



Land is Life:  
Continuity through change  
for the Yanyuwa from the  
Northern Territory of Australia

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May 1989

*awarded 14.2.90*

Thesis submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in the Department of Geography, University of Adelaide.

## Abstract

Geographers and historians in Australia have created and perpetuated the misconception that Aboriginal people "withered away" when they came into contact with Europeans. This thesis illustrates how a cultural geographic study using as a framework Sauer's concept of the cultural landscape can highlight the inaccuracy of conventional views of the contact process.

The interactive nature of contact is stressed and examples of how both Europeans and Aboriginal people influenced each other are drawn out. The issue of how Aboriginal people made the move from bush life to town based life is examined in detail. By moving beyond the usual approach of asking why Aboriginal people moved in, to examining how they moved in, a fuller understanding of this process is established.

In so doing, I highlight the important point that in many cases, initially at least, Aboriginal people did not move into European settlements, but in fact the reverse process occurred. I illustrate how many Europeans moved to the very same locations that had previously been foci for Aboriginal people. Subsequently, and to varying degrees, these Europeans were incorporated into Aboriginal social systems.

The gradual process whereby Aboriginal people came to spend longer periods of each year at these locations is examined. At such places Aboriginal people supplied labour for a variety of European economic activities and in exchange received various European goods. Aboriginal reliance on these goods and the related decline in traditional economic activity led to a growing Aboriginal dependency on European society. The concept of dependency is examined and its role in preventing Aboriginal people from leaving European settlements is highlighted.

The value of considering indigenous notions of history and geography is demonstrated. An understanding of how Aboriginal people classify periods of their past and perceive their environment are fundamental issues in the study of culture contact. To study Aboriginal views of the past and their land it is essential to use oral sources. The methodological issues that arise from using such sources are examined and this study itself provides an example of how such sources can be successfully incorporated into geography. A major issue that is addressed is how different individuals see the environment and history differently. The process by which different group views are

formed is examined.

By focusing very specifically on the contact experience of one Aboriginal group it is illustrated how specific local features shaped the contact experience of each separate area. However, at the same time general processes of wider relevance are also revealed.

The empirical contribution of the work should not be overlooked. In documenting a view of past processes that was in danger of being lost forever, a major contribution to knowledge has been made.

## Author's Statement

I, Richard Munro Baker, hereby declare that this thesis contains no material which has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma in any University and to the best of my knowledge and belief, this thesis contains no material previously published or written by another person, except where due reference is made in the text of the thesis.

I hereby give my consent to the copies of this thesis that are lodged with the University of Adelaide Library being available for photocopying and loan.

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May, 1989

## Acknowledgments

I wish to thank Jeanette Hope, Howard Morphy and Francis Morphy for the encouragement and suggestions that collectively led me to develop this thesis topic and have the inspiration to get started on it. Once started, the project benefited greatly from the generous assistance provided by my two supervisors, Peter Sutton and Fay Gale.

My greatest debt is obviously to all the people who gave me their time and talked about their experiences. As well as thanking all those listed in Appendix I, whom I interviewed and recorded, I wish to thank Ellen Kettle and John Dymock. Maisie Charlie, Eileen Yakibijna, Annie Karrakayn, Steve Johnson and Musso Harvey all helped me as interpreters when interviewing various of their Yanyuwa relatives. Richard Walker provided assistance supplying contacts with military personnel who served in the Borrooloola area during the war. Ted Evans greatly assisted with locating former Borrooloola Welfare officers.

My debt to my Borrooloola sisters Mavis and Florette Timothy is enormous. Their friendship was a constant source of emotional and logistic support. My research in Borrooloola was greatly assisted by the hospitality of Jim and Val Piper and Peter and Jenny Thomas.

During my 1986 field season I was greatly assisted by loans of vehicles from the following people; Lindy Malakar, Mavis Timothy, Isaac Walayungkuma, and John Bradley. I am also indebted to the following people for providing accommodation; in Katherine, Bruce Swain and Judy King; in Darwin, John Brock, Fred Gray, Colin and Bern Thompson, David Ritchie and Micky Dewar.

I received great help on different field trips from my sister, Liese Baker, my mother Val Baker and my wife Beth Slatyer. As well as providing all kinds of field assistance the contact my family had with the Borrooloola community greatly assisted my work in the long term by firmly linking my European and Aboriginal families. The friendships that they established while in Borrooloola have continued to develop during many Yanyuwa visits to our homes in southern Australia.

Bob Ellis and the rest of the staff of the Aboriginal Sacred Sites Protection Authority in Darwin were a constant source of support and assistance. The staff of the Northern Territory Archives, the Australian Archives Northern Territory Region and Canberra Branches, the South Australia Public Record Office, the Australian Institute

of Aboriginal Studies, the National Library of Australia, the General Reference Library of N.S.W. and the Mitchell Library all provided invaluable assistance. I am also indebted to the staff of the South Australia Museum and the Victorian Museum for their assistance in relation to collections they hold from the Borroloola region.

I have been particularly fortunate to have the assistance in the field of three gifted European linguists; John Bradley, Jean Kirton, and Chris Furby. Thanks to her long contact with the community, Jean Kirton was also an invaluable source on the recent history of the area.

This project has also greatly benefited from work that I conducted in the Borroloola area between 1982 and 1984. In 1982 and 1983 I carried out research on the archaeology and oral history of Macassan contact. This research was carried out for the Northern Territory Museum and funded by the Australian Heritage Commission. In 1984, I carried out a general archaeological survey in the area and some preliminary ethnoarchaeological work. This work was carried out while I was a Research Scholar in the Prehistory Department, RSPacS ANU. I am grateful for the assistance this Department provided.

Field work in 1986 and 1987 was made possible by grants from the Australian Institute of Aboriginal Studies, the University of Adelaide, the Northern Australian Research Unit of the Australian National University and the Royal Geographic Society of Australasia (South Australian Branch).

Drafts of this thesis have been read by; Chris Anderson, Liese Baker, Don Baker, John Bradley, Luise Hercus, Richie Howitt, Jean Kirton, Ann McGrath, John Mulvaney, Peter Read, Debbie Rose, Tim Rowse, Lyndall Ryan, Beth Slatyer, David Tigger and Edgar Walters and I am grateful for their constructive comments. Copies of transcripts of interviews were read by Musso Harvey, Annie Karrakayn and Steve Johnson and I am grateful for their corrections, explanations and comments. Bain Attwood, Bob Reece, Tim Rowse, Don Meinig and David Trigger all assisted by suggesting relevant reading.

My research has benefited from comments I received after giving seminars to the Prehistory Department, University of Western Australia, in April 1987 and the Prehistory and Anthropology Department, ANU, in October 1987. In Adelaide I have been fortunate to have had the benefit of an enthusiastic group of fellow postgraduates

and I am grateful for the feedback I got from the seminars I gave in the University of Adelaide Geography Department's post-graduate Aboriginal studies series. Chris Anderson, Peggy Brock, Ted Davis, Jane Jacobs, Barry Morris, Bruce Shaw, Peter Willis and Joy Wundersitz all made particularly useful comments.

For the opportunity to present papers on my research at conferences I am indebted to Nancy Williams and the Australian Institute of Aboriginal Studies. My project also received a boost as a result of the request of the Borroloola women to take them to the Aboriginal History Conference in Darwin in October 1984.

This work also benefited from the opportunity Fay Gale gave me to teach in her third year Geography unit "Aboriginal Australia". I am grateful to the students I taught in this course for providing a critical sounding board for many of the ideas developed in this thesis.

I am particularly grateful for the help I received from all the technical staff in the Geography Department. Debbie Canty, Chris Crothers and Max Foale provided invaluable assistance preparing maps, photographs and diagrams and Errol Bamford was a constant source of computing advice. Two members of the University Computing Centre greatly aided the project. Through Andrew Trevorrow's assistance I have been able to use the  $\text{\LaTeX}$  document preparation system to produce this thesis and Bob Jones devised a DBase genealogical data base that enhanced the data management side of my work.

I owe John Bradley great thanks for his help in many areas. His anthropological and linguistic assistance has been invaluable. His assistance in the field ranged from the most practical to the most intellectual. I need to thank him in particular for his patience in answering my countless requests to check Yanyuwa spellings and his contribution to the development of the figures 5.6, 6.7 and 6.8.

Finally I wish to express my deep gratitude to Fay Gale and Beth Slatyer. This thesis would never have been completed without the perfect combination of constructive advice, and critical comment they both provided. Their wisdom and support helped in so many ways through the long years of this project.

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# Part I

## Method and Theory



# Chapter 1

## Introduction

### 1.1 Aim

This thesis examines the patterns and processes of culture contact, using as a case study the experience of an Aboriginal group from the Borroloola area of the Northern Territory of Australia. As well as elucidating past processes, the thesis demonstrates the importance of the past in shaping the present. Geography, with its dual interest in the relationship between people and the land and its emphasis on human behaviour and interaction within a spatial framework, provides an appropriate theoretical and methodological grounding for this study of human and environmental change.

A major theme of the thesis is the role that indigenous people have had in shaping the contemporary cultural landscape. Land and life, to use the expression Carl Sauer popularised, are at the broadest level the foci of this study. The thesis demonstrates the value of a humanistic approach in geography in providing a deeper understanding of the people, who are part of this land and life. The intimate linking of land and life in Aboriginal ways of perceiving the world is well illustrated by the catch phrase of the modern land rights movement, which takes Sauer's expression one step further to, "land is life". Culture contact has for Aboriginal groups involved fundamental changes in their relationships with the land. The changing relationships between people and land are therefore a central focus of the study. A recurring theme raised by this approach is the significance of contrasting European and Aboriginal land uses and attitudes towards the land.

Out of this analysis of the cultural landscape the importance of seeing the landscape

through the eyes of those who have lived with it is developed. This understanding provides important methodological, conceptual and structural underpinnings of the study. Methodologically, it leads to an approach involving detailed interviewing and recording of individual life histories. The ways different people construct the past is, similarly, an important conceptual basis of the work and some chapters are organised according to Aboriginal recognised phases of the past.

An important issue raised by trying to see the landscape through the eyes of those who lived in it, is that these different eyes have both seen different things and, even when viewing the same thing, have often perceived things differently. These differences provide a vital clue to analysing the contact process and, in turn, provide understandings that are fundamental to a truly *human* geography being achieved. Both the field work and subsequent interpretation and analysis have been guided by the insights cultural geography provides about the variations in individual ways of seeing the world. Illuminating such an approach has been an acceptance of the general common ground of humanistic geography (see Johnston 1983:52) that the researcher should have as few presuppositions as possible so that his or her views and expectations structure what is seen and experienced as little as possible.

The analysis of different world views can easily be taken too far. In terms of being an analytical tool, it is meaningless to note that to a degree at least everyone sees everything differently. What is significant is how aspects of similar experience incline certain groups of people to see things in similar ways. Some of the different group views analysed in this thesis were quickly and readily seen but others became apparent only after much field work, analysis and reflection. The broadest division that needs to be made is between European and Aboriginal people. Throughout this work examples will be examined of how these two groups see things in both different and similar ways. However, it must also be noted that within these two groups there are many internal divisions affecting how people see the world and, indeed, in some cases some of these divisions cut across the Aboriginal - European divide. For example, at times the common experience of European and Aboriginal cattle workers produced shared perspectives that transcended the usually more significant Aboriginal - European divide. Numerous examples are given of how differences of sex, age, status and occupation affect peoples' perceptions.

Two factors which are particularly relevant to Aboriginal people and which are strongly related to the theme of land being life, are the importance of places of conception and long periods of occupation. Both these factors are recurring themes in how Aboriginal people in the Borroloola area see the past, for their attachment to such places is a prime factor in Aboriginal attitudes and actions. In conjunction with this theme of land and life, a related one that also recurs throughout this study is how little Europeans have understood the importance of land to Aboriginal people.

Another aspect of humanistic geography that is utilised is the emphasis ethnological approaches (see Garfinkel 1967 and Bauman 1978) place on how people structure and make sense of their every day life. The value, however, of a broader historical perspective in this approach is demonstrated. The analysis in this thesis focuses on how individuals construct their past and how, out of many individual views, a collective understanding of the past has arisen. In this approach I develop the suggestion Jackson (1981) makes, that humanistic approaches in geography can provide important insights above the level of the individual.

The thesis also makes a methodological contribution to geography by illustrating how the use of oral sources can contribute to a more *human* geography. Oral sources must be added to written sources to document the full range of how different people see the world around them. The empirical contribution should not be neglected because the detailed oral accounts presented here document a view of the contact process which would otherwise have soon been lost forever.

## 1.2 Focus

The Aboriginal group on which this thesis concentrates is the Yanyuwa, from the Northern Territory of Australia. Most Yanyuwa today live in or near Borroloola (see figures 1.1 and 1.2). Borroloola is located about 80km inland from their traditional country, a group of islands known as the Sir Edward Pellew Group and the adjacent coastal areas of the Gulf of Carpentaria. As discussed in section 6.3 the Yanyuwa were visited by Macassan trepangers long before Europeans first came to Australia. Hence they have had a longer history of contact with non-Aboriginal people than most other Aboriginal groups and therefore are a particularly appropriate group among whom to

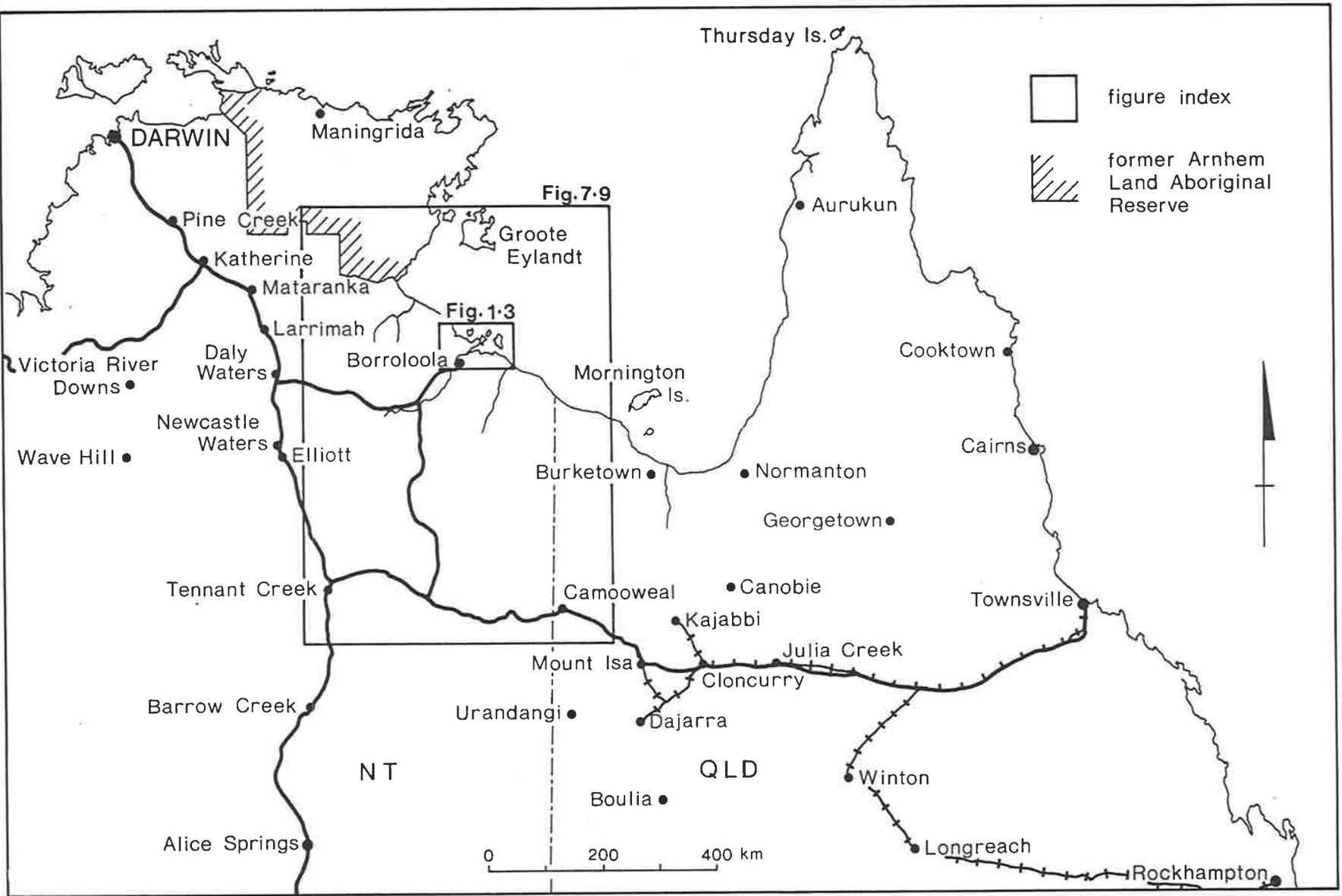


Figure 1.1: The study region



Figure 1.2: Borroloola from the air, 1984

study the patterns and processes of culture contact.

This thesis has a cultural focus on the group of people who call themselves Yanyuwa and the geographic focus of the land they have lived on. As noted below this area has changed considerably over time. It is necessary to have some flexibility in both cultural and geographic foci because the Yanyuwa have interacted with many other people and moved over a large geographic area and, indeed, as explained below, there is even flexibility as to who identifies as Yanyuwa. Nevertheless, it is useful to set the geographic focus of this study as the land that the Yanyuwa have lived on. The fact that this area has changed over time reflects the dynamic aspects of Yanyuwa response to contact.

It is important to note that my focus on the land the Yanyuwa have lived on is subtly different from the major land based division the Yanyuwa themselves make. Their division of what is 'proper country' involves land owned through the authority of the Dreaming. As is the case today, pre-contact the Yanyuwa often lived on land owned by other groups. This occurred as a result of individuals marrying into other groups and as a result of groups travelling to other areas for ceremonies or to visit relations. As highlighted in this thesis these patterns of movement into other areas have been greatly extended. As the focus of this thesis is geographic and not mythological the focus is on this land using rather than land owning area. The latter nevertheless must

be considered, as it has played an important role in shaping the Yanyuwa contact experience. It needs to be noted, for example, that not only land using but also land owning areas have changed.

Figure 1.3 illustrates the area Aboriginal people say was owned by Aboriginal groups in the Borroloola area before European contact. Three crucial points were used by most people in describing the limits of Yanyuwa country. Wardawardala on the McArthur River and the Bing Bong area are acknowledged as having marked the boundary between Wilangarra and Yanyuwa country and the junction of the Foelsche and Wearyan Rivers (close to Lurriyari Wubunjawa) marked the boundary between Garawa and Yanyuwa country.<sup>1</sup> With European contact Yanyuwa country has changed and most of the area mapped in figure 1.3 as Wilangarra country is now regarded as Yanyuwa country. Borroloola itself is now classified as Yanyuwa country although as the figure indicates this has not always been the case. As Annie Karrakayn notes<sup>2</sup> “other language properly for here now, Wilangarra little bit like Yanyuwa”.<sup>3</sup>

Yanyuwa people have developed a complex understanding of their country which, in turn, has played a fundamental role in structuring their history. This is a recurring theme of my thesis.

My focus on the Yanyuwa is one that has arisen out of my close association with the group of people who so identify themselves. The term “Yanyuwa” is one a group of people use to describe themselves. It is not strictly a language classification as the Yanyuwa have always been multilingual. What then is the nature of Yanyuwa identity? It was clear when I began my field work in 1982, that although living in a town which had many other Aboriginal groups, the Yanyuwa were still geographically very defined. The Yanyuwa lived in the Yanyuwa camp (see figure 1.7). I first had contact with Tim Rakuwurlma, a Yanyuwa man in this camp, and it is was Yanyuwa people, living in this camp, that I got to know on subsequent trips to Borroloola. Similarly on bush trips it was Yanyuwa people who showed me Yanyuwa country. The question of who are the Yanyuwa people in the Yanyuwa camp is, however, not as simple as it might

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<sup>1</sup>Garawa people in defining what was the boundary between their and Wilangarra country stress the role Kalalakinda had in marking the boundary.

<sup>2</sup>1983 Tape 19A 60 min.

<sup>3</sup>On another occasion (1987 Tape 67A 34 min.) Annie noted the similarities between the two languages by saying “Wilangarra that’s mate for that Yanyuwa”.

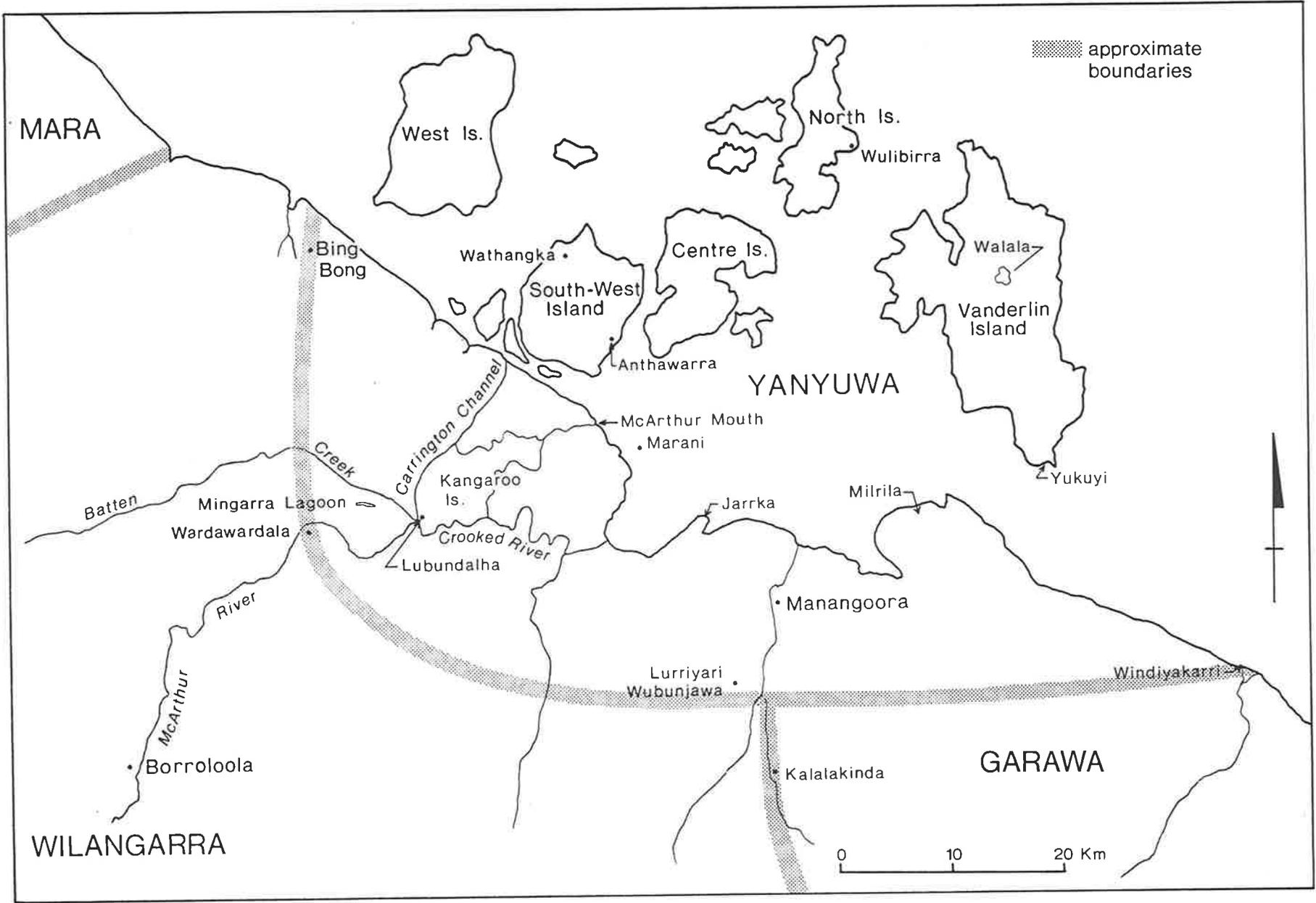


Figure 1.3: Yanjuwa 'proper country' pre-European settlement

seem.

Older individuals assert their Yanyuwa identity through their ritual links with Yanyuwa country. To them the Yanyuwa are those linked to Yanyuwa 'proper country'. Conception and birth sites on Yanyuwa land are the most important aspects of such links. Ceremonial associations with these locations link Yanyuwa people with Yanyuwa land. For younger Yanyuwa people links with Yanyuwa land are much more localised. As nearly all today's young people have been conceived in Borroloola and born in Darwin the process of individuals being specifically linked with a wide range of locations is rapidly declining. Nevertheless, Yanyuwa identity continues.

Before the Yanyuwa moved into Borroloola, marriage patterns generally involved women moving to live with their husbands. As some inter-marriage occurred with surrounding groups, some non-Yanyuwa women moved to Yanyuwa land to live on their husband's country. Children from such marriages were regarded as Yanyuwa. Once people moved into Borroloola this pattern of wives from other groups marrying into the Yanyuwa continued and the children of such marriages are usually regarded as Yanyuwa. The significance of location in defining identity is highlighted by examples of Yanyuwa men and women moving to other areas to live on their spouse's country. In such cases the children of these relationships are regarded not as Yanyuwa but as belonging to the group of the non-Yanyuwa spouse.

Another factor in who does and does not identify as Yanyuwa is the current political strength of the Yanyuwa. The fact that the Yanyuwa are the dominant Aboriginal group in Borroloola doubtless plays a role in whether husbands move into their wife's camp and whether the children of such marriages are regarded as Yanyuwa. The political nature of Yanyuwa identity is also highlighted by the fact that occasionally after disputes people will shift out of the Yanyuwa camp and align themselves with other groups. This is an option open to the inter-group married couples. Clearly then being Yanyuwa is many things: it is a self identification based primarily based on locational factors, but which is also influenced by a combination of linguistic, mythological, and political factors. To the Yanyuwa, however, it is not a contested concept, it simply involves whoever identifies as such. It is also a flexible term, as through marriage and adoption individuals can be lost to other groups while people from these other groups can also be incorporated into the Yanyuwa.

The thesis concentrates on the period when the Yanyuwa moved from bush<sup>4</sup> to town. For most Yanyuwa people, this process of 'coming in',<sup>5</sup> as they call it, occurred between 1900 and 1960 so I emphasise this period. However, as some people moved to town both before and after this half century, earlier and later decades are also considered, albeit in lesser detail. One aspect of Yanyuwa history before this period that is considered because of the way it influenced responses to subsequent contact with Europeans, is the long period of contact the Yanyuwa had with Macassans (see section 6.3). One recent process in Yanyuwa history, the outstation movement (see section 7.8.1), also needs to be considered as it provides another perspective on the earlier coming in process. As a return from town to bush, outstations represent the reverse of coming in and it is therefore revealing to study this recent trend for the light it throws on the historical process of coming in.

The description of Yanyuwa - European interactions is offered as a case study to provide a context within which broader questions of culture contact can be examined. The specific changing human - land relationships, that are part of the contact process, can be studied only through a detailed case study. In the process, however, broader issues are raised. Existing models of contact, for example, can be critically assessed against the case study. The example of the Yanyuwa demonstrates that these models are of limited value. The Yanyuwa example also throws light on the broader issue of the degree to which both local and general aspects of Aboriginal culture determined the course of different contact experiences.

The Yanyuwa case study involves the same general set of factors felt by indigenous people world wide. The arrival of Europeans has resulted in decreasing indigenous control over their land and this in turn has played a major part in the destabilisation of aspects of pre-contact life. This combination of factors in turn has led to a growing dependency on European society. Significantly in the Yanyuwa example these processes have occurred both more recently and in a shorter time scale than has usually been the case. As a result I could document from first hand accounts Yanyuwa perceptions of the contact experience. It is possible, for example, to talk to people who can remember the first permanent European residents arriving on Yanyuwa land. Such oral sources

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<sup>4</sup>"Bush" is used here and subsequently in this thesis in the Australian colloquial sense of the area away from town. As such it refers to no set vegetational type but is more of a cultural construct.

<sup>5</sup>McGrath (1987a:20) documents the use of this term elsewhere in northern Australia.

provide a major data source for this thesis.

At the same time as documenting factors that recur in indigenous history world wide, the Yanyuwa case also highlights how specific localised factors shaped the contact process. For example, for the Yanyuwa, the timing of their contact with Europeans and specific aspects of Yanyuwa culture played major roles in shaping the contact process in the area. The specific details of the Yanyuwa case study clearly *cannot* occur elsewhere. However, the principle that a complex array of local factors shaped each separate contact history *must* be applied world wide. The case study developed in this thesis needs to be seen to be operating on these two different levels. Hence this thesis, whilst highlighting local factors, also explores and develops general and recurrent processes that are relevant to the wider issues of the changing relationships of land and culture. The Yanyuwa case study is thus relevant to wider issues both by exploring general processes and highlighting specific local factors operating within these recurring processes.

The interest in past Yanyuwa relationships with their land, and past spatial aspects of Yanyuwa interaction with other Aboriginal and European groups, necessitate the consideration of understandings provided by historical geography. I conclude, however, that historical geography approaches are not particularly fruitful unless integrated with approaches from cultural geography. The work of Carl Sauer, who regarded historical and cultural geography as being inseparable, is relevant. I examine critically his concept of the "cultural landscape". While noting some inadequacies in its formulation and applications, when non-material aspects of culture are included and consideration is given to indigenous cultural landscapes, the model is very relevant to my analysis.

This is demonstrated for the field area first by looking beyond the 1900-1960 central focus of the work and outlining the cultural landscape of the Yanyuwa before European contact. Having established this as a baseline it is then possible to illustrate how Aboriginal and European cultural landscapes have interacted to produce the mosaic that makes up the current cultural landscape. Clearly, to achieve this, I need to examine both the changing relationships which the Yanyuwa have had with their environment and the broader history of which these changing relationships have been part.

Because from the Yanyuwa perspective history and land are completely intertwined and inseparable Yanyuwa explanations of what happened in the past are often based

on the land itself. While acknowledging this Yanyuwa belief, it must be noted that from a European perspective many other externally imposed factors have shaped the Yanyuwa past and external modes of analysis are equally relevant to the analysis of this Yanyuwa past.

In describing the general course of Yanyuwa contact history a great many examples of how Yanyuwa life changed as a result of Macassan and European contact are raised. At the same time, however, it is illustrated that the contact is a two way process and section 9.9 gives examples of how Europeans responded to the Yanyuwa. Existing models of contact are inadequate for a number of reasons including their lack of consideration of the two way nature of the process.

### 1.3 Contemporary Yanyuwa life

Living in this world today most of the young people are losing their culture and their fathers' ways.

The elders they try to teach them how to become a man to take over their father's law and their land.

So we young people should learn about our ways because our fathers and grandfathers will be gone.

Looking back on the past it is more difficult today because we're living in a whiteman's world now today.

Living in this world today most of the young people have lost their culture and their fathers' way.<sup>6</sup>

This song illustrates the awareness young Yanyuwa have of their people's past and how their world is changing. Like the song, this thesis examines the Yanyuwa past as a way to understand their rapidly changing present. To understand how and where the Yanyuwa are now living it is necessary to examine their history of contact with non-Aboriginal people and their culture.

Most Yanyuwa now live in the town of Borroloola. As figure 1.4 shows, in recent years Borroloola has had a rapidly growing Aboriginal population and an even faster

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<sup>6</sup>This song was written by the Borroloola rock and roll group, the Malarndarri Band, in 1980. The two last pessimistic lines were added in 1985. A recording of this song is on 1986 Tape 21B 41 min.

growing European population. in contemporary Yanyuwa life.

Year	Aboriginal			Non-Aboriginal		
	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total
1976	121	147	268	53	38	91
1981	156	160	316	73	31	104
1986	242	223	465	95	87	182

Source: Australian Bureau of Statistics.

Figure 1.4: Population of Borroloola 1971-1986

The pace of change in Borroloola during my field work there (1982-1987) seemed extraordinary. On returning from a bush trip after a day or two Aboriginal people would scan the town and play a game of "spot the change". It was almost always possible to note something new: new areas being cleared for buildings, fences, roads, light, electricity or telephone poles, television or radio receiver dishes, caravan parks, shops and schools. Since 1982, the town has almost been completely rebuilt and most Aboriginal people have made the move from one room iron huts and humpies to larger European style houses (see figures 1.5 and 1.6).

Television and radio have been introduced and the number of European tourists has probably tripled. It was a surprise, then, to come to the realisation that most Yanyuwa saw little unusual about the pace of change in recent years. This realisation, in turn, gave a powerful insight into the dramatic changes most Yanyuwa individuals had felt throughout their lives. This realisation came from collecting detailed life histories from many individuals. This process revealed how the majority of Yanyuwa adults over 50 years of age grew up in the bush in a situation which was vastly different from that in which they live today. Virtually their whole life has involved adjustment to change as dramatic as that which I observed in the last seven years.

Thus the transition, from first European settlement to the technological and leisure orientated European present which in some parts of Australia has taken two hundred years, has for the Yanyuwa occurred within individual lifespans. An understanding of



Figure 1.5: Typical old style iron hut



Figure 1.6: Typical new house

how much change has occurred within individual Yanyuwa lives, in turn, provides an important clue as to why a few specific periods of relative stability are stressed when the Yanyuwa discuss the past. Paradoxically, within these stable eras, when the Yanyuwa had a known set of relationships with non-Aboriginal people, Yanyuwa society changed considerably. While change certainly also occurred in other periods, it was during these periods of known relationships, that change was to a much greater extent on Yanyuwa terms.

Dislocation has been a major factor in Yanyuwa life since contact. Many of the families I worked with have members living elsewhere and much time and energy is spent by Yanyuwa people visiting relations. This pattern of visiting relatives is a continuation of pre-contact patterns of movement. Relations, however, are now spread over a much wider area. Considerable effort is now also spent trying to locate kin who have become lost from the Yanyuwa.

Powerlessness in the face of European authority is another important feature of contemporary Yanyuwa life. Perhaps the two most significant factors in this are the European imposed legal and educational systems. While some individuals working within these may be sensitive to Yanyuwa culture and aspirations, as systems, both are particularly insensitive to Yanyuwa wishes and concerns. The rapid turnover of teachers and policemen is a major factor in this insensitivity. Often just as individuals are getting to know the community well enough to respond to its wishes, they are transferred elsewhere.

Even those Europeans wishing to respond to local needs often find it difficult to do so because they are ultimately answerable to higher authorities in Darwin with little knowledge of the situation in Borroloola. Similarly, the initial training teachers and policemen have, provides them with little understanding of Aboriginal culture. Lacking an understanding of Aboriginal modes of communication and not knowing who are authorities within the community, Europeans often have great difficulty in both explaining things to the community and finding out things from the community. The European tendency to create Aboriginal spokesmen (it is very rarely spokeswomen) is one common response to this dilemma of not knowing whom to tell what. The fact that those chosen by Europeans are rarely those the Yanyuwa would consider appropriate, results in this technique rarely providing better communication.

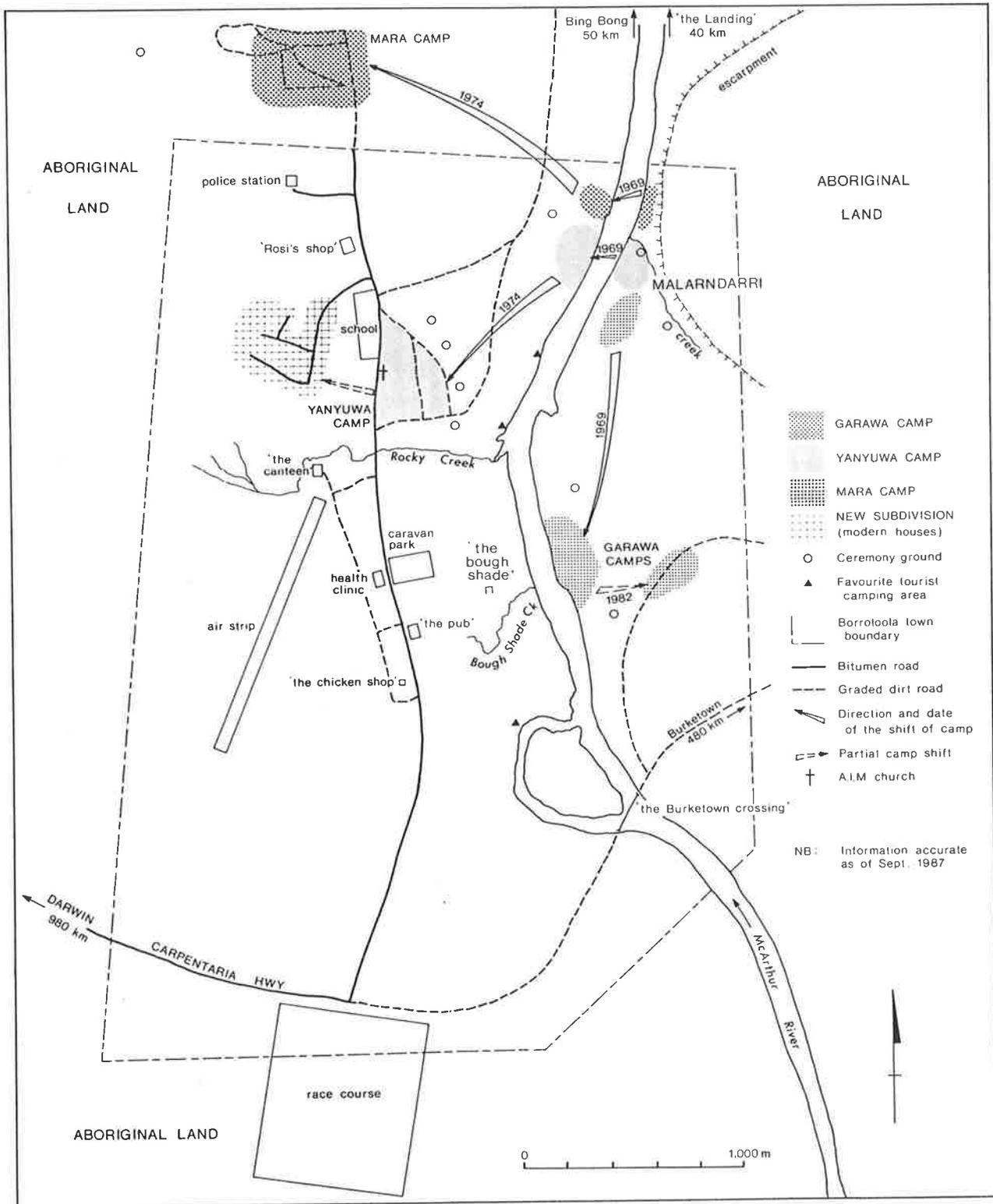


Figure 1.7: Borroloola town lay out

Another cause of Yanyuwa powerlessness is their lack of understanding of the limits of individual European authority. In the Yanyuwa world view, authority is, as it were, decentralised as each person is able to speak authoritatively about those particular locations for which they are spiritually responsible. Older Yanyuwa individuals, with very limited experience of the European world outside what they have seen in Borroloola, find it difficult to understand that Europeans in Borroloola are answerable to higher authorities elsewhere.

As well as being aware of how their lives have changed and their increasing powerlessness, the Yanyuwa are very conscious of how their land has changed. The Yanyuwa are thus aware of how both their land and life have changed and stress that the two are inextricably linked. A phrase commonly invoked by Yanyuwa people today is that "the land is getting weak". Annie Karrakayn makes this statement, for example,<sup>7</sup> and explains that it is the result of people now living in Borroloola away from their land. Once burial ceremonies were held on people's land so people could be "put back to country" and in the process the "spirit" of the person returned to the land.

Despite the changes Yanyuwa life has undergone it needs, nevertheless, to be stressed that present day Borroloola can only be understood in terms of how Aboriginal culture has influenced and continues to influence the town. Despite the town's physical appearance as purely European, it is socially still very much structured along Aboriginal lines. The three main Aboriginal language groups are spatially separate, each being located on the side of town nearest their traditional country (see figure 1.7).

Individuals of great ceremonial importance live next to ceremonial areas in attempts to maintain control over access to them. On weekends over fifty percent of Aboriginal people still go bush to get 'bush tucker', often leaving whole sections of the town deserted. Another aspect of the Aboriginality of contemporary Borroloola life is the way Aboriginal people make decisions. Large meetings are organised at which men and women sit quite separately and decisions are made by a lengthy process of consensus.

A further point that needs to be made about the contemporary Yanyuwa situation is that while often quickly adopting many aspects of European culture, the Yanyuwa use new items in distinctively Aboriginal ways. Two examples of European technology being used to continue ceremonial life illustrate this point well. In recent years Australia

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<sup>7</sup>1987 Tape 72A 43 min.

Post padded post bags have been used to send sacred objects that cannot be seen by the uninitiated. Within weeks of having access to a fax machine, the Yanyuwa used it to help organise a funeral ceremony.<sup>8</sup>

## 1.4 Thesis structure

This thesis illustrates how the interaction of Aboriginal and European culture in any one place has been more complex than most authors have credited. While Aboriginal life changed forever with the arrival of Europeans on their land, much of the change was also determined by various intrinsic aspects of Aboriginal culture. Further, it was not just Aboriginal people who responded to Europeans; Europeans also responded to contact with Aboriginal people. It needs to be noted that both Aboriginal responses to Europeans and European responses to Aboriginal people continually redefined the processes of contact. It is crucial then to be aware of the dynamic interactive nature of contact. By analysing this dynamic situation this thesis develops principles applicable to a wider scene.

These issues are developed within the following structure. Part 1 sets the theoretical and methodological parameters of the work. Part 2 outlines the physical and cultural landscape of the case study. Part 3 is a description of the contact experience in the case study area. While Yanyuwa perspectives on their past are stressed in the thesis it is also important to step back at times and adopt a purely European outlook. As the differences between these contrasting ways of looking at the world is a major theme of the thesis, many sections in this work make use of this process of stepping back and examining one perspective in the light of the other. Part 4 is an analysis of major issues raised by this particular case study of contact. Chapter 8 discusses the most important change in Yanyuwa life since contact; the move from bush to town. Chapter 9 outlines some of the major ramifications of this move. Part 5 contains the conclusions that can be drawn from the case study given.

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<sup>8</sup>Jarratt 1989 provides a journalistic account of the introduction and impact of fax machines on Aboriginal communities.

# Chapter 2

## Methodology

### 2.1 Introduction

To achieve the aims and answer the questions posed by this study it is necessary not only to integrate methods and sources from historical and cultural geography but also to do the same for a number of other fields. Chapter 4 outlines the relevance of geography to the research project and also delineates relevant aspects from three other disciplines; history, anthropology and prehistory. Section 4.2.4 illustrates how aspects of these disciplines can be drawn together within the framework of cultural-historical geography.

In this thesis both European and Aboriginal sources are used. European contacts in the area can be divided into seven broad groups: explorers, pastoralists, fishermen and trepangers, government representatives, hermits, missionaries and tourists.<sup>1</sup> As well as published accounts about or by these different groups, there is a vast quantity of relevant archival material. Particularly useful archival sources are the records of the police and Welfare Branch officers, who were at different times based at Borroloola. In both cases this material includes daily log books and voluminous correspondence between these officers and head offices in Darwin.

Aboriginal accounts of the contact experience form an important part of this thesis. My oral history research initially centred on one old man whose life spans the period from the Macassans to the present. This work gave me a good introduction to the

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<sup>1</sup>Arguably all included within the common colloquial expression for non-Aboriginal people in the Northern Territory “mercenaries, missionaries and misfits”.

community and an understanding of how to carry out oral history research. As well as using Aboriginal oral sources I interviewed a number of Europeans with experience in the Borrooloola area (biographical details of all those interviewed are in Appendix I). When quoting from taped interviews footnotes are given indicating the year of the tape recording, a tape number, the side of the tape and at what minute<sup>2</sup> on the tape the conversation comes from. Hence "1987 Tape 74B 35 min." is the 74th tape of 1987 and refers to 35 minutes from the start of side B. All tapes have been lodged with the Australian Institute of Aboriginal Studies in Canberra. In all cases except where it was necessary to protect the anonymity of the speaker, the name of the informant is included in the footnote. For Aboriginal informants a European first name plus an Aboriginal name is given except for the few individuals who are well known outside Borrooloola by their European surnames. European and Aboriginal names are cross referenced in Appendix I.

Some small quotes that are footnoted as "personal communication" were not taped but written down at the time in a note book. None of these quotes, however, exceeds a few words because without actually taping a conversation it is impossible to record it accurately beyond a few words. The practice of researchers claiming longer passages recorded in note books to be direct quotes needs to be questioned. Unless one has excellent shorthand, such passages, after a phrase or two must be described as paraphrasing.

Like written records, oral sources have to be assessed critically. Clearly not all information can be treated equally and it is particularly important to assess from what depth of knowledge someone is speaking. For example, the comments a European nurse, with midwifery experience and a long period of residency in the Borrooloola region, makes on Aboriginal birthing skills (see page 351) are likely to be more reliable than those on the same subject by a male European crocodile shooter, who has never seen a birth. Conversely the crocodile shooter is better placed to comment on Aboriginal knowledge of crocodile behaviour, particularly when he has spent a long time working with Aboriginal people shooting crocodiles.

By making use of Aboriginal sources it is possible to document a view of contact not previously recorded in the region and one that is in danger of being lost forever.

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<sup>2</sup>Such precision is made possible by using a tape player for transcribing that has a real time counter.

The approach of combining anthropological, prehistorical, historical and geographic methods and information provides a broad perspective of culture contact. This view, in turn, raises issues relevant to geographically wider considerations of culture contact.

Due to the neglect of oral sources in most research and their importance in this thesis, chapter 3 is devoted to methodological and practical considerations raised by oral sources. The emphasis placed here on methodological issues raised by using oral sources is in response to the usual neglect of such concerns and does not reflect a belief that there is something intrinsically more problematic about oral sources; similar critical appraisal needs to be used for written records. The following section gives a brief outline of some issues specifically relating to the use of written records. Most of the written records used are archival and library sources. A few items, however, such as letters sent to me and relevant pamphlets and other unpublished items have been used. These have been placed in a "Borrooloola History File" (subsequently referred to in footnotes as BHF followed by a number) and I hold a copy of this file and the originals have been lodged with the Australian Institute of Aboriginal Studies.

## 2.2 Terminology and conventions used

"Yanyuwa" is the term the Yanyuwa use to refer to themselves. There have been numerous spellings of this term. In this thesis following Kirton (1978, 1988) and Avery (1985:88) the spelling "Yanyuwa" is used. Alternative spellings include:

- Janjula (Tindale 1940, 1974 and Capell 1963).
- Anula is used by Spencer and Gillen in all their notes and publications. It is also used by patrol officer Harney<sup>3</sup> (see quote on page 217); and is also the spelling of a Darwin suburb.
- Anyula is used by Reay (1963:90). In using this term she notes that she is following Radcliffe-Brown. As Radcliffe-Brown, to my knowledge, did no field work in the area he must have relied on another source for this spelling. This spelling is also the name of a Borrooloola street name.
- Yanular (Griffin 1941).

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<sup>3</sup>Harney, however, also used the term Yanula (see his quote below on page 214).

- Leeanuwa (Stretton 1893).
- Yanyuella (*The Sunday Sun and Guardian* 25 June 1933).
- Yanyula is noted by Reay (1963:90) as a term recently introduced "by a Government Officer".

As well as spelling differences there have been alternative names given to the Yanyuwa. Tindale (1974) following Stretton (1893), gives the name Walu to the group that lived on Vanderlin Island. However, this term is not recognised by the contemporary Yanyuwa as either a language name or a name for a group of people.<sup>4</sup> People from other language groups use other terms to refer to the Yanyuwa. The Mara, for example, call them Wadiri<sup>5</sup> (Heath 1981:371). As Musso Harvey says,<sup>6</sup> "Garawa<sup>7</sup> call him Yanyula. Wadiri is Mara, call him Wadiri, that's same word".

Throughout this thesis the term "Aboriginal people" is used rather than "Aborigines". The former is the term most Aboriginal people in the Borroloola area use to refer to themselves, when discussing themselves collectively at the level above the language group. However, when talking about the past, it is more common for people to refer to themselves in terms of language groups. Hence people will say "we Yanyuwa people" or "we Garawa people". When the term "Aboriginal people" is used it refers collectively to the different Aboriginal groups now resident in the Borroloola area. Occasionally, when comparisons are made with Aboriginal people throughout Australia, this wider concept of Aboriginal people is made explicit in the text.

The term "European" is used instead of alternatives such as "white", "anglo-Australian", "euro-Australian" or "non-Aboriginal Australian". "European" is not a completely adequate term but it is used in the absence of a better one. "Non-Aboriginal-Australian" is the most accurate albeit cumbersome term, when used in a contemporary sense, but historically it is misleading as many "Europeans" in the

<sup>4</sup>It is probably the first part of the Yanyuwa term "Walunguyu" meaning the island people.

<sup>5</sup>One Yanyuwa man who has spent many years living in Mara country described himself to me as "I'm really full Wadiri" (Willy Mundumundumara 1987 Tape 39B 21 min.).

<sup>6</sup>1987 Tape 74A 20 min.

<sup>7</sup>This spelling of Garawa is used following its use by Trigger 1985b and the Summer Institute linguists the Furbys. Other linguists, however, prefer the spelling Garrwa (Louise Hercus: personal communication).

Borroloola area last century would have regarded themselves as British and not Australian. Most older Yanyuwa people use the term "whitefella" whereas many younger people use "European".

A final term that needs defining is "contact". I use it as a short hand for "contact between the Yanyuwa and non-Aboriginal people". Contact, hence, refers to a process of interaction between people who had not previously met. On occasions I use the term "contact" in an Australia-wide sense. More often, however, it is specifically defined in terms of the Yanyuwa and it needs to be stressed that it is for them an on going process. Because of the long period of contact with the Macassans (see section 6.3) the term pre-contact used in other areas of Australia is ambiguous when used about the Yanyuwa. Hence it is necessary to use the respective terms "pre-Macassan contact" and "pre-European contact".

When using Yanyuwa terms, either in the text or in quotations, they appear in *italics*. The spellings of Yanyuwa terms is based on the draft dictionary (Summer Institute 1984) Jean Kirton has prepared. Terms that have distinct Aboriginal English usages are introduced the first time they appear in single quotation marks and subsequently are used in the text without any quotation marks. In a few cases, however, when the subsequent usage may be ambiguous single quotation marks are used again to indicate the Aboriginal sense. Such terms also appear in single quotation marks if they appear in the table of contents or in section headings. The meanings of Yanyuwa and Aboriginal English terms used are listed in Appendix A. Double quotation marks are used in the text only for quotations and in defining specific terms. One specific Aboriginal English convention needs to be noted here. Aboriginal people in the Borroloola area when speaking in English often use the term "he" to refer to male and female alike. Such usage reflects the grammars of their own languages.

Sources referred to in the text fall into four categories: tape recordings I have made, newspaper articles, reports, and publications. The differing nature of these sources necessitates two separate referencing systems. The first two categories are referenced by footnotes while the latter two categories are referenced by using the Harvard system of year and page references in the text and a bibliographic entry.

### 2.3 Assessing written records

The discussion of culture contact in this thesis is based in part on the records various Europeans made. A major agent for change in the Borrooloola region is a major source for information on that change. One must consider the problems this situation introduces. For example, it is important to note that many early written records come from Europeans who had a vision that the "unused land" of Australia had to be "opened up" and such attitudes greatly influenced how Europeans wrote about Aboriginal people and their relationships with the land. Some understanding of the attitudes, ways of seeing things, biases and motives of each European recorder is obviously necessary in the evaluation of written records. The researcher must constantly make evaluations of such data. For example, when examining the records of land based explorers, it is important to realise that they are more likely to be sensitive recorders of the available Aboriginal food resources than many others, as these explorers were often dependent on these resources themselves.<sup>8</sup> In contrast, marine explorers with their knowledge of watercraft and the sea provide the most reliable accounts of the capabilities of Aboriginal watercraft. When examining any sources then, be they police, government, or missionary records, the particular viewpoint of each needs to be understood.

As well as being aware of variations in the value of records made by different individuals, it is important also to be conscious of the fact that perceptions of individuals can vary over time. A good example of this comes from the work of the two anthropologists, Baldwin Spencer and Frank Gillen, who completed their transcontinental expedition at Borrooloola in the hot and humid build up season. Their rapid intellectual decline is vividly documented in Spencer's diary.<sup>9</sup> The initial intellectual excitement of working with a new group of Aboriginal people waned and became lethargic despair in the oppressive tropical heat and humidity of Borrooloola in November and December. It also appears that being stranded in Borrooloola was a very anti-climactic end to their epic trip. Until they reached Borrooloola, they had carried out impressive research all the way but the standard of their work rapidly declined in Borrooloola. On arriving on 3 November 1901 Spencer notes "we ought to get some good stuff out of them" (1901:89)

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<sup>8</sup>The detailed descriptions of Aboriginal food resources made by Leichhardt when he passed through the area in 1844 are a good case in point.

<sup>9</sup>W.B. Spencer Diary 1901 No. 4 held by the National Museum of Victoria. Referred to subsequently as Spencer 1901.

but by 24 November 1901 Spencer gave up his daily diary entry with the comment “we have learnt from these natives pretty well all that we can that is of any great significance”. His dispatch for 5-17 December reads: “I have not written anything in this diary since sending this last batch to you because one day has been so much like another that there is really nothing to write about” (1901:127). On 20 December he notes that it was 109<sup>0</sup>F “in the shade and this [is] not a dry but a damp heat. It is simply impossible to do anything” (1901:132). The year concludes with the comment on 31 December: “we hope more still never to spend another New Year’s Eve in such a forsaken spot as Borroloola” (1901:146).

This example illustrates that what is recorded depends not only on the training and experience of the researcher but also on his or her state of mind at the time of the research. There is, therefore, a need to be aware not only of general biases in a researcher’s work but also of the particular history of the research and how this might have influenced what is recorded. In this regard the researcher using oral sources has a decided advantage over those using written sources, for he or she is in a position both to ask the informant about such matters and to assess them from meeting that person. In contrast, to assess biases in written sources one often has to read between the lines.

It is also important to compare the oral record with the written record. Throughout this thesis examples are given of how oral and written accounts of the past differ. Since European accounts of the past are predominantly written and Aboriginal ones are mostly oral, the differences between these two sources has obvious ramifications for research on contact between Aboriginal people and Europeans. A good example of such contrasts between written and oral sources is given in the different picture these two sources present of a Yanyuwa man called Donegan. While the police journal of the 1930s portrays him as a loyal tracker,<sup>10</sup> stories I have collected from the Yanyuwa show that, in fact, he was far from this but Europeans did not know due to the subtlety of his technique. I have been told, for example, how he assisted his relatives, when out bush on patrol, by yelling out in Yanyuwa to people to run away from the policeman, when the policeman was “proper cheeky”<sup>11</sup> and, on one occasion, he arranged in ‘language’

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<sup>10</sup>Tracker is a general term used for Aboriginal police assistants. The work they did was never just tracking but included domestic chores such as gathering and chopping fire wood. Current police aides are often still called trackers even though most of them have never been required to actually track anyone.

<sup>11</sup>The term the Yanyuwa use for someone who is a particularly violent mood.

with a group of prisoners to drown a policeman.<sup>12</sup> If Aboriginal oral sources had not been consulted this and numerous other examples of Aboriginal responses to contact would not have been recorded.

The example of Donegan is also a good one to illustrate why Europeans have not been aware of many aspects of Aboriginal responses to contact. In this case and many others Aboriginal people had a strong interest in Europeans not knowing what they were doing. As many of the processes of contact involved making sure the authorities—who inevitably are the ones who make written records that have survived—did not know what was going on, oral sources must be used to check the written accounts. Europeans too have had an interest in authorities not knowing what was going on. In particular, there are dramatic differences between written and oral accounts of illegal activities such as cattle stealing and cohabitation<sup>13</sup> with Aboriginal women. Details of the legendary cattle duffing<sup>14</sup> feats of the area are not found in police records or indeed in the books written by one of those involved, Bill Harney. The stories of these incidents, however, are well known in the area. Similarly it is necessary to consult oral sources to find out about many of the details of cohabitation and techniques European men had for sneaking into the Aboriginal camps (see page 344 for examples).

Cohabitation illustrates very well how the written record may be inaccurate as a result of people deliberately misleading the authorities.<sup>15</sup> As part of my research, I went through the lists of Aboriginal families that are contained in Welfare Branch reports. When checking the married couples on one cattle station with a group of Yanyuwa women, I was told that one listed marriage was fictitious. They also provided an explanation for this “mistake” when they pointed out that the woman in question actually lived with the white boss. As it is likely that the welfare patrol officer recorded all his information with the help of the European boss, it is easy to see how a relationship could have been invented to hide the illegal one.

Another example of how the written record can be misleading due to deliberately

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<sup>12</sup>1987 Tape 69B 28 min.

<sup>13</sup>A term for relationships between European men and Aboriginal women. Cohabitation was for a long time a criminal offence in the Northern Territory.

<sup>14</sup>Colloquialism for cattle stealing.

<sup>15</sup>See Frawley (1987a:52) work on the North Queensland agricultural frontier for further examples of the “difference between how the official record ‘says things are done’ and ‘how they are really done’”.

wrong information comes from the Borrooloola police records.<sup>16</sup> A letter of 17 June 1889 reports the murder of two renowned European horse stealers by "blacks". However, a later account<sup>17</sup> reported that the horse thieves had been seen in Western Australia and concluded that they "prompted the blacks to make the statement that they had murdered" them. It is likely that this technique of avoiding pursuit by the European law by fabricating one's own death was used on other occasions and was not detected by the police.

Individuals mislead authorities, but authorities also mislead individuals. A good case study of this comes from Goodall's (1987:22) work in which she explores the differences between what the written records describe and what the Aboriginal people in New South Wales say were their legal rights late last century and early this century. She shows that, while in theory Aboriginal people could own land and vote, in practice they could not and that the authorities at the time had an interest in these theoretical rights being publicised and the written record that has been preserved perpetuates the fiction of these "rights".

The examples given in this section, illustrate a point that is further highlighted elsewhere in this thesis. Written records alone provide but part of the story of culture contact. In this work by making great use of oral sources I provide an example of a methodology that provides a fuller and deeper appreciation of the complexities of the culture contact process.

## 2.4 Field work

### 2.4.1 Introduction

In addition to archival and library study, this thesis is based on a total of ten months' fieldwork carried out in April 1982, June-July 1982, November 1982, April 1983, July-August 1983, December-January 1983-1984, April 1984, September-November 1984, June-August 1986, and June-September 1987. I have worked in the area at different times of the year and this allows me to give the view of seasonal environmental changes discussed in chapters 5 and 6. The long term contact with the community has also

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<sup>16</sup>Northern Territory Archives, F275, Borrooloola Police Letter Book.

<sup>17</sup>Ibid: 16 August 1889.

allowed me to see social changes that have occurred within this period. I have had extensive contact with Borroloola people outside the area. Many visited me while I was living in Darwin, during 1982-1984, in Canberra, during 1984-1986, and in Adelaide, during 1986-1989. This has enabled me while out of the field to keep in touch with the activities of the community and also to clarify points and, at times, to do detailed interviews with people. Appendix I gives a list of all people interviewed with details of when and where these discussions took place. While most of my contact in Borroloola has been with older people, in the cities my contact has generally been with younger people.

It should be noted that from the beginning my research has made use of two field methods.

1. *Observation*: As far as possible, I tried to be a participant observer. Although my presence did perhaps influence people's actions to a degree, I attempted to limit this influence by trying to be sensitive to Yanyuwa social conventions. At other times, however, what I have observed has been in part a result of my own actions. For example, because on all but one field trip I had a four wheel drive Toyota, I have been responsible for taking people to places they currently cannot often go. Similarly, in 1987, I documented a dugout canoe being constructed, after helping to initiate the project by negotiating between the community and the National Maritime Museum, which commissioned the construction of the canoe.
2. *Interviews*: I have used both structured and unstructured techniques to collect information from both people in the Borroloola area and those Europeans I managed to locate who once lived in the area. Appendix G is a copy of a question/prompt sheet that I used to assist my questioning and recording of information from Aboriginal informants.

I constantly moved between these different types of research as one category was always raising new issues best explored by another research category. In practice there is usually a continuum between being a recorder and an actor. Observation, for example, often proved a fruitful way of both checking—or perhaps more accurately, slowly coming to understand—what I had already been told and for raising questions to ask about things I had not previously been told about. A good example of this was “the big

fight"<sup>18</sup> I saw in 1987. It was only by seeing this that I could understand much of what I had already been told about ritual fighting and public dispute settlement. By witnessing this event I also had many new questions to ask of informants that provided further insights into fights and disputes. Another example of the value of participant observation came in 1986 when I had no transport and relied on outstation Toyotas to go bush. When one young man took the car without permission and returned to town, we were all stranded at an outstation and had to rely totally on bush tucker. Such an experience gave me the opportunity to learn a great deal about bush tucker and to gain personal insights into how one felt in these circumstances.

This thesis is based very soundly on field observations and it was surprising to find that the geographic literature has been most notable for its lack of consideration of the practicalities of field work. A notable exception is Rowles's (1978) revealing self-criticism of his experiential fieldwork. In this he demonstrates the value of a "humanistic geography" that (1978:173) "seeks to move beyond conventional participant observation". It is only in recent years, as Jackson and Smith (1984:93) point out, that participant observation appears to have been discovered by geographers. This is despite a long history of its use in disciplines such as urban sociology and social anthropology.

There is considerable scope for geography to develop further the use of such techniques. It is important, however, that such borrowing of techniques from other disciplines should go hand in hand with taking heed of methodological warnings which other disciplines have sounded about the use of such techniques. There is, in particular, a need to be self conscious in one's methods and to be constantly aware of one's role and how it might be influencing informants and, therefore, the research. There is a tension between the possible and the desirable, between seeing a society from the inside and being an impartial outsider observer. A researcher dealing with a different culture can never see the other society either purely as an insider nor, indeed, as an impartial outsider but is always somewhere in between. Such awareness is necessary both during field work and during subsequent interpretation of information.

Geographical research also can profit from a consideration of ethical concerns other disciplines have raised. Mitchell and Draper (1982) present one of the few geographic studies of ethical issues and by drawing upon the experience of other disciplines analyse

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<sup>18</sup>This was a dispute that gradually escalated until it was resolved in a confrontation in the camp involving over 150 people.

the ethics of field methods such as participant observation (1982:76-89).

### 2.4.2 First Informants

My first contact with the Borroloola community was the result of an archaeological survey I carried out for the Northern Territory Museum of Macassan sites on the Sir Edward Pellew Group. Within an hour of arriving in Borroloola, I had been introduced to Tim Rakuwurlma and was listening to his accounts of what he could remember of the Macassan visits. It was an exciting introduction to oral history.

Tim gave me details of the Macassan contact with his country that I could never have deduced from the archaeological record. I also heard how, as a teenager, he had started work for a European trepanger on whose boat he travelled widely. Subsequently I learnt much about these travels, in which Tim had gone as far afield as New Guinea, Darwin and Townsville. I came to realise that Tim's knowledge of the world played a part in the high esteem in which he is held by the community. Tim also had seen the arrival of missionaries in the area and lived through the era of the Northern Territory Government Welfare Branch. His life spans the transition from bush living to the present township life of Aboriginal people in the area. The processes involved are issues I had previously read about and considered on a theoretical level. Here, however, was the opportunity to learn about such moves by asking someone who had directly experienced them.

Through my continuing oral history work with Tim, I was able to locate Macassan sites and Aboriginal art and occupation sites. Further, I obtained from Tim and others, details on what happened at many of the Aboriginal occupation sites. For example, I collected information about the places where people used to camp in different seasons and then I visited a number of these sites and recorded archaeological details. This gave me opportunities to compare what archaeology could reveal about a site and what its users could remember about their activities there. The contrasts in what these two sources could show about the past and, in particular, how little the archaeological record revealed, were sobering to one who had been initially trained as a prehistorian.

A particularly salutary warning of the dangers of archaeological work that does not document indigenous knowledge came when I asked Tim about a number of large rockshelters I was shown by his son on Vanderlin Island. There was considerable ar-

archaeological debris in these sites and, as there was the suggestion of deep well stratified deposits, they are the kind of sites prehistorians would excavate to gain information on the prehistory of the area. When I asked Tim how often people had lived in such rockshelters, he told me that they were only used for a day or so a year when there was particularly heavy rain. Tim explained that this was not only the case when he was living on the island but that his father and grandfather had both told him this was so when they were young. An archaeological reconstruction of Yanyuwa life from the evidence left behind in such shelters would therefore be a particularly misleading view of Yanyuwa life. The pre-European contact beachside lifestyle of the Yanyuwa imposes further limitations on archaeological research on the Yanyuwa past. As described on page 161, Yanyuwa life prior to the arrival of Europeans in the area was very much marine based with people nearly always camping on the beach. While it is possible to reconstruct this beachside way of life from oral history sources, it is not possible to do so from the archaeological record. Evidence of old camps left on beaches are extremely unlikely to be preserved for any length of time due to the reworking of sediment that occurs on beaches by wind and wave action and human trampling.<sup>19</sup>

My work with Tim would typically take the form of talking about matters in town for a few days and then going camping out in the bush, usually at weekends so school children and their mothers could accompany us. As Tim is crippled he was unable to move away from where we established camp. While the others went hunting and gathering we would talk usually about incidents that had occurred in the vicinity. When Tim rested, I was able to join the others getting bush tucker. Details in chapter 6 on Yanyuwa land use are based largely on the observations made during such bush tucker trips as well as my subsequent questioning.

Further insight into the power of oral sources came from working on recording Macassan trepanging camp sites<sup>20</sup> with a former Yanyuwa trepanger, Steve Johnson.<sup>21</sup> His detailed knowledge of trepanging and of the environment illustrated to me the value of seeing history through the perspective of Aboriginal knowledge of the area. At a particularly impressive Macassan site, with many rows of stone lines where trepang

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<sup>19</sup>Anderson and Robins (1988) document this from their ethnoarchaeological work.

<sup>20</sup>The Macassans and trepanging are discussed in more detail in section 6.3.

<sup>21</sup>See page 494 for details of Steve's life long association with Vanderlin Island.

was once boiled up Steve remarked, "if only we could turn back the years what a sight we would see". He then went on to reconstruct where the Macassan praus would have been anchored, where the best nearby trepang grounds were, how many dugout canoes would have been beached in the man-made clearing through the rocks in front of us and how the broken bits of pottery scattered about the beach dune we were sitting on would have once been pots used to prepare dinner and to carry water from a nearby well located behind the grove of tamarinds we sat under. This knowledge that Steve and other Yanyuwa people have of their past and their land owes much to the oral traditions that pass on details of the history of the area and an incredible wealth of information about the local environment.

### 2.4.3 The extension to the community

As I have indicated with the examples above, indigenous knowledge has much to teach prehistory. This thesis demonstrates that geography can benefit in a similar way. A cultural geography informed by indigenous sources needs to go further than the ethnoarchaeological methods outlined above. Geography is concerned with complex issues of the relations between people and land over time. This section examines how I broadened my research perspective from asking two informants about what happened at specific sites to that of a geographical study recording the views of 123 informants on their land and past.<sup>22</sup>

This thesis sets out to achieve, among other things, a broad community view of how the Yanyuwa see the history of their contact with Macassans and Europeans. In order to develop such a study I worked with as many members of the Yanyuwa community as possible. To do this, I made sure that in the 1986 and 1987 field seasons I worked with every Yanyuwa person over 40 years of age<sup>23</sup> who was in the Borroloola area. For other language groups it was not possible to do such a total survey but I interviewed as many different people as possible and attempted to make this sample representative in terms of age and sex.

Such a methodology builds upon the historical methods of collective biography.

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<sup>22</sup>Biographical details of these 97 Aboriginal people and 26 Europeans are recorded in Appendix I.

<sup>23</sup>I also worked with many younger people but my focus on the period 1900-1960 led me to making sure I worked with everyone over 40 years old.

Stone (1971:107) claims that collective biography (also known as prosopography) has since about 1930 “developed into one of the most valuable and most familiar techniques of the research historian”. Stone goes on (*ibid*) to summarise the method of such research as defining the group to be studied and “then to ask a set of uniform questions” of the written records available on and by these people. In essence this is what I did in the field with the question/prompt sheet (see Appendix G). However, as I was working with people and not old written records I could go further than most historians have with these particular methods. Many of the questions I asked, for example, prompted long conversations on particular subjects.

An important milestone in my contact with the community occurred when I was assigned a ‘skin’ which enabled me to become a part of their kinship system. This occurred on my third visit to Borroloola. I became the ‘son’ of Roddy Harvey and from this followed my relationship with everyone else. The fact I was Roddy’s son intrigued me as, at that stage, I had had only minimal contact with her. Subsequently I have found out that I was her son due to her close relationship with her uncle, Tim Rakuwurlma. The links I had established with Tim in turn linked me with her. My relationship and my obligations to every member of the community were hence well defined.

My role as a driver further linked me into this pattern of kinship and obligation and helped to develop my role as a participant observer. Because there were few vehicles that worked and women rarely had access to them my vehicle became a valuable resource. Often, literally within minutes of my arrival in Borroloola, people would make suggestions about where I could take people. Thus I was able to exchange my driving for the time people spent helping me with my research. Even during the field season when I did not have a vehicle my services as a driver were often called upon by people who had cars but either did not have a licence or the time to drive others around.<sup>24</sup> In 1987 there was an even more marked shortage of vehicles than previously. A number of outstation Toyotas provided in late 1983 had reached the end of their operational lives. A number of outstations had become unviable as a result and I became a major contributor to transport to several of them. I also entered the local exchange system through gifts. Such “presents” were seen, I think not so much as payment, but more

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<sup>24</sup>It was women who owned cars and did not have licenses while it was men who were often too busy to drive their own cars.

as an exchange that brought me further into the local kinship network. I was “given stories” and in exchange I gave Tim what he requested I bring back on the next trip.<sup>25</sup> I also found myself being a resource on the ways of European Australians. Among other things, I was asked to explain things as diverse as the origin of World War Two, the meaning of the term “worship”, the reasons for Europeans coming to Australia and for shooting Aboriginal people once they got here, whether Europeans get jealous over spouses and how fertility drugs work.

My progress from informant to informant was usually made through those I had already worked with and got to know well, who referred me (and often physically took me) to others who could tell me more on particular issues. The physical openness of the Yanyuwa camp meant that everyone soon knew me by sight and had some idea of my research methods. My role as a driver for Tim also made me obvious to the community as it led to my attendance at a number of ceremonies and public discussions. When people started approaching me saying they wanted to tell me stories about their (or their ancestors’) past, it became obvious that through word of mouth most Yanyuwa were aware of my research interest.<sup>26</sup>

It, however, must be acknowledged that my initial work with Tim clearly influenced how other people related to me. Many people, when asked questions, answered like Jerry Rrawajinda<sup>27</sup> saying that because of the time I had spent with Tim, “you ought to know”. Often I did not know and was being attributed more knowledge than I had. In other cases, when I did know what Tim thought about a subject, I was often interested in what others thought but often learnt little about this due to my association with Tim. For instance, when I asked Pyro<sup>28</sup> about stories of the ‘old days’<sup>29</sup> he declined

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<sup>25</sup>Items requested included ropes to hunt dugong, mosquito nets, blankets, tree seedlings and knives. Purchased presents, however, have gone two ways. One day, a parcel of new Toyota car lights mysteriously appeared at the back door of the Northern Territory Museum with my name on them. I did not know this origin until my next visit to Borroloola, when Tim asked if I had received the parcel he had instructed a relative visiting Darwin to give me.

<sup>26</sup>Most of the recorded interviews were set up beforehand, by asking people if I could come back later to talk to them about the old days. Assisting me in my task of explaining my work was the fact that my reputation, as someone interested in olden time stories, often preceded me. My requests for stories earned me the name *nya-wukamara* literally “the one desiring the word”.

<sup>27</sup>1987 Tape 13A 40 min.

<sup>28</sup>1987 Tape 63B 15 min.

<sup>29</sup>“Olden times” or “old days” are the two terms the Yanyuwa use when speaking in English to denote the past.

to say anything except, "Tim can tell you". On another occasion, I was told by a third party how much Amy Bajamalanya knew about the times her father spent trepaning with Tim, but when I asked her about them, she would not talk about this as Tim knew more and she told me,<sup>30</sup> "I might tell you lie". A combination of factors is working here. One is the ownership of stories, mentioned below (page 73) and, on top of this, is the fact that Tim's seniority gave people extra respect for him and his stories.

My links with Tim also at times influenced how people described things to me. In many conversations, Tim was used as a reference point for the community's history (see, for example, Annie Karrakayn's quote on page 281 and Steve Johnson's quote on page 291).<sup>31</sup> Such references to Tim, no doubt, are partly the result of his great age and authority but they also appear to be an acknowledgement of my association with him.

#### 2.4.4 Tape recording

The move from using archaeological sources to study the past to oral sources to study both the past and the present required a careful assessment of techniques. The most immediate problem was how to collect the wide range of different views people had on their land and their past. Tape recording conversations provided the obvious answer to this question. Recordings provided the opportunity for conversations to be assessed as spoken and later reassessed when, with the aid of more knowledge and the time for reflection, further meanings often emerged in what was said. Making tape recordings, however, introduced a major problem in how to process, store and index the mass of information one accumulates. As Ramsøy and Clausen (1977:1) so succinctly note,

our capacity for collecting and processing rich and detailed information on sequences of events in the lives of persons, has outstripped available concepts and theories for organising, synthesising and understanding these vast data assemblages.

An essential task of this research has, therefore, been to develop ways of making this mass of information manageable. A key to this has been the development of an index

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<sup>30</sup>1987 Tape 55A 3 min.

<sup>31</sup>During the Borroloola land claim proceedings (Australian Aboriginal Lands Commissioner 1977:1327) Tim was similarly used by Europeans as a reference point in discussions on the past.



Photographer Beth Slatyer

Figure 2.1: Dinny Nyliba being interviewed, 1987

of informants, of topics, and on which tape they appear. I have also compiled indexes of subject matter and people. Accessing information was also greatly aided by typing sections of the transcripts into a word processor. With the aid of an editing program it was then possible to search for key words. All mentions of particular places, persons or important phrases could be located in this way.<sup>32</sup> A computer database using the DBase 3 program, (see Appendix H for samples of the information stored) greatly aided the retrieval, searching and sorting of this mass of biographic details.

Because I have recorded conversations from my first contact with the community, I have been able to reassess many tapes. While it is certainly embarrassing to listen now to how much of the Aboriginal English and Yanyuwa I did not understand on these early tapes, this system has great advantages. It gives me the opportunity to listen to the tapes later and with the benefit of more understanding of the Yanyuwa and Aboriginal English languages and also of local history, geography and culture, I am able to get much more out of these conversations than I did originally. This is particularly important when the informants have subsequently died. Having early

<sup>32</sup>For example, every use of the term “rounded up” (see section 8.3.4) could be readily located.

tapes from people whom I subsequently got to know better and who became more at ease talking with me, also made it very apparent that I got more information as I got to know people better.

Listening to recorded tapes also occasionally provided surprising discoveries about what people were saying beyond those I interviewed. It was, for example, only when I listened to a recording<sup>33</sup> I made on an outstation of a couple describing how good the cattle days were, that I heard what their children were doing in the background. At the time of the interview I was too intently listening to their parents to hear that they were playing a game of what they would order from the take-away shop as soon as they got back to Borroloola.

Initially tapes were transcribed verbatim. This proved, however, to be too time consuming and not necessarily helpful, so I developed a process of transcribing selected sections and summarising briefly those sections not transcribed on cards. To keep track of both these notes and the transcripts, I used a system of cross referencing by subject, incidents and person.

I have attempted to keep my transcriptions as close to the verbal original as possible. To do otherwise would be moving towards turning their words into my words. Nevertheless, I have made some changes. "Ums" and "you know what I mean" have been left out, as have corrections people made as they went along. Hence, if someone starts with details, which they have then corrected themselves, I have typed up only the self-corrected version. I have also usually edited out words referring to me, hence kinship terms addressed to me, "mate" and "Richard" are deleted. Information I have added to explain quotes is in square brackets. Where people are quoting others within a quote, the new quote is indicated by starting the line with the name of the person being quoted in **bold** (see page 149 for an example). When a number of individuals are speaking, I have marked the new speakers by starting a new line with their names in **bold**.

A tape recorder was nothing new to Aboriginal people in Borroloola. Recorders are often used to tape sections of ceremonies and quite commonly in the evening people on outstations replay such tapes as fireside entertainment. Familiarity with tape recording resulted in many tape recording sessions being punctuated by requests for

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<sup>33</sup>1986 Tape 12A 42 min.

rewinding and listening. As well as being a form of entertainment, this rewinding was also sometimes clearly a form of checking on what was being recorded. Many of the people I have worked with were also involved in the making of the film *Two Laws*<sup>34</sup> and had therefore had a lot to do with recording equipment before.

### 2.4.5 Use of photographs

As part of my research I have located collections of photographs portraying life in the Borroloola area. Most of these were in the personal collections of Europeans who had spent time in the area. I have had copies made of these photographs and taken them to Borroloola to document them. This has proved a most productive way of eliciting information that I would not have been able to collect otherwise. Old photographs have an effect of prompting the memory similar to that of visiting old camps (see section 3.3.5). Details of the major photographic collections I documented are listed in Appendix B.

In 1987 I returned to the field with two large photographic albums of historic photographs from the area plus copies of some of these photographs to give to people as presents. The albums generated much interest and I heard myself referred to as "the man with the pictures". People I had not met previously approached me to see them. As well as serving as an introduction to people, they proved a useful way of getting informants to think further about the past. A look through them became a standard start to many interviews. In 1987 I also returned to the field with a video copy of a film made at and around Borroloola in the early 1950s. Like the still photographs, it proved to be a good method of starting up conversations about the past.<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>34</sup>This film is discussed by the film makers in Cavadini et al 1981 and an analysis of the film is in Jennings and Hollinsworth 1988.

