BLACKFELLA BUSINESS WHITEFELLA LAW:

POLITICAL STRUGGLE AND COMPETITION IN A SOUTH-EAST ARNHEM LAND ABORIGINAL COMMUNITY

JOHN EDWARD BERN, B.A.(Hons)

Thesis submitted for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy in Anthropology,
Macquarie University, 1974.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

MAPS

DIAGRAMS

SYNOPSIS

Chapter 1 outlines the political structure of Ngukurr and presents the methodological foundation of the analysis. I follow this with a discussion of the political organisation of traditional Aboriginal society and the place of Aboriginal and European modes of categorisation in the organisation of the Village. Chapter 2 outlines the ecological, and demographic background, the organisation of the Settlement economy, the main categories of kinship organisation, and the cycle of daily life. Chapters 3 and 4 present the history of Ngukurr, the contemporary Settlement structure of domination, and the categories of political organisation within the Village. Chapter 3 focuses on the developments in Australian society which have affected the indigenous population, while in Chapter 4 the changes occurring within the indigenous population are the centre of attention.

The public arenas utilised to discuss the organisation of the Settlement and the Village are classified and analysed in Chapter 5. Chapters 6 and 7 present the

the major events of political competition. Chapter 6 deals with the competition occurring in the context of traditional religion, which is classified on the bases of acquisition of property, maintenance of authority positions, and inter community relations. Chapter 7 deals with the competition occurring in relations between the Village and the Government and its local representatives. This competition is analysed as the actions of a subordinate category resisting and reacting to a situation of domination. Chapter 8 concludes the thesis with an examination of the contradiction inherent in Village political practice and its consequences for the formulation and pursuit of land rights.

I certify that this work has not been submitted for a higher degree to any other university or institution.

JOHN BERN

PREFACE

This thesis is based on fieldwork carried out in the Roper River area between 1968 and 1971. I collected the data during three field trips totalling sixteen months. My first visit, from August to November 1968, was carried out while I was a Research Officer in the Australian Institute of Aboriginal Studies. I am also indebted to the Institute for financing both my later field trips, which were carried out between December 1969 and October 1970, and September to December 1971. I wish to thank officers of the Northern Territory Administration and Church Missionary Society for their co-operation. I particularly wish to acknowledge the active co-operation I received from two Government officers, Mr Ian Pitman and Mr Gavin O'Brien. The study was only made possible by the friendship and hospitality of the 'Roper Mob'. There are too many for me to name each individual to whom I am indebted, but the following pages make apparent the depth and range of my debt.

The thesis was written while I was a post-graduate student at Macquarie University. Again I thank the Institute of Aboriginal Studies for awarding me a scholarship to pursue

this task. I wish to thank Kenneth Maddock and Les Hiatt for their support, constructive criticism, and patience during the seemingly endless period of preparation. My wife, Jan Bern, has assisted and supported me in ways far too numerous to mention.

I have attempted to protect the anonymity of those who appear in the following pages. It was not possible to disguise the location of the study. I have changed the names of the participants, but retained the characteristics of naming in the area. I have also changed the names of the locally owned estates.

My main concern on my first field trip was to survey the research possibilities on the cattle stations in the Roper area, and my visits to Ngukurr were only incidental to that task. This visit greatly facilitated my later study of the Ngukurr community. Apart from establishing contacts, I had the good fortune to observe two events of major significance to the conduct of Ngukurr politics. The first was the transfer of control of the Settlement from the Church Missionary Society to the Commonwealth Government on 1st October 1968; the other was the performance of the rites of the Balgin cult at Roper Valley during

October and November. Both these events provoked reactions and manoeuverings within Ngukurr Village, some of which I was able to witness. I was therefore able to formulate the overall direction of my research before commencing my main fieldwork.

Much of the political activity I recorded, during my later field trips, was directed against continued European domination. I had, and still have, strong feelings about the rights of this struggle, and these feelings were known to both the Aborigines and Europeans at Ngukurr. I supported the community's demands, largely through ineffective moral mutterings, but also with a little practical clerical assistance. My belief in the justice of the struggle, and in the necessity for the people to act on their own behalf, has played an important role in the writing of this thesis - a fact for which I make no apology.

MAP I LOCATION OF STUDY

CHAPTER 1

THE VILLAGE POLITY:
AUTONOMY AND DOMINATION

This thesis is a study of the Aboriginal population at Ngukurr, a Government institution in South East Arnhem Land. My primary concern is to analyse political relations as I found them in this community during 1970 and 1971. For my study this period is the present. It is not an ethnographic present - a privileged suspension of process accorded to the ethnographer to present his synthesis - but an historical moment. My presentation emphasises that something different has gone before and that something different is likely to follow after.

The Ngukurr Settlement is only a part society because it can not independently determine either its internal organization or its external relations. Control of the Settlement, especially of its economic and politico/ juridic al structures, is located outside its physical environs. This control is concentrated in the hands of the Australian Government, who provide the finance,

personnel, and direction for the maintenance and development of the Settlement.

The Aboriginal community at Ngukurr, whom I shall henceforth refer to as the Village, does not see itself as being deprived of autonomy by its subordination. The Village regards itself as autonomous, by organising its affairs as if the locus of power is contained within the Village. Objectively this view is false, but it is an ideal which must be taken into account when discussing the political actions of the Village. The Village's politics can be seen as having two distinct focuses. One focus of political action is contained by one of the structures of traditional Aboriginal society; the structure of religion. The other is the economic and politico/juridic al structures of the Settlement. The structure of traditional religion and the structure of Settlement control are not interdependent because the relations of superordination and subordination occuring in one do not determine the superordinate/subordinate relations in the other. However, the structure of Settlement control is itself a part of the politico/juridic al structure of Australian society (the State) which through its domination of Settlement life limits the applicability

of religion in defining power relations within the Village.

The independent Aboriginal societies of the Roper River area were destroyed by European intrus ion in the period after 1870. Their land was expropriated; Europeans launched periodic raids in an attempt to annihilate them, and finally they sought protection by attaching themselves as dependants to the few hospitable European establishments. Some of the fragments of groups who occupied the Roper area settled at the Roper River Mission Station,[1] after its foundation in 1908. These fragments came from a number of more or less independent groups which had no overall political unity, spoke different languages, and practiced different (though similar) varieties of traditional Aboriginal culture.

They lacked an internal cohesion, but they shared a common ideology. This ideology, in general terms, expounded the relationship between the people and their environment (the concept of the Dreamtime with its totemic affiliations and myths) and provided the superstructure for social relations. The people who settled at Ngukurr found their particular

1. The name was officially changed to Ngukurr in 1968, which for convenience is the name I use throughout the thesis, unless the context demands otherwise.

expression of the common ideology in the major religious cult complexes which they shared. The most important of these cults were the Jabuduruwa and the Gunabibi. The integration of the Ngukurr Village was a consequence of people's dependence on the Mission for protection and subsistence. However, the adherence to common cults gave additional support to this integration as well as supplying its ideological expression.

This brief outline gives some idea of the complexity of forces which operate (or have done so in the past) to specify the organisation of Ngukurr. I have chosen to limit my attention to that aspect of the organisation which is concerned with the political relations of Ngukurr Village. My study is of a community and not of the State, or of the 'widest political unit' in any other sense. I am looking at politics at the least inclusive level. I am focusing on a group at the bottom of the social hierarchy. In so far as I am concerned with relations in more inclusive levels it is from the view point of the community. This differs from the orientation of most political studies which are concerned with the most inclusive level of society. They are primarily interested in the institutions of social control and positions of authority, and if they depart from

this level it is to look down the hierarchy. Most of the language of political analysis has been formulated in this latter context. This raises problems for the use of such concepts as politics, power, and perhaps most importantly domination.

The question of what is or is not to be included in the sphere of politics is one which I intend to dismiss summarily. The unit of study is Ngukurr Village. The Village, at one level, is a social system. An incomplete one to be sure, but enclosed none the less. The sets of relations defined by traditional Aboriginal norms maintain this boundary. The Village is also a part of the Settlement, and this too is bounded both physically and as an institution. Finally, the Village is a part of Australian society and the jurisdiction of the State defines that boundary.

Political relations are those which are aimed at affecting the community's internal organisation, external relations, or both (Balandier 1972: 28-9). It is the politics of a community which make explicit how power is distributed and decisions made. There are two concepts which are central to political analysis: competition and domination.

Decisions can only be made if alternatives exist, and the choice between alternatives is resolved by competition (M. G. Smith 1960: 15-18).

Political relations cannot be identified by the existence of competition. Competition is a necessary, but not a sufficient, condition for politics. Decisions depend on the prior existence of alternatives, but the resolution of competition itself requires a mediator and that mediator is power. Power, in our case political power, is an illusive concept. Balandier, following Hume, states that "power is only a subjective category; not a datum, but a hypothesis that must be verified". (Op.cit: 34)..."Its existence is revealed above all in its effects" (35). Social decisions are such an effect and therefore Balandier concludes "political power is inherent in every society". Power being then an inherent condition of all societies must be broadly delineated. Weber provides us with the broadest yet most succinct definition. For Weber power (Macht) is "the probability that one actor within a social relationship will be in a position to carry out his own will despite resistance, regardless of the basis on which this probability rests" (1964: 152).

However, it is not power per se with which we are interested, but the result of its application to competition. "Domination", states Freund, "is the practical and empirical expression of power" (1968: 221).[2] It "is the probability that a command with a specific content will be obeyed by a given group of persons". (Weber op.cit). Weber, in stressing the act of command, is focusing attention within the dominance situation on the dominant category. Thus his formulation directs attention to the question of who has access to positions of command and on what basis do they attain such positions. This, says Poulantzas, is reducing the concept of domination to a question of legitimacy (1973: 105).[3] Assuming Poulantzas

2. Simmel provides a different definition of domination which has been extensively used by a number of functionalist theorists (cf. Blau 1967; Coser 1956; Gluckman 1955). However, Simmel's usage emphasises the reciprocity contained in relations of domination and subordination to the extent of denuding them of their power content (Wolff 1964: 181-3).

3. I have, following Freund (1968), used the term domination for Weber's 'herrschaft'. This is a closer approximation of Weber's usage than Parson's clumsy phrase 'imperative control' (Weber op.cit: 152). Poulantzas' translator uses the term power, which only adds to the confusion in an already complex conceptual field (op.cit: 105).

criticism is correct, then Weber is concerning himself with only the maintenance functions of politics. Most formulations of Politics at least pay lip service to two main functions; the establishment and maintenance of the organisation of society (cf. Balandier op.cit: 22-4). One cannot examine the establishment of society sui generis, but one can analyse the transformation of a dominance situation through changes that occur in the relations between the dominant and subordinate categories.

Politics is concerned with the organisation of society as a whole, and therefore policy decisions are relevant to all categories and not only the dominant category. Where a dominance hierarchy is entrenched and conflicts of interest are minimised, the relations of domination tend to be legitimised. That is, both the dominant and subordinate categories accept the concentration of power with the former, because there is overall agreement on what the areas of public policy are and how they should be organised.

In this situation domination becomes authority. This distinction differs from that made by Weber, for whom domination is the probability of a command being obeyed, and authority the knowledge that it will be (Freund op.cit:

221-3; Weber op.cit: 152, 324-8; Gerth and Mills 1948: 78-9). The difference between domination and authority is established by legitimacy for which the only necessary criterion is the fact of obedience (Freund ibid; Weber ibid). While I also use legitimacy as separating the two, the meaning I give to it follows Weber's usage in his discussion of the different types of authority (op:cit 328ff), which Poulantzas points out makes it a product of normative behaviour, and thus entails not only obedience to but also acceptance of and agreement with the dominance hierarchy (op.cit: 104-6; cf. Wolff op.cit: 183-4).

Every society contains categories which stand in a dominant/subordinate relationship. They do so because "political power is inherent in every society". The hierarchy which is composed of these categories is a structure of society. This is congruent with Althusser's view of domination as being at the core of the unity which is society (1969: 200-202). This unity is a complex arrangement of autonomous structures, and domination is an essential attribute of each.[4] However, in any particular

4. Engels characterises societies as having three primary structures: economy, polity, and ideology (Marx and Engels 1968: 682, 687, 690). Althusser adds a fourth, theory (op.cit: 162, 168-74, 252). These could be elaborated much further (cf. Nadel 1951: 135, who proposes nine institutions or structures). However, I shall restrict myself to the original three proposed by Engels.

type of society (social formation), the hierarchy of one of the structures establishes and articulates the dominance relations of the society as a whole. Thus the economy as capitalist mode of production defines the dominance situation of Western Liberal Democracy, and ideology as mediaeval Christianity defines that of European Feudalism. The structure that has this defining position Althusser designates as the structure of dominance of its social formation (ibid: 200-206, 249; Poulantzas op cit: 13-15).

The categories of a dominance situation are the components of its hierarchical structure. The social group which occupies each category has a set of interests which are different from that of other categories because it occupies a different position in the structure. At the least complex level of organisation sex and age are criteria for such structural differentiation. The categories contained by the dominance situation are structurally opposed, but this does not necessarily mean that their interests conflict. The existence of conflict depends on whether "the capacity of one class to realise its own interests through its practice is in opposition to the capacity and

interests of the other classes". (Poulantzas op.cit: 105).[5] Poulantzas is dealing with capitalist society and is using class to designate relations to the means of production. Different structurally opposed categories can be substituted for the analysis of other types of society. Althusser only considers domination to be economically determined to the extent that the forces and relations of production set limits to the capacity for domination (op.cit: 111-13; 117ff).[6] Thus traditional Aboriginal society can be characterised as one in which the ideological structure (Aboriginal religion) is dominant. The relations of domination and subordination are defined in the structure of religion, and result in the formation of three structurally significant categories: inducted men, novices and women.

5. That is the dominant class is able to transform an object of potential value into one which supports its own interests; e.g. the productive capacity of man becomes wage labour for the owners of capital, or, women become an item of exchange for mature Australian Aboriginal men (Althusser, op.cit: 166-7; 252; Poulantzas op.cit: 41-2).

6. Althusser's 'determination in the last instance' is much more complex than this. However, I think my rendering is justified in the limited context of political action, and a viable interpretation of Engel's statement that "...the 'ultimately' determining element in history is the production and re-production of real life" (op.cit: 682; cf. Poulantzas op.cit. 13-15; Glucksmann 1974: 106-8).

The position of each category is determined by its access to the knowledge, instruments and rites of religion; a determination in which inducted men form the dominant category.

The dominance categories of traditional Aboriginal society are opposed through their differential access to wealth. In circumstances where the interests of the subordinate categories are dormant, politics is restricted to its maintenance function and competition is contained by the dominant category. The competition is directed at the occupation of the positions of authority. However, the interests of subordinate categories are never entirely dormant. In Hiatt's analysis of Gidjingali marriage arrangements he noted five cases where women did not fall into "... the passive role imposed on them by the method of bestowal" (1956: 101). His analysis is solely concerned with arrangements which are imbedded in traditional Aboriginal society.[7] Similarly, Stanner discusses ritual

7. Hiatt's informants are clearly operating within the limits of the traditional structure, despite the continued dispute over its existence in contemporary Australia (cf. Lee and Devore 1968: 146-9).

innovation among the Murinbata partly as men's reaction to a perceived incompleteness in their domination (1964: 149-51, 153).

The dominance situation takes different forms in the two main contexts of Village politics. Althusser's notion of politics as being the struggle between different categories in the structure has a direct application to the competition between the Village and Government. However, the Village competition which takes place in the structure of religion entails no concept of struggle. Here competition is contained by the dominant category. The structure of religion does not define the dominance situation for the society, and the extent of its jurisdiction is not coterminous with society.

In examining the relations between the Village and the Government I am concerned with the category which is in a subordinate position. Thus Weber's command situation is of little value. The actions of the Village, however successful, are aimed at altering the adverse balance of power between itself and the Government. The Village can only realise its interests by opposing the existing structure of domination. The opposition must occur in areas relevant

to both Village and Government: such areas as the control of land, education, the work situation, and of course the Settlement. In Chapter seven I describe two series of events relevant to these areas. The first is a strike by the Village, lasting four weeks, which attempts to induce changes in all the areas of mutual relevance. The second is the conflict for control of the Roper River Citizens Club, which could act as a rehearsal for an attack on the Settlement structure itself.

The competition for the control of Village religion cannot alter the dominance situation. The competition occurs between inducted men, and both they and other participants accept the legitimacy of the structure. Weber's formulation of the questions of politics are appropriate in analysing this structure. Religion preserves symbols of autonomy for the Village, and provides the men with a criterion for prestige which is independent of European society. These symbols, of autonomy and prestige, sustain the identity and integrity of the Village. Religion contains a structure of authority for as long as it is relevant to Village integrity, and while it remains so the inducted men will compete for the positions of authority within its structure.

Traditional religion was once the structure which defined the hierarchy in an autonomous society: the pre-contact society on the Roper area. The analysis of contemporary religious competition, though occurring in a different social situation, may still provide some understanding of the political organisation of pre-contact society. While the literature is in basic agreement on its ideological importance there is considerable confusion on the political standing of religion (cf. Meggitt 1964; Hiatt 1965: ch. 6; Strehlow 1970).

The conduct of religion occupies an important part of the social energies of Aboriginal men. Even at times when cult performances are not in progress, they are continually in men's thoughts (Meggitt 1966; 201; cf. Stanner 1964; Maddock 1969a). Seen within the total context of Aboriginal life, cult activity stands out in importance. It brings large numbers of people together for joint action, and it has a hierarchical arrangement of positions. The contents of Aboriginal religion are among the most valued social items in their traditional culture. By contents I am referring to the totemic myths, the countries specified in them, and their associated ritual groups; to the means by which ritual groups are linked; to the ways in which these countries and linkages are transmitted, and the ceremonies in which they are represented.

The organisation and conduct of religious life is dramatically encapsulated in the periodic performances of secret ceremonies. These performances are major social events and periods of concentrated activity. The ceremony as an event, dramatises the relations of persons to the items of social value, of persons to the physical environment, of social segments each to the other, and the hierarchical order of social categories (cf. Stanner 1964: ch 6; Maddock 1969a: ch 4). The organisation of the event dramatises structural differences, both among initiated men, and between them and the uninitiated (Stanner op.cit: 153-4; Maddock 1972: ch 6), and also provides the most easily identifiable circumstances of domination in the traditional Aboriginal life cycle (Stanner op.cit; Meggitt 1964: 177).

Meggitt has pointed out that religion is one of the few areas of Aboriginal life in which an approximation of institutionalised leadership may be observed (1962:248). In view of this it is somewhat surprising that so little has been said about the political structure of religion, other than to note the existence of authority positions, and to generalise about their applicability or inapplicability to secular affairs. Stanner is an exception. He

discusses some of the political implications of ritual organisation, and the probable political basis of ritual innovation (1964: 149-151, 153).

The emphasis on the carry over of ritual authority to secular affairs is due to the preoccupation, in previous discussions, with the formal characteristics of Aboriginal government in general. The more recent contributions to this discussion, including those by Meggitt (1964), Hiatt (1965), and Strehlow (1970), have based their analysis on Radcliffe-Brown's conception of the nature of political organisation. To Radcliffe-Brown "political organisation... deal(s) with the maintenance or establishment of social order, within a territorial framework, by the organised exercise of coercive authority through the use, or the possibility of use, of physical force" (1940:xiv). In other words politics is identified as a juridic al superstructure, and the important questions that need to be asked to describe it are who maintains order in the society and how is it maintained.

The structure of Aboriginal government was the subject of a paper published by Meggitt in 1964. This has since received a certain currency as the definitive statement on

the subject (cf. Hiatt 1965). Its main claim to this honour is due to its attack on the then current belief, that Aboriginal society is ruled by headmen, a council of elders, or both. Meggitt challenged this opinion on the grounds that Australian Aboriginal society lacked accumulated property, that effective local groups were small in size and homogeneous in composition, and that people's roles were defined by interlocking sets of kinship and ritual norms, which though complex were essentially egalitarian. He concluded that such social conditions "would inhibit the emergence of permanent leaders ...withauthority in a wide range of sacred and secular affairs". (Ibid: 74).

Strehlow, writing in 1970, has strongly criticised Meggitt's analysis. He argues that there are headmen who rule local groups, precisely because these groups are defined by the religious organisation of their locale (79-8). A social group (a clan) is identified with a particular territory and this identification is mediated by the 'totemic geography', which is at once a representation of the social identification of the group and of the major economic assets of the territory (93-8). The clans are stratified on the basis of age and sex and each has a senior male who

is vested with control of its ritual. The senior male is a secular chief because his position is permanent (being based on the formal organisation of the group), and because economic well being is believed to depend on the proper conduct of ritual (110-11).

Both writers are concerned only with question of who maintains order. Strehlow's thesis presents a problem for Meggitt in the linkage he establishes between the totemic ideology and the economy. However this together with most of Strehlow's discussion is concerned with ideal relations rather than the organisation of actual groups, which is basic to Meggitt's discussion. The actual examples of the exercise of control which Strehlow discusses in the latter part of his paper offer little support for his earlier assertions because they are isolated incidents scattered in time and place and not fitted into the wider context of social relations of which they are a part.

Meggitt's aim is essentially negative. He is concerned with what Government is not rather than with what it is. Both he, and subsequently Hiatt (1965), play down the political implications of ritual, mainly because of the overemphasis on the coercive control of ritual leadership in other

discussions. Their failure to adequately cope with the politics of religion is, paradoxically, due to the emphasis both writers place on the dynamics of social organisation. Hiatt, in particular, has systematically analysed the 'clashes of interest' within an Aboriginal society (xiii). He examines secular conflict in detail, and we know how the competition is conducted and decisions reached in the acquisition of wives and the settlement of interpersonal disputes. Among the Gidjingali alignment in disputes is optative, and each individual's choice is a balance of his own interests and his ties with each of the protagonists (140-1). There is no independent mechanism for conciliation and arbitration (146). The organisation of ritual is only briefly discussed, and its political structure is left largely unconsidered (which may be due to ritual being of only marginal importance to the Gidjingali themselves) (63-7). Hiatt has, with this exception, shown how the Gidjingali "organise and control their activities" without reference to ritual authority (147). Thus he is able to state that there is no transfer of domination from ritual to secular spheres, because roles invested with ritual authority do not appear in the areas of secular conflict.

Meggitt and Hiatt also consider the implications of the absence of substantial transferable property, by which they mean physical economic goods. Their argument is that since there is no accumulable wealth there is no basis for domination, and therefore there can be no continuing positions of control. The main flaw in this argument is that social wealth encompasses more than durable economic goods. Wealth in Aboriginal society is women (most obviously their reproductive capacity, and to a lesser extent their domestic capacity), and ritual property (the ceremonies, songs, myths, and paraphernalia). This property is both durable and transferable, though the extent to which either can be exchanged is socially limited. Thus valued resources which can be accumulated do exist. Just as a man, through favourable circumstances, age, and forcefulness, can increase the number of his wives, so too can he increase the amount of his ritual property. The structural similarity between ritual relations and bestowal relations has been pointed out by Maddock (1969b). Both are exchange relations with a specified division of rights based on different kinship status in relation to the valued object, as well as between the exchanging subjects.

Hiatt and Meggitt admit the existence of positions of domination within the sphere of religion, but they treat this institution as separate from the sphere of politics. Their recognition of ritual authority emphasises its discontinuity. The context of control occurs only intermittently (at times of major cult performances). The men who dominate do so on the basis of their position in the particular context and leadership changes from one context to another. This may be true of the ego centred initiation and mortuary rites, but not of the major group centred cults. In the top half of the Northern Territory it is just these cults which occupy a major place in the ideology of Aboriginal society. Within the context of these cults both writers concede that there is a possibility of continuing concentration of power (Meggitt 1962: 248-9; 1964: 71; Hiatt op.cit: 146), but they do not elaborate. They minimise their concession with the statement that there is little carryover from the ritual to the secular sphere. Ritual leaders may not hold sway in daily life. Indeed, even Strehlow concedes that their leadership is not relevant to this scale of organisation (op.cit: 121). However, this does not preclude the interaction between ritual and secular behaviour. Meggitt (1962: 181) cites a case in which the decision to hold a circumcision ceremony was used to divert

attention from a divisive secular conflict. Also my informants at Ngukurr often told me that the Gunabibi was used to punish novices whose secular behaviour was unseemly (cf. Stanner 1964: 153). Stanner (ibid: 150-1, 163; 1960: 80-2) also notes that ritual power was extensively used in the pursuit of secular quarrels.

Meggitt's analysis implies that religion is organised on a different basis to that of secular activity. In examining the latter he and Hiatt are concerned with the alternatives available within the structure, with the confrontation of different interests and with the management of that confrontation. Religion, they assume contains no confrontations. It has a set of norms which include a hierarchy of authority, and therefore an already determined framework for regulating its affairs. Further, because these hierarchies of authority are non repetitive (with the possible exception of the major cults) and only intermittently activated, and because there is no material surplus to sustain them, they are non-operative outside their immediate social context. Their challenge to the notion that Aboriginal groups were ruled as patriarchal strongholds has been done at the expense of relegating religion to an apolitical limbo. Neither writer addresses

himself to the crucial question of where power is situated for establishing and maintaining the organisation of society. This can only be done by examining the conflicts of interest as well as interpersonal disputes and this would lead directly to the structure of religion.

The continuing religious bond is only one factor in the integration of Ngukurr Village. Another is the shared experience of institutional life. In common with Aborigines throughout Australia they are subjected to economic and political domination by white Australia. Their experience of domination differs from that of their neighbours. They have been the objects of close supervision and meliorative endeavour for over 60 years. Both the length of co-residence and the different particulars of domination separate the Village off from nearby Aboriginal communities. The unity of the Village has also been imposed on it from above. The primary role of the Settlement is the supervision of its dependants and to do this it has encouraged a stable and continuing population. It is characteristic of such supervision that the supervised are treated as objects and as a block rather than as individuals (Goffman 1961: 4-7).

The Ngukurr people have a foot in two worlds, that of their forebears and that of European Australia. Both worlds meet in the Village. The Village community must exist with both, and use whatever resources are available to support itself. The Village sees both Aboriginal and European ideologies as being relevant to their situation, but maintain a clear distinction between them. They express this distinction as a succinct dichotomy by the terms blackfella business or law and whitefella business or law.[8] The distinction between blackfella law and whitefella law is easily made. Blackfella law refers to the ideology, the body of norms and values, which validate Aboriginal kinship and religious behaviour and provide sanctions for its breaches. Whitefella law is a body of rules which are alien to and often opposed to blackfella law. They are, from the Village point of view, based on three main factors:

8. Maddock discusses this dichotomy in a recent paper, 'Two Laws In One Community', which is due to be published in a forthcoming volume on social change edited by R. M. Berndt. When I wrote this section I was unaware of Maddock's paper. However, he adopts a primarily legal approach to the question, which is rather different to the argument presented here.

1. Social relations are impersonal, and obligations are defined by persons positions in relation to the abstract rule, and not by their positions relative to others they are interacting with.
2. Individual property rights are sacrosanct.
3. Regular work and domestic habits are a virtue.

When the term business is substituted for law the conceptualisation refers more directly to behaviour differences.

Blackfella and whitefella business are used at Ngukurr to describe different ways of doing similar tasks (the term 'way' is often used as a synonym for business in this context) as well as cultural and normative differences. It is the more inclusive us/them distinction. Blackfella business is the expression of Aboriginal consciousness in general, and of Ngukurr Aboriginal consciousness in particular. It puts the emphasis on the Aboriginal content of their lives: their way of ordering relations, their law, their socialisation, their way of making decisions, their land, and even in the last resort their way of gambling and getting drunk. Blackfella law is the framework - the code of proper conduct - which subsumes the content and consciousness of Ngukurr society. Whitefella business is

running the Settlement, working for wages, going to school, and acting in ways which are outside of and opposed to the obligations of Village relations.

The Village and staff are brought together in various contexts. Situations often arise where each has his own evaluation of a common event which reflects the blackfella/whitefella dichotomy. The citizens club provides one such context.

The annual general meeting of the Roper River Citizens Club, held in September 1971, was attended by both Aboriginal and European residents of Ngukurr Settlement. One of the items to be decided was the election of office bearers for the club executive. The meeting proceeded to conduct this election by show of hands. Six candidates stood for the position of club president. By the time voting got to the fourth candidate it was clear that many electors were voting for more than one candidate. A number of Europeans objected to the procedure at this stage. They claimed the voting was invalid. The Aborigine who was presiding said that it was valid because the people were voting for those they wanted. The Europeans accepted this but commented amongst themselves that they couldn't see how this procedure would result in a fair choice. At the

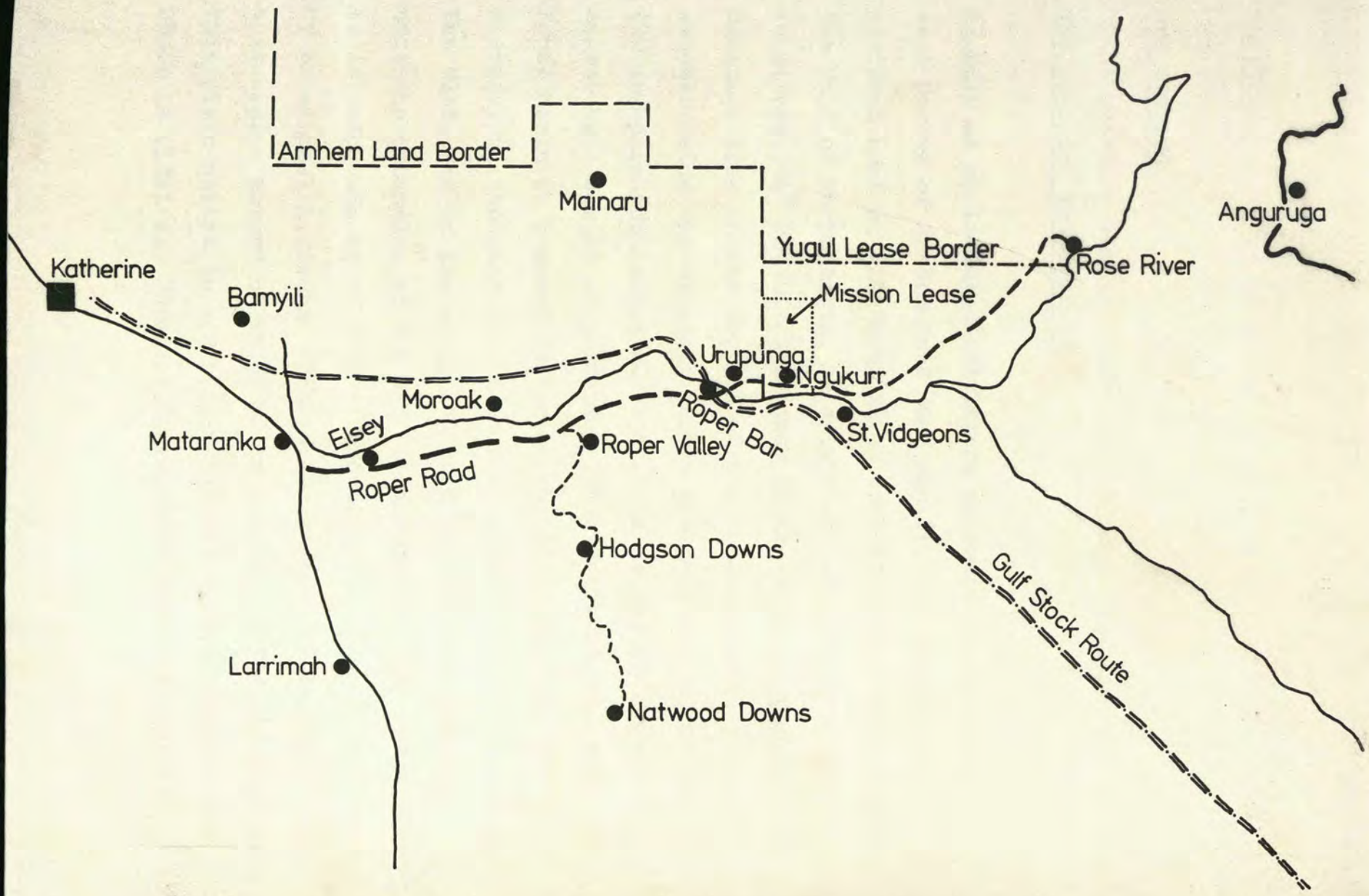
same time a number of young Aboriginal men shouted to the Europeans that this was a proper blackfella election. The Aborigine who presided over this election told me afterwards that the election was fair because people did not vote for those that they did not want. In effect the elected person was the person who the least number of people did not want. (See Ch. 7 Section 2).

Both blackfella and whitefella business have a shifting content. Drinking alcohol and playing cards are whitefella business. Their local use is seen by the Village as being different to the way Europeans use them, and to this extent they are absorbed into the content of blackfella business. The Settlement is a European institution, but the community of Ngukurr (the Aboriginal Village) is conceptualised in a way which partially absorbs the identity of the Settlement. The population has been formed into a community within the confines of the Settlement and they express the internalisation of this association in the language of blackfella law.

Blackfella business is the subject of my thesis because the aim of Ngukurr politics is ultimately directed at achieving autonomy. The other half of my title is not simply the

external threat to the Ngukurr polity, but also a challenge to its ingenuity and adaptability. The continuity of the polity depends on successfully accommodating whitefella law. Again blackfella business contains a contradiction within itself, because its general usage ties it to a posited traditional system of social relations whose normative expression is blackfella law. The traditional beliefs, practices, norms, and sanctions of Aboriginal society do not, on the whole, support the autonomy of Ngukurr politics or its polity. So that while I assume a simple opposition in the thesis title, the material I present (particularly chapters 6 and 7) shows that the contradictions are more complex.

MAP 2 ROPER BASIN AND ENVIRONS



CHAPTER 2

THE SETTING

The Physical Environment

Ngukurr is an isolated settlement situated on the south east border of Arnhem Land (See Map 2). It lies on the northern bank of the Roper River some 60 miles inland from the Gulf of Carpentaria, at a latitude of 135° East and longitude 14½° South. The Roper River is the second largest drainage area in the Top End of the Northern Territory (the largest being the Victoria River system), and is one of the few permanent streams. The river is fed during the dry season by a series of permanent limestone springs. The Roper basin in bounded in the north by the Arnhem Land plateau, in the east by the coastal plains and salt flats of the Gulf, and in the south and west by the western and northern extension of the Barkly Tablelands. The basin area is largely made up of coastal and alluvial plain broken up by occasional hillocks. Behind the coastal flats, which in this region extend 30 to 40 miles inland, is the river plain. This plain varies in width from five to fifteen miles. The Roper is tidal for 70 miles upstream to Roper (Leichhardt's)

Bar, and is navigable to this point. Below the bar the river varies in width from 100 yards at Ngukurr to three miles at the mouth. The streams of the basin are an impediment to land travel in both the wet and dry seasons. Their deep channels and natural levees make dry season crossings difficult, while during and after the wet season the levees prevent a quick drainage of the flooded countryside.

The Roper area is in the tropical savannah belt of north Australia and has two distinct seasons. The wet season, from December to March, produces 85% of the total annual rainfall. The dry season from May to October is almost rainless. The average annual rainfall is 27 inches, most of which comes during the north west monsoon as heavy tropical downpours in which several inches may fall in a few hours. Bauer (1964: 17) gives the average monthly rainfall for Roper River as:

Jan.	Feb.	March	April	May	June
6.83	5.92	5.83	1.56	0.10	0.23

July	Aug.	Sept.	Oct.	Nov.	Dec.
0.02	0.01	0.14	0.44	1.75	4.86

The mean maximum temperatures vary from approximately 80° in

July to 95° in November and the minimum temperatures from 55° to 75° in the same months.

Ngukurr Settlement is twelve miles from the Roper Bar police station which is the terminus of the Roper road. Ngukurr is connected to the Bar by the river, and also by a graded track which crosses both the Roper and Wilton rivers. The Wilton crossing is tidal, and even at the height of the dry season one may have to wait three or four hours to cross. During the wet season this section is impassable. The Roper road is 130 miles in length and joins Roper bar with the Stuart highway near Mataranka. It services seven cattle stations as well as the police station and Settlement. During the first period of fieldwork in 1968 the road, then little more than a graded track, was impassable after the monsoons began. The road was being upgraded and sealed during the following years, and by December 1971 it was bitumin sealed for 60 miles from the highway and all weather quality for the rest.

The poor ground communications meant that Ngukurr is largely dependent on air and water for the movement of goods and people. The majority of the Settlement's supplies are brought in by ship from Brisbane at two monthly intervals. The movement of people to and from Ngukurr is mainly by plane.

There is a bi-weekly service connecting Ngukurr with Darwin. The dependence on this service has meant that Darwin is the main urban centre to which the Ngukurr Aborigines gravitate. Travel by road, which would have oriented people to Katherine was extremely limited prior to 1971, not only because of the seasonal closure of the road but also due to the absence of suitable transport.

However, the road is an important artery of local communication, facilitating interaction between the different populations of the district. Ngukurr is the largest centre east of the Highway with an average population in 1970 of about 400 (including 30 Europeans). The Roper Bar police station and the seven cattle stations have a total of about 400 people, varying from five at St. Vidgeons to over 100 at Roper Valley. The Welfare Branch census figures for the centres outside Ngukurr show the number and distribution of the Aboriginal population: Elsey stn. 62; Moroak stn. 27; Roper Valley stn. 93; Hodgson Downs stn. 41; Nutwood Downs stn. 40; Roper Bar Police stn. 18; Urapunga stn. 29; St. Vidgeons stn. nil. (The figures are drawn from on the spot censuses conducted by Welfare Branch officers in 1967 and 1968). The Aborigines of these centres have kinship and ritual ties with the people of Ngukurr Village and there is regular contact between the various centres. The population of the

Ngukurr Village increases during the wet season, (in 1969/70 from 340 to 450), and the bulk of the additional population is made up of station residents holidaying during their layoff period.

Ngukurr also maintains links with two other nearby centres, Numbulwar and Borroloola. The Borroloola connections are rather minor at the present time, with some visiting being initiated from Ngukurr but almost none in the opposite direction. Numbulwar, on the other hand is of major significance. The Numbulwar Mission was established from Ngukurr by the Church Missionary Society in 1952. The initial population was a group of Nunggabuju speakers who had moved into the Ngukurr area in the late 40's. A number of families are established in both places and there is regular interaction between the two communities. There is also some intermarriage and mutual participation in ritual, particularly in the ego centred circumcision and mortuary rites.

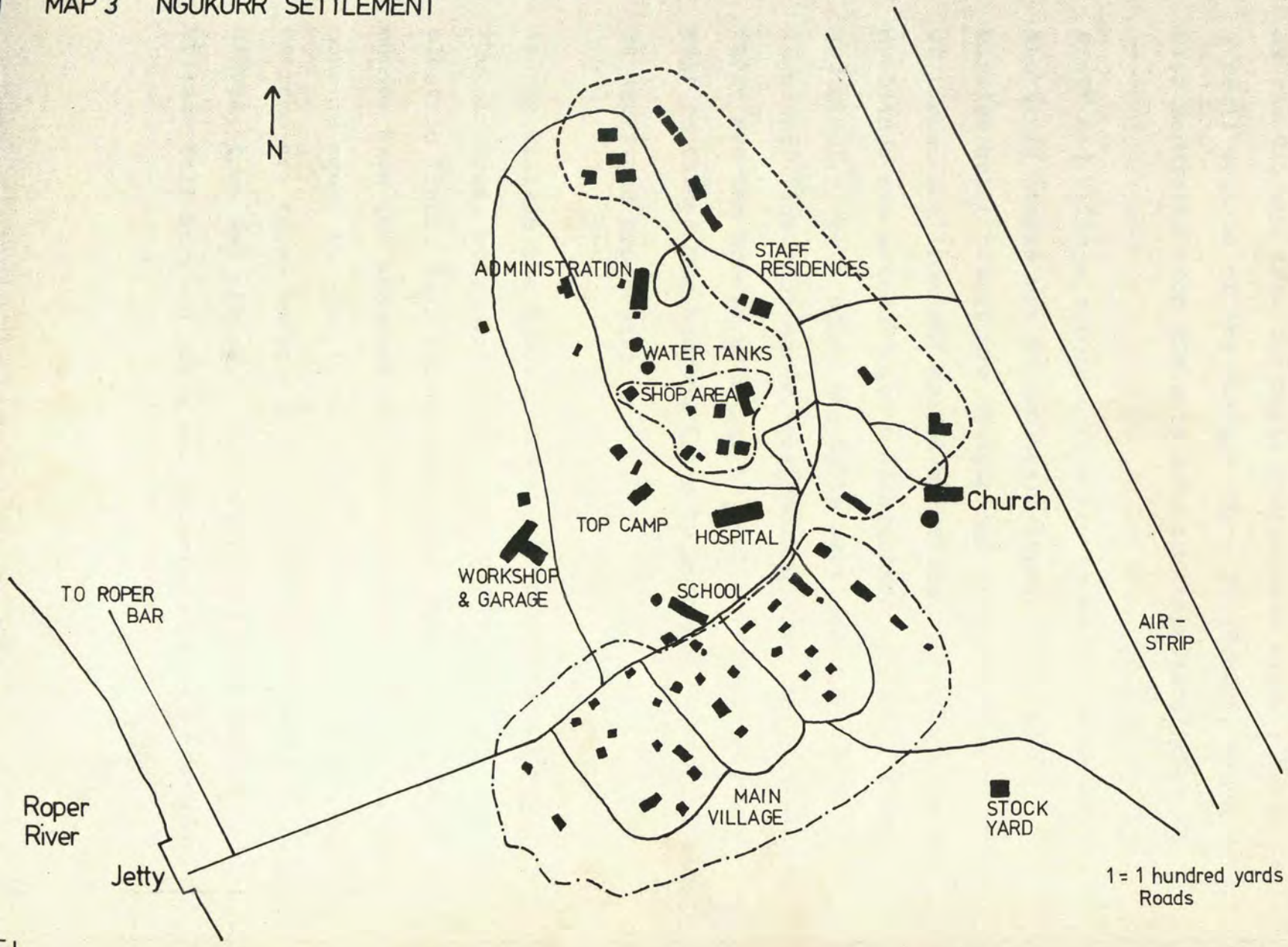
The area around the south east Arnhem Land Reserve is occupied by large cattle stations varying in size from 600

square miles to 2,500 square miles. Production of beef cattle is the sole economy of the non reserve part of the area. Until the last decade the stations have been run on an open range basis, a system entailing few capital improvements, little fencing, pasture improvement or stock control. The labour element is high but seasonal, and the most important skills are endurance and local knowledge. These requirements were met by the resident Aboriginal populations. At present the open range is gradually being replaced by enclosure, pasture improvement, and selective breeding and this is changing the nature of the labour skills required. However, during the period of fieldwork these changes had only a marginal effect on the employment pattern of the cattle station Aborigines.

The Settlement and Economy

The Settlement occupies a ridge on the northern side of the river (see map 3). The church, office and staff houses are on the crest of the ridge and its northern slope. The Aboriginal section, which I shall call the Village is built on the southern and western slop and surrounding flat. The Settlement store, hospital, school and workshops are also on the western slope, and they divide the main section

MAP 3 NGUKURR SETTLEMENT



of the Village from the staff residential area. There is a small section of the Village (five dwellings), which is also separated from the main area by these facilities.

Staff and Village accommodation are in marked contrast. The staff houses are of two basic types. The older mission built houses are of spacious tropical design, made of timber and iron and raised on stilts. The more recent dwellings are standardised prefabricated houses of fibro and steel. Both types are fully serviced with electric lighting, fans, hot water, gas cooking, and septic systems. There are ten houses with two to four bedrooms and four self contained one bedroom flats to accommodate approximately 30 staff and dependants.

In the Village the quality of houses varies considerably. The six best, built in 1964-5, are of fibro and iron, with electric light, fuel stoves and septic systems. Two of the houses have two bedrooms and four have three bedrooms, but none is equal in quality to staff housing. At the opposite extreme are three humpies made of discarded materials, mainly canvas, iron and timber. The majority of the houses in the Village fall between these two poles. Typically they are

iron shacks of one to four rooms some of which have electric lighting and fuel stoves. In mid 1970 there were 42 Village dwellings; 36 were more or less permanent, three were tents and three were humpies.

Aside from the six best houses there are two others with their own outside toilet pans. The rest of the Village shares three blocks of communal ablution facilities. The Village suffers from chronic overcrowding. In June 1970 the number of occupants per dwelling ranged from two to 20 with an average of eight (during the wet season influx this average increases to ten). The mean number of persons per available room (i.e. bedrooms and kitchen/living rooms), is four, compared with the staff ratio of 0.6 persons per room.

The staff are mostly public servants employed by the Welfare Branch of the Northern Territory Administration(now the Northern Territory Division of the Department of Aboriginal Affairs). The largest group are school teachers, numbering ten in 1970. The other Government employees are the Area Adviser (a position with the same function and statutory powers as a Settlement superintendent, by which term I shall

henceforth refer to him), mechanic, carpenter, hygiene supervisor, clerk and cattle project manager. The other staff are a chaplain and two nursing sisters employed by the Church Missionary Society, and a shop manager engaged by the Roper River Citizens Club - an incorporated social club in which membership is open to all residents of the Settlement.

The overall administration of the Settlement is in the hands of the Government. Policy, major administrative decisions and finance are controlled directly by the head office in Darwin and the Department of Interior in Canberra. The line of command on routine matters goes from these outside sources to the superintendent, or, on school matters, the headmaster. This line of command was sometimes bypassed, especially when crises arose or when important policy changes were envisaged. In these cases outside representatives of the bureaucracy often dealt directly with Village representatives.

In the normal day to day running of the Settlement official contact between staff and villagers occurred in three ways. The staff, especially the superintendent and nursing sisters dealt directly with villagers; hearing complaints and offering advice, assistance and criticism on matters ranging

from leaking taps, cockroaches and lack of firewood, through hygiene standards, to family disputes. This direct access was supplemented by four committees, part of whose function was to organise the communication between Village, Settlement and the external bureaucracy. The most inclusive of these bodies was the Station Council in which representatives of both staff and Village discussed matters relating to the Settlement in general. The School Council served to pass on information of the School's activities to the Village and organise the raising of funds for the school. The Church Council served the same function for the church as well as being responsible for the care of its physical property. The fourth committee was the executive of the Citizens Club, which brought staff and Village together in the operation of a business venture: the Settlement store.

The main area of day to day contact was the work situation. The economy of Ngukurr is entirely dependent on the Government. Only four out of approximately 85 persons employed in mid-1970 were not directly employed by the Welfare Branch. Two of these were shop assistants working for the Citizens Club, and two were part time domestics for staff families. There was also one independent economic

venture operating during 1970. This was a small fishing boat run by four men, of whom three were age pensioners. The boat was absent for two to ten weeks at a time, and only one to three weeks were spent at Ngukurr on stop overs. Normally, only two men went on each trip, though all four shared in whatever profit they made. Three catches were sold at Ngukurr between March and September 1970, grossing $200. The venture ceased when one of the principals died, early in 1971.

The Settlement labour force is grouped in five divisions; general labour, hygiene, garage, carpentry and cattle. The general labour and hygiene gangs have overlapping tasks handling general cleaning and maintenance, sanitation and the provision of fire wood. The labour gang was supervised by an Aboriginal leading hand under direction from the superintendent and mechanic. The hygiene gang had an European supervisor till mid 1970, at which time the Settlement's only Aboriginal staff appointee took over. The mechanical and carpentry workshop gangs do maintenance and repair work in their respective areas. Both were under the direction of European tradesmen in 1970, but in 1971 the carpentry gang was run by an Aboriginal leading hand.

The fifth gang is the stock camp employed on the cattle project. Aside from the five gangs there were people employed at the school as teaching assistants, gardeners, and cleaners; the hospital had its own staff of orderlies and cooks, and the superintendent had an office assistant and one or two Village orderlies.

The cattle project is the Settlement's only potential income earner. During the fieldwork period the stock camp was occupied branding cattle mustered on the reserve, maintaining plant and equipment, and periodically killing and butchering cattle for local consumption. During most of 1970 the camp was wholly staffed by Aborigines under an Aboriginal supervisor. From September 1970 to September 1971 there was an European cattle manager. The Welfare Branch cattle project ceased at the end of 1971 when the Jugul Cattle Co., whose shareholders were representatives of Ngukurr Village, received a pastoral lease of 2,000 square miles of south east Arnhem Land.

The Aborigines, with the exception of one who was a member of the Settlement staff, are paid according to a scale of training allowances introduced in early 1969. The term

training allowance is a euphemism. The allowance rates are all below the Australian minimum wage, though the villagers working under the scheme are employed on conditions similar to those of day labourers. At least at Ngukurr there are no staff or facilities for training people in any skill. The adult male rate varies from $50 to $72 per fortnight, and the female rate from $37.50 to $54 per fortnight. In June 1970 70% of persons on the payroll received the base rate. (The scheme was terminated early in 1974 and replaced by award wages and access to unemployment benefits).

Distribution of workers on training allowance scale

Classification	Adult Males		Adult Females		Jnr.Male		Jnr.Females	
	No.	Rate	No.	Rate	No.	Rate	No.	Rate
C3	35	$50	9	$37.50	21	$25.50 to $48	4	$19 to $30
C2	3	$52						
C1	6	$56						
B2	7	$60						
B1	4	$64						
A2	1	$68						
A1	3	$72	3	$54			1	$36
Special	1	$75.80						

The special classification is held by the supervising stockman. The people in A1 are trained nursing aids, teaching assistants, the leading hand mechanic and the bulldozer operator. The leading hand carpenter is A2. Two truck drivers, the office assistant and hygiene supervisor (before he became a staff member), are classified B1. The B2 classification is shared by four drivers, the head stockman, a carpenter and a gardener. The Village orderly and five senior stockman are graded C1, and a second gardener and the foreman of the general labour gang are C2.

Women accounted for 17% of the workforce and all except the shop assistant worked either at the hospital or the school. The age range of female workers is similar to that of the men, but unlike the men, the higher classifications are monopolised by young women. All four of these women have received outside specialist training and are in the top classification. Three are nursing aids and the fourth is a teaching assistant.

Age and sex distribution on higher pay scales

Age	20 to 30	30 to 40	40 to 50	50+
Men	6	5	7	5
Women	4	0	0	0

The income of Ngukurr Village comes from three main sources: wages, pensions and child endowment. The average total training allowances paid during the four pay periods of 8th April to 2nd June 1970 was $3,314.37. Other wages for the same period averaged about $200.

Resume of training allowances pay sheets 8th April to 2nd June

(Source: Welfare Branch pay sheets)

Pay period	1	2	3	4
No. available for work	87	84	85	84
No. working	81	80	81	70
Total net pay.	$3,672.23	$3,628.98	$3,461.76	$2,494.50
Average pay per worker.	$45.34	$45.36	$42.74	$35.64
Average hours worked	70	70	67	55

The Village has 30 pensioners whose average fortnightly income is $30. The total pension per fortnight is $900. the child endowment for approximately 230 children at an average of $2 per child is $460 per fortnight (the above two figures are approximations based on child endowment and pension schedules). Aside from these sources there are special Welfare payments to needy families. During May 1970

a total of $150 was paid to five families. The income from fishing, sale of artifacts and garden produce amounted to about $50 per fortnight. The total fortnightly money income from local sources was thus about $5,000. The money brought into the community by workers completing a period of labour outside Ngukurr was normally small, and at least balanced by money taken out when people left. Subsistence also added little to the income level. What there was came from household gardens (mainly bananas and pawpaw), and hunting and gathering. The latter were weekend recreations undertaken in any one week, by no more than 1/5 of the households. The area is no longer rich in game and many an excursion returns empty handed.

The Village weekly income for a theoretical average family of husband, wife and two children is $28, compared to an Australian minimum wage in 1970 of $37.90, and an average national wage of about $80. In terms of real income the three figures are roughly comparable. The Ngukurr villager has free medical services and pays a relatively low rental, ranging to a maximum of $10. However, other services, costs of travel, durables and most importantly food and clothing are considerably dearer than in urban centres.

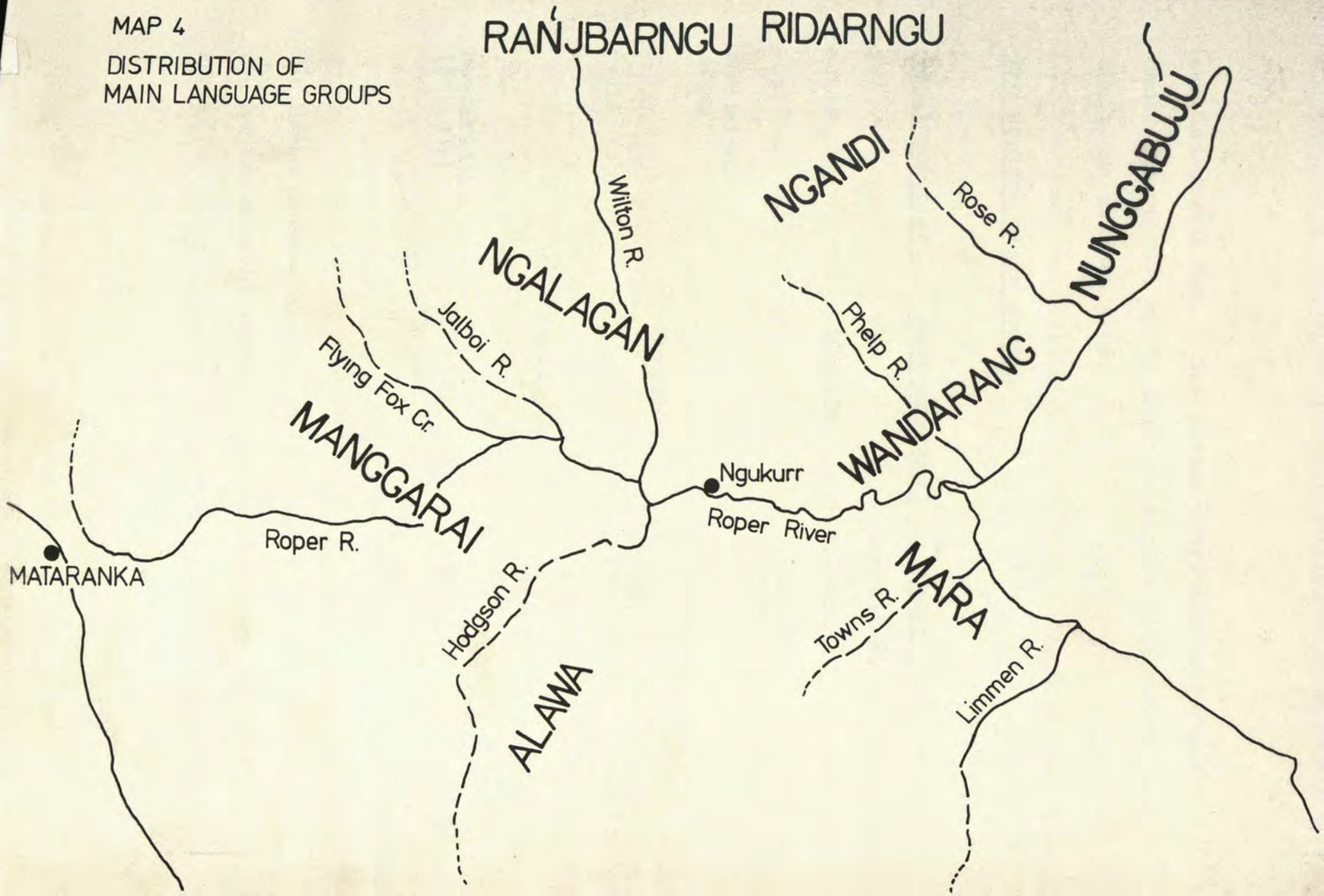
Kinship

The kinship structure I describe in this section is predominantly that of the Village core. The main area in which traditional kinship relations are an important determinant of behaviour is in the religious sphere. The structure that is articulated is in many ways a syncretic one (Capell 1960a:206-8). The Village population is drawn from nine main language groups (see map 4).

The east Arnhem Land groups lay the emphasis on patrilineal clan organisation, and combine groups of clans into two exogamous patrimoieties. (Warner 1937:ch. 2;Turner 1974 ch. 4 ; Vander Leeden 1964). The groups south and west of the lower Roper have a semi moiety or eight subsection system, and place greater emphasis on matrifiliation than do the northern groups. (Spencer & Gillen 1904: 118-30; Spencer 1914 : 58-65 ; Reay 1962). The kinship system as it exists at Ngukurr combines the three classes of patrilineal moieties, semi moieties and subsections, and exhibits a marked strain between patri determination and matri determination of class placement. The recent immigrants to Ngukurr use both the dominant Village system and their

MAP 4

DISTRIBUTION OF
MAIN LANGUAGE GROUPS



own indigenous one. The latter they reserve for use among themselves, or in their relations with others from their own culture area.

The Ngukurr class system

Patri moieties.	Semi moieties.	Subsections.	
		Masculine.	feminine.
Mandaiju. (Dua)	Mambali.	1. Wamud.	Wamudjan.
		4. Gela. (Buralang.	Galidjan. Buralangban.)
	Murongon.	5. Gamarang.	Gamain.
		8. Balang. (Namudjulu.	Bilendjan. Namudjulu.)
Mandaridja. (Jiridja)	Budal	2. Bangadi.	Bangin.
		3. Naridj.	Naridjan.
	Gujal	6. Godjog.	Godjan.
		7. Bulain.	Bulaindjan.

The named patri moieties are described locally be either of the two sets of terms. The moieties are the most inclusive classification, and everyone belongs to either

one or the other. Each of the two major ritual cults is associated with one moiety. The Jabuduruwa is Jiridja and the Gunabibi is Dua. (Elkin 1961a ; Maddock 1969a). Moiety assignation prescribes two roles within the organisation of the cults; those of owner (Mingeringi) and manager (Djunggaiji),(Maddock 1972 : 36). The moieties are ideally exogamous. Only five out of a total of 61 marriages recorded are between partners in the same moiety. These marriages were contracted between 1922 and 1965, with three of the five being contracted after 1960.

Children normally belong to the moiety of their father in fact, though there is disagreement on whether this is the ideal. Informants told me that after the earliest intra moiety marriage (contracted in 1922), the leading men of the time discussed which moiety the children would belong to. They decided the children would belong to the father's moiety. The decision was clearly not automatic, nor has it set an unquestioned precedent. During 1970 there was a disagreement over the moiety membership of the children of an intra moiety marriage contracted 30 years before. The majority of the village considered that the children belonged to the moiety of their father. Their MFB said

that this was not so, and that the children should belong to the opposite moiety to that of their mother. The children in fact conduct themselves as members of their father's moiety, and this is widely accepted.

The semi moieties are the most important classes for the organisation of cult activity. A number of totemic paths are referred to as belonging to particular semi moieties, though particular countries and sites are seen as the property of more exclusive categories. The Mermaid path in the Towns River area, and the Whirlwind path in the Limmen River area are associated with Murongon and Mambali respectively. Some totems, in so far as they are not specifying a particular country, are identified by their semi moiety affiliation. Thus Sandridge Goanna is Gujal, Plane Kangaroo is Budal, Catfish is Mambali, and the King Brown Snake is Murongon. Some ritual roles in the major cults, especially for the owning moiety, are defined by semi moiety membership. (Maddock 1969c). Climactic points in the Jabuduruwa are marked by dance sequences in which all the owners participate together. The dancers from each of the owning semi moieties wear distinctive markings and have a set position in the formation. Each particular Jabuduruwa and Gunabibi ceremony has a specific owner.

The attribution of ownership is firstly to the totemic group associated with the particular country, and secondly to the semi moiety of which this group is part.

The emphasis in recruitment to semi moieties is on patrifiliation. However, the same sorts of ambiguity apply here as for recruitment to moieties. The situation is more complex because there are four categories to choose from instead of the two in the case of moieties. (Maddock 1969c : 100-101). Except for the disputed case noted above, people do belong to the moiety and semi moiety of their fathers.

The situation is more complex for there is one family in which one generation is recognised as having dual semi moiety affiliation. The generation in question are the children of an alternate marriage and are reckoned as belonging to both semi moieties of their father's moiety. One is of course that of the father, and the other appears to be that linked with the next descending line of the mother's matri cycle. In fact the affiliation is not seen by the Village in this way. The stated basis of this alternate semi moiety membership is that the children belong to the group of their MFM (see diagram 10).

The reason for this is ritual prerogatives rather than some oblique rule of descent. The ritual in question is the Balgin cult. In the Balgin, as in the other major cults, a man stands in the same relationship to his MF as he does to his DS. The reason for activating this relationship in this way and in this particular case, is due to the restrictive criterion of ownership in the Balgin. Ownership in this cult is the sole prerogative of Murongon semi moiety. The estate group of the MFM of the men in question, and for which their MF was the senior manager, has no direct agnatic descendants. The leading men of the Balgin cult have used the equivalence of MF and DS to assign the country to these men. For general purposes and for the Jabuduruwa and Gunabibi cults these men are members of Mambali semi moiety. The semi moieties do not function to regulate marriages. The alternate or wrong marriage of Ngukurr do not require any realignment of semi moiety affiliation.

The subsection system is primarily used as a framework for describing jurally acceptable marriage arrangements. (Maddock op.cit). They are also used to specify a person's place in the local system of relations, when that person is a stranger to the community. Except for strangers, subsection terms are rarely used as terms of address or reference.

There are two principles of subsection recruitment. Patrifiliation divides the eight subsections into four sets of father/son pairs - 1-4, 8-5, 2-3, and 7-6. Matrifiliation divides the subsections into two sets of four generations - 1-3-5-7, and 2-4-6-8. (Hiatt 1965:47-50; Maddock 1972: 77-79, 91-94).

Ngukurr has a rule of preferred marriage with the MMBDD. If all marriages followed the preferred pattern then the rules of patri and matri filiation would be in harmony. Other forms of licit marriage, with a MBD or FZD, and illicit marriages, would put the patri and matri filiation principles out of step. My informants have stated that in such cases the progeny have a choice of two subsections. The data I have collected indicates that the choice depends to a great extent on whether the marriage is licit or not. The data I have covered nineteen marriages which are not with a partner in the preferred subsection.

1. In twelve cases of alternate marriage in which the subsection of the children is known, all are in the next descending subsection of their mother's matricycle. e.g. the children of a marriage between 1 and 6 would be 8 and not 4. (See following table).

2. There are five intra moiety marriages. The children of all are in the subsection patrifiliated to that of their father's. (This includes the disputed case mentioned above). e.g. the children of a marriage between 7 and 3 are 6 and not 5. There is a sixth case of an unsanctioned union (no longer extant) between Bangadi man and a Godjan woman in which the son is Balang, i.e. matrifiliated.

3. There are five marriages in which the partners are in the same matricycle. The children of four (three of which are also intra moiety) are in the patri-paired subsection of their father. The children of the fifth marriage between a Wamud man and Naridjan woman are in the next descending subsection of her matricycle : Gamarang.

The subsection system provides a framework for specifying the type of relationship between people, particularly in the context of marriage arrangements. The two tables below show the preferred and alternate marriages in subsection terms, and the relationship terms associated with each subsection taking Bangadi as ego.

Preferred and Alternate Marriage (after Maddock 1972:79)

Husband's subsection		1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
Wife's	"	2,6	1,5	8,4	7,3	6,2	5,1	4,8	3,7
Child's	"	4,8	3,7	2,6	1,5	8,4	7,3	6,2	5,1

Correlation of subsections and kinship terms

1. Wamud Bandji (mother's mother's brother's daughter's child, father's sister's daughter's daughter's child.)

   Nabudji - father's mother, father's mother's brother, sister's son's child.

2. Bangadi Ego

   Baba - brother, sister.

   Namari - father's father, father's father's sister, son's child.

3. Naridj *Dadi - father, father's brother.

   *Anti - father's sister.

   *Boi - son.

4. Gela Lambara - wife's father, wife's father's sister.

   *Boi - sister's son.

*Gel - sister's daughter.

5. Gamarang Bangga - mother's brother's child, father's sister's child.

Nabadjadja - mother's father, mother's father, mother's father's sister, daughter's child.

6. Godjog Gagau - mother's mother, mother's mother's brother, sister's daughter's child.

7. Bulain Mulari - wife's mother, wife's mother's brother, mother's brother's daughter's child, father's sister's daughter's child.

8. Balang *Angl - close mother's brother

*Mami - mother, mother's sister.

Lambara - classificatory mother's brother, classificatory mother's sister.

*Boi - daughter's husband.

*Gel - son's wife.

