# TENSE-MARKING IN GUNU PRONOUNS

#### S.A. WURM, L. HERCUS

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#### I. INTRODUCTION

Warm, SA. and Hercus, L. "Tense-Marking in Gasu Pronouns". In Kirton, J., Sommer, B., Warm, SA., Hercus, L., Austin, P., Ellis, R. and Hercus, L. editors, Papers in Australian Integristics No. 10.
44743345. Pacific Linguistics, The Australian National University, 1976. DOI:10.1514/8714-07.33

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The intricacies of genetic relationship and linguistic diffusion in Australian languages are as yet not fully understood. The odd similarities between languages even far apart are tempting and may mislead us into thinking that we can explain any unusual phenomenon in one Australian language in terms of what we know of another Australian language: we may imagine that there is nothing really unique. Tensemarking in the pronouns of Gunu is of particular interest from this point of view; there is nothing exactly like it elsewhere in Australia though there are some rough similarities as in Pitta Pitta where pronouns are marked for the future tense (Blake and Breen 1971), in Lardil (Hale 1967) and probably in Murawari (Oates 1976). This unique feature of the Gunu pronoun has aroused R.M.W. Dixon's suspicion and he states the following in his review in Language 52/1, March 1976), of S.A. Wurm's work The Languages of Australia and Tasmania:

W[urm] uncritically repeats grammatical misstatements that originated in the 'amateur literature'; in no case has any attempt been made to check original sources and re-examine

a controversial problem. Thus W[urm] (83, 133) follows Capell 1956 in believing that 'in some of the dialects of the Darling Group, the initial consonant of the personal pronouns undergoes change for tense; e.g. in Kurnu the first person singular pronoun forms for present, past and future are nadu, wadu and gadu.' This originated with Mathews 1904. Mathews was a surveyor and amateur linguist who gathered material on a considerable number of Australian languages between 1897 and 1912; he frequently doctored his field notes for publication and, as Schmidt (24) warned, all his work must be treated with caution. An examination of Mathews' notebooks (the existence of which was certainly known to W[urm] - see p.14) reveals that what Mathews described as inflection of pronouns for tense was in fact the operation of a phonological sandhi-type rule. The canonical forms for tense morphemes appear to have been PRES -nuna-, PAST -ngaw-, FUT -rag-; the pronominal subject normally followed the verb, and its initial consonant would be dropped after a tensefinal consonant. We thus have bulga-nuna-nadu 'I am hitting', bulga-ngaw-adu 'I hit (past)', and bulga-rag-adu 'I will hit'. There is no alternation in the initial segment of any pronoun when it follows a vowel-final word, or occurs sentenceinitially.

The present paper is intended to show that this view is untenable and that Gunu pronouns are indeed marked for tense and are thereby a striking and very unusual characteristic of this language.

#### II. THE GUNU LANGUAGE

Tense-marking in pronouns was found by R.H. Mathews to be a feature not only of Gunu (1904) but also of the south-eastern sub-dialect of Ba:rundji, bordering immediately on Gunu (Mathews MS.). Both Gunu and Ba:rundji are dialects of the Ba:gandji language of the Darling River of N.S.W. Knowledge of the Ba:gandji dialects has declined dramatically and tragically over the last few decades to the point of extinction. In 1957 S.A. Wurm was able to record grammatical data from speakers of Pooncarie Ba:gandji, Wiljagali, Gunu, Bandjigali and particularly Ba:rundji. His main informant, the last speaker of the language, was then living at Wilcannia; she was Mrs Hannah Quayle (Maljalari) a Maljaŋaba-Wangumara half-caste from the Salisbury Downs-Yancannia area. She spoke Maljagaba as her first and main language, but had learnt Ba:rundji as a child, and also used it daily in the late fifties when some of the materials presented here were recorded by S.A. Wurm. She was then around eighty-five years of age. L.A. Hercus started working extensively on Ba:gandji dialects in 1964 and was able to work with the last speaker of Bandjigali and with people who had a good knowledge of Southern (Pooncarie) Ba: gandji. Wiljagali was then already extinct. Mrs Quayle (Ba:rundji) had died in 1965, and Gunu became extinct in February 1976 with the death of the last speaker, the centenarian

Grannie Moisey. Many of her grand-daughters had long been grandmothers and she was respected and feared throughout the Aboriginal Community of the northwest of N.S.W. She was born a half-caste, Annie Clarke, and was reared by her maternal grandparents who knew hardly any English. In her early childhood she was camped under the wild orange trees near where Gundabooka Station was just being built. In her long and hard life she witnessed the total decline of the traditions in which she had been reared and saw her own people 'forgetting all the language and marrying their own relations (people of the same moiety)'. 'Gunu is the same as Ba:gandji (i.e. Pooncarie Ba:gandji) but it is different, it's my people's talk, from Louth along the river', she used to say.