<sup>35</sup>A commentary (BHF 5) of this film (which has no sound track or title) was made by recording comments from Aboriginal people in Borroloola and has been added to the documentation of the film held by the South Australian Museum. The film-maker was Roy Vyse and his note book for this trip is held by the South Australian Museum, archives accession number 1676 "Diary of trip to Borroloola July 1954".

## 2.5 Yanyuwa support for my research

My research was spurred along by the realisation that continuation of much of the knowledge of the past was by no means certain. Many older Yanyuwa are conscious of this and were therefore keen for me to record their memories of the past. The impact of European culture and, in particular, the inflexible demands of European schooling have led to a great deal of loss of knowledge of the past. Living in town, away from the country they used to inhabit, has had dramatic effects on the passing on of traditional Yanyuwa knowledge. This point was brought home to me on my first site recording trip to the islands. I made the trip with a father and son, the older man showing me around knew a great deal about the Macassan visits, from having visited the sites and talking to old people such as Tim Rakuwurlma. His son, however, was quite bemused by the whole exercise as he had never heard of the Macassans nor visited their old camp sites.

Five years later, when Eileen Yakibijna was telling me about how she worked collecting trepang in her youth on Vanderlin Island for Steve Johnson (senior), her daughter, Isa, exclaimed,<sup>36</sup> "What's that tharriba<sup>37</sup> that's the first time [I have heard] that word". From doing detailed work with Tim Rakuwurlma and two of his sons and getting to know two of his grandsons well, while they lived in Adelaide, I have also been able to document many examples of stories not being passed on. Neither of Tim's grandsons, for example, knew of the story about their great-grandfather making the first Yanyuwa dugout canoe (see page 149).

During the 1987 fieldwork, I checked transcripts from previous discussions with the individuals involved. This enabled me to correct or confirm many details and gave me a launching point for further discussion. I also gave three literate people sections of transcripts I had typed up from early fieldwork. All three eventually read the entire hundred pages and gave me valuable comments. Such feedback in itself was most valuable but there was an even greater and unexpected benefit from this process. Whereas I had previously attempted to explain that I was interested in the history of Aboriginal people in the area and that I was writing a book about it, physical

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<sup>36</sup>1987 Tape 62B 25 min.

<sup>37</sup>The Yanyuwa term for trepang which is clearly derived from the Malay and now Indonesian word *teripang* (see Macknight 1976:6).

evidence of this seemed to spur on people's interest. Subsequently a number of people approached me to tell me they had "stories to go in that book".

The people who had most understanding of what I was trying to achieve were a group of women who have gone to great lengths to explain their culture to non-Aboriginal Australians. Through conferences<sup>38</sup> and dance festivals they have travelled widely and developed an understanding of the ignorance of most Australians about Aboriginal people. In turn they have developed a commitment to educate interested non-Aboriginal people about their culture, in an attempt to develop wider respect for it. I was most fortunate in fitting into this category of people interested in learning and I gained invaluable assistance in my research from these women.<sup>39</sup> They formed a core support group for my research, giving their time generously. They often assisted further by explaining to other people in great length what I was trying to do. Annie Karrakayn, for example, often made comments to other Aboriginal people like the following:<sup>40</sup> "he got to put him along tape, Canberra<sup>41</sup> got to hear him".

On one of my last day's field work in Borroloola, Eileen Yakibijna made the following telling remark about the need for Europeans to understand Yanyuwa history as it really was. She was translating for her mother who was telling me about the wild times (her translation is on page 202) and after recounting a particularly gruesome atrocity committed by Europeans in the area, commented on how such information was not in books "but they don't read book that way". Clearly teaching me things 'straight' is part of Eileen's vision of increasing the understanding Europeans have about her people's culture and history. I hope my research fulfils some of her vision.

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<sup>38</sup>This group of Borroloola women attended a conference on Aboriginal women in Adelaide in 1980. The publication, arising out of this meeting (Gale 1983), "We are bosses ourselves", gets its name from a quote from one of the most prominent of these Borroloola women, Eileen Yakibijna.

<sup>39</sup>Kirton, another researcher in the area (1988:15) comments on the same group of women and their attempts to maintain language and ceremony in the community.

<sup>40</sup>1987 Tape 34B 13 min.

<sup>41</sup>Annie refers to Canberra because in 1984 I drove her and her husband, Isaac Walayungkuma, from Borroloola to Canberra and amongst other things showed them around the Australian Institute of Aboriginal Studies and explained how all my tapes were kept there for safe keeping and for interested people to listen to.

# Chapter 3

## Oral Sources

Oral materials share with written sources the quality of being prisms on the past rather than windows (Henige 1982:5).

### 3.1 Introduction

This thesis relies heavily on oral accounts by the Yanyuwa outlining their past. Such sources provide a vital counterbalance to some of the inadequacies that, as I outlined above, are inherent in the written record of culture contact. Because such sources have so rarely been used in geography, it is necessary to examine the practical and methodological considerations such an approach introduces. Due to the recent upsurge in the use of oral sources in history, the subsequent analysis relies heavily on issues raised by oral history. As Henige (1982:1) notes, oral history is different from conventional history as one is creating the data one subsequently is using. The role oral historians have in creating their own source information leads both to one of the great values of oral history and one of its methodological problems. The important contribution is that the researcher can direct his or her work to record information that might otherwise be lost and/or has never been recorded. This fact is particularly significant when the oral historian is studying people who are not part of the dominant cultural groups in society. The written record is particularly poor at recording the history of such groups.

The methodological problems introduced by using oral sources centre around the fact that in creating the data the researcher is in a position to structure what is recorded.

The researcher must therefore be particularly conscious of his or her methods and aware of how they are influencing the information they collect.

The rest of this chapter is divided into two halves. Section 4.2 deal with theoretical issues raised by the use of oral sources and section 4.3 examines some of the practical issues of collecting and using oral sources arising out of my research. The value oral sources have in revealing how different people see things differently is highlighted. Examples of such different views are explored in detail in the following chapters.

## 3.2 Methodological issues raised by oral history

### 3.2.1 Criticism of oral history

Many written word historians have reacted strongly to oral history. Instead of welcoming it as another source of information about the past many have responded with a combination of suspicion and damning criticism. In this flurry, many have lost sight of the fact that oral records were until recently an accepted part of history (see Appendix E) and that if they are treated with the same critical appraisal as other sources they have a vital role to play in history. Much of the recent oral history debate has been couched in confusion for the critics have not specified what they are criticising. As Roberts (1982-83:29) points out, the term "oral history" has "three meanings at least: the evidence collected orally about what people have directly experienced; the interview or collecting process; and the finished product".

Oral historians have themselves contributed to the confusion caused by these three different meanings of "oral history" by not making the differences explicit. A reason for such failings lies with the infatuation some oral historians have with their data. This has been such that some see recordings as the end product of oral history rather than subsequent interpretation of these data.<sup>1</sup> The schism between oral and written history is particularly unfortunate in Australia as there is a great need for the two to work together. Examples offered below from the history of the Yanyuwa illustrate the

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<sup>1</sup>Another source of criticism of oral history has come from what might be called professional-unprofessional rivalry. As Morrissey (1982-83:49) points out, there is a large percentage of women in the oral history field in North America and this has the result that "many of the prominent leaders have carried master's degrees and are married to — or often divorced from — men who received their doctorates and predictably entered male-dominated academic fields".

complementary role the two sources can play.

### 3.2.2 History of dominant and marginal groups

The written record tends to comprise the records that the dominant group made about both themselves and marginal groups. Dominant groups are also in the position to influence which written records of each generation are preserved. The letters of the famous are much more likely to be preserved in our archives than those of “ordinary” people. Oral history provides a means of circumventing biases inherent in both what is written and also in what written material is preserved to be read. Oral history work, when carried out on European society, has often been seen as a way of redressing past biases and has focused on groups traditionally lacking power, such as women. As Henige (1982:107) notes,

oral history provides an opportunity to explore and record the views of the underprivileged, the dispossessed and the defeated — those who, by virtue of being historically inarticulate, have been overlooked in most studies of the past.

Henige (*ibid*:107) also notes how the interest in oral history can be seen as part of a reaction against “elitist history” which he defines as “the history of society’s winners as they choose that it be remembered”.

When it comes to European knowledge of non-literate societies, there is clearly an even greater scope for oral history to rectify biases introduced by reliance on the written word. Stanner (1979:214), for example, notes how Aboriginal oral history “has a directness and a candour which cuts like a knife through most of what we say and write”. In a similar vein, Miller (1985:235) notes how “the important thing about oral history is that it gives you a personal view of events — a Koori view and you will never get that from a document written by a white man”.

### 3.2.3 Problems caused by creating data

In creating data comes the responsibility to make it available to others. To do otherwise would be akin to the written word historian writing a history and then destroying or hoarding the documents. It is only through others having access to the references that

oral history research can be assessed by colleagues. Such access is also important in that it enables others to build upon the original research. There is also a clear obligation to make the material available to the descendants of those interviewed.

The oral history process is an interactive one; what someone says to you is the result of what you ask them. Hence it is necessary for oral historians to make their line and method of questioning explicit. It is worth noting that written word historians are not free of these problems for they need to assess biases related to the particular world view of the author of each separate written source. Also it is unlikely that written word historians can examine every document related to their research topic, so like oral historians, they have to make a choice on what is and is not examined. Both the written word historian and the oral historian must assess their sources for possible biases in their sample of the available sources and in any biases inherent in each particular source. The oral historian, however, also has to be conscious of the limitations they themselves introduce on the data. For instance, while each written word historian will read the same words if they examine the same document, the oral historian informant's response depends very much on who is interviewing them and how this interview is carried out.

There are advantages in this situation as researchers are in a position directly to assess their sources. The written word historian relies on old records but is not usually in a position to know how reliable each individual author is. The oral historian, in contrast, soon gets to know who is considered a reliable source and who is considered to be unreliable. The written word historian, however, could be using the records of someone who was considered a liar by his or her contemporaries and the historian would often not know this.

Verification is a process both written word and oral historians use, as Thompson (1982-83:43) writes, "oral testimony, like any other evidence, has to be evaluated both in terms of its internal consistency, and in comparison with evidence from other sources". Oral historians, however, again have a decided advantage over written word historians as they can ask the same person the same question at different times. In this way internal consistency can be checked.

A different issue is that oral history often raises situations where different sources give different versions of what happened or collectively give a view that individually

cannot be collaborated. Such apparent contradictions often mark the point at which historians throw their hands up in collective methodological despair. If, however, the researcher perseveres further, oral history work can often solve such paradoxes and in the process illustrate how, in fact, the unravelling of such paradoxes is an important addition to historical understanding. As I illustrate in this thesis, complex historical processes involve a multitude of causative factors. The fact that different people cite different explanations simply reflects the complexity of the situation and the fact that different people, as a result of different experiences, have varying views of the past.

### 3.2.4 The art of asking

As the creator of information and therefore also of many of its limitations, the oral historian has a responsibility to be acutely aware of how the data are generated. One must be aware of the "art of asking". This clearly is a culturally specific matter and highlights the need for the researcher to come to an understanding of the society under study. Modes of communication and courtesy are issues that have been explored in the literature in relation to carrying out research with Aboriginal Australians by Brock 1985, Sutton and Walsh 1979, von Sturmer 1980, and Wurm 1967 (see also the exchange on European and Aboriginal communication between Davidson et al 1983, Muecke 1984 and Shaw 1984). The general issue of culturally specific modes of communication is taken up by Crapanzano (1984:957), who writes that researchers of life histories need to

know something about indigenous notions of authorship, rhetoric, style, and narrative techniques—figurative language, imagery, allegory, double entendre, humor, irony, beginnings and endings," (sic) conventional silences, suspense, and denouement.

An understanding of modes of non-verbal communication is also important. Shaw (1984:48) notes, from his life history research with Aboriginal people in the East Kimberley, the importance of understanding not only verbal conventions, such as "tone inflection, exclamation" but also non verbal ones such as: "hand claps . . . eye and body contact, mime, tapping with finger or a twig for emphasis, drawing lines in the dust, and indications of direction and distance". Some of the conventions I encountered included making various noises to indicate spears, bullets and axes hitting their mark,

physical contact to indicate where axes and spears landed, changes of tone to indicate different people speaking and tugging of my beard to indicate when the punchline of a story is reached.

A good example of the need to understand indigenous modes of communication is given in the Yanyuwa narrative style.<sup>2</sup> This involves story telling through quoting conversations usually complete with questions and responses. It is not necessary for the story teller to have heard the quoted speeches, indeed often they are not in a position to have heard them. For example, Tim Rakuwurlma recounts what his boss Captain Luff,<sup>3</sup> said when he came to Borrooloola looking for him and two other Yanyuwa men who were all away in Darwin. Tim recounts<sup>4</sup> how Luff said,

“Ah go long Darwin now looking for my boy, three fella.”

“Oh all right.”

The response “Oh all right” was said in a different tone to differentiate another speaker. Such a refrain is common and sometimes takes the form of a statement followed by a questioning “Yeah?” and the affirmation “Yeah!”. Another example of this story teller’s licence to quote conversations not heard is contained in Tim’s account of Captain Luff’s response when Tim jumped ship to leave Luff’s employment. Tim describes<sup>5</sup> how Luff accused the other crew members “You fella been make a fight.”<sup>6</sup>

Tim has also told me stories that quote people quoting others. For example, he describes<sup>7</sup> a visit to Roper River with Captain Luff when

That Captain Luff been talk, “you got to marry here, that missionary been tell me ‘you got to marry here long Roper’ ” that Captain Luff been talk,

“That missionary been asking me for you! ‘You’ve got to marry here’.”

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<sup>2</sup>This style recurs in many areas of Australia and Shaw (1984:49) argues that the convention of citing dialogue verbatim is an important part of Aboriginal storytelling in general. Sally Morgan’s (1987) account of her family’s history illustrates the use of this style.

<sup>3</sup>The *Mercantile Navy List and Maritime Directory* of 1919, lists the *Albatross* of 25 Gross Tonnage owned by William H. Luff.

<sup>4</sup>1987 Tape 50A 45 min.

<sup>5</sup>1984 Tape 5A 23 min.

<sup>6</sup>Tim never saw Luff or any of the Thursday Island crew again, so there is no possibility of him ever having heard what was said on the boat.

<sup>7</sup>1987 Tape 50B 41 min.

Again different tone is used to distinguish Tim, Luff and the missionary respectively.<sup>8</sup> This pattern of quoting others, even if not heard oneself, in telling stories about the past, is, of course, also used by Europeans (see Ted Harvey's quote on page 126 for an example) but it is a much rarer device than is the case in Yanyuwa story telling.

A final point that needs to be noted is the need to avoid encouraging people to make up information. If, for example, the interviewer is insistent that there must be an answer to a question and will not accept that it might be unanswerable, there will be a great temptation for the informant to make up an answer. Henige gives a detailed account of the effects oral historians can have on a society and on what they record. One particularly salutary tale he recounts (1982:56) concerns a researcher who offered to pay informants a set sum for every past ruler they could remember. This greatly assisted the ability of people to remember but subsequent research showed that only 18 of the 121 listed rulers ever existed.

### 3.2.5 The structure of memory

As well as assessing the biases the researcher introduces into oral history, one has to be aware of biases that are inherent in using human reminiscence filtered through the medium of the spoken word. One such factor is the tendency, especially in the old, to glorify the past. This is a general tendency, but for many people, particularly indigenous minorities whose lives have changed dramatically as a result of the arrival of Europeans, there certainly is some justification for seeing the past as better than the present. Some "glorious pasts" surely have to be seen as "real".

Also my fieldwork made me realise that the degree of exposure to European society and ways of thinking greatly affected how people saw their past. In particular, because of the way such exposure structures people's views, it is necessary to be aware of who is literate and who is not when assessing their accounts of the past. In 1987 I took typed transcripts of previous interviews and went through them with informants (generally reading them aloud) to check that I had accurately recorded their stories. In the process I also clarified details and developed further issues that had previously been

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<sup>8</sup>The tone Tim uses here, and other Yanyuwa people commonly use to indicate Europeans, is a high falsetto. Annie Karrakayn, also uses it in her account quoted below of European soldiers requesting Yanyuwa women (see page 215). As Shaw (1984:49), notes from his work in the north-west of Western Australia, this convention is used by Aboriginal people elsewhere in northern Australia.

raised. When three literate people read the interviews, two of them made comments on the need to “fix up” the stories and write them in “proper English”. Such a request raises the issue of the difference between the spoken and written word and how literate and non-literate people can have different views on the past.<sup>9</sup>

### 3.3 Practical issues raised by the use of oral sources

#### 3.3.1 Learning on the job

As my work has proceeded and particularly as I have listened again to early recordings, I have learnt to avoid many early mistakes.<sup>10</sup> The importance of understanding as much as possible about how things are done and said by the group one is working with, means that one is constantly reassessing one’s methods and findings. It is particularly salutary to consider the degree of understanding or misunderstanding in original conversations with people.

In my first meeting with Tim Rakuwurlma I asked him whether people ate fruit bats. We had a confused time as I had not used the local expression of “flying foxes” and Tim had no idea what I was asking about. I only made things worse by asking in desperation about flying bats, Tim presumed I was asking when the (flying) plane was due in and from this thought that I was in a hurry to get back to town to meet it. Likewise, when Tim described to me Thursday Island ceremonies and how “girl corroboree first time long lead”, I did not know what he meant. Later when I was familiar with the use of the Aboriginal English term “long lead” meaning “to precede” I understood what he meant. At the time, however, I misheard “lead” for “lake” and thought he was telling me that the ceremony occurred in a lake. Listening to these early tapes I can also now hear my difficulty recognising place names, kinship terms, semi-moiety group terms and surrounding language group names that I am now familiar with.

The obvious moral of this is that whenever possible, the interviewer should interview from a base of understanding. In some cases it has taken me years to build this up. The effort through extended field work, however, was always well worth it, for with rapport

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<sup>9</sup>Henige (1982:48) explores the latter issue.

<sup>10</sup>See Shaw (1985:79) for a description of his experience of learning on the job.

and trust an interview was transformed from me asking questions to two of us discussing issues. Of course it is not always possible to have the time to build up this rapport. A few of my interviews occurred the first and only time I met someone.<sup>11</sup> Thanks to the knowledge I have established, even single interviews on later field trips were much more successful than the very first interview I carried out in the area, described above. Nevertheless, it is clearly necessary to treat information gained from one off interviews differently from information obtained over a long period of time from the same person.

A good example of how methods and results changed with time is my work on the Yanyuwa and the cattle industry. From my reading of European authors such as Duncan (1967), Rowley (1972a, 1972b) and Stevens (1974), I had learnt a lot about how poor the conditions on stations were for Aboriginal people. Archival research examining the records of the Welfare Branch officers who had to report on conditions on stations painted a similar picture. The meagre or non-existent wages, the danger of the work and the inadequate health facilities to treat the inevitable injuries (see figure 7.13) and the poor housing available to Aboriginal people were all prominent in my thinking, as I started to ask people about their time on stations. The perspective such reading gave me structured my interviews to the degree that I merely confirmed what I had read. By asking about injuries I collected stories about how most people had been seriously injured in accidents with cattle, horses or machinery. By asking if people were paid, I found out that they were rarely paid<sup>12</sup> and that when wages were introduced many people suspect they were cheated. As Pyro puts it,<sup>13</sup> the boss “might be he take most of the money too”. Similarly, when I asked about general living conditions, I was told many stories about how people lived in tin sheds “hot, no light, no fan nothing, no window”<sup>14</sup> or in windbreaks with no roof “you can see stars through roof”<sup>15</sup> and I was told stories of how poor the food Aboriginal people had to eat was.<sup>16</sup> My belief that

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<sup>11</sup>See Appendix I for details of the length of contact I had each with each informant.

<sup>12</sup>Dinny Nyliba (1987 Tape 8A 33 min.), for instance, told me how people once “just work for bread and beef that is all, no more [not] money”.

<sup>13</sup>1987 Tape 63A 43 min.

<sup>14</sup>Dinah Marrngawi 1987 Tape 61B 28 min.

<sup>15</sup>Don Manarra 1986 Tape 11A 22 min.

<sup>16</sup>One man who spent some time living in Brisbane eating “whitefella tucker” recalls (1987 Tape 7B 27 min.) that he found the food served to Aboriginal people inedible when he returned to work on a cattle station.

the cattle days were bad for Aboriginal people was further reinforced, when I collected stories of a savage whipping (see page 252) and numerous stories about how women were sexually exploited.

As I got to know people better it became clear, much to my surprise, that most of the middle-aged people now living in Borrooloola had very fond memories of the "good old days" of life on cattle stations. Even the victims of the whipping felt this way. On my 1986 and 1987 field trips I spent more time sitting with people around camp fires at night on their outstations and the conversations often touched on how good the cattle times had been. Hence Musso Harvey<sup>17</sup> told me how things were really good then as "station managers and people used to work together", similarly Don Manarra<sup>18</sup> notes "that's when really good, good time".

Fortunately, by this time I realised it was important to go further and ask why they thought it a good time. At the question and answer stage of my early work this would probably not have been possible but, as the conversations became more relaxed and less structured, it was. Musso went on to explain<sup>19</sup> that it was a good time because he was able to learn "ceremonies right through to Elliott". Don, with the perspective today of being a father with unemployed sons who have drinking problems, stressed "good time, no grog that time".

Another good example of changing methods is the advance in interviewing technique I made in 1987. I was talking to Tim Rakuwurlma<sup>20</sup> about a second wife whom he briefly had. He told me she had stayed behind when he had made a visit to Roper River. My questions about why she did not go, did not elicit an explanation until I changed from asking "Why did she stay?" to asking "What did she say?". I immediately got the reply "Too much no tobacco there!". The technique of asking what people said, fits in well with the Yanyuwa narrative view of history that I have outlined above. Subsequently, I found it a most useful way of obtaining details about the past.<sup>21</sup>

Another thing that I learnt as my work progressed is the levels of meaning that

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<sup>17</sup>1987 Tape 51A 43 min.

<sup>18</sup>1986 Tape 11A 8 min.

<sup>19</sup>Ibid 46 min.

<sup>20</sup>1987 Tape 36B 37 min.

<sup>21</sup>The issue of who can and cannot have 'the word' on past events in Aboriginal communities is explored at length by Sansom (1980a).

can be attached to particular stories. A good case in point is traditional killings. The first time the details of a killing were told to me I usually got the simplest version of the story. I was just told who killed whom. Later, I was often told how sorcery was involved in many such incidents. For example, I was originally told that an old man was shot by Europeans. Later, it was explained to me<sup>22</sup> that this occurred because the man had been through a restricted area and had violated traditional law. As a result he had been 'sung' by fellow Aboriginal people.<sup>23</sup> The song was held responsible for his death because it was considered to have made him get himself shot by the Europeans.

### 3.3.2 The generation and maintenance of stories

A story about the Yanyuwa past survives in Yanyuwa memory because it has been passed from person to person. It is important to understand this process, for it is the source of Yanyuwa understanding of their past and structures what is and is not remembered. A story has to achieve a critical mass of interest to warrant retelling. It is worth stating the obvious, that stories that have been retold are believed to be worth retelling. Information obtained from an informant, which they themselves have previously been told, has then been through a "worth telling filter". In contrast, when you ask someone about their own experiences it is possible to unearth information that is so trivial in the informant's eyes (but of interest to the researcher) that they would never have spoken about it to others.

It is possible to observe the "story generation" process in action. An example from my 1987 fieldwork involved an election day incident. One individual famous for his vocabulary of European swear words, which he picked up while working with European cattle workers, was asked his name by the electoral officer checking the electoral roll. The reply came in no uncertain terms with a four word name including two European swear words. Over the next week this incident was described over and over again in the camps of Borroloola and the surrounding outstations.<sup>24</sup> When I took people out to see relatives on outstations the story was invariably retold and within a week the dialogue

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<sup>22</sup>1987 Tape 60B 6 min.

<sup>23</sup>This could be done by a variety of methods including the practise common elsewhere in Australia of 'pointing the bone'. The Yanyuwa term for this was *a-buyurru* (John Bradley personal communication).

<sup>24</sup>It came up in conversations I recorded on Kangaroo Island, Northern Territory (1987 Tape 34B 28 min.) and in Adelaide (1988 Tape 4B 14 min).

of the incident became known to most people in the area. Adding to the chances of this story surviving in the oral tradition for some time, is the fact that many people now refer to this individual by his own colourful phrase.

The manner in which stories were maintained was also illustrated during the 1987 field season. One evening when we were sitting around a fire out bush, Isa Yubuyu asked<sup>25</sup> her mother, Eileen Yakibijna, to tell the "olden time flour story" (see page 274 for the story Eileen told) that she had obviously heard many times before but wanted to hear again. It is significant to note that after the introduction of television to Borroloola in 1983 I only heard such night time family story telling out bush away from this new source of stories.

Another issue which needs considering is the fallibility of human memory and the changes that will occur in any story that is relayed from one person to another. From my field work I have been able to observe this process, recording varying descriptions of the same story from Tim Rakuwurlma, his sons and his grandsons. For example, Tim Rakuwurlma told me<sup>26</sup> how his father killed a group of Europeans after "whitefella been shot all the blackfella" while his son told me<sup>27</sup> the same story with identical details of how the Europeans were killed<sup>28</sup> but with the explanation that the Europeans were "killed for nothing, to get tucker off them or smoke". This then is a temporal variation of the legendary World War One story when the message "send re-enforcements we are going to advance" became "send three and fourpence we are going to a dance" by the time the message got relayed through the trenches to headquarters. The fallibility of human memory, however, is not the only reason stories can change. As Maddock (1976:168) notes Aboriginal narratives can be transformed by simple structural devices such as inversion. He gives the example of one widely known myth which while having "a common core" varies in different locations as a result of dualistic transformations. In particular "male/female, north/south, fresh water/salt water" differences exist in the details of the story.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>25</sup>1987 Tape 62B 9 min.

<sup>26</sup>1987 Tape 71B 35 min.

<sup>27</sup>Johnson Babarramila 1987 Tape 65B 1 min.

<sup>28</sup>Tim's father paddled his canoe to the anchored boat, climbed aboard, found an axe on the deck of the boat and killed a number of men before the axe got too slippery and he dived over board and swam back ashore.

<sup>29</sup>Stanner (1966:236) also explores the variations in myths noting that they are kept "alive" through

### 3.3.3 Truth, perception and views of the past

A fundamental issue in oral history is whether people are telling the "truth". This begs the question of what is "truth" in history. As noted above, verification of internal consistency is an important process in using any historical source, including oral sources. Consistency can be checked by asking the same person about the same things at different times. With all the Aboriginal people I have worked with this process shows them to be remarkably consistent. When I found differences in what the same person has told me at different times (as I did when interviewing some Europeans) it was necessary to consider how I was asking the question, whether people were telling me what they thought I wanted to hear, whether things had changed socially and/or politically causing people to alter their answers.

Variations between people are a different matter, although they are not necessarily a problem. By recording details of the same incident from different people one quickly builds up the realisation that different people see the past differently. In a sense then there is not a single past: the past, be it recorded through the spoken or the written word, is an interpreted thing because experiences of the past are subjective responses to events. Such differences in how the past is seen do not necessarily invalidate the evidence but rather, as I will demonstrate, such contradictions need to be analysed for these differences are significant and can often be explained. By examining why people see the past differently important insights into the past can be gained. Two broad categories of such variations are raised in this thesis. The most obvious contrasting views are the different perspective Aboriginal and European people have. The other category involves differences within groups. Examples are raised of different groups within both Aboriginal and European society holding different views.

To give a general example, of Aboriginal and European contrasts consider the contrast between the European view that because Borroloola had for a long period so few Europeans it was a "ghost town" (see page 363) with the Aboriginal view that stresses the large Aboriginal population of the town. Such different views also exist on very specific events. For example, one missionary told me<sup>30</sup> how the 'sorry business' variations and he also suggests that the "frailty of human memory" is not the only reason for such variation.

<sup>30</sup>1986 22B 26 min.

of women cutting themselves as part of funerals quickly ceased and cited one specific death after which there was no cutting.<sup>31</sup> In contrast a Yanyuwa woman told me<sup>32</sup> of how such 'business' continues to occur and cited the example of the same death as a case in point. This continuation of 'sorry business' provides a good example of how different views on the past are not proof of the inadequacies of oral history. The different views illustrated here are significant and need to be examined. It can be concluded that either the Yanyuwa were so successful in hiding such 'business' that the missionaries did not realise it continued or perhaps the missionaries so disapproved of such 'business' that they chose not to see it.<sup>33</sup>

It is important, however, when exploring such stark contrasts between European and Aboriginal views not to lose sight of the other category of different ways of seeing things. There are important variations between both how different Aboriginal people see things and how different Europeans see things. A good example of contrasting European views of the past that need to be analysed is contained in the following quotes which relate to the time when the Yanyuwa were moved by the Welfare Branch from Borroloola to Dangana on the Robinson River in 1961 (discussed in more detail in section 7.6.1). The head of the Native Welfare Branch at the time recalls<sup>34</sup> how

they cleared a few areas and they put up a few dongas<sup>35</sup> themselves and had a wow of a time because the fishing was absolutely marvellous and there was plenty of other bush tucker.

Whereas the Borroloola missionary<sup>36</sup> recalls,

People didn't want to go out there, they were taken out there against their will more or less, dirty red dirt and sand and there was a bad winter and three or four kids died up there. They were just sort of living in bits of shelter ...

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<sup>31</sup>The mission journal *Our Aim* 17 January 1955, also cites this death as an example of how 'sorry business' had finished at Borroloola.

<sup>32</sup>1988 2B 1 min.

<sup>33</sup>If I had not witnessed such "business" myself it would have been necessary to consider another alternative possible interpretation; that of the Yanyuwa falsely stressing cultural continuity.

<sup>34</sup>1986 Tape 27A 28 min.

<sup>35</sup>Colloquialism for a crudely built shelter.

<sup>36</sup>1986 Tape 23A 18 min.

This contrast in views no doubt has a lot to do with one informant having been responsible for the move and the other being opposed to it from the beginning. Similar contrasts exist in how individual Aboriginal people see their past. Ideally one needs to know as much about each informant and his or her particular viewpoint as one does about members of one's own culture.<sup>37</sup> This clearly is an unattainable goal and it is therefore necessary to bear this limitation in mind when drawing conclusions from life histories collected from another culture.

Variations in how people see the past are clearly often the result of their own personal interests. One can see experience shaping response, when a soldier based in the area during World War Two describes<sup>38</sup> elders as "the soldiers of the tribe". Likewise when describing an initiation ceremony he remarks on the initiates' bravery by saying "I tell you what, they would be really tough soldiers". Another European informant who was a market gardener similarly describes Aboriginal people through the filter of his own experience. He told me<sup>39</sup> that the "Aboriginal problem" was entirely the result of their lack of horticultural skills.

A particularly good example of different perceptions of the same incident are the contrasting reasons people give for the Yanyuwa move from the old camp at Malarn-darri across the river to the "white side" of the McArthur River. As I outline (page 317) it is possible to document at least seven different Yanyuwa explanations for this move, plus separate Garawa, Mara and European views. Throughout this thesis a number of broader examples of different perspectives on the past are explored. Two important examples of this illustrate how people of different sex and age tend to see things differently.

A telling contrast of Aboriginal male and female views of the past involve different descriptions of one woman. Whereas a number of men commented on how "jealous" she was and stressed how she would not let other women so much as look at her husband, a woman told me<sup>40</sup> how the woman in question fought another woman for not marrying

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<sup>37</sup>The prompt sheet I developed (see Appendix G) was a means of having on hand some of the knowledge every one of my Aboriginal informants regarded as basic knowledge. By having kinship and skin names in front of me I could understand a lot more of what was I was being told.

<sup>38</sup>1988 Tape 3A 20 min.

<sup>39</sup>1987 Tape 17B 14 min.

<sup>40</sup>1987 Tape 20A 14 min.

her husband as a second wife as she had been promised to do. I return to this issue of contrasting male and female views in section 10.4.

Field work also revealed how similar differences in how men and women see the Yanyuwa past exist among Europeans. This is to be expected as the European men (former policeman, welfare officers or missionaries) I interviewed had all spent most of their time dealing with Aboriginal men whereas the European women had most contact with Aboriginal women. The European women also did most of the medical work in Borroloola and were therefore in a much better position to comment on health issues. The respective accounts of the past that the husband and wife gave to me clearly reflected these differences in experience. One European couple, for instance, gave me completely different accounts of why a Yanyuwa woman and her husband moved to Darwin. The former policeman described how his tracker came to Darwin because of a falling out with the policeman who replaced him. The policeman's wife recalled that the move was due to the tracker's wife having to come to Darwin Hospital to give birth.<sup>41</sup> The woman involved, when describing<sup>42</sup> her move to Darwin, gives a different version again. While she mentions coming to Darwin to go to hospital she stresses the fact that they had relatives in Darwin and that they had come to see them.

While Aboriginal oral history does not always illustrate what the western historical process calls the "facts", it does provide the best way of recording what people think happened in the past. Such "truths" might be less fixed and absolute than the "facts" recorded in western history but they are, nevertheless, just as important to Aboriginal people as "facts" as are those recorded by European society. Collective understanding of what has happened to the community not only shapes how people view their past but can be one basis for contemporary action. Beliefs, such as the one outlined on page 376, that Captain Cook was the first European through the area and that he shot Aboriginal people so he could subsequently introduce cattle, do not correlate with the "facts" recorded in western history, but they are important aspects of Yanyuwa historical thought. Significantly, this tendency to attribute great individual power in historical/mythical figures, illustrated in this and many other accounts of the past, has close parallels with the creation myths of the Dreaming.

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<sup>41</sup>These two accounts are on 1987 Tape 43B 27 min.

<sup>42</sup>1986 Tape 4B 6 min.

"Facts" about the past are used by Europeans and Aboriginal people alike to interpret why things happened. These understandings of the past are fundamental to every society. The Yanyuwa, for example, when recounting stories about first contact with Europeans, often provide a moral base to these accounts, explaining why both Europeans and Aboriginal people killed each other. Thus Tim Rakuwurlma describes,<sup>43</sup> how at one time "blackfellas all been shot for spearing whitefellas" and on another occasion<sup>44</sup> how "olden time blackfella they want to fight. Well that is why whitefella been shoot everybody ... long time (ago)". At other times and places Tim recounts how "blackfellas were shot just for nothing". Tim here is clearly making different assessments about these different events. Similarly Rory Wurrubirrangunu, a Garawa man, told me about many atrocities committed by Europeans on his people but at the same time pointed out<sup>45</sup> that "blackfella been pretty rough he alla get horse and bullock ... wouldn't get shoot for nothing ... kill a horse and a bullock everything, that's why he been get shot". On another occasion Rory told me the same story and concluded "that's why whitefella been shoot him, not whitefella fault hey!" and in 1984 he told me a similar story<sup>46</sup> describing this time how spearing "quiet horses ... make white man cheeky, they been kill him quiet horse, and eat him, that's the way white man all been get cheeky now".

Oral history then illustrates the need, which written history has often ignored, to consider not only what happened but also what people think happened. As the latter understanding shapes individual action, it is just as worthy of study as the "facts" of what happened. Written word history has often overly objectified the past in concentrating on the "facts" and in the process has failed to recognise the interpretive subjective nature of the past. Oral history has an important role to play in highlighting how records (be they written or oral) are not just people's memories of events but also memories of human experiences. This phenomenological understanding is particularly important within the recurring theme in this study, of how the past plays a role in shaping the present. It is not what happened but what people perceive as having happened that shapes individual attitudes and therefore in turn shapes actions.

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<sup>43</sup>1986 Tape 21B 26 min.

<sup>44</sup>1987 Tape 71B 34 min.

<sup>45</sup>1987 Tape 63B 43 min.

<sup>46</sup>1984 Tape 23A 31 min.

### 3.3.4 Aboriginal story telling

Like all participant observers the oral historian needs to be aware of the effects of his or her presence on a society. One needs to consider, for example, how people might attempt to assert their authority through their contact with the researcher. This might take the form of embellishment to assert their status. This could occur directly, by promoting oneself in stories recounted or indirectly, by promoting ancestors or living relatives.

For Aboriginal people controls clearly existed which determined who could tell you what and there was an acceptance that what someone told you was "their story".<sup>47</sup> As Sansom (1980a) discusses in great detail, stories become a currency in Aboriginal societies. The stories have a value that can be exchanged.

Another point Sansom (1980a:85) makes is that great value is placed on having "witnessed" events. In Yanyuwa story telling there is a form of ownership of stories and in turn a hierarchy of such ownership. Top ranking is involvement in the incident, then "witnessing" it, then being related to someone involved in the incident and having been given the story by them and finally having a relative who witnessed it and has given it to you. Social etiquette usually prevents someone not in these categories from telling a story; they are obliged to refer you to someone who is. Likewise if they are in one of these categories but know someone in a higher ranking they are obliged to recommend that person. Hence the phrase "I have got a story for you" has more meaning than the same words said by Europeans. It is an invitation to become involved in an exchange system that involves giving and the building up of debts to be repaid by reciprocal giving.

The hierarchy outlined above stresses the importance of family to Yanyuwa society. If a direct relative is alive it would be undreamt of for someone else to steal their ancestor's story and tell it.<sup>48</sup> The classification of relatives is a broader and more encompassing affair for Aboriginal people than it is for Europeans, so it is not only

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<sup>47</sup>In the course of my fieldwork it became obvious that there was a contrast between how Europeans and Aboriginal people recounted the past. Europeans would often deride other people (both black and white), while Aboriginal people would very rarely do this.

<sup>48</sup>McGrath (1987a:8) notes how this respect for stories belonging to others caused her difficulties in her oral history research with Aboriginal people. She notes "how one informant told me he would not narrate any story he had not seen with his own eyes".

direct relatives (as classified by Europeans) who may hold "in trust" stories of relatives. If there are no full sons or daughters left alive, classificatory sons and daughters will assume responsibility for stories.

In situations of equal ownership it is the individual who is regarded as the better story teller who is deferred to. An example of this came when I heard details of how two brothers stole Johnny cakes<sup>49</sup> from their European boss. Isaac Walayungkuma, one of the brothers, was most reluctant<sup>50</sup> to tell me the story as his brother is a renowned raconteur, who gives a hilarious rendition of the story of how two small boys ate a week's supply of food in one sitting.

The more exclusive the knowledge of a particular story, the more it is said to be that individual's story. Often people who knew about an incident would refer me to someone else as "they have got that story properly". Age is clearly an important factor in building up exclusiveness of stories<sup>51</sup> but in some situations so is ownership of country, ritual importance, gender or relation to those involved in the stories. Other important issues here are Aboriginal attitudes of deference, shame and respect for elders. As Myers (1986:121) notes, these all affect who will tell you what.

A good example of Yanyuwa deference to those who know more than they do came when I tried to do some work with middle aged people on their knowledge of early European contact and the Macassan contact with the area. My aim was to find out how such knowledge changed between generations but my research on this proved extremely difficult as nearly everyone responded by referring me to older people who knew more than they did. For example, Pyro replied<sup>52</sup> "Tim can tell you . . . Tim knows . . . I don't know much. Tim knows most of it". The respect the Yanyuwa have for the aged clearly influences who will say what. Elders enjoy the kudos associated with their status as the holders of knowledge and are keen to reinforce it. One old individual I have worked with, for example, would sometimes deride the knowledge of younger men and dismiss them as "little boys" or "babies". Indeed I was told<sup>53</sup> that a man in his early 80s was

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<sup>49</sup>Scone like loaves made from frying a flour and water mixture in an oily pan.

<sup>50</sup>1987 Tape 49A 29 min.

<sup>51</sup>Indeed, having history, and most other aspects of knowledge, in their heads and not on paper, is surely one of the most significant factors in the importance of elders in Aboriginal society.

<sup>52</sup>1987 Tape 63B 15-17 min.

<sup>53</sup>1984 Tape 4A 20 min.

a “little baby”. The terms “baby” or “little boy” have a double meaning as they assert both seniority and have connotations of “little boys” being uninitiated. Indeed the second point is often made explicit by people pointing out<sup>54</sup> that they remember when they were initiated but that the person in question was not.

### 3.3.5 Significance of land

Since attachment to land is a fundamental aspect of Yanyuwa life what I was told also partly depended on where I was. It soon became obvious to me that the best way to collect information about a specific place was to go there. The locations of all the places in the Borroloola area where I recorded interviews are indicated in figure 3.1. This can be explained by a number of factors. Obviously being somewhere and seeing the landscape helps people remember about the past. When visiting old camps numerous natural features and marks people left on the landscape are markers of past incidents. Women often point out under which tree various children were born; the users of individual fire places will be recalled, ceremony grounds are noted, bush tucker trees that belonged to individuals are pointed out, and often scars on trunks or old stumps are located and the artefacts made from the wood described. Visiting an area hence usually involves a detailed reading of the landscape to reconstruct the past Yanyuwa activity that occurred at the location.<sup>55</sup>

As Stanner (1979:131) notes, Aboriginal people move “not in a landscape, but in a humanised realm saturated with signification. Here ‘something happened’; ‘there something portends.’” Myers, in his study of Pintupi history, explores these issues in depth and writes (1986:54),

Orientation in space is a prime concern for the Pintupi, ... place provides the framework around which events coalesce, and places serve as mnemonics for significant events ... Not temporal relations but geography is the great punctuator of Pintupi storytelling ... These people who move and shift so regularly from place to place have truly culturalized space and made out of impersonal geography a home ...

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<sup>54</sup>1987 Tape 23A 3 min. “corroborree long me first time, him little boy”.

<sup>55</sup>A more common contemporary Yanyuwa form of reading the landscape is the recounting on any drive where so and so got bogged or where so and so ran out of petrol.

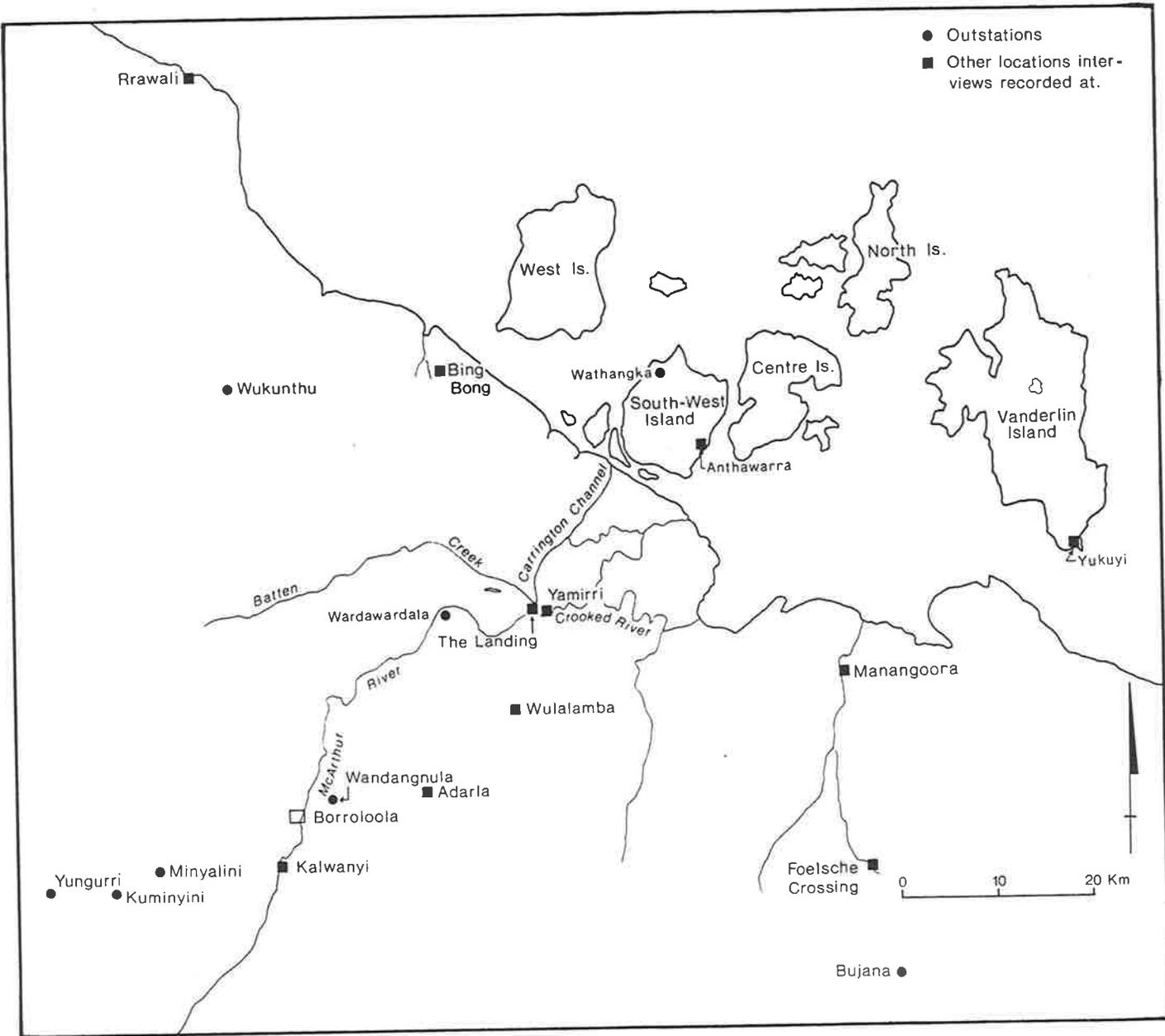


Figure 3.1: Locations of recorded interviews in the Borrooloola area

He goes on to note how

For each individual, the landscape becomes a history of significant social events. Geography serves, it would seem, as a signifier of experiences; previous events become attached to places and are recited as one moves across the country. History, then, is incorporated into the unchanging, ever-present features of the physical landscape.

This embodiment of people in the landscape — linking land with ancestors and therefore with history — is well summed up in the following words of Ricket Murundu.<sup>56</sup> He had been showing me around the long deserted old Manangoora camp and on leaving he turned around to address the camp that had not been lived in for 30 years and said “see you old people”.

Another factor in people recalling more when they are away from town is that the pressures of living in town are so great, that people are generally more relaxed and certainly have more time to think and talk about the past when they are in the bush. Part of this process is also obviously an identification with the bush being where their past was based. The lifestyle of the bush is different from the town based present and the best place to discuss that past is where it was situated. Not surprisingly the Yanyuwa, when discussing their history, often dwell on the contrasts of the new town life and the old bush life.

### 3.3.6 Group dynamics

Most of my work has been done speaking to one individual at a time. However, when I have worked with a group of people or with one person who is part of a group, it was obvious that what people said was dependent on whom they were speaking in front of. In particular, people rarely talked about the past in front of members of the opposite sex. Indeed, in the course of my research I only recorded information from a couple at the same time on three occasions. In each of these cases it was with a couple that I knew particularly well and the conversations focused on the past through the focus of their lives together.

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<sup>56</sup>Personal communication.

On many other occasions spouses were present and while not speaking to me nevertheless played an important role. For example, Tim Rakuwurlma's wife, Judy Marrngawi, was always present when I talked to Tim in Borrooloola (out bush she was nearly always away hunting) and although she rarely spoke to me directly she had considerable input to Tim's conversations. Tim often said things like<sup>57</sup> "I forget too, me ask this old woman here". Their knowledge of the past is complementary. Tim is an expert on country (the names and the mythology) while Judy's forte is people (names and genealogical relations). I have worked closely with a number of other couples but they all preferred to sit down and talk to me separately. One reason for this is, no doubt, the fact that the topic of relationships between Aboriginal women and European men inevitably arises when discussing the past. Away from men, women quite often volunteered information about such relationships but they were never mentioned in front of Aboriginal men. Aboriginal men, in contrast, very rarely raised such issues.

It is significant that women who talked to me about such incidents were usually those I 'call' mother or sister and these relationships seem to be those in which women were more at ease in instructing me in sensitive matters. Similarly the men I got to know best were my grandfathers, uncles and fathers. One could, however, easily over stress the significance of my skin relations with people, as my outsidership at times was also clearly a factor in what people could tell me. I have, as it were, a dual passport. While I can be slotted into the kinship system, at appropriate times I can be placed outside this and people can relate to me "whitefella way", without traditional constraints. Hence, away from their husbands, a number of women could talk to me about "humberging [see Appendix A] whitefellas" although, as mentioned above, this topic was not mentioned in front of Aboriginal men. Similarly, some of my major informants were my 'mother-in-laws' and "blackfella way" we should not have spoken to each other at all. At the same time, however, because I am male there are clearly restrictions on what women told me about issues such as female ceremonies.

### 3.3.7 Individual and collective views of the past

When using oral sources it is important to be aware of the process by which individual views of the past become amalgamated into a community view of what happened. It

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<sup>57</sup>1987 Tape 18B 20 min.

is necessary to distinguish between collective and individual biography and to examine the interaction between these different views of the past. This collective knowledge of the past is often labelled the "oral tradition". Henige (1982:2) writes that "oral traditions are those recollections of the past that are commonly or universally known in a given culture". He goes on to contrast this with "testimony" which he defines as "versions that are not widely known".

The understanding that cultural geographers have developed of how different people see the world differently has guided this work. It gradually became obvious in the field how valuable such a perspective was. Over time in the field I got to know people well enough to develop an understanding of their particular world view. Powerful moments of insight came when the degree to which different world views shaped people's perceptions became obvious. One such moment came at the very end of my fieldwork when I was listening to two old men talking together about their fifty year friendship. Tim Rakuwurlma summed up their closeness by saying<sup>58</sup> "You been my mate now, we fella sing kujika, kunabibi".<sup>59</sup> Conklebery, however, summed up their friendship by saying "we went droving ... together". Six years previously, at the beginning of my Borroloola field work, I would have been perplexed by such contrasting views and have understood little of the significance of both men's comments. However, thanks to the close contact I had had with the two men, the comments meant a lot to me as I had learnt how all important ceremony is to Tim and how the years Conkleberry spent droving are a central focus to how he sees his life.

If something as shared as a friendship can be seen from such contrasting perspectives it is to be expected that when people examine other aspects of their past, different people are going to have different views about the same thing. The collective view of the Yanyuwa past is not, however, simply the sum of all these different views as individual views themselves are shaped and modified by shared patterns of experience. Hence Conkleberry's views on cattle work must be seen in part as a result of the overall shared perspective Aboriginal people in the Borroloola area have that this was a good period in their past. As discussed in section 7.7.3, this communal view was such that

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<sup>58</sup>1987 Tape 71B 42 min.

<sup>59</sup>Kujika refers to mythological songs concerned with particular locations in the landscape, while kunabibi is the most important ceremony in the area for people from the Rrumburriya semi-moiety like Tim.

even those individuals who were savagely whipped on cattle stations still regard these as the 'good old days'. Likewise, Tim's views on the importance of ceremony cannot be seen in isolation from the importance of ceremonies to the Yanyuwa in general. Individual and collective views clearly, then, influence and shape each other.

Individual and collective views can be quite distinct. A good example of this is given on page . It describes how, in examining their move from the bush to town, the Yanyuwa give different explanations about what happened to them as individuals and what happened to the Yanyuwa collectively.

In the context of the land and life theme of this thesis it is important to note that both Tim's and Conkleberry's definition of their friendship is land based. Tim and Conkleberry call each other "countryman" because of their shared understandings of country. Tim stresses the role of ceremony in imparting these shared understandings and Conkleberry cattle work. The term "countryman" is a commonly used by Aboriginal people to express connections between people and highlights the Aboriginal land based view of the world. This term highlights two issues that this thesis is built around. First, it illustrates how a collective cultural understanding of the importance of land pervades and shapes Aboriginal life. Second, the flexibility of the concept to cover land based connections ranging from ceremony, to work, to having been in the same hospital together (see page 335) illustrates how the Aboriginal contact experience has involved continuity through change.

# Chapter 4

## Theory

### 4.1 Geography: the central focus

The holistic conceptual basis of geography forms the fundamental underpinning of this thesis. In doing so it recognises the relationship between macro concepts of geography and other disciplines, particularly anthropology, prehistory and history. As Meinig (1986:xv) notes “Geography is not just a physical stage for the historical drama, nor just a set of facts about areas of the earth; it is a special way of looking at the world”. The geographers’ “special way of looking” is particularly appropriate to the issues being addressed in this thesis.

While all people see themselves and their history within a geographic framework, the Yanyuwa have a particularly highly developed concern for space and place. A concern for place pervades most aspects of their lives. Ceremonies, which provide a fundamental basis for understanding life, are intimately linked with specific places. Ceremonial song cycles typically involve listing place names of country that are linked by the paths of ancestral beings. Knowledge of the song cycles thus provides “mental maps” (Gould and White 1974) of country. The Yanyuwa are also closely linked to particular locations through the importance for each person of their place of conception. As geography shares this Yanyuwa concern for place and space it is a particularly appropriate discipline for the study of Yanyuwa contact history.

Different cultural groups see their past and the land around them in different ways. A study of cultural contact, especially one written about a cultural group distinct from that of the author, needs to be constantly illuminated by the insights cultural

geography can provide into the significance of these different cultural views. This understanding is an essential underpinning of the historical framework of this thesis. The relevance of such an approach slowly became apparent in the field. In particular, cultural geographic perceptions of how different people see their land differently assisted me to see how the Yanyuwa saw their land in terms different from those of Europeans. Moreover, cultural geography assisted me in realising that not all Yanyuwa saw their past in the same way. Just as the experiences of different cultural groups can shape different views, so different experiences within a group can shape different views about the past. As I have uncovered more and more examples of Yanyuwa views that are radically different from what I presumed, the dangers of a research methodology centred on testing pre-supposed theories became clear. Such a positivist approach would have been particularly inappropriate, misleading and certainly unrevealing.

All history occurs in geographic space and as a result the value of geography to history has long been recognised. Geographic methods need to be used to understand the historical inter-relations between people and place. The classic example of this in history is the mapping of cultural distribution traits (see Davidson 1933, 1934, 1935, and 1937 for detailed Australian examples). As Ellen (1988:237) notes, the mapping of cultural traits also has been part of long term links between geography and archaeology and anthropology. The applications of such approaches have, however, often been limited, particularly because they tend to become “stamp collecting” exercises, in documenting both material and conceptual aspects of cultures out of any social context. There are more productive examples of the relevance of geography to Aboriginal history but unfortunately these have rarely been developed.

The relevance of a geographic framework can be categorised in four ways. The first two arise from the importance of land in Aboriginal history and the last two from the skill of the Yanyuwa as geographers.

**Human-land focus:** At its core, the history of contact in Australia between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people has been about conflict over land. Not only has this conflict been about use of land, it has also been about conflicting attitudes towards the land. While these two factors are closely linked, it is well worth separating them out and analysing both in detail.

**Mapping:** Many aspects of Aboriginal history are best studied by mapping. For in-

stance, changing patterns of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal land use, settlement patterns and movement are all best studied by the geographic technique of mapping.

**Aboriginal environmental knowledge:** The human-land focus of geography provides a framework within which it is possible to document the environmental knowledge of Aboriginal people. Documenting this knowledge in turn highlights the important role such knowledge has had in Aboriginal history.

**Sense of place:** Aboriginal people share with geographers an interest in the importance of place. This sense of place is labelled by some geographers as the "personality of place". The Aboriginal understanding that country has a personality that needs to be understood, is something cultural geographers have only recently discovered.

As well as these four broad areas of geography's relevance to the research topic at hand, three sub-branches of geography provide particularly valuable perspectives. The methods of historical geography provide a relevant temporal framework, regional geographic approaches provide a suitable areal framework, and cultural geographic understandings provide valuable insights into how people see their past and their land. This thesis illustrates the relevance of the insights and methods gained when aspects of these three sub-branches are harnessed together. By adopting the relevant aspects of each an impressive body of theory and method can be mustered for the question at hand.

The separation of cultural and historical geography in the English-speaking world has been to the detriment of both fields. Two particular examples of the value of a rapprochement between these two fields are illustrated in this thesis. These are:

1. The value for historical geography of using the concepts developed in cultural geography. In particular, the concept of how people see their world is the result of cultural perceptions.
2. The value which historical geography's concern for time and process has for cultural geography.

### 4.1.1 Historical geography

History ... is exceedingly difficult to follow without maps ... and, it may be whispered, geography untouched by the human element is dull to an extraordinary degree ... (Close 1932:118-119).

This section seeks to explore why the sub-discipline of historical geography has so often ignored the role of indigenous people. A particularly influential paper in geography was Carl Sauer's 1941 "Foreword to Historical Geography". It is worth examining this paper in detail both for how it illustrates the potential for considering the role of indigenous people within historical geography and how at the same time it illustrates Sauer's failure to grasp this potential. In this paper, he makes a number of calls for the centrality of historical geography within geography. For example, he claims (1941a:11) that, "historical regional studies are in the best and oldest geographic tradition" and goes on to "equate regional geography and historical geography". Later (ibid:16) he notes "I should not be interested in historical geography or in human geography except as helping to understand the differentiation of cultures, and I cannot get understanding of this sort except by learning the ways and devices men have used for making a living out of their homelands". He also provides a particularly all encompassing time frame for historical geography, calling (1941a:24) for it to "admit the whole span of man's existence ... from all the earth in all the time of human existence". Sauer also gives (1941a:17) an important piece of methodological advice: "In all historical geography, field work demands most acute observation, constant alertness to clues, flexibility in hypothesis. It is not comfortably routinized as may be mapping of current land utilization".

Of particular relevance is Sauer's call to see past landscapes through the eyes of those who lived in them. He writes (1941a:15), for example, that "the first objectives of historical field work are to value the habitat in terms of the former habit". Elsewhere, Sauer has also stressed the view of former inhabitants. In his "Personality of Mexico", for example, he notes (1941b:354) that "the two most important things to know about Mexico still are the patterns of life that existed before the coming of the white men and the changes that were introduced during the first generation or two of the Spanish period". Despite this call to see Mexico's history through this indigenous perspective

it is illuminating to note Sauer's difficulties in doing this for his own country. When he discusses the settlement of the United States it is very much within a European perspective. In his "Foreword to Historical Geography", for example, his discussion (1941a:20) of the "founding group" is implicitly restricted to European groups.

Sauer's use of the term "personality" in his article on Mexico reflects his intellectual borrowings from the French school of regional geography led by the work of Vidal de la Blache. This school placed great emphasis on the personality (*genres de vie*) of regions as a unifying theme that provides explanations of both regional character and variations. This concern for "sense of place" includes within it a concern for how people see the area they live in. Such a perspective provides a particularly incisive opening to the study of indigenous views of geography. It is, however, a line of research that has rarely been pursued.

As Williams (1983:10) notes, Sauer, while admiring the concept of "personality", tended to stress physical features in his approach to cultural geography at the expense of less tangible features. As a result, his conception of the cultural landscape focuses on the physical marks cultures create in the landscape.

### **Historical geography in Australia**

Historical geography in Australia has tended to ignore the role of Aboriginal people in shaping Australia's cultural landscape (see for example, Powell and Williams 1975). In this short sightedness historical geography reflects the narrow Eurocentric view long held within Australian history. As I illustrate below Australian historians, have largely ignored the role of Aboriginal people in Australia's history.

Historical geographers have perpetuated misconceptions about Aboriginal Australia, such as the view that Australia was an "untouched land" before the arrival of Europeans. Consider, for example, Bird's comment (1966:56) that the Gippsland lakes area of Victoria "may be regarded as 'unmodified by man' at the time of European 'discovery' ". A similar attitude is illustrated by Heathcote and McCaskill (1972:144) who, in their review article "Historical Geography in Australia and New Zealand", comment on the similarities in the historical geography of the two countries as both involved "the establishment of settlement in empty or sparsely occupied lands". Neither land was empty except in the imagination of some of the European settlers. As

Jennings so succinctly puts it in his book *The Invasion of America*, Europeans “did not settle a virgin land” (1975:15) but in many cases soon created a widowed one.<sup>1</sup>

Attitudes which ignore the role Aboriginal people have had in shaping Australian history have recently been challenged by an upsurge in Aboriginal writing and a related “new” history that documents Aboriginal perspectives on Australia’s past. Prehistorians and anthropologists similarly have recently begun to document the numerous ways Aboriginal people modified the Australian landscape. Australian historical geography has lagged behind in these developments. As yet little work has been done to document Aboriginal views on the geography of Australia. The lack of work in this area is particularly puzzling when it is considered that anyone carrying out field work in much of Australia will soon note the important role Aboriginal people have had in shaping both the current cultural landscape and past ones.

Moreover, in perhaps as much as half<sup>2</sup> of the Australian continent, it is still possible to find Aboriginal people who at one time lived on the resources of the land and are therefore able to provide information to geographers on the resources of that land. It is also possible to use indigenous knowledge of the landscape to document the environmental change that Europeans have caused. This thesis offers an example of a methodology that incorporates Aboriginal sources into Australian historical geography. In turn by dealing with Aboriginal historical geography theoretical issues of general relevance to historical geography are raised.

## 4.2 Related disciplines

### 4.2.1 Anthropology

Modern anthropology and geography have a common origin both dating back to the age of discovery when they respectively developed to document the “new people” and “new lands” that Europeans encountered. Ellen (1988:241) provides a particularly detailed account of the links between the two disciplines and notes amongst other things how they have come closer together during phases of environmental determinism (see the

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<sup>1</sup>Jennings 1975: chapter 2, is titled the ‘Widowed Land’. Cronon 1983:12 discusses Jennings use of this phrase.

<sup>2</sup>This area corresponds closely to the area Rowley (1972b frontpiece, and pages 1-2), denotes as “colonial Australia”.

work of Forde 1934 and Febvre 1925 for instance) and during recent developments in human ecology (see, for example, the work of Norwine and Anderson 1980, Eyre and Jones 1966). An enduring link between the two disciplines is the influence cultural anthropology had on cultural geographers. Sauer's work in particular (as Williams 1983:4 notes) borrowed ideas and concepts from the cultural anthropologists with whom he had close links at Berkeley.

A little considered link between anthropology and geography lies in the work anthropologists have done in oral history and, in particular, so called "life history" work. The definitive book written on this (Langness and Frank 1981) provides an excellent summary of the methodological issues of how such work should be carried out and illustrates the value such work can have for the social sciences in general. While geographers have adopted more structured questionnaire interviewing with some gusto, the more difficult but much more revealing less structured interviewing, along the lines of life history work, has largely been ignored. While there has been some such work done overseas,<sup>3</sup> there has been remarkably little in Australia. Two exceptions are the important work Frawley (1987a and 1987b) has done highlighting the value of oral sources to geography and Ryan's (1980) strident call for more such work.

As Frawley (1987a:51) notes, "oral geography" has a great potential in Australian studies of landscape change and European settlement as in many cases "there is still the possibility of communicating with those directly responsible for the transformation of the landscape from forest to farm". As I demonstrate in subsequent chapters, it is possible in some areas of Australia to go even further than Frawley and communicate directly with the Aboriginal people who were living in the area before the Europeans came to change the "forest to farm". Ryan (1980:112) argues that "historical geography written entirely from documentary evidence is like Shakespeare performed on an empty stage" and goes on to make the important point that historical geographers need to seek out a "*mutuality* of sources — written, tabulated, heard or seen".

It is also illuminating to draw a comparison between the two disciplines of anthropology and history which have also been closely linked (see Cohn 1981, Adams 1981, and Ginzburg 1981 for recent review articles analysing these connections). The anthropologists dealing with non-literate people have developed methodologies to handle such

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<sup>3</sup>See, for examples, Rowles 1978 experiential research.

information. They will readily quote informants the same way the "written word" historian will quote from published accounts. Anthropologists indeed have been too free in what they describe as a quote. Historians, in contrast, have placed an over emphasis on the written word at the expense of the spoken. There is surely a productive middle ground. Anthropologists, for example, could benefit from the historian's rigor in documenting sources by citing specific tape recordings as references. In the absence of such references the degree to which the anthropologist has interpreted the informant can only be guessed at. From my experience of transcribing tapes and comparing the results with what I remembered people saying, there is a minefield of possible dangers if there are no tapes to go back and check.

As Coltheart (1988:179) notes "a perspective in which anthropology and history are discrete disciplines is singularly inappropriate to the study of the Australian past". However, there have been few examples of what one might call historical anthropology.<sup>4</sup> One notable exception that illustrates the value of such an approach is Beckett's (1987) work *Torres Strait Islanders: Custom and Colonialism*. In this he combines a long term (over 30 years) anthropological study with detailed historical research. The two fields of study complement each other. His historical sources, for example, aid the interpretation of his 1950s anthropological field work and such interpretation in turn provides an illuminating context in which to consider the subsequent history of the area. Another recent example of historical anthropology is Anderson's (1983, 1984) study of the social history of an Aboriginal group from north Queensland in which he illustrates how specific economic, environmental and historical factors shaped the history of one Aboriginal group.

It should be noted that the lack of acceptance of indigenous accounts by historians mirrors a similar attitude long held within anthropology. The dominant structural-functionalist approaches in Australian anthropology stressed the symbolism and structure of accounts and failed to treat them as historical documents.<sup>5</sup> Such attitudes are well illustrated in Warner's influential work, *Black Civilization*. He (1937:451) quotes

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<sup>4</sup>This is despite Stanner's 1958 (reprinted 1979:51) eloquent call for such research to be carried out. Anderson (1984:50) comments on this separation in Australia and notes how it "allows and reinforces the sharp distinction between 'traditional' and 'non-traditional'".

<sup>5</sup>See Beckett (1988b:196) for further discussion on how "the timeless vacuum of structural-functionalism" diverted anthropological interest from Aboriginal history.

the American anthropologist, Lowie, on the worthlessness of indigenous sources to history<sup>6</sup> and concludes, "I have therefore placed no historical value on these myths or oral traditions concerning the early movements of the Murngin's ancestors".

Whilst mainstream Australian anthropology by considering social relations in a geographic vacuum failed to grasp the relevance of geography, the work of four mavericks; W.E.H. Stanner, T.G.H. Strehlow, D.F. Thomson and N.B. Tindale,<sup>7</sup> illustrates the value of geographic understandings of place and sense of place to anthropology. A little known link between geography and anthropology is the influence American based geographers had on the work of one of these mavericks, Norman Tindale. He acknowledges the influence of Sauer,<sup>8</sup> Huntington and Griffith Taylor on his work. In 1936 Tindale met Sauer at Berkeley, Huntington at Yale and Griffith Taylor in Chicago.<sup>9</sup>

In recent years Australian anthropological awareness of geography has developed significantly. Part of this geographic influence has come by an indirect route via prehistory. Mulvaney and Golson's (1971) publication provided a land mark in prehistorians considering geographic factors. In turn anthropologists developed links with archaeologists and became more aware of geographic methods and concerns as a result. Of particular interest to this thesis is recently developed human-ecology influenced social and ecological mapping work (see, for example, von Sturmer 1979, Taylor 1976 and Sutton 1978). Such work has reiterated the the relevance of geography to anthropology.

### 4.2.2 Prehistory

There has been a long association between geography and prehistory. Most of these links originate, as Daniel (1964:141) puts it, because "the geographer and the prehistorian meet in the map". Sauer (1941:13) likewise notes "a specifically geographic dimension to archeology, that of the complete distribution of the traces of a culture, so as to reconstruct its population patterns and its economic geography". As well as using maps prehistorians have also borrowed heavily, and often uncritically, from geographic

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<sup>6</sup>See Lowie (1915, 1917) for his development of this argument.

<sup>7</sup>Anderson (1988:140-144) explores in detail these "mavericks" noting their distance from academic anthropology and the extensive field experience each had.

<sup>8</sup>Anderson (1988:141) also discusses the links between Sauer and Tindale.

<sup>9</sup>Tindale letter dated 24 June 1988, BHF 11, writes of how he was particularly influenced by Huntington: "I was the guest in the home of Huntington, whose writings . . . had made a great impression on me".

theory. For example, central place theory and site catchment analysis have often been applied (see Wagstaff 1987:4-5 and Goudie 1976 for detailed analysis of the history of connections between these two disciplines).

There is a murky no man's land between history and prehistory and the study of contact history has been often neglected with both disciplines seeing it as belonging to the field of the other. Mulvaney (1975), in his influential work *The Prehistory of Australia*, attempted to rectify this situation by giving detailed consideration to what he termed protohistory.<sup>10</sup> He defines this term as the long period in Australia that can be studied from both a prehistoric and a historic perspective. Mulvaney, with the benefit of his dual training as a prehistorian and historian, admirably demonstrates the value of disregarding the demarcation line that has been constructed between history and prehistory. In most Australian studies, however, this demarcation has remained. This has had serious ramifications as there are inherent inadequacies in studying Australia's past through just one or the other of these disciplines.

The emphasis historians have placed on written records has clearly resulted in Aboriginal history being largely ignored by historians and our understanding of the history of European and Aboriginal contact in Australia has suffered as a result. At the same time, the emphasis prehistorians have placed on the distant past at the expense of more recent events has again worked towards limiting our understanding of the history of contact. Prehistorians have done very little work documenting changing aspects of Aboriginal life during the contact period despite the obvious potential of such work. For example, by studying changing patterns of Aboriginal settlement through an examination of the remains of Aboriginal camps of the contact period, prehistorians could provide valuable information on a process European written records have rarely recorded.

Trigger (1980:673) examines the potential role prehistory has to play in indigenous history and concludes from his experience in North America that it has "an important role to play in freeing Indian history from an exclusive reliance on written sources, which are overwhelmingly a product of Euroamerican culture". He goes on to suggest that (ibid)

By eliminating the white man's definition of history as studying himself

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<sup>10</sup>A term he borrowed from British writers (Mulvaney, personal communication).

and of anthropology as the science of allegedly simpler peoples, archaeology may at last transcend some of the false consciousness that is a heritage from America's colonialist past.

While prehistory certainly has the potential to provide documentation of indigenous cultures that is less value bound than the written accounts Europeans made of these peoples, it should be noted that prehistory has itself often been limited by pervasive European attitudes. Trigger (1985a:15), for example, shows that when large complex earth works were found in America in association with "sophisticated copper and mica ornaments . . . and fancy pottery" they were not attributed to Indians, who were considered too primitive to have been responsible, but to a race of "moundbuilders". It was further postulated, on the basis of racist stereotypes, that this non-existent race of "moundbuilders" was wiped out by savage Indians.

In Australia, prehistory was also influenced by prevailing attitudes towards Aboriginal people. Mulvaney (1958, 1961, 1981) has demonstrated how the view that Aboriginal people were "an unchanging people, living in an unchanging environment"<sup>11</sup> inhibited the development of prehistory in Australia. It also needs to be considered whether the penchant Australian prehistorians and anthropologists have had for attributing innovations in Aboriginal Australia to contact with South-East Asia is a result of similar attitudes of how backward Aboriginal people are.

Ethnoarchaeology is a recently developed sub-branch of prehistory that has taken an interest in contemporary indigenous lifestyles and knowledge of the environment as a way to understand past lifestyles more fully.<sup>12</sup> As such it has involved prehistorians using the ethnographic present to elucidate pre-contact processes. The contact period itself is seen as a time of little relevance and the aim is to go beyond this and reconstruct lifestyles as they were before they were sullied by European influences. In this emphasis on pre-contact times prehistory is reflecting its close ties with anthropology. Anthropology has tended to direct its focus towards reconstructing what precontact "traditional" societies were like.<sup>13</sup> This emphasis on what societies were like before Eu-

<sup>11</sup>Mulvaney 1975:121 quoting from a 1928 "Presidential address on Tasmanians to an Anthropological congress".

<sup>12</sup>Examples of such work in Australia include Betty Meehan's *Shell Bed to Shell Midden* (1975, 1982) and the edited volume *Archaeology with Ethnography* (Meehan and Jones 1988).

<sup>13</sup>There are exceptions to this general trend, for example, the work of Anderson 1983, 1984; Beckett 1977, 1987; Kolig 1972, 1981, 1987.

European contact has limited the amount of anthropological work done on this contact. Hence anthropology has done little to rectify the situation described above of there being a no-mans-land between history and prehistory. Anthropology, with its preoccupation with the "untouched" past, has, tended to look straight over this no-mans-land, into the idealised past that it is interested in.

### 4.2.3 History

Traditionally, space and time have been sundered and awarded respectively to geography and history. But it is increasingly realised that all events occur in specific places and that all places derive their character from changes through time (Broek and Webb 1973:xix).

The traditional separation of history and geography that Broek and Webb note has had ramifications for both disciplines. As Vidal de la Blache (1928:6) notes, history has been the poorer for seeing the earth as "the stage upon which man's activities take place" without reflecting that the stage itself is alive. In turn, geography, especially human geography, itself has been limited by its general lack of historical depth. By ignoring the time depth of cultural processes geographers have lost the opportunity to provide a fuller understanding of these processes.

Aboriginal history has tended to fall into a no-mans-land between history and anthropology. As one historian, Mackirdy (1966:170) put it "Historians generally have been content to leave the study of the Aborigines to the anthropologists and then to ignore the anthropologists". The divorce between history and anthropology results from the fact that anthropology was born out of European curiosity about so called "primitive people" during the age of discovery. As a result, anthropology has always tended to be about "them" while history has been about "us". The combination of ethnocentricity and the stand-off between history and anthropology has resulted in Aboriginal history being treated as just "a melancholy footnote to Australian History" (Reece 1979:253) until about 10 years ago. Conclusions that have been made about Aboriginal people have been rare and, when made, often misleading. The influential Manning Clark in the first edition of his first volume of his *History of Australia* (1963:4) writes "of the ways of life of [Aboriginal people] before the coming of European civiliza-

tion, little need, or indeed can, be said". Perhaps as a result of this attitude he could conclude (*ibid*:5) that the fate of Aborigines "was to wither when in contact with other races: for the aborigine was also endowed with a tenacious, if not unique inability to detect meaning in any other way of life other than his own".

Reece (1979) and Stanner (1979:211-215) review Australian history texts for comments about Aboriginal people and illustrate how few such comments existed and how when they had been written they were usually misleading. Reece (1979:253), for example, quotes a 1933 publication that describes how Aboriginal people "were never a serious impediment to colonization" and a 1958 one that claims that it was demoralisation or "loss of the will to live" that brought Aboriginal people close to extinction. Anthropologists have also contributed to such inaccurate views. Baldwin Spencer could write (1927:vii) that, "Australia is the present home and refuge of creatures, often crude and quaint, that have elsewhere passed away and given place to higher forms. This applies equally to the aboriginal as to the platypus and kangaroo."<sup>14</sup>

Such misconceptions are well enshrined in Australian history and have played a major role in structuring attitudes towards Aboriginal people. They, however, need to be exposed. Aboriginal people did resist colonisation, they did not lose the will to live. Reduced Aboriginal populations were the result of violence and disease<sup>15</sup> and decreases in reproduction rates which can be directly attributed to sterility resulting from European introduced sexually transmitted diseases. While Clark has modified his view in subsequent work and given some consideration to Aboriginal life before European contact, his earlier work helped perpetuate the false view, that "little need, or indeed can, be said" about Aboriginal people until the arrival of Europeans. It illustrates a view still often held by some historians that non-Europeans are not worthy of historical study and reasserts the view discussed above that history is about "us" and anthropology and prehistory is about "them". It is comparable with the attitude asserted by the Professor of Modern History at Oxford, Trevor-Roper (1963:871),<sup>16</sup> who wrote "Perhaps in the future there will be some African history to teach. But at

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<sup>14</sup>Mulvaney (1981:62) discusses the European perceptions of Aboriginal culture that led to this and other such early anthropological conclusions on Aboriginal people.

<sup>15</sup>The great extent of population loss through disease has only in recent years been highlighted by the work of Butlin (1983).

<sup>16</sup>Quoted by Henige 1982:21 and Trigger 1985a:34.

present there is none: there is only history of Europeans in Africa. The rest is darkness ... and darkness is not a subject of history". He concludes (ibid) that it is therefore inappropriate to "amuse ourselves with the unrewarding gyrations of barbarous tribes in picturesque but irrelevant corners of the globe".

Such academic arrogance has forced those interested in the history of indigenous peoples to define their own discipline as ethnohistory. As a result such history has rarely been incorporated within mainstream history. In Australia, as McBryde (1979) shows, much of the impetus for ethnohistory has come from prehistorians<sup>17</sup> wanting to know more about the history of Aboriginal people in the area where they are carrying out archaeological research. McBryde asks in the subtitle of this article whether such an impetus to ethnohistory research in Australia has resulted in it being an "Independent Discipline or Convenient Data Quarry". Her conclusion is that, while it has great potential to be the former, in practice it has in Australia mainly been limited to the latter.

It is illuminating to note how recently this field had developed in Australia despite having a long tradition elsewhere. In both Africa and North America there is a long history of such accounts, originally collected by Europeans but now mostly written by Africans and American Indians. There is also the journal *Ethnohistory* directed to the study of indigeneous history of North Amercia and the Pacific. Similarly there is a wealth of material from Papua New Guinea<sup>18</sup> and New Zealand. The tradition of using Maori accounts as a means of studying the past is particularly long standing. It was pioneered here by Peter Buck (Te Rangi Hiroa) who (1926:182) pointed out: "there is no comparison between the inaccurate writings of a globe-trotting European and the ancient traditions of a cultured barbarian".

We need to ask why Australia has been so far behind the rest of the world in considering indigenous accounts of the past. Stanner (1979:214) offers an answer in writing:

What may well have begun as a simple forgetting of other possible views turned under habit and over time into something like a cult of forgetfulness practised on a national scale. We have been able for so long to disremember

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<sup>17</sup>A notable exception is the historian Corris 1966 and 1969.

<sup>18</sup>See, the journal *Oral History* published by the History Department, University of Papua and New Guinea, Port Moresby.

the Aborigines that we are now hard put to keep them in mind even when we most want to do so.

Fortunately this “cult of forgetfulness” has in recent years been challenged. Recently, a burst of auto-biographical writing by Aboriginal people and European recorded and written Aboriginal “life histories”<sup>19</sup> has confronted the orthodoxy of Australian history. These Aboriginal accounts, in turn, have forced Australian historians to reappraise and rewrite Australia’s past. The publication of Henry Reynolds’ book *The Other Side of the Frontier* (1981), which through a detailed examination of written records attempted to document Aboriginal responses to Europeans, was influential in this historical reappraisal. Methodologically more significant, however, has been the work of authors such as Hercus and Sutton (1986), McGrath (1987a, 1987b) and Goodall (1987) which make great use of interviews collected from Aboriginal people. In such work the views of Aboriginal people on their history are given attention. Another land mark in Australia was the establishment of the journal *Aboriginal History* in 1977.