* These terms are adaptions of the english words : Daddy, Mummy, Uncle, Auntie, boy and girl (See Sharpe 1974:4-5)

The subsection system functions only as a general statement of the ideal relations. Its realization depends on other things being equal. These other things can be divided into four categories.

1. Marriages other than with a preferred partner. In the twelve alternate marriages the wife's father is in the subsection of the mother's brother. In the seven wrong marriages the affinal relationships cannot be assimilated into the subsection framework. e.g. two who stood in a mulari relationship before marriage have, since marrying each others' sisters, called each other bandji.

2. Closely genealogical or ritual connections. First and second cousins are too closely related to be marriage partners. If they are in marriageable subsections they are referred to by the alternate generation terms, nabudji not bandji and nabadjadja instead of bangga. Similarly men who share the same totemic emblems are regarded as being ceremony brothers. If these people are in the same generation they are referred to as baba, and in the senior generation are dadi and anti. e.g. The members of one family which is bangadi and naridj refer to a second family which is bulain and godjog, but shares the same totemic affiliation, by the kinship terms appropriate to their own family.

3. Persons may, during socialization, develop a relationship incompatible with the ideal of their relative kinship positions. e.g. One man refers to his ZH(the ZH is 20 years his senior) as angl, because this man raised him for part of his childhood. A second man raised by the same man, stands in the relation of DH to WF. He calls his former guardian angl and the guardian's wife (his mulari) anti.

4. The relations between two closely connected families may lose the internal generation distinctions. e.g. A's mother, as a youn g woman, called her MBS Bangga, but in later life called her MB, MBS and MBSS all angl. A followed her lead and ceased calling his MMBS mulari, and instead called all three generations gagau.

The patrilineal clans are associated with a set of totemic sites which may be separated from each other by the sites of other clans. A particular site or set of contiguous sites within a particular location identifies a social group which shares its totemic affiliation and who are part of the locations owning group, and links this totemic group to others within the same clan . The clan provides a jural framework for its affiliated totemic groups. In the final

analysis the clan is the owner of the ritual paraphernalia, the totems they are used to celebrate, and the associated myths, sites and paths. Clan membership and totemic affiliation are transmitted from father to son. Each localised segment of a clan has reciprocal rights in the celebration of the clan's totems.

The clan's only corporate existence, in present day Ngukurr, is in the area of cult activity. The members of a clan act in concert in ceremonial performances of the major cults. Each clan has a senior member or members in this context, and this seniority is acknowledged through identifying these men as the owners of the clan's ritual paraphernalia.

From Pay Day to Pay Day: The Cycle of Every Day Life

The events described in this section are typical of those occuring at Ngukurr during any fortnight of the year. The actual incidents mentioned occurred during late April and early May 1970, and are, with the exception of the cult performances, typical of any time of year. Cult performances were in progress during the first five months of 1970.

Every second Friday the workday concluded early, at about three, and the workers made their way to the superintendent's office to receive their fortnightly pay check. Then they moved down the road to the Settlement shop where their mothers, wives, children, and unemployed relatives were awaiting them. The shop prepared for the rush, when nearly half the fortnight's takings would be made in the next two hours. Business was brisk as people purchased their basic supplies for the following fortnight. There were the staples of flour, sugar, tea, tinned or powdered milk, and tinned meat (or fresh if it was available); a few relishes such as tins of vegetables, fruits, and jams; and the toiletries. Once the supplies were paid for the wage earners distributed much of their remaining income among the unemployed members of their domestic groups, offered something to close relatives who were short and gave the small change to the children for drinks and lollies. People began to leave the shop area around four thirty, and from then till six, there was an almost continuous stream of people moving from the shop to the Village.

Once home the women lit the fires and cooked the meal while the men showered and changed, and the children played.

While the meals were taken a few single men gathered for an early card game before the movies, but this was only a prelude to the main gambling later in the evening. By eight, most of the community was gathered at the movie place, a flat clearing near the shop. Each family had its spot and settled down on their blankets. Groups of children occupied the positions nearest the screen, a small group of staff sat on their deck chairs behind the main audience, and the single men congregated on the periphery.

A western was the highlight of the evening, and the audience roared support for the cowboy as he wreaked revenge on the murderous Indian. The cowboy succeeded, rescued his girl, and the movie ended. The audience, pleased with their evening, dispersed. Most of the families, carrying sleeping children, headed for their shacks. The unburdened adults moved off to start card games, while the young men lingered in the hope of catching a female eye and arranging a later assignation. The card games were well under way by eleven, with two games indoors in houses with electric light and two under the bright fluorescent street lights.

The game is called five eye or five card. It is a swift game using a short deck of 40 cards (no jacks, queens, or kings). Each game has a maximum of eight players, and on pay night there is never a shortage. Bets are laid prior to receiving a card. Early on pay night a $5 limit is usual, but this increases as the night progresses. The banker then deals two cards to each player and the winner is the player or players whose cards have a total closest to ten or a multiple of ten. The players then lay further bets and the banker deals each another three cards. Quick calculations are made: any three of a player's cards must add to ten or he is out. The score, for those who meet this requirement, is the total of their other two cards. Again the closest to ten or its multiple is the winner.

The stakes increased as the night wore on and losers' and those that had had enough pulled out and their places were taken by new players. Winners rarely held on to their gains for long, a turn of a card could rapidly change the position, and there was always a brother, wife, mother, father, husband, or cousin who needed a stake to re-enter another game. By two, only one game remained, but the stakes were high, with $200 being collected on a single hand.

Even these hard core players had had enough by three, for the weekend was still ahead, and the money would change hands many times before Monday.

The Village stirred late on Saturday. At eight, there were only a few children playing on the paths, and the women were stoking the fires for the breakfast fare of tea and damper. No general movement occurred during the morning. Most people were content to rest outside their shacks, drink tea, repair a fishing spear or leather belt, and exchange greetings with passers by. A few of the keener gamblers had a game going at ten, but patronage was poor. Two old men discussed having a cult performance, but got no response.

The early afternoon activity concentrated under the ample shade of the mango trees, six of which protected the busy hands distributing cards. At Jeremiah's he and three other Mara men discussed their next fishing trip. The Settlement mechanic drove down and picked up his leading hand and two other men to help repair the water pump, which had broken down for the second time that week.

At sunset the family hearth was again the centre of activity. There was some rare excitement as a couple arrived from Darwin by car, for a short holiday. For their families, this was an unexpected surprise. A car trip from Darwin was still enough of a novelty for people to ask about the state of the road and examine the state of the car. There was another movie that night. A utility load of stockmen arrived from Urapunga, and the Darwin couple drove up in their car.

The movie was disrupted by a shout and a flying spear. As he levelled another spear, George accused one of the Urapunga boys of committing adultery with his wife. Relatives intervened, and at last persuaded George to go back home. The movie resumed. Later the card games resumed. An occasional raised voice was heard from George's camp, but no one listened. Around midnight a strident stream of vindictive issued from another home. A woman was defending the honour of her daughter and niece against the hostile gossip of other women. There was no response to the harnague, people continued to go about their business, and the tirade subsided after a quarter hour.

On Sunday morning, the early risers lit their fires to boil a billy. The hard core gamblers (less than a dozen at

this state) paused for a cup of tea before heading off to take a nap, and exchanged greetings with the line of eleven church goers on their way to morning service. By mid morning the mango tree at Adam's house was again screening busy hands from the sun. A cheer came up from the bottom camp as Nathan managed to get his car going. Some women, infants in tow, set off for Jellowara billabong to collect lily roots, and Charlie carrying his fishing spears headed off for the other local billabong at Wadjilai.

Arnold and Garry decided to have a performance of the Jabuduruwa. They moved off to the ceremony ground after lunch. Only six men were at the ground at four. Three were owners preparing themselves for their dances and the other three preparing the paraphernalia. Others started arriving in the late afternoon, and the main body of men turned up in time to watch the performance. Arnold complained about the men's tardiness, the small number of performers and novices, and poor turnout of women to cook food, and the lateness of the performance. They were regular complaints and no one payed much heed. As the men returned from the ceremony ground the Village bell announced Sunday evening service in the Village. The lay preacher led his flock in prayer as the men passed by.

Monday morning started with the children being cleaned and dressed for school. The workers reluctantly moved off to their jobs. They discussed the weekend's results. There were three winners. Herbert had about $200 which was his fare to Darwin and a little extra for a drink. Adam had enough for his new clutch, and John had the fare for his mother to go to Numbulwar and for his sister to collect her son from Darwin hospital. There were other stories, of former winners and current losers, of Friday's movie, of Saturday's fight, and of the weekend's romantic encounters.

The superintendent arrived and checked attendance and gave his instructions. The men split up. One gang went off in the truck to gather fire wood and another to clear scrub from around the office. The hygiene gang started on their morning garbage collection. The carpenter and his leading hand went off to do some repairs leaving the rest of their men to clean up the workshop. The mechanic started repairing the Toyota while his two leading hands supervised the servicing of the tractor and bulldozer. The shop assistants and Village orderly stood around the shop as the stockmen rode up to get supplies before heading off on a muster. The mothers took their infants on the regular

daily trek to the hospital for innoculations and feeding.

The hospital was overcrowded and overworked with a minor flu epidemic in progress. The medical plane arrived in mid morning to take three children to Darwin for treatment. The women went to the airstrip to watch the Darwin plane's arrival bringing the papers, fresh fruit and two children returning from hospital. After the plane left some women walked to the shop to sit and chat in the shade, others payed calls on friends and a few started up a card game. In the early afternoon there was some shouting from the river. Brian, the Village orderly, emerged from the scrub holding a pack of cards and followed by a group of irate women. He had temporarily enforced the Settlement ban on cards during working hours. After work the boys played football, others were at home sitting and resting, doing odd jobs or cooking dinner.

The week progressed. Monday night there was a meeting of the men to discuss the time for finishing the ceremony. Differing opinions were expressed, and no decision reached. On Tuesday, Arnold called a Village meeting. He rang the bell at seven. People were slow in coming as there was no vital matter to discuss, and the meeting did not get under

way till after nine. Only 34 people were there to hear once more about the sorry state of their bankrupt shop. Thursday was pension day, a needed boost for the sagging finances of the Village.

On Saturday morning the Settlement truck pulled into Ngandi Street. People, swags, rifles, fishing lines and spears piled in for a day's trip to Walgadjadja billabong, 20 miles away. At night the young people took over the movie area. The record player blared and the Village youth danced to its rock beat. The majority were boys who occupied the centre stage while the few girls kept to the dim periphery. Close contact between the sexes was not for public show.

Sunday was quiet. There was another performance of the Jabuduruwa; better attended than last week, but it still finished late and Arnold still complained. The monthly Station Council convened on Monday after lunch. The staff complained about Village hygiene , the Village members complained about lack of facilities. An argument developed between the staff and Village members over responsibility for the bankruptcy of the shop. The meeting closed after three hours with tempers cooled but nothing resolved. The

shop was again the centre of attention at Wednesday's meeting of the Citizen's Club executive. This time the discussion was solely among staff, for only five of the twelve members were villagers and two of these had declined to attend. There was no Village meeting this week. The Village was quiet, money was short and card games few. This was pay week, and on Friday the cycles would begin again.

CHAPTER 3

THE IMPOSITION OF WHITE CONTROL

The History of Alien Intrusion

The history of the entry of non Aborigines into the Roper basin can be divided into three phases. The early period is one of intermittent interaction involving little if any disruption to the independent on going organisation of Aboriginal society. This period commences sometime around the beginning of the 18th century with the arrival of the early Macassan praus (Macknight 1972: 284) and ends with the building of the overland telegraph in 1871/2. The second phase is one of increasing intensity and extent of contact in which relations between the intruders and indigines are conditioned by basic conflict over living space and the use of resources. This phase is the period in which independent Aboriginal society on the Roper is destroyed. The end of this period roughly coincides with the establishment of the Church Missionary Society's Roper River Mission in 1908, though it continues in some degree right up to the 1930's (Hall 1962; Smith 1925). The third phase is the permanent establishment of Europeans, their

domination and the development of dependent Aboriginal communities. The second and third phases overlap considerably. Elsey station for example was well established by the mid 1880's, and had a permanent Aboriginal camp attached to it by the mid 1890's (Gunn 1907; Thonemann 1949; Hill 1951: 248). The most important landmark of this phase is the establishment of the Roper River Mission with its conscious aims of protecting and civilising the Aborigines.

The contact of Aborigines in the Roper area with both Europeans and Macassans was predominantly coastal till the middle of the 19th century. The Europeans who entered the area in this period were seamen on voyages of discovery, charting the coast, sampling the flora and fauna and assessing the potential for trade and settlement. The ships, from the Dutch 'Arnhem' in 1623 to 'The Beagle' in 1839, had only brief stays in the Gulf and established no regular intercourse with the local peoples. The Roper river was not navigated till Cadell discovered the entrance in 1867 (Bauer 1964: 58-9; Hill 1951: 86).

Until the middle of the 19th century the most important non-Aboriginal influence on the Roper people was that of

the Macassan Trepang collectors. Macknight's account indicates that the coast of the Roper area was part of the region regularly visited by the Macassan fleets (op.cit: 284). Macknight points to a number of important factors which help to define the characteristics of Macassan Aboriginal relations. These are (i) the seasonal nature of the Macassan sojourns which were limited by the north west monsoon to the period between December and April; (ii) the relative numbers involved in the contact situation. ('...in most encounters, the Macassans outnumbered the relatively small numbers of Aborigines in any one neighbourhood...'(285)); it was usual for up to 150 Macassans to be in a location at the one time, where the Aboriginal population of men, women and children would be no more than 100 (ibid);
(iii) Aborigines and Macassans were exploiting different economic resources, and their specialisations were such that each could exploit his resources without disruption to the economic activities of the other (ibid: 284-90). The net result of these factors was that neither group had the opportunity or necessity to eliminate or dominate the other. They explain why the technically more sophisticated Macassans had only a superficial, though extensive, influence on Aboriginal life. The elements of Macassan

culture incorporated were all of a type which could be utilised within the existing economic, cultural and aesthetic modes of Aboriginal society (ibid: 304-316).

There is no reliable evidence on the extent of Macassan influence beyond the coastal fringe. Some material goods such as iron and glass would most probably have been traded inland. Basedow (1925: 153-4) records an alcoholic beverage being made by Roper groups, but his description suggests that the drink is of indigenous origin. Whatever the extent of Macassan influence was, either on the coast or in the interior, it did not alter the economic, political or ideological structure of Aboriginal society.

The first significant European intrusion into the interior of the Roper region was the Leichhardt expedition which traversed the area late in 1844. (Leichhardt 1847). This expedition and two later ones by Gregory in 1856 and Stuart in 1862 paved the way for pastoral settlement on the Roper and areas to the west, and found the route to reach them. This route, the Queensland (or Gulf) stock route, went from Bourktown in Queensland's gulf country around the eastern side of the gulf through Borroloola on

the MacArthur river to Leichhardt's Bar on the Roper, and then along the course of the Roper to the Roper/Victoria divide (see Map 2). Until the 1870's the traffic along the route was small and transient, and of little more than nuisance value to the local inhabitants. After 1870, however, Europeans moved into and through the area in sufficient numbers to disrupt local society. This was the time when the Roper was a frontier line. The confrontation between the Roper peoples and the Europeans left the Aboriginal communities broken, their population decimated and their land expropriated.

There were three elements in the boom of European settlement which occurred between 1870 and 1890: the establishment of permanent communications through the successful development of the port of Darwin (founded in 1869) and the building of the overland telegraph line; the push of pastoralists in search of new grazing land; and the gold rushes. The construction of the overland telegraph line caused the first large scale influx of Europeans into the Roper. The river became a major supply route for the building of the line in late 1871 (Bauer 1964: 73-4; Hill 1951: 112). For the next year there were about 400 men working on the line and manning the depots from

Leichhardt's Bar. Supply trains of up to 150 pack animals traversed the route from the Bar to the telegraph, and ships ranging in size from cutters to the ocean going steamer 'Omeo' plied the river as far as the Bar (Bauer op.cit: 73-7; Hill op.cit: 112-13, 115-16).

Neither writer records the contacts between the locals and the construction gangs, and we may assume there was little interaction either friendly or hostile between them, on the grounds that there was little time for such interaction (the various gangs and depots were isolated from each other, and therefore other peoples in the vicinity, for four of the twelve months they were in the area), and because the Europeans were fully occupied with the single task of building the telegraph and did not seek to penetrate the surrounding countryside. However, the locals could not have failed to be impressed by the unprecedented numbers of men and equipment, and this knowledge of the potential scale of European enterprise may have influenced the hostility of local reaction when the intruders began to encroach on their livelihood.

Within a few years of the completion of the Telegraph and the departure of the construction parties, the Roper witnessed the start of a regular and increasing movement

of Europeans in search of land, gold and adventure. The movement came mainly by way of the Gulf stock route, though the river and the telegraph line were subsidiary points of entry. The first cattle were pushed through from the gulf in 1872 on their way to Darwin (Duncan 1967: 38; Hill op.cit.: 166). There were other drives during the 70's some of which met with disaster on the track but none tried to settle on the Roper. The biggest movement of the 70's was sparked by the Yam Creek gold rush of 1873. The reports of this early period indicate that the relation with the local people was anything but harmonious (Hill ibid). Already by 1880 the Roper was notorious for Aboriginal raids on parties of Europeans and their stock, and for European retaliation (Bauer: op.cit. 139; Durack 1959: 256-7). Traffic on the route to this time was barely a trickle. It was the decade of the 1880's that brought the sustained influx of Europeans and their cattle into the Roper area. Most of the travellers were still passing through. The miners were aiming for Pine Creek, and after 1885, Hall's Creek. The land seeking cattle man were mainly heading for the Ord and Victoria Rivers. However, for some of the pastoralists the Roper was their goal. Elsey station was the first, established in 1882. This was soon followed

by Red Lilly Lagoon in 1883 and Valley of Springs and Hodgson Downs in 1884 (Duncan op.cit: 161; Hill op.cit: 178). During the years 1882 and 1885, 64,000 cattle were exported from Queensland to the Northern Territory, and the bulk of these entered the Territory by the Gulf route (Duncan op.cit. 38-9).

The fullest account of settlement on the Roper during the 80's concerns John Costello's Valley of Springs property. By 1887 the Costello holdings stretched from the Limmen River in the south to Lake Allen 50 miles north of the Roper, and carried about 8000 head of cattle (Costello 1930: 158; Duncan op.cit: 161). The account of these Roper properties, written by John Costello's son, emphasises the difficulty of settlement: the climate, recurrent fever and cattle tick; crocodiles and passing whites of no account; but worst, the blacks. Costello reports numerous instances of attacks by Aborgines on both cattle and men, including the killing of three Europeans, (op.cit: 127-8, 163-8, 172-9) but only one attempted reprisal, and that one unsuccessful (ibid: 168). Costello was finally defeated by the hostile environment and lack of markets, and abandoned the Roper by the mid 90's (op.cit: 190-2; Duncan op.cit: 46). Most of the other

Roper stations fared no better and by the turn of the century only Elsey and Hodgson Downs were still occupied (Bauer op.cit: 150).

The more romantic writers on this period, such as Costello Durack and Hill, regard Aboriginal hostility as the main reason for the failure of pastoral enterprise. The tenor of their accounts, which are full of stories (of varying reliability) of successful Aboriginal attacks on both men and stock, leaves the impression of a Roper people who were victorious and thriving. They maintained their independence, forced the pastoralists to withdraw, and gained an important new food supply. Searcy's contemporary account of the Roper at this time leaves a decidedly different impression. Alfred Searcy was a customs officer who made three trips to the Roper in 1885, 1886 and 1888. His book 'In Australian Tropics' contains accounts of these three voyages (1909: chs. 6, 7 and 8). His observations on European/Aboriginal relations are worth quoting at length.

> "There were many murders by the niggers which the police had to look into... There can be no doubt that many of the murders were caused by the white men taking away the black women from their tribes. Nearly all the drovers, cattlemen, and station hands had their 'black

> boys' (gins)... It is the taking away of the women that has been the cause of so many white men having been rubbed out by the niggers. These women are invaluable to the white cattlemen, for, besides the companionships, they become splendid horsewomen, and good with the cattle... There can be no doubt that at times many of the blacks have been put away by some brutes just for the fun of killing, by others for revenge, but mostly the niggers brought the trouble on themselves by interfering with the cattle. In many of these cases no report ever reached the police. In one instance, so a man told me who was concerned in it, a whole nigger camp was wiped out. Some years ago I received a letter from a man who was attacked by the niggers in the Gulf country, and received some eleven spear wounds. He recovered. In his letter he said, 'I now shoot at sight; killed to date thirty-seven' ... Not for a moment would I defend those who wantonly shoot down the blacks, but it must always be remembered that at times stern measures, and even shooting, are necessary". (p. 173-4).

Searcy's picture is not one of successful warriors ranging freely over their domain, but rather of a society staging a last ditch defence. To Searcy's informants the Aborigine was a pest, an attitude which Rowley suggests was fairly general (Rowley 1970: 217). Reprisal raids on Aborigines were largely ad hoc affairs organised on the spot (Costello op.cit: Searcy ibid, and 154) and rarely reported. Systematic hunting of Aborigines was beyond the resources of most of the settlers.

The only systematic attempt at extermination of which I have evidence relates to the activities of the London based Eastern and African Cold Storage Company, which began development of a pastoral project in Eastern Arnhem Land in 1903. The lease covered an area of 19,250 square miles around the Goyder river and Blue Mud Bay. To stock this property the Elsey and Hodgson Downs were closed down and their cattle moved to the new holding, by way of the Roper and the coastal plains of eastern Arnhem Land. Protection of the herds was in the hands of "2 gangs of 10 to 14 blacks headed by a white man or half caste"., whose job it was to "hunt and shoot the wild blacks on sight" (Bauer 1964: 157). The personnel for these gangs would have been drawn from areas other than those they were to operate in. Queensland was an important recruiting ground for this purpose, but it is likely that some of the hunters were drawn from the 'tame station blacks' of the Elsey and Hodgson Downs. The cattle project failed and was abandoned after 1905, but from 1903 to 1905 the gangs roamed and hunted between the Roper and the Arafura sea. By the end of this period the Roper had been the scene of continuous conflict for over a quarter of a century. The Europeans had all but deserted the area and the Aborigines were uprooted, harassed and decimated.

It was an opportune time for the arrival of the Church Missionary Society, which established a Mission Station on the Roper in 1908, for the purpose of altering both the material and spiritual conditions of the Aborigines' life (Bayton 1965: 104-5; Cole 1968: 5; White 1918). During the first year of its operation about 200 Aborigines had gathered at the station. This rapid acceptance surprised the missionaries, who appear to have been unaware of the circumstances preceding their arrival (Cole, ibid: 6). As conditions improved on the Roper and cattle stations were reoccupied, much of this early population moved away from the Mission. In 1921 the Mission had a total inmate population of "94 half-castes and full-blood Aborigines" (Ibid: 10). From the earliest days the Mission was conceived as a total institution rather than a depot with extension services. Most of the early inmates were children and many of these were half-castes taken from their families and placed under the guardianship of the Mission (Cole 1972: 38-9, 54-64). The Mission exercised complete control over the half-castes who were placed in a dormitory situation. Control of the local children was less complete, because their families periodically left the Settlement taking their children with them.

Despite the concentration of the half-castes, a number of younger Aborigines became permanently associated with the Mission at a quite early date. Abraham, Gideon, Norman, Yardley, Amy and Beatrice became permanent residents during the first ten years of the Mission. By 1924 the full-bloods were a third of the adult Aboriginal population of 66 (Cole 1968: 11). During this year the half-caste population was removed to the newly established Mission at Groote Eylandt, and the Roper missionaries directed their full attention to the indigenous population of the Roper region. This did not lead to any substantial change in the Mission's activities. They did attempt to bring their work to independent Aboriginal groups at the mouth of the Roper River and at Rose River (Cole 1972: 36; Macknight 1969: 186-203), but because of financial difficulties, staff shortages, and Aboriginal resistance, their activity was concentrated mainly on the people already at the Mission (Cole 1968: 7-17; Rowley 1970:252). The children and young adults who came to the Mission in its first years were the backbone of its continuation. They were the permanent residents, the labour force,the congregation, and the parents of a generation who were raised in Mission dormitories and educated by missionaries.

The history of the Mission is a story of recurrent crises. In 1916 and again in 1940 the Mission was washed away by floods. There was major conflict between the missionaries and the Aborigines from 1910 to 1912 and again in 1932 (Cole op.cit: 7, 12), and tension among the missionaries reached serious proportions in 1912 and from 1928 to 1933 (ibid). Cole does not elaborate on the causes or course of the early crises, but it resulted in a number of staff changes and more importantly, a considerable decline in the number of Aborigines at the Mission. The later crisis period corresponds with the onset of the depression and generally unsettled conditions in Australia as a whole. It also covers a period of discussion about policy towards Aborigines of which two important landmarks are the Bleakley report (Rowley op.cit: 285-287) and the declaration of the Arnhem Land Reserve in 1931. There was a third set of circumstances which occurred at this time in close proximity to the Roper region. This was the series of killings in eastern Arnhem Land which culminated in the death of constable McColl and the sensational trials of five Aborigines which followed (Berndt and Berndt 1954: 137ff, Hall 1962, Rowley op.cit: 289-97; Worsley 1954: 367-70). Roper was on the periphery of the Arnhem Land trouble area which was

centred on Blue Mud Bay, but it was involved through supplying most of the trackers for the police punitive expeditions in 1932 (Hall 1970:87) and 1933 (Hall 1962:32-3), through its relatedness to the peoples of that area, and through the Mission's direct involvement in the apprehension of the defendants (Dyer ND.).

The content of the Roper crises was friction among the missionaries, between them and the Mission's southern headquarters, and between them and the adult Aborigines on the Mission (Cole op.cit. 11 & 17; Smith 1935 & 1936). The rethinking of Mission administration policy was stimulated by Government criticism of conditions on the Roper settlement and a general call from the urban south for the extension of European protection to the indigines of Arnhem Land, and made necessary by financial and staff shortage. The Roper Mission was near collapse. The staff were tense and often incapacitated through illness. The gardens were untended and the cattle widely dispersed, and there was food for only the children attending school. In this situation the adult Aborigines withdrew from the Mission. A new superintendent

sent to rectify the situation only intensified the discord by coming into conflict with one of the Aboriginal leaders, a man whom an earlier missionary had regarded as the most dominant personality on the Settlement (Joynt 1918:21; Cole op.cit.; Smith 1935:61, 1936:63-7, 75-83, 175-8). The discord continued to the point where the Aborigine, supported by a half-caste mission helper and a trader and a local squatter made a sworn complaint against the superintendent (S.M.H. April 29, 1937; Argus April 29, 1933; Smith 1936:191).

The CMS authorities considered abandoning Roper at this time. A first step in this direction was the administrative separation of Roper and Groote Eylandt Missions. The proclamation of the Arnhem Land reserve in 1931 delayed the final step. In 1933 the Government, prompted by an adverse report on the Mission's health conditions and the complaint made against the superintendent, set up a board of enquiry into the conduct of Roper Mission (N.T. Annual Report 1933:10). The board's report resulted in the Government withdrawing its subsidy, and the CMS recalling the

the superintendent (Cole op. cit.:12 & 17; S.M.H. September 6, 1933:13; Smith op.cit.:236-7, 244, 248-9). Again the future of Roper Mission came into question, and again external events intervened. After the killing of constable McColl the region was in a state of panic and there were fears of an armed attack on both Groote and Roper Missions (Cole op.cit.: 17; Hall 1962:104-6; Worsley op. cit.: 269). Under pressure the Government accepted a CMS offer to send a peace expedition into the area, and this expedition was successful in bringing the suspects to Darwin for trial (Rowley op.cit.:291). The CMS then offered to move their Roper Mission to north east Arnhem Land, in the middle of the unsettled area. The Government declined this offer, and the CMS, having made a strong stand for continued mission activity in the Arnhem Land area, decided to continue with the Roper Mission.

Conditions at Roper improved during the years 1934-40. This was facilitated by the cessation of institutionalisation of half-castes on Groote Eylandt Mission in 1934, and the return of some to Roper as mission

helpers (Cole op.cit,:18). The increased staff enabled the Mission to proceed with the institutionalisation of the Mission Aborigines (cf Lockwood 1962:ch 5). Even so there was little addition to the Mission population which in December 1939 was 75 Aborigines and 18 half-castes (Cole op.cit). The Mission was destroyed by flood in January 1940, and again the question of continuation was raised. A CMS delegation decided the work should continue and agreed on the selection of Ngukurr (a ridge about 4 miles up river from the old Mission) as the new site.

The CMS is a puritan evangelical body within the Church of England. There are two basic elements in its policy: to pursue conversion to Christianity and to radically alter life styles in the direction of puritan Anglo-Saxon norms. On Roper Mission this policy was pursued by controlling the greatest possible part of the inmates' lives. Children were separated from their parents, placed in sex-segregated, missionary supervised dormitories, and educated in English by missionary teachers. Infant betrothal, polygyny and ritual were discouraged, and acceptance into the congregation was dependent on abandonment

of these practices. Industriousness and cleanliness were two values upon which the Mission placed great emphasis (Cole op.cit.:5-6, 18-19, 22-23; Smith 1936:44-49).

In terms of its policy aims the Mission's most successful period was from the late 1930's to the late 1950's. Prior to this, it lacked the stability and the resources to adequately support its aims. By the late 1930's, a small number of middle aged adults, converts to Christianity, had been associated with the Mission for 30 years. There were a growing number of young adults (and by the mid 50's middle aged adults as well) who had been born and socialised at the Mission. The population was relatively stable as attested by the fact that two-thirds of the 1970 population of 350 were either on the Mission in 1939 or were their descendants. The Northern Territory Aboriginal Ordinances of 1933 and 1937 tightened control on the movement and employment of Aborigines and provided the Mission with greater authority to supervise their lives, (Rowley op.cit.:280, 285). The Aborigines were vulnerable for though they had not lost the techniques of traditional subsistence

they were unable to operate a continuing social organisation on that basis.

Even at this high water period of the Mission, it was unable to fully dominate the lives of the inmates. They were, for example, never able to suppress traditional religious beliefs and practices. Cult activity continued throughout this period with mission Aborigines participating, and in some cases holding positions of prominence. Rites in which mission Aborigines were the key personnel were held in the vicinity of the Mission, though not within its precincts.

The administrative changes of the late 50's and early 60's were largely stimulated by events occurring outside of Roper. During the 1930's there was increasing talk of assimilation, that is to say, the preparation of Aborigines for full membership of the wider Australian society, and for the authorities to take cognizance of the Aborigines' traditional social structure in doing so. The first of these concerns was given official backing in 1939 when the then Minister, the Hon. J. McEwen, issued a new

statement of Government policy (ibid:328-9). The intervention of the 2nd World War delayed its implementation and it was not until 1952 that the Hon. Paul Hasluck declared assimilation as official policy. The concern for Aboriginal traditions was largely ignored by the Government, but it did receive some belated mission support. This was due largely to the church connections of its most influential proponent, Professor Elkin, who in two articles, published in 1934 (1934a, 1934B) advocated preserving the traditional Aboriginal authority structure as the most productive way of facilitating change. His concern was impressed on the CMS at a conference of missions he convened in 1947 (Cole op.cit.:22). At Roper Mission the most visible change of attitude in this area was in relation to the performance of religious cults. This came in 1959 when the Mission set aside an area for this purpose, and encouraged the performance of cults as a means of maintaining discipline.

The war years themselves provided a catalyst for change. The army, in the Northern Territory, employed large numbers of Aborigines, and many Roper people were among these. The conditions in the army work

camps were both more favourable and more relaxed than on the Mission (Rowley op.cit.:332-336). The raised expectations of this experience were not realised in the restrictive enviroment of the Mission, and this led to an exodus of some skilled and articulate men.

The 1960's were years of accelerating change for the Aborigines of the Northern Territory. At Roper Mission the Aborigines were granted representation on the Station Council in 1962. By this time they were receiving cash wages for employment and had a store to spend it in. Following the Northern Territory Social Welfare ordinance of 1964 a number of legal impediments on Aborigines were removed, and the Mission dismantled part of its restrictive framework. Aborigines gained the rights to vote and consume alcohol.

The level of wages was still controlled by the Wards Employment Ordinance. The reserves and Settlement remained in the control of the Government (and also mission authorities in the case of mission Settlements) and were governed by special legislation. The autocratic

control at Roper was relaxed by the abandonment of the Mission court (see below, ch. 5). Neither the court nor many of the offences it tried had any standing in Australian law. The Mission no longer had the right to expel from the Settlement Aborigines whom it considered undesirable. The Settlement kitchen and communal dining facilities were closed. The workers were paid a subsistence wage and social service payments were made direct to the recipients.

The extra wages and the loss of the social service monies put severe financial strain on the Mission, which decided to end its secular control and hand Roper Mission over to the Australian Government (Cole op.cit.:26). The transfer occurred, after lengthy negotiations (see below ch.7), in October 1968. The Roper River Mission ceased to exist and the Settlement became the Government institution of Ngukurr.

Ngukurr Settlement: The Structure of Domination in 1970-71

Ngukurr Settlement is a unit of local administration, and the Aborigines are, in the Government's view, residents of the Settlement. The Government does not

recognise the Village as an autonomous body. The Settlement administration is not responsible to the population it administers, but to its employer the Northern Territory Welfare Branch. This has two important consequences for the organisation of the Settlement. The authority and responsibility for internal administrative decisions lies, in the last resort, with the Government. Policy decisions, major administrative questions and staffing are effected by the public servants or politicians who are not in close regular contact with the Settlement. Secondly, the population is divided into two categories, staff and Village, in which the first has a monopoly of the positions of authority within the Settlement.

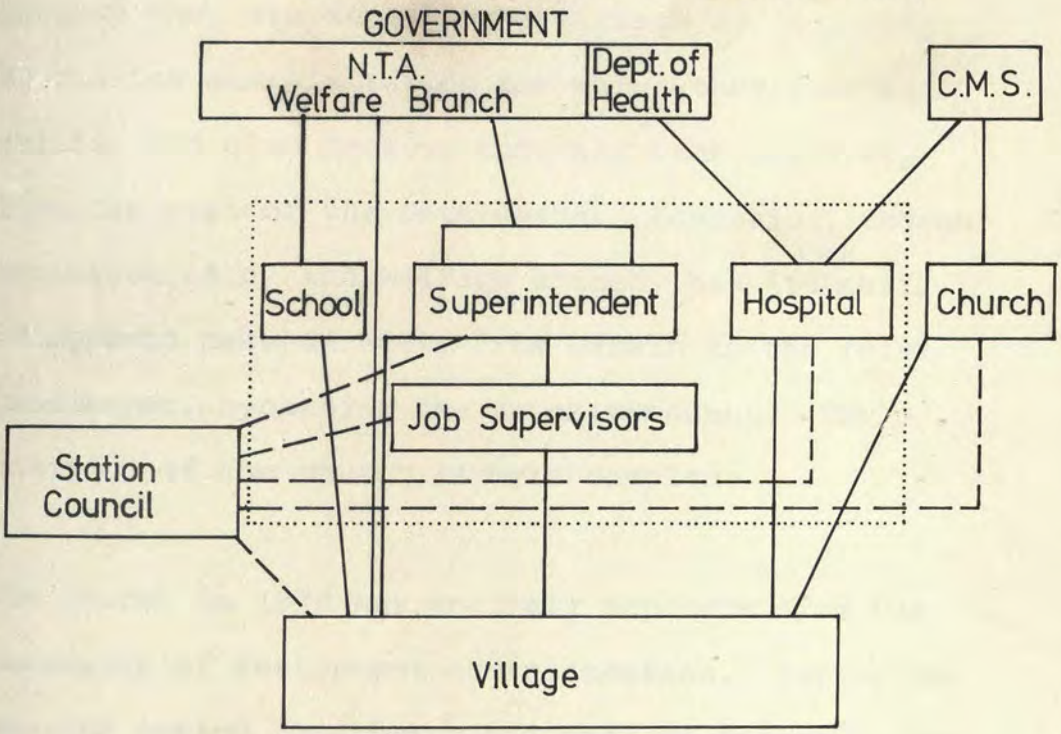
The authority positions are pivots of the structures in the Settlement which are primarily geared to the organisation and sustenance of the Village. These structures dominate the Village to the extent that they control resources to which the Village must have access for its maintenance.

The land is crown land. The capital improvements and productive capacity of the land are the property of the Government. The means of subsistence, which are largely derived from the receipt of social services and the sale of labour, are controlled by the Government. The support institutions of health, training and indoctrination (hospital, school and church) are defined and controlled by agencies alien to the Village.

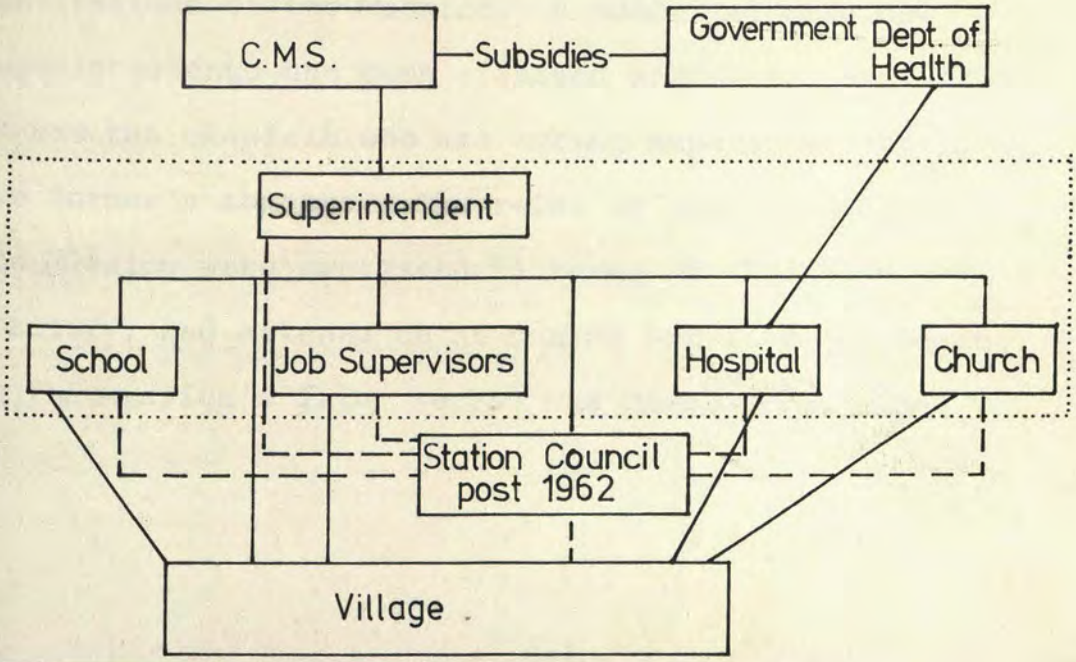
The Settlement has four main functional divisions; general administration, education, medical care and the church, (see diagram I). The first two are administered by the Government through the Northern Territory Welfare Branch and locally based subordinates. The medical service is also controlled by the Government, in this case the Commonwealth Department of Health, but its local representatives are CMS missionary sisters not public servants. The administration of the church is wholly outside the Government framework. General administration is the main area of relevance to the politics of Ngukurr. Education and medical care are largely ignored as objects of competition

DIAGRAM I NGUKURR ADMINISTRATIVE STRUCTURES

GOVERNMENT ADMINISTRATION—1970



MISSION ADMINISTRATION — EARLY 1960'S



because they are seen by the Village as requiring specialist administration for which they lack the skills, and also because they are run separately from the rest of the Settlement. Education, though administered by the Welfare Branch, has its chain of command pass directly from Darwin to the local headmaster, bypassing the superintendent. The position of the church is more complex.

The church in 1970 was entirely separate from the framework of Settlement administration. During the mission period the church had been an integral part of the authority structure of the Settlement, and gaining adherents to the church was the principal rationale for the Mission's existence. One body, the CMS controlled both the secular and religious institutions of the Mission. A number of Mission superintendents had been ordained ministers, and often it was the chaplain who was acting superintendent in the former's absence. The rules of good conduct on the Mission were expressed in terms of christian morality, and attendance at church services (at least in the Mission's later years) was compulsory. The

close connection between church and secular administration is reflected in the later mission period by the overlap in Aboriginal membership of both church and Station Councils. Of nineteen Aborigines who were members of Station Council during the last two years of mission administration, ten were also members of the church council in the same period. Of seventeen Aboriginal members of the Station Council during 1970 and 1971, two were also members of the church council in this period, although only one kept up regular attendance at church services.

The requirements for Villagers holding positions of liason between Settlement and Village have altered since the Government takeover to the extent that non-participation in church services and breaches of church morality are no longer criteria for suspension or disqualification from office. However, one Village notable still derives part of his prominence from his position in the church. This man holds the position of lay preacher and acts as liason between the church and the Village.

The superintendent is the Government's local representative. He is charged with the day to day running of the Settlement. He is the sole authority of local government, manages the local economy, and is the social welfare agent. He acts as mediator in relations between the staff and Village, and occasionally is called on by villagers to arbitrate disputes. The superintendent is assisted with management of the labour force by specialist job supervisors. Though he is not responsible to any local body, the superintendent has access to a consultative committee (known as the Station Council) which may discuss and make suggestions on matters within his area of responsibility.

The job supervisors are the superintendent's subordinates. These men occupy specialist roles such as mechanic, carpenter, cattle project manager, and hygiene supervisor. Their principal function is to carry out their speciality and supervise the work force under their control, and secondarily to assist the superintendent in maintaining the physical running of the Settlement outside of regular working hours.

It is the superintendent who is responsible for the maintenance of the Settlement, and who must find solutions for problems ranging from a leaky tap to failure of the water supply. He is called on by the villagers to enforce good conduct by both Village and staff. They bring him complaints about adolescent delinquency, excessive gambling (often defined as such by a loser), village fights, marital disputes, financial hardship, high shop prices, staff misconduct, general hygiene, and infestations of cockroaches. Many of these problems are perennial, and insoluble within the Settlement framework, and advice and discussion of them is often referred to the Station Council.

The superintendent is the regular channel of communication between the Government and the Village. He passes on information about the regular operation of the Settlement, and also proposals for minor changes in policy and administration. Similarly requests from the people for such things as staff changes or additional staff, and replacement or additional equipment, are directed to the Government through the

superintendent. However, he does not monopolise contact between the Government and the Village. Important policy or administrative changes, especially if these result in some rearrangement of the Settlement structure, and major new or additional resources, are often communicated directly by a representative from the Darwin head office of the Welfare Branch, who visits Ngukurr to inform representatives of the Village. The Village, on its part, often seeks discussion with senior Government officials on matters which it regards as important. The Ngukurr strike in March 1970 (see below chapter 7) resulted, in part, from unsatisfactory Government responses to Village demands, and was preceded by the sending of a Village delegation to Darwin for discussions. Late in 1970 the superintendent opposed a group of village men who wished to build a recreation hall, they approached a senior Welfare Branch officer, who approved the project.

Most contact between staff and village people takes place in the work situation. This is invariably a relationship of inequality in which the European is

in the superordinate position. None of the sections of the work force has a European subordinate to an Aborigine, though some sections are manned entirely by Aborigines and have Aboriginal foreman. The school is run by European teachers who exercise control over the children and regulate the activities of a few Aboriginal assistants. Two European nursing sisters manage the hospital and direct a staff of Aboriginal nursing aids. The Settlement store which is owned by the residents of Ngukurr, including the staff, has a European manager.

Staff and Village representatives meet regularly as members of the Station Council and the Citizens Club executive committee (the controlling body of the Settlement store). Both these bodies take similar committees in the wider Australian society as models for their organisation (cf Bailey 1965). They have office bearers, agendas, and formal procedures. European staff are more familiar with these procedures and tend to dominate proceedings, even though most committee meetings have an Aboriginal majority.

The spatial arrangement of the Settlement, described in chapter 2, reflects and helps preserve the social distance between staff and Village. Informal social contacts do occur, but they are conscious attempts on the part of individual Europeans to breach the social barrier. The great differences in life style and wealth contaminate these contacts with, at least, the suggestion of patronage, and thus militate against their becoming relations between equals, or being sustained for any length of time. The development of such contacts, and more importantly the growth of a stable co-existence, is made the more difficult by the high turnover of European staff. During the period from the Government takeover in October 1968 to the end of 1971, the Settlement had five superintendents. The school had four headmasters during the same period, the store had four different shop managers, and the church had three chaplains. Some positions also remained unfilled for quite lengthy periods. There was no resident carpenter during the whole of 1971. There were three periods totalling ten months in which there was not a shop manager. There were other

long periods in which there was no mechanic, hygiene supervisor, or cattle project manager. The teacher establishment, the largest section of staff, had a high turnover rate. Only three out of ten teachers who commenced at the beginning of 1970 stayed until the end of the year, and only one remained during 1971.

The difficulty in attracting staff to isolated Settlements has often been expressed by both missions and Government. Ngukurr is one of the more isolated and therefore may be expected to experience greater difficulty in both attracting and replacing staff, than Settlements with easier access to urban areas. I have no data on the situation of Ngukurr relative to other Settlements, except for Bamyili, where the staff situation in the mid 1960's was considerably more stable (Maddock, personal communication). There is another possible reason for the staff instability. This is a widespread reputation (within the Northern Territory) that Ngukurr is a trouble spot. This belief was held by some staff at

Ngukurr as well as many outsiders. One Government official of my acquaintance, on receiving a transfer from Darwin to a Settlement, expressed his relief at not being sent to Ngukurr by saying 'that Roper mob are too damn cheeky'.

CHAPTER 4

THE VILLAGE COMMUNITY

The Development of Common Identity

The population of the Village has no pre-Settlement tradition of political or cultural unity. The majority of the people are natives of the Roper basin. However, this area was traditionally occupied by a number of different cultural and linguistic groups. People from ten major language groups are presently resident at Ngukurr and six of these are indigenous to the Roper basin (see map 4). Representatives of three of the other four have been in the Roper area for at least half a century. They originate from central and eastern Arnhem Land, and moved into the Roper around the turn of the century, a move which was facilitated by the depopulation of the area during the preceding 30 years (see above, ch 3). With the exception of the Balamumu, who are recent immigrants from north east Arnhem Land, the immediate origins of the Village population is within an arc from Rose River through Mainoru, Elsey and Nutwood Downs to Borroloola.

The present Village population did not settle at Ngukurr at the same time. The villagers recognise a distinction between those families who were established prior to 1940 and those that have arrived since. The early settlers were well established at Ngukurr by the late 30's. This group and their descendants are approximately two-thirds of the total Village population. This group as a whole has a virtual monopoly over the conduct of public affairs, and I shall henceforth refer to them as the Village core. They are a core because they share a common socialisation and tend to be more closely related to each other than to other residents or outsiders. The location of the groups from which the core come is spread throughout the basin. They are Mara and Alawa from south of the Roper, Ngalagan from the Roper proper, and Ngandi, Wandarang, and Nunggabuju, who are located east of the Wilton River and north of the Roper. There are variations within these traditional groups in kinship, class organization, and ritual practices, but these have become blurred by long co-residence. (cf. Spencer and Gillen 1904; Spencer 1914; Van der Leeden 1964).

The core is a small number of closely related families who have been associated at Ngukurr for between 40 and 60 years. All these families state their interrelation by reference to

the ties they have with one or more of six men whom they regard as the founders of the Ngukurr community: Peter Abbot, Gideon Gideon, Emerson Emerson, Abraham Abrahams, Yardley Yardley, Norman Normans. The youngest, and only surviving founder, is Abraham, in his mid teens at the time the mission was founded. The oldest, Peter Abbott, would have been in his 30's at that time. These men are all native to the middle and lower Roper basin area: Abraham's traditional country is in the coastal region near Rose River; Gideon and Emerson are from the coastal plains of the Phelp river; Peter Abbott is from the lower reaches of the Wilton river; Yardley is from the Towns river area, and Norman from the middle and lower Hodgson river (see map 5). Norman is of minor importance. His children have on the whole left the settlement and his ritual property has only a minor standing in the Ngukurr scheme. He is included because he is a link between the small Alawa oriented section and the rest of Ngukurr, and because he has been an important personality in relations between Ngukurr and the Balgin ritual cult (see below ch 6 section 3). Yardley and Peter Abbott are also of minor importance as parents of the present community. Their significance rests with the ritual property they controlled and the direction in which they bestowed it. Both men

sponsored the rise of the Abrahams to ritual prominence. Yardley did so directly, by leaving his Gunabibi to one of Abraham's sons, and Abbott by bestowing his only daughter as Abraham's wife. Abbott also influenced the complexion of Ngukurr ritual by adopting as his brother Peterson, a Ngandi immigrant from the upper reaches of the Rose river. The association was established by 1930, and around this time Abbott willed to Peterson and his sons the whole of his ritual estate. These actions though indigenous have consequences for the integration of the new entity of Ngukurr (see below ch 6). The other three founders together with Peterson are the fathers of the bulk of the present population.

The early population of Ngukurr was socially fragmented, and this influenced the direction of its development. The people were not totally estranged from traditional associations, but much of their life styles had to be modified to cope with the new environment. Those that made the Settlement their home accepted certain cultural changes which brought them together, and separated them from other Aborigines who remained in the bush or migrated to the surrounding cattle stations. The most obvious change was the sedentary life under mission patronage. Mission teaching also had some

effect for by the mid 1920's most of the core had been baptised (Cole 1968: 7, 9-11). General European education was also established at an early date.

The prominent men in the formative years of the Settlement came from groups whose traditional ties were both north and south of the Roper River. For some reason many of those whose primary ties were with the Nutwood/Hodgson area withdrew from Ngukurr some time between the mid 1930's and late 1940's (cf. Smith 1936; Cole 1968: 12, 17). Norman was the most prominent of these emigrants. There appear to be two factors relevant to this withdrawal. The first was that their traditional country had established cattle stations at Nutwood and Hodgson Downs around which groups of their kinsmen had settled. This was not true for the other mission people. Their countries were either in Arnhem Land or in areas which were as distant from station homesteads as they were from the Mission Settlement. Perhaps this is sufficient reason, but my informants on this period have discussed ritual politics partially in terms of the rivalry between Norman and Peter Abbott. The rivalry was principally concerned with the control of the Balgin cult, but the reasons for it and its wider implications are unclear. The withdrawal of Norman's group left those whose

primary ties were north of the Roper predominant in the community.

Religious associations and the conduct of ritual were a major integrating force in the development of the Ngukurr community. The acceptance of a specifically Ngukurr ritual configuration did not emerge fully till the end of the 1950's. This outcome is the result of developments proceeding since the Settlement was established, both in the demographic pattern and in social alliances.

Today members of the Ngukurr core claim ownership of sixteen ritual estates.[1] The ritual estates were owned by patrilineal groups, each of which had (in the ritual context) a senior male. Depopulation in the Roper area resulted in the extinction of a number of estate owning groups. Some estates also became extinct, while others were acquired by the members of related groups. The sixteen estates are owned by fourteen estate groups, most of whom are locally resident patrilines. The three exceptions are the Abrahams, Normans, and O'Keefe groups.

1. The term ritual estate is roughly equivalent to Maddock's 'clan territory' (1972: 28-9). I have avoided the use of the term clan in this context because it presumes a characteristic of the owning group which is not constant in contemporary Ngukurr.

The Abrahams' Catfish estate is owned by the locally resident Abrahams patriline and other members of their clan, who live at Numbulwar. The local Normans patriline shares ownership of the Jabiru estate with fellow clansmen at Hodgson and Nutwood Downs. The local O'Keefe's share ownership of their Lightning estate with fellow clansmen living in the Borroloola area.

Of the sixteen estates nine are owned by groups belonging to Jiridja moiety (see map 5). Five of these are owned by Gujal semi moiety and the other four by Budal semi moiety. Three of the Gujal estates are on two different mythological paths the principal totem of which is Goanna. One path comes down through the Arnhem Land plateau to the Roper, and the main ritual site is on a plain 30 miles north of Ngukurr. The associated estate is owned today by the Peterson patriline. The other path follows the coast from the north, crossing the Rose and Roper rivers, then moving inland along the southern bank of the Roper. The Davies Goanna estate lies to the north of Rose river, and the Gideon Goanna estate is centred on a billabong south of the Roper some 20 miles east of Ngukurr. The other two Gujal estates are on the same Plum totemic path, which runs from west to east north of the Roper. The

Peterson's Hill Plum estate is on the middle reaches of the Wilton river some 50 miles from Ngukurr. The Gideon's Coast Plum estate is on the coastal plain between the Roper and Phelp rivers. The four Budal estates are on different paths. The Emerson White Cockatoo estate is situated on the Roper/Phelp coastal plain. The Morgan Plain Kangaroo estate is located in the immediate vicinity of Ngukurr itself. The Norman's Jabiru estate is centred on a ridge about 50 miles south of Ngukurr, and the O'Keefe Lightning estate is on the coastal plain of the Limmen river (cf. Capell 1960a, 1960b; Elkin 1971).

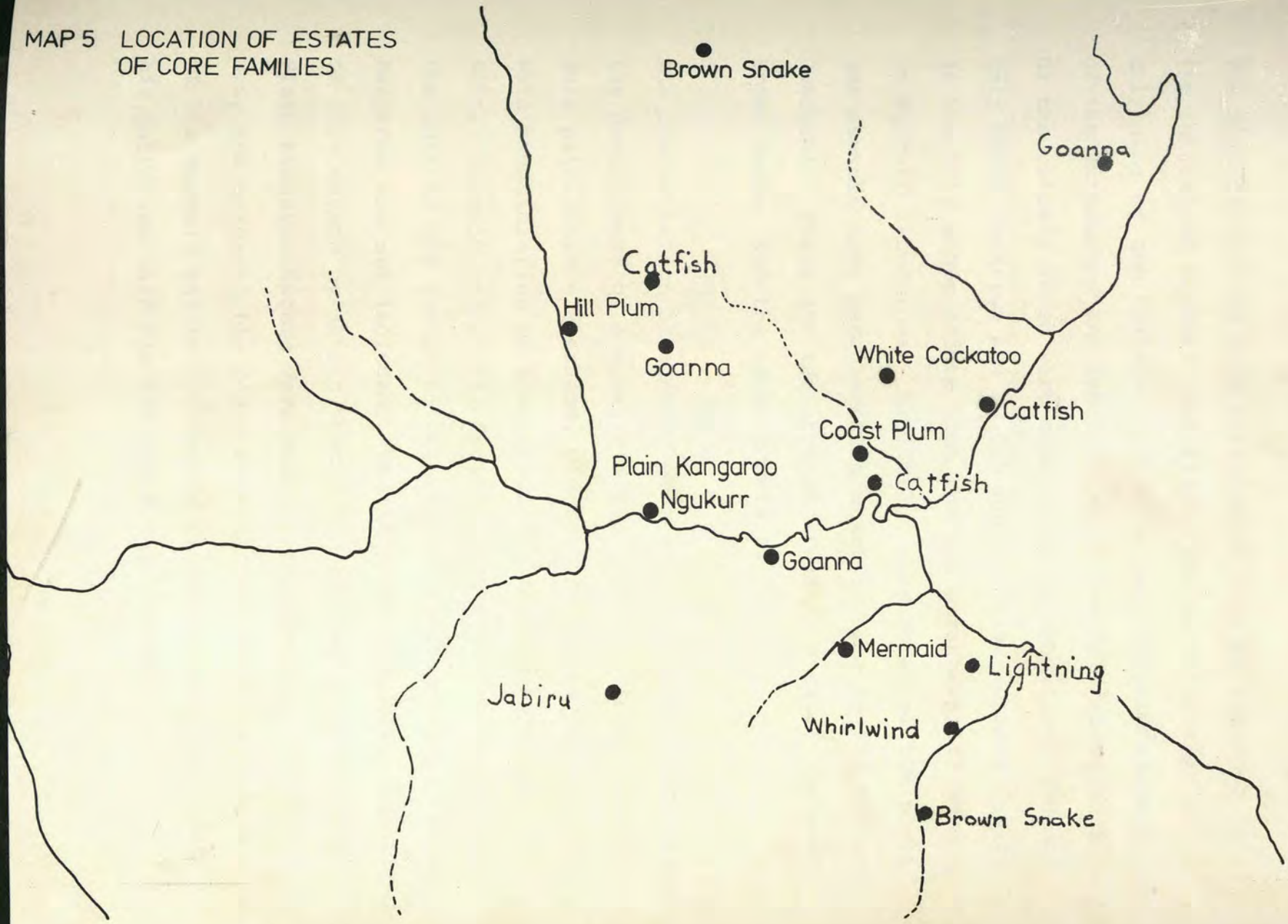
The Dua moiety groups have seven ritual estates. Four of these are associated with Mambali semi moiety and the other three with Murongon semi moiety. Three of the Mambali estates are on the same Catfish totemic path. The Everstone Catfish estate is located on a sandstone ridge 50 miles north of Ngukurr. The Abrahams Catfish estate is a beach near the mouth of the Phelp river, and Jeremiah's is on the southern side of the Roper mouth. The other Mambali estate is on the Towns river south of the Roper. This estate is on the path of one of the main Gunabibi myths, Mermaid. The ownership of this estate has been unclear since the death of its former owner Yardley.

The three Murongon estates are on different paths. The Avon Brown Snake estate is on the Arnhem Land escarpment about 70 miles north of Ngukurr. The Chase Brown Snake estate is on the middle reaches of the Limmen river and Palmer's Whirlwind estate is on the lower reaches of the same river (cf. Capell 1960b).

Two men, Abbott and Gideon, were the custodians of six of the Jiridja estates in the 1930's.[2] Abbott had his own Hill Plum estate on the Wilton river, and had been left the neighbouring Goanna estate by a related group which had died out. He also had custody of his MM's estate, Plain Kangaroo, for its then infant owners. Gideon held his own Coast Plum estate on the Phelp river, and the Goanna estate south of the Roper. The latter he had inherited from a related group who had recently died out. Gideon was also the custodian for his wife's estate, White Cockatoo. This estate had been placed in his custody by his WB's and WBS's.

2. I use the term custodian to specify control over the use of a ritual estate, regardless of whether the custodian is the owner of the estate, or even whether his relationship to the owning group permits him to adopt 'ownership' or 'managerial' prerogatives in its associated ritual (cf. Maddock op.cit.: 36, 38-9).

MAP 5 LOCATION OF ESTATES OF CORE FAMILIES



The significance of this arrangement becomes apparent in the context of Ngukurr cult life. The paraphernalia of only nine of the sixteen estates is used in performances of the Jabuduruwa and Gunabibi which are held at Ngukurr. Of the estates which were controlled by Abbott and Gideon, only White Cockatoo has no Jabuduruwa. The Normans Jabiru is the only other estate that has its paraphernalia used in Ngukurr Jabuduruwa. Similarly, only three of the seven Dua estates have paraphernalia which is used in the Ngukurr Gunabibi. These are the Abrahams Catfish estate, the Avon Brown Snake, and the Mermaid estate.

The concentration of control over ritual property facilitated the development of a Ngukurr community. The three largest core patrilines - Abrahams, Gideon, and Peterson - were the main beneficiaries of this concentration. Abbott had no sons. Shortly before his death, about 1950, he bequeathed the bulk of his estate to Peterson's eldest son Pat. Plain Kangaroo was not included. The Abrahams were given custody of this estate by Abbott, until the growing generation of Plain Kangaroo owners were able to take charge. Yardley too, had prior to his death made the Abrahams custodians of his Mermaid estate. Gideon's property remained within his patriline with his brother Frank as custodian.

Gideon had become the custodian of the White Cockatoo estate because of his marriage to Beatrice Emerson. This was one of the pivotal unions for the development of Ngukurr. Gideon was marrying his classificatory mother in law. This was not simply a breach of classificatory kinship rules, because the two lines were closely linked in ritual, belonged to the same language group, and had their estates in the same country.

Beatrice's father Emerson had six children. The children divided into two separate ritual groups sometime before 1930. Beatrice's marriage may have been a factor in this division. Beatrice and two of her brothers took their father's name and inherited the White Cockatoo estate. The children of the other brothers became known by the name of Morgan and inherited the Plain Kangaroo estate. Beatrice and Gideon had eleven children, all of whom are married. Nine of these were living at Ngukurr in 1970, and seven were married to other Ngukurr core people. The marriage of Rachel Gideon to Pat Peterson was the most important of these unions. The partners were classificatory brother and sister, and shared the same Plum totemic path. This union, like the earlier one between Beatrice and Gideon, reinforced the inward orientation of the Ngukurr core and

facilitated the establishment of a separate Ngukurr ritual complex.

Until the 1950's the cult performances in the middle Roper area were conducted and attended by men from throughout the region. The older Ngukurr men of that time participated but the generation they fathered did not follow suit. During the 1950's there was a six or seven year period when no performances of the Jabuduruwa or Gunabibi were held. When performances resumed in 1959, they were held in the immediate vicinity of Ngukurr Settlement. These ceremonies were controlled by the successors of Abbott, Gideon, and Yardley. The majority of the owners and managers who participated in the post 1959 performances were Ngukurr residents, though some senior men, notably Gideon's brother Frank, were itinerant residents even in 1970. However, the ceremonies were completely oriented toward the Ngukurr community.

The patriline is the most exclusive grouping of the core. Each is identified by the transmission of a European surname in the male line.[3] A possible exception is the Emerson/Morgan

3. These surnames were given to their first holders by the missionaries, who did not take cognizance of traditional grouping. The core have selectively retained names to achieve the desired result. Thus Frank (mission designation) becomes Frank Gideon, and Zachariah becomes Zachariah Normans.

line which has two names. However, they are well on the way to segmenting into two lines. The only corporate existence of the patrilines is in relation to estate ownership. The fourteen patrilines vary in size from one to 20 adult members. Jeremiah is the sole survivor of his line, and at the other extreme are the Gideons with 20 adults and about 30 children.

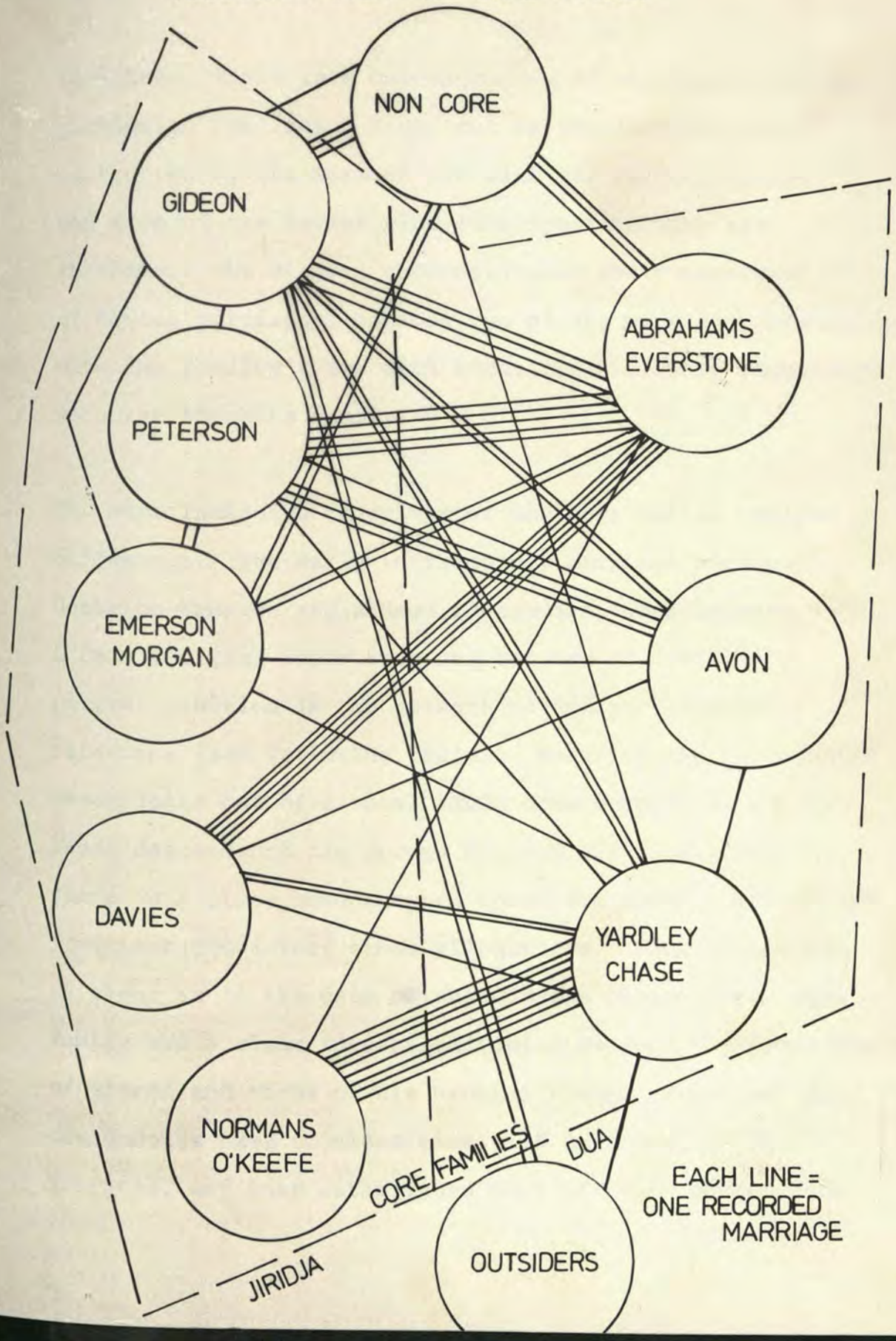
The group which the Ngukurr core identifies as its primary unit is not the patriline, but what I shall call the family. There is considerable overlap between the patriline and the family. Each family is known by the surname of its main patriline. There are eight families, and, excluding affines, only five are single patrilines. These are the Gideons with 20 adult members, the Petersons seventeen, Emersons with fifteen, Avons with eight, and Davies with seven. Two others, the Abrahams with 23 members and the Normans with nine members, consist of a major patriline plus other agnates. The Abrahams family is the Abrahams patriline, the Everstone patriline, plus two other putative agnates. The Normans family is the Normans and O'Keefe patrilines. The one exception to the agnatic composition is the Yardley family which has seventeen adult members.