## III. DIFFERENCES BETWEEN SOUTHERN BA: GANDJI AND GUŅU

Gunu vocabulary is practically identical with Southern Ba:gandji from the Pooncarie area, over 95 per cent of the vocabulary is shared by the two dialects. The speakers were conscious of this and commented repeatedly on the few differences that there were: e.g. George Dutton (Bandjigali dialect of Ba:gandji, 1967): 'We say yanmala when we talk about breaking something, but that old woman (Grannie Moisey, Gunu) says yanmala naba and that means that she is going away'. Despite the great similarity in vocabulary there were two major differences in the pronoun system between Southern Ba:gandji on the one hand and Gunu on the other:

- 1) Pronominal forms are affixed in Southern Ba:gandji but not in Gunu.
- 2) Tense is indicated by verbal affixes in Southern Ba:gandji and by pronouns in Gunu, where verbal affixes play only a limited role in marking tense.
- (1) In Southern Ba:gandji the possessive markers were identical in form to free pronouns with loss of the initial consonant. They were affixed to a noun denoting the third thing possessed, case marking affixes could then be added:

```
yunga gi:ra - (a)yi - na
own country - lsg.POS - LOC

yunga gi:rayina 'in my own country'

yabara - (a)yi - ndu
camp lsg.POS ABL

yabarayindu 'out of my camp'
```

```
balu - uma
child - 2sg.POS

balu:ma 'your child'

wananja - na
nest - 3sg.POS

wananjana 'its nest'
```

Only very rarely, in case of special emphasis was an independent pronominal form used to indicate possession.

```
nayi gi:ra (S. Ba:gandji) 'my country'
na:na gi:ra (Bandjigali) 'my country'
```

But in Gunu possession was normally expressed by a full and independent pronominal form.

```
gandja nari
grandmother mine
'my grannie'

numa balu
your child
'your child'

wananja iduna
nest his
'its nest'
```

In order to lend special emphasis the pronoun can be repeated in Gunu.

```
nari yara-yara nari
mine things mine
'my very own belongings...' (they stole).
```

The same distinction between the two dialects applies in nominal sentences.

```
Ba:gandji nu:ng(u) - aba
Ba:gandji woman - I
'I'm a Ba:gandji woman'

Gunu baraga naba
Gunu woman I
'I'm a Gunu woman'
```

(2) Tense in Southern Ba:gandji is expressed by special affixes, which are added to a verbal root or verbal root and aspect marker.

The tense affixes are:

```
zero or -r- for the present
-d- for the future
-dj- for the past
-ngu- for the habitual and causal past
```

The incorporated subject and object pronouns followed that tense affix.

bami - (i)ndu - ayl see (tense) you AG - me OBJ zero

baminduayi [bamindoi] 'you see me'

bami - d - indu - ayi see - FUT - you AG - me OBJ

bamidinduayi [bamidindoi] 'you'll see me'

bami - dj - indu - ayi see - PAST - you AG - me OBJ

bamidjinduayi [bamidjindoi] 'you saw me'

There is thus in Southern Ba:gandji a verbal complex as follows: verb root (± aspect) + tense ± subject ± object

In Gunu as explained below, the situation is different, and in any case, pronouns maintained their independence and were not usually incorporated:

nindu na:na dada na
you AG me OBJ block - PART
'you're blocking me'

### IV. THE POSITION OF BA:RUNDJI

The Ba:rundji dialect spoken by Mrs Quayle is of particular interest. Though it has some minor characteristics of its own, in the important issues under discussion it is half-way between Gunu and Southern Ba:gandji.

- 1) Ba:rundji goes with Southern Ba:gandji in affixing pronominal forms in both the nominal and verbal system.
- 2) Tense-marking by verbal affixes is optional (not obligatory as in Southern Ba:gandji) and the pronoun subject is affixed, but the pronoun marker changes with tense and there are a number of morphophonemic rules that may be observed in the juncture.

#### V. ASPECT MARKERS IN GUNU

R.M.W. Dixon, interpreting the evidence of Mathews, quotes:

bulga - ŋuna ŋadu 'I hit' (present)

bulga -  $\eta$ gaw adu 'I hit' (past)

bulga - rag adu 'I shall hit' (future)

Mathews often writes 'u' for a. The Ba:gandji word 'to hit' is balgaand 'nuna' represents - nana. -nana- is a stem-forming suffix used occasionally in Gunu to mark a continuative and present day action - it is not a simple tense marker for the today present, which is expressed otherwise:

bidja - na ŋina ni:ŋga
outside LOC we PRES sit

'we're sitting outside' (today, right now)

The following examples may illustrate the use of -nana-:

nindu - nali wayu - ri - nana
PRES you - we two worry - Inceptive - TODAY-CONT
'the two of us are worrying all the time now'

(winbadja) mu:ya-ŋana '(the people are) rowing all the time' yu:gu na:rila-ŋana 'the sun is just now going down...'

-ŋana is a special aspect marker: there is no chance of analysing it as \*ŋanaŋ in any of its occurrences, still less is there any chance of a 'sandhi effect' on a pronoun. It would be correct in Gunu to say

balga-ŋana ŋadu

or

nadu balga-nana

This sentence would mean 'I'm all the time hitting...'

-ŋga- is interpreted by Mathews as a tense marker of the past. It is a perfective-intensive stem forming affix. Like -ŋana- it is limited in its use.

bari 'to go'
bari-ŋga 'to go away'
yuri 'to listen'
yuri-ŋga 'to understand'

Again there is no evidence whatsoever that might enable us to interpret this affix as ngaw-, nor is there any 'sandhi effect' on pronouns.

-ra

There is a stem-forming suffix -la used throughout the Ba:gandji dialects; this has a number of complex functions, mainly that of top-icalising

bami 'to see'
bami-la 'to look'

When a verb-stem contains -I- there is a tendency for dissimilation and -ra is used for -Ia, unless another aspectual affix intervenes:

gulba 'to tell'
gulba-ra 'to talk'
malba 'to throw'

malba-ra 'to toss something around, to act in a silly fashion' balga-ra- is therefore used instead of \*balga-la 'to strike'.