### Oral history: methodological contributions

Cohn (1981:234) in a review article titled “Anthropology and History in the 1980s: Toward a Rapprochement” discusses the history of ethnohistorical research and locates the work of this subdiscipline “between conventional historians and anthropologists, methodologically and chronologically between prehistory as reconstructed by archaeologists and the ‘ethnographic present’ of field anthropologists”. Such a methodological position has resulted in ethnohistory raising many important issues for conventional history. In particular, it raises the question of how history is perceived by different societies and what function it plays in different societies.

One general issue raised by Aboriginal ethnohistory that needs to be raised here is the shortness of Aboriginal historical chronology compared with European chronology. A trend I noticed—and other authors, for example, Myers (1986:69) and Stanner (1966:85), have commented on—is that events that occurred more than two or three generations ago tend either to be forgotten or to become incorporated within Abo-

<sup>19</sup>For example, Batty 1963, Beckett 1958, Berndt and Berndt 1951, Hardy 1976, Harney 1947, Kennedy 1985, Lamilami 1974, Miller 1985, Morgan 1987, Roe and Muecke 1983, Rose 1969, D. Roughsey 1971, E. Roughsey 1984, Shaw 1981, 1983, Stanner 1960, Sullivan 1983, Sykes 1981, Thonemann 1949, Tucker 1977, West 1984, White et al 1985.

original mythology. Stanner (1966:140), for instance, writes that “Murinbata tradition ... [is] the product of a continuous art of making the past consistent with an idealized present”. Such constant revisionism is possible because Aboriginal mythology is so dynamic. This dynamic nature of Aboriginal law is in conflict with the widespread misbelief that the ‘Dreaming’ is a relatively fixed set of mythology akin to western religious belief. As discussed in section 10.2, mythological celebrations (ceremonies) are seen by many Yanyuwa as history. Like European history, ceremonies are a way of both learning about the past and trying to understand the present.

### How do we see their history?

A major issue raised by ethnohistory is how history is perceived across cultural boundaries. It is very important to be aware of biases arising from “us” looking at “their” history. As Ortner (1984:143) notes:

History is often treated as something that arrives, like a ship from outside the society in question. Thus we do not get the history of that society, but the impact of (our) history on that society.

Similarly, Beckett (1988b:210) notes that when Aboriginal people have been considered in Australian history it is often been just in terms of “what settlers did to and for Aborigines”. When studying a topic such as medieval European history, historians often attempt to understand how Europeans of that time saw their history. Yet they have rarely made the same efforts to see Australian history through Aboriginal perspectives. As Anderson (1983:474) notes contact history in Australia “is still very much seen through Euro-centric eyes. Much of this stems from the continued concentration on archival and written sources”. Another factor working against Aboriginal history is that it is simply easier to examine written records in city libraries than it is to venture into the field and face the difficulties of camping out and learning about Aboriginal groups first hand.

On top of general disinterest in Aboriginal history there are, ironically, those who are keen to see it studied but view it as “ideologically unsound” for European Australians to write about Aboriginal history. This, however, misses the point that in writing about any historical period one needs to consider the perspectives of those involved as much as possible. Non-Aboriginal historians are not writing *from* an Aboriginal perspective

but they do ideally need to understand that perspective as much as possible and write with that perspective in mind.

#### 4.2.4 Links between geography and these disciplines

Geography has a crucial role to play within studies of culture contact. It is well placed to document and interpret both the nature of human - environment relationships and the spatial aspects of human behaviour. As outlined above, demarcation lines that have been constructed between various disciplines have created a number of intellectual gaps that geography is well placed to fill.

One particularly important role geography can play is to stress regional variations in contact history. Recent developments in Australian historical studies while addressing some of the long held misconceptions about Aboriginal people have tended not to confront a major source of such misconceptions. The work of Henry Reynolds, is a good case in point. He successfully confronts many of the old orthodoxies about Aboriginal history but has done so within a misleadingly broad geographic perspective. He presents an impressive array of data, but by jumping often in the same paragraph from one end of the continent to the other, he glosses over regional contrasts and is in danger of creating new misconceptions about Aboriginal history. By taking such a broad perspective, he fails to adequately document the variety of different contact experiences that different Aboriginal groups had. Curthoys makes the same criticism of Reynolds work noting (1983:105) the inadequacies of "his patchwork method, his taking of examples for any one type of Aboriginal response from all over the country and over a long period of time".

McGrath's (1987a) work is more precisely geographically located. Her study of Aboriginal involvement in the cattle industry examines (ibid:x) "the northern half of the Northern Territory and the east Kimberleys, from around 1910 to 1940". She, however, rarely notes the wide range of environmental, cultural and historical factors at work in such a vast area. At times the area under discussion without any comment changes within a paragraph from one side of the Northern Territory to the other (for example, 1987a:12-13). As a result her conclusions suffer. For example, she argues that stockwork "was increasingly taken over from women as a male-only role". While this certainly was the general trend as I discuss (page 249) women in fact did con-

tinue to do stock work on particular stations. Significantly this was on one specific type of station; ones that were small, usually owner managed and with little capital development. This is but one of many examples raised in this thesis of the value that a geographic perspective can provide to history. The Yanyuwa case study highlights how specific regional factors shaped the processes of contact. It also shows how existing models of contact suffer from the Australia-wide generalising process outlined above. The complex nature of Yanyuwa contact processes results in various theoretical models being relevant at different times and places in their history. In arguing for the all encompassing nature of specific models, such theory has tended to obscure rather than illuminate the data. Aspects of Yanyuwa contact experience are best described by Elkin's (1951) reaction and interaction model, but other aspects are best described by the dispossession and resistance models of Reynolds (1981), Reece's (1986) accommodation model, marxist articulation models (see Anderson 1983, Bradby 1975) and by models of internal colonialism (see Beckett 1977).

Regional geography has for several decades been very unfashionable, but there is the suggestion that a recent upswing of interest may return it to a more central place within geography (see Gilbert 1988, Pudup 1988, Savage et al 1987 and Smith 1988). This thesis illustrates the need for a revitalised regional geography by noting the important role geography has in highlighting the significance of regional variations. It is only through a series of detailed regional case studies, such as the one offered here, that our understanding of the contact process will be increased. In arguing this I am not stating anything new. Corris (1966:12) made this point twenty years ago in calling for detailed area studies to test theories about contact such as Elkin's (1951) model of reaction and interaction. I have briefly illustrated above the value of ethnoarchaeology and ethnohistory to their respective disciplines. The value of these approaches points towards the need for the development of an ethnogeography.

### 4.3 Models of Culture Contact

A theme underlying most analyses of contact is the frontier. The origin and development of the frontier concept in history needs to be examined as it has had a pervading influence on the study of history in the so called "new lands". The frontier concept

also provides an example of the links between history and geography. An analysis of this concept highlights the important, but usually ignored, role indigenous people have had in shaping the frontier.

In 1893 Frederick Jackson Turner delivered a seminal paper entitled "The Significance of the Frontier in American History".<sup>20</sup> He criticised American history for being "the study of European germs developing in an American environment" (1921:30). Instead he put forward the notion that the American environment made America.

The wilderness masters the colonist. It finds him a European in dress, industries, tools, modes of travel, and thought. It takes him from the railroad car and puts him in the birch canoe. It strips off the garments of civilisation and arrays him in the hunting shirt and the moccasin. It puts him in the log cabin of the Cherokee and Iroquois and runs an Indian palisade around him. Before long he has gone to planting Indian corn and plowing with a sharp stick . . . In short, at the frontier the environment is at first too strong for the man. He must accept the conditions which it furnishes, or perish, and so he fits himself into the Indian clearings and follows the Indian trails. Little by little he transforms the wilderness, but the outcome is not the old Europe . . . The fact is, that here is a new product that is American (Turner 1921:4).

Similarly my thesis is promulgated on the concept that Australian history was structured by European responses to Aboriginal people. As Turner notes (1921:6) the frontier itself is defined by indigenous culture. As in North America the Australian identity arose in part as a result of the colonisers' need to group together to fight the indigenous population. As I will illustrate, the Yanyuwa example mirrors Turner's conclusions on how Indian land use structured North American history.

The Indian trade pioneered the way for civilisation. The buffalo trail became the Indian trail, and this became the trader's "trace;" the trails widened into roads, and the roads into turnpikes, and these in turn were transformed into railroads . . . The trading posts reached by these trails were

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<sup>20</sup>This paper was originally given as an address to the American Historical Association in 1893 and originally published in 1894. Subsequent quotations are from a 1921 collection of Turner's work that includes this essay.

on the sites of Indian villages which had been placed in positions suggested by nature; and these trading posts, situated so as to command the water systems of the country, have grown into ... cities ... The slender paths of aboriginal intercourse have been broadened and interwoven into the complex mazes of modern commercial lines ... (Turner 1921:14).

Turner's theme struck a cord with American historians and became for a long time a dominant focus of American historical writings and in turn led to the development of comparative frontier studies.<sup>21</sup> The impact of his ideas on American geography also needs to be considered. The next sections examine three pertinent issues which arise out of Turner's work.

### 4.3.1 The frontier school and indigenous history

While Turner's thesis does give Indians a role in North American history it is a limited one and is very much defined from an ethnocentric European viewpoint. His use of the term "wilderness" for the new lands the Europeans were moving into highlights this. Pervading European thought provided cultural blinkers which limited their ability to perceive the interaction between Indians and this new land. Turner defined the frontier as the line separating the "edge of free land" from the margins of settlement. The rights of those already using the land are dismissed to create this "free land". Similarly the indigenous use of the land is ignored so that land unoccupied by Europeans can be defined as unsettled.

As Meinig (1986:213) notes, the frontier concept is a Eurocentric one that reduces indigenous people to an "ephemeral role" on the margins of the European invasion. Although the ignoring of indigenous people is not implicit within the model, in practice it has worked this way. As Berkhofer (1981:44) points out, only in recent years have researchers come to see that "Turner's interpretation of the frontier solely in terms of sequences of white settlement ... is too ethnocentric, if not racist, in its neglect of nonwhite peoples".<sup>22</sup> Turner's model in its simplicity encourages such views at the

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<sup>21</sup>See Lamar and Thompson (1981: 3-13) for a review of the influence of Turner's thesis on American historical writing and on more recent comparative frontier studies. For the latter also see the definitive bibliography on North American and South African frontiers in Miles 1981.

<sup>22</sup>Another analysis of the limitations of Turner's model is given by Jacobs (1979:70) who calls for frontier historians "to focus more of our attention on what might be called the Indian point of view".



expense of more complex, and accurate, concepts of interaction. Part of this oversimplification—and perhaps part of the attraction of the concept—is the fact that it is, as Meinig (1969:229) notes, three things at once: “at once a line, a region, and a process”. Unfortunately it has too often been seen just as the first of these and, as a result, the dynamic and interactive aspects of contact have been hidden.

### 4.3.2 The frontier school and geography

The frontier concept is a classic example of historical geography. It is clearly a spatial concept, describing where people were when. As a concept it has its origins in geographic considerations of the spatial patterning of settlement. These changing patterns are clearly best studied by mapping. The frontier thesis was the child of its environmentally deterministic times coupled with United States nationalism.<sup>23</sup> American “man” was seen to be made by America’s land.

As well as having geographic origins, Turner’s thesis in turn influenced geography. Carl Sauer’s historical geography is, for instance, strongly linked with Turner’s thesis. Sauer’s interest in cultural succession and the lasting influence on the cultural landscape of separate waves of the frontier clearly builds upon Turner’s work. Sauer’s most explicit use of the frontier concept is in his article “Historical Geography and the Western Frontier” which first appeared in 1930 (reprinted in the 1963 collected essays). The outline he gives in this work of “the three major questions in historical geography” (1963:45) closely match the approach used in this thesis. He lists these questions as:

- (1) What was the physical character of the country ... before the intrusion of man?
- (2) Where and how were the nuclei of settlement established, and what was the character of the frontier economy?
- (3) What successions of settlement and land utilization have taken place?

Sauer (1941:22-23) critically discusses Turner’s work and, while acknowledging some links with his ideas, expresses more of a debt to “the great thesis of Vaughan Cornish, that of the cultural ‘march’ ”.<sup>24</sup> Sauer pays more attention than Turner did to the role of indigenous cultural landscapes shaping subsequent European cultural landscapes. In

<sup>23</sup>Lamar and Thompson (1981:4) describe Turner’s thesis as “ideas formulated in a nationalist ethos permeated by social Darwinism”.

<sup>24</sup>Cornish developed this idea most fully in his 1923 work *The Great Capitals: An Historical Geography*.

his "Historical Geography and the Western Frontier" he discusses the role "the Indian landscape" (1963:48) had in shaping the frontier. He notes in particular how "explorers reconnoitred an Indian country, with Indian guides, between Indian settlements" and also that "the American frontier took over the crops, methods, and fields of the Indian agriculturists". It should be noted, however, that in this work he gives much more emphasis to the cultural landscapes created by the waves of separate European cultural groups that moved into the United States. Sauer also gives some attention to the role of the Indian cultural landscape in his two works *Sixteenth Century North America* (1971) and *Seventeenth Century North America* (1980). The consideration of the role Indians had in shaping subsequent cultural landscapes, however, is very much in passing. The sub-title of the first of these two works "The land of the people as seen by the Europeans" accurately sums up the approach of these two works. Both are descriptive summaries of what European explorers saw and are largely lacking analysis. Sauer's descriptive approach does raise a number of significant examples of the way Indian cultural landscapes shaped subsequent European dominated ones but does not develop this idea. Like Turner (1921:6), Sauer notes how European explorers often followed Indian trails in their travels (1971:168-169) and the general reliance exploring parties had "on Indian knowledge of geography" (1980:237).

The fullest consideration Sauer gives to the role of indigenous cultural landscapes shaping the contact period landscape comes from his work outside the United States. His (1941b) article on the "The Personality of Mexico", for example, is clearly a landmark in the study of the role indigenous people have had in determining the "personality of place" and in his (1966) *Spanish Main* he outlines in detail the early interactions between indigenous people and the Spanish in what is now known as the West Indies. The limited examination he gives to the role of indigenous cultural landscapes in structuring the development of the United States, testifies to the influence the frontier school had on how researchers saw America. The nationalistic core of the frontier school, in particular the belief that European Americans were made by their land, was apparently such that it could over shadow Sauer's interest in indigenous geography.

Another American geography whose work illustrates an intellectual indebtedness to North American frontier studies in the Turner tradition is Meinig. If his work is examined it also illustrates a growing emphasis on the role of indigenous cultural landscapes

in shaping European cultural landscapes. While he does not consider this in *On the Margins of the Good Earth* (1962) in the work on his home country *The Great Columbia Plain* (1968) he gives some consideration to how Indian use of the landscape influenced European settlement and in his most recent work, *Atlantic America* (1986), he gives considerable attention to how the historical geography of the east coast of the United States is the result of Indian and European interaction.

Meinig also applied the American developed frontier theory to Australian geography. Meinig's (1962) influential historical geography of the South Australian agricultural frontier, is written explicitly within a frontier framework. He acknowledges (1962:7) "Turner's famous 'influence of the frontier' " and two authors who developed Turner's ideas: C.A. Dawson's model of "life cycles of a pioneer region" and Webb's<sup>25</sup> (1964) "global concept of 'The Great Frontier' ".

The Australian geographer who perhaps made the greatest use of the frontier concept was Price. In his *Island Continent*, for example, he defines (1972b:17) the contact period as a "story of moving frontiers and changing landscapes". Like Turner, however, he also largely ignores the role indigenous people had in the frontier. While devoting a chapter to Aboriginal people in the above publication, he portrays them merely as a back drop against which settlement occurred. His conclusion, that "wherever the foot of white man trod the Aborigines withered away" (1972b:24), certainly gives Aboriginal people very little room to play an active role in shaping the frontier.

The frontier in geography has more than survived and in recent years new frontiers have emerged, for example, the contemporary settlement frontier (Salter 1971). Salter (1971:55) describes the role Turner played in popularising the frontier concept and notes how it "has become an appealing concept to most of us who are interested in social change and settlement patterns".

### 4.3.3 The frontier school and Australian history

The frontier is clearly a fundamental concept in Australian history but it has been used without much attention to definition by both the old and new history. The recent publications of Reynolds (1981 and 1987) and Loos (1982) all include the term "frontier" in the title, but despite relying heavily on the concept they use the term

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<sup>25</sup>Mikesell 1960:64 describes Webb as "one of Turner's best known students".

without sufficient critical analysis. An earlier use of the term is found in Perry's (1963) *Australia's First Frontier*. Perry, from the perspective of a geographer, uses the frontier concept in an historical analysis of the spread of early European settlement in New South Wales. This work gives little consideration to the role Aboriginal people had in influencing European settlement. The only example given (1963:66-67) is that of settlement being delayed in one area due to it being in an "unprotected state" from "menacing" Aboriginal groups and escaped convicts.

A belated response to Turner's urgings that his model should be tested by making overseas comparisons resulted in a short burst of North American published comparative frontier studies in the late 1950s. Burt (1957), offers a comparative study of frontiers in a chapter titled "If Turner had looked at Canada, Australia, and New Zealand when he wrote about the west". Sharp (1955) also gives a comparative study of frontiers in an article titled "Three Frontiers: Some comparative studies of Canadian, American, and Australian settlement".<sup>26</sup> Other comparative frontier studies that include consideration of Australia include the work of Gerhard (1959) and Mikesell (1960). Two other works that focused on the relevance of Turner's frontier to Australian history are the short books of Alexander (1947) and Allen (1959). They both note how Australian historians had made little use of this thesis. Alexander in particular (1947:38) berates Australian historians for this perceived failure. The Australian historian W.K. Hancock (1940:1-72) compared British Commonwealth countries by examining what he describes as economic and missionary frontiers. His invitation (*ibid*:5) to stand in the gap in the Blue Mountains "and watch the frontiers following each other westward" mirrors Turner's invitation (1921:12) to "stand at the Cumberland Gap and watch the progression of civilization, marching single file".<sup>27</sup>

The British leanings of Australian history partly explain why this American thesis was ignored by Australians. Also the Australian frontier was vastly different from that in the United States. In Australia there was not one frontier forever moving westward. A combination of Australia's geography and the history of colonisation,

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<sup>26</sup>Sharp (1955:369) notes that he is responding to Turner's unanswered challenge to examine other frontiers.

<sup>27</sup>Despite borrowing heavily from Turner's approach Hancock (1940:41) is very critical of Turner's work arguing that Turner contributed nothing new to the debate as Adam Smith had said the same thing in 1776. Cronon (1983:5) also argues that Turner's work was partially anticipated by work dating to 1806.

resulted in there being various frontiers radiating inland from different colonial centres. In the United States there was the promised land of California but in Australia there was no equivalent. After the Australian inland sea was revealed to be imaginary, the Australian frontier was essentially heading into the nothingness of the "dead heart". Hence the development of the Australian concepts of the "outback" and the nebulous "never never" of the "back of beyond".

As Beckett (1988b:194) notes "the frontier ... has long been an idea rather than a reality for ... the majority of Australians" and because of this "it has assumed a symbolic importance in the construction of Australian nationality". Beckett goes on to point out how European visions of Aboriginal life have played a fundamental role in the construction of this "metaphorical frontier". He notes that the view that Aboriginal people are an ancient race in an ancient land plays an important part in the metaphorical frontier between "the newness of European settlement" and the antiquity of the land and its original inhabitants.

Another interesting feature of the Australian frontier is that it never has been a complete "wave" of settlement like that the Americans described. Nowhere is this more obvious than the Northern Territory where European settlement occurred along narrow routes. In a sense, the frontier here was for a long time not so much a frontier as an intrusion along two restricted tracks, one from South Australia to Darwin along the Overland Telegraph route, and the other the cattle droving route from Queensland, through Borroloola up to the Roper River and from there intersecting with the Overland Telegraph route and continuing on to the Kimberly. This pattern of intense European activity in a small band has had a major role in structuring the history of Aboriginal people in the Borrolooa area.

Another important difference between Australian and United States history is what European people did with the land once they had settled it. Australia has a far greater proportion of semi-arid land, which has meant that open range pastoralism has been the sole profitable European economic activity in most of Australia. In my study area, attempts at any other economic activity have been failures and indeed even pastoralism has had serious economic difficulties.

The narrow bands of frontier in the Northern Territory led to a pattern of partial colonisation. Aboriginal people living away from the European routes could continue, if

they chose, to live as they had before the arrival of Europeans in the Northern Territory. Superimposed on this large scale pattern of partial colonisation was a smaller scale version of the same thing. Pastoralism did not take up all the land in all areas. In the Borrooloola area the Sir Edward Pellew Group was insulated from the pastoral invasion by physical separation from the mainland. Also individual pastoralists often did not use all the land in their leases for pastoral purposes. Escarpment and swampy areas, for instance, were often not used. Similarly the open range, unfenced style of pastoralism in northern Australia, meant that European activity was limited to small areas around European homesteads for much of the year. It also should be noted that the demands for land that pastoralism made were not as absolute as those of agriculture. Most importantly, pastoralism in its free range northern Australian form,<sup>28</sup> did not preclude traditional economic activity because it did not change the environment as radically as agriculture.

As McGrath (1987a:23) notes, the frontier in much of the Northern Territory was not a clear cut wave of colonisation. Individual pastoralists moved into areas but lived a life "isolated from white society, surrounded by a land he did not know". Settlement was sparse, it usually involved little European economic development and was often not permanent. Nowhere was this more the case than the Borrooloola area. Here the frontier came and then decayed. Borrooloola's famous European hermits (discussed in section 9.9) were all that remained of European society in Borrooloola for much of this century. Many cattle stations in the area declined and some were abandoned. Maps of the region today bear witness to this, places marked include "Pungalina (ruins)", "St Vidgeons (abandoned)", "Rosie Creek (abandoned)".

Meinig (1986:208-210) presents a model<sup>29</sup> of contact that is particularly relevant to the history of the Yanyuwa. He maps different zones of contact that had different types of interactions between indigenous and invading cultural groups. Of most relevance to the Yanyuwa is the zone he delineates (1986:208) "of articulation and independence".<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>28</sup>As Ryan 1981 illustrates in areas of intensive pastoral activity such as Tasmania, pastoralism had a much more destructive impact on Aboriginal life.

<sup>29</sup>He had previously offered a simpler version of this model in Meinig (1969).

<sup>30</sup>In presenting this more dynamic and realistic model of the frontier, Meinig is reflecting developments in the use of the term by historians. Lamar and Thompson (1981:7), for example, stress the role both indigenous and invading groups had in shaping the frontier and define "a frontier not as a boundary or line, but as a territory or zone of interpenetration between two previously distinct societies".

As he suggests this zone is characterised by the utilitarian, linguistic and social changes *both* groups make in response to each other. It is important to note that the Borroloola area was in this zone for a particularly long time and indeed, may still in many ways be thought of as in such a zone.

The complexity of the Australian frontier and the differences between it and the American one mean that the unqualified application of any overseas theory to Australia is at best misleading. In this thesis the emphasis is therefore placed on contact processes rather than on the frontier. The term "contact" has as Anderson (1988) notes often been used loosely. It is used in this thesis in accordance with Anderson's definition (ibid:14) of it being the ongoing relationship between different cultures or societies. The fact that it is ongoing needs to be stressed in particular. Many of the frontier studies discussed above would be better placed within a contact framework as the ongoing and interactive nature of culture contact is lost within frontier models.

#### 4.4 Dependence

This section outlines the relevance of the concept of dependency to the study of culture contact. I am not using the term in the sense of a formal model<sup>31</sup> but rather in the every day sense of the word. Aboriginal dependency has typically taken the form of increasing reliance on European goods and services at the expense of traditional items. This growing reliance was often associated with the move from bush to town life. The concept of dependency is just as relevant to contemporary Aboriginal situations as it is to the past. This is well illustrated by the current 'outstation movement'. This contemporary trend is a movement from town to bush life and significantly many of the problems faced by this movement can be attributed to patterns of dependency created by decades of reliance on European services and goods.

The relevance of the concept of dependency to the Yanyuwa is well illustrated in one conversation I had with Annie Karrakayn. In reviewing her life she gave numerous examples of dependency. These included the dependency of limited options. She replied<sup>32</sup> to my question, of whether she preferred missionary or Government Welfare Branch

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<sup>31</sup>A formal model of dependency theory has been developed in the field of political economy by the work of Frank 1977 and others (for example, Sears 1981 and Palma 1978).

<sup>32</sup>1986 Tape 6A 26 min.

control by saying "I don't know which one to choose, missionary or government". Annie notes one aspect of dependency associated with the former, saying<sup>33</sup> that Welfare used to "(tell us) what to do. We used to do it for him, do that, do that". Annie also talks about Yanyuwa dependency on European boats to get out to her country now that they have stopped making dugout canoes. She also talks<sup>34</sup> about how in the old days people carried their swags and they 'footwalked' everywhere:

and what is wrong with me now, like this day, I think that motor car been make us lazy and weak, I reckon. That world is getting shorter, no good and weak. I think different way, people getting weak and sick and all that.

The terms "dependence", "dependency" and "dependent" are in common use in the literature on Aboriginal Australia. Stanner (1979:81), for example, argues that people drawn into the Daly River to work for Europeans had become (1979:81) "dependent on their goods" and how the subsequent failure of each of these European enterprises "led those now dependent to wander elsewhere looking for the wealth and excitements" associated with Europeans. Anderson (1979:174) writes that the current position of Aboriginal people in Australian society arose "primarily from lack of access to power and to an historically created situation of enforced dependence". Bell (1983:69) writes about the " 'coming in' process which may well have begun with curiosity but which all too quickly became dependence".

Despite this common usage of these term little attempt has been made in the literature to define the term. The Oxford English Dictionary defines depend, dependence and dependency as:

**Depend** - To hang from, to rest or rely, to trust.

**Dependence** - Conditioned or subordinate or subject; living at another's cost, reliance.

**Dependency** - Something subordinate or dependant, especially country or province controlled by others.

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<sup>33</sup>1986 Tape 6A 12 min.

<sup>34</sup>1986 Tape 6B 12 min.

In European value systems the transition from depend to dependence to dependency clearly has increasingly negative connotations. This range in meaning makes the use of the terms fraught with possible misinterpretations. However, this range in meaning, if made explicit is particularly appropriate to the contact process. Aboriginal people have moved from being interdependent and trusting each other, to becoming reliant on others, and in the process finally often being controlled by others.

In traditional life the dependence on each other in the economic, social, religious and political spheres was based on trust and the idea of reciprocity. Contact changed this situation for ever. The point to stress is that dependence within a society can be supportive, sustaining and fulfilling, when the relationships of dependence are understood and reciprocated. In this situation the term interdependence is more appropriate than dependence. In the contact situation, in the absence of these shared understandings of reciprocity, a society traditionally highly interdependent is particularly prone to the effects of the intruding culture. The very values that beforehand guaranteed stability and social order, are now working against the maintenance of that traditional culture.

As dependency involves the relationships of power within Aboriginal society, and also between Aboriginal and European society, it is worth briefly examining traditional Aboriginal power structures. Any study of Aboriginal power structures is complicated by the fact that European observers have been particularly inept at recognising their existence. Indeed some observers have argued that it was the lack of a power structure which led Aboriginal culture to be so devastated by European contact.

European misconceptions about this aspect of Aboriginal culture can at least in part be explained by the way the Dreaming straddles the European distinctions between politics and religion. Myers (1980a:212), in an article on the cultural basis of politics in Pintubi life, makes the point that senior Aboriginal members receive their political power "as part of nature rather than as a product of human activity (or history)". Myers goes on to stress that a high degree of individual autonomy results from this situation. Autonomy is defined in the Oxford English Dictionary as "The power or right of self government, personal freedom, freedom of will". As such it is the opposite of the institutionalised dependency that European paternalism has produced in contemporary communities. The potential contrast in meaning between dependency and

interdependency is highlighted by the fact that in Aboriginal society interdependence is a mechanism that produces the autonomy Myers speaks of. Traditional autonomy stems from everyone being an authority for his or her own country. However, interdependence is highlighted when it is noted that everyone is dependent on others to carry out the life sustaining ceremonies associated with the land.

As well as being dependent on certain other groups ritually, there is a society-based dependence on the older generations to pass on the law. Significantly then, the continuation of the law is dependent on the continued authority of elders. This individual authority is based on the acceptance of the Dreaming as an explanation of the world. However, the arrival of Europeans threatened the very base of this overall authority for, as Sharp (1952:22) notes, white contact questioned "the authenticity of the origin myths, which failed to take into account this vast universe of the white man".

It is important to note that different Aboriginal people had different interests in the existing system. Old men who had devoted their life to the existing system were not likely to be easily lured into the new world. In contrast, a young unmarried man with years to wait for marriage and much longer to achieve ceremonial significance had much less of an investment in the traditional system. Elkin (1951:171) notes a common contact pattern was that of younger Aboriginal people desiring European goods and sharing European disdain for traditional culture. There is however, as Elkin notes a contradiction for these younger people because

they are not sure of themselves, for the white man does not really share with him his view and way of life ... (and as) these young people are not entrusted with sacred knowledge ... when later on in middle age, they find themselves disillusioned through their lack of admission into the white man's social and economic life, they have no spiritual retreat.

In an article that makes fascinating parallels between the contact process in the Victoria in the 1860's and the Northern Territory a century later, Barwick (1978:52) illustrates how women also have taken advantage of the assault on the traditional power base of old men. She writes that women "were quick to use — and even exploit — their new emancipation". She goes on to illustrate how the breakdown of marriage rules is one such example. Relationships between Aboriginal women and European men are another example of how women have opted out of the traditional power structures.

While there can be no denying the oppressive nature of many such relationships there was certainly a voluntary aspect as well. Aboriginal men often attempted to control these relationships but this was often undermined by women acting independently. Goods obtained as payment were, for example, often being consumed secretly by the women (Anderson 1983:494).

Many of the problems communities are now facing can be attributed to the dependency on Europeans created over years of paternalistic European control. Tonkinson's (1982) study of kids 'playing up' at Gigalong is equally applicable to Borroloola and no doubt many other Aboriginal communities as well. Tonkinson (*ibid*:124-126) points out the following chain reaction of events.

1. People moved into settlements and traditional methods of conflict resolution such as moving apart, were not possible.
2. Settlement life, with its high population densities, has led to problems and a reliance on Europeans to solve these problems.
3. Because of a "population explosion that followed sedentarism and acceptance of western medical treatment" (*ibid*:125) these settlements are youthful ones. This is a situation without parallels traditionally. The problem of kids 'playing up' can be attributed both to the combination of loss of traditional authority controlling them and the fact that there are more children about.
4. In this situation the very permissive traditional child rearing practices are quite inappropriate to the changing circumstances. Children now have a "power they never had traditionally — to abandon Aboriginal culture in favour of that of the whites" (*ibid*:126). Significantly also, little of the secret sacred life is passed on to them until they are teenagers. As Tonkinson notes (*ibid*)

In the meantime, they are being schooled and wooed by a host of Western cultural elements, such as movies, music, trips to the city, all of which turn their horizons outward to the wider world rather than inward toward Aboriginal culture and its powerful secrets.

Numerous other cases can be cited of the problems introduced by generations of Aboriginal exclusion from authority and decision making and the resulting dependency. These

issues are particularly pertinent in the contemporary climate of self determination with Aboriginal people suddenly being told they are the bosses.

Various aspects of the Yanyuwa contact experience outlined in the rest of this thesis are linked by the concept of dependency in two broad interconnected ways:

1. Patterns of traditional culture have made traditional Aboriginal people prone to becoming dependent.
2. Once these dependent situations are created a chain reaction of increasing dependency occurs.

For example, as a result of their ceremonial significance, the movement of older Aboriginal people into Borroloola led to a chain reaction of more and more people coming to live in town. A similar chain reaction occurred with "wrong way marriages", which helped undermine the traditional culture, leading in turn to more wrong way marriages. The process of working for Europeans also involved a spiral of increasing dependence with the use of European food sources and tobacco leading to a reliance on these. Such reliance made any attempted return to the bush extremely difficult.

As examined in section 9.1, dislocation has been a major result of Yanyuwa contact with Europeans. It is again a factor that can be seen in terms of dependency. Responsibilities to kin; for example, result in many people today travelling vast distances to maintain kinship obligations. Many other aspects of traditional life also work towards the creation of dependency. The importance of reciprocity to Aboriginal people, for example, has often worked against them in the contact situation. It has meant Aboriginal people have been prepared to give something to Europeans in the usually unfulfilled expectation that they will receive something in return. Similarly traditional beliefs have led Aboriginal people to seek mythological explanations to many of the dramatic changes Europeans have caused, in the process letting the perpetrators "off the hook".

Another aspect of traditional culture which has contributed to the impact of Europeans on Aboriginal people is the linguistic ability of Aboriginal people. This meant Aboriginal people had little trouble learning one more language and picking up English. As Curr (1886 Vol 1:26) notes, this skill contrasts with European linguistic abilities.

As a rule, White men, who are in daily contact with Blacks, seldom learn

half-a-dozen words of their language; but the Blacks always and quickly pick up sufficient broken English to understand what is necessary, and make themselves understood.

In the long term this was to the detriment of the survival of their own languages as the Europeans found it easier to rely on Aboriginal people learning English than vice versa. The widespread knowledge of English by Aboriginal people also led to the loss of Aboriginal languages as English became a lingua franca between Aboriginal groups.

The brief examples given in this section highlight the relevance of dependency to the analysis of contact. The subsequent description and analysis draws out many further examples of the relevance of this concept to culture contact processes. Dependency has played an important role in contact and greater consideration to its relevance needs to be given within the models of contact outlined above.

## Part II

# Physical and Cultural Landscape

# Chapter 5

## Environment

### 5.1 Introduction

This and the next chapter explore the interconnections between the physical and cultural landscapes. In this chapter four aspects of the physical environment are outlined: climate, location, land units and environmental change.

By placing emphasis in this chapter on Yanyuwa views of their physical landscape, I hope to minimise the influence of preconceived European views of this landscape. In so doing the unproductive, strange and indeed at times frightening landscape of the European imagination is transformed into the known bountiful home of the Yanyuwa. It needs to be noted that this transformation of perception was forced upon me during my field work. A telling personal realisation came on my very first trip to the Yanyuwa islands. When our outboard engine seized, we spent a number of days paddling through what for me was a frightening maze of mangrove lined channels and sand bars.<sup>1</sup> I imagined that this inhospitable environment provided little food and no drinking water and was more than a little concerned when our meagre supplies of both food and water ran out. It was only then that I came to see that the Yanyuwa men were literally at home in this landscape. With the benefit of decades of experience paddling canoes around the area they were relaxed and enjoying the chance to see their country. The end of my supplies did not signal disaster but initiated a three day lesson for me on how to live off the bush.<sup>2</sup> This and the next chapter summarise some of what I was

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<sup>1</sup>The need to get out of the boat to push us off the sand bars added to my unease due to the large number of crocodiles in the area.

<sup>2</sup>In a good example of their marine view of the world the Yanyuwa men I was with thought it to be

taught about the Yanyuwa environment on this and many other trips out bush with Yanyuwa people.

## 5.2 Tropical climate

The most striking feature of the region's climate is the intensely seasonal variation. Summaries of temperature and rainfall statistics for the Borroloola region are given in figure 5.1. As the graphs in this figure indicate, the contrast between the dry season and the wet season is stark but it is a Eurocentric view to consider that there are only two seasons in Northern Australia. As the Yanyuwa five season calendar (figure 5.2) indicates, the climatic pattern is much more complex than this.<sup>3</sup> In the Yanyuwa calendar *ngardaru* is the hot weather time of August and September. During *ngardaru* grasses die back, waterholes often dry out and dust storms (*kurumbirribirri*) are often whipped up by strong hot winds (*yunduyduwarra*). *Na-yinarramba* is the hot humid weather of November and December. This is a period of extreme human discomfort as temperatures regularly top 40°C and accompanying high humidity make any strenuous activity difficult. There is little relief at night time as the temperature rarely falls below 25°C and the humidity persists. As noted previously, conditions like these brought Spencer and Gillen's research at Borroloola to a virtual standstill. The Yanyuwa, despite their long experience of such weather, often respond in a similar way, minimising physical activity.<sup>4</sup> During this period there are often intense rainless electrical storms. In areas in the region that have not been managed by Aboriginal burning, lightning strikes during such storms often start large bush fires. A startling local meteorological feature that occurs at this time of year along the coast are the rolling clouds known as "morning glories"<sup>5</sup>

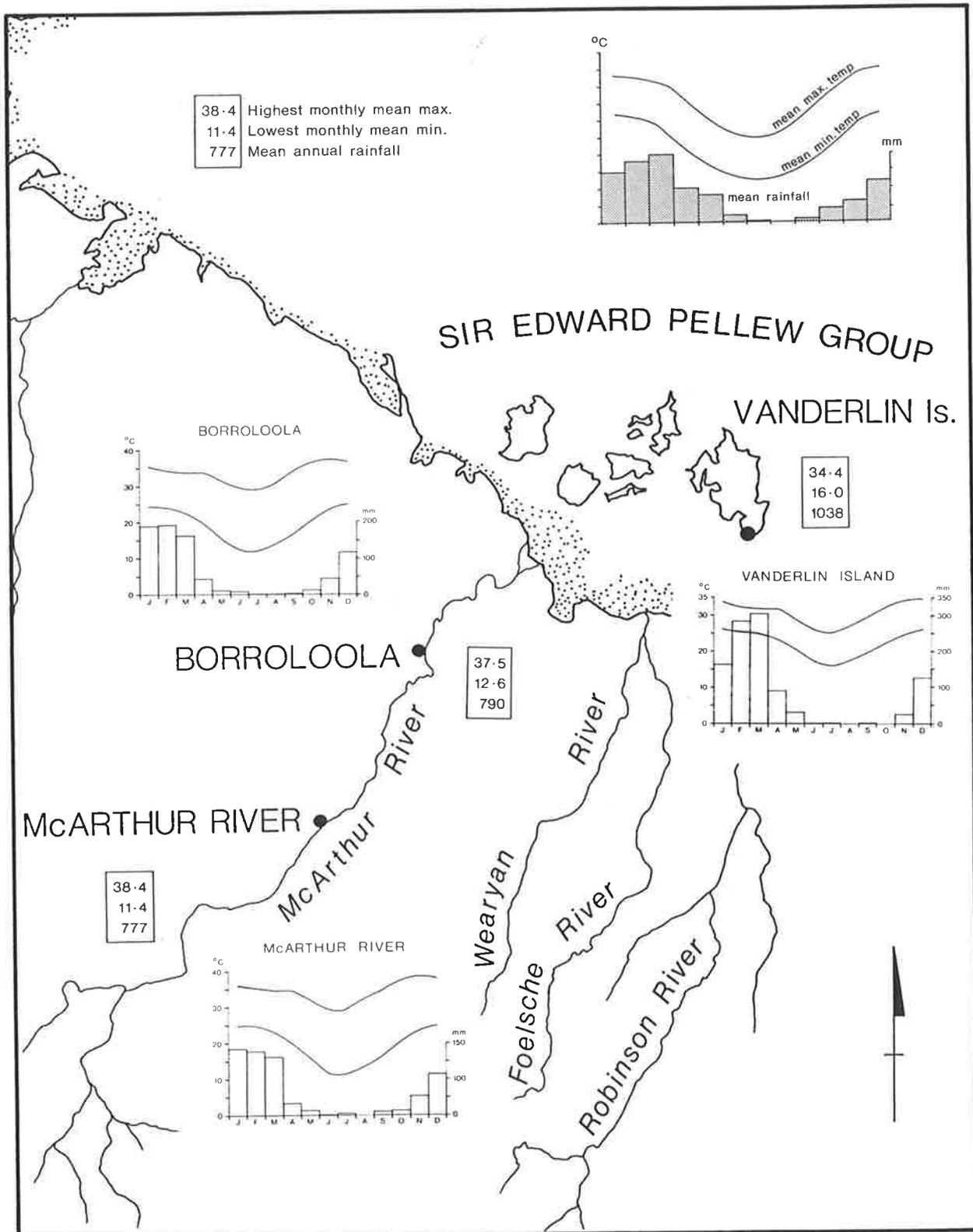
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safer to head out to sea over the horizon to an island outstation than to paddle back up the river and then to walk across country for help.

<sup>3</sup>Other researchers working in northern Australia have recorded the complexity of Aboriginal recognised seasons. Thomson (1949a:16) notes a six season system from his work in eastern Arnhem Land. Chase (1980:156) also records six recognised seasons from his Cape York fieldwork and Anderson (1984:96-97) records 5 seasons from another part of Cape York.

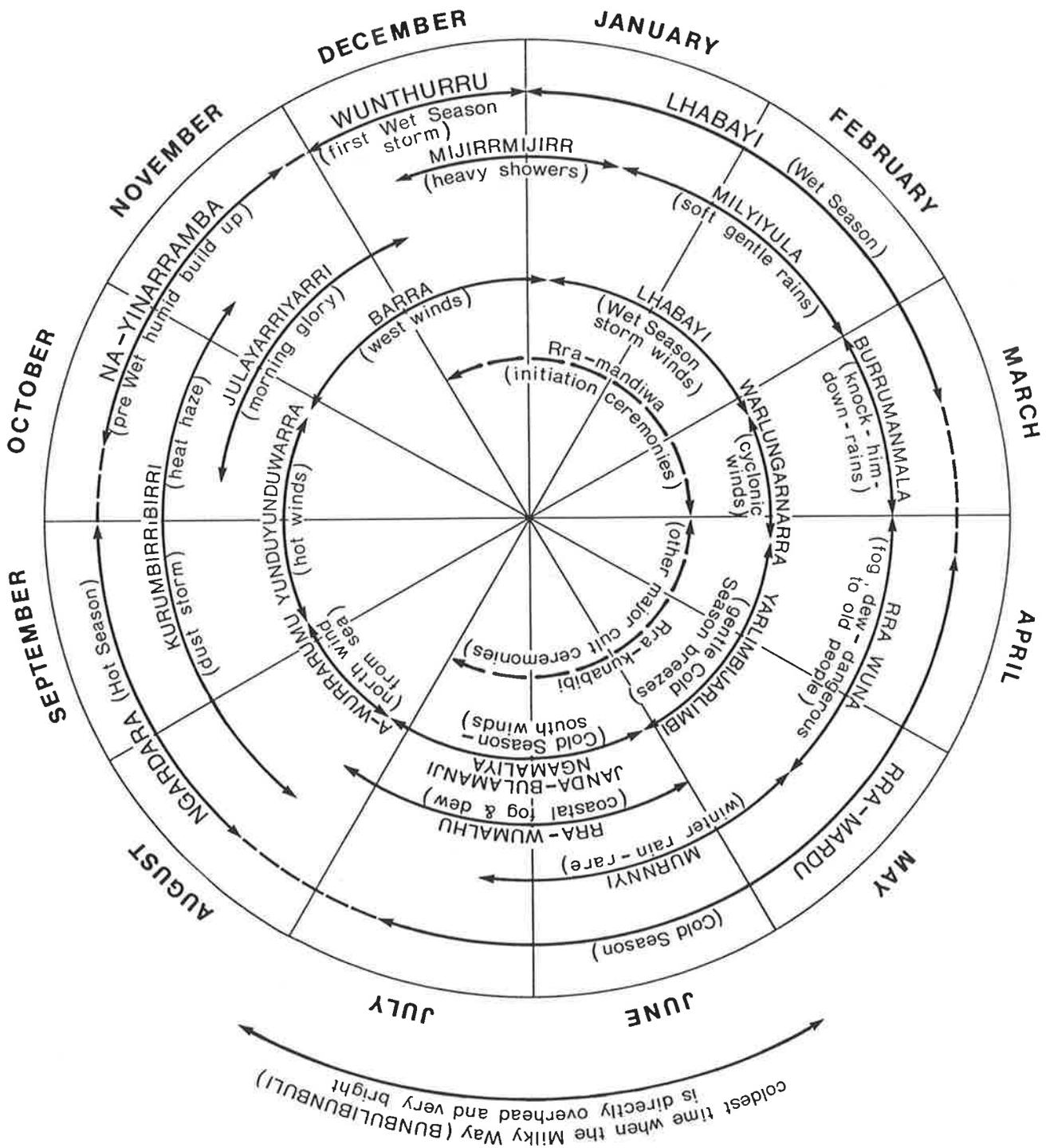
<sup>4</sup>Annie Karrakayn, who is said to have the power to 'sing up' the hot weather, told me (1987 Tape 65A 37 min.) during the pleasant cool weather of the dry season how she had been told by Tim Rakuwurlma not to bring on the hot weather as he was enjoying the cool dry season weather.

<sup>5</sup>See Bell 1988 for a detailed meteorological analysis of this feature. This feature plays a role in Yanyuwa mythology songs. A group of women sing a song concerning this cloud formation on 1987 Tape



Source: Bureau of Meteorology figures - Tabs elements NT-SA March 1988.

Figure 5.1: Temperature and rainfall figures for the Borroloola region



Notes: The months listed are only an approximate guide to when events start and finish. The exact date of onset of seasons is variable. It is the sequence and not the date of their occurrence that is recorded in Yanyuwa knowledge of the seasons (and plant and food resources see figures 6.7 and 6.8).

Figure 5.2: Yanyuwa concepts of seasons

The first storms of the wet season provide an enormous relief to the hot humid conditions. Spirits are lifted and tensions relaxed as rain finally falls after what is often a period of six to eight rainless months. The Yanyuwa sub-divide the wet season into *wunthurru* (early storm period) and *lhabayi* (wet season proper). *Lhabayi* is a period of heavy rainfall but it usually falls less violently than the rain of *wunthurru*. An unpredictable variable in the wet season are cyclones (*warlungarnarra*) that can occur any time between November and May.<sup>6</sup> Late in the wet season there are also usually *burrumanamala* (knock him down<sup>7</sup>) winds. These are windy rain storms which often flatten the high (often two metres and over) grass that has rapidly grown during the wet season.

*Rra-mardu* corresponds to the European recognised dry season. This is a long pleasant period with sunny generally cloudless days and cool evenings.

During *rra-mardu* heavy fogs (*rra-wuna*) often occur.<sup>8</sup> The fogs produce very heavy dews that make sleeping out in the open most unpleasant and wet. As a result this is a period of numerous colds, coughs and often influenza. The fogs are considered to have dangerous properties capable of causing the death of old people. Such fogs, however, tend to last only a few weeks and for the rest of *rra-mardu* conditions are pleasant and this is the time when large energy-draining ceremonies were held. European behaviour in the area has also been very season specific. For example, the recent tourist boom in the area (see section 7.9) is concentrated in the pleasant months of *rra-mardu*. As Bella Marrajabu notes<sup>9</sup> “when storm come now they all [go] back to their country”.

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62B 33 min. The cloud is also used as an indicator that flying foxes and certain bird species are about to commence their seasonal migrations.

<sup>6</sup>Figure 5.2 shows them occurring in the area in March as this is a common month for cyclones.

<sup>7</sup>This period is recognised by many Europeans in northern Australia and is given this name.

<sup>8</sup>Don Manarra (1987 Tape 62A 21 min.) describes how people were sometimes stranded out at sea at night in fogs and had to spend the night sitting it out, as they had no bearings for directions.

<sup>9</sup>1987 Tape 60A 9 min.

## 5.3 Significance of location

### 5.3.1 Introduction

The location of both Borroloola and the Sir Edward Pellew Islands has been a significant factor in the history of the Yanyuwa. The contact the Yanyuwa had with Macassans was due to the location of their islands, as was the subsequent relative isolation they enjoyed from Europeans.

Borroloola is located on the McArthur River near its tidal limits. It is also close to the point where Leichhardt crossed the river in 1844. Borroloola's location subsequently resulted in large numbers of cattle passing through the area as the Northern Territory pastoral industry was opened up and stocked from Queensland properties. Both Leichhardt and the cattle drovers passed through the Borroloola area for the same reason, which was that the Gulf rivers are easiest to cross near their tidal limits. In most cases a rocky bar exists at this point allowing an easy crossing. Downstream the rivers rapidly widen into wide, mangrove lined, crocodile inhabited estuaries, while upstream the rivers have often formed steep sided gorges through the rugged sandstone country. The crossing at Borroloola and another more precarious one 20km downstream at Wardawardala (see figure 1.3) were obviously significant factors in Aboriginal movements in the area, both before and after contact. As well as being used as crossings these rocky bars were used, as Leichhardt notes,<sup>10</sup> for fish traps:

These fords were generally indicated by fisheries of the natives, sticks having been stuck close to each other to form a sort of hedge, preventing the fish from returning with the tide, or stone walls having been formed by heaping loose stones on each other.

### 5.3.2 Limited road access

Until 1968 when the bitumen road into Borroloola was finished, vehicular access was extremely limited. As a newspaper report<sup>11</sup> in the 1930s put it, "there is only one way

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<sup>10</sup>Mitchell Library C159:6.

<sup>11</sup>(BHF 3) *Sunday Sun and Guardian* 25 June 1933 also in Australian Archives, Canberra, CRS A1 Item 33/7361 as a newspaper clipping.



Source: Ted Harvey collection.

Figure 5.3: The “Cora” being unloaded at the Landing, circa 1955

out of it [Borroloola] in the wet season, and that is to die”.<sup>12</sup> Until recent improvements in the road into Borroloola virtually all supplies were brought in by boat (figure 5.3 illustrates the longest serving of these boats the “Cora”). However, even access from the sea was difficult, due to the maze of mangrove lined shallow channels that make up the delta of the McArthur, an area of moving mudbanks that separates the Pelleus from the mainland and a series of hazardous submerged rocks in the river. To navigate these waters successfully, Yanyuwa pilots were required. Due to the submerged rocks and sand bars large vessels could not navigate the river beyond ‘the Landing’ (see figure 3.1). For much of the wet season roads to this area are impassable so supplies had to be carried up the river in smaller boats to Borroloola. Aboriginal paddled dugout canoes were the usual means by which supplies got to Borroloola (see figure 5.4).

Another buffer against Europeans was the large area of seasonally inundated mudflats *rrujuwangu* that are located behind the thick band of mangroves. This zone is as

<sup>12</sup>This same quote is used verbatim by Hill 1948:192.



Source: Steve Johnson collection.

Figure 5.4: Supplies from the "Cora" being carried by dugout canoe, circa 1955



Figure 5.5: The Burketown crossing at Borroloola after a storm, January 1984

equally inhospitable in European terms as the seaward belt of mangrove lined channels. Flooded for part of the year, the area dries out to become waterless and, in the dry season, winds whip up massive dust storms. Vehicular transport on the absolutely flat plain is deceptively easy until random patches of damp ground underneath the dry crust cause calamitous bogs. The high salinity of these mudflats makes them of no interest to European pastoralists. The only European economic activity carried out in this area was the collecting of salt that occurred at one specific location (see page 302). Apart from this isolated case, these flats were an economic and physical barrier that isolated the Yanyuwa island country from Europeans.

Although the opening of the bitumen road to Borroloola has made it possible to reach Borroloola in the wet season for much of that season, none of the other roads in the area is passable. Figure 5.5, for example, illustrates how much water can cover the road to Queensland after an overnight storm. Before the introduction of helicopters much of the Borroloola region was inaccessible to European forms of transport for up to six months a year.

### 5.3.3 Social isolation

Another important aspect of Borroloola's location is its isolation from the rest of the Northern Territory and particularly from Darwin. In European terms the "tyranny of distance" meant that transport and communication links to the outside world have always been poor. Ernestine Hill (1945:8) went so far as to claim that Borroloola "is the hardest place in Australia to get to, and the most difficult to get away from . . . You need a couple of years to spare to visit the place by land or sea". While transport links with Borroloola have improved since Hill wrote this, Borroloola is still one of the most isolated locations in Australia. A report prepared by the Bureau of Transport Economics in 1983, maps a remoteness index (the map is reproduced in Holmes 1988:70) which illustrates that there is only one area in Australia more remote than Borroloola. Significantly, this area (a band running from the Nullabor north through the Great Victoria and Gibson Deserts) has no settlements as large as Borroloola.

The isolation of Borroloola from Darwin and Katherine has led to it becoming dependent for many goods and services on Queensland. Links with Queensland have been strong ever since cattle were introduced into the area from Queensland last century. Great expectations for Borroloola's growth as a service town have never come to much, as stations in the area preferred to deal with Queensland rather than to rely on irregular, infrequent shipping connections between Borroloola and Darwin.

The isolation of Borroloola is well summed up by Peter Riley, who was a policeman there in the 1930s:<sup>13</sup>

There was only a bridle track to the Queensland border at Wollgorang. The only mail service [came] once a month from Camooweal via Tablelands stations, by motor truck in the "dry" and packhorses in the "wet". The police station had the only radio "Transceiver" for despatch and receipt of telegrams through the AIM Flying Doctor Base at Cloncurry. We could receive on voice but had to transmit on morse . . . It was a dead-end place, on the road to no-where.

Joyce Johnson gives another indication of the isolation of Borroloola before the opening

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<sup>13</sup>Letter to author 16 November 1987 (BHF 6).

of the bitumen road. She describes<sup>14</sup> that, after the severe cyclone in 1948 destroyed the radio at the police station, it was a week before a plane flew over and anyone outside Borroloola knew that most of the buildings in the town had been destroyed.

Borroloola's isolation made it a generally unpopular posting for European government officials. The early records of the Borroloola police letter book<sup>15</sup> illustrate this well. They are full of pleas to be posted elsewhere<sup>16</sup> and include a graphic description of one officer's decline and eventual suicide.<sup>17</sup> Sixty years later Borroloola still had a bad reputation as Joyce Johnson, who lived there with her policeman husband, recalls<sup>18</sup> "Borroloola always had a bad name for being so far away".<sup>19</sup>

Borroloola's isolation also had ramifications during the period that the Northern Territory Welfare Branch was active in the area. One officer remembers<sup>20</sup> that it was at the bottom of the pecking order as far as postings were concerned: "they could not get anyone to go there so I said 'I'll go out there'." Borroloola's isolation affected Aboriginal people during the welfare era. The former Director of the Welfare Branch, for instance, argues<sup>21</sup> that the Aboriginal people at Borroloola "were fortunate in their very isolation, except when the township started to grow in size, they were insulated from some of the worst features of the contact situation". Ted Harvey, who was a welfare officer at Borroloola in the 1950s and also served at a number of other Aboriginal settlements, made a similar comment<sup>22</sup> on the significance of Borroloola's isolation. He compares it with the other locations at which he was welfare officer and notes how in comparison at Borroloola "there was no [sealed] road, there were no tourists, there were no bad influences, there was no grog". Ted Harvey goes on to describe some of the implications of working on isolated settlements, recalling<sup>23</sup> that he often had to get on the radio to

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<sup>14</sup>1986 Tape 30B 3 min. She also outlines this incident in Johnson 1966:29.

<sup>15</sup>Northern Territory Archives, F275.

<sup>16</sup>Ibid. A letter written on 17 January 1888, for instance, starts "I have the honour respectfully to ask that you will be pleased to grant me a transfer from this station as soon as possible".

<sup>17</sup>Ibid. The suicide is reported on 5 September 1888.

<sup>18</sup>1987 Tape 31A 5 min.

<sup>19</sup>In Johnson (1966:28) she also writes of that the posting "was a kind of bogey, owing to its isolation".

<sup>20</sup>1987 Tape 1A 6 min.

<sup>21</sup>1986 Tape 26B 23 min.

<sup>22</sup>1987 Tape 3A 15 min.

<sup>23</sup>1987 Tape 3B 34 min.

order things from Darwin and that inevitably the wrong thing would arrive. He notes, for example, after a request for a spare part for a pump “a semi-trailer full of toilet paper” turned up and concludes that the Darwin office “didn’t have a clue what went on out in the bush on settlements, they had never been further than the ... Parap<sup>24</sup>. But that would be the extent of their bush knowledge, so they never worried us and we never worried them”.<sup>25</sup>

Harvey also makes an interesting comment<sup>26</sup> on the breakdown of Borroloola’s isolation in the 1960s with the general improvement in Australian air transport and the political implications this had. He compared how long it took to fly anywhere in the 1950s with the 1960s when “air transport speeded up and politicians thought this was a good lurk for winter ‘we’ll head up for Darwin’.” He goes on to suggest that these short term contacts politicians had with the Northern Territory led them to push for changes of policy in Aboriginal affairs “instead of coming along with the assimilation plan as was Harry Giese’s<sup>27</sup> plan ... they just wanted it changed overnight completely”.

Another indicator of the area’s isolation is that it was not until the mid 1970s that the taxation department finally “discovered” a number of properties in the area and attempted to tax them.<sup>28</sup> The dramatic increase in tourism in recent years in the Borroloola area presents another example of the significance of the isolation of the area. It is the isolation of Borroloola and “untouched” remoteness that is a major factor in attracting tourists. This clearly is not a sustainable situation, the commodity of isolation is destroyed by the utilisation of this resources. The tourists are attracted by the isolation of the area, the chance to camp away from other tourists and to fish for barramundi but all these resources are being rapidly diminished because of the presence of tourists in such large numbers.

It is important to note that the examples of isolation discussed above are about isolation from Europeans and European services. The Yanyuwa pre-contact would have

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<sup>24</sup>Referring to a “pub” about 2km from the centre of Darwin.

<sup>25</sup>The isolation of Aboriginal people in general from city based administrators has, as Stanner (1979:8-9) observes, had considerable importance for the development and administration of Aboriginal policy in Australia. He notes, for example, how failure to act on Aboriginal health problems in part can be attributed to “the widespread ignorance of what conditions are actually like among the tribes”.

<sup>26</sup>1987 Tape 2B 35 min.

<sup>27</sup>Giese was the long time Director of the Welfare Branch (see page 226).

<sup>28</sup>Discussed on 1987 Tape 57A 20 min.

felt, as each Aboriginal group did, that they were at the centre of the universe. It is only since contact that they have been isolated and this has been isolation from European services and centres of population. In recent years, however, with the increasing development of Aboriginal run organisations such as the Northern Land Council, which are centralised city based bodies established and run along European administrative lines, the Yanyuwa are beginning to become isolated from Aboriginal organisations as well as European ones.

## 5.4 Yanyuwa concepts of land units

The way the Yanyuwa see their environment is a fundamental theme of this thesis. It is essential therefore, to examine this environmental knowledge in detail. In doing so, the contrast between the depth of knowledge the Yanyuwa have of their environment and the limited scientific understanding Europeans have of this landscape is highlighted.

The Yanyuwa system of land classification is similar to that developed by the Commonwealth Scientific and Industrial Research Organization (CSIRO) in Australia in the late 1940s in their Land Research Series.<sup>29</sup> In a later volume in this series, Speck et al (1960) refer back to an earlier volume, saying:

The concept of land units and land systems as an appropriate technique for comprehensive surveys was developed by Christian and Stewart (1953), who defined it as “an area or group of areas through-out which can be recognized a recurring pattern of topography, soils and vegetation”.

This technique of recognising areas where the combination of topography, soils and vegetation produce distinctive land units is essentially the same as the much older Yanyuwa system of land classification outlined in figure 5.6. It also needs to be stressed that it is not surprising that the Yanyuwa and CSIRO techniques for arriving at these units are similar because the aims of the two systems are essentially the same. The CSIRO surveys assessed large areas to provide an inventory of natural resources with the aim of facilitating their economic development (Christian 1952:140). The aim of the Yanyuwa system is the same. Despite this correspondence in interests in understanding

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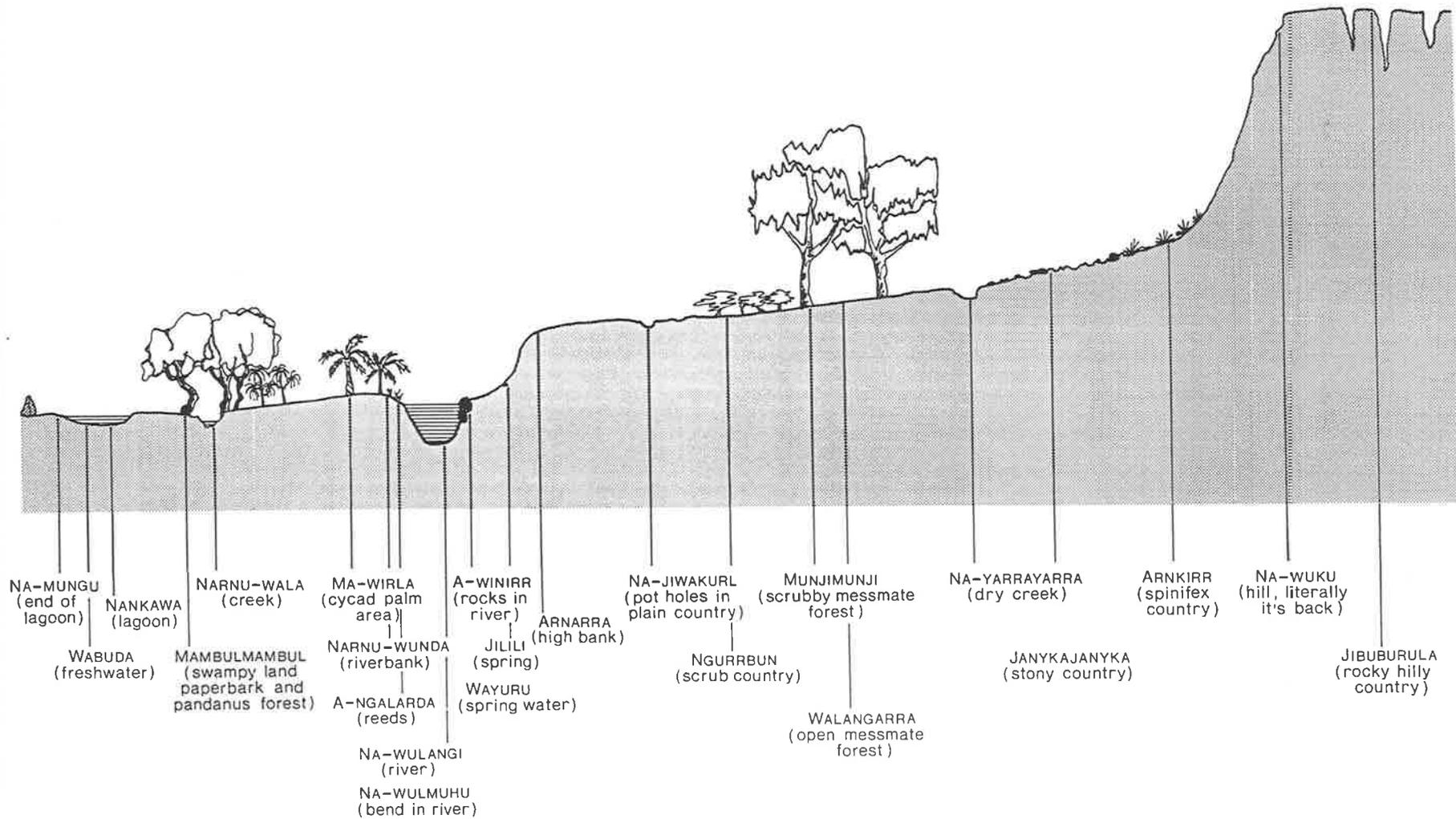
<sup>29</sup>Jones (1980a) makes the same point about the land classification system of the Gidjingali of Arnhem Land.

the land and its resources, scientists have tended to ignore Aboriginal knowledge of the environment. The third Land Research Series CSIRO published (Christian et al 1954) was on the Barkly region including Borroloola. It is ironic to note that while CSIRO was essentially doing on a larger scale what Aboriginal people had done on a smaller scale for millennia, Aboriginal people, let alone their environmental knowledge, do not rate a mention in this publication.

Despite the importance of understanding Aboriginal views of their landscape, research in Australia on Aboriginal environmental knowledge has been limited. Tindale's 1962 paper "Geographical Knowledge of the Kaiadilt people of Bentinck Island" briefly deals with such knowledge. The anthropologist Strehlow (1965) examines the links between environmental and mythological knowledge. The nature of Aboriginal recognised boundaries is discussed by Williams (1982:141) who notes the role vegetation, physiographic and soil variations have in defining boundaries. Thomson (1939:212) and Jones (1980a:13) discuss land units recognised respectively by the Wik Monkan of Cape York and the Gidjingali of Arnhem Land. Chase (1980:151) and Chase and Sutton (1981) also present a detailed account of Aboriginal recognised land units on western and eastern Cape York.

Thomson, Jones, Chase and Sutton are all describing coastal areas with linear patterns of land units running parallel to the coast. Yanyuwa country is environmentally more complex than this due to the extension of marine environments inland along the tidally influenced McArthur River and due to the extension of terrestrial environments out into the sea due to the numerous islands of the Sir Edward Pellew Group. It needs to be stressed then that while the mapping of land units in figure 5.6 follows the same inland to sea cross-section that the other mentioned authors have used, my cross-section is very much an idealised one. The wide range of different land units occurring in the area are listed but one would never find them all on one given transect.

Of particular importance to the Yanyuwa economy prior to European settlement were large permanent lagoons *nankawa*. As figure 5.6 indicates such lagoons tend to be located in the zone stretching from *yarriwin* (ant hill country, see figure 5.8) to *ma-wirla* (cycad palm zone, see figure 5.9). The bulk of Yanyuwa terrestrial resources listed in figures 6.7 and 6.8 and their drinking water are in this zone. As figure 5.7 illustrates water lilies are to be found in these lagoons and as outlined below these were



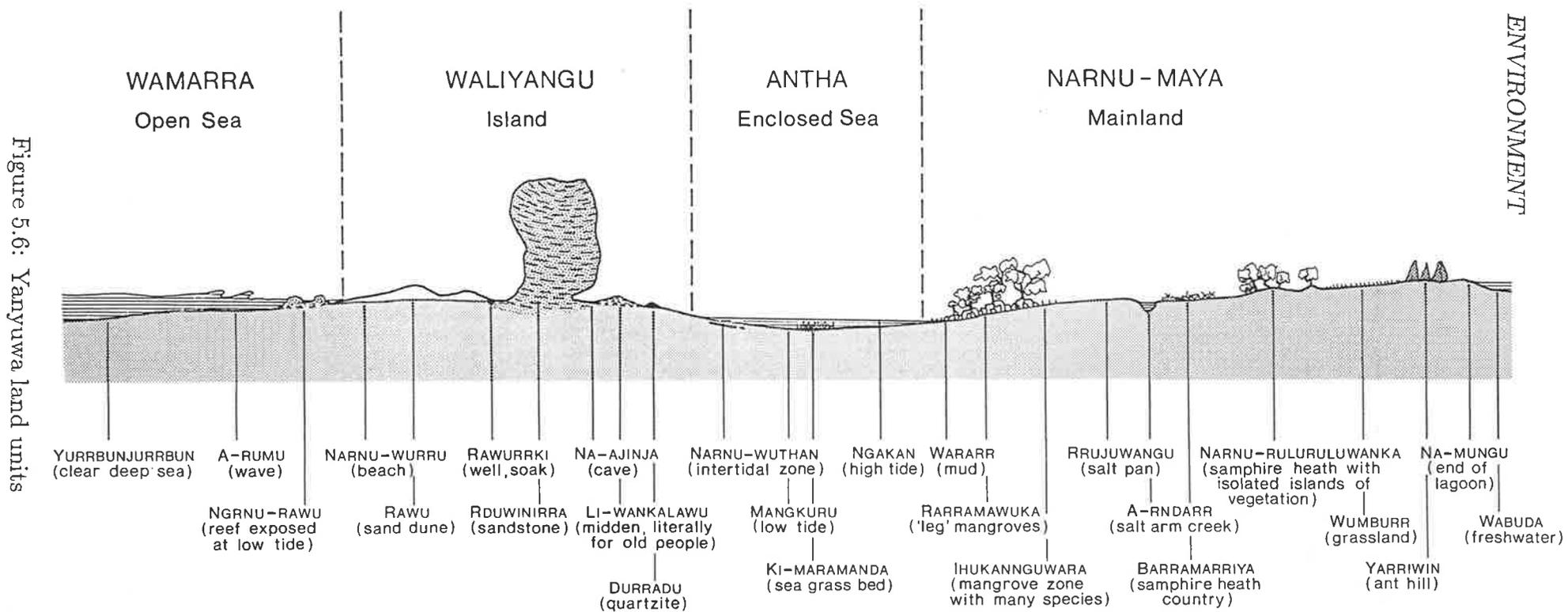


Figure 5.6: Yanyuwa land units



Figure 5.7: *Nankawa* (lagoon) in the late dry season



Figure 5.8: *Yarriwin* (ant-hill country)



Figure 5.9: *Ma-wirla* (cycad country) at Manangoora

a particularly important food resource. In the late dry season when drinking water was scarce most Yanyuwa people would have moved from the islands and lived close to such lagoons. It is important to note that with European settlement these lagoons quickly became foci for Europeans activities as the new settlers and their cattle were equally dependent on the lagoons for water.

Some features of the Yanyuwa environment not covered in figure 5.6 are the tendency for them to call (using English) sand ridges in coastal areas “islands”<sup>30</sup> and the end of these ridges “capes”. While the reason for this is not clear in the dry season, it is very obvious in the wet season when these ridges do become islands. Another “land unit” that obviously varies with the seasons is the salt water — fresh water boundary of the rivers. The term *Wurrunkurrin*<sup>31</sup> is used to describe the brackish water where salt and fresh water merge and this moves up the McArthur River as the dry season progresses, usually reaching Borroloola in the late dry when the temperature is beginning to rise.

Figure 5.6 also illustrates how the Yanyuwa with their marine emphasis do not

<sup>30</sup>Trigger 1987:72 notes that Ganggaliida people (whose country is about 200km east of Yanyuwa country) use this term in the same way.

<sup>31</sup>Eileen Yakibijna and Annie Karrakayn (1987 Tape 65A 33 min.) discuss this and other terms concerning rivers.



Figure 5.10: Sandy mudflats in the *narnu-wuthan* zone



Figure 5.11: *Ki-maramanda* (sea-grass country)

restrict their classification of land units to terrestrial environments. A number of marine units are differentiated and knowledge of the characteristics of these different areas is of fundamental importance to economic activity carried out in these zone. The inter-tidal zone *narnu-wuthan* was a particularly important zone for the Yanyuwa economy. At low tide shellfish were gathered from sandy flats (such as the area in figure 5.10) and crabs caught from exposed sea grass beds (figure 5.11 illustrates this area which the Yanyuwa call *ki-maramanda*). At high tide *ki-maramanda* was also of vital importance as this was the zone dugong could be caught in as they grazed on the sea grass.

## 5.5 Environmental change

The Yanyuwa are conscious of both natural and human induced environmental change.<sup>32</sup> A major element in natural change are cyclones which are capable of producing major changes in the vegetation and geomorphology of coastal margins. After a major cyclone in the region in the 1984<sup>33</sup> considerable comment was made on where they had built up land and where they had destroyed land. It is European induced environmental change, however, that has had the greatest impact on Yanyuwa land.

The environmental changes that the Yanyuwa are most conscious of are ones changing the resources they hunt and gather. Cattle have been a major factor in such change in the area and women in particular often comment on the drastic effects this has on traditional food gathering. Dinah Marrngawi, for instance, notes<sup>34</sup> how cattle damage water lilies “knock him in” and how today people “can’t find *murndangu*,<sup>35</sup> too much cattle . . . muck him up [ground] and can’t find him ground for *murndangu*”. Likewise Bella Marrajabu remarks that cattle:<sup>36</sup>

eat him [water lilies] he go down long water and grab him, eat him up and

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<sup>32</sup>The acute awareness Aboriginal people have of environmental changes occurring in the landscape around them has also been noted by Meehan (1975:27) in her work with the Gidjingali. She notes that the “appearance of new land, shifts in mangrove belts or in river channels are always noted and their causes keenly discussed”.

<sup>33</sup>Discussed in more detail on page 384.

<sup>34</sup>1987 Tape 61B 38 min.

<sup>35</sup>Fresh water turtles gathered in the late dry season in dried up billabongs. They are located by finding the bulge in the ground where they have buried themselves.

<sup>36</sup>1987 Tape 60A 12-13 min.

we looking for that lily seed, for roots, he gone, he eat him that bullocky, that's no good ... no matter where you go you look bullocky foot here, no turtle, some turtle run away hide long river side now, big river, because too many bullocky.

Cattle are also held responsible for lagoons no longer lasting through to the next wet season. Pyro<sup>37</sup> talks about how many wallabies were around in welfare times:

lot of wallaby been that day, you can't see wallaby much now. I don't know where they gone ... a lot of places go dry every waterhole, all over some lagoon there ... most of the wallaby gone and water dry, everywhere gone dry.

Another example of the Yanyuwa becoming aware of changes in the resources they depend on, arises from the growing concentration of Aboriginal people in Borroloola after World War Two. As Annie Karrakayn notes,<sup>38</sup> there were from this time on too many people to live off the resources of the nearby bush: "too many people used to live around and not enough kangaroo, not enough anything, goanna because big mob [see Appendix A] ... too many people". In more recent years the Yanyuwa have begun to notice not only that the resources around Borroloola were being depleted but that resources over a wider area have been depleted: "we used to get plenty of fish, not now all the whitefella take him away now ... *warrki* [see Appendix A] greedy one".

As well as changes in the resources that their country is supporting, the Yanyuwa have also seen landforms change. Due to the seasonally concentrated rainfall, which often falls in torrential storms, and the loose friable alluvial soils, the Borroloola area is very prone to erosion if the vegetation cover is damaged. A good example of the rate of erosion in the area and the role Europeans have played in initiating it, is given in the recent origin of "Bough Shade Creek" (see figure 1.7). After wet season storms, this creek flows through a gully which is in places over 4 metres deep. The creek, however, is an artefact of European activity, having been formed along a road that led from the store to a winch on the river bank that was once used to unload cargo.<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>37</sup>1987 Tape 63A 44 min.

<sup>38</sup>1987 Tape 48A 26 min.

<sup>39</sup>Steve Johnson 1987 Tape 29B 27 min.



Figure 5.12: Over grazed land

Cattle also have initiated erosion. It is, however, a little harder to categorically attribute particular erosion features to them. The actions of cattle are more widely distributed than those of humans in cases such as the Bough Shade Creek example. As figure 5.12 illustrates, areas that are densely stocked can lose their grass cover and become highly vulnerable to erosion. One large area of eroded badlands (see figure 5.13) about 10 kilometres upstream of Borroloola presents a most dramatic example of erosion that has apparently been initiated by overstocking. This is an area in which cattle had been concentrated for a long time because in the late dry season water was available from the McArthur River and several large lagoons in the area. The high river banks in the area make it particularly prone to large scale erosion.

All these examples of environmental change are apparently about to pale into insignificance compared with the damage the cane toad will cause in the area if the westward spread of this animal is not stopped. The dramatic impact this animal has had on areas east of Borroloola is well known to the Yanyuwa due to the links they have with the Aboriginal community of Doomadgee in Queensland. In particular people have heard how the toads have virtually eliminated goannas and other lizards to



Figure 5.13: Badlands

the point that “nobody been go hunting”.<sup>40</sup> The toads have recently reached the Pungalina area (see figure 7.9) and Isa notes<sup>41</sup> that relatives visiting the area “been look all the dead [goanna] all over the place”. As these animals make up the bulk of the meat women from Borrooloola now obtain from the bush, the Yanyuwa women are particularly apprehensive about their imminent arrival in the areas they hunt in.

Another invasion that is have increasing environmental implications is the dramatic increase in tourists visiting Borrooloola. As discussed in section 7.9, the Yanyuwa are already feeling the environmental impact of tourists.

## 5.6 Conclusion

This chapter has highlighted how seemingly objective quantifiable aspects of the landscape are very differently perceived by Europeans and the Yanyuwa. It is therefore important to stress that the cultural and physical environments are not neatly sepa-

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<sup>40</sup>Isa Yubuyu 1988 Tape 4B 13 min.

<sup>41</sup>Ibid 14 min.

rated but in fact are a product of each other.

# Chapter 6

## Cultural Landscape

### 6.1 Introduction

As highlighted in the previous chapter the physical environment is perceived in contrasting ways by different people. While the landscape can be analysed in terms of objective measurable criteria (for example, temperature ranges, precipitation, etc.) the landscape is much more than this. The landscape is as much a mental construct as it is a physical reality. It is the result of how people both see and influence the world around them. In so far as much of this view is culturally learnt, and the uses culturally determined the landscape needs to be seen as a cultural construct. In the context of this study it is important to examine understandings Europeans and Aboriginal people have of the landscape of the Borroloola area and in turn to explore the contrasts between these respective understandings. The culture landscape needs to be seen as the dynamic result of interactions between contrasting European and Aboriginal land uses and understandings of the land.

A fundamental tool in such an examination is the concept Carl Sauer proposed, and which the so called Berkeley school developed, of the "cultural landscape". This concept provides a framework for this chapter. It is argued, however, that the cultural landscape concept needs to be developed further than the Berkeley school took it. My approach follows the course Cosgrove and Jackson (1987:95) argue for the " 'new' cultural geography". As Rowntree (1988:580) notes, this new cultural geography "builds upon the Berkeley school tradition with a revitalized emphasis on the landscape as a cultural construction that structures and gives meaning to the external world". As

Duncan and Duncan (1988:125) observe recent debate in cultural geography has highlighted the need for the landscape to “be seen as transformations of social and political ideologies into physical form”.

In this chapter the dynamic nature of this cultural landscape will be stressed. Yanyuwa society has had an internal dynamic that has constantly redefined its relationships with the land. These changing relationships are the combined result of a changing environment and the development of cultural knowledge of this environment. The detailed knowledge the Yanyuwa have of their land is the product of an attentive and retentive culture. What observant individuals have discovered over many generations about their environment has often been culturally retained. It should be noted that mythology has a role in formally codifying such knowledge and hence assists in its maintenance.