This family is made up of the Yardley patriline, Yardley's two uterine half brothers, Jeremiah and Palmer, and the Chase patriline which is agnatically related to Palmer. Seven of the eight families are based on those patrilines whose estates are celebrated in the Ngukurr cults. Only the Davies family has no independent ritual position at Ngukurr. Its continued existence as a family is possibly due to the fact that it is ritually dependent on two not one other patriline.

The families are important units for reckoning core marriages. The Village sees a marriage as an affinal link between say an Abrahams and a Davies or a Gideon and an Avon. The pattern of core marriages is shown in diagram two. These marriages cover a period from about 1920 to 1970, and include all the marriages of current core residents, with the exception of those terminated unions in which the ex-spouse (if alive) and progeny are not current residents. There are 59 marriages of which 46 or 78% are intra core. Forty of the 46 marriages are inter moiety, but the marriages within a moiety are significant for wider groupings of the core. This is particularly true for those connecting the Gideon, Peterson and Emerson

DIAGRAM II

MARRIAGE PATTERN OF CORE FAMILIES



families. There is a concentration of marriages between particular families. Eight out of the nine marriages contracted by the Normans are with the Yardley family, and five of the Davies nine marriages are with the Abrahams. The diagram underestimates the concentration of Davies marriages, because two of the marriages contracted with the Yardley's are with individuals closely associated with the Abrahams family.

The more inclusive groupings of the core follow various alignments. The early intra moiety marriage between Beatrice Emerson and Gideon is crucial, both because of Gideon's ritual importance and because of Beatrice's pivotal position in the network of Ngukurr kinship relations (see following table). Beatrice has 63 cognatic descendants out of a total adult core population of 116. These descendants are spread through all eight families. There is a close bond between these descendants which may sometimes cut across other allegiances. This is nowhere as clear as in the case of the Gideons themselves. This family has a clear internal division between the descendants of Gideon and those of his brother Frank. Frank and his descendants have no close ties with Beatrice, or the Emersons, and have established most of their connections

with the Avon and Yardley families. The later marriage between Rachel Gideon and Pat Peterson altered relations between two groups who share the same totemic path. This has further compounded the simple patriline division of the core.

The concentration of marriages between the Normans and Yardley families, and between the Davies and Abrahams families is a regular avenue for developing more inclusive groupings. In the case of the Davies they have largely been absorbed by the larger and longer established Abrahams. The alliance between the Normans and Yardleys is further reinforced by common ethnic identification because these two are the representatives of the southern culture area. They together with the Yardley's uterine kinsman Frank Gideon form a distinct sub group wihin the core which I have called the Mara/Alawa group.

There is a close affiliation between the Abrahams and Peterson lines which is like the Gideon and Emerson association, more the result of one marriage than of a multiplicity of marriages. This is the union between Abraham and Peter Abbott's only child Amy. Amy's importance is due to the fact that both families rely heavily on their connection with Peter Abbott for their positions in the major religious cults.

Patriline membership and kinship

with Beatrice and Amy of core adults

	Total	Cognates of Beatrice	Cognates of Amy	Affines of Beatrice and Amy	No close kinship with either
Normans	9	1	0	3	5
Yardley	17	5	0	5	7
Avon	8	3	0	2	3
Gideon	20	11	0	0	9
Emerson	15	15	0	0	0
Davies	7	5	0	2	0
Peterson	17	8	17	0	0
Abrahams	23	15	15	3	0
Total	116	63	32	15	24

The close association between Davies and Abrahams, and Normans and Yardley, together with the pivotal positions of Beatrice and Amy, gives the core an even tighter network than is at first apparent from the marriage pattern. It reduces the eight patriline based families to an effective four family groups. Indeed it is possible that the Petersons, despite their size and ritual importance, are more properly regarded as part of the Abrahams group, in which case there are a total three family groups. The Gideon group is the

Gideon family (less Frank and his children), the Emerson family (less the Morgan section), plus a small number of kinsmen from the Yardley and Avon families. The Abrahams, Davies and Peterson families are joined in the Abrahams family group. Both these groups are closely interrelated and there is no sharp line of demarcation between them. Within the overall organization of the Village and in every day behaviour the people of these groups occupy roles which are irrelevant to or cut across family group allegiance. It is only in the organization and conduct of the major religious cults that they emerge as important social units. The Mara/Alawa group of Yardley, Normans and Frank's family are relatively more self contained than the other two groups. They do exhibit a tendency to associate more closely in every day life by occupying distinct areas of the Village and cooperating on joint ventures. However, they, like the other groups, are most clearly identified in the context of major cult activity.

The Recent Immigrants

There are two distinct groups of recent settlers. One has migrated directly from Arnhem Land and the other from Roper cattle stations. The migrants from eastern Arnhem Land,

who are predominantly from the Nunggubuju, Riddarngu and Balamumu language groups, have been settling at Ngukurr since the late 40's. Some of these people have come to Ngukurr directly from a traditional environment. This is particularly true of those who came before the establishment of Numbulwar Mission in 1952. More recently they have come via other missions and settlements. They came to Ngukurr for European goods, for security, because they had kinship ties with residents, or to flee from conflict in their own communities.

The cattle station migrants provide a more complex picture. Most have a long history of interaction with the core, in some cases stretching back to the beginning of the mission. The permanent populations of the Roper cattle stations can be divided into three categories. There are those, particularly on Elsey station, who have remained continuously in their traditional country. There are others, like many of the present residents of Hodgson Downs and Nutwood Downs, who resided at Ngukurr for a considerable time during the early part of the century, but then returned to their home country during the 30's and 40's. The third category are Arnhem Landers, particularly from the Riddarngu and Ranjbarngu language groups, who replaced indigenous groups

that had been annihilated during the frontier stage of white settlement. This last category is the predominant group at Roper Valley and Urupunga stations. The movement between Ngukurr and the cattle stations has been continuous, but since the mid 60's there has been a net gain in immigrants by Ngukurr. This recent movement differs from the earlier one because it is affected by changes in the social conditions prevailing in the region, in particular the takeover of Ngukurr by the Government in 1968, and the increasing hostility to Aboriginal residence on the cattle stations resulting from the equal pay decision of 1965 (cf. Rowley 1971; 342-5). These changes have made Ngukurr more, and the cattle stations less attractive. The station migrants do not appear as a separate enclave within Ngukurr. They come from all three categories of station residents and tend to form associations in Ngukurr on the basis of this categorization. However, even those in the second category are not incorporated into the core for they retain their identification with the cattle station community of their origin.

There are differences in the life styles of core villagers and later settlers. The core has a greater degree of European sophistication. They have a greater command of

English and all under the age of 50 use it as their common daily speech.[4] Many of the younger adults and children have little or no knowledge of their traditional languages. The literacy rate and level of educational attainment of the core are high for Northern Territory Aborogines, and is in marked contrast to that of the later settlers.

Literacy among adult male residents of Ngukurr Village

Age:	20 - 30		30 - 40		40 - 50		50 +		
	Lit.	Illit.	Lit.	Illit.	Lit.	Illit.	Lit.	Illit.	Total
Core	29	0	14	0	9	2	5	7	66
Station	3	3	0	2	0	3	0	1	12
Arnhem	3	2	0	3	0	3	0	0	11
Total	35	5	14	5	9	8	5	8	

4. Sharpe (1974) while she distinguished the Ngukurr creole from English, admits to the mutual intelligibility of the two forms of speech (p. 2). As my interest in the language is not technical I find it more convenient to refer to the creole as a dialect of English.

Education level of adult male Village residents

Age:	20-30	30-40	40-50	50 +	Core	Non Core	Total
No school	5(5)	5(5)	8(6)	8(1)	8	18	26
Ungraded or to grade 3	4(3)	7	9	5	22	3	25
grade 4	0	2	0	0	2	0	2
grade 5	4(1)	1	0	0	4	1	5
grade 6	4(1)	3	0	0	6	1	7
post primary	23(1)	1	0	0	23	1	24

(figures in brackets are the number of non-core in total).

The core participate more fully in the public affairs of the Village. I have identified 56 people as active participants in one of the fora of Village politics. Forty of these are core males, six non core males and ten core women. The various Settlement committees had no non core representation early in 1970, one later in the year and one in the following year. The participation in ritual activity is more complex. The conduct of the Jabuduruwa and Gunabibi is controlled by core villagers. During 1970 28 men contributed at meetings held to discuss these cults, and only five of these were recent settlers. There was a similar imbalance in the men's attendance at performances

of the Jabuduruwa held in 1970. The other locally performed rituals, circumcision and death rites, present a different picture. Unlike the major cults the control of performances in these rituals depends on specific kinship connections between celebrant and celebrated, and participation cuts across the core/non core distinction.

Core and non core villagers have different marriage patterns. Core men marry earlier than their non core counterparts, and core women later. The average age of core males who contracted their first marriage since 1960 is 22.6, and for core women 22.5 The range in both cases is eighteen to 31 years. The average age of first marriage for non core women is sixteen years with a range of fourteen to 20 years. Non core men have an average age of first marriage of approximately 25 years with a range from eighteen to about 33 years. The marriages of core women are, in general not arranged by their relatives, but those of non core women are. The marriages of core men and women and non core men and core women are generally contracted by the parties themselves, but those between core men and non core women are not. The residential status of the woman is a crucial factor in determining the type of marriage contracted. Ngukurr has a high overall rate of

wrong marriages; that is marriages contracted between parties who stand in a kinship relation which prohibits marriage. The Village, as a whole, has 25% of illicit marriage for those marrying since 1960. The percentage of illicit marriages is even higher (35%) where both parties are core residents. Both these figures are significantly higher than the figures quoted by Maddock (1972:62) to support his statements regarding the tenacity of traditional marriage systems. However, if at least one of the partners in a marriage is a non core resident the percentage of illicit marriages is only 7%, which is well within the limit that Maddock quotes. At least for core women the traditional marriage exchange system has little place in their choice of spouse.

Arranged and non arranged marriages contracted at

	Ngukurr since 1960		Sample number 39	
	Core F/ Core M	Core F/ non Core M	Non Core F/ Non Core M	Non Core F/ Core M
Arranged	2	1	4	8
Non arranged	19	3	0	2

Licit and illicit marriages contracted at Ngukurr since 1960

Total sample 35. (data on four other marriages was insufficient for this table).

		Both partners core	%	One or both non core	%
Correct	) Licit.	9	45	9	64
Alternate	)	4	20	4	29
Wrong		7	35	1	7

The recent settlers are materially less well off than their core counterparts. Their housing is poorer. All six of the self contained houses are occupied by core families, while the three humpies are the dwellings of recent Arnhem Land migrants. There is also a minor income disparity between the two categories. In June 1970 there were 27 persons receiving wages above the base rate, but only five of these were recent settlers.

Core villagers and recent settlers differ in the means they adopt for the conduct and settlement of interpersonal disputes. I observed six disputes between men, over the rights to women or their alleged adultery. Both principals were recent settlers in three of these cases, while in the

other three the injured party, at least, was a core resident. The course of the first three disputes followed the general pattern described by Hiatt for Maningrida (1965:75ff). There was public remonstration, attempts at mediation by kinsmen, and the display of threatened combat, both by parading armed in a public place and by actually throwing spears. Only in one case was physical injury inflicted on the guilty male, and in this case alone did the woman remain with her paramour.

The fourth case proceeded differently. A wife left her husband because of his continual beatings. The husband, after failing to induce his wife to return, approached the Station Council to restore his conjugal rights. The Council declined to interfere. Later, the wife returned briefly to her husband, but left again after further beatings. The woman's brother then approached the Council requesting that the husband be charged with assault. He added that if nothing was done he would take the matter into his own hands. Nothing was done, and neither the brother nor any other relative took any action against the husband during the following six months. The pattern of the other two core disputes was more direct. Both were provoked by public gossip about the sexual behaviour of

core men's wives. In both cases the husbands reacted to the gossip by having a fist fight with the alleged adulterer.

In a number of public disputes the principal participants were women. The disputes were all associated with the spreading of gossip by one party about the alleged affairs of other women or their children. The injured party would loudly berate her detractors while walking around the village, often brandishing some weapon. Four of these disputes were between core women. The crisis was a physical attack by the injured party on her detractor or one of her detractor's close female relatives. Other women would quickly break up the assault and the episode would end with the mutual shouting of abuse. The men took no part and in fact hurriedly left such scenes before they reached their crisis.

The fifth dispute was between two recent settlers. There was no immediate sequel to the episode in which abuse was hurled. However, a few weeks later, one of the antagonists visited a nearby cattle station for a Maddaiin cult performance. During the visit a close classificatory brother speared her in the leg. Informants later told me that he had attacked her because she had broken the ceremony law and shamed him.

The breach consisted in carrying on a public dispute while the Maddaiin was in progress, but I was unable to discover whether the brother's shame stemmed directly from this or was also because he may have heard his sister's cursing or being cursed (cf. Hiatt 1964).

The recent immigrants do not participate fully in the public life of the Village. This is hardly surprising when we consider that the Village's business is what the Village's leading men define as such,and these men are all senior core residents. This point can be illustrated by the differing attitudes core and non core take to the four major cults of the region. Only two of these, the Jabuduruwa and Gunabibi, are performed at Ngukurr. The local form of these widespread cults is closely identified with the Village, and control of their performance is firmly in the hands of the Village core. The Maddaiin cult is regarded by the core as being Arnhem Land business. Most core men over the age of 40 have been initiated into it, and the ceremony was performed locally till about 1950. During 1970 and 71 two Maddaiin ceremonies were held at nearby centres, one at Urapunga station and the other at Numbulwar. The only Ngukurr residents who participated in the Urapunga Maddaiin were recent settlers. A number

of core men did attend the Numbulwar Maddaiin, but these men had to be guided through the ritual by their Numbulwar relatives, and took no part in decision making. In contrast the Jabuduruwa held at Ngukurr in 1970 had few participants from among the recent immigrants, but two visitors from Roper Valley station were accorded positions of prestige.

The Balgin, which is the fourth major cult, has a more ambiguous relationship to Ngukurr. The area of its performance is currently limited to the cattle stations of the middle and upper Roper, but knowledge of it and respect for it is considerable. The only recent performances of which I have evidence took place at Roper Valley and Elsey stations, in country which is associated with the Ngalagan and Mangarai language groups. A number of Ngukurr residents, both core and recent settlers, have been initiated and have participated in recent years. Leading men of the village (none a Balgin initiate) made moves in the last few years to have the cult brought to Ngukurr. They have put pressure on the local initiates and their own cattle station relatives, but so far their move has been unsuccessful.

Segmentation and Alliance

Generation and sex are important criteria of social differentiation in Aboriginal society. The categories set up by these criteria are dissimilar, because the members of each have different social positions. The power potential of these positions is not equal. Following Poulantzas (1973:13-15) I have characterised the traditional Aboriginal society as one in which the religious structure (ideological level) is politically dominant, and within that structure the mature males are the dominant category. They control the two institutions to which restricted access is socially and politically meaningful. These are the religious cults and the right to bestow women (as wives and mother's in law). Traditional society contains four main categories which are defined by generation and sex. I shall not discuss the category of children, for this is one which in political terms is acted on, but has no independent role of its own. The mature males are men who have completed the process of induction and are in a position to accumulate wives and control the induction of others. The younger men who are undergoing induction are denied access to wives and are dependent on the mature men for completion of their training. These two categories are opposed because one has

a monopoly over the resources to which both seek access. However, they are not exclusive, for the younger men will become older men in time, and will therefore gain access to the valued resources.

The mature males, in traditional society, were not an undifferentiated group, who ruled their society as a clique. The attainment of maturity came between the ages of 30 and 40, and those who had reached this stage were structurally equivalent. Differential status beyond this point was determined by success in the competition with other men in accumulating wives and controlling the conduct of ritual cults.

The traditional dominance hierarchy excluded women. However, women were members of the society, and in so far as politics pervades society as a whole, women were part of it. The religious cults were concerned with the ritualization of men's lives, but women were a necessary part of the support structure in the conduct of the cults (cf. Maddock 1972:155-57). Women were also resources in the men's status game, for it was they who were distributed as wives and mother's in law. Women were not simply objects, and therefore might assume an active role in their own

distribution. They did this both by playing male competitors off against each other and by assuming responsibility in the absence of an appropriately placed male (Hamilton 1970:17-20; Hiatt 1965:84-102).

No group limited its differentiation to age and sex. Family, place of origin, wider kinship relations, and totemic affiliations were all utilised in the segmentation of Aboriginal groups. Unlike age and sex these divisions created, categories which were structurally alike. The internal structure of a clan, language, or totemic group was repeated in each group of its kind. The degree to which these groups were hierarchically arranged depended on the results of their competition to control the valued resources of the society and restrict others access to them.

Present day Ngukurr still has social divisions which are based on the traditional organisation of Aboriginal society. The relevance of these divisions is restricted to the conduct of religious cults. The basic division is between the Jiridja Gideons and the Dua moiety Abrahams. These two families have different positions because of their moiety placement. However, both have primary rights in the Plum totemic path. The Gideons are the owners of

Coast Plum and the Abrahams are the senior managers of Hill Plum. The Abrahams also have primary ownership rights in the Catfish Gunabibi but the Gideons, because fo their history of intra moiety marriage, have only minor rights in the Gunabibi, their main managerial rights being through Gideon's mother to the Whirlwind path. The division is politically manifest in the different interests each has in the Plum path. The Peterson family is aligned with the Abrahams on this criterion, because both derive their rights from Abbott. The Mara/Alawa group form a third division with primary rights in countries outside the Ngukurr area.

Sex and generation distinctions are not only relevant to the traditionally oriented context of ritual activity. Within the Settlement these differences are accentuated by differing perceptions of the relations with European domination and by the contrast between the Settlement situation and traditional sex and age roles. Younger men have easier access to the acquisition of European wealth than their elders because they are more mobile and more familiar with the European environment, through schooling and length of association. Their access to wealth is not dependent on any indigenous organization and they are in

control of the remittance for the product of their labour (that is in so far as the question of control is considered only as one for the Village).

There are four main age and sex categories within the Settlement context: women, young men, middle aged men, and the Old mission mob. The old mission mob are an assortment of both sexes, all over the age of 50. They are a terminal category because they are defined by their particular historical situation, which can not be repeated in the next generation. They have in common a long association with the Settlement dating back to, at least, the 1930's. They are the first generation of the Village core. The members of this category apply this name to themselves to signify their close association with the Mission. All the regular church goers, with the exception of the catechist, belong to this category, but the group also includes others whose allegiance to the church is more tenuous. Those older people who do not have a long association with the Mission are not part of the old mission mob.

The old mission mob base their identity on a shared perception of the Settlement as a paternalistic structure

run by Europeans, which has as its main aim the provision of security. They are largely antagonistic to the notions of an independent Ngukurr Village or an Aboriginal run Settlement. This group, largely brought up on the Mission during a time of strict regimentation, have internalised mission morality. They hold puritanical views on gambling, consumption of alcohol, work discipline, and sexual behaviour. The opposition to gambling and drinking is very strong, and the old mission mob is an active and consistent lobby against both. They make no attempt to enforce their views, which generally take the form of grumbling about the deterioration of moral standards.

The unity of the old mission mob disappears in areas not concerned with Settlement authority and morality. The group contains both those who have opted out of the traditional religious and alliance structures as well as those who are actively engaged in the first and vainly trying to rekindle the latter. The active traditionalists are not themselves a solidary group, because, in this arena they are absorbed into the family groups and factions of backfella politics.

The old mission mob are rarely in the forefront of Village

discussion. None of them competes for a position as intermediary between the Village and the staff or Government, or for leadership in communal action (outside of the sphere of ritual politics). They are largely a conservative force opposing change. The areas which they are most successful are those where other sections of the Village have equivocal positions. Their most notable public success is opposition to legalised liquor for the Settlement. Toward the end of 1971 a group of influential middle aged and younger men initiated a move, with Government encouragement, to obtain community approval for a licensed club. They gained clear majority support for their proposal at a Village meeting called to discuss the issue, but the opposition though small, was vocal and intense. The Village took no decision but agreed to discuss the matter further at its next meeting. Discussion continued for a few days after the first meeting, but gradually subsided, and the matter was not raised at the following meeting. The old people remained implacably opposed, and as one young man put it to me, "We have to be easy on old people. Better we wait till they've gone."

The women, particularly the core women between the ages of fifteen and 50, have no continuing organization nor formal

leaders. They take no action which would increase either the power of their Village leaders or the Government. They act politically, as a group, only to preserve or increase the range of their own freedom of action. The European hegemony has destroyed the basis of traditional male authority. The loss of the hunting and gathering economy changed the economic relations between the sexes. Both now have independent sources of subsistence (wages, pensions, child endowment) which are largely controlled by the Government. The loss of independence has reduced the ability of men to impose sanctions. European opposition has helped to free women from the restrictions of the marriage exchange system and the necessity to marry at an early age. The cost of this is the acceptance of European domination.

The core women fall into two overlapping categories. There are those, largely under 25 years, either unmarried or separated who are very mobile. They take extended trips to Darwin and tend to look on Ngukurr as a place of retreat. The political activity of this group is directed primarily at protecting their own personal freedom of movement. At the other extreme are the stable married women with children. Their role in the context of male politics is also a largely

protective one, but because they are permanently resident at Ngukurr their political action is more concerned with opposing interference in their daily lives.

Generally women are politically apathetic. They act as a united force only when decisions threaten their independence, either by committing them to a particular line of action or by reducing the range of manoeuvre. Twice during 1970 men decided to move the Village outside the Settlement boundary, and on both occasions the women opposed the move. The reasons they gave were that the conditions of life would be less tolerable because they would be without the amenities of the Settlement, and because the men would have greater independence in directing community activities. The occasion for the first proposed move was a Jabuduruwa ceremony in which few core women were active. A successful move under this circumstance would have put considerable pressure on these women to become active participants. The second move was a tactic of the strike, and in this case the general concern over increased male domination was added to by the fear that the women would lose control of their pension and child endowment cheques to the men and also be required to spend considerable time in gathering bush food.

The threats to women's independence did not only emanate from the Village men. Women are the main subsistence shoppers of the Village, and are acutely aware of shortages of goods and threats to their purchasing power. These threats reached a crisis in the latter part of 1971. Women were in the forefront of action to have shop prices reduced, and when this did not end the crisis, they successfully used their voting strength to have the shop manager dismissed.

The competition for positions of public prestige and influence is the business of men. When women participate in this competition they do so only as supporters. Their choice of support is made on the basis of family allegiance, personal obligation or preference, and they override these considerations only when they perceive a threat to their freedom and security.

The young men are the largest single category of the village. The core/non core distinction has least relevance within this category. Most men under the age of 25 have been raised at Ngukurr, and they share common experiences. They show no significant differences in marriage pattern or general life style. The main difference is the

leadership of the young men. All the prominent younger spokesmen belong to the core families.

The young men have a higher degree of association with white Australian society than the rest of the community. They are fluent in English, and spend a greater proportion of their time outside Ngukurr working in towns, mining centres, and cattle stations (mainly ones without large resident Aboriginal populations). When outside Ngukurr they tend to mix freely (though this applies less to cattle stations) in work and leisure with unmarried Europeans who share their class situation. They were raised at Ngukurr during a period of decreasing authoritarian control, and their increased expectations have made them acutely aware of the social disabilities they suffer through being Aborigines in a white Australia.

These factors give the young men's actions a more dynamic quality than is evident in the rest of the Village. They show a marked propensity to encourage change, and are in the forefront of action aimed at altering relations between the Village and the Settlement. Their actions are geared to achieving social equality with Europeans through reaching economic parity and Village self government. They are not

assimilationists and retain a strong sense of Aboriginal identity which they express by actively supporting and participating in the major religious cults.

The middle aged core men are the most visible group in Ngukurr politics. These men who are roughly between 30 and 50 years old, are the public front of the Village. They predominate in public discussion, act as spokesmen for factional interests, and are the normal intermediaries between the Village, and the Settlement or Government or other outsiders. These men share a common background through being mission raised and educated, and they are the people who have organized and given expression to the concept of a Village community. Within the community the middle aged men do not represent a single interest group. They are a category largely because the Village sees them as the appropriate people to look after its interests. They are appropriate because they are generally married and have children, most of them remain at Ngukurr throughout the year, and they have completed their ritual induction. The prominent middle aged men compete among themselves for the control of Village affairs. They do not monopolise the competition either in the field of ritual or in the field of relations with the Government. A number of older men are

still active competitors in ritual, while in the affairs of the Settlement the leading young men are also seeking to influence policy.

In the following chapters I shall describe the contexts and process of Ngukurr politics. Many of the individuals who participate in the events I describe are identified (by fictitious names), and some knowledge of the main personalities is necessary for following the discussion. To facilitate the identification I am including a number of short descriptions of the main personalities. I have chosen to list the participants by family for the sake of convenience.

Abraham: Born c.1893. He has lived at Ngukurr since the foundation of the mission in 1908. Active in ritual in 1970. Strong supporter of the localisation of the main cults. Supports his second son Albert in Settlement politics.

Adam Abrahams (Beswick): Born c.1922 at old mission. Eldest son of Abraham. Absent from Ngukurr through most

of 1950's and 60's. Returned 1971. Resided most of time in Katherine/Beswick region. Elected to station council and citizens club executive in 1971. Not active in ritual during fieldwork. He supports indigenous control of Settlement affairs, but retention of Settlement framework.

Albert Abrahams: Born c.1924 at old mission. Second son of Abraham. Seaman on coastal shipping in 1950's. Public servant with Northern Territory Administration during mid 1960's. Village leader in early 1960's. Principal organiser of filming of Ngukurr Jabuduruwa in 1965. Returned to reside at Ngukurr in 1968. Member of station council 1969 to 71, and second citizens club executive. Senior cult organiser and strong supporter of localisation of main cults. Ambiguous on indigenous control of Settlement affairs, and supports retention of Settlement framework.

Arnold Abrahams: Born c.1928 at old mission. Third son of Abraham. He has lived at Ngukurr continuously since marriage. Village leader 1963 to 1972, except for short breaks in 1965 and during 1969-70. Organised 1965 Jabudur wa in conjunction with Albert. Member of every station council since 1962, and member of second citizens club executive. Senior cult organiser and main proponent

of localisation of major cults. Opposed to early indigenous control of Settlement and supports retention of Settlement framework.

Alan Abrahams: Born 1937 at old mission. Fifth son of Abraham. Resided most of 1960's in Darwin. Official of North Australia Workers Union in mid 1960's. Resident at Ngukurr in 1969-70 with extended absences. Not active in ritual. Main spokesman for Village with trade unions and urban Aboriginal organisations. Supports indigenous control and deinstitutionalization of Settlement.

Adam Abrahams: Born 1945 at Ngukurr. Eldest son of Albert Abrahams. He has lived at Ngukurr continuously. Village leader 1972-3. Member of station council 1970-1 and first and third citizens club executives. He is being groomed for ritual leadership along with Mark and Terrence. Supports indigenous control but is ambiguous about retention of Settlement framework.

York Abrahams: Born 1948 at Ngukurr. Second son of Albert Abrahams. Lived with father till return to Ngukurr. Member of third citizens club executive. Active but not prominent in ritual. Supports indigenous control and deinstitutionalization of Settlement.

Mark Abrahams: Born 1945 at Ngukurr. Eldest son of Arnold Abrahams. He spent mid 1960's in Darwin, first at high school and then in public service. He is being groomed for ritual leadership. Supports indigenous control but is ambiguous about retention of Settlement framework.

Terrence Abrahams: Born 1943 at Ngukurr. Eldest son of Abraham's brother Neil. Resides at Ngukurr with occasional absences. Member of station council 1970-1 and 1971-2, and president of third citizens club executive. He is being groomed for ritual leadership. Supports indigenous control but is ambiguous about retention of Settlement framework.

Hugh Abrahams: Born 1947 at Ngukurr. Second son of Neil. High school and public service in Darwin in late 1960's. Resides at Ngukurr with occasional absences. Member of second and treasurer of third citizens club executive. Active but not prominent in ritual. Supports indigenous control and deinstitutionalization of the Settlement.

John Angurugu: Born c.1937 at Groote Eylandt mission. Only son in law of Abraham. Resident at Ngukurr since childhood. Church catechist. Member of station council

1969-70, 70-71, and 71-72, and president of first citizens club executive. Not active in ritual. Supports indigenous control, but retention of Settlement framework.

Frank Gideon: Born c.1900. Brother of Gideon. Residence alternates between Ngukurr and surrounding cattle stations. Senior cult organiser and main opponent of localisation of ritual. Opposed to indigenous control of Settlement.

Brian Gideon: Born c.1930 at old mission. Eldest son of Gideon. Resides at Ngukurr with occasional absences. Member of station council 1969-70, and member of third citizens club executive. Prominent in ritual and heir to Frank's position. Supports localization of ritual. Opposed to early indigenous control and supports retention of Settlement framework.

William Gideon: Born c.1932 at old mission. Second son of Gideon. Resides at Ngukurr with extended absences. Village leader 1969-70. Member of station council 1969-70 and 70-71, and member of second citizens club executive. Active in ritual and supports localization of cults. Supports indigenous control and deinstitutionalization of Settlement.

Pat Peterson: Born c.1912. Brother's son of Peter Abbott. Resides at Ngukurr since childhood. Senior cult organiser and supporter of localization of ritual. Not active in Settlement affairs.

Oscar Peterson: Born 1943 at Ngukurr. Eldest son of Pat by second marriage. Resides at Ngukurr with occasional absences. Member of station council 1969-70 and 70-71, and member of first and second citizens club executive. Ritual position complicated by parents wrong marriage. Supports localization of ritual. Supports indigenous control and deinstitutionalization of Settlement.

Winston Peterson: Born c.1938 at old mission. Eldest son of Pat's second brother. Resides at Ngukurr with occasional absences. Village leader for few months in 1965. Member of station council 1969-70 and 70-71. Active in ritual and supports localization of cults. Supports indigenous control but ambiguous on retention of Settlement framework.

John Peterson: Born 1947 at Ngukurr. Eldest son of Pat's youngest brother. Resides at Ngukurr with occasional absences. Only minor activity in ritual Supports indigenous control and deinstitutionalization of Settlement.

Zachariah Norman: Born c.1898. Younger brother of Norman. Resident at Ngukurr since before 1920. Active in Roper Valley Balgin in 1968. Not active ritually in 1970-71. Lay preacher in church. Opposed to indigenous control of Settlement.

Palmer Yardley: Born c.1903. Half brother of Yardley and mother's brother's son of Frank. Residence alternates between Ngukurr and surrounding cattle stations. Senior cult organiser and main opponent of localization of ritual. Opposed to indigenous control of Settlement.

Jeremiah Yardley: Born c.1906. Half brother of Palmer and Yardley, and mother's brother's son of Frank. Resident at Ngukurr continuously since 1930's. Minor activity in cults and opposed to localization. Opposed to indigenous control of Settlement.

Andrew Yardley: Born c.1935 at old mission. Younger son of Yardley. Resident in Katherine region. Returned to Ngukurr for a year during 1969-70. Only minor activity in ritual. Opposed to indigenous control of Settlement.

Herbert Emerson: Born c.1932 at old mission. Senior male of Emerson family. Absent on cattle stations through most of 1950's. Resides at Ngukurr with occasional absences since early 1960's. Not active in ritual. Supports indigenous control and deinstitutionalization.

Bruce Emerson: Born 1938 at old mission. Father's brother's son of Herbert. Resides at Ngukurr with occasional absences. Member of Settlement staff from mid 1970. Member of station council 1970-71. Not active in ritual. Ambiguous on both indigenous control and retention of Settlement framework.

Garry Morgan: Born c.1926 at old mission. Agnate of Emerson's. Resident in Katherine region. Returned to Ngukurr for Jabuduruwa in 1970 and left at end of year. Senior custodian for Plain Kangaroo Jabuduruwa. Not active in Settlement affairs.

Mark Morgan: Born c.1934 at old mission. Father's brother's son of Herbert and Bruce Emerson. Resident in Katherine region with periodic returns to Ngukurr. Resident at Ngukurr 1969 to late 1970. Heir to Plain Kangaroo ritual estate and prominent in ritual. Supports indigenous control and deinstitutionalization.

Paddy Davies: Born c.1936 at old mission. Resides at Ngukurr with extended absences. Village leader for few months in 1967. Member of station council 1970-71. Minor activity in ritual and supports localisation of cults. Supports indigenous control but ambiguous on retention of Settlement framework.

Nat Davies: Born 1942 at Ngukurr. Brother of Paddy. Resides at Ngukurr with occasional absences. Village leader 1973-74. Member of station council 1969-70 and 70-71, and member of second and secretary of third citizens club executive. Active in ritual and supports localization of main cults. Supports indigenous control but ambiguous on retention of Settlement framework.

CHAPTER 5

THE ARENAS OF PUBLIC AFFAIRS

The Settlement Fora

The Aboriginal community operates in two political arenas: the Village and the Settlement. There is no absolute separation of the arenas and manoeuvres in one are used to gain advantage in the other. The Village organises its own regular meetings in which it publicises and debates matters of relevance to the community. The organisation of public affairs also brings villagers and staff together in a number of committees. These committees are designed by the Government or staff on the model of counterparts in white Australian society (cf. Bailey 1965).

There are four such committees in the Settlement: church council, school council, Station Council, and Citizens Club executive committee. The first two have narrowly defined areas of competence which impinge very little on the organisation of the Village. The church council is custodian of the church building and responsible for local fund raising. It holds meetings once a month under the

chairmanship of the chaplain. The Village takes no interest in its proceedings, which are rarely advertised at Village meetings. The council consists of the chaplain plus nine members. Six of the members elected for one year terms by the annual general meeting of the congregation, and three are appointed by the chaplain. At the annual meeting in 1970 there were 22 people present, including four Europeans. There was no ballot for the elected positions, as only six nominations were received. Four of the elected members and all of those appointed by the chaplain were Aborigines. The Aboriginal councillors were all men and had an average age of 56.

The school council is a parents and teachers association whose prime function is raising funds, to supplement the school budget and pay for special projects. The council was first established in April 1970. Prior to that fund raising had been done on an ad hoc basis by one or more of the school teachers. The inaugural meeting was organised by the teaching staff, to publicise their aims and form a committee to carry them out. The committee was not formally constituted but was to consist of all who were interested. The headmaster who was chairman of the meeting conducted affairs on the assumption that those present would offer to

join. All the Europeans present did so volunteer (the entire teaching staff, their wives, and the wife of the area superintendent), and fifteen of approximately 30 Aborigines present also volunteered. Two poorly attended meeting were held during the following five months, and the council became defunct in 1971. The organisation of raising funds and directing its expenditure was carried out throughout by a nucleus of school teachers.

The Station Council and the Citizens Club executive committee both have an important place in the organisation of Ngukurr politics. The Station Council was founded by the CMS in 1962 to act as a consultative body for the running and development of the Settlement (Cole 1968:26). It was a replacement for an earlier council which had had only staff representation. The Council was organised to have equal representation of staff and Village members. The history of the Council falls into three phases: 1962-4, 1964-8, and since 1968.

During the first phase the Council was primarily a tool for affecting the Mission assimilation policy. The council was to facilitate the social transformation of the Village through the incorporation of Village representatives into

the administration of the Settlement and its moral code, and by having Village councillors identify with the Mission's objectives. These objectives were the development of Ngukurr into a self sufficient christian community. The Council, at this time, had a disciplinary sub-committee which operated as a Settlement court. The court was organised to involve Aborigines in the administration of sanctions for breaches of the Settlement moral code, a set of rules formulated by the Mission to regulate the conduct of the Village population. The cases heard by the court and cited in the Council minutes for the period to mid 1964 relate to offences such as gambling, lack of care for houses, negligence by mothers in taking their babies to hospital feedings, failure to keep dogs tied up, and pre-marital sex. Gambling was by far the most common offence.

The court was established by the Station Council on the 29th October 1962.

"The court must have the superintendent with three Aborigines and one staff in order to meet. (A new) station court to be appointed yearly. (Council) agreed that the sub committee should work on station rules and punishments (for) when they are broken. The court would be responsible for carrying out disciplinary measures approved by the council, and would at all times act under the council." (Station Council minutes 29/10/1962).

The competence of the court was elaborated further at a later meeting.

"a/ It was recognised (by council) that matters requiring disciplinary action fell under three groups:

Village council - Aborigines - matters.
Police business.
Station council business.

Station court is concerned in the third group.

b/ The following points were decided:

1. Gambling to be punished by a fine of 10/- to be paid on demand. Fine to be doubled for second offences.

2. 6/- fine to be paid on demand (double for second offences) by those making excessive noise.

3. Those failing to keep dogs tied up to be fined 6/- payable on demand (doubled for second offence).

4. Houses were to be considered private property and no one is allowed to trespass.

5. After lights out (the Settlement power generator was turned off at 9 p.m. in 1968) lights should be carried by those moving around.

6. Workers are to be encouraged to work a full week Monday to Friday, and to give a week's notice before leaving a job. Those who walk off jobs will forfeit pay.

7. Those who leave without proper notice are to be reminded of their responsibility to pay for the house their family occupies.

8. The station court will meet during the dinner hour of the same day the station council meets.

9. These and any other rules made are to be read out three times in the Village."

(Station Council minutes 28/11/1962).

The court was conducted in an attempt to enforce a restrictive code of thrift (1.), diligence (6.,7.), and private property (2.,3.,4.,7). The court itself and some of its areas of jurisdiction had no validity in Australian law. Its legality rested on the superintendent's power to control 'wards', which he held as a delegated power from the Director of Welfare (Rowley 1971:296-7). The code of conduct was concerned to instil regular habits and develop an acceptance of the work ethic norms of the majority white Australian society.

The court was structured so that much of the burden of responsibility for enforcement would be placed on the Village representatives, who were a majority of its members. The Aborigines were able to minimise this responsibility, in so far as the superintendent was the permanent chairman. The court was not a marked success. It clearly failed to instil the mission code of conduct, for all the delicts within its determination were still much in evidence in 1970. Its operation was not smooth. The court was scheduled to meet monthly, prior to regular council meetings, but there appears to have been some difficulty in holding court sessions. The Station Council minutes make no mention of court proceedings on six

occasions between December 1962 and March 1964. The minutes for 6/3/1963, 3/7/1963 and 18/12/1963 record that no court was held because of lack of a quorum, and on the 8/1/1964 the court was convened immediately after a council meeting, after failure to find a quorum earlier in the day.

The members of the court were chosen by the Station Council. The calibre of the Village representatives was a clear indication of the importance the Mission attached to Village participation. The Aborigines chosen for the court were all senior core men. The members of the first court, chosen at the end of 1962, were the most senior available middle aged men from four of the leading families: Albert Abrahams, Brian Gideon, Percy Normans and Damian Yardley. Altogether, in the eighteen months of the court's existence, it had eight Village members. Six of these were senior men from the leading families (as well as the four already mentioned there was Arnold Abrahams and William Gideon). The other two, Jeremiah Yardley and John Angurugu, were minor associates of the Yardley and Abrahams families respectively, but were closely connected with church administration. Both were outside the age range of the main group of Village spokesmen.

Jeremiah was already in his late 50's when he joined the Council in 1962, and John, the church catechist, was only 27.

The phase of involving the Village in the imposition of authoritarian policy was brought to an end by the Northern Territory Social Welfare Ordinance of 1964 (cf. Rowley 1971:109-10). This legislation, among other things, removed from the Council its punitive powers. The meliorative message of the legislation was interpreted by the Mission as requiring them to actively encourage greater self reliance within the Village (Cole op.cit.: 26; Station Council minutes 18/3/64). One means chosen to implement this policy was the rapid development of a cash economy, resulting in the closure of the communal kitchen, the payment of social service benefits direct to the recipients, an increase in wage levels, and an increase in the number employed. The Mission also increased its reliance on the forum of Station Council for the discussion and decision of Settlement policy, particularly budgeting. The demise of the court and the change in the direction of mission policy significantly reduced the area of direct Settlement interference in the daily life of the Village. There were two other factors which influenced a change in

the character of the Council at this time.

During 1962 and 1963 the composition of the Village membership of Station Council had been changing, so that by the middle of 1964 one man dominated the Village contingent and practically monopolised the liaison between the Settlement and the Village. It came about as follows. The establishment of Station Council had created an indirect channel of communication between the Settlement and the Village in which the Village councillors could act as both intermediaries and buffers. The councillors who could control the representations between the Village and the Settlement would be in a position of considerable influence. However, this influence would be dissipated and largely ineffective if there were too many active intermediaries. There had to be one dominant councillor for the potential of the position of mediation to be realised.

Two of the original nine village councillors were women, and on this ground alone were excluded from active mediation. A third was only 24 years of age and too young to command effective support. Jeremiah lacked a strong Village base and was too old for continuing leadership potential. Of the other five, two (Brian Gideon and Damian Yardley)

showed no interest in accepting the position. Only three men (Albert and Arnold Abrahams, and Percy Normans) were well enough placed in the Village and active enough in Council to compete for the position of intermediary. Albert and Percy were the most prominent in the early months of the Council. Both, but not Arnold, were members of the first station court, Albert was the elected Village leader, and Percy was the Settlement representative at the 1963 missions field council. Albert incurred the displeasure of the Mission early in 1963 by taking a complaint on rents over their head to the Government in Darwin (Station Council minutes 13/2/63), and soon after he left Ngukurr to accept a position with the Government. Percy also accepted a Government offer soon after and left Ngukurr in 1964. Arnold, in the meantime had become the elected Village Leader, a court member, and Settlement nominee for field council. Thus by the middle of 1964 there was no active opposition nor alternative to Arnold's domination of the role of intermediary between the Village and the Settlement.

The other major factor influencing the change in the approach of the Council was the financial position of the Mission. The Mission's finances were always precarious, and in 1964 The Church Missionary Society was again

actively considering curtailing its activities at Ngukurr, and even of withdrawing entirely from secular control of the Settlement (Station Council minutes 27/5/64). The period from 1964 to the transfer of secular control of the Settlement to the Government in October 1968 was one in which the Council became more and more involved in discussions of policy and the Settlement's future development. There was an increasing emphasis, in council meetings, on Aborigines accepting responsibility under tutelage, and there was a greater use of councillors, particularly Arnold Abrahams, for handling the communications between the Government and Mission, and the Village.

The transition from the second to the third phase is clearly marked by the transfer of Settlement control from the Mission to the Government (see diagram 1). The Mission had emphasised the role of the Council in administration and policy discussions during the period prior to the transfer. The Village expected that this emphasis would continue to develop and that greater authority would be vested in the Council after the Mission's withdrawal, and that control of the Council would shift away from the staff to the Village representatives. These expectations were not fulfilled. The Government's policy and administration

procedures were more centralised than those of their mission predecessors. The Government superintendent, unlike his mission counterpart, was less able to delegate responsibility to Council,and the Council had no official status within the Government's framework of Settlement administration.

One result of the Council's loss of administrative competence was that the Village spokesmen turned their efforts more towards direct communication with the bureaucracy. By 1970 the Council was virtually moribund. The Aboriginal membership was increased to two-thirds of the total in the middle of 1970, but no changes were made either to its areas of competence or its internal authority structure. By the end of the year the Council had ceased to meet. It was revived and again reorganised in October 1971, but was still denied administrative competence or statutory authority, and in the two meetings I attended it gave no indication of playing an important role in the organisation of the Settlement.

The Council still retained two important functions in 1970. Though it had no effective control of the running of the Settlement or in deciding its policy, it would be, stated Government representatives, the organ which would have

such control if and when there was any localisation of control. It was the main continuing forum of debate for both Village spokesmen and staff. It was an established forum for the Village spokesmen to be seen to be representing, and for the staff to be seen to be concerned. The Council also provided, until June 1970, the only regular avenue for the articulation of Village/staff conflict.

During 1970 council meetings were held once a month under the chairmanship of the superintendent. The meetings were formally convened by the chairman and opened with a prayer. The minutes were read out by the chairman, who also acted as the council secretary. Correspondence and business arising out of the minutes were dealt with next. The chairman conducted this by asking each member in turn if he had any question to raise on the minutes. General business proceeded in two ways, depending on whether or not there was any important issue to be discussed. When no such issue was known before hand general business was conducted in the same way as questions arising. There were no agendas for council meetings and the above general procedure was departed from only once in seven meetings that I attended in 1970. The exception was a meeting

convened in May to discuss the future structure and role of Council, and the implications for the Council's continuation of the strike and the shop crisis (see below, and chapter 7, section 2).

The content of Council business falls into five categories. The first are matters relating to the maintenance and physical running of the Settlement. This includes such matters as repair work, complaints about noise, misuse of equipment, and work absenteeism. Questions or proposals on these matters are addressed to the chairman who undertakes to have the work done (if possible), or deal with the offenders, again if possible. The role councillors adopt in these matters is to bring a particular item to notice, and have the situation rectified. The rectification is not a function of the Council, but of the superintendent. Therefore the questions raised are directed to him. He then decides if he is competent to do the job or needs to consult Welfare head office in Darwin. The councillors requests are not directed to him as chairman of Council, but to the superintendent of the Settlement. The majority of items dealt with by Council are from this category. In the seven meetings attended in 1970 the proportion of these items to the total number of items in each meeting was six

of nine, six of nine, seven of eleven, none of three, four of eleven, two of three and nine of fifteen.

Specific projects of development for the Settlement are a second major interest of Council. These consist mainly of new equipment requests and additional economic and social facilities. The items discussed during 1970 were the continuation of the Settlement cattle project, applications for a housing grant, the building of a community hall, and a town plan. The decision to embark on these projects and the responsibility for carrying them out rested with the Government and was organised by the relevant sections of the Welfare Branch in Darwin. The Council's role was to fill out applications and make requests to the Government for more information or quicker progress. Fulfilling these requests was outside the superintendent's competence and he acted as a channel for information going to and from the Government.

The Council discussed some matters which did not need to be referred to the superintendent or Government for implementation. The choice of new and additional members for Council and the organisation of such joint activities as the celebration of National Aborigines Day were matters

which the Council might decide itself.

The Council acted as a political forum in two ways. Occasionally it would discuss matters which would touch off a clash between the Village and staff members and which was related basically to the tension of the two groups living in the same Settlement under very different social conditions. Secondly there were very fundamental issues which raised questions of the distribution of power both within the Settlement and between the Village and the Government. The two were interconnected because the tension was closely related to the staff's dominant position within the Settlement, a domination which they exercised as agents of the Government.

The positions of the two groups within the Council differed. The Aborigines were there as the representatives of the interests of the Village. They were a part of the Village community which had chosen them and to which in the last resort they were answerable.

The staff members did not represent the staff in the same way for they held their places as occupants of particular positions within the Settlement not as representatives of

the staff group. Nor did they, with the exception of the superintendent, represent the Government on Council. They were employed by the Government in specialist positions and their responsibility to the Government covered their performance in those positions, and they were not required to accept any general responsibility for overall Government policy. Even though they were members of Council because of the positions held, they were, as councillors, acting outside those positions, and asked to discuss and deliberate on matters outside their special area of competence and for which they were not responsible as public servants. Thus on Council they had no body to whom they were an swerable, and could act as critics of both Government and Village without the necessity to accept responsibility for their actions.

The most dramatic instance of this aspect of Council affairs occurred in the meeting of 5th May 1970. This meeting, which lasted four and a half hours, took place one month after the end of the strike and two weeks after it was revealed that the Settlement shop was insolvent. The whole time of the meeting was taken up with two issues: the future role and powers of the Council and the fixing of responsibility for the shop's demise. The tenor of the

meeting also falls into two parts. In the first part of the meeting the Council discussed itself as an embryo local government body. The Government had said that this is what they were, and the staff considered that it was only as such that their existence was justified, and that if they were to be the local authority then they and only they should speak for the whole population.

The Europeans held the initiative in this discussion and criticised the Village members for permitting others to speak on behalf of the Village (some of the strike spokesmen were not Council members). This criticism was based on two misconceptions held by the staff. They tended to look on the Village as an undifferentiated body which had the same set of problems and interests, and that those that acted outside this framework were renegades and were probably thwarting the Village's legitimate authority (i.e. the station councillors). Further, they saw the Village councillors as the duly elected representatives of the Village and the only people authorised to speak and act on its behalf. They saw the situation facing them as one in which the Village had lost confidence in Council and their own elected representatives, and their answer was to give the Council a broader base. One staff councillor

summed up the problem and the staff solution: "There were some people representing Roper river (during the strike). It wasn't Station Council. If those people weren't on Council they had backing. Would they stand for a larger council? If they did would that encourage people to support Council?" The Village councillors agreed that they were not effective representatives in the present situation, but did not see a larger council as the answer. Only two of the five Village councillors expressed their view, which was to return to the authoritarian period of the early 60's when the station court enforced the will of the Council. This view was rejected as impractical, and the Village members reluctantly agreed to give the staff proposal a try:

"Superintendent:	When you say some people are not fit (to be on Council), what do you mean?
Arnold:	They are muddle headed.
Superintendent:	But people listen to them. Wouldn't it be better to have them here (on Council).
Arnold:	I think it would. We can try, but don't think it'll work."

Neither side queried the structure of Council and in particular the staff presence there. Both recognised the

main problem was the Council's lack of power, but there was no common understanding between them on what the role of Council should be. The staff saw the Council as the body which would act on behalf of the Settlement; take care of its internal needs: garbage collection, maintenance, welfare support, etc., and represent the Settlement to outsiders. The villagers, in so far as they saw the Council as relevant, wanted its primary function to be the policing of Village behaviour. The discussion never came to grips with this difference and instead concentrated on the less controversial question of expanding the Aboriginal membership.

Towards the end of this discussion a European queried, in the context of the shop's failure, the Aborigines' ability to run a commercial enterprise. This sparked off a heated confrontation over who bore the responsibility for the failure of the shop. This confrontation is discussed in detail in chapter 7. The main points to be noted here are that the Council provided a forum in which the confrontation could take place, and that there was no consequence for the Council because it could not accept responsibility either for the existence of the situation or for its rectification.

Until the second half of 1970 Council membership was based on equal representation for staff and Village. There were, when all positions were filled, eight staff representatives and eight representatives from the Village. The staff members were drawn from the different areas of specialisation within the Settlement organisation. The superintendent, chaplain, headmaster, senior sister, and shop manager were all members. The other three staff positions in the first half of 1970 were filled by the carpenter, mechanic, and supervising stockman. This last was only a staff position for the purposes of Station Council membership and was filled by Arnold Abrahams, the senior Aboriginal stockman. The eight Village representatives were selected annually by the Village and any vacancies that occurred during the year were filled either by the Village or by the Council itself.

The May 1970 meeting of Council decided to enlarge membership to 24, which was to be made up of nine staff[1] and fifteen Village members. At the time of the selection, in June, there were only six active elected members. The Village added seven more, but four of these declined selection, leaving a total of nine selected Village

1. The addition was a newly appointed hygiene supervisor, who was a Ngukurr Aborigine.

members. The superintendent made requests for more representatives to bring the total up to the agreed number. Only one additional representative was chosen to give the new Council a membership of nineteen with ten selected representatives from the Village and nine staff. The Aboriginal staff representatives acted as part of the Village contingent and one of them was a senior Village spokesman.

Village membership, throughout the history of the Council, reflects the predominance of the core in Settlement affairs. There has been a sharp decline in the representation of women and the Mara/Alawa group since the departure of the mission. There has been an overall increase in the representation of younger men and of members of the Abrahams family.

The age, sex and core/non core distribution of Council members

Date of birth	1962	1963	1964	1965	1966	1967	1968	1969	1970	1971	Total
before 1920	1	2	4	3	2	3	0	0	0	0	15
1921-30	5	4	2	1	1	1	1	2	2	2	21
1931-40	1	3	2	2	3	4	3	3	5	2	28
1941 plus	0	1	2	1	0	1	5	3	5	3	21
Women	2	2	4	4	2	3	2	0	0	1	20
Non core	0	0	0	1	1	1	0	0	0	1	4
Total	9	12	14	12	9	13	11	8	12	9	109

Core family distribution of Council members

	1962	1963	1964	1965	1966	1967	1968	1969	1970	1971	Total
Abrahams	2	3	4	3	3	4	4	3	6	5	37
Gideon	2	3	4	3	2	2	2	2	1	1	22
Peterson	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	2	2	11
Mara/Alawa	4	4	4	3	1	3	2	0	0	1	22
Other core	0	1	1	1	1	2	2	1	3	1	13

The decline in the Mara/Alawa representation is partly due to the younger age of members and the exclusion of women. These two categories account for fifteen of the 22 Mara/Alawa representatives. The Gideon's post Mission decline is also related to the exclusion of women who provided eleven of their 22 representatives. All the women members prior to 1969 belong to either the Gideon or Mara/Alawa families and most of them are active supporters of the church. The consistency of their representation during the Mission period is due to the Mission's insistence on female representation on Council. The second table under-emphasises the predominance of the Abrahams family who include no women representatives. Similarly, the first table over-emphasises the representation of both women and older men, including the non core, particularly in the 1964 and 1965 figures. The figures for the years prior to fieldwork are drawn from the attendance records of Station Council minutes, and includes replacement members coopted during the year. The records indicate that there was never more than two women and two older men on Council at any one time.

The 1971 Council was selected differently to the earlier ones. There was no public selection of members. The

choices were made by Arnold Abrahams, the Village leader, and the superintendent, with the latter specifically requesting that both women and non core men be represented. Even so the woman chosen in 1971, unlike those chosen prior to 1969, was not a member of any of the main families.

The Citizens Club executive committee is the governing body of a legally constituted club which has specific aims. It is elected annually by a general meeting of Club members. The criteria for membership are a minimum of three months residence at Ngukurr and nomination by a Club member. The constitution of the Club lists its objects as:

"a/ The fostering of community and group participation in social, cultural, and recreation activities among the people of the Roper River (Ngukurr) community.

b/ The provision of assistance and training for members of the Club in the management of their own affairs.

c/ The supplying of goods and other amenities to members of the Club." (see appendix 4)

Early in 1970 the Club pursued its objects through two avenues. It owned the Settlement general store (the shop) and it organised much of the Village's entertainment. The executive committee is the Club's board of directors, and had at this time four office bearers: president, vice president, treasurer and secretary, and three other members.

The lub was conceived by the Mission in its last years as part of its program of localising control of Settlement affairs. When the Club was incorporated in 1969, the Mission handed over to it the shop and some of its assets. The Club had seven foundation members who became its first executive. Six were Aborigines and one a European staff member. The European was secretary and acted as advisor to the executive. The executive also employed a European as its shop manager. With the exception of two months early in 1970 the shop's manager was not a member of the executive, though he attended executive meetings. The Aboriginal members of the executive had direct control of organising entertainment, mainly films and dances, until the end of April 1970. They left the running of the shop to their manager, and executive liaison with him was in the hands of the European secretary.

The meetings of the executive were conducted informally at this period. The manager and secretary informed the executive of the shop's state of affairs from time to time, and the Aboriginal members informed the executive of entertainment affairs. The finances of the Club's two areas of activity were separated and each had its own bank account.

The executive committee, unlike the Station Council, actually controlled valued resources. Both it and its areas of activity were important objects of political competition, and this competition is discussed in detail below (see chapter 7, section 2). The revelation of the shop's insolvency in April 1970 led to a major reorganisation, under Government supervision. The executive was enlarged to twelve and had to include a nominee of the Director of Welfare: the Settlement superintendent. The enlarged executive was elected in June 1970, and included seven European staff members and five Aborigines. All the office bearers with the exception of the vice president were Europeans. The Aboriginal members of the first executive retained control of the Village entertainment. They organised their own committee outside of the framework of the Club, and operated independently of both Club and its executive.

The meetings of the second executive were formally convened and run, minutes were kept and motions raised and voted on.[2] The attention of the second executive was taken up with the shop, its finances, relations with the shop manager, and relations with the Village. In this last area the executive was duplicating one of the roles of Station Council, the articulation of staff/Village conflict. The Club was the major focus of conflict throughout this period, and this contributed to the declining interest in the operation of Station Council. The European majority ensured that the initiative, on the executive, remained with the staff. The composition of the executive changed considerably, and by the end of its term of office in September 1971 it had only eight members (four Europeans and four Aborigines but with the addition of the shop manager there was an effective European majority), and only one of these had been among the original twelve.

The election of the third executive radically altered the composition of the committee and the balance of power within

2. See Bailey op.cit. 9-15. The first executive is much less an arena council than the second and third. However I doubt that the fact of voting is a crucial indicator. Rather it is a matter of formal procedure, like keeping minutes and raising motions.

it. Only one of the retiring committee, an Aboriginal, was re-elected (the superintendent was still a member, ex officio). The new committee had nine Aboriginal members and three Europeans. Aborigines were elected president, treasurer, and secretary, and they took over the control of the committee's proceedings. This situation lasted for less than two months, because a new auditor's report showed that the shop was again insolvent. The executive had no alternative but to invite the Government to assume full control of the shop, which left them as a board of directors without anything to direct.

The Aboriginal members of the three executives were all core villagers. The following tables show the age, sex and family distribution of members. Most of the Peterson men were absent from Ngukurr during the latter part of 1971 and so were not available for election. None of the Mara/Alawa family were members of any of the executives. The bracketed figures show the overlap of membership between the various executives.

Age, sex and family distribution of executive committee members

Executive	First	(1st & 2nd)	Second	(2nd & 3rd)	Third	(3rd & 1st)
Total	6	(2)	5	(0)	9	(2)
Abrahams	2	(0)	2	(0)	5	(1)
Gideon	1+	(0)	1	(0)	2+	(0)
Peterson	2	(2)	2	(0)	0	(0)
Other	1	(0)	0	(0)	2	(1)
Date of birth						
before 1931	1+	(0)	2	(0)	2	(0)
1931-40	2	(1)	2	(0)	0	(0)
1941+	3	(1)	1	(0)	7+	(2)

+ number includes one woman.

The Village Fora

There are two main types of public meeting which have a continuing existence within the Village: the regular Village meetings, open to all Villagers, and meetings of people with a common interest held for specific purposes, (e.g. tactical meetings of working men on strike, and meetings to discuss and decide ritual matters).[3]

A third type of meeting is one which has a specific purpose and in which the Village participates en masse with others, (e.g. one or more Government representatives, or the Settlement staff). I include this type here rather than in the first part of the chapter, because the dominant characteristic of these meetings from the Village point of view, is that they are meetings of the Village in which others participate. This view is clear in situations where a representative of the Government comes to address the Village on some matter, for they are the public. It is less clear in general meetings of the Citizens Club where the

3. These bodies are not councils in Bailey's sense. Kuper (1971:14) in treating them as if they are of the same order is ignoring the crucial fact that councils are representative bodies. The public is outside,not a part of the council. All the meetings discussed here are public in the above sense.

public is composed of both the Village and the resident staff. The basis of the Village view is that the Citizens Club is not part of the Settlement structure, but is an incorporation of the Village with the staff acting in an advisory capacity. That the staff are also members is a technicality to facilitate their advisory role. The legal situation is different. The constitution of the Club has no special category of member: all residents of three months standing or more are eligible. The Village view is still tenable, at least in the context of the organisation of meetings, because of the numerical preponderance of villagers at such meetings and because of the role of Village activists in their organisation. There were fourteen Europeans at each of the three general meetings out of a total attendance of between 90 and 100. The procedures adopted differed in each of these meetings. The procedure of any meeting was the result of the tension between the Aborigines desire to run them along the same line as Village meetings and the European's desire for formality and order. The result in any one meeting is part of the politics of that particular time.

The procedures of these meetings can be divided into three types. There are, at one extreme, meetings organised by

the Village to which a Government representative has been invited to address them on some topic. These are essentially Village meetings and their oganisation and conduct are in the hands of the Village. There were five such meetings, four of which occurred as part of regular Village meetings. The fifth was specially convened by the Village leader during the strike, to hear the latest proposals from the Government brought by an officer from the Darwin head office. At the other extreme are the two annual general meetings of the Citizens Club. Both meetings were convened by the executive committee, and their main business was the election of the next executive. The conduct of the meetings was largely restricted by the election procedures which had been previously determined by the outgoing executive. At the June 1970 meeting the superintendent and outgoing European executive member arranged the order of business and directed discussion. In September 1971 the superintendent and the Village leader had this role, but their control was less than complete,and the order of business was changed from the floor.

There were two other meetings which fall into neither of the above categories. One of these was a meeting organised

by the superintendent for the Minister for Interior (the Government Minister responsible for the administration of Northern Territory Aborigines), who was visiting the Settlement while on tour through the Territory. This meeting was conducted as a question and answer session in which only three leading Village spokesmen participated. The second meeting was a special general meeting of the Citizens Club called by the executive to discuss the manager's conduct of shop affairs. The meeting was called at the insistence of the staff, and they entirely dominated its proceedings, determining the issues to be discussed and monopolising the discussion. All these meetings have one strand in common, that they are fora of confrontation between the Village and Europeans, and this sets them apart from those meetings which are primarily directed at the internal organisation of the Village.

The Village meeting is a more or less regular affair, open to all Village residents, in which all matters of interest to the Village population are discussed. Every question that is raised in the other fora of either the Village or the Settlement is also discussed by the Village. The villagers state that meetings should be held every Monday night. The actual time between meetings ranged from two

days to four weeks depending on the immediacy of issues and the mood of the Village. In the six week period leading up to and during the strike there were seven Village meetings. The four week gap occurred immediately after the collapse of the strike, at a time when Village morale was low. At other times, when there was no pressing reason either to hold a meeting or not to have one, they tended to occur fortnightly.

Monday night was the favoured time for the meeting and ten of the 24 meetings recorded in 1970 and 1971 took place at that time. Competing activities made it difficult to organise meetings on the other nights of the week. Tuesdays were set aside for the various committee meetings, Wednesdays for the Village church service, Thursdays for films, Fridays for films, and on alternate weeks cards, Saturday for films or dances or cult performances or cards, and Sundays for cult performances or Village church service or cards.

The numbers and regularity at meetings varied considerably. The adult population of the Village (men and women over the age of sixteen) averaged around 160. The mean attendance at meetings was 60 with a range of from 30 to

90. The ratio of adult males to females in the Village was 0.8/1.0, but the mean attendance was 40 for males and 20 for females. The percentage of the male Village population at meetings ranged from 34% to 67%, while the proportion of the female population was from 9% to 27%. There was also a marked difference in the attendance of core and non core Village residents. Core residents were two-thirds of the Village population but comprised 80% to 100% of the attendance at meetings.