Again there is no means of analysing, -la, -ra as \*-lag-, \*-rag-. The suffix can topicalise any tense, though it is possibly more common with the future.

dayi- la gali miriga-na  $\hat{e}at$  - TOP FUT we two first-LOC dayila gali mirigana 'we two shall eat first'

mu:ya - la wali
quarrel - TOP PAST we two
mu:yala wali 'we two had a row'

dayi - la nadi eat - TOP PRES they dayila nadi 'they're eating'

diga - la wadu return - TOP PAST he

digala wadu 'he came back'

Again there is no question of sandhi.

There are a number of other aspectual and 'action type' markers in Gunu - some difficult to analyse, they are all independent of both tense and pronoun.

#### VI. PRONOUNS AND TENSE

Pronouns in Gunu vary with the tense. The present (and also the general neutral form) is marked by an initial  $\mathfrak{g}$ - (zero in the case of the demonstrative pronoun of vicinity), the future is marked by an initial  $\mathfrak{g}$ - and the past by initial  $\mathfrak{w}$ -. The materials collected in Gunu in the field allow the following paradigmatic tables of tense forms of the pronouns to be set up:

	Present	Past	Future
lsg. subj	ŋaba	waba	gaba
lsg. agent	ŋaḍu	wadu	gadu
2sg. subj	ŋimba	wimba	gimba
2sg. agent	ŋindu	windu	gindu
3sg. subj	n a d u	wadu	gaḍu
3sg. obj	ŋa:na	wa:na	ga:na
ldu. <sup>1</sup>	ŋali	wali	gali
2du.	ŋuba	wuba	guba
3du.	ŋadu:lu	wadu:lu	gadu:lu
lpl.	ŋina	wina	gina
2pl.	ŋuḍa	wuḍa	guḍa
3pl.	ŋadi	wadi	gadi
dem.pron. of vicinity	Ιdi	wiģi	giḍi
dem.pron. of distance	ŋaŋa	waŋa	gaŋa

(Ba:rundji, like S. Ba:gandji, has idu, not idi as a pronoun of vicinity)

On the whole except in cases of special emphasis, only one pronoun in a sentence receives a special tense form; it is usually the subject or the pronoun referring to the main topic. The other pronouns retain their present/neutral form. The pronoun subject usually follows the verb, but as the examples quoted below will show, the system of tensemarking cannot be linked immediately with the verb in Gunu. Even if the changes in the pronoun had their origin in phonological conditioning it seems clear that in the present form of the language they have to be analysed as changes for tense. This can be demonstrated in the following manner:

- a) The pronouns are not linked with any particular phonological environment, they can follow any verb or verb + aspect marker; and different tense forms can occur in the same conditions:
  - i) After all simple verbs

```
baridji - ri dani gaba far away - ALL go FUT I
'I'll go a long way off'
```

dani wadi go PAST they 'they've gone'

In the third person singular and throughout the dual and plural one form functions as both intransitive subject and as agent, though the latter is sometimes marked by -ru.

nulardji mani bami wina many corroboree see PAST we 'we've seen lots of corroborees'

mandi -na ga:ndara bami gindu ground -LOC blood see FUT you AG 'you'll see the blood on the pavement'

bami nadu see PRÉS I AG 'I can see'

iba gadi badi -ri
lay FUT they egg -DAT
'they'll lay eggs'

iba wina lay PAST we 'we put it down'

ii) after verb + aspect marker (such as -ri and -la, examples for the latter are given in section V)

gila dinga -ri waba
not rise -INC PAST I
'I didn't get up'

gila dinga -ri nadu not rise -INC PRÊS he 'he's not getting up'

bina -ri gimba
climb -INC FUT you
'you'll climb up'

b) The pronouns, marked for tense, can follow words other than verbs:

wilga -wilga ŋadi hungry PRES they

'they're hungry'

diga -la gadi gi:ra gidi -na miri return -TOP FUT they country FUT this -GEN towards 'they'll go back to their country'

gandjalga nu:ngu widi -na good woman PAST this -GEN 'he had a good wife'

c) In isolated instances and in order to focus on the subject, the pronouns were placed initially in an utterance, and this naturally precludes any possibility whatsoever of explaining the changing initial consonant of the pronoun by means of sandhi; the changing initial simply expresses tense:

mu:ya wadu wimbara -na: 'windu gaba -nja mali numa' scold PAST I AG daughter -LOC: 'PAST you AG follow -CONT man yours' 'I roused on my daughter (and I said to her): "You've been running after this man of yours (while I have been minding the kids)".'

wadu ga:ndi balu-balu PAŜT he carry small-child

'it was him that carried the small children'

The following two instances of pronouns beginning an utterance were heard in conversations between Grannie Quayle (Ba:rundji) and Grannie Moisey (Gunu):

1) Mrs Quayle: daya:du (< dayi gadu) wanga  $\hat{e}at$ - $\hat{I}$   $\hat{e}at$  FUT  $\hat{I}$  AG meat

'I'll eat the meat'

Mrs Moisey: gadu dayi FUT I AG  $\hat{e}at$ 

'I'm the one that's going to eat it'

2) and in answer to a question as to who ate it

Mrs Moisey: wadu dayi PAST I AG eat

'I was the one who ate it'

The fact that pronouns change with tense in Gunu is thus proved by

- a) the free use of all pronominal forms in identical environments after verbs and verb + aspect marker;
- b) the occurrence of pronouns after adjectives and nouns;
- c) the occurrence of pronouns initially in an utterance.

