploitation, coupled with a decline in world prices. Its subsequent efforts to set up quarrying and gravel operations have been hampered by fierce competition from large well-equipped companies able to offer low contract prices and, since their workforce is not part of the Yuendumu social system, to ensure that the project will progress with minimum interruption through absenteeism. Efforts to gain part of the contract for the sealing of the Tanami Road met with no success, although the recent agreement to provide gravel for the airstrip has reinforced the confidence of Company employees. Although lack of capital prevents the Mining Company from participating directly in mineral exploration, it does hold the mineral leases over considerable areas of Warlpiri land in the Ngalia Basin, and, through rent of these leases, has entered into agreements with several Australian and overseas based companies. These include Agip Australia and Afmeco Pty. Ltd. (French owned). Exploration in the vicinity of Yuendumu has so far revealed uranium oxide deposits within the Mount Doreen pastoral lease, and small amounts of tantalite and wolfram on Mount Allan. Recently one company, on satellite photograph evidence of the existence of geological structures in the Mount Allan/Napperby area, has applied for exploration licences for diamonds.

In April 1980 Yuendumu Mining Company decided to make an offer to the Australian Atomic Energy Commission for their uranium exploration interests on Mount Doreen. Their offer suggested the establishment of a separate company, Ngalia Energy Resources Pty. Ltd., whose shareholders in order of preference would be the traditional land-owners, Warlpiri, other Aborigines and other Northern Territory residents. These efforts all aim at Aboriginal control of mining in the vicinity of Yuendumu, so that the Warlpiri

people can reach satisfactory agreements on shares in the profits, and so that they can monitor the impact which mining will have on their society.

Financial problems encountered in carrying out the original pursuits of the Company - mining and exploration - have forced the Mining Company to seek other avenues to earn money. The most important of these are the sale of groceries, fuel and spare parts through the shop (60 per cent of the income earned during the September quarter, 1979) and the hire of machinery (the bull-dozer hire earned 24 per cent of income during the same period). The Company also carries out repairs and maintenance to private vehicles. These activities not only provide important services to the community, but also are an important source of paid employment.

EMPLOYMENT AND INCOME

With a relatively large population but limited economic base, Yuendumu's potential workforce far exceeds the present employment capacity. In October 1978 only 138 adults, or 19 per cent of the population aged 15 or over, were earning wages (Table 2.6).

Yuendumu Council workforce, which is responsible for basic urban services, was by far the largest employment group. Apart from key administrative workers, for example Municipal Officer, or Clerk in charge of Social Security, most Aboriginal council employees are unskilled or semi-skilled labourers, engaged in camp cleaning and firewood collection. Following complaints in 1978 that some camps received few services because none of their members were employed, this sector of the Council workforce was reorganized into six gangs, one for each camp and one for the urban centre. Each included male supervisors, drivers and wood cutters and female cleaners, all drawn from the camp in question. As a result the provision of services improved. Members of these gangs change fairly frequently, but replacements are easily obtained from other camp dwellers. Supervisors and drivers are likely to remain in the workforce for a longer time than labourers and cleaners.

Table 2.6

Aboriginal employment in Yuendumu, late 1978

	Males	Females	Total
Yuendumu Council	35	34	69
Yuendumu Housing Assoc.	12	-	12
Yuendumu Social Club	1	9	10
Cattle Company	11	-	11
Yuendumu Mining Co.	2	1 (p/t)	3
Education	7	13	20
Health	1	5	6
Police	1	-	1
YMCA	1	1 (p/t)	2
Other	2 (1 p/t)	2 (1 p/t)	4
Total	73	65	138
Employed/pop. 15+ (%)	21.5	16.6	18.9

Source: Community Records.

Most Yuendumu Housing Association employees are skilled or semi-skilled painters, builders and carpenters some of whom have previously worked outside the community. Apart from general maintenance, their work includes the transformation of Stage I Transitional houses into three room dwellings with power, water and sewage facilities. Recently they have also been demolishing obsolete structures, such as the Kingstrand shelters, and using the materials to erect water tanks and basic storage facilities at some of the outstations. This move has been welcomed by Yuendumu people who felt that the Housing Association should extend its operations beyond the conventional urban area.

Cattle Company and Mining Company employees, like those working for the Council and Housing Association, were paid largely from DAA grants. The stockmen, many of whom had been working in that capacity for many years, were permanent government employees, not subject to the insecurities faced by pastoral workers elsewhere, most of whom are only in seasonal employment. As noted earlier, the present financial problems of the Mining Company had drastically reduced the workforce, then confined to two

skilled mechanics and a part-time shop assistant.

Education and health employees, the majority of whom were women, are paid directly by the government departments concerned. Both groups include unskilled staff (cleaners, groundsmen etc.) and skilled and semi-skilled workers (teachers, teacher aides, literacy workers, health workers). Teaching and health work seem to be regarded by the community as primarily a female responsibility, and the Council normally nominate women to fill vacant positions in the clinic. All the more experienced teachers are also women, several of whom have attended some years of training at Batchelor College, near Darwin. Most Warlpiri men who took up teaching at an earlier period now work as administrators.

The Social Club workforce, paid from the receipts earned by the store, was also female dominated, and several of the workers, with some years of experience, had become expert in unpacking and sorting stock and operating the cash registers.

Other employment in Yuendumu was limited - one man acted as a caretaker and part-time prospector with an exploration company based on Mount Doreen land, one woman worked for the Baptist Mission, and the two museums had part-time caretakers. Altogether, 92 per cent of the workforce were employed by government funded organizations or by government departments.

The employment structure shown in Table 2.6 changes according to availability of funds for wages, casual jobs associated with special contracts, and seasonal demand. Figures for November 1977 show that the Council then employed eighty Aborigines and, since the community was still under government administration, also had a larger non-Aboriginal staff than in 1978. In late 1979 the workforce had to be drastically reduced because of lack of funds due to over-spending of the grant for the first part of 1979/80, but the blow fell entirely on the women, twenty two of whom lost their jobs. Lack of funds can also be accommodated by reducing the hours worked. At any one time, almost every employee of Yuendumu Council works a 30 hour rather than a 40 hour week. If this practice were to change, fewer people would be employed. At the same time the Mining Company had increased its staff because of its successful tender for gravel for the airstrip. The

Department of Health had also increased the number of its employees because of the agreement to train health workers for outstations. Cattle Company and Housing Association workforces remained similar to those of previous years although Cattle Company employees were no longer in government employment. Since the Yuendumu workforce is primarily concerned with basic service activities, it does not show marked seasonal fluctuation, a characteristic which distinguishes it from the workforce on cattle stations such as Willowra.

Participation in wage earning in Yuendumu varies according to age, and sex and is unequally distributed among the various camps which make up the settlement. Almost 60 per cent of adult men and over 80 per cent of adult women did not belong to the labour force in 1978 (i.e. were neither working nor registered with the Commonwealth Employment Service and receiving unemployment benefits (Table 2.7). Discounting the oldest age group (many of whom were in receipt of pensions) the lowest level of participation in wage labour occurred among those aged between 15 and 24. In other words, while the unemployment problem severely affects all adult Aborigines at Yuendumu, it is more serious for the young than for others. Young people not only fail to get jobs but they are also less likely to be receiving unemployment benefits. Youth employment is, in non-Aboriginal terms, one of the most important problems facing the Yuendumu community. Unemployment occurs for a variety of reasons:- among Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal leaders and employers young people have a reputation for unreliability; they are heavily involved in initiation and other traditional learning experiences during their early teens, and, having completed six to eight years of schooling, they have formal educational qualifications higher than they themselves feel to be necessary for labouring jobs. The changing lifestyle of Yuendumu may also have prevented them from acquiring skills which might otherwise have been valuable. Seven of the eleven men who work for the Cattle Company are over 45, and few young men have worked as stockmen.

The age structure of the female labour force shows similar characteristics to that of the male, in that the highest numbers of non-participants are in the youngest age-groups (Table 2.7). However the reasons are different. Young women marry relatively early and quickly become involved in child rearing. Outside jobs such as health work

require full-time commitment, with work outside normal hours, and are more suitable for those in a position to share their family responsibilities with others. Hence all female health workers have grown-up families. Teaching requires similar involvement, but since it also requires a minimum level of formal education, teachers come predominantly from younger age groups and several have young children. Yuendumu Council employees, however, are older women whose children are growing up. In general, although the majority of young women at Yuendumu have not joined the workforce, the frustrations which they suffer are less severe than for their male counterparts because many have assumed time-consuming family responsibilities.

The relationship between access to wage employment and living situation in Yuendumu is to be expected because only those with reliable sources of income are able to obtain better quality housing. From the sample of people individually interviewed in September/December 1978 (28 per cent of the Yuendumu population) it is clear that the proportion of adults in work was highest among those living in conventional housing in the urban core and lowest among the people in Ngangini and Manja Camps (Table 2.8). Other camps where a high percentage of respondents were working were Purlapa and the small temporary camp near the Power House (Fig. 2.3). This also reflects the operation of family networks within the employment structure. Certain types of job, offering relatively high status and control of resources, are passed between related family members rather than being equally available for all. It is difficult to examine the operation of such networks in isolation as it is common for an entire extended family to have made a definite commitment to acquisition of formal education, and hence of skills which fit them for high status jobs. Thus, while all wage earners in Manja and Ngangini, were unskilled labourers, many of those who lived in the town, Janganpa, Purlapa and Wakurlpa camps were teachers, health workers, clerical and administrative officials and store operators. It is tempting to attribute the disadvantaged position of residents of Manja and Ngangini also to their tribal origins - Pintubi and Anmatjirra rather than Warlpiri.

Although the social stratification indicated by these distinctions undoubtedly exists, it has not yet raised insurmountable barriers within the Aboriginal community. Young teachers and their families move freely between their three bedroom weatherboard houses and the humpies where

Table 2.7

Labour force and age-group, Yuendumu, October 1978

Age group	Employed (1)			Unemployment benefit (2)			Labour force (1) + (2)			Total population (1) + (2) + (3)			Not in labour force (a) (% of total)		
	M	F	T	M	F	T	M	F	T	M	F	T	M	F	T
	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	No.	No.	No.	%	%	%
15-24	19.2	20.0	19.6	41.4	22.2	39.2	30.1	20.3	26.7	135	133	268	69.1	88.7	78.4
25-34	26.0	30.8	28.3	22.9	-	20.2	24.5	27.0	25.3	77	88	165	54.5	77.3	66.7
35-44	24.7	33.8	29.0	15.7	55.6	20.3	20.3	36.5	25.8	46	56	102	37.0	51.8	45.1
45-59	26.0	15.4	21.0	20.0	22.2	20.3	23.1	16.2	20.7	45	79	124	26.7	84.8	63.7
60+	4.1	-	2.2	-	-	-	2.1	-	1.4	37	36	73	91.9	100.0	95.9
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0						
No. in sample	73	65	138	70	9	79	143	74	217	340	392	732	58.0	81.1	70.4

(a) Receiving neither wages nor unemployment benefit.

Source: Young, fieldwork, 1978.

Table 2.8

Population, employment and incomes in Yuendumu, late 1978 (sample interviewed)

Section (no. of households)	M/F Ratio	Population			Total	Employment				Income \$/capita/fnt.
		0-14	15-59	60+		M	F	T	% employed 15-59	
Town (4)	1.00	6	10	-	16	4	2 (1p/t)	6	60	93
Manja (13)	0.4	23	35	6	64	3	5	8	23	62
Ngangini (14)	0.93	35	33	13	81	3	3	6	18	52
Janganpa (8)	1.03	22	31	10	63	9	6	15	48	82
Power House (4)	0.9	8	7	4	19	2	2	4	57	73
Purlapa (7)	1.3	22	23	1	46	3 (1pt)	9	12	52	85
Wakuripa (9)	1.4	14	27	2	43	5	5	10	37	67

Source: Young, fieldwork, 1978.

their parents, aunts and uncles live, and it is not uncommon for families to move rapidly from one living environment to another depending on their economic circumstances. It remains to be seen whether this type of social mobility can be maintained in future.

Wages are not the only source of money income in Yuendumu. Since employment opportunities are so limited, many people derive their entire cash income from Social Security payments, and hence have considerably smaller sums available for the support of themselves and their dependents. The lowest incomes in the community are found in those sectors with fewest wage earners (Table 2.8). In October 1978 the number of adults receiving pensions and benefits exceeded those earning wages (22 per cent compared to 19 per cent, Table 2.9). The remainder of the population (59 per cent) received no official monetary income apart from, for women, monthly child endowment cheques. Thus more than half of Aboriginal adults resident in Yuendumu have to depend on the generosity of their relatives and friends for money to buy food, clothing and other necessities. While the sharing of these resources is an integral part of the social system, vital to the maintenance of status and consolidation of alliances and relationships, the amount available for redistribution, as indicated by the low per capita income, is clearly less than required.

The preceding discussion focuses entirely on wage-earning employment and, with the exception of the part-time museum curators, is concerned only with occupations essentially non-Aboriginal in origin. Both wage earners and non-wage earners also spend a considerable part of their time carrying out tasks related to the practice of Aboriginal law and custom. Ceremonial preparations sometimes fill entire days and nights and the schooling of young initiates may require those adults in charge to remain for long periods in seclusion. Hence this type of work is bound to disrupt the day to day servicing of Yuendumu. This difficulty is overcome to some extent by planning major ceremonies such as initiations to coincide with holidays. In December 1978 the ceremony introduced from Balgo began in earnest on the day the school and Housing Association staff began their leave. During the next week the Council operated with a skeleton staff and both Social Club and clinic worked on a loose rota system, with the service being carried out by whoever was free. Functions which occur without warning, such as mortuary ceremonies, cannot be

fitted in in this way, but none of the employment organizations in Yuendumu would penalise staff for carrying out obligations of this sort.

Greater Aboriginal control of the town's affairs has undoubtedly resulted in more sympathetic understanding of people's needs. Some non-Aborigines have begun to perceive that, in Aboriginal terms, these activities are work, and are a more important form of work than emptying garbage tins or carrying out repairs to the Council's vehicle fleet. Although people at Yuendumu have not so far suggested that Aboriginal work of this type should be formally recognized, and paid for, this topic has been raised elsewhere²⁰ and it has been argued that, in communities where the CDEP program operates, participation in ceremonies should be counted as a legitimate monetary activity. In effect those who 'own' ceremonies and teach others the songs and dances associated with them are often paid by those who benefit from the performance, but in this case money is basically replacing other media of compensation which would have been used in the past.

Table 2.9 suggests that the service provided by the Department of Social Security does not reach a considerable number of Yuendumu residents. This is due to a variety of problems - poor communication between departmental officials and would-be recipients, because the bureaucracy fails to accommodate itself adequately to the special needs of illiterate and semi-literate clients; the fact that the department has been very short of fieldworkers in the Central Australian region; and the inflexibility and inappropriateness of rules and regulations applied by the Department, particularly with regard to the work test²¹ for unemployment benefits. Other reasons are that some people are unwilling to apply for benefits, because they feel shame by doing so, and that some leaders in the community do not consider that young unmarried men should receive money from this source.

20. A review of the CDEP program (DAA,1978e:3) mentions this as a suitable strategy for remote tribal communities.

21. Applicants for unemployment benefits are required to prove that they are actively seeking work, a futile restriction in places like Yuendumu. Such regulations are now applied less rigidly than in the past in Aboriginal communities.

Table 2.9
Sources of cash income in Yuendumu, October 1978
 (People aged 15+)

	Males		Females		Total	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Wages	73	21	65	17	138	19
Unemployment benefit	70	21	9	2	79	11
Other Social Security (a)	31	9	50	13	81	11
None(b)	166	49	268	69	434	59
Total	340	100	392	100	732	100

(a) Age pension, widow's pension, invalid pension, supporting mother's benefit.

(b) Many women receive child endowment.

Source: Social Security records, Yuendumu.

Table 2.10
Yuendumu community income, October 1978
 (\$ per fortnight)

	Amount (\$)	% of total
Wages	31,357	57
Social Security		
Unemployment benefit	11,650)	
Pensions	8,646)	43
Child endowment	3,196)	
Total	54,849	100
Cash income per capita	\$47	

Source: Young, fieldwork, 1978.

In general, the main difficulty lies with unemployment benefits; most who are eligible for other types of pension receive what is due to them. Women face a different type of problem. Distribution of some welfare payments in non-Aboriginal society assumes that the wife is a dependent of her husband; hence unemployment benefits include an

allowance for the support of wife and children. However, in Aboriginal society, man and wife remain economically independent in most, though not all respects and, although the means to subsistence has changed, this feeling persists. Thus there is no guarantee that the wife will receive a share of the unemployment benefit cheque, and yet, unless her husband agrees, she cannot receive part of that cheque in her own name. This difficulty does not arise with age or invalid pensions, where the wives receive separate allowances.

Since such a high proportion of Yuendumu adults have no source of cash income, overall community incomes are low (Table 2.10). Fifty-seven per cent of the per capita fortnightly income of \$47 comes from wage earning, which shows that Yuendumu is less dependent on social security payments than some other Central Desert communities, (Willowra in early 1979 derived 82 per cent of its income from pensions and benefits) (Chapter 3). Comparison with Anderson's figures (1976:9-10) suggests that dependence on social security at Yuendumu has increased. He found that only 16 per cent of the community income (then \$29 per capita per fortnight) came from that source. Although his figures show that the workforce has decreased in size²² (164 in 1975 and 138 in 1978) the main reason for the change is easier access to unemployment benefits. In 1975 only ten people received these payments while the equivalent figure for October 1978 was 79.²³ The per capita income for Yuendumu was considerably higher than that of Willowra in January 1979 (\$33), but during the stockwork season these two Warlpiri groups would be receiving almost exactly the same amount of money. This income is well below the estimated averages for both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal population in 1976 (\$71 and \$140 per capita per fortnight respectively (Treadgold, 1980:4)). The level of poverty indicated, which

22. Due to the winding down and closure of some government sponsored enterprises, e.g. the garden, the communal kitchens, etc.

23. Peterson (1977:138-41) obtained figures for Docker River, Warburton and Amata of 77 per cent, 14 per cent and 69 per cent respectively for wages and other non-social security incomes in 1970. The relative insignificance of social security payments at Docker River and Amata at that time can also be attributed to lack of access to unemployment benefits.

shows itself in low levels of living and poor nutrition, provides part of the explanation for the chronic health problems still suffered by Yuendumu people. Although most families have few overhead expenses for housing and basic amenities, they all have to pay high prices for food and clothing, and it cannot be assumed that subsistence production contributes much to their sustenance.

Cash incomes within Yuendumu obviously vary according to type of participation in wage employment. Fluctuations in size and composition of specific groups within Yuendumu and its satellite outstations, rapid turnover in some sectors of the workforce, and variations in the amounts of unemployment benefit received, all hinder analysis of income differences. Nevertheless, some trends are apparent. Outstation dwellers at Yuendumu have no access to wage jobs and, at present, none of their plans for income generation have been significantly realized. A few older men make handicrafts but rely on the limited market of Yuendumu for sales; Jila is unlikely to be re-established as a cattle station, although the concept of a killer herd has potential if the population stabilizes; gardens, on anything but a minor subsistence level, are unlikely to have any success; and other ideas, such as taming feral camels from around Nyirrpi and Ngarna, would face many problems. Under these circumstances, outstations depend on social security payments. As Table 2.2 shows, their fortnightly incomes in late 1978 ranged from \$29 to \$90 per capita. In Yarripilangu, the poorest group, only one of the three elderly couples who formed the camp core at that time qualified for age pensions, and neither of the other couples had any source of income. They depended heavily on help received from their relatives who visited at weekends. Most of this help came in the form of food, whether purchased from the store or game killed during the journey from Yuendumu. At the same time, several residents of Nyirrpi were receiving unemployment benefits. In contrast, their fellow Warlpiri at Jurlpungu derived little cash from this source because, for a variety of reasons, they had failed to complete the monthly forms and the issue of their cheques had ceased.

Income variations also occurred within sections of Yuendumu (Table 2.8). The sample surveys show income ranges from \$52 to \$93 per capita per fortnight, and correspond exactly to the number of wage earners in each group. While the totals cannot be compared to the community average of

\$47 (because of problems of locating respondents, the sample shows a definite bias in that, although it covered only 28 per cent of the population, it included 44 per cent of wage earners), the relative rank of each section is probably valid. Ngangini, with a considerable number of relatively unsophisticated Pintubi families with poor access either to higher status jobs or to information about how to apply for other forms of income support, was the poorest, while people who lived in conventional town houses were the richest. As with outstations, the incomes of town sections are not used only to support the population living in that group but are redistributed to relatives residing elsewhere, in some cases outside Yuendumu altogether. Some of the income received at Yuendumu undoubtedly finds its way to the Warlpiri camp at Ilperle Tyathe, on the outskirts of Alice Springs.

EXPENDITURE

In October 1978 approximately 80 per cent of Yuendumu's community income went to the Social Club store for the purchase of food, clothing, petrol and other items such as tobacco, rifles, and radios. A further \$10,000 (9 per cent) went to the Yuendumu Mining Company store, mostly for groceries (64 per cent) and petrol. The remaining ten per cent of income was used for paying rents, buying alcohol and cars, and for incidental expenses such as picture shows. Bank deposits amounted to over \$14,000, but were exceeded by withdrawals of almost \$15,000, and thus did not represent an item of investment that month.

As the main retail centre for a substantial population, Yuendumu store has a sufficiently large stock turnover to allow a variety of lines to be carried. Nevertheless most people spend much of their income on basic food needs - flour, bread, tea, sugar, tinned and fresh meat (Table 2.11). Carbonated cold drink, as in Willowra (Chapter 3) has also come to be regarded as a necessity, and is carried on most hunting expeditions and accompanies other social occasions. Certain varieties of these basic products are more popular than others - for example, corned beef is almost always preferred to other types of tinned meat - and from time to time the store management deliberately concentrates on providing those lines. The pattern of food purchases has changed since 1970, when, according to Middleton and Francis (1976:159-163), a far higher proportion was spent on sugar and tinned meat; carbonated

drink, in contrast, was much less significant. This change is almost certainly related to the rise in income.²⁴

Table 2.11

Yuendumu Social Club store expenditure, October 1978

	<u>% of total spent</u>
Flour/bread	7.8
Tea	1.3
Sugar	1.3
Tinned meat/fish	9.6
Fresh meat	4.2
Soft drink/juice	10.5
Other food	20.8
Cigarettes/tobacco	3.0
Soap	3.9
Other (clothing, petrol, (a) etc.	37.6
<u>Total</u>	<u>100.0</u>

(a) Only 4 per cent in October 1978. The proportion is usually higher but the pump was out-of-order and the Mining Company had a sales monopoly for part of that month.

Source: Yuendumu Store Records.

In 1970 only 21 per cent of the money used for flour and bread was used to buy bread, whereas in 1978, 72 per cent of this component was used for bread. In terms of nutrition, the 4,000 kg of flour bought in October 1978 provided more protein and a greater intake of energy than the 5,000 loaves of bread, at about a third of the cost. The shift to bread also reflects improvements in transport and in refrigeration facilities at Yuendumu store, where it is now possible to stock sufficiently large amounts to maintain almost constant supplies. Many Yuendumu people have now become so accustomed to bread that they would find it hard to return to damper.

24. Peterson (1977:136-46) gives fortnightly incomes ranging from \$4.6 to \$14.4 per capita for four Central Australian communities in 1970. Anderson (1976) calculated the 1975 per capita income in Yuendumu as \$29.

Comparative analysis of the food buying patterns and nutritional intake of Yuendumu and Willowra residents cannot be made in detail because no figures are available for Yuendumu's second retail outlet, the Mining Company store. Nevertheless superficial examination reveals some contrasts which must affect the Aboriginal diet. Yuendumu people appear to consume less flour and bread, sugar and carbonated drinks than Willowra people, and more fresh fruit. Their meat intake, both tinned and fresh, was almost equal. It can be assumed that, to some extent, Yuendumu people now eat other products in place of some flour and sugar, and thus probably have a more varied diet than people at Willowra. Hence some of the nutrient deficiencies which apparently occur at Willowra may be less marked in Yuendumu. For example, the basic foodstuffs bought in Yuendumu in October 1978 provided 62 per cent of the recommended intake of Vitamin A, while Willowra people only received 13 per cent of their recommended requirement (Chapter 3). This can be explained by higher consumption of milk, eggs, margarine (a necessary accompaniment to the large amounts of bread purchased), and orange juice in Yuendumu. However the advantages gained by eating these foods must to some extent be offset by greater consumption of alcohol, certainly a significant component of the diet of some Yuendumu men.

Expenditure on food and other products varies according to time and income. Pay and cheque receipt days, and those immediately following, are buying periods while at other times only a few purchases are made. Examination of the purchases made by two women, both employed by Yuendumu Council as casual labourers, shows that, during a fortnight in early December 1978, more than half of their store expenditure occurred on one or two days. These buying periods followed receipt of pay, although in this example a four day break, caused by participation in a major ceremony, took place before the money was spent. At least 60 per cent of the cash which each woman spent on food was used to buy bread, tinned and fresh meat and cold drink or cordial. However the two differed in the remainder of purchases. While both bought considerable amounts of fresh fruit, one spent most of the remainder on tea, sugar and biscuits while the other bought eggs, margarine and fresh vegetables as well. Individual variations such as these, ultimately a matter of taste and past experience as well as a product of income, cannot be predicted. Products such as eggs and vegetables, which can provide such important nutrient supplements to the basic Yuendumu diet, are the very foods

to be omitted by poorer families.

Yuendumu store carries a wide range of clothing and footwear for all age groups and that, along with blankets and bedding, accounts for over two-thirds of the final category in Table 2.11. The remainder is spent on electrical goods, household items such as buckets and billycans and equipment such as rifles, axes, saws and hammers. Rifles, which cost between \$80 and \$100 each, are in very great demand for hunting and are always bought as soon as they appear. Petrol is an important item of expenditure at Yuendumu. Since the consumption is sufficiently great to warrant bulk transport, the cost is subsidized and is only marginally above that in Alice Springs. Community purchases amount to around 5,500 litres per week, or about seven per cent of the total income.

Comparison of the 1978 expenditure patterns with those described by Anderson (1976:11) in September 1975 show a broadly similar pattern, with the exception of petrol sales which are now more significant. This reflects the recent increase in car ownership in Yuendumu. The amount spent on cars varies greatly, and is hard to estimate. Between September and November 1978 about a dozen cars came to Yuendumu, at a total cost of around \$13,000, or four per cent of the community income. Car ownership is both a benefit and a source of concern to the individuals involved. It allows the freedom of movement essential for carrying out many practices highly valued by Warlpiri - visiting friends and relatives at outstations and other settlements, going on hunting and gathering expeditions, and taking part in ceremonies. However, while it remains roadworthy, the car will be under constant demand from many people with legitimate claims on the owner, and the rapid turnover in drivers, of varying skills and sometimes inebriated, leads to very high levels of wear and tear. It has been estimated that, in 1978, a newly acquired car (usually second-hand) was unlikely to last longer than six weeks in Yuendumu.

Cash remaining after purchase of essential food and clothing, basic consumer goods, petrol and cars and payments of debts or loans to friends is used for gambling or buying alcohol. Officially Yuendumu has retained its status as a 'dry' community and all drinkers were supposed to have permits. In 1978 this rule was ignored, and alcohol was frequently consumed within the community. The nearest sources of liquor - Alice Springs, Rabbit Flat, Glen Helen

and Aileron - are all over 200 km away, and thus alcohol reached Yuendumu periodically and in large quantities rather than as a continual flow. Some car-owners made a considerable income from buying flagons of cheap wine and sherry and reselling them in Yuendumu at about 300 per cent profit, (sometimes \$20 per flagon), a price which people are willing to pay because of their physical isolation from this commodity. When liquor is brought into a camp it is consumed very quickly, usually only by the men, and the resultant arguments and brawls are very disturbing for the women, children and old people, who often move temporarily to other camps. Occasionally serious fights occur which sometimes aggravate festering social disagreements, for example arguments over wrong skin marriages, and eventually lead to full scale settlement disputes involving women as well as men. At that time, many Yuendumu leaders condemned drinking, and acknowledged it as a major reason for the outstation movement, but they rarely took definite steps to stop it, apart from occasionally intercepting large consignments before they reached camp, a measure which is only temporarily effective. Altogether, they are well aware that excessive drinking reflects the social problems which people experience - the pressures of living in close proximity to unrelated groups, boredom, the necessity of belonging to both the Aboriginal and the European world - as well as providing a status-giving medium of exchange within the traditional system of reciprocity. Under those circumstances it is very difficult for them to take a firm stand on this problem. Since 1978 visiting officers of the Liquor Licensing Board of Northern Territory have met Yuendumu leaders to discuss whether the community should in practice be declared 'dry'. In late 1979 the Council adopted a policy of controlling drinking through a permit system but in 1980 further discussed the possibility of banning it altogether. Because of a recent spate of alcohol-related fatal car accidents many people are more favourably disposed to such a policy than before.

Gambling through card playing is a favourite pastime for both men and women. Pay days are followed by intensive card sessions, sometimes lasting twenty four hours or longer, at which stakes vary according to the resources of the players. Thus people with money to invest, and intent on making a large profit, deliberately choose high value games while others may be content to play with only a few dollars in circulation. It is not uncommon for some Yuendumu men to visit Willowra for the purpose of playing

cards because people in that community are reputed to favour playing with high stakes. This has been attributed by Yuendumu people to the lack of cash expenditure in that community on alcohol. Gambling is a mechanism for income redistribution, sometimes used purposely by low income families to accumulate an independent means of support. Much of the cash invested probably eventually finds its way to Yuendumu store although, when people win large sums, they sometimes make immediate purchases of cars. Gambling profits are also used to buy alcohol.

Outstation people have different expenditure patterns from those who have remained in the central settlement. None of the Yuendumu outstations are located in areas with dependable food resources and thus store food is a necessity. This is obtained either as a single bulk load, based on a community order and paid for from a communal community account, or bought from the itinerant store truck (see above). Since access to this service is limited, outstation people spend more of their money on basic necessities than people in Yuendumu. For example, in a bulk order for Jurlpungu in November 1978, flour and bread accounted for 16 per cent of the bill, tea for 12 per cent and meat (tinned and fresh) for 33 per cent. Only 6 per cent was spent on soft drink. Equivalent figures for Yuendumu store were 13 per cent, 2 per cent, 23 per cent and 18 per cent. While the difference in tea consumption partly reflects bulk buying (with outstations purchasing tea in 60-packet cartons, which last for a long time), it is also a product of access. Tea lasts longer than soft drink. For outstation people, cold drinks are one of the luxuries to be consumed on coming to town.

Alcohol is unlikely to be a main item of expenditure in outstations, but petrol, spare tyres and other necessities for car maintenance can be costly. In addition campers need tarpaulins for making weatherproof shelters in the summer and rifles, axes and other equipment for settlement construction. Unlike those in the central community, they cannot expect to borrow these quickly from others.

YUENDUMU - PRESENT AND FUTURE PROSPECTS

Yuendumu's socio-economic situation is, in non-Aboriginal terms, unpromising. The community inevitably suffers from all the problems inherent in its outback situation-poor communications, high living costs, limited social attractions - and because of its location in a region of limited material resources, its prospects for future development are unsure. In addition its Aboriginal residents are still attempting to establish a lifestyle which, through those elements of the Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal worlds which it includes, will most closely approximate to their own desires. At times these two components of Yuendumu life appear to be quite incompatible. Yet, compared to the past, Yuendumu's situation has clearly improved. The Warlpiri people now feel that they have made significant advances towards internal political and social self-management, firmly based on strong traditional foundations in Aboriginal law, customary practice and maintenance of links with the land. Their Community Council performs a vital role in these achievements.

Yuendumu Council, whose members are appointed by consensus to represent all main resident groups, assumed responsibility for settlement administration after the withdrawal of DAA officials in 1978. Most councillors are middle-aged men who, although they have had limited opportunities for formal education, have had extensive and varied experience of working with Europeans both in Warlpiri country and in more distant areas, for example as cattle drovers, trackers and army drivers. They also, because of the age-group to which they belong, have important positions in ceremonial life. Thus they can act effectively as intermediaries between their own and other extended families and between the Aboriginal community and the outside world. The handful of younger councillors and council executives, who are more highly schooled than their elders, provide invaluable help in dealing with complex paper work and other procedures demanded by government departments, and in relieving older councillors of some of the pressures which at times place a considerable burden upon them.

With strong Council control and European colleagues who are less paternalistic than in former times, Yuendumu people now feel that the community belongs to them. Their aspirations are based on maintaining the strength of Aboriginal tradition, with as much freedom of movement as

possible. The granting of their Land Rights claim has brought this into focus and seems to have fostered a feeling of Tanami Desert solidarity, shown recently in meetings at Lajamanu which have led to the formation of a Central Desert Land Trust (Centralian Advocate, 6.9.79). This council, with members drawn from all Aboriginal communities concerned in the Warlpiri land claim, will administer the enormous territory which they have been granted. The development of Yuendumu's outstations, inextricably linked to the achievement of land rights, is a further indication of people's aspirations. While many will not be attracted by this lifestyle, there is no doubt that a considerable number of people derive great social and cultural benefit from re-establishing themselves in their own tribal territory.

Unfortunately, the strong Warlpiri socio-cultural foundation at Yuendumu is not matched by economic independence. The town owes its survival to direct financial support granted by the Northern Territory and Federal governments and it is unlikely that this frustrating situation will change markedly in the future. Dependence on government funding brings many problems. While recipient organizations obviously must account for their grants of public money, the budgeting procedures which they are required to follow are sometimes too inflexible to allow for changing circumstances. Thus, for example, Yuendumu Council cannot make a rapid decision to dispose of obsolete equipment and use the funds for another purpose; permission must first be sought, and is normally received only after prolonged negotiations with the funding departments. Delays resulting from such procedures are frustrating for everybody but are particularly difficult for Aborigines, with little previous exposure to bureaucratic methods and values to understand. They have created special difficulties for those Yuendumu groups who have been attempting to establish outstations. Because of problems of isolation and aridity, several outstations have not developed as planned, and have either misused or failed to use the funds allocated. Under recent policies, government funding has been more specifically tied to stated needs, such as bores, tents or tools, but delays in providing these has prevented people from making their desired moves. Poor communication links contribute to these delays. One of Yuendumu's prime needs is for adequate telephone and two-way radio contact with administrative centres and other scattered Aboriginal communities. This would greatly increase the flexibility in funding allocation.

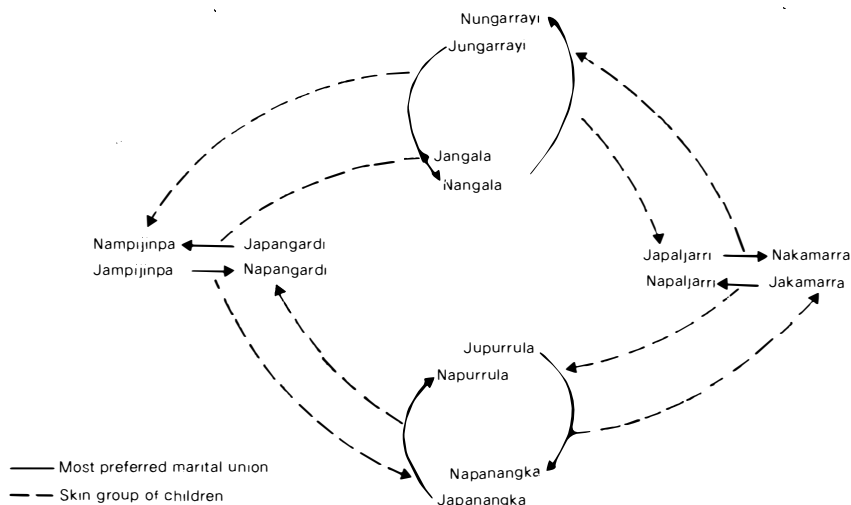
Dependence on government funding can be decreased only through encouragement of independent organizations in Yuendumu. However, since these organizations all require initial financial support from the Government, they are still unable to carry out their own plans without referral to donors. Thus, before August 1979, the government-owned Yuendumu Cattle Company was not permitted to muster stock or repair and replace equipment without government permission. With the assumption of ownership, all pastoral operations came under Aboriginal control but as long as government support continues, some decisions made by the Company will be subject to prior external scrutiny. Nevertheless the Company now has the opportunity to generate income independently. The Mining Company has been less fortunate, and current attempts to earn money through contracts have often been frustrated by inability to compete with larger organizations on an equal basis. Both of these Companies are essential to the Yuendumu community because, since they are Aboriginal-owned, they provide a demonstration of Warlpiri determination to enter into a sector of the non-Aboriginal world which provides a commodity now necessary for survival - money.