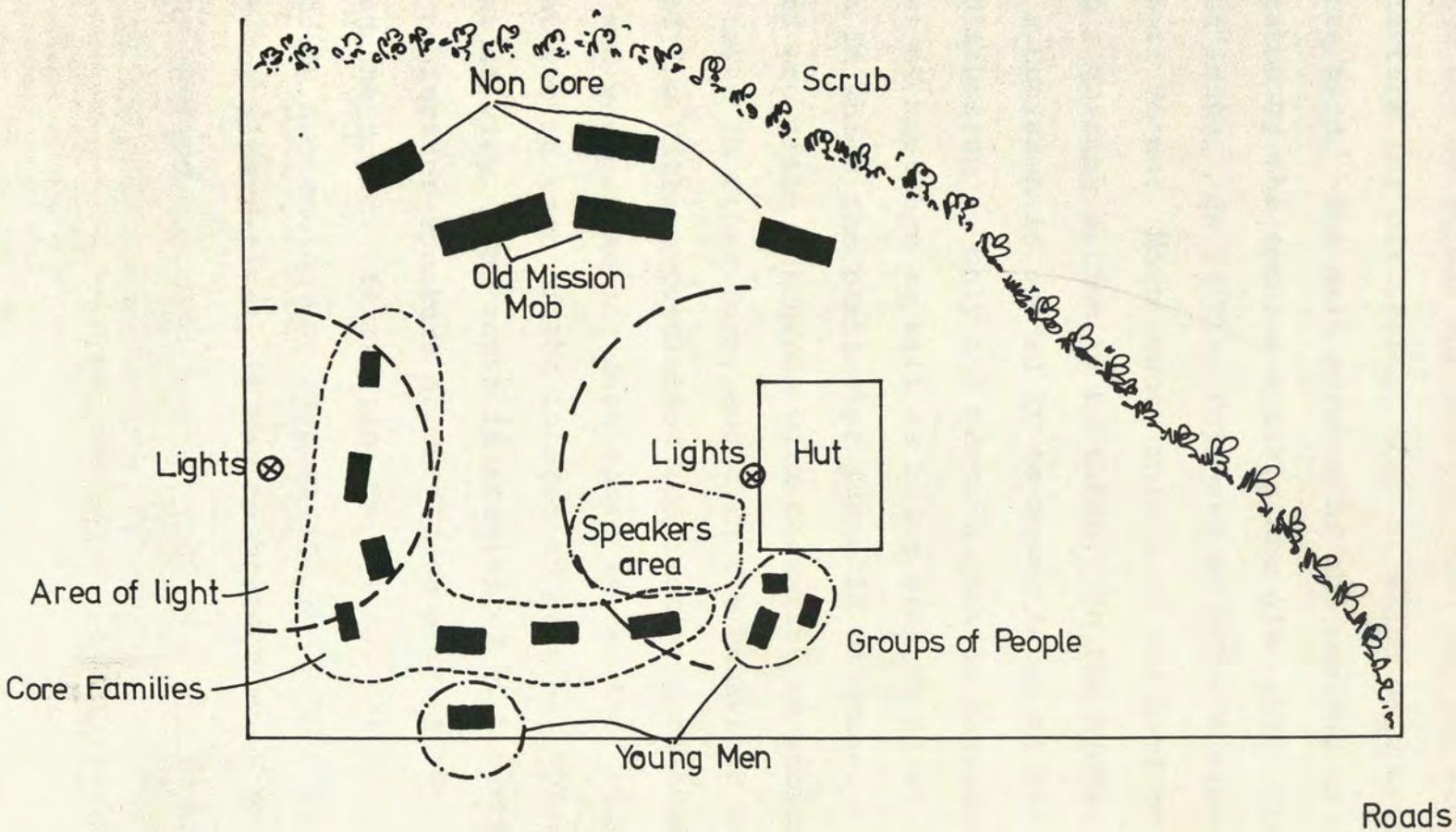
The core and particularly the core men controlled the meetings. I attended a total of 24 Village meetings during 1970 and 1971, at which there were a total of 43 different speakers. All the discussions were initiated by one or more of twelve men, all of whom were core residents. Twenty of the other 31 speakers were also core men (five of them were recently returned emigres), nine were core women, and only two were non core men. If one excludes those speakers whose sole contribution was either in support of another speaker or answering a question, then the number of active contributors is reduced from 43 to 27: 22 core men, four core women, and one non core man.

The Village meetings were held in a cleared area centrally

located in the Village (diagram 3). The convener of a meeting was usually the Village leader, though other Village notables who wished to have something discussed occasionally initiated meetings. Meetings were called together by the convener ringing the bell at around seven in the evening. Over the next half to one and a half hours he and a few early arrivals would call for people to attend, with increasing exasperation. The meeting would commence when sufficient people had arrived. The quorum for a meeting was around 20 adults. There were three occasions when less than 20 had arrived one and a half hours after a meeting was called, and on all three the proposed meeting was called off. On two other occasions the meeting convener stated there were insufficient people in attendance, but the meeting went on (the number present were 35 and approximately 80). Most meetings commenced with a speech by the convener, touching on the matters he wanted discussed. On two occasions, one when a missionary was present and the other when the church catechist was the convener, the speech was preluded by a Christian prayer.[4]

4. I attended two Village meetings in 1968, one immediately before and one after the Government take-over, neither was convened by the catechist nor attended by a missionary. Both were opened by a prayer .

DIAGRAM III THE VILLAGE MEETING



The meetings had no formal agenda, but each meeting had specific matters for discussion, most of which were widely known before hand. The main purpose of the meeting is usually stated by the opening speaker who also gives his view on the issue. He is then followed by other speakers who put their views. Most issues raised do not lead to a decision requiring action to be taken. In the event that such a decision is needed it is never taken on the basis of discussion at only one meeting, but is discussed at a number of meetings as well as being brought up at other fora in which the particular issue is relevant. Discussions are often concerned with censuring or praising decisions taken in other fora, and with the behaviour of sections of the Village population (particularly that of the women and younger men). Each topic is debated, with representatives of each of the interested parties expressing their point of view. The topic is terminated either when there are no further speakers or when a speaker is successful in changing the topic. Termination may or may not be accompanied by expressions of support for the prominent sentiments, or alternatively it may be brought on by people leaving the meeting.

During a meeting there is much coming and going. People arrive throughout the proceedings and leave when they have had enough. There is no formal arrangement of seating though each group has its own spot. Some of the main male speakers do vary their position. When they are leading a debate or aligning with the speaker on a contentious issue, they stand or sit in the central lighted area of the clearing. At other times they sit with their families or age mates. Meetings are generally noisy and give the appearance of being chaotic. At any time there are children playing and numerous side discussions in progress. Interjections are common. There is a tendency for the speaker to take his position in the central lighted area while talking, but this is only a tendency, and at least one of the main speakers never did so.

The topography of seating is an issue at many meetings. This occurs despite the constancy of the seating arrangement. The bulk of the audience is seated in a wide arc around the edges of the clearing. Most people are seated in small family groups, with the non core families and old mission mob concentrated on the river side furthest away from the light and speaker. The area around the light and

hut is occupied by the main speakers and other, usually young, men. The young men alternate their positions between the speakers area and the roadway on the periphery of the clearing. The scattering of people gives rise to regular and numerous complaints. The audience complaining that they cannot hear the speaker, and the speakers continually calling on the audience to move in closer. Despite this expressed dissatisfaction the seating arrangement remains constant (see diagram 3).

Little deference is shown to senior speakers. Other men or women interrupt or interject as they please even if the speaker is the Village leader or a senior ritual leader. Debates on contentious points are often heated and can become laced with personal invectives, particularly between members of the same family. The vitriolic interchanges subside with the ending of the debate, and people regard their occurrence as a sign of the success of a debate. Heated exchanges, they say, are an indication that the issue is being treated seriously, and a speaker often prefaces his introduction of an important topic with the remark that people "should speak from their hearts". After one occasion on which the exchanges were particularly heated and personal, the contenders came together and congratulated each other

on the good meeting they had just had. One of the men put the feeling succinctly when he said: "argument was good, and people found out what he was thinking".

The Village meeting is part of the complex web of the Ngukurr political structure. It is the most inclusive continuing political forum, for its composition includes all the adults of the Village. The proceedings highlight the competition between the three main family groups, the process of escalating opposition to European domination, the ideological conflict between the old mission mob and the young, the women's continuing policy of obstruction to any domination, and the overall powerlessness of any group to enforce its will on the Village as a whole. All these foci are apparent within the meeting, but none is fully contained by the meeting. No issue has its birth there and none is resolved there. In this sense the Village meeting is not a decision making body. Its resoltuions are largely rhetorical and it has no mechanism for implementing its decisions, nor can it apply sanctions against their breach.

The forum of the meeting is in itself a focus of community. The corporate existence of the Village and its political

identity are represented through the meeting. The Village people are Village citizens (i.e. they are enfranchised by, and in relation to the Village). This consciousness of community is an explicit part of the meetings' proceedings. In nearly every meeting the speeches of Village notables contain references to an ideal pattern of Village behaviour, whose breach should be censured and whose attainment should be pursued. These references have a persistent negative content, being directed against gambling, work absenteeism, neglect of houses and hygiene and ritual laxity. On the positive side the stress is on the Village's commitment to its own development. The issue of public conduct is a perennial one, and at times whole meetings are devoted to it.

The meeting of the 19th January 1970 was one. This meeting was called by Arnold Abrahams, the senior Village notable, to discuss two matters: the sudden departure of his younger brother from Ngukurr, and the poor attendance by women at the previous weekend's Jabuduruwa performances. The following description of that meeting highlights the concern for communal solidarity.

Example 1. The meeting commenced at ten past eight on

Monday night, 50 minutes after Arnold first rang the Village bell. The first two speakers were Arnold Abrahams and John Angurugu who both decried the general behaviour of the young men of the Village. Arnold specifically criticised his brother for leaving his job and Ngukurr without giving notice, while John rounded on all those who were persistently late for work and were not diligent on the job. After 20 minutes, during which they were not interrupted, Arnold concluded by declaring that gambling was responsible and should be banned. There was mild laughter at this from most of the younger people, and Albert, Arnold's elder brother, mocked the suggestion as being unrealistic. Albert's son Adam then cut in complaining that he had been sacked that morning for being half an hour late for work. Arnold, changed his tone and said he couldn't understand why the superintendent would do such a thing. John, who was Adam's foreman, said that he had had nothing to do with the dismissal, but added that Adam was a problem to him.

At this point Arnold changed the direction of his attack, and stated that if the superintendent didn't like blacks he would go and see the Minister (of Interior) and have him removed. Albert mocked Arnold's implied claim to have

influence with the Government. Arnold reiterated that he would go right to the top, and was again mocked by Albert.

Arnold did not reply, but again changed the direction of attack. He upbraided people in general for not keeping their houses clean and tidy. Albert turned the complaint back onto Arnold, who agreed that his wife was too busy playing cards to look after the house. At this Arnold's wife rounded on him saying that she worked the whole week, including Saturdays and Sundays while he just loafed around. Arnold replied that he was only talking (i.e. he didn't mean it), and then quietly said that cards should only be played after work and should finish by half past ten. He rounded off his reply with an aggressive statement that if the superintendent tried to tell him what to do in the stock camp (of which he was foreman) he would call a strike of all the stockmen.

Without a pause Albert then swung into a new theme. Supported by Arnold and their father Abraham, he criticised the women's attitude to the Jabuduruwa performances. The three men told the women that they were not fulfilling their responsibility to look after the novices and do the

cooking. They stressed that this failure was:

a/ an insult to the women's fathers, both living and deceased;

b/ dishonourable for the Village; and

c/ it could bring trouble (i.e. sorcery) to themselves and their families.

This attack concluded with a demand which met with wide approval from both sexes and no dissent, that the women attend to their duties properly at the next performance or suffer the consequences (which were not specified). This rebuke lasted about half an hour, was uninterrupted, and at its conclusion the meeting terminated.

This meeting was primarily concerned with the Village's external image, and with rebuking those whose behaviour some sections of the Village felt was inimical to that image. Arnold's attempt to censure gambling was blunted by the wide range of conduct he chose to attack. On other occasions such a censure motion could expect to receive the support of the meeting. Partial bans on gambling were agreed to by two other meetings in 1970. However, in this meeting, Arnold not only attacked gambling but also succeeded in offending the young men and women and even his own family (by singling out his younger brother and elder brother's son). As a result he had to successively modify his censure,

and finally make a tactical withdrawal. In contrast to this the censure of the women for ritual laxity was very successful. The meeting fully concurred with the sentiments of the speakers and supported the demand for greater diligence. However, both moves were unsuccessful in altering people's behaviour outside the meeting context. Both women's ritual laxity and the pattern of gambling remained the same.

Example 2. The concern with the Village as a community was not only directed at censuring delinquent behaviour. External threats from the Settlement staff, Government, and other Aboriginal communities were used to elicit expressions of unity in the meeting. Such occasions were not infrequent, and the events surrounding the strike, the financial crises of the shop, and the performance of the Jabuduruwa provided many.

March of 1970 was an explosive period at Ngukurr. The strike was underway, and the Jabuduruwa was also in a crisis phase (see below ch 6, section 2). On 10th March one of the strike leaders returned from Darwin with news concerning four prominent ritual men. He reported that the four men's lives had been threatened with sorcery by

a cattle station ritual leader, for alleged ritual infringements in the Balgin cult. None of the four was active in the secular politics of the Village, though two of them were deeply involved in the competition surrounding the performance of the Jabuduruwa. Three of the men were members of the Mara/Alawa family group, and the fourth was a non core man associated with the Abrahams family. The news caused some consternation in the Village, and not least for the four men. It also came at a convenient time for the Village because it drew attention away from the internal divisiveness of both the strike and the Jabuduruwa, and focused opposition onto an outside source.

The existence of the threat was used by the Village notables to elicit expressions of community solidarity at the Village meeting of 14th March. The four men claimed that they were not guilty of breaching ritual law, and that therefore the threat was motivated by other feelings. They alleged that the Balgin leader feared them and was jealous of their ritual positions. This was reinforced by the commonly held Village belief that the cattle station people were jealous of what Ngukurr regarded as their own ritual prominence.

The call for support for the four men was preceded by

extensive criticism of both women and young men by a number of Village notables and older men. The criticism concentrated on lack of diligence in the Jabuduruwa performances. Fighting among some novices and younger initiates was singled out for special mention, and William Gideon, the Village leader, threatened to call in the police if it did not stop. This provoked a hostile reaction from the young men, who called for the termination of the meeting and began to leave. At this point Arnold announced the news that the lives of four men had been threatened, a fact which was already widely known. His public announcement had the effect of halting the break up of the meeting. He said that the men were their people, and all of them were endangered by the threat, and that the people should carefully protect the men and their families. People from all sides of the meeting expressed their solidarity with the threatened men, and voiced the opinion that Ngukurr was one people who must stick together.

The meeting, as the Village's regular public forum, can not limit its activities to the expression of community identity. The meeting is the Village in its political guise. As such it is the body responsible for choosing people to represent the Village, and is the body through

which information is disseminated to the Village (particularly the proceedings of the Settlement committees, and the Government pronouncements). More importantly, the meeting is a public platform for the Village notables and other activists to demonstrate their prominence and gauge support for their actions or proposals. Village activists display their public concern at the Village meeting. The more successful of them (which includes the notables) initiate topics of discussion and have resolutions passed on proposals they support. This success is only an indication of the man's public prominence and not of any right or ability to lead the Village.

Passing resolutions and eliciting expressions of support are a common feature of most meetings and they carry no commitment to implement them. The resolutions on gambling and women's ritual behaviour discussed in example 1 are essentially votes of confidence (or in the case of Arnold's failure to gain a resolution, lack of confidence) in the men who propose them, but do not imply an acceptance of the resolution. During June 1970 one Village notable, who was also the Settlement orderly, attempted to enforce a ban on gambling during working hours, which the Village

meeting had imposed a few days earlier. He succeeded in confiscating a packet of cards from a group of women gamblers, but was forced to retreat under a hail of abuse. After some animated discussion by the women about the man's impertinence, they produced another packet of cards and continued playing. The man did not return, though he knew the game had recommenced and he made no further attempt to enforce the resolution.

Although effective decision making is not a function of the meeting, there are policies which need the tacit approval of the Village for their implementation. Thus those individuals, or groups who want to implement a particular line of action may use the meeting to test the Village response.

Example 3. When I arrived at Ngukurr in December 1969 William Gideon was the Village leader. He had held the position for only a few months, and had been chosen when Arnold Abrahams had declined to stand for re-election. Arnold had previously held the position almost continuously since 1964. During the first four months of fieldwork Arnold often attempted to usurp (sometimes successfully) William's prerogatives, using his greater familiarity with

Government officials and William's occasional absences from Ngukurr. The strike, which occurred in this period, saw the two men on opposite sides, with William being one of the main spokesmen for the strikers. Late in April William said that he would like to resign the Village leadership because of a crisis in his personal relations. This came at a time when Arnold's prestige was very low with two important sections of the Village: the strike supporters, and the Mara/Alawa group.

The question of a new leader was raised at four meetings before a decision was finally made on 17th August. At the first meeting, held on 2nd May, Arnold stated that William was going to leave and the Village would choose a new leader in two days time. Participants at the meeting put forward the names of three men they thought could fill the position. Arnold's name was not put forward. The question was not raised at the following meeting, nor was it raised a month later when the meeting chose its representatives for the new Station Council. The choice of Village leader was again raised at the meeting of 6th July along with the filling of casual vacancies for the Citizens Club executive and Station Council. None of those present offered himself for

Village leader, and the one nomination that was put forward was ignored by both Arnold and Albert who were jointly running the meeting. The question was again raised on the 20th July. I was not present at this meeting but my informants told me that two names were suggested, and Arnold, who was not one of them, argued successfully that they could not decide because the stockmen were absent on a muster.

The choice of Village leader was finally made at the Village meeting of 17th August. Arnold opened the meeting with his account of the proceedings of the Church Missionary Society's field council (a body with representatives from all the Society's Northern Territory organisations) to which he was the Ngukurr Village representative. He went on to inform the people that he had, while in Darwin, represented the Village in talks with Government officials about proposals for a pastoral lease for the community. He concluded this account with the announcement that a Village leader had to be chosen, and added that the Government had told him that he was the leader of his people. Two old mission people said Arnold should be the leader. After a short pause, in which no one else spoke, Arnold said he would take it on for this year, but only

because they had important business (negotiations for a pastoral lease). The meeting then immediately proceeded to other business. There was no voting, no opposition, and no comment.

The Village meeting lacks the power to implement decisions. This power, in so far as it is located in the Village, is controlled by those groups who accept responsibility for the implementation of decisions. Two of these groups conduct their own meetings to discuss and decide on their own sectional interests. Both are groups of men. Their meetings are more irregular than the Village meetings, and tend to coincide with the planning and carrying out of particular activities. The men's meetings are held in a variety of places around the Village, but never at the central meeting place. Meetings are arranged, either by the interested parties informing others of the time place and reason, or through the expansion of a small discussion group.

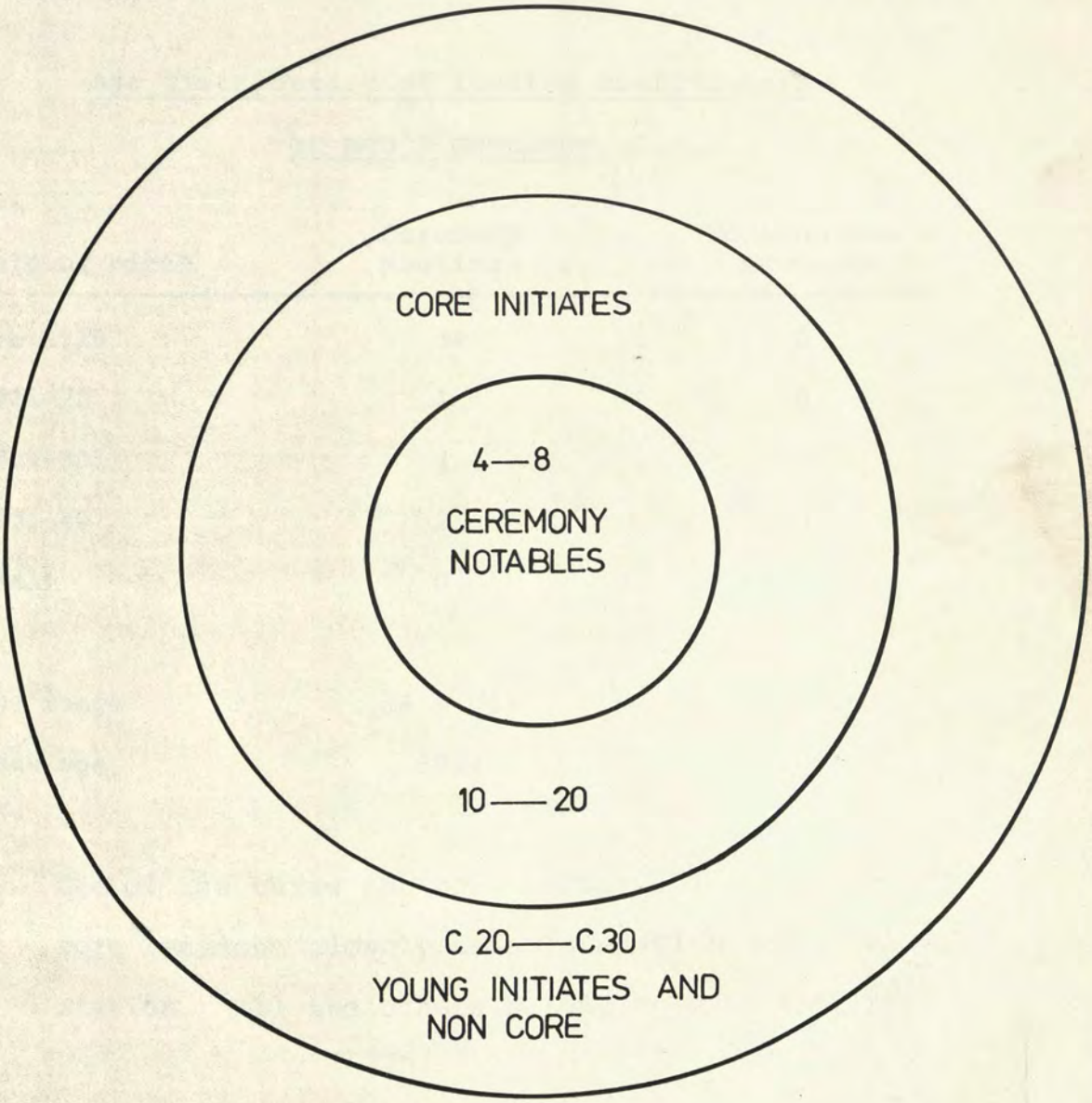
There are two kinds of men's meetings: working and ceremony men's meetings. The latter is explicitly restricted to

initiated adult males. As the name suggests they are concerned with the ritual activities of the Village. They are primarily concerned with the major cults. The individual oriented initiation and mortuary rituals are largely handled by the immediate kinsmen of the celebrant, and were never the subject of meeting discussions during the time of fieldwork. The content of the ceremony meetings falls into four categories. They discuss which cult is to be celebrated, and when. They deal with questions of procedure in cult performances. They discuss the attitude that they should adopt to the ceremonies of neighbouring communities, and they consider cases of ceremony misconduct, and rumours and accusations of sorcery.

The meetings have a regular structure. The seating arrangements reflect the ritual status of the participants. The centre of the meeting stage is occupied by the leading men and distinguished visitors. Radiating out from there are the rest, with outsiders and recently initiated men on the outer boundary (see diagram 4). Discussions are initiated by both middle aged and older ritual leaders, and these people dominate the debates. The young men's contribution is largely restricted to asking and answering questions. The following tables are a rough guide to the age and

DIAGRAM IV

THE CEREMONY MEN'S MEETING



family distribution of men who are influential in both types of men's meetings. A man who is regarded as influential is required to exhibit and defend his position publicly.

Age distribution of leading contributors at men's meetings.

Date of birth	Ceremony meetings	Working men's meetings
Pre 1910	3+	0
1911-20	1	0
1921-30	4	2
1931-40	2	3
1941+	0	5
Age range	36 - 70+	21 - 46
mean age	50.4	30.2

\+ One of the three men born before 1910 is a non core resident closely associated with Roper Valley station. All the others belong to core families.

Family group allegiance of leading contributors

Family	Ceremony meetings	Working men's meetings.
Abrahams	3	6
Gideon	2	2
Peterson	1	1
Morgan	2	0
Mara/Alawa	1	0
Other core	0	1
Non core	1	0

During fieldwork in 1970 I attended fourteen ceremony meetings at which there were between 20 and 60 men present. The average number per meeting was about 40, or half the adult male population. Meetings occurred around times of major ritual activity. Three meetings were held in the middle of January, at the time of starting the Jabuduruwa. Five more were held during the period of the changeover in the Jabuduruwa in the second half of March. One was held in mid April during a suspension in performances. One was held in mid May at the time of the finishing of the Jabuduruwa. Four were held between late July and the end of August in connection with the repurchase of a set of Gunabibi objects which had been sold by two Rose River

men to the Australian Institute of Aboriginal Studies.

The tone of discussion is more subdued in ceremony meetings than in the other public fora. Deference is always shown to local old men and to distinguished visitors by reserving prominent places in the meeting area for them and by allowing them an uninterrupted hearing. In discussions concerning particular cults, young men and men who are in the owning moiety of that cult (mingeringi), always ask the pardon of the leading managers (Djunggaiji) before making a contribution to the discussion. This etiquette was broken at only one meeting. Frank Gideon interrupted a meeting that was in progress and harangued the assembled men and any one else in ear shot for about five minutes. No one interrupted or attempted to stop him. When he had finished he sat down and apologised to the three leading managers present, saying that he had behaved badly, but that this was because he was very upset at some recent sorcery threats made to his family. The meeting then continued as though nothing had happened.

Ceremony meetings do not highlight any differences that occur among its participants. At one meeting called to

consider a site for a ritual dancing ground three different views were put forward. Each was presented by its sponsor as a minor part of his contribution to the discussion, which concentrated on the area of general agreement. At no time did the differing views become the centre of attention. There was discussion of the dancing ground in three consecutive meetings, which led to the area of agreement being extended to where definite action could be taken without dissention.

The ceremony meeting normally reaches its decisions only after lengthy discussion, which may, as in the case of the dancing ground site cover more than one meeting. There is no voting on proposals. The knowledge that a decision has been reached emerges from the discussion, when all the leading men express their unequivocal support. Contentious issues are usually shelved when no consensus appears likely to eventuate. There were two occasions when decisions were taken without the full support of the meeting. In both cases the issues could not be shelved, because a failure to act would have resulted in the termination of the Jabuduruwa without completing all the rites. On both occasions the decision was taken with the active support of the three main middle aged leaders: Arnold and Albert Abrahams and Brian Gideon. On the first occasion

the decision was opposed by two older leading men: Frank Gideon and Palmer Yardley, and on the second occasion only one old man, Abraham, opposed the decision.

The working men's meetings differed from the ceremony meetings in a number of respects. They had no time honoured tradition to support their existence, and no exclusive area of concern for which their responsibility was acknowledged. Whereas the ceremony men had the exclusive right to determine ritual policy and administration, the working men had no similar right in the areas of labour relations and Settlement development. The very term working men, which the men used to describe themselves, is misleading. A more accurate description would be a caucus of young men. The impetus for their meetings came from a group of younger generation core men, plus the two Village notables least committed to maintaining the Settlement status quo, William Gideon and Albert Abrahams. Although there was no formal restrictions on participation, no women and only two older men (over 50 years) ever attended the meetings. Like the ceremony meetings they were well attended. Numbers ranged from 23 to 60+, with an average attendance of about 40. Meetings

were held in conjunction with major activities. There were seven meetings of which I was aware during my 1970 fieldwork period, and none during 1971. I was only able to attend three of these meetings. Five of the meetings occurred during late February and March in connection with the strike. The other two were held to discuss and organise the construction of a community hall in September.

The tone of proceedings was often vociferous. The control of the meeting and its discussions was dominated by the two Village notables and three young men, Terry and Adam Abrahams and Nat Davies. These men and the other activists would express their points of view forcefully. Differences were highlighted and openly argued. All the issues discussed were contentious both from the Settlement and the Village view point. There was no voting on proposals, but minority objections were regularly overridden. The meetings aimed at getting active support and commitment from a wide enough group to allow action to be taken, rather than eliciting a generally accepted opinion.

The three public fora of the Village and the two main Settlement committees provide continuing arenas for the discussion of public affairs. Only the Station Council

appears to be unaffected by the rhythm of political activity during 1970 fieldwork. The frequency of meetings tend to coincide with the ebb and flow of political interest. The ceremony and working men's meetings are in fact activated by events, but even the Village meeting and Citizens Club executive, which are set up as regular fora for discussion, respond to political high points.

Frequency of meetings in Settlement and Village fora

Dates	Village Meeting	Citizens Club Executive	Station Council	Ceremony Meeting	Working Men's Meeting	Events
1970						
12.1-25.1	1	0	1	2	0	Start of Jabuduruwa
26.1-8.2	0	1	0	1	0	
9.2-22.2	1	0	0	0	0	
23.2-8.3	2	0	1	0	1	
9.3-22.3	3	1	0	4	3	Strike
23.3.-5.4	1	0	0	1	1	Strike Jabuduruwa changeover
6.4-19.4	1	0	1	1	0	
20.4-3.5	0	1	0	0	0	C.C.G.M. 20th Manager leaves
4.5-17.5	2	1	1	1	0	Jabuduruwa completed
18.5-31.5	1	1	0	0	0	C.C.A.G.M. 25th
1.6-14.6	1	1	0	0	0	
15.6-28.6	1	1	1	0	0	
29.6-12.7	1	1	1	0	0	
13.7-26.7	1	0	0	0	0	
27.7-9.8	1	0	0	2	0	New Manager arrives

Frequency of meetings in Settlement and Village fora...cont.

Dates	Village Meeting	Citizens Club Executive	Station Council	Ceremony Meeting	Working Men's Meeting	Events
10.8-23.8	2	1	1	2	0	Organization of repurchase of Gunabibi Community hall proposal
24.8-6.9	1	0	0	0	1	
7.9-20.9	0	1	1	0	1	
1971						
6.9-19.9	1	1	0	0	0	
20.9-3.10	0	3	0	0	0	C.C.A.G.M. 20th Manager leaves
4.10-17.10	1	1	0	0	0	
18.10-31.10	1	1	1	0	0	
1.11-14.11	0	1	0	0	0	Government takes over shop
15.11-28.11	0	0	1	0	0	
29.11-11.12	0	0	0	0	0	
TOTAL	23	17	10	14	7	

CHAPTER 6

BLACKFELLA LAW: COMPETITION FOR PRESTIGE IN AN AUTONOMOUS STRUCTURE

Introduction

The Ngukurr Village is an Aboriginal community. As such it sees itself and is seen by outsiders as being culturally distinct from white society. The Aboriginal distinctiveness is widely regarded by the Village people as being a positive value, which is embedded in the norms and ideals of Blackfella Law. The dichotomy between this Law and that of white society provides the community with a means of organising some of its relations, which is ideologically autonomous from the dominant European structure. Blackfella Law encapsulates the traditional order of society, which is most prominently maintained, at Ngukurr, through the organisation of religious cults.

Ngukurr includes representations of certain types of property relations in its celebration of the major cults. The main components of these relations are the ritual estates and the control exercised over their use and those

that may use them - within the context of cult activity. Control of the major rites is based on the custody of the ritual estates, and both are subject to competition. Success in this competition confers prestige on the victor, a prestige whose relevance is largely restricted to ritual performances and associated activities. The competition for prestige is a major interest in the holding of ceremonies. Indeed, the Ngukurr celebrant seem to be preoccupied with the competition to control individual estates and the conduct of rites.[1]

The politics of religion is not limited to the competition for prestige within the Village community. The Jabuduruwa (Elkin 1961a, 1971; Maddock 1969a), Gunabibi (Berndt 1951; Hiatt 1965:63-7; Warner 1937; 290-311; Stanner 1964), Maddaiin (Elkin 1961b; Hiatt op.cit.:67-8; Warner op. cit.:340-70; Worsley 1954:122-39), and Balgin (Appendix 1; Maddock 1972:149. No description of this cult has yet been published), are the major cults recognised by Ngukurr. They perform only the first two, but all four have a distribution of social relevance (if not of current performance) of which Ngukurr is only a part. The wide

1. It is possible that the emphasis on the competition to control the individual estates has become intensified in recent years, because of moves, from both within and outside Ngukurr, to have traditional land rights recognised by the Australian Government.

distribution of the cults provides a basis for inter community competition and cooperation. The recognition of wider relevance provides criteria for the possible integration of the communities within the cults' ambits, while at the same time posing a threat to the ritual autonomy of Ngukurr. The relations between the Village and the other communities within the province of the cults are regulated by these conflicting concerns.

SECTION 1: NGUKURR RITUAL PROPERTY AND FAMILY PRESTIGE

Rights in ritual estates are divided between two sets of people. One set are the owners (Mingeringi) of the estate and the other the managers (Djunggaiji) (Maddock op.cit.:36; 1969b:21-3). The owners may be constituted as a patriline, a family, or a patri clan. Succession to the ownership of an estate is patrilineal (Hiatt 1965: 18-24; Maddock 1972: 28-9). Managers are not, in the first instance, constituted as a group but derive their rights as individuals through a uterine connection with the owners (Maddock 1974:207-8). They are the sons and sons sons of women of the owning group, and in the case

of the Balgin, it seems that daughters sons are also included.[2] Owners and managers have complementary responsibilities for their estates. The managers prepare, care for and organise, the sacred sites, emblems and rites, while the owners are its celebrants (Hiatt op.cit.: 54-7; Maddock 1972:36).

The estates are represented symbolically in performances of the rites with which they are associated. Each estate is represented in particular dances members of its owning group perform, and in the designs and paraphernalia they wear in these dances. The knowledge of the dances and designs, together with the physical paraphernalia, are

2. My data on the ownership of Balgin estates is insufficient for me to be certain on this point. DSs, though they belong to the opposite semi moiety (Mambali) of Dua moiety, occupy the same position in Balgin performances as members of Jiridja moiety (cf. appendix 1). They are referred to by the same term as managers (Djunggaiji), though a second term is also applied to them (Dalnjin). This term is applied in Ngukurr Jabuduruwa by the members of one Jiridja semi moiety to the members of the other Jiridja semi moiety (i.e. to describe relations between the two owning semi moieties). Roughly the term means helper or supporter. The importance of the moiety division in the organisation of cults suggests that the DS would not be a manager (Maddock 19 74:207-8), but Maddock elsewhere shows the logical possibility at the level of semi moieties (1969b: 101-2), and MM/DS managership is known in other parts of Arnhem Land (ch.Hiatt: op.cit.).

collectively referred to as the Gulinga of that estate. The managers of the estate care for its Gulinga (Hiatt ibid; Maddock 1974:211-213; cf. Elkin 1971;119 n3, 142-4).

The Jabuduruwa and the Gunabibi are the two major cults celebrated at Ngukurr. These two are complementary because ownership of the Jabuduruwa is restricted to the members of Jiridja moiety, and ownership of the Gunabibi to Dua moiety. Together the two cults allow ritual participants to occupy positions both as owners and managers (Maddock 1972:100-101). However, full participation depends on having access to a Gulinga . The number of Gulinga currently in regular use at Ngukurr is restricted. For the Jabuduruwa there are only six different Gulinga , and three for the Gunabibi (see above ch 4).

Each ceremony is initiated by a single estate group to celebrate its estate, totems and often a recently deceased (2-5 years previous) senior member. While people were living in their traditional habitat, and traversing their own countries, the ceremonies were held on the estates of the owning groups. European intrusion

and occupation of these countries made this practice difficult to continue. Some of the intruders denied groups access to their estates. Other groups, whose estates were some distance away from the Settlement, found that the sedentary life of the Settlement made it impossible to organise ceremonies on their own estates. The mission authorities also compounded the problem by actively discouraging ritual performances within their precincts.

Ceremonies continued to be held, but were, largely, conducted outside the owning group's estate. However, the attitude of the mission prevented the complete localisation of ritual performances. Until this attitude changed in the mid 1950's, Ngukurr appears to have been only one of a number of population centres (the other being Roper Bar, St. Vidgeons, Roper Valley, Hodgson Downs, and possibly also Nutwood Downs and Elsey) which shared in the cult life of the middle Roper area. This cult life was richer than that currently held at Ngukurr, because it included the Balgin and Maddaiin as well as the Jabuduruwa and Gunabibi.

I found it difficult to gather accurate information on

the ceremonies held before the mid 1950's (particularly about the dates they were held). However, the statements of older informants (over 40 years of age) about the places where they were initiated into the major cults indicates the extent of the distribution of common cult activity. The information in the following table includes only the first ceremony in each of the main cults that the informant attended. The information covers ceremonies held between about 1910 and 1950. The data for the sixteen informants is incomplete, because three informants did not remember the place where they had been inducted into the Maddaiin, two did not remember the place they were inducted into the Jabuduruwa, and two did not remember the place where they were inducted into the Gunabibi.

Older Ngukurr men's place of induction into major cults

Center, or vicinity	Gunabibi	Jabuduruwa	Maddaiin	Balgin	Total
Ngukurr-Old Mission	2	5	3	0	10
Roper Bar	3	1	3	0	7
St. Vidgeons	3	2	2	0	7
Rose River area	2	0	3	0	5
Roper Valley	2	3	0	2	7
Hodgson Downs	1	1	0	0	2
Nutwood Downs	0	1	0	0	1
Elsey	0	0	0	1	1

From the mid 1950's the mission allowed ceremonies to be held in the immediate vicinity of the Settlement. After 1957 all the ceremonies put up by Ngukurr men have been held in this area. This has been accompanied by the dropping of the Maddaiin as a ceremony performed at Ngukurr, and a decline in the representation of Ngukurr men at the ceremonies of other centres. The Ngukurr men, in 1970, said that the Maddaiin was an Arnhem Land cult, which, when it had been held at Ngukurr, was organised by the Nunggabuju people from the Rose River area. These people left Ngukurr to establish their own settlement at Rose River after 1952, and they took the Maddaiin with them. The reasons for the decline in the attendance of Ngukurr men at the ceremonies of other centres are more complex. These are largely political and relate to conflict over the conduct of the Balgin cult, and the internal development of a Ngukurr ritual complex.

The changes during the 1950's emphasised the existence of a distinct group of Ngukurr Gulinga. Eleven ceremonies have been held at Ngukurr since 1957, each of which has been associated with one or two of the nine locally held

Gulinga

Major cult ceremonies held at Ngukurr since 1957

Date	Cult	Initiating group
1957	Jabuduruwa	Coast Plum
1958	Gunabibi	Mermaid and Brown Snake
1959	Jabuduruwa	Sandridge Goanna
1959/60	Gunabibi	Catfish
1960	Jabuduruwa	Coast Plum and Black Goanna
1960/61	Gunabibi	Mermaid and Brown Snake
1965	Jabuduruwa	Hill Plum
1967	Gunabibi	Catfish
1968	Jabuduruwa	River Plum (unfinished)
1970	Jabuduruwa	Plain Kangaroo (and River Plum?)
1971	Gunabibi	Brown Snake (unfinished?)

Seven of these nine Gulinga are owned by senior members of the Ngukurr core. Coast Plum and Black Goanna are owned owned by Frank Gideon, Hill Plum and Sandridge Goanna by Pat Peterson, Catfish and Mermaid by Abraham, and Brown Snake is owned by Mathew Avon. River Plum is owned by Mulingera, a close agnate of the Gideons. He is a member of the Roper Valley community, and a long term, though occasional, resident of Ngukurr. Plain Kangaroo is owned by Garry Morgan, the senior member of the Morgan family. He was born and raised at Ngukurr,

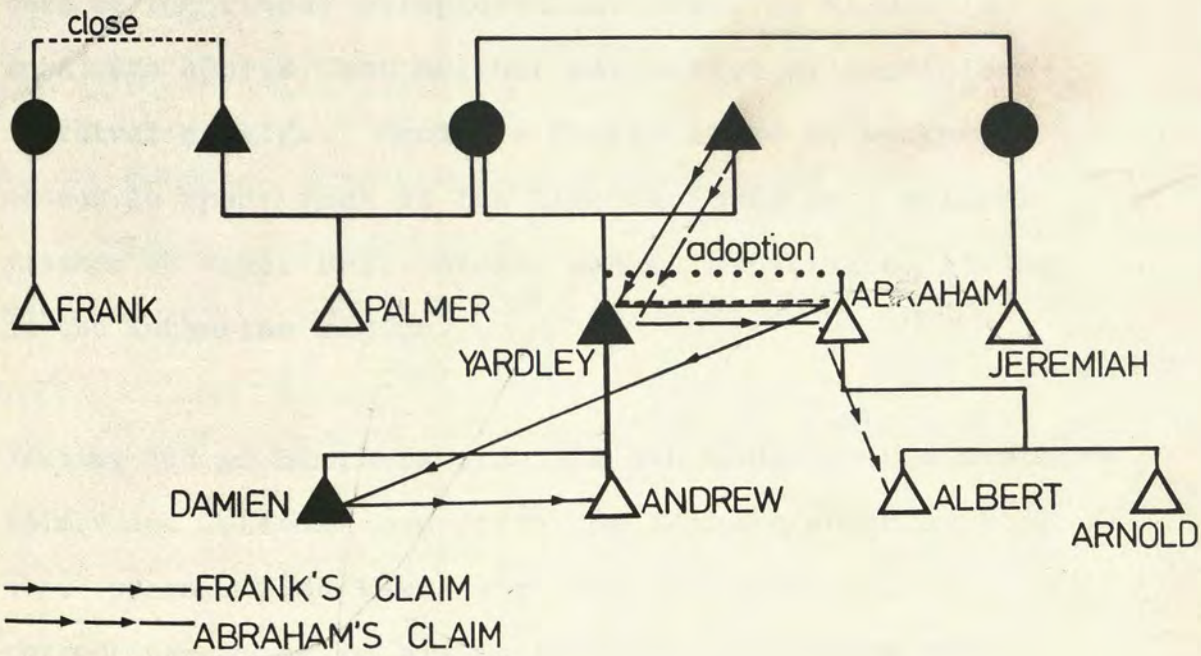
but has spent most of his adult life in the Katherine region. Neither of these men belong to the Ngukurr core, but the successors to their Gulinga and their senior managers do. The predecessor of both was Peter Abbott, the mother's father of the Abrahams family. A major concern of the 1970 Jabuduruwa (which is described in detail in section 2 below) is the retention of local control over these two Gulinga. Competition for control was not restricted to these two alone. Competition within the Ngukurr community also centred on settling the disputed ownership of Hill Plum and Mermaid.

Example: The inheritance of the Mermaid 'Gulinga'

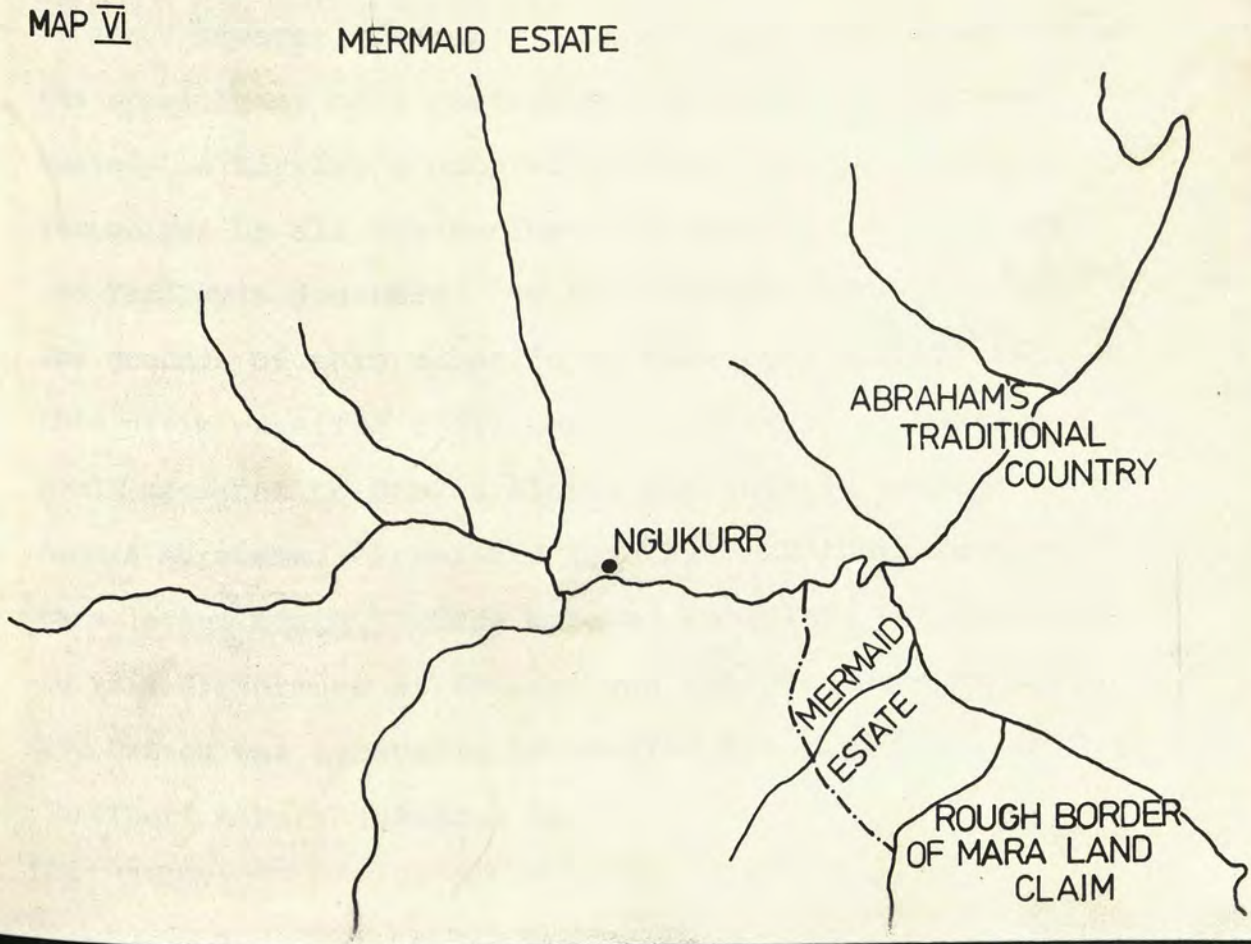
The Mermaid estate is on the Towns river south of the Roper (map 6). The estate belongs to Mambali semi moiety and Dua moiety, and is located in the traditional area of the Mara language group. Until the early 1960's the Gulinga was owned and held by Yardley. On his death the Gulinga passed to Abraham to be held in trust for Yardley's sons, Damien and Andrew, and his own sons, particularly Albert. Abraham's custodianship was long recognised, as it had been the desire of Yardley's father (who had recognised Abraham as his adopted son) as well as the wish of Yardley. At the time of Yardley's death

DIAGRAM V

THE INHERITANCE OF MERMAID



MAP VI



his FZS Frank Gideon was his senior manager, and had care of the ritual paraphernalia. Both of Yardley's sons were adults, but neither was active or proficient in ritual affairs. Damien's family lived at Ngukurr, though he spent much of his time employed as a police tracker at Roper Bar. Andrew was an expatriate, living in the Katherine region.

Yardley had no brothers from his own country (his brothers Palmer and Jeremiah had different fathers whose estates were separate from Yardley's) and the genealogically correct successor to his Gulinga was his eldest son Damien. However, Damien's lack of knowledge necessitated the appointment of a custodian. Abraham claimed the custody as Yardley's adopted brother, and his claim was recognised by all the senior cult men, including Frank and Yardley's brothers. He also claimed ownership on the grounds of this adoption by Yardley's father, and this claim entailed a further one, that the succession would pass not to Damien alone, but jointly to Damien and Albert Abrahams. Frank and Yardley's brothers rejected this latter claim. There were no immediate consequences to this difference as Abraham was accepted as custodian, and Damien was agreeable to sharing his position with his 'brother' Albert (diagram 5).

A crisis in the succession occurred when Damien died suddenly in 1968. The general belief at Ngukurr was that Damien's death had been caused by sorcery, because of his alleged interference in Balgin affairs a few years earlier. The death and its accompanying accusations (discussed in section 3 below) sparked the crisis over ownership of the Mermaid Gulinga. Frank removed the Gulinga paraphernalia from Ngukurr, and refused to return it. The Abraham's family insisted that the paraphernalia be brought back because Abraham was still the custodian and Albert was now the sole heir. Frank, Palmer and Jeremiah disputed this on the grounds that Yardley's other son, Andrew, was still alive. The dispute remained unresolved throughout 1969, with Frank strengthening his hand by bringing Andrew back to Ngukurr. The situation was a stalemate because Frank could not organise a Mermaid Gunabibi without the participation of the Abrahams, and the Abrahams could not hold one without Frank's supervision. The dispute simmered throughout 1970, with Frank and Palmer being content to tutor Andrew in the Mermaid song cycle, and the Abrahams recording the Mermaid myth and expounding the details of their claim.

At the end of 1970 Frank Gideon organised a Gunabibi for the Brown Snake Gulinga of Mathew Avon, which belonged to the Murongon semi moiety. The rules of the Gunabibi in the Roper area do not permit a Murongon group to erect its Gunabibi unless it is accompanied in the ceremony by a Mambali group.[3] On my return to Ngukurr late in 1971 I was told that Frank had wanted the Mermaid Gulinga to accompany Brown Snake. My informants were reticent about the details of what had happened, but I did learn that the Mermaid Gulinga had not been represented, and that the ceremony had terminated without being properly concluded. In particular the climax of the ceremony, where the Jaramanindji (an eclipse shaped frame about eight feet high, decorated with a design from its owning group) of the owning group or groups is destroyed, was not performed. Andrew Yardley had returned to Katherine shortly after the termination.

During my 1971 stay people were preoccupied with other things, and interest in the Jabuduruwa and Gunabibi were

3. This subordination of Murongon semi moiety is not recorded for the Gunabibi of other areas (cf. Berndt 1951; Hiatt 1965; Warner 1937; Worsley 1954). However, it does fit with the restriction of ownership to Murongon semi moiety in the Balgin cult. See further section 3 below and appendix 1.

at a low ebb. The Abrahams particularly, were embroiled in Settlement affairs, Palmer had died earlier in the year, and both Frank Gideon and Mathew Avon were absent from Ngukurr. Absences by Frank and Mathew were not unusual as they often made extended visits to kin outside Ngukurr, and none of my other informants suggested that there was a connection between their absence and the termination of the Gunabibi. Palmer's death was more of a mystery, but one which no one was willing to discuss. I am unable to state what connection these facts have with each other, with the termination of the earlier Gunabibi, or with the succession to the Mermaid Gulinga However, it is unlikely that people's reluctance to discuss these matters was due to lack of interest. It is clear that the succession to the Mermaid Gulinga remained unresolved. Andrew had apparently withdrawn from the field, and therefore the only people who could use the Gulinga were the Abrahams. However, Frank was still the senior manager, and the Abraham's claim to ownership was empty until Frank accepted it. It is he who would be responsible for the organisation of any Mermaid Gunabibi.

Mermaid is the most important of the three active Ngukurr Gunabibi Gulinga . Brown Snake is of only minor importance

because of its recent introduction into the Gunabibi cult, and because both the estate and the owning group belong to the Murongon semi moiety. Mathew Avon's Brown Snake estate was previously celebrated in the Maddaiin cult, and is located well to the north of Ngukurr on the Arnhem Land escarpment. Ngukurr informants, in 1970, said that Avon's Brown Snake estate had been introduced into the Gunabibi some time after Mathew's father had taken up residence at Ngukurr in the 1920's.

The path of the Catfish passes through a number of estates which are owned by the one clan (see above ch 4). This clan, of which the Abrahams are a part, is residentially divided between Ngukurr and Numbulwar. The clan has three catfish Gulinga , of which only one is directly owned by the Abrahams family. The other two are associated with men who are now resident at Numbulwar. Abraham is the senior member of the clan and the senior Catfish owner, but this gives him no control over the other two Gulinga , and even his own Gulinga is shared with his brother. The position of Abraham's sons in the Catfish hierarchy is not very secure. Succession to the two Gulinga held at Numbulwar is certain to remain with

the families resident there, and Abraham's own one must pass to his brother. For this reason control of the Mermaid Gulinga is important. With it the sons of Abraham would secure for themselves an independent status as Gulinga owners.

The interests of Frank and Palmer and Jeremiah were also bound up in the fate of the Mermaid estate. These three laid claim to the country between the lower Roper and the Limmen rivers and had made representations to the Government for a lease over the area. The Mermaid estate, as well as their own, fell within the claimed area. These men and their families maintained contact with this country, making frequent visits of up to three months at a time. Their long term aim was to take their families and resettle in the area (the area was, and still is, part of the St. Vidgeon's pastoral lease). An important difficulty in the plan was the eventual inheritance of the area. The main participants in the proposed claim were Frank and his family, the O'Keefe family, Palmer and Jeremiah.[4]

4. The Abrahams showed no interest in participating, and were themselves heavily committed to a claim for land rights in south east Arnham Land.

The land claimed was the traditional country of these men and was conceived in terms of the complementarity of Mara semi moiety divisions (Spencer and Gillen 1904: 119-30; Maddock 1972:91-2). Each of the four main participating families belonged to a different semi moiety. This was the crux of the problem. The two Jiridja families: Frank's (Gujal semi moiety), and the O'Keefe's (Budal semi moiety), were both growing and had sufficient children to ensure a continuation. The Dua families: Palmer (Murongon semi moiety) and Jeremiah (Mambali semi moiety) did not. Palmer (c.60 years) had no children. They had a closely related Murongon family of fellow countrymen: the Chase family, but the males of this family were not interested in their traditional country. Jeremiah (c.60 years) also had no children, and his only surviving male agnate was Andrew Yardley, whom he adopted in 1970. Thus securing for Andrew his inheritance of the Mermaid estate had a double importance; it kept the estate within the Mara group, and it relieved the threat of extinction of the Mambali semi moiety.

The Abrahams had their need for the Mermaid Gulinga and the Mara theirs, but whatever the outcome Frank's

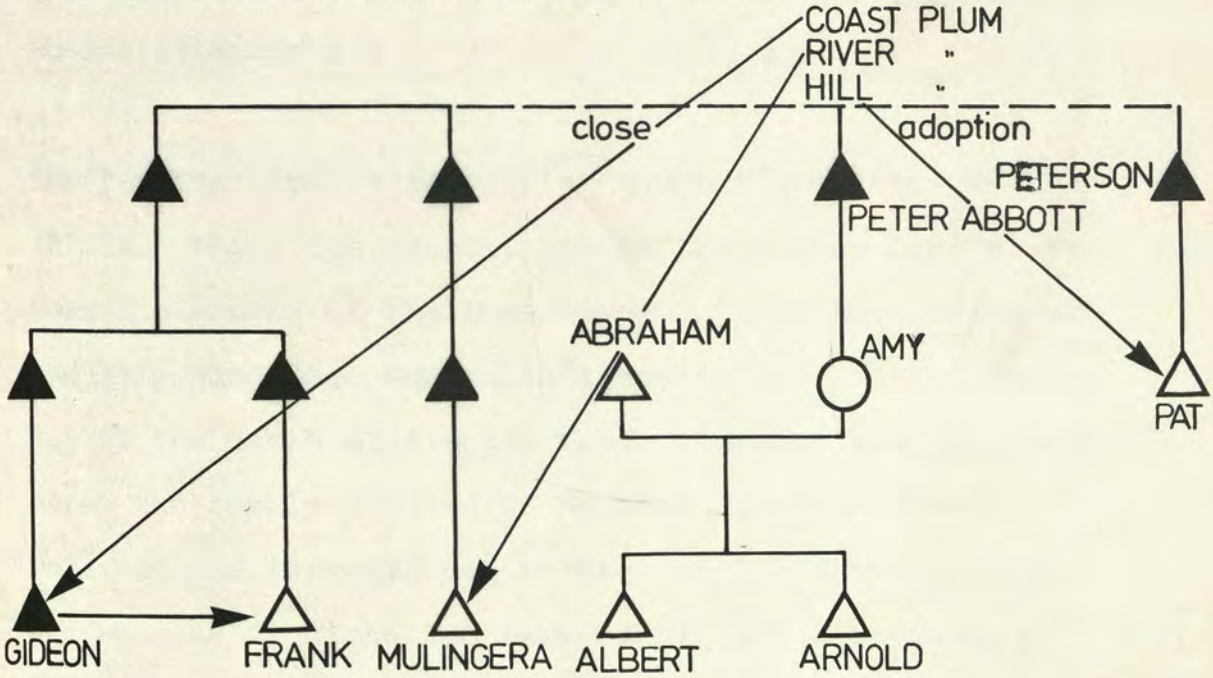
ritual position should have been secure. That he felt threatened was a reflection of the wider setting of overall control of the religious life of Ngukurr. If Frank was the most important manager for Ngukurr Gunabibi, then the Abrahams were in a similar position in relation to the Jabuduruwa. They had, through their mother Amy Abbott, managerial rights to all the Jabuduruwa Gulinga except Black Goanna. The most important for the Ngukurr Jabuduruwa were the three Plum Gulinga Plain Kangaroo is potentially of at least equal importance, but it is yet too early to know whether the 1970 ceremony established its localisation. The two Goanna Gulinga are held by two of the Plum groups as secondary Gulinga

Example 2: The inheritance of Hill Plum

Prior to the second world war Peter Abbott had custodianship of all three of the Plum Gulinga . The Hill Plum was his own, Coast Plum he held in trust for Frank's elder brother Gideon, and River Plum for Gideon's fellow clansman Mulingera. When Abbott handed over the Coast and River Gulinga to their rightful owners, he also promised to give them Hill Plum. However, in the period between this promise and his last years, Abbott changed his mind and bequeathed the Hill Plum to his adopted

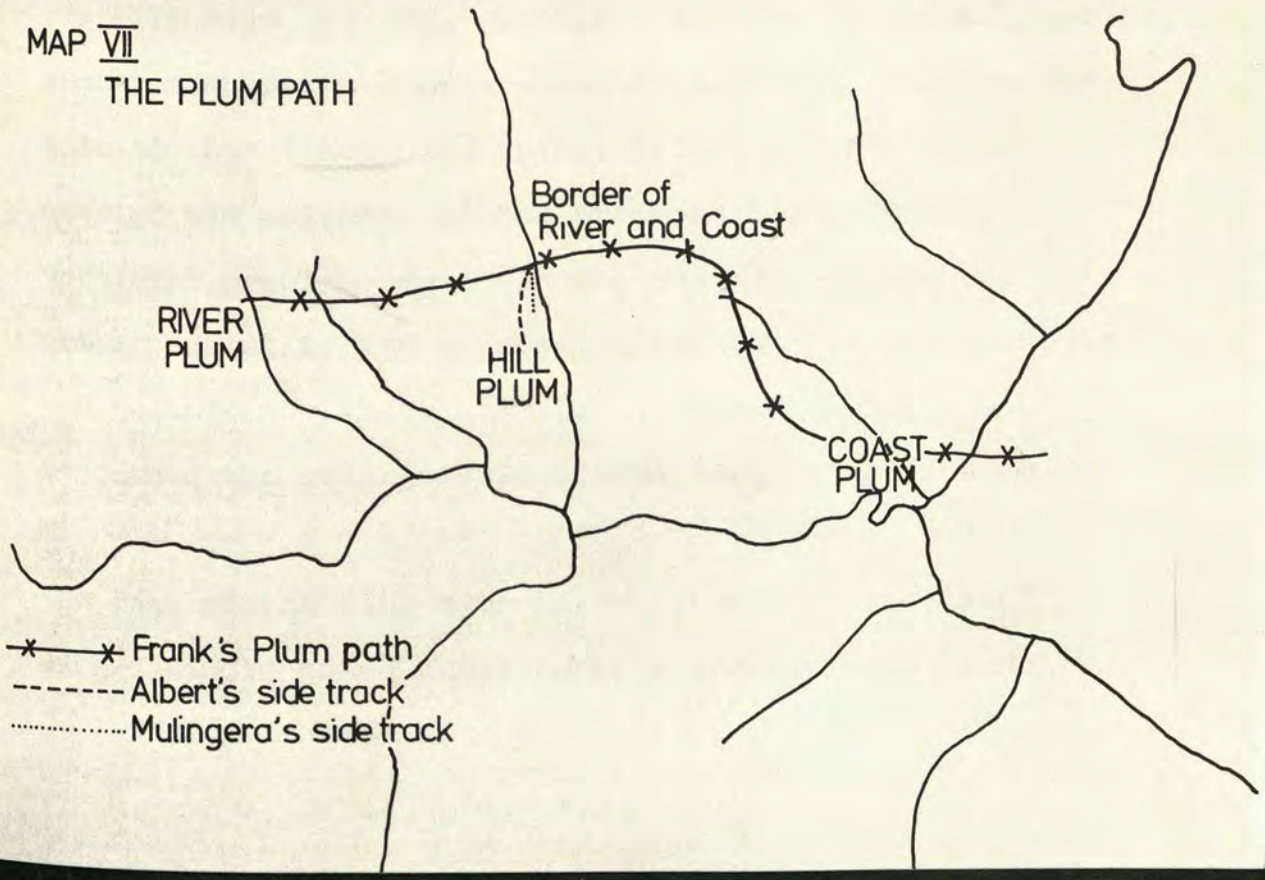
DIAGRAM VI

THE INHERITANCE OF THE PLUM ESTATES



MAP VII

THE PLUM PATH



brother's son, Pat Peterson. Old Peterson was already in possession of Abbott's other Gulinga , the Sandridge Goanna (diagram 6).

The Peterson family settled at Ngukurr some time in the 1920's. Their own country was on the Arnhem Land plateau near the source of the Rose river. Their main totem was the same Sandridge Goanna as Abbott's, but their estate lay to the north of his and their ceremony was the Maddaiin. After the family settled at Ngukurr Abbott adopted Peterson and introduced him into the Jabuduruwa. Abbott had no sons or close brothers so he gave his Goanna Gulinga to Peterson, and shortly before he died he gave his Hill Plum Gulinga to Pat. The senior ritual leaders accepted Abbott's bequest at the time, but after he died some of them (including Frank, Palmer and Mulingera) queried the validity of his transmission of Hill Plum. The legal problem, as these men saw it, was whether the later bequest to Pat superseded the earlier one to Gideon and Mulingera. There was also a second problem, which concerned the relationship of the three Plum estates.

The path of the Plum myth is, as a whole, associated with a single named group. There are two main branches

of the group, and each owns a separate lengthy section of the path. One of these centres on the River Plum estate and the other on the Coast Plum estate. In between these two sections is a small area, a side track from the main path, which is Hill Plum. Hill Plum,unlike the rest of the path, belongs to a different named group, of which Abbott was the last male member. Frank, in an angry moment during the 1970 Jabuduruwa, claimed that Hill was not a genuine Plum estate, but had been invented by Abbott to secure a Plum Gulinga for himself. A few months later, when questioned by the chaplain's wife (who was collecting data for Elkin), he repeated this story in more moderate terms. (Elkin 1971:123, 129). In his earlier outburst Frank had denounced the whole of Hill Plum as a fraud, but in his later statement he limited this accusation to one ritual object. The effect was essentially the same because the object, called Wadaminmara, establishes the estate as a major one in Ngukurr Jabuduruwa (see appendix 1).

The Plum myth cycle also suggests a disjuncture between the Hill and the other two Plum estates (map 7). I am aware of four different versions of the myth which deal with the area around Hill Plum. The first version, from

Albert Abrahams, was recorded by Maddock in 1966 (1969a: 231-2), by Elkin at about the same time (op.cit.:127-9) and again by myself in 1968. This version emphasises the cult hero's travel through the Hill estate, and leaving there important ritual objects including Wadaminmara. I recorded a second version from Frank Gideon in January 1970, which was also collected by Elkin later in the same year (ibid.:131), in which there is no mention of the Hill estate. Elkin also records a third variation, in the form of comments on Albert's account by unnamed 'Older Jabuduruwa men' (which almost certainly would have included Frank). This version offered a compromise between the other two. The cult hero looked into the Hill estate and claimed it and its associated totemic objects for the Jabuduruwa, but did not deviate from the path of Frank's earlier version (op.cit:129). Mulingera gave me a fourth version of the myth in May 1970. This version had the hero travelling part of the way from the main path to the principal Hill site. He stopped at a point from which he could see the principal site, made the country around it, and left Jabuduruwa paraphernalia there, including a Wadaminmara.

The differing versions of the Plum myth cycle indicated

there was some uncertainity about the status of Hill Plum. I cannot say whether the various versions predated the particular controversy or not, though clearly the versions each participant used tended to support his particular argument. Frank, by throwing into question the whole validity of Hill Plum,was going much further than simply challenging an inheritance claim. He was undermining the very basis of the claims to ritual status, of both the Abrahams and Peterson families. If the Hill Plum was illegitimate, then there was nothing for Pat to inherit, for Peter Abbott had nothing to give. Also, if Abbott had nothing to give, his DSs had nothing to manage. Frank's later version of the myth was a withdrawal from this extreme position. The possible repercussions from destroying Abbott's credibility were too widespread. Nearly all the Ngukurr Jabuduruwa Gulinga (Coast, River and Hill Plum, Sandridge Goanna, and Plain Kangaroo) had been owned or in the custody of Abbott and had been handed by him to their present owners.