#### VII. A NOTE ON BA:RUNDJI PRONOUNS

The Ba:rundji dialect spoken by Mrs Quale differs from the Gunu dialect mainly in the following features:

- 1) Some words differ in their phonological form, e.g. the demon-strative pronoun of vicinity is idu (Gunu idi); the nominative plural of demonstrative and third person pronouns is formed by the addition of a further suffix -iga.
- 2) The subject pronouns are suffixed to the verb and morphophonemic changes affecting both the pronominal forms and the final vowel of the verbs are in evidence.
- 3) The same tense-marking verbal affixes as in Southern Ba:gandji

are optionally used in Ba:rundji as is seen from some of the examples quoted, and so tense may be marked both by the verb and by the pronoun.

The purpose of this paper is the demonstration and illustration of the changes of pronouns in two Ba:gandji dialects for tense. This is therefore not the place for a detailed discussion of the morphophonemic phenomena observable in the Ba:rundji material, but a few remarks may be given on them:

## With past pronoun forms

the first syllable of the pronoun is dropped after verb-final -u or -i, e.g.

baribuli (< baribu-wali) 'we two came'
maṇgu yaṇmalu-du (< yaṇmalu-wadu) 'he broke his arm'
ba:rayi-dji-du (< ba:rayi-dji -wadu) 'I heard'
hear PAST-PAST I

After verb-final -a and -ayi (which changes to -aya [-ayɛ] when a pronoun is added), -a in the first syllable of the pronoun changes to -u, e.g.

ງulja-wudu (< ŋulja-wadu)

daya-wudu [daye-wudu] (< dayi-wadu)

With present and future pronoun forms

verb-final -a and -u become -a:, and the initial syllable of the pronoun is dropped. Verb-final -ayi becomes -aya:, e.g.

waga:-du (< waga-gadu) 'I will chop'

ŋuljamalda:-du (< ŋulja-ma -lda -ŋadu)

wash-verbaliser-REFL-PRÊS he
'he can wash himself'

mangu yanma-la:-du (< yanma-lu -gadu) 'he will break his arm' break-TOP-FUT 3sg.

When preceded by a consonant subject to non-phonemic gemination (a typical feature of a number of consonants in Ba:gandji), verb-final -i remains unchanged, and the initial consonant of the pronoun is dropped, e.g.

bami-adu [bammi-adu] (< bami-gadu) 'I will see'

Therefore in all these cases the distinction between Present and Future has been obscured and we simply have a Fast/Non-past distinction. There is, however, one group of verbs that form an exception to this: Verb-final -i preceded by a consonant not subject to non-phonemic gemination becomes -i:, and the pronoun remains unaltered, e.g.

bari:-gali (< bari-gali) 'we two will go'

Examples illustrating the use of a single pronoun (or pronominal derivative):

minamandi nimba baribu wanaga 'why did you come here?' why neutral thou come PAST here

gidu- ru-da dadja-wa gambidja-ayi-na

```
FUT this-AG-EMPH bite-INT father- my-OBJ
'this [snake] will bite [my] father'

Tense marking through more than one changeable pronoun:

dulaga gidi:ga (< gidu-iga) wimbadja-ru balga-nda:-di:ga
bad FUT-they pl. man AG

(< balga-nda-gadi-iga) nali-na
kill- ASP-FUT they-pl. we two-OBJ
'those bad men will kill us two'

gidu-wu:lu wimbadja- u:lu balgu gulbanjala:-du:lu
```

gidu-wu:lu wimbadja- u:lu balgu gulbanjala:-du:lu
FUT -this du. man-du. speech
(< gulba-nja- la- gadu:lu)
 speak-CONT-TOP- FUT they two
'these two men will talk (with each other)'

Examples of sentences with a single suffixed changeable pronoun only:

```
wimbadja-nu:lu badanga:du:lu (< bada- nga-gadu:lu)

man two fight INT FUT they two

'the two men will fight'

bugamala-wudu gambidja-ayi galjbu

die PAST he father -my not now

'my father died a long time ago' (galjbu indicates 'non-

present': past or future)

galjbu diga-la:-ba (< diga- la- gaba)

not now return-TOP-FUT I

'I will return later'
```

#### VIII. CONCLUSION

The manner in which pronouns change with tense in Gunu is of interest not only because it is unique to Gunu: it poses further questions. The morphological differences between Gunu and S. Ba:gandji are considerable and not confined to pronouns:

		S.Ba:gandji	Guņu
l.	Personal possession markers affixed	+	_
2.	Pronoun subject and object incorporatio	n +	_
3.	Tenses marked only by affixes	+	_
4.	Pronouns may vary for tense	_	+
5.	(Non-obligatory) ergative marking of nouns		+
6.	(Non-obligatory) ergative marking only on demonstrative pronouns affixed to nouns	+	
7.	Bound morpheme for allative	+	_

Yet the vocabulary of Southern Ba:gandji is almost identical to that of Gunu. By lexicostatistical evaluation therefore Gunu and S. Ba:gandji are dialects of the same language but a more thorough grammatical and general evaluation (as described by Dixon 1970) would leave us with grave doubts on this topic.