As well as this internal source of change two external cultures (firstly Macassan and later European) have greatly influenced Yanyuwa life. Hence three separate elements of change need to be examined in this chapter. To study the two introduced agents of change it is necessary to adopt the slice in time approach often used in historical geography. To understand both how the external agents influenced Yanyuwa life and conversely how the Yanyuwa influenced the newcomers, it is necessary to reconstruct a picture of what Yanyuwa life was like at both the time of contact with Macassans and Europeans. Such reconstructions can then act as baselines against which change can be measured. In noting such change, caution needs to be taken to avoid an overly causative and unidirectional model of change. As I show many aspects of Yanyuwa life have not changed as a result of contact. Moreover, while contact has initiated many changes, it is important to note that the course of such change is usually structured by existing Yanyuwa culture. Further, it is possible to note (see section 9.9) examples of how the alien culture has been influenced by the Yanyuwa.

Section 6.5 charts this dynamic and interactive aspect of the Yanyuwa cultural landscape by going beyond a slice in time view and examines some specific changing aspects of Yanyuwa life over time. The first factor examined is the Yanyuwa language and examples are given of how it creatively adapted to cover new concepts. In keeping with my theme of people and place, the other factors examined in this section are; land use, territorial organisation, population, perception of country, and material culture.

While on first consideration material culture might appear somewhat removed from the theme of people and place, this is far from the case. It is through material culture that people make use of and live in places. As outlined below Sauer's definition of the cultural landscape stresses "the specific geographic expressions" people leave on the landscape with the aid of their material culture. Changes in material culture are hence direct causes of changing cultural landscapes. Studying changes in material culture provides an important key to understanding less material aspects of cultural changes. As I illustrate in the Yanyuwa case, a study of material culture provides examples of the adaptation of European items to distinctively Yanyuwa usages. It needs to be noted that this pattern of creative adaptation mirrors similar changes in less material aspects of Yanyuwa life and that therefore the study of changes in material culture can provide ready pointers to less material changes.

My approach then involves charting the cultural landscape at different times in the past by integrating the two usually separate historical geography techniques of examining slices in time and processes over time. Temporal and geographic parameters are integrated to depict how the cultural landscape changed over both time and space. As written records documenting past Aboriginal life in the area are extremely limited the reconstructions I make of the impact of contact on Yanyuwa life are made mainly by observing current Aboriginal life in the area<sup>1</sup> and trying to separate out those aspects of life that anthropologists would call traditional from the non-traditional. Such a process, however, has two particular difficulties.

Firstly, aspects of "traditional" life of other areas were introduced into Yanyuwa life as a result of contact. Hence the arrival of the sub-section system (see Appendix G for details) is a recent event and appears to have been a direct result of increased Aboriginal mobility that resulted from European contact. Reay (1963) and McConvell (1985) both discuss Borroloola skin groups (also called subsections) and argue that they have been introduced to the area within living memory. It is important then to stress the regional variations in Aboriginal culture and the dynamic processes of regional interaction.<sup>2</sup> Acknowledging this regional variation provides the opportunity then to

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<sup>1</sup>The other main information source available is archaeological sites. However, in the absence of any detailed excavations in the area, conclusions from archaeological sites can only be tentative and restricted to comments on matters like distribution of sites and nature of surface remains.

<sup>2</sup>Chase (1980:382) makes a similar point noting that "local and regional differences in identity need to be recognised as dynamic, not static" and he concludes by calling for anthropology to make greater

examine the dynamic nature of different interacting Aboriginal cultural systems.

The second problem with the approach outlined concerns the concept of “traditional”. The Yanyuwa example highlights the misleading nature of the “traditional” concept. Because European contact was preceded by a long period of Macassan contact, it needs to be stressed that the pre-European cultural landscape was itself partly shaped by outside contact. The arrival of Europeans does not represent a divide between a rapidly changing European influenced lifestyle and an unchanging “traditional” one. The use of the term “traditional” encourages this incorrect perception of Aboriginal society and the way it responded to contact with Europeans. The concept obscures the dynamic nature of Aboriginal society both before and after the arrival of Europeans and is very much an Eurocentric one that stresses the moment of Europeans arriving. It creates a false dualism between a hypothetical unchanging “traditional” past and a post-European situation of great change.

## 6.2 Definition of the cultural landscape

Sauer in 1925 (reprinted in Sauer 1963:343) presented a diagrammatical model of the cultural landscape that is summarised in figure 6.1. He adds to this model a discussion (ibid) of how a new alien culture creates a new cultural landscape “superimposed on remnants of an older one”. In a later work Sauer (1941a:7) further defines the cultural landscape as:

the geographic version of the economy of the group, as providing itself with food, shelter, furnishing, tools and transport. The specific geographic expressions are the fields, pastures, woods, and mines, the productive land on one hand, and the roads and structures on the other, the homes, workshops, and storehouses . . .

His words are revealing in how they move from describing universal factors to “specific geographic expressions” that are decidedly Eurocentric. In this definition of “specific geographic expressions”, Sauer fails in his goal, outlined above (see page 84), of seeing the landscape through the eyes of the user. The role indigenous cultural landscapes have had in shaping present cultural landscapes is also obscured by such a model.

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attempts to study such dynamism.

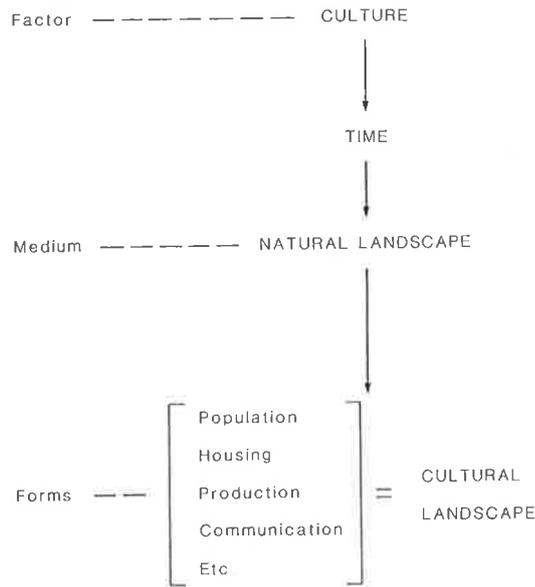


Figure 6.1: Simplified version of Sauer’s model of the cultural landscape

A more appropriate model of the cultural landscape is outlined in figure 6.2. It acknowledges the existence of an indigenous cultural landscape and the interactive relation this had with the European culture of the immigrants. The two contemporary cultural landscapes in this model are the result of the two groups responding to a new land. The newness of the land to Europeans has long been acknowledged but the fact that the land was in a sense new to Aboriginal people as well has rarely been noted. The land, however, was often new to Aboriginal people not only because of large scale environmental changes brought by the arrival of Europeans but also because contact often involved the shifting of Aboriginal people to areas unknown to them.

The common ground in the two contemporary cultural landscapes represents accommodations each group has made to the other. Both attitudes towards, and use of, the land, however, remain largely separate. This diagrammatic zone of interaction parallels with a geographic zone of articulation discussed above (page 106). As Meinig (1986:208) outlines a frontier zone where the intruding cultural group is in part dependent on the existing cultural group is a zone of “articulation and interdependence”.

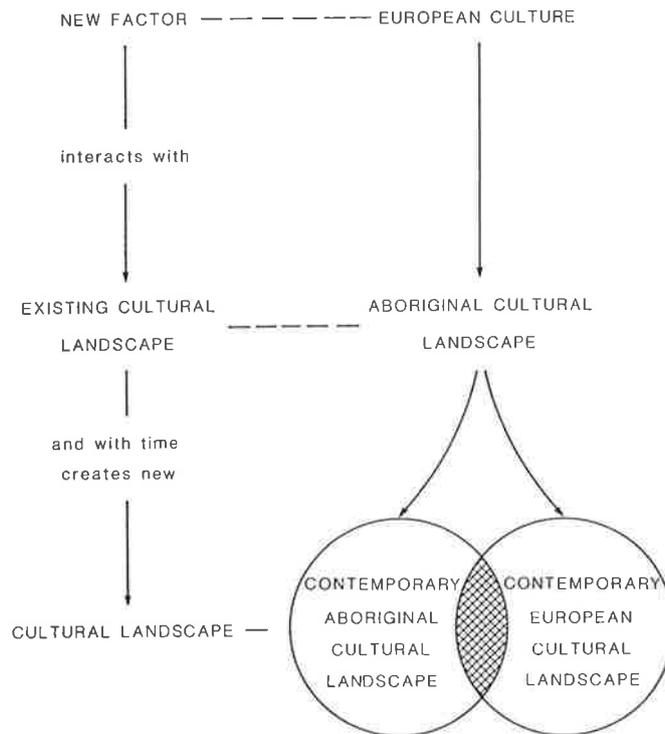


Figure 6.2: An interactive model of the changing cultural landscapes

Thus the model developed here, as well as following Sauer's idea of the cultural landscape as the expression on the landscape of economic activity, material culture and settlement patterns, also stresses that the cultural landscape is the outcome of the sum of attitudes and perception of the landscape of those living in it. As Solot (1986:509) notes, Sauer's conception of the cultural landscape stresses the physical expressions of culture at the expense of "nonmaterial elements such as values, social structure, religion, and economic organization". It is essential that these non-material aspects of culture be incorporated into a model of the cultural landscape. As demonstrated in this thesis, non-material aspects of culture, such as the contrasting attitudes towards land that different groups of people hold, played an important role in the culture contact process. Such an integrated model of the cultural landscape offers a middle ground between the emphasis Sauer places on the physical expression of culture on the landscape and the idealist approach taken by geographers such as Guelke (1982). As Dennis (1983:588) notes, in this work Guelke tends only to consider "land insofar as it reflects the consequences of rational thought".

In integrating Sauer's concerns for physical features in the landscape with non-material aspects of culture, it is necessary to adopt some of the understandings developed by structuralist approaches. Palm (1986:471), in a review of such work notes that a starting point for such work has been the conviction that "because people make decisions within highly constrained circumstances, good geography must study the nature of these constraints". As illustrated in this thesis, the Yanyuwa have often acted within such highly constrained circumstances and therefore coming to an understanding of these constraints is a fundamental step in coming to understand their responses to contact.

## 6.3 The Macassan influenced cultural landscape

### 6.3.1 Macassan contact

The Macassans were fisherman who annually sailed from the port of Macassar in the Celebes<sup>3</sup> to northern Australia. While in Australian waters they obtained a variety of goods. Macknight (1976:44-45), for example, mentions that items the Macassans took back with them included trepang, tortoise-shell, pearl-shell, pearls, sandalwood, tin, manganese, dried shark tails and buffalo horns. Stokes (1846a:60) also gives a reference to red ochre being obtained by the Macassans. Of these items trepang<sup>4</sup> and turtle and pearl shell were by far the most important items. Recent research has tended to stress the trepanging side of the Macassan visits, because this activity is so obvious in the archaeological record. The stone lines (see figure 6.3) that the Macassans used to boil up the trepang are a highly prominent reminder of the trepanging that occurred.

Yanyuwa oral accounts, however, stress the importance also of gathering turtle and pearl shell to trade with the Macassans. Significantly, these were activities that the Yanyuwa could have continued year round and was not seasonal like the trepanging. Gillen, who was in Borroloola in 1901, confirms the importance of pearl and turtle shell gathering in the following account (1968:317): "A great number of blacks ... collect tur-

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<sup>3</sup>Now known as Ujung Pandang and Sulawesi respectively.

<sup>4</sup>Marine cucumbers also known as *bêche de mer*. Trepang is a general term for a range of edible holothurians species.



Figure 6.3: Stone line at Karruwa

tle shell and pearl shell for the Malays who ... give them rice, toacco and ... arrack.<sup>5</sup>

Much of the modern state of Indonesia is closer to Australia than Macassar but it was merchants from this island who as a result of their entrepreneurial history controlled the trade of the above listed items between Australia and markets in south-east Asia. Despite this Macassan control there was a considerable ethnic diversity amongst the crew of the praus. As Macknight (1976:17-18) notes there were Bugis, Papuan New Guineans, Javanese, Ceramese, Sumbawese and Badjuese all working on the praus. Despite this ethnic diversity the term Macassan is a useful one and justified as they were the entrepreneurs who organised the trade.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>5</sup>A strong alcoholic drink.

<sup>6</sup>Macknight (1976:1-2) introduced the use of the term "Macassan" which replaced the misleading term, "Malay", that had previously been much used in the literature. Macknight's (1976:1-2) definition of a Macassan as "any person who came in the annual fleet of praus to the Northern Territory" is, however, somewhat misleading itself due to the ethnic diversity of these crews, that he himself notes.

A fleet of praus left Macassar each year when the north-east monsoon winds set in, usually in December (Macknight 1976:32). With the aid of these winds Australia could be reached in between 10-15 days (ibid:35). The return voyage was made when the winds reversed with the establishment of the south-east trade winds, usually in April (ibid:37). In the four months in between the Macassans appear to have spent most of their time gathering and processing trepang which abounds in the shallow mud flats of northern Australia. The Macassans's established trepang processing camps along the Northern Territory coastline<sup>7</sup> from the Cobourg Peninsula eastwards as far as the Sir Edward Pellew Group (ibid:62, Baker 1986). There is evidence that they occasionally travelled further eastward as far as Sweers Island in Queensland (Macknight 1976:187, Dymock 1973). Macassan visits east of the Pellews, however, were probably only occasional and accidental as no processing camps have been recorded past the Pellews.

Each prau carried a number of dugout canoes which were used to carry trepang that they had gathered to the processing camps the Macassans set up. The trepang was obtained by a variety of means. It was gathered off mud banks exposed at low tide, speared with barbed darts with long bamboo handles (Wildley 1876:80), brought to the surface by divers or obtained by dredging.<sup>8</sup> Techniques used would have depended on the relative abundance of the trepang and on factors such as water clarity, which would have determined when diving would take over from spearing as a means of obtaining trepang.

As each Macassan prau had a crew of about 30 (Macknight 1976:29) the Macassans had a substantial labour force to gather trepang. The efficiency of the enterprise, however, would have been greatly increased when Aboriginal labour could be obtained. There was therefore an economic motive for the Macassans to stay on good terms with Aboriginal people. In turn Aboriginal people also had an interest in relationships staying on good terms so they could obtain the items the Macassans traded with them in exchange for labour and supplying them with items such as turtle-shell.

The Macassans chose locations to establish their camps where there were nearby shallow mud flats, wood to collect to burn in their fire places and drinking water.

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<sup>7</sup>Crawford 1969 documents that the Macassans also visited the Kimberley coastline of Western Australia.

<sup>8</sup>Macknight (1976:50) argues that this last technique was only introduced in the 1840s. Searcy (1907:28) gives a general discussion of these different techniques.

All the Macassan sites that I was able to record on the Sir Edward Pellew Group (see figure 6.4) have this set of features. Site recording was done by consulting Tim Rakuwurlma and other old Yanyuwa individuals about the location of sites. Tamarind trees, introduced by the Macassans, grow at most of these sites. These trees, with their distinctive bright green leaves and considerable size, make most sites very easy to identify once their general location is known. A number of Macassan sites are located not on the major islands of the Pellews but on very small islands. All these sites are large and particularly well preserved. Their state of preservation suggests that these sites were used more recently by the Macassans. The stone lines that once held the boilers the Macassans used to boil up the trepang are still visible at most of these sites.

One important item that the Macassans introduced was the dugout canoe. Dugout canoes represented an improvement on existing technology rather than a radical departure from existing material culture. Hence they could be introduced into Yanyuwa society in a sense by the Yanyuwa themselves, through their own decision to start making them.<sup>9</sup> It is therefore very different from many subsequent examples of cultural change that were forced upon the Yanyuwa and were not their choice. Dugout canoes would have further increased an already existing marine emphasis of the Yanyuwa economy. Dugout canoes replaced bark canoes and allowed safer, more efficient dugong and turtle hunting. Dugout canoes were also used to collect and carry a variety of other food, including cycads,<sup>10</sup> bird eggs and chicks,<sup>11</sup> and shellfish.<sup>12</sup>

In pre-Macassan days, the messmate bark canoes that the Yanyuwa had, would have made the use of the more remote of the islands much more difficult. Spencer and Gillen (1912:483-484) record both dugout and messmate canoes in use in the area in 1901. Aboriginal and historical records right across the top end of the Northern Territory suggest that production of dugouts did not commence until after the Macassans stopped coming to Australia and bringing canoes with them. Warner (1937:459) and Thomson<sup>13</sup> both quote informants who say dugout canoes were not made until the Macassans

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<sup>9</sup>I have explored this issue at length in Baker 1988.

<sup>10</sup>Annie Karrakayn describes this, 1987 71B 40 min.

<sup>11</sup>Tim Rakuwurlma describes this, 1987 36B 21 min.

<sup>12</sup>Annie Karrakayn describes this, 1987 Tape 46B 42 min.

<sup>13</sup>National Museum of Victoria Thomson Collection File No.94 entry for 14.1.1937.

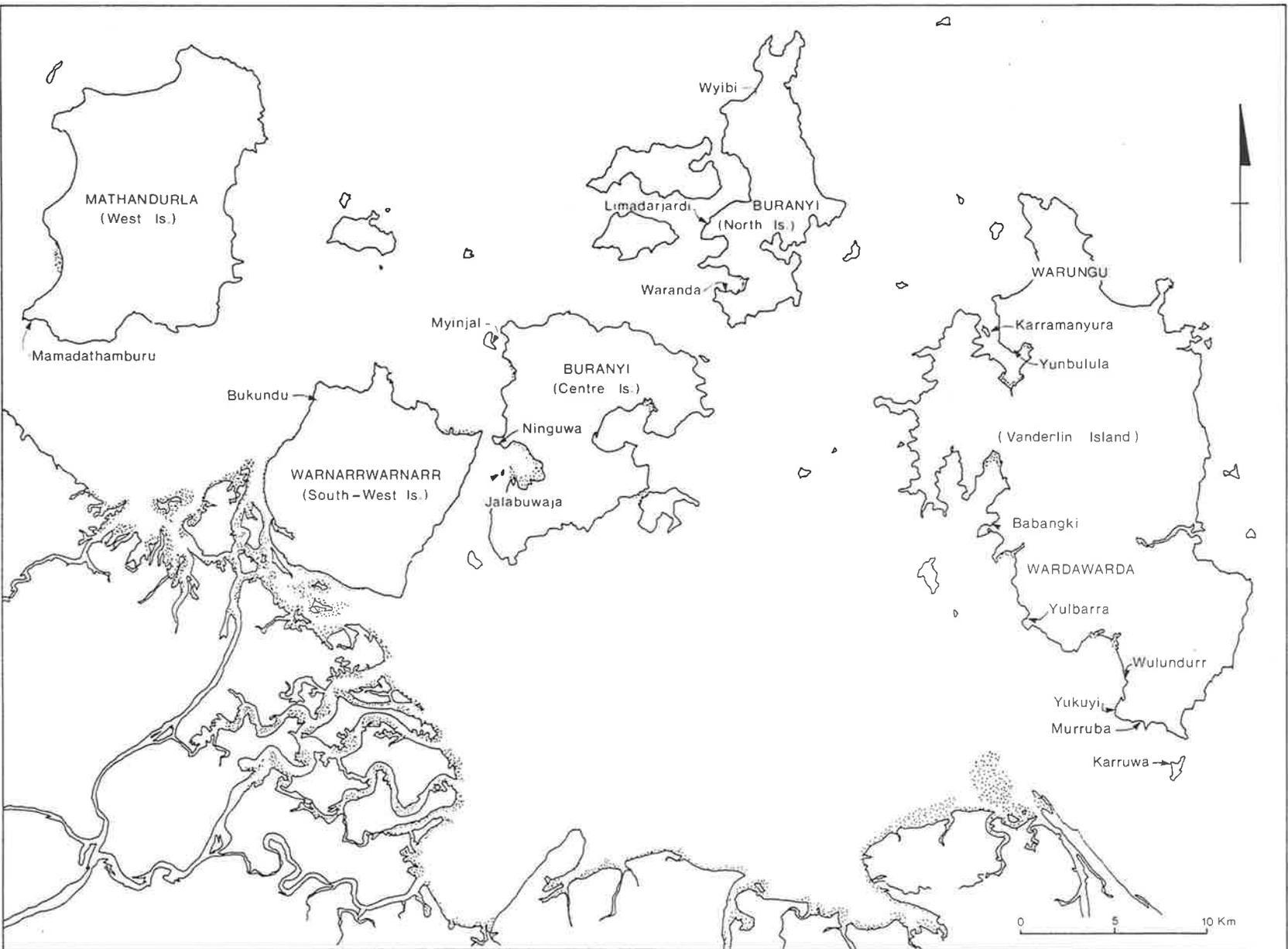


Figure 6.4: Location of Macassar sites on the Sir Edward Pellew Group

stopped bringing them.<sup>14</sup> Warner suggests that, in the area in which he was working, people reverted to using paperbark canoes for a while until they learnt how to construct dugouts from Aboriginal people from the English Company Islands. Worsley (1954:61-64) also argues that dugout canoes were not made until after the end of the Macassan visits. Heath (1980:532) presents a Nunggubuyu text (from the Roper River area) which again states bark canoes were used first and that dugouts were introduced later as a result of Macassan contact.<sup>15</sup>

The following account by Tim Rakuwurlma<sup>16</sup> supports this suggestion:

My father messmate [canoe] him been have first time. Bye and bye he been think about now, him been find big tree there, Leichhardt tree along Island along him country.

**Tim's father said** - "I think I'll cut him ... I been look that mob from Groote Eylandt, Ingura<sup>17</sup> mob been learn me."

Significantly Vanderlin Island, the largest island in the Pellew Group and the one with the best drinking water supply would have been the most hazardous to get to in the messmate bark canoes that predated the dugouts. Dugong and turtle hunting would also have been much more dangerous and less effective before the introduction of dugout canoes, metal and harpoon technology (see figure 6.5). Previously wooden points made from a beach dune Acacia (see Wulban in Appendix D) were used and people describe<sup>18</sup> how these were only effective if turtle were speared in the neck or flippers where it could penetrate deeply enough to secure the harpoon ropes.<sup>19</sup>

According to Yanyuwa accounts, the Macassans also dug wells on the islands, which were lined with stone. Today these wells still provide some of the most dependable

<sup>14</sup>In Thomson 1952:3 the informant is not mentioned but the same point is made in more general terms.

<sup>15</sup>I have discussed the Yanyuwa history of canoe making, at greater length in Baker 1988.

<sup>16</sup>1983 Tape 7A 2 min. Tim indicated changing speakers with different tones of voice.

<sup>17</sup>This term for Aboriginal people from Groote Eylandt, is used by Aboriginal people in the Borroloola area. It is also the term that Tindale (1974) uses on his *Tribal Boundaries* map.

<sup>18</sup>Jerry Rrawajinda (1987 Tape 61B 11 min.) describes the use of wooden points. Johnson Babarramila (1987 21B 7 min.) notes that with wooden points the hunter had to hit the neck of turtles and the nose of dugongs otherwise the point did not stay in "only soft place you could get ... been good shot one time, old people".

<sup>19</sup>Thomson 1934 makes a similar point about the difficulties of turtle and dugong hunting before the introduction of metal.



Figure 6.5: Harpoon shaft and metal point

drinking water. Because of the late dry season shortage of water, these wells may also have had a significant impact on the Yanyuwa economy. Like the other introductions, the wells would have allowed people to camp at times and in numbers previously not possible and in so doing increased the permanency of Yanyuwa occupation at specific sites. Macassan sites hence became foci for Yanyuwa settlement. In the dry season they would have had the camps to themselves and in the wet season they would have had the option of staying and working for the Macassans or moving elsewhere.

It is important to stress the significance of the seasonal nature of Macassan contact. In the wet season the Yanyuwa could, if they wished, work for the Macassans but for the rest of the year their lifestyle would have been little altered. They could collect turtle shell at their leisure which could be traded with the Macassans when they returned. The Macassan sites are associated with dense remains of Aboriginal camp sites that in the main appear to post-date the establishment of the Macassan sites. These archaeological remains suggest that these sites remained a focus for settlement after the Macassan visits stopped.

Rose (1968:138), in his discussion of nearby Groote Eylandt, suggests that the Macassan introduction of dugout canoes was responsible for the permanent occupa-

tion of that island. It is possible this was also the case for the more remote of the Pellew Islands. If so, the marine emphasis of the Yanyuwa economy would have been accentuated and utilisation of mainland resources further diminished.

To some extent, the seasonal round of Yanyuwa movement and the marine emphasis of their society prior to European settlement, must be seen as an artefact of Macassan contact. Musso Harvey gives a good summary<sup>20</sup> of the seasonal movements of Rrumburriya people of Vanderlin Island before they became incorporated into the European economy:

The old people didn't stay one place, the longest they stay about six months. That's the longest they stay and they'll shift from here to the next water-hole. Stay there another one or two months and shift again and shift again, gradually coming back to that old camp again where they were before . . . all around that island, Vanderlin Island, they take about one year to go around that island and back in that old camp. By the time they come back to that old camp where they were it will be clean again, fresh, no sickness . . . one big family go around . . .

As well as moving around the islands as Musso describes, the Yanyuwa regularly visited a number of important mainland camps. It is likely that Macassan contact caused a changing pattern in the use of these inland sites that paralleled the changes that occurred in the use of island sites. Dugout canoes would have increased both, the number of people who camped at these sites, and the duration of their occupation. Canoes allowed dugong and turtles to be carried up the river to supplement mainland resources. It needs to be emphasised then that Macassan contact greatly enhanced the ability of the Yanyuwa to utilise the resources of their country. The Macassan introduction of dugout canoes, harpoons and metal for harpoon points and axes would have greatly increased the efficiency of the Yanyuwa economy. It is likely this allowed a greater number of people to live on the islands.

It should be noted that Macassan contact also influenced Yanyuwa responses to European contact. European contact was not the extraordinary event that it was for most other Aboriginal groups. Many groups in Australia (including the neighbouring

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<sup>20</sup>1987 Tape 22A 16 min.

Garawa) regarded Europeans as supernatural spirits (they were often thought to be dead Aboriginal people returning). The Yanyuwa had no such illusions. The Yanyuwa, like other groups the Macassans were in contact with, had a wider world view. A major factor in this was that some Yanyuwa men had travelled back to south east Asia with the Macassans.<sup>21</sup> As a result of their experiences dealing with outsiders the Yanyuwa were obviously in a better position than many other groups to cope with European contact. Such experience helps explain the examples raised in following sections of the willingness the Yanyuwa had to trade<sup>22</sup> with Europeans and how they successfully incorporated individual Europeans into their social and economic spheres.

Aboriginal accounts of the end of the Macassan visits to Australia<sup>23</sup> are tinged with sadness and a view of a past golden era pervades. This nostalgia has obviously been heightened by the contrast in treatment of Aboriginals by Macassans and Europeans. Stories about early contact with Europeans stress the number of shootings that occurred and that Aboriginal spearings of Europeans were reprisals for the shootings. In contrast, accounts about the Macassans emphasise their respect for conventions regarding Aboriginal women, the presents they brought and in particular the usefulness of such introduced goods as metal axes and dugout canoes.<sup>24</sup>

The initial outside contact with Macassans brought new goods and foodstuffs to the area and in turn created a level of dependence. What made this period different from the first contact experience of many other Aboriginal groups was the degree to which the pre-contact economy survived. It is significant also that prior to World War Two all the Europeans to live on the Sir Edward Pellew Group were trepangers. As such early contact with Europeans had many similarities with the long period of contact they had already had with Macassans. To a degree the Yanyuwa had already worked out the

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<sup>21</sup>Tim Rakuwurlma describes how one of his uncles made this voyage (1987 Tape 50A 26 min). Steve Johnson (1987 Tape 23B 19 min.) also describes a Yanyuwa man who made this trip.

<sup>22</sup>Donald Thomson notes the willingness and skill the people he worked with in Arnhem Land in the 1930s had in bartering with him as compared with Queensland people he had previously worked with and attributes this difference to Macassan contact. He describes how his main informant had "learned always to ask for more, to bargain, as no Queensland native I ever knew would do". (National Museum of Victoria Thomson Collection File No.94 entry for 14.8.1936, Page 2.

<sup>23</sup>The visits ended in 1907 as a result of South Australian Government Legislation (Macknight 1976:125) in an era of mounting white Australia policy.

<sup>24</sup>Donald Thomson working in Arnhem Land in the 1930s concluded that Aboriginal people held the Macassans in "far greater regard than they now do white men" (National Museum of Victoria, Thomson Collection, File No.94 entry for 14.1.1937 Page 3).

terms on which they wanted to have contact with trepangers and continued the patterns of interaction that they had already established. To the Yanyuwa the transition from Macassan to European trepangers hence meant economically little more than a change from obtaining flour instead of rice and a change in the type of alcohol and tobacco that they enjoyed. Their ability to obtain food by traditional means was not radically altered as was the case for mainland groups, where control of the land was lost to the pastoralists and where introduced cattle radically altered the ecology.

## 6.4 The European influenced cultural landscape

### 6.4.1 European contact

#### The Dutch

As Heeres (1899:vi) outlines, when Tasman visited the Gulf of Carpentaria in 1644 he was probably the first European to have passed Yanyuwa country. Heeres describes how a number of other Dutch explorers had been in the Gulf of Carpentaria earlier but apparently did not pass within sight of the Sir Edward Pellews. Tasman did see the Pellews but it was at such a distance that he did not realise that Cape Vanderlin (which he named) was part of an island and not part of the mainland. Tasman made a similar mistake mapping Mornington and Maria Islands as part of the mainland (ibid:vii).

#### Flinders

Flinders sailed around (see figure 6.6) and named the Sir Edward Pellew Group in 1802. He describes (1814: Vol 2, 169) how he navigated with the aid of an “old Dutch chart” and notes the mistake of Cape Vanderlin being considered part of the mainland and ponders (ibid:170) whether this was a result of landscape change or “whether the Dutch discoverer made a distant and cursory examination”. Among other things he made detailed descriptions of the Macassan stone lines (ibid:172):

Indications of some foreign people having visited this group were almost as numerous, and as widely extended as those left behind by the natives. Besides pieces of earthen jars and trees cut with axes, we found remnants of bamboo lattice work, palm leaves sewed with cotton thread into the

form of such hats as are worn by the Chinese, and the remains of blue cotton trousers, ... but what puzzled me most was a collection of stones piled together in a line, resembling a low wall, with short lines running perpendicularly at the back, dividing the space behind into compartments.

He also suggests that Vanderlin Island was “more thickly inhabited than usual since 35 natives were seen together”.

### Leichhardt

Leichhardt passed through the Borroloola area in 1844 (see figure 6.6), making detailed descriptions of Aboriginal life in the area in his journal.<sup>25</sup> As he was constantly trying to find bush food for his party, he was a particularly astute observer of Aboriginal economic life. He often examined Aboriginal camp sites for evidence of food they ate and the types of preparation techniques. His experimentation was such that he successfully found a bean to make “a pot of *Sterculia*<sup>26</sup> coffee” (29 September). His journal also includes descriptions of:

- Middens of “fish-bones, muscles, oysters” (11 September).
- How “a regular harvest” was made from pandanus and how “their camps [were] full of heaps of the fruit, the lower part of which they have either sucked, or having roasted the whole fruit and broken the seeds out, finding besides generally big stones to smash them” (12 September).
- A “footpath went from *Zamia* [cycad] grove to *Zamia* grove”. He also describes finding a “*Zamia* forest, a much frequented camping place of the natives, so much favoured that they had taken the pains to make a Dyke or wall to keep the fresh water in which oozed out of the sandy banks above a layer of clay” (16 September).
- “The black fellows lives probably for several months on the fruit of the *Pandanus* and of *Zamia* but both fruits require much preparation to take their poisonous

<sup>25</sup>This was published in 1847. Copies of original notebooks and journal are held by the Mitchell Library in Sydney, accession numbers, C155, C159. All subsequent references to Leichhardt are, unless otherwise stated, from his journal (C155) and dates rather than page numbers are given to enable comparison with the less detailed published accounts.

<sup>26</sup>The species in question is probably *Sterculia quadrifida* (see Brock 1988:303).

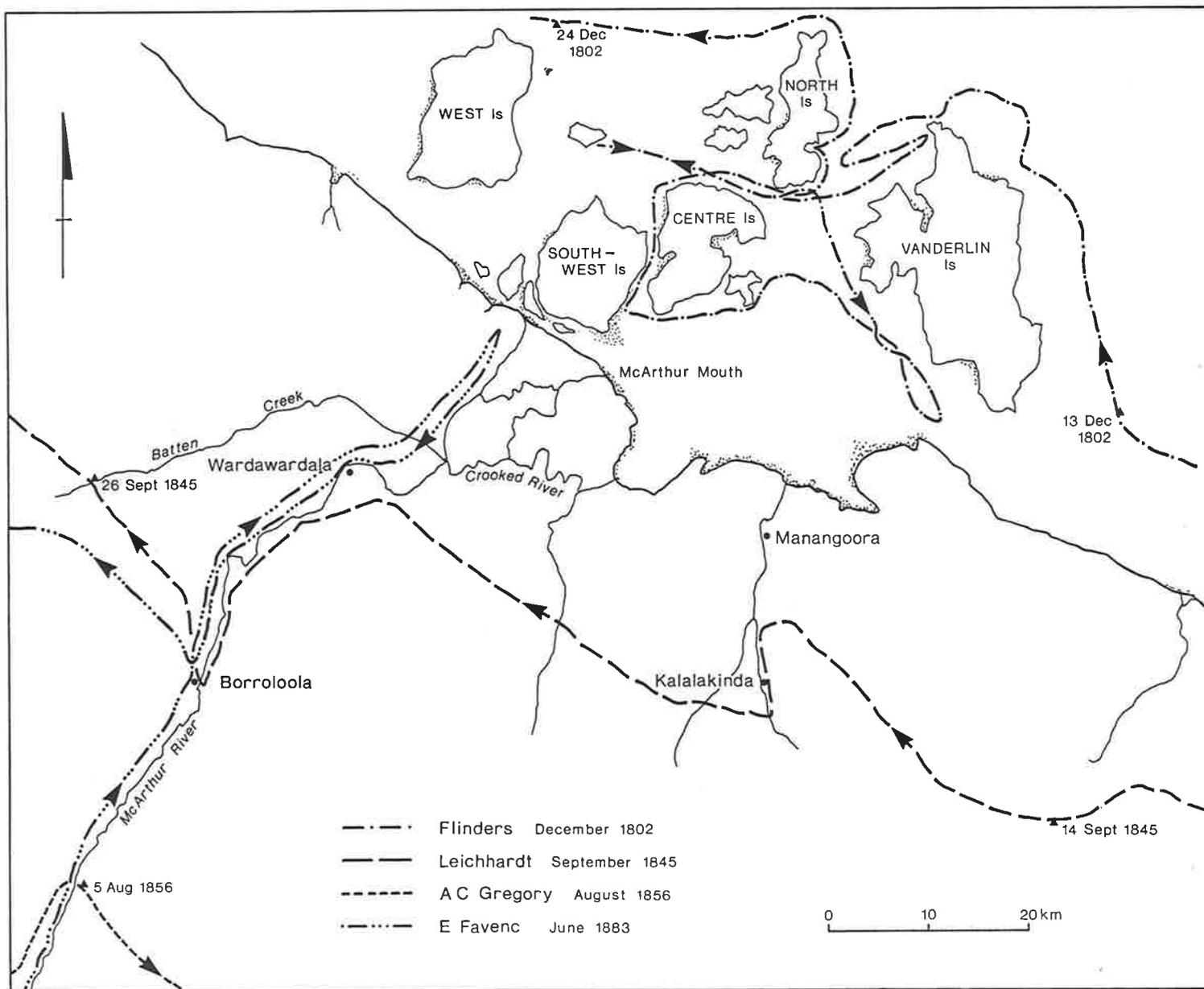


Figure 6.6: Routes of European explorers in the Borrooloola area.

qualities out of them". He then goes on to note the following evidence he found in a "blackfellows camp" for how they were treated: "found half a cone of the Pandanus covered up in hot ashes" and nearby he "found very large koolimans full of water" with roasted pandanus nuts in them. He observed the following treatment for cycads "the seeds/nuts of the zamia are cut in this slices and spread out on the ground to dry" (17 September).

- "A broad foot path of the natives unites the creek and the River, passing through a series of Zamia groves, which rather deserve the name of Zamia forest" (18 September).
- A fish trap made at a rocky bar by "building a rough stone wall across the river" (20 September).
- Aboriginal people burning the country. He describes arriving at a waterhole "which the natives had just left [and had been] busy in burning all the grass about" (25 September).
- "Teatree thickets which are full with water during the rainy season and appear to yield vast numbers of Unios [freshwater shell fish]" (30 September).

Leichhardt also makes an important comment on the Macassan influence on Aboriginal people, noting on 22 September that "they must have met white men or Malays before hand; for they know the use of ...knives ... [and] firearms appeared not entirely unknown to them". Another significant feature about the Aboriginal people he describes on this day is how he met them. Whereas in previous weeks he records in his journal how the sight of Europeans caused panic (Aboriginal people usually fleeing as fast as they could and leaving their camps deserted), on this occasion he notes that "they came running after us". Leichhardt's account reveals that this keenness to meet his party was probably because they wanted to trade items with him. He notes that when the group caught up to his party they were most keen to trade their boomerangs for the "bullockrings and buckles" that Leichhardt offered them. It is important to note that Leichhardt very precisely locates where this knowledge of knives and guns begins. The above quote continues "this tribe was not that of ... the Robinson, but entirely new[,] probably belonging to the Macarthur". Leichhardt was in the Wardawardala

area, which as noted above (see figure 1.3), marked the boundary between the Yanyuwa and Wilangarra country. Whether Leichhardt was in contact with Yanyuwa or Wilangarra people is not clear. The Yanyuwa today stress how closely connected these two groups were linguistically (see Annie's quote on page 22) and through inter-marriage. So regardless of whether Leichhardt was dealing with Wilangarra or Yanyuwa people it is not surprising that they knew about the Macassans.

### Gregory

Gregory passed through the McArthur River area in 1855-56 (see figure 6.6) but his comments on Aboriginal life in the area were extremely limited.

### Favenc

In the late 1870s and early 1880s, Ernest Favenc spent a considerable period in the area looking for good grazing land for the pastoralists who financed his expeditions. In 1883 he made a trip from Daly Waters to the McArthur River and back to Daly Waters (see figure 6.6). His report of this trip focuses on the pastoral and agricultural potential for the area. He writes about the Borroloola area (Favenc and Crawford 1884:1) in terms of the value to South Australia of "such a large tract of sheep country close to the coast". Similarly he writes (*ibid*:4) that the upper McArthur River area "is quite available for cattle, and will no doubt be thickly populated in the future".

His comments on Aboriginal people are interesting for their rarity. He notes (1884:3-4) "we had no trouble whatever with the natives—in fact, we saw very few of them. In places we found large camps which had been deserted by them owing to lack of rain". An examination of his diary<sup>27</sup> reveals that in the entire trip (from 28 May to 15 July) Aboriginal people were only encountered on three occasions. On the 3 June 1883, Favenc's party met two men who served as guides until the 8th June, when they "departed . . . after informing us there was no more water the way we were going".<sup>28</sup> At the headwaters of the McArthur, on 25 June they met "some gins digging roots" and on 13 July, when almost back at Daly Waters, they met a group at a waterhole.

Beyond this, his comments on Aboriginal people are based on the camp sites they

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<sup>27</sup>Mitchell Library MS B 879.

<sup>28</sup>It is perhaps more likely that they left because they had reached the end of their country.

had left behind. On his way from the Limmen River to the Overland Telegraph he describes how in “many places we came across permanent camps left by the natives where they had erected almost what we should call villages—if such a thing was possible among them”. There are a number of possible explanations for their lack of contact with Aboriginal people. Perhaps Aboriginal people were avoiding his party or, conversely, for the period he had Aboriginal guides, these guides may have been avoiding Aboriginal groups they knew were in the area or were keeping Favenc’s party clear of mythological sites. Evidence supporting such a suggestion comes from Favenc’s notes of 13 July which record that his guides were taking him in “the most roundabout fashion”.

The lack of people on the dry Barkly Tablelands in the middle of the dry season is not surprising. At this time of year there would have been little option for people but to move to the few permanent waterholes in the area. What is more surprising in his account is the absence of people on the permanent freshwater sections of the McArthur River. During his time on this river and its headwaters, he makes no mention of seeing any Aboriginal people apart from the “gins digging roots” comment of 25 July. Significantly, he also makes no mention of any evidence of old camps in this area. In fact, apart from the group of women, the only mention of Aboriginal people in the McArthur River area is the discovery of a body in a burial platform on 15 June.

A possible explanation for the absence of Aboriginal people is contained in his description of the countryside on 27 July when he was near the location where the township of Borroloola was about to spring up. He writes “country very poor and sandy[,] cattle have crossed lately”. It is impossible to tell from his notes if he made the connection between the degraded state of the area with the large numbers of cattle that, even at this early date, were being driven through the area. Considering that today this area is as well if not better vegetated than the the Barkly Tableland country he had passed through previously, it is likely that the cattle had already had a major ecological impact on the McArthur River area.

The droving route from Queensland into the Northern Territory, and on further to the Kimberleys, passed through the area in a narrow band between the salt water reaches of the McArthur and the rugged sandstone gorges of the headwaters of the river. Within this area, the effect of the cattle would have been considerable, especially on the freshwater lagoons that would have been the focus of life for Aboriginal people

in the dry season. An environmental analogy to this early impact of cattle is perhaps contained in reports of the effect of more recent droving in the region, on the nearby Barkly stock route. The Welfare Branch Annual Report of 1958/9:84 remarks on how "stations endeavoured to secure first use of the Barkly stock route before the sparse feed was exhausted".<sup>29</sup> It is likely, then, that by the time of Favenc's journey, European initiated environmental change had already drastically changed Aboriginal life in the area.

Another point that needs to be made about Favenc's explorations is the great assistance he received from his Aboriginal guides. Like many other Australian explorers, he relied on them to find water and food. His journal has many comments similar to the one on July 5th when he notes how the Aboriginal guides had "trotted along" (on foot while the Europeans rode) "all day hunting as they went. They killed a big snake 14 feet long and brought it in and have it cooking now".

### Others

H.Y.L. Brown, a Government geologist, visited the Pellews in 1907 and gave descriptions of, among other things, the types of canoes in use at the time. W.E.J. Paradise led a naval survey of the islands in 1923 and made comments on large middens on Vanderlin Island and long neck turtle remains in Aboriginal camps. He concluded (1923:7) that "the Group is inhabited by a more or less nomadic tribe, who wander from island to island, and at times make their way to McArthur River, as far as Borroloola". Paradise's visit is well remembered by older Yanyuwa people due to the excellent clothing that the flags he put up subsequently provided.<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>29</sup>See Christian et al 1954, Plate 5, figure 1 for a dramatic photograph of the destruction of perennial grasses on the stock routes.

<sup>30</sup>Described by Tim Rakuwurlma 1987 Tape 14B 18 min.

## 6.5 The dynamic cultural landscape

### 6.5.1 Language

It is possible to document changes in the Yanyuwa language that illustrate how the Yanyuwa incorporated the new into the old.<sup>31</sup> Examples below show how the Yanyuwa language has adapted to cover European concepts. The Yanyuwa term is given first and is followed by the literal meaning and the European term it covers.

#### By extension of meaning of an existing term

*julaki* → bird → plane.

*mankarni* → Aboriginal ‘cleverman’ → doctor.

*na-ankaya* → the upper part of his body → a shirt.

*na-burruburru* → paperbark → paper, cards, book.

*na-marnda* → its foot → its wheel.

*na-wulaya* → its nose → its bonnet (of a car).

*na-wi* → its arm → its door (of a car).

*yilarr* → dangerous, poisonous, ‘cheeky’ → alcohol and police

#### Derived terms

*barrawu arrkanthawu* → the shelter related to spearing → tailor shop.<sup>32</sup>

*a-kariyangu* → the feminine thing from the west → European women.

*nya-karakarrangu* → the male thing from the east → European men.<sup>33</sup>

*barrawu wukanyinjawu* → the house of talking → court house.

*ja-wurniji* → the place of the flashing → light house.

*li-nhanawa arrkanathawu* → women who spear<sup>34</sup> → nurses.

<sup>31</sup>Jean Kirton and John Bradley provided invaluable help with my research for this section. The opportunity to discuss linguistic matters with them in the field greatly aided my research. I am also grateful to the comments they both provided on draft versions of this section.

<sup>32</sup>A tailors shop existed once in Borroloola.

<sup>33</sup>Presumably these different directions for European men and women were the result of the early cattle overlanders being men from the east and the fact that European women did not come into the area until much later. Not many European women were in the area until the road to Borroloola from the west was open.

<sup>34</sup>Referring to injections.

*ma*<sup>35</sup>-*balabangu* → spread-spread food → jam.

*ma-jayngka* → stone food → money.

*ma-karakarrangu* → food from the east → porridge.

*ngajarr* → lightning → gun.

### 6.5.2 Land use

This section has been written by integrating information obtained in interviews about the past and by observation of current economic activity. Hence in the subsequent analysis both the past and the present tense are used to indicate which practices have ceased and which still exist.

Prior to European contact the Yanyuwa economy was very much marine based. Steve Johnson, for example, told me<sup>36</sup> that people moved away from the coast “only in those bad days when you get the south-east wind and everything is too rough” and that on such occasions they used to “live off lily roots and yams . . . all the men would probably have a rest, it would be up to the women to feed them”. The marine emphasis of Yanyuwa life is highlighted by the fact that despite now living inland Yanyuwa male identity is still intimately tied to their prowess as marine hunters. Many Yanyuwa men proudly told me how they, like their fathers and grandfathers before them, are “dugong hunters number one”. This marine mammal is still highly prized by the Yanyuwa who particularly value its fatty flesh.<sup>37</sup>

Figures 6.7 and 6.8 illustrate the Yanyuwa knowledge of their animal and plant resources. It should be noted that virtually all the non-marine resources indicated in these figures would have been obtained from the mainland and that little use was made of areas on the islands away from the coastline. Seasonally abundant mainland resources, in particular, cycads, pandanus and water lillies, allowed large groups to come together for ceremonies.

The separation of animal, plant and environmental knowledge made in these figures is made just for the sake of clarity. For the Yanyuwa these factors are all inter-linked as they have a detailed knowledge of the interconnections between the animal

<sup>35</sup>“Ma” is the Yanyuwa prefix for food.

<sup>36</sup>1987 Tape 29B 7 min.

<sup>37</sup>See Thomson (1934b:241) for this same appreciation of its “fattiness” by Aboriginal people from Cape York. Bradley (1988b) discusses in detail Yanyuwa marine hunting.

and plant worlds and seasonal climatic patterns. For example, the flowering times of various plants are known to correspond with specific animal resources. The acacia, *ma-kawurrka*, is known to flower when dugong and turtle move close to shore and are particularly “fat”. Similarly, it is known that dugong are easy to hunt at the time of year when *na-wurlurlu* (cuttlefish shells) are washed up on the beaches and the arrival of the Torres Strait pigeon heralds the end of the hot *ngardaru* season.

In other cases the connections between plant and animal worlds are more directly linked. ‘Sugar bag’ (bush honey), for example, is particularly rich and plentiful in the early dry season due to the number of plants in flower at this time of year. A similar link occurs between some animals. As Tim Rakuwurlma notes: “When pretty blue jelly fish arrive, the turtle go out to sea to feed [on the jelly fish] and meet girl friend [i.e.mate], when they come back, oh they are good [to eat].”

An important aspect of the Yanyuwa economy was the development of various techniques for storing food and resource management strategies. Examples of storage include:

1. Placing *murndangu* (long necked turtles) that had been obtained from freshwater lagoons in grass lined holes with a rock on top. These animals are still an important food resource and are obtained in great numbers in the late dry season by women. As noted above, they are obtained by inspecting the dried out lagoons, and testing spots with a crow bar to find the “house” the turtles made when they burrowed into the mud earlier in the year, when the lagoons had water in them. Today the turtles are stored in hessian bags, in kitchen sinks, baths and on strings attached to posts. Goannas similarly can be kept tied up until required (see figure 6.9).
2. Grass seeds were ground up to make dampers, that could be kept for a few days.
3. Turtle and sea bird eggs were “scrambled”, then cooked up and sealed in paper bark bundles.<sup>38</sup>

<sup>38</sup>Tim Rakuwurlma (1987 Tape 65A 24 min.) describes this and says sea bird eggs were cooked straight away while turtle eggs were carried around for up to five days. Annie Karrakayn (1987 Tape 67A 30 min.) describes how “big mob scrambled egg” could be kept “might be one week” and also notes that sea bird eggs had to be cooked straight away. Harvey (1945:191), from her field work in the Borroloola area, gives a detailed description of eggs being prepared in this manner.



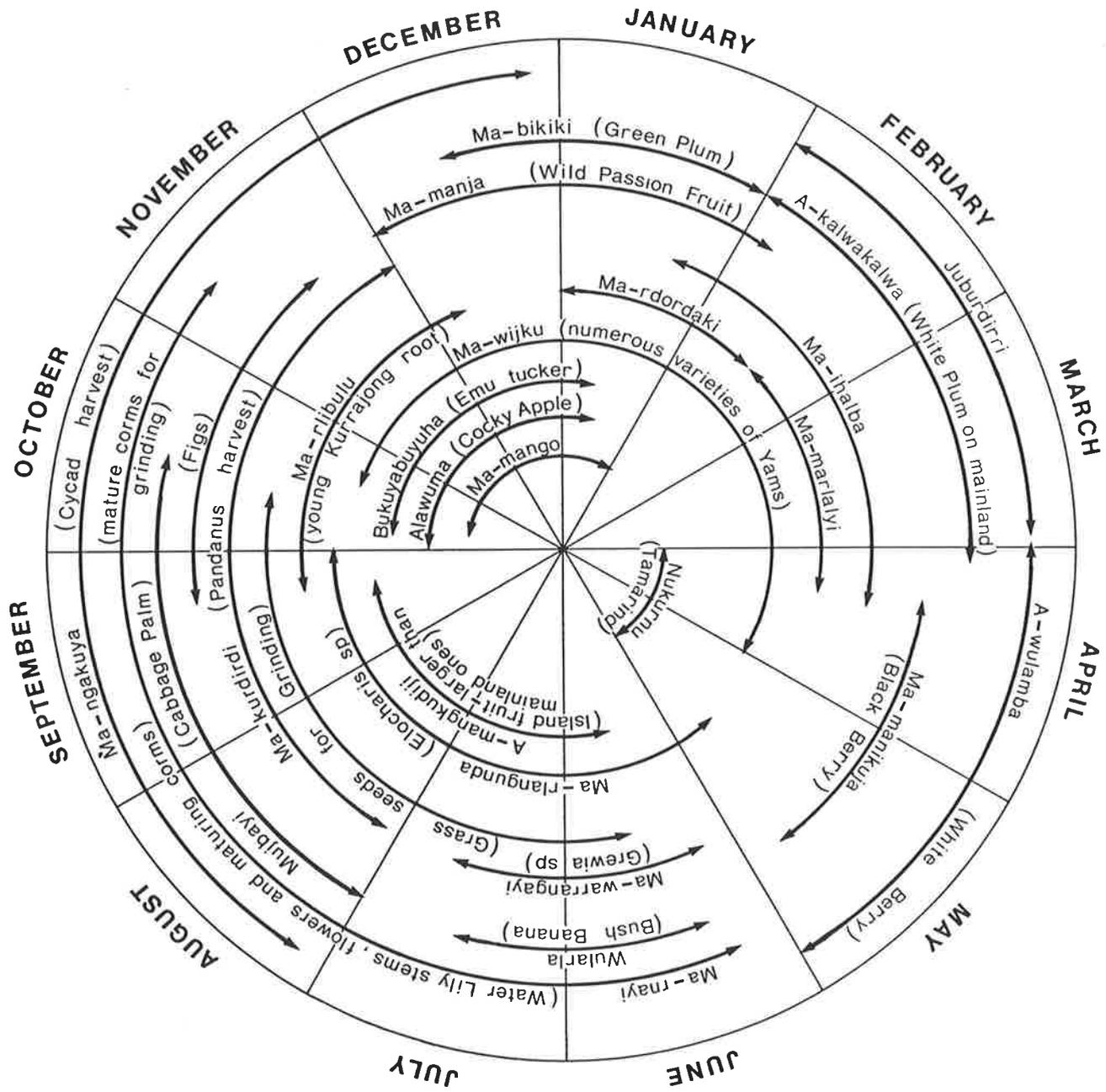


Figure 6.8: Yanyuwa plant food calendar



Figure 6.9: Goanna kept tied up until required for food

4. The fruit of the *ma-bikiki* (*Buchanania obovata*) see Appendix D, was pounded up into a sweet dessert paste. The same fruit was also dried by a process which involved coating it with red ochre. This stopped it rotting and enabled it to be stored.<sup>39</sup>
5. Marine turtles once caught are kept alive in camps or in the river where they are tethered by big ropes tied to trees. Hence they can be consumed when required.
6. Cycad, and pandanus nuts are ground, dried and stored to later be made into large dampers (*ma-wurluburlu* and *ma-lhandawarr*) that are often consumed during ceremonies.
7. Water lily seed *ma-kakayi* is prepared to make dampers for ceremonies too, but here the drying occurs before the grinding. The preparation of lily seed is discussed here by Bella Marrajabu:<sup>40</sup>

Make him for ceremony, that seed they used to put him away in bag, dry him out and put in a bag ... sometime (it was wrapped in) paperbark, they used to roll him up and keep him ... for long time, hungry time they used to ... take him out of that paperbark, put him into water, soak him and start ground him ... and make a damper ...

Examples of Yanyuwa resource management include:

1. Yams are collected in such a way that a part remains to allow regrowth.
2. Flying foxes (fruit bats) are not killed until April when the chicks are weaned.
3. Rules exist against wasting food that is caught. For example, if a goanna is not all eaten it is believed that goannas in general will become skinny as will the person who wasted it.
4. Prohibitions against hunting on a dead person's country allow animals to breed up in hunt free havens. Such prohibitions exist for the person's country in general and for the location of log coffins.

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<sup>39</sup>Annie Karrakayn describes this in detail (1987 Tape 39A 15 min.) as does Bella Marrajabu (1987 Tape 60A 17 min.). Bella stresses how this technique gave a year round supply of this fruit, the preserved fruit lasted until "they pick him up more new one now, long another year".

<sup>40</sup>1987 Tape 60A 15 min.

5. Specific resources from certain areas are restricted. For example, flying foxes obtained from certain locations can only be eaten by initiated men.<sup>41</sup>
6. Rules exist for how dugongs can be hunted and how the animal has to be cut up and distributed.
7. There is total prohibition on some species and typically these are attributed with the power to preserve particular resources. For example, the survival of the 'quiet' water snake is thought to maintain waterholes.<sup>42</sup>
8. Permission from the *ngimarringki*<sup>43</sup> is required to hunt in areas. These rights were jealously guarded in areas of rich resources, such as small islands rich with bird or turtle eggs.<sup>44</sup>

Like other Aboriginal people across Australia, the Yanyuwa also used fire as a land management tool. After the end of the wet season great attention is paid to when the tall, wet season grasses will burn. Once there is even the most remote chance some will burn, trips out bush become slow, stop-start affairs, during which literally hundreds of lighted matches are thrown out the car windows (and hasty departures are made if the grass catches alight). As most of the grass is still too wet to burn, these early dry season burns produce the mosaic pattern of burning that other authors (Latz and Griffin 1978, Latz 1982) have commented on. This pattern of burnt and unburnt areas means that fires lit later in the dry season have fire breaks of already burnt ground around them.

Country is nearly always burnt before it is hunted on. In practice then it is necessary to get permission from *ngimarringki*<sup>45</sup> to burn country and associated rights to hunt on the area are granted at the same time. The rights to burn areas, particularly those rich in food resources, are still jealously guarded by *ngimarringki* and during my field work

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<sup>41</sup>Tim Rakuwurlma 1987 Tape 65A 23 min.

<sup>42</sup>1987 Tape 51A 28 min.

<sup>43</sup>Traditional owners. The Yanyuwa are *ngimarringki* for their father's country and *jungkayi* for their mother's country. The former is usually translated into English as "owner" The latter term is translated by the Yanyuwa into English as "manager".

<sup>44</sup>Annie Karrakayn (1987 Tape 39B 13 min.) gives an example of a *ngimarringki* exercising this control over bird egg sites.

<sup>45</sup>For some areas it is also necessary to seek permission from *jungkayi*.

I witnessed a number of heated disputes when burning occurred without permission. During one such dispute I was told by a Yanyuwa woman<sup>46</sup> how people in the past also accused people: “ ‘hey you been go along my burn grass ... why didn't you wait for us?’ ... If they got properly angry for one another they get sticks to fight”.

Burning country offers three separate opportunities to go hunting. I have seen the first two types of hunting carried out virtually only by women and the last method always by men.

1. In areas that do not have tall grass (usually very sandy or saline soils) small game is caught by walking with the advancing flames and competing with the circling birds of prey for animals attempting to flee the flames.
2. A few days after burning it is very easy to hunt goannas and other lizards by following the tracks on the ashy surface. These tracks are very prominent and animals are tracked back to their burrows and dug out.<sup>47</sup>
3. Two or three weeks after the burning, fresh green grass attracts kangaroos, bush turkeys and other game. Figure 6.10 illustrates the green regrowth three weeks after a late dry season (six months since any rain) fire. These animals were once hunted by stalking them and spearing and now are still stalked in a similar way but are shot.

A number of these management techniques are explained by Musso Harvey in the following words:<sup>48</sup>

You got to burn the country, keep it up ... not leave him until he really dry, that means you destroy everything ... cook it.<sup>49</sup> Keep burning the grass too. Just sort of fertilise it [referring to yams] if you don't go cook it there ... [the yams] just die out ... [When] digging [to] get the roots, leave that small roots inside there, they still grow up for next time ... as you are taking the food out the seed fall down and go into that soft country and grow up

<sup>46</sup>1987 Tape 60A 14 min.

<sup>47</sup>As Annie Karrakayn notes (1987 Tape 46B 29 min.), “we burn for the food so we can find something, goanna ... and blue tongue ... easy to look that camp for goannas”.

<sup>48</sup>1987 Tape 51A 22 min.

<sup>49</sup>“Cook it” here implies that the temperature of the fire is too hot.



Figure 6.10: Late dry season regrowth after a fire

a bit more same as sugar bag. You've got to eat it, [then] you get plenty sugar bag. Soon as wet season stop ... grass starting to dry out, you burn grass then ... so you don't burn all the animals, you only kill half of the animals, if you burn it [then], some have a place to hide, but if you leave him [it gets too dry], and you burn the grass you kill everything, that's no good.

Musso goes on to note<sup>50</sup> how, in the area we were camped in, for many years goannas and blue tongue lizards "went real poor ... because nobody been burn the grass".

Despite the abundance of resources outlined above, a period of seasonal shortage of resources did occur. This period was in the wet season as Emmalina Wanajabi notes<sup>51</sup> "can't find him tucker wet season ... wet season now, starving time".

### 6.5.3 Population

It is extremely difficult to estimate the pre-European population of the Borrooloola region due to the massive depopulation associated with European arrival. A combination of disease and violence probably led to a rapid decrease in Aboriginal numbers. It is

<sup>50</sup>Ibid 25 min.

<sup>51</sup>1987 Tape 71B 21 min.

difficult to document but it is likely that, as occurred elsewhere in Australia, disease spread in advance of Europeans. Therefore, as Butlin (1983) highlights, the observations on population size made by early explorers passing through an area need to be questioned because of the possibility that infectious diseases had already killed large numbers of people. The impact of European violence on Aboriginal people is also hard to quantify as Europeans tended to avoid recording these events in writing. Those comments that were made, tend to be couched in the euphemisms of the time, shootings of Aboriginal people being often described as "dispersals".<sup>52</sup>

Another issue that needs mention is European-Aboriginal population ratios. A significant aspect of the history of contact in the Borrooloola area is that to this day Europeans have outnumbered Aboriginals on probably only two occasions. This occurred for the first time very briefly in 1886, when large numbers of gold-diggers passed through on their way to the Kimberley gold fields. McMinn, the customs officer at Borrooloola at the time, reported that, in three months of 1886, 1500 people with 3000 horses passed through Borrooloola.<sup>53</sup> Aboriginal people would not have been outnumbered again until the Government sponsored Borrooloola centenary celebrations in 1985 resulted in a weekend influx of Europeans.<sup>54</sup>

An indirect method of reconstructing Yanyuwa population is to examine the carrying capacity of their land. Because, as noted above, the most important economic zone for the Yanyuwa was the coastline and the sea, carrying capacity estimates should give emphasis to these features and not square kilometres of land as is more usually done. It would also be appropriate in the Yanyuwa case to include the important resource zone of shallow marine areas. As figure 6.11 illustrates Yanyuwa "country" includes about equal proportions of dry land and shallow marine areas less than 3 fathoms (5.5 m) in depth. This large area of shallow sea was of great importance to the carrying

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<sup>52</sup>In records that do mention killings there is often a tendency towards self-righteous justification and bravado. MacIntyre (1921:134), for example, describes shootings carried out in the Borrooloola area, by a European called Hume, in the following terms: "the guests at the camp with Hume made a bolt and Hume directed the footsteps of two of them to hell". Searcy (1911:225 and 283) also gives euphemistic accounts of two separate shootings of Aboriginal people in the Borrooloola area.

<sup>53</sup>South Australian Public Record Office, 566/41, page 6 of copy of letter sent by McMinn to Parsons, "Description of social and economic conditions Borrooloola: draft report to Government Resident".

<sup>54</sup>An official history (BHF 4), published for this centenary of European settlement by the Northern Territory Department of the Chief Minister, has but one indirect mention of Aboriginal people ever having lived in the area. In an article on one of the early European "pioneers" it notes that he "went to live at McArthur River station where his part-Aboriginal son Joe, was head stockman".

capacity of Yanyuwa country as dugong and turtle abound in these shallow waters. It is significant also, that Yanyuwa country with its numerous islands and complex river delta has an extraordinarily long coastline in relation to area of land. It was from this coastline that they had access to marine resources. The length of coastline, calculated from islands and channels marked in figure 6.11, is approximately 500km while the area of Yanyuwa land is approximately 1050 square km. Maddock (1974:22) presents a range of Aboriginal population density figures. The most relevant figure he gives are probably the ones of 1 person to 3 square miles for the Wanindiljaugwa from nearby Groote Eylandt. Converting this figure to people per square kilometer and applying it to the Yanyuwa land and shallow sea area gives a population figure of about 135. It might, however, be more appropriate to double the Yanyuwa land area to include the shallow sea area of their "country". This then would give a figure of about 270.

Another means of estimating pre-European Yanyuwa population figures is by examining the size of various social units and extrapolating from known sub-units to make an estimate of the total. Prior to European settlement the basic economic unit of Yanyuwa life were extended family groups that travelled together usually around the land belonging to the semi-moiety of the male members of the group. Such groups have been labelled by anthropologists as "bands" and the areas they move over as "estates". These small groups came together usually at least annually for large ceremonial gatherings that were made possible by seasonal abundances of particular resources. From descriptions I have been given of such groups, they typically consisted of two or three brothers, their father and two or three mothers, four to six wives and eight to twelve children.<sup>55</sup> Adding these figures up, provides an estimate of group size of 15-25 people. Members of the four semi-moieties (see figure 6.15) describe how there were about three or four such groups with male members from each semi-moiety.<sup>56</sup> There were then probably 12 to 16 such bands. Multiplying these figures (15-25 times 12-16) gives an estimated pre-European contact figure for the Yanyuwa of 180-400.

The earliest published estimates of Yanyuwa population come from Stretton (1893:-249) (see Appendix C). His total of 240 fits within the range calculated above. He made this estimate only 10 years after the region was settled by Europeans and therefore the

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<sup>55</sup>These figures are very much only educated guesses based on genealogical information and descriptions of specific groups that I have been given.

<sup>56</sup>The wives of these men were from a different semi-moiety.

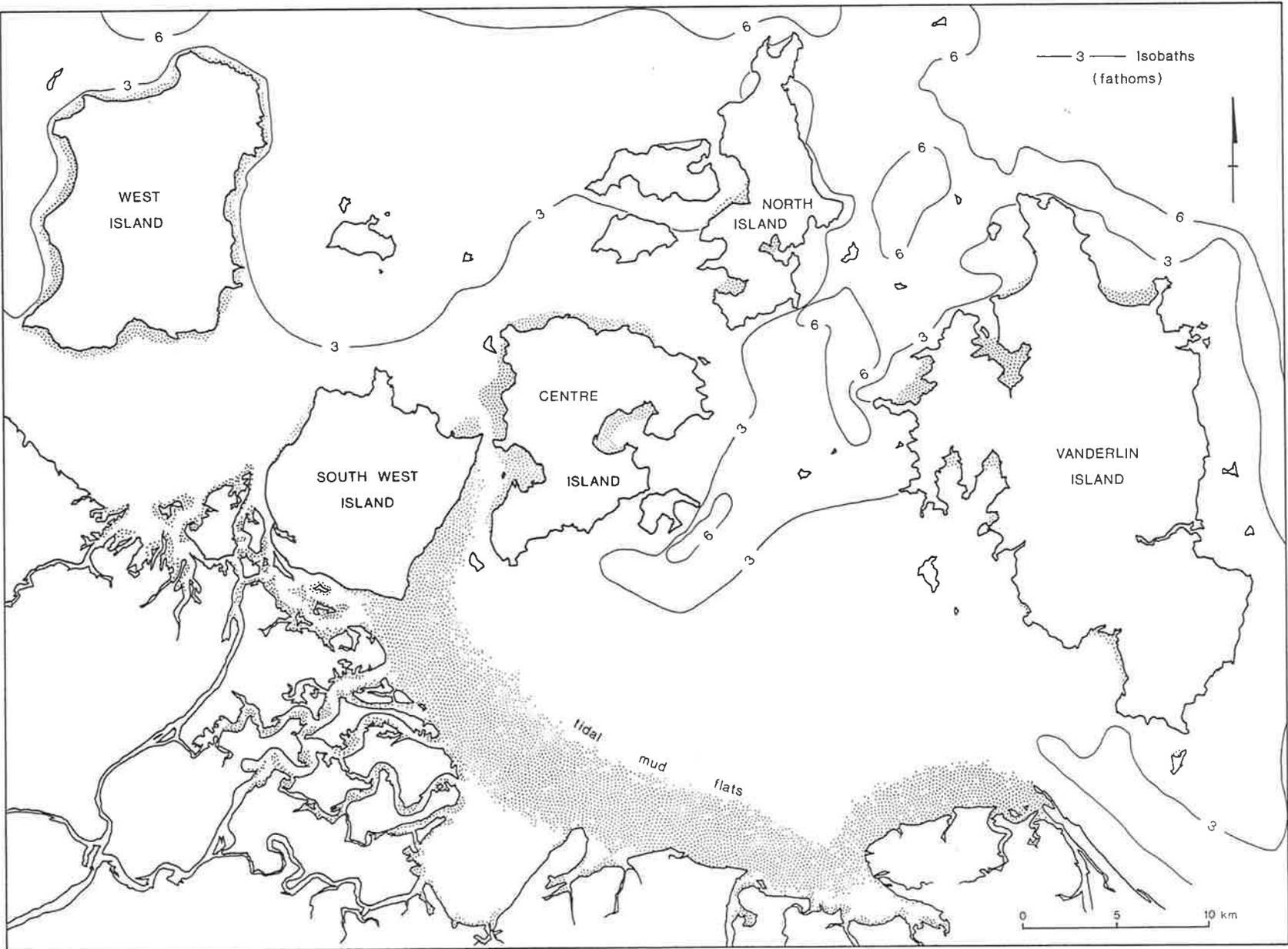


Figure 6.11: Bathymetric map of the Sir Edward Pellew Group

effects of European introduced violence and disease probably had not greatly reduced the Yanyuwa population. It is also important to note that as in other areas where Aboriginal people had prolonged contact prior to European settlement (Ryan 1981:175) the Yanyuwa had some resistance to common diseases such as colds that had devastating effects on other groups. If between 10-20% is allowed for population loss resulting from early European contact, Stretton's figures point towards the Yanyuwa population having been between 270 and 290. Appendix C outlines the range of other figures collected from written and oral sources on Yanyuwa population levels and the changing Aboriginal population of Borrooloola.

#### 6.5.4 Contact with other Aboriginal groups

The Yanyuwa have had a long history of contact with other Aboriginal groups. Asking people about the birth place of non-Yanyuwa ancestors proved a good way to document changing patterns of such contact. Prior to European settlement all but one recorded non Yanyuwa ancestors were Wilangarra, Garawa or Mara. The exception was a Macassan trepanger who fathered a child during a stay on Yanyuwa country. With European settlement, as a result of greater Aboriginal movement, Yanyuwa marriages started occurring with Binbinka, Alawa and Kurdanji people. From the 1950s on many Yanyuwa worked on the Barkly Tableland cattle stations and many found spouses from this country. This pattern of a wider and wider sphere of marriage has continued. Today, relationships formed at high school in Darwin result in marriages with people from as far afield in the Northern Territory as the Victoria River area. Another recent marriage has resulted in a Yanyuwa man moving to Aurukun (see figure 1.1) in Queensland after having met his wife at a dance festival on Mornington Island.<sup>57</sup>

Both Macassan and European contact increased Aboriginal movements and in doing so introduced new tensions into Aboriginal life. The former did this mainly through the introduction of the dugout canoe while the latter did by destabilising traditional controls which had existed against travel and by establishing European settlements that provided havens away from the controls of Aboriginal law.

<sup>57</sup>His mother, Lina Riley, describes how he "kept going from" Mornington to Aurukun (1986 Tape 20A 42 min). Chase (1980:368) documents from his field work at Lockhart River on Cape York dance festivals resulting in a marriage between a member of this community and a person from Groote Eylandt.

Macassan contact with other Aboriginal groups affected the Yanyuwa. The Macassans, for example, allowed Groote Eylandt people to raid the Pellews for women. These raids were made possible by dugout canoes and apparent Macassan patronage. Tim Rakuwurlma<sup>58</sup> notes how these raiders were brought down to the islands on Macassan praus and were assisted in their raids by the supply of dugout canoes. He describes how “robbers that mob came down at night time . . . take away all the girl back to Groote Eylandt.”<sup>59</sup> Such raids are confirmed in the literature from researchers working on Groote Eylandt. Worsley (1954:14) and Cole (1972:19) both comment on the existence of women on Groote born in the Borrooloola region. Wilkins (1928:233) also comments on Borrooloola women being on Groote Eylandt and writes,

All our inquiries did not extract information as to how this woman had reached Groote Eylandt . . . The men, however declared that this woman did not come on a trading-ship, so it is possible that there is more wide travelling by natives that is generally supposed.

Similarly, Fred Gray describes<sup>60</sup> how they heard about incidents such as Aboriginal deaths at Borrooloola because a number of Borrooloola women were married to Groote men and kept in contact with their Borrooloola relatives through Aboriginal people carrying news up and down the coast. At least one Yanyuwa woman also ended up living on the nearby Arnhem Land mainland. As a result of the good English this woman spoke she was often an interpreter when Europeans started visiting the area.<sup>61</sup> A report by M.C.<sup>62</sup> McNamara in 1925, for example, notes<sup>63</sup> how his interpreter:

brought the lubra Clara to the camp, this is the Borrooloola lubra that was captured by the local tribe in 1916 when a raid was made on Catians (sic)

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<sup>58</sup>1983 Tape 7A 14 min.

<sup>59</sup>This pattern of non-Aboriginal patronage being exploited by other Aboriginal groups to raid neighbouring groups has been noted elsewhere in Australia. Ryan (1981), for instance, documents a very similar pattern in 19th century Tasmania.

<sup>60</sup>1987 Tape 43B 12 min.

<sup>61</sup>Fred Gray, for example, recalls her being there when he was in the Port Bradshaw area in the 1930s. Harney 1946:108 mentions her being in this area as well.

<sup>62</sup>It is not clear from the report if these are his initials or an abbreviation of Mounted Constable. The latter is probably the case.

<sup>63</sup>Australian Archives, Canberra A3 25/2911, Report of M.C. McNamara relative to Captain Wilkins, statement to the *Brisbane Daily Mail* of the 23rd May 1925.

Luffs<sup>64</sup> trepang camp at Bradshaws Inlet when some of the coloured crew were killed. This lubra could speak good English . . .

Clara's skills were again called up in 1934, when she boarded the Reverend H.E.D.M. Warren's boat.<sup>65</sup>

While the Yanyuwa feared the Groote Eylanders due to their raids for Yanyuwa women it is important to note others equally feared the Yanyuwa. Trigger (1985b:140) shows this from his research with Aboriginal people from Doomadgee. As well as presenting Aboriginal oral accounts of this, he cites an article from the *Queenslander* of 10 April 1897 that describes a group of Yanyuwa and Garawa "about 300 strong" visiting Queensland on a revenge expedition.

Yanyuwa trade<sup>66</sup> was an important part of pre-European movement. Many items were traded over considerable distance. Much of this activity occurred when different groups came together for ceremonies. To this day in a number of ceremonies gifts are ritually exchanged. While having a ceremonial context such trade also has important economic functions. Items that the Yanyuwa lacked, such as high quality stone for tools, could be traded for items they had plenty of, for example, cycads. As well as cycad the Yanyuwa were renowned for the possum fur pubic aprons they made. In turn the Garawa and Mara were both renowned for the stone tools they made and the Kurdanji for the large wooden coolamons and hooked and plain boomerangs.<sup>67</sup> Dinny Nyliba discusses<sup>68</sup> how the Garawa traded stone knives *majaja* for various items:

They been sell him all about give all about Yanyula<sup>69</sup> mob, this way . . . give all about . . . for hair belt big one too, spear everything buy him along that one, take away boomerang, give all about . . . they been buy him along that one.

<sup>64</sup>This is the Captain that Tim Rakuwurlma worked for. Tim says he started work with Luff the year after this incident occurred. Tim's sister was at the camp when it was attacked but unlike Clara she returned to Borroloola. Tim describes her return by foot and the attack on 1986 Tape 5A 5-10 min. R.M. and C.H. Berndt (1951:105) describe this incident as well but incorrectly date it as having occurred in 1915 and mistakenly conclude that Luff was killed.

<sup>65</sup>An account of this appears in Mrs Warren's notebook for 1934, Mitchell Library Mss 872 Item 8.

<sup>66</sup>The Yanyuwa term for trade items is *danya*.

<sup>67</sup>Johnson Babarramila (1987 Tape 65A 41-43 min.) describes the wide range of items different groups in the Borroloola area made and traded with each other.

<sup>68</sup>1987 Tape 63A 12 min.

<sup>69</sup>Dinny is using here the Garawa term for the Yanyuwa.

Thomson's (1949a:5) conclusion from his eastern Arnhem Land field work that Macassan contact "stimulated a remarkable ceremonial exchange" needs to be applied also to the Yanyuwa case. As Thomson notes, Macassan contact provided the "drive" (ibid:94) to extend existing economic and ceremonial exchange systems. Although he discusses the introduction of the dugout canoe he does not stress the role this had in extending trade links. Presumably this is because the people he worked with had already established trade links inland and, as he documents, it was these inland links that were extended as a result of Macassan contact.

The Yanyuwa, in contrast, seem to have already had trade links along the coast with the Mara to the north-west and the Garawa to the south-east and the introduction of dugout canoes therefore greatly extended these existing coastal links. It should be noted also that subsequent employment on European boats increased Yanyuwa links with other coastal areas even further. It should be stressed then, that the changing trade patterns that came with contact were basically extensions of existing patterns. New objects were added and they were traded further. They were, however, traded in the same way and often along the same routes.

As well as the movement outside Yanyuwa country it is important to examine internal Yanyuwa movement. A significant aspect of such movement were the existence of footpaths (described above by Leichhardt).<sup>70</sup> Important resources, whether economic or ceremonial (often the two were combined), were joined by commonly taken footpaths that linked these places via convenient stop-over points. These stop-over points were often shady lagoons, which provided water for drinking, shade to rest in and often food resources such as water lilies and freshwater turtles.

### 6.5.5 Material culture

Material culture provides one aspect of culture that readily lends itself to the study of cultural change over time. The brief summary of changes in Yanyuwa material culture given below illustrate how innovative the Yanyuwa were in adopting new items into their material culture. As these examples show, far from being conservative in their response to contact the Yanyuwa readily accepted new items as long as they could be

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<sup>70</sup>Such features appear to have been common over a wide area of Australia. Chase and Sutton (1981:1842), for example, note the occurrence of similar features in Cape York.

adapted to existing tasks. Subsequent chapters illustrate how this principle of trying to incorporate the new into the old has been a general Yanyuwa response to contact. Examples are also given of how the Yanyuwa adapted old items for new purposes.

**Paperbark** stripped off various *Melaleuca* species (see Appendix D) was once used for a variety of purposes including mattresses and blankets. European items have been adopted for these functions. European blankets are also now used in ceremonies to hide initiates whereas bark was once used for this purpose.<sup>71</sup> Paperbark was used to make ceremonial head-dresses but now cardboard is used (see figure 6.12). Paperbark was also once used to make containers for scrambled eggs but now aluminium cans are usually used. Paperbark was also used to make torches<sup>72</sup> that were used at night time for amongst other things fishing off reefs and along the McArthur River. It should be noted, however, that the reverse process of change has also occurred with paperbark being used as a substitute for European items. For example, paperbark is used at times when cigarette papers are unavailable (see quote on page 276).

**Bark** from a number of species was used to make rope. Tim Rakuwurlma notes<sup>73</sup> that as a result of Macassan contact the Yanyuwa started making more sophisticated ply ropes.<sup>74</sup> Since European ropes have become available such rope making is rare. However, bush ropes have been made since European contact to make bridles to ride bush horses to hunt cattle without European cattle station managers knowing (see figure 7.2 and detailed descriptions on page 468).