While Yuendumu must continue to accept its dependent situation, some measures could be taken to relieve its impact on the people. For example, although outside contractors might provide more attractive tenders for works contracts in the town, Yuendumu organizations should be favoured. If contracts are too large, more determined efforts should be made to ensure that Yuendumu people are employed wherever possible. In this way the funds allocated for new projects, such as the recent reconstruction of the school, enter the Yuendumu community in the form of wages paid to the workforce. Furthermore, Aboriginal employees would have the opportunity to increase their skills. If this can be extended to management training, then the advantage to the community would be great. This field requires much greater emphasis from every employing organization at present operating in the town. While attempts to use local human resources are perhaps more important, much greater efforts should also be made to use other local resources. Thus plans to provide some of the community's fresh meat supplies from Yuendumu cattle deserve encouragement. As with labour, there would inevitably be problems in guaranteeing supplies, but these should be dealt with as and if they arise, not presented as counter arguments for starting the project in the first place.

Ultimately all outside organizations involved in supporting Aboriginal-run businesses or administration organizations should demonstrate greater confidence in these bodies to carry out their jobs effectively and should not be so concerned with the methods by which these jobs are done.

Any measure which decreases economic dependence at Yuendumu will help to alleviate some of the more pressing problems which the community now faces. Low income and unemployment are perhaps the two greatest concerns. While it would be untrue to state that all adult men at Yuendumu want to be employed as wage earners in occupations which are essentially non-Aboriginal in character, many younger men need the opportunity to work, both to relieve their boredom and to provide themselves with an independent means of support. Unemployment must be relieved at the source - Yuendumu - because, with lack of opportunities and the social problems which arise for most Aborigines forced to leave their tribal communities, migration provides no viable alternative. Increased employment should take much greater account of the tasks which Aboriginal people perceive as necessary to maintain their lifestyle, and should certainly incorporate many jobs, such as outstation support, which currently receive no formal recognition. Improvements in employment opportunities and in the delivery of social security benefits would then lead to an increase in minimum incomes which, for individual Aboriginal families in Yuendumu, is probably the greatest worry.

APPENDIX



The above diagram represents the relationships between Walpiri kinship groups. There are eight groups, each with male and female equivalent terms; male terms begin with J (e.g. Jakamarra) and female terms with N (Nakamarra). The groups are linked according to strict marriage customs and children assigned to their relevant group. For example, Jakamarra should only marry Napaljarri and their children would be Jupurrula and Napurrula; Nakamarra should marry Japaljarri and their children would be Jungarrayi and Nungarrayi. Male groups are linked in father/son pairs (e.g. Jakamarra/Jupurrula) which are repeated every two generations and it is those pairs which form the major land owning categories. Thus Willowra country is owned by Japaljarri/Jungarrayi.

Chapter 3

Willowra: cattle station and community

Willowra, which takes its name from Wirliyajarrayi, an adjacent waterhole and important dreaming site of the Lander Warlpiri people, is a pastoral property about 350 km northwest of Alice Springs. Since 1973, when it was bought from its former owner, Mr E.Parkinson, with money allocated through the Capital Fund for Aboriginal Enterprises, it has been operated by the Aboriginal group belonging to that country and now has a population of around 270. The Willowra community is almost entirely Warlpiri in origin and forms a close-knit and stable group, still heavily involved in practices influenced by traditional beliefs. Ownership of Willowra has given the people control of their own country and its resources and freedom to carry out important religious ceremonies associated with it.

For the Warlpiri, this is more vital than the cash earning opportunities which exist through participation in the cattle industry. Pastoral operations, a potentially lucrative source of earnings with current high beef prices, are of secondary importance. Thus, while Willowra's productive opportunities are, in non-Aboriginal terms, superior to those available in large settlements on former reserves, for example Yuendumu or Warrabri, they are not necessarily realized to their fullest capacity. Even if the property reached maximum commercial productivity in Western economic terms, the financial returns would not be sufficient to support such a large population. Therefore government support will always be necessary. As far as the Lander Warlpiri are concerned, Willowra's success lies in its social and cultural stability, features which are all too rare in other Aboriginal communities of similar size. Granting of freehold title to the land in 1980 has set the seal on this achievement.

THE COUNTRY AND ITS HISTORY

Willowra pastoral lease covers an area of 4,885 sq km, bounded to the west and north by the Tanami Desert Wildlife Sanctuary, and unalienated crown land (much of which was granted to the Warlpiri after hearing of their land claim in 1978), and to the south and east by Mount Barkly and Anningie stations (Fig 3.1). Most of Willowra country is flat and featureless although granitic and quartzite outcrops near its boundaries form prominent landmarks in Mount Windajong and Mount Barkly. The property is cut by the Lander River which drains northwards from the Reynolds Range. While the Lander normally has little surface water, apart from in a few exceptionally deep waterholes such as Wirliyajarrayi and Boomerang Hole, 50 km downstream from the homestead, it flows extremely fast after prolonged heavy rain and near the settlement can form a braided stream over 500m wide. In this semi-arid region, where the annual average rainfall is only 265 mm, such conditions are unusual but when they occur they have an important impact on the community because both road and air communications are disrupted. Away from the Lander, surface water is very limited and stock are watered from a series of bores, most of which were sunk in Mr Parkinson's time. The unpredictability of Willowra's rainfall, and hence water supplies, has caused marked variations in the stock-carrying capacity of the lease. During the 1960s drought the property was at one time carrying less than 1,500 beasts while in early 1979, after a prolonged 'wet' period it has been estimated that it supported more than 10,000 head of cattle.

The Willowra plains, with their soils derived from aeolian sands, have a vegetation cover of grasses, predominantly spinifex, and small trees and bushes, mostly acacia species. Large eucalypts, such as ghost and river gums, only occur near the Lander or in other areas where surface water is available. While the selective grazing habits of cattle must have changed the natural vegetation, Willowra country is still rich in many kinds of vegetable foods which were traditional staples for the Aboriginal population. These include wild yams (*Ipomoea* sp.), bush tomatoes (*Solanum* sp.), and a variety of tree fruits and berries such as the bush orange (*Capparis* sp.). It also supports kangaroo, plain turkey (bustard), emu and several species of goanna, all of which are hunted as prized items of food.

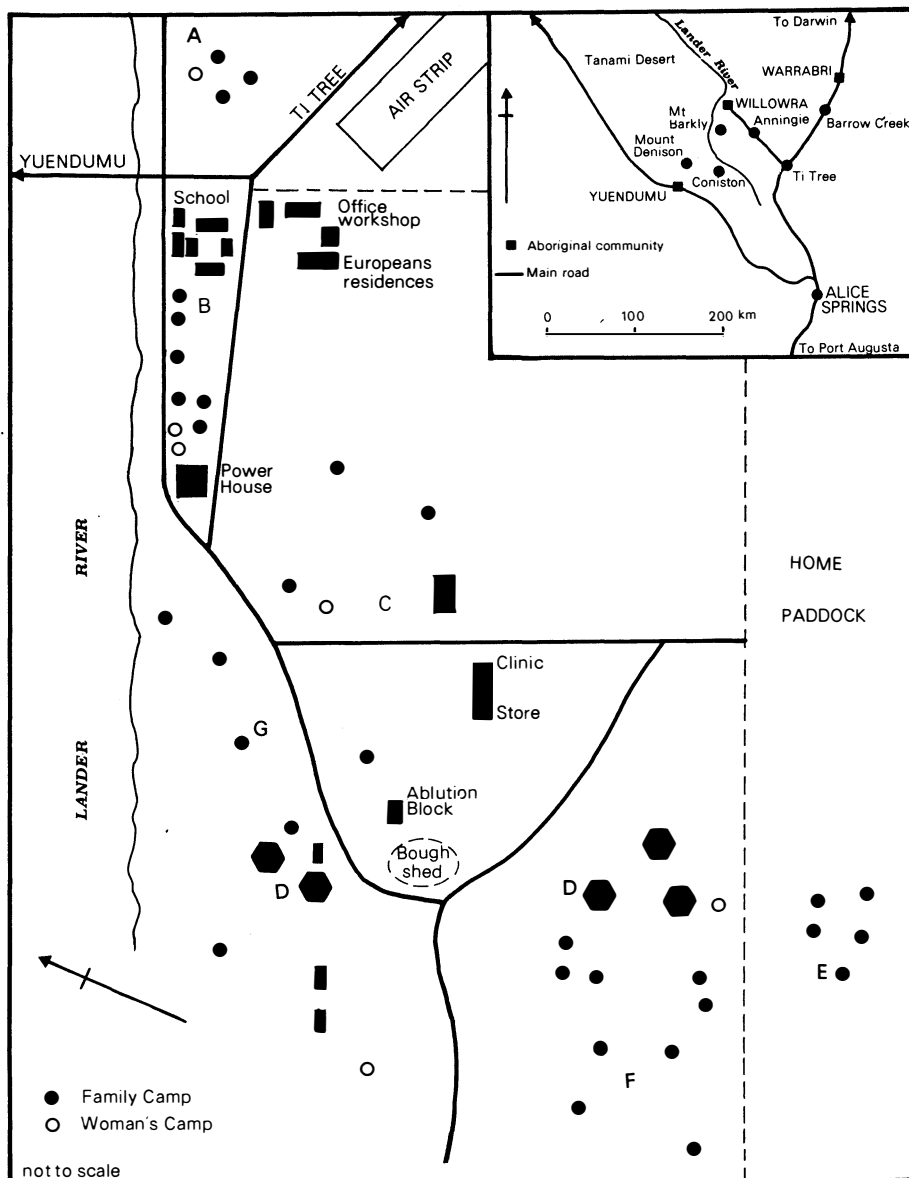


Fig 3.1 Willowra: location and settlement, 1979

The history of contact between Willowra people and non-Aboriginal explorers, pastoralists and prospectors dates from the journeys of Stuart (1862), Gosse (1873) and Davidson (1900), all of whom comment on the abundant evidence of Aboriginal occupation of the Lander area. As has been documented in the submissions for the Warlpiri and Kartangarurru-Kurintji and the Lander Warlpiri-Anmatjirra Land Claims (Peterson et al, 1978; Wafer and Wafer, 1980) contact after 1910 was confined to spasmodic incursions by itinerant prospectors en route for the Tanami goldfields. As Terry (1939) has described, these contacts were sometimes quite startling, as when, in 1927, a fleet of motorized trucks was driven through Willowra on a journey from Halls Creek in Western Australia. This event is still vividly recalled by older residents of Willowra. Pastoralists moved into Willowra in the 1920s. Grazing leases granted during that period to Morton and Sandford led to the introduction of cattle, and resulted in competition between Lander Warlpiri and pastoralists for the use of water and food resources, a conflict that became particularly severe in the drought years of the latter part of the decade. This strife culminated in the murder of Brooks and attacks on other Europeans in the vicinity of Coniston in 1928, a series of events which is still fresh in the minds of many Willowra people.¹ After police reprisals, in which it is now believed that from 60 to 100 Aborigines were shot, Lander Warlpiri fled west to other Warlpiri country - the Tanami Desert, Mount Doreen; to the country of their Anmatjirra neighbours in the east; and in some cases as far as Tennant Creek. The pastoralists meanwhile abandoned their leases. During the 1930s Willowra, as the Wafers (1980:26) describe, must have had a comparatively small population, composed of people who had gradually returned from their refuges. They once more shared their land with cattle, owned by Wickham, who had taken out the grazing lease in 1931. Only a few physical signs of that early non-Aboriginal occupation can still be seen - the remains of Morton's hut at Mud-Hut Bore and of some of his stockyards at Patirlirri in the Tanami Wildlife Reserve. However, the mental impact on Willowra people has been great; the older people could never forget the trauma of their early contact experiences.

1. Evidence on the Coniston killings has been documented in detail by Hartwig (1960, 1975) and first hand accounts related in Read and Read (1979) and Japangardi and Jampijinpa (1978).

The contemporary history of Willowra dates from 1941, when Wickham converted his grazing lease to a pastoral lease, and established himself on the property. He sold the station to Mr J Parkinson in 1946, and Willowra then remained under Parkinson ownership until it became Warlpiri property in 1973. Apart from their flight after the Coniston killings, Lander Warlpiri remained close to or within their traditional country until the war, and for many men the move to wartime labour camps at Dunmara, Barrow Creek and other points on the Stuart Highway must have given them their first contact with Aboriginal people other than those within traditional Warlpiri exchange systems. Since then most men have worked from time to time on Willowra or on neighbouring properties and have become skilled at stockwork, droving, bore and dam maintenance and fencing. Few have travelled far from Warlpiri territory and Alice Springs still remains a place which is visited rarely and only for very special reasons. Willowra women have been even less mobile than the men and most of their experience of Europeans has been gained on Willowra station. The present day stability of the Willowra community, which contrasts markedly with the situation at larger settlements such as Papunya, owes much to this contact history, now reinforced by control of the traditional land.

WILLOWRA IN 1979

Population and settlement

In early 1979 the population of the Willowra community was about 270, of whom all except seven were Aborigines, mainly Warlpiri from the Lander River region (Table 3.1). Incomers, all of whom are related to Warlpiri people, are Ngalia Warlpiri from west of Yuendumu, Warlpiri from Warrabri, and a few people of Anmatjirra or Waramanga descent. The present Aboriginal population is approximately twice that of 1973 when, at the time the station came under Aboriginal control, 127 people were on the ration list. The increase can be attributed partly to the return of Willowra families who had been living on neighbouring pastoral properties and large government settlements. To them the purchase of the property meant the possibility of resettlement in their own country. All families who have recently moved to Willowra have claims to traditional ownership of the land.

Table 3.1
Willowra population, 1979(a)

Age Group	Male		Aboriginal Female		Total	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
0-14	57	47.1	62	40.5	119	43.4
15-59	58	47.9	80	52.3	138	50.4
60+	6	5.0	11	7.2	17	6.2
Total	121	100.0	153	100.0	274	100.0

Dependency Ratio = $\frac{\text{Children 0-14} + \text{Adults 60+}}{\text{Adults 15-59}} = 0.99$

Child/Woman Ratio = $\frac{\text{Children 0-4}}{\text{Women 15-49}} = 0.8$

Masculinity Ratio = Males/Females = 0.8

(a) The non-Aboriginal population in 1979 was 7.

Source: Willowra Health Records, 1979.

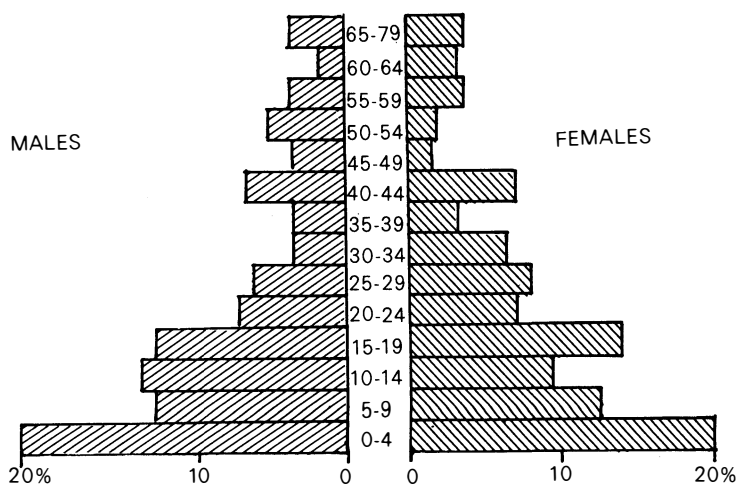


Fig 3.2 Willowra: age/sex structure, 1979.

The population has also grown because of a high rate of natural increase. As Fig.3.2 shows, Willowra has a youthful population structure, with over 40 per cent under the age of 15. Although accurate fertility estimation is not possible because of deficiencies in the records and the small size of the sample, the child/woman ratio (0.8) suggests a high birth rate and, with improved medical services, the death rate is certainly declining. At present there are no signs that this situation will change. Despite the large number of young people, the dependency ratio at Willowra is not excessively high by Aboriginal standards,² because only 6 per cent of residents are over 60. However, the high rate of natural increase and lack of outward migration from the community is likely to cause this ratio to rise in future as the adult age group becomes proportionately smaller. In-migration may also continue as more relatives resettle from other communities. Hence Willowra undoubtedly faces problems associated with increased population growth, and the chance of reaching economic self-sufficiency will recede still further. While this is of little concern to the present residents, Willowra people are worried about what their children will do when they grow up and also about possible social disruption caused by the influx of less traditionally oriented and more 'sophisticated' relatives from larger communities.

Table 3.1 also shows that Willowra has a low masculinity ratio, particularly in the 15 to 59 age group. This reflects a relatively high degree of polygynous marriages (over 30 per cent of adult men have more than one wife and one has four) and at the present time, the presence of several women who have been widowed comparatively early through the death of older husbands. The persistence of polygyny indicates the strength of traditional customs at Willowra compared to other Warlpiri communities where non-aboriginal practices have made a greater impact. Bell (1978) found that only 6 per cent of married men at Warrabri were polygynous. A further sign of Willowra adherence to traditional practices is the age difference between marriage partners (men on average are more than 14 years older than their wives), and the fact that 93 per cent of marriages are strictly in accordance with the Warlpiri kinship system. On the other hand, the existence of young widows suggests some breakdown in Warlpiri custom. It can be partly attributed

2. 1976 census figures show that the Aboriginal dependency ratio in the Northern Territory was 0.98 compared to 0.48 for non-Aborigines.

to the monetary independence which these women achieve through social security benefits.

All members of the Willowra community live on the south-east side of the Lander River, adjacent to the original homestead and airstrip. The school, where permanent structures have now replaced caravan classrooms, lies directly opposite the homestead (Fig 3.1) and thus the three European families who are normally in residence (teacher, nursing sister and mechanic/stockman) are all within the one area. The Aboriginal community is split into several camps, some strongly nucleated and others more widely scattered, all except one of which lie west of the homestead. Camp A, the only one on the eastern side, was formed in 1978 when one family moved after a death. The settlement contains nine permanent houses - five hexagonal plasterboard structures, a stone house, and three corrugated iron sheds. All five hexagonal houses and the stone house, which are relatively new (the last was completed in 1978), are in use but only one of the iron sheds, built shortly before the purchase of Willowra from Mr Parkinson in 1973, is still occupied. The new buildings contain at least three rooms and house extended families of up to twenty people.

Only a quarter of the Aboriginal population use permanent houses. The remainder have constructed temporary structures from corrugated iron, car bodies and canvas combined with some bush materials. These humpies are grouped according to family relationships, with brothers and sisters mostly living adjacent to each other. Thus people who belong to the same Warlpiri kinship groups congregate in particular parts of the settlement. For example, most families in Camp B (Fig.3.1) belong to Japangardi/Nampijinpa³ or Jampijinpa/Napangardi groups and the children are therefore Japanangka/ Napanangka or Jangala/Nangala; in house C Jungarrayi/Nangala owners live with their Japaljarri/Napaljarri children and Nakamarra daughters-in-law. Unrelated kinship groups live closer together in the permanent part of the settlement than in the humpy camps. This can create social problems because Warlpiri impose strict taboos on contact between people in certain relationships to each other, in particular mothers-in-law and sons-in-law. In Willowra, where this convention is

3. See Appendix to Ch.2; Meggitt (1962) for a summary of the Warlpiri kinship structure.

rigidly upheld, people go to great lengths to avoid places where there is 'no room'⁴ for them.

As in many other Aboriginal communities, dwellings are vacated in the case of a death, and the entire camp structure can be rapidly transformed. The present settlement pattern at Willowra differs radically from that which existed before the death which led to the establishment of Camp A. Families closely affected by the death are likely to move their camps permanently, but those who are more distantly related may make a temporary move and return when the first mourning period is over. When death occurs in a permanent house, as happened at Willowra in 1978, the structure may later be reoccupied by another family, provided that they stand in the correct kin relationship to those who were forced to move.

Willowra people mainly use houses and humpies for storage of their belongings. They sleep outside except in bad weather and even in the cold season often prefer to camp behind a windbreak with fires for warmth than on the concrete floor of a house where there is no fireplace. The experimental designs of the new houses have not proved to be entirely successful. The hexagonal houses have open central courtyards designed for communal family use but these are rarely occupied because people sitting there cannot see what is happening in adjacent camps, and therefore receive no warning of visitors, an important factor because of taboo relationships. Moreover, when it rains, the courtyards rapidly fill up with water which floods the rooms. In one house the courtyard has already been enclosed and plans have been made to carry out the same modification in the others. In the stone house the ant-bed which lines the flat roof becomes saturated in heavy rain and the roof leaks. After a severe storm at the end of January 1979 the occupants of that house were forced to move out and build themselves a corrugated iron humpy.

Willowra settlement contains four other permanent structures; the ablution block, the store, the health clinic, and the power house, with adjacent water tower. The ablution block, built in 1978, is used and cared for by people in Camps C and D but is too far from the other camps for anything but occasional use. In the winter time it is more popular because, apart from the school, it is the only

4. The Common English expression which Willowra people use when forbidden contacts are likely.

source of hot water for washing. The store, and nearby clinic which was completed in late 1979, are focal points for Willowra women. Those with young children often congregate there when the clinic opens in the early morning and then stay until the store, which keeps variable hours, is open. Trees near this building, unfortunately small and few in number, provide shade where the women meet and discuss everyday happenings. Meanwhile the men gather in the bough shed between Camps C and D, or beneath shade trees behind Camp D, where they spend most of each morning and late afternoon talking, playing cards and making plans. Willowra power house, and associated water reticulation system, completed in 1977, provides facilities for all permanent buildings and all, except Camp A, are relatively close to water taps.

Figure 3.1 shows Willowra settlement as it was in early February 1979, after a severe rainstorm followed by flooding. In early January 1979 the whole of Camp B was in the middle of the Lander Creek bed where the sand provides the most comfortable camping sites and where soakage water is available. This area is also preferred because it is quiet, relatively cool at night, has better natural shade than the top of the river bank (very important in January with daytime maxima over 40 C), and less dusty.⁵ After the thunderstorm, which brought over 200 mm of rain in 36 hours, everyone had to move rapidly to the top of the river bank and within a further 36 hours the Lander had become a raging torrent up to eight feet deep.

Unlike those in many larger Aboriginal settlements, Willowra people have not established outstation communities within their territory. This is because they already live on their country and do not really feel strong pressure to move out to particular points of significance within it. People do visit these important sites and sometimes camp there for 'holidays'. For example, the Japangardi mob spent part of December 1978 at a temporary camp about 10 km downstream from Willowra homestead and Jungarrayi/Japaljarri people are interested in establishing a 'holiday' outstation at Patirlirri, a very important site at a clay pan close to the western boundary of Willowra. Apart from these temporary relocations within Willowra country, Willowra people also pay extended visits to their kin at Warrabri,

5. Willowra airstrip is unfortunately situated upwind from the camps and strong winds are continually depositing layers of unconsolidated top soil on the inhabited areas.

Ti-Tree, Anningie, Yuendumu and Mount Allan. Most movements associated with ceremonies and other traditional activities take place between Willowra and these centres.

SETTLEMENT ACTIVITIES AND ORGANIZATION

The contemporary Willowra lifestyle is an amalgam of traditional and non-traditional elements, both of which are vital to the social and economic well-being of the community. While the traditional component, in the form of Warlpiri law and custom, is seen as being responsible for the maintenance of social and cultural identity, the non-traditional component, in particular wage earning employment and income obtained from social security pensions and benefits, provides most of the essential material support. The two components are, however, closely interwoven; for example, Willowra people still take part in a variety of ceremonies, both within their own country and in other Aboriginal settlements, but must have access to transport, and hence money for petrol, in order to do this effectively. The organization of other activities, such as schooling or health care, also demonstrates the significance of Warlpiri custom in creating a system of services which at least partially meets the perceived needs of the Willowra people.

Traditional activities

Through freehold ownership of the former pastoral lease, Willowra people have acquired unrestricted access to the resources which it contains and enthusiastically participate in hunting and gathering expeditions whenever the opportunity arises. While trips to areas near the camp are occasionally made on foot, most families prefer to go to their own territories, where they can use their detailed knowledge of the land, and hence must have access to transport. Thus Japangardi men like to hunt at Windajong, their tribal territory in unalienated crown land about 40 kms north-east of Willowra homestead, where they know where to look for kangaroo, euro and porcupine. Jungarrayi and Japaljarri men, on the other hand, prefer to hunt closer to the settlement or to the south and west towards Yuendumu, areas with which they have strong traditional ties. Women will accompany their husbands when possible, but since gathering vegetable foods and grubs can only be done by walking (large game are often located, chased and shot at

from the vehicle) expeditions in which they take part go to specific places and remain there for considerable periods. Therefore, when Nampijinpa women accompany their Japangardi husbands to Windajong, they like to spend several hours in the area of acacia bush where witchetty grubs are plentiful; the men then hunt from that site rather than from other sites which they might have visited if they had been on their own. Thus the organization of hunting and gathering trips differs from that of pre-contact times. Since people need to use vehicles to go hunting, men and women go together, and are therefore restricted in their choice of destination by the interests of the entire group. They can no longer operate independently. Non-Aboriginal technology has made a significant impact on this traditional activity.

The productivity of hunting and gathering varies according to the weather and time of day. Early morning and late evening are the best times for hunting large game and are also the preferred times for gathering during the hot season. From December until April women are not interested in trips which involve prolonged walking or digging in poorly shaded areas but will make quick sorties by truck to gather bush tomatoes or seasonal fruits. After rain, travel is almost impossible because the clay soils do not drain rapidly, and game is harder to find because it disperses with the abundant supplies of surface water. Thus, except for seasonal products, winter is the preferred hunting and gathering season. The amount of food redistributed among non-participants depends on the product and quantity obtained. Some kangaroo and emu meat will often be brought back to Willowra, although it is normally cooked in the bush where there are plentiful supplies of firewood, but a single plain turkey or a few goannas may be entirely consumed before return. Women usually bring back most of the wild yams that they find but witchetty grubs and honey rarely return to camp.

Variations such as these make it difficult to assess the contribution of traditional foods to the Willowra diet, although a detailed twelve month survey would clarify the position. Another factor which influences the extent of hunting and gathering activity is that Willowra people prefer traditional foods to fresh beef from their own cattle or products which they can buy in the store, and will go to great lengths to obtain them. Hunting and gathering are also an important way of expressing their relationships with their land. Thus, although the nutrition obtained from

traditional food forms a significant part of their support, the cultural vitality gained from carrying out the activity may be of even greater importance.

Ceremonial activities, concerned with the re-enactment of dreamtime stories or with rituals associated with death or initiation, occupy a great deal of time in Willowra. Death rituals usually mean full-time involvement of men and women from relevant skin-groups for one or two days - longer if they take place in another community to which mourners have to travel - and then shorter meetings which might continue for some weeks or months. Women who belong to that skin-group who form the chief mourners are not allowed to speak for some weeks after the death and during that time move very little from their camps. This therefore disrupts other camp activities since others have to fetch and carry for them. Initiation ceremonies are prolonged, particularly for the young single men who may remain in isolated bush camps for several months, and since most of the associated dancing takes place during the night, daytime activity for everyone is very limited at these times. All members of the community, young and old, are active participants in appropriate ceremonies, and through this maintain the cultural strength of Willowra. Bell and Ditton (1980) state that Willowra women attribute the peacefulness and stability of their community to support which they receive through Warlpiri law and customs.

Non-traditional organizations

External funding and its use. In 1973 Willowra finally came into the hands of the Lander Warlpiri when the government bought the property from Mr E Parkinson for \$278,000. Settlement followed a negotiation period of five years, during which agreement could not be reached because of arguments at government level but, as Coombs (1978) has described, these were finally resolved and the patience of both Parkinson and the Willowra people rewarded. Since then the community has received over \$1 million in government grants for financing of pastoral operations and construction and maintenance of basic infrastructure. Three incorporated bodies have been formed in Willowra - the Pastoral Company, the Housing Association and the Community. These have assumed responsibility for the operation of the cattle station, the construction and maintenance of housing for Aboriginal residents and community administration respectively.

Table 3.2
Government funding, 1973-1978

	1973/74-1977/78	1977/78 only
Willowra Community	\$ 279,000	\$ 7,000
Willowra Pastoral Co.	608,000	95,000
Willowra Housing Assoc.	304,000	24,000
Total	\$1,191,000	\$126,000
Purchase price for property (non repayable loan) \$ 278,000		

All figures to nearest '000\$.

As Table 3.2 shows, the bulk of the funds received since purchase have gone to the Pastoral Company. These have been used to construct and maintain bores, fences, mustering yards, vehicles and other necessary equipment, to pay wages and salaries to the manager and stockworkers, and for other incidental expenses such as insurance, accountancy fees, etc. During the financial year 1977/1978, wages and salaries accounted for 32 per cent of expenditure, with other major items being repairs, maintenance of equipment, and fuel and oil. Prior to that year the Pastoral Company operated under the supervision of a South Australian based consultancy firm - AACM (Australian Agricultural Consulting and Management Company Pty.Ltd.) - and incurred considerable expenses in consultancy fees. Since then the company has operated primarily under the control of its Aboriginal directors with occasional assistance from a neighbouring pastoralist who has been recompensed partly in kind. Since 1978 the company has employed a European resident (the husband of the nursing sister) as stockman/mechanic, and no longer has need of outside assistance.

In the past the Pastoral Company was also responsible for the operation of the community store which in 1977/1978 made a profit of almost \$18,000. That, combined with the grant from DAA, was the major source of revenue. Cattle trading operations earned little prior to that period (Table

3.3). This can be attributed to physical and social factors affecting Willowra and also to price fluctuations in the beef cattle market. For example, high rainfall, bush fires and low prices discouraged mustering in 1975 and 1976. The increase of cattle on Willowra, due to low turn-off and, plenty of water and feed following relatively high rainfall, caused concern over possible overstocking. In 1978 the Willowra herd was estimated to number about 10,000, approximately two beasts per sq. km. This rate is double the estimated average carrying capacity in Central Australia,⁶ and must certainly be excessive for Willowra, where most bores are close to the river, and a large part of the lease has very little potential for cattle. Other permanent water supplies are small, and those that exist have been utilized since the first non-Aboriginal settlement, as can be seen by the remnants of Morton's stockyard at Tippenbah, a well adjacent to the significant Jungarrayi/Japaljarri dreaming site at Patirlirri beyond the extreme western boundary of Willowra. According to the previous owners, the station carried approximately 8,000 head in normal years but at the time of extreme drought in the 1960s stock numbers fell to around 1000.

Table 3.3
Willowra cattle sales

Financial Year	Number	Receipts (\$)
1974/75	262	10,186
1975/76	401	17,250
1976/77	662	27,891
1977/78	1350	65,000
1978/79	1300	174,955
1979 (Calendar Year)	2546	345,194

Sources: Financial statements of Willowra Pastoral Company; records kept by Elders Goldsborough Mort, Alice Springs.

6. A Report by the Bureau of Agricultural Economics (1974) estimates that the average stocking rate for the Alice Springs region in 1972 was one beast/sq.km. In 1964/65 that region had 13 per cent of Northern Territory cattle; in 1972/73 this had risen to 24 per cent.

Concern about overstocking at Willowra led to promises that large scale mustering would be carried out in 1979. Fortunately this coincided with a marked increase in cattle prices, and as a result the 1979 season saw a turnoff of over 2500, with gross earnings of almost \$350,000. This has greatly enhanced the financial position of the Company by leaving a considerable profit even after debts have been settled. The store is no longer a source of revenue, since it was closed in late 1978 after severe financial problems. It is now being operated under private contract with a European businessman from Alice Springs.

Willowra Community revenue has only a small wages component as Willowra is not designated as a settlement, with complex urban infrastructure, but as a pastoral station. Hence it receives no substantial allocation for jobs such as garbage collection or camp maintenance. In 1977/78 the Community spent most of its funds on capital improvements, of which the main components were the electricity and water supplies and the ablutions block (completed in that year). Fuel and oil for the powerhouse was a further main item of expenditure. The power and water reticulation system was constructed between 1974 and 1978 at a total cost of over \$250,000, and now costs approximately \$50,000 per annum to run, financed on a recurrent grant from DAA. While the system undoubtedly provides some much needed and appreciated facilities for the Aboriginal community, for example a refrigeration room for the shop, and stand pipes adjacent to some camp areas, the scale and hence the cost of running the project does seem to be excessive. Moreover, when breakdown occurs, the inconvenience experienced by most Willowra residents is minimal; they do not use electricity, they can usually obtain soakage water from the creek bed (and prefer its taste for making tea), and those who camp near the powerhouse always relish the peace and quiet which descends when the engines are not working.

Willowra Community workforce consists of the Community Advisor, for whose salary a separate grant is received from DAA, workshop mechanic, the health sister (salary received from the rural health subsidy granted by the Department of Health) and a casual domestic worker to help the sister.

Willowra Housing Association has now been wound up. Since 1974/75 this organization has received over \$300,000 which has been used to build five weatherboard houses, the store and sheds and a stone house. These assets are

currently valued at almost \$300,000. House construction was carried out by outside contractors using skilled non-Aboriginal labour. A group of Willowra men provided unskilled labour from time to time. All houses are at present occupied although, as mentioned earlier, problems have been encountered with the designs. As the Environmental Health Survey (Northern Territory Department of Health, 1979) shows, Willowra, where they describe the people's condition as one of 'absolute squalor', has a smaller component of permanent housing than most other Aboriginal communities. However, Willowra people do not regard a continuation of the housing program as an immediate priority. While there is no doubt that by non-Aboriginal standards the living situation of Willowra people is far below what would be acceptable, by the standards of the Willowra people there are compensations. They are still able to devise their own traditional camp structures and move as they wish so as to preserve law and custom. Most feel that additional permanent housing should be provided only if they so request, not according to their needs as perceived by outsiders.

During 1978/79 Willowra received additional funding from the Departments of Education and Health for the construction of new classrooms and ablution blocks at the school and a new health clinic at a total cost of around \$350,000. Both projects employed only outside labour, and thus none of the wages component of funds entered the community income. Agreements to employ local people on the construction of the school were reputed to have been included in the initial contract but failed to come to fruition.

As funding arrangements indicate, Willowra remains heavily dependent on government subsidies. The contemporary situation has changed little from that described by Penny (1976) in which he shows that, using social accounting methods, Willowra operated at a huge deficit which had to be covered by government funding. As Penny states, this indicates that in non-Aboriginal economic terms, the pastoral station is a failure. However, in Aboriginal terms, this is not strictly the case. While the station cannot hope to earn sufficient income to support all its residents, it is a success because it is a unified and socially stable community in which Aborigines take much responsibility for the organization of their affairs. From their viewpoint, this is the way in which to assess success

or failure. Buoyant cattle prices are but an additional advantage which enables the community to demonstrate some economic independence from the government, in terms which the non-Aboriginal community can understand. A cattle station of that size was never expected to provide a livelihood for 270 people.

The school. Willowra school was opened in 1969 using mobile classrooms and caravans for European staff accommodation. These have since been replaced by permanent classrooms and teachers' houses, finally completed in 1979.

From the beginning, Willowra people have been interested in the school, especially since it has meant that their young people do not have to move away for schooling. Before 1969, few Willowra children attended school and the effects are noticeable today in general low levels of English literacy and comprehension for all but the youngest adults. After the first group of young people completed their primary education, some were sent to Yirara College in Alice Springs. However, the community was unhappy about these teenagers being separated from their families, and was worried about social problems which might arise in town and, as a result, all the youngsters returned after only a short absence. This attitude has persisted and today almost all Willowra children who attend high school belong to families which have moved into the community from Warrabri, a much less traditionally oriented settlement. Since 1976 the school has been providing some post-primary training and most of the young women presently working as teaching assistants and trainees in store and office work have been members of these classes. Few boys attend the post-primary classes because at that age they undergo training associated with initiation and circumcision ceremonies, and may be absent for several months in the bush. Wafer (1977:533) also attributes their lack of continuing interest to the predominant 'cowboy image' to which young Willowra men aspire, an ideal which does not combine easily with Western schooling.

In 1979 Willowra school had three European teachers and four Aboriginal women working as teaching assistants and literacy workers. The European linguist from Yuendumu visits Willowra from time to time to help with the organization of the bi-lingual program. An older couple work as caretaker and cleaner and help to organize the children's showers in the morning and to prepare snacks for

breaks. They also help in the school gardening project. About sixty children, or 80 per cent of those enrolled, normally attend school. They are divided into four groups - pre-school, infants, lower primary and upper primary (including post-primary), all taught both by Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal staff.