For the speakers there was no doubt at all: Gunu was a form of Ba:gandji. People do not normally speak more than one dialect of the same language: thus nobody ever claimed in our hearing to speak both Gunu and S. Ba:gandji, there was no need as Gunu was felt to be a form of Ba:gandji. George Dutton, the last speaker of Bandjigali, was a brilliant man (Beckett 1958) who knew Maljanaba, Wangumara, Yandruwanda, and Arabana and often talked about these languages but he did not speak Gunu. He would often converse with Mrs Moisey, but he would talk in Bandjigali and she in Gunu; they agreed to differ, as to them it was all Ba:gandji anyway. The most common observations by S. Ba:gandji speakers about Gunu were of a phonetic nature: 'they speak heavier', 'they speak broader'; some observations concerned the few lexical items that differed. We still have much to learn, not only about the genetic affiliations of Aboriginal languages, but also about language perception and evaluation. The Gunu example seems to point towards the importance of lexical similarities rather than morphology with regard to what was felt to be a different language and what was a dialect.

## S.A. WURM, L. HERCUS

## SPECIAL ABBREVIATIONS

AG Agentive case

ASP Aspectual affix

CONT Continuative

INC Inceptive

INT Intensive

PART Participial form marking continuous and contemporary action

TOP Topicalising verbal affix

Note: For simplicity ndj has been used

throughout for njdj.