**Stone** was used to make spears but was replaced with metal when this more durable material became available. Figure 6.13 illustrates how so called "shovel-nose" spears were made from European metal in exactly the same way as stone spears.

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<sup>71</sup>1987 Tape 51A 2 min.

<sup>72</sup>Jack Twyford describes (1987 75A 28 min.) seeing them in use during World War Two.

<sup>73</sup>Tim describes (1987 Tape 14A 40 min.) how his father went from "make him along leg" to "make him along waddy" the way the Macassans did. Tim discusses Macassan rope making again on 1987 Tape 51A 45 min.

<sup>74</sup>The same thing was told to Donald Thomson during his work in north-east Arnhem Land. Donald Thomson collection, Museum of Victoria, notebook number 94, page 3 of notes and page 5 of typed notes. He also took a series of photographs No 1675-1691 of the rope making techniques his informants said were introduced by the Macassans.

Aboriginal people obtained metal for spears by a variety of means. For example, the Borroloola Police Records<sup>75</sup> record how “the natives cut up a 200 gallon galvanized rainwater tank . . . for the purpose of making spear heads”. Car bodies were also used for spears.<sup>76</sup>

**Wood** points were used prior to the availability of superior raw materials. As Tim Rakuwurlma recalls,<sup>77</sup> Macassan introduced metal not only replaced stone knives but also replaced wooden harpoon points “before never been have knife . . . black-fella they had stone knife for cutting dugong . . . that dugong nail, him never been have him . . . that wood one they been make him”. The current favoured source for harpoon nails are the tappet rods from wrecked Toyota vehicles. The same wood that was used for harpoon points (from *wulban* trees, see Appendix D) trees) was also used to make fishing hooks when metal was not available.<sup>78</sup>

**Down** used for sticking on to ceremonial dancers once gathered from native trees is now usually obtained from the shops as cotton wool (see figure 6.12) or by tearing up the lining of disposal nappies. Tampons are occasionally also used for the same purpose. The down was once attached with human blood, but this glue was initially replaced by sugar and water and more recently by wall paper starch.

The history of Yanyuwa canoe making that I have outlined in detail elsewhere (Baker 1988) provides another good example of the processes of incorporation and change in Yanyuwa material culture. Dugout canoes replaced messmate canoes and have in turn been replaced by aluminium boats. Methods of construction changed with the availability of new tools and trees. For example, canoes were made on cattle stations and brought back to Borroloola on the back of trucks (ibid:182). Methods to repair leaks in dugouts also rapidly evolved. Initially the bark of *ma-wunjurrwunjurr* (*Terminalia carpentariae*) was used but iron and tacks were soon found to do a better job. Red ochre was used to protect canoes from boring worms but when available tar, pitch and various boating oils were used as they were superior.

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<sup>75</sup>Northern Territory Archives, F268, 11 November 1916.

<sup>76</sup>Jack Twyford 1987 Tape 75A 41 min.

<sup>77</sup>1984 Tape 15A 13 min.

<sup>78</sup>Nora Jalirduma describes the use of these hooks on 1987 Tape 70A 3 min.



Figure 6.12: Beer carton head-dress



Figure 6.13: Metal and stone spears

The history of Yanyuwa watercraft also provides a particularly good example of the dependence that can come with adopting new items. The move to using aluminium boats instead of dugouts occurred for the same reasons that dugouts were originally adopted. The new item had great advantages. In the case of adoption of aluminium boats, however, as has been the case for many other aspects of European culture adopted by Aboriginal people there have been unforeseen ramifications.

The Yanyuwa started using European dinghies in the late 1960s when, with the granting of equal wages on cattle stations, there was plenty of cash about to buy dinghies. However, the prosperity of this time was short lived. Massive lay offs of Aboriginal people in the cattle industry in the 1970s have resulted in very few Yanyuwa people currently being employed. Today, there is little money to buy dinghies or outboard motors and often not enough mechanical know how to maintain those motors purchased. However, any return to making dugout canoes is extremely unlikely as only a very few old people know how to make them.

Hence Tim Rakuwurlma who spent much of the first two thirds of his 90 years travelling in dugout canoes around his island country, can now lament<sup>79</sup> "I want to go island, sit down long island, but no boat too much ... I got no boat too much, I want to sit down long my country".

Aboriginal culture has often been classified as highly conservative. This section has illustrated how the Yanyuwa were far from being conservative in adopting new items. They were, however, conservative in the sense that they tried to conserve their culture by adopting new items for existing purposes.

### 6.5.6 Territorial organisation

European observers of Aboriginal people in the Borroloola area have, as elsewhere in Australia, tended to stress language group divisions.<sup>80</sup> For Aboriginal people, in the area, four semi-moiety<sup>81</sup> divisions are just as important (see figures 6.14 for the extent of the country of each semi-moiety and 6.15 for an outline of the groupings of the semi-

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<sup>79</sup>1987 Tape 71A 43 min.

<sup>80</sup>The approximate pre-European extent of these groups in the Borroloola area is mapped above in figure 1.3.

<sup>81</sup>As Layton (1980:8) notes from his field work in the nearby Cox River area, these "semi-moieties are analagous with the father-son pairs in an eight sub-section system".

moieties). These two systems, one linguistic the other mythological are discrete but their members intersect. A good example of this comes from the Lurriyari Wubunjawa area which is close to the boundary of Yanyuwa and Garawa country. This division is of little consequence as Aboriginal people who lived in the area would always have been at least bilingual. Many people describe themselves, as Rory does,<sup>82</sup> as “me Yanyuwa - Garawa”. When discussing this area people were more concerned to impress on me that all the area is Mambaliya semi-moiety country.

Semi-moieties ceremonially link individuals through the shared influence of ancestral beings. The tracks these figures took extend over great distances and hence link individuals that are often quite distant. Tim Rakuwurlma,<sup>83</sup> for example, describes how old Doomadgee<sup>84</sup> which is over 300km away in Queensland is on Wuyaliya country because it is located on land associated with the Wuyaliya ancestral being, the groper.

Yanyuwa land ownership is intrinsically linked with environmental knowledge of country, through the agency of mythology. The paths that ancestral beings travelled provide mental maps that, in general terms, are a way of understanding country and, in specific terms, link groups of people with specific places. The travels of particular ancestral beings (especially the power they left at specific locations) link together members of each semi-moiety. This linking of land ownership with mythology and, in turn, environmental knowledge, provides an important key to understanding why ceremony and land are such fundamental factors in shaping both what happened in the Yanyuwa past and how they now see that past.

It is, thus, very significant that today many Yanyuwa speak of countries that they have not been on for some time as “not knowing them”. When returning to such areas, people limit their activities for some time so that links between people and place can be re-established. Individuals often address the country explaining the reasons for their absence and introducing strangers (be they researchers or spouses) who have come from other country. Another important aspect of Aboriginal attitudes to land is, as mentioned above, the attachment to conception sites. The concentration of people in town has obviously dramatically affected patterns of conception. Yanyuwa parents,

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<sup>82</sup>1987 68A 26 min.

<sup>83</sup>ibid 39 min.

<sup>84</sup>The mission was moved from the coast inland to new Doomadgee in 1930s. Old Doomadgee derived its name from the Ganggalida name for the location *Dumaji* (David Trigger, personal communication).

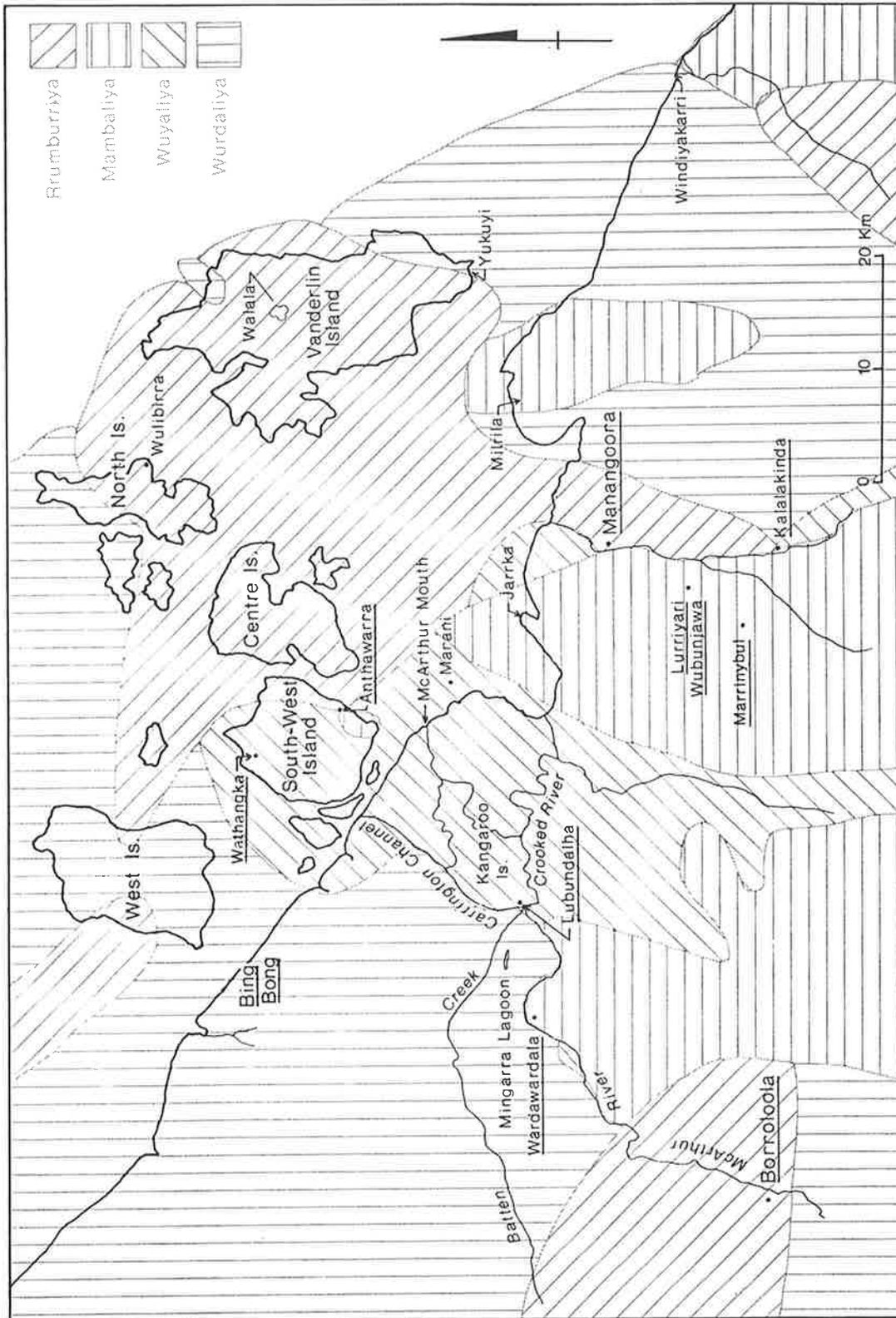


Figure 6.14: Land belonging to each semi-moiety in the Borroloola area

YANYUWA SOCIETY			
Moiety A		Moiety B	
semi-moiety Wuyaliya	semi-moiety Wurdaliya	semi-moiety Rrumburriya	semi-moiety Mambaliya- Wawakarriya

**Note:** This table is based on a similar one in Bradley 1988a:xv.

Figure 6.15: Yanyuwa social groupings

when talking about their children, will often comment on which were born on the islands and which were born in Borroloola.

As elsewhere in Australia, there is a strong cultural divide in the area between ‘salt water’ people and ‘fresh water’ people. Despite a long period of co-residence in Borroloola these differences have survived, with Yanyuwa people heading seaward in their weekend hunting trips and the fresh water people heading inland. As Tim Rakuwurlma puts it:<sup>85</sup> “My father no more savvy kangaroo, he dugong hunter number one<sup>86</sup> like me too, I no more savvy spearing kangaroo . . . blackfellas long this country [the Borroloola area] hunt kangaroo, no more salt water people”. This cultural division has a mythological expression as well. A major dreaming path through the Sir Edward Pellew Islands and nearby mainland areas involves a hunting contest between the Dugong Killers and the Mullet Killers. On winning the contest the Dugong Killers banish the Mullet Killers inland to a life of hunting emu and kangaroo.<sup>87</sup>

### 6.5.7 Perceptions of country

Non-material aspects of Yanyuwa culture have influenced their cultural landscape and in doing so shaped their history of contact. An aesthetic appreciation of open vistas is,

<sup>85</sup>1983 Tape 11A 5 min.

<sup>86</sup>This phrase translates as the Yanyuwa term *maramaranja* which more literally means “a dugong and sea turtle hunter of excellence” (Bradley 1988b:99).

<sup>87</sup>John Bradley 1984: “An Unchanging Law” Unpublished Report for the Aboriginal Sacred Sites Authority, Darwin p45-50.

for example, a shared trait of older Yanyuwa people and this appreciation in turn has influenced their past. The source of such an appreciation is presumably years spent sitting on beaches looking out to sea scanning the horizon. One example of how this view influenced Yanyuwa history comes in their responses to their short lived move to Dangana settlement (see section 7.6.1). A major dissatisfaction many Yanyuwa had with this site was the lack of a view. As Eileen Yakibijna describes<sup>88</sup> there were “too many trees everywhere you can’t see”. Such attitudes are the result of the marine emphasis of Yanyuwa life and the uninterrupted views beach based life offered.

Some idea how marine orientated Yanyuwa life was comes from the distribution of locations they named. Site mapping work carried out in the area by John Bradley of the Aboriginal Sacred Sites Protection Authority reveals a dense distribution of coastal names but only a very few named inland sites.<sup>89</sup> Detailed archaeological surveys I carried out on the islands located only very sparse evidence for inland areas being used. The only time inland areas on islands were extensively used was for ceremonial purposes. Resources used on such occasions include *ma-bikiki* fruit and sugar bag. It is significant that when recording place names on the islands away from the coast it was generally women, who would have done most of the inland gathering, who knew names for inland locations.

A dramatic example of different perceptions of country is illustrated in figures 6.16 and 6.17. As part of research on the old Malarndarri camp (see section 8.4.6) I asked individuals to draw maps of the camp. It soon became obvious that Aboriginal men and women had very different perceptions of this camp. The differences between figures 6.16 and 6.17 are typical of this contrast between male and female views. While Andrew’s view of Malarndarri camp is centred on the river and stresses paths for canoe travel, Bella’s is centred on the church and stresses the arrangement of family groupings. Munn (1973a:214-215) notes that a similar contrast exists in male and female Walbiri narratives, the former giving a travelling hunting view and the latter a domestic view.<sup>90</sup>

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<sup>88</sup>1987 Tapē 13B 13 min.

<sup>89</sup>Marie Reay makes this point under cross-examination during the Borroloola Land Claim (Australian Aboriginal Land Commissioner 1977:1330) stressing that this concentration of sites is the result of Yanyuwa being “a maritime people”.

<sup>90</sup>Sutton (1988b:83-88) also explores this issue.

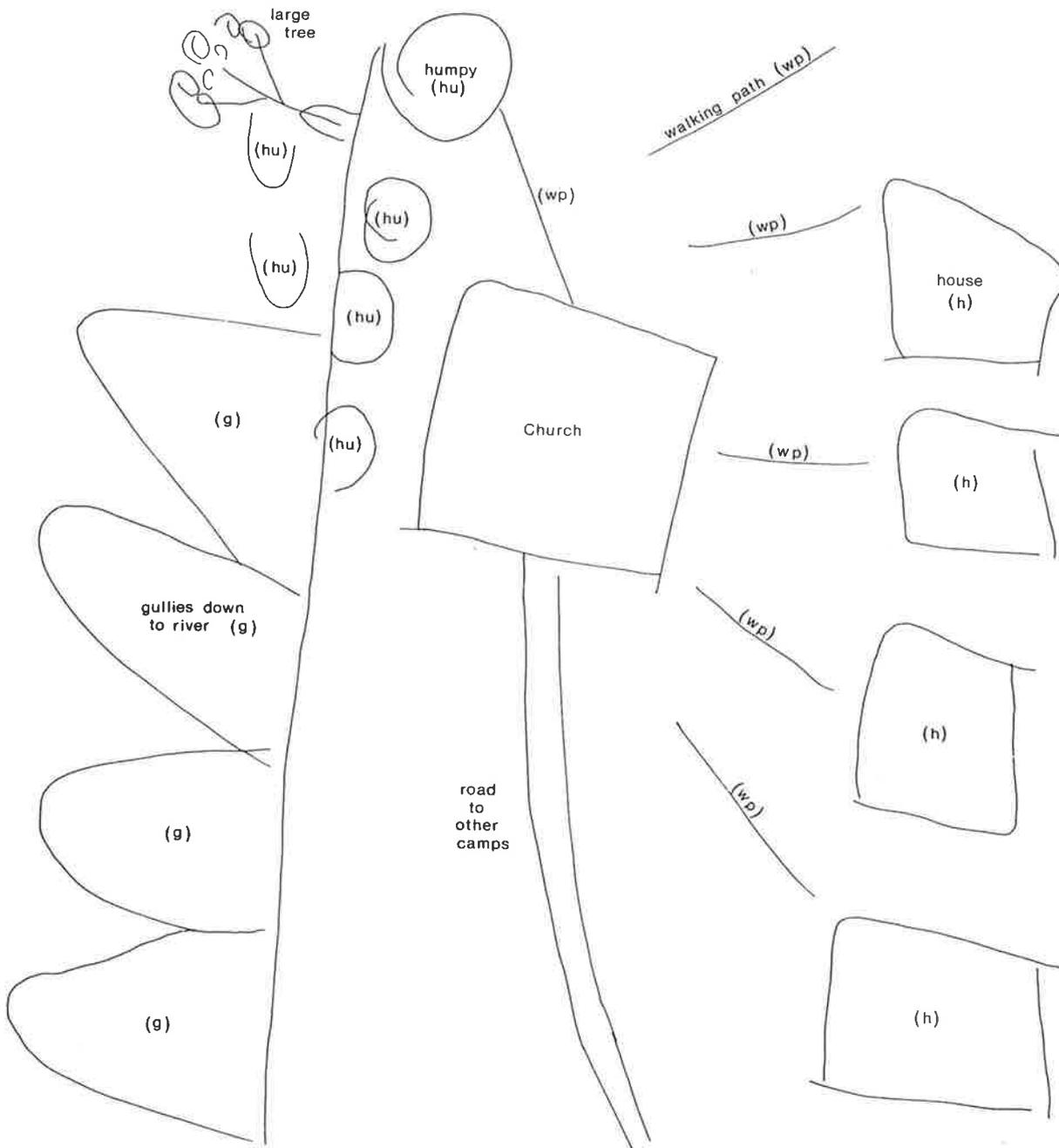


Figure 6.16: Bella Marrajabu's map of Malarndarri camp

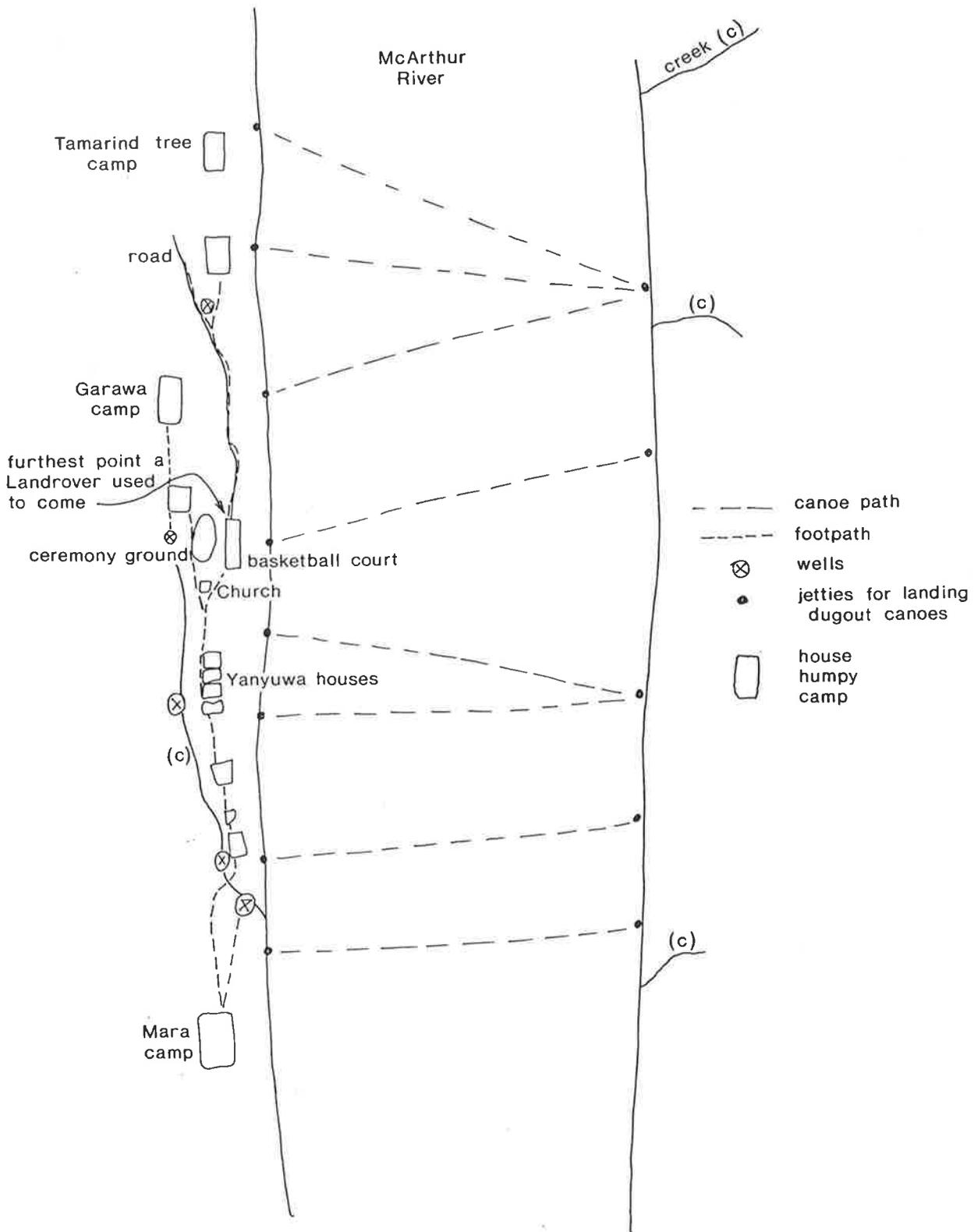


Figure 6.17: Andrew Dodd's map of Malarndarri camp

## 6.6 Changing cultural landscapes: other Aboriginal groups

The fact that contact has involved changing relationships between different Aboriginal groups has rarely been acknowledged. Eurocentric views have obscured this issue by focusing on what European culture did to Aboriginal people and in also having usually seen Aboriginal culture as a unified undifferentiated entity. A cultural landscape framework highlights the changing relationships between different Aboriginal groups in the Borroloola area. Two important points emerge from such an analysis. First and foremost, the contact experience of the Yanyuwa cannot be studied in isolation, for what happened to surrounding groups influenced them. Secondly, a consideration of the history of surrounding groups is necessary to reveal distinctive features of the Yanyuwa experience.

Sunny Raggard's following words<sup>91</sup> provide a good summary of the contrast between Yanyuwa and Kurdanji contact experiences. His views are based on the perspective of his 50 year association with Kurdanji people.

They never had trouble with the settlers, they lived out on the islands in peace ... the Yanyuwa mob. And when the country was settled they drifted in, they never got in trouble because there was no cattle or anything to disturb. Where the Kurdanji ... the cattle and the Kurdanji tribe [were] mixed up, that's where they had all the trouble.

This Kurdanji view of history paints an over rosy picture for the Yanyuwa because their contact with Europeans was not always peaceful. This quotation does, however, highlight the differences between the history of European contact for the Yanyuwa as compared with those of surrounding groups. Clearly, the island location of the Yanyuwa influenced their history. Significantly, it gave them pre-European experience of contact with the Macassans and then limited some of the major implications of European contact.

The dramatic decline in population among a number of surrounding groups had a profound influence on the Yanyuwa. The Borroloola area was not the traditional coun-

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<sup>91</sup>1987 Tape 18A 7 min.

try of the Yanyuwa but belonged to the Wilangarra. On their demise, the Binbingka<sup>92</sup> people assumed responsibility for the Borroloola area for a while. While a few individuals with some Binbingka ancestors survive, it is acknowledged by Aboriginal people in the area that the Binbingka also no longer exist as a land owning entity. Responsibility for their land has in turn been assumed by the surrounding groups, specifically the Mara from the north-west, the Garawa from the south-east, the Kurdanji from the south-west and the Yanyuwa from the north. Control over the land immediately around Borroloola now rests with the Yanyuwa.

As Peterson et al (1977:1004) outline, the demise of Aboriginal groups "must have been a recurrent problem and it is not surprising that the Aborigines have evolved mechanisms to deal with it". They go on to note six types of secondary rights that can be asserted by surrounding groups to assume authority over country. Of these, three mechanisms for assuming rights over land are relevant to the Borroloola area: 1) place of conception, 2) place of birth, and 3) shared ceremonies.<sup>93</sup> Through these three factors links to new areas have been established in the Borroloola region. A guiding principle in this process has been the similarities in the semi-moiety systems in the area.<sup>94</sup>

As all the other surrounding groups were mainland based before contact, the Yanyuwa probably had the biggest adjustments to make with these changes in control of land. As a result of these changes, some Yanyuwa people, who will boast about their ancestors' prowess as dugong hunters, are today setting up outstations well inland. Further, as a result of a long history of involvement in the cattle industry, activities on these outstations are often centred around cattle. It is important to note, however, that despite having to make this cultural adjustment, it is the Yanyuwa who have, at least since about 1950, been the dominant Aboriginal group in Borroloola. All the Europeans I

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<sup>92</sup>Elkin, in a report to the Acting Director of the Native Affairs Branch, 22 July 1953, Australian Archives, Northern Territory Region, CRS F1 Item 53/487 page 9, on the "Tribes of the NT", describes "Binbinga" country as "Middle Macarthur River and Bauhinia Downs", "Yanyula" country as "Borroloola to the Pellew Islands and the Limmen Bight River", "Mara" country as "From the Yanyula north across the lower Roper to the Roper River Mission".

<sup>93</sup>The term Peterson et al (1977) use for shared ceremonies is "company for ceremony". Aboriginal people in the Borroloola area use "company" in the same sense.

<sup>94</sup>Avery (1985:218) presents a table illustrating how it is possible to list corresponding semi-moieties from as far afield as the Katherine area. He also argues that the similarity in the respective names for semi-moieties suggests "that they originated from a common set".

have interviewed, who lived in Borrooloola since this time, were conscious of this fact.

It is possible to use oral sources to reconstruct past shifts in Aboriginal power balances in Borrooloola. When I asked Tim Rakuwurlma who was living in Borrooloola when he first went there in about 1915 he replied,<sup>95</sup> “more Garawa and Binbingka, Kurdanji ... little bit Yanyuwa and big mob [from] Roper”. He goes on to describes the change in control of Borrooloola ownership in the following terms:<sup>96</sup>

Wilangarra country, Borrooloola ... I look after this country now, me [and my brother] Banjo. I been find all my boy long Borrooloola ... me fella and Banjo find big mob girl too and boy. That deadfella<sup>97</sup> been give me two fella, give that country ...

“You fella can keep this country now, you fella been have big mob piccaninny now, you fella sit down here.”

Tim uses “find” here in terms of spiritual conception. The place at which a Yanyuwa mother first becomes aware of the child is particularly important. Mythological power at that location is considered responsible for the conception and the child is forever mythologically connected to this location. Hence there is great attachment to this location and this is the reason Tim cites the ‘finding’ of his and his brother’s children at Borrooloola as grounds for their assuming authority for the area. This growing spiritual attachment to places in which people are living is a major factor in perpetuating the process of coming in to Borrooloola (outlined in detail in chapters 8 and 9) once it has started.

Baldwin Spencer’s record of his stay in Borrooloola provides some interesting detail about the separate distinguishable groups in the area. He stresses the independence of the Yanyuwa<sup>98</sup> (1901:97):

These people live down by the salt water and don’t have much to do with the inland natives. ... [they] are not at all unfriendly but very independent.

<sup>95</sup>1987 Tape 71B 33 min.

<sup>96</sup>1987 Tape 72A 3 min.

<sup>97</sup>“Deadfella” here refers to the Wilangarra man who handed over to Tim and his brother the ritual control of the area.

<sup>98</sup>Anula in their orthography.

There is such a supply of food here that they can do without what we have to give them easily in fact they fed just about as well as we do.

Spencer goes on to give a clue to the reasons for Yanyuwa independence, in his description of how they brought dugongs up from the coast. It is likely that their marine based economy made life easier for them in the contact situation than was the case for their mainland neighbours who lost control of much of their land. As the McArthur is tidal as far upstream as Borrooloola, the Yanyuwa, when in Borrooloola, had (and still do have) an extension of their marine environment to exploit. Moreover, the river provides a highway along which to this day large quantities of food can be carried up from the coast.

Spencer and Gillen also record Mara people being at Borrooloola (Spencer 1901:89). The pull of a European settlement is well illustrated in their presence, as their country is centred on the Roper River about 150km away from Borrooloola. Their presence emphasises the importance of the order in which European settlements were established. Had Roper River Mission pre-dated Borrooloola, presumably the pattern of movement would have been reversed.<sup>99</sup> The Mara movement<sup>100</sup> into the Borrooloola area has had a profound affect on the Yanyuwa, particularly on marriages.

More recently, the lay off of cattle workers that accompanied the introduction of equal wages in the late 1960s has led to many Aboriginal people from a variety of language groups ending up in Borrooloola. A Wambaya woman, Topsy Pyro, told me<sup>101</sup> how people in Borrooloola are "all mix here now" and went on to note that none of her group was still living on their traditional country "nobody in Brunette, nobody in Alexandria, Anthony, all been die old people, only all new mob we, we don't talk much Wambaya". Billy Kid, a Garawa man, describes<sup>102</sup> a similar history for his people who "leave the country, we been all scatter come to Borrooloola stop here". This recent move into Borrooloola of other groups has been particularly significant when viewed

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<sup>99</sup>Roper Mission was established by the Anglican Church Missionary Society in 1908 (Bleakley 1961:104).

<sup>100</sup>Merlan (1981:141) documents how in turn people from southern Arnhem Land moved into the Roper River area "earlier this century" attracted by the cattle stations there.

<sup>101</sup>1987 Tape 63A 40 min.

<sup>102</sup>1987 Tape 63B 21 min.

from a Yanyuwa perspective. One Yanyuwa woman, for example, described<sup>103</sup> how on returning to Borrooloola after a 10 year absence she noticed that “it had all changed, I didn’t know the place . . . all different people there . . . from [the Barkly] Tableland”.

The rest of this thesis explores the changing patterns in the Yanyuwa cultural landscape during various phases of their history of contact. It needs to be stressed that the discussion while focusing on the Yanyuwa is predicated by the understanding that the Yanyuwa contact experience cannot be considered in isolation from the experiences of other groups.

## 6.7 The role of the cultural landscape in history

European pre-conceptions have greatly shaped how we perceive Australia. The intellectual baggage Europeans brought to Australia ill-prepared them for the realities of the country. The well documented examples of initially not being able to accurately paint Aboriginal people and the flora and fauna (Donaldson and Donaldson 1985), because of existing mental stereotypes, are but the tip of the perceptual iceberg. Of particular interest to this study are Eurocentric views that large areas of Australia are harsh and inhospitable. While much of Australia indeed is marginal as far as European economic uses are concerned, the same is not true, if Aboriginal land uses are considered. Aboriginal land uses, however, have usually been ignored and in doing so the perception of an inhospitable cultural landscape has been created.

Nowhere in Australia are the contradictions between European perceptions and the environmental reality more stark than in the tropical north. European culture, be it in regard to specific factors such as clothing or general matters such as favoured economic activities, is ill adapted to the tropics. As noted above even European categorisations of the seasons are inappropriate to tropical Australia. European economic development has been limited in the Borrooloola area as a result of it being in European terms isolated and having a harsh climate and environment. The economic marginality (in European terms) of the area has been a vital factor in the contact history of the area. The limited requirements Europeans have had for Yanyuwa land, for example, enabled the Yanyuwa to stay living on their land until very recently.

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<sup>103</sup>1987 Tape 4A 11 min.

Similarly, the economic marginality of the cattle industry, in the Borroloola area, and the resultant European dependency on their Aboriginal employee's bush skills have been important factors in the local history. Another good example of the significance of different cultural views of the landscape involves the issue of coming in, that is explored in detail in chapter 8. The official government policy of encouraging Aboriginal people to move into centralised settlements was primarily based on the advantages this provided in administering Aboriginal people and also perhaps on the way this encouraged the European development of vacated land. It needs to be noted, however, that the policy was fueled in the field by European misconceptions regarding the landscape.

In interviewing the government officials involved it became obvious that these individuals genuinely considered the bush was not capable of adequately supporting Aboriginal people. If such views were not also reflected in the written documents of the time, it would be tempting to analyse them in terms of retrospective justification for past actions. There can, however, be no denying that many Europeans involved believed that Aboriginal people living out bush were unhealthy and under-fed and thought encouraging their move into town was for the good of Aboriginal people.

The fact that in Yanyuwa eyes town life has not been better has sharpened current Yanyuwa awareness of past contrasts between Yanyuwa and the European perceptions. Annie Karrakayn, for example, recalls<sup>104</sup> how "Welfare was bringing all the people from out bush . . . because that people used to starve for tucker, that's the way they reckon all the welfare but I reckon big mob of food in the bush". Similarly Isa Yubuyu recalls<sup>105</sup> how a welfare officer tried to get her mother to move into Borroloola by telling her, "there is nothing out here for you". Isa says her mother responded by saying "they lots of tucker in the bush here for us, we can't starving, plenty of bush tucker, Aboriginal tucker in the bush, we'll find anything when we are walking".

Different European and Aboriginal views of the cultural landscape have obviously shaped the history of the Borroloola area. An understanding of this process provides a valuable context for the following chapters that first describe and then analyse the Yanyuwa contact experience. Two other important points raised in this chapter are the long history of contact the Yanyuwa had before Europeans arrived and the mechanism

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<sup>104</sup>1987 Tape 33B 18 min.

<sup>105</sup>1988 Tape 4A 25 min.

the Yanyuwa had for handling change, by incorporating new items into existing systems. As illustrated in following chapters this long history of contact influenced Yanyuwa-European contact and the Yanyuwa response of incorporating new items into their culture played an important role in contact processes.

## Part III

### Description of Contact

# Chapter 7

## Phases of Yanyuwa-European Contact

### 7.1 Introduction

This chapter examines the range of contact the Yanyuwa had with Europeans. A number of particular case studies of contact are examined in detail and, in subsequent chapters, the results these had on the Yanyuwa are analysed. The structure used in dividing up these different historical phases is a Yanyuwa perspective of their past. The different 'times'<sup>1</sup> are listed in figure 7.1 in the order in which they are dealt with in this chapter. This order with the exception of 'war time' also corresponds to the chronological order of the commencement of these periods. War time is an exception as it is a period which occurred during 'police times'. This period is discussed before police times to highlight the transition that occurred from police times to 'welfare times'. Macassan times are not dealt with again in this chapter as the influential role Macassan times had in shaping the cultural landscape of the Yanyuwa has already been discussed. European trepangers, however, need to be examined and it is important to note how they are seen by the Yanyuwa to have been in many ways a continuation of Macassan times. These times are ones the Yanyuwa often refer to and are part of the Yanyuwa view of history.

It is important to stress that these times should not be seen as neatly divided periods as they are often overlapping. Moreover, it needs to be noted that the extent

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<sup>1</sup>It should be noted that the three shortest periods are usually described by the singular "time".

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Macassan times

Wild times

War time

Police times

Welfare times

Cattle times

Gough Whitlam times

This (tourist) time

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Figure 7.1: Yanyuwa recognised historical phases

of particular times varied from place to place. The wild times, for example, ended when people “been quieten down” and this occurred at different times in different places. It should be noted too that, the Yanyuwa use the terms “Gough Whitlam time” and “land rights time” interchangeably (see section 7.8).

Other times are recognised in Yanyuwa history such as “starving time”<sup>2</sup> and “that time when we just been work for bread and beef”<sup>3</sup>. The latter example is a sub-category of cattle times and the former is often mentioned by the Yanyuwa as the brief time between police and welfare times. Individual long-serving policemen and welfare officers also earned the title of ‘times’. The use by Aboriginal people of the concept of “times” has been widely recorded by anthropologists (see Anderson 1984:348 for an example) and indeed Chase (1979:109) notes that an anthropologist himself achieved such status. He describes how Cape York people from the Lockhart River area now refer to “Thomson time”, after the period that Donald Thomson worked in the area in the 1930s.

Trigger (1985b:131) also discusses how Aboriginal people from Doomadgee recognise various times and gives a detailed analysis of the “wild time” concept. It is important to note that these times tend to be named after particular external influences that are

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<sup>2</sup>Discussed by Annie Karrakayn 1987 Tape 48A 25 min. and Oscar Wungunya 1987 Tape 48A 8 min.

<sup>3</sup>Don Bubuji 1987 Tape 47B 19 min.

felt for a while. It has been European welfare officers, anthropologists, or politicians whose influences have been felt for a while and then departed the scene who have earned these titles. Aboriginal people in contrast are seen to be more permanent and attached to particular places and therefore can not be used to define set periods.

Specific events also provide important landmarks in the Yanyuwa past, playing a role similar to dates in European history. I was only able to construct a chronology of Yanyuwa history by establishing the dates of events that the Yanyuwa refer to. Such events include, "when Foster got shot" (March 1941 see page 303), "Ted Evans time" (1949-1950 see page 224) "new money time" (the arrival of decimal currency in 1966) and "Cyclone Tracy time" (24 December 1974).

An understanding of both Yanyuwa classifications of periods and specific well remembered events in their past is essential to understanding Yanyuwa views of their history. The rest of this chapter deals with each of the times listed in figure 7.1.

## 7.2 European trepangers: Macassan times continued

Although chronologically very distinct from 'Macassan times', the contact the Yanyuwa had with European trepangers is very closely linked in Yanyuwa views with Macassan times. European trepanging in the Sir Edward Pellew group is seen by the Yanyuwa to be in many ways a direct continuation of traditions established by the Macassans. The linking of these two periods by the Yanyuwa is a good example of the emphasis their views of the past place on continuity and stability. From a Yanyuwa perspective there was considerable continuity between Macassan and European contact as all the early European residents on the Pellews were trepangers. This Yanyuwa perspective of continuity contrasts with European perspectives of their "opening up" of the area. Most Europeans know nothing of the Macassan contact with northern Australia and view Europeans as the discoverers of the area. When Europeans have acknowledged the Macassans they tend to stress the contrast rather than similarity between this early contact and subsequent European contact. The emphasis in European thinking on chronology further separates Macassans and Europeans.

The European trepangers on the Pellews were seen by the Yanyuwa to be filling a

gap left by the cessation of the Macassan visits. Yanyuwa responses to such visitors were vastly different to those of mainland Aboriginal people to pastoralists. When the Yanyuwa describe trepanging work they often do not differentiate between Macassan and European bosses. When recording details about trepang camps and trepanging methods a great deal of questioning was required to find out if the stories were about Europeans or Macassans. Yanyuwa songs about trepanging, for example, span the Macassan and European trepanging eras without any differentiation. The techniques the two groups used were very similar for European trepangers usually learnt how to go about the business of gathering, boiling, drying and smoking trepang by asking their Aboriginal labour force how the Macassans did it.

Fred Gray and Syd Kyle-Little (Europeans who were involved in trepanging in the 1930s and 1940s respectively) have both described to me how they had to learn how to gather and process trepang from Aboriginal people who had previously worked with the Macassans.<sup>4</sup> Fred Gray, for example, recalls<sup>5</sup> “We didn’t know how to make a smokehouse on our first trip ... [I was taught by] one of the black boys on Goulburn Island ... [he knew] from the Macassans ... I had to find our how to do it the Macassan way”. Similarly, Babe Demaso describes<sup>6</sup> how his father used the same locations as the Macassans had previously used, when he was trepanging on Vanderlin Island in about 1910.

The Yanyuwa early European contact experience with trepangers<sup>7</sup> contrasts starkly with the contact experience of mainland people. Around Borroloola there would have been no getting away from Europeans and their cattle and, apparently quite quickly, people were forced into living in town. The same was not the case for the Yanyuwa, the European trepangers, like the Macassans before them, needed little land to carry out their business and they worked seasonally. The activity they were involved in was also less removed from traditional practices, for trepangers are engaged in inter-tidal gathering. As the Yanyuwa economy was centred almost entirely on marine resources,

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<sup>4</sup>A report by Kyle-Little (Australian Archives, Northern Territory Region, F315 49/393A 2.) describes how he established trepang camps in the Maningrida area as part of a Native Affairs Branch attempt to provide employment for Aboriginal people in their traditional country.

<sup>5</sup>1987 Tape 6B 28 min.

<sup>6</sup>1987 Tape 42B 31 min.

<sup>7</sup>The best known of whom was Bill Harney whose book *North of 23°* is about his trepanging days.

trepaning would not have been such a foreign concept as pastoralism must have been to inland people. Significantly trepaning also involved a local familiar (albeit previously unvalued species) and not an introduced one.

The length of contact with different European trepangers varied greatly. In 1910 there was, for example, a report<sup>8</sup> about the Pellews stating that a “brief flurry of trepan collapsed due to indolence on the part of the fisherman together with too much rum”. The longest period of contact on the Pellews as a result of European trepaning is from 1910 to the present in the case of the Johnson family of Vanderlin Island. Steve Johnson (senior) came to the Pellews in 1910 and trepaned at a number of sites that the Macassans had used beforehand. In about 1925 he established a permanent base at Yukuyi on the southern tip of Vanderlin Island and brought up a large family there with his Aboriginal wife, Harriet Mambalwarrka. Harriet was a Wurdaliya woman from West Island and, once they started living together, it followed that Steve Johnson (senior) was given the skin which made him ‘straight way’ married to his wife. This meant that he became a Rrumburriya man which happens to be the land owning semi-moiety for Vanderlin Island (see figure 6.14). In Yanyuwa eyes, his attachment to Vanderlin Island was illustrated by his long association with the area.

The commitment of Steve Johnson (senior) to the area is stressed today by the most senior *ngimarringki* for this country<sup>9</sup> in the following terms: “Him been finish there again, along Vanderlin, never go to hospital long Darwin, go back long his country nothing”. His son, Steve Johnson (junior) has lived his whole life on Vanderlin Island and, as the only permanent occupant of the islands since the 1950s, has played an important role in ‘looking after’ the islands in the eyes of the Yanyuwa people now resident in Borroloola. He has continued traditional burning practices and has also played a significant part in safeguarding various sites of significance.

An excellent example of the high regard in which Steve is held, is contained in the following quote from Irene Kanjujamara. I was asking her how one couple<sup>10</sup> managed to stay out on their traditional country by themselves right up to the 1970s and she explains how Steve was responsible for this by making sure they had the supplies they

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<sup>8</sup>Commonwealth Parliamentary Papers 1910 Paper No. 66 page 44.

<sup>9</sup>Tim Rakuwurlma 1983 Tape 7A 33 min.

<sup>10</sup>Tyson Walayungkuma and Rosie Marikabalinya.

needed:

He [Tyson] stayed there all the time because if he needed sugar or tea leaf or something like that, flour, ... Old<sup>11</sup> Steve would ... send order with them, Old Steve was really good for people, very helpful, helped people everywhere, you wouldn't get stuck out there with him around. Because we got stuck out there quite a few times, he'd come to the rescue all the time, yeah. That is why a lot of people like Old Steve, a real help, he'd do anything for people. ... he was born there.

This example of the Johnsons highlights how Aboriginal people have been able to maintain some influence over land through long term relationships with Europeans. Stanner (1979:79) noted a similar pattern that occurred in the Daly River area. An important variable in this process is the permanency of the Europeans. The longer they were in the area the greater the opportunity there was for Aboriginal people to incorporate them into aspects of their social and economic spheres.

### 7.3 'Wild times'

That wild country, wild time (Rory Wurrulbirrangunu<sup>12</sup>).

They reckon it was wild west little town (Steve Johnson<sup>13</sup>).

#### 7.3.1 Introduction

These two quotes outline two contrasting views of the 'wild times'. The first reflects the view of many older Aboriginal people and the latter reflects the view of many younger Aboriginal people. In general, old Yanyuwa individuals see the wild times as being a period when country was wild before Europeans arrived. Such a classification occurs elsewhere in northern Australia, For example, Peter Sutton<sup>14</sup> has recorded it from Cape York. Many younger Yanyuwa individuals, however, have a view of the wild time being the period of early violent European contact. This latter wild time lasted,

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<sup>11</sup>Old, is a term of respect many people, including many older than him, use for Steve Johnson (junior).

<sup>12</sup>1987 Tape 64A 14 min.

<sup>13</sup>1987 Tape 31A 32 min.

<sup>14</sup>Personal communication.

to use the expression the Yanyuwa picked up while working on cattle stations, until “all the blackfellas were quietened down”. This obviously occurred at different times and places for different people.

The concept of a pre-European wild time is part of a older Yanyuwa view that sees Europeans imposing some order on previous instability. “Wild” here is used in the same sense that cattle or horses might be wild. It refers to the untamed nature of both people and land. As such its use provides a very telling insight into how European influence has indoctrinated the Yanyuwa (and many other Aboriginal groups) to see their past, as it implies that both people and land were tamed by Europeans. Rory Wurrulbirrangunu, for example, talks<sup>15</sup> of how “this country been running wild, and whitefella been come through”. He goes on to stress<sup>16</sup> how before Europeans “him been wild time, people been running wild yet longa bush”.

It is only a few old individuals who refer to a pre-European wild time. To the majority of Aboriginal people in the area, the wild times is the story of European introduced instability and violence. For Aboriginal people in the Borrooloola area the violence of this period is well remembered and the term “war” is often used to describe the events. Willy Shadforth notes,<sup>17</sup> “it was a war ... war straight away”. Jerry Rrawajinda similarly notes,<sup>18</sup> “war been fight here, everywhere people ought to know ... war yes. Shoot everybody”. Billy Kid also used the term “war”:<sup>19</sup>

After that war been stop, settle down all the whitemen still bad yet, they been shoot everything, all the travellers walking about horse back ... He [an Aboriginal man] been ask him [the European],  
 “What for you shoot [at] me, [I had] all the kid [with me].”  
 “No sorry old man, I been get a mistake, I thought been wild mob ... ”

The idea Billy raises here of misunderstandings is common when Aboriginal people in the Borrooloola area refer to the wild times. It is an attitude that shows an extraordinary level of forgiveness about the violent past. They see it as a period

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<sup>15</sup>1987 Tape 63B 42 min.

<sup>16</sup>Ibid 44 min.

<sup>17</sup>1987 Tape 70A 35 min.

<sup>18</sup>1987 Tape 13A 36 min.

<sup>19</sup>1987 Tape 63B 15 min.

of misunderstandings on both sides, Aboriginal people and Europeans being equally strange to each other. As Rory Wurrulbirrangunu notes<sup>20</sup> each side thought the other was “myall”<sup>21</sup> for not speaking their language.

Another aspect of first contact misunderstandings involved the power of guns. Dinny Nyliba recounts,<sup>22</sup> for example, how when people were shot dead, others tried to “wake him up” by telling the corpses “ ‘hey get up’ ”.

Many wild time stories make the analogy of people being killed like animals. Dinny Nyliba, for example, describes<sup>23</sup> a incident when children were bludgeoned to death with sticks, in a similar way to how the Yanyuwa hunt goannas “hit him just like goanna . . . hold him leg two fella, kill him like a goanna”. The comparison with goanna hunting goes further as the bodies were thrown on a fire. The analogy of people being treated like animals is also used by Jerry Rrawajinda who describes<sup>24</sup> how people were burnt after Europeans had “shoot him there again like a dog”.

Of all the atrocities committed by Europeans during the wild times the ones most remembered involved babies being killed and bodies being burnt. The following story, told by Nora Jarlidurma,<sup>25</sup> combines both these elements: “baby he been hit him, kerosene burn him. They used to make big fire on top, enough people now, [pour on] kerosene now and burn him”. It was after this comment that Nora’s daughter Eileen made the previously mentioned (page 55) comment,<sup>26</sup> “they been shoot him before. But they don’t read along book that way, long museum maybe [they tell the story]

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<sup>20</sup>1987 Tape 67B 44 min.

<sup>21</sup>Myall is derived from the English term “wild” and it was much used in Australia by Europeans referring to “wild uncivilised” bush-living Aboriginal people. It is still used by Aboriginal people in the Borroloola area to refer, often with some humour, to ancestors who did not understand European ways. The term is also often used by Aboriginal people in a derogative sense during arguments. “You mob all bloody myall” is a common insult. The current derogatory use of the word “myall” to describe “uncivilised” Aboriginal people is a good example embracing of European attitudes. One woman told me (1987 Tape 36A 4 min.) how her white son-in-law was “myall . . . [because] he been grow long black people”.

<sup>22</sup>1987 Tape 66B 2 min.

<sup>23</sup>1987 Tape 66B 3 min.

<sup>24</sup>1987 Tape 13A 38 min.

<sup>25</sup>1987 Tape 69B 31 min. Nora spoke in Yanyuwa, her daughter Eileen Yakibijna gave this translation as Nora spoke. Nora describes how the the incident occurred when her mother was young. This dates the incident to about 1890.

<sup>26</sup>Ibid 33 min.

somewhere, they used to shoot them people". This discrepancy, that Eileen notes, between what books say happened and what actually happened in the wild times, is symptomatic of different views the Yanyuwa and Europeans have in general on this era. It is important to note that while European accounts play down the violence; Aboriginal ones graphically present it in a matter-of-fact manner.

### 7.3.2 Shoot their own colour

Europeans used Aboriginal people against other Aboriginal people. As Dinny Nyliba recalls,<sup>27</sup> "shoot their own colour too, they been shoot all about, whole lot blackfella, their countrymen, they been shoot them ... father belong him whiteman, but him become flash along their colour and shoot all about". Similarly Harry Jabarlya describes<sup>28</sup> how police trackers assisted the police in capturing Aboriginal people: "them old police tracker, blackfellow, they used to be rogue ... blackfellow him colour take to that white bloke policeman".

Conversely, those Aboriginal people working for Europeans likewise were sometimes killed by "their own colour". Rory Wurrulbirrangunu tells<sup>29</sup> how an Aboriginal man working for a European was killed when he was spotted alone with his boss's horses. It was decided that the stranger was dangerous and that it was likely that "him finish up [kill] people here". As Dinny notes above, many of the Aboriginal people assisting Europeans were of mixed descent. A number of people commented that such people lacked attachment to country and therefore concern for the Aboriginal people who were part of that country and that this was the reason they could act in the ruthless way they did. Trigger (1985b:138), from his work in the Doomadgee area, records Aboriginal people from there making similar comments: "Yellafella real bloodthirsty ... 'cause he wasn't belong to country".

### 7.3.3 Jail

The shootings of Aboriginal people that were common in the wild times were probably reduced by the arrival of the police in the late 1880s but in Aboriginal eyes, the police

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<sup>27</sup>1987 Tape 63A 9 min.

<sup>28</sup>1987 Tape 60B 7 min.

<sup>29</sup>1987 Tape 68A 13-23 min.

actions in arresting people may have been even more inexplicable than the shootings. Those committing crimes were treated less summarily but punished apparently just as indiscriminately. Yanyuwa accounts of police actions invariably stress how the wrong person was caught. In Aboriginal eyes Europeans were particularly incompetent when it came to recognising the role of sorcery in 'bush killings'. Stories told today about these times are full of humour about this European fallibility.

The usual punishment for Aboriginal people arrested was getting locked up for a period in the Borroloola jail. A view of how Aboriginal people saw prisons is given in Tim Rakuwurlma's story of how he ran away from his job working on a cargo boat when he heard his father had been put in the Borroloola jail.<sup>30</sup> On arriving back in the area, he was told<sup>31</sup> by relations: "your father all right now he's outside".

Those imprisoned in Borroloola often worked in chain gangs during the day time. M.H. Ellis describes<sup>32</sup> how, on arriving in Borroloola in 1924, he only saw a single Aboriginal person until

Further life appeared in the distance, in the shape of a procession of native prisoners. They were all naked save for belt and tassel and a set of chains ... fastened to their necks by enormous padlocks, and to their ankles by rings.

He goes on to make an illuminating contrast:

If the administration of the mandated territories were even to breathe a suggestion that the pampered native of ex-German New Guinea should be treated in that fashion various missionaries would die of indignation, and the affair would become an international scandal. In the Northern Territory, missionaries are more or less scarce, and, any way, the blackfellow there does not wear hibiscus in his hair, and is not always amusing.

A little later, the same author wrote<sup>33</sup> "At Borroloola the chain gang is the township's most conspicuous sight".

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<sup>30</sup>His father was jailed on 13 June 1921, Northern Territory Archives, F269 A318.

<sup>31</sup>Tim Rakuwurlma 1984 Tape 10A 25 min.

<sup>32</sup>*Adelaide Advertiser* 18 September 1924 and also as a cutting in Mitchell Library Mss 1336.

<sup>33</sup>*Adelaide Advertiser* 11 October 1924.

### 7.3.4 Borrooloola: a wild west town

The law and order problem that led to police being stationed at Borrooloola, was not perceived by Europeans in terms of protecting Aboriginal people from Europeans, or vice versa, but rather as one of keeping control of a large and wild population of Europeans. A visiting government official<sup>34</sup> in 1886 requested police protection for Borrooloola

for these districts are at the present the resort of all the scum of Northern Australia, who dare not go to Queensland and dare not go to the Telegraph line, but find the Macarthur<sup>35</sup> a very suitable place to squat. ... If they want money, they don't stand on much ceremony about getting a man half drunk, taking him into the scrub, bashing his head against a post, giving him one or two kicks in the ribs, robbing him of all his cheques and leaving him to come to as best he can. If they want horses they take the first they come across, what beef they require they kill anywhere ... they steal anything they can lay hands on ...

Once stationed at Borrooloola, the police made numerous pleas for more staff to control the area. The Police Letter Book<sup>36</sup> of 24 October 1886 notes: "this is a very large District the resort of the most notorious horse & cattle stealers from the other Colonies who are up to every dodge such as burning the country<sup>37</sup> to prevent them being tracked".<sup>38</sup>

In its early years, the bulk of prisoners in the Borrooloola jail were Europeans. In the first two years (1886-1887), all nine prisoners listed in the Borrooloola Prisoners

<sup>34</sup>Cuthbertson report on Borrooloola, 21 January 1886, page 7, Australian Archives, Canberra, CRS A3 Item 225/1886.

<sup>35</sup>This is the spelling Liechhardt gave when he named the river. The current spelling of McArthur became generally used in the 1890s.

<sup>36</sup>Northern Territory Archives, F 275.

<sup>37</sup>The technique of using fire to hide tracks was probably learnt from Aboriginal people who used fire in the same way (see page 470).

<sup>38</sup>Two years later, (ibid 24 November 1888) the following plea to the Inspector of Police was made for better firearms, "it is most unfair to constables stationed here where not only the blacks, but some of the white population are ready to take life without compunction, to palm off upon them any sort of old and indifferent firearms".

Register were European.<sup>39</sup> Between 1886 and 1893, European prisoners numbered 25 and Aboriginal ones only six. The listed charges against the Europeans included lunacy, maliciously wounding, drunkenness, cattle stealing, assault and fighting.

This period, 1886-1893, represents the height of Borroloola's "wild west" days but, to a degree, the mystique of these days survives even to the present, with Borroloola still having a reputation Territory wide for wild behaviour.<sup>40</sup> Other records from this era tell of a race meeting that "degenerated into a saturnalia of drunkenness and excesses" that involved stores being held up and rifle practise in the main street (Neal 1977:31). Alcohol took its toll on the Europeans, one individual, for example, killed himself by galloping a stolen horse around town "whilst in an intoxicated condition" before being thrown against a tree.<sup>41</sup> Fifty years later, a newspaper article<sup>42</sup> on Borroloola could still say, "Men who were wanted all over the world, and horses wanted from all over Australia were found there". The fact that European records stress the violence between whites may simply reflect an attitude that killings of Aboriginal people were so common they needed no comment. One shudders to think what the Borroloola gun slingers got up to in the bush away from the gaze of the semblance of civilisation and authority that existed in Borroloola. It is likely, however, that this element did not direct their violence at Aboriginal people as such but were simply dangerous to be around.

The reign of the wild west days at Borroloola was short lived for by the time Spencer and Gillen arrived there in 1901 they could report a European population of six (1912:501).<sup>43</sup> This figure does not seem to have been substantially increased until the 1960s.<sup>44</sup> The reasons for this rapid decline in population lies in the decline of the pastoral industry in the 1890s and the resultant dramatic decrease in stock and

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<sup>39</sup>Northern Territory Archives, F269 A318. In later entries Aboriginal people are indicated as such in a column titled "Profession or calling".

<sup>40</sup>A reputation with some justification. In 1987, for example, when camped near one of the European fishing camps in the area, I spent an evening listening to a dispute that arose after a days heavy drinking between two groups which culminated in an exchange of shot gun blasts.

<sup>41</sup>Borroloola Police Records, Northern Territory Archives, F275, 16 November 1894.

<sup>42</sup>(BHF 3) *Sunday Sun and Guardian* 25 June 1933 and also in Australian Archives, Canberra, CRS A1 Item 33/7361 as a newspaper clipping.

<sup>43</sup>It was even lower at times (five in the 1930 according to the *Sunday Sun and Guardian*, 25 June 1933), giving rise to Borroloola's fame as one of the ghost towns of Australia (see Farwell 1975).

<sup>44</sup>The adult European population still only numbered ten in 1960-61 (Reay 1963:90).

people moving through the area. The damage, however, had already been done to Aboriginal groups living in areas of extensive pastoral activity. The Binbingka group, for example, declined in numbers so drastically that they are no longer considered by Aboriginal people to be a land owning group. Their rapid decline in numbers can be attributed primarily to the early pastoral phase.<sup>45</sup> Their traditional country centred on the McArthur River station area and this was one of the first stations to be established in the area. The Wilangarra people who were centred on the Borroloola area (see figure 1.3) suffered a similar fate.

### 7.3.5 Aboriginal responses: cattle killings

Cattle and bush natives cannot together do well on the same country, the cattle must suffer.<sup>46</sup>

The killing of cattle by Aboriginal people was a major issue in the early history of contact in the area. A few of the many entries in the Borroloola police journals<sup>47</sup> documenting the concern Europeans felt about such actions are listed below.

**7 December 1893** Annual report of Borroloola region stock inspector: "the natives are a constant source of annoyance and loss to the Managers and owners and I think they are largely responsible for the herds not increasing as they should do".

**31 December 1910** "Re depredations by aborigines amongst the herds: several complaints have been made by the manager of McArthur River Station."

**14 June 1913** Letter from manager of Wollogorang station: "Blacks are a great drawback to settlers in these outside places and we can get no redress. I consider, I lose 5 percent of cattle from niggers and 5 percent from natural causes . . . I can assure you that the natives are more troublesome now in this District than they were 20 years ago."

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<sup>45</sup>Although Aboriginal people in the Borroloola area attribute the demise of the Binbingka to a particularly "heavy ceremony". See Tim Rakuwurlma 1987 Tape 50B 33 min. and Eileen Yakibijna 1987 Tape 62B 18 min. Avery (1986:339) makes this point also.

<sup>46</sup>Mounted Constable Dempsey, Borroloola Police Records, Northern Territory Archives, F275, 8 August 1913. It is worth noting the contrast between this European perspective view that cattle must suffer and Sunny's comments above (page 187) that Aboriginal people "had all the trouble" when cattle were introduced.

<sup>47</sup>Northern Territory Archives, F 268.

27 June 1917 Wollongorang station "Fifteen head of cattle have been killed by the Aboriginals".

The Borroloola police records show that the majority of Aboriginal people arrested were charged with offences relating to cattle killing.<sup>48</sup> The oral history suggests that these acts were isolated incidents, carried out by hungry individuals asserting their traditional rights to hunt on their land. Collectively, such actions can be seen to have formed a resistance to European authority but it is doubtful that the individuals involved saw them in such terms.

Yanyuwa accounts stress that introduced animals were killed because the people were hungry. A number of people also told me that they killed bullocks in the wet season, when they were often hungry, because it was difficult to get any other type of food at this time. As Davey Yibuwana puts it,<sup>49</sup> "sometimes through the wet when you can't find anything, you got to find bullock".

Despite this history of cattle killing, factors independent of Aboriginal people were, probably more significant in the downturn of the cattle industry in the 1890s. The three most important of these were the depression of the 1890s, the outbreak of redwater cattle disease<sup>50</sup> and the fact that the industry was dependent on the condition of the stock routes out of the Territory.<sup>51</sup>

It is possible that Aboriginal resistance was stronger in the coastal region as there was a denser Aboriginal population in this area than inland on the Barkly Tableland. Moreover, the rugged sandstone gorge country of the coastal region would have made guerilla warfare much easier than it would have been on the featureless plateau of the tablelands. Evidence to support this suggestion is found in the police records. For example, there is a description<sup>52</sup> of the inability of the police on a visit to Bauhinia Downs

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<sup>48</sup>The Prisoner's Register (Northern Territory Archives, F269 A318) shows that nearly all Aboriginal people arrested were charged with "misdemeanors against property", "cattle killing", "unlawful possession" (usually of meat) and "larceny" (again usually of meat). Cattle stealing was also high on the list of offences committed by Europeans, second only to charges of drunkenness.

<sup>49</sup>1987 Tape 56B 29 min.

<sup>50</sup>This disease was transmitted by ticks but this was not recognised at the time (see Bauer 1964:117).

<sup>51</sup>The only route the South Australian Government would spend any money improving was the north-south route. It was, however, the Queensland route that handled virtually all the stock in and out of the Northern Territory.

<sup>52</sup>The Borroloola Police Letter Book, Northern Territory Archives, F 275, of 24 November 1888.

station to catch Aboriginal suspects, "all the endeavours . . . to catch the ringleaders of the mob proved futile as the country is very mountainous and affords them excellent hiding places". Most incidents of Aboriginal resistance seem to be isolated actions such as individual cattle spearings but there are descriptions of a group of 11 Aboriginal men raiding Bohemia<sup>53</sup> Downs in 1889. From the manger's description<sup>54</sup> it appears some planning went into this raid during which various items were stolen.

Evidence of how threatened pastoralist felt comes in the precautions taken. Consider, for example, the comments a visiting policeman made on a visit to Wollogorang station in 1913:<sup>55</sup>

In each door in Wollogorang homestead is a small port through which a rifle could be placed and a view of an attacking party could be obtained. Some years since hostile natives made this necessary. As a further precaution several parallel rows of wire netting fence surrounds the house making a spear proof shield.

Reports in the Police Journal also indicate that direct hostilities were scaled down after about 1910. In an end of year summary in 1911 Mounted Constable Dempsey notes<sup>56</sup> that "the killing of cattle by natives was I believe a less frequent offence than usual but some complaints were made".

A number of factors probably worked towards the decline in reported cattle killings and attacks on homesteads. There was probably an acknowledgement by Aboriginal people that Europeans had superior weapons. There was also, as a result of disease<sup>57</sup> and European violence, a decrease in the Aboriginal population that could resist. Further, those who survived had an increasing dependence on Europeans and their goods and hence a reduced ability to survive on their own land. It is also possible<sup>58</sup> that the decline of hostilities was, in part, the result of the decrease in European population in the area. The decreasing European presence in the area would obviously led to

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<sup>53</sup>This is the spelling used in the police report, "Bauhinia" is the current spelling.

<sup>54</sup>Borroloola Police Records, Northern Territory Archives, F275, 29 July 1889.

<sup>55</sup>Borroloola Police Records, Northern Territory Archives, F275, 8 August 1913.

<sup>56</sup>Borroloola Police Records, Northern Territory Archives, F275, 31 December 1911.

<sup>57</sup>There are reports of a serious influenza epidemic in the region in the 1890s (Stretton 1893:237).

<sup>58</sup>It is difficult from the available evidence to be any more definitive on this issue.



Figure 7.2: Dinny Nyliba with kurrajong bridle he made

decreasing tensions, particularly over conflicts between the land use requirements of pastoralists and traditional hunting.

The decline in European population in the area probably also affected relations between police and Aboriginal people, as the police would have been able to shift the focus of their attentions from controlling the unruly Europeans to upholding European law in relation to Aboriginal people. While it is difficult to reconstruct the relative significance of these different factors, it can be stated that the resulting scaling down of conflict represents the transition from the wild times to the next phase the Yanyuwa recognise in their history: police times.

Yanyuwa oral sources highlight another reason why the police could record a scaling down of Aboriginal “depredations” after about 1910. Aboriginal people clearly developed more subtle techniques to continue killing European stock and to obtain other desired European items without provoking violent retaliation. Individuals involved describe how they avoided getting caught, by killing the animals away from Europeans and by hiding the evidence. For example, as noted above, Aboriginal people made bush bridles (see figure 7.2) so they could ride horses and hunt cattle without the European boss knowing.

Having killed cattle it was important to dispose of the bones and blood to avoid getting caught. Jerry Rrawajinda describes<sup>59</sup> how after they had killed bullocks they would dispose of the evidence:

**Jerry Rrawajinda** - take him long camp ...eat him, ... chuck him in water.

**Richard Baker** - What about the bones?

**Jerry Rrawajinda** - Oh chuck him in water.

**Richard Baker** - What about that blood?

**Jerry Rrawajinda** - Oh leave him now bush cover him up ... long ground ... whitefella never catch me yet ...

When I asked Jerry why they killed the cattle he replied "not [enough] bloody beef". Appendix F outlines in more detail Aboriginal cattle killing techniques.

It should be noted that theft of cattle by Aboriginal people pales into insignificance compared with the legendary cattle duffing (also called poddy dodging) Europeans carried out in the area. One famous incident involved the renowned Bill Harney,<sup>60</sup> who ended up with others in the Borroloola jail.<sup>61</sup> Cattle stealing became an art form among Europeans in the area. As Steve Johnson notes,<sup>62</sup> "there was a common saying amongst all those old cockies ... 'you got to go over to your neighbour's place to get your own beef' ... you never killed your own". Ted Harvey suggested to me<sup>63</sup> that most stations in the Borroloola area in the 1950s when he was the welfare officer at Borroloola, only survived through poddy dodging.

### 7.3.6 Other Aboriginal responses

Cattle killing was not the only Aboriginal response to European contact. As Isaac notes a variety of other items were stolen from Europeans. Isaac Walayungkuma told

<sup>59</sup>1986 Tape 18B 9 min.

<sup>60</sup>Discussed by Steve Johnson 1987 Tape 32A 31 min., Les James 1987 Tape 17B 9 min., Lenin Anderson 1987 Tape 17B 9 min.

<sup>61</sup>Northern Territory Archives, F273 records Harneys arrest on 9 March 1923. Harney attributed his later literary career to the education he received in the jail ("the University of Borroloola") where a large library was housed.

<sup>62</sup>1987 Tape 32A 40 min.

<sup>63</sup>1987 Tape 3A 13 min.

me,<sup>64</sup> “We stealing about everything . . . we alla been hungry and get potatoes now and pumpkin, and steal him watermelon for him”.

Another Aboriginal response to Europeans in the wild time was to attack Europeans in retaliation for European actions. Knowledge that Aboriginal people gained of Europeans was often used against them to lure Europeans to their death. Tim Rakuwurlma, for instance, describes how his father responded to Europeans shooting Aboriginal people, by luring the captain of a boat to his death with the promise of a woman.<sup>65</sup> The inhospitable nature, as far as Europeans are concerned, of the mangrove lined delta of the McArthur River is probably the reason Tim’s father was never caught (or shot) by European authorities following this event.<sup>66</sup> It should be noted here that in all cases the Yanyuwa stress the actions of their ancestors was in retaliation for European violence. In contrast, however, the Garawa have stories about how their ancestors thought that the first Europeans they saw were evil spirits and responded by spearing them.

The repercussions of direct retaliation were such<sup>67</sup> that more subtle means of fighting back were developed. Billy Kid, for instance, describes<sup>68</sup> how his father ambushed one European to rob him of his food and tobacco by scaring him into running away. He achieved this by following the European until he set up his camp at night and then painted his face up, banged a hollow tree and yelled as he jumped in front of the startled European. Billy goes on<sup>69</sup> to note another wild time survival technique describing how people hid in the bush and made sure they did not attract European attention: “Just light little one fire, cook tucker, boil him tea, [put] out him quick and camp long dark . . . big hill country too, rough gorge country”.

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<sup>64</sup>1987 Tape 71B 14 min.

<sup>65</sup>Tim Rakuwurlma 1987 Tape 63A 18 min. Tim indicated how his father mimicked breasts and pointed into the mangroves to the captain.

<sup>66</sup>The same event is recorded from an European perspective in the diary entry of 14 May 1888 of Borroloola’s first policeman, “Michael Donegan’s customs diary”, (South Australian Public Record Office A420 B6) and also by Searcy (1911:282).

<sup>67</sup>Searcy 1911:282-283, for example, gives a description of a reprisal shooting that followed Tim’s father’s actions. On another occasion the Borroloola Police Records, Northern Territory Archives, F275, 12 March 1892, reports in a matter-of-fact way how a “party of settlers followed blacks to revenge murders and that a number of blacks [were] shot”.

<sup>68</sup>1987 Tape 63A 18 min.

<sup>69</sup>Tape 63B 16 min.

Another wild time response was to leave the Borroloola area all together for a safer location. The main direction of such movement was into Queensland. Initially cattle stations and towns and later the mission at Doomadgee offered greater safety than was to be found around Borroloola. Annie Karrakayn recalls,<sup>70</sup> for instance, how a number of her relatives “went to Doomadgee [as] that’s when all the people used to shoot him all about, wild time, that’s the time now”. Another wild time response of aligning oneself with a European boss is examined in section 8.4.3.

### 7.3.7 An island haven?

The physical isolation of the Sir Edward Pellew Group lessened the impact of the wild times on the Yanyuwa as here there was less demand from pastoralists for land. Those Yanyuwa who stayed on the islands had much less contact with Europeans than their mainland neighbours. On the islands contact was usually optional. Those who wanted to trade with passing boats or work as pilots guiding boats up the McArthur River to Borroloola could approach European vessels and offer their wares or services. Judy Marrngawi’s describes how her *mimi* (mother’s father) in about 1900<sup>71</sup> lived most of the time on West Island and used to trade with Europeans on passing boats exchanging dugong and fish for tobacco. He also occasionally visited Borroloola to trade dugong for axes from Aboriginal relatives in town.

## 7.4 ‘War time’

Although World War Two occupied a relatively brief period in Yanyuwa history, it is stressed by the Yanyuwa as an important time in their past.<sup>72</sup> It was a period of great change for the Yanyuwa. The massive increase in Europeans in the Northern Territory during the war had a dramatic impact on Aboriginal people in general. Large numbers of Aboriginal people took on employment in military camps and the good conditions they received raised questions about the conditions of their employment in other areas,

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<sup>70</sup>1987 Tape 33B 37 min.

<sup>71</sup>1987 Tape 40A 31-36 min. She recounts what her *mimi* told her. It can be dated to about 1900 as he told Judy it was the era when the Macassans still came.

<sup>72</sup>The existence of “army time” in the view Torres Strait Islanders have of the past is noted by Beckett (1987:62). He also notes how this was a significant period of change for these people.

particularly the cattle industry.

Large scale relocations of Aboriginal people occurred during this time across the Northern Territory and the Yanyuwa were no exception to this. Les Penhall, who joined the Native Affairs Branch directly after the war and was the Welfare Branch Superintendent for the Borroloola area for a long time, recalled that<sup>73</sup> “most of the Aboriginals were involved in some way, in the war, particularly those at Borroloola, where the army (was based)”. A report to the Director of Native Affairs by patrol officer Bill Harney dated 7 November 1944<sup>74</sup> also stresses the impact the war had on Aboriginal people in the Borroloola area.

The coastal and river natives of the Pellew Group of Islands and the Wearyan and McArthur rivers were, a few years ago, a strong tribe of people who lived by the sea in canoes and were a very peaceful lot. ... During the last four years, a systematic clearing out of these people has been going on and on my recent patrol of the Barkly Tablelands I was amazed at the number of coastal people who were sent out of Borroloola by the local protectors there ... If ever a tribe felt the full weight of this war then that one is the Yanula [sic] tribe, who not five years ago, lived together and who are now scattered over four hundred miles of plains country, far from their tribal lands and their old folks ...

Harney notes that one of the main agents assisting this movement of Yanyuwa people to these stations was a mailman known as Hudson.<sup>75</sup> The above movements involved those Yanyuwa who went into Borroloola and those who stayed out bush during this period recall relations who went into town and disappeared.<sup>76</sup>

A number of Aboriginal people worked for the army carrying supplies and personnel

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<sup>73</sup>1988 Tape 1A 8 min.

<sup>74</sup>Australian Archives, Northern Territory Region, CRS F1 Item 44/275. Pages 1-2 of “Report on movement of natives - Borroloola”.

<sup>75</sup>Musso Harvey went to his first job with Hudson. Sunny Raggard, who was working at Anthony Lagoon station in the 1930s recalls (1987 Tape 14B 37 min.) Hudson dropping people off here, including Musso Harvey.

<sup>76</sup>Patrol officer Bill Harney when visiting Borroloola in 1944 notes “I was amazed at the requests of natives to have their children returned from places where “policeman been send him” and on a check up with the police files I find that in the past the drovers would wire the local protector for natives and these would be sent on request”, Australian Archives, Northern Territory Region, F1 44/275, page 2.



Figure 7.3: Tim Rakuwurlma and Mack Manguji paddling supplies for the army

**Source:** This photograph was taken by Jack Twyford probably in 1943. Photograph held by the Australian Institute of Aboriginal Studies, accession number N4448-23.

in their dugout canoes (see figure 7.3)<sup>77</sup> out to the observation post the army had on South West Island. The presence of this observation post meant that those who stayed on the islands did not escape the effects of the war. Part of the contact involved the Yanyuwa bartering fish, turtle and dugong for tin food and tobacco. In the following quote Annie Karrakayn and Nora Jalirduma<sup>78</sup> describe the sexual contact that also occurred during the war between soldiers and Yanyuwa women:

**Annie Karrakayn** - they were greedy one for women, . . . at sundown they used to go through looking for girl.

**Nora Jalirduma** - Bring him up at night time, tin beef full bag, for that girl.

**Annie Karrakayn** - And money and biscuits, dry biscuits. . . . And they told that old man, "tell all those girls hey, come out tonight". They used

<sup>77</sup>Mack Manguji and Tim Rakuwurlma who are in this photograph talk together about this work on 1987 Tape 62A 7 min.

<sup>78</sup>1986 Tape 6B 43 min.



Source: Jack Tywford collection, Australian Institute of Aboriginal Studies N4448.23

Figure 7.4: Army camp at Borroloola, circa 1942

to tell that husband, . . . every girl here [used to go].

**Nora Jalirduma** - Young girl been want to go properly, crazy bugger, young girl.

**Annie Karrakayn** - They used to just sing out for girls . . .

There was also for a period during the war a small army camp in Borroloola (see figure 7.4).

The Yanyuwa today also give accounts of being told not to go too far away from Borroloola due to the possibility of a Japanese invasion. Tim Rakuwurlma recalls,<sup>79</sup>

we been wait here [Borroloola] for Japaney man come through. “We’ll have to stay here.” . . . I want to go walkabout there long my country.

Tim notes how after “Englishman been push him away” they were told “ ‘All right you fella can sit down long country, long island, no more frightened now’ ”. Similarly people were told not to go around certain areas on the islands. Tom Wambarirri, for instance, recalls<sup>80</sup> how they were told “ ‘don’t go back that way, we might reckon you Japanese

<sup>79</sup>1987 Tape 14B 10 min.

<sup>80</sup>1987 Tape 60B 3 min.

going around there' ". For a period during the war those Aboriginal people camping in Borroloola were moved upstream to a location on the McArthur River known as the Four Mile. Bessie Kithiburla recalls this move and notes<sup>81</sup> that it occurred "when that army been there long Borroloola, thinking Japanese might come in canoe or plane ... we all been camping there [at the Four Mile]".

The greatest effects of the war were felt along the Stuart Highway (about 360km west of Borroloola), where Aboriginal people were placed in a number of large camps under military control. The largest of these camps was at Mataranka and patrol officer Bill Harney notes<sup>82</sup> that twenty different languages were spoken at the depot including "Anula" (sic).<sup>83</sup> These Yanyuwa people were probably people who had worked on cattle stations such as Nutwood Downs which is relatively close to the Stuart Highway.

It was not just Aboriginal people who were relocated during the war. European women were evacuated from many areas of northern Australia as well<sup>84</sup> and there was pressure to evacuate the European men from the Borroloola area as well. A number of Yanyuwa children of mixed descent, who were at Roper River Mission, were also evacuated to southern states and as a result some have had little contact with Borroloola since.

Significant as these examples of direct influences of the war were, a general indirect effect on Aboriginal and European relationships was probably more significant. This involved the greater opportunities offered to Aboriginal people by the war and the way their ready acceptance of these challenged many existing racist stereotypes Europeans had about Aboriginal people. As Elkin, somewhat colloquially, puts it (1947b:17), "that the aborigine is not entirely the useless degenerate he is often pictured was proven during the war years". Elkin goes on to note (ibid:18) that the "army system of organising aboriginal settlements on a community basis ... proved that full-blooded natives can adapt themselves in a very short time".<sup>85</sup>

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<sup>81</sup>1987 Tape 72A 9 min.

<sup>82</sup>Australian Archives, Northern Territory Region, CRS F1 Item 44/275, Page 1 of "Report of activities from May, 1942 to May, 1943".