On the whole, Willowra school appears to be fairly well integrated with the community. Wafer (1977:527) says that from the beginning the Willowra people have regarded non-Aboriginal education as a process which will help them cope more adequately with the non-Aboriginal components of their lives. Hence they have appreciated the introduction of the bi-lingual program and have welcomed the opportunity of joining in school activities and instructing European teachers about Warlpiri customs and traditions. They are also particularly interested in practical courses which the school provides for training young people and will specify the kinds of skills which are needed. Willowra leaders have been enthusiastic about the recent training course in office management because they would like this institution to be run by Willowra people with as little European involvement as possible.

The health clinic. Before 1976 health care at Willowra was the responsibility of a succession of nursing sisters assigned to make periodic visits to the community from Alice Springs. While health problems were not unusually severe, the people felt that they would benefit from a more continuous service from a sister who had had the opportunity to get to know them and understand some of their customs. In early 1978 the community arranged to employ a full-time qualified European nurse, whose salary would be provided by subsidy granted by the Department of Health. She is assisted by two young women, both enrolled under the Aboriginal Health Worker Training Scheme. They attend courses in Alice Springs as part of their training. The clinic, now housed in a new building completed in 1979, is intensively used by the women, particularly mothers with young children, and staff visit the school to check on the health of older ones. Men are rarely willing to come to the clinic because all the health personnel and the main users of the facility are women. Instead they visit the sister's house after hours, a practice which is sometimes inconvenient for her but under the present circumstances probably inevitable. Separate facilities for men could be

provided in the new clinic but, ideally, a male health worker would also have to be employed.

Health at Willowra is fairly satisfactory, and certainly of a higher standard than that in many larger settlements or in fringe camps around Alice Springs. The main complaints are eye and ear infections, sores and boils, and, in young children, respiratory and gastric disturbances. As in other Aboriginal communities, diabetes has become a problem, particularly for adults over forty. Its side effects, often noticeable in the form of boils and abscesses, can seriously hinder recovery from other illnesses. In December 1979 Willowra had eight known cases of diabetes, 13 per cent of those aged forty and over. Most patients can be cured without being hospitalized in Alice Springs as health workers can obtain medical advice through the Royal Flying Doctor Service radio network. Injuries arising from fights and illness from high alcohol consumption are uncommon in Willowra because most social problems are solved through negotiation, and the community leaders have enforced a ban on the importation of grog.

On the whole Willowra people are using the clinic facilities with increasing confidence, and feel that the service now available to them is much superior to what they had before. They also use the services of traditional healers, either members of their own community or prominent people resident in Yuendumu and Mount Allan, and find that the two methods - European and Aboriginal - are effective in dealing with both physical and mental aspects of illness.

The store. While Willowra store was financed and operated under the Pastoral Company, it was run by a group of young Warlpiri women who had received partial training in shop management while attending post-primary classes at Willowra school. Accounts were kept by the European book-keeper then resident in the community. During the last few months of 1978 it was discovered that the store had run into severe financial problems, attributed partly to book-keeping deficiencies in the past and partly to the inexperience of the women. Because of its debts the store had to be closed. The community was very concerned about this because, since Willowra people had been running the shop with very little aid from Europeans, they regarded it as clear evidence that they were capable of managing this type of enterprise. Moreover the closure caused

considerable hardship because people were forced to go to Ti-Tree or Yuendumu to shop, and then spent additional money on travelling and, in some cases, on buying alcohol in these other centres. Some reported the complete disruption of family groups because men had moved semi-permanently to Ti-Tree and were living there with other women while their wives and families at Willowra did not have enough money to support themselves. The community was therefore determined that the store should re-open. In December 1978, they drew up a 12 months contract with an Alice Springs based businessman whom they already knew and trusted. Under its terms he undertook to keep the store open regularly, provide the service requested by the people (i.e. stock what they wanted and needed rather than what a European considered they should want and need), administer social security payments, and assist in further training in store and office management for the young women. He also organized community film shows.

This system was only partly successful. At first, the store managed to provide for most basic needs although, from time to time, problems arose when stocks were allowed to dwindle. Moreover, since the European managers were not permanent Willowra residents but lived in the community on alternate weeks, it was sometimes difficult to ensure that messages for stock requirements, etc., were properly co-ordinated. In bad weather, when it was impossible for the store managers to reach Willowra, the shop could not be opened and the community residents might go short of food. No attempt was made to continue with the training of Willowra people as managers, largely because those young women who would be involved have been fully occupied in learning basic office management. During 1980 the management of the store has deteriorated, and Willowra people have once again resorted to travelling considerable distances to buy basic supplies - to Anningie, Ti-Tree and Yuendumu. Their reluctance to shop at the poorly stocked Willowra outlet has cut the profits earned by the contractor, and hence prevented adequate stocking. Unfortunately the solution to this problem - to seek a more efficient operator - is unlikely to be taken because the present incumbent is related to the Parkinson family, former owners of the property, and regarded by Willowra people as kin. Ultimately the people hope that they will be able to take over the running of the store once more, and will thus assume full responsibility for this essential community service.

The pastoral company. Since the Willowra people opted to dispense with the services of AACM, the government appointed consultancy firm in 1977, the Pastoral Company has been operated primarily by its own board of directors, which consists of prominent members of each family group in the community. This has enabled several of the men to gain experience in management, a skill which they had little chance to acquire either in Mr Parkinson's time or under AACM, with its strict adherence to non-Aboriginal concepts of economic organization. Only two non-Aborigines are now concerned with the company. Financial advice is provided by the non-resident accountant, who visits Willowra once a fortnight, and practical help given by the stockman husband of the nursing sister.

Willowra stockcamp, which employs about ten men, functions in the cooler season between March and November. While most of the men are experienced, the group usually includes one or two teenagers who are learning the trade, and thus the pool of skill in the community is still being replenished. Because the best water and feed areas on Willowra are located along the length of the Lander River, stockcamps are often sited at considerable distances from the homestead and workers may be absent for some days. While horse mustering is still carried out, the Willowra people also make frequent use of helicopters, hired from Alice Springs. Although these are expensive (approximately \$150 per hour), they are particularly useful on Willowra where, because activity has been limited prior to 1979, some of the present stock have had very little contact with man. The stockcamp maintains contact with Willowra office by two-way radio and messages can then be relayed to Alice Springs when a herd is ready for transport to market. Willowra stockmen occasionally work on other stations, as, for example, in carrying out a contract muster on Mount Doreen in 1978, or attending Anningie or Mount Barkly musters in order to claim stray Willowra cattle.

All adults in Willowra have been involved with cattle station operation for most of their lives, and have a wealth of experience. However, as a whole, they are not deeply concerned with the money-making aspect of the venture. Their main interest lies in the ownership and control of the lease, and the resultant opportunity to maintain their religious and cultural links with the land. Fences, paddocks and bores are alien introductions, as are the cattle. As Willowra people acknowledge, the animals are

'money walking around on four legs' but the conversion into money will only take place when it is essential for survival. The record turn-off of 1979 should be regarded partly in those terms - it was essential because the community had to meet considerable debts incurred with business organizations in Alice Springs. It was also recognized as desirable because of previous over-stocking. It remains to be seen to what extent the stock is further reduced, although in the long run it would probably be an advantage if the property had far fewer animals. This would ease the burden of responsibility which some leading members of the community feel, especially when they encounter adverse criticism from neighbouring pastoralists who are only too willing to find fault with an Aboriginal enterprise. As yet, there is no evidence that Willowra Pastoral Company is any less mindful of its responsibilities in fence and bore maintenance than operators on adjacent stations.

The office and workshop. Willowra office and workshop, the service centres for the entire community, are located within the complex of buildings adjacent to the original homestead and consequently at some distance from the Aboriginal part of the settlement. Until recently, these services were organized by non-Aborigines, and, being situated in a place regarded by many Willowra people as non-Aboriginal territory were little used by them. The situation has now changed. The workshop, where repairs and maintenance of community vehicles and equipment for pastoral operations are carried out, is run by two Aboriginal mechanics, and day-to-day work in the office is now the responsibility of young Aboriginal women. The office workers took part in a training course, funded in 1979 by the Aboriginal Study Grants Scheme (ASGS), and devised and carried out by a former teacher at Willowra school, now a member of staff at the Institute of Aboriginal Development in Alice Springs. During this course the women have learned to do basic book-keeping and accountancy and to operate the radio and radio-telephone, the vital communication links between Willowra and other centres. Their success in this field, which has been due both to their own efforts and to the support given by community leaders and by others such as their tutor and the non-resident book-keeper, has stimulated interest in similar projects in other Aboriginal communities in Central Australia. As far as Willowra is concerned, it has not only demonstrated that members of

their community are capable of dealing with what has previously been regarded as a 'white man's province', but has also shown that these services can be made more appropriate to Aboriginal needs. Thus, since women work in the office, Willowra women now make much more use of the telegram service to send enquiries to other Warlpiri settlements to check on rumours of social problems about which they are concerned; the men are also much more confident in using both radio and telephone to communicate with other places directly.

EMPLOYMENT AND INCOME

Employment at Willowra, as in other settlements associated with the pastoral industry, is affected by seasonal fluctuations in labour requirements. During the hot season, approximately November to February, stock work ceases and, as Table 3.4 shows, only four men (7 per cent of the adult male population) were employed during this period in 1979.

Table 3.4
Aboriginal employment at Willowra

	Early 1979(January)			Mid 1979(eg.June)		
	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total
Willowra Pastoral Co.	-	-	-	12	-	12
Willowra Community	3	1(p/t)	4	3	1(p/t)	4
Education	1	1	2	1	5	6
Health	-	2	2	-	2	2
Office (ASGS)	-	-	-	-	3	3
Total	4	4	8	16	11	27
Employed/Adults 15-59(%)	7.0	5.0	5.8	27.6	13.8	19.6

Source: Young, fieldwork, 1979.

When mustering starts, about ten or twelve stockmen are signed on and over a quarter of the adult men have jobs. Women's employment opportunities also fluctuate, in this case because the Department of Education, the main employer for women during the school year, classifies teacher aides as temporary workers and thus does not pay them during the long school holiday. By mid-1979 the employment market for women had improved still further through the establishment of the office training scheme.

Almost every adult man in Willowra has at some time been employed as a stock-worker and has also carried out such tasks as bore and dam maintenance or fencing. Since 1973 most older men, who had formed the core of the labour force in Mr Parkinson's time, have been unemployed, and stockcamp workers range from young men in their teens, apprentices in the skill, to men in their late 30s and early 40s. Labour turnover is high. In 1977/78, thirty four men (58 per cent of the adult men) worked in the stockcamp for periods ranging from 1 to 23 weeks, with an average work period of 9 weeks. Thus, although the proportion employed at any one time is small, a large number of Willowra people do participate in the operation of the station. This indicates that people take full advantage of the flexible nature of stockwork in order to combine it with other activities, often of a traditional nature. Those who are not employed show no tendency to seek work elsewhere, partly because few jobs are available in any centre, but also because of their strong attachment to the Willowra community.

Apart from stock-handling, few men in Willowra have acquired skills which would enhance their employment opportunities in non-Aboriginal types of occupation. Those who work in the workshop have considerable mechanical expertise and have operated heavy machinery such as road graders, while others learnt the techniques of house construction while working with the Housing Association, a skill which they now use only spasmodically. After the house construction program was complete at Willowra, one young man moved to Alice Springs to take up a position with Tangatjira, the Aboriginal Camp Council, but later returned because of the social pressures which he encountered in town and because he was homesick. It is unfortunate that, in recent work on the school and health clinic, there was no attempt to use Willowra workers. Skills which demand relatively high levels of literacy are noticeably lacking

amongst the men, partly because of the reluctance on the part of elders to allow their children to go to secondary school, and also because boys rarely attend post-primary training (see above). This may also be due to the Willowra concept of what constitutes men's wage earning work - essentially the job of a stockman.

Women wage-earners at Willowra, in contrast to the men, mostly occupy skilled positions - in the clinic, the school and the office. Eight of the eleven working in mid-1979 (73 per cent) had at least been to primary school and five had had some post-primary or secondary training. Seven of the women were below the age of 25, a result of the tardy development of formal education at Willowra, but all except three were married. Responsibility for young children has rarely prevented women from working because infants can be left in the care of relatives, or, with the informal work environment, can accompany their mothers. One teacher worked for much of 1979 although she was feeding an infant of less than one year, and one of the office workers continues to care for her two year old during at least part of the working day. The female workforce is much more stable than the male, and the only change during 1979 occurred when one health worker resigned from the clinic. Educated people such as these women perform an extremely important role in the community because they are able to act as interpreters of many features of non-Aboriginal society which impinge on everybody. In Willowra their youth and their sex prevent them from carrying out these roles effectively at all times, although these problems are frequently overcome by consultation within the community, whereby older more powerful women delegate authority to the young women as spokespersons.

Unlike large settlements, Willowra does not receive a government grant for the employment of people in general maintenance or beautification. Jobs such as cleaning the communal ablution block or clearing rubbish from the camp areas are carried out on a voluntary basis, as people see fit. As a result Willowra has sometimes received severe criticism from outsiders because of its physical appearance. The Willowra community are concerned that some of these tasks should be carried out, and has discussed the possibility of using some funds earned from the sale of cattle to finance garbage collection and the provision of firewood.

Since only 20 per cent of the adults at Willowra can find work even during the peak employment season, it is clear that access to paid jobs will be unevenly spread within the community. Table 3.5 shows that, in mid 1979, most of the more permanent jobs (i.e. all except stockwork, which is casual and is spread fairly evenly through the community in the course of a season) were held by members of only three camps - B, C and G.

Table 3.5
Population, employment and incomes
in Willowra camps, mid-1979

Camp	Population				Total	Income (excl. stockmen) \$/cap/fnt.	Employment (excl. stockmen)		
	M/F Ratio	0-14	15-59	60+			M	F	T
A	0.46	17	14	4	35	39.5	1	-	1
B	1.00	15	18	1	34	65.6	1	4	5
C	0.44	4	8	1	13	75.5	1	2	3
D	0.78	27	33	4	64	37.6	-	2	2
E	1.00	10	18	-	28	7.7	-	-	-
F	0.53	6	15	6	27	34.1	-	1	1
G	0.88	14	16	-	30	43.6	1	2	3

Source: Young, fieldwork, 1979.

This reflects both the uneven distribution of skill in the community, with these camps having a larger proportion of literate members, and the focus of the balance of power. Camp C, the camp of the Community Adviser, is also the camp of one of the principal traditional Nunggarrayi land-owners of Willowra. Camps A and E, many of whose members are linked to Willowra people only through marriage and claim traditional land on adjacent pastoral leases such as Anningie, Mount Dennison and Mount Barkly, are peripheral to the community. Not only do they exert less power in the decision-making base for Willowra, but they are also disadvantaged because they grew up on other pastoral

properties where no formal schooling was available. Their younger members are thus not able to compete for jobs which require some literacy and numeracy. While it must be remembered that Table 3.5 presents a static picture of an essentially dynamic situation, it nevertheless demonstrates internal inequalities which exist in an otherwise apparently cohesive group.

Table 3.6
Willowra, income, 1979 (fortnightly average, \$)

Source	Jan. 1979		June 1979		Nov. 1979	
	\$	%	\$	%	\$	%
Wages	1625	18	6093	45	6093	36
Social Security						
Child Endowment	763)		763)		800)	
Pensions	3148)	82	3148)	55	4500)	64
Unemployment benefit	3550)		3550)		5500)	
Total	9086	100	13554	100	16893	100
Income/capita	33.7		49.5		61.7	

Source: Young, fieldwork, 1979.

In non-Aboriginal terms the employment situation at Willowra is quite unacceptable. However, the Willowra people have a different view. Although they would probably like to extend the service provision for the community, they already occupy most of the permanent positions with which they presently feel able to cope. Stockwork fits in very well with other demands on their time and, since they manage this operation themselves, they can allocate these jobs appropriately without conflict. They would not like to be pressured into looking for employment elsewhere, a task which they recognize to be fruitless. As the community adviser has said, 'We would rather that our young people stayed here and had no work than sat in the Charles River Creek bed in Alice Springs and had trouble as well.' This statement expresses the essential reality of the current paid work situation for Central Australian Aborigines.

However, the low level of employment inevitably forces the entire community into dependence on other sources of monetary income - social security payments. These accounted for between 50 and 85 per cent of the entire personal income at Willowra at different times during 1979 (Table 3.6).

While, as Table 3.6 shows, income variations are also a feature of the Willowra structure, it is clear that the average income has risen in recent times. Penny (1976:7) calculated a per capita figure of \$24 per fortnight in 1974/75, while in November 1977 the equivalent average income was \$35 (DAA Willowra Profile, 1978). Changes in the 1979 income are due to seasonal employment and to improvements in the delivery of social security payments.

In January, both wages and welfare payments were low, in the first case because it was the non-working season for both stockmen and teachers, and in the second case because, with a recent turnover in administrative staff, no-one had assumed responsibility for documenting the receipt of pensions and benefits. At that time payments for unemployment benefits were far below those for which the community was eligible; 60 per cent of men aged between 15 and 59 had no official source of cash income. Those who received nothing included the stock-camp workers of the 1978 season, whose claims had been lodged but not yet processed, an administrative time lag that is particularly frustrating for people who are out of work purely because of the seasonal nature of their jobs. They were then forced to depend on their families and friends for money. Others who received nothing were older men who had not been stockworkers since the purchase of Willowra but were not yet eligible for pensions. Some had earlier applied for unemployment benefit but had been rejected on the grounds of a rigid work test; others had been asked for further particulars but these had never been forwarded to the Department of Social Security because no-one in the Willowra office had taken responsibility for answering the correspondence. Since these people were illiterate and had no experience of dealing with bureaucratic procedures, they had not followed up the progress of their claims. Further discrepancies at Willowra arose through the high incidence of polygyny, with several men receiving no allowances for the support of their additional wives. By June 1979 employment was at its peak, and by November the community was receiving both a high wages component and, since office workers and store managers had combined to rectify social

security payments, a much larger income from pensions and benefits. The per capita income per fortnight was then almost double that at the beginning of the year.

Income variations on this scale make a considerable impact on the community, and their effects are clearly seen in levels of expenditure on both food and consumer goods (see below). Their causes are also not easily comprehended by many people in the community and thus changes are not easily dealt with. In early 1979 officials from DAA and the Department of Social Security were holding frequent discussions with Willowra people on schemes which might be used to alleviate some of the problems. These included either a system of bulk payments of social security cheques or a Community Development Employment Project (CDEP) whereby the total unemployment benefit allocation is distributed by the community for work which they wish to carry out. Neither of these schemes has subsequently been implemented and members of the community seem to be content with the present situation because they are receiving those pensions and benefits for which they are eligible. However there is no guarantee that this favourable situation will continue, as it depends heavily on the individual commitment of the persons responsible for administration, both in Willowra and in Alice Springs regional office.

Income variations also occur within the community. As Table 3.5 shows, the incomes of different camps (excluding stockwork) varied from less than \$8 to over \$75 per capita per fortnight in mid 1979. While these variations are less significant than they may appear, since monetary incomes are shared within extended families whose members belong to different camps, and income earned from stockwork at times redresses the balance, they still reflect inequalities in access to jobs (as mentioned earlier). They also reflect differences in access to social security payments; several families in Camp E had recently moved from other pastoral stations and Yuendumu and had neither lodged new social security claims from Willowra nor managed to arrange to collect cheques from their former places of residence. As far as social security is concerned, those camps which include several old people or widows (A,B,D,F), and hence derive their incomes from reliable sources such as age and widow's pensions, suffer less severely from income fluctuations than those such as E which depend on unemployment benefit and seasonal employment. The rules which must be complied with for the receipt of unemployment

benefit often make it difficult for people to depend on this source of income.

EXPENDITURE

Even at its maximum, the income at Willowra in 1979 was less than half the Australian average, approximately \$150 per capita per fortnight. While it is true that Aborigines who live in that community only need to pay small amounts for their shelter, light and water, they have to pay very high prices for most of their basic necessities such as food, clothing and fuel. Hence their income may be barely sufficient for their needs and, in adverse circumstances when social security cheques do not arrive, well below their requirements. At such times people supplement their diets from hunting and gathering, and continue to wear clothes long after they have fallen into rags and tatters. A further problem is that people receive their money at specific times during the fortnight, and at other times may have nothing. Social security cheques arrive on the weekly mail plane on a Friday, the same day on which Community and Pastoral Company wages are paid. Other wages, in the form of cheques despatched directly from the government departments concerned, also come by mail. Hence, normally, every second Friday is a bonanza for Willowra. Those who are employed are often paid on a weekly basis, and thus some money also enters the community on intervening Fridays. The only variations to this routine occur when the mail bag is collected in Alice Springs by some one who has been visiting town. Lack of banking facilities, plus a tendency to spend money rapidly and rely on friends until the next cheque is due, means that at other times very little cash is available.

Willowra store, which takes approximately 80 per cent of the available monetary income, is the focus on days when cheques arrive. People rapidly pass the news of their arrival and by the time the store opens most of the community is congregated near the building. Cheques are cashed at the counter, and recipients, plus others who are given money by those with cheques, often spend several hours making their purchases and talking with their friends. The process of cheque receipt and buying is highly prolonged because men and women cannot visit the store at the same time in case they infringe taboo relationships. Thus, if the men arrive first, the women sit behind the building,

periodically sending children to report on whether all the men have finished their business, and await their turn; conversely, if the women arrive first, the men must wait. Buying is a lengthy process, partly because the store does not offer self-service, but also because people like to return several times, often to buy things which their friends have bought but which they did not consider initially. In addition, as extra money is shared out to those with nothing, others also become purchasers. It is not uncommon for the whole procedure to take four or five hours on a Friday evening, and when this is then followed by the weekly film show it makes a very late evening for the whole community.

People usually stock up on the essentials such as flour, sugar, tea and meat before buying more exotic items such as tinned fruit, cooked chickens and biscuits, although all of these would figure prominently in purchases on days when there is cash. Other items such as tobacco and cigarettes, soap and cold drinks are also virtual necessities and, as Table 3.7 shows, they form a significant part of store expenditure. Flour, for making damper, is the main source of cereal, because bread, although popular, is only available occasionally. The store sells both fresh and tinned meat, but people infinitely prefer fresh meat when they can afford it and it is available. The store manager reports that after the community income rose in late 1979, the main change was increased consumption of fresh meat - up to approximately \$2,500 worth per month. It must be remembered that this is additional to meat obtained from killers spasmodically culled from the Willowra herd. Cold drinks, the largest single item of expenditure in January 1979 (Table 3.7), are always popular but are in particularly high demand during the hot season, especially since the store has the only refrigerator in the community. Shopkeepers periodically promote fruit juice as a more nutritious replacement for lemonade or coke, and people certainly appreciate the change. Flavoured milk is also popular but, since it does not keep well, is usually stored only in small quantities.

As Table 3.7 suggests, Willowra store provides only a limited range of foodstuffs. This reflects both the tastes of the people, which are fairly conventional, and the small size of the enterprise. As a consequence, the Willowra diet lacks variety. Table 3.8 presents an analysis of the community intake of essential elements from purchased foods

during an 18 day period in January/February 1979. As it shows, energy, protein and iron intakes exceeded the recommended levels but the diet from that source was apparently deficient in calcium and vitamins in general. These needs are usually provided for in foods such as milk, eggs, cheese, fresh fruit and vegetables, none of which are consumed in large quantities by Willowra people, partly because the store stocks few of these products.

Table 3.7
Willowra store expenditure, 17.1.79 - 2.2.79

	Amount Spent on Food %
Flour	7.6
Tea	5.2
Sugar	7.7
Tinned Meat	14.0
Fresh Meat	10.0
Cigarettes, Tobacco	4.4
Cold Drinks, Juice	32.3
Other	18.7
	100.0

Source: Stock records.

While some foods, for example fresh fruit and cheese, are popular and would probably be eaten in larger quantities if available, others are not considered to be acceptable substitutes for meat, always the favourite. In the past store-keepers have attempted to influence nutrition by limiting stock to particular items. This has been only partially successful because the introduced foods do not accord with people's tastes or, if they require elaborate preparation such as baking or stewing are, in general, inappropriate to an existence which, although no longer nomadic, is still essentially outdoors. Food that requires storage also presents problems because Willowra people have difficulty in finding places which are safe from the depredations of children, dogs and donkeys.

Table 3.8
Composition of purchased foods at Willowra,
Jan/Feb. 1979
 (18 days, whole community)

Nutrient	Estimated(a) intake	Recommended(b) intake	Estimated Recommended(%)
Energy (KJ)	56218,190	44,827,300	118
Protein (gms)	329,900	135,420	230
Calcium (mg)	753,740	2,225,300	32
Iron (mg)	43,410	40,190	108
Thiamine (mg)	4,420	4,490	98
Riboflavin (mg)	2,520	6,780	37
Niacin (mg)	49,370	74,850	66
Ascorbic Acid (mg)	105,460	136,080	78
Retinol (Vit.A) (mg)	400	3,050	13

(a) Calculated according to analysis presented in Thomas and Corden (1977).

(b) Based on allowances recommended by FAO/WHO (World Health Organization, 1974). This system was used in preference to that suggested for the Australian population (Thomas and Corden, 1977), because in the latter cases the amount of protein recommended is high for 'sociological causes' (Australians seem to feel that a high protein diet is essential for good health). It could be argued that, since Aborigines also feel that they must have large supplies of meat, the Australian allowances should be used. The Joint FAO/WHO Expert Group on Energy and Protein Requirements (1971) suggest that the actual requirements of protein fall far below those assumed to be necessary in Australia.

Source: Stocktaking records, Willowra, 17/1/79-2/2/79.

Imbalance in the composition of the Willowra diet almost certainly contributes to some health problems. The high incidence of adult diabetes has been attributed to high intake of refined sugars and carbohydrates (Wise *et al.*, 1976); trachoma, nasal discharge, otitis media, blindness and skin diseases have all been shown to be more prevalent

in Aboriginal communities with poor nutritional status (NTEHP,1980:Ch.10).

For a variety of reasons, the results presented in Table 3.8 provide only a superficial picture of the dietary intakes of Willowra people. First the analysis does not take all food sources into account; infants obtain a substantial part of their sustenance from human milk, all members of the community periodically share fresh meat obtained from killers, and bush foods often supplement the diet. As Peterson (1978:28-9) has shown, some bush foods are important sources of nutrient; witchetty grubs are a valuable source of protein while solanum fruits (bush tomatoes) contain considerable quantities of ascorbic acid. However the quantity and type of bush food obtained varies according to season and according to who participates in hunting and gathering expeditions (see above); during the period in question few women wished to collect bush food because the high day-time temperatures (over 40 C) discouraged any physical activity. A further dietary element, prominent in some Aboriginal communities but not significant at Willowra, is alcohol. Only a few members of the community drink alcohol, and none obtain it frequently. Hence it is not considered in this analysis.

Secondly, the analysis is based on a constant population with constant energy needs. As has been shown earlier, the Willowra population is mobile, and energy needs vary individually and seasonally. During the time in question, the population was relatively stable, and the exodus of visitors to other centres was roughly compensated for by an influx of visitors from outside. Energy needs in January and February are probably below those of the cooler season. Few Willowra people carry out hard physical labour during that period, and many spend much of the day sleeping or gossiping in the shade. In the middle of the year, when the stock-camp is operating and when daytime travel is common, people are much more active. While Table 3.8 suggests that community levels of energy intake are adequate, the existence of obesity, which is most marked amongst the women, suggests that personal intakes vary. It is quite likely that some individuals do not have an adequate diet in this sense, but, for a variety of reasons, differences in diet are hard to assess. Nutritional variations cannot be measured by observing expenditure patterns because, when purchases have been carried back to camp, food is frequently redistributed. Products obtained

in the course of hunting and gathering expeditions are also shared out and, if the item is particularly prized, for example emu meat, small portions may reach a large number of recipients.

In general, older people depend more heavily on the basics of flour, bread, tea, sugar and meat, while younger people also buy foods such as tinned fruit or cakes. Children (as in the rest of Australian society) are the main consumers of crisps, peanuts and biscuits and everyone, young and old, likes cold drinks. Women consume most of the vegetables, fruits and small game, such as goannas or snakes, which they gather but probably receive a smaller share of meat from kangaroo or emu than do the men.

At the time of the survey, Willowra store stocked few non-food items, and people travelled to Yuendumu or Alice Springs to buy clothes, footwear or other items. The store manager was, however, willing to obtain these and other goods if specifically requested and, during the humid season in January, had stocked mosquito nets and tents. Since then, the store has increased its stock of consumer goods, particularly of warm clothes, footwear and blankets, necessities during the winter season. People buy these goods as soon as they are available and may then wait for a considerable time before stocks are replenished. Clothes, cooking equipment and other items quickly deteriorate because of the physical conditions of Willowra's open air lifestyle, and frequently need to be replaced. The rise in personal incomes during 1979 has led both to increased consumption of these goods and of better quality foodstuffs, a change which has probably already made some impact on the dietary intake.

The remaining monetary income at Willowra is used for gambling, for buying, repairing and running vehicles, for buying a small amount of grog and, from time to time, for payment of costs incurred in taking part in ceremonies. Gambling, in which both men and women take part, is a major method of redistribution of resources and can be particularly important for those families receiving little from social security. Card playing takes place at any time, but stakes are small in periods immediately preceding the arrival of cheques or wages. It is intense on weekends following paydays. Women and men play cards for entertainment as well as for the possible accumulation of money, and if they have no cash will use their personal

belongings for stakes - blankets and clothes and, while the stockcamp is operating, swags, billycans, hats, belts and riding boots. A loser is usually left with just sufficient to keep warm and clothed. The same rules apply when people are playing for money; winners redistribute enough to losers for purchase of food. Large winnings are frequently used to buy cars, either from other members of the community or from outside, in which case men travel out immediately to town.

Willowra community owns three Toyota trucks, one of which was bought partly from individual contributions and is available for communal use. It is controlled by one man, appointed as driver by the community. Inevitably members of his family have easier access to it than do other people, a source of grievance to other Willowra groups. The other Toyotas are kept for the running of the property. The community also has a cattle truck which is used at times for transporting people to and from ceremonies. When Yuendumu people travelled to Willowra for a corroboree last year, they hired the cattle truck to come and collect them in Yuendumu. People from Willowra who use the truck for these purposes also pay fees to cover fuel costs. In addition, the community has approximately twelve private cars, not all of which are always in running order. These are used for hunting game on Willowra, a pursuit which is hard on the car and causes a great deal of wear and tear, and for travelling to other communities or to Alice Springs. On occasions when a large number of people have to travel at once, people make special efforts to get these cars back on the road. After the death of a prominent Willowra man at Warrabri in January 1979, about 80 per cent of the community travelled there for the mourning ceremonies using the cattle truck, two Toyotas and eight private cars. Many of the men are skilful 'bush' mechanics and are able to repair their vehicles in camp with apparently inadequate resources, but they can use the facilities at the community workshop if necessary. Petrol and oil can also be bought from the workshop although costs are extremely high because, owing to the relatively small consumption and no subsidy, such as that for which a large community like Yuendumu is eligible, supplies have to be brought in privately. The cost per litre in early 1979 was 44 cents, compared to 26 cents in Yuendumu and 24 cents in Alice Springs.

The Willowra community enforces a strict ban on alcohol. Willowra people who wish to drink usually do so at Ti-Tree, where many of them have relatives, or with friends at Anningie on the road back. The absence of alcohol at Willowra itself is an important reason for the peacefulness of the community. Fights during early 1979 were infrequent and were all concerned with infringements of traditional laws and customs. While fights at neighbouring Yuendumu also had similar causes, they took place much more frequently and were often sparked off by drinking bouts.

WILLOWRA ASPIRATIONS AND PROSPECTS

Throughout the years the Willowra people have indicated to outsiders that their preferred way of life is predominantly Warlpiri, and that their main aim is to be able to practice that lifestyle with as little external interference as possible. Most other Aboriginal communities in Central Australia would share this aspiration. However, through ownership of the pastoral property, the Willowra people have a much better opportunity of reaching this goal than do their friends living in large heterogeneous settlements. Consideration of the interaction between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal components of Willowra life demonstrates how this may be achieved.

Leadership has played a vital part in maintaining the stability of the Willowra community. Its strength lies in the combination of traditional and non-traditional roles. For example, Stumpy Martin Jampijinpa, who acts as both Community Adviser and cattle station manager, also has responsibility as *kurdungurlu* (guardian) for the Jungarrayi/Nungarrayi owners of Wirliyajarrayi dreaming site; in one capacity he acts as the chief intermediary between members of the Willowra community and the 'whiteman's world'; in the other he oversees the religious practices necessary for the maintenance of the links between the principal owners of Willowra and their land. The composition of the board of directors of the Pastoral Company, made up of prominent traditional leaders of each of the Willowra groups, provides a further example of this type of combination.

Although such leaders are able to exert strong control on community organization, they may encounter severe problems when dealing with non-Aboriginal processes of consultation, bureaucratic methods and rules and regulations. Most are older people who, while experienced in some aspects of the European world, lack formal western education. Willowra leaders have recognized that they are disadvantaged in this way and, accordingly, have been enthusiastic about the schooling of their young people. However, their enthusiasm is confined to those features of non-Aboriginal education which they perceive to be necessary within the Willowra community, and their eventual aim is to be able to cope effectively with the outside world without having to rely on the services of Europeans. Young people who have learned these skills already perform these roles; they operate the telephone, they write and translate letters, they act as interpreters. However they still carry out these tasks as intermediaries for the Willowra leaders rather than as leaders in their own right, and thus are not forced into positions of authority which they cannot possibly hope to maintain. Europeans who come to consult with Willowra people sometimes fail to understand the position of these younger adults, and conclude that they exert greater power than they do.

Education is not the only feature of contemporary Willowra life which people have tried to tailor to their own requirements. The health service, in its present form, also stems from community rather than Department of Health decision-making. Community leaders, concerned about the type of health care offered by non-resident nurses, took the responsibility for arranging the employment of a European sister, and applied to the Department of Health for a subsidy to cover her wages. Permanent housing has now been given a lower priority because the people are well aware of some of the disadvantages - poor and costly design, lack of residential mobility. Wage employment of a casual nature at Willowra is recognised to be appropriate because it can be easily combined with other forms of occupation. However permanent wage employment, almost inevitably away from Willowra, is, for most people, not to be considered because it means the disruption of social and cultural life. Money, while now universally recognized as an essential element for support, is used as a medium of exchange within the traditional system rather than a means of investment of non-Aboriginal type. In general, the Willowra attitude towards these and other non-traditional elements which they

have adopted is that they should be used to support the fabric of Warlpiri society; they should not be used to make Warlpiri more European in their outlook.

Willowra's function as a cattle station is a topic on which there has been much, sometimes ill-informed, discussion. As recently as January, 1979 (NT News, 19.1.79), Willowra community has been accused of 'failure' because, in the six years since purchase, it neither paid back the money loaned for its purchase nor generated sufficient income to support itself. Such a suggestion ignores the true situation with regard to the purchase of pastoral properties for Aboriginal groups. During the prolonged negotiations for its sale there was no suggestion that Willowra could provide a large enough monetary income to support an Aboriginal population of over 200. The main reason for acquiring the property was to give the control of the land back to the people who could traditionally claim it as theirs - the Lander Warlpiri. This is certainly how the transaction was perceived by the Warlpiri, and, subsequently, has been the avowed policy of the Aboriginal Land Fund Commission (Rowley, 1978:61-62). In the case of Willowra the issue has been complicated by the fact that the purchase was made through a loan, rather than, as in more recent transactions, through money allocated by the Aboriginal Land Fund Commission. There is now no assumption that the community should repay the loan. By placing emphasis on the significance of Aboriginal pastoral stations as communities, neither DAA nor the ALFC have ever suggested that the pastoral operation or conditions of the lease should be ignored. They expect that communities like Willowra will generate income through cattle sales, use this income for basic community support as they see fit, and maintain fences, bores and stock. Willowra is now doing all of these things, and more. The community is now hoping to use part of its recent earnings to purchase neighbouring Mount Barkly. Complaints about earlier failures of the Pastoral Company to trade cattle fail to take account of the depressed situation of the beef industry in Central Australia, in the mid 1970's. For example, the European manager of Napperby Station, adjacent to Willowra, admitted that he sold no beasts in three seasons from 1976 to 1978, and that when he began to muster in 1979 he found 5,000 cleanskins to be branded and marketed.