#### TENSE-MARKING IN GUNU PRONOUNS

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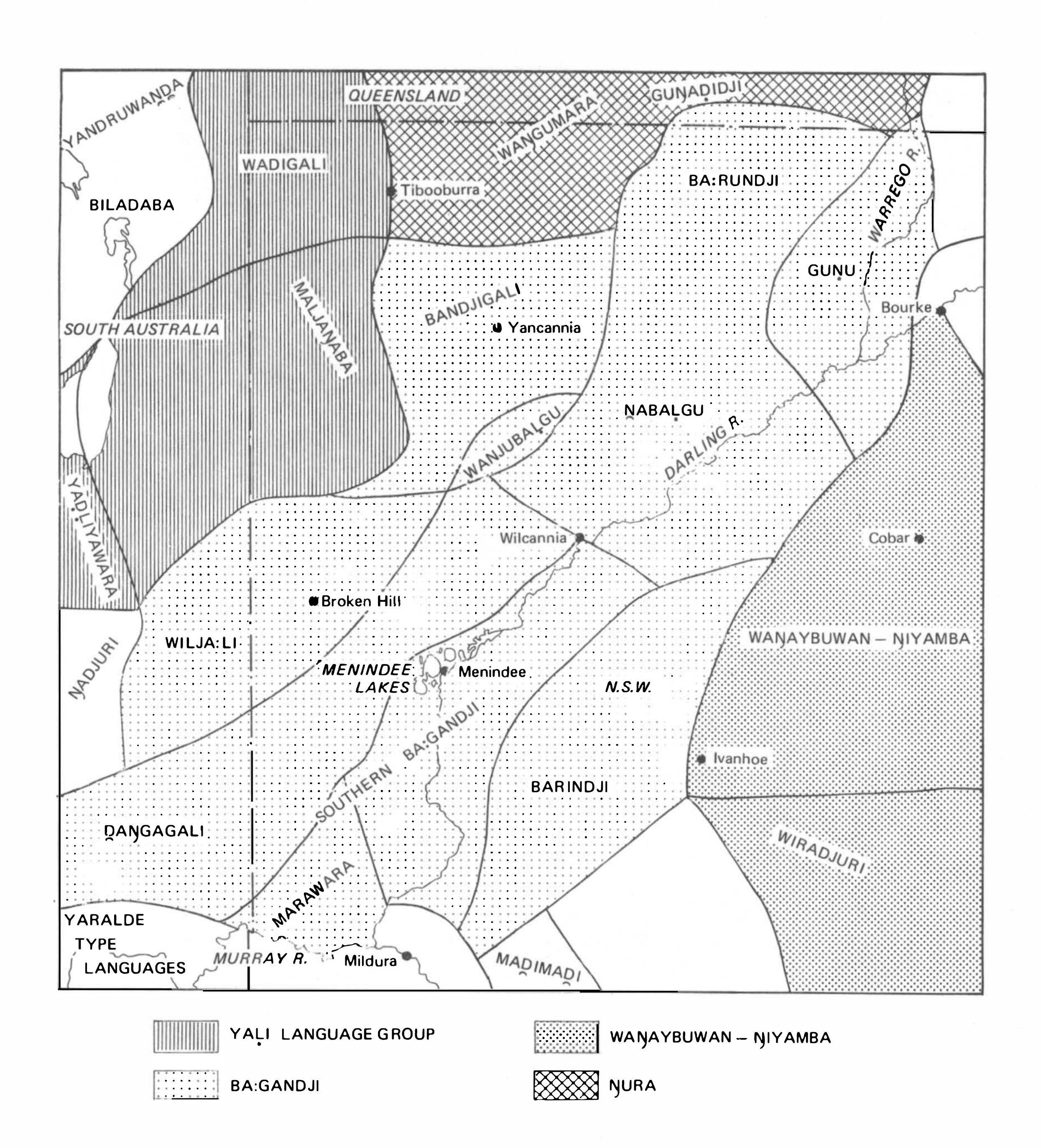
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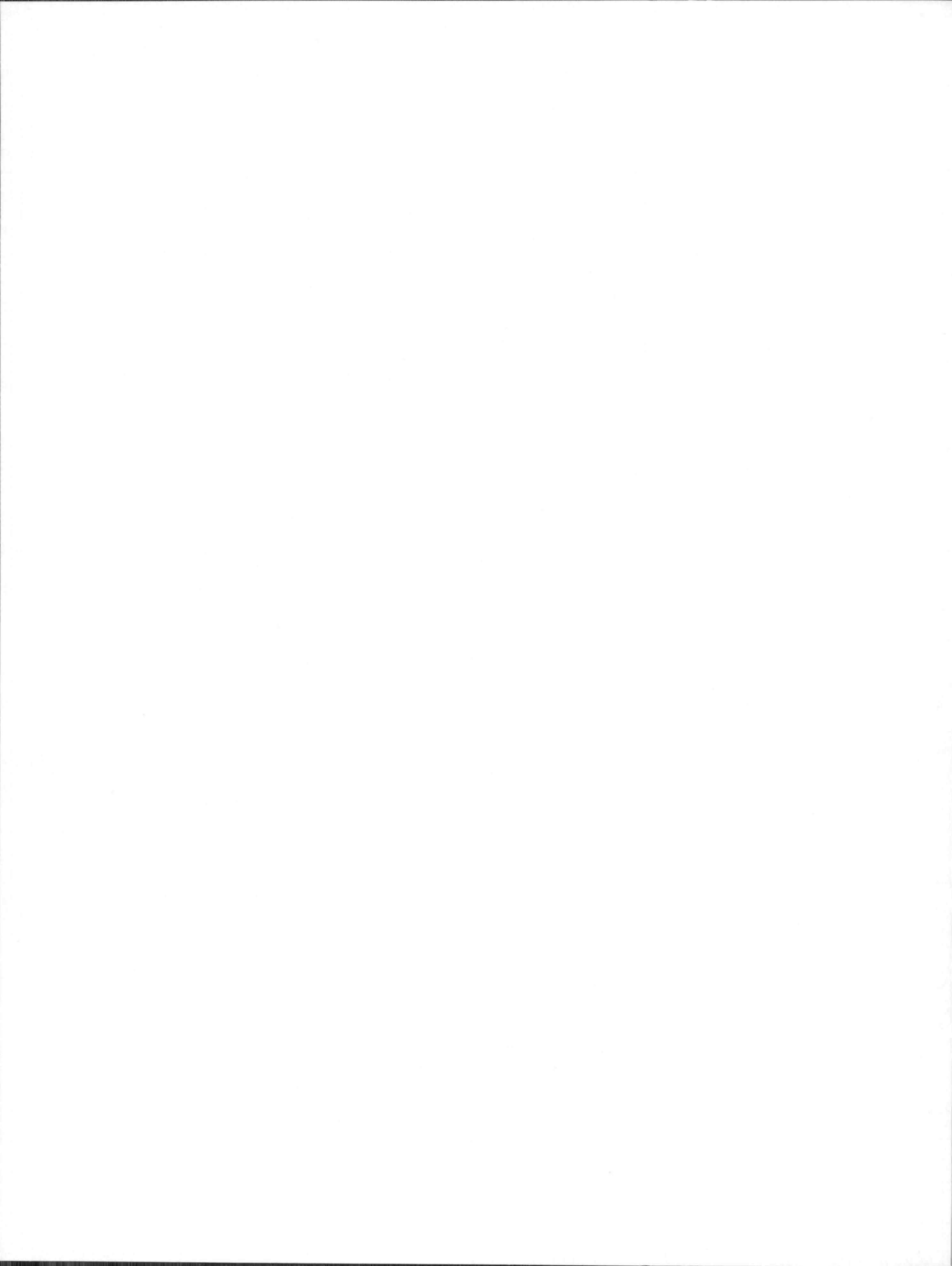