The mythological uncertainity and the dispute over inheritance left the Abrahams and Petersons in an insecure position. During the 1960's they made three attempts to

secure the position of the Hill Plum estate and their own ritual positions. The first of these was the organisation of a Hill Plum Jabuduruwa in May 1965.

The stimulus for the 1965 Jabuduruwa grew out of informal discussions in Darwin between a Darwin film director and a number of Ngukurr men, including Albert Abrahams, in which the former canvassed the possibility of filming a Jabuduruwa ceremony on behalf of the Australian Institute of Aboriginal Studies. The Ngukurr men found the idea attractive and Albert returned to Ngukurr to arrange for the performance of the ceremony. The Hill Plum ceremony was arranged at short notice by Albert and Arnold to fit in with the Institute's filming schedule. Albert was himself on leave from a Darwin job, which added to the haste. The ceremony itself was performed in a single two week period (Elkin op.cit.:112).

This ceremony was important for the Hill controversy because it was organised by the Abrahams, and was owned by Pat Peterson. The central focus of the ceremony was Pat's Hill Plum Gulinga and the Hill Plum Wadaminmara (Elkin ibid.). The other senior Plum owners, Frank Gideon and Mulingera, were not present at the ceremony. However,

Frank's senior managers, Palmer and Jeremiah, were both active participants, which meant they at least accepted the legitimacy of the proceedings. The successful completion of this Jabuduruwa should have established the validity of the Hill Plum estate and the positions of both the Abrahams and the Petersons. It did not, because allegations were made about irregularities in its organisation and performance. The allegations took a while to develop, and broke into public controversy following the first screening of the film at Ngukurr. Frank was at the forefront of the critics. He enumerated a number of,essentially technical, faults in the individual performances (some of these were due to the editing of the film), and declared that the ceremony had been conducted in too short a time and was therefore not a legitimate Jabuduruwa. He also stated that the Abrahams were in error for allowing the ceremony to be filmed. Similar criticisms, particularly relating to the fact of filming, also reached Ngukurr from Numbulwar and the surrounding cattle stations. These outside criticisms were brought to Ngukurr second hand and gave rise to rumours of planned retribution against the alleged breakers of Blackfella law. Instead of finally settling the issue of the Hill Plum estate, the 1965 Jabuduruwa only

intensified the controversy.

Another attempt to settle the Hill Plum was made in 1968. On this occasion the Abrahams were responsible for organising a Jabuduruwa to celebrate Mulingera's River Plum estate. the Abrahams planned to have the Wadaminmara objects of both Hill and River Plum represented at the final Wadaminmara rite. When questioned, early in 1970, Albert said that Mulingera had agreed to this. Mulingera would make no comment. However, the plan was never put to the test. Mulingera's brother died shortly after the Jabuduruwa started, and the ceremony was terminated without being completed.

The third attempt occurred in conjunction with the 1970 Jabuduruwa. This ceremony was owned by the Plain Kangaroo group, but special provision was made for Mulingera to share in the final rites so as to complete his aborted 1968 Jabuduruwa. During the course of the ceremony Pat Peterson and his family used the Hill Plum Gulinga despite objections from Frank and Palmer (see below section 2, example 6), and in the final rite it was the Hill Wadaminmara which shared the limelight with Plain Kangaroo with Pat Peterson and Mulingera performing the

rite together. By sharing the final performance with Pat Peterson, Mulingera unequivocally recognised the validity of the Hill Plum estate (which he had never denied) and Pat's ownership of it (which up till then he had periodically questioned). This greatly strengthened the position of the Abrahams and Petersons, but it did not finally settle the controversy. The statements from 'Older Jabuduruwa men' which Elkin cites (loc.cit.) were recorded at Ngukurr some months after the completion of the Jabuduruwa.

However, by the middle of 1970, the Hill Plum Gulinga was firmly established in the Ngukurr Jabuduruwa repertoire. The Gulinga , and especially the Wadaminmara, had now been used in two recent Jabuduruwa ceremonies. Mulingera and most other senior Jabuduruwa men (the only exceptions were Frank, Palmer and Jeremiah) had publicly affirmed Pat's ownership of Hill Plum at a ceremony men's meeting during the course of the ceremony. All the senior men at Ngukurr (including Frank, Palmer and Jeremiah) and visitors from other centres attended the final Wadaminmara rite. Frank's attendance at the rite entailed a tacit acceptance of the situation, and this reduced the effectiveness of his later disclaimers. The Abrahams had

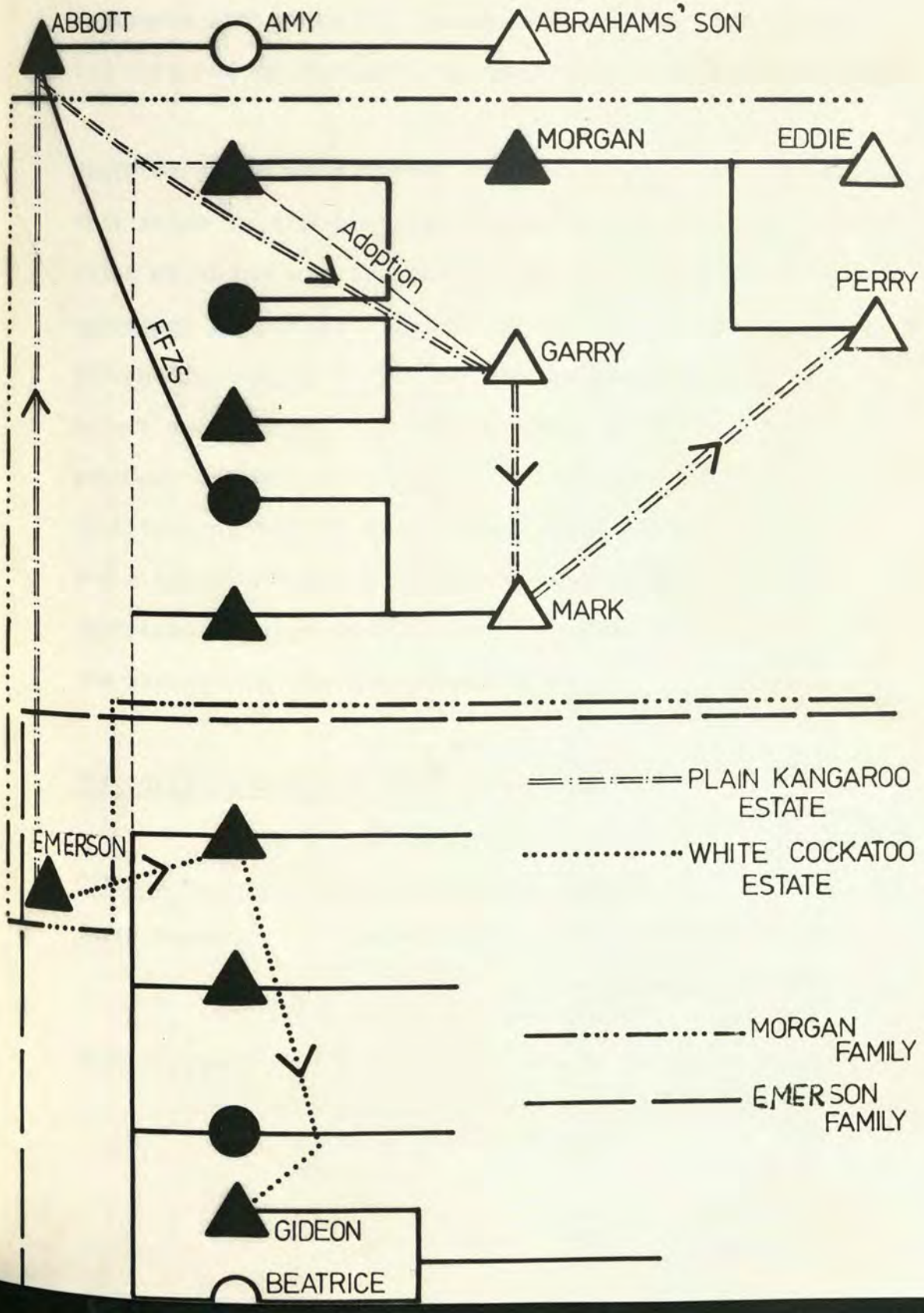
succeeded in outmanoeuvring Frank, and had done so by controlling the conduct of the 1970 Jabuduruwa.

SECTION 2: THE MECHANICS OF COMPETITION IN A JABUDURUWA PERFORMANCE

The Plain Kangaroo Jabuduruwa was held during the first five months of 1970. The ceremony was organised by Albert and Arnold Abrahams. They encouraged Garry Morgan, the custodian of the Plain Kangaroo Gulinga to hold the ceremony at Ngukurr, so that he could transfer the Gulinga to the owners of the Plain Kangaroo estate: Mark, Eddie and Perry Morgan (diagram 7). A Plain Kangaroo Jabuduruwa had not been held at Ngukurr for over 20 years and there were few men conversant with the details of its ceremony. (The content and sequence of all Ngukurr Jabuduruwa is the same (see appendix 2), but there are three important items which differ for each owning group. The exact dimensions of the sacred hut (Budjada) built on the main dancing ground are different for each group. The size of the main dance ground is also specific for each, as also is each group's Wadaminmara). The two men acknowledged as experts by the

DIAGRAM VII

INHERITANCE OF PLAIN KANGAROO



Ngukurr people were both cattle station residents: Mulingera and Pieball. Garry, himself an expatriate, had returned to Ngukurr especially to hold the ceremony.

There were two main themes running through the disputes that arose in the context of the 1970 Jabuduruwa. The first of these was the continuing competition for local supremacy in ritual affairs in which the central protagonists were Frank and the Abrahams brothers: Albert and Arnold. The other theme concerned the autonomy of Ngukurr ritual. The Jabuduruwa, as an institution, had an established structure of positions, and a known content and sequence of events which are described in appendix 2. This overall framework set the parameters for the competition.

The participants and their positions.

Jiridja Moiety:	The Jabuduruwa owners
Garry Morgan	Custodian of Plain Kangaroo estate and initiator of the ceremony. Age: late 40's. Budal semi moiety and Naridj subsection.
Mark Morgan:	Successor to Plain Kangaroo estate and Garry's FBS. Age: mid 30's. Budal semi moiety and Naridj subsection.

Frank Gideon	Owner of Coast Plum estate. Age: early 60's. Gujal semi moiety and Bulain subsection.
Mulingera	Owner of River Plum estate and 'FBS' of Frank. Age: early 60's. Bulain subsection and Gujal semi moiety.
Pat Peterson	Owner of Hill Plum estate. Age: late 50's. Gujal semi moiety and Godjog subsection.
Pete Peterson	Pat's brother. Age: late 40's. Gujal semi moiety and Godjog subsection.
Oscar Peterson	Pat's son. Age: mid 20's. Gujal semi moiety and Bulain subsection.
Brian Gideon	Frank's elder BS and successor to both Coast and River Plum estates. Age: early 40's. Gujal semi moiety and Godjog subsection.
William Gideon	Brian's younger brother. Age: late 30's. Gujal semi moiety and Godjog subsection.
<u>Dua moiety:</u>	<u>the Jabuduruwa managers.</u>
Abraham	Titular head manager of Jabuduruwa. Pat's "sister's" husband. Age: 70's. Mambali semi moiety and Wamud subsection.
Albert Abrahams	Co-organiser of Jabuduruwa. Abraham's second son. Pat's ZS, Mark's 'MBS', and Mulingera's 'FZS'. Age: mid 40's. Mambali semi moiety and Gela subsection.

Arnold Abrahams	Co-organiser of Jabuduruwa. Albert's younger brother. Age: early 40's. Mambali semi moiety and Gela subsection.
Palmer	Frank's MBS and his senior manager. Age: mid 60's. Murongon semi moiety and Balang subsection.
Jeremiah	Palmer's 'brother' and Frank's second manager. Age: mid 60's. Mambali semi moiety and Gela subsection.
Pieball	Mulingera and Garry's 'MB'. Senior manager for both. Age: early 60's. Murongon semi moiety and Gamarang subsection.

There are five main interest groups represented in the decision making process of the ceremony. Not all of these operated at any one time, but all had an important influence on the course of the ceremony. The Abrahams family, whose main spokesmen are Arnold, Albert and their father Abraham, are the principal local Jabuduruwa organisers. All action in which more than one interest group participates is initiated by them. Their prime concern is to maintain the position of prominence that they already hold in the organization of Ngukurr Jabuduruwa.

Garry and his family are outsiders in the general community. He initiated the ceremony at Ngukurr because it is the traditional country of his totemic group.

The Plum totemic path is represented by three groups. Each group has its own estate and its own interests. Mulingera is the owner and sole representative of the River group. He, together with his manager Pieball, is the main representative of the cattle station based outsiders, whose expertise the locals need to overcome certain technical problems. The cattle station people, as a whole, are reluctant participants. They have no wish to become embroiled in local disputes. Mulingera finds it difficult to maintain his distance, because he is committed to completing an earlier Jabuduruwa that was initiated by his, since deceased, brother.

Frank is the leader of the Coast Plum group. He and his managers, Palmer and Jeremiah, are the main opponents of the Abrahams family. Their aim is to wrest the organising role away from the Abrahams'. They are persistent critics of the decisions and courses of action taken during the ceremony. They are attempting to assert their primacy in both ritual knowledge and the control of Gulinga

The Peterson family, whose leader is Pat, are the Hill Plum group. They are close allies of the Abrahams family.

Their ownership of the Hill Plum Gulinga is questioned by Frank, and to a lesser extent by Mulingera. Both of these men have, at some time, claimed ownership for themselves. The Peterson's main concern is to protect their ownership of Hill Plum.

Preliminary disputes: the key ceremony roles.

Before the Jabuduruwa could start there were two problems that needed to be resolved. The first was which totemic group was to be regarded as owner of the ceremony. The other was which managers were to be the principal organisers.

Example 1.

The moves to initiate the ceremony were made by the senior men of the Plain Kangaroo group. However, two years earlier, a Plum Jabuduruwa was left unfinished after the death of its initiator. This man's brother, Mulingera, now decided the time was appropriate to complete his brother's ceremony. There was no precedent for resolving this issue, and the norms were ambiguous. Mulingera claimed that as the Plum ceremony had not been completed it was still theoretically in progress. It should therefore be completed before a new ceremony was begun. Arnold, who

had organised the uncompleted ceremony, said that he had tried to finish it the previous year but Mulingera had not responded. He considered that therefore he had no further responsibility to complete it. Mulingera and his supporters then agreed not to press their point, asking only that the Plum design should be used alongside Plain Kangaroo at the ceremony's finale. This was agreed to, and the Jabuduruwa was then said to belong to Plain Kangaroo.

Example 2.

Garry, the leader of Plain Kangaroo, had two close ZS. However, neither was a permanent resident of Ngukurr. Both lived on cattle stations which were respectively 60 and 100 miles from the Settlement, and they were only on holidays at Ngukurr till March. The alternative organisers were Arnold and Albert. They were the DSs of an earlier holder of Plain Kangaroo, (Abbott), who was not himself a member of the totemic group, but had custody of the estate in trust for the Morgan family.

The Abraham's had a number of advantages despite the weakness of their genealogical claim. They were local residents and they had organised the previous two

Jabuduruwa. They were influential in the general community and could mobilise support more readily than outsiders. Theirs and their mother's family together made up almost 40% of the available participants. It would, in fact, be difficult to conduct the Jabuduruwa without their cooperation. Withdrawal by the Abrahams would make participation impolitic for most of the other locals. Active participation by local residents would be limited to a handful of the Abrahams' main opponents.

Garry wanted a short ceremony so that his ZSs could be his organisers. But he was worried about how the Abrahams would react. Frank encouraged Garry by saying that with his own family and managers they would have sufficient people to conduct the ceremony. A meeting of initiates was held a week before the ceremony was due to commence. At this meeting Garry asked for a short ceremony as he, and the cattle station people, would have to resume work in March. Albert argued that this was too short, because he needed time to organise Mulingera's Plum design for the finish. He suggested three months as a suitable duration. Mulingera and most of the locals supported Albert. Garry and Frank reluctantly agreed to Albert's proposal. Garry's two ZSs then publicly and

apologetically withdrew as ceremony organisers. They said that though they were Garry's correct managers, the main organisers for this country (Ngukurr) were the Abrahams.

Both examples are of disputes in which the issues are stated in terms of traditional usage and ceremonial precedent. Traditionally one ceremony must be completed before another begins. The accepted compromise could be seen to fulfill both norms, and perhaps set a precedent for the future. The relation between owner and manager is genealogically specified as MB/ZS or FMB/ZSS. There is also a belief that the manager-organiser should be an appropriate local man in the closest approximate relation to the owner. The acceptance of locality as the decisive criterion is on the basis of the practical considerations of length of ceremony and mobilization of support. Neither dispute could be resolved by an appeal to clear out traditional norms.

Disputes over Ceremony Content

Example 3.

The Plain Kangaroo's central dreaming place is a lagoon

two miles west of the Village. All the parties recognised this area as the proper place for the main ground. Garry, the cattle station people and Frank said this was the only place where the ground could be. The Abrahams family considered construction in this area impractical. A great deal of work would be needed as the area was heavily overgrown, and about 200 head of cattle would have to be moved into another paddock. The area was beyond an easy walking distance, which meant the task of arranging performances would be made more difficult. The women, whose participation was at best half hearted, would be reluctant to travel the distance to cook for the men. As an alternative the Abrahams proposed an area one mile south east of the village. This area was set aside for ceremonial use, fenced off from cattle, and reasonably open country. Arnold and Albert could theoretically enforce their choice as they were the organisers, but they were unwilling to do so for fear of alienating the station outsiders whose help they needed for details of the construction of the ground and the sacred hut.

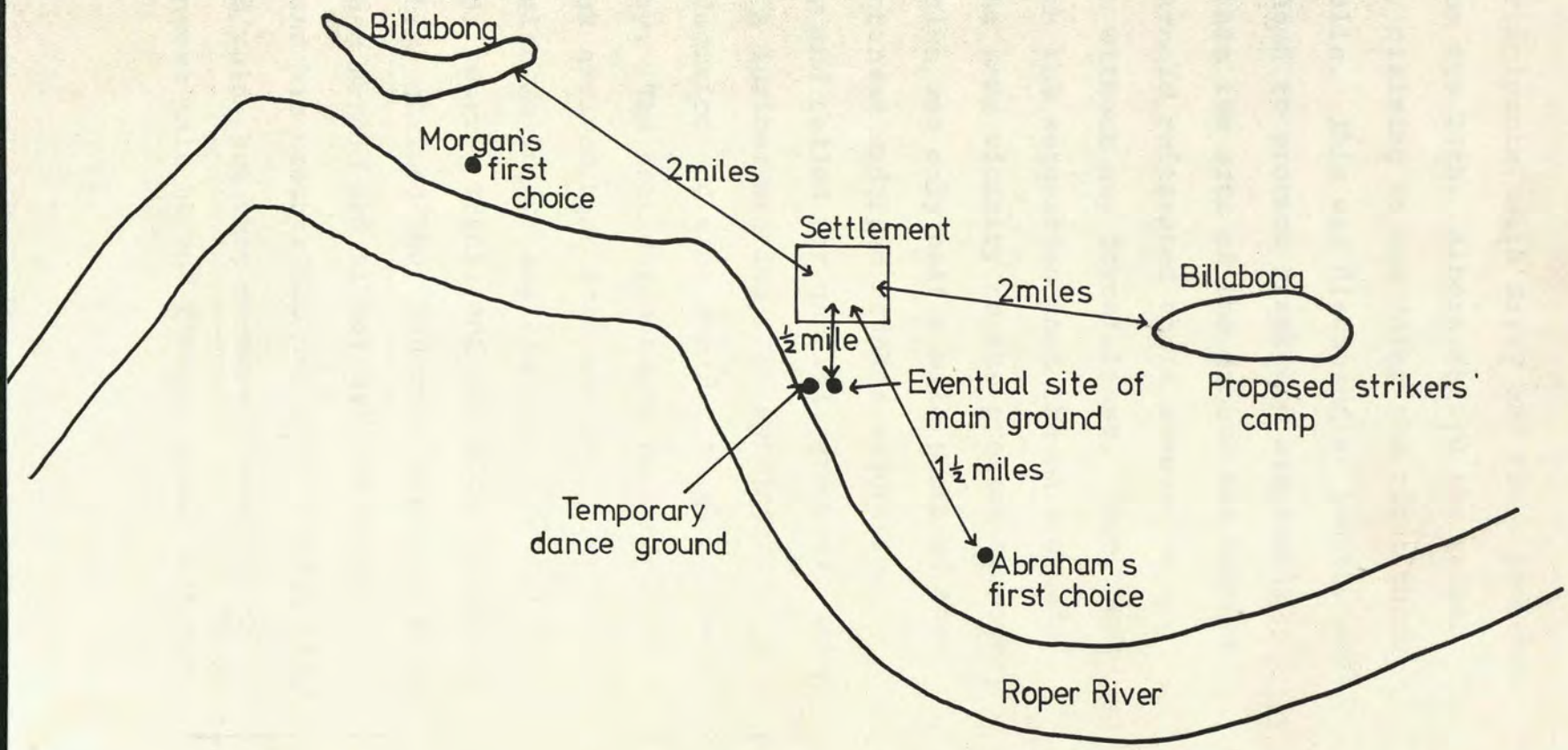
Once the duration of the ceremony was set at three months, then the best time for phase three (see appendix 2) would be six weeks or early March. Two unforseen occurances

delayed the move from the temporary dance ground. First there was the death, on a cattle station, of Garry's brother. This led to the ceremony being stopped for one week. The second was a series of demands and confrontation between the Aboriginal community and the Government which culminated in a strike commencing on the 9th March. The original one week cessation continued for 23 days, by which time it was realised that if a move was not made the ceremony would have to be abandoned.

The position changed during the 23 days suspension. Garry became worried that the ceremony would not re-commence. Frank was on the receiving end of a sorcery threat for allegedly causing trouble about a Balgin ceremony in the past. Arnold and Albert were preoccupied with the strike, particularly their conflict with the young men over strike policy. Part of this conflict concerned moving the people out of the Village and setting up residence at a lagoon two miles east. Both Arnold and Albert opposed vacating the Village, and were aware that moving the ceremony ground to where they themselves had previously wanted it might play into the hands of the vacators (see map 8).

The Abrahams, Garry and Frank were all ready to compromise, but none wished to appear the loser. A meeting of ceremony participants was held on 11th March without the presence of either Garry or Frank. This meeting was a follow on from a public meeting in which people displayed a rare unity in a general enthusiasm for the strike. This feeling of well being and unity was carried over into the ceremony meeting. Arnold said the ground would be where he originally planned it, and this was received in the general mood of agreement. Within two days it was obvious that things were not going according to plan. A public meeting on the 14th was tense. Arnold, Albert and Frank's eldest son Brian upbraided people for lack of concern for the ceremony. Herbert, a leading member of the militant strikers, took this up and told the Abrahams that the only way to have people in full attendance was to have them camping near the ceremony ground. The euphoria of the 11th was gone. The militants were showing that they would use the ceremony ground location for their own ends. The result was that nothing was done about shifting the ground during the next week.

MAP VIII ALTERNATIVE SITES FOR MAIN CEREMONY GROUND



The ceremony participants, with Garry and Frank present, held a meeting on the 20th. Albert raised the recent threat to Frank, claiming he was doing the right thing by making it public. This was discussed at length, and all present pledged to protect Frank and his family. Straight after this the site of the ground was brought up. Garry and Arnold reiterated their respective preferences, but without any forcefulness. Then Frank came forward with the suggestion that the main ground be cleared in the same vicinity as the present temporary dancing area, which was only half a mile south of the Village. The Abrahams endorsed Frank's suggestion enthusiastically and called for general agreement, which they received. A further meeting that evening re-emphasised the decision and also decided to clear the site the next day. The next day nothing happened. In the evening Frank arrived back from the neighbouring cattle station with Mulingera and Pieball, and another meeting was held. Garry, Frank, and the older managers (including Abraham) claimed they had been ready to go up, but hadn't because Arnold and Albert had not moved. Albert said he and his brother had not gone because they thought it would rain, but they certainly would go up tomorrow. Mulingera said he and Pieball could only stay

for one day, but they would help mark out the new ground. As an afterthought Albert told Pieball they had only chosen this site because of the cattle at the main site, and that if Pieball wanted the traditional Plain Kangaroo site they would do it there. Pieball said the new site was alright. The following day the ground was cleared.

The issue started as a direct dispute between the Abrahams family and the Plain Kangaroo group, with Frank firmly on Garry's side. Garry's early insistence on the traditional site was due to the fact that he had gone to the trouble to have the ceremony in the right country, and therefore felt the ground should be on the proper location. The lengthy cessation of performances, the absence of his cattle station managers, and the desertion of Frank, all contribued to the weakening of Garry's position. The Abrahams family's position was weakened by the dissention over strike policy, and their dependence on outsiders for expertise. Arnold and Albert needed Mulingera and Pieball not only to help mark the new ground, but also to widen the basis of agreement on its siting. The strike produced a crisis in the Abraham's family. Arnold, who was a leading intermediary between

Village and the Government, was displaced by the strikers' direct action. Albert, one of the strike organisers, attempted to guide strike policy but failed to attain a commanding position. Their sons were part of the core of militant strikers. The internal unity of the family, rent by the strike, was very weak.

Frank was not directly affected by the siting of another totemic group's ground. However, he aligned himself with Garry in the hope of embarrassing the Abrahams family. The threat to his life, against which he wanted local support, was partly responsible for his change of position. A second factor was the position taken by his two eledest sons, Brian and William. Both were prominent in local affairs and opposed to the vacating of the Village. Neither held the same view of the Abrahams family as Frank. It was probably that they would support Arnold and Albert in any proposal to keep the ceremony ground near the Village. The lead up to the acceptance of Frank's compromise indicates that there was fore knowledge, at least by Arnold and Albert. I suspect the compromise was suggested to Frank by either Brian or William, with Albert's knowledge. But why didn't Albert, Brian or William put it forward themselves? A proposal

by Frank supported by the Abrahams would carry more weight with the senior men, particularly Garry, and as Frank was not involved in the strike it would also be more acceptable to the young men. As for Frank he gained kudos as the proposer of a successful compromise.

Example 4.

The question of a messenger being sent to collect people from other areas also raised problems. No ceremonial messenger had been sent from Ngukurr since before the current generation of organisers were initiated. In answer to questions, I was told by Abraham, Frank and Palmer that the messenger was a traditional part of the Jabuduruwa in this area. It appears to have been used, in pre-Settlement times, to contact and collect groups for attendance at a ceremony. The groups contacted were associated with the particular estate being celebrated, but were not its owners. They were also groups which were living at some distance from the ceremonial centre, and could therefore not be expected to just pop in during the course of the ceremony without prior preparations.

Palmer gave me a recent example (date unknown, but probably some time during the late 1950's) from a

Jabuduruwa held on a cattle station in the Gulf country near Borroloola. This ceremony was started by three men: one manager and two owners. It continued for about two months with little additional support. At this stage the participants felt they should prepare for the finish, and sent one of the managers to collect people (a big mob). The manager went by foot to a lot of places (Palmer named only two: Nutwood Downs and Tanumbirini), and after one month (a rough approximation; one month is the traditional duration for a messenger's absence) returned with a big mob (number unspecified). Palmer concluded his example by saying that Ngukurr doesn't do this because they've got a lot of people and all the big men (cult leaders) were here.

However, Garry, though he was born and raised locally, lived with and was married into the Mainoru community. He was naturally anxious to have the people from his adopted home present for the finish of the ceremony. He wanted a traditional messenger to be sent to Mainoru from Ngukurr to collect the people. He had voiced this desire since the beginning of the ceremony, and in the first month the emphasis on a traditional messenger was part of his general concern for maintaining traditional precedent.

Garry feared that the death of his Mainoru 'brother', the strike, and the controversy over siting the main ground, would make the Mainoru people reluctant to come. He pressed Arnold to send some ritually significant invitation, preferably a traditional messenger, but even just a piece of his paraphernalia by some other means. Arnold equivocated. Mark Morgan offered to make the trip, but Arnold rejected this because only a manager could carry the invitation. Arnold's indecision went on for two weeks after the end of the changeover period. On 11th April Mulingera visited Ngukurr and discussed the question of contacting the Mainoru people with Arnold. Both men agreed that it was unnecessary to send a messenger. Garry was upset, but it was a job that could only be done by a manager, so he decided to press on with the ceremony.

There was serious doubt about the future of the ceremony at this time. There had been no performances since 28th March. The difference over the messenger was only one of the contributing factors. The internal dissention and bitterness left by the failure of the strike was another. A third factor was the behaviour of Frank who had withdrawn himself and his sons from the ceremony, because, he said, of the persistent rumours that his life was being threatened.

The Petersons had also withdrawn. Their reason was Frank's attack on their ownership of Hill Plum and on the ritual status of Oscar Peterson (see below examples 5 and 6), which their managers: the Abrahams, had not immediately and publicly rebuffed. The Abrahams also contributed to the intensification of the crisis. Albert had gone to Darwin soon after the completion of the changeover, and left Arnold to bear the full burden of keeping the ceremony going. Arnold would not or could not do this, and instead turned his attention away from the ceremony altogether.

This was the situation which faced Garry when he moved to restart performances on 12th April. During the day of the 12th Garry informed Arnold and a number of other men that he and Mark were going to the dance ground to paint up straight after work. When I arrived at the ground at 4.30 there were only six men present: Garry and Mark preparing themselves with the assistance of their Gagau (MMB), another young man from Jiridja moiety, and two old managers who did nothing except complain about no managers being present. Two newly inducted men and one owner were the only other people who arrived prior to the performance. None of Garry and Mark's managers came up.

They had to perform their dances using headgear discarded after a previous performance, which they said was undesirable but not illegal. One of the old men took the manager's role in the dance, while the accompaniment on the sacred gong (Djandayi) was played by Garry and Mark's MMB, who belonged to the same moiety as them (Jiridja) but opposite semi moiety (Gujal).[5]

Garry was angry, and called a ceremony meeting that evening to complain about people's non attendance and try and get a commitment to complete the ceremony. The meeting apologised to Garry, but then embarked on a session of personal accusation and recrimination in which all the current disputes were brought to the surface (see example 6). The meeting did not produce the commitment Garry had sought. The ceremony continued to languish during the next week, and Garry and Mark both talked of abandoning altogether the ceremony and Ngukurr. At this point a

5. The beating of the gong in all but the 'Managers Rite' is the prerogative of managers (Maddock, 1969a). In the exceptional circumstances of this performance the participants invoked a rule that a MMB is like a manager who can, in the absence of a suitable manager, perform his function. This was the only occasion in which a gagau acted in this way (cf. my note 2).

chance occurrence completely altered the situation. On Monday 20th April a Jabuduruwa manager from Mainoru stopped over at Ngukurr on his way from Darwin to Mainoru (Ngukurr is a regular stop for the local airline). He contacted Garry to find out how the ceremony was proceeding. Garry said that he needed his family from Mainoru to complete the ceremony, persuaded the man to act as messenger, and gave him a part of his ritual paraphernalia to ensure that he would. After the plane left in the afternoon he told Arnold. Arnold replied that he had no right to do such a thing. Garry then said he would like to paint up on Wednesday. Arnold replied that that was alright, he would come. Regular performances and preparations for the finale recommenced on Wednesday 22nd April.

Disputes over Property

Once the ceremony had started the roles of its participants were established. Neither the dispute over siting of the main ceremony ground nor the messenger controversy affected the traditional positions of participants relative to each other or their prerogatives. The disputes over the organisation and content of the ceremony were not directed at either gaining additional resources or reducing the

resources of others. The two following disputes were aimed at changing the relative status of key Jabuduruwa men. The ownership of the Hill Plum estate and the ritual position of Pat's son Oscar were the objects of dispute involving the three Plum groups and their managers.

Example 5.

About half way through the course of the Jabuduruwa performances were shifted from the temporary dance ground to the main ceremony ground. The shift was marked by a massed dance (Nadjba) in which all available participants from the owning moiety took part.

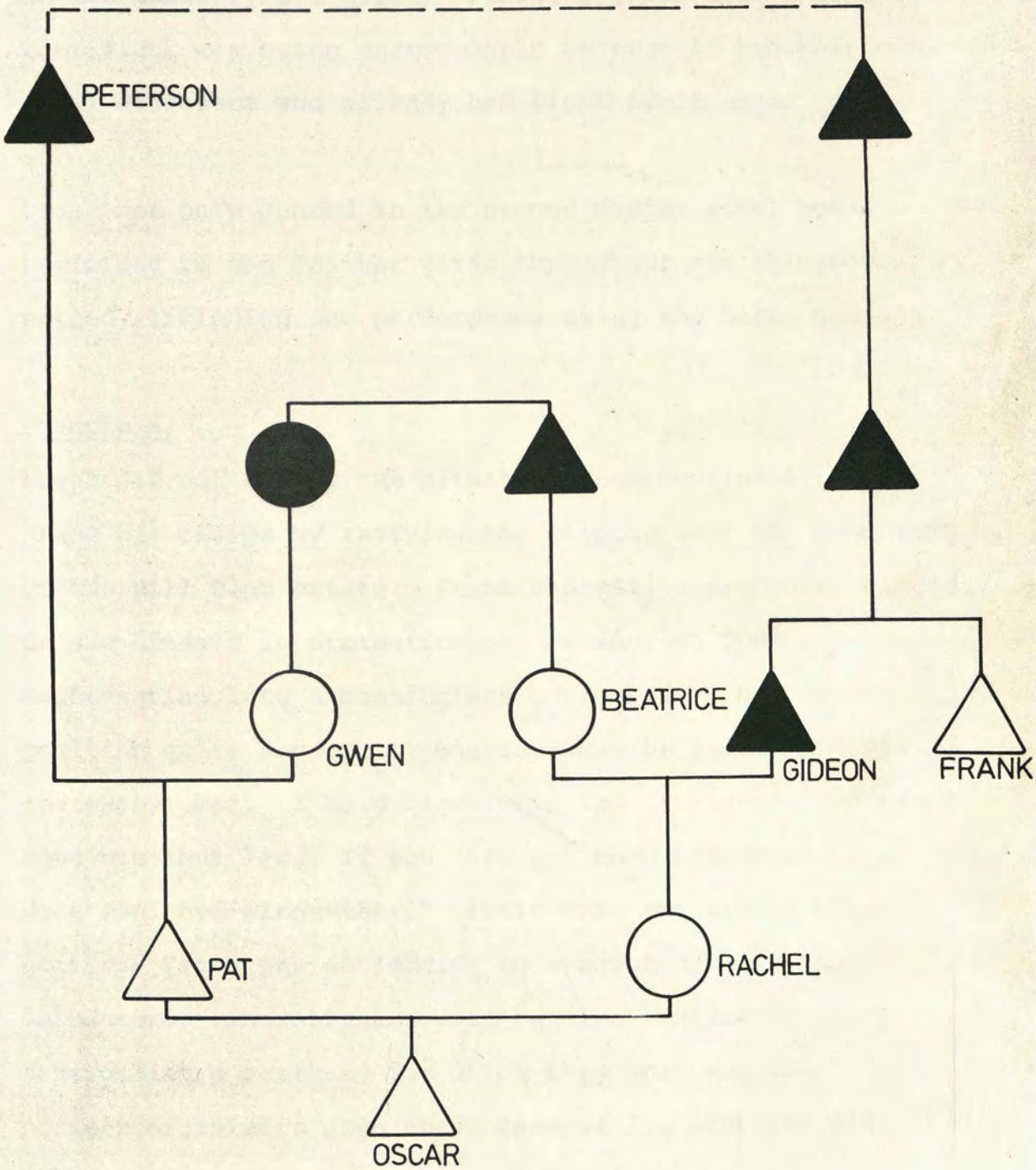
Oscar made his initial appearance in the ceremony at the time of the second Nadjba on 17th March. He was just standing around while the men of the owning moiety were preparing themselves for the dance. Paul, one of the young managers, berated Oscar for not getting ready. Another young manager told Paul to desist. Paul then sought Albert's advice. Albert went over to Oscar and told him to prepare for the dance. He was Pat's eldest son and should not hold back, said Albert. This Oscar willingly did. He then joined the other owners and participated in the dance.

Oscar's position in relation to the Jabuduruwa was ambiguous. His father, Pat, was one of the three leading Plum owners. His mother, Rachel, belonged to the Coast Plum group. She was the daughter of Frank's elder brother Gideon. Theirs was a wrong marriage between classificatory brother and sister (diagram 8). As Frank's 'DS' Oscar should have been one of his managers. As Pat's son he was owner of the Jabuduruwa. Frank claimed that Oscar should follow his mother's ceremony and be a manager for the Jabuduruwa. Pat and the Abrahams family said he should follow his father. They argued that though his mother was Plum,her mother was White Cockatoo and therefore in the correct mother in law relation to Pat. Frank acknowledged that Gideon had made a wrong marriage, but said that a meeting of ceremony leaders, at the time, had agreed that their children would follow the father's patriline and not the mother's matriline. He also claimed that no such agreement had been made about Pat and Rachel's children because he, Palmer and Jeremiah, had not been consulted.

The claims of both Frank and Pat were soundly based. Pat did not publicly advocate his claim. This was done by his ZSs, Arnold and Albert. Frank on the other hand

DIAGRAM VIII

OSCAR'S GENEALOGY



championed his own cause. He acted wrongly in that it is the manager's job to do such lobbying, and the owner should publicly sit quiet. Public opinion also considered that Frank was being unreasonable because he had thirteen other daughters who already had eight adult sons.

Oscar not only danced in the second Nadjba rite, but performed in the feather rites throughout the changeover period, including one performance using the Hill Gulinga

Example 6.

Frank did not accept the situation, but continued to press his claims by reviving the dispute over the ownership of the Hill Plum estate. Frank's position was quite simple. He saw himself as protecting the Jabuduruwa from degenerating into a meaningless corroboree. He put his position quite succinctly one day when he said: "I'm Djandi (ceremony) man. I hold blackfella law straight. You can't bend him that law. If you (try to) bend him he break. He's finished altogether." There were two groups whose actions Frank saw as leading to a break down of the Jabuduruwa. The Abrahams were bending the law by controlling a ceremony for which they were not the correct organisers (see above example 1), and they did

things wrong "They let djunggaiji play like mingeringi" (a reference to Oscar). Pat, his children, and by extension all the Petersons had broken down the Jabuduruwa. Pat's wrong marriage was compounded by making his son an owner in his own mother's ceremony, and even worse of her own dreaming (the Plum). The situation was even more deplorable to Frank, because in his view, Pat had no right to the Plum dreaming (section 1, example 2).

During the first two months of the ceremony Frank had not raised the question of the disputed ownership of Hill Plum. Indeed, in the changeover period, he, Mulingera and Pete Peterson had performed in the same feather rite using Plum paraphernalia (Mulingera and Frank had used the River Gulinga , while Pete had used Hill) and in the feather rite on the 28th March three of Frank's sons (using Coast Gulinga) had performed with Pat, Pete and Oscar (using Hill Gulinga). It was perhaps this last event which led Frank to renew his challenge to Pat's ownership of Hill Plum. In the two weeks following the 28th March he made a number of references to the uncertain status of Hill Plum. He privately told a number of people, including myself, that Mulingera was angry because the Petersons had used the

Hill Gulinga. Frank added that they should not use that Gulinga until people were agreed on who owned it. He said that he thought Mulingera should have it, as Mulingera and Gideon (now deceased) were the correct successors. At the same time as Frank was advancing this argument, he was also telling people that he had withdrawn from the ceremony. The issue was dramatically brought into the open at the meeting Garry called following his attempt to restart performances on 12th April.

The meeting started with a series of accusations and counter accusations covering a whole range of disputes. Frank was charging around on the outskirts of the meeting loudly accusing everyone of wanting to kill him, and of holding the ceremony incorrectly. Things began to calm down after about fifteen minutes. The recriminations changed to apologies to Garry and a general promise of an early resumption of the ceremony.

Frank, while joining in the apologies, said he could no longer participate. He said he had too much trouble, and added that his sons were lax in their care of the paraphernalia. The trouble he referred to was the

supposed sorcery threat already mentioned and his loss of face over the Oscar affair. At this point Oscar said that he and his fathers had pulled out of the ceremony because they had heard a story that they did not own Hill Plum. Pat and his brother Pete said that what Oscar said was true and, though they would not have brought it up, they were glad Oscar had. The whole gathering then affirmed the Peterson ownership of Hill Plum. In the midst of this vocal support, Palmer blurted out that he would never go to another ceremony. Frank then reiterated that he was pulling out because of the threats (from outsiders) to himself and Palmer. He added that he could not understand why the people here (i.e. at Ngukurr) were against him, because he was a good man who looked after the ceremony in the correct way.

Frank and Palmer did not participate again till the penultimate day. The Petersons participated and used the Hill Plum Gulinga . One concession was made. Oscar did not participate during the remainder of the ceremony.

Frank's challenge failed on five grounds. First he had again publicly touted his views. Secondly he had tried to implicate Mulingera in his challenge. Mulingera, who

made one short visit to Ngukurr during this period, neither confirmed nor denied Frank's claims. But he stayed with the Abrahams family, thus indicating he was not supporting Frank's attack whatever his own feelings on the issue. Thirdly, some of Frank's attacks had been too specific. He attacked the Peterson and Abrahams families for the conduct of the Hill Plum Jabuduruwa held five years earlier. He detailed many alleged mistakes in its course and in its admission of outsiders, and concluded that it was not a proper ceremony. Frank had gone too far. Many of the senior men now present, including Palmer, had participated in that Jabuduruwa and were thus implicated by his charge. In the fourth place he alienated his brother's sons by preventing them from participating, and by accusing them of laxity in caring for the paraphernalia. Finally his challenge was resented by Garry, who saw it as another impediment to the success of his ceremony.

Frank had made two challenges and lost. His second defeat was so complete that it appeared he would withdraw entirely from the arena. The withdrawal of a senior man would not bring any credit to the ceremony or its organisers. Oscar's removal was not an admission of Frank's case, but a placatory move to keep him in the arena.

Conclusion

The principal arena of the Ngukurr Jabuduruwa is the local community. The Ngukurr people see the Jabuduruwa as a celebration of those totemic estates which are close to the Settlement, and are represented by local residents. The communicants are those people directly associated with these estates. They were raised at Ngukurr and have their homes there.

The 1970 Jabuduruwa is unusual for the part played by non-residents. This confirms, rather than contradicts, my remarks on the community emphasis of the ceremony. Garry is a long term expatriate, but he is the only man available who could take on the leading role. Ngukurr is itself built in the traditional Plain Kangaroo estate. The Plain Kangaroo group has a long history of residence in the area and some members, particularly a senior female, have continued to reside there. Mulingera, again an outsider, is the only man who could complete the ceremony initiated by his deceased brother, who was himself a local resident.

The dispute over the ownership of the ceremony only affects the positions of Garry and Mulingera. Both disputants utilise universally applicable norms, and there is no recourse to local integrity in the resolution of this dispute. In the other three disputes some aspect of local practice is at stake. The Abrahams' authority is based on their position in the community and on their locally validated ritual ties. The Peterson ownership of the Hill Plum estate, and the position of Oscar, are both based on what are seen as local variations of the rules of ritual affiliation and succession.

The competition for power is basically between Frank and the Abrahams. They are the leaders of two local cliques. The concentration of ownership in outside hands makes the assertion of local control an issue. The major role of the non-residents facilitates Frank's attacks on the Abrahams and the bases of their power. He allies himself with Garry in the issue of the ceremony organiser, and tries to draw Mulingera into the Plum dispute. The Abrahams' consistent emphasis on local practice places Frank

in the position of challenging local integrity and ensures them of solid backing in the community.

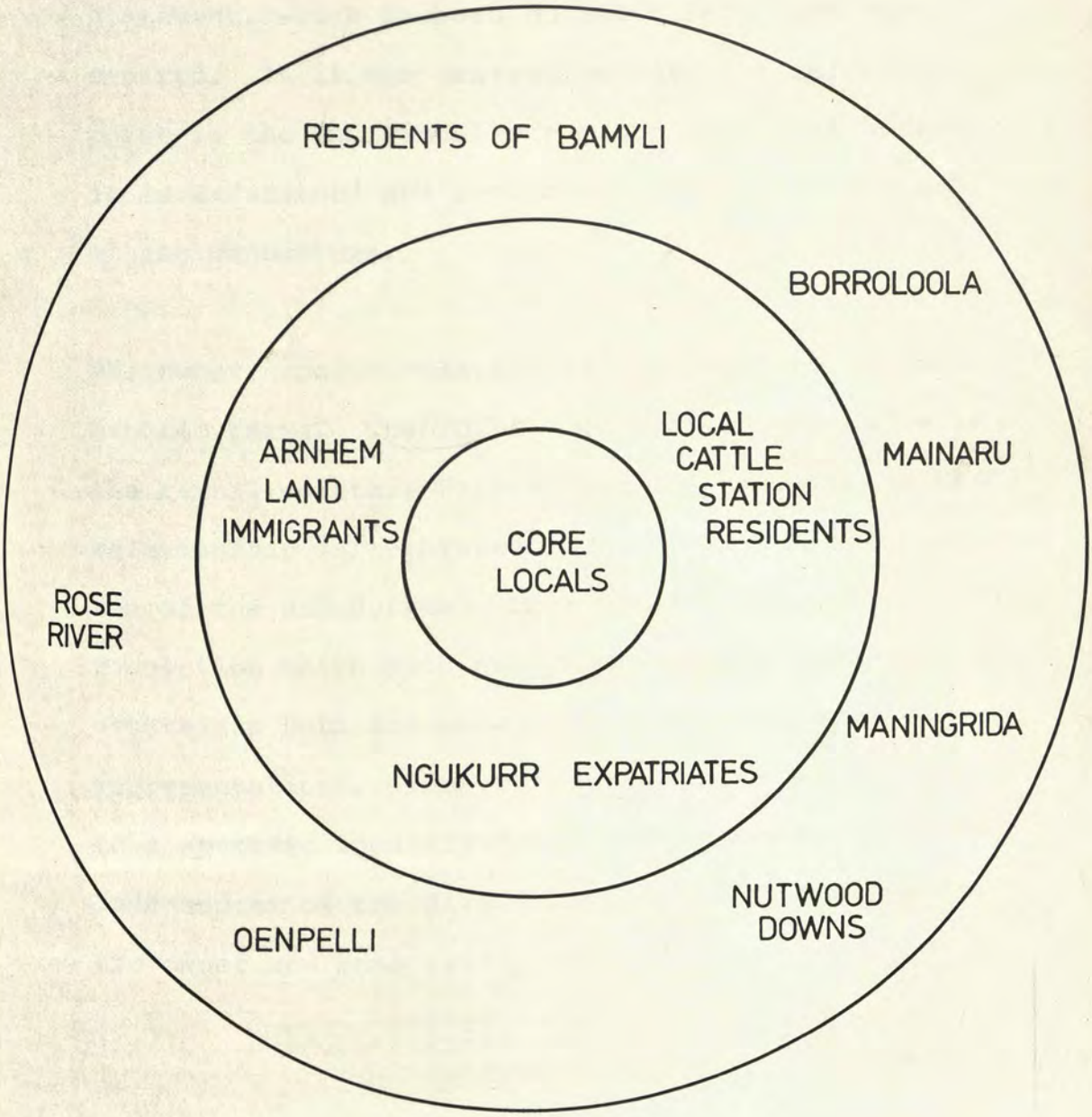
The local view of the Jabuduruwa divides its participants into three groups which can be represented as a set of concentric circles (see diagram 9). The ownership and organisation of a ceremony is the preserve of representatives of the inner circle. They have the duty of preparing and conducting the ceremony. They usually initiate the meetings called to discuss ceremonial matters and dominate its debates. This inner circle contains the local residents who represent the estates celebrated. The second circle represents people with a secondary association with these estates. The connection may be derived from direct association with a more distant part of the totemic path on which a local estate lies. Most of the nearby cattle station residents are linked to Ngukurr in this way. The linkage may be by recent immigration to Ngukurr followed by partial incorporation into one of the local totemic groups. Many of the post war immigrants from central Arnhem Land participate in the Jabuduruwa in this way. I would include in this category Ngukurr

expatriates who occasionally return to participate in ceremonies but do not intend to re-establish residence. About 30% of participants were from this category. Their participation was largely restricted to actual performances. They took part in meetings only when matters directly effecting them were discussed. The outer circle encompasses the initiates of other Jabuduruwa centres. This category is included because these other centres are part of the overall view of the Jabuduruwa. The Ngukurr people know the Jabuduruwa is widespread. They talk of it as forming a bond among widely dispersed groups of people. On the other hand the Ngukurr ceremony is contrasted with other Jabuduruwa, emphasising its local identity and supposed superiority.

The universal and particular perceptions of the Jabuduruwa are exemplified in the different ways the recruitment criteria for senior managers are expressed. The shorthand term for the owner/manager relationship is lambara/boi (MB/ZS). The recruited organiser may be the ZS of the custodian of the Gulinga, of the owner who has not yet received the Gulinga, of his

DIAGRAM IX

THE PARTICIPANTS IN THE NGUKURR JABUDURUWA UNIVERSE



patriline, or of the owner's totemic estate. Ideally the organiser should be the real ZS of the real owner who holds the Gulinga and whose Z made a preferred marriage. Expressed in this way the owner/manager relationship is a genealogical statement, which is both universalistic and ego centred. It is ego centred because its reference point is the individual owner and universal because it is understood and applicable throughout the area of the Jabuduruwa.

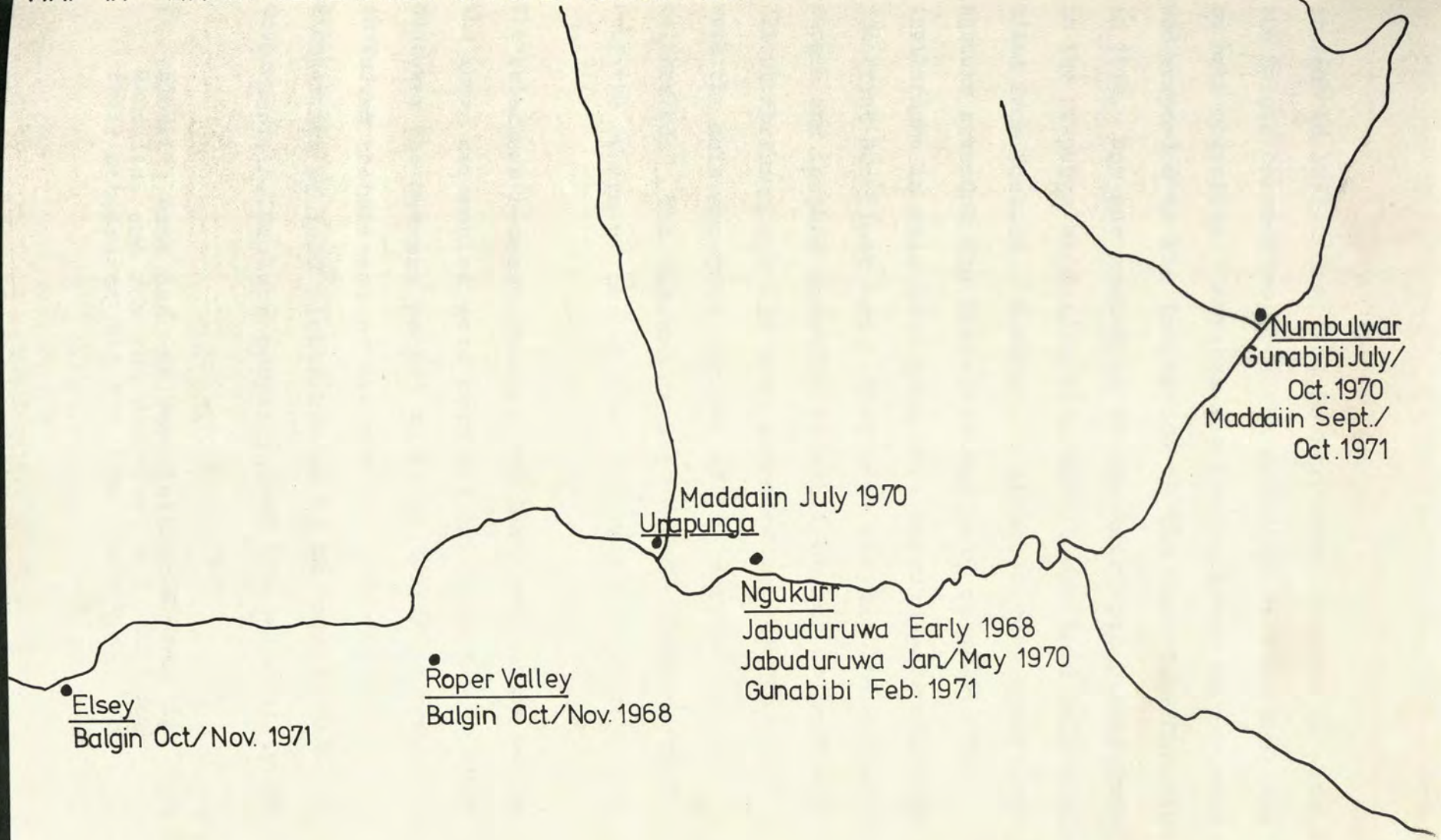
The owner/manager relationship is also seen in socio-centric terms. The reference point in this view is the ritual estate. From this point of view the MB/ZS relationship is rephrased as ag natic son and uterine son of the Jabuduruwa. More specifically, it is the connection which both owner and manager have with the estate, in both its metaphysical and concrete representations. Thus both are seen as being tied to a specific locality and this connection is independent of the direct kinship relationship of the owner and manager.

SECTION 3. RITUAL AGGRANDIZEMENT AND INTER COMMUNITY RELATIONS.

The localisation of the control and conduct of Ngukurr cult life did not lead Ngukurr to remain entirely aloof from the cult life of her neighbours. The Ngukurr community has developed what appears on the surface to be two incompatible attitudes to the ritual activity of these communities. During the time of my fieldwork, from 1968 to 1971, the Ngukurr people showed a marked reluctance to attend ceremonies of the major cults held on the nearby cattle stations or at Numbulwar mission. However, in the same period, they showed a keen interest in the conduct of ceremonies at these places, and in two instances attempted to direct the way they were run.

There were five major ceremonies of which I was aware held in the region, but outside Ngukurr, between the middle of 1968 and the end of 1971. (map 9). One Maddaiin was performed at Urapunga station in 1970, and another at Numbulwar in 1971. A Gunabibi was held at Numbulwar in 1970. There were two ceremonies of the Balgin cult; one at Roper Valley station in 1968, and the other at Elsey

MAP IX MAJOR CEREMONIES IN ROPER REGION : 1968–71



station in 1971. Men from Ngukurr were invited to attend the Balgin ceremonies, but the majority of them declined on both occasions. Abraham was the only man of any note who responded to the invitation to the Numbulwar Gunabibi in 1970. Not one member of the Ngukurr core participated in the Urapunga Maddaiin, although it was held only eight miles from Ngukurr. However, a sizeable contingent from Ngukurr attended the Numbulwar Maddaiin in 1971. The invitations in this last case were carried personally by important Numbulwar men. They were directed to particular people and invoked specific ritual ties and obligations. Albert Abrahams and his sons attended because the sons were the main managers for one of the estates being celebrated.[6] The Emerson family attended because they were the owners of one of the celebrated estates.

The relations between Ngukurr and the communities where the above ceremonies were held was ambivilant. In some contexts the Ngukurr people spoke of all the communities, including themselves, as one people. During their discussions of land rights claims to be made to the Government,the Ngukurr people raised the possibility of

6. Albert's sons had not been initiated into the Maddaiin, and for the Numbulwar men, this made their attendance all the more important.

making a single claim for all the communities. The one people idea that was being expressed was essentially asymmetrical. Ngukurr was to dominate. All the other communities were related subordinately to her. The Ngukurr leaders could therefore make claims on behalf of all, and be responsible for activities in which all had a shared interest. The other communities accepted the inter-relatedness in so far as this meant they had a cultural affinity, and kinship and ritual ties. However, their actions, both in internal and external relations, did not indicate an acceptance of Ngukurr's claim to suzerainty.

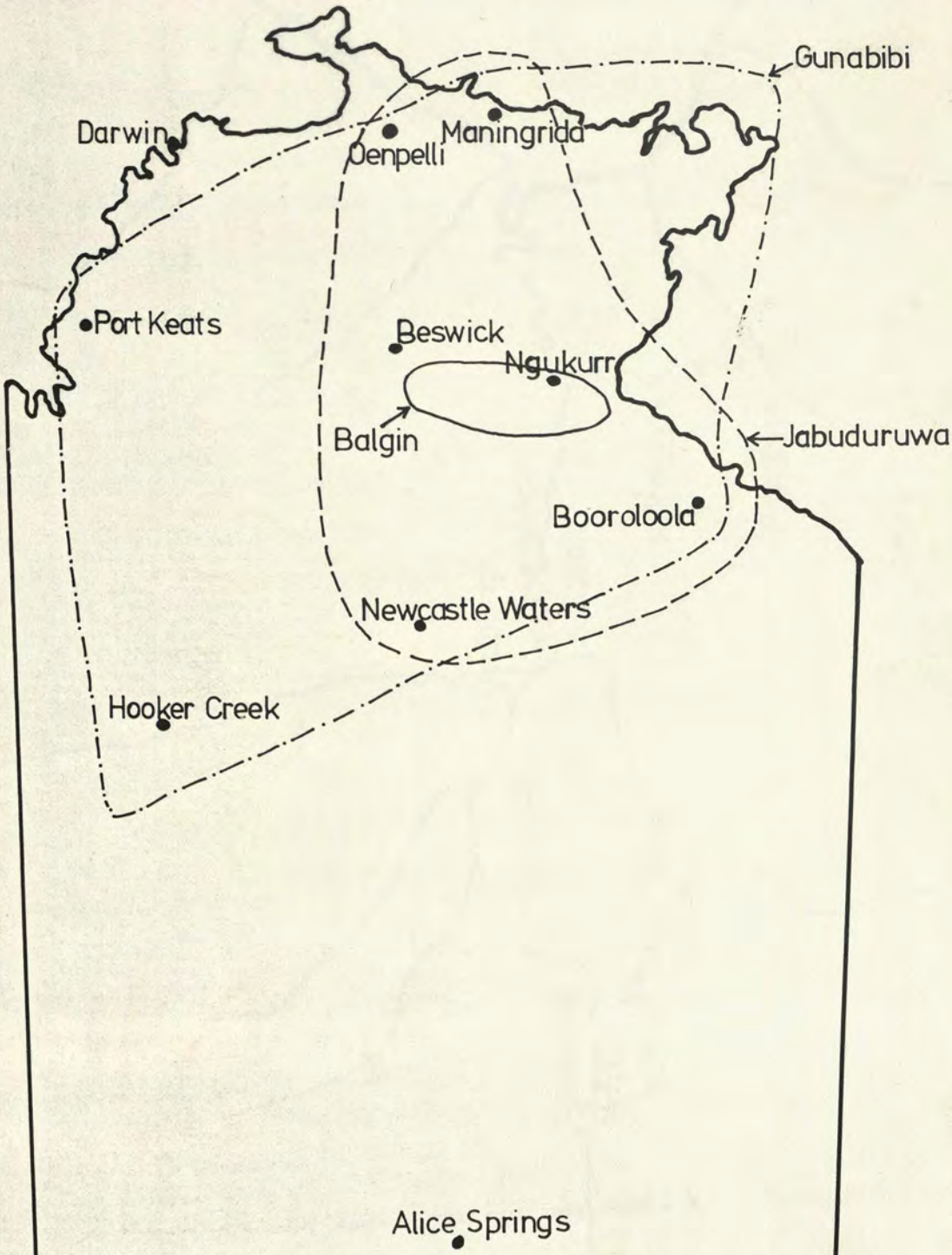
The ambivalence of Ngukurr's relations with her neighbours was most apparent in the politics of religion. The concentration on the localisation of ownership and control of certain cult practices, which was discussed in the previous section, was at odds with the wider view of community. Ngukurr's relations with the cattle station communities centred on the conduct of the Balgin, while her relations with Numbulwar were primarily concerned with the Gunabibi.

Ngukurr and the Roper Valley Balgin

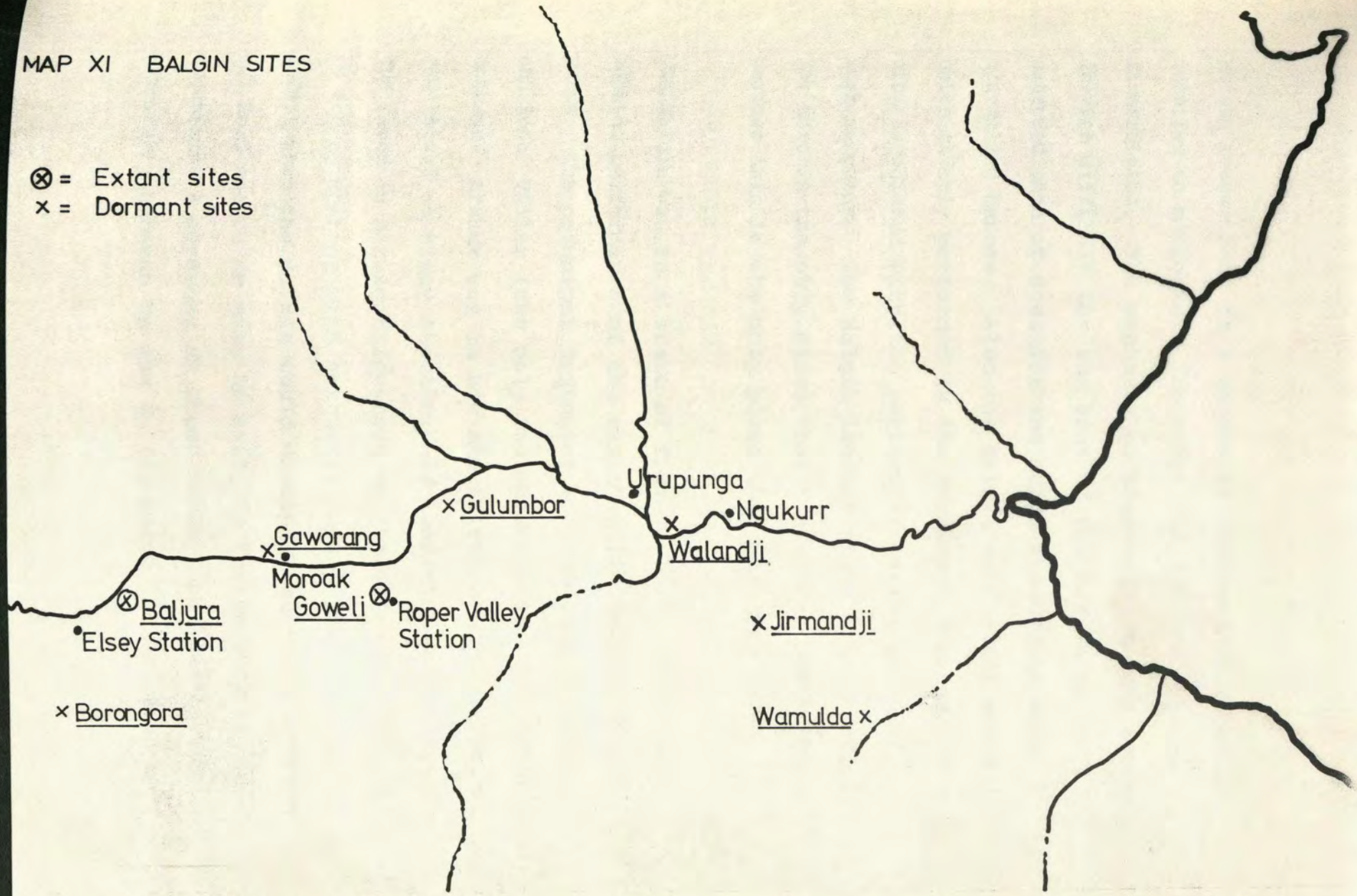
The Balgin is a secret male cult organised on similar lines to the Jabuduruwa. It has the categorical division into owners and managers. The sequence of rites parallels those of the Jabuduruwa (including a modified form of Goanna Tail, but without the Wadaminmara. Maddock 1972: 149). There is no singing in the rites. However, there are important differences between the Jabuduruwa and the Balgin. The Balgin owner manager division does not coincide with the moiety division. Only the members of Murongon semi moiety are owners in the Balgin, and the members of the other three semi moieties: Budal and Gujal from Jiridja moiety and Mambali from Dua moiety, are its managers. The central myths of both the Jabuduruwa and the Gunabibi detail the travels of cult heroes, but the main Balgin myths celebrate single sites (see appendix 1 for a more detailed account of the relation between Balgin and the other cults). The area of Balgin performance is more limited than that of the other major cults (map 10). The Balgin is confined within the middle and lower reaches of the Roper Valley. (map 11).