<sup>83</sup>One Yanyuwa man who was there is Willy Mundumundumara; he describes his time there and Harney's role as patrol officer in overseeing Aboriginal people on 1987 Tape 9B 24 min.

<sup>84</sup>Ruth Heathcock, describes how she was evacuated from Borroloola on Tape 1986 Tape 30A 27 min.

<sup>85</sup>Elkin was not the only one to note the significance of the success of Aboriginal settlements run along army lines. Patrol officer J.R. Ryan, in his general report of 1953 (Australian Archives, Northern Territory Region, CRS F1 Item 50/10. Page 7 of report dated 12 December 1953.), argues that government

During the war Aboriginal people quickly proved their ability to work in a wide variety of jobs. Previously, such opportunities were extremely limited. As Walker and Walker (1986) describe at length, considerable attempts were made to involve Aboriginal people in the war effort in the Northern Territory. Aboriginal knowledge of country would clearly have been important if the Japanese had managed to land in Australia. As one ex-soldier recalls<sup>86</sup> "If the Japs had ever landed they'd be the ones you wanted with you because they can sense, hear and see tracks".

A number of authors have commented on the impact the presence of large numbers of Australian and American military personnel had on Aboriginal people during World War Two. The willingness of the army to pay wages and relate on a social level unheard of by the old time European population of the Northern Territory had considerable social ramifications. As Hall (1980b:79) notes, this presence brought with it a "More liberal . . . approach to Aborigines common in south-east Australia, a general ignorance of pre-war racial attitudes and conditions in the north, and the egalitarian influences of the Army society . . . while at the same time civilian influences declined due to evacuation".

Hall (1980b:81-82) notes that the army quickly became the single largest employer of Aboriginal people and provided conditions "generally better than those provided by pastoral employers". Hall also (1980a:37) gives a graphic description of the differences in conditions for Aboriginal people living on Vestey<sup>87</sup> cattle stations and those working for the army. Berndt and Berndt (1987:x) similarly argue that army settlements and employment "served to counterbalance the more feudal environments of the pastoral stations by presenting a wider range of amenities and wage economy". The result of greater Aboriginal employment and exposure to more liberal attitudes was a rise in confidence and expectations regarding their place within European society.<sup>88</sup> This rise in expectations was further boosted by seeing the position of authority black American servicemen had.<sup>89</sup>

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run "native settlements could gainfully adopt some of the military training which during the war years was helpful to aboriginals".

<sup>86</sup>1987 Tape 75B 22 min.

<sup>87</sup>The British company that had the largest controlling interest in Northern Territory stations.

<sup>88</sup>Beckett 1987:61 makes this same point for Torres Strait Islanders.

<sup>89</sup>The presence of black American soldiers is remarked on by Willy Mundumundumara (1987 Tape 25A 27 min.) "whole lot of negro there".

Rising Aboriginal confidence and expectations were not generally approved of by the old time Territorians and after the war, as the Berndts' note (ibid:45), "some cattle managers opposed the engaging of Aborigines previously employed by the army" on the grounds that they had become "cheeky" from the conditions they worked under for the army. The Berndts note (ibid:46) that part of the problem in the view of cattle managers were the attempts Aboriginal people with this army experience made to "become friendly or considered themselves the potential equals of their employers".

## 7.5 'Police times'

Police were first stationed at Borroloola in 1886.<sup>90</sup> However, when the Yanyuwa discuss police times, they are usually referring to the time between when the wild times ended and welfare times started. This period ended at different times in different places and the action of one policemen in the 1930s single handedly extended the wild times in the Borroloola area.<sup>91</sup> Throughout the police times "justice" was often summarily administered by the police. A good example of this is contained in an incident Tim Rakuwurlma describes<sup>92</sup> involving one of his Yanyuwa crew mates on the lugger they were working on. The Yanyuwa man concerned committed the "crime" when visiting Thursday Island, of telling the captain's wife the truth when she asked him about her husband's sexual activities at Borroloola. On returning to Borroloola, the captain complained about this to the police and the police used the "handle of tomahawk [to] hit him [across the face] . . . make blood come out".<sup>93</sup>

The transition from the wild times to getting 'quietened down' involved the imposition of a foreign legal system on Yanyuwa life. "Crimes" committed during this period

<sup>90</sup>The first police arrived on 4 October 1886, (Northern Territory Archives, F275 entry of that date).

<sup>91</sup>This policeman was Gordon Stott and the death of one Aboriginal woman that resulted from his mistreatment of her is well remembered by the Yanyuwa. This incident was graphically re-enacted by the Yanyuwa in the film *Two Laws*. Dolly one of the women involved describes (1987 64A 29 min) how Stott did not feed the dead women and forced her to drink salty water. Stott's career as a Northern Territory policeman continued until 1965 and he received a medal for long service and good conduct in 1964 (see the Northern Territory police magazine *Citation* June 1966:31).

<sup>92</sup>1987 Tape 50B 9 min.

<sup>93</sup>Tim Rakuwurlma 1987 Tape 50B 11 min. The Borroloola police records of 11 June 1918, Northern Territory Archives, F275, give a completely different version of this incident. The dismissal of Donegan is recorded as being for "disobeying orders on high sea".

involved both resistance to and ignorance of the new legal system. In retrospect, it is difficult to ascertain the relative degree to which these differing responses occurred. The killing of European livestock often involved the continuation of traditional hunting practices but the prey changed from the indigenous fauna to the introduced animals rapidly taking their place. In descriptions of bush life Aboriginal people often include cattle within the category of bush tucker (see Pyro's description of page 469). Such a classification highlights the fact that in killing cattle Aboriginal people were doing what they had always done and lived off the resources of the bush. From a European perspective, however, there was an enormous difference between hunting bullock and other animals.

The radical differences between Aboriginal and European law provided the European law enforcer with an enormous potential to prosecute Aboriginal people. The police stationed at Borroloola, and other places like it, continually had to decide when to step inside the Aboriginal world and interfere and when to allow traditional ways of doing things to run their course. A wide range of traditional practices, ranging from lighting fires<sup>94</sup> to aid the hunting animals, to pay back killings, could be classed as offences.

In this situation there was a great potential to use the law selectively to achieve set aims. Individuals considered "trouble makers" could, for example, be removed by following the letter of the law.<sup>95</sup> Some idea of the power police had to prosecute can be gained by examining some of the strange offences individuals were charged with. For example, in 1908 two Aboriginal men were each sentenced at Borroloola for two months "with hard labor" for the offence of "cruelty to animals".<sup>96</sup> Another Aboriginal man was on 15 February 1924 sentenced to three months "with hard labor" for "unlawfully enticing aboriginals away from their lawful employment".<sup>97</sup>

In isolated communities such as Borroloola, the policeman became more than just

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<sup>94</sup>The importance of fire lighting to Aboriginal people to manage their environment (see page 167) seems to have been completely lost upon Europeans in the area and sinister intent was read into most fires. The police records, for example, document (Northern Territory Archives, F268, 10 July 1918) an Aboriginal man being "detained" for lighting a fire. As the entry for 29 January 1919 documents fires certainly were an inconvenience to pastoralists as they burnt down cattle yards and fences.

<sup>95</sup>As McGrath (1987a:86) documents the selective application of the law could be used by police in the Northern Territory to remove Europeans as well who "the local policeman had a grudge against".

<sup>96</sup>Northern Territory Archives, F273.

<sup>97</sup>Northern Territory Archives, F273.

the upholder of the law, he also became its interpreter. The longer an officer spent in Borroloola the more likely it was that he gained some understanding of and respect for traditional culture and its legal system. It needs to be noted, however, that turnover of police to this day has been great and this has worked against individuals developing an understanding of traditional life. People today remember vividly the variation in police sensitivity to their culture. Most individuals are remembered as being fair and just, but a few individuals are singled out as being "too cheeky" or "too rough".

It also needs to be noted that all but the most serious charges were heard initially by a local magistrate and latter by a justice of the peace. Both the longest serving magistrate and justice of the peace were long term Borroloola residents and there is the suggestion that both were fairly flexible in their interpretation of the law as it related to Aboriginal people. W.G. Stretton, the Borroloola magistrate in the 1890s, had an interest in Aboriginal culture which went as far as carrying out ethnological field work which led to his 1893 article "Customs, rites and superstitions of the aboriginal tribes of the Gulf of Capentaria". Charlie Havey was the local justice of the peace for over twenty years and his close links with the Aboriginal community (see page 371) seem to have often influenced his legal decisions.<sup>98</sup>

It can be seen, then, that there would have been quite a variation in the interpretation of the law with sympathetic individuals giving de facto recognition to traditional law. However, this recognition only seems to have occurred in internal matters such as pay back killings. In contrast, the full (and in Aboriginal eyes incomprehensible) force of European law was brought against Aboriginal people accused of offences related to Europeans and European property. Hence at Borroloola murder charges could be dismissed by a sympathetic magistrate, apparently on the grounds that traditional law was involved, while C.E. Cook, the Chief Protector of Aborigines, could report in 1936:<sup>99</sup>

Some months ago an Aboriginal was sentenced to a heavy term of imprisonment on a charge of unlawful possession of a hat at Borroloola under

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<sup>98</sup>As Jack Twyford recalls (1987 Tape 75A 10 min.), Havey was also very flexible in his administration of justice to Europeans. When Twyford was in Borroloola during World War Two he heard the story that Havey used to fine Europeans a case of whiskey and then organised parties for its consumption.

<sup>99</sup>Letter to the Administrator of the Northern Territory, dated 3.1.1936 Australian Archives, Northern Territory Region, CRS F1 Item 36/15.

circumstances which from the point of view of the Aboriginal and his Protector might be taken to indicate that he was entitled to the hat.

It was not just isolated individuals who gave some consideration to traditional law. In the 1930s considerable official attention was given to this matter. The question of the role corporal punishment could play to replace jail sentences, for example, was examined in detail and the Northern Territory administration sought the views of prominent anthropologists such as T.G.H. Strehlow and A.P. Elkin. Strehlow gave the following reply: "Imprisonment will make a disreputable loafer, a useless hanger-on, a gambling waster of him; corporal punishment, if it is of the right type, will make a man out of him".<sup>100</sup> Many older Yanyuwa individuals share Strehlow's views. Isaac Walayungkuma, for example, describes<sup>101</sup> how his boss, "must have been kind long me" for not reporting him to the police and instead giving him a severe beating. Isaac's "crime" was that he was "cheeky" in not giving his boss some tea when told to.

The end of the wild times also corresponded with a phase from about 1930 to 1948 when an increasing number of Yanyuwa were in Borroloola receiving rations from the police. Unlike later rationing by the Welfare Branch, the police only gave rations to the "aged and infirm". Rations were first distributed at Borroloola by the police in the 1910s. By 1940, the Director of the Northern Territory Native Affairs Branch, E.W.P. Chinnery,<sup>102</sup> could note that there were 27 such "ration centres where aged and infirm and otherwise helpless natives are congregated and provided with rations by the Protectors (police and others in charge)".

The commencement of rationing represents a turning point in the history of the Yanyuwa. By coming in to Borroloola to obtain rations the elders had commenced what was to become an increasing spiral of dependence on Europeans and a matching decrease in their authority. Rather than having "a confident dependency on nature"<sup>103</sup> they were in the process of becoming dependent on Europeans. Associated with the loss of economic independence was a similar loss of political and social independence.

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<sup>100</sup>Elkin in his reply (*ibid.* Letter 2 April 1936) also stresses the destructive effects of prisons. There is, however, no evidence of these comments having initiated any change in the administration of justice to Aboriginal people in the Northern Territory.

<sup>101</sup>1987 Tape 49A 33 min.

<sup>102</sup>Letter to the Administrator Australian Archives, Northern Territory Region, Item F1 40/478.

<sup>103</sup>Stanner's (1979:83) description of bush life.

The new European authority brought with it a new set of cultural notions that worked towards undermining aspects of Yanyuwa social life. These factors worked towards the undermining of the authority of Aboriginal elders. In turn this erosion of the gerontocracy led to the collapse of social systems such as wife bestowal. Each step in the collapse of these systems further weakened existing authority and hence a fueled the growing spiral of dependence.

For a time those Aboriginal people in town continued to leave Borroloola to go bush for ceremonies but a crucial turning point came in Yanyuwa history when this pattern was reversed. From this time (1950, see page 306) on, Borroloola became increasingly more important, for the greater the ceremonial activity in the area the more important the area became ritually. Many Yanyuwa made their first trip into Borroloola to attend ceremonies and so started a pattern where visits to town became longer and longer over time.

Borroloola's police times ended in December 1948,<sup>104</sup> when the police station was closed.<sup>105</sup> The publican, Jack Mulholland, was left in charge of distributing the aged and infirm rations, however, when patrol officer Ted Evans visited the area in July of 1949 he reported,<sup>106</sup> "Jack Mulholland, being married to a full-blood aboriginal native of the district, is thereby compromised and cannot strictly issue the rations in accordance with our policy".<sup>107</sup> Evans also discussed<sup>108</sup> the following effects of the closure of the police station:

With the closing of the police station and the consequential lifting of controls in that district there is an atmosphere of *laissez faire* that is likely to attract to the district undesirable characters who have frequented Borroloola in the past and who have been ordered away under various pretexts by the

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<sup>104</sup>The station was re-established in November 1966 (Anon 1967b) and in the interim Borroloola was policed from the distant Anthony Lagoon police station and later Daly Waters police station.

<sup>105</sup>Bessie Kithiburla (1987 Tape 46A 12 min.) describes how she and her husband stayed at the police station looking after the building and the herd of goats that had long been kept to supply the police with milk and meat.

<sup>106</sup>"Report on visit to Borroloola District". Page 2 of a report to Director of Native Affairs dated 9.8.49. Australian Archives, Northern Territory Region, CA 1078 Native Affairs Branch CRS: F315 Item 49/393 A2 (a copy is also in F1 48/15.).

<sup>107</sup>The Director of the Native Affairs Branch also comments on Mulholland's conflict of interest in a letter to the Northern Territory Government Secretary. Australia Archives, Northern Territory Region, CRS F1 Item 48/15. Page 1 of letter stamped 7.9.1949.

<sup>108</sup>Ibid, page 3.

police. It is rumoured that one such has already returned to his old haunts and ways. This person is also alleged to be the father of one of the part-aboriginal children in the camp. Also the periodical visits to Borroloola by the vessel "Cora" is apparently an occasion for general celebration involving free mixing of the crew with the aboriginal inhabitants.

Evans also notes<sup>109</sup> that "there is no effective control of natives congregating at Borroloola who should be gainfully employed in stockwork". Another report by a welfare patrol officer in 1948 provided further impetus for the permanent stationing of a welfare officer in the area. The patrol was made by Kyle-Little in October 1948 and the following year the Director of the Native Affairs Branch wrote to the Northern Territory Government Secretary<sup>110</sup> stating that "as a result of [Kyle-Little's] investigations it is evident that there are some 250 aborigines in the district who are under no form of supervision and who receive very little assistance".

The Native Affairs Branch responded to the state of "laissez faire" described above that resulted from the end of Borroloola's police times, by trying to send a married couple to Borroloola. The Director of the Branch, in a letter<sup>111</sup> to the Government Secretary, notes "I do not think it fair to send a single officer there alone and it has been most difficult to obtain a suitable married couple". The couple he had in mind, the Ropers,<sup>112</sup> had previously made a visit to Borroloola. Joyce Johnson, the wife of the policeman then stationed there, can recall<sup>113</sup> them visiting. However, they were never stationed at Borroloola and late in 1949 Ted Evans was sent to Borroloola for three months to serve as the first welfare officer.

It is significant the 1949-1950 wet season was also the last time that a major ceremony was held away from Borroloola. Evans recounts<sup>114</sup> how, soon after he arrived, he awoke to find that all but a handful of the people he had been sent there "to look after" had gone to Manangoora for this ceremony.

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<sup>109</sup>Ibid, page 2.

<sup>110</sup>Australia Archives, Northern Territory Region, CRS F1 Item 48/15. Two paged letter stamped 7.9.1949.

<sup>111</sup>Letter dated 6.9.49 Australian Archives, Northern Territory Region, F1 Item 48/15.

<sup>112</sup>Ibid, he refers to them by name.

<sup>113</sup>1986 Tape 30B 36 min.

<sup>114</sup>Ibid. and BHF 9.

The hiatus<sup>115</sup> of over a year, between the police leaving and the permanent stationing of a welfare officer at Borroloola is seen as being a significant turning point in their history by some Yanyuwa. The significance of this period and Mulholland's apparent less than generous rationing policy is highlighted by Annie Karrakayn's and Tim Rakuwurlma's response to being asked why people moved into Borroloola:<sup>116</sup>

**Annie** - We used to walk everywhere around, place to place, we used to go everywhere you know, the welfare<sup>117</sup> came then [bush life] finished. ... he used to go and pick all the people out and starving<sup>118</sup> people ...

**Tim** - (interrupting) Starving for tucker, nobody feed them policeman can't feed him, policeman been go away.

**Annie** - Only policeman used to keep them old people.

**Tim** - Get a ration, old people, that's why government been come up now.

**Annie** - That welfare been say now, "sit all the people everywhere", Wollogorang [near the Queensland border], everywhere, every station bring them in now for tucker, get rations.

## 7.6 'Welfare times'

We came into Borroloola welfare time, we sat down and people died. When people used to [be] out in the bush, they used to [be] good. I don't know why we came together and die people. All our people been die now ... *kalu-wingka*, *kalu-yabanda*, *kulu nyamb-irra* [translating] we came, we sat, we died. (Annie Karrakayn<sup>119</sup>)

The welfare times is a Yanyuwa category of the period when a Government official

<sup>115</sup>Evans discusses this period (1987 Tape 44A 36 min.) and describes how they had to get a plane load of rations flown out to Borroloola as "there was nothing" there.

<sup>116</sup>1983 Tape 11A 22 min.

<sup>117</sup>Annie here uses welfare as a shorthand for both the actions of the Welfare Branch and the individual officers of this department. Subsequently, I use the term in the same way. It is a shorthand term that Europeans also use for both the branch and individual officers within it.

<sup>118</sup>It should be noted that "starving" is often used in a less than literal sense as someone might say "I am *dying* for a smoke".

<sup>119</sup>1987 Tape 37A 37 min.

was based at Borroloola “supervising” Aboriginal people. As Annie’s above quote illustrates the Yanyuwa consider this to have been a period of great changes in their lives. Initially the Native Affairs Branch<sup>120</sup> was the relevant authority and administered “native affairs . . . under the Aboriginal Ordinance 1918-1954”<sup>121</sup>. In 1957 “Mr. H.C. Giese<sup>122</sup> took over his statutory duties as the first Director of the Welfare Branch when the Welfare Ordinance and its appropriate Regulations came into force”.<sup>123</sup> The new Welfare Branch at this time took over the Native Affairs functions at Borroloola.

Welfare times represented the application by both Federal and Northern Territory Government of assimilation policy. The policy was guided by a vision of gradual “advancement” of Aboriginal people into the European sphere with an end goal of equality of opportunity. The stated policy of the Welfare Branch was that “aborigines in the Northern Territory . . . will become indistinguishable from other members of the Australian community in manner of life, standards of living, occupations, and participation in community affairs”.<sup>124</sup> The same passage goes on to note that “Australian citizens should be ready and willing to accept aborigines in the wider community as fellow citizens in all respects” and concludes that “it is equally important that aborigines should be encouraged to detach themselves from their present position of group separateness and solidarity and become merged as individuals in the general community”.

With the benefit of hindsight, it is possible to note a number of the contradictions of this policy. Aboriginal people did not necessarily want to lose their cultural identity and merge into the rest of Australian society. Conversely, many non-Aboriginal Australians have shown themselves far from ready to accept Aboriginal people “as fellow citizens”. Nearly all the former welfare officials I interviewed, however, argued that the failure of the policy came from the abrupt change of policy to “self determination” that accompanied the Department of Aboriginal Affairs assuming control in 1973. Ted Harvey, for example, argues<sup>125</sup> that the Director of the Welfare Branch “had the right idea . . . he saw it as three generations ahead and he was on . . . the right track”.

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<sup>120</sup>The Native Affairs Branch was established in 1939 (Berndt and Berndt 1987:11).

<sup>121</sup>Welfare Branch: Northern Territory administration Annual Report 1957/58, page 2.

<sup>122</sup>Giese had since 1954 headed the Native Affairs Branch.

<sup>123</sup>Welfare Branch: Northern Territory administration Annual Report 1957/58, page 2.

<sup>124</sup>Welfare Branch: Northern Territory administration Annual Report 1957/58, page 3.

<sup>125</sup>1987 Tape 2B 34 min.

Some idea of how slow the Welfare Branch saw this "advancement" is indicated in the Welfare Branch Annual Report for 1953.<sup>126</sup> In a section titled "Control and Discipline", it notes how Aboriginal people were beginning to stand up and fight Europeans mistreating them and says that "they are beginning to show signs of effrontery and undue confidence in themselves". The report goes on (ibid:7) to lay part of the blame for this on "the so-called kind people, some of them on government settlements and missions, who teach the doctrine of equality of black and white races to the aborigines and who foster the performance of tribal ceremonies at the expense of working hours are a menace to the proper development of the aboriginal". This quote also highlights the emphasis welfare placed within their assimilation goals on work and the belief that ceremonies were a major impediment to be overcome in this process.

Life for Aboriginal people in Borroloola during welfare times was highly organised. A bell or siren denoted the pre-dawn start to the day.<sup>127</sup> Aboriginal people paddled across the McArthur River from their camp (see figures 1.7 and 8.5) to the "white side" of the river. Able bodied adults were expected to work in exchange for the rations that the welfare officer handed out each week.

Jobs for women included baking bread, washing clothes and being domestics for the welfare officer's household. Men worked in the welfare vegetable garden, maintained vehicles and pumps, handed out rations<sup>128</sup> and a few men were official hunters.<sup>129</sup> Mothers with young babies would bring their babies across the river daily to receive formula feeds. Older individuals would only come across once a week.<sup>130</sup> The welfare officer's wife also ran regular sewing classes (see figure 7.5) and homemaker classes for Aboriginal women.

On ration day people would queue to receive their supplies in cloth bags (see figure 7.6). The major items rationed in January - April 1955 are listed in figure 7.7. Ration day was a particularly important social event when all the community came

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<sup>126</sup>Australian Archives, Northern Territory Region, CRS F1 Item 50/10 Page 6 of "General Report" dated 12 December 1953.

<sup>127</sup>A description of this by Mick Baker is on 1987 61A 11 min.

<sup>128</sup>Ted Harvey describes (1987 Tape 3A 32 min) how he gave the key to the ration store to two Aboriginal men who organised the distribution of the rations.

<sup>129</sup>Splinter Waranduwa (1986 Tape 2A 46 min.) describes how he was the official welfare kangaroo hunter and was issued with a rifle.

<sup>130</sup>Jean Kirton (1987 Tape 72B 16 min.) describes this routine.



Source: Ted Harvey collection. Notes: Left to right, Emmalina Wanajabi, Roddy Bayuma, Amy Bajamalanya, Thelma Walwamara, Margaret Wakabararra, Ruth Kaykalanya, Jemmima Wuwarlu, Kathleen O'Keefe.

Figure 7.5: Sewing class, welfare times, circa 1955



Source: Merv Pattemore collection.

Figure 7.6: Ration day at Borroloola, circa 1960

together. In passing it should be noted how ration day provides a good example of how the past lives on in contemporary Borrooloola. Today most income arrives via social security payments, on the plane every second Thursday. "Big Thursdays" involve a large group of Aboriginal people spending most of the day socialising and picking up their cheques and shopping. The shop next to the Aboriginal council office where the cheques are handed out is the old welfare, canteen and is still called "the canteen". Most people spend all their funds on one big shop that is reminiscent of their once weekly ration distribution and indeed rations is the term most people still use for their supplies.

The highly organised life of the time under the paternalistic control of the welfare officer is something that many older Yanyuwa people now look back on in positive terms. Don Manarra, for instance, noted<sup>131</sup> "everything been run really smooth" and Annie Karrakayn describes<sup>132</sup> "they used to look after him our kids make him really good" As noted above (page 111) the legacy of paternalistic government control of Aboriginal settlements can be seen in many of the contemporary problems of these settlements.

The power of the welfare officer was virtually complete. His control of the distribution of rations was the main source of this authority. Ted Egan illustrates this well:<sup>133</sup>

People often say to me, when I say I was on settlements, "What was your job?" I say "I was God because I had the key to the bloody ration store and with that you could achieve anything, anything you like".

The Yanyuwa too recognised this authority; as Don Manarra put it,<sup>134</sup> "welfare been big boss for Aboriginal" and Don Bubuji notes<sup>135</sup> "welfare been big boss now, have to take notice of welfare".

The Yanyuwa felt the power of this "God" perhaps most in people being sent away to work on Barkly Tableland stations. While most Yanyuwa enjoyed cattle station work

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<sup>131</sup>1986 12B 9 min.

<sup>132</sup>1987 48B 8 min

<sup>133</sup>1988 Tape 6A 24 min.

<sup>134</sup>1987 Tape 47B 24 min.

<sup>135</sup>1987 Tape 47B 22 min.

	Jan.	Feb.	Mar.	Apr.	Monthly average	Per person per month
People issued ration	86	77	89	64	79	
Flour (lbs)	2130	1600	1785	1813	1832.0	23.2
Tea (lbs)	64	58.5	68	62	63.1	0.8
Sugar (lbs)	430	387	446	406	417.3	5.3
Rice (lbs)	192	148	195	263	199.5	25.3
Preserved Beef (lbs)	108	164	92	20	96.0	1.2
Rolled Oats (lbs)	180	160	180	145	166.3	21.0
Potatoes (lbs)	130	90	30	75	81.3	1.0
Soap (no.)	87	78	90	82	84.3	1.0
Blankets (no.)	-	-	-	73	18.3	0.2

**Notes:** These items made up the bulk of the rations but other items issued included; powdered milk, salt, beans, tinned peas, dried apricots, jam, tinned tomatoes, tinned carrots, cheese, dripping, margarine, tobacco and various items of clothing.

**Source:** All figures come from Australian Archives, Northern Territory Region, F1 Item 52/948 Pt.2, Forms of "Monthly return - rations, expendable stores, clothing received and issued".

Figure 7.7: Major items rationed by welfare at Borroloola, January - April 1955

once they had started it, welfare officers were often responsible for getting teenage boys to start work. As Pyro recalls,<sup>136</sup> the welfare officer used to “come across [to Malarndarri<sup>137</sup>] have a look around for young boys [who] might be stop back [and] send him work quick”. Individuals were also sometimes punished by sending them to work on stations. Annie Karrakayn, for instance, describes<sup>138</sup> how “that welfare been send out [one woman] to Anthony Lagoon . . . herself no husband” after the woman gave birth and “someone [else] killed [the baby] because they didn’t like it yella<sup>139</sup> kid”.<sup>140</sup> Annie also recalls<sup>141</sup> how if people were caught drinking alcohol, the welfare officer would “come down . . . send them out to other place on station”.

As Egan mentions above, part of the welfare officer’s authority came from his control over the rations. Aboriginal people could be threatened with this punishment for doing anything wrong. Annie Karrakayn, for example, describes<sup>142</sup> how if children were not kept clean or if people “talked back” to one welfare officer they were told “ah you’re not getting ration, you’re not getting ration”. Rations were withdrawn at least once as a general punishment for Aboriginal people after a few individuals disappeared into the bush when a medical plane came to take them away to hospital.<sup>143</sup>

The stated aim of the Welfare Ordinance introduced in 1953 was to “direct and encourage the re-establishment of the Aborigines that they will eventually be assimilated as an integral part of the Australian community”.<sup>144</sup> The Yanyuwa remember this early phase of welfare times as one of getting “rounded up”. It is difficult, however, to find anyone who actually was rounded up. On early field trips I uncritically accepted the stories people told me of how they had “all been rounded up” and brought into Borrooloola by welfare officers. In 1987, however, when I devoted several weeks work just

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<sup>136</sup>1987 Tape 63B 6 min.

<sup>137</sup>The old Aboriginal camp at Borrooloola, discussed in detail in section 8.4.6.

<sup>138</sup>1987 Tape 37B 19 min.

<sup>139</sup>“Yellafella” is the usual term Aboriginal people in the Borrooloola area use for people of mixed descent.

<sup>140</sup>Annie is not sure if the woman concerned was being punished for having a “yella kid” or because of the suspicious circumstances of the child’s death.

<sup>141</sup>Ibid 18 min.

<sup>142</sup>1987 Tape 49A 45 min.

<sup>143</sup>1987 Tape 72A 26 min.

<sup>144</sup>Northern Territory Annual Report 1953-54.

on the issue of the move in from bush to town, I found it was much more complex than I had initially realised. I went from person to person trying to find someone actually picked up by welfare officers.

At the time various possible explanations came to mind to explain this apparent paradox. Perhaps because of their dependence on old people, not many individuals had to be “encouraged” to move in, in order to force the whole society to shift its emphasis from bush life to town life. If it were mainly old people who were ‘rounded up’ not many of them would be left alive today to tell the story. Alternatively, welfare may not have had to do much to encourage people to move in. The departure of the police and their rations clearly created (as Tim says above) a drought of items such as tobacco, tea and flour. If this were the case, the current Aboriginal view of a period of rounding up may be a contemporary view to justify retrospectively the move away from the islands.

It needs also to be asked how government policy in Borroloola fitted in with the overall development of official policy regarding Aboriginal people and whether local factors influenced the Government as well. One possibility is that a serious drought in the area was a significant factor. In many parts of Australia there has been a pattern of dry years having a particularly harsh effect on traditional people as Europeans had already destabilised both the environment and the society that supported them. Myers (1986:35), for example, describes how the Pintupi moved into settlements in “waves of migration in 1953-56 and 1960-66 ... during extended droughts”. As Read and Japaljarri (1978:145) illustrate, however, there is a danger of being too ethnocentric and deterministic in attributing moves to droughts. Japaljarri describes how he was part of a move into Wave Hill station in the late 1920s. While Europeans have cited a drought as the cause of this move Japaljarri’s oral testimony refutes this.

The apparent paradox I have raised in this section about “rounding up” is examined in detail in chapter 8.

### 7.6.1 Dangana

A brief sub-period of welfare time that is often commented on by the Yanyuwa is the forced move to a small reserve, (marked in figure 7.9 as “Aboriginal Reserve proposed”)



Figure 7.8: The move to Dangana, 1960

at a place known as Dangana on the lower reaches of the Robinson River in 1960.<sup>145</sup> The Welfare Branch Annual Report of 1960/61:76 documents the move of 133 Aboriginal people previously resident at Borroloola.<sup>146</sup> Most of Borroloola's Aboriginal residents travelled to Dangana on the back of the Welfare Branch truck (see figure 7.8).

The Welfare Branch had for sometime considered establishing a reserve away from Borroloola. Borroloola represented a unique situation for welfare in that it was an Aboriginal settlement in what had always been (and still is) an open town. Welfare could not control the entry of Europeans into the area as they could on settlements that were in Aboriginal reserves. Most of the Europeans in the area were seen by Welfare to be undesirable influences. The establishment of Dangana needs then to be seen as an attempt by welfare to assert its absolute authority.<sup>147</sup> The fact that it was considered necessary to isolate Aboriginal people from Europeans as part of an assimilation policy highlights the contradictions of such a policy.

<sup>145</sup>The contrasting views the Director of the Welfare Branch and the Borroloola missionary had on this incident have been already noted above.

<sup>146</sup>There had been calls for the establishment of a reserve away from Borroloola for some time. Sweeney (Australian Archives, Northern Territory Region, CRS F1 53/352) in his report "Native Depot at Borroloola and its Future" makes the same recommendation.

<sup>147</sup>Les Penhall and Ted Evans in discussing the settlement (1987 Tape 44B 10 min.) describe how it was part of the Welfare Branch Director's vision of establishing a Maningrida type highly institutionalised settlement.

The Yanyuwa residence at Robinson River was short lived.<sup>148</sup> In Yanyuwa eyes a discussion between one old Yanyuwa man and Paul Hasluck, the federal minister in charge of Aboriginal affairs at the time, is considered to be responsible for their return. The story is told of how Tim Rakuwurlma's brother told Hasluck the Yanyuwa did not belong to Robinson River country and how subsequently they were allowed to return to Borroloola. This would appear to be another example of great power being attributed to an individual, for Hasluck does not even recollect ever going to Robinson River, let alone the conversation in question, although he did visit the Borroloola area around that time.<sup>149</sup> Hasluck does, however, recall some of the reasons why the Welfare Branch was keen to move people to Dangana. He writes,<sup>150</sup> "the camp at Borroloola was considered to be unsatisfactory for a great number of reasons, including sanitation, consequent health problems, lack of opportunities for developing gardens".

It is crucial to note that the Yanyuwa objected to being moved from Borroloola to Dangana because of their strong feelings of attachment to Borroloola. As Don Manarra notes,<sup>151</sup> "they didn't want to leave Borroloola because they been grow there". This was their home and the country they were spiritually attached to. It was not the islands that people wanted to return to but rather town. When Dangana was abandoned (less than 12 months after it was established), many Yanyuwa people paddled back to Borroloola, passing through their island country on the way. The pull of Borroloola, however, was greater and everyone continued on to Borroloola. It should be noted that some Yanyuwa still held out hopes of returning to their islands before the move to Dangana. Musso Harvey describes<sup>152</sup> how many Yanyuwa people were keen that, if they were going to be shifted from Borroloola, they should relocate the settlement to South West Island at Anthawarra (see figure 1.3). However, once Dangana was abandoned, there was apparently only thought of returning to Borroloola.

Dangana is a particularly powerful symbol of Yanyuwa loss of independence. The fact that welfare could move the community to a location they did not want to go to, is a dramatic example of welfare's authority over Yanyuwa lives. However, the Yanyuwa,

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<sup>148</sup>As Ted Evans notes (1987 Tape 44B 10 min.) the Yanyuwa "had other ideas".

<sup>149</sup>Hasluck, personal communication letter 24.4.86 BHF 8.

<sup>150</sup>Ibid.

<sup>151</sup>1986 Tape 11A 54 min.

<sup>152</sup>1987 Tape 21B 16 min.

when recalling this move, stress the fact that their opposition to the settlement led to it being abandoned and this abandonment is seen as a symbol of continuing Yanyuwa authority and independence. With the benefit of hindsight, it is possible to see that this “victory” the Yanyuwa claim is a very hollow one. What the incident highlights is that the Yanyuwa had become institutionalised to the extent they could all be moved and that ties with Borroloola had become so great that it was now home and not the bush where the older people were born and had grown up.

In passing it should be noted that the Dangana move had a very different impact on Garawa people. Whereas the Yanyuwa stress how they were shifted *to* Dangana, the Garawa stress that they were shifted *from* Dangana. Roger Charlie, for example, describes<sup>153</sup> how he worked on various cattle stations in the area but once the Dangana settlement was established he and his family moved in there because “they been feed us for ration”. Subsequently, when the settlement was abandoned, Roger describes how welfare “pick us up . . . ‘take you in Borroloola’ . . . just move us down there. They treat us welfare way.”.

### 7.6.2 Conclusion

The Yanyuwa consider that welfare times ended in 1973 when the new Commonwealth Department of Aboriginal Affairs (DAA) took over the functions of the Welfare Branch and, in the process, initiated ‘land rights time’. Annie Karrakayn sums up the difference between welfare times and land rights time saying that, in the former, people were told what to do and, in the latter, Aboriginal people were “bosses ourself”.<sup>154</sup>

## 7.7 ‘Cattle times’

### 7.7.1 Introduction

Welfare and cattle times are closely interlinked because the welfare officers, like the Native Affairs and police officers beforehand, all played an important role in supplying labour to cattle stations. The large cattle stations of the Barkly Tableland (see

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<sup>153</sup>1987 Tape 69A 15 min.

<sup>154</sup>1987 Tape 54B 8 min.

figure 7.9) benefited from Aboriginal people becoming concentrated in Borrooloola. Recruitment of workers was greatly aided by having a labour force concentrated in one place for them. The cattle stations also benefited from welfare officers played in encouraging people to go to work and the role they played in organising the transport of workers to and from stations. The mass exodus by truck from Borrooloola (see figure 7.10) early in the dry season was organised by welfare. Moreover, the Government subsidised the industry by often clothing and feeding dependants, when men were away working, and the men themselves received some government assistance during the period the industry had no need for their labour. The pastoral industry probably also benefited from the work ethic values that the welfare officers attempted to instill in Aboriginal people once they were living in town.

The policy of sending people away to work on stations was an acknowledgment by the Welfare Branch that there was not sufficient work on the settlements in which people were being "directed" and "encouraged" to "re-establish". The contrast needs to be made with the small subsistence stations of the Gulf where, previously in the wet season lay off, most Aboriginal people had either gone bush and supported themselves or were fully provided for by their bosses. It is interesting in this context to consider the opposition some pastoralists had to the Yanyuwa being moved away from Borrooloola to Dangana (see section 7.6.1). Paul Hasluck described to me<sup>155</sup> how there was "some opposition by pastoralists to any change as they had become accustomed to relying on the camp at Borrooloola as a resort where casual labour could go when they were not wanted and where they could be picked up when they were needed again". Whereas Borrooloola has all year access to the Barkly Tableland stations, Dangana is both further away and isolated for long periods by flooded rivers.

The cattle industry on the Barkly Tableland employed few Aboriginal people from the Borrooloola area until after World War Two. Until this time the stations employed only a small number of Aboriginal people and there were enough Aboriginal people from the Barkly Tableland to meet the requirements for labour. As Les Penhall recalls,<sup>156</sup> "none of those stations [on the Barkly] really got into gear until after the war . . . [before that] they were big open range hunks of dirt with cattle wandering all over them".

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<sup>155</sup>Hasluck, personal communication letter 24 April 1986 BHF 8.

<sup>156</sup>1988 Tape 1A 7 min.

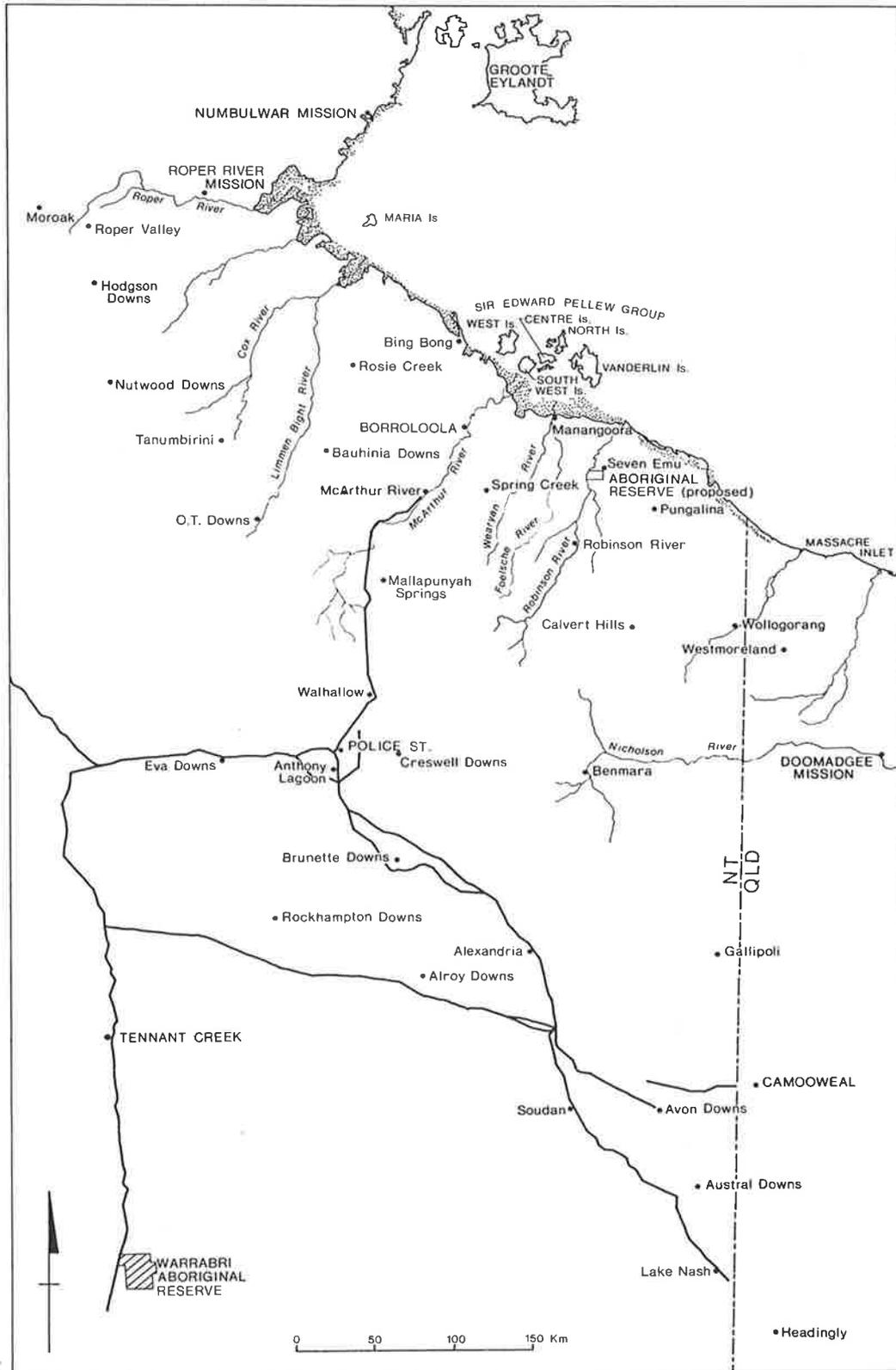


Figure 7.9: Barkly Tablelands cattle stations and stock routes



Source: Ted Harvey collection.

Figure 7.10: Leaving Borroloola for the Barkly Tableland, circa 1955

After the war there was a considerable increase in pastoral activity on the tableland and an associated increase in demand for Aboriginal workers. This section explores this important phase in Yanyuwa history and highlights the significance of the cattle experience in shaping the contemporary Yanyuwa world. Figure 7.11 lists the number of Aboriginal people employed in the Borroloola region in 1956. The figures were compiled by the Borroloola welfare officer but as he points out<sup>157</sup> “not all these natives spend the wet season here”. From other welfare documents it can be estimated that about 75% of these people were recruited from and annually returned to Borroloola. When cattle employment for Aboriginal people on cattle stations declined rapidly in the late 1960s and early 1970s nearly all of these people, even those who had originally come from elsewhere, moved into Borroloola. It should be noted also how this table illustrates the greater opportunities Aboriginal men had over women for work on cattle stations whereas at the time welfare was employing more women than men at Borroloola.

<sup>157</sup>Australian Archives, Northern Territory Region, CRS F1 Item 52/770, “Employment of natives” report of 5 April 1956.

Type of work	Employer	Male	Female	Total
Droving	H. Lewis	4	-	4
	S. Barnes	4	-	4
	S. Howard	2	-	2
Cattle stations	Anthony's Lagoon	29	9	38
	Creswell Downs	14	13	27
	Brunette Downs	27	10	37
	Alexandria	30	25	55
	Walhallow	9	-	9
	Mallapunyah	4	1	5
	McArthur River	20	-	20
Assisting Welfare	Borroloola ration depot	4	5	9
Boring	McFarlane	6	-	6
Mining	Redbank Mine	6	-	6

**Source:** Australian Archives, Northern Territory Region, CRS F1 Item 52/770, Table of "Employment of natives" report of 5 April 1956.

**Note:** The original table has the following note attached "Fencing Have applications for ten boys cannot supply".

Figure 7.11: Aboriginal employment in the Borroloola region, April 1956

### 7.7.2 The seasonal round of cattle work

Like pre-European life, cattle work consisted of a highly seasonal round. Significantly because of the seasonal lay off this new cycle, allowed for ceremonial activity. While old Yanyuwa individuals told me that most ceremonial activity had previously been concentrated in the dry season, the seasonal cycle of cattle work meant that most ceremonies were now held in the wet season. The three to five months wet season lay off gave Aboriginal people the opportunity to have a concentrated, uninterrupted period of ceremonial life.<sup>158</sup>

The seasonal nature of cattle work also provided a challenging variety of jobs. Musso Harvey, for example, describes<sup>159</sup> how a typical year involved bursts of hard work such as mustering and branding followed by perhaps a month "holiday" before work would start "looking after the bores, fix the pumps or windmill . . . shifting cattle to another bore, another bore". While Aboriginal employment has fallen dramatically since the introduction of award wages (in the late 1960s) and the associated increase in capital expenditure on properties, there still is a wet season influx of Aboriginal cattle workers to Borrooloola. This was much more pronounced in the past and Stevens (1974:113), in his detailed account of Aboriginal involvement in the cattle industry in the 1960s, describes how "Borrooloola, on the Gulf, also seemed to take on the role of a 'Blackman's Brighton'. Stations on the Barkly Tablelands often drove their workers to Borrooloola for the 'wet'".

At the end of the wet season as soon as the road into Borrooloola was passable, trucks returned to pick up Aboriginal workers and took them back to the Barkly Tableland stations. The shortage of funds and food Aboriginal people suffered at this time of the year appears to have been a major factor in people going back to work. One long term European resident of the area went so far as to say,<sup>160</sup> "most the stations believed in the old days they wouldn't work until they were starving and that is the way they used to try and keep them . . . starve him and then he'll come to work". A former cattle station manager concurs in this suggestion that hunger made Aboriginal people eager

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<sup>158</sup>Harry Giese, the former head of the Welfare Branch, notes (1986 Tape 27A 39 min.) how well the seasonal lay off worked in "terms of any traditional obligations that they had".

<sup>159</sup>1987 Tape 21B 27-29 min.

<sup>160</sup>1987 61A 20 min.

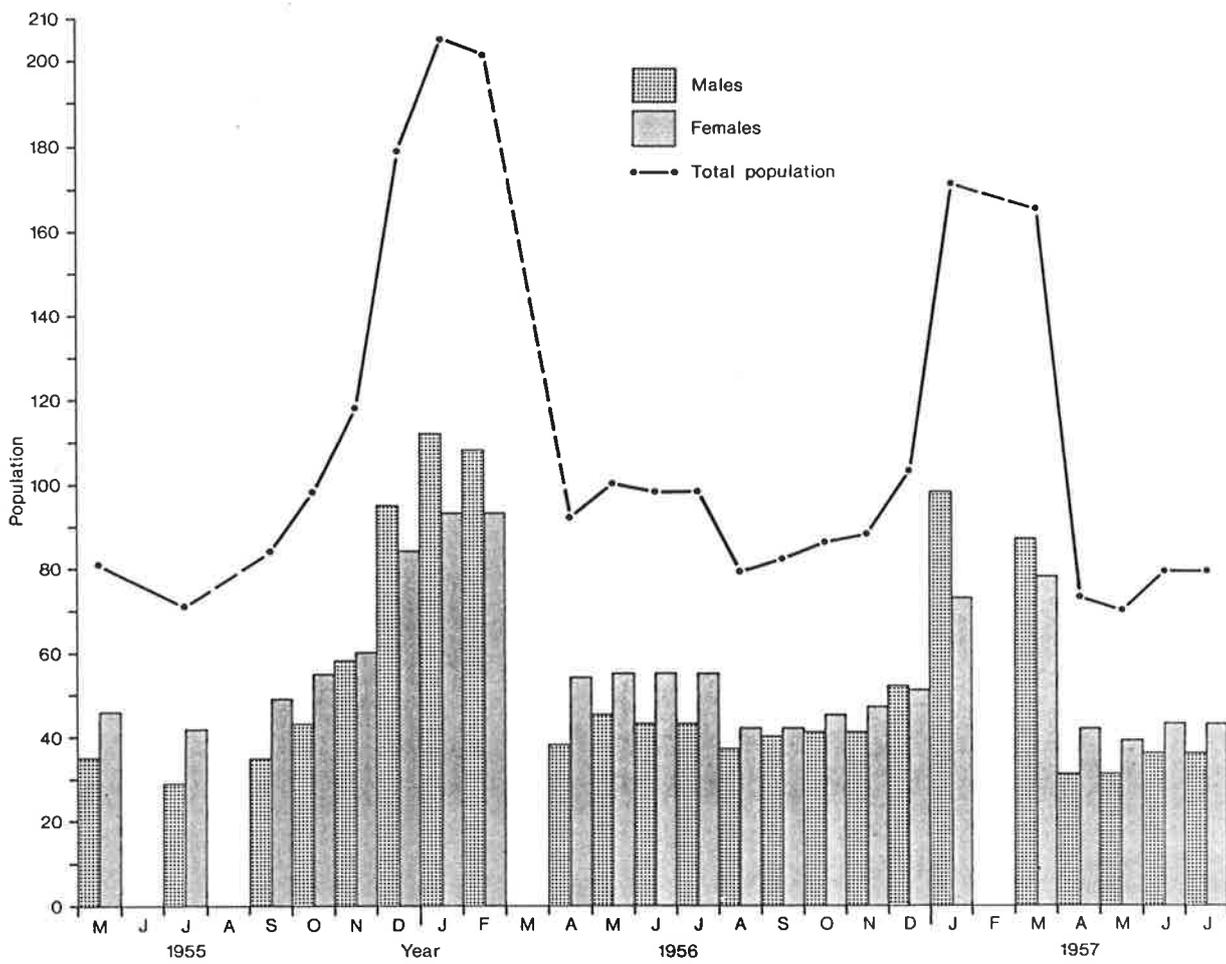


Figure 7.12: Aboriginal population of Borrooloola, May 1955 - July 1957

to return to work. He notes<sup>161</sup> “at the end of the wet they were all broke, all hungry. That was the main thing that spurred them back to work was that they knew on 99 out of 100 stations that the first thing you do when you got them out there was pour plenty of food into them ... after a couple of months in Borrooloola they were happy to get out there”. Another former cattle station manager told me:<sup>162</sup> “they were willing to go out to work because the only thing they used to get at the time was a weekly ration from the government that was much less than what they’d get if they were out working so they used to all make for green pastures”.

The mass exodus out of Borrooloola left very few Aboriginal people remaining there. Jean Kirton recalls<sup>163</sup> how only pregnant women who had had “some difficult times before” in giving birth and the very old stayed in Borrooloola. Figure 7.12 is based on the monthly reports of the welfare officer and highlights the seasonal variation of Borrooloola’s population. It also illustrates the fact that more women than men stayed behind in Borrooloola in the dry season.

### 7.7.3 The good old days?

Cattle station times were better ... used to have your own way that time ... do what you like, when you want to work or you go out bush, holiday. Welfare time you always get pushing for work ... (Roger Charlie<sup>164</sup>)

Roger’s sentiments are echoed by most Aboriginal people in the Borrooloola area who lived and worked on cattle stations. The contrast Roger makes with welfare life back in Borrooloola is often made. When Edna Bob was asked whether she preferred life in Borrooloola or on cattle stations, she replied<sup>165</sup> without hesitation: “long cattle station ... [because] you do something there all the time work. When you live long Borrooloola you don’t know what you are doing”. A remarkably similar reply was given<sup>166</sup> to

<sup>161</sup>Les James 1987 Tape 17A 1 min.

<sup>162</sup>Sunny Raggard 1987 Tape 14B 38 min.

<sup>163</sup>1987 Tape 72A 29 min.

<sup>164</sup>1987 Tape 69A 29 min.

<sup>165</sup>1988 Tape 4B 2 min.

<sup>166</sup>1987 Tape 21B 29 min.

the same question by Musso Harvey: "cattle days were best, everybody was moving, working, we knew what we were doing".

This preference of cattle station life to settlement life was also noted by Stevens in his work on the Northern Territory cattle industry. He notes (1974:116) that "most station Aborigines viewed the possibility of residence on settlements with dismay due to distrust of the Welfare Branch" and as a result of "a belief that the residents of settlements were not as well off economically as the employees on the cattle stations". In defence of the Welfare Branch it should be noted that they played a major role in the cattle times being the good old days. It was only as a result of their actions that everyone who wanted to return to Borroloola during the wet season lay offs could do so. In doing so, they created a seasonal cycle of work and holiday that particularly suited Aboriginal people. The economic benefits of working for Europeans could be gained without sacrificing the independence necessary to keep up ceremonies and the bush economy. This new situation contrasts dramatically with what happened before welfare was around to organise the return of workers to Borroloola. Steve Johnson describes<sup>167</sup> how before welfare, workers "went away and stayed away, only once in a while when they fluke a trip back down [could] they ever come back. It was only in welfare time they went and came back".

Paradoxically, many European researchers have stressed how destructive the cattle station experience was for Aboriginal people. Stanner (1979:221), for example, describes the pastoral industry as "the greater wrecker" of Aboriginal culture. Is Stanner wrong or have Aboriginal people in the Borroloola area glorified a past that was not as good as they now recall? The answer is probably somewhere in between. Stanner's conclusion is too sweeping. Perhaps it does apply to top end Aboriginal cattle workers in the area west of the Stuart Highway that he was most familiar with but such a conclusion cannot be generally applied. Differences in local conditions have meant the cattle station history has been vastly different for different Aboriginal people. Even within the Borroloola area, people today can recall very different experiences, depending on the time they spent respectively on the small local stations, on the large Barkly Tableland stations, on Queensland stations or the time they spent droving.

The Aboriginal golden era view of the cattle stations is in part no doubt a result

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<sup>167</sup>1987 Tape 33A 14 min.

of the contrast with the alternatives available both at the time and subsequently. An important reason for this attitude is the self-esteem, responsibility and independence that was associated with the work men (at least) had on cattle stations. This fact is highlighted by examining subsequent work at places like Borrooloola which has always been limited and often involved boring and menial work such as picking up cans and ice-cream papers. Perhaps the most fundamental difference between settlements and cattle stations was the need on the latter for labour. The need for labour on stations, coupled with the law of supply and demand led to stations having economic reasons for offering attractive conditions.<sup>168</sup>

Despite this theme that “those were the days”, conditions on cattle stations were far from good for Aboriginal people. The work was physically hard, working hours were long, diet was poor, medical facilities usually very basic (despite the inevitable injuries associated with working with wild cattle and breaking in wild horses) and sexual exploitation of women was apparently prevalent. On top of this there was a set hierarchy of living standards according to the percentage of “white blood” one had. This would have further emphasised to those at the bottom of this pecking order their low status and poor living conditions. A number of Aboriginal people have described to me how the Europeans camped “up there”.<sup>169</sup> On the flat Barkly Tableland “up” describes social rather than physical elevation. Dinah Marrngawi makes a similar comment<sup>170</sup> on Europeans camping “up” and goes on to describe how “we used to have outside fence camp, whitefella used to [camp] inside fence yard”.

What, then, is the explanation for the generally high regard in which Aboriginal people in the Borrooloola area now hold the cattle days? When I put the proposition to Musso Harvey that: “some people look at those cattle days and say ‘ah mucked up the culture for Aboriginal people’”, he adamantly denied this suggestion:<sup>171</sup> “no that is not true, not true, I don’t believe that because I been in that”.

Three sets of factors help explain why the cattle days are seen as the good old days.

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<sup>168</sup>As a result Ted Egan recalls (1988 Tape 6A 19 min.) how cattle station managers used to come to Borrooloola and “very consciously recruited, and sometimes a bit of an incentive here to change for a good stockmen or good house girl”.

<sup>169</sup>Don Manarra 1986 Tape 12A 46 min.

<sup>170</sup>1987 Tape 61B, 15 min.

<sup>171</sup>1987 Tape 51B 32 min.

### Continuation of ceremonial life

The attraction of cattle stations when compared with settlement life was, as McGrath (1987a:177) argues, the result of the greater autonomy station life gave Aboriginal people. As Don Manarra notes,<sup>172</sup> “stockcamp all right you can sing *jarrada* all night”. Musso Harvey similarly stresses<sup>173</sup> how his immense ceremonial knowledge was built up from working on cattle stations. As a result, he can now “go any ceremony wherever I go. If I go Newcastle Waters, Elliott, ceremony there, I will just walk in”. He notes<sup>174</sup> that evenings on cattle stations were spent around the camp fire listening to old men describe the mythology of the land they were on. He recalls how “they used to call the name of people, call the country, what ceremonial, oh good. What dreaming went through, how he went . . . tell us all the ceremonial”. Musso also notes that employment on stations was flexible enough for people to take a day or two off for short ceremonies. He recalls<sup>175</sup> how they could have “one day off or two day off, they have the dance, go back to work” and that the cattle station managers did not intrude on such ceremonies “he just leave us alone . . . they knew what was going on, they don’t disturb people”. Musso goes on to note that the manager further assisted ceremonial life by stopping other Europeans from going “into that business, stay out of it . . . that was good”.

### Continuation of getting bush tucker

Many people have described to me the opportunities to get bush tucker when working on stations. McGrath (1987a:45) also makes this point, noting that hunting was particularly possible on droving trips. It is interesting to note the extraordinary lengths Aboriginal people went to, in order to send food back to Borroloola. Roy Hammer, for instance, describes<sup>176</sup> how, when he was working on a coastal cattle station, he collected marine turtle eggs and sent them back to Borroloola in a plane to his wife.<sup>177</sup> Such

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<sup>172</sup>1987 Tape 62B 22 min.

<sup>173</sup>1987 Tape 22A 34 min.

<sup>174</sup>Ibid 36 min.

<sup>175</sup>Ibid 37 min.

<sup>176</sup>1987 Tape 52A 45 min.

<sup>177</sup>Tim Rakuwurlma describes (1983 Tape 16B 28 min.) how he, 50 years earlier when working on a European boat, similarly collected turtle eggs on the return voyage to bring back to relatives in Borroloola.

presents were an important way of keeping in contact with relatives in Borrooloola and represent attempts to integrate cattle station and settlement life. Like much Aboriginal trade the social importance of the gift outweighed its economic importance.

As well as giving the opportunity to continue getting resources people already knew about, new food was discovered on cattle stations. Edna Bob recalls<sup>178</sup> the strange spotted goannas to be found on the Barkly Tableland that were particularly easy to catch as their response to people was not to run but to freeze and the hunting of an animal she previously had not heard of, "pussy cat".

One reason that the cattle industry could be readily incorporated into Aboriginal lifestyles was that as an economic activity, it was not so foreign a concept from previous Aboriginal male economic activity. As noted above, Aboriginal men had no aversion to hunting cattle instead of kangaroos or emus. Aboriginal male self image in the Borrooloola area is still tied up with the ability to provide meat for relatives, be it from dugong, kangaroo or bullock. Part of the status of cattle work, then, is the large supplies of meat that were available to workers and families. While many other provisions were meagre, there was always meat to be had by killing stock and most European bosses provided plenty of it. Whereas in the wild times attempts to incorporate cattle into the bush tucker economy brought harsh punishment, in the cattle times such incorporation was sanctioned by Europeans.

### Aboriginal skills valued

A third important factor in the cattle experience was the skills Aboriginal people developed working cattle and the way these skills were valued (albeit often grudgingly<sup>179</sup>) by the European management. The cattle industry perhaps represents the most significant example in Australian history of Aboriginal people having skills that were of value to the European system. It is not surprising then that this period stands out in the memory of many Aboriginal people.<sup>180</sup>

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<sup>178</sup>1988 Tape 4B 11 min.

<sup>179</sup>See Reynolds (1987:103) for an example.

<sup>180</sup>Ted Egan discusses the difference between the present and the cattle times when Aboriginal labour was required in the following terms: (1988 Tape 6B 27 min) "at that time there was no sense of thinking Aboriginals were a bunch of useless bastards. Aboriginals were a very valuable commodity and essential to the well being of the cattle industry".

A significant attraction of cattle work was the range of employment opportunities available. Those gifted at particular work could develop their skills according to their personal aptitudes. Mechanically minded individuals, for example, could work building and maintaining bores while those with a suitable understanding of horses could work as specialist horse breakers. Most individuals, however, were not specialists, but did the whole range of jobs that cattle work required. While such a pattern did not allow the degree of skill of the specialist worker it had the advantages of varied work which provided individuals with the opportunity to be constantly learning new skills.

An often heard statement from Europeans involved in the cattle industry can be paraphrased as "white musterers go out looking for cattle and could spend weeks not finding them, while Aboriginal people will go out looking for tracks and will always find the cattle".<sup>181</sup> Significantly, the skills that made Aboriginal people useful to the industry were traditional skills, such as tracking, finding water and generally finding their way around a landscape that Europeans could not survive in by themselves. Detailed knowledge of animal tracks and natural history, such as the pattern that dew and nocturnal insects leave, enabled Aboriginal people not only to track cattle but also to know how far behind the cattle they were.<sup>182</sup>

Other bush skills also came into use on stations. For instance, the bush bridles, (illustrated in figure 7.2 and discussed in more detail below in Appendix F), that were used so bush horses could be used in the hunting of cattle, were also used for more legitimate cattle work. Dinny Nyliba describes<sup>183</sup> how he used to make such bridles to go mustering when no European bridles were available. Another valued Aboriginal bush skill was making fire. Roy Hammer recalls<sup>184</sup> how when he was mustering with his boss, he had to regularly dismount to start a fire by twirling one stick into another, so that his boss could have a cigarette.<sup>185</sup>

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<sup>181</sup>Ted Egan notes that the lay off of Aboriginal cattle workers was a "cut off your face to spite your face thing ... a lot of them subsequently found out white stockmen were not very good, they tended to get lost and things like that" (1988 Tape 6B 34 min).

<sup>182</sup>Steve Johnson (1987 Tape 30A 36 min.) and Willy Shadforth (1987 Tape 70B 3 min.) both give descriptions of the use of these tracking skills on stations. The latter gives an example of an Aboriginal man who tracked a particular horse's tracks over several days through rain and other horse tracks.

<sup>183</sup>1987 Tape 71A 1 min.

<sup>184</sup>1987 Tape 52B 25 min.

<sup>185</sup>Roy, as a result of his years of such practise, has been the undisputed Northern Territory fire lighting champion in recent years at the annual Barunga Aboriginal festival.

In some cases Aboriginal environmental knowledge was literally a matter of life and death. One man has told me<sup>186</sup> how his family was dropped at a station to work and had to wait four months before the boss and supplies arrived. In the interim, he and his family had to support themselves off the land.

Of all the work associated with cattle stations droving is held in the highest regard by Aboriginal men. As Powder Punch puts it,<sup>187</sup> "droving that was the best part of it". Powder goes on to outline the better wages and conditions he received as a drover. A point made by Powder and many other former Aboriginal drovers is the equality of droving. Typically, there was a European boss drover, a cook (often Chinese or European) and a team of about six Aboriginal stockmen making up a droving plant and European and Aboriginal people alike shared the working and living conditions. There was much less room for the social differentiation that occurred on cattle stations. Like many others who worked as drovers, Powder also stresses how such work enabled him to travel and see new country and people. Associated with this travel was some of the function (and perhaps prestige) of ceremonial messengers.<sup>188</sup> Drovers became important for relaying messages in the same way that people travelling to organise ceremonies were (and still are).<sup>189</sup>

Cattle work kept people in touch with land and gave them the opportunity to leave marks on the landscape that have subsequently become symbolic indicators of the good old cattle days. Musso Harvey, for example, told me<sup>190</sup> with pride how a windmill he made is still standing and Dinny Nyliba describes<sup>191</sup> with equal pride how fence posts cut and erected by his grandfather are still standing. A recurring theme in talk about the cattle days is how much people learnt during them. As Johnson Babarramila told me,<sup>192</sup> "I learn about everywhere". This learning was about cattle work and about land and ceremony from new places.

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<sup>186</sup>1986 Tape 1B 30 min.

<sup>187</sup>1987 Tape 68B 10 min.

<sup>188</sup>McGrath (1987a:33) notes how "the sacredness of traditional messengers was extended to those carrying messages for Europeans".

<sup>189</sup>Tim Rakuwurlma (1987 Tape 71B 41 min.) describes how when working as a drover his brother carried messages across the Northern Territory.

<sup>190</sup>1987 Tape 22A 13 min.

<sup>191</sup>1986 Tape 14A 34 min.

<sup>192</sup>1987 Tape 65B 30 min.

As McGrath (1987a:44) points out, an important aspect of cattle work for Aboriginal men was the lack of supervision by overseers. In turn this led cattle workers to have great self motivation and a sense of independence. A good indicator of the independence and responsibility most Aboriginal people enjoyed in their cattle station work is shown by their responses when this was threatened. A number of Aboriginal people walked off stations when they were given needless or inappropriate orders to do things by an overseer. Often it was noted that this person—usually European—knew less than they did about the particular task at hand. As Musso Harvey explains,<sup>193</sup> “he was only a jackaroo that’s why I pulled out from there”. Don Manarra likewise recounts<sup>194</sup> how he left a station after being told to “‘just walk over and grab a horse’” when he was in the middle of calming it down so he could handle it. Don on the spot told the European overseer “well I finish off today”. As Don told me “I knew better than him, he only just come up from town”. These quotes, in the way they highlight the pride people had in their work, provide a fitting summary of why Aboriginal people regard cattle times as the good old days.

#### 7.7.4 Role of Aboriginal women in the cattle industry

A number of Yanyuwa women were stockwomen. Ninganga, for example, describes<sup>195</sup> how “me stockmen number one, I been run bullock long scrub country, I been ride buck jumper too, long time everybody know me, I never skiting [see Appendix A]”. She goes on to describe how as a young girl she was taught to ride: “Margaret my granny been teach me ... learn me for horse”. Another woman who worked as a stockwoman was Bessie Kithiburula. She often used to do this work with her youngest child strapped to her front and describes how when throwing particularly wild bulls she would tie her children up in a tree out of harm’s way.<sup>196</sup> Another woman who did a lot of stock work is Bella Marrajabu. In the following passage<sup>197</sup> she describes how cattle work offered her the opportunity to be continually learning new skills, how child rearing could be

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<sup>193</sup>1987 Tape 21B 41 min.

<sup>194</sup>1986 Tape 12A 33 min.

<sup>195</sup>1987 Tape 17B 19 min.

<sup>196</sup>1987 Tape 46A 37 min. “I used to tie him up that little boy in the tree ... leave him in the tree, that little boy, when I used to chase that bullock”.

<sup>197</sup>1986 Tape 15A 90-92 min.

combined with work and how when droving she and her husband had considerable independence.

**Bella Marrajabu** - My husband . . . teach me for put that buckle up and swag . . . I been tailing bullock got [with] my two sister-in-law, I had two kid with me, other one in the back, another one in the front [of the saddle] but I been little bit learner them. . . . On the horse and I been little bit gallop now learning and I been gallop myself now, I used to gallop and pack<sup>198</sup> him up horses for me and my husband I used to help him, he been teach me for that and saddle him up two horses for us, he was sitting and looking after kid and he let me have that job, just teach me how to saddle the horses.

Bella concluded this account by telling me how, when her husband was pensioned off after "he had accident, I couldn't learn more . . . nothing now". This feeling of not learning anything since the cattle days is shared by many others.

The examples given of women being involved in stock work were exceptions to the general rule. Significantly, most female involvement in stock work occurred on the very small coastal stations. On the larger Barkly stations, work was much more gender based so men and women had quite distinct work experiences on these stations. While women were mainly based around the station homestead and were often employed as domestics, men were often away for long periods on stock camps and droving. As a result many Aboriginal women working on cattle stations spent much of each year separated from their husbands who were out bush on stock camps.<sup>199</sup>

Bella's stories about the independence of droving and travelling around the country with her husband and first two children all relate to work on the small coastal stations. Most of these stations are still operating mainly at a subsistence level.<sup>200</sup> This economic marginality has allowed a more easy going life style for Aboriginal employees on these stations. A former welfare officer makes a similar point on the differences between large

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<sup>198</sup>In 1987 I checked with Bella what she meant by this and she explained it involved preparing the saddle and packing up all swags.

<sup>199</sup>Dinah Marrngawi, for instance, (1987 Tape 61B 17 min.), describes how when she and her husband were on the Barkly Tablelands he was often out at stock camps for up to five weeks at a time.

<sup>200</sup>One resident of this area told me (1987 Tape 32A 42 min.) how these stations have never developed "as everybody is too casual and don't seem to care". See also the comment of one leaseholder below (on page 300).

Barkly Tableland stations and the smaller coastal stations. He notes<sup>201</sup> that things were better for Aboriginal people on smaller stations due to the better relationships between Aboriginal people and the owner-managers.<sup>202</sup> He goes on to emphasise the differences between stations in the two areas by comparing the highly racially stratified life on the large stations with the egalitarian life of smaller coastal stations. He describes, for instance, one such station where the European boss treated all his Aboriginal workers as if they were his family and Aboriginal people were free to walk in and out of his house.

### 7.7.5 The scars of the cattle times

Despite the fond memories of the cattle times outlined above, many Aboriginal people bear physical and psychological scars from this era. In this section I will concentrate on the physical scars, which are much easier to document than the psychological ones. The physical scars I document mostly are from men. If psychological scars were documented in detail I suspect that women would be shown to have suffered greatly as many had their children taken from them and all experienced sexual harassment by Europeans.

Aboriginal people were injured on cattle stations both as the result of accidents and direct European violence. It is illuminating to note that some of the worst stories of European violence come from the same individuals who give glowing descriptions of how good the cattle times were. Edna Bob, for instance, who is quoted above (page 242) preferring cattle stations to town, in the very same conversation went on to describe how violent cattle times could be for Aboriginal people. She describes<sup>203</sup> how her father, Rory Wurrulbirrangunu,<sup>204</sup> was shot in the leg by the manager of a cattle station after a disagreement and how the same man flogged her little brother with a whip so that “everywhere long face bleeding”. This particular manager’s reputation for carrying out his threats of shooting people was such that Dinny Nyliba recalls<sup>205</sup>

<sup>201</sup>1987 Tape 64B 34 min.

<sup>202</sup>The larger stations were nearly always run by managers.

<sup>203</sup>1988 Tape 4B 4 min.

<sup>204</sup>Rory describes the incident on 1987 Tape 64A 6 min. This incident is also mentioned in a number of letters in Welfare Branch file F1 55/554 (examined in the Federal Department of Aboriginal Affairs Office Darwin). For example, ‘Alleged Shooting of and at Aborigines . . . ’ E.O. Harvey 27 January 1955 and 25 March 1955.

<sup>205</sup>1987 Tape 66B 26 min.

INJURY	CAUSE	TAPE REFERENCE
“Smashed foot”	Horse	1986 2A 56 min.
“Rupture”	Kicked by horse	1986 7A 41 min.
“Hurt me back”	Fell from horse	1986 11A 23 min.
Broken leg	“Falling from horse”	1986 15A 49 min.
“Broke every bone”	Fell under horse and dray	1986 22B 18 min.
Damaged bladder	Kicked by horse	1987 7B 28 min.
Lost finger	Fencing accident	1987 8A 8 min.
Broken leg	Thrown by horse	1987 13A 1 min.
Lost finger	“Putting in pickets”	1987 60B 20 min.
Shot in leg	European boss	1987 64A 6 min.
Broken collar bone	Horse rolled on him	1987 69A 23 min.
Whipped back	European boss	1987 71A 9 min.
“Flogged . . . long face”	European boss	1988 4B 3 min.

Figure 7.13: Cattle station injuries

“him shoot anyone” and notes that as a result other Aboriginal people used to warn each other “don’t go long his boundary”.

As McGrath (1987a:110) describes, particularly before World War Two, stock whips were quite often used against Aboriginal people on some stations. A telling insight into the application of such “justice” comes from an old time European resident of Borroloola who recalls that, when he first went there, he saw one old Aboriginal man with whip marks on his back. He concludes<sup>206</sup> that the Aboriginal man concerned must have been “very cocky as a young feller, they might have tried to straighten him up”.

Another brutal incident from the cattle times involved the whipping of a group of Yanyuwa and Garawa people at Eva Downs in 1956.<sup>207</sup> Dinny Nyliba, one of those to

<sup>206</sup>1987 Tape 25B 27 min.

<sup>207</sup>Kettle (1967:103) describes how when she was at Anthony Lagoon police station early in 1956 two men and a woman “who had been victims of a vicious whipping” were camped there.

suffer in this incident, recalls<sup>208</sup> how the after the whippings he saw a large hole dug and feared that they would be shot and “put along that hole”. He also suspected that the management would cover up the killings by saying they had gone bush; “people might [think we’ve gone] bush somewhere and die somewhere, [Aboriginal people] don’t know, policeman can’t know, welfare can’t know”. The incident was a crucial one in the history of Aboriginal and European relationships in the Northern Territory due to the fact that patrol officer Ted Evans, happened to arrive at Anthony Lagoon police station on the day the victims arrived after the 100km walk there.<sup>209</sup> Evans got the policeman to take photographs of the wounds<sup>210</sup> and these subsequently played a crucial part in the Europeans involved being convicted. Ted Egan, who was a welfare officer at the time, describes<sup>211</sup> how this conviction and jailing was a turning point in racial relationships in the Northern Territory. Europeans were forced to accept that “hobble chain days were over” and “blackfellows suddenly realised you didn’t need to cop this any longer”.

Most injuries for Aboriginal people on cattle stations were the result of accidents with horses, cattle or machinery or were due to poor working conditions. Dusty working conditions, for example, have been a factor in eye diseases.<sup>212</sup> Numerous people also suffered severe injuries from accidents with wild horses and cattle see figure 7.13.

The fact that Aboriginal people can still regard the cattle times as the good old days, despite all these injuries, is in part a reflection of two aspects of Aboriginal life influencing their response to contact. Corporal punishment was a fundamental part of pre-European Yanyuwa life. Disputes were often settled by fights with grievances often settled with the drawing of blood. Until about 1960 couples who had left Borroloola to marry wrong way could expect a fight on their return if there was an aggrieved party who had been promised the woman involved. Given the acceptance of this system of corporal punishment, it is not surprising that the Yanyuwa had some respect for Euro-

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<sup>208</sup>1987 Tape 71A 9 min.

<sup>209</sup>They made the walk over a number of nights as they were scared they would be caught and further beaten.

<sup>210</sup>The Department of Aboriginal Affairs “Aboriginal Population Record” files on the individuals concerned list whip marks on their backs as “distinctive markings”. Evans in discussing the wounds recalls (1987 Tape 45B 12 min.) “by gee they were savage”.

<sup>211</sup>1988 Tape 6B 41 min.

<sup>212</sup>This is recognised as a cause for eye complaints by Yanyuwa individuals concerned and by Western medicine see Royal Australian College of Ophthalmologists 1980:28.

pean bosses (see page 222) who delivered their own punishments rather than handing people over to the police and European justice. "Hard but fair" is the compliment paid to many bosses. Bosses, however, who administered physical punishment without being "fair" were seen in a very different light. The fact that Aboriginal bush life had its inevitable injuries and that many ceremonies involve great endurance of physical pain, must surely also have influenced Aboriginal responses to some of the injuries of cattle times.

### 7.7.6 End of the 'cattle times'

During the 1970s, large numbers of Aboriginal workers were laid off from Northern Territory cattle stations. As Les Penhall, the district Welfare Branch Superintendent at the time, recalls:<sup>213</sup> "A lot of them went back to Borroloola . . . I think most stations just asked them where they wanted to go . . . then camps began to spring up". Jean Kirton, who was living in Borroloola throughout the period of cattle lay offs, recalls<sup>214</sup> how there were only small lay offs when equal wages were introduced in the late 1960s but how during an extended drought and subsequent collapse in beef prices there were massive lay offs. As she notes,<sup>215</sup> the influx of Aboriginal people into Borroloola at this time included people who "had never come back to Borroloola before". She goes on to explain how this influx placed the community "under real pressure both from the numbers of people, it was far more people together in the community that they had ever had, also because there were people were not normally there . . . and there were not established relationships". Kirton here also notes that the new residents had "different values" and how the Yanyuwa were "horrified" by things such as "young mothers drinking [alcohol] and not looking after their children properly". Kirton (1988) explores these issues and cites this influx of people as a major factor in the declining fortunes of Yanyuwa as a viable language. She notes (1988:6) that "these changes resulted in an increased number of Aborigines at Borroloola who had no knowledge of Yanyuwa".

The cattle times played an important part in the coming in process that is discussed

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<sup>213</sup>1988 Tape 1A 17 min.

<sup>214</sup>1987 Tape 73A 28 min.

<sup>215</sup>Ibid 30 min.

in detail in the next chapter. As Lenin Anderson<sup>216</sup> notes, no sooner had people arrived in Borrooloola than they were sent to work on cattle stations far removed from their traditional country; “as soon as they ended up in Borrooloola they used to send the lot away ... up to work [on Barkly Tableland cattle stations]”. The option of simply walking back to their traditional land, which had been possible when people first moved in to Borrooloola, had obviously gone.

## 7.8 ‘Land rights (Gough Whitlam) times’

The Yanyuwa often refer to the early 1970s as ‘Gough Whitlam times’ after the Prime Minister who is seen to have introduced land rights for Aboriginal people. The Borrooloola region land claim was heard in Darwin and Borrooloola from September to December 1977 (Avery 1985:17). The outcome of the claim was that the two extreme islands of the Pellew Group were granted as was the Borrooloola common. The township of Borrooloola and major roads were exempted from the land granted. Title to this land (see figure 7.14) was finally handed over on 29 June 1986.<sup>217</sup> In exchange for providing Mt Isa Mines with a corridor through the Borrooloola common, to enable them access to a port they plan to build on Centre Island, Mt Isa Mines has handed over to Aboriginal people the lease for a large area (see figure 7.14) of Bing Bong station.

Land rights time was a period of great hope for the Yanyuwa. People have described to me how they were told<sup>218</sup> “you might get this country”. The process of demonstrating their mythological attachment to the land, while a great strain on the Yanyuwa, encouraged an increase in ceremonial activity. The fact that some Europeans were showing an interest in the Aboriginal law and ceremony was a source of pride and renewed self esteem.

The legal procedure of having to give evidence in a locally convened court room, in front of a largely hostile audience of local Europeans, who were opposing the claim, was an ordeal for many Yanyuwa (Avery 1983:63). Don Manarra, for instance, describes<sup>219</sup> how it was “too hard hey! You’ve got to stand up ... and talk”. The Yanyuwa also felt

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<sup>216</sup>1987 Tape 57A 32 min.

<sup>217</sup>*Land Rights News*, November 1986 Vol 2 (1):10.