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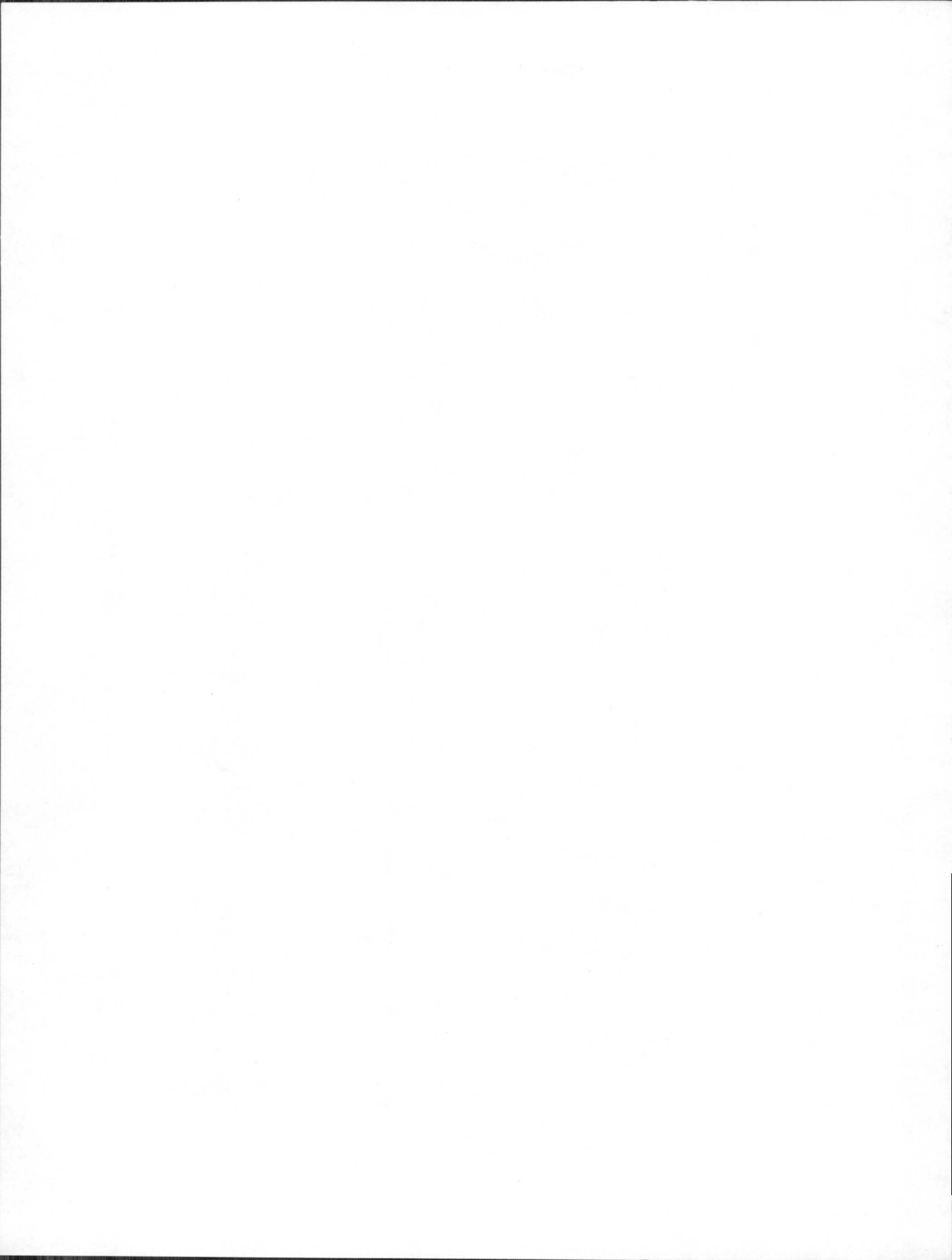
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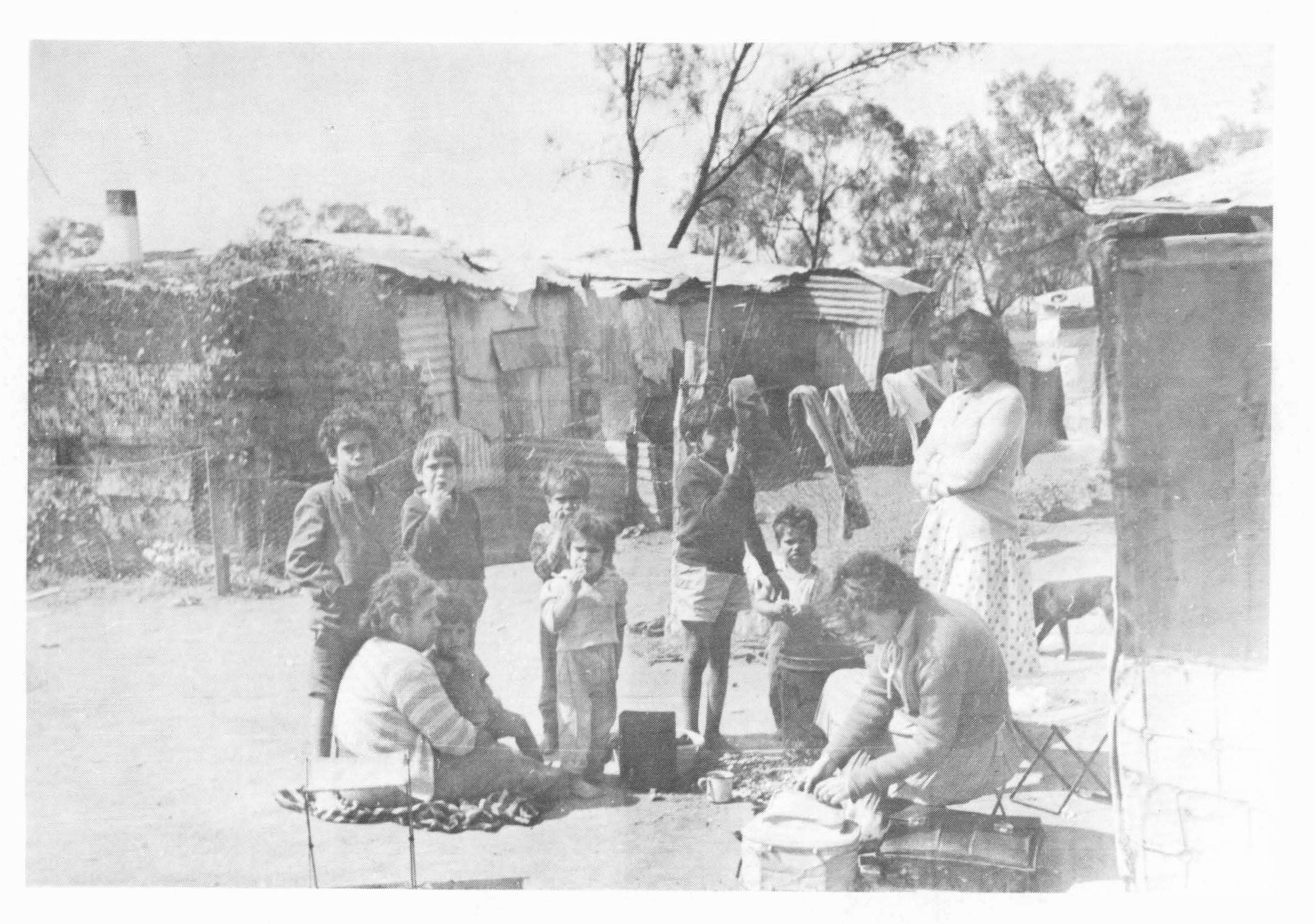