These differences have consequences for the conduct of the Balgin. The limitation of ownership to one semi

MAP X APPROXIMATE EXTENT OF GUNABIBI, JABUDURUWA AND BALGIN CULTS



MAP XI BALGIN SITES



moiety means there is a perennial shortage of owners relative to managers. The other two differences are interrelated. The emphasis on stationary heroes makes it more difficult for the area of the Balgin to be extended than it does for the cults associated with travelling heroes. Also the Balgin unlike the other cults is only performed in the immediate area of the site associated with the particular owning group of that ceremony. The Balgin leaders state that in Balgin law this is the only place that a ceremony can be held, because this is the only place that the hero made.

The Balgin was in a state of flux in 1968. There had been no performance of the ceremony for four or five years. The principal organiser for the cult at Elsey and Roper Valley (the only two extant sites) was Arthur Normans. Arthur was in his mid thirties. He was born and raised at Elsey station, his traditional country, but lived in Darwin throughout my fieldwork period. On my second meeting with Arthur in August 1968, he expressed a fear that the Balgin would disappear unless a ceremony was held soon. He was, he said, in the process of organising a ceremony at Roper Valley, but was having difficulty because he was so far away. He enlisted my

support to contact the Balgin leaders and received from them assurances that preparations would be started for a ceremony to be held in mid September. Arthur then returned to Darwin and immediately problems arose over the preparations. A number of older men were unhappy with the haste of the preparations, and were unwilling to continue without Arthur's presence. The same men objected to the timing of the ceremony which they said would conflict with the cattle station's work requirements (this in fact occurred and led to the ceremony being suspended for a week after it had commenced). Mulingera was the senior Balgin manager resident at Roper Valley. He acted as Arthur's deputy and managed to prevent the discord from stopping preparations from going ahead, though not at the rate Arthur had wanted.

The older men had two main reasons for wanting to delay the preparations. They were concerned that they would be criticised, particularly from Ngukurr, both for holding a Balgin and for its haste. They were also worried that they would not have sufficient owners to perform all the dances. Arthur knew of both these concerns. However, unlike the older men, he considered that holding the Balgin ceremony was the best way to overcome them.

Ngukurr's attitude to the Balgin was a major problem for the cattle station communities. There were two main factors in this attitude: the position of the leading Ngukurr men within the cult itself, and the connection between the Balgin and sorcery. The Ngukurr people identified the Balgin cult and its leaders as the main source for executing punishment of ritual offences throughout the Roper region. People not initiated into the Balgin commonly stated (not only at Ngukurr, but throughout the region) that the ceremony was 'hard' or a killer. By this they meant that the Balgin law was strict, in relation to that of the other cults, and particularly that offences against it led to the death of the offender or his kin or both. These outsiders contend that the Jabuduruwa and Gunabibi have been made 'clean' or 'soft',by ridding them of the duty to exact capital punishment for offences. They add that not only had the Balgin men not done this for their own ceremony, but they had also extended their punitive jurisdiction to cover alleged offences committed in the contexts of the other major cults as well. The Balgin men continuously denied this charge. They insisted that they had also made

their law 'soft'. They did not exact capital punishment (Munj),[7] either within the context of their own cult or outside it, and a fine was the most they exacted for wrong-doing or error.

From the stand point of Ngukurr the charge against the Balgin people was understandable. The people throughout the region believed that sorcery occurred. On the whole they believed that the members of their own communities did not practice it.

The Ngukurr people stated that most sorcery was initiated within the context of the major cults. In the 'old days' their predecessors had passed such judgements using the authority of Jabuduruwa and Gunabibi, but these cults were now 'clean', at least within Ngukurr. Therefore the cult, or cults, which still permitted the old ways to continue must have been ones practiced outside Ngukurr. The Balgin was the logical prime suspect, for two reasons. Ngukurr perceived the communities who practiced the Balgin

7. This term includes killing by physical attack and through the use of mediating agents such as spells. The term also refers to the process by which an order to kill is initiated and passed on from its source to the actual assassin or sorcerer.

as adhering more closely than themselves, to the ideal of Blackfella law. This was based on the fact that the cattle station people used their own language in daily intercourse, whereas the Ngukurr people spoke English, and the station people retained their traditional marriage system, while the Ngukurr system was virtually extinct.

The second reason for suspecting the Balgin was derived from the current mythology concerning the relation of Balgin to Gunabibi. The relation of Balgin to Gunabibi was stated to be of the same order as the relation of the secret part of the Gunabibi to the open part of the Gunabibi. There were versions of Gunabibi myths, songs and parts of the ceremony which women were permitted to know and see, and these were categorically distinguished from the secret aspects which only the inducted men could know. Ngukurr informants applied this as an analogy for the relation of Gunabibi to Balgin.

One senior Gunabibi man (Palmer Yardley) who was not a Balgin initiate told me a part of the Mermaid (Gunabibi) myth which emphasised this distinction. "Mermaid had travelled from the sea carrying all the Gunabibi Gulinga, but he had also carried something else. He carried it

right underneath (i.e. hidden). It was real deep,that thing (i.e. secret, potent and dangerous). That thing got too heavy, he (Mermaid) wanted to put it down and rest. He stopped at Wamulda (a place on the Towns river. See map 11) and slept. Gudagudaga (a little black night bird, and major Balgin emblem) saw Mermaid sleeping. He stole that Gdridjinggarra (the name of the thing Mermaid was carrying and also the sacred name of the Balgin cult) and hid it." Palmer and others interpreted this statement as establishing Balgin as the highest, most secret and most dangerous of all the major cults. The Ngukurr people, including both the Abrahams family and the Mara/Alawa group, concluded that therefore the Balgin centres were responsible for the initiation and execution of sorcery.

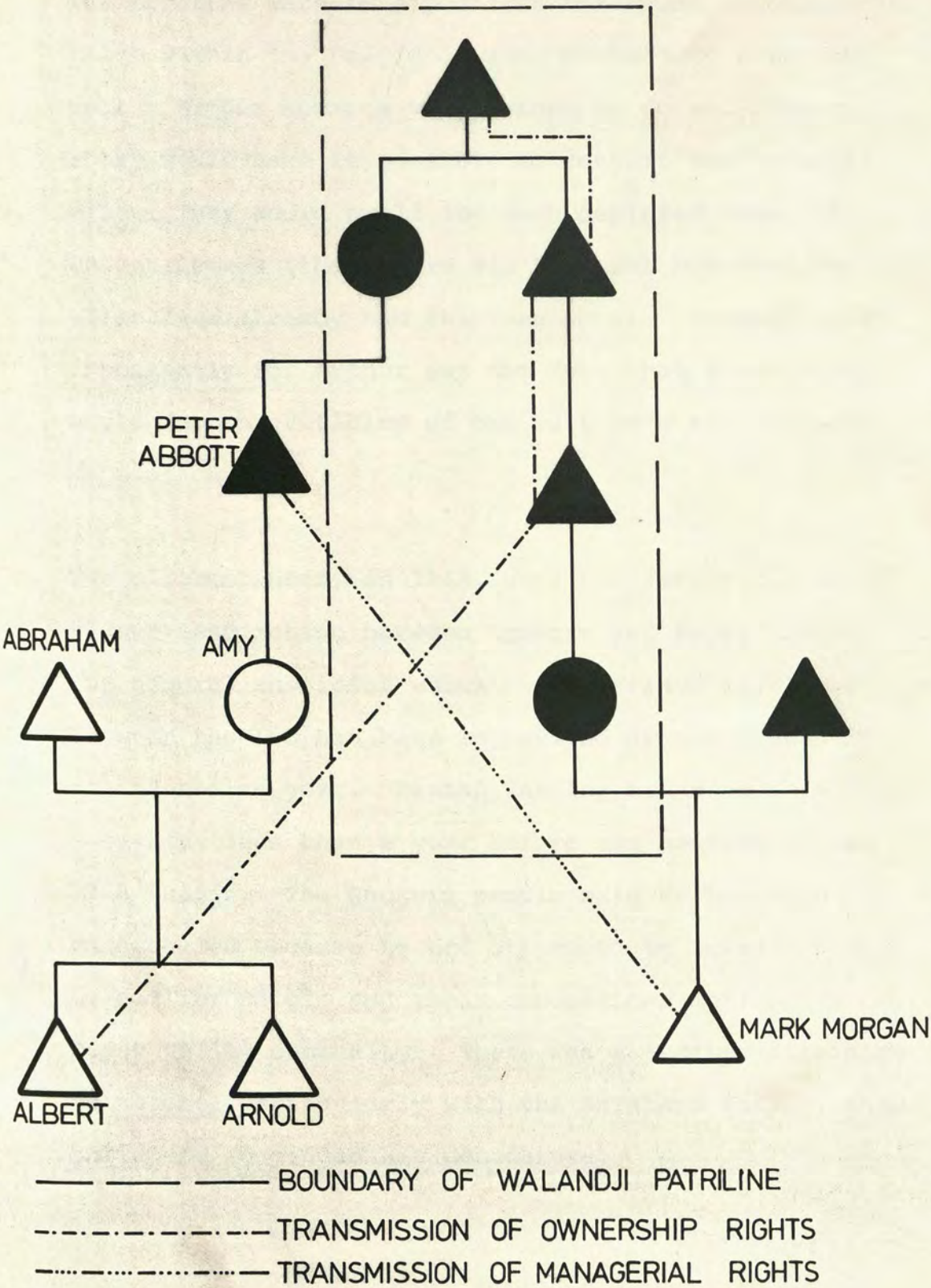
This essentially simple view of the Balgin communities as an external threat to Ngukurr's security was complicated by the interrelatedness of the people of these centres, particulary by the connection some Ngukurr men had with the Balgin. None of the senior Ngukurr ritual men, active during the time of fieldwork, were inducted members of the Balgin, though there were three strategically placed men who were Balgin initiates.

However, the most important connection affecting Ngukurr's policy was the potential postion of the Abrahams. Their position in the Balgin was derived from their MF Peter Abbott. Abbott had been the head manager of Walandji, the Balgin site near Ngukurr, the owners of which were Abbott's mother's clan. This clan had died out, and in the late 1960's the only living descendants were Abbott's daughter's children and Mark Morgan (Abbott's MBSDS). Mark's mother was the last member of the Walandji group. Mark, who was not initiated into the Balgin, was the potential head manager for Walandji. Senior Balgin men, particularly Arthur Normans, Mulingera and Pincher, recognised Abbott's DSs especially Arnold and Albert Abrahams as the owners of Walandji (diagram 10).[8]

8. This allocation of ownership was explained to me in two ways. Albert said that he was adopted as heir by the last owner of the Walandji group, his MFMBS, because his mother Amy should have married this man's son, if he had had one. Arthur Normans emphasised the place of Abbott in the allocation. Wallandji had belonged to his MF. Albert and Arnold were his DS. MF/DS is a reciprocal relationship,therefore there was an equivalence in the positions of Albert et al and Abbott's MF in relation to Abbott. As there were no direct patrilineal descendants to the Walandji estate then Albert et al were the proper heirs.

DIAGRAM X

THE INHERITANCE OF WALANDJI



The Abrahams were in a position to assume an important place within the Balgin if they decided to enter the cult. Arthur Normans wanted them to do so. Their entry would make it possible to restart the Walandji site. They would swell the much depleted ranks of Balgin owners (there were six Abrahams brothers who themselves already had thirteen sons). However, most importantly for Arthur was the fact that their entry would dampen criticism of the cult from the Ngukurr population.

The circumstances, in 1968, were not favourable for a closer association between Ngukurr and Roper Valley. The general suspicion which characterised relations between the two had been aggravated by two events in the preceding year. Damian Yardley had died at Ngukurr suddenly, less than a year before the holding of the 1968 Balgin. The Ngukurr people said he had been ensorcelled because he had attempted to interfere with an earlier Balgin and their accusations centred on the Roper Valley community. There was a further strain on relations, particularly with the Abrahams family, when Mulingera suspended his Jabuduruwa.

The Ngukurr people had a generally negative attitude toward the Roper Valley group, whom they regarded as interlopers. The Roper Valley group were Ranjbarnga migrants from central Arnhem Land who had settled in their present location about 40 to 50 years ago. During the intervening period the small indigenous Ngalagan population had lost its separate identity and been absorbed by the immigrants, who became the custodians of the local estates and inherited the indigenes' position in the Balgin cult.

However, the origins of the Roper Valley group were still remembered in 1968 and both Ngukurr and the other main Balgin centre Elsey still referred to them as newcomers. The Manggarai of Elsey station used this label to assert their own superior status, but not so forcefully as to cause any rupture in relations for the two communities depended on each other for the conduct of the Balgin. At Ngukurr there was no similar restraint and denigration of the Roper Valley group's immigrant status was a frequent occurrance. These immigrants were not, in Ngukurr's view, as closely related to them as the Elsey Manggarai and were therefore more likely to initiate sorcery against them.

The Roper Valley residents were well aware of these feelings and were reluctant to push ahead with preparations for the 1968 Balgin until they received more active support from the Elsey group, particularly Arthur Normans, and some assurance of Ngukurr's neutrality. The Roper Valley people sought to clarify their relations with Ngukurr through three main sources: Zachariah Normans, Pincher and the Abrahams.

The positions of Zachariah and Pincher were important because they were the only two Ngukurr residents who held positions of importance with the Balgin. Zachariah, a Balgin initiate, held the important managerial role of messenger which he had inherited from his brother Norman.[9] Zachariah had not attended a Balgin ceremony for many years and had never actively filled the position of messenger. He was about 70 years old in 1968, and though he was inactive in ritual it would be impolitic not to at least inform him of the intention to hold a Balgin ceremony.

Pincher was an active Balgin initiate. He was a senior owner who held the Gulinga for Baljura, one of the two

9. The main task of the messenger was to gather people from their places of residence and bring them to the ceremony.

active sites. Pincher was a Manggarai and his traditional country was at Elsey. He was not a member of the Ngukurr core but had lived there for some years and was married to one of the daughters of Gideon. He was also a close confidant of the Abrahams family and favoured their admission into the Balgin.[10] The Roper Valley people saw Pincher's support and participation as insurance against other Ngukurr people's interference in the ceremony. His presence was even more satisfying if he brought the Abrahams with him.

There were two other Ngukurr men of importance whom the Roper Valley people made no attempt to approach: Palmer Yardley and Frank Gideon. These two were Ngukurr's most vociferous critics of the Balgin and of the Roper Valley group in particular. They were accused, by the Roper Valley group and some sections at Ngukurr (including the Abrahams), of having attempted to prevent the holding of the previous Balgin ceremony at Roper Valley. They had done this,said their accusers, by urging Damian Yardley (then a police tracker at Roper Bar) to convince the

10. Pincher's marriage to Gideon's daughter was contracted despite objections from Frank Gideon. Frank's continued opposition to the match may have had some bearing on Pincher's close association with the Abrahams.

policeman that the ceremony was responsible for people's deaths, and thus get him to break up the performances. Both men denied the substance of the charge and said that they had only wanted the policeman to tell the people that the ceremony must be 'clean' and not for him to break it up. The policeman did not in fact approach or attempt to interfere with the holding of the ceremony.

The brothers of both men were Balgin initiates, but they themselves had consistently refused to be inducted. Despite this they often spoke to non-Balgin men (including myself) with the authority of men privy to the cult's innermost secrets. They told stories of wrong doings and mistakes which they alleged had occurred in its ceremonial performances.

Frank claimed that his authority to make such statements came from the 'old people' of Hodgson Downs and Roper Valley. He never said who these 'old people' were, only that they were dead but had been the real 'bosses' of the Balgin (the implication being that the present 'bosses' were usurpers). Such statements whether true or false did not incline the present Roper Valley people to be sympathetic or open toward Frank and Palmer.

The influence of these factors made themselves felt during the course of the preparations leading up to the performance of the 1968 Balgin. The first time I went to Roper Valley to discuss preparations for the Balgin in early September, I was accompanied by Pincher. Zachariah also happened to be visiting at the time. A meeting of the leading men was called at which both Zachariah and Pincher urged the locals to push ahead with their preparations. They promised to attend the ceremony and bring the Abrahams with them, and added that they would block Palmer if he tried to interfere (Frank was in hospital at Katherine throughout this period). A week later I returned to Roper Valley with Albert Abrahams. He gave the same assurances as Zachariah and Pincher. Despite these two meetings the Roper Valley people still held back. The visitors had given assurances of support, and the locals had given assurances that the ceremony was clean, but each was still suspicious of the other. All three visitors had been asked to remain at Roper Valley and help with the preparations, but each had excused himself.

At Ngukurr, awareness that the Balgin ceremony was imminent had led to the rise of two contradictory sets

of sentiments. On the one hand the Abrahams, Pincher, Zachariah and even Palmer said the Balgin should be held, that it was important to have the Balgin made 'clean', and that the entry of the Ngukurr men was a good thing. At the same time, these very men hesitated. They spoke of the hurriedness of the preparations, and of the short period over which the ceremony was to be performed (Arthur Normans had specified two weeks). They were not sure, but they felt that perhaps this particular ceremony was not a suitable avenue for introducing the Abrahams into the Balgin.

Shortly before the ceremony was due to commence in late October Zachariah (who was also a lay mission preacher) left Ngukurr for his annual round of church services on the cattle stations. After he left people started to give different versions of his instructions regarding the Balgin. Pat Peterson said that Zachariah had told him not to go to the ceremony, and that the Abrahams would also not be going. However, Arnold Abrahams said that Zachariah had told him that he and his family had to go. The contradiction renewed people's feelings of unease and suspicion. One man told me he didn't know whom to believe, because although Zachariah was a

missionary he was also a Balgin man. I had left Ngukurr for Roper Valley prior to Zachariah's departure and was unaware of these developments. The preparations for the ceremony were completed at the end of October, and on 1st November accompanied by a Balgin manager I returned to Ngukurr to collect those people who had promised to attend.

When we arrived at Ngukurr Albert told us that Pincher was sick and that Zachariah was still absent on his mission duties. The most senior Balgin man available was Jeremiah Yardley who Arnold persuaded to choose the people who were to attend the ceremony. The choices were in fact made by Arnold with Jeremiah's acquiescence. The final list contained the names of seven members of the Abrahams family, Pincher's son, Palmer, four locally resident Balgin men (including Jeremiah) and one woman. When the list was completed Arnold told me that Pincher was not sick but had gone to Darwin two days earlier. Arnold also said that Albert was the only member of his family going with me. He and his father had to wait for the rest of the family who were out mustering. Albert then said that he too must wait for his brothers. When Palmer was approached by the Balgin manager he bluntly

refused to go. Pincher's son said he had to wait for his father. The woman, who was Palmer's sister in law, Jeremiah, and two other Balgin men agreed to come. Palmer prevented his sister in law from going at the last minute, and we returned to Roper Valley with three men, only one of whom, Jeremiah, was a core member of the Ngukurr community.

The result of the Ngukurr trip dismayed the Roper Valley group, and there was a strong move by the older men to call off the ceremony. Mulingera, with the support of the younger managers, resisted but agreed to delay the start while a party was sent to collect people from Elsey and Mataranka stations. A small group arrived from these places two days later, and the ceremony started on the 5th November.

Zachariah, still on mission business, arrived at Roper Valley on 6th November. He immediately called a meeting of the leading men on the main ceremony ground. He proceeded to make a lengthy speech, the main points of which were:

1. He was the number one manager on a par with Arthur Normans, and Mulingera was only his subordinate.

This was emphatically denied by the locals after Zachariah left.

2. The preparations for the ceremony were hurried but still alright,but the main ceremony ground was too close to the camp.
3. He had told the Abrahams family and others to come, and when he returned to Ngukurr he would again urge them to attend.
4. He could not stay on this trip as he was still on mission business, but he would come back with the others.
5. He urged those present to do everything correctly, or someone might get killed.
6. He had heard a lot of stories at Ngukurr about sorcery by Roper Valley. He didn't know if they were true, but they had to stop.

The men sat quietly through most of Zachariah's speech, and only interrupted once to deny the accusation of sorcery. When he finished Jeremiah produced a small parcel of feathers which he alleged were part of someone's Balgin Gulinga and which he said had been found in Darwin by Pincher. Both he and Zachariah thought it signified an order which had been sent from somewhere (unknown) to

someone (unnamed) to have someone else (Zachariah said it was Pincher and himself) killed. The locals became angry at this implied accusation of them, and themselves accused the Ngukurr people of always trying to blame them for their (Ngukurr's) troubles. Mulingera succeeded in calming the locals and getting a general agreement to bury the feathers; an act which put a stop to any alleged sorcery. The locals were visibly upset by this incident. The feathers were not, they said from this place, and they did not think they even belonged to the Balgin. Some of the older men again wanted to halt the ceremony, but they continued with the afternoon's performance. By the time the performance was over the men had decided to continue with the ceremony. This decision was strengthened that evening when Zachariah held a christian service on the public part of the ceremonial area; an act which the Roper Valley people considered an insult to the Balgin and themselves.

There were two consecutive days of performances following this episode. Then the manager of the cattle station recalled the stockmen to the mustering camp, and told Maddock and myself to leave the station (Maddock had joined me in the field just before the ceremony started).

Performances were suspended and Maddock and I left the area and returned to Sydney. I afterwards learned that the ceremony had resumed a week later, following the arrival of Arthur Normans, and had been brought to a successful conclusion. Jeremiah and the other Balgin men from Ngukurr had left the ceremony at the same time as myself. They did not return and no other participants came from Ngukurr before the ceremony was completed.

Repercussions from this ceremony were still apparent at Ngukurr during my 1970 field trip. The most important was the alleged threat to the lives of Frank, Palmer, Zachariah and Pincher. Frank's BS William reported that Arthur Normans had said that these four men had six months to live. The alleged threat was supposed to have been made during a drinking session in a Darwin pub. The report caused a flurry in the community and produced a number of public statements of support for the threatened men (see above chapter 5, example 2). However, Arthur Normans arrived at Ngukurr at about the time the six months were over. He said that he had heard about the alleged threat he was supposed to have made, and wanted to have a meeting with the four men. Only Zachariah was at Ngukurr. Palmer was away on a fishing expedition, Pincher was at Elsey and

Frank had gone somewhere into Arnhem Land when he heard Arthur was coming. Arthur held his meeting with Zachariah and people from the families of the other three men. He told them he had been misreported. He had not said that they had six months to live, but that he would see them in six months to discuss the rumours of sorcery, and to try to convince Frank in particular, to stop his accusations against himself and Roper Valley. There was no sorcery. Arthur had paid fines for the mistakes of Zachariah and Pincher in 1968. The mistakes he named were Zachariah's speech at the main ceremony ground and his holding of a church service, and Pincher's failure to attend the Balgin altogether. Arthur was unable to accomplish the main object of his visit, which was to confront Frank with certain accusations he was alleged to have made against Arthur. The following day he returned to Darwin without seeing Frank.

After Arthur's visit at the end of July 1970 the accusations against the Balgin and Roper Valley subsided. During the following months the Ngukurr ritual leaders were preoccupied with the Gunabibi ceremony being performed at Numbulwar. Their relations with the cattle station communities, including Roper Valley, were amicable in the latter part

of 1970, and still so during 1971. The Abrahams kept their interest in the Balgin alive by occasionally publicising their ownership of Walandji and expressing their interest in entering the cult at the next ceremony.

The next Balgin ceremony was held toward the end of October 1971 at Elsey station. The preparations for this ceremony proved to be less difficult than those for the 1968 ceremony. There were problems internal to the Elsey community, but there was a total absence of conflict or tension between Elsey and Ngukurr. The circumstances were very different to 1968. The ceremony was held at Elsey instead of Roper Valley and Ngukurr's relations with Elsey were generally less tense than those with Roper Valley. Zachariah played no part in the proceedings. He was by then an invalid restricted to his home. Palmer had died early in 1971, and Frank was away from the area throughout the period. The ceremony that was held at Elsey was owned by Pincher, who had himself asked for it to be performed, and who was resident at Elsey for that purpose. It is also possible that Ngukurr was simply too exhausted by three years of almost continual conflict over the control and conduct of cult affairs (the period from Mulingera's aborted Jabuduruwa in 1968

to the termination of Avon's Brown Snake Gunabibi early in 1971). However, there was one area of similarity between the two Balgin ceremonies; the Abrahams were again invited to participate, again they accepted, and once again they did not appear.

The Jaramanindji Affair

The occasion for the interference by Ngukurr in the religious affairs of Numbulwar occurred in connection with the Gunabibi cult. The provocation was the construction of a number of sacred Gunabibi objects which were sold to the Australian Institute of Aboriginal Studies sometime before September 1969. There was some uncertainty as to which groups the objects belonged to, but it was known that objects from both Mambali and Murongon semi moieties were sold. The objects were made and sold by a group of Numbulwar men without consultation with other interested parties, either within Numbulwar or at Ngukurr and Angurugu (the two communities most closely related to the Numbulwar people). Knowledge of the sale and removal of the objects from Numbulwar spread quickly and was soon followed by objections from both Ngukurr and Angurugu. These objections were made not only to the Numbulwar group but also to the Institute of Aboriginal

Studies and representatives of the Australian government. The Institute, with Government assistance, took steps to clarify the issues and arranged meetings of the interested parties during September and October 1969. The Aboriginal representatives stated that the Numbulwar men had been wrong to sell the objects, and that they should not remain in Darwin but he returned to Numbulwar. The Institute agreed to return them on condition that the money they had paid be refunded. This condition was agreed to, and the responsibility for raising the refund ($200) and organising the collection was left to the men from Ngukurr. The collection was to take place on 8th November, but the Ngukurr delegation failed to appear. A further meeting decided that the objects would remain in the custody of the Welfare Branch in Darwin until the refund was paid and new arrangements for collection made. This was where the matter stood when I arrived at Ngukurr in December 1969. No further moves were made to organise the collection during the first half of 1970.

The issue was revived when Numbulwar started a Gunabibi ceremony in July 1970. On hearing the news that a ceremony had started the Ngukurr Gunabibi men held a meeting to discuss the propriety of holding a ceremony

While the objects were still in Darwin, and to decide what their attitude should be. Initially they felt that the Numbulwar men had been wrong to hold the ceremony because (a) they should have sought Ngukurr's advice first, and (b) they should not have started while the objects were still in Darwin. The meeting accepted a suggestion from Albert Abrahams that a delegation be sent to Numbulwar to discuss the matter. The delegation was instructed to inform the Numbulwar men that they must either let the purchaser of the objects (a European woman) return them and be allowed to see the ceremony, or pay the refund and themselves being the objects back to Numbulwar. Whichever course they adopted it should be completed before they continued with the ceremony.

The Ngukurr men reasoned that the objects could only be constructed in the context of a Gunbibi ceremony. Therefore, the fact of the objects' construction meant that a ceremony was on. The problem caused by starting a new ceremony could be resolved by using the existing objects (which meant that the current ceremony became a continuation of one started by the original construction) or by destroying the objects and then restarting the current ceremony.[11] The position

11. It is usual for these objects to be broken up and buried at the conclusion of a Gunabibi. (Berndt 1951; Warner 1937).

of the purchaser was an awkward one for the Ngukurr men. She was a woman and therefore excluded from the secret rites of the Gunabibi, but she had seen the sacred objects which was tantamount to being admitted to the cult. There was no problem if the money paid for the objects was refunded, but they had already experienced the difficulty in raising the refund, and for this reason suggested the possibility of her viewing the ceremony and making her payment for entry the amount of the refund.[12]

The Ngukurr delegation spent a week at Numbulwar while the ceremony leaders considered their proposals. The Numbulwar men said that the objects were no longer their responsibility, because the Ngukurr men had taken charge of the collection the previous year, and they had already contributed to the refund payment.[13] They had done their part and they therefore felt that they were free to hold a Gunabibi without having to take account of the sold objects. They declined to halt the ceremony, but added that as the objects had originally come from Numbulwar they would assist Ngukurr to regain them. They said they would collect half the

12. This suggestion seemed appropriate to the Ngukurr men who had themselves had a European woman observe the 1965 Jabuduruwa (Elkin 1971).

13. The Numbulwar men sent some money to Ngukurr the previous November, but I was unable to find out the amount or where the money went.

payment and contribute men to a party sent to Darwin to reclaim the objects. All the arrangements they left to Ngukurr, but the purchaser was not to be admitted to the ceremony.

The Ngukurr men held a meeting immediately after the delegation returned. All the men criticised Numbulwar's attitude, but they were trapped by their belief that Ngukurr was the senior Gunabibi community. If they were the most senior then they must take charge or lose face. The two former delegates to Numbulwar, Paddy and Nat Davies (senior managers for the Abrahams' Catfish Gunabibi) supported by Abraham pressed for quick action to reclaim the objects. Albert and Arnold wanted to delay action. They were unhappy about Numbulwar's attitude, and did not want to accept sole responsibility for the collection and disposal of the objects. However, the meeting decided to go ahead with the collection.

Arnold and Albert made no move to organise the collection. They said they were very busy with work, and also that they needed time to arrange for transport. By the end of the week Paddy had become impatient with their inaction. He approached the superintendent for permission to borrow

the Settlement truck for the trip to Darwin. The superintendent said he would ask head office. Paddy took this to mean they could have the truck, and immediately sent a wire to Numbulwar to send their contingent.

The Numbulwar contingent arrived three days later to find that Ngukurr was still not prepared. The availability of the truck was still uncertain, and Ngukurr had not yet raised its half of the refund. However, a more serious problem had arisen among the Ngukurr men over how to dispose of the objects. The disagreement was largely among the Abrahams family themselves. Abraham said they should be brought back intact and broken up and buried with the proper rites, either at Ngukurr or at Numbulwar. Albert also wanted the rites performed,but wanted them done in Darwin, the objects destroyed there, and returned to Numbulwar for burial. Arnold on the other hand, wanted them broken and buried in Darwin without any rites. This disagreement continued throughout the week with no sign of resolution. In the meantime Welfare Branch head office put the truck at the disposal of the men and Paddy raised Ngukurr's half of the refund. Events had overtaken them and Arnold and Albert could no longer delay the proceedings.

Albert accepted the situation and took charge of selecting the Ngukurr party. Arnold, though he helped choose the collection party, declined to join them.

The collection party, consisting of five men from Numbulwar, six members of the Abrahams family, two other Ngukurr Gunabibi owners, Pat Peterson, Paddy and Nat Davies, and Perry Morgan, left Ngukurr for Darwin on 26th August. Even after their arrival in Darwin the group could not agree about how to dispose of the objects. Abraham and the younger men wanted to dismantle them in the storeroom and return them to Ngukurr for ritual destruction and burial. Albert and Paddy wanted to take them into the local Darwin bush, have a shortened rite there, then break them up for burial at Ngukurr or Numbulwar. Albert pressed his point of view and the others acquiesced. The objects were removed from the Government storeroom in the late afternoon of 27th August. They were transported to some bushland near Bagot Settlement. A short rite for the knocking down of the Jaramanindji was performed in front of an audience of invited Government officers. The objects were then broken up and packed for return to Ngukurr.

The party returned to Ngukurr on 29th August. Abraham and Albert showed the totemic designs on the Jaramanindji to Arnold, and after a short private conference Arnold stated that the designs did not belong to any of the Gunabibi estates in this area. He suggested that they might be made up or belong to Borroloola or Blue Mud bay. He said they did not belong at Ngukurr and so could not be buried here. The Numbulwar party, accompanied by Abraham and myself then took the objects to Numbulwar. In the ensuing discussion between Abraham and the Numbulwar leaders all disclaimed ownership and attributed the objects to a variety of groups which were not represented. It was clearly not possible to transport the objects further. Even if they could agree on which outside group were the owners, it was unlikely that that group would concur. The meeting then agreed that though the objects were not what they should be no one present was in error. They then buried them and closed the matter.

The question of the authenticity of the objects had only arisen after they had been collected. There were two prior indications that some such question would be raised. They were the legal problem surrounding disposal of the objects, and the question of a group's legal status once its Gulinga

had been sold.[14] I had raised the question about the implications of selling one's Gulinga with two informants early in 1970, in a context totally unrelated to the current events. Both informants (Albert Abrahams and Frank Gideon) said that by the sale a man had given away his dreaming and lost the right to hold his group's ceremony. Around the middle of 1970 this statement appeared in public discussion surrounding the Jaramanindji objects. The group in which I first heard the statement repeated attributed it to men at Numbulwar. This group treated the statement as a threat to Ngukurr which was motivated by jealousy of Ngukurr's claim to superiority in the Gunabibi. A little later I heard Frank Gideon repeating the information he had given me earlier in the year to which he added a query about the legitimacy of repurchase. He said he did not think that one could buy back one's dreaming, but if one could then that might restore one's prerogatives. Frank made this statement in general terms but the implication for the Numbulwar objects was quite clear: the ritual status of the restored owners was open to question. Apart from this episode Frank himself took no part in the Jaramanindji events.

14. Legal in this context refers to Blackfella Law and not the legal system of the Australian State.

The proper disposal of the objects was a serious problem. There was no precedent to follow as the circumstances were unique. Each opinion could be supported by some aspect of Blackfella Law, and each could be challenged by other aspects. Arnold reasoned that the construction and sale of the objects had been wrong. The objects themselves were therefore outside the pale of Gunabibi, and no ritual was needed for their disposal. Abraham and Albert both considered that the objects no matter what their genesis, belonged to Gunabibi and could only be disposed of within the context of Gunabibi. Abraham felt that this context could only be realised in the area from which the objects symbolically originated, whereas Albert felt the objects themselves symbolised the Gunabibi and their presence created a sufficient condition for holding the rites. It is quite likely that no matter what course had been adopted it would have been criticised. The proceedings which were followed received strong criticism from every quarter. Even Albert joined in the criticism, after he shifted responsibility for the event by bla ming pressure from Government officers and Ngukurr expatriates living in Darwin.

The whole course of the Jaramanindji affair had put the Ngukurr men, particularly the Abrahams, in a vulnerable position. They had interfered in the first place because they claimed ownership rights in the objects. Indeed on a number of occasions (including the period from the collection of the objects till their return to Ngukurr) they claimed that the Mambali Jaramanindji belonged to the Abrahams' Catfish Gulinga. If they persisted with this claim then they left both their ritual status and their conduct in the disposal open to attack. But if they dropped the claim they lost whatever influence they had hoped to gain over Numbulwar's cult life.. The risks to themselves were obviously too great. They took the simplest way out and denied the authenticity of the objects.

Ngukurr's attempts to bring her neighbours into her religious polity were unsuccessful. The Abrahams family was pivotal in both attempted encroachments. They were themselves a branch of one of the main clans at Numbulwar, and through Peter Abbott they were potential owners of an important Balgin estate. The Abrahams dominated the Ngukurr religious polity, a position which they had reached as a result of their successful competition with the Mara/Alawa group.

The Mara/Alawa's continuing challenge to their local supremacy made it difficult for the Abrahams to adopt a firm and consistent stand in their dealings with outsiders. Theoretically their ritual status would have been enhanced by entering the Balgin, but to do so would have meant being more closely associated with its centres, especially Roper Valley. This would have provided their local opponents with ammunition against them because they could be seen to have deserted the integrity of the community. The possible advantage of entering the Balgin rested on their ability to occupy controlling positions in its conduct. There was no possibility of achieving this position in the short term, but there was a danger that they would open the way for Balgin leaders, particularly Arthur Normans and Mulingera, to interfere in the affairs of Ngukurr. Ritual ambitions had, therefore to be sacrificed to protect the present political positions of the Abrahams.

The Abrahams entered the Numbulwar affair with more conviction and with more apparent chance of success. They were already full owners in the Gunabibi cult, and there was no question of inferior status. Also the interference was brought about by a ritual error on

Numbulwar's part. The Abrahams and Ngukurr were therefore in a strong position. They lost this advantage through their own inability to act decisively, and because they left room for Frank to raise questions about the implications of the Abrahams' stand for their ritual position. They were again forced to forego their ambitions to protect their internal position.

CHAPTER 7

WHITEFELLA BUSINESS:
DEPENDENCY & POLITICAL PRACTICE

During the 1960's the Village sought to consolidate its identity by gaining greater autonomy from European domination, and to validate it by Government recognition of its claim to a large area of south east Arnhem Land. At the beginning of the 60's there was a change in the orientation of Mission policy. It came under the influence of the assimilation policy of the Hasluck era. The emphasis shifted away from concentration on care and religious conversion as such, toward equipping the Aborigines for entry into the wider Australian society. The Mission policy focused on Aboriginal advancement through a gradual increase in local responsibility (Cole, 1968:22-3). The main early expression of this policy change was the inauguration of a reconstituted Station Council in the latter part of 1962. This Council was composed of eight staff and eight Village representatives. The express purpose of the Council from the Mission view was to educate the Aborigines to accept responsibility. The immediate result was the establishment of a buffer between the Village and the Settlement, by concentrating the lines of communication

into the hands of a few Village spokesmen (above, Chapter 5).

The Aborigines desire to control their own environment was strongly influenced by their current life style. The articulation of this desire was increasingly oriented to the concept of a Village community with a cash economy, necessarily interacting with European society. The 1964 Social Welfare Ordinance gave added impetous to the movement for autonomy by giving Aborigines the Legal Status of citizens while denying them the means to social equality (Rowley 1971, 183ff, 301ff). For the Settlements, including Ngukurr, the legislation removed some of the penal sanctions available to the authorities. The Mission lost the authority to expel recalcitrants and to hold its own courts. However, the legislation left unaffected the institutional organization of the Settlements (Rowley 1971, 117-25; Tatz 1964; Long 1970; 7, 201).

By the end of 1964 Ngukurr was well on the way to developing a political and social identity. The next four years provided the Village with the stimulus and the direction for political action.

The orientation of Village policy, in its relations with European authority, was infleunced by the negotiations for the transfer of the Settlement's secular control from the Church Missionary Society to the Federal Government. The negotiations began in 1965, but the transfer of authority was not finalised till October 1968. The future status of Ngukurr was the main focus of discussion. Behind the discussion of whether Ngukurr was to be a town or a Settlement were a number of substantive issues. One of the Mission's demands was for European staffing to be kept to a minimum. This would reduce the risk of the Village being subject to the elaborate paraphernalia of other Settlements and preserve its self-supporting features.

This self-support was the Aborigines' control over expenditure of their cash income. They purchased their own subsistence and were not subjected to payments in kind or communal dining arrangements. The Mission also argued for the retention of the consultative framework of the Station Council, and the preservation of, at least, those areas of decision-making autonomy that it had under the Mission. Finally, the Mission wanted to transfer some of its equity in the Settlement to the local population. This equity was the Settlement general store (called locally 'The Shop'), and a lease over 200 square miles of country around the Settlement.

The Aboriginal people were not a party to the negotiations, but they were well aware of the issues being discussed. The Mission kept Station Councillors (half of whom were Aborigines) informed of what it was trying to achieve. In doing so, it emphasized the people's need to support themselves, and develop responsibility for the conduct of their own affairs. The Mission was largely considering short-term developments. They saw the future in terms similar to the Government: integration into European society. The differences were of degree rather than kind.

This emphasis on the differences between the Mission and the Government acted as a catalyst in the development of the Village's political strategy. It focused immediate attention on the interrelation between economic development and the control of policy. Autonomy was thus linked to an increase in the level of wages and material goods, and local control of productive resources. The Aborigines saw the low staff/Village ratio as a step towards making staff positions available to the Aborigines. There was also a marked difference in the interpretation of the concept of localization. The Mission, in particular, saw localization as a joint control by both local staff and Village; an unequal partnership in which the staff role was

theoretically educational and practically managerial. The Aborigines interpreted localisation as Village control, and saw European participation as being in an advisory capacity only.

The Aboriginal interpretation also varied with the specific aspect of localisation being considered. The attitude to the Station Council was tied up with the question of limiting European staff. The people believed the control of the Station Council would shift toward the Village as the positions and functions of European staff were taken over by Aborigines. The Citizens Club, formed to control the shop and Village entertainment, was regarded as an incorporation of the Village for a particular purpose. European members were there on sufferance, or more accurately, because the Government and Mission both stated that European staff and Aborigines were together the citizens of Ngukurr. In any case said the authorities, people had to be members to use the facilities of the Club. A European executive member was accepted on the grounds that the people needed an advisor in the unfamiliar field of European business.

The most important aspect of localisation was the control of land. This was an issue of great emotional, as well as social significance. The implications, for the Aborigines,

of the Mission's desire to transfer their lease, went far beyond the conduct of a pastoral project. The Aborigines' demands for land rights, in turn, made the limited transfer of the Mission's lease unsatisfactory. The failure of the Government to agree to the transfer, together with the general concern over land rights stimulated by the Gurindji protest, at Wave Hill and the recent mining company encroachments in Arnhem Land, intensified the importance of land in defining the Aborigine's position.

SECTION 1

THE STRIKE

Frustrations and early reactions

The wide differences in interpretation made conflict between European and Aboriginal aims inevitable. This conflict did not depend on the failure of the Government to implement the Mission's program. The fundamental dissonance already existed and would undoubtedly have developed further without the change in administration. The transfer of authority accelerated the increase in expectations and

sharpened the awareness of potential alternatives to the institutional situation.

Throughout the latter period of the transfer negotiations, the Village suffered a series of set backs. The Mission authorities, short of finance, began to cut back expenditure. The Village housing program ceased. Some staff were withdrawn resulting in the closure of the market garden and cessation of development in the cattle project. The Mission lease, together with most Settlement property, was taken over by the Government and not transferred to the Village. Only the shop was relinquished by the Government. Immediately prior to the handover, Settlement funds practically dried up and employment restrictions were imposed on the Village. It was thus a very frustrated people for which the Government finally accepted responsibility in October 1968.

The situation was not relieved after the takeover. The employment restrictions were eased, but further frustrations developed. The level of local participation in Settlement decision making not only did not increase, but almost disappeared entirely. The bureaucracy left little in the way of policy decisions to its local officers, and they were

accountable to superiors for the use of whatever powers they had. Thus the Station Council ceased to have even the very limited decision making role it enjoyed under Mission administration.

In the fifteen months following the takeover there were no improvements in the people's material conditions. This, at least, they had expected. A major reason given by the Mission for its withdrawal was lack of finance. Therefore, further development must await the Government, and of course when the Government arrived so would the developments. The Government had also promised some form of land title to the Village, but this would take time: time to sort out claims and prepare legislation. In the second half of 1969 the people's impatience was further exacerbated when it became known that the shop, their shop, was heavily in debt.

The Village people did not simply resign themselves to the continual series of frustrations. They reacted with threats and actions, asserting what little power they had. Within a month of the Government assuming control of the Settlement, the Village launched its first act of defiance on the land issue. A group of Village stockmen set out

to trap horses for their own use. They undertook this action on behalf of the Village, and acted without prior consultation with or approval from the Government. The Government made no attempt to prevent the endeavour. The trapping expedition was unsuccessful because the abundance of watering places (due to good rains and previous wet season) kept the wild horses scattered. The Village had failed to force a confrontation, or even a reaction, from the Government.[1]

During the following year, 1969, the Village became dissatisfied with the European manager of the shop. Their dissatisfaction was shared by a section of the local staff establishment. The Village and their staff allies alleged that the manager was arrogant and highhanded in his dealings with both the Citizens Club executive (his employer) and with customers. The manager resigned after this opposition was successful in preventing the renegotiation of his terms of employment.

1. The horse trappers said the horses were for their own use. The Government could regard this situation, if it had arisen, as the use of its property by its dependants. Had the trappers, instead, stated they intended to sell the horses, the Government may well have reacted.

Throughout this period Village spokesmen expressed their feelings about Government actions and inaction in militant terms. The use of threats of strike action appeared quite early, and was certainly in common use by the latter part of 1968. The employment restrictions imposed immediately prior to the Government takeover provoked Village spokesmen to threaten strike action. Regular approaches were made by the Village to the Government concerning their land claim, and these were frequently accompanied by threats of strike action if they were not given early satisfaction. I attended a Village meeting on 16th September 1968 in which the shortage of work was the main topic. All the spokesmen criticised the Government for indecision about when they were to assume responsibility for the Settlement, and demanded the right to have employment.

"Arnold Abrahams (who was the official Village leader): I told Dean (The Administrator of the Northern Territory) we run out of money. He promised people won't suffer, but nothing (has happened).

Adam Abrahams: (the resident Government patrol officer) sent telegram (to head office) about how many men can work.

John Angurugu: What if telegram says only ten men work?

Chorus: Then all stop work.

Arnold: People got to be strong, if telegram no good we got to have meeting straight away and all pull out".

The drastic step was not taken, despite the fact that the

Government reply only permitted the employment of ten men. However, the villagers continued to threaten such action until the employment restrictions eased a fortnight later.

The militant posture of the Ngukurr spokesmen was not unique among Northern Territory Aborigines, but they were unusual for the regular use they made of the language of industrial conflict. This was largely due to the type of familiarity they had gained of urban labour since about the late 1950's, and which was itself dependent on their long period of mission indoctrination and European education. When the assimilation policy was well under way, in the late 1950's and early 1960's, the Government looked for Aborigines to recruit into the bureaucracy as examples of the success of its policy. The Ngukurr men, because of their sophistication in European ways, were the first approached by the Government recruiters.

By the late 1960's there was a sizeable group of Ngukurr men who lived or had lived in Darwin under conditions which gave them some access to wider political processes, both within the bureaucracy and in outside political organisations. In 1966 four Ngukurr men were officers in the Northern Territory public service, and another was an organiser in

the North Australian Workers Union. In the same year, the president and half the members of the Council of Bagot Aboriginal Settlement in Darwin were men from Ngukurr. Also, at this time the Northern Territory Council for Aboriginal Rights (a Darwin based, European sponsored, civil rights organisation) was reformed with a predominantly Ngukurr executive. The political skills these men learned in Darwin were applied at Ngukurr with increasing frequency from the time of the changeover. The early actions, already mentioned were largely sporadic and uncoordinated. They were reactions to specific grievances. The Village people needed to develop a more concerted protest if they were to affect their general condition.

The gathering momentum

The events that culminated in the strike began to converge in early February 1970. The immediate provocation was a ban on mustering cattle imposed to prevent overstocking of the paddocks, which concentrated people's complaint on the question of land rights. The new European manager of the shop was sympathetic to the complaints. He suggested to Albert that something could be done if they could get outside support and advice. As a result of these casual exchanges a meeting was arranged between some of the Village notables and the shop manager. The meeting was held at

the shop manager's house on the night of the 9th February. The main Village spokesmen attended. The meeting discussed sending three representatives to Darwin to lobby for land rights. The emphasis in the discussion was on how to gain control of land.

Arnold Abrahams: I think we get same lease that CMS had and make money out of it.

William Gideon: (The new Village leader): No one fella, one fella asking (each tribe his own). We get one block all together.

Arnold: Mr. Dean (Administrator of N.T.) going to have meeting with council (St. C.) Then straight ask him lease and brand.

Albert Abrahams: Might be best we ask to buy land. Then they might give it.

Arnold: No! We should buy it, then they can't take it away. Like Elsey stn not like others (Local belief was that Elsey was freehold property not leasehold).

Albert: Welfare mob might say have to ask Lands Dept. Better if we go to Lands ourself.

Shop Manager: Shop can't get lease. You should form a company.

Albert: We will form a company here - us blackfellas.

Arnold: We have to ask right question on Wednesday (time of proposed visit by Administrator, which was postponed).
What being done about land?
How can the people get the lease?
What is Welfare doing?"

The discussion continued to consider Welfare obstruction and their own reaction.

Albert: "Only thing might be to do a Wave Hill.[2]

Shop Manager: You could threaten to pull off workers and kids from school, and also open the place up to everyone (ignore permit system).

Arnold: If they don't get things (done), we'll just pull everyone out."

After considering the possibilities it was decided to put Arnold's questions to the Administrator and send three men to Darwin to get advice on how to apply for land and to publicise their demands. The three delegates' expenses were to be met from shop funds.

Already at this meeting the possibility of strike action was openly canvassed. In fact the only way they saw of reacting to welfare procrastination was by such action. They had been put off time and again. The Shop Manager's proposal to investigate forming a company and applying for land through use of non-Government help was a positive alternative to direct action or continued inaction.

The proposed visit of the administrator did not eventuate and this helped to sharpen feeling that action should be

2. A reference to the strike at Wave Hill station in 1966. See Hardy 1968.

taken. Public Village discussion occurred on the following Friday, 13th February. Discussion is perhaps an exaggeration: it was the public staging of the intention to act, and an announcement of the three representatives. Discussion of the issues had gone on in the Village all week and there was wide acceptance of the proposals. The tenor and content of the meeting is summed up in this extract.

Nat: (young man) We just work and get money from Government. We don't do nothing for this place. You going to run this place - no - might be your grandchildren? We should be able to stand on our own backbone.

Arnold: This meeting for that. We going to send three men to Darwin.

Nat: We got to send one cheeky man, one quiet one, and one between.[3] Its up to you big men to make the choice and we young men will back you up. That right?

Chorus: (of young men) Yes.

The choices were made - William Gideon (39) - Village leader - "the quiet one"; Albert Abrahams (45) - ex welfare officer - "between"; and Alan Abrahams (33) - ex union organiser - "the cheeky one". All of them were to become

3. Cheeky is a local term meaning outspoken, particularly with Europeans. A quiet man is one who listens.

major leaders of the strike. The possibilities for further action were also broached and one can sense in them the coming divisions.

Albert: (in answer to Arnold) "Don't need union tickets. Wave Hill didn't have them. We can strike without.

York: (young man) Now you talking.

Shop manager: We got to try legal way first.

Arnold: You got to give Government two weeks to answer - Albert, and if not we got to take action.

The following Monday the delegation left. Within a few days a reaction was evident. The presence and purpose of the delegation was raised in the Northern Territory Legislative Council, but the Government representative sidestepped the issue. On the 17th February the member for Ludmilla, Mr. Ward, A.L.P. put a question to the Director of Social Welfare, Mr. Giese:

> "Is consideration being given to vesting the land comprised in the Roper River settlement in the Aborigines of the area?

Answer: I am not quite sure of the significance of the honourable member's question. Does he refer to the area within the settlement area itself or does he refer to the area comprising part of the Arnhem Land Reserve surrounding the immediate settlement ....

Mr. Ward: The question is directed to both areas of land ....

Mr. Giese: In that case the answer is that there is no proposition at this stage that I am aware of that would suggest that the Aboriginals have requested that the land either in the immediate settlement area or in the area outside be vested in them ..."
(N.T. Leg. Co. Hansard; 10th Council 6th sittings, Part 2, p. 78).

On the following day the member for Port Darwin,

Mr. Withnall, A.L.P. took up the Ngukurr case during the

adjournment debate:

Mr. Withnall: I have had certain conversations with some Aboriginal people whom I first saw, I think, in October, 1964 when they discussed with me the proposition that they should be able to take up some land in the Arnhem Land Reserve just north of Roper River. I told them then that they could not take it up because there was no law which permitted them to take up pastoral land ...

The Aboriginal people that I have spoken to are not only restless, they are rebellious. The assurances that I gave them back in 1968 that the bill was passed now (the Lands Bill allowing Aborigines to lease land inside the reserve.) and that it was a Government Bill and that it would be in operation soon proved to be quite wrong ... These people have told me, Mr. President, that they are rebellious ... I believe they are ...

Mr. Giese: How many are rebellious?

Mr. Withnall: ... I understand and believe they all are. Does the honourable member know if any of them are or are not?

Mr. Giese: Yes, he would know more than you."

The Director of Social Welfare followed up his question

later in the same debate:

Mr. Giese: "On the question of Aboriginal people being rebellious, I think the honourable member (for Port Darwin) is drawing a rather long bow. He is exaggerating at least. I would probably have somewhat more contact with Aboriginal people over the length and breadth of the Northern Territory than the honourable member, and I know no Aboriginals about whom the term could be used at this point of time ...."
(op. cit. Part I, p. 134 & 142).

The delegation also received prominent space and sympathetic coverage in the Darwin daily newspaper, The Northern Territory News. On 18th February the paper carried a front page report entitled "The Roper River Tribe demand land rights." in which they quoted the frustration and the demands of the Ngukurr delegation:

"They (the delegation) say the 400 Aboriginals at Roper River Settlement ... want control of the land.

'We have heard nothing but promises for years now and want less talking and more action from ... the Government' Mr.(Abrahams) said.

He said a series of meetings of the tribe had listed their needs and decided on a firm plan of action unless they were granted." (N.T. News, 18th February, 1970).

The following day the paper devoted two columns on page three to an interview with Alan Abrahams, and on 24th February a three column half page report of an address by the

delegation to the local waterside workers.

The first reaction at Ngukurr came from the superintendent. He privately advised the shop manager not to become involved in affairs he could not handle. On the afternoon of 18th the superintendent called a meeting with the shop manager, Arnold Abrahams and Brian Gideon. He expressed his support, in principle for the Village demands, but strongly objected to the use of shop funds for financing the Darwin delegation. Events progressed rapidly over the next 24 hours. This was sparked by a statement made by Alan Abrahams, and reported on the evening news. He called for the abolition of the permit system, which required visitors to the Reserve to obtain prior permission from the Government, and also stated that the Village would go on strike if the Government did not grant their demands. The following morning there were telephone calls from Welfare Branch headquarters in Darwin to Ngukurr. They wanted the superintendent to answer two questions. Were the people going to strike? Did the people agree with Alan's rejection of the permit system? Apparently his answers did not reassure the Darwin administration. They called again and told the superintendent to announce that the Federal Minister of Interior, Mr. Peter Nixon, who was currently on tour in the Northern Territory, would visit Ngukurr on 26th February.

There were attempts made locally to undermine the unity of the Village. Many of the local staff, while expressing their general sympathy with the people's desires, told them that their Darwin delegation was pushing things too far and too fast, and that they should be more patient. They chose Alan as the main focus of attack: "Alan was too impulsive, remember the union (North Australia Workers Union) sacked him for calling an unauthorised strike", and they appealed to the people's fear of European encroachment: "you need permits to protect your sacred grounds". These appeals, while not falling entirely on deaf ears, were rendered ineffective by the visible success of the delegation. They received attention from the press, and the Government was sending the Minister to visit them on the following Thursday.

The older Village residents supported by Arnold Abrahams and Brian Gideon were not entirely happy about the course the Darwin delegation was taking. They were worried by the public threat of strike action, but what upset them most was Alan's call for the abolition of permits. Arnold had supported retention of the permit system the previous year, at a Government sponsored conference of delegates from all Arnhem Land missions and Settlements. Arnold and

Brian reacted angrily to Alan's statement. Without consultation they told the superintendent that the Village disowned the statement. A little later on 19th they were suggesting that the delegation be recalled. Many of the older villagers supported this suggestion. Some were in fact expressing a fear that the actions of the delegation would provoke retaliation from the Government. The type of retaliation was ill defined, though some of the fears expressed included the taking away of people's pensions, calling in the police, and telling people to leave the Settlement or alternatively removing the staff from the Settlement.

The reaction to the delegation did not consolidate. The news of the Minister's visit helped to modify the opposition. There was little news from Darwin during the rest of the week, and this gave tempers time to cool. The younger men also helped dampen the opposition by reminding Arnold that he had earlier agreed to using the threat of ignoring the permit system as a tactic to get Government action. This they said was what Alan had done. Arnold accepted this explanation and so defused the antagonism which had developed against the delegation.

The evening prior to the Minister's visit, a Village meeting was held to decide procedure for the morrow. Many grievances, hopes and fears were aired. Arnold was chosen as spokesman in the absence of the delegation (who were having problems raising funds to get back). A full list of demands were worked out and I was asked to type copies:

"Main points of Village meeting Wednesday, 25.2.70.

1. Main thing is to get lease of land covering the area of the old Mission lease ... (& maybe) extending eastward to Rose River. Lease is to be for everybody, not for each man to ask for his tribal land.

2. People want to govern themselves. For this we must have good homes and the means to make money for ourselves.

3. Housing. The people want good houses. We need the money and the materials to build them. No money from Welfare for houses, but have to borrow from the Aborigines fund.

4. The permit system should not be controlled from Darwin by Welfare. The people at Roper should control it for themselves and by themselves.

5. The cattle and horses here should be handed over to the people. They should have their own brand as well.

6. The women need modern amenities. They should have washing machines and refrigerators. These should be included in any housing. They (the amenities) should also be given high priority in general.

7. The crawler must be fixed and made operational.

8. Must have a new truck.

The morning started with the surprise arrival of a charter flight bringing William, Alan and two Darwin press men. They brought promises of Union financial support, tales of Government obstruction of permits for reporters, and news that the Nixon visit had not been planned but prompted by activities of the delegation in Darwin; the delegation and the press had learned of Nixon's visit only the previous day. The Minister himself arrived half an hour later and, formalities completed, the meeting was convened. The workshop was packed with the Minister and his entourage, local staff, the press, myself, and over eighty Aborigines including eight women. People listened intently while Arnold, William and Alan put their case. The message from the Minister was clear. He would look into question of housing requirements. Household durables were not Government responsibility. Permits would stay as they were. Nothing would be done on points 1, 2 and 5 until the passage of necessary legislation was complete.

"Nixon: Seems to me the land must come first then the other things will flow from it.

Arnold: I hope we don't have to wait another five years.

Nixon: I hope so too."

The Ministerial entourage departed leaving a community far from satisfied. They had been told to wait yet again, and they were tired of waiting. Feeling was running high, particularly among the younger men. They felt they were not going to get results by talking. However, the Government was not inactive, the Minister applied pressure and on the following Tuesday, 3rd March, a list was posted detailing the benefits Ngukurr would receive in the current year.

1. A new water supply.
2. A new power plant.
3. New electrical reticulation.
4. Money alloted for 10 new houses to be built in 1971.
5. The arrival of a Ngukurr town plan.

The Village people examined the list and concluded that the first three items were largely for the benefit of the European staff. True, they had sought washing machines and refrigerators, but they didn't have them and the Europeans did. The existing water supply came from the river, and though it was usually cloudy and sometimes muddy, the Village preferred it to the clean but hard bore

water which was to be the new source of supply. The houses were not yet at Ngukurr, and 1971 was a long way off. They had received the finance for the houses at someone elses expense, and what could be promised to them could also be taken away.[4]

The town plan which was exhibited together with the list of benefits was regarded by the Village people partly as a joke and partly as a threat. The joke was the scale and detailed amenities the plan provided. The plan was drawn for a population of 1,000 properly housed, with paved streets and a divided main thoroughfare. It included new and enlarged hospital and school facilities, a town hall, a shopping centre, restaurant, motel, hotel, and police station. It was the provision for a hotel and police station which provoked a hostile reaction to the plan. Both were anathema to different sections of the Village. The Village, in 1970, did not have an alc ohol problem. The determined opposition of the older residents had prevented the establishment of a 'wet canteen', which

4. There had been no provision for additional housing at Ngukurr in the 1969-70 budget, and this new allocation was at the expense of some other Settlement.

the Government had offered on a number of occasions since late 1968. Villagers who drank went to town to do so, and the remoteness of Ngukurr and the absence of independent transport prevented any substantial amounts of alcohol reaching the Village. The inclusion of a hotel in the plan was an insult to the successful prohibition lobby in the Village, and even their opponents objected to what they saw as the Government's high handed action in including a hotel without prior consultation. The older villagers were the only group who were not completely opposed to the idea of resident police. They were ambiguous. On the one hand they supported the notion of police being readily available to check the disobedience (largely to themselves) of the younger people (though it is unlikely that the police would have been able to exercise any control in this field), while at the same time they were opposed to the establishment of yet another body which could interfere in the Village's conduct of its own affairs.

The people were told by local staff members that the list had been prompted by the experience of the Minister on his visit. The younger men, in particular expressed the opinion that the list was simply a hasty attempt to pacify

them. The only substantial benefit, housing, did not even touch on the core of their demands. They had forced the Government to make some concession. Alan and William argued that the Government did not want any bad publicity and would therefore make more concessions if the people acted together and pressed their advantage. These two then assumed the initiative and arranged a closed meeting of mainly younger men, leaving out such notable villagers as Arnold Abrahams and Brian Gideon. About 30 men attended the meeting, and incredibly, in such a small community, very few other people were aware of it till it had occurred (I was unaware of its occurrence till the following morning). Alan stated later that he had wanted only a small meeting of those who were not afraid to act, because if everyone came those who were afraid of the Government (he mentioned the old people), those who were undecided (a side swipe at Arnold and Brian among others), and those who supported the staff (he named two men and three women), would have mixed them up. He also said that he was afraid this last group would have run straight to the staff and revealed all they had decided. The meeting itself had been very short, lasting less than an hour. There had been little discussion and the men had rapidly agreed on a definite course of action. They would go on strike from the coming Monday, 9th March.

The day following this decision the atmosphere of the Settlement was tense. By morning the news of the meeting and its substance had spread through the Village and also reached the superintendent. The superintendent held discussions with Village notables, including William, Alan, Arnold and Brian, and with the shop manager and even with me. He expressed his sympathy with the people's demands, but he opposed the strike. He said that the people had no economic bargaining position and they had no real labour to withdraw. They could not force the Government to act. They would, he said only hurt themselves. They would gain nothing and would suffer physical hardship as well. He also proposed an alternative to the strike, which was a petition to the Queen for rights to their land.

There was obvious apprehension in the Village about the new turn of events. The old people, in particular, expressed fears of reprisal from the Government and the police if a strike occurred. Most of the villagers, including the majority of young men, were unfamiliar with working conditions in which strikes had an accepted place. But the young men, buttressed by the solidarity of the previous evening's caucus meeting, decided their need for action was greater than their fear of the unknown.

The shop manager was also apprehensive, and asked some of the Village notables to come to his house to discuss the situation before the Village meeting which had been arranged for that evening. Seven men came (Alan Abrahams, William Gideon, Brian Gideon, Steven Gideon, Ian Gideon, Mark Abrahams, and Winston Peterson), but only Alan, William and Brian were important village leaders. Alan and William, supported by four of the other men, stated their determination to strike. Brian made no commitment and no contribution to the discussion. The shop manager talked of the difficulties of strike action and the financial hardship, but in the face of the men's determination he suggested a short strike of one week, and emphasised the need to get outside financial help. He, like most people, was worried. Mark offered him a way out: "If you don't want to go any further, that's O.K. It's up to you. We don't want you accused of stirring us." He replied that it was their fight, but he would help if he could.

At 9.15 p.m. on Wednesday, 4th March, Alan rang the meeting bell. At 9.45 p.m. he opened the packed meeting with a general attack on people who had run to the staff and reported the proceedings of the previous night's meeting

of young men. He then singled out four men for criticism. The first was Pearce Young, an outsider who had spent most of his youth at Ngukurr and only returned recently. He had been educated in an urban school, had a long history of close association with Europeans, and was a former associate of Alan's in the trade union movement. Pearce had been telling people during the day that they should not take precipitous action. He told them they had to organise and get guarantees, in writing, of outside support first.

"Alan: You (Pearce) been talking about that business (last night's meeting). You shouldn't talk against our strike.

Pearce: Might be not everyone agrees.

Alan: O.K., then you stay out."

A little later, following an impassioned plea for unity from Arnold, Pearce pledged his support. Toward the end of the meeting when Alan said that he and William were going to Darwin the next day to get support, Pearce returned to his earlier scepticism.

"Pearce: If you don't get back from Darwin then I go to work on Monday."

The second man singled out was about 50 years old, an Arnhem Land immigrant, and a police tracker.

"Alan: Where's my mulari (mother in law or mother in law's brother).

Nic (the mulari): I told you you got to be union (belong to one). Got to know what you doing.

Harry Emerson (strike supporter): You said you'd call the policeman (if we struck).

Nic: Policeman told me you people can't strike. I don't really understand.

Harry: If you don't understand you just follow Alan and the mob.

York Abrahams (strike supporter): It's about your land. We going to fight for it.

Nic: I don't understand.

Harry: I told you. Police can't take the whole of Ngukurr.

Nic: Well, I don't understand, but I can follow you mob.

Adam Abrahams (prominent younger leader and strike supporter): Leave him alone. He doesn't understand. He'll follow us. I'll talk quietly to him tomorrow."