Willowra is therefore above all an Aboriginal community, and, according to most of its residents, a highly congenial place in which to live. Its social cohesiveness stems from its closely knit kinship structure - as people have frequently said 'We Willowra mob are one family'; its strong and united leadership; and above all, ownership and control of its tribal land. Willowra is lucky to have all these things. Most other communities in Central Australia contain a variety of family and language groups, many of which are cut off from their land. This causes divisive leadership and generates enormous social pressures which often lead to violence and alcohol abuse. Willowra people are well aware of the differences and indicate this in their unwillingness to spend long periods of time in such places as Yuendumu or Warrabri, even although they have relatives living there. Preservation of the social stability of Willowra is obviously crucial, and a major reason for the grant of freehold title to the land.

Although Willowra's position is, in some ways, relatively favourable, it would be false to suggest that there are no problems which are a cause for future concern. First, there is the land rights issue, coupled with the issue of control over the entry of outsiders. If government policies change towards the imposition of rigid control over the use of Aboriginal controlled properties, then both of these issues will be vital. The Willowra people undoubtedly want to be able to decide on the use of their land, and to control who has rights of residence upon it. Secondly, there is the high rate of population growth, both through natural increase and migration; since this is likely to continue, the strains within the community will grow and the benefits to be gained through monetary earning will decline. As Bell and Ditton (1980:55) note, Willowra has so far managed to retain its young people; although its leaders hope that this process will continue, they are also worried about what these young people are going to do with their lives. Thirdly, although relatively well-knit, Willowra does have internal divisions. These are likely to become more significant as the population grows and equitable distribution of resources becomes more difficult. Present residents are concerned about an influx of relatives from Yuendumu or Warrabri, because it is usually from these sources that alcohol reaches the community and hence generates violence. Finally, like other Aboriginal communities, Willowra does have problems in dealing with the white bureaucracy. These range from difficulties over

organizing the financial affairs of two (formerly three) incorporated bodies when one should have been enough, to difficulties over social security delivery and difficulties caused by lack of consultation with other government departments. For example, the Willowra people were not consulted about the plans for the new classrooms built in 1979, nor were they even asked whether they wanted new classrooms. The decision was made by the Department of Education and implemented because the funds were available. For all that the Department knew, the entire Willowra community might have decided to shift its camp 10 kms downstream. Essentially, all government officials need to be far more aware of the changing circumstances within a community, and to place more confidence in the ability of the people to decide how funds should best be used.

Chapter 4

Numbulwar: emergence from the mission umbrella

The Numbulwar community (population approximately 500) is located in south eastern Arnhem Land at the mouth of the Rose River (Fig.4.1), on the site allocated to the Church Missionary Society (CMS) by Aboriginal elders in 1952. After almost 30 years of mission administration, the Numbulwar people have recently assumed formal responsibility for the management of their own affairs, under an Aboriginal Council appointed by the various clans within their group. The transition to Aboriginal autonomy, carried through by leaders with limited experience in dealing with many aspects of the non-Aboriginal world, has not been easy, and has led to some internal political conflict and social disruption. At the same time Numbulwar people have, like their Arnhem Land neighbours, expressed the wish to re-establish close contact with their tribal lands through setting up satellite outstations, and the resultant process of decentralization has become an important component of the assertion of Aboriginal control.

Both those who elect to leave the settlement and those who decide to remain are concerned about their lack of economic resources, which might be exploited to provide a stronger basis for independence. Numbulwar's physical isolation, which hinders successful participation by the community in the external market economy, is likely to prevent solution of this problem. Although the present period of uncertainty and instability at Numbulwar, caused by these circumstances, has resulted in pessimistic predictions for the future, every effort should be made to set social change within a broader time perspective. Numbulwar people are currently experiencing a transition, which hopefully will lead to the establishment of a stronger foundation for Aboriginal community government.

COMMUNITY LOCATION AND CHARACTERISTICS

Physical location

Numbulwar is isolated from other Aboriginal or European communities. Its only land link to the interior is a narrow gravel road, along which Mataranka and the Stuart Highway lie over 300 km to the west. During the wet season (January until May) that part of the road which connects Numbulwar to Ngukurr (Fig.4.1) is impassable because of flooding, and Numbulwar people can then contact the outside world only by air or sea travel, or by telephone and radio, communication links which are all liable to be disrupted in bad weather. However, with higher incomes and hence increasing Aboriginal use of aeroplanes and four-wheel drive vehicles, isolation is breaking down. Greater mobility and freedom to move have extended Numbulwar knowledge of the non-Aboriginal world and accelerated the process of social change in what must previously have been a highly protected community.

The country surrounding Numbulwar consists of a level coastal plain which rises very gradually inland towards the Arnhem Land plateau. The plain is fringed by expanses of estuarine and coastal alluvium which, from the mouth of the Rose River northwards, have been formed into a series of unstable sand dunes parallel to the beach. While the sandstones and limestones which form the coastal plain have weathered to lateritic soils with poorly defined surface drainage, the alluvial areas are unconsolidated, frequently flooded and have a brackish water table.¹ However, fresh water can be obtained from billabongs which form between the sand dunes, and can also be found by sinking spears through the dunes² to the water table. These sources provide the main supply for the settlement. Unfortunately, because of variations in rainfall, they fluctuate in both quality and quantity. In earlier times it was feared that, because of the unreliability of water supplies in the dry season, the whole settlement would have to be relocated (DAA,

1. See Bureau of Mineral Resources, 1963 and 1965 for more detailed description of the physical characteristics of the region.

2. Hollow tubes which, when they reach the water table, can be used to draw water to the surface.

77/909:78). Even now, with a much greater number of spears and wells, it is not unusual for the water to be turned off for long periods during the day, and, since shortages coincide with the dry season when all supplies of rain water have already been used, this can cause considerable hardship.

Numbulwar has a tropical climate with a pronounced seasonal precipitation regime. Maximum temperatures range from about 30 C in the dry season (June/July) to over 35 C in the month immediately preceding the onset of the wet period (December), and in the same months minima range from 15 C to 27C. Although higher daytime maxima are rare, they make a considerable impact on daily life because they usually coincide with high humidity. Dry season minima are sufficiently low for people to require several blankets when camping outside and also for people to light fires for warmth. The annual rainfall (approximately 800 mm on average), occurs almost entirely between the months of January and May. In 1979 Numbulwar received over 650 mm in that period (Fig.4.2). Wet season precipitation is not continuous but occurs in spasmodic heavy downpours often separated by prolonged dry spells, especially during the March to May period. Thus in 1979, although rain fell on more than half of the days in January, amounts greater than 10 mm were recorded on only six days; the only other large amounts of precipitation fell during a four day period in early March and again in mid-April (Fig.4.2). Storms such as these, which can severely disrupt the community, are usually associated with tropical cyclones occurring in adjacent areas. While Numbulwar is within the region at risk from cyclones, it has rarely been severely affected and even when it lay close to the centre of a storm which moved into the south-western area of the Gulf of Carpentaria in 1973 (Cyclone Madge), damage was slight.

Although rainfall is not continuous during the wet season, it is sufficient to cause severe flooding especially at major river crossings, such as Policeman's Crossing on the Rose River to the west of Numbulwar, and areas where swamps and billabongs form indefinite drainage patterns associated with the limestone bedrock, and to saturate the light sandy soils so that even four-wheel drive vehicles find it impossible to move. After heavy rain journeys are either postponed or end in frustration. For example, ten days after the Easter storms in 1979, three four-wheel drive trucks attempted to make the trip to Ngukurr for a ceremony.

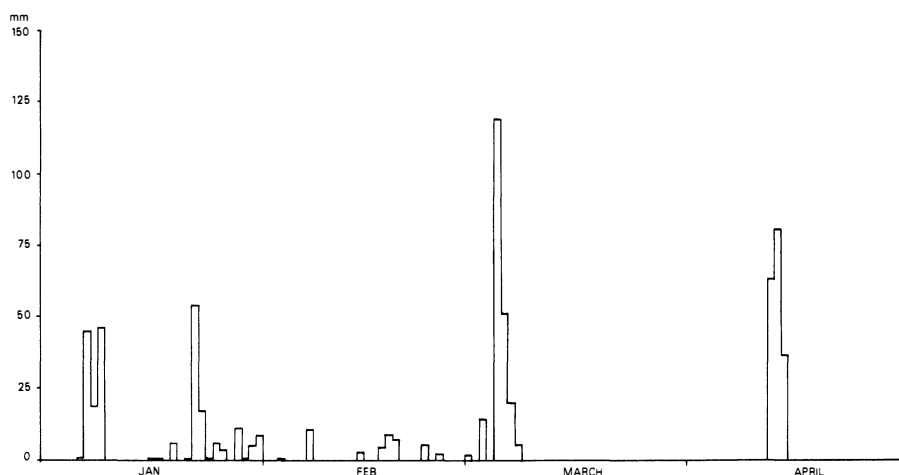


Fig 4.2 Numbulwar: rainfall, January to May 1979.

Only one, equipped with a winch, succeeded and this vehicle was also used to free the other two, stranded for two days in a swampy part of the road over 60 km from the nearest settlement. These difficulties in land communications have hindered outstation development and, during 1979 wet season, the people at Andhananggi, who have access to a rough airstrip, were the only ones to remain in residence.

The Numbulwar climate is basically transitional between that of the 'Top End', with a strongly pronounced wet season, and the arid and semi-arid regimes of the centre. This is reflected in the dominant vegetation - open savannah of eucalypt (*E. tetradonta* and *E. miniata*), cypress pine (*Callistris intertropica*) and pandanus (*pandanus spilaris*) interspersed with annual grasses and sorghums. Along river courses, mostly slightly incised, the vegetation cover becomes thicker and includes some larger trees. Grassland is sparse during the dry season and the arid landscape is dominated by thick red dust. Vegetation clearance is partly due to fires, sometimes deliberately lit to remove undergrowth which hinders hunting, and sometimes the result of lightning strikes. Savannah vegetation extends on to isolated islands elevated from the salt flats of the coastal alluvial areas. The flats themselves have a variable cover of salt tolerant plants and extensive areas of bare sand, and are fringed on the seaward side by

mangrove swamps which form impenetrable barriers between the sea and inland areas.

Both the coastal plains and salt flats provide a large variety of natural resources which formed the basic support for nomadic hunting and gathering in the past. These include game such as kangaroo, emu, flying fox, goanna and snake and, from fresh and salt water sources, a great variety of edible birds, fishes and reptiles. Rivers and lakes provide barramundi, perch, bream, catfish, freshwater turtle and, in season, ducks, geese and broilgas; brackish areas and mangroves are rich in crabs and other types of shellfish; coastal waters abound with mullet, bream, rays and other fish. Men go further afield to hunt dugong and green turtle and, in season, collect terns' eggs from the sandy offshore islands. Vegetable foods include two varieties of yam, one of which contains a poisonous substance which must be removed by leaching and boiling before consumption, water lily seeds and roots, and various fruits and berries. Wild honey is a popular additional food. Two relatively common introduced animals are cattle and buffalo, both of which are extremely wild and, in the case of buffalo, are regarded as a major danger to unprotected hunters and gatherers. Crocodiles are similarly treated with caution. Cattle have, until recently, had little or no value but some outstation groups now muster them for use as killer herds.

The natural resources of the Numbulwar region also include raw materials for building houses and other structures, and for making artefacts for personal use and sale. Cypress pine was heavily exploited when the mission buildings were being constructed from locally sawn timber; saplings are still collected for making spears, harpoons and nulla-nullas; tree bark is used for making coolamons and, nowadays, as a medium for painting; fibres provide rope for hunting turtle and dugong and string for dilly bags; hardwoods are suitable for boomerang manufacture; and seeds and bird feathers make colourful decorations and symbolic objects used in ceremonies. Different coloured ochres for body painting and artefact decoration are less generally available but are traded from those people within whose tribal country they occur.

Settlement history³

Numbulwar, or Rose River Mission as it was called at the time of its establishment, was founded as a centre for the Nunggubuyu people whose territory lies in the southeast of the Arnhem Land Reserve, between Blue Mud Bay and Rose River (Fig.4.1). During the severe drought of the 1940s and early 1950s some Nunggubuyu had gathered at Roper River Mission (now Ngukurr) in order to obtain rations to supplement their diet. Their resettlement at Numbulwar, carried out in 1952 with the agreement of tribal leaders, alleviated severe water shortages caused by population increase at Roper River Mission. The size of the group at Numbulwar, initially sixty five Aborigines, rapidly increased to over 100 as it was joined by Nunggubuyu and some Wandarang and Mara, whose country lies to the south of the Rose River along the shores of Limmen Bight. Most of these newcomers had previously had very limited contact with Europeans and, unlike those who had lived near Roper River Mission, no schooling or Christian instruction.

In the early days Numbulwar, administered as a satellite of Roper River Mission, was forced by its isolation to be as self-sufficient as possible. Attempts to produce all material needs within the community also accorded with CMS policy, aimed at teaching Aborigines agricultural and industrial pursuits and encouraging them to relinquish their nomadic past for a more settled lifestyle (Cole, 1977:182-3). The first years were spent in constructing an airstrip and, after a sawmill was set up in 1955, a church, a hospital, school, houses for missionaries and, finally, houses for Aborigines. People were expected to derive much of their sustenance from bush tucker and game, and, in fact, were told to go off on holiday ('walkabout') when mission supplies were low. The mission employed Aborigines on a trading basis, i.e. men and women who made artefacts, or men who went fishing were paid for what they produced (dugong meat fetched 2d per lb in 1952), and could then use their money to buy flour, tea, sugar, clothes and other things. Those who helped to build houses or worked on the airstrip received rations rather than wages. All able-bodied people, with the exception of the elderly and those women who were pregnant or lactating, were expected to work, although it was recognized that jobs would

3. Much greater detail is given in Mercer (1962) and Hughes (1974), and in monthly reports submitted by CMS to the Welfare Department (1963-73). Production figures in this section are taken from the CMS reports.

not always be available; for example, in the wet season, fishermen could not always venture far in search of dugong and turtle. Those who could not be employed received some rations in support. Thus, through these experiences, Aborigines at Numbulwar were expected to acquire some of the concepts of the western work ethic. However, since they earned so little their opportunity of learning about non-Aboriginal ideas of how money should be used was very limited.

When mission construction was completed, attention turned towards increasing local food production, mainly for consumption within the community. This was so successful that it became apparent that Numbulwar could provide a considerable surplus, particularly in fruit, vegetables and eggs. In 1959/60 the market garden produced 4 tons of fruit and vegetables but in 1965/66 this had increased to over 40 tons, approximately a pound per day for every man, woman and child on the settlement. Groote Eylandt, where manganese mining was commencing at that time, was seen as the obvious outlet, but, because of organizational problems, these plans met with little success, although for a number of years Numbulwar exported eggs for workers for the Groote Eylandt Mining Company (GEMCO).⁴ In the absence of a market, Numbulwar garden crops were distributed freely throughout the community or, on occasion, were left to rot.

Artefact manufacture, although the goods were non-perishable and of higher value, faced similar marketing problems. Under mission tuition, Numbulwar women became skilled at weaving mats and baskets from pandanus fibre, and also made traditional items such as dilly bags and carvings. Men made spears, harpoons, boomerangs and, in some cases, models of dugout canoes. During the latter part of the 1960s, when a group of Balamumu people from the northern part of Blue Mud Bay settled in Numbulwar, some men also produced bark paintings. These were all bought by the CMS and then sent to the mission headquarters in Sydney for sale. Earnings were small and variable; for example, artefact sales brought in \$2,636 during 1966, but monthly totals ranged from \$56 to over \$750. However, the expense involved in using this outlet limited the amounts that could be despatched, and workers also had to try to sell their

4. Quantities sent to GEMCO were considerable; in October/November 1966 over 950 dozen were sold, while September 1971 saw over 1000 dozen (60 per cent of local production) going to Groote Eylandt (CMS. 1963-73).

goods locally. Since Numbulwar's European population at that time consisted of only about six families, local demand was clearly very small. Workers were soon discouraged and ceased manufacture.

Despite the limited opportunities of their community, Numbulwar people have shown little inclination to seek work or entertainment elsewhere. In the 1960s the movement of some young people to Groote Eylandt to work for a few months with GEMCO marks the real beginning of Nungubuyu contact with the money economy. From 1969 onwards workers at Numbulwar received wages under the Training Allowance scheme and, in 1973, these were increased to meet the standards of full Award Wages. Rising money incomes in the community have increased Aboriginal dependence on store bought food and have enabled people to purchase assets such as vehicles, dinghies and outboard motors or to finance travel to other centres. At the same time mission organized funding has been replaced by more substantial government funding. Numbulwar now has a new school, a new hospital and a large number of new houses; a modern power house; a supermarket, and a community hall. It must bear little resemblance to the settlement of twenty years ago, when non-Aboriginal material inputs would have been less apparent.

Economic changes have been accompanied by political and social changes. The present Aboriginal council is very different from its predecessor, the Village Council (established in 1963) which consisted of all leading Europeans in the community and two or three prominent Aborigines. Today Europeans, none of whom are members, attend council meetings only by request when certain issues require clarification. This change is comparatively recent since, as DAA officials have noted (1978:III.8) council meetings in 1974 were attended by equal numbers of Aborigines and Europeans. A further important change, related to the replacement of the CMS by the Aboriginal Council administration in 1978, is the employment of non-mission personnel in many key positions. Until mid-1979 this movement had made little impact but since that time several CMS workers, who had transferred to employment under the Council, have been replaced by people whom the council have appointed independently. While this transitional period has in many ways been painful, it is seen as a necessary part of the emergence of Aboriginal leadership at Numbulwar.

Population

Numbulwar's population in early 1979 was approximately 520, of whom 89 per cent were Aboriginal (Table 4.1). This

Table 4.1
Numbulwar Aboriginal population, 1979 (a)

Age Group	Male		Female		Total	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
0-14	89	38.4	104	44.8	193	41.6
15-59	135	58.2	118	50.9	253	54.5
60 +	8	3.4	10	4.3	18	3.9
Total	232	100.0	232	100.0	464	100.0

(a) Non-Aboriginal population was approximately 60.

Masculinity Ratio 1.0

Child/Woman Ratio 0.63

Dependency Ratio 0.83

For ratio definitions see Chapter 1, Table 1.2

Source: Department of Health Records, Numbular.

represents an Aboriginal population increase of 3.7 per cent per annum over the last 20 years,⁵ a change which can be attributed partly in-migration and partly to natural increase. In the early years of the mission the core population of Nunggubuyu, mostly from country close to the present site of Numbulwar, was increased by the inward migration of other Nunggubuyu who have remained in a semi-nomadic state in their own territory. At a later stage, they were joined by families from Bickerton Island and Limmen Bight, and, in 1963, by Balamumu people from northern Blue Mud Bay. While the Balamumu have since departed to settle on Yirrkala outstations and at Lake Evella, the others have remained. High levels of mobility, a marked characteristic of the Numbulwar people who frequently visit other communities to see family and friends

5. These figures, assembled for the Northern Territory Department of Welfare, must be accepted with reservations because of variations in definition etc.

and participate in ceremonies, also affect population figures, usually collected on a de facto basis.

The Aboriginal population in Numbulwar has a high rate of natural increase. Statistics which cover the main part of the settlement's history (NT Welfare Reports, 1958-71) indicate that children have accounted for approximately 40 per cent of the population, compared to 29.5 per cent in the non-Aboriginal population of the Northern Territory in 1976.⁶ As Fig.4.3 shows, the age-sex structure of Numbulwar in 1979 is that of a population with potentially high rates of reproduction. This is confirmed by the child-woman ratio (0.63), which is close to that of all Aborigines in the Northern Territory in 1976, but much higher than that of the non-Aboriginal population of the state at that time (0.43). While, because of the small sample size and inaccuracies in the data, it is not possible to measure fertility rates exactly, crude analysis of the reproductive histories of Numbulwar women aged between 15 and 49 suggests a birth rate of about 37 per thousand, again much higher than that of the total population of Australia (16 per thousand in 1978).⁷ High birth rates are, however, combined with high mortality, currently estimated at around 15 per thousand compared to 7.6 per thousand for the Australian population. While this figure is still unacceptably high, it is certainly an improvement on former times. Birth and death statistics show that, in 1978, no infants born alive subsequently died. This must partly be due to the present Department of Health practice of evacuating all expectant mothers with complications or in their first pregnancy to Nhulunbuy hospital, well before delivery time, a procedure which has developed because of the isolation of Numbulwar.

High rates of population growth and high fertility result in a high dependency ratio in the Aboriginal population (0.83 compared to 0.48 for the non-Aboriginal population of the Northern Territory in 1976). Most of these dependents are children; old people form only a small percentage of the community and, as contributors to monetary resources, can hardly be considered as dependents because their age pensions form an important element in both

6. Figures based on the 1976 census are derived from special tabulations made from the Aboriginal Summary File at Collector's District Level.

7. Methods of analysis used are those described in United Nations publications on analysing fertility and mortality from deficient data (1968).

community and family incomes. In Aboriginal terms their knowledge of customary practice, including exchange systems, gives them positions of prime importance, in which many others are dependant on them.

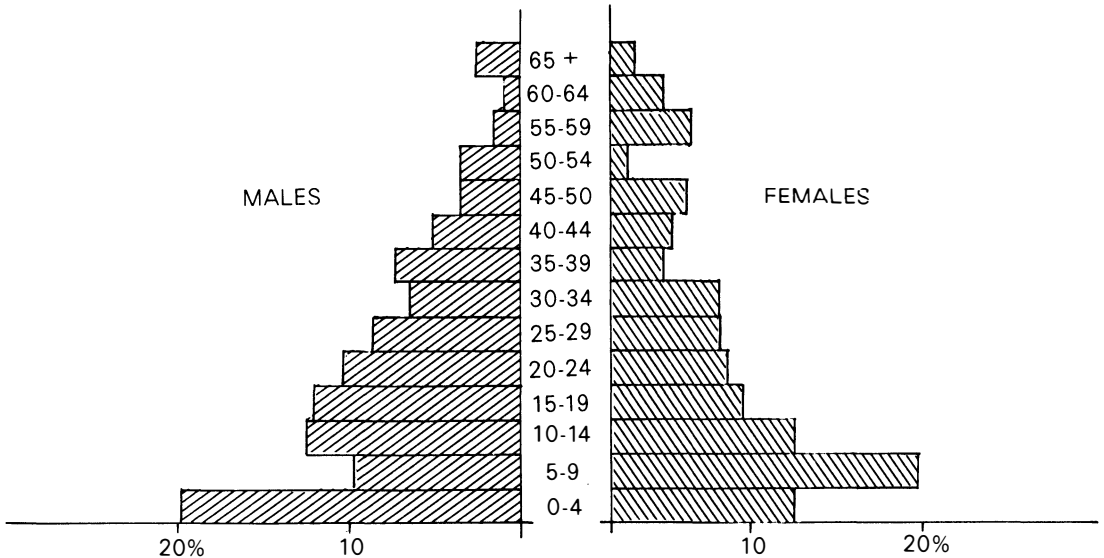


Fig 4.3 Numbulwar: age/sex structure 1979.

Marriage at Numbulwar is almost universal for women of 25 years and over. However, although most young women still conform to the customs of the traditional tribal marriage system, and as a consequence may be married to men several years older than themselves (the average age difference in Numbulwar is more than 8 years), changes have occurred. Polygyny is now rare and, as Burbank (1980:47) records, most women said to be members of such unions did not share accommodation with their co-wives. The virtual disappearance of polygyny seems to be fairly recent (in 1978, 39 per cent of Numbulwar women over 30 had at one time been in polygynous unions with shared housing) and has been attributed to contact with Angurugu (Groote Eylandt) Mission, where CMS officials organized a redistribution of wives in the 1950s, as well as to disapproval expressed by missionaries at Numbulwar (Burbank, 1980:47-8).

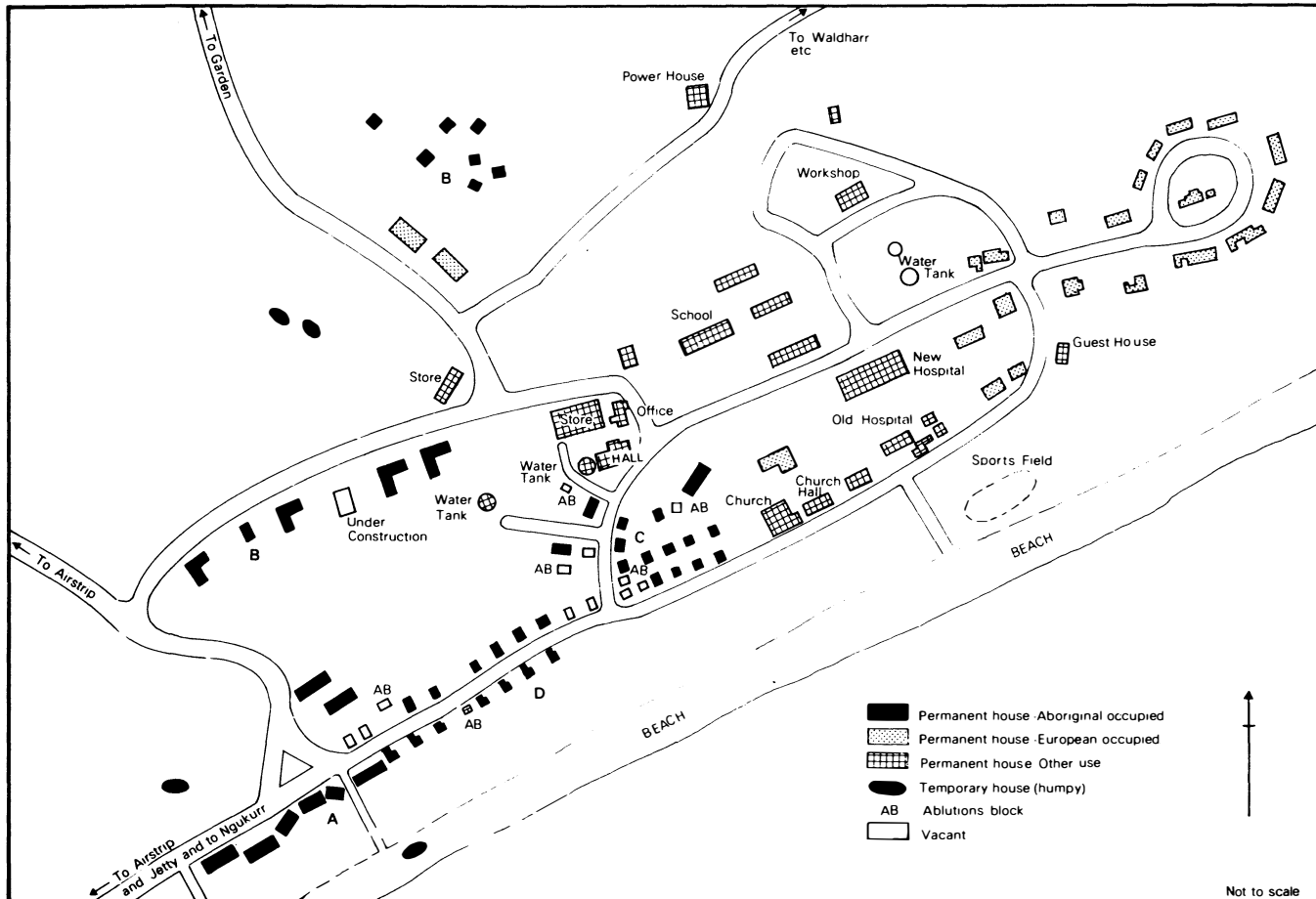


Fig 4.4 Numbulwar: settlement, 1979

Nowadays, both widows and some young women have managed to retain their single status, although they may have been subjected to considerable social pressure in the process. Most of those who have never married are committed to a non-Aboriginal career; for example, one has been working in the health centre for over 20 years, while another, handicapped following polio in childhood, is the only Aboriginal teacher in the community. Other Numbulwar women have also diverged from customary behaviour by marrying Europeans working in the settlement. While such events often cause social strife and disruption in the initial stages, they are usually accepted later by all parties.

Marriage ties link the ten clans and moieties of the Nunggubuyu system (see Table 4.2), and create a network of contacts which underlies the social structure of the settlement. Biernoff (1979:168-170) describes how Aboriginal residences at Numbulwar were occupied by clan groups which were closely related to each other and which were in sites which corresponded roughly to the location of their tribal territory. While this pattern is still apparent, in that Nunggubuyu from the south live at the southern end of Numbulwar along with Wandarang and Mara, their southerly neighbours, and northern Nunggubuyu live to the north, it has become masked by the construction of larger modern houses which are used by several related families. Since these are allocated according to status in the community rather than clan affiliation, next door neighbours are not necessarily connected to one another.

Numbulwar settlement, built on the coastal sand-dunes about 3 km north of the original mission camp at the mouth of the Rose River, consists almost entirely of permanent buildings. It is split into two distinct sections - the European area to the north and the Aboriginal area to the south, with the school, office, community hall and store forming a service nucleus in the centre (Fig.4.4). Most Europeans are now housed in three and four bedroom dwellings built from materials imported by barge from Darwin. These have replaced the earlier timber buildings. During the last part of 1979, the old timber hospital was also replaced by a modern clinic, and the original buildings have now been demolished to make way for flats for health workers. Most of the dwellings in the Aboriginal part of the settlement are made from locally produced timber and date from a variety of periods during the 1950s and 1960s. Those

adjacent to the church are the earliest (Camp C). Many huts of a similar age in the section immediately to the west (Camp D) are now now longer occupied, and others were replaced in the 1960s by larger two-room structures with verandahs. The camp to the north of the store, (Camp B), specially built for the Balamumu people when they settled in Numbulwar, also dates from this period. After they left to return to their own country, their camp was taken over by Nunggubuyu from the northern part of the tribal territory.

Table 4.2
Nunggubuyu clans and moieties

	Moieties	
	Mandirrija	Mandhayung
Clans	Nunggarrgalu	Mangurra
	Nundhirribala	Murrungun
	Wurramarra	Ngalmi
	Nunggumajbarr	Numamurdiridi
	Nunggangulgu	Magurri

During the 1970s two blocks of conventional European style tropical houses (Camps A and B) (three and four bedroom dwellings raised from the ground on stilts) have been built for Aborigines. This project, now complete in the westernmost camp but still in process in the camp adjacent to the store, was undertaken because of complaints from Aborigines that the contrast between their own living standards and those of the European residents was too great. Two of these houses are single women's camps, with a large number of women ranging from elderly widows to young unmarried girls and children. Women visiting Numbulwar usually stay there. Temporary dwellings, apart from those built for outdoor living during the hot dry season and those erected to shelter visitors, are occupied by old people who in many cases reject more conventional structures (in non-Aboriginal terms) because they find them inappropriate.

None of the timber huts in the Aboriginal settlement has a piped water supply and all share ablution and washing facilities. Since some of these date from the earliest period, they are now substandard and will require replacement in the near future. All new houses are

connected to the town water supplies and have both internal and external washing facilities and access to rain water tanks. Power supplies have been connected to the more recently built wooden huts, and were incorporated into the construction of all the large houses. Altogether, Aborigines in Numbulwar have better access to these facilities than their counterparts in many other settlements in the Northern Territory (the Environmental Health Study of 1978 shows that 95 per cent of Aborigines in Numbulwar had permanent houses, 25 per cent had internal water supplies and 53 per cent were connected to the power supplies; equivalent figures for Yuendumu in the Central Desert were 22 per cent, 17 per cent and 15 per cent (NT Department of Health, 1979: 248-50, 324-6) (See Chapter 2).

Although most Numbulwar residents now occupy permanent houses and have access to urban-type services, their lifestyle still manifests many Aboriginal characteristics. Biernoff (1979:169-70) comments that in 1972 Numbulwar people used their houses only for storage and sleeping, and carried on most other activities outside. The same situation existed in 1979. Cooking, eating, talking, card playing and artefact making were all outdoor activities, except in bad weather. In the hot dry season many families also slept outside, either in shady areas among the sandhills where they constructed bough sheds for daytime use, or on the beach. Several occupants of beach camps in December 1979 came from the large modern houses. One need only experience the differences in temperature between the beach, with its cooling sea breezes, and the sandhills, where heat radiates from every object, to understand the reasons for these moves. These things make it hard to assess the actual demand for modern housing by Aborigines in Numbulwar. At community meetings people tend to express views which they consider should be stated for political reasons, or which they think their non-Aboriginal listeners and advisers wish to hear. Undoubtedly anyone, Aboriginal or non-Aboriginal, who lives in a climate such as that of Numbulwar would like access to a refrigerator and the use of an electric fan, but Aboriginal use of inside cooking facilities is likely to be much more limited. Food preparation is essentially a social activity to be carried on outside, where proper interaction with other members of the community is possible. An important factor, which, as DAA rightly state (1978:III.7), concerns Numbulwar people, is that large modern houses cost considerable amounts in rental, and while this may be a minor problem when people

are employed, it becomes a major difficulty when people are out of work.

Separate development of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal settlement at Numbulwar has had, and still has, a profound influence on social interaction between the two groups. Aboriginal people rarely visit non-Aborigines except for highly specific reasons and, in the same way, it is uncommon to see non-Aborigines sitting down in casual conversation within an Aboriginal camp. The problem of establishing social links stems partly from the way in which the community was run by the CMS who, for fear of intruding, seemed to consider that their people should remain aloof from the Aborigines. As a consequence, many Aborigines in Numbulwar have come to expect that non-Aborigines are not interested in their way of life and, in their turn, do not make overtures of friendship. They still refer to all non-Aborigines in the settlement as 'missionaries', and are surprised when some of the present day non-Aboriginal population, who do not wish to conform to the old customs of remaining apart, ask if they can watch or take part in ceremonies, or express an interest in accompanying Aborigines on hunting and gathering expeditions. While the breakdown of these barriers has started, the process will probably take a considerable time. In late 1979 an Aboriginal family moved into one of the former mission houses in the non-Aboriginal part of Numbulwar and, as a result, there was a noticeable increase in Aboriginal movement into that area. This was not regarded with favour by all the non-Aboriginal neighbours.

While, to an outsider, Aboriginal/non-Aboriginal segregation is an obvious feature of the Numbulwar community, splits within the Aboriginal community, a further cause of factionalism, are equally significant. Nunggubuyu society is divided into exogamous moieties each subdivided into ten clans, associated with a specific area of country within the broad Nunggubuyu territory between the mouth of Roper River and Blue Mud Bay (Fig.4.5) (Table 4.2).

Within Numbulwar, clans maintain their separate camps, to some extent located according to the orientation of their tribal country (see above), and people obey customs which restrict them from moving freely to the camps of non-affiliated groups. This has a marked effect on communication; for example, news about decisions taken at Council meetings can only be transmitted properly if each

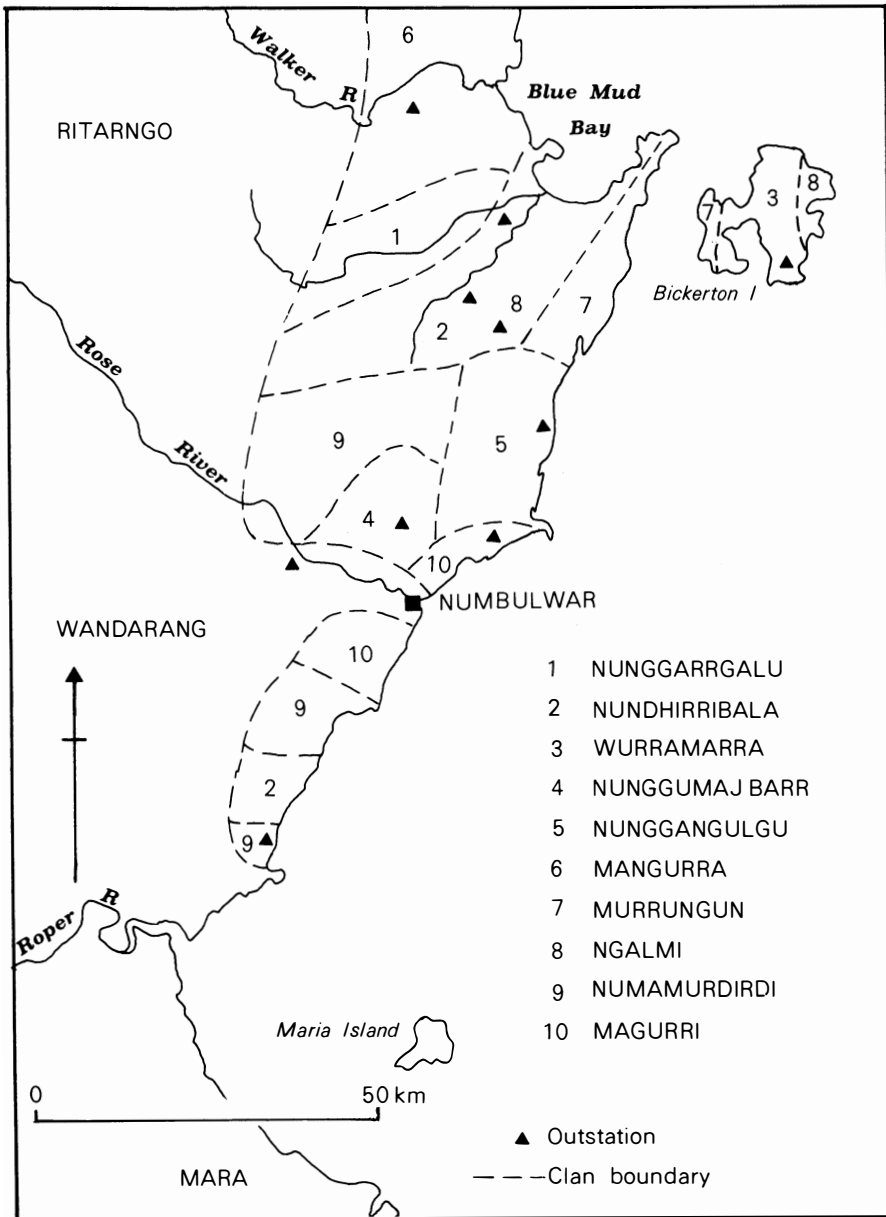


Fig 4.5 Numbulwar: clan territories and outstations.