<sup>218</sup>Pyro 1987 Tape 63A 34 min.

<sup>219</sup>1987 Tape 35A 16 min.

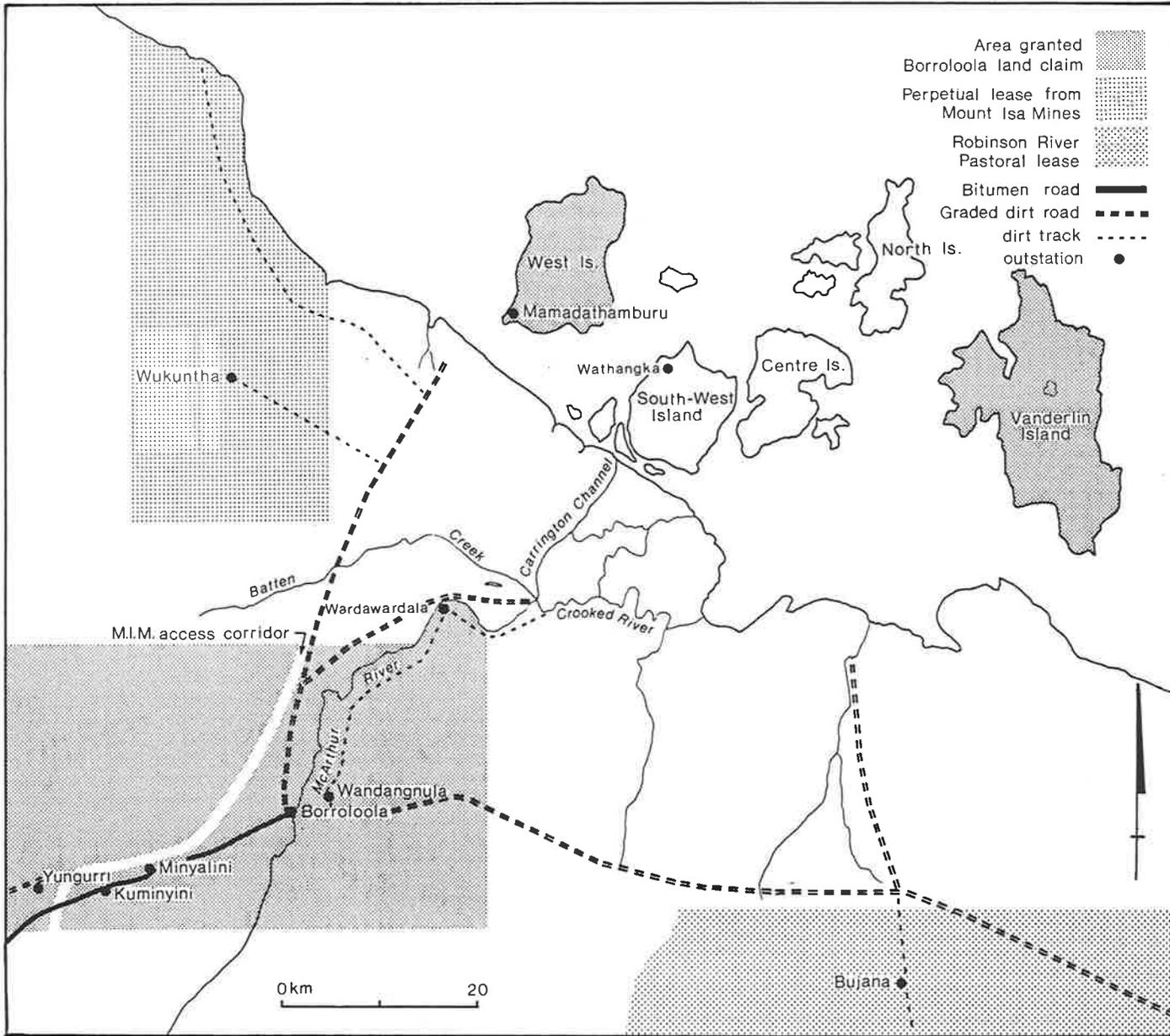


Figure 7.14: Outstations and area granted in Borrooloola land claim

the ramifications of the land claim in changing attitudes of cattle station managers in the region. Because continuity of economic use was a factor in claims for land, stations became much less willing to give Aboriginal people access for hunting.<sup>220</sup> As Annie Karrakayn recalls,<sup>221</sup> “land rights time . . . other people been hard now after that [on] all the station . . . they didn’t like people to move any place”.

### 7.8.1 Outstations

Land rights allowed Aboriginal people to return to sections of their country to live on outstations.<sup>222</sup> This movement has been made possible in the Borroloola area by the granting of legal title to the Yanyuwa of limited areas of land. Figure 7.14 illustrates how all but one of the outstations in the area have been located on Aboriginal land.<sup>223</sup> An important aspect of these outstations is the ability Aboriginal people have on them to control aspects of their lives that they cannot in “open” towns. For example, the Yanyuwa would like to control the sale of alcohol to Aboriginal people in Borroloola but are unable to do so. Significantly an important feature of outstations in the Borroloola area has been the prohibition of alcohol and signs such as that in figure 7.15 are common on the approach roads to outstations.

Figure 7.16 maps Wardawardala outstation in July 1986. The two houses are substantial and built in iron and timber. The variety of other structures that people camp in are also mapped. During the dry season the inside of the houses are rarely used and most activities including sleeping goes on outside. In the wet season people sleep inside and keep personal belongings inside as well.

The outstation movement is the opposite to the general long term move from bush to Borroloola that the Yanyuwa have made since contact with Europeans. Some of the difficulties facing the outstation movement provide particularly valuable insights

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<sup>220</sup>There is little legal logic to this attitude on behalf of the stations as only unalienated crown land can be claimed under the Northern Territory Land Rights Act.

<sup>221</sup>1987 Tape 37B 1 min.

<sup>222</sup>Also called the “homelands” movement in some areas. This movement has occurred in many other area of central and northern Australia.

<sup>223</sup>The exception is Wathangka which was set up here by Don Manarra a Wuyaliya man. The selective nature of the land granted as a result of the Borroloola land claim is highlighted by the fact that Don (who was one of the key figures in the Yanyuwa fight for land claims), was granted none of his land and was forced to set up an outstation on land he did not, in the eyes of European law, own.



Figure 7.15: "No alcohol" sign at outstation entrance

into the processes that fueled the previous coming in process. For example, medical problems that have resulted from dietary changes and the unhygienic conditions of town camp life, have made many people dependent on regular visits to the health clinic. Visits to outstations are therefore now fitted in around clinic visits. Tim Rakuwurlma, for example, describes<sup>224</sup> how "tablet, tablet me drink everyday tablet". Mothers and grandmothers are similarly tied to town by their need to see children through school and to ensure the safety of their relatives. Many women have virtually a full time job each evening keeping a close eye on the pub so they will be able to get relevant kin and/or police to halt trouble involving their children.<sup>225</sup> Many women, therefore, feel unable to spend time away from Borroloola and as a result men often have to make the choice between their wives and their outstations. The outstations often win and in the process a new cause of tension is obviously introduced to the society.

Dependency is also very evident in the influx from outstations to town every second week on 'big Thursday' when welfare cheques arrive. The need for such regular returns places great strains on the viability of many outstations. Annie Karrakayn

<sup>224</sup>1987 Tape 24B 26 min.

<sup>225</sup>Annie Karrakayn, for example describes (1987 Tape 66B 44 min.) how she stays in town to "just look around our family if they good, not fight, not sick".

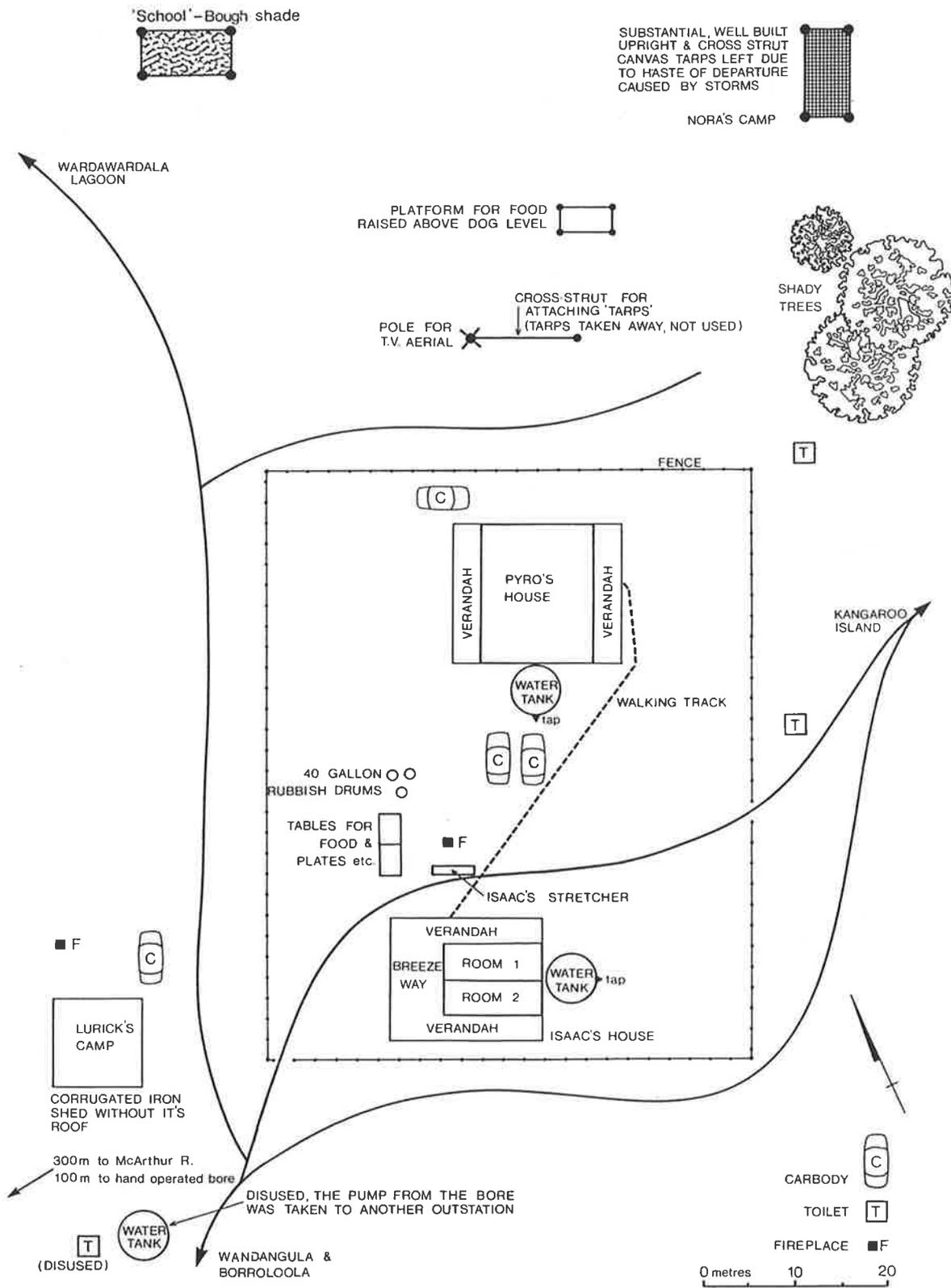


Figure 7.16: Wardawardala outstation, July 1986

makes this point<sup>226</sup> stressing that people are not living on outstations “just because . . . unemployment money and pension money and all that. That is why we go out [only] for maybe one week in the bush and come back for money”.

The current problems of the outstation movement around Borroloola are well summarised in Tom Wambarirri's situation. For a number of years he has spent as much time as possible at the South West Island outstation of Wathangka. He has, however, spent most of this time alone on the island<sup>227</sup> and has had to travel back and forth, to and from Borroloola, for various reasons including his need to attend meetings in Borroloola about his outstation. “Come back, go back, come back all the time, we been come for meeting here [in Borroloola] for Wathangka”.<sup>228</sup> Another man keen to live on his outstation describes<sup>229</sup> the time demands of various meetings including outstation meetings as far afield as Alice Springs. Similarly, Musso Harvey exclaimed in frustration<sup>230</sup> “meeting, meeting, meeting . . . any sort of meeting, government stopping people that is what I reckon . . . see we can't have decent time out in the bush we must be back there for your meeting, there for that meeting . . . got to go to Darwin for meeting”. Clearly outstations do not represent a return to pre-contact life. The need to attend meetings with the European established bureaucracy is but one example of how life has irreversibly changed for the Yanyuwa.

Outstations tend to become camps of middle aged people as older people are too dependent on medical facilities to live away from Borroloola and younger people identify more with the town lifestyle of Borroloola. Many parents complain that they cannot get their children to stay on outstations with them. Pyro and Topsy, for instance, discuss this problem.<sup>231</sup>

**Pyro** - Some of them people thinking about go out long bush, away from town but young boy can't follow . . . big mob young boys they like town because they got different brains now.

**Topsy** - Got whiteman's brains now.

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<sup>226</sup>1987 Tape 37A 3 min.

<sup>227</sup>Tom discusses this on 1987 Tape 60A 29 min.

<sup>228</sup>1987 Tape 60A 34 min.

<sup>229</sup>1986 Tape 11A 57 min.

<sup>230</sup>1987 Tape 23B 36 min.

<sup>231</sup>1987 Tape 63B 9 min.

When parents are successful in getting their children out to the outstations, the children often ended up pining for the comforts of town. On one occasion a bored teenager told me that the outstation was the “deadest place out” and bemoaned the lack of videos, ice creams and soft drinks as he vandalised the house in frustration. Another good example of the respective attractions of town and outstations to children is the outstation game of what each child will order as soon as they get back to the take-away shop (see page 52).

It is important to note that outstations in the Borroloola are not an attempt to reconstruct a pre-European lifestyle and economy. Rather they are attempts to reconstruct something in between town and bush life. The large camps of the 1930s and 1940s discussed below provide a obvious model for such attempts. Indeed most of the outstations in the area are located at the sites of these old camps. Attempts to replicate these old camps have gone so far as to try the same economic activity Europeans previously carried out at these locations. Cultivation of peanuts, for example, was attempted at Wardawardala, on the same spot that a European had once had a peanut farm.

## 7.9 ‘This (tourist) time’

‘This time’ is a commonly used phrase when discussing the present or making comparisons with the past. It is considered to be an evolving sub-category of land rights time. The thing that most concerns the Yanyuwa when they discuss ‘this time’, is the massive increase in the numbers of tourists visiting the area and the impact they are having on Aboriginal people. The number of tourists visiting the area has been slowly increasing since the road from the Stuart Highway to Borroloola was sealed in 1968.<sup>232</sup> As one old time European resident told me,<sup>233</sup> “before the bitumen if you saw four tourists in Borroloola in the dry season you’ve just about seen them all”. Since the opening of the new road there has been a steady increase in the number of tourists visiting the area. A massive jump in this trend has occurred with the sealing of the

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<sup>232</sup>The road was sealed in sections and finally completed in 1968 (Kirton 1988:11).

<sup>233</sup>Les James 1987 Tape 17A 27 min.



Figure 7.17: Caravans at the Burketown crossing, Borroloola 1987

remaining dirt sections of the Stuart Highway from Darwin to Adelaide.<sup>234</sup> Borroloola has since become part of a round-Australia tour route particularly popular with retired aged couples pulling caravans. Caravans are now parked in such numbers along the banks of the McArthur River (see figure 7.17) that Aboriginal access to former fishing spots is restricted.<sup>235</sup> Another rapidly growing type of tourism in this and other isolated areas in Australia (Anderson 1984:422) is the “wilderness adventure” four wheel drive tourists and in recent years this has extended to four wheel drive bus tours (see figure 7.18).

A recent report on the potential of tourism development in the region (Pannell, Kerr, Forster 1988) estimates that the Borroloola region is now receiving 20,000 tourists a year and predicts an annual growth rate of 12% which would result in 35,000 tourists per year by 1992. During the course of my field work in the Borroloola area (1982-1987) I witnessed a dramatic increase in the numbers of European tourists. Many of the areas where Aboriginal people used to hunt and camp around Borroloola are now

<sup>234</sup>The long stretch of dirt road in northern South Australia was bitumenised in stages in the 1980s with the final section being completed in early 1987.

<sup>235</sup>On field trips prior to 1986, I often took Tim Rakuwurlma to the gravel bank in figure 7.17 as this was his favourite location to bath in the river. In 1986 and 1987 Aboriginal people avoided the area due to the number of tourists camped and fishing here.



Figure 7.18: The “Bill Harney” four wheel drive bus

effectively off limits due to the presence of tourists. Many of the discussions I had with Aboriginal people in the area in 1987 centred on the consequences of the numbers of tourists visiting the area.

A number of women told me about how “whitefellers were closing up country”. Mavis Hogan told me<sup>236</sup> “too many tourists that’s the trouble . . . it is no good, you never see me go out fishing, I’m frightened”. When I asked her, “what are you frightened of?”, she replied, “might get shot or something”. Dinah Marrngawi similarly told me<sup>237</sup> how tourists were now “everywhere along island and Manangoora . . . Here long Landing (see figure 3.1) we didn’t go hunting now, too many whitefella. We used to have him camp down there. And island too, no whitefella been there before . . . ” A group of women also discussed<sup>238</sup> the tourist influx at “the Landing” (see figure 3.1):

**Jemima** - We been have big camp there people used to stay there, Old Tim and Banjo all his daughters.

**Eileen** - Nothing [now] too much whitefella there.

<sup>236</sup>1987 Tape 18B 14 min.

<sup>237</sup>1987 Tape 61B 41 min.

<sup>238</sup>1987 Tape 62A 38 min.

Isa - Too much whitefella take over that place there now.

On another occasion Eileen Yakibijna described<sup>239</sup> how, because of the growing tourist numbers, there are more permanent European residents in Borroloola providing various services for the tourists "too many [European] people in town we don't know them". She goes straight on to make the same point about the tourists as well: "too many we don't know them. I don't know where they are from". To the Yanyuwa, with their highly complex kinship system that attempts to place everyone within a known relationship, it is this element of unknown newness that is so disturbing about tourists. Their land based view of the world is also highlighted by Eileen's comment that she does not know the Europeans as she does not know the country they are from.

Another comment on tourists comes from Johnson Babarramila who told me<sup>240</sup> how when he goes down the river hunting dugong, he now sees "more tourists these days . . . than blackfellows". Johnson goes on to note how tourists are "new people, I never see them before". Johnson goes on to describe<sup>241</sup> how he can no longer camp at his old camping spot at the Landing:

I had to camp last year across the river there, Kangaroo Island, with these kids last year holiday . . . all the tourists this side . . . I don't think a man will get room on this side, because when I went down last year, my old camp all covered with tourists, well I used to camp there.

When Johnson mentions "this side" he is referring to the West side of McArthur River. Nearly all the places people asked me to take them hunting on in previous field trips had been on this side of the river. In 1987, because of this increase in European presence and the desire the Yanyuwa have for privacy, all the hunting trips I took people on were on the other side of the river or much further afield away from the river. The loss of the Landing to a large camp of Europeans<sup>242</sup> has been particularly telling as the above quotes reveal. For the Yanyuwa, this spot had the benefits of road access to Borroloola and easy access to the dugong and turtle grounds of the shallow waters between the

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<sup>239</sup>1987 Tape 13B 3 min.

<sup>240</sup>1987 Tape 21A 33 min.

<sup>241</sup>Ibid 34 min.

<sup>242</sup>In the 1987 dry season there were always at least 60 people (and often more) living in about 20 separate camps there. Accommodation ranged from tents and caravans to permanent shacks.

mainland and the islands. In my earlier trips to Borroloola, it had been the most favoured weekend and holiday spot for Aboriginal people. Women and children would camp there and fish and hunt while men and boys went dugong and turtle hunting. When successful, the men would bring the animals back to the camp and they were cooked in ground ovens. Most female hunting and gathering activities involve burning and, as Eileen Yakibijna notes,<sup>243</sup> "too many [European] people there, we can't burn him grass". Eileen, like other Yanyuwa women, is highly aware of the possible dangers of fires near European tents, cars, caravans, gas cylinders and outboard motor fuel.<sup>244</sup>

As well as severely restricting hunting and food gathering, tourists cause resentment due to the environmental damage they are causing. The Yanyuwa are particularly conscious of how tourists are wasteful of resources such as fish, dugong and turtles and leave much rubbish at the places where they camp. When I broached the question of tourists with Dinah,<sup>245</sup> by asking "What do you reckon about that tourist mob?", she answered, "Well mess up, get fish and throw them out again, crabs they waste them [too]. We go down fishing we get some fish we can't waste him, we eat him." While the Yanyuwa can understand, and indeed have pride in, the tourist interest in their land, they are often dismayed by individual tourist actions. They are ready to accept tourists when they can see that they are interested in their country and regard tourist visits as a compliment to their land (and therefore to themselves) but are often shocked by the irreverence of European behaviour towards their land.

There is an acceptance of the inevitability of tourists. As Pyro notes,<sup>246</sup> they are "all over now, can't stop him". However, he, like many others, is upset about how tourists "frighten all the everything for Aboriginal people ... fish or dugong". As Pyro says, it is difficult to explain things to Europeans, we "can't tell them much because they can't believe it. 'Oh, I can go through here, he don't own this place.' ". Pyro concludes,<sup>247</sup> that tourist are

all right for me, sometimes, as long as it is not that many people, all right

<sup>243</sup>1987 Tape 13B 3 min.

<sup>244</sup>Altman (1988:197) notes the general reluctance of Aboriginal people in Kakadu National Park to hunt in front of tourists "for safety and public relation reasons".

<sup>245</sup>Ibid 40 min.

<sup>246</sup>1987 Tape 63B 27 min.

<sup>247</sup>Ibid 29 min.

not too many people, all right. But too many people there now, when you travelling down there you see boat all over the place, motor boat going down, last time when we been go dugong [hunting] ... when I been in the sea now I see big mob in sea go through across everywhere ... I couldn't get a dugong, might be too many tourist been frighten him ...

The mixed emotions that the Yanyuwa have about tourists are well illustrated in Bella Marrajabu's following words:<sup>248</sup>

They can come, they want to go fishing, they can come ... as long as they go back home ... some tourist they kind for Aboriginal people, but some not ... when that storm come now they all went back to their country home, where they come from. They not going to stay around here, they don't have any houses to live around here, they just the tourists.

Bella's feeling that tourists are all right as long as they return to their own country is shared by many Yanyuwa.<sup>249</sup> The aim which the Northern Territory Government has for tourist developments in the area is, however, just what Bella and many other Aboriginal people do not want. That is, to turn the town into a larger service centre for tourists. A rapid increase in the permanent European population of the area is already underway.

In 1987, I carried out a pilot survey of tourists with the aim of seeing why people were coming to the area, what they hoped to do there and what in fact they did do. Many tourists said they were particularly interested in learning about Aboriginal culture and expressed disappointment about the lack of formal opportunity to do this in the area. In view of the fact that the Aboriginality of many tourist destinations is a prime factor in the marketing of these areas, it is crucial that the impact of tourism on Aboriginal people be assessed.

In one of the few studies of Aboriginal people and tourism, Palmer (1985) notes in his introduction that there is a conflict in the simultaneous advertising of areas as both wild and untouched and as displaying living Aboriginal culture. As he (*ibid*:5) also notes while the "Aboriginal quality" of the Northern Territory is "itself an integral

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<sup>248</sup>1987 Tape 60A 9 min.

<sup>249</sup>Eileen Yakibijna, for instance, notes (1987 Tape 57A 1 min.) "too many people they should come, stay for three week and go back".

part of tourism promotion and presentation" few steps have been made to plan tourist developments to minimize negative effects on Aboriginal people. In the Borroloola area, as elsewhere in the Northern Territory, only limited attempts have been made to consult with Aboriginal people to establish their views on tourist developments. Indeed, only rarely have Aboriginal people been involved on more than a token level.

## 7.10 Conclusion

This chapter has described the phases the Yanyuwa recognise in their history of contact with Europeans. It has highlighted how conscious the Yanyuwa are of the different types of Europeans they were in contact with at different times and the changing political realities that came with these different groups. It needs to be noted how in contrast Europeans have generally failed to see the diversity both between and within Aboriginal groups. This thesis highlights the contrast of the Yanyuwa contact experience with that of surrounding Aboriginal groups.

The contrast needs to be made also about European and Aboriginal understanding of cultural change. There has been a pervading European view that Aboriginal societies were unable to cope with change. Attitudes that Aboriginal society was only capable of resisting change for a time before collapsing have worked against Europeans seeing the history of change that is inherently acknowledged in the Yanyuwa view of the different times in their past.

A fundamental process that can be seen through the phases outlined here has been a gradual move from a bush to a town. The physical move and resulting cultural changes this involved are discussed in detail in the next two chapters.

## Part IV

# Analysis of Contact

# Chapter 8

## ‘Coming In’

They took them in there [to Borroloola], bunched them up, got them going and dumped them (Steve Johnson<sup>1</sup>).

### 8.1 Introduction

In this chapter, I will demonstrate some of the complexities of the move the Yanyuwa made from bush to town life. In so doing I test the relative merit of conflicting views that that Aboriginal people were rounded up or came into European settlements of their own volition.

An expression that the Yanyuwa and many other Aboriginal groups use to describe this process is “coming in”.<sup>2</sup> Loos (1982:161) in his discussion of European - Aboriginal relationships on the north Queensland “frontier” uses the term “let the blacks in”. In doing so he is writing about the European perspectives of the Aboriginal move from bush to town. This chapter, while considering this perspective, concentrates on another view of the process. With the benefit of oral sources that Loos and other historians have often ignored<sup>3</sup> it is possible to present Aboriginal perspectives on the move from bush to town.

The issue of people coming in and being let in has rarely been addressed. Reynolds

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<sup>1</sup>1987 Tape 30A 26 min.

<sup>2</sup>Whylo Widamara, 1986 Tape 15A 12 min., for example, talks of how the last Yanyuwa man remained living in the bush until “this time when citizen[ship] been open he *come in* then”.

<sup>3</sup>Anderson’s 1983, 1984 use of oral sources in his work on part of the area Loos’s work is concerned with, highlights the failings of Loos in considering such sources.

(1987:63) briefly discusses how Aboriginal people came in and makes the point that "these events have rarely been studied by Australian scholars although they must have been repeated a hundred times over". This chapter makes a step towards rectifying this situation. In providing a detailed case study of what was a common process, many factors of wider relevance are raised.

A fundamental issue in contact history is to what degree contact was the result of Aboriginal people coming in and how much resulted from Europeans going out into Aboriginal country. This issue is examined in detail by Stanner (1958:101)<sup>4</sup> who, from his field experience in the Fitzmaurice River area of the Northern Territory in the 1930s, notes that "for every Aboriginal who, so to speak, had Europeans thrust upon him, at least one other had sought him out".<sup>5</sup> Building on this view he argues elsewhere (1979:5) that Aboriginal people "co-operated in their own destruction by accepting a parasitic role which enabled them to live peaceably near the intruding whites".

This chapter addresses the issue of the relative significance of Aboriginal people coming in and Europeans going out to contact Aboriginal people. I illustrate that there was not a single reason for Aboriginal people coming in. To hold such a view glosses over the fact that different groups came in for different reasons, at different times and in different places. Moreover, different individuals within groups came in for different reasons and indeed, as I will illustrate, some people came in on a number of different occasions for different reasons each time. Hence, when the group is considered as a whole, many factors were responsible for the collective move from bush to town.

As I will show, it is also important to go beyond asking *why* people came in and examine *how* people came in. To illustrate this, I will first analyse the move the Yanyuwa made from bush to town in terms of the more standard question of why they came in. I will then show that it is possible to map how the Yanyuwa came in.

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<sup>4</sup>This article also appears in Stanner 1979 and this quote is on page 48.

<sup>5</sup>Sansom 1980b:11 coined the expression the "Stanner corrective" to describe this equation of contact.

## 8.2 Why did people come in?

From the details of the life histories I have recorded,<sup>6</sup> it is possible to group seven major categories of reasons for people coming in. These are:

1. Longing for stimulants, for example, tea, sugar and tobacco. As I explore in the next section European tobacco was a particularly important factor in people coming in. The Yanyuwa had an appetite for this drug prior to European contact through the trade of Australian narcotic plants and the Macassan source of tobacco. A mild stimulant was also already made by soaking pandanus nuts in bark coolamons.
2. Desire for staple foods. As well as new foods<sup>7</sup> and stimulants, Europeans brought with them food, such as flour and sugar,<sup>8</sup> which was essentially the same as existing food types. These foods were very attractive due to the volume they could be obtained in and the great saving of labour they represented. McGrath (1987a:125) aptly describes flour and other such European foods as "fast foods".
3. Economic necessity, due to environmental damage. This factor certainly needs to be considered for mainland people because of the great damage cattle did to such important resources as water, water lilies, freshwater turtles and small mammals.
4. Curiosity about Europeans, their lifestyle and material goods.
5. The fact that surrounding groups had already come in would have been a great attraction to those still out bush due to the social and ceremonial opportunities that large gatherings would have provided.

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<sup>6</sup>See Appendix I for details of the 54 adult Yanyuwa, 21 Garawa, 8 Mara, 6 Kurdanji, 2 Wambaya, 1 Arrente, 1 Alyawara, 1 Nunggubuyu, 1 Jawoyn and 1 Kunwingku people from whom I recorded such life history information.

<sup>7</sup>The Macassans brought new food types as well, long before the arrival of Europeans. While Tim Rakuwurlma (1982 Tape 1B 38 min.) is disparaging about the Macassan lack of dress, "he got no trousers only sarong", he concedes "but he got proper good tucker" and mentions rice in particular.

<sup>8</sup>Prior to European and Macassan contact, flour had been made from grinding a variety of seeds and fruits and the honey of native bees was collected. The latter was also added to a drink made from lemon-grass and water (discussed by Johnson Babarramila 1987 Tape 65B 7 min.), which represents a precursor to the sweet tea commonly drunk in the area now.

6. Disease may have considerably affected people still living in the bush and it had a destabilising effect on traditional life, forcing people into town.
7. Security, providing protection from both Europeans and other Aboriginal people. For example, people give one reason for leaving Vanderlin Island as fear arising from a traditional killing carried out by Tim Rakuwurlma's brother, Kilpery, in 1928.<sup>9</sup> Myers (1986:34) records a similar occurrence for the Pintupi move into Haast Bluff. Through oral histories, he documents how some people came in attracted by food but others were "fleeing revenge parties and others attempting to evade the repercussions of wife stealing". This implies that people left out of fear of both the toughness of Aboriginal law<sup>10</sup> and the intervention of white law.

Of these categories, the first three are economic reasons and could be labelled as categories of a "super waterhole"<sup>11</sup> theory. Such a theory argues that Aboriginal people always gathered at places of plentiful economic resources and that European settlements merely offered new and better waterholes. The last four reasons are all to do with social factors, the fourth and fifth can be grouped together as part of a "super ceremony" theory which stresses that Aboriginal people came together whenever possible for social reasons and that European settlements provided a new means for (or causes of) such gatherings.

Another general distinction can be made between the super waterhole and super ceremony factors for the move in. In general, the former occurred first and the latter, in turn was dependent on the first. That is, for people to be attracted into European settlements for the social and ceremonial reasons of the latter category there had to be Aboriginal people already there and those already there generally came in for super waterhole reasons. Many people came into Borroloola for the first time to attend ceremonies. Obviously, in such cases, others had already made the move in and in the process created a pull for others to do so. Clearly, then, super waterhole and

<sup>9</sup>The Borroloola Magistrates book, (Northern Territory Archives, F267) lists the case of "Gilbry" on 14 April 1928. Harney (1946:128) also mentions this killing.

<sup>10</sup>As the Yanyuwa police aide, Billy Rijirngu, put it, the punishment for breaking Aboriginal law was often extreme "he's gone . . . with white man law at least you get a chance.

<sup>11</sup>McGrath (1987a:20) uses this term to describe the attraction cattle stations had for Aboriginal people. I use the term in a more general sense to refer to the attraction various types of European settlements had for Aboriginal people.

super ceremony factors are interrelated. Each person who came in be it because of any combination of the above factors, or of one single factor, created a further incentive for others to do so. From the life histories I have collected it would be possible to write at length on each of the above seven factors but here I will outline just one example of the first category, that of tobacco.

### 8.2.1 Tobacco

The example of tobacco provides a good example of the super water hole theory. When talking about the reasons for the move from bush to town life, the Yanyuwa emphasise tobacco, and those who did stay out bush made arrangements to get supplies of tobacco. Tim Rakuwurlma, for example, tells<sup>12</sup> how his father managed to stay on the islands, when others came into Borroloola for tobacco, by collecting turtle shell and sending this in to Borroloola with relatives, who traded it with a European store owner for tobacco and brought it back to the islands for him.

Of all the substances Europeans brought, tobacco was perhaps the most familiar. The Macassans had brought tobacco with them. It is likely also that, at the time of first contact with Europeans, the Yanyuwa knew about the indigenous Australian drugs pituri *Duboisia hopwoodii* and *Nicotiana sp.* that were used by Aboriginal people to the south of the Borroloola region.<sup>13</sup> They certainly are well aware of them today and they were being traded into the area late last century. Mounted Constable R. Stott, who was stationed at Borroloola, collected a sample as part of the large ethnographic collection that he sent to the South Australian Museum in January 1910.<sup>14</sup>

This prior knowledge of tobacco is highlighted in an often told contact story in the area. The uses of flour, sugar and tea leaves were not understood when Europeans first gave them to Aboriginal people in the area, but tobacco was readily appreciated.<sup>15</sup> Eileen Yakibijna recalls<sup>16</sup> that her mother's parents told her that, when Europeans

<sup>12</sup>1983 7A 4 min.

<sup>13</sup>Watson 1983 gives a detailed discussion of the Aboriginal use of these drugs, their natural distribution and the extent of trade networks distributing them.

<sup>14</sup>This sample has the accession number A 1796 and is labelled "Narcotic, native tobacco *Nicotiana suaveolens*". The species identification was presumably made by Museum staff at the time the collection arrived.

<sup>15</sup>See Hercus and Sutton 1986:57 for a variation on this story in which tobacco was not recognised.

<sup>16</sup>1987 Tape 62B 10-12 min.

first came to the area, they gave Aboriginal people flour and that "they used to take that flour long bush now and they used to make paint now long their body paint themselves". When given sugar, "they used to put long water, like sugar bag ... drink him long that grass like a sugar bag".<sup>17</sup> Tea leaves were given but were, thrown away; however, Eileen notes that "tobacco all right" and the suggestion, "you smoke, this is tobacco we smoke like that", was readily taken up. Rory Wurrulbirrangunu tells<sup>18</sup> a very similar version of this incident and notes that when he obtained tobacco one man "smoked that tobacco ... day and night, right up to daylight, really like that one".

The craving for tobacco is well illustrated in a story Annie Karrakyn tells<sup>19</sup> of her grandfather and others singing out at one of the first planes to fly over the Pellews to try to make it drop tobacco:

now my grandfather ... been listen now (to the plane) "He's coming now"  
... they used to cry for tobacco to smoke, they been like him really tobacco,  
all right that plane been come from Darwin ... "Come on everybody, come  
together, we have got to sing out for that aeroplane to chuck him down  
tobacco".

Another example of the significance of tobacco is given in the following discussion<sup>20</sup> between Tim Rakuwurlma and Annie Karrakyn after I asked them why they had moved in from their islands:

**Annie** - ... we used to come from island every day up this way.

**Tim** - (interrupting) Nobody along islands can't get tobacco, no tobacco along island.

**Annie** - Yeah everyday tobacco, tobacco, tobacco ... people used to look for tobacco every day.

It is also interesting to note that, when I asked Tim what all the Mara people were

<sup>17</sup>The grass referred to is the native lemon-grass, mentioned above, that was used with sugar-bag honey to make medicinal drinks. The grass was made into tight pads and used as a sponge to soak up liquid which was then sucked.

<sup>18</sup>1987 Tape 64A 20-22 min.

<sup>19</sup>1983 Tape 19A 76 min, Annie also tells this story on 1987 Tape 34A 38 min.

<sup>20</sup>1983 Tape 11A 16 min.

doing in Borroloola,<sup>21</sup> he explained<sup>22</sup> how when "I been big boy" Mara people "been alla come up here looking about tobacco, go back along Bing Bong". Tim gives a further intriguing insight into the significance of tobacco in early contact situations with his descriptions<sup>23</sup> of the aftermath of the killings of two Europeans at Port Bradshaw in 1916.<sup>24</sup> Tim was a member of a party that went to the area and he recalls,

One fella old man<sup>25</sup> been come up he savvy talk ... that Macassar language  
... talk along everybody,  
"Leave spear now no more bring him up spear now, leave him, you fella  
want to smoke tobacco ... you can sit down along whitefellas".

Tim Rakuwurlma also gives an interesting account of the significance of tobacco from his experience of working on a European boat along the Arnhem Land coast in the between 1917 and 1921.<sup>26</sup> He recalls<sup>27</sup> how

all blackfella been all come out, come out (to their boat) long get tobacco  
... bring plenty of fish, bring him up dugong too, turtle too live one ...  
him been have *libaliba* [see Appendix A] ... he alla come up in boat.<sup>28</sup>

He also recalls<sup>29</sup> that his captain "been sleep [with] all the girl ... all about girl come up long him ... for plug tobacco and for tobacco".

Dinny Nyliba's following description<sup>30</sup> of the quietening down process indicates that tobacco not only led to people coming in but was a major factor in why they stayed once they had made the move. As Dinny notes, tobacco therefore played an important role in people taking up work with Europeans:

<sup>21</sup>He had identified a number of people as Mara, when I showed him a group photograph taken by Spencer at Borroloola in 1901.

<sup>22</sup>1987 Tape 71B 27 min. Tim further elaborates on this at 33 min.

<sup>23</sup>1986 Tape 5A 12 min.

<sup>24</sup>This is the same incident discussed above on page 175. McCarthy and Setzler 1960:230 and the Borroloola Police Records, Northern Territory Archives, F275, 17 November 1917 and F268 11 November 1916 also discuss this incident.

<sup>25</sup>Due to his linguistic abilities this man was known as Macassar Jack.

<sup>26</sup>As outlined above (page 175) he started work in 1917 and (page 204) he stopped work in 1921 as his father had been arrested.

<sup>27</sup>1987 Tape 36A 21 min.

<sup>28</sup>This last line is from *ibid* 27 min.

<sup>29</sup>1987 Tape 50B 11 min.

<sup>30</sup>1983 Tape 9A 46 min.

they been quiet properly, they been quiet now all about give about tobacco.  
 "Oh all right." ... they been say yes, they cann't run away when they used  
 to it along white man ... "no more run away we want him tobacco long him  
 he got to help him and you and me and you and me got to try working".  
 Just sit down we been work ...

Considering the importance of tobacco as a factor in encouraging Aboriginal people to work for Europeans it is not surprising that it is one of the few things Europeans have ever grown in the area.<sup>31</sup>

Isaac Walayungkuma following description<sup>32</sup> highlights the degree to which the desire for tobacco influenced Aboriginal movements.

Oh we been go ... all the time in and out, looking for tobacco. [Someone would say] "Ah I think that tobacco long Borroloola, we will have to go, might be tin of tobacco down there, Borroloola." Right finish that tobacco long Borroloola. "Ah we will have to go long Manangoora, big mob of pituri<sup>33</sup> there." ... whitefella tobacco ... they been grow him up, one line ... they grow big leaf ... you break that leaf and dry him out and then smoke now, oh proper tobacco now ... Old Foster been grow him up that one ... he been get it for me now ... just make a cigarette, paper or tea-tree paper ... have a smoke and we been fall down, bring me up, drop now<sup>34</sup> ...

Isaac goes on<sup>35</sup> to discuss the merits of the long smoking pipes introduced to the area by the Macassans and concludes that they "make you drunk ... old people been use that one".

Isaac<sup>36</sup> also discusses the strong flavoured molasses coated trade tobacco once available in the area:

that niki niki<sup>37</sup> tobacco that's the one proper number one, one go you

<sup>31</sup>Steve Johnson discusses all the Europeans who grew tobacco in the area (1987 Tape 29B 15 min.).

<sup>32</sup>1986 Tape 11A 72 min.

<sup>33</sup>Isaac here uses the term for the Australian narcotic to refer to European tobacco.

<sup>34</sup>Isaac's wife, Annie Karrakayn (1987 Tape 38B 3 min.), also comments on the strength of the Manangoora home-grown tobacco "strong one making you headache and make you take turn".

<sup>35</sup>Ibid 74 min.

<sup>36</sup>Ibid 75 min.

<sup>37</sup>This term is derived from "New Guinea twist" (Peter Sutton, personal communication).

just smoke little bit and make you drunk ... straight away ... this fine cut tobacco<sup>38</sup> him come not long, black one like pituri, we cut him got a pocket knife ...

Another indicator of the importance of tobacco is that it was the first introduced plant that the Yanyuwa cultivated. In the 1930s at Manangoora there was a large vegetable and tobacco garden. It was located on the European side of the river and a Yanyuwa man "Old Bulldozer"<sup>39</sup> was employed to tend it. He soon set up his own garden across the river in the Aboriginal camp and, of all the plants he had cultivated for his European boss, he chose only to grow tobacco for himself.<sup>40</sup>

Tobacco users also developed strategies to circumvent traditional sharing ethics and make personal supplies last longer. Hence caves on one small, isolated island were used to "stash" supplies.<sup>41</sup> The island earned the name Tobacco Island from this practice.<sup>42</sup> Queenie Ngarambulirri<sup>43</sup> recalls how her husband

been smoke himself when we go down before down the river and he used to put him, take him out of the ground, and put a paperbark and cover up that tobacco ... hide him along the river where we been camp then [we went] further like that again and we go out then [to the islands]. Well him know when he coming back starving for tobacco he know half way that tobacco there and they been ask him daddy,

"What's that you been dig him out?"

"Ah this one tobacco of mine." Now that is the way when you have tobacco outside too many asking him [for it] big mob, but him in the hole all right, he been smoke by himself, him been have that smoke.

Another indicator of tobacco's importance is the distances travelled to get it. When

<sup>38</sup>Commonly called plug tobacco and sold in the Northern Territory under the brand name Havelock until it was withdrawn from sale in 1987.

<sup>39</sup>Tim Rakuwurlma recalls (1984 Tape 4A 15 min.) "That Bulldozer proper strongman ... him fight long nulla nulla [see Appendix A], waddy. Him been knock down everybody, they call him 'Bulldozer'." This man was also known as Sam Birribirikama.

<sup>40</sup>Steve Johnson 1987 Tape 29B 17 min., discusses "Bulldozer" and his garden.

<sup>41</sup>Steve Johnson 1987 Tape 27A 1 min.

<sup>42</sup>The name was changed to Harney Island by the 1966 topographic survey party. Many Yanyuwa, however, still call it Tobacco Island as a result of the association the island had with tobacco.

<sup>43</sup>1986 Tape 19B 1 min. she tells the same story again on 1987 Tape 14A 26 min.

carrying out research on the distances people travelled in traditional watercraft,<sup>44</sup> I collected a story of a man from the Borroloola area making a voyage to and from Burketown in Queensland, a return distance by sea of at least 1000 km. When I asked why he went so far I was told:<sup>45</sup>

**Topsy** - Tobacco, nicotine.

**Pryo** - Might have got a long pipe to smoke.

**Topsy** - Looking for tobacco that far.

Smoking pipes were introduced to the area by Macassans and until recently were the preferred means of smoking. Steve Johnson's following comment<sup>46</sup> gives details first on these pipes and then on smoking in general:

I have seen them up to six feet long ... and you'd see blokes walking around with their pipes like a walking stick, some of them carry them across their backs with their arms folded like that [indicates behind them] and they'd be sticking out about a foot each side, especially those old fellers ... they wouldn't go anywhere without their pipe ... they used to clean it out, scrape the inside when they ran out of tobacco and use the nicotine part to smoke, and every now and again they would scrape it that much they'd keep cutting a piece off, shortening it up and it would finish up, I suppose 18 inches ... and they used to filter the smoke [with hessian bags] and that used to be full of nicotine, so they would save all that up ... and they'd finish up smoking that if they ran out of tobacco.<sup>47</sup> They also used that wattle bark, the one they used to make the rope out of, they used to tease that all up and chew into something like coconut husk and then shove that down the pipe ... and later on they would smoke it ... they'd finish off smoking that when they ran out of tobacco ... they'd smoke the lot ...

Steve goes on to describe how pipe stems were made from old metal matchboxes and the techniques developed to make one charge of tobacco last all day.

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<sup>44</sup>See Baker 1988.

<sup>45</sup>1987 Tape 63B 25 min.

<sup>46</sup>1987 Tape 31A 23-28 min.

<sup>47</sup>This practice of smoking nicotine coated hessian is also discussed by Pyro 1987 Tape 63B 23 min. and Don Manarra 1987 Tape 34B 37 min.

The continued importance of tobacco was apparent during my 1987 field work. The withdrawal<sup>48</sup> from sale of the plug chewing tobacco led to a desperate hunt for remaining stock from surrounding cattle station stores and distant towns and individuals returning to Borroloola were quizzed on which towns and stations had supplies left. Telephone calls made to me during my breaks away in Darwin also all centred on requests for plug.

Tobacco was used to pay Aboriginal people and also traded among Aboriginal people and therefore naturally became a currency. Tim Rakuwurlma, for example, describes<sup>49</sup> how his mother had a song to encourage the fruiting of cycads and how she would sing it, if paid tobacco "big mob ... pay her tobacco ... buy him make that munja [see Appendix A], make big mob come".

Another interesting aspect of tobacco in Yanyuwa history is that it has not only been a factor influencing what people did but it has influenced how people interpret the past. A good example of this is seen in the earlier mentioned (see page 67) example of changing views on why a group of Europeans were killed by a Yanyuwa man. While Tim Rakuwurlma describes how his father did this because the Europeans had shot at Aboriginal people, Tim's son describes how the incident occurred to procure "tucker off them or smoke".

## 8.3 The Yanyuwa view of 'coming in'

### 8.3.1 Introduction

While tobacco obviously played a role in the Yanyuwa coming in, it is not a factor they stress when recounting this process. Instead they emphasise a factor that was new and not an extension of existing Yanyuwa life as tobacco was. When asked directly why everyone had moved into town, Yanyuwa people inevitably reply along similar lines to

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<sup>48</sup>Rumour had it at Borroloola that it was withdrawn for health reasons but the actual reason was that the manufacturer, W.D. and H.O. Wills, had fully automated their Sydney factory and plug could only be made manually. Eileen and Dinah express their concern about the lack of tobacco on 1987 Tape 34A 14 min. and Eileen remarks "if they can stop tobacco they can stop grog too", implying that it would be better to stop grog.

<sup>49</sup>1987 Tape 24A 9 min.

Pyro, who said<sup>50</sup> “[welfare went] mustering up all the people there, old people from every station”.<sup>51</sup> However, during all my field work it was nigh on impossible to find anyone who was actually picked up by the welfare officers. It is worth exploring this apparent paradox.

It took several months’ work, being referred from person to person, before I eventually found a number of Garawa people who actually were picked up by a welfare officer and brought into Borroloola. However, even in these cases it appears it was not a case of welfare picking up people who were unwilling to move. When I asked why they had been picked up, I was told<sup>52</sup> that they had been “starving for tucker”. After further discussion,<sup>53</sup> it was explained that this situation had arisen because the station manager’s wife had been “jealous” of Aboriginal women and refused to give them any rations. Apparently her jealousy was caused by the relationships her husband was having with Aboriginal women.

If, in several months’ work, I could only find a few individuals who were brought into Borroloola as they were “starving for tucker”, where does this leave the view that “welfare been rounded up everyone”.

It is worth breaking this statement in two.

1. Was it welfare?
2. What does “been rounded up” mean?

In answering these two questions a third question, of whether it was everyone, will be answered as well.

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<sup>50</sup>1987 Tape 63A 30 min.

<sup>51</sup>Others to use this or similar expressions in this way include Dulcie, who describes (1987 Tape 66B 34 min.) how welfare “been muster him all about”; Roger Charlie, who says (1987 Tape 69A 18 min.) Aboriginal people were “round up like a cattle” by welfare; Dinny Nyliba who told me (1983 Tape 9B 15 min.) that “welfare been muster up all the people bring up from Manangoora” and Musso Harvey, who describes (1987 Tape 51B 36 min.) how welfare “started to muster all the people”. McGrath 1987a:2 documents similar expressions being used by Aboriginal people from the Ord River area of Western Australia. She quotes Amy Laurie describing how a European “started mustering all the blackfellers and quietening them all down . . . like horses”.

<sup>52</sup>1987 Tape 47B 15 min.

<sup>53</sup>1987 Tape 47B 32 min.

### 8.3.2 Was it welfare?

Patrol officer Evans lists the Aboriginal population of Borroloola in 1949 as 31.<sup>54</sup> He lists by name 28 people and all of these are Yanyuwa apart from one Queensland man who married a Yanyuwa woman. As explained above, these Yanyuwa people had already come in for a variety of reasons. Annie Karrakayn describes<sup>55</sup> how many Yanyuwa people came in before the arrival of welfare and emphasises the role one Yanyuwa woman had in bringing people in:

All the families belong to island, they all up here now ... [in] Borroloola like Tim [Rakuwurlma] and all his family before the welfare they came in ... Banjo's daughter was married to whitefella here and that's the way they been come here and stay here.

Banjo's other daughter was later married to another European and Annie notes<sup>56</sup> how people also came to Borroloola to see her and to obtain tobacco.

The police and the rations they issued to the "aged and infirm" were an important factor in people coming in before welfare's arrival. Lenin Anderson,<sup>57</sup> who has lived virtually all his life at Manangoora and is therefore in a unique position to comment on the move of Aboriginal people from there to Borroloola, notes that people moved in before welfare:<sup>58</sup> "the police started to drag them into Borroloola, give them ration, then the welfare took over". Whylo recalls<sup>59</sup> how Ted Heathcock, the policeman at Borroloola in the late 1930s, came out to Vanderlin Island and told his father " 'you got to shift to Borroloola, got all this kid". Whylo remembers that they came in because of a promise of schooling but they had to "wait for school, we never went to school ... wait, wait, wait, wait, nothing. Not long that school been come ... when I

<sup>54</sup>"Report on visit to Borroloola District". Report to Director of Native Affairs dated 9.8.49. Australian Archives, Northern Territory Region, CRS: F315 Item 49/393 A2 (a copy is also in F1 48/15).

<sup>55</sup>1983 Tape 19A 88 min. Bella Marrajabu similarly (1986 Tape 15A 73 min.) discusses how "they already been here".

<sup>56</sup>1987 Tape 37B 15 min.

<sup>57</sup>Lenin's father was Andy Anderson, the European leaseholder of Manangoora from the 1940s until his death in 1972, and his mother was a Garawa women. Andy's death is discussed by the Pollards (1988 Tape 5B 27 min.) who were the welfare officers at the time.

<sup>58</sup>1987 Tape 57A 32 min.

<sup>59</sup>1987 Tape 13A 3 min.

been working stockman". He also recalls<sup>60</sup> that when questioned about when the school would arrive the welfare officer replied " 'ah not long now [until you get a] school.' " and concludes that he "used to tell liar that old fella".

Ruth Heathcock, who lived in Borroloola and Roper Bar in the 1930s with her husband, Constable Ted Heathcock, recalls<sup>61</sup> that Aboriginal people then were living in town in camps that

were established because people were getting old and there wasn't the care [out bush], their young ones were going away for work and things like that. So at least the Aboriginal Department established camps and they were near whatever police station, ... but there wasn't schooling for them unless they were taken down to the mission ...

She also goes on to describe how some Aboriginal people left Borroloola to go to Roper and Groote Eylandt, if they had relations there, so that their children could go to school. She also notes<sup>62</sup> that the Aboriginal trackers employed by the police "brought the old people" into Borroloola and adds that other old people came on their own accord as they were getting "decrepit and they knew they would be supplied [with rations]".

A common explanation given by Aboriginal people for first coming in to Borroloola was to attend ceremonies. This process was occurring long before the arrival of welfare. Rory Wurrulbirrangunu, for example, describes<sup>63</sup> how he first came to Borroloola for a ceremony when he was a young man (probably around 1920) and notes that Aboriginal people "want to live here [Borroloola] ... people [from] every place no matter where from, they come up big fella business [ceremonies] ... I been come along my father". Rory concludes by noting how he and his father "been go back long country now, go home now". Many others, however, once in town, did not make this return trip and those who did return to the bush had begun a pattern of return trips to town separated by shorter and shorter spells in the bush. The very last couple to come in, did so, like many before them, to attend a ceremony. Maisie Charlie in translating

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<sup>60</sup>Ibid 4 min.

<sup>61</sup>1986 Tape 29B 28 min.

<sup>62</sup>1986 Tape 30A 12 min.

<sup>63</sup>1987 Tape 68A 30 min.

their description<sup>64</sup> of why they came in notes how relations went out to their camp and brought them "here for that ceremony and they been stop here for good then".

Both before and after the establishment of the welfare depot at Borroloola, periodic collapses of the small Gulf stations, due to bankruptcy or death of the owner-managers, led some Aboriginal people to move into Borroloola. Ricket Murundu gives an example of this when he describes<sup>65</sup> the owner-manager of Pungalina and how "soon as he died everyone shift from there". An interesting aspect of this example is that, while Ricket moved west back to Manangoora, his sisters moved east. He describes how they "kept going to Wollogorang, keep going to Doomadgee". His sisters are still in Queensland, having moved further east still to Burketown.

Two important points have been raised by this section. Firstly, the only people to be physically brought into Borroloola by welfare were the small group of Garawa people mentioned above who were picked up in the late 1950s from Siegal Creek, Wollogorang and Robinson River stations and Red Bank mine.<sup>66</sup> Secondly, by 1949 as a result of a variety of factors 31 Yanyuwa people had already moved into Borroloola. The following subsection illustrates another example of people coming in that occurred independent of welfare.

### 8.3.3 Coming in to Doomadgee

A number of Aboriginal people from areas within the Northern Territory moved in to Doomadgee mission and surrounding cattle stations in Queensland. While those who made this move were mostly Waanyi and Garawa groups whose country is located closer to the Queensland border some Yanyuwa people also made this move. As discussed above (page 213) an early phase of this movement was due to Doomadgee being a lot less "wild" than the Borroloola area.

As part of his detailed study of the history of Doomadgee, Trigger (1985b) analyses the moves into this area from the Northern Territory.<sup>67</sup> Trigger (*ibid*:143) concludes that most of this movement from the Northern Territory to the Doomadgee area oc-

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<sup>64</sup>1987 49A 4 min.

<sup>65</sup>1987 Tape 35B 13 min.

<sup>66</sup>Musso Harvey (see figure I.5, who was working with the welfare officer involved, describes picking people up from these locations (1987 Tape 22A 25 min.).

<sup>67</sup>He presents a Map (9) of this in his Introduction and discusses it at length on pages 140-149.

curred late last century and in the first two decades of this century. He cites (ibid:149) Roth 1901<sup>68</sup> on the history of migrations into Queensland and evidence of a major route along the coast. Roth presents a map of three separate routes from the Northern Territory into Queensland, the most northerly of which is marked as a line linking Borroloola with Wollogorang and continuing into Queensland.<sup>69</sup> He notes (1901:2) that "the number of Queensland blacks going into the Territory is infinitesimal as compared with the number of Territor [sic] aboriginals coming into Queensland". He also makes the interesting comment that these migrations were all along pre-contact Aboriginal trade routes and how the same routes, (ibid:3) "on account of the suitability of certain water-holes, grass, native-foods &c", had also become the major stock routes.

The Yanyuwa oral sources confirm the timing Trigger places on this movement. Tim Rakuwurlma describes<sup>70</sup> how when he was young his *kuku* (mother's uncle), "go along Doomadgee . . . him been go away all together and him been dead there . . . him too much he want him tucker . . . him like him flour and sugar, tea . . . long time ago when I been young fella". Tim goes on to explain why this man's children stayed in Doomadgee "him daughter been married long Doomadgee". Tim here supports the hypothesis outlined above of super waterhole factors initiating moves that are subsequently made permanent by social factors.

Incorporation into Doomadgee usually occurred as a result of people getting work on cattle stations further and further to the east of Borroloola. A point was reached where the pull of Doomadgee became greater than that of Borroloola. Part of this pull seems to have been the result of active recruitment by the Doomadgee missionaries. Nora Jalirdurma, for instance, describes<sup>71</sup> moving eastwards with her husband in steps, station by station, until at one station the Doomadgee missionary came up and said, " 'You've got to come along Doomadgee, you got to work' ". Nora spent a number of years at Doomadgee, her first child was born there and her second conceived there and born while she and her husband were walking back to Borroloola. As she was already

<sup>68</sup>This is an unpublished report of Roth's "The Northern Territory-Queensland border, north of Urangie" which is held by the Australian Institute of Aboriginal Studies as part of the Gulf Country History File made by Trigger and I gratefully acknowledge Trigger's permission to examine this material.

<sup>69</sup>McCarthy 1939:191 maps this same path as a major trade route.

<sup>70</sup>1987 Tape 50A 31 min.

<sup>71</sup>1987 Tape 70A 10 min.

married and her children were very young, there was not the opportunity in this case for Yanyuwa people to be permanently incorporated into Doomadgee society through marriage. Jean Kirton did some of her linguistic field work at Doomadgee and recalls<sup>72</sup> how the Yanyuwa people living there were "almost all of them . . . married crooked" and that "when they were young the option of marrying crooked was there but the price you paid was exile". Kirton's evidence supports the above quoted (page 272) claim of Myers that fleeing traditional law was a factor in coming in.

The links established between the Borroloola area and Doomadgee in the above manner have been actively maintained and it is therefore wrong to consider that those who made the move away were forever more isolated. Lenin Anderson, for example, recalls<sup>73</sup> that many of the Doomadgee people, who "took off from here [the Borroloola area] and started a little family over there", came back for ceremonies at Manangoora (until the end of them there in 1950). Because the missionaries successfully discouraged ceremonies at Doomadgee, people from there became dependent on Borroloola people for initiations. Trigger (1985b:202) comments on this trend, which has continued to the present. In a regional Aboriginal context the reserve of ceremonial knowledge at Borroloola gives people there great ceremonial standing. Large scale initiations have been carried out for boys and men coming from as far afield as Mornington Island.<sup>74</sup>

### 8.3.4 "Been rounded up"

Yanyuwa people today use many European expressions that they have picked up from their long association with the cattle industry. For example, individuals have described to me how the police been "quieten us down",<sup>75</sup> how "this [is] my country, this [is] my run",<sup>76</sup> how when young they were "like a green colt",<sup>77</sup> how someone was a "little

<sup>72</sup>1987 Tape 72B 41 min.

<sup>73</sup>1987 Tape 57B 9 min.

<sup>74</sup>Musso Harvey (1987 Tape 22A 45-47 min.) describes three generations of one Mornington Island family being initiated at the same time.

<sup>75</sup>Nero Timothy 1983 Tape 14A 5 min. This is part of a longer passage quoted below.

<sup>76</sup>Laura 1987 Tape 48B 33 min.

<sup>77</sup>Don Manarra 1987 Tape 35A 21 min.

bit jackaroo",<sup>78</sup> how all the young people "are very hard to wheel out now"<sup>79</sup> and how "we're trying to catch him up and break them young boys in".<sup>80</sup>

The use of the terms "been rounded up" or "mustered up" are further examples of cattle work imagery being applied to people. To view "been rounded up" as the welfare physically picking people up is to put mainstream Australian English connotations on an Aboriginal English term. Such an interpretation overlooks the way it works, like all the examples above, as a cattle times inspired metaphor. Moreover, within this metaphor it needs to be realised that cattle can simply be rounded up by going to where they have gathered themselves. While cattle can be rounded up by whip cracking stockmen roaming the country, they can just as effectively be rounded up by stockmen going to the waterholes where cattle congregate in the late dry season.

Like cattle that are fenced up in yards, after they have rounded themselves up at a waterhole, the Yanyuwa have become aware of their decreasing independence only sometime after they made the move into a central spot. Herein lies a core issue of the "we been rounded up" view. It is, essentially, a retrospective perspective. Hence it is only after it happens that people can wonder, as Annie Karrakayn does,<sup>81</sup> "how this whitefella came over us".

The complex cycles of dependence that came with town life provide an answer to Annie's question. Reliance on European food, medicine, schooling and the associated loss of use of (and eventually knowledge of) Aboriginal equivalents, all led to increasing cycles of dependency on Europeans and their goods and services. The move into town *per se* did not change the Yanyuwa. For example, they attempted to keep up hunting and gathering from this new base. In pre-contact times people had come together in large groups and later dispersed. The Yanyuwa, like other groups (see Read and Japaljarri 1978), regarded this move, like previous ones, as temporary. Only with hindsight could they see that this was not the case and that things had radically changed. There were now too many people in one place for the surrounding bush to support.<sup>82</sup> Changes unforeseen at the time of the move were creating increasing

<sup>78</sup>Musso Harvey 1987 Tape 52A 8 min.

<sup>79</sup>Gordon Milyindirri 1987 Tape 17B 38 min.

<sup>80</sup>Ibid 42 min., he was referring to the need to get them to understand the old ways.

<sup>81</sup>1987 Tape 48B 14 min. This is part of a longer passage quoted below on page 361.

<sup>82</sup>This point is highlighted in Annie's quote above (page 134) on there not being enough food around

dependence on European goods and services.

As well as being a retrospective view, the rounded up perspective the Yanyuwa have of their history, is a collective view. It is an explanation of what happened to the group and not to individuals, hence people say “*we* got rounded up” and not “*I* got rounded up”. Herein lies the explanation of the apparent paradox that I mentioned above. While individuals were not rounded up, from a retrospective view the Yanyuwa as a group were collectively rounded up.

## 8.4 How did people ‘come in’?

The retrospective and collective Yanyuwa belief that they had been rounded up is essentially the result of the Yanyuwa asking themselves “how did we end up where we are today?”. Much of the European analysis of the coming in process is based on a similar methodological framework. The question often asked is “how did they end up where they are now?”. Reasons can be found and factors given such as the seven listed above (see page 271). Researchers in some cases have argued about the relative importance of these different factors but some also have argued that a single reason has been *the* reason for people coming in.

It is possible, however, to go beyond such approaches and actually examine *how* people came in. This can be done by using life history information in conjunction with mapping both these lives and overall changes in settlement patterns. This mapping of settlement patterns needs to be done on two scales. On a large scale it is possible to map the changing patterns of where people were living and on the smaller scale it is possible to map the changing internal patterns of individual camps. As I will show, mapping the process of the Yanyuwa move from bush to town raises findings that necessitate a radical redefinition of the more usual question, “why did people move in?”.

### 8.4.1 An individual example: Tim Rakuwurlma

By asking people where they lived when, it is possible to map individual lives and build up a picture of how these people made the transition from bush to town. The resulting picture is a complex one. Not only did different individuals come in for different reasons,

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Borrooloola to support people.

but many individuals came in many different times for different reasons. This pattern of coming in and going back out is best illustrated by an example.

Tim Rakuwurlma was born late last century on Vanderlin Island. His childhood was spent moving around Vanderlin Island. The Rrumburriya seasonal movements mapped in figure 8.1 are based on what Tim told me about this period of his life. Tim first came into Borroloola in about 1915. He describes<sup>83</sup> how he came in to attend a ceremony and ended up staying for a while with his sister, who had a job with a Chinese gardener. Soon after, he and an older brother got a job working with Captain Luff, a European trepanger. They worked for a number of years before returning to Vanderlin Island.

For most of the 1920s and 1930s, Tim remained on his island country. He and his brother and their families travelled in dugout canoes around Vanderlin Island and often visited nearby areas on the mainland. The time they spent at each location appears to have been longer than when Tim was young. Europeans had established settlements at two of the Rrumburriya favourite camping spots, Yukuyi and Manangoora. While he had visited these places often before Europeans went there, with the arrival of the Europeans he and his family spent longer of each year at these locations. At both places there was casual employment available (trepanging at Yukuyi and salt gathering at Manangoora) for which supplies such as tobacco and flour could be obtained. During this period Tim went to ceremonies at Manangoora, Bing Bong, Wathangka, Anthawarra, Roper River and Borroloola. As well as going to Borroloola for ceremonies Tim made visits there to bring in turtle shell that he traded for tobacco and flour but Vanderlin Island remained his base. His contacts with Europeans at Yukuyi, Manangoora and Borroloola appear to have been fuelled, in part, by the taste for European food he had developed while working for Luff.<sup>84</sup>

His two oldest sons spent their early years on Vanderlin Island but, as one of them recalls,<sup>85</sup> their lives changed dramatically in about 1940:

We left that place because of the law, Government, that policeman wanted everybody to stay in one place. I don't know why they never trusted [us] just

<sup>83</sup>1987 Tape 51A 8 min.

<sup>84</sup>Tim describes (1987 Tape 36A 14 min.) how, while working for Luff, he became used to European food such as flour and jam.

<sup>85</sup>Nero Timothy 1983 Tape 14A 6 min. This is the same incident that Nero's full cousin Whylo describes above.

to I suppose quieten us down, to know the law ... my father couldn't stay out there he had to come in ... he wanted to stay out there but ... because that policeman said "you want to keep them one place where he can look after them with rations and that" or send them out to work when the cattle station was ... short of men. So my father went to work droving out to Queensland, Boulia ...

On his return from droving, at the time of World War Two, Tim was based at Borrooloola as the army discouraged Aboriginal people from going bush. However, he managed to keep visiting his country by working for the army, carrying supplies out to the army base at Anthawarra on South West Island in his dugout canoe. After the war he spent much of his time with his family moving by canoe between Borrooloola, Vanderlin Island and Manangoora. Manangoora was their most permanent base and when I visited the old camp site my Aboriginal guides could all point out where Tim's camp was. In the 1950s and 1960s, Tim's visits to the island occurred during the school holidays. His movements became more and more restricted due to the time his children spent at school and the work he did for welfare. Medical problems also made it increasingly difficult for him to paddle out to his islands.

Tim's life has always centred on ceremonies. In his younger days he made long trips by canoe to participate in ceremonies and, more recently, he has flown in light planes to other Aboriginal communities for ceremonies. A turning point in his personal history, and that of the Yanyuwa in general, was in 1950 when the last major ceremony to be held out bush in the Borrooloola area occurred (see page 306). Since 1950, all ceremonies have been held in town and this has tended to reassert the importance of town at the expense of the bush. Whereas previously ceremonies involved those who had made the move into town returning to the bush, subsequently the few people left living out bush in order to keep up their ceremonial obligations had to make a trip into town. Once a person had made the initial step of working for Europeans, a cycle of increasing dependence on European goods and services was created that eventually led people into town. Once in town this process of increasing dependence was further intensified.

This very brief summary of Tim's life has introduced a number of points that need to be examined in detail. Three points that will be taken up are:

1. People did not necessarily stay in town once they had come in, there was a lot of coming and going.
2. Employment with Europeans was an important factor in bringing people in. People often entered the European sphere through a series of stepping stones of longer and longer periods of employment. In some cases such alignment was an important survival tactic during the wild times when Aboriginal people not associated with a European boss were often indiscriminately killed.
3. The locations that the Yanyuwa took up employment and became aligned with European bosses were locations that the Yanyuwa had previously seasonally congregated at.

#### 8.4.2 Coming and going

It needs to be stressed, that for a long period a number of people continued to live out bush when relations lived in Borroloola and that there was contact between town and bush people. The bush and town Aboriginal people came together particularly for ceremonies and to trade prized bush foods such as dugong for prized European items such as tobacco. Musso Harvey recalls how, from about 1920 to 1940, his grandfather remained a "bush man"<sup>86</sup> and occasionally walked into Borroloola taking with him "big mob of dugong on his head, take him to Borroloola, half of the dugong . . . give it relation they give him tucker, ration, little bit tea, sugar, tobacco". Musso notes that his trips to Borroloola were limited to only a day or two.

Coming in involved a gradual process of longer and longer stays in town with an associated growing attitude that Borroloola was home. A crucial turning point in each person's life came when they came to regard Borroloola and not the bush as home. Steve Johnson, who has spent his whole life on Vanderlin Island, is well placed to comment on the move from the islands into Borroloola and the subsequent gradual decrease in return visits. His following quote shows how the cattle industry disrupted the learning about country that had previously been passed on from generation to generation. Steve can remember a period when older people continued to go out bush

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<sup>86</sup>Another fiercely bush orientated man of this era earned the title "bushranger" for his commitment to the bush.

every dry season:

In the cold weather, like May, June ... they'd all be out on their walkabout, most of them ... the old timers like Tim [Rakuwurlma], Peter and all that mob, most of the young ones were away working of course but it is when those old fellers got too old, well that's it, all the young fellers never came down much.<sup>87</sup>

Clearly the passing on of knowledge of country from one generation to the next was limited by the younger generation being away working. Steve goes on to note<sup>88</sup> that when he travelled up the McArthur River in the 1950s "you could see where they had been, ... camps on just about every bend ... you could see signs where they had been just about everywhere". With time, however, both the frequency and the duration of these trips decreased:

"Oh well we've got to go back to Borroloola now" ... that's common when they are out on a holiday trip ... It has got into the state where they couldn't get out of Borroloola because they might miss something ... because everyone else is in there and everyone watching one another and that's it. I think that is what they live on now ... that's their life, they hang around so they don't miss anything ...<sup>89</sup>

Steve here notes a crucial shift in Yanyuwa political locus. Where people are is the centre that holds people and this local political geography clearly had shifted. It was a crucial turning point in Yanyuwa history for Borroloola and not the islands to be regarded as home. Steve Johnson recalls<sup>90</sup> that this first occurred in the 1950s when people making the trip out to Vanderlin Island began to say things like "ah, looks like we will have to stay in Borroloola now, that is our home". Another factor limiting return visits to the islands is outlined in Reay's account (Australian Land Commissioner 1977:1327) of Borroloola in the early 1960s. She notes that while some old people continued to paddle canoes "in the vicinity of Borroloola, they and their

<sup>87</sup>Steve Johnson 1987 Tape 31A 2 min.

<sup>88</sup>Ibid 6 min.

<sup>89</sup>Ibid 10 min.

<sup>90</sup>1987 Tape 26B 43 min.

relatives thought it was a risky for them to . . . undertake a long . . . journey in a dug-out canoe to the islands".

Another changing aspect of bush trips is the Monday to Friday working week introduced by welfare.<sup>91</sup> Those employed by welfare obviously could only go out bush on the weekend or during longer holidays from work. Those employed tended to be the same prominent community leaders, who owned dugout canoes, and who otherwise would have been taking their families out bush. With time even those people not working tended to wait for the weekends to go out bush.<sup>92</sup>

Ted Harvey, the welfare officer at Borrooloola from 1954 to 1959, recalls<sup>93</sup> that by the time he was in Borrooloola, Yanyuwa trips to their islands were only "for a couple of weeks, but it was more like we go for a holiday".<sup>94</sup> Steve Johnson, from the perspective of his island home, similarly notes<sup>95</sup> how, in the late 1960s, "they started to slacken off and stay in the 'Loo"<sup>96</sup>. All their trips got shorter and shorter and shorter and shorter until there were none".

It should be stressed just how gradually both the frequency and the duration of such trips declined. The welfare officer at Borrooloola could write<sup>97</sup> in January 1955, for example, that "75% of natives have left camp and are located at various points along the river as far as the mouth". It should be noted also that welfare not only had a role in encouraging people to make the initial move into Borrooloola but as Annie Karrakayn notes<sup>98</sup> they played an active role in making sure people came back to Borrooloola from subsequent bush trips.

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Every time when we used to come down here to bush this way, that welfare

<sup>91</sup>Discussed by Steve Johnson 1987 Tape 31A 10 min.

<sup>92</sup>This pattern of those with jobs, and therefore with the least time, making the most trips is continued today in Borrooloola. It is those with jobs who own cars and boats that are needed to make trips. Billy Rijirngu, for example, describes (1987 Tape 55B 4 min.) how he uses his annual leave from his job as a police aid to go bush.

<sup>93</sup>1987 Tape 3B 6 min.

<sup>94</sup>One needs to be wary of European dismissive comments comparing Aboriginal trips to holidays because much of Yanyuwa pre-contact life could be seen by Europeans as a holiday. Fishing, travelling in boats and camping on beaches are all associated by Europeans with holidays.

<sup>95</sup>1987 Tape 32A 13 min.

<sup>96</sup>A local colloquialism for Borrooloola.

<sup>97</sup>Australian Archives, Northern Territory Region, CRS F1 Item 52/948 Pt 2. E.O. Harvey letter to Director of Welfare Branch 31 January 1955.

<sup>98</sup>1987 Tape 33B 43 min.

used to come down too, follow us and take us back. "You better go back. Might be kid might get sick." And that we used to take notice.

Welfare, however, probably needed to do little to encourage a process that was very much self generating. A major factor in this self generating process of Borroloola becoming more important is the significance of birth and conception sites to the Yanyuwa. The growth in Borroloola's importance was further assisted by the reciprocal process of people losing touch with traditional country. As a result people lost some of the intimacy that they had with the land and today people often express a fear of country that has not been used as much as it once was.

### 8.4.3 Alignment

The move from bush to town life was a gradual process and not a one or the other decision. Sometimes the stepping stones in this process were Europeans living away from Borroloola carrying out labour intensive economic activities such as trepanging and salt working. These employers needed labour and in exchange offered both access to coveted supplies such as tobacco, tea and flour and the protection that involvement with a European gave. Such involvement enabled people to stay on their land and to avoid the larger adjustments involved in moving into town. Annie Karrakayn gives a good description of this stepping stone process describing<sup>99</sup> how "all the people used to work" trepanging for Steve Johnson on Vanderlin Island "first [and] then they used to work for that salt [for] Horace Foster" at Manangoora. Annie similarly speaks of<sup>100</sup> how her father had progressed from "first for the salt and for that timber [sandalwood cutting] and he worked on cattle stations and droving".

By working for a European one became known as one of "their blackfellas" and so was set apart in European eyes from "myall" relatives still in the bush. This view, that a dichotomy existed between "myall" and "civilised" Aboriginal people, embodies the assumption that "civilising" was an irreversible one way process. It was a view at the core of much official policy on Aboriginal people and was firmly embedded in the assimilation ideals of the Northern Territory Native Affairs Branch and the Welfare Branch which succeeded it.

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<sup>99</sup>1987 Tape 37A 9 min.

<sup>100</sup>1987 Tape 37A 15 min.

This view may have had some validity for a society as a whole, in the sense that there was a general shift from bush to town life. For the individual, however, it was illusory. An individual on holiday from work could, for example, go bush and return to traditional patterns of life. See, for example, Pyro's account, on page 469, of him making this move to and from cattle and bush life. One must then be careful in assessing European comments on the "nomadic" state of Aboriginal people. In 1948 the Native Affairs Branch patrol officer Syd Kyle-Little<sup>101</sup> visited the Foelsche River area Pyro was living in when he was not working and reported: "When I reached the Fulche [sic] River I met a party of nomadic natives". While these individuals were not working for anyone at that time there is no reason why they might not have been doing so previously; there had been small scale pastoral activities in the area for at least 40 years and the nearby Manangoora salt works had been operating for over 30 years.<sup>102</sup>

#### 8.4.4 'Big places'

The European settlement of the Borroloola area was shaped in many ways by the existing cultural landscape. While it is generally acknowledged that Aboriginal people moved in to European settlements it is of crucial importance to note that the reverse process also occurred. This section explores how Europeans often went to Aboriginal settlements and as a result most European settlements in the area are on old Aboriginal camps. What were previously seasonally occupied Aboriginal camps became occupied year round and as a result the first step of the coming in process was initiated.

Figure 8.1 reconstructs an idealised seasonal round for bands. As noted above (page 171) there were probably between 12 and 16 such groups prior to European settlement and these groups tended to travel around and live off the land belonging to the semi-moiety of the male members. This reconstruction is idealised in that each group probably did not visit all these locations each year and they would sometimes have come together for ceremonies at locations other than the ones indicated. Visits also would have been made for social reasons to visit relations who lived on other country. In recounting their past movements members of each semi-moiety stressed

<sup>101</sup>Australian Archives, Northern Territory Region, F315 49/393A 2 "Report on Patrol of Borroloola District."

<sup>102</sup>A report on "Darwin Salt Works" Australian Archives, Northern Territory Region, CRS F1 Item 43/89 dated 25 November 1943 lists (page 2) production figures for salt back to July 1928.