The other two men were both prominent in Village affairs and both were considered to have close relations with the staff. One of the men, Nat Davies, was reported to have said that the shop would close if people went on strike (Nat was senior shop assistant). Nat was not at the meeting, and the shop manager apologised for him, saying that Nat had misunderstood him, and that Nat supported the strike. The last man was Brian Gideon. Brian had

done nothing and said nothing. He had not come out either for the strike or against it. He was the senior Gideon male active in Village affairs and the meeting wanted to know his position.

"Alan: We got to make sure no one's going to work Monday. If you see a man going then you pull him back to camp.

Pearce: What about Brian, he's next to the staff. (Brian worked in the superintendent's office).

Brian: I listen to the people first. If they say strike, I strike."

There was one important leader who had not committed himself by the beginning of the meeting, and who was left to do so on his own terms. Arnold Abrahams chose his time midway through the meeting. He was not singled out by Alan because he was Alan's elder brother, and because he had been the senior Village spokesman for many years.

"Arnold: I wasn't here (at the meeting) last night. I told Alan to go ahead because I was tired (Alan told me he had not asked Arnold to attend). Two points I want to bring up. You had meeting without me and some councillors (Station councillors), O.K. Who settled Arnhem Land, Welfare or Government, no - CMS. They started with very little money (the local CMS chaplain was present during this speech). Government let whites kill blackfella. If YOU think your white, get out. Government had nothing to do with Mission at old mission time (up to 1940). Native Affairs (the predecessor of Welfare Branch) gave nothing to Aborigines.

> This what I'm asking you people who are holding back (from the strike). At least CMS left us shop, money and other things. Government bring houses and high wages? No.
>
> I've been fighting them for years. I know how many promises they made. I was head councillor for CMS for seven years, and one with Welfare. Always (they) promise, and only hope.
>
> I don't want white man in Arnhem Land. We told Alan to tell press that we don't want permit. (that was) to trick Government. Well, theyv'e done it to us before, now its our turn.
>
> We can't keep holding meeting. Last night's meeting should have satisfied you all. You got to fight together. If Giese (the Director of Welfare) was here I tell him Welfare haven't done anything for us. I told (superintendent) if people decide on action, I got to follow. Nobody in Roper, or any blackfella, is full citizen."

The strike was unanimously endorsed by the 51 working men present. The women, of whom there were about 20 present, took no part in the proceedings. The men said they would stop work for one week from the coming Monday, and the children would be withdrawn from school for the same period. Three men, Herbert and Harry Emerson and York Abrahams, called for an indefinite strike and wanted the people to move out of the Settlement and live in the bush. William said no, and the suggestion was dropped. Alan added that this was the first strike, and if there was no result, they would go longer next time. Arnold then suggested that they send a petition to the Queen asking

for their land. This was agreed to, but no move was made to organise one. The next morning Alan and William flew to Darwin to seek support and publicise the strike.

The Anatomy of the Strike

The Ngukurr Village went on strike from the 9th March to 6th April, 1970. They withdrew their labour, their children from the school, and made plans to move away from the Settlement. They had lost patience with a Government which had promised them much and produced little. Their exacerbation was eloquently expressed in a letter, written on 12th March, by the Villager leader, William Gideon. It was sent to the editors of the major dailies in Sydney and Melbourne, but was not published.

"Dear Sir,

Just a letter to inform you that the people of Roper are still on strike. There are 400 of us now on strike. This includes all the children as well.

On 11th March, which was yesterday, the people decided that it may be necessary to extend the strike for a longer time, not five days as we said. We will strike until the answers we want are given.

This is our land we want the rights to own it. If we don't get them we will work it anyway. There has been a lot of talk about leasing land. Why should we lease the land, it is ours, it was taken from us. Also we don't want Welfare to come down for meetings, we have

had too many meetings and nothing has happened.

The things we want are land, houses, and equal wages for the men working for Welfare.

Also if things keep on the way they are going we intend to start branding the cattle and working the land, because this is our land, it belongs to the people here and not the Government.

The white people took over the whole of Australia, is it too much to ask for a small patch of Arnhem Land to be used by my people.

Yours faithfully,
William Gideon,
Village Leader."

At eight o'clock on the morning of Monday, 9th March the staff supervisors commenced duties alone. At nine the teachers were ready for their pupils, but by ten only a dozen Village children had arrived. In the Village people milled around the meeting place. The superintendent drove down for a discussion. Arnold and Brian walked away. Adam and Mark Abrahams took charge. No, they said, they didn't want to talk with him. They were going to have their own meeting. The superintendent drove off. A young man then noticed a few children going into the school. Adam demanded to know who was sending their children to school. Brian replied that the children should be left out of the strike. A group of about fifteen young men and women shouted that everyone had agreed, and accused

Brian, Arnold and a third man Niel Abrahams (Arnold's FB) of going against the Village decision. The three didn't reply. The senior hospital sister then arrived and asked that the hospital be staffed. Arnold argued that they should staff the hospital or it might close, and told his wife (who was a nursing aid) to go. She said no, and walked off. The young men said that no one was to work and that included the hospital.

The situation remained uncertain throughout the morning. Some people were preparing to go to a nearby waterhole to camp for the week, but the majority said they should stay till Alan and William returned in the afternoon. Only six children were still at school after the mid morning recess, and two women went to work at the hospital. The superintendent informed people that a senior officer from head office would arrive for discussions in the afternoon. Some men said they should not talk with him, but Adam, Mark and Arnold said they should find out what he had come to offer them. By and large people didn't know what they should do next. The arrival of the senior Welfare officer came as a relief. It gave them something to focus their attention on.

A large group of Village people (about 60) met with the Welfare officer in the Settlement workshop. Adam and Mark Abrahams took charge of the proceedings, and questioned the officer about the Government's intentions.

"Mark: Main strike is for land. We want (our) own area of land. 50 working men had vote (to strike). We have been asking for land long time. Only way is strike. You said we had to wait for law.

Officer: That's right, and I'll have to repeat it. This delay is because Gove went to court (Gove land rights case, see Rowley 1971; Ch. 8). No one at all can get land on Reserves while this case is on.

Mark: We'll strike till we get land, I'm sorry.

Officer: That's all right. I don't want to influence you. We won't sack you, but you realise you won't be paid. We just want to know what it's about.

Adam: All you ever say when you come out, is wait.

Officer: I might agree, but I don't make the law.

Adam: Can't you give better answer. Can't you go to law for us.

Officer: Aborigines are going to the law themselves at Gove.

Adam: Why are you coming out, you never do much.

Officer: We've only been here (at Ngukurr) two years.

Arnold: We think it's about time our own Government in Darwin (The Welfare Branch) should give us something.

Officer: I agree. Mr. Giese is trying to get you land, but he's only one man on the Legislative Council. But we know we'll get it.
(there followed a further interchange on the relevance of the Gove case, then the officer changed the subject.)

Officer: One thing that worries me, is why the children too? I can see why your on strike but why the children.

Adam: If I send my children to school, who'll feed them? I have to take them with me (to camp outside the Settlement).

Superintendent: Why do you have to go to Wadjilai (the planned camping area).

Adam: Because people might scab.

Officer: We never asked you to go to work. We'll feed your children.

Pearce Young: The toilets are full. People going to have sickness.

Arnold: I said this (would happen). We got to work hygiene and hospital."

Following the interjections by Pearce and Arnold a number of people started talking at once, and a split developed with Pearce, Arnold and Brian on one side, and Adam, Mark and other vocal young men on the other. This carried on for some ten minutes till Nat Davies got up to speak.

"Nat: I ask everybody. You had a meeting before Alan left. I wasn't there. Alan talked to the press and said you were going to Wadjilai and all the children (would be) out of school. Now what are you going to do? I talk from my heart. You should all go (to Wadjilai). You promised Alan, and now your going behind his back. I'm ashamed."

Arnold took this as a personal attack and accused the strikers of being too hasty. Then Adam stepped in and said the people would stay at Ngukurr till William and

Alan returned. The meeting then broke up leaving the question of essential services and the children unresolved. During the afternoon some women remained at work at the hospital, and about one third of the Village children attended school.

William Gideon and Albert Abrahams returned from Darwin early the following morning. They called a meeting of working men, at which 42 attended. They told them that Alan had gone to Sydney and Melbourne to gain Union support for their strike, and called for an end to dissension over the children and essential services. The young men, particularly those who wanted the Village to move to Wadjilai, attacked those men, led by Pearce Young, who continued to man the Village sanitary service. They were not supported by William and Albert, who said the Village would not move this week and sanitary service was needed to maintain their own health. Most of the meeting was devoted to the issue of the school children. About half of the Village's 140 children were at school that day. The younger men, this time supported by William and Albert, criticised the parents of children still at school. Most said they had misunderstood or been misled, and would now take their children out of school.

"Wilson Actor (middle aged father of four school children): I'll pull mine out, but other men said it's not strike (to take children out of school).

Herbert Emerson: That's white man strike, we're black.

Wilson: Arnold and Brian are pushing the children to school."

Arnold was not present, but Brian, and another man Andrew Yardley, continued to argue against withdrawl of the children.

"Brian: My boy's at high school and he's sticking at it. I'm proud of him.

Albert: That doesn't mean you'll get land.

Brian: I went on strike, only my children are at school.

William: Alan said we got to pull kids out. Teachers don't worry, strike is our business.

John Peterson (young strike supporter): With parents permission we got to pull out all (the kids). Take a vote. Hands up who agrees (to withdrawal of children).

Brian: I don't agree.

Andrew: I don't agree.

John: Everyone else agrees.

Brian: You can do what you like to me, kill me if you like. I said we should wait till after the wet (to strike).

Andrew: You were supposed to organise properly. Remember, you were supposed to wait till Alan returned."

Both sides of the argument had become quite heated. The last two statements from Brian and Andrew threatened to open up the whole question of the strike itself. At this

point William stepped in:

"William: Well, what'll we do?

John: No more (i.e. its not for us to say). You got to say. We wait for your word. Your (our) leader.

Andrew: William, you want your kids at school or bush?

William: I want my kids out for one week.

All (including Brian and Andrew): Well, that's it."

For the moment the issues seemed to be resolved. Some young men wanted to picket the school, but William vetoed the plan, and told them to wait till evening when he would call a Village meeting. The meeting started at nine with the strikers angrily attacking the women for not supporting them and for pushing the children to school. The tone of the meeting in its early stages was extremely hostile, with the women, supported by Brian, Pearce and Terry Abrahams (who had returned only that day from a long stay at Rose River), replying with equal vigor to the strikers' attacks.

"William: I heard old people say they would fine children $2 if they didn't go to school. We're on strike. We all got to stop. You worried for food. You can all go and look for bush tucker.

Stella Abrahams (William's ZD, age 25): I don't care. I'm working at hospital. If I pull out, I'll leave Roper altogether.

Dawn Everstone (William's Z): Me too.

William: You go away and take kid's money (child endowment).

Dawn: I'll go on holiday if I want to. You won't stop me. I just want kids to learn.

York Abrahams: They don't want kids to have land. We're striking for kids so they'll have land.

Pearce: We didn't get telegram from you fellows (William and Albert). We didn't know what to do.

William: But we told you what to do.

Brian: Pearce is right. We didn't know. I stopped but sent my kids to school.

Pearce: Where's Alan?

Mark Morgan: He's doing our business.

Pearce: Why have kids got to suffer. Alan and I both worked in Union. They never took children from school.

Terry: My kids are at school. I didn't know what's on.

Albert: Newsmen send telegram every day to find out if kids in school. As soon as we say no kids, they'll be here right away. This way we make Government brains work. Hurry them up. We won't suffer. We hunt and we share what we get. We got Butcher's union and Warfies from all over Australia behind us. If we send telegram for money we'll get it. No one can hurt us. Worry about money later when we run short, not now.

Adam Abrahams: Bella, why you send kids (to school)?

Bella (Terry and Stella's mother); I wasn't here (also just returned from Numbulwar).

Adam: What about you Joan?

Joan Peterson: I don't know.

Terry: Education, we need him. Don't know how long this strike going to last. We can't afford for them to miss. What about people here who don't even agree with striking.

John Angurugu: If you mob don't agree with Alan, I can just send telegram to bring him back. He's my Bandji (brother in law). He could get shot for us. If you disagree then better I call him back. Now, you decide, because tomorrow I call him back. God is my witness.

Terry: I'm sending my kids to school tomorrow.

Bella: You mob should have had one month meeting for this thing.

Brian: Your right.

William: You, you started this backsliding.

Brian: You want to fight me?

Steven Gideon (younger brother of Brian, William and Bella): Shut up. We can't back out (of strike)."

Tempers were very frayed at this stage and the exchange among the Gideon siblings seemed likely to break the meeting up in disarray. The meeting was almost out of control, aside from the Gideons, there were at least three other arguments under way. Albert and John tried to cool the tempers. Finally it was Arnold who restored order with an impassioned plea for unity. The argument still continued but now both sides were trying to find a solution. Nat Davies revived the suggested move to Wadjilai. Terry then agreed to withdraw his children if

they moved. However, Arnold, Albert and Brian all objected to the move. Terry then suggested another compromise: there were only two days till the weekend. For this period the men would run the sanitary service on a voluntary basis, there would be no move to Wadjilai, and no children at school. The meeting accepted this solution.

The people had arrived at a solution and their morale was boosted by it. The tenor of the meeting changed from trying to find a solution to opposed views on an immediate problem, to planning continuing action:

"Terry: We work (next) Monday?

Many voices (including Albert and William): Yes

Nat, Adam, Arnold, and some others: No. Too soon. The more we strike the quicker we win.

William: We got to decide now. If you want to continue don't back out.

Terry: Rolling strike is chicken.

William: We decided that in Darwin. Maybe one week too short.

Adam: What do we decide? Just one person talks.

Terry: Tomorrow no one at school?

Everyone: Yes.

Albert: Monday the strike continues and we go to Wadjilai?

Adam: Anyone against?

Everyone: No.

Adam: Pearce, you got anything to say?

Pearce: Monday you go, Monday I go."

The meeting had lasted just over three hours, and people were tired but pleased with the result. On Thursday and Friday a small group of men manned the sanitation service, and the hospital workers reported for duty. Both had Village approval. On the same two days no children attended the school. Another Village meeting was held on Saturday evening. The meeting reaffirmed the decision to continue the strike into the next week. However, they reversed the decision to move to Wadjilai as a result of statements from Arnold, Brian and Albert, that it would be too far from the Jabuduruwa ceremony ground. The decisions were reached without any difficulty and the meeting was concluded in less than one hour.

The unity of purpose only lasted as long as the weekend. However, the threat which came on Monday morning was new, and had its source outside the Village. A meeting of strikers was hastily called by Albert at about nine. The men gathered outside the shop and were addressed by the shop manager. He told them that they had agreed with Alan

to have a rolling strike; to strike one week and work the next. He said they might upset Alan's plans to get them support if they continued the strike into this week. Having said this he then dropped a bombshell which no one had forseen:

"Shop manager: The shop's in big debt. If we don't have money we can't pay it off. If we don't get money we'll have to crawl back to work and lose face, and even lose the shop."

The men had known the shop was in debt, but not that it was this serious. Only a few days earlier the manager said that things were good and the strike was no problem for the shop. Now they were being told the shop would go bankrupt if they didn't go back to work. Arnold and Albert supported the manager's call for a working week to help the shop. The other men were at a loss and seemed unsure of what to do. A few fell in with Arnold, but others, including Adam and York Abrahams, and John Angurugu expressed their disgust at the continual changing of minds, and said they were finished with striking. The manager then restated his support for the men's strike, but emphasised the prior need to save the people's one asset: the shop.

I had been growing increasingly angry during the meeting, and following the manager's last speech, I was no longer able to contain myself. I relinquished, for the first time, the passive role of recorder and took the floor. He had, I said been less than honest. He knew of the decision to continue the strike last Thursday. He had seen the letter William had sent to the newspapers, and had been in close touch with William, Albert and others throughout. As late as Friday afternoon he had said the shop could manage. He talked of people losing face if they went back later and lost the shop. What, I asked, did he think would happen if people returned to work now, after having widely and publicly declared their intention to continue the strike. I then apologised for my intrusion and (still shaking from the shock of my action) sat down.

I can't assess what effect, if any, my speech had on the course of events that followed. The manager, himself, was visibly shaken and took no further part in proceedings. The opinions of the strikers polarised with one group led by Albert and Arnold wanting a return to work, and a resumption of the strike in the following week. The other group, led by William and Adam, pressed for

continuation of the strike now. Neither side wanted to discuss the position and the meeting broke up without agreement.

An hour after the meeting closed a member of the Settlement staff informed me that Albert and William had sent a telegram prior to the meeting, to the Northern Territory News stating that the men would return to work for this week (see N.T. News, 17th March, 1970). I approached both men, but neither was willing to discuss the matter. However, by mid afternoon the situation again took a dramatic turn. Albert came and told me he was going to hold Nadjba (an important Jabuduruwa rite involving a large number of men) the following morning, Tuesday, 17th March. The holding of this rite would occupy most of the men for a large part of the day and certainly precluded a resumption of work.

Nadjba was held the next morning and during its course a number of men, including Albert, expressed their disappointment in the shop manager. After the morning performance concluded Albert rang the Darwin press and informed them that the strike was continuing. (N.T. News, 18th March). The strike front was maintained without an

open breach throughout the rest of the week. A senior Welfare Branch officer had arrived on the Monday night, but he brought no new offers and the people refused to meet with him.

Another meeting of strikers was called on Friday morning, 20th March, as a result of two telegrams received from Alan. Alan told people to continue with rolling strikes and to arrange for two men to be flown to Canberra for the national conference of the Federal Council for Advancement of Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders. There was no controversy among the men at the meeting. They agreed, without debate, to return to work the following Monday and recommence the strike on 30th March. They unanimously chose two men, Adam Abrahams and Hugh Abrahams (Terry's younger brother), to represent the community in Canberra. The main point of discussion was the raising of the money to pay for the fares of the proposed delegates.

The discussion centred on a sum of about $2,000 which had been raised by the Village from entertainment and sale of artifacts since 1968. The money had been raised under the auspices of the Citizens Club and was held in a Club account. The account was controlled by the Club executive, and the shop manager was putting pressure on

the executive to have the proceeds of the account used to assist with the shop's finances. The meeting was unanimous in holding that the account was for Village use and not for the shop. They asked the manager to come to the meeting to discuss the matter, but he refused. They then instructed the three members of the Club executive who were present to prevent the manager from having access to the account, and to have sufficient funds released to cover the delegates expenses.

The Citizens Club executive met at five o'clock the same day. There were five members present: the shop manager (who was Club treasurer), another European (the Club secretary), John Angurugu (Club President), Oscar Peterson, and Winston Peterson. The shop manager stated his position: the shop was in desperate straits. It was unable to pay its debts, and needed the $2,000 if it was to have any chance of surviving. As the Club treasurer he would not permit any of the money to be released for other purposes. The secretary supported the manager's position. John and Oscar argued that the money belonged to the Village. The secretary disagreed. The money, he said, belonged to the Club members, which included staff as well as Village. John and Oscar then stated their refusal to sign the account over to the shop, and left the meeting.

Later the same evening John called a Village meeting to discuss the entertainment account. The men started by attacking the shop manager and reaffirming their belief that the money was theirs. The first note of discord was introduced by Dawn Everstone. This gradually widened till the meeting became deeply divided over the efficacy of the strike itself.

"Albert: Last week manager said shop almost out of trouble, now (its) almost broke. He talks two ways.

Dawn: Well that's because you mob won't work.

Brian: That's none of your business.

Albert: Manager knows Welfare going to help (the shop). He just wants to grab money from everywhere.

Dawn: Why don't you work and look after children?

Brian: You watch it. You better look after your own children. Don't hand them out everywhere and go off drinking.

Dawn: You mind your own business.

Brian: Your one of the backsliders. You run to whites and tell them everything.

Dawn: You mob make things worse with strike.

Brian: I heard from Dawn that Welfare going to close this place.

Shout from large number of Men: Dawn rubbish.

Dawn: No rubbish. Its true. You all humbug."

At this point there were a large number of interjections and a call from many of the men present to close the meeting. Albert and others repeatedly stated that the strike was not the business of this meeting. It had been settled. Arnold then joined in and brought the meeting to the verge of disintergr ation.

"Arnold: I told you to write to the Governor General (a reference to the petition mentioned above). You didn't listen, so I'm back at work and I'm never going to strike again at Roper River.

Albert: You start talking now, in the middle. Why didn't you do it before. You change in middle like (shop manager).

Herbert Emerson: You change and what about Alan down south?

Arnold: If Alan gets shot by whites I'm going to fucking shoot all of you (young men). You wanted him to go south.

Adam: Only one Munanga (white man) stirred up strike; that (shop manager)."

Proceedings now became totally confused. Most of the leading men, and some of the women, became embroiled in personal arguments. Each accused the other of being responsible for the strike or the current disunity. In the course of the turmoil a number of the firmest strike supporters declared they were finished with the strike. Alan's sons (brothers' sons) told Angurugu to recall their father. With a great deal of effort Albert managed

to restore a semblance of order, and addressing himself solely to the young men, got agreement on the continuation of the running strike. The entertainment money was left aside, and instead Albert suggested approaching the trade union sponsoring Alan for the delegates fares. The men agreed and the meeting broke up.

Monday morning, 23rd March was the start of the working week in the rolling strike program. 60% of the male workforce, including four of the leading strike supporters (William Gideon, Mark and York Abrahams, and John Peterson), reported for work. Twelve leading strikers remained on strike along with eighteen other men. School attendance was normal throughout the week. This situation continued throughout the week. No attempts were made to revive disputes and no public meetings were held. The Government made no approaches to the community, and no communication was received from Alan or his trade union sponsors.

The following Monday, 30th March, the strike officially resumed. The four leading strikers who had worked in the third week withdrew their labour. The strike was not fully effective as 20 men continued to work, including the three leading conservatives: Arnold Abrahams, Brian

Gideon and Andrew Yardley. A Village meeting was held on the Monday evening to decide on the week's tactics. The shop manager and superintendent were invited to attend. After discussion between the manager and Adam Abrahams the men reluctantly agreed to let the shop use the entertainment account. The strikers had now to settle two problems: the move to Wadjilai and the school children. The attitude to both had altered considerably since the first week of the strike. Neither was now approached as part of the program of protest. The men were inclined to remain at the Settlement and send the children to school, but they were concerned that if they did so they would be forced back to work to pay their rent and feed the children. At first the superintendent, supported by Arnold and Brian, tried to talk the men into going back to work, using the health hazards of Wadjilai as an inducement. This proved unsuccessful. The superintendent then stated that most rents were in fact up to date, and in any case payment could be delayed. He also affirmed that the Government had agreed to feed the children who were at school. On the basis of this information the majority of the men agreed to continue the strike, remain at the Settlement, and send the children to school. The men did not discuss what their plans would

be in coming weeks. They were running short of money and were waiting for word from Alan and also from Albert, who had gone to Darwin the previous week to get financial aid from local unions. They received no communication from Albert during the week. Late on Thursday a telegram arrived from Alan. He told the people he could not send any money at that time, and asked them to return to work till he came back. The men had no further meeting, but returned to work the following Monday. The strike was over.

Competition within the Village

Up to the time of the caucus decision by the young men to go on strike, the discussions and actions of the Village had been externally oriented. The decisions to this point had not committed people to make a positive move, but only delegated others to act on their behalf. This was relatively simple for all felt the common frustration of their present position. However, for people to take concerted action in opposition to authority was quite a different matter. The three decisions, of withdrawal of labour, withdrawal of children, and the move to Wadjilai, committed the whole community to positive

action. The young men had taken the decision to strike based on their assessment of gains to be made, and their own propensity to oppose authority. These views were not held by all the community. Two other interest groups had quite different interpretations of their positions. These were the women and the older mission reared people. The critical roles of mediating and articulating the divergent interests were taken by the Village spokesmen who were predominantly middle aged men.

The competition for leadership within the community played a part in determining the stance adopted by each spokesman. Thus Arnold and Brian adopted a conservative stance. They were the principal spokesmen in normal times and dominated liaison between the Government and the Village. William, on the other hand, was the young men's choice for Village leader, a position which had been held by Arnold for the previous seven years. Albert and Alan, Arnold's older and younger brothers, had both spent many years in Darwin and only been back in the Village for some eighteen months.

The past experiences of the Old Mission Mob conditioned their perception of the situation. These were the people with memories of genocide and forced eviction. They had been protected by the Mission and built a new life there. They had experienced the hard hand of Government reprisal, and its protective cover. They did not want to jeopardise the latter.

The position of the women was different. They were excluded from access to authority within the community. It was not in their interests to support the transfer of power to their menfolk. The strike threatened to fetter them with greater responsibility. They would have the children around all day. It might be necessary to have to gather bush food for family sustenance, and there could be a threat to their pensions and child endowment from their non income earning kinsmen. However, despite these differences there was little active opposition to the strike, as a withdrawal of labour, because in the women's view this was clearly the working men's business.

The internal friction in the first two weeks of the strike centred on four issues. The withdrawal of the children from school was initially opposed by the women and

conservative men on the grounds that the children should not be dragged in to the adult's struggle. The strikers said that the struggle was primarily for their children's benefit. They insisted that withdrawal was necessary to show solidarity, particularly as the strike lacked industrial strength. The persistence of the strikers resulted in a total withdrawal on the fourth day. However, by the beginning of the second week the momentum had declined and there was a partial return to the school. By the end of the third week the school children were openly excluded from the strike.

	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday
Week 1	20-45	c70	c30	Nil	Nil
Week 2	c30	36	30	c30	c30
Week 3	c100	normal	normal	normal	normal
Week 4	normal	"	"	"	"

School attendance figures during strike
(Enrolment 140, normal attendance = 120+)

The young men, in calling for the withdrawal of labour, had aimed at a total withdrawal including both hospital and sanitation. In this they met, not only with conservative opposition, but also that of William and Albert. The hospital was not at issue once the main spokesmen made

their views known, but the opposition to the maintenance of sanitation services was initially quite hostile. The reason for the hostility was the organisation of the service by Pearce Young. The strikers thought his union background should have made him one of their strongest supporters. The opposition and the strikers' anger dropped when Pearce declared his support for the strike and agreed to do the work on a voluntary basis.

The mooted move to Wadjilai hit a nerve in a different competitive arena - the organisation of the Jabuduruwa. There were two sites currently being considered for the main ceremonial ground, one of which was close to Wadjilai. However, Arnold and Albert were among the men who favoured this site, and neither of them wanted the Village to move. Among those who favoured the second site were men who would otherwise have favoured leaving the Settlement. Thus a split in the ranks of the strikers compounded the opposition of the Old Mission group and the women, and effectively prevented a move from taking place.

The men themselves were divided over whether the strike should be maintained continuously or be a week on week off affair. The dissension resulted partly from a

difference in the understanding of strike action. Men such as Albert and William had long experience of wage labour. This experience played a part in their responses to the strike cue. They supported the policy enunciated by Alan, of a rolling strike until financial aid was available. They were also aware of the dangers of this policy, which through the stop/go effect could destroy the momentum of the strike. Most of the young men chose to ignore Alan's advice in this regard.

The issue arose at the end of both the first and second weeks. William, at the end of the first week, favoured continuation which he thought necessary to consolidate the solidarity that had been reached only in the middle of the first week. For Albert the question was complicated by his connection with the shop, in which he was senior assistant. He supported resumption in the morning meeting, but by evening had reversed his position. There were no such complications for Arnold, whose support for at least temporary resumption, was reinforced by the position of the shop. The issue had intensified by the time of the Village meeting on the following Friday. Arnold wavered between support for a one week resumption and total rejection of the strike. The strike

spokesmen had agreed on a working week and stuck by their decision. However, only four of the sixteen most prominent strikers returned to work. Friday's divisive meeting had raised a real risk of the strike being called off, so most of them remained out. At the same time they ceased their attempts to involve the whole community. This decision, never formally taken, was clear at the next Village meeting. The strikers ignored attacks on them by Arnold and Brian and reached agreement on their tactics for the following week.

Men at work or on strike, weeks 3 and 4

	Prominent Strikers	Conservative Spokesmen	Total male Workforce
Week 3 Work	4	3	45
Strike	12	0	30
Week 4 Work	0	3	20
Strike	16	0	55

Proportion of each age group working weeks 3 and 4

Age	No.	Week 3	%	Week 4	%
15-24	31	19	61%	3	10%
25-34	24	12	50%	5	21%
35-44	12	7	58%	6	50%
45+	8	7	88%	5	63%

There were two other issues current in the Village at this time. While they were not part of the strike they had to be accommodated by it. The Jabuduruwa was clearly used in two political manouvres during the strike. The decision on the siting of the main ceremonial ground was an important factor in quashing the proposed exodus to Wadjilai. On Monday afternoon of the second week of the strike a decision was made to hold a major performance on the following day. The decision, taken largely on Albert's initiative, served to prevent a possible breach in solidarity that had appeared in the earlier strikers' meeting.

The Government was not slow to use the presence of the Jabuduruwa in its propaganda. The Welfare Branch Annual Report for 1969-70 includes the following paragraph in its description of the strike.

> "It may have been quite coincidental that the strike occurred at the same time as a Yabaduruwa ceremony was held. Nevertheless, it did give the adult men the opportunity of devoting themselves full-time to the demands of the ceremony." (P. 49)

The Jabuduruwa had started in mid January. Some indication of the actual encroachment on people's time can be gained from the table of performances held during the strike period. The starting time of performances (except on Tuesday of week two) varied between ten past six and half past seven in the evening.

Ceremony performances and numbers of working men in attendance at mid afternoon
(N.P. = No performance on that day)

	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday
Week 1	N.P.	N.P.	4	4	10
Week 2	10	65	N.P.	N.P.	N.P.
Week 3	4	7	11	N.P.	21
Week 4	N.P.	N.P.	N.P.	N.P.	N.P.

A little further on in the same report the third week of the strike is described in the following terms:

> "On 23rd March between 45 and 50 men were back at work, about 20 were attending the ceremonial corroboree ... fifteen were still on strike ..." (P. 50).

The following table gives the breakdown of mid afternoon figures for that week.

	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Friday
Men at work during day	1	4	6	9
Men on Strike	3	3	5	12
Pensioners, & visitors	5	5	9	9

The holding of the strike in March and April of 1970 was independent of the presence of the Jabuduruwa. However, political decisions had to be made in both areas, and clearly the Jabuduruwa did provide some political resources for the strike context.

At the beginning of the strike people were aware it would mean a loss of income and therefore a reduction in the amount they could purchase. In so far as they supported the strike they were prepared for this. What they were unprepared for, was the shop manager's bombshell, that the shop was in serious financial difficulty. The reaction to this news was first disbelief and then consternation. The conservative spokesmen wanted to call off the strike, at least temporarily. Their argument was that it was the people's shop and should be supported. The majority of strikers said it was unfortunate but it should not effect their action. They also argued that the shop was not really theirs, but was run by Europeans. This view was later reinforced by the insistance of the European dominated executive that a separate entertainment account of $2,000 could not be used for strike purposes, but had to be used in helping the shop.

Until the end of the first week of the strike the shop manager was regarded by the community as a supporter of their aims and actions. The announcement of the shop's debt, the refusal of the $2,000, and the sacking of two shop assistants altered people's opinion. During the latter part of the strike the manager came under attack from both conservative spokesmen and strikers, for supposedly stirring the people to strike and for supposedly attempting to break the strike. He was the obvious scapegoat, being neither an integral member of the Welfare staff nor the Village.

The financial crisis of the shop was a serious blow to the strike. It discredited their main local European supporter. It dried up the main source of funds for strike propaganda. People lost confidence in their ability to withstand an extended period of loss of income. It was a serious set back to the people's belief that the shop was their property.

SECTION 2

THE SHOP

Establishment of the Citizens Club and the first Crisis

The Mission established the 'Roper River Citizens Club' in the last year of its administration of Ngukurr to provide a body to whom certain Mission assets could be transferred. The Club was formally constituted and registered as a non-profit making organisation. (see appendix 4.) Membership in the Club was open to all people over the age of eighteen years who were residents of Ngukurr for more than three months. The business of the Club was controlled by an executive committee elected annually from Club members, by a general meeting of the Club.

The business of the Club was separated into two areas of operation. The more significant area was the management of the Settlement community store which was the main provider of foodstuff and clothing to the Village. The second area was the conduct of Settlement entertainment, which consisted mainly of movies (once or twice a week) and rock and roll dances (no more than once a fortnight).

The shop and its stock were the main assets the Mission transferred to the Club. The shop was not of equal significance for the whole population. The Settlement staff purchased most of their supplies in bulk from Brisbane. These were delivered by the regular shipping service which visited Ngukurr every two months. They used the shop mainly for incidentals and to cover shortages between shipments. The Village depended on the shop for practically all their subsistence. It was the only regular source of supply to which they had access.

The Club operated the shop as a commercial business venture. Its aim was to retail goods to the people at a profit. The accumulated profit, if any, was then available for the Club to provide other services to its members. The construction of a community hall was one most commonly mooted. The shop's turnover from April 1969 to March 1970 was $135,000. The honorary executive did not physically run the shop, but employed a full time manager for this purpose. As well as the manager, there were a number of full time Aboriginal shop assistants, usually two, but ranging from one to four during the period of fieldwork.

The manager occupied a key position within the Club structure. He was the only employed person in an executive position, with direct responsibility for the operations of the Club's major income earner: the shop. Unlike the other European residents of Ngukurr he was not employed by an outside body (Government or Mission). His employer, the Club's executive committee, hired him, determined his conditions of employment, and had the power to fire him. The manager was the only executive (and at this time the only European resident) on the Settlement who was directly responsible to the local population and over whose position they had authority. The position of manager was at the centre of the three crises which the Club faced between 1969 and the end of 1971.

The first dispute over the running of the shop occurred in the second half of 1969. This dispute had two main ingredients. The first concerned the manager's right to delegate responsibility and the second his demand for an increase in salary. I was not in the field at the time of this dispute and my

information on the issues and the course of events is based on later accounts from people who were themselves party to the dispute.

The immediate provocation for the dispute arose as the result of arrangements made by the manager, for the running of the shop, while he went on leave. He arranged, without executive approval, for a European woman from a nearby cattle station to take over temporary management during his absence. Adam Abrahams, who was the senior Aboriginal shop assistant at the time, objected. He took his objection to the next Village meeting rather than to the executive committee. The meeting expressed its disapproval of the manager's proposed action and offered the opinion that Adam was the proper person to be left in temporary charge. Aside from this, the meeting took no action and no steps to present its views to the manager or the Club executive. The first action was taken when the woman came to open the shop the day after the manager's departure. She was met by a delegation of villagers who told her they did not want her to open the shop. The delegation was joined by the Settlement superintendent and the Club secretary (a European member of the Settlement

staff). They told the woman that she had no authority to open the shop as the executive had never consented to the manager's arrangement. The woman then handed the shop keys to the Club secretary and departed from the Settlement. The Club secretary then took temporary charge of the shop pending the manager's return.

Both the villagers and the Settlement staff were angry about the manager's failure to consult the executive over his replacement. Two staff members present at the time, told me that there was considerable discussion about the manager's suitability during his absence. The discussion by the staff, and apparently also by the villagers, was not only critical of the above mentioned action, but also of his general managerial conduct. The staff has three main criticisms. The hours kept by the shop were inconvenient. The range of stock was inadequate. The manager was arrogant in his dealings with customers. The force of these criticisms was people's acceptance of them. Unfortunately, I had no evidence that the villagers either accepted or rejected them. There was also a fourth accusation

levelled against the manager by some members of the Settlement staff. The substance of this was that the shop was being financially mismanaged and was not covering its costs. There was no independent evidence available at the time to substantiate this accusation. There was no recent report of the shop's financial position. However, the accusation caused concern in the Village and the Village spokesman asked the executive to call a general meeting of the Club as soon as the manager returned.

The meeting, which was held in October 1969, did not get the opportunity to resolve the issues raised in the prece ding weeks, because the manager placed before the meeting a number of demands relating to his conditions of employment. The main demand was that he receive a substantial salary increase. The meeting rejected the manager's demands and he tendered his resignation. The Village leaders were upset by the manager's resignation, and though they had joined in the rejection of his demands, they blamed the staff for his departure. The grounds (which were given to me some six months later) were that it was members of staff who

had talked about the manager behind his back, and it was this that made him leave. Whatever the reason for the manager's resignation there was, in the Village, a strong desire to prevent a similar situation occuring again. With this in mind, Arnold Abrahams proposed that the Church Missionary Society be approached to select the next manager. He reasoned, and others apparently concurred, that the Society's choice would be a man of christian principle, dedicated to community service, and therefore unlikely to provoke the controversy which surrounded the last manager. The Club executive accepted Arnold's proposal and approached the Church Missionary Society who agreed to act on the Club's behalf.

The desire to have a missionary as shop manager (for this is what the people believed the Society would send them) was greatly strengthened by the result of an audit of the shop which was carried out following the departure of the first manager. The audit, carried out by the Government auditor, showed that the shop had assets of about $20,000 and debts of $20,000. The news of this large debt came as a shock and was unsuspected even by those who had been most vocal in

criticising the former manager. The auditor found no evidence to justify prosecution of the former manager or any other person. As far as I am aware, no official reason was given, either by the auditor or the Government, for the financial condition of the shop. Some time later, a Government official familiar with the recent history of the shop told me privately that inadequate supervision and bad costing were the main reasons for the shop's position. He added that this situation was in evidence even before the Mission had relinguised control of the shop to the Citizens Club.

The Club executive took no initiative in the events surrounding the first crisis. Following the resignation of the manager, the executive had direct responsibility for the management of the shop. The executive did not take on this responsibility, but left the shop management to its sole European member. The Aboriginal members took no active part in the running or direction of the shop. However, peoples complaints, about poor stock and short hours, were directed to the executive as a whole. The executive was anxious to get a new full time manager, and when the Church Missionary

Society informed them that they had an applicant for the position, they accepted him. The new manager, who took up his position in mid December 1969, was in his early twenties. He had some previous experience in retail trade, but none at a supervisory or managerial level. He had no experience of working in an isolated community and had never before worked with Aborigines. With the arrival of the new manager, the executive withdrew completely from the daily affairs of the shop. The relations between manager and executive returned to the pattern which existed under the previous manager. The manager had complete control of the shop and the executive left to him the preparation and presentation of all matters relating to the shop.

The second shop crisis

The new manager took up his position to a refrain of good wishes and expressions of support from all sections of the Settlement. After just four months, he departed without giving notice, and left behind an insolvent shop and an angry community. The management of the shop precipitated the crisis, but the

discord which accompanied it was not even temporarily resolved until four months after the manager's departure.

The second crisis began shortly before the strike in March 1970 and reached a resolution with the arrival of the third manager in August. The crisis went through three phases. The first phase ended with the sudden departure of the manager on 21st April. The dispute during this phase concentrated on the manager's conduct of shop affairs. The second phase covers the period from the 21st April to the election of the second executive committee on 25th May. During this period, the insolvency of the shop became known and staff and Village factions conflicted with each other over the apportionment of blame and over control of the Club. The third and final phase was a period of direct executive control of the shop. It was also one in which the division of Club activities, reached during the second phase, was accepted and formalised.

The manager precipitated the first public airing of conflict over the shop when he threatened to resign his position at the beginning of March. He gave as his reasons for wanting to resign undue interference in his management of the shop by the Club secretary and the superintendent, as well as unspecified complaints about him which he alleged were circulated by the Settlement staff behind his back. There were four events which had occurred over the previous month which had contributed to this reaction on the part of the manager. His public support for independent Village action to promote its political and economic aspirations had led some staff to regard him with disfavour and provoked questions about his activities by the Welfare Branch. He rectified a serious stock shortage by purchasing goods in Darwin at prices higher than those prevailing in Brisbane, shipping them to Ngukurr by expensive airfreight, but selling them at normal prices. This increased the financial strain on an already heavily indebted shop. The third event was the auditing of the shop's books at the end of the month, which was unlikely to reflect credit on the manager. Finally the Village decision to go on strike intensified his problems with the other staff and reduced the possibility of his being

able to overcome the shop's deteriorating financial position.

At the time the manager stated his intention to resign, the Settlement had no knowledge of the shop's serious position. Indeed the manager himself consistently stated that the financial position was improving. The executive did not want to accept the resignation, and after consulting with leading men in the Village and the superintendent, they called a special general meeting to discuss the manager's complaints.

The meeting was held on the evening of the 6th March. The meeting started without the manager, who declined to attend. The Club president, John Angurugu, opened the meeting with a defence of the manager which made quite clear that he held the staff responsible for the current situation.

> "....he knows what is best for shop and people. We got to trust him, even if we don't agree sometimes, but he's been trained for that work--he knows....(His) feelings are hurt and he'll leave. Might be staff (are) responsible. I don't know. If he goes away we got to start all over again. This is our problem, we're all members of shop. If you (staff) got something against (the manager) say so. I want to know."

The staff objected to John's implied accusation and said it was improper for them to discuss the issue without the manager being present. He was sent for but refused to come. In his absence, Arnold and Adam Abrahams delivered his complaints for him.

Adam: "(The manager) said to me that its (the superintendent and Club secretary) who are pushing him around".

Club Secretary: "Can you tell me how I've been pushing him around".

School Teacher: "What staff? I would talk to his face".

Club Secretary: "I say what I think. In my position as advisor to the Club, I have something to say".

Arnold: "Adam, you get him (the manager). We can't have this shop always getting us in trouble. I don't like this business. Whose going to run the shop when he goes".

Club Secretary: "All we can do is advertise for a new manager".

The Village spokesman took the view that the manager was their man, knew his job, and that other staff should not interfere with his work. The staff were dissatisfied with this position, but were unable to breach the solid wall of Village support. When, finally the manager did arrive at the meeting, the

the staff challenged him to substantiate his accusations. He was only able to say that he had heard that people were complaining about stock shortages and irregular hours. Pressure of work, he said, had led him to over react and he apologised, He then withdrew his resignation.

A number of staff including the superintendent, and the Club secretary, were not satisfied and pressed the manager about the shop's financial position. The manager replied that the stock shortages were a result of his reduction of the shop's debt. The shop was now financially sound, and the stock position would be relieved by the next shipment from Brisbane. A school teacher asked for details, but was cut short by the Village spokesmen, who expressed their full support for the manager and closed the meeting. The meeting had succeeded in getting the manager to withdraw his resignation. It had failed to provide clarification of the shop's position, and it had publicly set staff and Village in opposition over shop affairs.

The following Monday, the strike started. The staff, who had not been reassured by the previous Friday's meeting, became increasingly apprehensive about the conduct of the shop. The manager had pledged his support for the strike and was in close contact with its leaders. Two of his shop assistants, Albert Abrahams and Nat Davies were strike spokesmen (the third shop assistant was Albert's daughter-in-law). The manager had already contributed heavily to the cost of the Village delegates' trips to Darwin and he admitted that at least part of this money had come from shop receipts. During the first week of the strike he made further material contributions by allowing some Village customers to have goods on credit, but he did so without first recording the customer's name or the amount of his debt. The staff complained, but the Village was in no mood to listen. They supported the manager who was helping them, and in any case, they said, the manager had told them that the shop was almost out of debt.

On Thursday the 12th March, the auditors telephoned the manager and informed him that the shop was in a serious financial position. They could not say how

serious because the shop records which they had were incomplete. They asked the manager to provide them with further and more detailed information, and advised him to take urgent steps to increase the shop's liquidity. The auditors also informed the Welfare Branch of the situation, and they, through the superintendent, informed the manager that a senior officer would be sent to discuss the situation.

The news of the shop's indebtedness was not broadcast till the following Monday morning, 16th March. The manager used the revelation to support a call for return to work that he made to a gathering of strikers (see above). This was his second step in the attempt to redress the shop's position. The first, the cessation of Village credit, commenced as soon as the shop had opened that morning. The news shook the people's confidence in the manager and opinions were divided over continuation of the strike. However, the manager's second step failed and the strike continued. The Village rebuff upset the manager's main plan for increasing the shop's liquidity, which was to take over the Club's entertainment account and use its balance of $2,000 to pay some of the shop's most outstanding debts. The two signatories to the

account, John Angurugu and Adam Abrahams, were supported by the strikers in their refusal to release the money. It took two weeks of persuasion (including threats that the shop would close down) by the manager, Club secretary, and superintendent, before they agreed to sign over the account (see above).

The manager further increased the growing Village antipathy toward him by sacking the two male shop assistants at the end of the second week of the strike. The shop was overstaffed with three full time assistants and one half time, and the Welfare Branch had insisted on economies being made before it provided help to the shop. All the assistants were being paid at the same rate, so there was no financial ground for selecting which assistants would go. The two men dismissed were both important Village spokesmen, and were, in the Village's view, their representatives within the shop. To dismiss these men while retaining two female assistants, was an insult to both the men and the Village.

The following four weeks contained few new developments. After getting control of the entertainment account, the manager virtually isolated himself from the rest of the Settlement. At the end of the month, he sent his wife back to Victoria. Throughout this period, he was under ever increasing pressure from the Government, the auditors, the superintendent and the Club secretary to provide a full statement on the shop's position. At the end of the second week of April, he flew to Darwin, ostensibly to see the auditors. He returned a few days later riding a newly purchased motorbike. The auditors were contacted, but they had not seen the manager recently nor had they received from him the information they sought. The executive which had not met since the second week of the strike, was called together by the superintendent. He told them the situation was out of hand and asked them to convene an urgent general meeting.

The meeting took place on the evening of 20th April. The president, John Angurugu, opened the meeting. He said he knew nothing of the shop's position and immediately handed the meeting over to the Club secretary.

Club Secretary: "I am not keen to do all the explaining. This is a very embarrassing position. The auditors report to January is missing. I remember a number of the points in it. One was that we have a monthly audit. The manager agreed to supply the figures and do a stocktake each month. Another was that we have a daily cash reconciliation. The manager started to do this. There have been mistakes in the audits. I know that some of the stocktake figures were wrong".

The secretary was cut short by some of the staff who proceeded to cross examine the manager on the points just raised.

Staff Member: "Were the stocktakes a physical count".

Manager: "February and March were".

Staff Member: "Why didn't the auditor have a stocktake available".

Manager: "He said it wasn't necessary".

Staff Member: "Is the auditor working from figures only or statements and receipts".

Manager: "Statements and receipts. Last month I said we had a debt of $17,000. I made a mistake it was $21,000. Since then I have received bills I didn't know about. With all these we owe a total of $27,731.10. This presents a big problem.....I need time. We will have the stock. Goods in transit are worth about $15,000.....".

Staff Member: "You quoted $8,000 for the stock on the last barge. If you have half sold that then you have $4,000 in stock. That plus $15,000 doesn't add up to $27,000".

Manager: "There maybe about $11,000 of other stock".

Staff Member: "Mostly dead stock".

Manager: "Yes".

Staff Member: "You talk in terms of I think. What about actual figures".

Manager: "The auditor has the figures".

Staff Member: "You mean you don't keep copies".

At this point, the manager said he was expecting a 'phone call and abruptly excused himself from the meeting. In his absence, the staff directed their attention to the executive. They accused it of being lax in controlling the shop. The secretary said that he did not want to interfere with the manager's prerogatives. Oscar Peterson, an executive member, said that the Village members' job was to look after the entertainment side of the Club. The shop was the manager's responsibility. The manager then returned but then left again after five minutes. The meeting became confused and a polarisation between staff and Village started to appear. The superintendent forestalled a breach by changing the topic to enlargement

of the executive. This suggestion received unanimous support. Arnold Abrahams and Oscar Peterson expressed the predominent Village feeling when they called for more staff to be elected to the committee. "You and me Aborigines can't run the shop. The Whites will help us". With this mood of co-operation in the ascendancy the superintendent proposed that an investigating committee of three members be set up immediately to unravel the shop's affairs. He nominated a woman with previous experience in shop management (the wife of one of the school teachers), a male school teacher who also ran the local bank agency, and Adam Abrahams who was a former executive member and shop assistant. The committee and the nominations were unanimously accepted by the meeting, and were commissioned to commence their work the following morning.

The next morning, the manager climbed onto his newly acquired motorbike and left the Settlement. The investigating committee were left to unravel the situation alone and the shop was left without a manager. The superintendent called a meeting of both the executive and the investigating committee and recommended that the investigators also be appointed as a committee of

management for the shop. The four executive members present: John Angurugu, the secretary, Oscar Peterson and one woman, endorsed the recommendation. The two European members of the committee immediately took control of the shop. Adam Abrahams absented himself and took no further part in the committee. The remaining committee members had an interim report on the shop ready by the end of the week, of which a copy was forwarded to the Welfare Branch head office. The report stated in part:

"The club's debts exceed the club's total financial assets by $9,426.34. The club is therefore insolvent".

On it goes on to say:

"Investigations by the management committee have shown that the main cause of the club's heavy losses were (a) gross mismangement by the previous shop manager (the one just departed) and (b) allied to this, the sale of goods at far below their cost price, and -- during the strike particularly -- the handing over of both cash and goods to individuals and families either by the shop manager himself or by the shop assistants with his approval."

The management committee directly implicated the Village in the shop's disaster. This was a blow to the aspirations of Aboriginal management held by some Village people, and it gave firm backing to the strict control of the shop being exercised by the management committee. These points were firmly put by the superintendent at a meeting held with the executive a few days later:

Superintendent: "All the handing out that went on during the strike is over. We can prove this went on from the books. I am not saying you are rogues. I know the great pressures put on you (a reference to traditional kinship obligations)....I know this hurts the whole feeling for Aborigines running the shop, but that can't be helped."

There was no denying that goods and cash had been handed out, particularly in the first week of the strike. The problem was one of interpretation and responsibility. The Europeans explained the action, at least publicly, as the shop assistants being unable to withstand the pressure of traditional kinship obligations. The shop assistants emphatically denied this interpretation. The cash and goods that were handed out, said Nat Davies, were not their own and therefore they could not be obliged by kinsmen to hand them over. The manager, continued Nat, was responsible for the shop and it was he who had initiated the handing over. The assistants had only followed his instructions.

Nat Davies had asked for this meeting to complain about the failure of the management committee to consult him, as senior shop assistant. The accusations were a rebuff to his own aspirations. He sought, with some Village backing, to be appointed as shop manager.

The question of an Aboriginal shop manager was a recurrent one in the Village. It was revived most recently by a group of younger Village spokesmen immediately after the 20th April general meeting. These men decided that they should try to appoint one of their own if the manager left. The next day, following the manager's abrupt departure, even Arnold Abrahams, a generally conservative leader, was caught up in the movement and told one of the management committee that they should get an Aboriginal manager. Only two names were suggested for the job at this time: Nat and Adam Abrahams. Adam did not want the position and withdrew from the management committee to allow Nat a clear chance. Nat took his chance and received the brunt of the staff condemnation as a result.

The hoped for Village control of the shop was now out of the question. The people, particularly those involved with the Club and the shop, were frustrated and disillusioned. They reacted to their exclusion from the shop by forming a new club to operate and control the Village entertainment outside the framework of the Citizens Club. The new club was set up on 25th April with the assistance of the wife of a member

of staff and with the approval of the superintendent. The Village was not a party to the establishment of the Ngukurr Entertainment Club. It was formed by its foundation committee, which consisted of the active Aboriginal members of the Citizens Club executive, the two shop assistants, and Adam Abrahams. Nat Davies was chosen to fill the only formal position; that of treasurer. Although the Village as a whole had no part in the club's formation, the new club regarded the Village as the only group to which they were responsible.

The questions of responsiblity and blame for the collapse of the shop simmered and boiled in the following weeks. The boiling point was reached at the regular meeting of the Station Council on 5th May. The staff had held the initiative on all previous discussions of this question. This time it was the Village members who initiated the confrontation, and directed charges of racism against the staff. Nat launched into a tirade against the staff accusations, alleging that the Europeans only believed what each other said and treated the Aborigines as, at best, ignorant. He and Oscar Peterson separately

challenged the superintendent and the Club secretary to deny their prejudice. Both Europeans denied that they had blamed only the Aborigines. They apologised for having given that impression. All of the people in the Settlement were at fault, including themselves, they said. Oscar replied that this is what they should have said in the first place. The meeting then calmed down with feelings temporarily soothed. The Aborigines had made their point.

The annual general meeting of the Citizens Club was held on 25th May. The management committee presented its report which reiterated the insolvency of the shop. The meeting offered its thanks to the committee for its efforts. The meeting, on the advice of the auditors, reluctantly decided not to prosecute the prior manager. The Club president then informed the meeting that an offer of financial assistance had been made by the Welfare Branch and he invited the head office representative who was present to explain the offer. The representative read out the following letter from the Director of Welfare.

The President,
Roper River Citizens Club Inc.,
Roper River,
VIA DARWIN. N.T. 5777

Dear Sir,

I refer to your letter to (the Auditors) dated 30 April 1970 in which you gave authority to (an officer of my department) to discuss shop affairs because of the financial difficulties faced by your Club.

After consideration of these financial difficulties I am prepared to approve a loan of $2,000 subject to the following conditions:-

(1) The $2,000 is to be used to meet the most pressing debts now outstanding in accordance with directions given by my nominee.

(2) No repayment will be required on this loan for the first 12 months.

(3) Repayments will commence on 1 June 1971 at the rate of $100 per month.

(4) No interest will be charged on this loan.

(5) There will have to be a new Board of Management formed and the list of members of this Board will need to be sent to me for endorsement.

(6) You will have to include the area Advisor or his nominee as a member of the Board.

(7) The Board's nominee will have to send a signed statement of accounts to me each quarter.

(8) An audited statement will have to sent to me every six months.

(9) An officer nominated by me shall have access to stocks and books of accounts at any time.

(10) You will have to send me details of anyone proposed by the Board for appointment as manager for my endorsement.

(11) As security for this loan and any other loan made, a Bill of Sale over the stocks will be required.

(12) European staff will man the store in a voluntary capacity pending appointment of a new manager.

(13) One of the signatories on cheques shall be the area advisor or his nominee.

Yours faithfully,

Director of Social Welfare.

When he finished, the representative stated that it was possible the Director may reconsider condition twelve but that all other conditions must be accepted. A number of speakers form both staff and Village said they should not accept condition twelve, and these speakers were greeted with murmers of approval from the meeting. Nat called for the retention of the

condition because, he said, the Europeans did not think Aborigines could be trusted. He received no support. Adam then called for total rejection of the offer, but he was shouted down by people calling for a vote. The meeting voted 84 to 0 to reject condition twelve, with Adam abstaining.

The meeting then proceeded to the election of the new twelve man executive. There were 85 Club members at the meeting including fourteen Europeans. Eighteen candidates were nominated: eleven Aborigines including two women, and seven Europeans. The retiring Club secretary read out each candidate's name. As he read each name, he asked that those who wished to vote for the person to raise their right hand. A teller then counted the raised hands and recorded the number. Prior to the voting, the members were told that they were each entitled to vote twelve times.

Successful candidates in order of votes received

School teacher (management committee member)	82
Superintendent	81
School teacher	76
Arnold Abrahams	75
William Gideon	74
Nursing Sister	74
Winston Peterson	72
Settlement mechanic	71
Oscar Peterson	68
School teacher	67
Albert Abrahams	65
School headmaster	65

When the successful candidates were declared, the meeting proceeded immediately to the election of office bearers. The superintendent won a run off with Arnold Abrahams for the presidency, and Arnold was then declared vice president. The management

committee member and the nursing sister were unopposed for treasurer and secretary respectively. The new executive was elected with seven staff members and five Village members, and only one Village office bearer. Only Oscar and Winston Peterson remained from the old executive.

The preponderance of Europeans disturbed both the staff and the Village spokesmen. After the meeting a group of Village men gathered looking at the results. They were bewildered. They expressed particular disapproval of the election of the management committee member, who had scored the highest vote. Some of them must have voted for him because only three of the 85 did not. Part of the reason for the result can be seen in the pattern of voting. If each voter had twelve votes, then the total possible number of valid votes was 1,020. However, 1,160 votes were cast. I, in my role as teller, observed a group of about 20 to 25 older people (predominantly women) who raised their hand for all eighteen candidates. There was a much

larger body of villagers, including some young men, who voted for every European candidate. After the meeting, five Europeans and at least twice as many Village men told me they had not used their full twelve votes.

Whether by design or accident, the elections endorsed European control of the shop. Only a small number of younger men, most of whom had not attended the meeting, were not party to this endorsement. Of their spokesmen only William Gideon and Oscar Peterson had stood and been elected. William's election was in fact his swansong. He was in the process of withdrawing from Village activity and had already resigned as Village leader. There was to be no early challenge to the formalisation of staff control. The establishment of a balanced executive was left to the staff. They decided that one of their number should resign and the lowest placed school teacher volunteered. He was replaced by a Village member chosen by Arnold and Albert Abrahams. The executive formalised relations with the breakaway Ngukurr entertainment Club which became an autonomous sub-committee within the Citizens Club. The situation was further stabilised with the selection of a new management committee

consisting of the superintendent/Club president, the Settlement mechanic's wife and Nat Davies.

The executive, with the assistance of a major Brisbane supplier, advertised for a new shop manager. The Brisbane supplier interviewed the applicants and sent its recommendation to the executive. The executive accepted this recommendation: a man with extensive retail management experience in New Guinea. The new manager arrived in August. The situation now return to its pre crisis arrangement as far as the Village was concerned: an unstable equilibrium disturbed by periodic complaints about high prices, non-availability of goods, and executive isolation. The complaints were confined to Village meetings and did not disturb the regular flow of Settlement life.

The solution to the second crisis saw the executive, under Government scrutiny, accept responsibility for the direction of shop affairs. This arrangement remained effective into the early stages of the new manager's term of office. The relaxation of executive vigilance, which started before the end of 1970, was a result of internal changes in the executive. By the end of 1970 the president, secretary, treasurer, and two other

European members had left the Settlement. Their replacements had not, on the whole, been present during the second crisis, and were less diligent in their supervision of the manager. The Government too had also relaxed its scrutiny once the new manager had settled in. At the time its term of office ended the second executive had only eight members, four Europeans and four Aborigines, and of the original twelve only Arnold Abrahams remained.

The third shop crisis

The third crisis erupted in the second half of 1971. However, it had been building up throughout the year. One of its roots was the exclusion of Village participation, which the resolution of the previous crisis had imposed. Another was the increasing disparity between income and purchasing power. The Village per capita income had appreciated little since late 1968. The training allowance rates, which provided the bulk of Village income, had not changed since their introduction early in 1969. On the other hand the cost of goods and freight had risen considerably. Rising prices were a persistent Village grievance, but one which was insoluble within the local context.

Another factor which influenced the developing crisis was internal conflict among the Europeans. By the middle of the year the staff was virtually split into two feuding groups. The shop manager was at the centre of one of these factions, and the other was defined, by the Village and by the few staff who considered themselves neutral, as those people who were opposed to the shop manager. The opposition faction were, on the whole, more closely associated with the Village both through their work and through choice. Two of them, the mechanic and the cattle manager, worked closely with their Aboriginal subordinates who included most of the more articulate and active men of the Village. The manager, on the other hand, kept himself aloof from the Village and restricted his association with Aborigines to the shop assistants. The opposition was not represented on the Club executive in the second half of 1971. By the time I arrived at Ngukurr in the beginning of September, both the Village and the opposition faction looked on the executive and the manager as a single unit. The executive's position was difficult. They could not rectify Village grievances over prices nor alter the aloofness of the manager. For this and other reasons they were under persistent criticism from the opposition faction.

The situation early in September was explosive. Late the previous month a large group of Village people (I received estimates of between 50 and 100+ people) confronted the manager and demanded his resignation. Adam Abrahams stated the group's reasons. The manager had failed to bring prices down to a reasonable level. He would not account to the Village people for his running of the shop, and he had not called an annual general meeting, which was now three months overdue. They were particularly worried because they had nothing about the shop's finances for months, and the most recently available auditors report only covered the period to the end of August, 1970. Indeed the Village suspected that once again the shop was about to become insolvent.

As a result of this confrontation the manager tendered a letter of resignation to the executive. The executive refused to accept it, expressed their full confidence in the manager, and stated that only the executive could ask the manager to resign and no other group had any authority in shop matters. The manager and executive were vindicated to some extent by the arrival, at about that time of the auditors report for the year ended 31st March, 1971. However, neither the Village nor the

opposition faction were satisfied by the report, which praised the shop management, because it was already six months out of date.

The arrival of the auditors report removed the main reason for delaying the annual general meeting. The retiring executive held their last meeting on the evening of 13th September. The atmosphere of the meeting was tense. The meeting's first decision was to refuse my request to record its proceedings, something which had never happened before throughout my fieldwork. This motion had been moved, seconded and spoken to by the European members. The voting was three against (the school teacher, chaplain and manager's wife) and five abstentions (the superintendent, and the four Aborigines). The meeting then unanimously ratified its earlier decision not to accept the manager's resignation.

The annual general meeting was set for the following evening, and the superintendent (a new man who had been at Ngukurr since early 1971) and Arnold Abrahams were selected as its joint chairmen.

The meeting then adopted the following voting procedure for the election of the new executive. There were to be two booths. Each was to consist of a blackboard and a teller. The blackboards on which the names of the candidates were written were to be set facing away from the body of the meeting. Each voter would enter either of the booth areas individually and indicate verbally or by sign a maximum of eleven preferences. The teller, who carried a pad on which the candidates names were listed, recorded each preference by a stroke alongside that candidates name. The meeting then agreed that the tellers should be people who were not involved in the business of the Settlement or shop. Three names were put forward; a nursing sister, a contract carpenter, and my own. I declined and the executive left the final choice for the following evening. As things turned out the other two also declined, and I reversed by decision. The other teller was the superintendent. No one raised the question of scrutineers and none were provided.

Arnold opened the general meeting with a speech praising the manager and calling on people to act in an orderly fashion and avoid conflict. The meeting was in no mood to accept this advice. Arnold then called for seventeen nominations for the executive. 39 candidates were

nominated. Arnold objected to the large number, but was shouted down. The two staff factions then raised objections about four of the European nominees. Three of these, a non Club member and two non-residents, were struck off. The nomination of the shop manager's wife was declared valid. Arnold then objected to the nomination of his brother Albert because of his frequent absences from Ngukurr (he was in Darwin at the time). Albert's name remained. The debate then turned to the membership credentials of various people present. The three Europeans earlier removed from the list of candidates were denied full membership of the Club. A group of ten Aborigines who normally resided at Urapunga cattle station, but spent some of their time at Ngukurr were admitted to full membership.

The superintendent read out the auditors report, and this was followed by Arnold publically tendering a cheque for $2,000 to the superintendent. This was the repayment of the Government loan received the previous year. Both the report and the staged cheque presentation received a strong reception from the body of the meeting, in which jeers drowned out the cheers. The opposition faction and most of the Village spokesmen queried the report's lack of currency, and demanded more up to date information.

This was not forthcoming. Arnold, supported by Hugh Abrahams (shop assistant) and the superintendent, defended both the report and the manager. The proceedings degenerated into a confused cross fire of personal accusation. Adam Beswick, Arnold's eldest brother, tried to restore order and eventually he and the superintendent succeeded in having the election brought on.

The election resulted in both a clear defeat for the manager's faction and a Village victory for the younger Village spokesmen.

Successful candidates in order of votes received

Adam Abrahams	69
Terry Abrahams	52
Hugh Abrahams	50
Nat Davies	47
Settlement cattle manager	38
Emmy Abrahams (nee Gideon)	38
Adam Beswick (Abrahams)	34
Settlement mechanic	34
York Abrahams	32
Brian Gideon	28
Eddie Morgan	27
Superintendent	ex officio

Votes were cast by 80 club members, including fourteen Europeans and the ten Aborigines from Urapunga. Seven of the 36 candidates were Europeans, and all the others were Village residents. The voting was conducted at two

open booths. I was the teller in booth one which recorded 51 voters, and the superintendent recorded 29 voters in booth two.

There was a marked difference in the category of voter attending each booth, and this requires some comment. There was a clear over representation of Village men and Urapunga residents at booth one, and a similar over representation of Village women at booth two. The different position of the two tellers, within Ngukurr had some bearing on the choice of booth. The Urapunga people were directed to my booth by their station manager, whose relations with the superintendent were less than cordial at the time. Throughout my fieldwork my associations were predominantly with the Village men. Also my relations with the Village included recognition and acceptance of the formal aspects of kinship relations. The younger men paid less attention to this than did the rest of the Village, with the result that the young men congregated at my booth while the older men who stood in a non familiar relation to me and the women went to the other booth. The superintendent had a neutral position (in the sense outlined) as far as the Village people were concerned.

Distribution of voters between booths

	Village Men	Village Women	Urapunga	Europeans	Total
Total	37	19	10	14	80
Booth One	30	3	10	8	51
Booth Two	7	16	0	6	29

The two booths returned different distributions of results.