Table 4.3
Numbulwar outstations (a)

	Wumajbarr	Wuyakipa	Waldharr	Miwul	Marraiya	Andhananggi	Wandu	Gulurruj	Wuyindhangayn
Location (dist. from Numbulwar)	16 km	95 km	61 km	41 km	51 km	90 km	22 km	16 km	95 km
Population									
0-14	3	2	15	-	8	15	6	-	-
15-59	5	4	12	3	17	16	7	2	3
60+	-	-	2	2	-	1	-	-	2
Total	8	6	29	5	25	32	13	2	5
M/F ratio	1.00	0.50	1.07	0.67	1.50	0.88	0.63	1.00	0.67
Type of country	Savannah	Coastal	Savannah	Coastal	Savannah	Savannah	Savannah	Coastal	Coastal
Water	River/ billabong	Well/ spring	River tank/ pump	Billabong	River	River	River	Spring/ creek	Spring/creek pump
Communications	Road	Road/sea	Road	Road/sea	Road	Road/air	Road	Road/sea	Road/sea
Clan	Nunggumajbarr	Numamurdiridi	Nunggargalu	Nunggan/ gulgu	Ngalmi	Mangurra	Nungayin- bala (Wandarang)	Magurri (Murrungun)	Murrungun
Subsistence products	Fish, vegs, duck, geese	Fish, turtle, du- gong, shell- fish, goanna cattle	Fish, cattle, duck, broilga vegs. etc.	Fish, turtle, dugong, vegs.	Fish, cattle, vegs.	Fish, turtle, dugong, yam, goanna, vegs.	Fish, yam, vegs. goanna	Fish, shells, turtle, vegs., dugong	Fish, turtle, dugong, duck, geese, vegs.
Housing	1 tin	3 tin	6 tin/tent	2 tin/ tent	7 tin/tent	3 tin 10 tent	1 stone	1 tin	4 tin
Transport	4 WD	4 WD, boat	4 WD	4 WD	4 WD (x 2)	4 WD, boat, tractor	-	-	4 WD, boat
(1978-79)									
Cash income (\$/f'nt.)	527	124	520	302	75	400	60	188	290
Cash income (\$/f'nt./capita)	66	21	18	60	3	12.5	5	94	58
Cash income source	Soc. Sec.	Soc. Sec.	Soc. Sec.	Soc. Sec.	Soc. Sec.	Soc. Sec.	Soc. Sec.	Soc. Sec.	Soc. Sec.
Other business	Cattle	Cattle	Cattle	-	Cattle	Artefacts	Garden	-	-

(a) See Fig. 4.1 for outstation locations.

Source: Young, fieldwork, 1979.

group has its own representative on the council, and councillors state firmly that they have no right to impose decisions on, or express the views of, people who do not belong to their own clan. To some extent men can overcome these barriers in casual discussions held in the single men's house or on the verandah of the community hall, but for women, who are more strictly confined by custom, this is less likely to happen. Numbulwar people extend these strict conventions to their use of the beach frontage and surrounding areas for hunting, fishing and gathering. People from Wandarang, Mara and southern Nungubuyu clans fish along the shore in a southerly direction but do not go to the north unless accompanied by people who belong to Nungubuyu clans to the north. Certain key sites, such as the jetty, are considered to be common property.

Clan ownership of specific tracts of country is vested in one or two people who inherit these rights through their fathers, the owners of the dreamings. They alone can decide on appropriate times and places to hold ceremonies connected with their land and associated ancestral beliefs. These are led by the guardians (junggayi) who, although not members of that clan, are cousins of the owners and are responsible for the correct performance of dances. Owners and guardians alone can give permission for others to visit clan territory. This well-defined system of land ownership contrasts markedly with that of Central Desert dwellers where responsibility is held collectively by all members of the group whose origins are connected with particular sites of significance and the dreaming tracks which link them. It has been attributed to differences in population density (considerably higher in Arnhem Land), natural resources and water supplies and, hence, the need for mobility and interdependence.⁸ Concepts of land ownership have a profound effect on relationships within the Aboriginal community in Numbulwar where they provide a restrictive environment for social interaction. Infringements against these customs (and other tribal practices) are dealt with by laying 'curses' which prohibit the use of certain amenities or buildings, or remove privileges from individuals or sectors of the community. This causes considerable inconvenience. For example, a curse on the jetty prevents fishing, launching of boats and unloading of the barge, while one on the shop prevents trading. In those circumstances the

8. See, for example, Peterson, 1976: Peterson et al., 1978:4-5.

community exerts pressure on those involved so that the issue can be settled.⁹

When one considers the natural divisions which exist within the Aboriginal community in Numbulwar, it is perhaps surprising that the group has remained nucleated for so long. This can be attributed to the strong centralized control exerted by the CMS, along with the influence of tribal leaders who, having given permission for its establishment, thereafter provided support. While these people were still in control, no outstations were formed. However, from the early 1960s the CMS expressed an interest in pastoral and forest exploitation of the Wurindi area (adjacent to Waldharr and Marraiya outstations, Fig.4.1), and although their applications for a lease were unsuccessful because, as a non-Aboriginal organization, they were not eligible to claim control over reserve land, Nunggubuyu from that area were very interested in these possibilities. From 1974 onwards other groups (Andhananggi, Miwul, Wuyindhangayn, Fig.4.1) also stated that they would like to return to their own country and applied for funds for vehicles, building materials and other equipment. Until 1977 none of these plans progressed beyond the stage of forming transitory weekend camps. The final impetus to move, which came during the dry season of that year, followed internal political disruption in Numbulwar, a result of the deaths of the most influential original leaders and the ensuing power struggle. An important feature of this was the assertion of traditional rights to the land on which Numbulwar itself is sited, which caused others to feel that they were no longer welcome on the settlement.

In the dry season of 1978, when this movement was at its height, outstations had been established at eight sites (Fig.4.1), and at a ninth, Mambu Mambu, some people from Numbulwar occasionally camped alongside their kin from Ngukurr. In the late wet season of 1979 another outstation started at Wumajbarr. Road distances between Numbulwar and its outstations range from under 20 km to almost 100 km (Table 4.3). Since none of these roads are passable during the wet season and only one outstation, Andhananggi, has an airstrip (that at Waldharr is not yet complete), communications pose a severe problem between January and

9. Burbank (1980: Ch.8) discusses the causes and effects of 'cursing' at Numbulwar in great detail.

and May. Until now most outstations have been abandoned during those months.

In addition to their seasonal nature, the populations of Numbulwar outstations fluctuate widely from month to month and between weekends and weekdays. The resident populations (core groups only) accounted for approximately 25 per cent of Numbulwar Aborigines in 1978 (Table 4.3).¹⁰ Three outstations - Waldharr, Marraiya and Andhananggi - had several resident families, but in the other centres only one or two families, usually the principal owners of the country, were present. In some smaller outstations all residents were adults, but in the larger centres the population structure was similar to that of Numbulwar as a whole, i.e., children accounted for 40 per cent or more of the group. Since most Numbulwar parents wish their children to attend school, and only two outstations - Andhananggi and Wandu - provided this facility, most of these children were below school age. The dependency ratio for the outstation residents was close to that of Numbulwar (0.81 compared with 0.83), an indication that, despite their newness, these centres had attracted productive adults who might have been expected to find life in the main settlement, with its financial and social advantages, more satisfying. This characteristic, which is a distinct benefit when new outstations are being established, can be attributed to the significant political pressures which caused people to leave Numbulwar.¹¹ A further significant feature is that Numbulwar outstations had almost equal numbers of men and women, also an important consideration in terms of construction and development.

Despite their recent establishment, almost all outstation have some permanent buildings, mostly rectangular corrugated iron huts, the materials for which have been obtained with funds granted by DAA or the ABTA. The stone house at Wandu was built by a European who had been given

10. These figures must be accepted with reservations - they could only be assembled retrospectively as data were collected during the 1979 wet season when most people had returned to Numbulwar.

11. Outstations established from the Central Desert community of Yuendumu between 1977 and 1979 still have few children and an abnormally large number of older people. This has hindered many of their activities and, since older people cannot drive, prevented them from maintaining communication by vehicle with the main settlement (see Chapter 2).

permission to settle there because of the traditional rights held by his Aboriginal wife. When he later departed after disagreements with Aborigines at Numbulwar, the house and remaining equipment were resumed by the Wandarang owners of the territory. Although some residents at each outstation live in bough shelters or wurlies made from traditional materials such as timber and paper bark, all state that permanent buildings are necessary. While this is partly because of the climate (although, since few people remain on outstations during the wet season, this has not yet proved to be an important reason), it also reflects the fact that Numbulwar people have become so accustomed to having access to houses that they consider them to be essential. This implies considerable investment in outstation infrastructure, a policy which has not always been regarded favourably by DAA.

In 1974 an outstation was established at Amaya (between Miwul and Wuyindhangayn, on the coast) by a combined group of Nunggubuyu (Ngalmi clan) from the mainland and related Lalara from Bickerton Island, accompanied by a European who had also been living on Bickerton. They received considerable support (\$28,000) from the Groote Eylandt Aboriginal Trust (GEAT) (money for which mainland dwellers are not eligible to apply - a frequent bone of contention) and also applied for DAA funding. The Department of Aboriginal Affairs, who considered their plans, at one time said to include the construction of fifty houses, reticulated water supplies and power lines, too grandiose and European-oriented, i.e. not in accord with the basic principles of outstation development, refused any further supplement. As it happened, Amaya was transitory; the mainland Nunggubuyu group moved to the inland site of Marraiya, the Lalara returned to Bickerton Island and Amaya is now a coastal staging point for Marraiya, a boat anchorage and place from which people go fishing and hunting for dugong and turtle.

Numbulwar provides a further example of the problems faced by both the community and the funding organizations when planning for viable outstation development. Waldharr was an originally envisaged not as outstation but as a 'township', to house approximately half of the Numbulwar population (DAA, 1978:III.13-14). The four clans involved - Ngalmi, Murrungun, Nundhirribala and Nunggargalu - considered that they were more likely to receive government support if they planned for a settlement larger than normal.

In the event, DAA decided to watch progress at the site before committing large amounts of money and by mid 1978, when Waldharr had become a Nunggargalu outstation rather than a town, were convinced that the project was a 'pipedream' (DAA, File 77/909:212). Whether this was due to lack of funding or to continuing political instability in Numbulwar is unclear - both factors were probably significant. During the dry season of 1979 there was only a small number of residents at Waldharr and at present any large scale development at the site seems unlikely because one of the main instigators of the movement holds a position of power on the town council and feels that he must remain in the settlement.

A further reason why the project failed is that three of the four clans involved would be living on another's territory - clearly a disadvantage when a major reason for returning to one's country is the possibility of guarding sacred sites and carrying out appropriate ceremonies. This problem came to the fore when Waldharr leaders suggested that their outstation was a suitable site for a central school to serve children from Marraiya, Wuyindhangayn and Miwul as well as their own. Parents from these other centres disagreed and said that, if they could not obtain their own schools, they would rather that their children remained in Numbulwar. Thus, although several Numbulwar groups have expressed great interest in establishing outstations and, in some cases, have shown considerable determination in fulfilling their plans, the movement is still extremely unstable. During the 1979 dry season outstation residents spent only a few weeks in their territory because they wished to attend a major ceremony at Numbulwar and because the settlement was in a ferment over elections for a new council.

The future development of outstations, will depend on adequate financial support, particularly for road, sea and air communications, and also for the establishment of an internal radio system. This will enable the provision of more adequate health and formal educational services, and will also allow outstation residents to remain fully aware of decisions which are being made by the Numbulwar council. At present many are dissatisfied because their voices carry little weight in council meetings, and plans for forming an outstation council have frequently been put forward. Despite the instability of the movement there is no doubt that Numbulwar people are extremely concerned over the

maintenance of control over their land; they have frequently stated that they, and they alone, must be able to supervise the movements of all visitors and must be the ultimate decision makers on the ways in which the land is used.

TRADITIONAL ACTIVITIES AND ORGANIZATIONS

Fishing, hunting and gathering

Although Aborigines in Numbulwar now spend most of their time in a centralised settlement and derive most of their sustenance from food bought in the community store, fishing, hunting and gathering are still important activities. Because of the coastal location of the settlement, the sea and its margins provide the bulk of produce but, with the establishment of outstations in inland locations, other resources to which people may have only limited access for a number of years are also used. Table 4.4 lists the main types of food obtained from the Numbulwar region. Although my data are limited because they apply only to selected clan groups in one season - the wet and early dry period - they support the findings of others

Table 4.4

Main subsistence foods obtained:
March-May, 1979, December, 1979

Women	Yams (<i>Discorea sativa</i> sp.); water lily seeds/roots (<i>Nymphaea</i> sp.); corms of bulrushes (<i>Eleocharis dulcis</i>); fruits (wild grape, bush banana, bush plum); wild honey Fish - barramundi, mullet, bream, catfish, etc. Shellfish - oysters, crabs, mussels Goanna, turtle (fresh water), snake
Men	Kangaroo, wallaby, emu, goanna, flying fox Fish - barramundi, stingray, mullet Duck, goose, broilga Dugong, green turtle Eggs - turtle, tern

Source: Young, fieldwork, 1979.

(e.g. MacArthur, 1960b; Meehan, 1977) that meat and fish are more important in the diet than vegetables. It has been estimated (V. Burbank, pers. comm.) that about 90 per cent of the meat eaten by Numbulwar's outstation residents is obtained through hunting and fishing. In the settlement this proportion would be much smaller (about 25 per cent) but at certain times, for example when large shoals of mullet enter the mouth of the Rose River, a glut of fish can occur. On one Saturday in April 1979, about 150 mullet, some weighing over 3 kg, were caught at Numbulwar jetty by fifteen women; even after distribution throughout the settlement, which admittedly had a smaller population than usual because many of the men were attending a ceremony in Ngukurr, there was plenty of food left for the dogs.

As Table 4.4 shows, women are the main procurers of vegetable foods and, nowadays, of fish, while men either hunt large game in the inland savannah areas or go on deep sea expeditions in pursuit of turtle or dugong. However, the distinction is not absolute; men often accompany their wives on fishing trips or help them to catch crabs in the mangrove swamps.

The amount produced from food gathering varies according to season and according to access to transport. During the wet season, gathering expeditions in the vicinity of Numbulwar produced only a few seasonal fruits (wild grape), honey and a few small roots, although women also collected water melons and other introduced crops now growing wild. Yams were not found locally but were obtained on a trip to Wandu outstation where they grow abundantly in the thick scrub on the banks of the Rose River. Lily seeds, from which damper is made, were only collected occasionally. Although these starchy staples are very much prized, and shares are repeatedly requested by people who have not participated in expeditions, they now form only a small part of the diet and have been largely replaced by flour, bread and biscuits. Most of them are gathered by elderly or middle aged women, who state that younger women no longer know where to seek the products or even how to recognize the plants. Several of the women who went to collect yams had to be taught how to trace the vine stems below ground, and how to deduce where the most productive tubers would be growing. In contrast, bulrush corms, which were obtained in large quantities in the late dry season (December), were collected by women of all ages, and were distributed throughout the settlement. Access to transport extends the

scope of gathering, but, since few women can drive, trips are not normally made specifically for this purpose. Gathering is usually combined with a visit to an outstation.

Women are the main procurers of shellfish and fish. Mangrove crabs, caught by spearing in the tidal flats and swampy marshes adjacent to the mangrove fringes, are the main product although a variety of shells - oysters, cockles, mussels, winkles - are also collected. These are used both as a food and for bait. Crabbing can be highly productive. Eight expeditions in the neighbourhood of the Rose River mouth yielded 133 crabs, obtained in the equivalent of 41 woman hours, over 3 crabs per woman per hour; the most valuable trip produced 29 crabs, caught by two women in 2 hours. The introduction of nylon handlines and nets has revolutionized fishing for food. In former times the men caught the bulk of the fish, either by spearing them in the shallows or by trapping and poisoning in inland streams. Now their wives, who have become highly skilled with lines, and few of whom are members of the workforce and have more time to spare for this occupation, have taken over. Fishing expeditions yielded 250 fish (some over 4 kg) in 160 woman hours, approximately 1.5 fish per woman per hour.

Productivity varied greatly; in some cases women would spend hours wandering along the shore casting a line and catching nothing; in others fish were caught in large numbers - the record during the time in question was fifty two mullet caught by one woman in 6 hours. On the whole, fishing is a less reliable way of finding food than crabbing. Success with fishing depends on obtaining bait, sometimes a tedious process if hand lines have to be used; on the level of the tide and, at the river mouth, the resultant mix of fresh and salt water; on access to dinghies for reaching the richer grounds in mid-stream; on having the right sizes of hook for the fish which happen to be biting. Crabs, on the other hand, can usually be found provided one knows of their movements according to changing water levels, and, with a fishing spear and stout stick, they are easy to catch. The only unsuccessful crabbing trip in which I participated took place immediately after heavy rain storms during which the salt flats had been completely inundated with fresh water, causing the crabs to migrate.

River fishing is important at inland outstations and, at Wumajbarr billabong, for day trippers from Numbulwar. By far the most prized catch is barramundi, caught either on lures or with bait consisting of frogs or pieces of raw meat. These fish can weigh well over 5 kg. Other fresh water trophies include perch, bream and catfish and fresh water turtle.

Numbulwar men now use modern equipment - rifles, dinghies and outboard motors - for most of their hunting and fishing expeditions. Nevertheless the methods by which they catch turtle and dugong, their main quarries, have scarcely changed; while bush fibre ropes have been replaced by nylon and wooden nails by iron, wielding the long harpoons and manoeuvring the boats calls for the same skills and sharp eyesight as of old, and the community knows well which of its members have these qualities. Between March and May 1979 men in Numbulwar obtained 46 green turtles and nine dugong, mainly from coastal regions to the north and south of the settlement and around adjacent off-shore islands. Many trips were unsuccessful because the water was too rough or too muddy for spotting the prey. Some older men also say that it is harder to catch dugong from modern dinghies than it was from dugout canoes because the animals, with their acute hearing, can detect the outboard motors. For these and other reasons it is hard to assess whether dugong are more scarce today than before. They certainly accounted for a large proportion of the fresh meat supplies obtained for the CMS - in 1956 over 150 dugong, yielding about 45,000 lbs of meat, were bought by the mission from the fishermen of Numbulwar. Despite the unpredictability of both dugong and turtle fishing, men are always keen to go out if they think that there is the slightest chance of success. These trips often include people of several different generations - the old men, who are the boat-owners and have the most experience (and, in some cases, reputations for being able to 'sing' for the dugong to come); younger men who know how to operate the engines, have sharp eyesight and are physically strong; and boys, to learn the skills of the trade.

Other products which the men obtain in season are turtle eggs, laid in nests on some coastal beaches and offshore islands, and terns' eggs from a number of colonies in nearby areas. Both are brought back in large quantities whenever they are found. For example, in April 1979 two trips to Sandy Island, about 15 km east of Numbulwar,

yielded approximately 150 dozen terns' eggs and a similar quantity was brought back during the same period by a boat returning from a trip to Ngukurr.

Hunting in inland areas is most commonly carried out near rivers and billabongs where there are likely to be water birds as well as kangaroo, wallaby, goanna and other game. Because of the problems of moving around during the wet season, most hunting takes place between June and December and hence is often based on outstation camps rather than the central settlement. Wild buffalo, reputed to be very savage, abound near Numbulwar and have been known to walk through the settlement; they are regarded as a definite hazard by hunters and gatherers and reports of wounded animals, the targets of pot-shots, running amok are sufficient to deter even the keenest person from venturing forth from Numbulwar on foot. Crocodiles, relatively common in larger rivers and in the mangrove swamps, are additional dangers but dogs, not human beings, are the usual prey.

Produce from fishing, hunting and gathering, highly valued by all for its taste and variety, is widely distributed within the settlement. The main recipients are those who are related to the successful hunters, those who have obliged them in some way, such as lending them equipment or providing transport, and those who have traditional claims to the country where the catch was made. When the catch is small, little is shared and, on some occasions, all is consumed during the trip; when it is large, plenty is brought back for those at home. Thus, for example, eight out of nineteen mangrove crabs caught on the salt flats on the south side of Rose River were cooked and eaten by the river bank. The remainder, also cooked, were brought back to Numbulwar and shared amongst kin and owners of the boat which had helped to tow the women's dinghy across the strong tidal currents to the jetty. On another trip which yielded only two fish, the entire catch was consumed by the catchers.

Turtle, dugong and eggs are shared much more widely. Turtles are usually brought back live to Numbulwar and are cooked on the beach where it is easy to make a hollow for firing the shell and where there is no need to drag the heavy carcase a long distance. During the two or three hours of preparation, those who know that they will be entitled to a share gather with their billycans and buckets and engage in social chit-chat. The meat is shared out

according to strict convention and, once billycans have been filled with the thick juices which accumulate inside the shell during cooking, the dogs finish off the carcass.

Dugong are often butchered before return to Numbulwar because the carcasses are too heavy to transport in small dinghies. The meat is boiled or cooked in hot sand and ashes, and is then shared with close kin and other people with distinct claims. Subsequently others often visit the camps of recipients and demand some of the dugong meat, and eventually the food is distributed widely. With about 150 kg of meat per dugong (the CMS estimate) it is scarcely surprising that many people get a share. Eggs, similarly, come back in sufficient quantities to feed many people. The sight of a heavily laden boat returning from Sandy Island during the nesting season is a signal for everyone to carry containers to the beach and fill them up. For a day or two thereafter eggs are eaten at every meal, sometimes in huge quantities - a dozen per person at one sitting. Egg collection only ceases when it is clear that all that remain contain part grown embryos.

Ceremonial activities

Numbulwar people still carry out initiation ceremonies and teach their youngsters to obey tribal laws and customs. However, the teachings of the CMS have had some effect on the conduct of ceremonies and certainly on the dress of participants. While mission workers no longer openly condemn people for taking part in ceremonies,¹² many Aborigines who adhere to the church know of their feelings, and unless they are principal performers (e.g. the mother of an initiate) will not attend. Numbulwar people have also accepted that boys who have just been circumcised during initiation ceremonies must immediately be taken to the health centre to be treated. Furthermore, they also program initiations to coincide with school holidays, and no longer expect that initiates will subsequently spend a protracted period of instruction in seclusion from the community.

¹². As they did during the 1960s. Comments from CMS monthly reports in 1965 and 1966 show that the missionaries attempted to prevent those who attended church from going to ceremonies, and that they expressed public disapproval and disappointment when this occurred. Occasionally, as in October 1967, the CMS chaplain himself attended ceremonies so that he could vet the proceedings and decide whether his flock should be allowed to go.

Despite these changes, ceremonies continue to pay a central part in Numbulwar life. Initiations are held collectively and since between five and ten boys, all around the age of eight or nine, may go through the ceremony at once, can involve members of several clans. When there are only one or two initiates, only a small section of the settlement attends. In these cases conflict of interest can arise, since those who are not interested in the ceremony want to watch films and other forms of entertainment and chief participants are sometimes tempted away from their duties. For example, an initiation ceremony held by the Mangurra group in May 1979 suffered several delays because of nightly films sponsored by the council and the Nunggargalu clan. Things came to a head when the council received notice that a European folk-singing group were also arriving to give a special performance. At this the Mangurra elders protested and, after reaching agreement with fellow councillors, managed to arrange for postponement of this visit and the cessation of film shows until the initiation ceremony was completed.

Other ceremonies, for example those associated with fertility, involve a larger number of people. These events are particularly important for those Numbulwar residents whose tribal country lies to the south and west towards Ngukurr, reputedly one of the original centres of this long-established cult. However, Nunggubuyu and others from further north also participate, and many aspects of daily life in the community can be affected. In April 1979 more than sixty men (over 50 per cent of the adult male population of the settlement) travelled from Numbulwar to Ngukurr by charter plane, truck and every sea-worthy and serviceable dinghy that was available. During their absence at the ceremony, the council workforce was virtually non-existent and the community office closed because business was so slack. Ceremonies held at Numbulwar, like that which was taking place in December 1979 have a similar effect because people are either performing in the ritual or are too exhausted to carry out other tasks.

Ceremonies of all types involve a considerable amount of travelling and expense. During March 1979 the Numbulwar people spent over \$8,000, or 12 per cent of the community income, on charter flights, both to transport Numbulwar people to ceremonies at Ngukurr, Borroloola and Groote Eylandt, and to bring relatives from these settlements to local celebrations. Lake Evella and Yirrkala people also

attend ceremonies at Numbulwar.

Numbulwar people place strong emphasis on their maintenance of tribal custom and law and see this as the basis of their society. They contrast this healthy situation, which exists throughout eastern Arnhem Land, with that in some Queensland communities such as Aurukun and Mornington Island where tribal learning patterns linked to initiation have been disrupted. Great concern was expressed when Numbulwar received a visit from two young men from the latter settlement who, although past puberty, had not been initiated but were travelling around settlements on the shores of the Gulf of Carpentaria in an attempt to arrange for this ceremony to be held. Numbulwar leaders, along with others from eastern Arnhem Land and Groote Eylandt, then held extended meetings to discuss how the Mornington Island people could be re-educated in their tribal customs and laws.

Artefacts

Many Numbulwar people are skilled at making artefacts both for their own use and for sale. However the commercial industry has been hampered by lack of access to an organized marketing body, essential when local demand is so limited. During 1979 Numbulwar craftsmen visited Yirrkala to investigate the possibility either of selling through that community's organization, or setting up a similar body in Numbulwar; they also attempted to persuade fieldworkers from the government sponsored Aboriginal Arts Board to visit them. Further strategies included sending goods to dealers in Sydney, and selling locally on an ad hoc basis. None of these steps have been entirely successful, due to problems in organizing and financing a local organization; lack of quality control (vital when goods are sent directly to dealers - several items despatched to Sydney were returned because they did not meet the required standards); and problems over payment of craftsmen who, ideally, prefer immediate recompense to an initial sum, with the remainder to follow on sale. Many people continue to rely on the community store as their outlet (see below). It is to be hoped that contact with the newly established artefact centre in Katherine will provide the stimulation needed for perpetuating these skills within the Numbulwar community.

Numbulwar artefacts show a wide variety, reflecting both the different origins of the Aboriginal population and the different skills which have been introduced by European residents. While shovel spears and fishing spears, sometimes intricately carved and decorated, were made and used by all adult male Nunggubyu, bark paintings were produced only by those from the north where there was close contact with similar artists now at Yirrkala and its outstations. Boomerangs, which are more common among groups belonging to the southern region, are mostly made by Mara, Wandarang and members of the Numamurdirdi clan. Older men from these groups also know how to make bush-fibre ropes for use in dugong and turtle hunting, and how to fashion harpoons. However, these and other implements such as paper bark coolamons and wooden water containers, have now been largely replaced by products made of nylon, plastic and metal. Women also, although they still know how to weave dilly-bags from bush string and how to make baskets and mats from pandanus leaves, do not make much use of these items. They carry their belongings in plastic bags, and sleep on rugs and cotton sheets. With the lack of a market outlet and the lack of local demand there is a very real chance that many of these skills will be lost, and that future generations of Nunggubyu will have to refer to their neighbours at Yirrkala if they wish to relearn them.

NON-TRADITIONAL ACTIVITIES AND ORGANIZATIONS

Numbulwar, like other Aboriginal communities in remote parts of the Northern Territory, is heavily dependent on government funding for its material survival. Until 1972/73 these funds were received through Capital Assistance to Missions, but since then most money has come directly from the Department of Aboriginal Affairs (Table 4.5). In 1978/79 the community also received a grant from the Northern Territory government, by then responsible for some of the former functions of DAA. In future this source will become even more important as other services are transferred to its care and supervision.

Under CMS control, with no direct government funding, Numbulwar attempted to produce as much of its own food and raw materials as possible (see above). As control has shifted to the Aboriginal Council, funded directly by DAA, many of these supporting projects have been abandoned. This is partly because, with the introduction of Award Wages and

increasing access to pensions and benefits from the Department of Social Security, Aborigines have larger resources of money under their individual control and prefer to buy imported foods and other items rather than expend a great deal of time and effort in finding these locally. Furthermore, many schemes introduced by the mission needed to be operated in ways which did not readily accord with Aboriginal lifestyles and have now been virtually discarded. As Cole (1977) reports, early CMS policy encouraged agricultural and industrial activity but in both cases these required sedentary settlement and, in agriculture at least, the use and maintenance of relatively complex technology. These needs neither fit in readily with outstation development nor with many aspects of Aboriginal control of economic enterprises.

Table 4.5
Funds Allocated to Numbulwar (\$000)

	DAA	Capital Assistance to Missions	Total
Up to 1970/71 -		591	591
1972/73	111	134	245
1973/74	219	69	288
1974/75	443	55	498
1975/76	487	59	546
1976/77	291		291
1977/78	560	30	590
1978/79(est.)	380	71	626 (a)

(a) (includes \$175,000 from NT Government).

During the last decade funds allocated to Numbulwar have risen dramatically both because of rising costs and because of increased spending on housing, other service buildings and capital equipment such as vehicles. In 1977/78 the two main receiving organizations - Numbulwar Numburindi Council and Numbulwar Housing Association (incorporated into the Council in 1977) - worked on a total budget of over \$600,000, over half of which was used to pay wages and salaries (Table 4.6).

Table 4.6
Budget allocations, Numbulwar Council/housing
1977/78 (\$)

	Capital \$	Operational \$	Wages/Salaries \$	% of Total	Total
Council	60,848	95,547	275,453	64	431,848
Housing		109,868	70,021	39	179,889

This component was, however, more important for the Council than for the Housing Association which had high operational and maintenance costs. Road maintenance projects were responsible for much of the Council's capital expenditure, while the mechanics' workshop and market garden had high operational costs. The Housing Association supplemented its grants with revenue earned by carrying out construction contracts for outside bodies, in this case the Department of Education. In 1977/78 this work brought in more than \$100,000. This inevitably means that housing workers have little time available for carrying out repair and maintenance to existing buildings, a major problem considering the age of some of the Aboriginal occupied dwellings. Reports submitted in 1977 and 1978/79 (DAA, 1978:III.6; DAA, 78.7.7559:42-46) indicate that members of the community are very concerned about this, and suggest that much greater emphasis should be placed on improving living levels for Aborigines. Altogether, although much of the increased allocation received by Numbulwar during the 1970s undoubtedly improved the infrastructure, most changes accord with non-Aboriginal rather than Aboriginal assessment of need. Aboriginal members of the community have not always derived much benefit from these innovations.

In recent times Numbulwar Council has further re-organized its funds allocation because of changing needs within the community. In 1977/78 its budget was split between ten sections - administration; roads; mechanical workshop; municipal maintenance; hygiene; parks and gardens; resource centre; building maintenance; market garden, and services - with over 60 per cent of funding going to the first five units, all of which are essential for the day to day running of the community. Following a period of uncertainty due to internal political strife and

organizational problems connected with the hand over of authority from CMS to the Council in 1978, a review of council operations recommended that funding for the market garden, parks and gardens and resource centre, should cease, and that radical revisions of work programs for municipal maintenance were needed (DAA, 75/1295:218-28). The market garden, which produced no food in return for over \$30,000 of funds in 1977/78, has now been closed, but other recommendations have not been implemented.

In 1979 frequent discussion took place over the operation and function of the resource centre, essentially designed as a service organization for outstation groups. Established after a successful application for a grant (for the purchase of a boat, four-wheel drive vehicle and outstation radios) from ABTA, it was subsequently allocated a considerable part of the Council wages vote (16 per cent of the weekly wage bill in April 1979). However, two major difficulties have arisen. First, since few Numbulwar people remain at their outstations during the wet season, the service group has little to do during those months; as a consequence they have been using outstation equipment (e.g. the boat) for other purposes, and outstation people consider this to be unfair. Secondly, some outstation residents consider that the wages allocated by the Council could be used more profitably to employ people living at outstations on projects such as fence building or airstrip construction, rather than as payment for a town-based workforce, who can do little to assist outstation dwellers during the wet season. Arguments over these problems continue, and meanwhile outstation people feel that although they wish to remain away from the mainstream of community life, they should receive greater benefit from funds allocated to Numbulwar as a whole.

In late 1979 a further crisis arose when the Council was found to have overspent its funds for the first part of the financial year. Solution of this problem involved cut-backs in the Aboriginal workforce, which was reduced by 27 per cent, and strict enforcement of regulations regarding use of Council equipment such as vehicles. Measures such as these made a significant impact both on the income of individuals and on the morale of the whole Aboriginal community, because they signified a failure which would be criticized by non-Aboriginal administrators. While financial mismanagement of this type must be checked, it must also be acknowledged that the problem stems partly from

insufficient training for those who have had to assume responsibility.

Up to early 1979 Numbulwar had been allocated over \$160,000 from ABTA. More than half of this money went to support outstation groups, both for the establishment of the resource centre and the purchase of vehicles, boats and building materials. Other allocations were made for school excursions, personal loans and community amenities such as a film projector.

Other government departments also allocate funds to provide essential services for Numbulwar. The Department of Education, with an annual Aboriginal wage bill in excess of \$65,000, is a major contributor to community money income, as is the Department of Health, whose annual wages reach over \$20,000. Both departments have constructed new buildings in recent years; 1979 saw the completion of a new manual training block for the post-primary section of the school, and a new hospital. The Department of Housing and Construction also provides skilled workers and equipment for use in Numbulwar projects, although it does not usually employ Aborigines as casual labourers.

The school

Church Missionary Society workers started a school at Numbulwar in 1953, with the aim of providing basic literacy and numeracy training for Aboriginal children and teaching them the principles of Christianity. From the early days the European staff were assisted by Aboriginal women who had already received similar instruction at the school at Roper River Mission. Numbulwar school remained under mission control until 1969 when the first government appointed teachers joined the staff. It is now entirely a government institution.

In 1979 Numbulwar school had an enrolment of 179, a European teaching staff of ten, six Aboriginal teachers, of whom one was almost fully qualified, and an Aboriginal literacy worker/liaison officer. Classes ranged from pre-school to post-primary training for both boys and girls, with the majority of pupils in the main primary section. Teaching was generally in English. Previous attempts to establish bi-lingual instruction, under the supervision of a linguist who formerly worked for the CMS, had encountered grave difficulties and Nungubuyu, the

language used, was only being taught orally. A major problem is that Nunggubuyu is not the mother tongue for all Numbulwar children and that Roper River Creole is gaining an increasingly strong hold among young people in the community. Since the Northern Territory Department of Education has now decreased the resources available for the development of bi-lingual schools, it seems unlikely that Numbulwar will be able to make much further progress along these lines.