Looking across towards Ba:rundji country from the McCulloch Range.

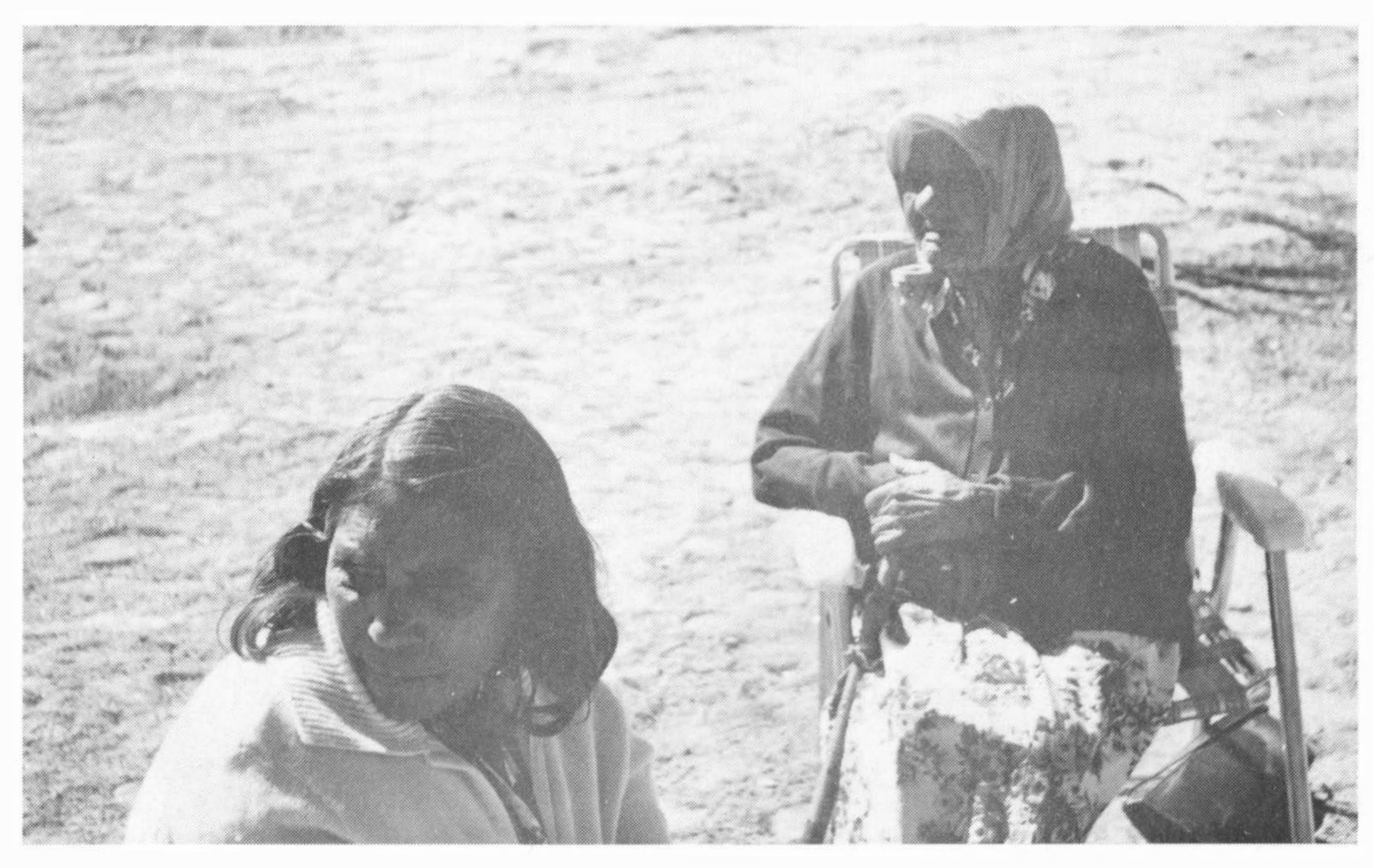




Recording Southern Ba:gandji (1964).
The late Gladys Smith with her family and L. Hercus.



Maljalari (Mrs Hannah Quayle)(Ba:rundji) at Wilcannia in 1957.



Mrs Elsie Jones (Southern Ba:gandji) in foreground with the late Grannie Moisey, the last Gunu (1972).