Distribution of candidates polling in the top twelve in either booth one or booth two

	Booth One		Booth Two	
	Vote	Position	Vote	Position
Adam Abrahams	43	1	26	1
Terry Abrahams	27	=4	25	2
Hugh Abrahams	26	6	24	3
Nat Davies	27	=4	20	4
Emmy Abrahams	22	7	16	6
Cattle manager	30	2	8	19
Adam Beswick	19	=8	15	=7
Mechanic	28	3	6	23
York Abrahams	19	=8	13	=9
Brian Gideon	10	16	18	5
Eddie Morgan	12	14	15	=7
Arnold Abrahams	14	13	13	=9
George Naridj	17	10	7	=21
Bruce Emerson	16	=11	7	=21
School Teacher	16	=11	5	28
George Gideon	7	=21	12	=11
Perry Morgan	7	=21	12	=11

There were seven successful candidates who were the clear choice of both booths. All were core Villagers and were associated with the two main family groups - Abrahams and

Gideon. Eddie Morgan and Arnold Abrahams tied for eleventh place and Eddie gained selection in a run off. Brian Gideon, even though he was a critic of the outgoing executive and the manager, was not popular with the younger men. This probably accounted for his poor polling in booth one. The greatest discrepency was in the voting for the European candidates. The three top Europeans - all associated with the opposition faction - came second third and eleventh in booth one, and nineteenth, twenty third and twenty eighth in booth two. This discrepency was due partly to the voting pattern of the Urapunga group. These ten voters cast almost identical votes. All ten voted for the same three candidates; Adam Abrahams, the cattle manager and the mechanic. Six of these voters cast only those three votes. The other four voters cast four votes each, and their fourth votes all went to Nat Davies. Without the votes of this group Adam and Nat would still have retained first and fourth position, but the two Europeans would have slipped to sixth and nin th positions in booth one, and tenth and thirteenth overall. There is still a marked discrepency to be accounted for, which might have been due to the different voting patterns of Village men and women. Booth one had six Europeans in their top eighteen candidates, while the highest placed in booth two was nineteenth.

There was another significant difference between the booths. Family heads and middle aged village spokesmen fared better in booth two than in booth one.

Poll result for family heads in each booth

	Booth One	Booth Two
Adam Beswick	8th	=7th
Brian Gideon	16th	5th
Eddie Morgan	14th	=7th
Arnold Abrahams	13th	9th
Herbert Emerson	26th	13th
George Chase	21st	14th
Albert Abrahams	28th	23rd

A condition of the loans the Club had from the Government (the $2,000 only repaid one loan and there was still a second one of $10,000 to be repaid) required the superintendent to be on the executive, and his name was added to the eleven elected members. The meeting then proceeded to the election of office bearers. The voting was by show of hands and there was little control over the number of times an elector voted. Adam Abrahams declined to stand for office. There were six candidates for president and vice president (the runner up became vice president). Three candidates stood for treasurer, and the remaining two for secretary.

Result of the election of office bearers

Ballot	President	Treasurer	Secretary
Terry Abrahams	63		
Hugh Abrahams	12	63	
Nat Davies	28	44	56
Cattle manager	61		
Emmy Abrahams	48		
Superintendent	26	35	44

Terry Abrahams was the new president, the cattle manager was vice president, Hugh Abrahams was treasurer and Nat Davies secretary. The meeting was closed after the declaration of this poll. The manager's coup de grace was left to the new executive.

The first meeting of the new executive was held on 21st September. The Village members dominated the meeting and reversed many decisions made by the old executive. There first decision was to rescind the ban on my tape recorder. They attacked the manager on particular items relating to the shop, such as the pricing of particular goods, hours of opening, and credit policy, but for a long while they avoided the general question of the manager's future. It was finally the manager who insisted they decide whether he was to be dismissed. The three Europeans wanted to avoid a quick decision and argued that

they first needed to examine the manager's contract and reach agreement over termination payment and notice time. The Aborigines and the manager said these issues could be settled later. The important question, they said, was whether they wanted the manager to remain or leave. Terry, Hugh and Nat argued that he should remain, emphasising his proven ability to run the shop. The two Adams, Emmy and York emphasised the lack of current information on finances, and the Village's expressed desire for the manager's dismissal. Finally, over the superintendent's continued objection, a vote was taken. The executive voted seven to five in favour of the manager's dismissal. The vote was closer than the Europeans, but not the Aborigines, had expected. The minority consisted of the superintendent, Hugh and Nat who were both shop assistants, Terry who was Hugh's elder brother, and Eddie who was the brother of the third shop assistant.

The division between the Aboriginal members was superficial. They found a common purpose the next morning when the executive met to discuss a fellow villager's alleged debt to the shop. This man claimed the debt had been repaid, and his story was substantiated by a former Club secretary. The executive, with the sole exception of the

superintendent, held the manager to be at fault and declared the debt paid.

The question of the manager's dismissal came to a head on 27th September. The manager refused to open the shop that morning until the matters of his payment and date of termination were settled, and he handed the president a list of his pay claims. By half past eight a large group of angry men were gathered outside the shop. Many of them wanted the manager to be paid what he asked and told to leave immediately, while others thought the payment too high. The executive talked the men into going about their business and leaving the matter to them. The executive retired to the cattle manager's house and invited the Village leader, Arnold Abrahams, to join them. Two members were not present; the mechanic who was away in Darwin, and the superintendent who had refused to attend during working hours. All those present agreed that the manager had to leave. The manager's pay claim totalled $5,300 which was made up of: one months salary $600, three months salary in lieu of notice $1,800, car allowance $500, half yearly bonus $1,100, leave entitlement $900 and air fare $400. The executive queried the salary rate which was only $350 per month in the contract,

the amount of notice, the air fare, and the basis of the bonus claim. After much discussion the executive decided to pay him $2,200 and told him to remain till after the auditors visit later that week. The manager accepted the payment but left the Settlement before the auditors arrived.

With the departure of the manager the question of new shop management arose. Unlike the time of the departure of the previous manager there was no formation of a management committee. Nat Davies was given de facto control of the shop, and was assisted by the superintendent with ordering and bookwork. The working out of future management arrangements was the main business of the following executive meeting held on 9th October. The Aborigines were confident. They refused to consider another European shop manager. They conceded the need for experienced help for ordering and bookeeping. The resolution, unanimously accepted, was to advertise for a business adviser whose brief was to educate and assist the shop staff with ordering and bookwork. The title of manager and the physical running of the shop was to be controlled by the Aborigines. No one was proposed for manager and Nat Davies was left in temporary charge.

The Aboriginal ascendency lasted for three weeks. On 29th October the executive, minus the president and treasurer who had gone to Darwin, met to discuss an application for the position of business adviser. The application was from a European man at Ngukurr, who had just been dismissed from his position by the Government. The superintendent immediately made it clear that the Government had to approve any appointment, which was a condition of the loan it had made the Club. The Government would not, he said, approve the present applicant. He also advised the executive that a representative from Welfare head office would arrive in the following week to discuss the shop's future with the executive. The Aborigines reacted angrily - "if we're the executive we got to decide not them ...", and "might as well we just tell Welfare to take over ...". A timely withdrawal of the application took the edge off their anger and the meeting closed.

The Government representative arrived the following Monday, 2nd November. In addressing the executive his opening remarks were: "A week ago Welfare were informed by the Club's auditors that there were most alarming figures". These figures were that the Club's known debt

was $53,370, and its total assets were $30,000. The shop's position had gone from a credit of $17,000 at the end of March 1971 to a debit of $23,000 at the end of September, 1971. The situation was catastrophic.

Changes in Shop Financial Position:
November, 1969 - September, 1971

Date	Assets	Liabilities
November 1969 (1)	about $20,000	about $20,000
30th April, 1970 (2)	$14,584	$24,090
31st March, 1971 (3)	$58,000	(4) $41,000
30th September, 1971 (3)	$30,000	(4) $53,370

Sources: (1) Personal communication from Club secretary in January, 1970.

(2) Management Committee report, 30th April, 1970.

(3) Statement by Government representative to executive committee, 2nd November, 1971.

(4) These figures include Government loans totalling $12,000.

The Government was unable at this stage to give any reason for the dramatic turn. The executive was stunned. They must, they said, have action taken against the former manager. The representative promised, that if there was a case, this would be done. But what, the

the executive queried, was to happen to them and the shop? They were dependent on the Government and they knew it. There were a few snipes at Welfare's past inactivity from Nat and Adam Abrahams, but the rest were quiet. The representative then spelled out the Government's conditions for rescuing the shop.

1. They (the Government) will take over physical control of the shop for three months.
2. They will have the activities of the former manager investigated, and launch a prosecution if things are not in order.
3. The Club will employ a business consultant, selected by the Government, for twelve months. His job to be to establish the Club on a sound business footing.
4. The executive must be reorganised. The office bearers must be people who can handle the job; that is Europeans, either alone, or jointly with an Aboriginal assistant.

That was it. The executive agreed, but asked for another meeting to consider their own reorganisation. By the end of my fieldwork, a month later, the meeting had not taken place. The Aboriginal members of the executive

expressed their agreement with the Government's action, but expected some adverse reaction from the Village. There was none. For the time being it appeared that the shop, as a political issue, was dead.

The Village and the Shop

The Village held a common belief that the shop belonged to them and was there to serve them. When it failed to do so they reacted. Their reaction was, however, rarely a unified one. Each section of the Village reacted in terms of its own priorities. In the early part of the second crisis the strikers saw their immediate struggle with the Government as being important enough to risk the shop. This same group saw the removal of each manager as opening up the possibility of Aboriginal management of the shop. The middle aged Village spokesmen's initial support for this was quickly dampened, particularly in the second crisis, and their main effort was directed to co-operating with the Government. Early in the third crisis Village opinion was divided. The shop assistants, Arnold Abrahams and a few supporters tried to hold off a confrontation. They felt the manager was bringing the shop out of debt, and his dismissal might well upset this

progress. The Village majority, which included the women, thought the shop's failure to cater properly for their needs outweighed this danger.

The elections for both the second and third executive provided a public display of Village differences. In the 1970 election the vast majority supported European control, accepting that they had the ability to organise the reconstruction of the shop. The younger men were divided three ways. A section of them followed the majority motivated largely by disillusionment, which was clearly and frequently expressed by Oscar and Nat. Another section, with similar reasoning, boycotted the election. The third group persisted in their endeavour to secure Aboriginal control and suffered a severe defeat. The older people, particularly the old mission group, were neutral. They were always marginal to the competition for control of a European style activity.

The election of the third executive was a more active affair. The old mission people were largely absent from this meeting. The other men and women of the Village had clear areas of agreement and disagreement. They agreed on Village control, and on a majority of the

executive members. Their differences were in the balance between youth and experience and staff and Village. The women voted for Village control and a broad representation of Village views. Their voting was affected as much by the Village family structure as it was by their attitude to the shop. The women did not express a preference in the staff feud, but instead rejected all staff. The men did take sides, and, while ensuring Village control of the executive, they accepted the opposition's support as valuable.

The differences within the Village were a subsidiary part of the competition in the shop crisis. The main direction of the conflicts were outward; toward the Settlement staff and ultimately the Government. Underlying all three crises were the questions of who was the community (Settlement or Village) and whose rules were applicable to the conduct of Club affairs. The main points of conflict were the questions of managerial and executive responsiblity to the Village and the role of staff in Club affairs.

CHAPTER 8

LAND, POLITICS, AND THE VILLAGE

Politicizing the Land.

In December 1971 the Yugul Cattle Company, whose shareholders were the members of Ngukurr Village, was granted a pastoral lease over 2,000 square miles of south east Arnhem Land (Map2). This was the first major success in the campaign for the recognition of land rights, which the Village had been actively pursuing since the mid 1960's. The lease increased the Village's equity in their environment, and was a partial recognition of their ownership of the productive capacity of the land.

The current form of the demand for land rights was of quite recent origin. The present demand was dependent on the development of political awareness in relation to white Australian society. The Ngukurr demand developed in the mid 1960's as a result of the people's general increase in expectations. The discussion of changes in the organisation of the Settlement, of which the economic development of the Village was an important part, directed attention to the

land and its usage. At the same time mining companies were encroaching on other parts of the Arnhem Land Reserve, and their activities raised the spectre of land alienation (cf. Rowley 1971: 147ff).

Prior to the 1960's a less articulate Village, with narrower horizons, was secure in the occupation of its country. The people and their land were protected by the Arnhem Land Reserve, which had been created for their benefit in the early 1930's (Rowley 1970: 267-9). They understood that the Reserve was an area set aside for them, to which access by others was restricted, and the exploitation of its resources by Europeans was prohibited. It was during this period that the Mission fostered the notion of land as an economic asset (in the context of a commercial economy) by establishing a beef cattle project and market gardens(Cole 1968:21). The Mission employed Village people in the operation of these projects, and explained their purpose in terms of providing a livelihood for the Village (ibid:22).

The intrus ion of prospectors, mining ventures, and the establishment of European townships dramatically breached

the security of the Reserve in the 1960's. The Government had to explain that the Reserve was not the property of the Aboriginal people, but belonged to the Crown. The situation was grasped by a people who were in a process of rapid change. Two generations of mission schooling had broadened their horizons. Their understanding of, and interaction with the wider Australian society was sufficiently diverse for them to perceive their relative deprivation. The negotiations for the transfer of Settlement control from the Mission to the Government intensified the fear of land alienation. The Reserve was Crown land, but the Mission held a lease over the portion of the Reserve surrounding the Settlement. With the mission's departure the lease fell vacant. There was, as yet, no provision for Aboriginal communities to lease Reserve lands, so the lease reverted to the Crown.

This was the milieu which gave rise to the demand for land rights and made it a distinctly political phenomenon. The demand, which was part of the reaction to general feelings of frustration, also provided a focal point compatible with the Village's Aboriginal identity. The symbolic importance of land was based on three main factors:

1. In the traditions of Aboriginal society a man's country was the vessel which held his identity. The bond between man and country validated his existence, and defined his social and ritual position. The country, its totemic sites, mythical tracks, and clan territories established, defined, and mediated many of the important relations between men. These same attributes also defined important groups and the relations between those groups.

2. The realisation of autonomy is a Village ideal. This means that outside (particularly Government) control must be diminished and eventually removed. The control of the land is a means to achieve this end, but only if this includes rights over access to and use of the land. This entails the right to exclude Europeans, and decide how and for what purpose the resources of the land are to be used.

3. The Village cannot completely isolate itself from the outside world. Land is an important commercial asset, and one which may provide an economic base for an autonomous Village. An economically self sufficient Village may be better able to deal with Australian society on terms of equality rather than subordination.

Land and Traditional Authority

The content of the first factor is derived from the structure of religion. I have argued that religion was the dominant structure in traditional Aboriginal society. I have also stated that the dominant category of inducted men had legitimate control over the organisation of society. This is a difficult statement to support because of the nature of our knowledge of traditional society. Anthropologists have not observed the operation of a pre-contact society. Traditional society (or societies) is an ethnographic reconstruction. A consequence of this is that the view of the society is synchronic and much of the dynamics of its organisation is lost. We can still examine the organisation of domination in this situation but not the subordinate categories' reactions to it, because all categories (at the time of observation) are subject to constraints external to traditional society(cf. Lee and Devore 1968:146-9). In effect this means that only the maintenance functions of politics are available for investigation.

The organisation of society is maintained through control over its major resources: women and land. The control of women

is affected through the class and kinship system, which distributes them among the dominant category in such a way as to maintain the common interests of that category (Hiatt 1967; Fox 1969; Maddock 1969b; cf. Levi-Strauss 1969:part 1). The land is controlled through the 'totemic geography' and the associated myths and cults, full knowledge of which is monopolised by the dominant category(cf. Strehlow 1970).

Society is organised, in relation to land, both as discrete groups and as links in a chain. The clan is a corporate group associated with a bounded unit of land, the clan estate (cf. Hiatt 1962; Stanner 1965). Adherents to a cult complex and those who share its myths and symbolic objects (which may or may not be restricted to the area of the cult's jurisdiction), are associated with paths which cross many estates. These paths link people and groups in a variety of ways, both complementary and supplementary (cf. Maddock 1974). This second form of association mitigates against society becoming a closed system, a tendency which is inherent in an organisation based on discrete groups.

The double relationship to land facilitates the dominant group exercising control beyond the boundaries of the local

group. The dominant category is itself organised outside the local group. The resources the dominant group controls cannot be utilised within the local group or the estate group. The interdependence established by relations which define people as bestowers, givers, and receivers, and as owners and managers, can be conceptualised within the context of the cult complexes (cf.Maddock 1974). In the Roper area each cult links a number of estates. The territory covered by each cult overlaps but does not correspond to territory covered by the other cults. The distribution of the cults does not describe a single territory. The dominant category is better represented as a network rather than a group (cf. Sharp in Lee and Devore op.cit: 159-60; Thomson 1949).

The inducted men who are the dominant category do not have equal access to resources. The multiplicity of estates and the variation in the size of estate groups, the flexibility of inheritance rules, and the concept of custodianship all ensure that some are better placed than others to occupy command positions. This does not diminish, and possibly facilitates the exercise of

authority (cf. Strehlow op.cit). Certainly within the cults the senior men control the conduct of others, but their control is not limited to this context. Coercion is an instrument of last resort to those in control. The organised use of force (sorcery and physical attack) are policy decisions often taken in the context of the cults, and are reactions to attacks on the prerogatives of those in control as well as to infringements of the rules of the cults. The movement of a camp or arbitration of a quarrel are not questions affecting the organisation of society. All that is required is that the dominant category can realise its interests and that the hierarchy remains intact.

Land and Village Autonomy

In the contemporary Aboriginal scene, and in Ngukurr Village in particular, religion is not the dominant structure. Religion has lost its ability to exact retribution. Sorcery, though still believed to exist, is ineffective as a means of social control. Religion still retains political relevance because it provides the basis for the Village definition of itself, or rather that part of its self definition which locates it outside

of Australian society. The Village thus continues to contain a hierarchy independent of the wider society, one which has two crucial features for the organisation of the Village:

1. The hierarchy is not a dominance hierarchy in a political sense, because the ability to command is restricted to the narrow circumstance of its own performance.

2. The dominant category control the totemic estates.

Estate custody has an immediate relevance to the issue of land rights. The Abrahams' emphasis on the primacy of the Village in cult affairs strengthens its identity (as distinct from a more general Aboriginal identity) in opposition to outsiders. The Mara/Alawa group's emphasis on more traditionally acceptable forms of association would effectively divide Village interests. The effectiveness of land rights, as a focus of Village political action, depends on restraining estate custody (i.e. the custody of estates within the area claimed) within the boundary of Village relations.

The establishment of a specifically Ngukuur cult complex in the 1960's provides the traditional substantiation for the Village claim to the area of south east Arnhem Land south of the Rose River. The claim itself is not brought about by the localisation of cult activity, but by the external threat of alienation. Nor is the protection of recently established traditional association the sole basis of the claim.

The claim, or rather the demand, for land rights is made by a group subjected to external economic and political domination. The demand is not so much for rights over a particular territory, important though this is, but rather for the restoration of economic and political autonomy. The Village political practice in 1970 and 1971, which is formulated and pursued by the core men (both the middle aged group of intermediaries and the younger generation), is directed to this end. The core men have a common aim. They want to control the instruments of political and economic domination. This is not always acceptable to other sections of the Village.

The actions of the women nearly always undermined the ability of the men to pursue their goal. In the strike,

their persistence in sending the children to school and their resistance to the proposed removal from the Settlement, are clear examples of the opposition of their interests to those of the men and of their ability to realise those interests. However, the women do not have a separate set of interests which belong to them and them alone. They are a part of the Village and as much an object of external domination as the rest of the Village. Their interests do not exist in a void. They too, are faced with external opposition to the realisation of their interests. At times, such as the opposition to the third shop manager, there is a common purpose between them and other sections of the Village.

It is important to note that in all cases where the women successfully pursue their interests, they are acting in concert with other sections of the Village. They supported and were supported by the conservative Village spokesmen and the Old Mission Mob in opposing the children's withdrawal from the school and the removal of the Village. They were allied with the younger and more radical men in forcing the dismissal of the third shop manager.

Equality and Continued Domination

The Village is a subordinate category in the dominance hierarchy. There is no internal dominance hierarchy which can affect the organisation of relations outside the narrow arena of cult performance. Each section of the Village is excluded from access to the resources which can be converted into power. In this situation there is little restraint on the promotion of sectional interests over those of the subordinate group as a whole. The situation is not entirely atomistic because the affects of domination fall most directly on the men, and therefore they are in the best position to oppose it. It is the men who are the heads of families. It is the men who are obliged to remain in the work force, and it is the men who occupy the positions of mediation between the Government and the Village.

The men have a common interest in redressing the balance of power between themselves and the Government, but they have not developed a common strategy to achieve this end. This is largely because the two aims of autonomy and economic equality have consequences which are incompatible. The positions of conservative and radical represent two

different ways of reconciling this problem. However, both approaches retain the basic contradiction: that economic development is being sought through Government intervention, and autonomy is dependent on an economic base.

The inherent difficulty of reconciling the opposed views is dramatically represented in the strike. The most apparent characteristic of the strike is that it is a generalised protest. There is a millenarian aspect in action which seeks a panacaea for the poverty and dependency of the Village. The demands and the tactics of the strikers encompassed both sides of the contradication. The strikers' refusal to meet Welfare representatives, their attempt to withdraw the children and then the Village, the call for the abolition of permits for entry on the Reserve, are all directed at removing themselves from Government domination. The strikers are also demanding higher wages and an injection of material goods, and they are looking to the Government to satisfy these demands.

The contradiction operates both to support and prevent concerted action. The people had mixed reactions to the

concessions made by the Minister of Interior immediately prior to the strike. The concessions, which are compatible with the aim of economic equality, are inadequate. It is essentially this inadequacy which sparks off the final move toward a strike. The interpretation of the town plan (specifically the hotel and police station) as an attempt to impose further external restraints on the Village facilitates the community acceptance of strike action. The proposed move to Wadjilai and the withdrawal of the children are resisted for a number of reasons, but part of the reason is the dependence on the comforts of the Settlement (as revealed in the request for transport and the concern with sanitation) and the commitment to European education. The strikers are no less committed than their opponents and both proposals are eventually set aside.

The strikers' inability to reconcile the two aims provides some credence for the Welfare Branch claim that they are not able to find out what the strike is about, (Annual Report 1969-70). However, the inability to communicate is more a result of their own restrictive frame of reference and paternal orientation. The officials can treat Village damands seriously, as they

did in making concessions before the strike. During the strike the Government withdraws from this conciliatory position. The strike is looked on as a release of tension which has no rational basis, because the implementation of Government policies are rapidly improving the conditions of the Village.

During the strike the Government representatives take up a paternal position. They are concerned for the children's welfare and offer to feed them if they return to school. They council against the move to Wadjilai because it would create a health hazard. They warn of the hardship loss of income causes, but frequently state that they are not trying to make the people go back to work. They state their willingness to discuss the issues of local government and local development, but not while the strike continues. As the Minister of Interior puts it in a letter to Arnold Abrahams:

> "I was very disappointed to learn that the people of Roper River have gone on strike. This will make it very difficult to help the people as I cannot see the plans for improving

> Roper River can be worked out and put into operation unless there is very close co-operation and goodwill between the Roper River people and the Government."

The conservatives and the radicals, and even at times the Government, see land as the panacaea for Village problems. The land issue, more than any other, has to contain the autonomy, equality, development contradictions. Long before the strike the Government had started to move to establish a legal basis for land holding on Aboriginal Reserves (Rowley 1971:ch.8). The conception of these holdings is that they are either a commercial resource or they are a small area of deep religious significance. Acceding to the Aboriginal demand for land, if the area is larger than a waterhole, a clump of tress, or a rock ledge, meant providing a leasehold which could be a viable commercial proposition. The lessor also protects himself against the lessee's failure to realise the land's commercial potential (ibid: 187-9). At least at Ngukurr the Government, in the person of the Minister, states the view that once the land (as a commercial asset) is released for the people's use, then the people can realise their other aims (above ch.7 section I).

The Government offered the land as a basis for economic development. The pastoral lease which was granted in December, 1971 took no account of the desire for autonomy, and even made economic equality a long term goal. The lease had to be organised as a cattle project for which development plans were commissioned. A European manager was to be appointed to supervise the project. During 1972 about $350,000 were made available to the Yugul Cattle Company to be used, under close supervision, for development of the cattle project (Yugual Cattle Company Pty. Ltd. Development Project 1972). The Government released, under strict supervision, only the pastoral potential of the land. The Government retained for itself the control over entry, and the mineral and timber rights. The Village had gained a paper asset, another Citizens' Club.

The Village is a part of Australian society, and the interests of its people have a wider relevance than the closed environment of the Settlement. The community is opposing a domination which is located in the structures of Australian society as a whole. Even the interests they have, which are specifically Aboriginal, are located in a context of which Ngukurr is but a small part.

The Village people do, in fact, recognise the wider context, and many of the actions of the radicals (such as soliciting trade union support, and seeking press coverage during the strike) indicate their awareness. The Village struggle against domination is undermined by its own narrow identity. Village identity, built as it is on blackfella law and a particular re-arrangement of traditional association, offers the community ideological protection against complete absorption into Australian society. However, it does not provide the Village with an indigenous hierarchy, because the bases for domination (control over the relations of production and reproduction) are not to be found within its bounds.

APPENDIX 1

A Note on Balgin and Wadaminmara

Wadaminmara is a part of the Gulinga of four Jabuduruwa estates in the Roper area. In the performance of a Jabuduruwa ceremony celebrating one of these estates, the Wadaminmara of that estate is represented in the final rite. The representation is a large rectangular structure measuring about six feet by four feet by one foot. One side of the structure carries the design of the estate's Wadaminmara (cf. Elkin 1971: plate III).

The Wadaminmara rite does not, as far as I am aware, occur outside the Roper area. There is a major difference of emphasis in the Ngukurr and Beswick Jabuduruwa which is connected with the former's possession of Wadaminmara. The climax of the Beswick Jabuduruwa is the women's Goanna Tail rite, which while dramatising the exclusion of women, practically brings the whole population into the realm of Jabuduruwa (Maddock 1969a; 1972: 146-8). The Ngukurr Jabuduruwa reduces the impact of this rite by having the women sleeping at a greater distance (half a mile) from the main ceremony ground. The climax of

Ngukurr Jabuduruwa is the Wadaminmara rite which is attended only by senior men and a select number of younger initiates. Women, novices, and many young initiated men are excluded from either observing or participating in this rite.

The significance of Wadaminmara is apparent from Elkin's description of the 1965 Jabuduruwa (and the same holds for the 1970 ceremony). There is a contrast between the fixed location of Wadaminmara and the travels of the other Jabuduruwa myths (op. cit: 123-5, 163). The relationship of Wadaminmara to the rest of Jabuduruwa is paralleled in the Roper area by the relationship of Balgin to Gunabibi. Both Balgin and Wadaminmara emphasise exclusiveness, secrecy, hierarchy, and authority to a greater degree than either Gunabibi or the rest of Jabuduruwa. Informants at Ngukurr told me that decisions to punish ritual infraction were formerly taken at the time of the Wadaminmara rite (cf. above chapter 6 section 3). Both Balgin and Wadaminmara are restricted to fixed locations. They were deposited or built at those locations by a totemic traveller. Balgin was left by Gunabibi, and Wadaminmara was left by Jabuduruwa. The sites of both are

restricted to the Roper area and roughly parallel to each other, though the Wadaminmara sites (or rather the Jabuduruwa that left them) move from east to west (see Map 5 and 7), and the Balgin sites (or rather the Gunabibi that left them) move from west to east (see Map 11).

Balgin and Wadaminmara have important differences. The Balgin is a separate cult while Wadaminmara is only a rite in the Jabuduruwa cult. Ownership of the Balgin is restricted to members of Murongon semi moiety of Dua moiety, while the owners of Wadaminmara belong to both Budal and Gujal semi moieties of Jiridja moiety. The complementarity of Gunabibi and Jabuduruwa is not paralleled by Balgin and Wadaminmara (Maddock 1969a: ch. 6; 1974: 211-14). Indeed the form of the Balgin ceremony is similar to that of Jabuduruwa, and likewise complements the form of Gunabibi. The Wadaminmara does not provide a similar complement to the rest of Jabuduruwa, though it does to one particular rite: the Goanna Tail.

APPENDIX 2

The Sequence and Timetable of Performances of the 1970 Jabuduruwa

There are three primary divisions of participants in the Jabuduruwa: initiates, novices and women. The latter two take no part in the decision making processes. The initiates are divided into two broad categories, which coincide with the patrilineal moiety division. The owners (Mingeringi) belong to Jiridja moiety. They are members of those estate groups whose totems are identified with the Jabuduruwa, and are represented in the course of the ceremony. They are the performers of the rites, who act out the episodes of their totems and participate in the massed dances which mark the turning points of the ceremony. Their main decision making prerogative is to inform the managers that they want a Jabuduruwa to be held.

The members of Dua moiety are the ceremony managers (Djunggai ji). They are responsible for the organisation of the ceremony, its course and timing. They prepare and care for the ritual paraphernalia. They prepare the performers, stage the performances, and have care of the novices.

The Jabuduruwa is said to belong to the estate group that initiates it. Other estate groups from the same moiety have a supportive role as, either 'brothers' (groups from the same semi moiety), 'MMBs' (groups from the complementary semi moiety). They also perform in the rites, but the lead, in all but one case, is the prerogative of the owning estate group.[1] The major items in the ceremony, including the main dance ground (Daba), sacred hut (Budjada), and Wadaminmara, belong to the estate group which initiates the ceremony.

Managerial positions are defined in two ways. Firstly they are defined by the manager's kinship connection with a particular owner or estate group. A man manages the preparation and performances of his MB and FMB. A senior manager in this context is the ZS, ZSS, DS or DSS of the senior member of the owning group. In practice

1. The exception is the dance sequence for clearing away the ceremony, which is performed by senior owners on the final morning. The lead in this rite is invariably taken by an owner representing Goanna. The Plain Kangaroo group has no Goanna totem. A man from another group took the lead in this rite in the 1970 Jabuduruwa.

this is usually the senior male of the ZS's or ZSS's own estate group, even if his own M or FM was not a member of the owning estate group.

The managers also act as the organisers of the Jabuduruwa ceremony. In this context seniority, experience, kinship and locality are all factors which influence the choice of a senior organiser.

The rites of the Plain Kangaroo Jabuduruwa were conducted between January and May, 1970. Performances were held on a total of 43 days over a period of four and a half months. The ceremony had five phases (cf. Maddock, 1969a). It began at night during a camp corroboree, when the initiated men were led away from the camp to the accompaniment of the sacred gong (Djundayi). The men prepared a temporary dance ground during the night and in the morning the owning moiety performed a massed dance (Nadjba) to mark the start of the ceremony.

The second phase is a period of evening dances (feather rites, Ramon) by individual owners representing parts of the travels and deeds of mythological beings. This period lasted for two months, with performances normally held on weekends.

The third phase was a changeover period which included the clearing of the main dance ground (Daba), and the erection of a sacred hut (Budjada) upon it. The changeover was marked by two Nadjba performances. The dispatch of a ritual messenger (also called Nadjba), if one was to be sent, should have occurred at the end of this phase. The changeover was completed in twelve days, though a messenger was not dispatched for a further four weeks. Phase four was a continuation of the second phase, and covered a similar two month period.

The finale was held over two days. It commenced with a massed dance by the owning moiety in the morning (Djamalara or Milky Way). During the day the owners made up bundles of paper bark (goanna tails) for presentation to the women. The owners performed another massed dance in the evening (burned grass). During the night the men of both moieties stayed at the dance ground, humming and tapping sticks. In the early hours the women, carrying their goanna tails, were led to a clearing a few feet from the main ground. They lit their goanna tails at a fire in this clearing, and then returned, waving the lighted paper bark, in single file to their own camping area about half a mile away. On arrival the women buried

the goanna tails in a circular hole. The women kept their heads bowed throughout this rite. In the pre dawn light the men of the managing moiety performed a massed dance, with the owners conducting and playing the sacred gongs. Shortly after sunrise two senior owners performed feather rite dances to clear away the ceremony. At this point the senior men of both moieties declared that the ceremony was over. In the late afternoon the final rite (Wadaminmara) was performed. This rite was attended by the senior men of both moieties plus a few chosen younger initiates. The completion of this rite marked the end of the ceremony.

Timetable of performances in 1970 Jabuduruwa

Week	Day	Date	Time	Rite	No. of Dancers	Gulinga Used	Comments
1	Fri	16/1	Night	Start	N.A.	N.A.	I was not given permission to attend all secret rites till the end of week 2. Jabiru estate is owned by Nutwood group and local use is with their permission.
1	Sat	17/1	Morn.	Nadjba	N.R.	N.A.	
1	Sat	17/1	A/Noon	Feather	N.R.	N.R.	
1	Sun	18/1	"	"	N.R.	N.R.	
1	Tues	20/1	"	"	1	Coast Plum (Frank)	
2	Sat	24/1	"	"	4	Plain K Hill P Sandridge G Jabiru	
2	Sun	25/1	"	"	N.R.	N.R.	
3	Fri	30/1	"	"	1	Plain K	
3	Sat	31/1	"	"	7	2. Plain K 1. Sand. G 3. Black G 1. Jabiru	
3	Sun	1/2	"	"	7	3. Plain K 2. Coast P 1. Black G 1. Jabiru	
4	Sat	7/2	"	"	7	3. Black G 3. Plain K 1. Jabiru	
5	Sat	14/2	"	"	9	4. Plain K 2. Sand. G 2. Black G 1. Jabiru	
5	Sun	15/2	"	"	11	4. Plain K 1. Coast P 3. Black G 1. Sand. G 2. Jabiru	
6	No Performance						

Week	Day	Date	Time	Rite	No. of Dancers	Gulinga Used	Comments
7	No Performances						
8	Wed	11/3	A/Noon	Feather	2	2. Plain K	
8	Thur	12/3	"	"	6	4. Plain K 1. Coast P 1. Black G	
9	Fri	13/3	"	"	5	1. Plain K 1. Coast P 1. Sand. G 2. Black G	
9	Sat	14/3	"	"	2	1. Plain K 1. Black G	
9	Mon	16/3	"	"	6	3. Plain K 3. Black G	
9	Tues	17/3	Morn.	Nadjba	16	N.A.	
9	Tues	17/3	A/Noon	Feather	16	4. Plain K 1. Coast P 5. Sand. G 4. Black G 2. Jabiru	
10	Sun	22/3	"	"	10	2. Plain K 2. River P 1. Hill P 1. Sand. G 4. Black G	Main dance ground cleared, and used. This is first appearance by Mulingera, and first time Hill and other P. perform together. Frank is other River dancer, and Hill is Pat's younger brother Pete.
10	Mon	23/3	"	"	3	3. Plain K	

Week	Day	Date	Time	Rite	No. of Dancers	Gulinga Used	Comments
10	Tues	24/3	A/Noon	Feather	5	3. Plain K 1. Black G 1. Sand. G	This is the first performance by Pat's son Oscar - as Sand. G.
10	Wed	25/3	"	"	5	4. Plain K 1. Sand. G	- Oscar
11	Fri	27/3	"	"	11	4. Plain K 2. Coast P 3. Sand. G 2. Jabiru	- includes Oscar
11	Sat	28/3	Morn	Nadjba	20	N.A.	Budjada built
11	Sat	28/3	A/Noon	Feather	23	4. Plain K 3. Coast P 3. Hill P 8. Sand. G 3. Black G 2. Jabiru	Oscar's only performance as Hill. Coast dancers are 2 eldest sons of Gideon, and one son of Frank.
12	No Performances						
13	Sun	12/4	A/Noon	"	2	2. Plain K	
14	Wed	22/4	"	"	2	1. Plain K 1. Sand. G	Garry sends messenger to Mainoru.
15	Sun	26/4	"	"	4	2. Plain K 1. Sand. G 1. Jabiru	
16	Sun	3/5	"	"	5	2. Plain K 1. Sand. G 2. Jabiru	

Week	Day	Date	Time	Rite	No. of Dancers	Gulinga Used	Comments
16	Mon	4/5	A/Noon	Feather	N.R.	N.R.	
17	Mon	11/5	"	"	8	3. Plain K 1. Coast P 1. Hill P 3. Sand. G	Ceremonial arrival of visiting party from Mainoru and Urapunga. Coast used by William without Frank's permission.
17	Tues	12/5	"	"	7	3. Plain K 1. River P 2. Sand. G 1. Jabiru	
17	Wed	13/5	"	"	11	4. Plain K 1. River P 2. Hill P 3. Sand. G 1. Jabiru	
17	Thur	14/5	"	"	7	2. Plain K 2. River P 3. Sand. G	
18	Fri	15/5	"	"	4	3. Plain K 1. Sand. G	
18	Sat	16/5	"	"	10	3. Plain K 1. River P 4. Sand. G 2. Jabiru	
18	Mon	18/5	"	"	N.R.	N.R.	
18	Tues	19/5	"	"	7	4. Plain K 1. Coast P 1. Sand. G 1. Black G	

Week	Day	Date	Time	Rite	No. of Dancers	Gulinga Used	Comments
18	Wed	20/5	A/Noon	Feather	14	3. Plain K 2. River P 1. Coast P 3. Black G 4. Sand. G 1. Jabiru	
18	Thur	21/5	"	"	17	4. Plain K 3. River P 2. Hill P 6. Sand. G 1. Black G 1. Jabiru	Last feather rite performance.
19	Fri	22/5	Morn	Djamalara (Milky Way)	15	N.A.	Same as Nadjba
19	Fri	22/5	A/Noon	Burnt Grass	21	N.A.	Same as Nadjba
19	Fri	22/5	10pm	Goanna Tail Presen-tation	N.A.	N.A.	Men present paper bark bundles to women at women's ground.
19	Fri	22/5	11 pm -3.30am	Sugar bag	N.A.	N.A.	Humming to clap stick accompani-ment, with no dancing. Performed by owners and managers.
19	Sat	23/5	4 am	Goanna Tail (Women's Rite)	N.A.	N.A.	Women walk in single file with paperbark bundles from own ground to fire 10 ft. from main dance ground. Light bundles, return to own ground and bury bundles in cir-cular hole. They do not look at main dancing ground.

Week	Day	Date	Time	Rite	No. of Dancers	Gulinga Used	Comments
19	Sat	23/5	4.45am	Djungag-aiji dance (Managers)	N.A.	N.A.	Same form as Nadjba, but manager and owner roles reversed.
19	Sat	23/5	7 am	Clearing the track of the ceremony.	2	1. Plain K 1. Sand. G	Same form as feather rite. Garry, senior Plain K wipes away ceremony from the main ground. Pat, senior Sandridge Goanna, wipes away women's track from area where they lit goanna tail.
19	Sat	23/5	6 pm	Wadaminmara	4	2. Plain K 2. Hill P	Same form as feather rite, with addition of Wadaminmara objects. Plain K: Garry and Mark Morgan perform on one object. Hill P.: Pat and Mulingera perform on the other. Attendance at rite restricted. No novice and only selected younger inducted men.

N.A. = Not applicable
N.R. = No record

APPENDIX 3

Timetable of Events in the Strike and Shop Crises

Date	Shop	Strike
1969		
October	Club general meeting to censure manager. First manager resigns.	
November	Government auditors report showing poor financial condition of shop.	
December	New shop manager arrives.	
1970		
January	Manager co-opted to executive committee as treasurer.	
February 9th		Village spokesmen meet at the shop manager's house to discuss land rights. Decide to send three delegates to Darwin.
13th		Village meeting. Delegates chosen.
16th		Delegates leave for Darwin.
19th		Government informs superintendent of forthcoming visit by Minister of Interior.
25th		Village meeting to formulate demands for Minister's visit.
26th		Two delegates plus pressmen arrive. Minister arrives. Village meeting with Minister unsatisfactory.

Date 1970	Shop	Strike
March 3rd		Minister's list of benefits posted. Caucus meeting of working men agree on strike action.
4th		Shop manager meets with men to discuss strike. Men reiterate determination to strike. Village meeting endorses strike.
5th	Manager states intention to resign.	William Gideon and Alan Abrahams leave for Darwin.
6th	Special general meeting to discuss manager's resignation. Manager withdraws resignation.	
9th		First day of strike. Alan Abrahams leaves Darwin for Melbourne. Strikers have meeting with senior Welfare officer.
10th		William Gideon and Albert Abrahams return from Darwin. Strikers meeting to discuss school children.
11th		Village meeting agrees on withdrawal of school children.
12th	Call from auditors on poor financial position of shop.	William Gideon's letter to the press.
16th	Manager announces poor financial condition of shop. He halts further credit for Village. Welfare makes tentative loan offer.	Second week of strike. Albert and William telegraph press that strike not on this week. Strikers meeting decides strike is on. Senior Welfare officer arrives but men refuse to meet him.

Date	Shop	Strike
1970		
March 17th		Albert telegraphs press that strike still on. Senior Welfare officer leaves Ngukurr.
19th		Two telegrams from Alan Abrahams asking for rolling strike and two delegates for Canberra FCAATSI conference.
20th	Executive committee meeting refuses money from entertainment account for Village business. Aboriginal members refuse to release account to manager. Manager sacks shop assistants Albert Abrahams and Nat Davies.	Strikers meeting decides following week is work week, and choose two men for conference. Village meeting reveals deep division over strike.
23rd		Third week of strike. Officially working week. 60% at work.
26th		Albert Abrahams leaves for Darwin to raise funds.
30th	Village executive members agree to release entertainment account to the shop.	Fourth week of strike. Twenty men continue to work. Village meeting. Strikers ignore opposition and continue strike.
April 2nd		Telegram from Alan Abrahams calling for return to work.
6th		Strike terminated.

Date		Shop
1970		
April	16th	Manager flies to Darwin
	19th	Manager returns with new motor bike.
	20th	Special general meeting to discuss financial position. Investigating committee appointed.
	21st	Manager leaves Ngukurr. Executive appoints investigating committee as committee of management.
	25th	Ngukurr Entertainment Club formed by Aboriginal members of Citizens Club executive.
	31st	Management committee report on financial position. Shop is insolvent.
May	5th	Station Council meeting. Village members accuse staff of racism.
	25th	Annual general mmeting. Government loan of $2,000 accepted. Election of second executive committee of twelve members: seven Europeans and five Aborigines.
June	6th	First meeting of second executive. Selection of new management committee: Superintendent, mechanic's wife, and Nat Davies. Ngukurr Entertainment Club incorporated as sub-committee of Citizens Club. Advertisement for new manager agreed on.
July		Loan of $10,000 received from Aboriginal Benefits Trust Fund.
August		Arrival of new (third) manager.
1971		
August		Between 50 and 100 Village people confront manager and demand his resignation. Manager tenders resignation but executive refuse to accept it.
September	13th	Final meeting of second executive.
	14th	Annual general meeting. Dispute over membership credentials. Auditors report criticised. Election of third executive with nine Aboriginal members and three Europeans. Aboriginal President, Secretary and Treasurer and European Vice-President.

Date	Shop
1971	
September 21st	First meeting of third executive. Majority vote to dismiss manager.
22nd	Second meeting of executive. Aboriginal members unanimous in opposition to manager.
27th	Manager refuses to open shop. Executive meeting agrees on termination settlement of $2,200.
30th	Manager leaves Ngukurr.
October 9th	Executive meets to discuss future shop management. Agree to have Aboriginal manager and European business adviser. Nat Davies left as temporary manager.
29th	Executive meet to discuss application for position of business adviser. Superintendent advised executive that the Government will not approve the applicant. The applicant withdraws his application.
November 2nd	Welfare representative arrives. Informs the executive that the shop is again insolvent, and presents Government conditions for rescue operation. Executive accept conditions.

APPENDIX 4

CONSTITUTION OF ROPER RIVER CITIZEN'S CLUB

1. NAME

The name of the Club shall be the Roper River Citizen's Club.

2. OBJECTS

The objects for which the Club is formed are:

(a) The fostering of community and group participation in social, cultural, and recreation activities among the people of the Roper River community.

(b) The provision of assistance and training for members of the Club in the management of their own affairs.

(c) The supplying of goods and other amenities to members of the Club.

3. MEMBERSHIP

(a) The foundation members shall be (six Village people and one staff).

(b) All persons over the age of 18 years who have been residing at Roper River for a period of three months prior to application for membership shall be eligible for ordinary membership.

(c) All persons under the age of 18 years who have been residing at Roper River for a period of three months shall be eligible for junior membership.

(d) The Executive Committee may from time to time admit persons to honorary membership upon such conditions as it sees fit.

(e) A current register of all members, whether ordinary, junior or honorary shall be maintained by the Executive Committee.

4. APPLICATION FOR MEMBERSHIP

(a) Application for ordinary membership shall be made by the candidate to the Executive Committee.

(b) No application is necessary for junior membership.

5. ELECTION OF ORDINARY MEMBERS

(a) Every application for ordinary membership shall be submitted to the Executive Committee at the next meeting following such application

and at such meeting the Executive Committee shall proceed to the election or rejection of the candidate.

(b) A candidate shall be elected or rejected by a majority of Committee members present, and the voting shall be by ballot if so desired by any members of the Committee.

6. SUBSCRIPTIONS

(a) The Executive Committee may in its discretion require all or any of the members to pay an annual subscription, the amount and manner of payment of which shall be decided by the Executive Committee.

7. MEMBERS IN ARREARS

(a) A member who fails to pay a subscription fee in the manner prescribed by the Executive Committee and whose default continues for more than 28 days shall be deemed to be unfinancial and may be debarred from participating in the business of the Club and from the privileges of membership until such time as all arrears are paid. The limitations imposed upon an unfinancial member shall be at the discretion of the Executive Committee.

8. RETIREMENT OF MEMBERS

(a) A member may retire from membership at any time by giving notice thereof in writing but nothing contained herein shall relieve the retiring member of his obligation to pay his subscription fee up to the date of his retirement.

9. EXPULSION OF MEMBERS

(a) Every member on joining the Club undertakes to comply with the rules of the Club, and any refusal or neglect to do so or any conduct unworthy of a Club member shall render such member liable to expulsion by a resolution of an annual or special general meeting provided that at least one week before such meeting he shall have had notice thereof and of the intended resolution for his expulsion and that he shall at such meeting and before the passing of the resolution have had an opportunity of giving orally or in writing any explanation or defence as he may think fit.

(b) A member expelled under this rule shall forfeit all right and claim upon the Club and its property.

10. OFFICE BEARERS

(a) The office bearers of the Club shall consist of president, vice-president, secretary and treasurer.

(b) The office bearers shall be elected at each annual general meeting and shall hold office for a period of one year when they shall retire, but will be eligible for re-election.

(c) Until the first annual general meeting the Foundation Executive Committee shall elect the office bearers from its own members.

11. VACANCY AMONG OFFICE BEARERS

(a) In case of any casual vacancy in the office of president, vice-president, secretary or treasurer, the Executive Committee may appoint one of its members or some other member of the Club to act as president, vice-president, secretary or treasurer as the case may be until the next annual general meeting.

(b) Any office bearer who fails to attend three consecutive Executive Committee meetings without leave or reasonable excuse shall be deemed to have vacated his office which shall then be declared vacant by the Executive Committee at its next meeting, and may be filled in accordance with paragraph 11 (a) of this constitution.

12. EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

(a) There shall be an Executive Committee consisting of the president, vice-president, secretary and treasurer, and three other members of the Club.

(b) Until the first annual general meeting the Executive Committee shall consist of the seven foundation members. Thereafter, the Executive Committee shall be elected at the annual general meeting.

13. EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE MEETINGS

(a) Meetings of the Executive Committee shall be held as often as the president directs, but may be convened by any office bearer or any two Executive Committee members not being office bearers, provided that not less than four meetings are convened between any two consecutive annual general meetings.

(b) Four Executive Committee members shall constitute a quorum provided that at least two of them are office bearers. If votes are equal the president or chairman for the time being shall have a second or casting vote.

14. DUTIES OF EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

(a) The Executive Committee shall manage the affairs of the Club in accordance with this constitution and with any rules of the Club.

(b) The Executive Committee may appoint sub-committees with such specified powers and duties as it may deem necessary.

(c) The Executive Committee may engage or terminate employees of the Club and fix their remuneration and conditions of employment.

15. RULES

(a) The Executive Committee may from time to time make, alter, or repeal, rules regarding the use of Club facilities by members and generally for the good conduct and affairs of the Club.

(b) Such rules shall, provided that they are not inconsistent with this constitution, be binding on all members.

16. ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

(a) An annual general meeting shall be held in the month of May in each year on a date to be determined by the Executive Committee.

(b) The business of such meeting shall be the election of office bearers and other members of the Executive Committee, the appointment of an auditor, to receive the report of the outgoing Executive Committee, and to receive the annual statements of accounts, and any other business of which notice shall have been given to the secretary not less than 28 days prior to the date of the meeting.

17. SPECIAL GENERAL MEETINGS

(a) The Executive Committee may at any time and shall on the request of any five members of the Club stating the business for which it is required convene a special meeting for any specific business. Such meetings shall be held not less than seven days and not more than twenty one days from the date of request.

18. NOTICE OF ALL GENERAL MEETINGS

(a) The secretary shall at least give seven days notice before any general meeting and shall send to every member a notice of such meeting stating the time when and the place where it will be held and the business that will be brought before it.

(b) No business other than business of a formal nature shall be brought forward at such a meeting unless notice thereof has been given in accordance with paragraphs 17 and 18 (a) of this constitution.

19. PROCEDURE AT ALL GENERAL MEETINGS

(a) At all general meetings the chair shall be taken by the president or if the president is absent by the vice-president or if the vice-president is also absent by an ordinary member chosen by the meeting.

(b) Every question (unless otherwise expressly provided by this constitution) shall be decided by a majority of votes.

(c) Every financial ordinary member shall have one vote and in the case of equality of votes the chairman shall have a second or casting vote.

(d) Members absent from the meeting may vote by sending their votes in writing to the secretary prior to the meeting or by proxy.

(e) The quorum at a general meeting shall be ten members.

(f) An unfinancial ordinary member, a junior member, or an honorary member, shall not be entitled to speak or vote at a general meeting.

20. CLUB PROPERTY

(a) The Club may acquire by purchase, lease, sub-lease, hiring, or otherwise lands and buildings and any right, title, estate, or interest in land of whatsoever tenure including Crown land and to enter into agreements or arrangements whether under statute or otherwise relating to and to change vary and improve the same.

(b) The Club may erect buildings, work or improvements of any description on any land of the Club or which the Club has any estate or interest or on any other lands or property or may demolish, rebuild, construct, repair, alter or improve any existing buildings, works, or improvements thereon to convert such land into roads, streets, thoroughfares, ways, recreation grounds, gardens and the like and generally may deal with and improve the property of the Club.

(c) The Club may purchase, improve, manage, develop, sell, exchange, lease, mortgage, charge, dispose of or otherwise acquire any real or personal property or rights of the Club.

21. CLUB FUNDS, FINANCES AND ACCOUNTS

(a) The funds of the Club shall be kept by the treasurer under the supervision of and in such place and manner as shall be determined by the Executive Committee or as otherwise provided by this constitution.

(b) The Executive Committee shall have power to expend the Club funds in such manner as it sees fit, in accordance with the provisions of this constitution and the law generally.

(c) The Club may borrow or raise upon loan any sum or sums of money whether upon current account or otherwise and for the purpose of securing the repayment thereof may execute and give any mortgage, charge, bond, debenture, bill of exchange, promissory note or other security over all or any part of the property or assets of the Club as may be deemed necessary.

(d) The Club accounts shall be made up to the 31st day of March in each year.

(e) The Executive Committee shall cause to be prepared an audited statement of receipts and expenditure in each year and a balance sheet

made up to the 31st day of March in such way as to show the true state of the finances of the Club which shall be submitted to the members at the next annual general meeting.

(f) All money received by the Club shall be deposited in such trading or savings bank accounts as may be nominated by the Executive Committee, and the name of such bank accounts shall be "Roper River Citizen's Club". All cheques drawn, or other withdrawals made upon, all Club bank accounts shall be signed by any two of the president, secretary, treasurer, or person who for the time being is employed by the Club as its manager.

22. AUDITOR

(a) The Foundation Executive shall appoint an auditor to hold office until the first annual general meeting.

(b) An auditor for each business year shall be appointed by the annual general meeting.

(c) The auditor shall at least two months before each annual general meeting examine the treasurer's accounts with the vouchers and receipts and shall certify the general statement of accounts and balance sheet.

(d) If the position of auditor falls vacant during the year an auditor may be appointed by the Executive Committee to hold office until the next annual general meeting.

23. CLUB NOT CARRIED ON FOR PROFIT

(a) It is expressly declared that the Club shall not be carried on for the purpose of profit or gain to its individual members and any distribution to individual members either in money, property or otherwise is expressly prohibited.

24. CESSATION

(a) In the event of the Club ceasing to operate continuously it will be disbanded, and after payment of all debts, all assets including trading stock and plant, chattels and utensils, shall be sold by private treaty or public auction for the best price and the remaining members of the Executive Committee last in office shall distribute the balance of the funds remaining to such charities assisting children as the Director of Social Welfare shall nominate.

25. AMENDMENTS TO CONSTITUTION

(a) The Constitution may be amended by a two-thirds majority vote at a general meeting at which not less than one third of the ordinary members of the Club are present, provided that notice of the intention to propose an amendment to the constitution shall have been given in writing to all ordinary members not less than fourteen days or more than 28 days before the date of the meeting.

(b) The Executive Committee shall convene a general meeting to discuss or amend the constitution upon application by at least ten financial ordinary members of the Club, and shall give such notice as is specified in paragraph 25 (a) of this constitution. Such a general meeting shall be held within two months of the date of the members' application.

(c) Notwithstanding the provisions of paragraphs 25 (a) and 25 (b) of this constitution, the members of the Club shall have no power to delete or amend paragraphs 23 and 24 of this constitution, which shall remain unalterable.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Althusser, L., 1969. FOR MARX. Penguin Books, Harmondsworth.

Bailey, F.G., 1965. 'Decisions by Consensus in Councils and Committees', in POLITICAL SYSTEMS AND THE DISTRIBUTION OF POWER, M. Banton ed. Tavistock, London.

Balandier, G., 1970. POLITICAL ANTHROPOLOGY. Penguin Books, Harmondsworth.

Banton, M., (ed.) 1965. POLITICAL SYSTEMS AND THE DISTRIBUTION OF POWER. Tavistock, London.

Basedow, H., 1925. THE AUSTRALIAN ABORIGINAL. Preece, Adelaide.

Bauer, F.H., 1964. HISTORICAL GEOGRAPHY OF WHITE SETTLEMENT IN PART OF THE NORTHERN TERRITORY. Part 2. The Katherine - Darwin Region. C.S.I.R.O., report No.64/1, Canberra.

Bayton, J., 1965. CROSS OVER CARPENTARIA. Smith and Paterson, Brisbane.

Berndt, R.M., 1951. KUNAPIPI. Cheshire, Melbourne.

-----(ed.), 1970. AUSTRALIAN ABORIGINAL ANTHROPOLOGY. University of Western Australia Press, Perth.

Berndt, R.M. and C., 1954. ARNHEM LAND. Cheshire, Melbourne.

Blau, P., 1967. EXCHANGE AND POWER IN SOCIAL LIFE. John Wiley, New York.

Capell, A., 1960a. 'The Wandarang and other tribal myths of the Yabaduruwa ritual'. Oceania, V.30, no.3.

-----1960b. 'Myths and tales of the Nunggubuyu, south east Arnhem Land'. Oceania, V.31, no.1.

Casagrande, J.B. (ed.), 1960. IN THE COMPANY OF MAN. New York.

Cole, K., 1968. ROPER RIVER MISSION. CMS, Melbourne.

-----1972. GROOTE EYLANDT STORIES. CMS. Melbourne.

Coser, L. 1956. THE FUNCTIONS OF SOCIAL CONFLICT. Glencoe, Illinois.

Costello, M. 1930. LIFE OF JOHN COSTELLO. Dymocks, Sydney.

Duncan, R. 1967. THE NORTHERN TERRITORY PASTORAL INDUSTRY, 1863-1910. MUP, Melbourne.

Durack, M. 1959. KINGS IN GRASS CASTLES. Constable and Co., London.

Dyer, A.J. (N.D.) UNARMED COMBAT. CMS, Melbourne.

Elkin, A.P., 1934a. 'The Aborigines: legal problem in North Australia'. Sydney Morning Herald, August 20.

-----1934b. 'The Aborigines, our national responsibility'. Australian Quarterly, No.23.

-----1961a. 'The Yabuduruwa'. Oceania, V.31, No.3.

-----1961b. 'Maraian at Mainoru, 1949'. Oceania, V.3, No.4; V.32, No.1.

-----1971. 'Yabuduruwa at Roper River Mission, 1965'. Oceania V.42, No.2.

Engels, F. 1968. 'Selected letters', in Marx and Engels SELECTED WORKS. One volume edition, Moscow.

Fortes, M. and Evans-Pritchard, E.E. (ed.), 1940. AFRICAN POLITICAL SYSTEMS. OUP, London.

Fox, R., 1969. 'Alliance and the Australians: a response to Dr. Hiatt'. Mankind, V.7, No.1.

Freund, J., 1968. THE SOCIOLOGY OF MAX WEBER. Allan Lane, London.

Gale, F. (ed.), 1970. WOMAN'S ROLE IN ABORIGINAL SOCIETY. AIAS Study No.36, Canberra.

Gerth, H., and C. Wright Mills, (eds.), 1948. FROM MAX WEBER. R & KP, London.

Gluckman, M., 1955. CUSTOM AND CONFLICT IN AFRICA. Oxford.

GLUCKSMANN, M., 1974. STRUCTURALIST ANALYSIS IN CONTEMPORARY SOCIAL THOUGHT. R & KP, London.

Goffman, I., 1961. ASYLUMS. Penguin Books, Harmondsworth.

Gunn, A., 1907. WE OF THE NEVER NEVER. Melbourne.

Hall, V.C., 1962. DREAMTIME JUSTICE. Rigby, Adelaide.

-----1970. OUTBACK POLICEMAN. Rigby, Adelaide.

Hamilton, A., 1970. 'The role of women in Aboriginal marriage arrangements', in F. Gale Ed., 1970.

Hardy, F., 1968. THE UNLUCKY AUSTRALIANS. Nelson, Melbourne.

Hiatt, L., 1962. 'Local organisation among the Australian Aborigines'. Oceania, V.32, No.4.

-----1964. 'Incest in Arnhem Land'. Oceania, V.35, No.2.

-----1965. KINSHIP AND CONFLICT. ANU, Canberra.

-----1967. 'Authority and reciprocity in Australian Aboriginal marriage arrangements'. Manking, V.6, No.10.

Hill, E., 1951. THE TERRITORY. A & R, Sydney.

Joynt, R., 1918. 10 YEARS WORK AT ROPER RIVER MISSION STATION, NORTHERN TERRITORY, AUSTRALIA. Hearne, Melbourne.

Kuper, A., 1971. 'Introduction', in A. Richards and A. Kuper (eds.), COUNCILS IN ACTION.

Lee, R. and I. Devore (eds.), 1968. MAN THE HUNTER Aldine, Chicago.

Leeden, A. van der., 1964. 'Report to AIAS on fieldwork, 19th March to 31st August, 1964'. AIAS, (unpublished).

Levi-Strauss, C., 1969. THE ELEMENTARY STRUCTURES OF KINSHIP. Revised edition, SSP, London.

Lockwood, D., 1962. I, THE ABORIGINAL. Rigby, Adelaide.

Long, J., 1970. ABORIGINAL SETTLEMENTS: A SURVEY OF INSTITUTIONAL COMMUNITIES IN EASTERN AUSTRALIA. ANU, Canberra.

Macknight, C.C., 1969 (ed.). THE FARTHEST COAST. Melbourne.

-----1972. 'Macassans and Aborigines'. Oceania, V.42, No.4.

Maddock, K., 1969a. THE JABUDURUWA. Ph.D. thesis, University of Sydney (unpublished).

-----1969b. 'Alliance and entailment in Australian marriage'. Mankind, V.7, No.1.

-----1969c. 'Necrophagy and the circulation of mothers: a problem of Mara ritual and social structure'. Mankind V.7, No.2.

-----1972. THE AUSTRALIAN ABORIGINES. Allen Lane, London.

-----1974. 'Dangerous proximities and their analogues'. Mankind, V.9, No.3.

-----N.D. 'Two laws in one community'. Unpublished paper, Macquarie University.

Marx, K. and F. Engels, 1968. SELECTED WORKS. One volume edition, Moscow.

Meggitt, M.J., 1962. DESERT PEOPLE. A. & R. Sydney.

-----1964. 'Indigenous forms of government among the Australian Aborigines'. Bijdragen, Tot de Taal-, Land- en Volkenkunde, Part 120.

-----1966. 'Gadjari among the Walbiri Aborigines of Central Australia'. Part 1, Oceania, V.36, No.3.

Nadel, S., 1951. THE FOUNDATIONS OF SOCIAL ANTHROPOLOGY. Cohen and West, London.

Northern Territory Administration, 1933. ANNUAL REPORT.

-----1969-70. WELFARE BRANCH ANNUAL REPORT.

Northern Territory Legislative Council, 1970. Debates and Question Paper, Tenth Council, First session.

Northern Territory News, February to April, 1970.

Poulantzas, N., 1973. POLITICAL POWER AND SOCIAL CLASS. NLB, London.

Radcliffe-Brown, A.R., 1940. 'Preface', in M. Fortes and E. Evans-Pritchard.

Reay, M., 1962. 'Subsections of Borroloola'. Oceania, V.33, No.2.

Richards, A. and A. Kuper (eds.), 1971. COUNCILS IN ACTION. Cambridge.

Rowley, C.D., 1970. THE DESTRUCTION OF ABORIGINAL SOCIETY. ANU, Canberra.

-----1971. THE REMOTE ABORIGINES. ANU, Canberra.

Searcy, A., 1909. IN AUSTRALIAN TROPICS. Robertson, London.

Sharpe, M., 1974. 'Notes on the 'Pidgin English' creole of Roper River'. AIAS, Newsletter, new series, No.2.

Smith, K. Langford., 1935. SKY PILOT IN ARNHEM LAND. A & R, Sydney.

-----1936. SKY PILOT'S LAST FLIGHT. A & R, Sydney.

Smith, M.G., 1960. GOVERNMENT IN ZAZZAU. OUP, London.

Spencer, W.B., 1914. NATIVE TRIBES OF THE NORTHERN TERRITORY OF AUSTRALIA. Macmillan, London.

-----and F. J. Gillen, 1904. THE NORTHERN TRIBES OF CENTRAL AUSTRALIA. Macmillan, London.

Stanner, W., 1960. 'Durmugam, a Nangiomeri', in J.B. Casagrande (ed.).

-----1964. ON ABORIGINAL RELIGION. Oceania monograph No.II.

-----1965. 'Aboriginal territorial organisation: estate, range, domain and regime'. Oceania, V.36. No.1.

Station Council, (N.D.). Roper River Mission Station Council Minute Book, 1962 to 1968. Unpublished.

Strehlow, T.G.H., 1970. 'Geography and the Totemic landscape in Central Australia: a functional Study', in R.M. Berndt (ed.).

Sydney Morning Herald, September, 1933. Sydney.

Tatz, C., 1964. ABORIGINAL ADMINISTRATION IN THE NORTHERN TERRITORY OF AUSTRALIA. Unpublished Ph.D. thesis, Australian National University.

The Argus, September, 1933. Melbourne.

Thomson, D., 1949. ECONOMIC STRUCTURE AND THE CEREMONIAL EXCHANGE CYCLE IN ARNHEM LAND. Macmillan, Melbourne.

Thonemann, H., 1949. TELL THE WHITE MAN. Collins, London.

Turner, D., 1974. TRADITION AND TRANSFORMATION. AIAS Monograph No.53, Canberra.

Warner, L., 1937. BLACK CIVILIZATION. Harper, New York.

Weber, M., 1964. THE THEORY OF SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC ORGANISATION. T. Parsons (ed.) Free Press, New York.

White, G., 1918. 30 YEARS IN TROPICAL AUSTRALIA. London.

Wolff, K., (ed.) 1964. THE SOCIOLOGY OF GEORGE SIMMEL. Free Press, New York.

Worsley, P.J., 1954. THE CHANGING SOCIAL STRUCTURE OF THE WANINDILJAUGWA. Unpublished Ph.D. thesis, Australian National University.

Yugul Cattle Co. Development Project. Office of Aboriginal Affairs, Canberra, 1972.