Andhananggi was the only outstation to have a full-time teacher - one of the most experienced in Numbulwar. Her classes, essentially a blend of formal instruction and informal training in all aspects of Aboriginal economic and social life, fluctuated widely in size, from only one or two pupils to over thirty. She spent most of her time at the outstation, but received periodic visits from European staff who brought materials and equipment and discussed the development of syllabuses and programs. In 1978 Wandu outstation also had a small school, although the young man who worked there as the teacher was not on the payroll and received no wages. Outstation groups hoped that, in 1979, they would be able to obtain paid teachers for Waldharr and, possibly Marraiya. Although the Department of Education indicated that they would be able to meet this demand by appointing outstation teachers as part-time instructors, the scheme was never developed because so few Numbulwar people moved back to their outstations. This is yet another example of a basic problem frequently encountered in outstation development - families will not move out of the centre because of lack of schooling, and the Department of Education will not pay for a teacher until sufficient people have moved out.

Very few young people from Numbulwar currently attend high school at either Dhupuma College (Nhulunbuy) or Kormilda College (Darwin). This reflects a general reluctance on the part of parents to allow their children to live away from their families and from their own cultural group, and concern over social problems which youngsters may encounter while in town. This attitude also affects the Aboriginal teachers, several of whom would like to attend Batchelor College for training but who do not want to leave their families. They have suggested that courses at the college be re-arranged so that some of the training can be carried out within the home community. It might be possible to combine this with adult education, which in 1979

consisted of basic literacy teaching within the village area, and of classes such as cookery instruction for those Aboriginal women interested in learning how to prepare different foods. The adult educator also performs an important function in transmitting and translating information, helping people to deal with paper work and making contact with officials in government departments or organizations such as artefact dealing agencies.

Relations between Numbulwar school and community have been strained in the past, and still show deficiencies in mutual understanding. This is partly because the school, although close to the administrative office, is sited within the non-Aboriginal part of the settlement, and partly because of the lack of basic social contact between European and Aboriginal residents. It has been very difficult for Aborigines in Numbulwar to see the school as anything other than a westernized, missionary organized institution. Social tensions and strife threatened it with closure in late 1978 and education officials at the time anticipated that a situation similar to that at Ngukurr, where the school was closed and then re-opened along lines suggested by the Aboriginal community, might develop.

During 1979 things progressed more smoothly and better contact was established by holding open-air pre-school classes in the Aboriginal residential area, thus showing mothers what their children were doing; arranging joint hunting and gathering expeditions for school staff, children and parents; and inviting clan leaders to the school to teach their children songs and dances and to show them how to make artefacts. Nevertheless, European staff and Aboriginal parents at Numbulwar are still unable to discuss matters freely, and have still not surmounted the considerable barriers which separate them. The Aboriginal School Council, an advisory body composed of the Aboriginal staff, play a key role in this respect. They are responsible for decisions over who should be employed, what rules should be applied within the school, and, to some extent, what should be taught. Problems such as class discipline and truancy, often caused by lack of understanding between non-Aboriginal staff and Aboriginal parents and their children, are also frequently referred to them. Effective consultation between the non-Aboriginal teachers, Aboriginal teachers and this group is obviously essential if the school is to perform a useful function within the community.

The health centre

Numbulwar health centre is now equipped with most of the modern facilities likely to be needed in an isolated centre - in-patient wards, delivery rooms, dispensary and, when completed, a dentist's surgery. It stands on top of the coastal sand-dunes, in stark contrast to the old timber structures which it replaced. Yet, while the whole community will undoubtedly benefit from the improvement in facilities, the service remains essentially the same. Since the earliest days of the mission the CMS have emphasized the importance of their role in caring for the health of the Numbulwar people. The present health staff are highly experienced and, since two of them (one European and one Aborigine) have been working in the clinic for over 15 years, are well-established in their positions. Younger health workers, all women at present, benefit greatly from the experience of these two women and are able to use this along with their own relatively high levels of literacy to learn their jobs quickly.

The health centre serves both the central settlement and the outstations, but its only link to Nhulunbuy, the main centre to which patients requiring hospitalization are evacuated, and Alyangula (Groote Eylandt), the nearest settlement with resident doctor and dentist, is by Aerial Medical Service. It is connected to these centres by two-way radio, a service which is sometimes very difficult to use because of atmospheric disturbances which either block out all communication or create conditions whereby contact can be made only with places other than those which are sought. It is not uncommon for health staff at Numbulwar to be able to raise Darwin or Katherine and yet be unable to talk to doctors and nurses in Nhulunbuy. Because of isolation, many expectant mothers and any Numbulwar patients with risk of health complications are sent to hospital, and thus reliable contact with Nhulunbuy is essential. Aboriginal families are always anxious to have accurate news about any sick relatives.

Outstation groups have so far depended largely on the central Numbulwar clinic, and have returned to and remained in the settlement if they require treatment. During 1978, one young woman at Andhananggi, who had received basic first aid training, was able to care for people in that community, but she did not continue in this position in 1979 because she found outstation life too quiet and preferred to live in

the centre. Other outstations were occasionally visited by health workers but no regular schedules were organized. Lack of outstation health facilities, one of the reasons for the present instability of these small population centres, could be partially overcome by provision of radio links between Numbulwar and those sites. At present it is not possible to assess how the outstation movement has affected the health of those concerned. Health personnel in other Arnhem Land centres such as Yirrkala and Galiwinku are concerned that outstation people will experience an increase in infant mortality through problems of evacuating sick children, but so far there is no evidence to support these fears. Other studies, for example Morice (1976), stress the considerable health benefits to be gained from living away from the social stresses and overcrowded conditions in the large centralized settlements. Certainly Aboriginal outstation dwellers believe that they and their children will lead healthier lives in these remote communities.

Table 4.7
Major complaints at Numbulwar, 1978
(% new cases recorded)

Age group	0 - 4	5 - 14	15+	Total
Malnutrition	16.3	-	-	8.8
Ears	10.5	12.9	8.7	10.2
Eyes	6.9	20.0	9.2	9.3
Chest infections	24.1	27.1	44.6	31.4
Diarrhoea	27.6	5.7	15.2	20.6
Scabies	4.1	11.4	5.4	5.5
Other	10.5	22.9	16.8	14.2
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
No. in sample	294	70	184	548

Source: Health Centre monthly returns to Department of Health, 1978.

Although Numbulwar's rate of infant mortality is now comparatively low (see above) the Aboriginal community still suffers from some persistent health problems which result from overcrowding, poor sanitation and water supplies, and, in the case of infectious diseases, lack of immunity due to prolonged isolation from other centres. As Table 4.7 shows, chest infections and diarrhoea were still the major problems, but were of different significance for different age groups. Diarrhoea, for example, was a more severe problem for young children than for others, while adults reported more ailments connected with chest and respiratory infections.

Eye and ear diseases persist although they do not appear to be as severe as in the Central Desert communities (where, in Yuendumu, they accounted for 11.6 per cent and 20.7 per cent respectively of all illnesses reported in 1978 (Chapter 2). The incidence of these and other diseases also varies seasonally. Ear problems are more pronounced during the dry season, while eye troubles are concentrated in the wetter months from January to May. Respiratory complaints are also more dominant in the dry season but fevers, the main component of the 'other' category, occur mainly in the wet. Although the data are too variable to permit rigorous analysis,¹³ these seasonal variations are worth bearing in mind. For example, infective tinea, a chronic complaint in Numbulwar, is particularly likely to flare up during the wet season when dampness and mildew pervade every building. The irritation which results is a primary cause of other skin diseases, particularly sores.

Malnutrition still affects young children in Numbulwar (Table 4.7). It is hard to assess its significance because children suffering from diarrhoea and other diseases soon take on all the characteristics of under-nourishment through rapid dehydration, but it appears to be most serious among infants aged six months or more, and is related to the natural decrease in breast-milk production after that stage. An Arnhem Land review of weight for age of 700 Aboriginal infants below the age of five shows that almost half weighed less than 80 per cent of the expected weight at their ages

13. Data depend on reported illnesses, and hence when special clinics, e.g. at the school, are held the number of complaints recorded immediately increases. They also fluctuate according to epidemics etc. Table 4.7 omits an influenza epidemic which affected 165 Numbulwar people in July/August, 1978.

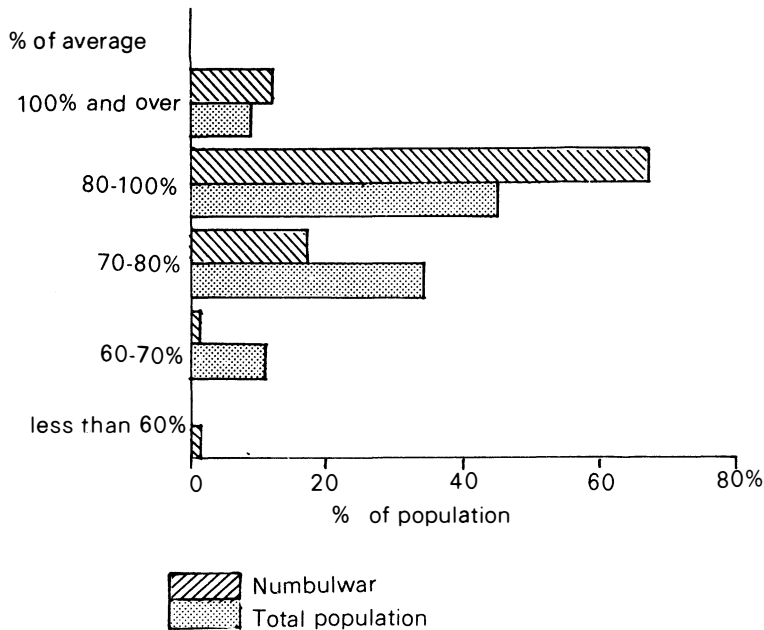


Fig 4.6 Infants in East Arnhem Land communities: age by weight.

measured on the Harvard scale (Fig. 4.6). The deficiency was more marked among children aged between one and four years than for infants below the age of twelve months. Numbulwar children were heavier than average, and a higher proportion were above the 80 per cent mark. Comparison with an Aboriginal scale, based on a survey of Arnhem Land children made in 1966, shows that infants examined in 1979 were lighter than those of former times. This rather surprising result (considering the improved access to money and a greater variety of foods) can be explained by the fact that only about 50 per cent of the Arnhem Land population were included in the earlier survey. The remainder, who were living away from the centralized settlements in outstations, were the ones likely to have the smaller children. The nursing sister at Numbulwar denies that today's children are smaller than in the past and states that the increasing size of babies is a major reason for hospital confinements because caesarian and forceps deliveries are more common. Regardless of whether these measurements can be accepted as accurate indicators of the growth of Numbulwar infants, they still show that young

children in the community are prone to nutritional problems.

Other complaints which affect adults at Numbulwar are leprosy, venereal disease and diabetes. Neither of the former are now significant; most cases of leprosy are no longer active and disabilities are, on the whole, slight; venereal disease is uncommon and there have been no instances of secondary infection among children, a problem that now causes concern in some Aboriginal communities. Diabetes, however, does affect a considerable number of adults (eight known cases in December, 1979) and it is likely that there are others who are unaware that they have developed this condition. It frequently only becomes apparent when people suffer from boils and sores or infections which refuse to yield to normal treatment. Although it has been suggested that Aborigines may have some genetic tendency which makes them particularly prone to diabetes, the disease is commonly linked to obesity, brought about through dietary change, in particular the increased consumption of sugars and carbohydrates. In many Aboriginal communities this problem is aggravated through high alcohol consumption but in Numbulwar, a 'dry' community, this added risk does not occur.

The store

Since 1973, Numbulwar store has been run as a supermarket, selling food, clothing and a variety of household goods and also acting as the main market outlet for locally produced handicrafts. In previous times it was a much smaller organization, stocking only a limited range of items sold in exchange for the meagre amounts of cash which Aborigines earned through making artefacts or selling their catch from fishing. It is still run by the CMS and to some extent maintains the mission's policies from an earlier period; eating patterns are influenced through the stock carried by the store, and customers are expected to conform to certain standards in dress and behaviour. Within the last two years Numbulwar Council has expressed the wish to assume control of the store. No decision has yet been taken, although discussions are still in progress; if the Council do take over from the CMS, it is possible that they may then enter into a private contract with an external operator, as has already happened at Ngukurr.

At present the store does not make large profits (\$1,000 in 1978). Nevertheless prices remain high and supplies of basic lines often fall well below demand. These features, which are a frequent source for adverse comment from both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal members of the community, arise from the difficult nature of supply lines. All basic foodstuffs and most frozen goods are brought by barge from either Cairns or Darwin. Vessels arrive at approximately four to six week intervals, sometimes with the full complement which was ordered, but sometimes lacking in some essentials, such as flour. In the wet season it is impossible to bring in these heavy items by any other method, and therefore Numbulwar must 'make do' until the next barge arrives. Other perishables come by air from Katherine and Nhulunbuy. Neither boats nor aircraft can travel during bad weather and may encounter other hazards which cause delay; for example, the barge can only negotiate the shallow mouth of the Rose River at high tide and on several occasions has been stranded for some time on sandbanks. Because of these problems, freight costs are high (adding up to 50 per cent to the cost price of goods) and these expenses are handed on to the consumer.

Another complaint which Aborigines make about the store are that the opening hours are too restricted. The store is open from Monday to Friday, with an extended lunch hour, and Aborigines, few of whom have access to refrigerators to store food, find it difficult to budget over the weekend. Fortunately this is also the time when families are most likely to be fishing or hunting and gathering, and therefore have access to alternative food supplies. Sundays would otherwise be 'hungry days', a problem that does occasionally arise when adverse weather prevents people from going out. Finally, Aborigines say that the store stocks too many items which cater mainly for European tastes. While the management must take account of this section of the community, who are, after all, living in isolation from their normal habitat, it should always ensure that stocks of basic necessities for everybody are maintained; for example, on a few occasions the store has run out of baking powder, an essential item unless one has a taste for 'flat' damper. While this does not really concern European women, most of whom keep yeast to make their own bread, it is a great inconvenience to Aboriginal women. Europeans also all have refrigerators and freezers, and many arrange for specific goods to be sent by air freight from Darwin and Nhulunbuy. Hence, they are not nearly so

dependent on the community store.

The store has a European manager, and a group of Aboriginal employees working as shop assistants, check-out clerks, cleaners and storemen. As yet there has been little attempt to give them management experience. This has been attributed partly to the mobility of the Aboriginal staff, who are often absent because of other commitments. The current manager tries to allow for this by asking staff to tell him when they will be away, and by paying wages strictly on the basis of time worked. Lack of involvement of Aborigines in running the store may help to explain periodic vandalism and thefts from store premises. Most people still see it as an institution over which they have little influence or control.

Although Numbulwar people do not see the store as an Aboriginal-orientated organization, they still badly need the service which it provides. On weekdays most women gravitate towards the shop around nine o'clock in the morning. Shopping is a protracted activity, with periods of buying interspersed with periods spent sitting in the shade, examining each other's purchases and gossiping. At ten o'clock the siren rings for morning 'smoko' and the children emerge from the school to join their mothers, eat goods already bought and collect money to buy cold drinks and snacks. The men, who meet outside the community hall beside the office, also gather at this time to talk, and to buy soft drinks and tobacco. After 'smoko' women return to their houses, either carrying their purchases or, if they have bought heavy goods such as bags of flour, transporting them in one of the community Toyotas which they have hired for the purpose. Afternoon shopping is much less common, apart from on those days when pension and family endowment cheques arrive on the lunchtime plane from Darwin. On those occasions, everyone visits the bank after lunch to cash their cheques, and then move to the store where they buy everyday items and more exotic goods such as fruit, toys and sweets for the children and clothing. While younger women seem to enjoy these crowded sessions, many of the older people find them trying and will sit outside the shop for a long time waiting for the crowds to disperse before they enter.

At present the store provides the only local outlet for those who wish to sell artefacts. The manager will buy most items, and bases his prices on those offered by larger dealers, such as the Aboriginal Arts Board or Yirrkala Arts and Crafts. However, his stock tends to pile up because of the lack of buyers, thus creating problems both for him and for the artists. People tend to follow trends which are seen to be profitable. For example, two women collected materials for making decorated nulla-nullas and then sold them to the store for about \$6.00 each; this caused an exodus of enthusiastic nulla-nulla makers in search of suitable raw materials, and within a few days the store had a stock of over fifty weapons, very few of which it could sell. It had to cease buying, and hence the women stopped working. Higher value items, such as large bark paintings, are even more difficult to sell, and the policy has been to give the artist a deposit, with the remainder to come when the final transaction is made. This results in grave misunderstanding because the artists sometimes do not realize that more payment will be forthcoming, and feel that they are being grossly undervalued.

Administrative office and communications systems

Numbulwar Council office and communications system, consisting of a two-way radio and a radio telephone, is situated in the nucleus between the Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal sections of the settlement. In terms of interaction with the non-Aboriginal outside world, it is the hub of the community - the place for receiving and sending news, collecting mail, cashing cheques, banking money, buying air tickets and arranging for many other kinds of what Aborigines classify as 'whitefella' business. It is much less important in the organization of Aboriginal business, and hence is only spasmodically visited by most of the women and many older men. Thus Europeans who work in the office make only a limited range of social contacts with Aborigines, and most of these are confined to a highly specific situation, in which the functions of the non-Aboriginal world are paramount.

The office is run by the non-Aboriginal town clerk, whose main responsibility is to oversee all its functions, act as communicator for Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal staff and, where appropriate, assist in the training of Aboriginal workers. Until mid-1979 this key position was held by a former member of the CMS, but its present incumbent, who had

previously occupied a similar position at Port Keats, was appointed independently by the council, and consequently it is easier for the council to move away from the former mission control if they wish to do so. Other office staff, with the exception of the accountant, are Aboriginal. They are mostly young, well-educated and literate but, since they lack experience and status, they need strong support from others. This comes partly from older men such as the Council President and Vice President who are on the permanent office staff so that they can deal with day to day community business.

Office business, like that at the shop, tends to be concentrated into the mornings. In the early part of the day the building is a hive of activity as Council work-gangs are organized, telephone calls are made and people gather to send and receive messages on the fixed two-way radio schedules. Business is then relatively slack, except on those days when commercial flights are due from Darwin. Then, would-be travellers and others come to pay for and collect tickets, deposit luggage and check on arrangements. In the late morning the plane arrives, and most available vehicles drive out to the airstrip laden with passengers, mail, freight and, when there is space, hangers-on. On return the office workers sort and distribute mail and, on pension days, prepare for a busy afternoon cashing cheques.

Numbulwar is now linked to towns and other communities by radio-telephone and two-way radio. Although the present radio set belongs to the CMS it is made available for non-mission use during specific schedule times, such as that allocated for free transmission between all Arnhem Land groups. It is operated and controlled by a prominent member of the Council and provides a useful link to other Aboriginal communities in Arnhem Land and the adjacent area. In 1980 the Council expect to acquire their own radio which will also be used as a base set to co-ordinate contact from outstations with transmitters. The radio telephone, only installed in March 1979, is under Council control and is the main means of communication for all official business. Telegrams are now received and sent by telephone and Aborigines are making increasing use of the facility, although Europeans still dominate private use. As in other parts of Arnhem Land, both radio and radio telephone are affected by atmospheric disturbances and during the wet season it is not uncommon for reception to be impossible for hours or even days.

The Church Missionary Society

For over 20 years Numbulwar (Rose River) was run under the auspices of the Anglican Church Missionary Society. Mission workers introduced the Aboriginal people to new social, cultural and spiritual beliefs and practices which impinged on and changed many elements within their lives - their education, health, work patterns, shelters, diet and eating habits. The impact made by the mission on the Numbulwar community has been great, but must not be regarded solely as a form of change imposed upon one people by another. Numbulwar's Aborigines have taken many of these new ideas and adapted them; they have joined the church but have not abandoned their own religion; they appreciate the work of the teachers and nurses but do not forget their own systems of education and healing. Now that the CMS exerts less control over the community, the meaning of these choices is becoming clearer. Greater Aboriginal input into decision-making reveals that in their approach to many aspects of their daily lives, they have retained a strong feeling for traditional elements.

The CMS in Numbulwar is now run by a group of lay workers, assisted by ministers and field staff who pay periodic visits from the head office in Darwin.¹⁴ Their main activities, apart from holding services and religious meetings, are in the fields of linguistics and literacy. Lay mission personnel also have other jobs - store management, nursing, house construction, plumbing - the number of these positions which they occupy has recently been reduced as the Council is appointing European employees independently. Aborigines do not as yet have prominent positions in the leadership of the church, and are seen to be in 'training'. Only a small core,¹⁵ mostly women, are regular church attenders although more are involved at special services with visiting preachers or on trips to conventions held in centres such as Katherine or Darwin. Many Aborigines seem to regard the church principally as a white-man's activity in which they are happy to participate from time to time, generally when it does not interfere with

14. In early 1980 a newly ordained minister, formerly a CMS field superintendent, was appointed to Numbulwar.

15. Burbank (1980) estimates that in 1977/78 three men and ten women regularly went to services - five per cent of the adult population.

other business. Occasionally it is allowed to dominate, as, for example, when women attended a special service which clashed with the performance of preliminary dances for a major ceremony. If the final stages of their ritual had been reached, it is unlikely that this would have happened. On the whole, while the work of the mission has been appreciated, it is now viewed as yet another of the diverse elements in Numbulwar life, rather than as an element which dominates.

Business organizations

Numbulwar's previous level of economic self-sufficiency has now been drastically reduced. However, some Aboriginal groups in the community have expressed interest from time to time in establishing cash generating ventures, for example cattle management, commercial fishing, market gardening and artefact production. None have so far met with much success.

Cattle projects in Nunggubuyu country have been under discussion for some time. During the 1960s an agricultural survey of the Anbali-Wurindi region (adjacent to Waldharr and Marraiya outstations) suggested the establishment of cattle on these grasslands, with a view to supplying the growing market on Groote Eylandt. This ambitious plan was scaled down by 1971 to the suggestion that a small training project be set up in the same area,¹⁶ so that Numbulwar men could learn the skills necessary for the pastoral business and become involved at a later stage. Although no progress has been made along these lines, subsequent moves to set up outstations in that area have fostered an interest in cattle. Both Waldharr and Marraiya outstation groups have constructed paddocks and stockyards and, using horses obtained for the purpose from Oenpelli, have mustered scrub cattle to form small killer herds. They aim to provide beef for themselves and for sale in Numbulwar, but at present are unlikely to serve other markets although some originally had aspirations towards sending carcasses to Groote Eylandt. Mara, Wandarang and southern Nunggubuyu people have been brought in to help with these projects because they have skills with stockwork which the others lack.

16. A necessity since few Nunggubuyu have worked on pastoral properties and know how to muster stock or to look after them.

In 1979 a group of Aborigines based partly at Numbulwar and partly at Ngukurr established an outstation at Wumajbarr, with the intention of setting up a pastoral enterprise. They have applied for a lease of this part of the Arnhem Land reserve, and have also applied to the Aboriginal Loans Commission for an establishment grant of about \$50,000. All concerned in the projects have traditional claims to that country, mainly Nunggumajbarr clan territory. They plan to import stock and produce meat for local consumption and, perhaps, sale in Katherine. Young men from the group will work as paid stockmen and older men hope that the training and experience which they gain will help them to weather some of the social pressures currently arising through boredom and lack of opportunity for youth. Until now progress has been slow; the road to Wumajbarr has been graded and realigned and one hut, generally used by one of the principal traditional landowners and his family, has been erected.

Although Numbulwar no longer has a market garden, many adults in the community, mainly from the Wandarang and Numamurdirdi groups, are skilled at this work and have expressed an interest in its re-establishment. Plans for resettling some of this group near the former garden have so far led nowhere, but the same people did start a small garden at Wandu outstation in 1978. This venture produced small quantities of sweet potato, cassava and water melon, and trees such as mangoes, cashews and coconuts were planted. Water, which, with no pump, had to be carted by hand from the river over 100m away, was a major problem, and when the people returned to Numbulwar at the beginning of the wet season the crops were abandoned. Although some of the produce was harvested later, the mobility of the gardeners would ultimately prevent this type of venture from succeeding.

Commercial fishing has also been suggested for Numbulwar. However, an application to the Capital Fund in 1973 for funds to buy a boat, motor and refrigeration plant, was refused on the grounds that it would be too difficult to establish a market. Kailis Company in Groote Eylandt had been approached but expressed no interest because the distance from their processing centre to Numbulwar would make the project unprofitable. They did suggest that a small-scale venture aimed purely at providing fish for local consumption would be worth considering, but so far this has not eventuated.

Altogether, business activities at Numbulwar are greatly hampered by the isolation of the community, and hence by the costs and organization necessary to reach a market. Business can succeed only if it aims at the local market or if the goods are of sufficiently high value, e.g. artefacts, and it is efficiently linked into external marketing systems. These problems, combined with cultural constraints arising from Aboriginal customs and attitudes, are so great that the community has come to depend almost entirely on grants and allowances allocated by government departments for community improvement and infrastructure maintenance, services, employment and individual welfare incomes.

EMPLOYMENT, INCOMES AND EXPENDITURE

The Numbulwar wage workforce is far smaller than the working age population in the community; in the first part of 1979 only 54 per cent of the men and 20 per cent of women had wage jobs (Table 4.8).

Table 4.8
Aboriginal employment in Numbulwar, April 1979

	Men	Women	Total
Council/Housing Assocn.	66	4	70
Store	3	6	9
School	2	9	11
Health centre	1	4	5
Mission	1	-	1
Total	73	23	96
Employed as % adults aged 15-59	54	20	38

Source: Young, fieldwork, 1979.

These figures fluctuate widely according to season, availability of funds for wages, and the other often conflicting activities in the settlement. For example, most school employees are out of work during the school holidays; when large ceremonies are taking place many of the council workforce, most of whom are employed casually, take leave of absence and, unless this is prolonged, are not replaced; and financial problems can result in many casual workers becoming redundant. This occurred in the latter part of 1979 when the council found itself short of funds. A further reason why it is hard to assess the level of employment accurately is that the population from which workers is drawn can include Ngukurr as well. Young men from that community often live temporarily with their friends and relatives in Numbulwar and take short-term jobs. Despite these variations Numbulwar's employment figures fluctuate less than those in Aboriginal settlements dependent on the pastoral industry.

As Table 4.8 shows, the Numbulwar Numburindi Council is the main employer. Most openings are for unskilled labourers but a few positions for skilled and experienced people are available in the office and in supervisory positions among the rest of the workforce. In 1979 the council workforce was split into several separate gangs - housing, municipal maintenance, hygiene, workshop, security, parks and gardens, roads, outstation resources, administration and special contracts (jetty maintenance and power and fuel supplies). While most of these had clear duties (building and construction, garbage collection, cleaning ablution blocks, repairing vehicles and maintaining roads) two sections performed less obvious functions. Outstation resources, whose services were not extensively needed then because most outstation groups were living in Numbulwar, were working principally on the establishment of one outstation, Wumajbarr (see above). Special contracts offered to groups who would otherwise be unemployed, are limited to specific tasks. Thus the Marraiya people had taken on a contract to repair the jetty during the wet season while they were resident in Numbulwar. They were using their own vehicle for this work and were recompensed with a mileage and fuel allowance by the council.

The other three main employers - the store, the school and the hospital - differ from the council in that they employ more women than men. All except one teacher and the school liaison officer are women. Six work as teachers or

teaching assistants while the remainder are cleaners. Health workers, hospital cleaners and check-out clerks in the store are also female. The community seems to regard these institutions as places where women should be employed rather than men. This is understandable in the case of teaching children and caring for the sick, both of which would commonly be an important responsibility of women in Aboriginal society, but less so in the case of the store. Since most of these jobs require some European-style skill - literacy and further training - they are fairly well-paid, and married women in these positions would often be earning more than their husbands.

Wage employment participation at Numbulwar also varies by age and, to some extent, by section of the community. The highest percentage of wage earners were men and women aged between 25 and 34, an age group whose members have both relatively high levels of literacy and have also had the opportunity to travel and sometimes receive training. They also, in most cases had a family to support, and hence were interested in earning a reasonable income. However, similar numbers of people in the adjacent age groups (15 to 24 and 35 to 44) were working, and there had certainly been some attempt at Numbulwar to employ some of the younger men. Nevertheless, when the size of the workforce is compared with the size of each age group, it is obvious that labour force participation rates for those aged between 15 and 24 are well below those of adults between 25 and 44 (Table 4.9). Approximately two thirds of men below the age of 25 were not even in the labour force. Young people in Numbulwar, like those in Yuendumu, find time hanging heavily on their hands and, while many spend their days sleeping, talking or going fishing and hunting, others turn to other diversions, sometimes allied to petty crime.

Apart from families in Camp B, employment variations between sections of the community were slight (Table 4.10). Differences are to some extent related to type of housing. Camp B contains several new houses, for which significant rental is charged and which are therefore occupied by wage earners, many of whom are in supervisory positions. Camp A also includes many new houses, but some are occupied by groups of pensioners, and hence the proportion in employment is smaller. Both Camps C and D contain several older people who are no longer employed.

Table 4.9

Employment and age group, Numbulwar, April 1979

Age group	Employed			Unemployment benefit			Labour force			Total population			Not in labour force		
	M	F	T	M	F	T	M	F	T	M	F	T	M	F	T
	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	No.	No.	No.	%	%	%
15-24	26.0	30.4	27.1	-	-	-	23.2	30.4	24.8	52	42	94	66.5	83.3	72.3
25-34	31.5	34.8	32.3	44.4	-	44.4	32.9	34.8	33.3	35	38	73	22.9	78.9	52.1
35-44	27.4	21.7	26.0	55.6	-	55.6	30.5	21.7	28.6	29	15	44	13.8	66.6	31.8
45-59	15.1	13.0	14.6	-	-	-	13.4	13.0	13.3	20	23	43	45.0	87.0	67.4
60+	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	8	10	18	100.0	100.0	100.0
	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	-	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0						
Total number in sample	73	23	96	9	-	9	82	23	105	144	128	272	43.1	82.0	61.4

Source: Young, fieldwork, 1979.

Table 4.10

Population, employment and incomes in Numbulwar, April 1979 (sample interviewed)

Section	M/F (ratio)	Population (no.)			Total	Employment			% Employed 15-59	Income \$/capita/fnt.
		0-14	15-59	60+		M	F	T		
Camp A (6)	0.97	33	35	5	73	8	4	12	34	52
Camp B (6)	0.63	24	30	3	57	7	7	14	47	68
Camp C (7)	0.95	18	22	3	43	6	1	7	32	55
Camp D (6)	0.91	25	37	1	63	11	3	14	38	52

Source: Young, fieldwork, 1979.

Welfare cheques, made through the Department of Social Security, and earnings from artefact sales, are the only other sources of personal income in Numbulwar. However, although many people do not have jobs, only a small number are officially registered as unemployed (6 per cent of the men in early 1979, Table 4.11) and hence many are classified as not belonging to the labour force. Unemployment benefits have become available in Numbulwar only within the last two years, and a large number of men have either never applied or have been considered ineligible. Many of them are youngsters who have never been in the workforce or old men approaching retirement age, but a considerable number are outstation dwellers. Unlike their counterparts in Central Australia, many of whom receive unemployment benefits while living on outstations, Aborigines in Arnhem Land have not had access to this type of support. Arnhem Land is considered to provide a more stable and productive natural environment than the desert, with better opportunities for those in remote communities to support themselves through subsistence and to make some income by selling artefacts.

Table 4.11
Sources of income, Aril, 1979
(Adults aged 15+, including pensioners)

	Males		Females		Total	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Wages	73	51	23	18	96	35
Unemployment benefit	9	6	-	-	9	3
Other social security	11	8	21	16	32	12
None (a)	51	35	84	66	135	50
Total	144	100	128	100	272	100

(a) Child endowment and occasional earnings for selling handcrafts excluded.

Source: Young, fieldwork, 1979.

In Numbulwar the development of the artefact industry is so limited that earnings must be smaller than the income

required for food purchase (see above). Thus outstation people in Numbulwar probably do need some form of income support, although this might be better provided through some form of bulk funding system similar to the Community Development Employment Project pilot scheme now suggested for some Maningrida outstations (see Altman, forthcoming).

A further reason why few at Numbulwar receive unemployment benefit is that the CMS previously discouraged people from applying, in the belief that receipt of cash without work would undermine the establishment of the non-Aboriginal work ethic. While such an attitude is understandable, it takes insufficient account of the current economic situation, in which the Numbulwar community as a whole clearly needs more income support than can be obtained from the small number of wage jobs available.

For those not in the labour force, income comes mainly from other pensions and benefits, in particular age, widow and invalid pensions. Most recipients, 12 per cent of all adults (Table 4.11) are therefore in the older age groups. A higher proportion of women, many widowed comparatively young after the death of husbands older than themselves, receive these types of payments. Most younger women also receive monthly child endowment cheques, in many cases their sole source of income. Although these payments are regular, the amounts are too small to provide the basic food needs of a family. Those with sufficient alternative resources often spend this money directly on their children as soon as it is received.

Many people receive neither wages nor social security payments and hence have no individual source of cash income (Table 4.11). They are forced to depend on money given to them by other members of their families. Because half of the adults at Numbulwar come into this category, the community income is low (Table 4.12).

Almost three quarters of the income comes from wages, which are usually paid weekly, thus enabling people to spread their resources more evenly than they can with the fortnightly social security cheques. Estimates of income for outstation groups (Table 4.3) show that they had much smaller amounts of money at their disposal. Their average cash income, only about \$20 per head per fortnight in 1978, was derived almost entirely from social security cheques, excluding unemployment benefits. Incomes for individual

outstation groups ranged from \$3 at Marraiya (child endowment only) to over \$50 at Wumajbarr, Miwul, Gulurruj and Wuyindhangayn, at all of which there were several old age pensioners in residence. However, like outstation residents elsewhere, these Numbulwar groups receive some financial help from their families who remain in the settlement and from individuals who have left Numbulwar to work elsewhere. Although few men from Numbulwar were employed by GEMCO in 1979, several have worked in Groote Eylandt in the past, and have sent part of their earnings back home. On at least one occasion young men have been sent there to work so that they can raise funds for the establishment of an outstation or the purchase of a Toyota.

Table 4.12
Numbulwar community cash income, April, 1979
(\$ per fortnight)

Source	Amount	%
Wages	21,376	74
Social security		
Unemployment benefits	2,280	8
Pensions	4,108	14
Child endowment	1,158	4
Total	28,922	100
Population	465	
Fortnightly income/cap.	\$62	

Source: Young, fieldwork, 1979.

Incomes also vary within Numbulwar although, as Table 4.10 shows, differences are not great. While Camp B, with the highest proportion of wage earners, had an above average income, those of the other three camps, all of which included both people who received social security cheques and wage earners, were almost equal.

Incomes from all sources are redistributed throughout the community. After initial expenditure at the store, the remainder is shared out among those to whom one has obligations, used for gambling, deposited in a savings account, or kept for later use.

In early 1979 approximately 90 per cent¹⁷ of Numbulwar's community cash income was spent in the store. Although, because this was the wet season when few travelled outside the community and because Numbulwar's population was swollen by people attending for ceremonies, this figure may have been higher than usual, the store would always be the main destination for money. Other important items of expenditure are transport - air charters, and petrol for vehicles and outboard motors - gambling and payments for ceremonies. Little money is spent on alcohol; most men and almost all the women wish to preserve Numbulwar as a liquor free community.

As Table 4.13 shows, staple food items (flour/bread, tea, sugar, tinned meat/fish, fresh meat) accounted for 37 per cent of expenditure, and 65 per cent of the total store takings came from food purchases. Flour, used mostly for making damper, is a more important staple than bread. Numbulwar's bread supplies are flown in weekly from Nhulunbuy but the quantity available is much less than that which the community could use. Other perishables are also bought soon after reaching the shelves and since supplies of these goods are disrupted during bad weather, can be unobtainable for part of the year. At those times people revert to buying tinned meat and fish, tinned stew and tinned vegetables. Soft drinks and juice are the most important single item sold. Since few Aborigines have access to refrigerators, the store is the only place where they can buy a cold drink. Soft drinks have become an expected accompaniment to most social gatherings, ranging from casual gossip sessions and card games in the women's camp to community and council meetings and all night dancing sessions which form part of the initiation ceremonies.

17. Europeans also spend a lot of money in the store during the wet season because they cannot leave the community easily. This figure is estimated by subtracting ten per cent from the actual takings for the month. Since Europeans buy few clothes or consumer goods in the store, this should be more accurate than estimating according to their proportional share in the population (12 per cent).

Table 4.13
Store expenditure Numbulwar, April, 1979
 (% of total spent)

	%
Flour/bread	9.9
Tea	3.1
Sugar	5.9
Tinned meat/fish	9.7
Fresh meat	8.5
Soft drink/juice	14.6
Other	13.3
<hr/>	
Total	65.0
<hr/>	
Cigarettes/tobacco	10.5
Soap	3.4
Clothing/other goods	21.2
<hr/>	
Total	100.0
<hr/>	

Source: Store stock records, 1979.

Although the community store is not the sole source of food for Numbulwar people, analysis of basic expenditure patterns provides some superficial information on nutritional intake from purchased foods (Table 4.14). Most requirements appeared to be adequately covered, but there were apparent deficiencies in calcium and riboflavin. Some intake categories, in particular energy, protein, iron and thiamine, appeared to be excessive. High energy intake is related to high consumption of flour, bread and sugar, in all of which Numbulwar's daily per capita intake was approximately double that of Willowra (Chapter 3). While flour is also a major source of protein, corned beef and fresh meat, products also eaten in greater quantities in Numbulwar than in Willowra, contribute a high proportion of this nutrient, and some also comes from tinned fish and oysters, foods which Numbulwar people often buy for occasional snacks. Since Numbulwar people also obtain considerable amounts of fish and meat from subsistence hunting and gathering, their actual protein intakes are higher. High consumption of the basic staples - flour, meat

and fish - also explains high intakes of iron and thiamine. Ascorbic acid and retinol, both of which appeared to be deficient in Willowra's diet (Table 3.8), occurred in adequate quantities in Numbulwar, mainly due to higher consumption of fresh and tinned fruit and tinned vegetables. The intakes of calcium and riboflavin, however, still appeared grossly inadequate; milk, cheese and eggs, all of which would contribute to these needs, are unimportant foods in Numbulwar.

Table 4.14
Composition of purchased foods at Numbulwar
April 1979 (daily intake)

Nutrient	Estimated intake	Recommended intake	Estimated/ Recommended %
Energy (KJ)	10,366,000	5,315,800	195
Protein (gms)	59,956	15,895	377
Calcium	114,727	314,800	36
Iron (mg)	9,138	4,316	211
Thiamine (mg)	815	506	161
Riboflavin (mg)	414	766	54
Niacin (mg)	8,702	8,382	104
Ascorbic Acid (mg)	16,634	14,240	117
Retinol (Vit.A).	382	335	114

Source: Store records.

Analysis based on Thomas and Corden (1977) and FAO/WHO (1974) (see Table 3.8).

Comparison of these figures with those of Taylor (1972) suggests that the 1979 diet in Numbulwar was much more satisfactory than that of Mitchell River (also a Gulf of Carpentaria community) in 1972. With the exception of calcium and riboflavin, all the main nutrient deficiencies which he noted had been covered. However, for several reasons, the analysis presented in Table 4.14 must be accepted with caution. First, the Numbulwar population during the month in question was augmented by an influx of an unknown number of visitors; as this group had to be disregarded in the population figures, all estimated intakes are likely to be too great. Secondly, variations occur

within the community; older people and those with less money probably have more restricted diets, and certainly consume less fresh or tinned fruit, fresh meat and other relatively expensive products. Thirdly, considerable dietary variations occur according to cash availability and, especially when subsistence activities are important, seasonal conditions.

As indicated earlier, most bush foods are more easily obtainable in the dry season and fish catches fluctuate widely. Although these factors must be taken into account, comparison of this analysis with the results of Taylor's earlier study does suggest a general improvement of nutrition with increasing income. Nevertheless, the high figures for bread, flour, sugar and meat consumption show that people have remained fairly conservative in their tastes, and may lend some support to Taylor's 1977 suggestion that an increase in income does not necessarily lead to purchase of more nutritious foods. Numbulwar's high energy intake from flour and sugar must help to explain obvious tendencies to obesity among some people in the community, and increases the risk of contracting diseases such as diabetes.

Non-food items account for 35 per cent of store takings (Table 4.13). During 1979 Numbulwar adults on average smoked twenty four packets of cigarettes and four two ounce tins of tobacco each, and those two items accounted for 10 per cent of store expenditure. People buy most of their clothing in Numbulwar because they rarely visit other stores, and they also spend money on equipment such as fish hooks, lines, nets, tent-sheets and outboard motors.

Outstation people have different expenditure patterns from those of Numbulwar residents. As mentioned earlier, they normally provide most of their protein requirements, chiefly meat and fish, through hunting and gathering. Thus their supplies from the store consist of flour, usually bought in drums, bulk sugar and tea, and tools and equipment needed for bush living. The store does not send goods to outstations, and therefore people either buy their supplies during visits to Numbulwar or expect their relatives to bring these when they make weekend visits. Radios would obviously be useful in allowing outstation residents to make orders for what they require.

The remainder of Numbulwar's cash income is used for travelling, financing ceremonies, and, in a few cases, for buying alcohol. Vehicle expenditure is low because the poor condition of the roads would make it impossible to run conventional cars. A few individuals have bought second-hand four wheel drive vehicles. It also provides stakes for gambling but much money used for this purpose subsequently becomes available for purchase of other items. Money used for gambling circulates in large amounts on the days immediately following payment of wages or receipt of social security cheques. Because so many people play cards, the Council defers payment of wages to its workforce until the end of Friday afternoon as otherwise people would leave their jobs early. While large sums are in circulation, card games often continue throughout the night because people can foresee the chance of making substantial gains. When these sessions are finished, winners either spend their takings on items such as boats or outboard motors, or pay for charter flights to other communities. In some cases the trips are solely for the purpose of drinking alcohol. Winners also put their money back into the card games and, in this way, redistribute it amongst other players. Gambling with small amounts of cash, which occurs after resources have been depleted, is more a method of passing the time than of accumulating a stake. The newly elected Council in Numbulwar is concerned at the amount of time which many people spend in card playing, and has attempted to restrict this by imposing sanctions. It remains to be seen whether these new ideas will be accepted in the future.

Since air transport is the chief means of travelling between Numbulwar and other centres, the cost of moving from the settlement is high. Apart from the twice weekly commercial flights, which link Numbulwar with Groote Eylandt, Ngukurr, Katherine and Darwin, most people use air charters. In early 1979 charters were provided by a Groote Eylandt company, for whom a Numbulwar councillor acted as agent. During March that company grossed over \$8000 in hire charges from Numbulwar people. The main destinations were Groote Eylandt (40 per cent of all trips), Borroloola and Ngukurr (23 per cent each). Oenpelli, Maningrida and Katherine were also visited. Costs for chartering the five-seater plane to the three major centres were \$95, \$315, and \$235 respectively or, if the plane was full, \$19, \$63, and \$47 per head.

Most trips were undertaken to visit family or friends or for ceremonial business, but some trips to Borroloola were solely for the purpose of drinking at the hotel. Since all the above charter costs include fares between Numbulwar and Groote Eylandt, where the planes are based, they are higher than necessary. For this reason, in 1979 the Numbulwar community entered into an agreement with Connair that a five seater plane and pilot should be permanently based in the settlement. This system has cut down costs of transport to centres other than Groote; in May 1979, fares to Borroloola and Ngukurr were \$240 and \$145. During the first ten days of Connair operation \$3800 was spent on charters. Takings depend on whether there is 'surplus' income in the community. In December 1979, after many of the council workforce were laid off, funds for travel were low and, in one week, the only trips made were shopping expeditions to Groote Eylandt, paid for by female teachers who had just received their holiday pay from the Department of Education. Some of the money needed to travel to ceremonies, or to bring participants from elsewhere, comes from contributions given by those responsible for organizing the activity.

Other methods of travel are less expensive. Those who own outboard motors buy fuel in bulk when they can afford to do so (\$70 per drum in December 1979) and expect recompense in either cash or kind from those who borrow their boats. People rarely travel to other communities by boat unless the roads are impassable, the destination is nearby, and a large contingent wishes to go. Over fifty men attended a ceremony at Ngukurr in April 1979 after journeying for a day and a half in small boats. Women rarely join their menfolk on these trips, partly because they do not like travelling on the 'deep sea', although at the time of the Ngukurr excursion there was some dissension among Numbulwar women because they owned some of the vessels taken by the men, and some women with prominent roles in the ceremony were left behind.

Although few people in Numbulwar own private vehicles, most clan groups have at least one Toyota, purchased with funds granted by ABTA. Between 1974 and 1979 seven clan vehicles and one clan boat were financed from this source, at a total cost of approximately \$55,000. Numbulwar people contributed about \$6000 towards this cost, the largest share being \$2000 paid by some of the Murrungun group from Wuyindhangayn who earned this money by working for GEMCO.

Clan vehicles are intended for outstation use but, since few people remain in these communities during the wet season, spend a large part of their time in Numbulwar, where they are used for short hunting, fishing and gathering trips. In general, fuel is provided from clan contributions and cash paid by travellers who belong to groups other than the owners. Clans without vehicles (Mara, Wandarang and Wurramarra people) only have limited opportunities to go on expeditions and find the present situation frustrating. In past times, people have also been allowed to use council vehicles outside working hours, but with the present financial difficulties, this privilege has been restricted to those who are willing to pay a fair hiring charge.

Numbulwar has always been a 'dry' community. Since the majority of adults are non-drinkers, community feeling was sufficiently strong for the settlement to be declared liquor free under the new Northern Territory legislation introduced in 1979. Those who wish to drink must do so away from Numbulwar, normally at Borroloola (the nearest unrestricted canteen), Groote Eylandt (not so popular because the canteen only has a club licence) or on trips to Nhulunbuy, Katherine or Darwin. This inevitably means that alcohol is very costly.¹⁸ Numbulwar people try to enforce rules against bringing alcohol back to the settlement, but cannot prevent revellers from returning while still 'under the influence'. The resultant disruption often causes fighting, and women, children and old people are sufficiently apprehensive about this to hide in the bush when they know that a drinking party is about to return. Actual disturbances caused by drinking are minor compared to those which occur in some other settlements, or in fringe camps around Darwin or Alice Springs, but tend to be exaggerated by Numbulwar people. After a telephone call from Numbulwar, an incident during which a returning drinker drove a Toyota recklessly around the settlement, killed two puppies and threw a stone at the windows of one house, was reported in the Darwin press as 'Numbulwar riots - whites go in terror of their lives'. Most Europeans in Numbulwar were unaware that any incident had occurred.

18. It has been estimated that on a one hour drinking spree to Borroloola a can of beer would cost approximately \$10, \$50 for the trip plus an hour on the ground to drink.

CONCLUSION

After an extended period under Mission control, the Aboriginal community in and near Numbulwar is now assuming actual responsibility for the administration of its own affairs. This transition has caused some internal instability but is a phase which must be experienced before independence can become meaningful. As Aborigines in Numbulwar become more adept at modern administration and more versed in the workings of the external government and its representatives, the paths of change will run more smoothly. While some features of Numbulwar's social and physical environment are likely to favour stable development others may hinder this. Helpful features are land rights, the continuing importance of Aboriginal law and custom, the productivity of the natural environment, and the relatively high levels of literacy and skill in the community; disadvantages are physical isolation, continuing economic dependency, factionalism within the Aboriginal community, and problems of communication between non-Aborigines and Aborigines.

Numbulwar people are fortunate in that most of them have unrestricted access to and control over their tribal land. They place great value on this resource and guard it against unannounced intrusions by outsiders. Their territory provides a variety of natural resources which, with predictable, permanent water supplies, form a supportive environment for the development of largely self-sufficient outstations. Dispersal of population to these centres has reinforced identity with the land, and caused a resurgence of interest in ceremonies and customs associated with specific clan groups. These in turn help to maintain the strength of Aboriginal law and custom in the central settlement, and thus provide a firmer basis for social life within the community. A further advantage held by the Numbulwar people is that many members of the community have been able to develop fairly high levels of literacy and have acquired practical skills necessary for administration and provision of essential modern services. Although, because of lack of opportunity for training, many of these attributes are not yet fully used, they form a framework which should be conducive to successful development in the future.

Throughout its history the development of Numbulwar has been affected by its isolated location. This physical fact continues to influence many aspects of community life - the growth and stabilization of outstation communities, the establishment of efficient air, land and sea links and telecommunication systems, and the formation of contact with an external market necessary for the stimulation of commercial ventures in the settlement. Under present circumstances none of these difficulties seem easy to solve and this problem is likely to prove one of the main future stumbling blocks. Extreme dependency on government funding, a dominant feature of the Numbulwar economy, can be attributed partly to the problem of isolation. Further difficulties which may cause disruption in the settlement stem from social relationships both between Aborigines and Europeans, and within the Aboriginal group. Until recently, contact between Europeans and Aborigines has been largely confined to discussion on specific topics concerning community management and services, most of which has taken place in a neutral environment such as the office. Although considerable efforts are being made to establish less inhibited contact in more natural surroundings, these still have a long way to go before mutual understanding exists between the two groups.

Factions within the Aboriginal population, arising through the proximate association of different linguistic groups and clans of the Nunggubuyu and neighbouring peoples, are also potential sources of disruption. Ideally each of these groups should be equally represented on every community body. In practice this does not occur, and the resultant frustrations show themselves in inter-clan rivalries, attempts at concentrating resources for the benefit of a few people and occasionally, in physical violence. This difficulty is largely a consequence of the formation of the centralized settlement, and should be alleviated by outstation growth. However, for a variety of reasons, progress with outstation development has been slow and the problem is not yet near solution. Ultimately, the future of Numbulwar will depend on the relative significance of all these factors, and it is to be hoped that the potential strengths of the community can be realized.

Chapter 5

Socio-economic issues in rural communities

European policies affecting the Aboriginal inhabitants of Australia have assumed various forms during the two centuries which have followed initial colonial settlement. These, as Coombs (1978:217-18) describes, occur as a series of stages - an early period of patronizing kindness, soon replaced by a period of destruction based on fear and contempt; as the Aboriginal population apparently headed for extinction, destruction was replaced by protectionism, to be followed during the last half century by assimilation and, finally, self determination. While such policies may apparently be universally adopted, their impact on and means of implementation to different types of Aboriginal community must vary. In the case of self determination, some groups clearly have better prospects than others. However, as these three case studies show, realization of aspirations for self determination depends not only on such factors as access to and control over natural resources or relative strength of tribal background, but also on the extent and quality of individual and collective support given by both public and private organizations and by members of the community. Appropriate support can occur only if the policy itself is recognized on a practical as well as theoretical basis, and at present it appears that, while self determination is encouraged, many elements in Aboriginal support systems are still geared towards assimilation.¹ Failure to recognize distinctive Aboriginal interpretations of socio-economic characteristics shows that assimilationist attitudes still control much thinking. Communities such as Yuendumu, Willowra and Numbulwar are caught in this web. While their members now play a major role in determining their own future, a way of life in which the Aboriginal component will remain strong, success in achieving their goal is hampered not only by problems such as physical and social isolation and a dearth of material resources, but

1. Stanner (1978:19) argues that a similar time-lag in policy adoption and implementation occurred in the 1930s and 1940s, when facets of protectionism survived alongside assimilation.

also by problems concerned with the delivery of the support which they receive. It is scarcely surprising that the resultant frustrations easily undermine all but the most determined efforts.

These problems highlight the existence of a variety of socio-economic issues affecting such rural communities. Some stem largely from Aboriginal physical or cultural traits - the structure and organization of the population, and its location in regions of limited commercial resource base; others are caused by the structure of non-Aboriginal society - emphasis on monetary employment and the commercial exploitation of resources, and high degree of centralization in the provision of all forms of services. In all cases mutual comprehension of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal understanding of these matters is rarely achieved. It remains to examine the case-study evidence on some of these issues.

Physical location

In non-Aboriginal terms Yuendumu, Willowra and Numbulwar are physically remote. Not only are they located at considerable distances from the nearest towns (see Table 5.1) but, since they lie in areas of limited commercial potential their communications systems are poorly developed - inadequate roads and airstrips and inefficient and overloaded radio and telephone services. However, Aboriginal interpretation of these physical situations differs. In their eyes these settlements are not remote but central, places from which they can maintain religious practices and ceremonies, reinforce their contact with the land of their forefathers and hold fast to the customary laws which bind their social fabric. Even those residents who, through the process of population consolidation, have moved a long distance from their tribal homeland (e.g. the Pintubi at Yuendumu) now see the central settlement as their base. Under these circumstances few Aboriginal inhabitants of these communities would consider permanent migration to a point closer to the modern hubs of Northern Territory life and most recognize the disadvantages of the social disruption which would follow. The strength of this feeling is apparent in many ways - the reluctance of parents to permit their teenage children to attend boarding school in Alice Springs or Nhulunbuy, the high degree of circularity in population movement from all three communities, and the concern felt by most forced for some reason to move into an

Table 5.1

Characteristics of Yuendumu, Willowra and Numbulwar

	Yuendumu (1978)	Willowra (1979)	Numbulwar (1979)
Physical Isolation	All weather road/air poor telecomm. reception/access Outstations distant.	Normally all weather road/dry weather air; poor telecomm. reception access.	Dry season road/dry weather airstrip periodic barge; poor telecomm. reception adequate access; Outstations close but cut off in wet season.
Nearest Town	300 km (Alice Springs)	350 km (Alice Springs)	450 km (Katherine), 270 km (Nhulunbuy)
Population Structure	High fertility/declining mortality. High dependency Polygyny	Very high fertility/declining mortality. High dependency Polygyny	High fertility/declining mortality. Monogamy
Shelter	Camp, transitional, modern conventional government style.	Camp, modern	Local timber huts, conventional government style.
Education	Strong bi-lingual, Aboriginal teachers Few secondary pupils No outstation schools	Strong bi-lingual, Aboriginal teachers No secondary pupils	Limited bi-lingual, Aboriginal teachers No secondary pupils One outstation school
Health	New clinic Aboriginal health workers Recent outstation health work	New small clinic Aboriginal health workers Not applicable	New clinic Aboriginal health workers No established outstation health work
Retailing	Supermarket run by community Social Club with non-Aboriginal management	Limited small store, run under private contract by non-Aboriginal manager.	Supermarket, run by CMS management

Land	Former Reserve, unalienated Crown Land - now freehold Aboriginal title Limited access to adjacent non-Aboriginal pastoral leases Some groups with access to traditional lands	Former unalienated Crown Land, pastoral lease - now freehold Aboriginal title Limited access to adjacent non-Aboriginal pastoral leases	Former Reserve - now freehold Aboriginal title Some clans limited access to traditional lands
Non-monetary Maintenance	Limited subsistence, except for out-stations; vehicles necessary in settlement. Mainly cold season activity Spasmodic dietary supplement All age groups	Limited subsistence, unless vehicles Mainly cold season activity Spasmodic dietary supplement All age groups	Limited subsistence from inland, except outstations, vehicles; coastal fishing productive all seasons - boats needed for deep sea access Considerable addition of meat/fish to diet at all times Mostly older people
Monetary Maintenance			
Wage earning work	Service, gov. departments, mining cattle, store	Government departments cattle	Service, government departments store
Wages/Income (%)	57	18-45 (Jan.-June)	74
Self-employment	None	None	Negligible (artefacts)
Unemployment Benefit	Yes	Yes	Yes
No source income (% men 15+)	49	60	51
Income/Cap./fnt.	\$47	\$33-\$47	\$63
Expenditure	Food, clothing, cars, petrol, Alcohol Gambling Gifts, ceremonies, etc.	Food, clothing, cars, petrol, Limited Alcohol Gambling, gifts, ceremonies, etc.	Food, clothing, cars, outboard motors, Petrol, aircharters Limited alcohol Gambling, gifts, ceremonies, etc.

alien region for any length of time.

Unfortunately this strong attachment to place is allied to dependence on the non-Aboriginal economy for most material needs, and hence the provision of communications becomes of paramount importance. Aborigines now make considerable use of road and air linkages for both social and economic reasons. Increased access to vehicles has enabled Aboriginal groups to travel extensively, both for subsistence purposes and to visit friends and relatives, journeys which in the case of Warlpiri at Yuendumu and Willowra often take several days. Numbulwar people, lacking access to all weather road links, use both commercial and private air services for similar reasons. Aboriginal leaders in all three communities now also recognize the importance of radio and telephone services for transmitting news of a more personal nature. The growth of dispersed outstation groups has further focused Aboriginal attention on the importance of communications and there is little doubt that, as a recent report on telecommunication requirements in the Northern Territory (Implementation and Management Group, 1980) suggests, their requests for improvement in these services will grow.

Poor communications have also hindered the successful development of most forms of local commercial enterprise, such as the Yuendumu Mining Company or the Numbulwar artefact industry, although their effect on pastoral operations appears to be less serious, at least in Central Australia where the industry is geared to the needs of people remote from the market. They also increase the cost and decrease the efficiency of providing and maintaining basic infrastructure such as power and water supplies, health facilities and retail outlets. Everyone who lives in such places is resigned to periodic disruption to these and other facilities, and to the fact that they will have to pay more than their town counterparts for an inferior service. Outstation communities are more gravely affected by such service difficulties than centralized settlements; for example, the delay of several months in repairing the water pump at Nyirrpi outstation (Yuendumu) was due to difficulties in relaying accurate information on the spare parts required, a problem which would certainly have been solved more quickly in Yuendumu itself.

While accepting that Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal interpretations of 'remoteness' differ, it must be acknowledged that Aborigines do want and need many of the material benefits normally to be found only in larger centralized places. Thus strategies to combat remoteness must be considered. Those already attempted include local production of basic necessities and the provision of mobile services. The former measure has previously been adopted by both government and mission administration, generally with very limited success. For example, in Numbulwar and Yuendumu, market gardens and other primary production projects such as pig and poultry farms and commercial fishing ventures eventually failed; Numbulwar's housing project, in which structures of locally sawn timber were erected for all residents, was completed through the determination shown by mission personnel, rather than a sense of commitment on the part of the Aboriginal population. These disappointments can be attributed to lack of involvement of Aborigines in project planning, and consequently poor assessment of Aboriginal priorities.

They also demonstrate that some types of non-Aboriginal business venture, although of benefit to the group concerned (e.g. a poultry farm producing eggs and chickens for local consumption), require to be organized in ways that are incompatible with Aboriginal lifestyles; outstation gardens like that started at Wandu (Numbulwar), need continual attention if the crops are to survive, but will be readily abandoned if the owners feel obliged to move elsewhere. It remains to be seen whether any of the projects suggested by Aborigines themselves, for example the taming and farming of feral camels at Yuendumu outstations or the culling of feral cattle to provide meat for Numbulwar, meet with greater success. A further important consideration is that these and other forms of community-based business enterprise have to compete with external opposition, usually from larger companies able to make considerable savings in production costs. Yuendumu Mining Company's problems in gaining contracts for local jobs illustrate this clearly. While such a company might well face difficulties in the provision of equipment and of a reliable workforce, the fact that they are Aboriginal-owned and that their wage component is directly injected into the Aboriginal community should qualify them for some preferential treatment from funding organizations.

The provision of mobile services is another method of tackling the problem of 'remoteness', particularly for outstations. While because such communities associated with Yuendumu and Numbulwar are not yet fully established, these facilities have not so far been described in detail, their need is frequently discussed by Warlpiri and Nunggubyu people. They would like health, schooling, retailing, and marketing services for their outstations, and hence require the transport to provide these and radio communications to support them. It must be acknowledged that the expense of providing such services may be hard to justify in terms of the number of beneficiaries, a problem faced in sparsely populated regions throughout the world. Nevertheless the outstation movement does seem to be of great benefit to many tribally-oriented groups, and therefore should possibly receive special consideration. While the need for services has been recognized by those providing funds (e.g. DAA, ABTA), the timelag between application for and receipt of aid is sometimes so great that a decentralization move founders through frustration.

Demographic characteristics

Compared to the non-Aboriginal population the Aboriginal population has a high growth rate, the result of high fertility and declining mortality, and a high dependency ratio with the majority of dependents below the age of 15. Other distinctive features are differences in marital and family structures and in processes of mobility and migration.

The studies of Yuendumu, Willowra and Numbulwar illustrate all of these characteristics (Table 5.1) and highlight some of their socio-economic repercussions. In all three communities, where about 40 per cent of the Aboriginal population were below the age of 15, facilities which catered particularly for the needs of young children (e.g. health clinics, schools) were appreciated and heavily used. While fertility has declined slightly since 1975, the number of children below school age remain high and continued or increasing pressure on modern educational facilities can be expected. This factor had already been allowed for in the recent expansion of Willowra school.

The youthful structure of the population has focused attention on a further problem - how to occupy young people in their teens and early 20s. At present, as analyses of the labour forces of Yuendumu and Numbulwar show, young men aged between 15 and 24 have the lowest level of wage labour participation; they are also less heavily involved in traditional activities than their elders. Many spend their time sleeping, talking, playing pool and, in some cases, causing social unrest by stealing cars, pilfering and drinking alcohol. Even in more traditionally-oriented Willowra, where young men are heavily involved in the initiation process and are also given the opportunity to work in the stock camp, this situation exists. Community leaders in general recognize that their young men face this problem, but their attitude towards it shows some ambivalence, probably because there is no easy solution. While neither they nor those concerned regard employment-seeking migration as an answer, mainly because such moves would break ties with country and family, they still criticize the young men for their idleness. At the same time they are sometimes loathe to offer them the opportunity to work because they are not considered to be reliable.

For young women the problem is less serious. Most marry in their teens, often to older men to whom they have earlier been 'promised' according to prescribed custom, and many continue to attend post primary classes at school. A few who have continued with their formal training are then able to obtain some skilled jobs in the community, such as book-keeping and telephone/radio operation at Willowra or teaching and health work (all communities).

Although most families in all three communities now stem from monogamous unions, polygyny is still common in Yuendumu and Willowra, and has only recently ceased to occur in Numbulwar. It is an important feature of a closely knit kinship structure within which the extended, rather than nuclear family is dominant. Such a structure, which differs from that assumed to be the normal family unit in Australia, is not usually catered for in the planning of social services, housing and other facilities. Social security benefits, for example, are allocated on a nuclear family basis, in which the male is seen as the economic support; an Aboriginal man in a polygynous union may, in those terms, have several family units to support but may only receive allowance for a single unit. Moreover, since Aboriginal men

and women still operate largely as independent economic units, there is no guarantee that the family component of a man's allowance will actually be used for the support of that group. Problems such as these have affected many families in both Yuendumu and Willowra. However the situation has recently improved and, with the agreement of the regional office of the Department of Social Security in Alice Springs, applications for unemployment benefits or supporting mother's benefits to second and subsequent wives have been granted. However such grants only occur on application and since officials of that department still expect clients, many of whom lack the necessary information, to make the first approach, many who would be eligible for special consideration never apply.

Planning of shelter and facilities such as power, water and sewerage in Aboriginal communities has often failed to allow adequately for the important extended family structure. In Yuendumu, Willowra and Numbulwar, the settlement areas are subdivided into a series of camps whose residents are linked in this way. Single houses, of suitable size for a nuclear family, often shelter several such units, with resultant heavy use of their amenities. Camps of this type, which remain distinct, and are the responsibility of their own residents, form a framework for the flow of goods, services and information within the community, and must be recognized if these needs are to be catered for adequately. Yuendumu Council's reorganization of its workforce along camp lines, in response to complaints that centralized services controlled by people from one or two groups did not benefit the whole population, certainly increased the efficiency of cleaning, garbage collection and firewood provision in the settlement. Conversely, lack of council representation for all the small fragmented groups in Numbulwar has inhibited the flow of information to some families.

Mobility and migration processes also make an important impact on the organization and efficient function of Aboriginal communities. In general, Aborigines are highly mobile on a short term basis, following patterns of movement strongly related to the location of members of their extended family; long-term movement outside such a network, away from tribal territory, is uncommon. Mobility within a central settlement or, in Numbulwar and Yuendumu, between a central settlement and outstations causes constant fluctuation in populations of camps and of individual

shelters, and consequently affects the provision of fixed services and amenities. While such movement normally occurs on a small scale, special events, such as the death of an important leader or the organization of a large ceremony can cause whole camps to change position to sites which may have no amenities whatsoever. During this process permanent houses are abandoned and reoccupation is not necessarily guaranteed. Many examples of this type of mobility can be cited for all three case-study groups - the restructuring of Willowra camps following a death in mid 1978, the movement of almost every Yuendumu family to Ngangini camp for a ceremony in late 1978, and the constant flow of people between Numbulwar, Groote Eylandt and Ngukurr to see relatives and organize ceremonies. When such movement involves visits to friends and kin elsewhere it affects employment, since wage earners may absent themselves for considerable periods. This problem can be tackled by allowing people to work on a casual, day-to-day basis, an approach adopted to some extent in all three communities. Such a solution is more suitable for unskilled rather than skilled jobs.

Permanent migration from Yuendumu, Willowra and Numbulwar to towns or other places away from familiar territory has rarely occurred and, for most people, would not be considered attractive. Those who have resided in such places have generally been young people attending educational establishments such as Kormilda and Yirara high schools and Batchelor Teaching Training College or in wage employment. Many who have gone into employment have been specifically asked to do so, and hence have known that an opening existed; few have voluntarily left to seek a wage job, a situation that is to be expected in terms of the limited opportunities for the unskilled in Northern Territory towns and elsewhere. Even those whose particular skills qualify them for relatively high level town-based occupations, such as working as field officers for the Department of Social Security, only remain absent from their community for a limited time. Their reasons for returning are concern for their families and for their own country, a feeling of strangeness in an alien town and, in some cases, hostile and unsympathetic encounters with more sophisticated Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal urban dwellers. Under these circumstances it seems quite unrealistic to expect permanent migration to develop as a response to lack of wage employment opportunities or lack of amenities in such rural communities. The tie to family and land remains of supreme

importance.

Use of and attitude towards land and other natural resources

The divergence in Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal use of and attitudes towards land and other natural resources is perhaps more strongly marked in rural areas than elsewhere, mainly because many Aboriginal groups in rural Australia still live on or near their ancestral territory. Hence they can visibly express their emotional attachment to that area, and use its resources as they see fit. In general they consider the commercial value of that land and resources to be secondary. In contrast, for non-Aborigines, the commercial emphasis is generally dominant although long time residents may develop emotional feelings for a property. Access to traditional land is therefore extremely important to the maintenance of culture and custom in Aboriginal communities. In those terms Aborigines in Yuendumu, Willowra and Numbulwar are all in fortunate positions - they all control their adjacent areas, formerly reserves, unalienated Crown land and pastoral lease. Residents in other communities, such as Warrabri or Borroloola, where the settlement is surrounded by alienated land, are less fortunate.

Although these three communities have achieved control of much of the territory to which members have traditional ties, actual access to that territory can be physically and socially restricted. Physical restrictions, in particular sheer distance from the central settlement and lack of reliable water supplies for a semi-sedentary population, have inhibited outstation development in both Yuendumu and Numbulwar where it has so far proved impracticable for some groups to move back to their territory. Pintubi from near Lake Mackay and Warlpiri from the interior of the Tanami Desert have been unable to plan for decentralization and cannot even make frequent visits from Yuendumu. Older people from these and other distant areas talk constantly of the resources and cultural significance of the country and transmit detailed information to their families so that knowledge of that area is preserved. For example, when a party of young Willowra women visited Tippenbah for the first time, they easily located the buried spring and the primary significant sites because these had been described to them frequently by their fathers and uncles.

Social restrictions on land access are associated mainly with legal aspects. Where land is contained within a non-Aboriginal controlled pastoral lease, as at Mount Doreen or Anningie, adjacent to Yuendumu and Willowra respectively, access is normally restricted to hunting and gathering forays and permanent settlement is precluded. Otherwise restrictions may be imposed within Aboriginal law. At Numbulwar those who wished to use the resources from the country of another clan, a common occurrence since people cannot travel extensively during the wetter half of the year, initially obtained permission from principal Aboriginal land-owners. Changes in land-holding status, for example the assumption of control over former reserves at Yuendumu or Numbulwar or replacement of leasehold by freehold title at Willowra have given rise to much speculation about the future of groups living on the territory of others. Thus at Yuendumu there were rumours amongst the Aboriginal population that some would have to leave the main settlement and at Numbulwar similar rumours stimulated an exodus to outstations in 1978. Such fears are probably groundless as most clans are inter-related through marriage and therefore bear joint responsibility as owners and guardians of specific tracts of territory. The request of the Willowra people, to include both owners and guardians as claimants in the evidence for their land claim, indicates that Aboriginal people see this as a strong connection.

Concern about the future status of Aboriginal land control arises from recognition that Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal concepts of land-use differ, a theme that is constantly presented both publicly and privately. While government agencies responsible for purchase of land for Aboriginal groups have not demanded that the land be used in a non-Aboriginal way, Aboriginal communities which control land are under constant pressure from the many unsympathetic and ill-informed critics who accuse them of allowing fences and bores to fall into disrepair, of starving their stock, and of denying access to innocent tourists. Where valuable mineral deposits are found, government pressure to allow exploitation is applied and opposition interpreted as failure to take account of the 'common good'. Similarly, Aboriginal practices of resource management, such as husbandry to ensure future production, go unrecognized or, in the case of deliberate firing of ground vegetation to improve pasture for game, are seen to be positively harmful. Changes wrought upon the land and its resources by non-Aboriginal farming practice receive little comment. While

some criticisms of Aboriginal land and resource use may have some basis, they are often grossly exaggerated. Both Yuendumu and Willowra people are well aware that many non-Aborigines are sceptical about their ability to manage the land and, in particular, to look after cattle. However, as their recent financial successes have shown, they can contribute successfully to the pastoral industry. While it must be admitted that recent price levels for beef cattle have been abnormally high, both groups are justifiably proud of these achievements and understand their significance not only in gaining at least partial respite from financial dependency but also in proving that they can succeed in the white man's world.

Nevertheless they would still stress that for them control over their territory, and associated freedom to demonstrate their attachment to it, outweighs the advantages to be gained from the money which can accrue from sale of its resources. For all Aboriginal communities the achievement of some rights to land is by far the most important issue, about which debate will no doubt continue. Without the assurance of substantial land rights, the entire social and economic structure remains fragile. A more positive type of strategy, which makes use of Aboriginal knowledge of land and natural resources, could be used to advantage. Thus the employment of Aborigines as rangers in areas of wildlife protection, as has been suggested for the Tanami wildlife reserve near Yuendumu, should be promoted. Similarly, greater imagination could be shown in considering possible uses for feral animals (camels, donkeys, horses, rabbits, buffalo, cattle in these studies) and encouragement given to Aboriginal groups who wish to experiment along these lines.

The importance of access to land is most clearly expressed in the growth of decentralized communities - outstations - on Aboriginal-controlled land. In recent years many small groups have re-established centres on their own land, and in the process have inevitably experienced both rewards and frustrations in dealing with physical isolation in a situation of varying degrees of economic dependency. In some cases, where centralization into government and mission stations was marked, the movement has involved a return to areas scarcely visited for many years; in others, where centralization was less complete, it has rather been a reaffirmation of the need to live in small groups, a way of life that was never really disrupted.

Either form of outstation is a new type of settlement, incorporating aspects of the Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal world, only partially dependent on natural resources and requiring certain basic facilities. Numbulwar and Yuendumu, both of which have recently participated in decentralization movements of the first type, provide interesting examples of the process in its early stages.

Since those who have moved out of Yuendumu and Numbulwar have mostly spent at least twenty years, and in some cases almost all their lives, in a large centralized settlement, the change to outstation life involves some radical readjustment. Older people appear to be content to live without many material possessions or infrastructural components such as housing from permanent materials or pumped water supplies; for them re-establishment of their bonds with significant sites and the opportunity to hunt and gather in their own territory is eminently satisfying. Younger people, while they value these rewards, are also concerned about other aspects, elements of the non-Aboriginal lifestyle which they want for themselves and their children - health, schooling; they are also less committed to the religious practices associated with the outstation site and less knowledgeable about subsistence activities. Consequently provision of services such as health care and schooling becomes very important, and if these are not available, they may not make the move. At the same time their absence makes the outstation less viable. Some Yuendumu outstation groups, lacking younger adults to carry out tasks involving heavy physical labour, have found it difficult to maintain themselves. The transience of Numbulwar outstations demonstrates that for many younger people in particular, the counter-attraction of the central settlement, particularly during the adverse conditions of the wet season, is very great, especially when most families are now accustomed to living under conventional shelter. It is doubtful whether Numbulwar people would accept living conditions such as those tolerated by old men from Yuendumu who existed for weeks behind a windbreak, with no reliable water source.

Most of the frustrations experienced by prospective outstation dwellers arise through difficulties in providing such facilities as water and communications. In the desert, water is the first priority, to be obtained from bores and hence dependent on the operations of water resources organizations. Subsequent equipment of bores and tanks depends on allocation of funds, usually from government sources. Either stage is subject to frequent delay; some Yuendumu people had to wait at least two years before drilling was finally carried out. In Arnhem Land, where water is more plentiful, the problem is less severe. Both regions have suffered from communication deficiencies, essential when the central community lacks an efficient resource centre which can co-ordinate health care or provide retailing services. While vehicle communications are now reasonably satisfactory, radio linkages have yet to be finalized. Problems such as these arise partly from inflexibility and bureaucratic procedures followed by the funding organizations, coupled with an understandable reluctance on the part of these agencies to waste money on schemes which may not eventuate. While it cannot be denied that funds have been wasted or misused in the past - outstation vehicles and boats at both Yuendumu and Numbulwar have been used for other purposes, and market gardening projects have failed to produce a single crop - these failures are due in part to inadequate consultation with those concerned, and poor understanding of the physical and social conditions within which they exist. They can also be attributed to Aboriginal lack of understanding of the bureaucratic processes involved, and, more particularly, the financial resources required. Many of these services may ultimately be too expensive to warrant their introduction. However those responsible for funding could perhaps demonstrate greater confidence in the ability of Aboriginal people to make appropriate use of the resources which they receive.

Community infrastructure and the provision of services

The infrastructure of rural Aboriginal communities today provides many examples of both past and present attempts to supply those non-Aboriginal amenities felt by administrative bodies to be necessary for Aboriginal well-being. While in recent times some efforts have been made to consult Aborigines about the type of infrastructure they want, most amenities and services remain primarily non-Aboriginal in concept.

Shelter, usually the first component of the infrastructure to be noticed by a non-Aboriginal visitor to an Aboriginal community and a major instrument for assimilation, assumes most forms in Yuendumu, Willowra and Numbulwar - bush material, canvas and iron sheet humpies, sun-shelters and windbreaks; concrete and aluminium transitional houses; pit-sawn timber huts; conventional government residences; and modern, specially-designed flats and houses. All types are in use, although many buildings, such as the transitional houses in Yuendumu, are only spasmodically occupied because they are physically uncomfortable. The problem of providing suitable housing for desert climates and lifestyles is still to be solved, as is apparent in Willowra where the costly new hexagonal dwellings have proved subject to flooding. Under those circumstances it is not surprising that Aborigines have developed their own ways of using these shelters; houses with insufficient all round visibility, like the patio flats at Yuendumu and the conventional raised houses in Numbulwar, are relegated to sleeping and storage only, and other activity occurs in adjacent open spaces; during the hottest season, all solid structures are likely to remain empty at night as people move to cooler sleeping places such as the beach or the creek bed. Modifications such as these are often severely criticized by non-Aborigines and are used to accuse Aborigines of ingratitude towards those who have provided shelter.

Other amenities, such as power, water and sewerage supplies have also been provided with non-Aboriginal rather than Aboriginal usage in mind. As noted earlier, they are in fixed positions and hence cannot be adapted to accommodate family mobility. Their operation also demands a fairly complex technology, outside Aboriginal experience. Thus flush toilets and showers frequently block and, particularly in desert communities like Willowra where reticulated water supplies are regularly interrupted, often cannot quickly be cleared; under continuing use a build-up of potentially contaminating sewage soon occurs. Furthermore, construction and running costs for houses and for these amenities are high, and thus it is important to determine how they are regarded by Aboriginal users. Discussions with people in these communities indicate a strong desire to decide on their own housing priorities and, in Willowra and Yuendumu, some scepticism about the value of large, expensive power stations (using increasingly costly diesel fuel) and centrally located ablution blocks in places

which, for customary reasons, cannot be used by everybody.

All three communities confirm, in varying degrees, the health and nutritional problems suggested by other studies of Aboriginal groups. Main forms of illness - eye and ear infections, gastro-intestinal and bronchial ailments - are both environmentally and nutritionally related and their persistence shows that health services are still failing to provide an answer. One reason for this failure is that these services, framed within an assimilationist policy which combined efforts to reduce morbidity and mortality with attempts to inculcate habits of cleanliness, better nutrition and, in non-Aboriginal terms, child care, have been offered mainly within a non-Aboriginal environment - a hospital or clinic whose surroundings were alien and even threatening to prospective patients. The employment of Aboriginal health workers, and increased sympathy towards Aboriginal methods of health care, have begun to change this pattern, but further progress is still possible. Although clinics in these communities are now used with greater freedom by the Aboriginal population, the creation of a confident and congenial atmosphere within which to approach health problems still substantially depends on the attitude of non-Aboriginal employees in supervisory positions. Rapid turn-over in non-Aboriginal health staff can quickly undermine the confidence of patients, who may be reluctant to seek help from people with whom they are unfamiliar, and who do not understand their ways. Feelings such as these led to Willowra's application for a resident sister, to replace itinerant visiting staff based in Alice Springs.

Many of the points raised with regard to health care also apply to educational services, where the introduction of bi-lingual systems of training, coupled with reliance on a partially skilled Aboriginal teaching staff, have done much to integrate the essentially non-Aboriginal school and the community. The greater impact of these changes at Willowra and Yuendumu than at Numbulwar, which is readily apparent in these settlements, can be attributed to the efforts of individual staff, combined with continuity and commitment in literacy training. As with health services, rapid turnover of non-Aboriginal teachers can quickly undermine the fragile fabric of relationships built up over several years.

While most people would agree that health and educational services now provide appropriate facilities, these still tend to be over-centralized. Community clinics such as that at Numbulwar may be located at some distance from large sections of the population which, lacking transport, fail to attend for treatment. Their sites may also be unsuitable for visiting by people from specific camps, and the need for separate facilities for men and women, who cannot inter-mingle because of customary taboo relationships, has not always been recognized. Aboriginal health workers have created more efficient lines of communication between camps and clinic, but improvements are possible. Yuendumu's recent graphic description of the clinic/community network, in the form of a Warlpiri sand painting (Junga-Yimi, 2-6: 1980) illustrates that people appreciate these changes. Schools similarly may be inaccessible to some sections of the community, a factor which affects the attendance of Pintubi children at Yuendumu, and the separation of school grounds from areas of general community use hinders the development of mutual understanding between parents and teachers. While the use of the adjacent area for fighting undoubtedly disrupted work at Yuendumu school, the erection of a stoutly fenced enclosure merely enforces the feeling that the school belongs to the Government, not to the people.

Problems of overcentralization also affect the use of higher order health and educational services, located in the towns of the Northern Territory. Hospitalization in Alice Springs or Nhulunbuy is a daunting prospect for rural dwelling Aborigines and, since they may be receiving treatment from staff quite unfamiliar with their socio-cultural background, may be positively counter-productive. In the same way, parents in all three communities have shown great concern over the need for secondary school children to reside in town, and consequently only a few succeed in completing their courses. These failures, which hinder future development of management skills in the administration of Aboriginal communities, signify not a lack of interest but rather an inability to accommodate to a system that is perceived to be inappropriate.

The enforcement of law and order, a service often cited by non-Aborigines as a prime need in Aboriginal communities, provides a further example of the importance of integrating Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal methods of behavioural control. Of the three communities studied only Yuendumu, the largest and most prone to social disturbance, had an official police station in the vicinity. While non-Aboriginal police were requested to trace and charge many miscreants, whose crimes were often related to excessive alcohol consumption, disturbances connected with transgression against tribal laws usually remained the responsibility of Aboriginal leaders. The success with which the two systems operated side by side was largely due to a trusting relationship developed between the community and the police. There can be no guarantee that, as individuals are replaced, such a situation would continue. In Numbulwar and Willowra law enforcement was the responsibility of the community but, while Willowra appeared to be able to deal with problems without asking for outside help, Numbulwar leaders occasionally requested police intervention. In some cases such intervention seemed unnecessary; police sometimes arrived to break up fights only to find that the entire dispute had already been settled.

Retail services, unlike those already mentioned, are not the responsibility of government departments but are now normally organized by a community body, such as the Yuendumu Social Club. Stores have been viewed by government officials as prime foci for attempts to establish money earning enterprises, and hence for implementation of the principles of self-management. Unfortunately the reality has frequently been far removed from the practice. Few Aboriginal communities can provide sufficient management expertise to run a store without support, particularly in financial aspects; failure has led to store closure, which not only frustrates others in the community but undermines the confidence of all (Willowra, 1978). Alternative strategies are to employ non-Aboriginal management (Yuendumu); to allow the store to be run by outside operators (Willowra, 1979); or to continue under the previous system (CMS store, Numbulwar). None are entirely satisfactory because they do not actively promote the development of Aboriginal experience and they fail to achieve the necessary integration between the store and its customers. People still continue to view the store as a non-Aboriginal component of the socio-economic

infrastructure. Moreover, these approaches provide plenty of scope for unscrupulous and/or inexperienced people to exploit the system by overcharging, failing to carry out periodic checks on stock and other dubious practices. Since community stores have a monopoly on trading, these are hard to check. These strategies also remove control over stocking from the hands of the community and, unless complaints and suggestions are acknowledged and rectified, may lead to concentration on items which are not appropriate to people's needs, as has happened in Numbulwar. However, in spite of these disadvantages, it is easy to understand why many Aboriginal groups still allow their stores to remain in outside control. For most people the most important factor is the service provided - a store which opens at the right time, sells the right items at the right prices and provides a congenial atmosphere in which to shop. Ownership and control of monetary profits tends to be secondary. Nevertheless some people in most communities would be interested in those aspects, and, through provision of appropriate training and back-up support of the type proposed by Yulngu and Baruwei Enterprises in Katherine, their interest should be fostered.

This brief discussion of the provision of amenities and services in rural Aboriginal communities has exposed several common problems which arise whether the service is provided by private firm or government department; other difficulties refer more specifically to the delivery of services by the government. Common problems include the inappropriate nature of services for Aboriginal use, often the result of inadequate discussion and consultation with the Aborigines concerned; this problem often stems from poor communication, a result of language differences and inadequate understanding of each other's customs and practices. A second problem is that proper consultation requires sufficient contact between Aborigines and those responsible for service delivery for a trusting relationship to be built up; this requires considerable commitment on the part of non-Aboriginal advisers, as well as training of these personnel. With high rates of staff turnover, a feature of the non-Aboriginal labour force in the Northern Territory, stable relationships are rarely achieved. The first question asked by Aboriginal school children of a new non-Aboriginal teacher is often 'How long will you stay?' Finally, both private and government servicing bodies are over-centralized. This situation, largely a function of the sparse population of rural areas such as the Northern

Territory, would be less of a hindrance if communication links were better. At present, not only is it difficult for Aboriginal communities to make contact with central offices, but some central office personnel display considerable ignorance and a lack of sympathy over the service needs of rural dwellers.

Problems more specific to government services include the use of bureaucratic procedures and rules which cannot be easily adapted to the Aboriginal situation. Insistence on these practices often results in excessive delay in providing a service, and may mean that changing circumstances, such as the need to reallocate some part of council funds, cannot be accommodated. Social security service delivery, described below, provides many examples of this problem. An additional government service problem is that the role of departments and those employed by them should now be that of providing advice as requested by Aboriginal communities; some have continued to see themselves as controllers of Aboriginal organizations.

Material maintenance

Non-monetary support: While comparison of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal attitudes to land highlights the social significance of its ownership for Aborigines, it would be unwise to underestimate its economic importance. Today, although it is doubtful whether any Aboriginal group depends entirely on its resources, hunting and gathering remain important activities and, from time to time, food from these sources provide valuable dietary supplements. However, comparison of such activities in these communities reveals wide-spread variations in productivity according to physical environment and seasonal change. In general, Numbulwar's territory provides more reliable resources; there non-monetary support, particularly in outstations, can supply a relatively large proportion of sustenance, especially meat and fish. In desert communities, such as Yuendumu and Willowra, supplies of both vegetable and meat products range widely, from dearth to plenty.

Subsistence activity is also affected by access to resources and by the demographic structure of the group. Regardless of environment, the concentration of people into large population groups, has limited their access to resources, and most participants require some transport, usually the use of a vehicle or boat. Even in outstations,

where the resources of the hinterland have been less seriously depleted than around settlements, transport is an important aid for locating and tracking game such as kangaroos and emus. Where fish and water fowl play a significant role, as around Numbulwar, this need is less pressing as most outstations are close to rivers or the coast. Vehicles have thus virtually become subsistence tools. The demographic structure, in particular the age/sex composition, also affects hunting and gathering productivity because each sex concentrates (although not exclusively) on certain types of activity, and because many younger people, born and brought up on settlements, are less skilled in these pursuits than their elders. Older people in all three communities were very concerned by the lack of knowledge and interest displayed by their children, and went to considerable lengths to train them. This was particularly noticeable in the gathering of vegetables and tubers at Numbulwar, an activity which demanded detailed knowledge of the environment and, since the main sites were located inland, considerable physical effort. Most younger women were not prepared to participate in these expeditions but preferred to buy bread and flour instead.

Variations in subsistence production make it hard to assess its overall contribution. Not only does this change from one time to another but it is also affected by the social significance of the foods obtained. Hunting and gathering are important ways of expressing the links to the ancestral territory, and a means of obtaining foods preferred to those bought in stores. Thus it is not adequate to measure the equivalent monetary value of these foods (often considerable when bullets, petrol, wear and tear on vehicles and rifles are taken into account) because people always prefer the meat of goanna, dugong, turtle or kangaroos to beef or lamb. They will even complain of having 'no tucker' if these products are not available. The possibility of participating in hunting and gathering thus provides important support to the social fabric.

Monetary support: While hunting and gathering remain popular and sometimes productive activities, Aborigines in Yuendumu, Willowra and Numbulwar have now come to depend on money as the main means of maintenance for their families. Their main sources of money are wages, earnings from self-employment, and pensions and benefits received through the Department of Social Security. The relative contribution of these sources to personal incomes varies

between communities and according to factors such as seasonal fluctuations in labour requirements and the external market situation. In general, communities which have a larger wage component have higher per capita incomes. Thus, during the period in question, in Yuendumu and Numbulwar, both of which are allocated DAA funding for the employment of an urban service workforce, more than 50 per cent of the money received by Aborigines came from wages; in Willowra, which as a pastoral community lacks such allocations, wages accounted for less than 20 per cent of monies received, except for the mustering season when the proportion exceeded 40 per cent (Table 5.1). These differences are reflected in personal incomes which ranged from \$33 per capita (Willowra in January) to over \$60 per capita (Numbulwar).

Self-employment earnings contribute little to Aboriginal money incomes in these communities, partly because of the limited resources available for development of such openings but also, as the Numbulwar study shows, because of the lack of marketing organizations to deal with the product (e.g. artefacts). Without this form of support, craftsmen and women are forced to depend on the local market, whose demands are easily satisfied. Other Aboriginal communities, for example Yirrkala, Ernabella and those in Bathurst Island, have developed a more efficient system of marketing and consequently have been able to provide more of their money needs through self-employment. This has obvious advantages because this activity can be fitted in with others such as hunting or preparation for ceremonies.

Lacking sufficient wage employment or self-employment opportunities, social security payments have become the main, and often only source of money for many Aboriginal families. The reliability of this source varies according to the type of benefit received; child endowment, widows, age, invalid and supporting mother's benefits all provide a regular money flow once application has been granted; unemployment benefit receipt, dependent on continuing application, fluctuates. While such procedures are necessary to ensure that people who take on a job do not continue to receive unemployment benefit, they are difficult to administer in Aboriginal communities where applicants do not understand and cannot cope with the paperwork involved, and where many live in small scattered population groups, in outstations distant from the community centre. Men living

in Yuendumu outstations in 1978, when transport links to Yuendumu were unreliable, often commented that their cheques had stopped; they were forced to depend on the pensioners for store bought food until their new applications were processed, a period of at least four to six weeks. Problems such as this can be overcome by establishing efficient social security administration in the main community but, as Yuendumu's experience has shown, it is extremely difficult to do this. A non-Aboriginal clerk does not have sufficiently detailed knowledge of the Aboriginal community to check information, and an Aboriginal clerk may come under enormous pressure from friends and relatives, irate because their money has not come through. Ideally the two should work together, and provide essential back-up.

Since Aboriginal recipients of social security payments depend on others to complete and dispatch their applications, the actual delivery of this service can easily be influenced by factors such as the policy adopted by departmental officers or by community administrators. For example, Yuendumu's desert outstation dwellers, deemed to have no alternative source of income, had made successful applications for benefits but their counterparts in Numbulwar, who were assumed to have better opportunities for self employment in the artefact industry, and where, partly because of CMS influence, stronger feelings about the ethics of receiving 'money for nothing' prevailed, had not. Similarly, Willowra's low community income in 1979 was partly due to failure on the part of former book-keepers to process social security applications. After some time Aboriginal applicants ceased to ask why cheques had not arrived and attributed the failure to yet another bureaucratic rule which disqualified them.

As these differences in delivery suggest, the framework of social security payments is not entirely appropriate to the needs of rural-dwelling Aborigines. Alternative measures, for example CDEP or bulk payment of social security, have been suggested. In 1979 Willowra people were involved in discussions on implementation of the latter strategy. With few guidelines, people found it hard to imagine how such a scheme would operate although they were interested in the possibility of accumulating a store of money for communal needs (a Willowra 'bank') and of stabilizing income flows. They expressed strong reservations over the reactions of long-term pension recipients, who would object to their cheques being docked

before distribution. Although the scheme did not eventuate, the process ultimately benefited the community because the detailed overview of entitlements resulted in additional applications and a rise of community money income by almost 100 per cent.

Variations in access to wages and in delivery of social security cheques cause income inequalities between communities. While the per capita incomes in all three communities in 1979 were less than 40 per cent of those for Australia as a whole, and well below the average for the Aboriginal population, they ranged from only \$33 per head (Willowra) to over \$60. Income inequalities make a clear impact on expenditure. Even superficial analysis of food-buying patterns shows that Willowra people had to confine themselves more strictly to inexpensive basic staples such as flour while people in Yuendumu and Numbulwar could afford more costly items. This in turn affects nutrition which, in Willowra, appeared to be deficient in certain vitamins. Ultimately this has an impact on health and hence on individual ability to function well in all spheres of life.

Income inequalities also occur within communities. These case-studies show, although only superficially, that access to wage employment, the most lucrative source of money, depends to some extent on one's family relationships. The emergence of elite Aboriginal groups (in the material sense) is also linked to formal schooling, and there are signs that the children of important leaders receive more family support and encouragement to continue their education beyond primary levels than do others. However it is also clear that members of that group are still closely tied in the Aboriginal systems of obligation and reciprocity, under which money and other items of material value are redistributed. Thus, although high income earners in Yuendumu buy more consumer goods than those who depend on social security money, they repay and establish obligations with cash, and their vehicles, rifles and radios are freely borrowed by others. Therefore, income inequalities do not necessarily correspond to large differences in access to things which money can buy. In the same way, although Aboriginal families do find it difficult to budget their spending when cash is received fortnightly, they can smooth over income differences by sharing with those whose money is paid on different days.

This discussion highlights several important issues with regard to the material maintenance of Aboriginal families. While problems associated with provision of wage employment are clearly important - lack of wage earning opportunities, in particular of jobs which would give Aborigines much needed training in management techniques; limited scope for Aboriginal-run businesses in remote regions, where competition with more experienced non-Aboriginal entrepreneurs is too stiff - consideration must also be given to the attitudes of Aborigines towards such activities. These case-studies confirm many of the general points made earlier. Aborigines in Yuendumu, Willowra and Numbulwar do not consider money as a valuable commodity in itself; they are concerned with what it can be used for - buying food, or cars and petrol to go hunting or visit friends; giving to others to repay obligations; even purchasing land of great cultural significance to them (Willowra people have been negotiating to buy neighbouring Mt. Barkly station with profits from cattle sales). It therefore becomes very difficult to assess how much money Aboriginal families need for maintenance - as income increases demands also increase and we, as non-Aborigines, cannot really determine which of these demands are 'necessities'. This, it might be argued, is also a characteristic of the affluent, non-Aboriginal society. Secondly, Aborigines display different attitudes from non-Aborigines in their economic motivation; they are co-operative rather than competitive - Willowra people work together to sell cattle for the overall benefit of the community, rather than to compete with neighbouring pastoralists; they believe strongly in the redistribution of wealth, either cash or other goods, so that none should be destitute and everyone should own obligation to someone else; men and women operate as independent economic units - men do not necessarily consider sharing their unemployment benefit cheques and women, such as school teachers in all of these communities, do not feel obliged to give part of their earnings to non-working husbands.

A further important aspect of material maintenance is the overall support given to Aboriginal communities by the government, the provider of almost all funds for both capital and recurrent expenditure. Amounts allocated vary according to size of community and according to needs at any one time, assessed on the basis of examination of requests by councils and government officials. Even with the limited information available, it is clear that these allocations

vary considerably; thus, in these examples, in 1977/78, Numbulwar received a per capita government grant more than double that of Willowra, mainly because Numbulwar, as an 'urban-type' community, funds a service workforce to look after houses, roads, power supplies, communal ablution blocks, etc. Willowra, recognized as a pastoral station (although DAA have always acknowledged that its function as a community is of major importance), has no such services. It could be argued that the income received from the sale of cattle could be used to pay people to do such jobs, a possibility which Willowra people have occasionally discussed. That this has not occurred suggests that these service jobs are not considered a top priority by the people, and that they would rather carry out these tasks as required. Before the hearing of the Willowra land claim in 1980, the community came together to clean the living space, as yet one more way of demonstrating their pride in their community. In the end they appreciate that since they receive less government funding they are more independent in the material sense. Their experience could be salutary in considering options for places like Yuendumu and Numbulwar; these communities probably need more rigidly organized service workforces than small places, but perhaps block funding which would allow their councils greater flexibility in deciding on such priorities would be preferable to the present system.

The place of women

The collection of Aboriginal groups into centralized settlements, administered according to non-Aboriginal precepts and concepts, has made a great impact on the lives of women. To all intents and purposes, their existence has been moulded to conform with that of their white sisters - their previous economic independence has been replaced by dependence on husbands, and a focus on domestic pursuits and the care and nurture of children. Few non-Aboriginal administrators, either from government or mission bodies, have been aware of the impact of these changes or have realized that many aspects of the traditionally strong economic role of Aboriginal women have survived. They have not treated them as equals and have failed to ask their opinion on many matters of relevance to them. In recent times this situation has begun to change.

To an outside observer, women in Willowra, Yuendumu and Numbulwar appear to be primarily concerned with health care, shopping for food and, in leisure moments, gossiping and gambling. They rarely attend meetings and contribute little to public debate; they are little represented on the Council and other supervisory bodies; their cultural activities, apart from gathering, are unknown and hence considered to be non-existent. Such a view, which reinforces the assumption of subservience, is false. Women's domination of key service jobs in health, education, retailing and occasionally clerical spheres gives them access to well-paid positions which require relatively high levels of formal education (Young, forthcoming). Support from their extended families allows even those with small children to participate. However the advantages gained here are offset by the scarcity of such jobs. Few other women are working, and when the unskilled labour force is cut back through financial stringency the women are the first to become redundant. Thus most women are forced to depend either on the wages earned by their menfolk, or on social security payments, in both cases a situation which does not accord with their traditionally independent role. Since it appears that this difference in cultural attitudes will survive, it is perhaps time that they were formally acknowledged in methods of income support.

Women's territorial rights, and associated ceremonial activities, and their role in internal politics, are also strong. In all land claims which have affected residents of Yuendumu and Willowra (Warlpiri and Kartangaruru - Kurintji, Lander Warlpiri, Yulumu) women claimants, inheriting rights patrilineally, hold equal status with their male kin. In Willowra older Nungarrayi women are particularly prominent because they represent the leading generation (Jungarrayi/Nungarrayi) of owners of the central Wirliyarrayi site, and in Numbulwar one woman is currently principal owner of the land on which the settlement is located. All of these women inevitably wield political power, and many decisions which appear to emanate from the men can only be reached after prior consultation with their sisters and mothers.

Women's ceremonial activities, rarely described by past outside observers, most of whom have been men, are closely associated with these territorial rights. In all three communities these customs are vigorously maintained, and knowledge of them passed onto the younger people both

overtly, as when Yuendumu women carry out active teaching associated with the operation of their museum, and more privately within the family. Ceremonies such as initiation are the joint responsibility of men and women, and the roles assumed by each are of substantially equal importance.

While Aboriginal women seem to be reluctant to involve themselves directly with many aspects of what they perceive as 'whitefella business', they are very concerned about the impact of social change on their lives. Bell and Ditton's (1980) study revealed many fundamental anxieties over the conflict arising between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal law and showed that women have strong views over such problems as drinking, unemployment and juvenile delinquency. In many cases they censured the men severely for their lack of effectiveness in dealing with these difficulties. Official bodies obviously should make more deliberate effort to discuss these and other situations with Aboriginal women.

Community leadership

Aboriginal organization and control of communities such as Yuendumu, Willowra and Numbulwar has resulted in people assuming leadership roles within an essentially non-Aboriginal framework, e.g. being a councillor or running a cattle station. Many of those who hold these positions also perform important parts as traditional leaders, while others may have little status in traditional aspects of Aboriginal society. Either situation is likely to present some difficulty. Community Councils, for example, function as the points of contact between the external non-Aboriginal world and the Aboriginal community. Their members, usually chosen by consensus to represent each sub-section of the group, often find it difficult to perform their roles effectively, and come under considerable pressure from both their fellows and non-Aboriginal administrators. As the main group to be consulted by external advisers, they should be important leaders in the Aboriginal sense, and hence they are likely to be older people with limited literacy in English. To overcome this deficiency they have to depend on younger people to translate information for them, and thus many councils, for example Yuendumu, have younger members as secretaries and executive officers. Aboriginal leaders who have entered the commercial world have sought similar solutions, as in Willowra where the cattle station manager receives some clerical assistance from his high school trained wife. Solutions such as these are preferable to the

use of non-Aborigines as advisers, except in certain key roles where their skills are needed. It is all too easy for non-Aborigines to assume too much responsibility, especially when their role has formerly been more powerful; mission personnel at Numbulwar, for example, found it difficult to relinquish control to the Aboriginal Council, especially during the early phases when teething troubles were apparent. Aboriginal mastery of these new roles can only be achieved through personal experience, and any policy of continuing to use non-Aboriginal employees because they would (supposedly) be more efficient should be carefully vetted.

While community leadership is of the greatest concern to Aborigines living in these remote groups, those who assume these roles are also drawn into wider political and administrative bodies. Thus people from Yuendumu and Willowra are active on the Central Lands Council, the Central Australian Aboriginal Congress, the Aboriginal Development Commission, the Aboriginal Arts Board, etc. In those capacities they travel widely both to other Aboriginal communities and to towns and cities in other parts of Australia. Numbulwar people also travel widely in these roles. These experiences greatly extend awareness of other places and other problems, both for the people concerned and for those who hear the news on their return. Nevertheless people living in these rural centres still feel that many of the operations which take place at a national level, for example within the National Aboriginal Conference, are only partly relevant to them. Similarly, although recent attempts to foster political education in the Northern Territory have made people more aware of the issues involved (Jaensch et al., 1980), external politics makes little obvious impact on many Aborigines in isolated communities. They need to be given more opportunity to understand that those decisions which are most likely to affect their aims for effective self-management and determination will be made at that level.

Aboriginal/non-Aboriginal contact - consultation

Aborigines in all sectors of society now come into more frequent contact with non-Aborigines than in the past, and hence the need for greater understanding of each other's values and attitudes becomes increasingly necessary. Such contacts take place both at public levels, with government officials, and at private levels, with businessmen,

missionaries, academics and tourists. They can contribute greatly to that necessary understanding or, through attempts to exploit or manipulate, they can hinder the establishment of good relationships. In all cases consultation between the two groups must play an important part.

Lack of understanding about who the true Aboriginal leaders are, which leads visiting officials into relying on information given by young articulate Aborigines and non-Aboriginal advisers, is one reason for failure in consultation. Language difficulties are another major cause. As Brennan (1979) has suggested, open discussion forums with freely available interpretation services provide the most accurate information on the views of any group. Practical arrangements for such meetings require full understanding and agreement from the Aboriginal community, and confusion which arises at this level is often responsible for subsequent lack of successful communication. For example, in 1978 the Northern Territory government attempted to improve contact between Darwin-based politicians and rural constituencies by holding cabinet meetings in outlying centres. Their visit to Yuendumu was interpreted as an opportunity to air local problems with those in power. When the Darwin visitors allocated only an hour to such discussions and spent the remainder of the day behind closed doors, in a cabinet meeting, Yuendumu people were puzzled and wondered why the politicians had come. Similarly, Numbulwar people misinterpreted the 1979 visit which they received from the Minister for Posts and Telecommunications. While he came to discuss the domestic satellite, they connected his visit with their radio-telephone, installed only a few days earlier after many months of waiting. In open question session he received no queries on the satellite but plenty of complaints about radio reception, delays over allocation of outstation frequencies and other local problems. In both cases misunderstanding could have been avoided by proper prior consultation. In contrast, in Willowra general discussions over the introduction of bulk payment of social security cheques were initiated only after detailed arrangements had been made through community leaders. Every adult attended the meetings and both men and women contributed freely, sitting separately in accordance with custom but within earshot of each other. While such arrangements are easier in a smaller group, some of the practices used, for example, allowing plenty of time for information to be disseminated throughout the community, could be adopted even in the more impersonal situation of

larger settlements.

Since consultation cannot always take place face to face, secondary contact plays an important part in the transmission of information to and from rural communities. Investigations into Aboriginal usage of radio-telephones and radios in Yuendumu, Willowra and Numbulwar in 1979 showed that these facilities were only used by a small number of people in each community, normally younger, educated men (although in Willowra some women worked as operators). Specific problems in using such instruments were lack of personal contact, linguistic problems, unfamiliarity with the equipment and cultural barriers such as speech taboos affecting certain kinship groups. Many Aboriginal people felt a distinct need to use telecommunications, not only in case of emergency in isolated situations but also because of their dispersed family networks. Warlpiri groups, for example, are scattered among at least six settlements some of which are over 700 km apart. However their reservations about making this type of contact, sometimes exacerbated by the impatient attitudes of non-Aboriginal users towards those who have problems with English expression, have prevented their taking advantage of the facilities available. In addition, it must be stressed that physical limitations, mainly atmospheric disturbances, also frequently interrupt radio contact and knowledge of these problems discourages people from attempting to make contact.

Planning for the future

Consideration of these issues focuses attention on many factors of importance in terms of the future of communities such as Yuendumu, Willowra and Numbulwar, in particular on methods which would help to foster Aboriginal self-management and lead to a decline in material dependency. First and foremost, true self-management must be based on Aboriginal control of land and natural resources. Secondly, it must be recognized that except for pastoral communities like Willowra or others which may be able to earn substantial incomes from mineral royalties, resources are limited, and hence that their development depends on strong and meaningful support from outside agencies. This would entail sympathetic understanding of Aboriginal ideas on resource use, e.g. ways in which they feel that some of their special skills could be employed to further their own position, and the provision of appropriate forms of centralized organization, in particular marketing.

Thirdly, most Aboriginal business development will take place on a small scale, and hence may need protection from competition with larger non-Aboriginal organizations able to employ considerable economies of scale. Fourthly, Aborigines have so far had little opportunity to gain skill and expertise in the business world, especially in dealing with financial matters. Those who take these responsibilities need management training, and preferably should be able to obtain this in situations close to those in which they work, partly within the job itself. They also require adequate assistance from outside, such as that provided by some accountants who serve Central Australian communities on an itinerant basis.

In addition there is a definite need for delegation of responsibility by non-Aborigines to Aborigines, a move which is often perceived to be important but is not made because people are concerned about the impact of possible loss of efficiency on the business and administrative life of a community. Finally, Aboriginal business organizations require advice on the investment of their profits. This need, previously unimportant because so few Aboriginal groups had control over large sums of money, is now recognized but only tentative approaches have so far been made. Thus, for example, Aboriginal pastoral companies, like those at Willowra and Mount Allan in Central Australia, now find themselves holding funds exceeding \$100,000; they are faced with deciding whether to store this money for the future, in which case it ought to be invested for reasonable return of interest; or whether to spend it on immediate needs. At present both have adopted the former approach, but while Mount Allan's money has formed a store to be drawn upon in small amounts, Willowra would prefer to use theirs to buy adjacent Mount Barkly station. Willowra people see the purchase of Mount Barkly as a distinctly Aboriginal form of investment - the reacquisition of the land to which many of them have traditional rights; non-Aborigines would rather view it as a method of storing monetary wealth.

Although it must be acknowledged that the achievement of some degree of material independence is central to self-management, social and political independence, i.e. self-determination, are equally important. These become possibilities only if Aborigines are really able to exert control over their own affairs, in both specific ways, such as the decision on which jobs will be offered to non-Aborigines and who will fill these posts, and more

general ways, such as the decision on the kind of lifestyle which members of a community wish to maintain. Success will depend not only on the willingness of Australian society to allow Aborigines some meaningful autonomy but also on their willingness to acknowledge the differences between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal society.

While self-management and determination remain the chief aims for Aboriginal communities, it would be unrealistic to expect these to be achieved in totality. Communities such as Willowra, Numbulwar and Yuendumu will still have to depend heavily on the support of outside organizations, in particular that provided by state and federal government departments. These case-studies raise several important issues which could be taken into account in determining guidelines for such support.

First, while Aborigines both need and want many facilities provided by non-Aboriginal society, their requirements are not necessarily the same as those of non-Aborigines, and hence are not adequately assessed by non-Aboriginal indices. Consultation and discussion should precede implementation of any plan or project, to ensure that, as far as possible, resources are not wasted because the desired ends are not achieved.

Secondly, since government plans are rarely carried out quickly, changes in the socio-economic situation in Aboriginal communities should be taken into account. This requires maintenance of contact between the community and the government agency, a link which is not always easy to preserve. For example, during the two years which have elapsed since I began field work in Yuendumu, Willowra and Numbulwar, the following major changes have occurred. Willowra have, through high cattle prices, converted a considerable debt into financial credit; Yuendumu outstations have, against the odds, survived to the stage where they seem likely to become relatively stable settlements. Both of these changes will have marked repercussions on the communities, and will affect future planning.

Thirdly, each Aboriginal community is unique and needs to be considered separately. In these cases Yuendumu differs markedly from Warrabri, which has a less homogeneous population and, through proximity to the Stuart Highway, a greater degree of sophistication and reliance on

non-Aboriginal socio-economic inputs. Willowra contrasts with other Aboriginal-owned cattle stations such as Utopia or Mount Allan; the former, like Willowra, remains relatively independent of non-Aboriginal management but has split itself into several small autonomous groups, on a basis of clan affiliation; the latter is still for all practical purposes under non-Aboriginal control, with little Aboriginal input into decisions over pastoral operations. Numbulwar differs from Ngukurr, also a former CMS settlement but a community which in recent years has made a determined show of independence. Although government agencies must work within some general format, contrasts such as these could be cited and their effects calculated.

Fourthly, since it seems inevitable that tribal communities will have to continue to seek non-Aboriginal assistance in certain specialized spheres for some time to come, care should be taken to ensure that those employed in this capacity are suitably qualified and committed to training Aborigines to take over their positions. High turnover rates among non-Aboriginal staff, a problem which has been more acute in government than mission communities, where many have a high level of commitment, is a further significant hindrance to the advancement of Aboriginal training and experience in management.

Finally, if, as the evidence shows, government agencies currently use a set of procedures which do not always allow appropriate servicing of rural Aboriginal communities, it may be necessary to consider alternative sets of rules and regulations. In general there appears to be a need for much greater flexibility in all funding arrangements, perhaps along the lines of untied aid granted to overseas developing countries; a need for some measure of decentralization of services, linked to provision of a more adequate system of telecommunications for isolated population groups; and a need to take Aboriginal socio-economic and cultural characteristics into account. If these and other needs could be met then government agencies will have made substantial progress in their roles as supporters of the fabric of contemporary Aboriginal society.

The approach to the economy defined by this study - a consideration of how Aborigines themselves allocate their resources to satisfy their wants - has focused attention on many components of life which contribute to human survival. While the interpretation, made by a non-Aboriginal person, is inevitably superficial, it provides an alternative way of looking at contemporary society, hopefully one that Aborigines themselves find to be relevant. The Aboriginal contribution to the Australian economy should not be measured solely in monetary and materialistic terms but in terms of the enrichment gained when a society encompasses differing attitudes to providing for its members. In those terms the Aboriginal contribution is considerable.

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