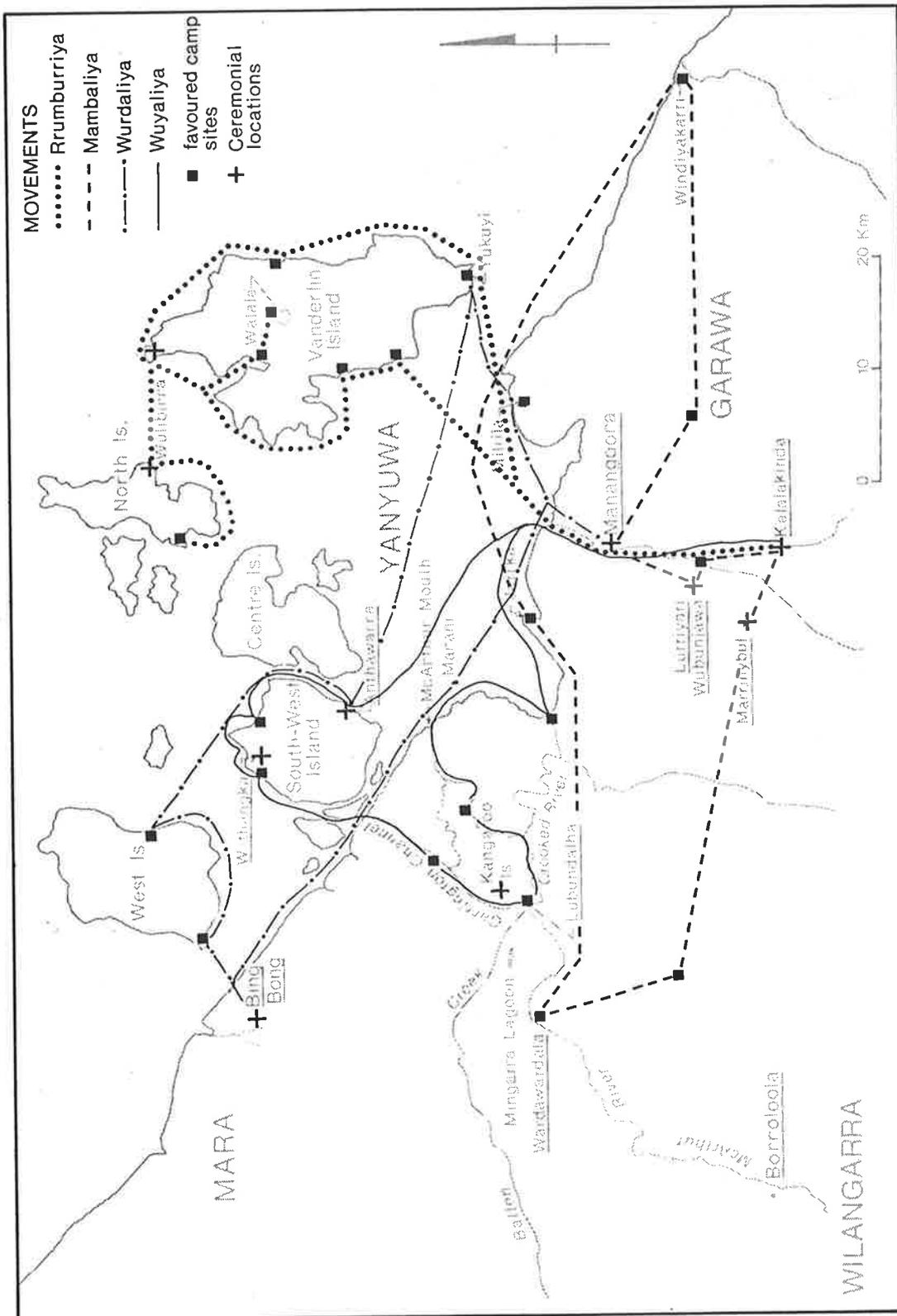


Figure 8.1: Band seasonal movements

favoured camping spots. Nine locations are particularly stressed and are referred to as "big places" (they are underlined in figures 8.1 and 8.2).

Work mapping details of individual lives highlighted the importance of these 'big places'. By plotting the location of births (see figure 8.2) areas that were foci for occupation can be highlighted. Births prior to the establishment of European settlements at these locations are shown and the approximate date of each European settlement is given. This bush births map indicates that every European settlement in the area is located where Aboriginal people had previously been seasonally concentrated. As well as this birth data, the amount of archaeological evidence at these sites also indicates their importance prior to Europeans settling there. Scatters of stone artifacts are to be found at all the big places. It needs to be noted that Borroloola itself was a focus for Aboriginal activity before European settlement. Even though it was the first location of European settlement in the region, I was able to record information on two births that occurred there before the arrival of Europeans.<sup>103</sup>

Three of these big places have already been mentioned (see page 22) as locations that marked where the country of two groups meets. Each of these sites had specific features that made them meeting places. Wardawardala is the lowest location on the McArthur River that it is possible to wade across the river. The absence of recorded births at Wardawardala is probably the result of it being more of a meeting place than a camp. As this is the furthest downstream that the McArthur can be easily crossed, it was a point people often passed through and met each other. A series of islands and sandy bars form the river crossing that earned the location the name "Blackfellas Crossing". Leichhardt reached the McArthur River close to Wardawardala on 22 September 1844 and provided the important evidence quoted above (page 156) on how this area was a cultural divide.

The Bing Bong area, as mentioned above, marked the boundary between Wilangarra and Yanyuwa country. It provides the best land base to reach the Sir Edward Pellew Group. Instead of mangroves the coastline there is a sandy beach and large permanent

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<sup>103</sup>Information on birth places was collected by asking individuals with known birth dates about the location of ancestors birth places. By examining known age differences between generations, an estimate of average generational age differences was made of 20 years for mothers and children and forty years between fathers and children. As such these figures are obviously only broad guesses. As figure H.3 indicates there can, however, be no doubt that big places were big before Europeans came, as many births calculated by this system occurred many decades before Europeans arrived.

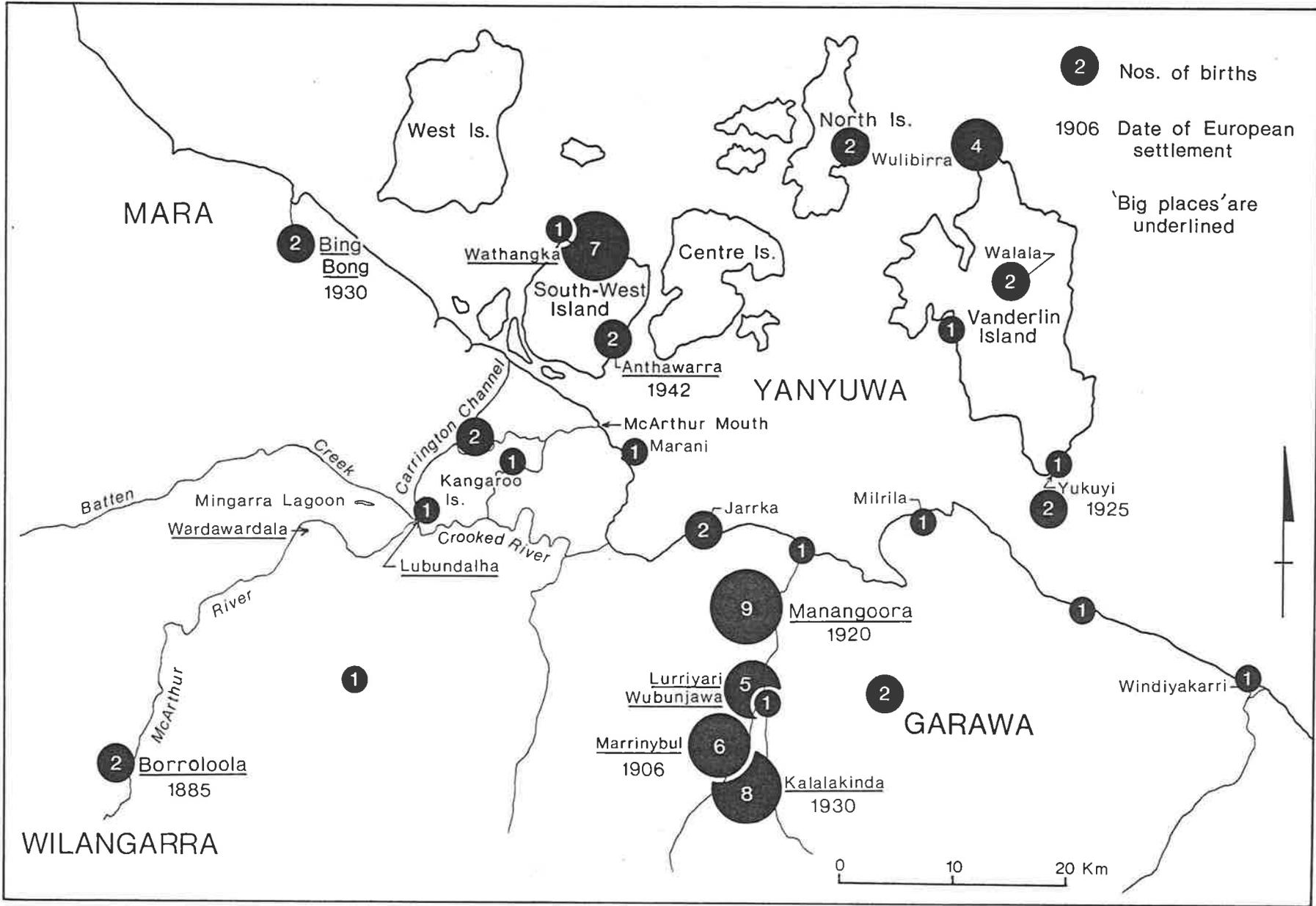


Figure 8.2: Yanyuwa bush births

freshwater lagoons are close to the beach. The other big place, mentioned, Lurriyari Wubunjawa, marked the boundary between Garawa and Yanyuwa country. It has the best waterholes in the whole Wearyan River area and provided an important base from which the rich cycad resources of the area could be exploited.

The mainland big places were all linked by well defined footpaths that followed favoured routes between these locations. Such routes usually linked together a series of favoured camping spots (often lagoons). The two island big places, Wathangka and Anthawarra, have two of the most reliable water supplies on the islands and are also both very well located in terms of access to and from the McArthur River mouth. Both can be reached without an open sea voyage by hugging the coastline of South-West Island.

The most significant locational factor for mainland big places is the close juxtaposition of fresh drinking water and associated mainland food resources with easy access by river to marine resources. For the Yanyuwa such sites represent the best of both marine and mainland worlds. The same factors that made these sites attractive to Aboriginal people were the factors that encouraged Europeans to settle at them. From the earliest European settlement there was a need for lagoons for horses and cattle to use.<sup>104</sup>

Another point that should be made about figure 8.2 is that it highlights how Aboriginal settlement was focused along the major rivers of the area. As well as being an important resource zone the rivers were the "highways" along which Aboriginal people moved. Until very recently, in the absence of all weather roads, the rivers were also the main routes European moved along in the area. This then provides another good example of the European cultural landscape being built on and reflecting the Aboriginal cultural landscape.

It should be stressed that this example also illustrates how European patterns of life influenced Aboriginal settlement patterns. The European use of the McArthur river in particular led to changes in Aboriginal settlement patterns. What had previously been favourite locations to camp at, butcher dugongs and maybe stay just for a day or two became more permanent camps from which contact could be made with Europeans travelling up the river.

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<sup>104</sup>Mingarra lagoon, for example, was a police horse paddock in 1889 Borroloola Police Records, Northern Territory Archives, F275, 31 August 1889.

An important process that occurred at big places was the incorporation of Europeans, to varying degrees, into Aboriginal economic and social spheres. The example has already been given (page 200) of how this occurred at Yukuyi on Vanderlin Island with Steve Johnson (senior). In the next section I highlight how this pattern has occurred at the biggest of the big places, Manangoora. At both Yukuyi and Manangoora the European bosses have long since died but, as a result of their successful attempts to keep their children, their Aboriginal descendants remain.

As Anderson (1983:428) notes from his research in Cape York on Aboriginal relationships with European bosses, the degree to which bosses could be successfully incorporated into Aboriginal society depended on the length of time bosses stayed. Yukuyi and Manangoora represent the living places of the two longest term European bosses in the area and therefore it is not surprising that these bosses were so successfully incorporated. It needs to be stressed, however, that the same process was operating at all the big places Europeans moved to and also, as discussed below, this process occurred in Borroloola with the long term European residents.

#### 8.4.5 Manangoora

Yanyuwa and Garawa mob they been come there, live there one mob ... long that place, Manangoora, they all been come there for work for salt ... all the Yanyuwa people been all come there, from island too, island mob they been come there live one mob, Yanyuwa and Garawa they're good mates (Ricket Murundu<sup>105</sup>)

This section examines how Manangoora became the biggest of the big places. As Ricket notes, Manangoora played an important stepping stone role in the move from bush to town. His comment on Yanyuwa and Garawa becoming "one mob" at Manangoora illustrates how the coming in process involved the establishment of new alliances. As I describe below, Manangoora had been an important ceremonial site for both Yanyuwa and Garawa people long before the arrival of Europeans. The process of becoming "one mob" was a development of a ritual association that already existed, rather than being

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<sup>105</sup>1987 Tape 35B 20 min.

a break from tradition.

*Manankurra* is the Yanyuwa name for an area on the lower reaches of the Wearyan River. I will use the spelling Manangoora after the station of this spelling, which is located on the Wearyan River about 15km from its mouth and about 80km by road from Borrooloola. There are three major river crossings between the area and Borrooloola (the Wearyan, Foelsche and McArthur) and as a result the area is still cut off from vehicle access for three to five months a year during the wet. Due to this isolation there has been little European economic development on the coastal area east of Borrooloola. Pastoral activity has remained at little more than the subsistence level of producing cattle to eat<sup>106</sup> and capital improvements have been minimal. Another subsistence activity in the area, that has already been mentioned, is tobacco growing. It proved a great attraction to Aboriginal people and a number of people have described to me how they walked to Manangoora from surrounding areas when they were "starving" for tobacco.<sup>107</sup>

The Manangoora area was of great ritual and economic significance to Aboriginal people before European contact. Dense stands of cycads in the area (see figure 5.9) were a greatly prized food source and are still very prominent in Yanyuwa mythology. Leichhardt passed within 15km of Manangoora in 1844 and in doing so passed through the area that has dense stands of cycads. The significance of the cycads as a food source lies in their seasonal dependability and the fact that, after treatment, sliced nuts could be stored until required and then baked into loaves. As a result, cycads formed an important part in the diet of large ceremonial gatherings in the area.

The Manangoora area is also ideally situated for the exploitation of both terrestrial and marine resources. It is located just down stream of the fresh water limits of the Wearyan River. This enabled easy access in canoes, both upstream for fresh water resources and downstream to the rich dugong and turtle hunting areas formed by the shallow water between the mainland and the Sir Edward Pellew Group.

Patrol officer Kyle-Little, who passed through Manangoora on 8-10th October 1948, noted that nine "natives of the Yanyula tribe were employed by Mr. Anderson to work

<sup>106</sup>As the current leaseholder for Manangoora told me (1987 Tape 28A 11 min.), most properties in the area are still run "just for killer [bullock ready for eating] sake".

<sup>107</sup>Isaac Walayungkuma, for example, (1986 Tape 11A 73 min. and 1987 Tape 38B 3 min.) describes walking to Manangoora from Seven Emu station to get tobacco.

his salt pans".<sup>108</sup> He also notes that Andy Anderson was living with an Aboriginal women and that they had two "half-caste" sons. Kyle-Little records that "approximately 60 natives (living a nomadic life) ... were camped on the opposite side of the Wearyan River to Mr. Anderson's establishment".<sup>109</sup> Kyle-Little also stresses<sup>110</sup> the abundance of food there:

Manangoora is an old established tribal ground and all the natives of the Borroloola district visit this country when on walkabout or holiday period. There is an abundance of native foods, i.e., cycad palm nuts, yams,<sup>111</sup> wallaby, unlimited supplies of fish, dugong, etc.

Archaeological remains indicate the long history of Aboriginal use of the Manangoora area. The concentration of ceremonial earth-works in the area gives an indication that Manangoora has for some period been ritually significant. A high density of stone artefacts similarly testifies to an intensive use of the area before Macassans and Europeans introduced steel and glass, which replaced stone as the raw material for tools. Middens of shellfish<sup>112</sup> (some of considerable age as they are eroding out of river banks) in the area also testify to the long history of use.

Another indicator of the importance of the area prior to European settlement, is the number of people born or conceived there before Europeans arrived (see figure 8.2). One such person was Tim Rakuwurlma's younger brother, Leo Yulungurri, who was conceived there in about 1905. Tim notes<sup>113</sup> that his parents were at Manangoora then to "get munja, sit down long ceremony too, young man [initiation]". The current leaseholder of the area has told me<sup>114</sup> that there must have been "big mobs here" before Europeans arrived, because of the number of ceremonial earth-works in the area. Steve

<sup>108</sup>Australian Archives, Northern Territory Region, CA 1078 Native Affairs Branch CRS: F315 Item: 49/393 A2. Page 1 of "Report relative to mines and cattle stations employing native labour in the Borroloola district".

<sup>109</sup>Ibid.

<sup>110</sup>Ibid Page 2.

<sup>111</sup>The Manangoora area also has an important "yam dreaming" site. This is described by Annie Karrakayn 1987 Tape 40B 27 min. It is located at Lhurnunda, 3km downstream of Manangoora.

<sup>112</sup>As elsewhere in the region near the coastline *Kurruyuyu* (*Anadara granosa*) predominates.

<sup>113</sup>1987 Tape 51B 18 min.

<sup>114</sup>1987 Tape 57A 45 min.

Johnson<sup>115</sup> also argues for the area's importance before Europeans arrived. Ricket Murundu,<sup>116</sup> likewise, describes how an ancestor of his "lived that place [when] no whitefellas been before" and told me<sup>117</sup> how there was a "big camp there ... before that whitefella ... Old Foster". Jerry Rrawajinda similarly notes,<sup>118</sup> "Manangoora we belong to that place, all this whitefella been come after, they're looking for bloody country". Tim Rakuwurlma<sup>119</sup> stresses the mythological significance of the area before Europeans, stressing that his "dreaming shark" made the well at Manangoora "before that whiteman been come up".

Ceremonies were an important reason why people came into Manangoora and often they remained there after the ceremonies had finished. Dinny Nyliba, when describing<sup>120</sup> how in his grandfather's times "people been all come from every country" for Kunabibi ceremonies, says "sometimes they been have them at Manangoora that is why people been sit down there, poor bugger, just work for bread and beef that is all".

The first European to reside permanently in the area was Horace Foster, who commenced working salt at Manangoora in the early 1920s. He set about organising the gathering of salt from a seasonally flooded salt pan using Aboriginal labour in this labour intensive enterprise. The salt pan had been worked occasionally before by Steve Johnson (senior) but he did so from his base on Vanderlin Island and sailed across in a lugger to get the salt.<sup>121</sup> A significant aspect of the salt gathering was that it was strictly seasonal. Steve Johnson told me<sup>122</sup> how people only worked "from July to about October [when it] started to get too hot and the king tide used to come back into the salt pan". The work was highly flexible also in that the quantity gathered depended on the amount of salt ordered. Annual salt sales varied, for example, in the years 1929

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<sup>115</sup>1987 Tape 27A 9 min.

<sup>116</sup>1987 Tape 69A 37 min.

<sup>117</sup>1987 Tape 35A 46 min.

<sup>118</sup>1987 Tape 13A 36 min.

<sup>119</sup>1987 Tape 71B 39 min.

<sup>120</sup>1987 Tape 8A 32 min.

<sup>121</sup>Nora Jalirduma (1986 Tape 2A 21 min.) worked for Johnson at this time and describes working getting salt for him and also subsequently for Foster. Annie Karrakayn also discusses working the salt on 1986 Tape 37A 11 min. and Ricket Murundu on 1987 Tape 35A 40 min. An early European description of the salt works is in the Tom Turner's Papers Mitchell Library, Sydney Mss 1336, letter of 26 July 1907.

<sup>122</sup>1987 Tape 27A 11 min.

to 1942, between nil to 147 tons. The average annual figure was 26.5 tons.<sup>123</sup>

The salt was gathered up by raking it with a flat hoe into large heaps which were then bagged. The bags were subsequently kept out of the rain under 'bough shades' until the arrival of the boat that carried them away.<sup>124</sup>

It appears that Foster chose the location of the station to take maximum advantage of the existing concentration of Aboriginal people in the area. Foster stayed until his death in March 1941 when he accidentally shot himself.<sup>125</sup> Foster's presence at Manangoora changed Aboriginal settlement and movement. area. Whereas previously people had only gathered there seasonally, they now established a permanent residence. A large camp of people grew up on the opposite side of the river to Foster's house. Permanent settlement there had the advantage of safety, for, as Dinny<sup>126</sup> recalls, they "never had trouble nothing . . . because [Foster] know people" who camped there. Ceremonial activity continued in the area after Foster's arrival with the more significant ceremonies being held a discrete distance away from the European homestead.

Economic life also continued much as before due to the abundance of bush tucker around Manangoora. Manangoora served as a base from which people could hunt. Annie Karrakyn recalls<sup>127</sup> how, when she lived there in the 1940s with her parents, they used "to go up the river look for sugar bag, goanna . . . fish . . . camping out for one week, might be two week". European items such as tobacco, flour, sugar and tea would have been added to the existing economy. The addition of flour would have reduced the labour intensive work women did preparing cycads to produce the bush tucker equivalent of bread. The European boss at Manangoora, however, did not always have flour and when this happened he relied on Aboriginal people to provide them with

<sup>123</sup>All figures are from report titled "Darwin Salt Works", Australian Archives, Northern Territory Region, CRS F1 Item 43/89 dated 25 November 1943. The average figure has been calculated from figures given in this report. The report also notes that the boost in sales in 1941 to 147 tons was the result of "Queensland buyers . . . lodging larger orders".

<sup>124</sup>Nora Jalirduma who worked the salt describes this sequence of work on 1987 Tape 13A 19-22 min.

<sup>125</sup>Recorded accounts of his death by Ruth Heathcock 1986 Tape 29B 3 min. (the European nurse who travelled from Borroloola in a dugout canoe to treat him), Bessie Kithiburla 1987 Tape 46A 2 min. (one of the Aboriginal people who took Ruth there), Steve Johnson 1987 Tape 27A 34 min. and 1987 Tape 33A 33 min. (he was there with his father) and Pyro 1987 Tape 63B 20 min. (who travelled with his father by foot to Borroloola to notify Heathcock). The *Northern Territory News* of 19 November 1983 has an article describing Heathcock's version of her role in the incident.

<sup>126</sup>1987 Tape 8B 14 min.

<sup>127</sup>1987 Tape 37A 10 min.

cycad equivalents.

Figure 8.3 is a reconstruction of this camp as it is remembered by a number of individuals who lived there. It shows that a three-fold division of contact with Europeans developed. Women living on the European side of the river obviously had the most contact with Europeans. On the "Aboriginal side" of the river, closest to the boat landing, lived people who worked the salt and assisted in the loading and unloading of stores when a boat arrived. As in other old camps in the region, the more experience Aboriginal people had had with Europeans, the closer they lived to them. Significantly, the two closest camps to the European side of the river belonged to Tim Rakuwurlma and Sam Birribirikama who both had a long history of working for Europeans. Other people lived near Tim and Sam but further back from the river. Another group of people who had less to do with Europeans and who typically spent more time away carrying out traditional hunting and gathering activities lived further still from the river in the 'bush camp'. The European - Aboriginal divide at Manangoora was such that Lenin Anderson can state<sup>128</sup> that his father, Andy Anderson, never went across the river. Anderson, like Foster before him, was, however, incorporated into Aboriginal life in many ways. He had a series of Aboriginal wives, relying often on bush tucker that they provided and he employed many Aboriginal people to gather salt on the nearby salt pan.

When the Yanyuwa recall their days at Manangoora they stress the seasonal round of movement that initially occurred from this base. People continued to visit the other 'big places' (see figure 8.2). It is very significant, however, that those stressing the seasonal range from Manangoora are older individuals. With time people spent longer of each year at Manangoora and made fewer movements to other locations. The reminiscences of younger people stress the semi-permanent life style that developed here.

When talking about their association with Europeans at Manangoora, Aboriginal people often stress the useful skills they obtained in the process. Aboriginal people chose to live there, so they must have made a conscious decision that the advantages of living there outweighed the disadvantages. In particular, they stress the opportunity to learn English. However, because of the sexual demands placed upon them, by the

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<sup>128</sup>1987 Tape 57A 26 min.

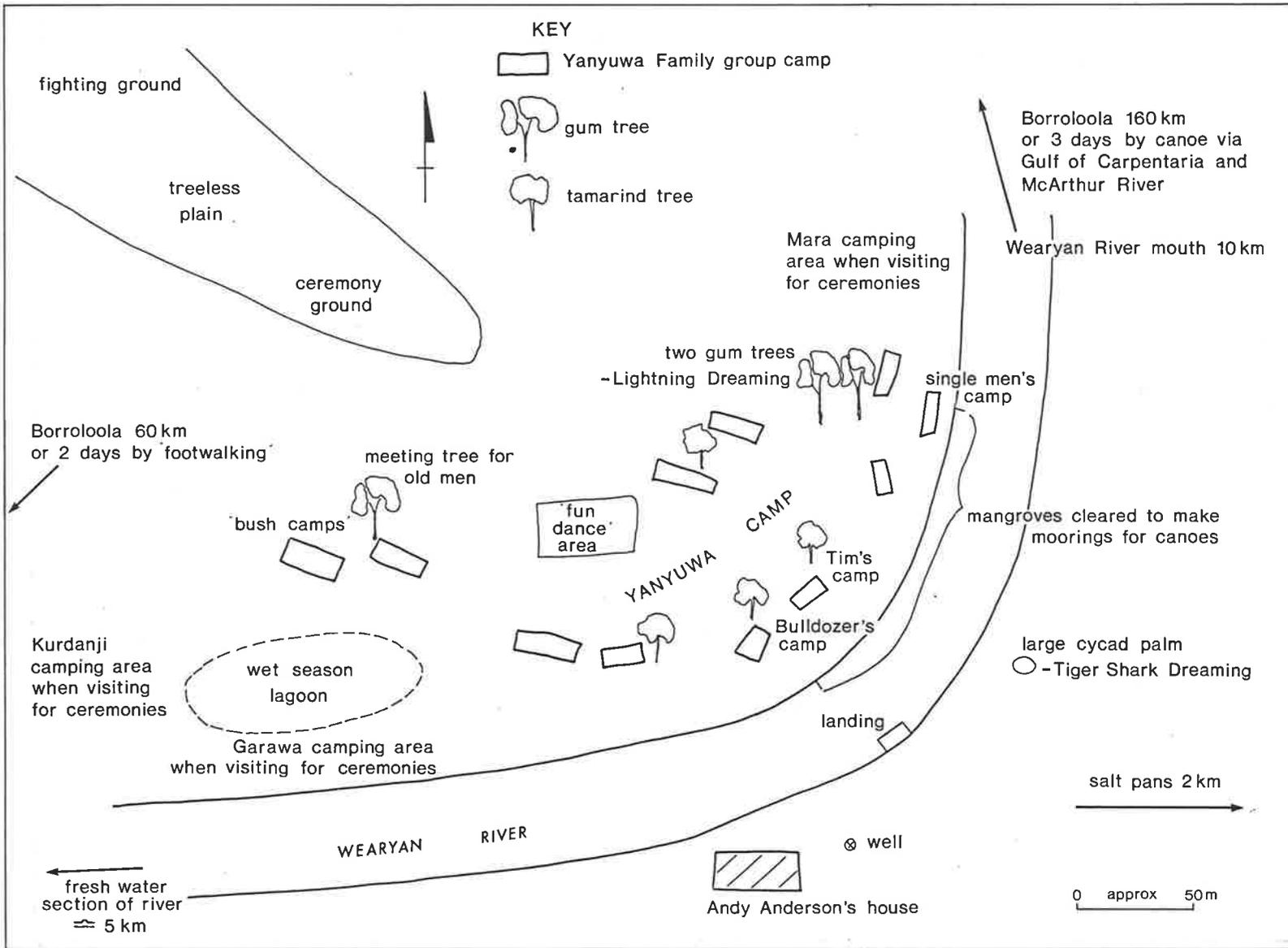


Figure 8.3: Mananggora homestead and Aboriginal camp

boss and other European men who visited, women are somewhat ambivalent about their time there. Eileen Yakibijna, for example, values what Aboriginal people learnt at Manangoora and stresses how things were all right, at least for her, as she was not pursued by the European boss:<sup>129</sup>

He been teach us English now ... he used to teach us work, gardening and horse hair boil him, put it in sun and teach us how to speak English and cooking ... good man all right but he used to be looking for girl all the time, not along me, he was good man along me, good friend, only for those other people.

Like other old camps, Manangoora has become a symbol for many Yanyuwa people of what was. Older people still hold it very dear and are keen to return to the area. Significantly, younger people (who have never lived in the area) do not share the passion of their parents. Ricket Murundu, who was camped at Manangoora with his wife for most of the period I have had contact with the area, told me<sup>130</sup> how Aboriginal people

still want that country Manangoora, because we're not going to leave that country because we been born there ... and all the white people been come push around Aboriginal people from that country ... and people today scattered ... the welfare scattered him ... I don't know why ... everybody been say "I think we'll have to go, welfare got to cart people down Borroloola ... " ... we want that country really, because we been born long that country. And why them European been come and push everyone, pushing everyone, trying to claim that country. I don't know where he come from that bloke.

Adding potency to this view of Manangoora representing the past, is the fact that the last local ceremony to be held away from Borroloola took place there in early 1950.<sup>131</sup> Ted Evans, the newly arrived welfare officer in Borroloola, writes that this ceremony left Borroloola deserted. On visiting the Aboriginal camp, he found it "had

<sup>129</sup>1986 Tape 26B 17 min.

<sup>130</sup>1987 Tape 35B 2 min.

<sup>131</sup>Patrol officer Ted Evans visited the Manangoora area in February 1950 and noted the gathering of people for this ceremony in his report "Patrol to Wearyan River" a Report to Director of Native Affairs dated 10th March 1950, Australian Archives, Northern Territory Region, CRS: F315 Item 49/393 A3.



Source: Ted Evans collection, Australian Institute of Aboriginal Studies N4440:7 Note: With Ted Evans are (left to right) Malcom Majamaja, Splinter Waranduwa and Mack Manguji.

Figure 8.4: Ted Evans' 1950 patrol, Vanderlin Island

been almost abandoned except for about a dozen people". Three of these people subsequently paddled Ted (see figure 8.4) to the site of the ceremony, at the junction of the Wearyan and Foelsche Rivers, where he found "some 300 Aboriginals had assembled there from places as distant as the Queensland border to the east and the Roper River to the north-west".<sup>132</sup> Queenie Ngarambulirri, who with her husband and children travelled in a dugout canoe from Roper River for this ceremony, notes<sup>133</sup> "only that ceremony now been bring us back" to the Borroloola area. She also recalls<sup>134</sup> how, after the ceremony she and her husband decided to stay at Borroloola: " 'We will have to stop here now, too far to go back.' " Queenie goes on to say that "children been go school now" was a major reason why they stayed in Borroloola. Subsequently ceremonies in the region have all been at ceremony grounds in Borroloola. As Musso Harvey notes:

<sup>132</sup>Both quotes from Ted Evans come from a typescript he supplied me with, BHF 9. He also recounts details of his time at Borroloola and his visit to Manangoora on 1987 Tape 44A 34 min.

<sup>133</sup>1987 Tape 14A 19 min.

<sup>134</sup>Ibid 14 min.

"that last one too that time ... rest we had in Borroloola".<sup>135</sup> For Ricket Murundu, this event represents the end of a phase in Yanyuwa history "everything finish, we been have last ceremony, finished no more."<sup>136</sup> And after that we been move".<sup>137</sup>

The presence of Evans at the 1950s ceremony adds to the current symbolic significance of Manangoora and this last ceremony held away from Borroloola. "Ted Evan times" is a short hand expression many people use for this time. It was from Evans at this ceremony, that many Aboriginal people in the area first heard about the ration post the Native Affairs Department had established in Borroloola. Hence many people date their "rounding up" from this time. The beginnings of my unravelling of the rounded up paradox occurred when I could find no one who was actually brought in by Evans. While numerous people spoke of this as the time of getting "rounded up", Musso Harvey who accompanied Evans, told me<sup>138</sup> that Evans "didn't force them, to go. He just told them for old people ... look after them for medicine ... a lot of old people moved in and stopped [in] Borroloola". On another occasion Musso again stressed<sup>139</sup> that "no one picked up from Manangoora ... they come up themselves".

The lure of rations in Borroloola was a major factor leading people to "come up" themselves. Lenin Anderson, who has spent his whole life at Manangoora, describes how in the years following Evans's visit there, those few people who stayed at Manangoora were enticed into Borroloola by the promise of rations. He recalls<sup>140</sup> that those coming back to Manangoora for brief visits would tell those Aboriginal people still living there, "oh ration now, the Government giving us ration now, we don't have to work". Lenin concludes "so that's why they started to get led into Borroloola".

The best way to illustrate the complexities of the coming in process is to give the example of the move one family made from Manangoora to Borroloola. Annie

<sup>135</sup>1987 Tape 22B 11 min.

<sup>136</sup>Ricket is revealing a Manangoora-centric view of the world here. Ceremonies did continue in Borroloola but not at Manangoora, the place most important to him.

<sup>137</sup>In 1988 the Yanyuwa with the help of John Bradley of the Aboriginal Sacred Sites Protection Authority organised a major walk from Borroloola to Manangoora with the aim of educating younger Yanyuwa people of the mythological and economic resources of the areas traversed.

<sup>138</sup>1987 Tape 51A 40 min.

<sup>139</sup>1987 Tape 22A 25 min.

<sup>140</sup>1987 Tape 57A 39 min.

Karrakayn, who was a young woman at the time, describes<sup>141</sup> how she and her family had previously lived year round at Manangoora and says, "only welfare now been make us go out there". When I asked her how they did this she replied, "Well I don't know, that's his job from Government. I can't understand, just took us back". She gives the following account of what Evans told people:

"You better come up now, all your children you got to bring all your children back for school ... no food in the bush you can come, bring your children and yourself you can get ration now in Borrooloola."

Annie adds that

we didn't understand that time too we just been come we used to frighten for whitefella, to talk, to talk back to them<sup>142</sup> ... He used to come in ... his Land Rover and tell us you better come down to Borrooloola for tucker. Anywhere they used to look for the people hunting around for the people, right up to Wollogorang, bring all the Wollogorang mob to Borrooloola ... I been come along *libaliba*.

Annie here expresses the subtle nature of 'rounding up'. If people were not able to "talk back" to welfare they had little option but to do as they were told. People were not directly brought back by welfare, they paddled their dugout canoes into Borrooloola; however, there can be no denying that they were indirectly brought back by the combination of welfare's authority and inducement of rations.

One couple though, did not come in and stayed living out bush in the Manangoora area to the mid 1970s. Annie explains<sup>143</sup> that this was because the husband was "really bush man". When I asked her if her father "was a bush man too", she replied, "ah nothing, my daddy been working [for Europeans] all his life". Annie goes on to cite her father's work history (quoted page 293) as proof of his contact with Europeans. Herein lies another reason why Evans could 'round up' people so easily, most of them had already been in and out of the European sphere and in particular had a liking for the rations that came with life with Europeans.

<sup>141</sup>1987 Tape 37A 12 min.

<sup>142</sup>Annie on another occasion described (1987 Tape 33B 19 min.) how people moved into Borrooloola as "we have to go there because used to take word for welfare".

<sup>143</sup>1987 Tape 37A 15 min.

A further reason why Annie's family moved in is that older relatives were already living in Borrooloola. Annie describes<sup>144</sup> how when she was a young girl in the 1930s her family travelled regularly between the Sir Edward Pellew Group and Borrooloola. On one visit to Borrooloola they found out that the police were distributing rations to the aged and her fathers parents decided to stay in Borrooloola and live on these: "when they get that ration now all the old people . . . used to stay there now".

Another factor in Annie's family's move in to Borrooloola from Manangoora involves Annie's "half-caste" brother. Annie describes<sup>145</sup> how Ted Evans told Annie's father that he had to bring this young boy into Borrooloola and quotes Evans as saying " 'old man you've got to give me that boy now, so he can go to school so he can learn about for you' ". It is also possible that the increasing numbers of people at Manangoora was making it hard for the surrounding bush to support all the Aboriginal residents of the camp. Annie recalls<sup>146</sup> how "in those days little bit of food used to be around the place, too many people".

Yet another factor that needs to be considered in Annie's family move to Borrooloola is a tidal wave associated with a cyclone in 1948 that destroyed the previously productive European-run vegetable gardens at Manangoora and for many years after caused the previously productive soil to be too saline for vegetables.<sup>147</sup> Hence Evans's offer of rations in Borrooloola came at a particularly opportune time as supplies of European food in the area to supplement bush tucker were limited.

A factor Annie does not mention—although she alludes to it in a quote below (see page 345)—was the need to get away from European men at Manangoora. This point is also raised by Eileen Yakibijna, who attributes<sup>148</sup> the move in from Manangoora to Borrooloola, at the time "that welfare man told them to come for [rations]", to the need to "run away from" the European boss of Manangoora who "been want to marry young girl".

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<sup>144</sup>1987 Tape 39A 12 min.

<sup>145</sup>Ibid 34 min.

<sup>146</sup>1987 Tape 35B 46 min.

<sup>147</sup>Discussed by Steve Johnson and Lenin Anderson 1987 Tape 26B 32 min.

<sup>148</sup>1987 Tape 13B 20 min.

### 8.4.6 Malarndarri camp

Malarndarri is the name for the old camp on the east side of the McArthur River. It was established as a camp in 1916, when the policeman moved all "unemployed" Aboriginal people across the river. The policeman concerned noted how because "the Blacks camped here are a nuisance ... I have instructed all the blacks not employed to remove their belongings etc to the other side of the River".<sup>149</sup> From this time until 1969 this was the home of all Borroloola's Aboriginal people apart from the very few who worked and lived in town. Malarndarri then became the home of those Aboriginal people who came in to Borroloola.

This section focuses on the period from 1950 to 1970 when as a result of Aboriginal people coming in to Borroloola, Malarndarri became a big camp. It was both much larger and more permanent than any of the big place camps had been. As figure 7.12 illustrates in the wet season there were over 200 Aboriginal people in Borroloola and all but a handful lived at Malarndarri. Prior to 1950 there were probably never more than 40 Aboriginal people living in Malarndarri but this figure rapidly increased in the early 1950s after the opening of welfare's ration depot.

Two Yanyuwa maps of Malarndarri have already been given (figures 6.16 and 6.17) and make interesting comparisons with the map I compiled (figure 8.5) by taking a variety of people to the camp and asking them about features still visible. Many frames of old humpies are still visible (see figure 8.6) and my informants could tell me who had lived in each. The huts were made from timber frames, flattened kerosine drums and paperbark. As supplies of paperbark soon ran out around the camp it was brought to the camp in dugout canoes from elsewhere (see figure 8.8).

In recent years the lack of Aboriginal contact with the "white side" of the river has been used against Aboriginal people trying to assert their rights over land here. In a public meeting when this issue was raised Musso Harvey forcefully made the point<sup>150</sup> "we had to stay Malarndarri, that was our land over there. We could not come in this side. If we come this side policeman would say 'no this not your place, your place over

<sup>149</sup>The Borroloola Police Records, Northern Territory Archives, F275, Letter titled "Re Blacks Nuisance Town" 4 December 1916. Only the very oldest Yanyuwa individuals can remember the move to Malarndarri. Jerry Rrawajinda who is in his late 70s and was in town as a young boy can just recall the move here (1987 Tape 13A 40 min.).

<sup>150</sup>1987 Tape 53A 36 min.

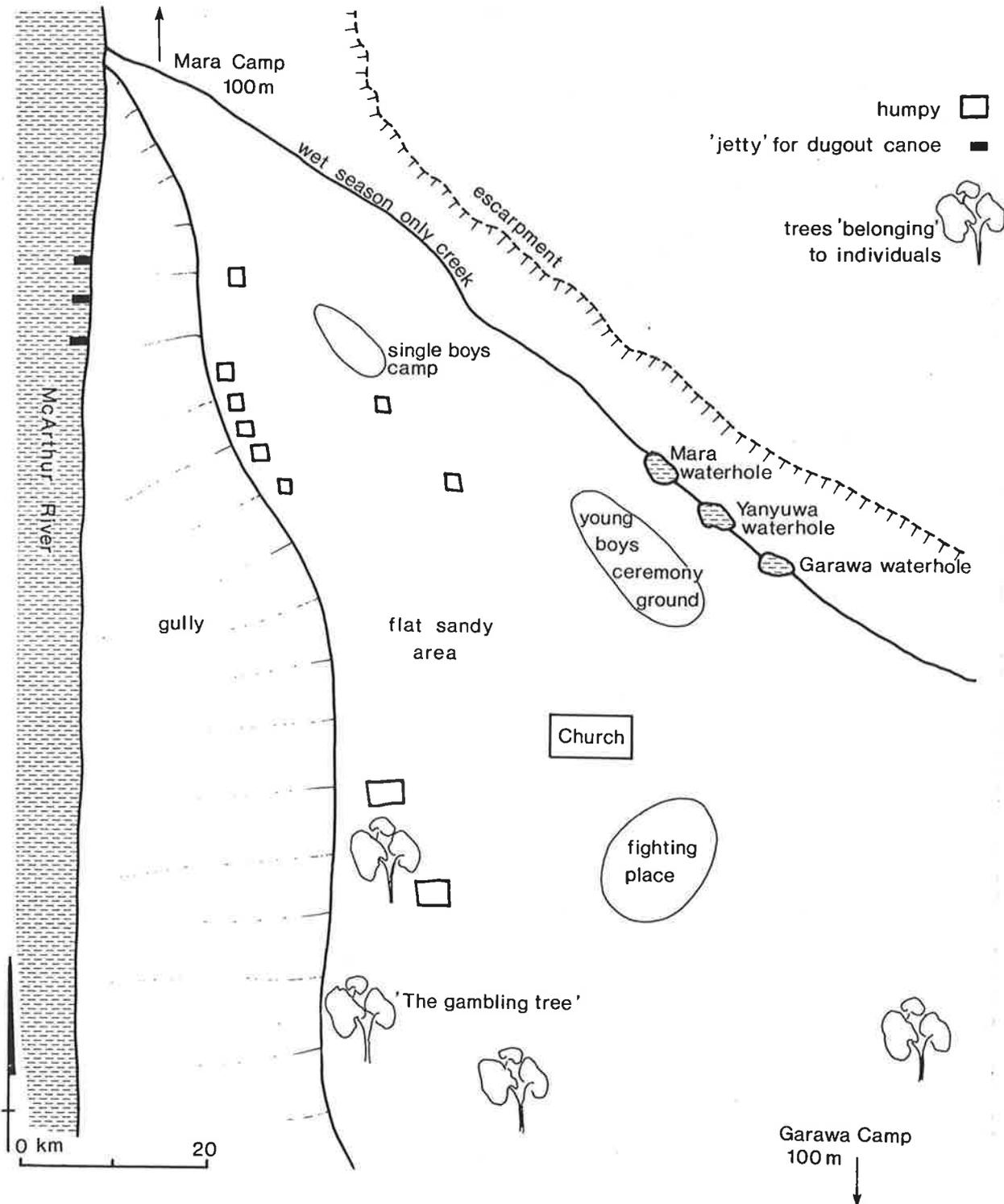
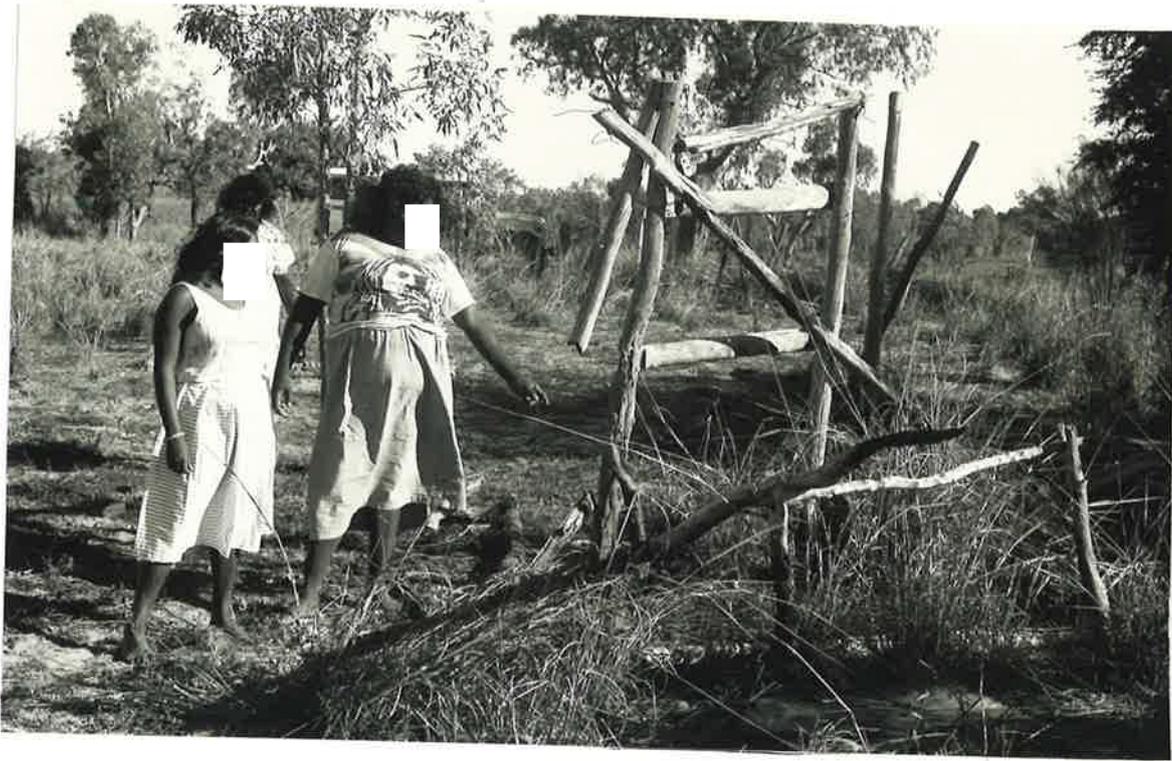
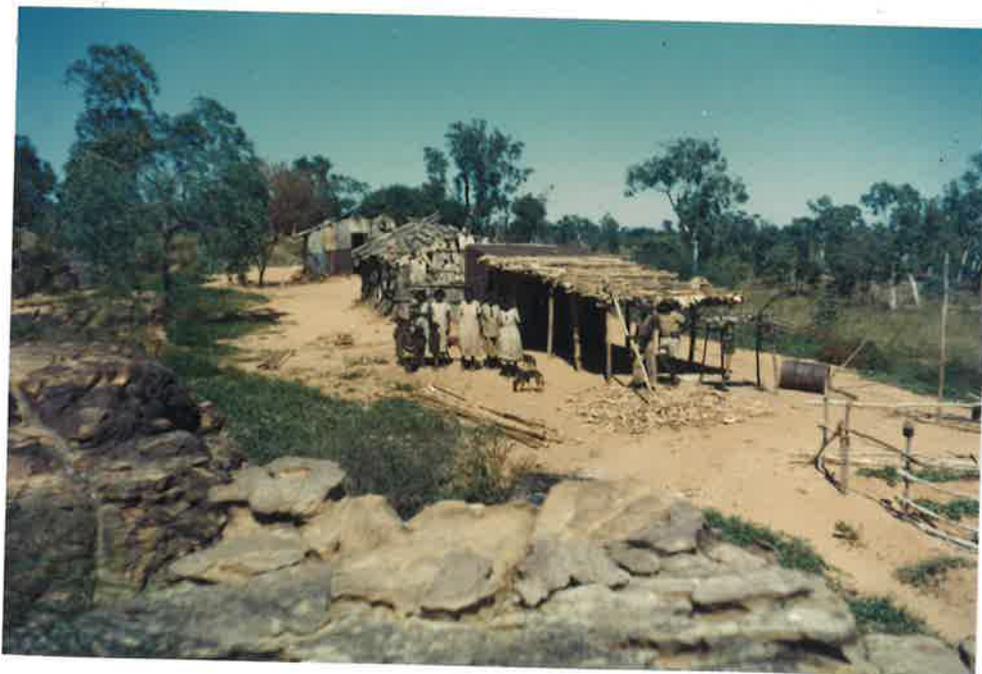


Figure 8.5: Malarndarri camp



Note: Left to right. Rachel Muyurrkulmanya, Eileen Yakibinja, Elizabeth Walngayiji.

Figure 8.6: Malarndarri camp ruins, 1987



Source: Pattemore collection.

Figure 8.7: Malarndarri camp, circa 1960



Figure 8.8: Dugout canoes carrying paperbark, circa 1955

the other side. Stay out there' ". Malarndarri was the result of strict policing of a policy of segregation. Initially made by the police, this policy was subsequently enforced by the welfare officers. An illustration of how welfare continued the segregation is contained in a dispute between the welfare officer and the Borroloola missionary in 1954. The missionary was keen to hold evening services but was thwarted as welfare prohibited both the missionary from visiting the camp after dark and Aboriginal people being on the "white side" of the river after dark. The District Superintendent visited Borroloola and reported on this dispute. He supported the welfare officers upholding the "unwritten law at Borroloola, that all natives must be across the river, in their own camps, before sundown".<sup>151</sup>

The time spent at Malarndarri is now, like the cattle days that were occurring at the same time, seen by many as the good old days. The manner of the establishment of Malarndarri and the strict policing of the rules on where Aboriginal could and could not live that maintained the existence of the camp, are very rarely commented on.<sup>152</sup> Instead positive aspects of the camp are stressed. It is only through examining the

<sup>151</sup>Les Penhall, report on Borroloola, 27 July 1954. Australian Archives, Northern Territory Region, F1 Item 52/606. The above outlined dispute is described in this report.

<sup>152</sup>Musso Harvey's comment (see above) is the sole comment I have heard either publicly or in all my questioning, that European authorities compulsorily defined Malarndarri as an Aboriginal camp.

written records that the strictly policed segregation that defined Malarndarri becomes clear. The good memories of Malarndarri are highlighted in the following quotes:<sup>153</sup>

**Bella Marrajabu** - In the old days we lived on the east side of the river. It was really lovely country. There was no grog there. Nobody carried [grog] to the camp. We all sat down contented at night. The moon would come out and shine like fire on the river, shimmering beautifully. It was lovely country.

**Nero Timothy** - In the old days they made shelters from paperbark on the east side of the river. The women would go and draw water from amongst the rocks. It was clear spring water running continually. The men would go hunting down the river for kangaroos and in the late afternoon they would return to the shelters. The moon would come out like a torch.

The fact that both Bella and Nero mention the reflection of the moon is related to the location of the Malarndarri camp on a high river bank. This location also provided a vantage point to watch out for any strangers. There was plenty of time to prepare for visitors as the main route to the camp was by canoe across the river. When European men came across 'humberging' for women, it was possible for young women to disappear into the scrub. A long time European resident of Borroloola told me<sup>154</sup> how, when they moved across the river, the Yanyuwa "lost something very special, on the other side of the river they had their privacy" and then goes on to note how previously "they could see if anyone was driving up to the side of the river" and that this allowed mothers to take daughters into the bush to hide from white men who would come across looking for women.

Like Manangoora, Malarndarri has become to many Yanyuwa people a symbol of what was. They often say "things were good then". It is significant also that a rock and roll band from Borroloola, that is particularly conscious of the need for the younger Aboriginal people in Borroloola to hold on to traditional knowledge, have called themselves the Malarndarri Band.<sup>155</sup> It is important to note that this symbol of the good old

<sup>153</sup>Recorded and translated from Yanyuwa to English by John Bradley in 1982. I gratefully acknowledge John granting me permission to examine his field notes.

<sup>154</sup>1987 Tape 73A 6 min.

<sup>155</sup>As well as being a conscious identification with the past, since most of the band was conceived and

days is not what one would label "traditional life". Life at the Malarndarri camp was in many ways an artefact of contact with Europeans. Malarndarri represented a way of life that the Yanyuwa themselves developed to accommodate changing circumstances.

A significant feature of the camp was the autonomy of the people living there. Aboriginal people and Europeans alike have commented to me on the independence Aboriginal people enjoyed there and the authority of "Aboriginal bosses" of this camp. Dinah Marrngawi, for instance, recalls<sup>156</sup> how her father had the nickname "Government" because "he boss for Aborigine . . . long Malarndarri camp". European accounts also stress the control over their affairs that Aboriginal people had here. The film-maker Roy Vyse<sup>157</sup> describes a "council of old men" meeting to discuss a proposed marriage. Tas Festing, a former Borroloola welfare officer, describes<sup>158</sup> an "Elders Council" consisting of Tim Rakuwurlma, his brother Banjo and two other old men. Likewise, when I asked Ted Egan, the welfare officer at Borroloola briefly in the mid 1950s, if Aboriginal people "were left to run their own show across the river", he replied<sup>159</sup> "Oh totally".

In the 1950s and 1960s when the camp reached its peak in population, many Aboriginal people went across to work on the "white side" of the river but would return each night to the camp. Traditional hunting and gathering was carried out from the camp and the daily running of the camp was mostly left to Aboriginal people. Eileen Yakibijna recalls<sup>160</sup> how people went from Malarndarri "hunting, camping and they used to count like Friday, Saturday, Monday, they used to . . . come back every ration day . . . back from the bush". This ability to keep hunting and gathering<sup>161</sup> is an important factor in the high regard that Malarndarri is now held in. Younger people who were brought up across the river after Malarndarri was deserted never learnt the same degree of bush skills as older generations brought up at Malarndarri.

In 1969 Malarndarri was abandoned and the Yanyuwa moved across the river. The range of reasons given for this move provide an excellent example of how different

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born at Malarndarri, this name follows the traditional pattern of names coming from the place where people are born.

<sup>156</sup>1987 Tape 61B 20 min.

<sup>157</sup>South Australian Museum, Archives, Accession Number 1676 Diary of trip to Borroloola July 1954.

<sup>158</sup>1986 Tape 25 18 min.

<sup>159</sup>1988 Tape 6B 22 min.

<sup>160</sup>1988 Tape 2A 4 min.

<sup>161</sup>As Amy Bajamalanya notes (1987 Tape 20A 7 min.) "that ime we been learn to go hunting".

people can see the same event in different ways. The different reasons people gave for this move included:

1. People who had close relations who died from illness, usually attributed it to the need to get a better water supply, or to have their old sick relatives closer to medical attention.<sup>162</sup>
2. People whose close relatives drowned in boating mishaps crossing the river stressed the dangers of crossing the river.
3. "Drinkers" of the time tended to attribute it to the advantages of being closer to the pub.
4. Annie Karrakayn attributed<sup>163</sup> it to the promise the Government made that they were going to get good houses.
5. Don Manarra also stressed the role of the Government, citing the move as evidence of European power over Aboriginal people,<sup>164</sup> "white man got to tell you what to do. Move over this side of river, he in charge".
6. A European crocodile shooter in the area at the time said<sup>165</sup> the move was made as all the dugout canoes, needed to make the trip across to the "European side" of the river, were washed away in floods.
7. A Mara man agreed<sup>166</sup> with the significance of the canoes being swept away but goes on to give a Mara version of history, pointing out that no more canoes were made as his Mara relatives, the last of the canoe makers, had left Borroloola to live at Rose River Settlement.<sup>167</sup>

<sup>162</sup>Johnson Babarramila, whose father's sister died at the time, (1987 Tape 21A 31 min.) described arriving back from Calvert Hill station at this time and advising people, "We'll have to go across the river, too much sickness". Jean Kirton (1987 Tape 72A 25 min. and 72B 14 min.) attributed the move across the river to people becoming scared of the camp after the number of deaths there. Eileen Yakibijna similarly noted (1987 Tape 20A 4 min.), when I took her to Malarndarri, "all been die, they been sorry for this camp".

<sup>163</sup>1987 Tape 54A 46 min.

<sup>164</sup>1986 Tape 11A 21 min.

<sup>165</sup>1987 Tape 25B 33 min.

<sup>166</sup>1987 Tape 52A 37 min.

<sup>167</sup>These two men and their canoe building skills are discussed in Baker (1988:177).

8. Another version of the significance of the loss of canoes came from a number of parents of school aged children, who stressed that the loss of the canoes and the problems this caused in getting children to school was the reason for the move.
9. Yet another version of the role of canoes in the move across the river came from Steve Johnson,<sup>168</sup> who attributed the loss of canoes as the result of, not the reason for, the move across the river. "When they all moved across the river they just left their canoes on the river and [in] the first flood they lost everything".
10. Garawa speakers did not move across the river but stayed where they were, slightly upstream of the Malarndarri camp. They therefore have yet another perspective on the move. Pyro,<sup>169</sup> for example, stressed how "welfare been shift them all other side, close that water". He is giving some of the same reasons as mentioned above in the first point but from a "them" rather than "us" perspective.

Yanyuwa life has changed dramatically since they left Malarndarri. When I took people back to the camp to collect information about the times when people lived there, emotions of nostalgia and sadness about having left the camp often surfaced. Consider, for example, the comparisons made in the following conversation between life in the past at Malarndarri and life subsequently across the river:<sup>170</sup>

**Bella Marrajabu** - We should camp long here ... we don't like there amongst the whiteman.

**Eileen Yakibijna** - ... more better here we've got to come back soon.

**Bella Marrajabu** - ... too many white people ... too many [Aboriginal] people too from [the Barkly] Tableland and Mara side all mixed up here.

Bella's comments on Aboriginal people getting "mixed up" stresses the distinct Yanyuwa identity of Malarndarri. There were separate Mara and Garawa camps respectively down and up stream of Malarndarri (see figure 8.5). This spatial separation occurred in the directions of the respective country of the Mara and Garawa and clearly defined

<sup>168</sup>1987 Tape 32A 25 min.

<sup>169</sup>1987 Tape 63B 4 min.

<sup>170</sup>1987 Tape 74A 5 min.

the Yanyuwa as distinct from both. Eileen's comment on "we've got to come back" to Malarndarri highlights another important factor in the coming in process, that of closing options. Unbeknown to Eileen it is no longer possible for Aboriginal people to move back because, as figure 1.7 illustrates, Malarndarri is now part of the Borroloola township and sections have been subdivided and sold to Europeans.

## 8.5 Why did people stay in town?

This section examines the factors that kept Aboriginal people in town once they had made the move in from the bush. It is pertinent to consider the bold claim Stanner (1979:49 but originally published in 1958) makes:

Nowhere, as far as I am aware, does one encounter Aborigines who want to return to the bush, even if their new circumstances are very miserable.

They went because they wanted to, and stayed because they want to.

This chapter has illustrated that such a statement is overly simplistic both in terms of why people went in and why they stayed. As explained, many indirect reasons contributed to what might superficially be seen as an entirely voluntary process. Likewise, the question, why people stayed, is equally complex and to say "they wanted to" ignores this complexity.

To understand why people stayed in, once they had moved in, it is necessary to examine the cycles of dependency that were created by moving in to town. One facet of dependency that came from living in town is how reliance on European food meant a decrease in both the use and knowledge of bush tucker. Isaac Walayungkuma, for example, describes<sup>171</sup> how when people moved into Manangoora:

We're hungry now [for flour] we forget about that bush tucker, we don't think about that bush tucker ... we lose all our everything ... all this tucker here ... we been get that flour now, we been grow up that flour all the time ... [before] we been tuck out that munja, ... bush tucker, but we been forget about it now ... we been live on that flour now, whitefella tucker ... and we don't think about bush tucker now, we finished now, lost him.

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<sup>171</sup>1986 Tape 11A 80 min.

Musso Harvey also says,<sup>172</sup> “when they got that ration that’s when they got spoilt then, they had to be there [in Borrooloola] all the time for ration”. Pyro similarly notes<sup>173</sup> the significance of the pull of sugar and tea bringing people into Borrooloola:

A lot of people couldn’t go back bush, old people<sup>174</sup> when they been eat that tucker for whitefella, they couldn’t live in the bush ... might be half a year out here<sup>175</sup> and go back long town, might be two or three weeks that’s all.

The questions, how people ended up in town and why they stayed there, are ones some Yanyuwa people give great thought to. Consider Annie Karrakayn’s response<sup>176</sup> to my question: “Why do you reckon everyone stayed in town?”

Yes, because they like town ... I don’t know what they thinks, themselves ... but I’m thinking all the way from way back, I’m thinking all the time when I go to sleep too, I’m thinking anything, everything, what was happening for people, when all this whitefellas came, might be other people just don’t care about things, they are just doing their own business, not thinking about what good or what right or bad ... [recently] first time when the people came strong, people to speak for white people ... we tell him “we got to go back to our land too all you mob white people, take our land away now, we’ve got to have half too for our kids, when we dies, so kids can live in our land”. That’s the way we been talk about it ... we been thinking, just from that welfare now. “What we doing, all this welfare come over us ... What we just let this people talking to us we got talk back to them too”. Me and Eileen was talking, nobody else.

Annie makes two particularly important points here. Firstly, that people only retrospectively become aware of the consequences of coming in; as her quote illustrates, it is something to think and ponder about after the event. Secondly, as she notes, people

<sup>172</sup>1987 Tape 22A 11 min.

<sup>173</sup>1987 Tape 63B 13 min.

<sup>174</sup>Meaning here “those who moved in”.

<sup>175</sup>This conversation was recorded on an outstation, so Pyro uses “here” to refer to the bush.

<sup>176</sup>1987 Tape 48B 4 min.

tend to act as individuals, "just doing their own business" and do not at the time usually consider the collective results of their individual actions. As Annie so succinctly puts it, people tend act as individuals without thinking "about what good or what right or bad" about their actions.

It is also worth quoting from Musso Harvey about the reasons people came in and stayed in. He notes<sup>177</sup> how, once people moved into town, they "got that way they could not go back in their way because they got plenty tobacco, plenty tucker, and free ration". Musso, like many other Yanyuwa people, can now see very clearly the ramifications of easier access to rations that came with the arrival of welfare in the area. He remembers<sup>178</sup> how "before only the old people get a ration when that policeman there, the old people, the old blind one, not young people". Musso also stresses<sup>179</sup> that old people did not have young people to look after them "because that's the only time, young people gone to work on the cattle station ... all the old people stay behind, let the welfare look after him". Clearly then, like the move many Yanyuwa people made earlier into Manangoora, the move into Borroloola had unforeseen consequences.

An important factor in people coming in and staying in is schooling. Schooling was a major factor in bringing in those individuals who attempted to stay out bush. As Musso Harvey notes,<sup>180</sup> the school worked to "draw the old people in" from the bush. Musso goes on to tell how a number of families "used to come into Borroloola and go out in the islands, live around the islands" but that, as children reached school age, trips became restricted to school holidays.

An examination of one family's history gives a good indication of the significance of school in bringing people in. Eileen Yakibijna recalls<sup>181</sup> how she "been stay bush all the time" but eventually came into Borroloola after her eldest child was taken to Borroloola "for welfare school" after a welfare officer "been tell us to go back long Borroloola, take your kid". Isa Yubuyu, Eileen's daughter, describes being brought in and remembers<sup>182</sup> how her mother initially refused to come in and told the welfare officer "no I'm not

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<sup>177</sup>1987 Tape 24B 32 min.

<sup>178</sup>Ibid 33 min.

<sup>179</sup>Ibid 35 min.

<sup>180</sup>1987 Tape 51B 33 min.

<sup>181</sup>1987 Tape 62B 4 min.

<sup>182</sup>1988 Tape 4A 12 min.

going there that's not my home, my home is Manangoora". Isa lived with relatives in town for some time before Eileen came and took her bush again. They were, however, soon visited again by a welfare officer, who persuaded her to return to Borroloola. As Eileen recalls,<sup>183</sup> "I didn't like it but they been say 'You've got sick kid<sup>184</sup> here' ... I been come away then, with them. And I'm still here now, down here all the time, get a job".

Another factor in keeping Aboriginal people in Borroloola, once they had moved in, is the attachment they have to the place of conception, birth and where people 'grew up'. The latter sort of attachment is illustrated in Isa Yubuyu's answer<sup>185</sup> to my question, why do so few people live on outstations: "They like it in town because they grow up in town".

For most of the cattle times the Yanyuwa were away from their "proper country". As a result what young people learnt about country during this period was often at the expense of the passing on of knowledge about their own country. The resulting decline in knowledge about Yanyuwa country that came with spending so long away from it was an important factor in making coming in a long term matter and not a temporary event. When individual lives are examined it becomes clear that those who moved into Borroloola in welfare times did not stay in town very long at all but soon went out to work on the large cattle stations of the Barkly Tableland. As many of these same people had previously been working on the small Gulf cattle stations, the coming in process essentially involved a transfer of labour from small to large stations. On the small stations there had been greater scope for Aboriginal economic independence as a large proportion of the diet was still hunted and gathered by Aboriginal people. On the larger stations Aboriginal people were further incorporated into the European economy. There would have been much less chance for hunting and gathering skills to be passed on to the next generation.

It should be stressed that it was the younger generation that got jobs on stations, while older people tended to stay out bush. Such a situation, however, was not tenable, as those out bush were getting older and did not have the young people around to assist

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<sup>183</sup>1987 Tape 13B 6 min.

<sup>184</sup>Eileen's daughter, Isa, describes (1988 Tape 4A 22 min.) how a health worker had visited Eileen's bush camp and reported the sick children to the welfare officer in Borroloola.

<sup>185</sup>1987 Tape 69A 1 min.

them, as had been the case previously. Moreover, the young people were not learning all the bush skills that the older generation knew, so it was becoming increasingly difficult (even if they had chosen to) for them to return to the bush. Steve Johnson describes<sup>186</sup> how younger people working on cattle stations had the dual effect of making life more difficult for those out bush and making the return to the bush of those who had left unlikely: "most of the younger people was away working and they never got a chance to get to learn how to live off the land like the old fellers did because they were away ... and when [those left in the bush] got too old to hunt they gradually sort of got into Borroloola and stayed there". Steve goes on to note how when the young people did come back to Borroloola "it was too late anyway they didn't know enough to go back out".

The questions, why people originally came in and why they are, or are not, going back to their country, are obviously inter-related and research into both the contemporary and the historical periods throw light on each other. In this examination of why people came in, I have a valuable information source in the very few people who stayed on their country until very recently. The last couple to come in, did so in the late 1970s when, due to their age, they were no longer able to fend for themselves alone in the bush. Their plight, alone out bush, with no one to assist them in their advancing years, provides a highly symbolic ending to the coming in process. Their situation provides the extreme example of the fact that those who moved into town affected the viability of life for those left out bush. Ironically, this final stage in the coming in process occurred at the same time as a going back process had begun with the outstation movement.

## 8.6 Conclusion

This chapter has demonstrated the complexity of the coming in process. It has illustrated that the suggestion that welfare physically brought everyone in from the bush is misleading. However, equally misleading is the view that Aboriginal people gave up their bush life out of choice. What actually happened involved a multitude of factors with the issue of control over land playing a crucial part in many of these factors. It

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<sup>186</sup>1987 Tape 27A 2 min.

is not possible to delineate a single reason for why people came in because there are many different reasons.

I have also illustrated how initially the Yanyuwa did not come in at all but that Europeans went to the big places that the Yanyuwa were already camping at seasonally. The Yanyuwa subsequently started to spend longer each year at these places and in so doing the gradual process of coming in was initiated. Nevertheless, it must be stressed that in many ways the Yanyuwa move from bush to town was forced upon them. Their response to this situation was to attempt to shape for themselves the patterns of this process. Coming in therefore needs to be seen as an interactive process involving two broad sets of factors:

1. Changing circumstances resulting from European contact.
2. Yanyuwa responses in Yanyuwa terms to these changing circumstances.

In turn it is important to understand how situations of created dependency play an important role in the first factor and the pattern of the Yanyuwa attempting to incorporate the new into the old is an important process determining the second factor.

## Chapter 9

# Results of 'Coming In'

Having shown the complexity of both the reasons for, and the processes of, the move from bush to town, I can now discuss some of the consequences of this move. This chapter, therefore, moves from the descriptive account of coming in to an analysis of some of the major results of this process. Rather than attempt an exhaustive account of these, a number of key issues have been selected.

### 9.1 Dislocation

European contact dramatically increased both Yanyuwa movement and the contact they had in their own country with other Aboriginal people. Previously, contact with other groups would have been limited to ceremonial gatherings and intermarriage with bordering groups. Contact beyond these neighbouring groups would have been very limited. As discussed, in section 6.3, the trend of increasing mobility had been established with the introduction of the dugout canoe before European contact. To some degree, the Yanyuwa were in control of this introduction; however, the same could not be said for most of the changes stemming from European contact.

A very good example of how Aboriginal lives have been disrupted and dislocated is contained in Matthew Gordon's description<sup>1</sup> of his unsuccessful efforts to find his son:

I was looking around for this fellow here<sup>2</sup> this youngest one [of my sons].

He was working at Groote [Eylandt], I flew from Cairns to Groote, he not

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<sup>1</sup>1987 Tape 8A 15-17 min.

<sup>2</sup>Matthew indicated his smallest finger.

there, he was here [points with his lips towards] Mornington, and I went back to Aurukun, I caught a plane from there [to] Cairns, they tell me he is in Mt Isa, I get job there, I was working up there and then I went from there to Isa, and he said "No he is down in Western Australia." I went up to Western Australia one bloke told me, "He's down Darwin." I went up to Darwin another bloke [who] come from Aurukun told me about it, he said, "No he's down Sydney, he married." "Oh yeah." Well I was knocking around there in Sydney, bugged if I couldn't see him anywhere at all.

Mathew's plight is shared by many of the Aboriginal people of the Borroloola area and much time and energy is spent trying to relocate family. Aboriginal people in Borroloola often remark on how they have all been "scattered" or "mixed up". The former term is used when people are discussing the history of particular Aboriginal groups, while the latter term is the result of various groups now living in one location. The demise of 'loudspeakers' outlined below is but one of many changes in Yanyuwa life resulting from people being scattered and mixed up and it is worth examining in detail four of the main forces that have caused this dislocation.

### 9.1.1 European legal system

A number of Aboriginal people from the Borroloola area ended up in Darwin<sup>3</sup> as prisoners or as witnesses to give evidence against a countryman. While the trip to Darwin was a compulsory one, arranged and organised by the police, the return journey for prisoners after release, or witnesses after a court case, was not so straight forward. As A.P. Elkin noted<sup>4</sup>

it is a rare thing for the native to be returned to his own country when let out of jail. He must just find his way back and he does not necessarily

<sup>3</sup>Some Borroloola people also ended up in Alice Springs. For example, Australian Archives, Northern Territory Region, CRS F1 Item 51/17 mentions an Aboriginal person from Borroloola in jail in Alice Springs. Also at least one Yanyuwa man was transported to Goulburn Island. Patrol officer Harney in discussing this man (Australian Archives, Northern Territory Region, CA 1076, CRS F3 Item 20/105, "Case Jimmy Berri Mudje") argues for the advantages of such punishment: "Transplanting natives from one locality to another is a greater deterrent from crime than placing them in gaol, where they will meet other natives who will teach them methods to evade the law".

<sup>4</sup>Australian Archives, Northern Territory Region, CRS F1 Item 38/636, Letter 2 April 1936.

bother to do so. The moral of this is that there should be some reform of the jail system.

Elkin, goes on to support this claim by giving the example of a Borroloola man being stranded after being acquitted of a murder charge in Darwin.<sup>5</sup> 'Footwalking' back to Borroloola was often the only option. As this journey was over 800km by the shortest route, such a trip was certainly an arduous one and it is not surprising that Aboriginal people who lived closer to Darwin appear to have been more successful in getting back to their country.

Many Yanyuwa people never made it back to Borroloola. For example, after his release from jail, Tim Rakuwurlma's brother, Kilpery, only got as far as Mataranka before being re-arrested. He failed to return to Borroloola after his second jail sentence. Similarly, Willy Mundumundumara describes<sup>6</sup> how his father ended up in Fanny Bay jail and on release did not return to Borroloola. He eventually died in Katherine. Some individuals did make the long journey back on foot. Willy Shadforth, for instance, describes someone returning on foot in about 1933, when "you'd come back the best way you can". Similarly when Darwin was bombed by the Japanese during World War Two, prisoners in the jail were released and told to make their own way home.<sup>7</sup>

Tim Rakuwurlma visited Darwin in about 1920 and in the following quote<sup>8</sup> describes why many Borroloola Aboriginal men were there, mentions the walk some made home and explains why others stayed:

Big mob of Borroloola boy been go along Fanny Bay [jail] ... when they been kill bullock ... Garawa side too ... no matter cart them long way, from Wollogorang, from Westmoreland, everywhere, they been kill a bullock ... still come back, footwalk from Darwin ... [but] some fella been stop, marry there long Darwin.

<sup>5</sup>A.P. Elkin letter to the Right Hon. T. Paterson, Minister of the Interior, 3 December 1936, Australian Archives, Northern Territory Region, CRS F1 Item 38/636.

<sup>6</sup>1987 Tape 71B 30 min.

<sup>7</sup>Borroloola Willy (1987 Tape 25A 21 min.) describes the bombing and how he rode a bicycle from Darwin to Adelaide River where he met up with some Yanyuwa men who had been released from jail and had 'footwalked' south.

<sup>8</sup>1987 Tape 50A 47 min. - 50B 0 min.

Tim<sup>9</sup> also speaks of a Yanyuwa man who did not come back but chose to move to Roper instead, as he feared traditional Aboriginal reprisals for the crime he had committed.

### 9.1.2 European welfare system

Perhaps the most resented of all European laws were the provisions allowing the removal of children with European fathers away from their Yanyuwa mothers. The Director of Native Affairs (and later the Welfare Branch) had the power to "undertake the care, custody, or control of any aboriginal or half-caste if, in his opinion, it is necessary or desirable in the interests of the aboriginal or half-caste".<sup>10</sup> The policy of taking "half-caste" children away from their Aboriginal mothers arose out of a false belief that such children could be assimilated into European society. The Yanyuwa did not consider these children to be any less Yanyuwa because of their lighter skin. Europeans, however, with their views predicated on racial concepts that saw Europeans as inherently superior, thought such children, with the benefit of their European "blood", were more likely to be receptive to the benefits of "civilisation". The policy of removing "half-caste" children had two side effects. When the children were *not* acknowledged by the European father the removal saved him embarrassment. When the children *were* acknowledged it represented an official expression of disapproval of European men openly living with Aboriginal women.

The removal of children led to the dispersal of Yanyuwa people far and wide throughout Australia. Some families have managed to keep in contact despite these separations but other individuals became lost from the community. Some lost individuals have been relocated when Yanyuwa people visited various Australian cities.<sup>11</sup> Such rediscoveries have been made possible by the extraordinarily knowledgeable Aboriginal social networks in Australian cities.<sup>12</sup> Others, however, have remained lost. Musso Harvey, for

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<sup>9</sup>1987 Tape 50B 20 min.

<sup>10</sup>The Director of Native Affairs in the Northern Territory in 1950, F.H. Moy outlines this and further powers he had to remove Aboriginal people. in a letter to the Administrator of the Northern Territory. The title of this letter "Removal of part-Aboriginal children" highlights the fact that while authorities had the power to remove any Aboriginal people it was virtually entirely "part-Aboriginal" people that were removed. Australian Archives, Northern Territory, CRS F1 Item 47/201, letter dated 20.3.50.

<sup>11</sup>Many "half-caste" children from the Northern Territory were sent to southern Australian cities to work for European families (McGrath 1987a:92).

<sup>12</sup>I have observed this process while living in Adelaide and also when with Yanyuwa people in Sydney for the "Invasion Day" demonstrations of January 26th 1988. Helen Lansen (1987 Tape 18A 28 min.) also

instance, has a niece who, he thinks, lives<sup>13</sup> "around Adelaide somewhere or Brisbane somewhere there . . . we might try find her, I don't know where she is".

As well as the obvious direct dislocating role, the removal of children has been an indirect factor contributing to dislocation as relations have at times followed children. One Yanyuwa woman, for example, describes<sup>14</sup> how she followed her sons to Darwin "because I been want to go there close to my two sons". Another example (but one that does not involve the Yanyuwa) comes from Sunny Raggard who describes<sup>15</sup> how, when he was taken away from his Aboriginal relatives, his grandmother followed him first to Alice Springs and later to Jay Creek as Sunny went from one institution to another.<sup>16</sup>

As Sunny Raggard observes,<sup>17</sup> mothers "put up some tough battles" to try to keep their children. The following passage describes one occasion when women were successful in keeping a child by hiding her from the police. The women recall<sup>18</sup> what the policeman said to them and their replies when he came looking for "half-caste" children:

**Dinah** - "Hurry up, hurry up policeman coming up here."

"Where?"

We been run me and Margaret, Elizabeth's mother come just sit down there quiet, frightened. Police come now.

"What's your name. What's your name?"

"Dinah."

"What's your name?"

"Margaret."

"What's your name?"

"Emmalina."

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describes how her visits to Adelaide when her child was receiving medical treatment involved quizzing every Aboriginal person she met about "lost" relatives.

<sup>13</sup>1987 Tape 74A 12 min.

<sup>14</sup>1987 Tape 46A 22 min.

<sup>15</sup>1987 Tape 20A 19 min.

<sup>16</sup>An example of this pattern of female relatives following children to the towns they were taken to is also given by Coltheart (1988:188).

<sup>17</sup>1987 Tape 20A 44 min.

<sup>18</sup>1986 Tape 18A 23 min.

"What's your name old lady?"

"Nellie..."

... that kujaka<sup>19</sup> been put that blanket before that policeman come, he been put that baba<sup>20</sup> Peggy put him long blanket and roll him up like a swag, just put him one side. Well that policeman been reckon swag.

"Sit down quiet," they been tell him [the baby]. Him been sleep quiet, he couldn't move nothing, he never cried nothing. 'Till that policeman been come back this way, and that baba been get up now ...

The girl in question was taken away on a later occasion and, for a long time, was out of contact with her family. She came back to Borrooloola looking for them in 1960 and had the misfortune to arrive<sup>21</sup> when virtually all the Aboriginal people had been moved to Dangana (see section 7.6.1).

Some idea of the sense of loss mothers felt and of how little hope they felt of ever again seeing their children come from Eileen Yakibijna's account<sup>22</sup> of how mothers, who had children taken away, used to cut themselves in the same 'sorry business' usually carried out when mourning a death. Those individuals taken away and who have not returned to find their families can have a radically different perspective on these events from that of their mothers. Cole (1972:54), for example, documents a number of "half-caste" people from Borrooloola who ended up at missions on Groote Eylandt and who still live there. He quotes one as saying "we were not wanted by our mother's people and were ignored by the whites". Such conclusions while understandable in the circumstances, are based on a lack of knowledge of:

1. The powerlessness of their mothers to resist European authority.
2. The attempts their mothers made to try and keep children.
3. The anguish their relations went through about their removal.
4. The fact as illustrated in the example given (see page 310) that even when children

<sup>19</sup>"Mother", referring to my classificatory relationship with her.

<sup>20</sup>"Sister", referring to my classificatory relationship with her.

<sup>21</sup>Steve Johnson (1987 Tape 27B 23 min.) describes her unsuccessful attempt to find her family. Steve heard that she had been in town and later managed to get her back in contact with her family.

<sup>22</sup>1988 Tape 2B 1 min.

were voluntary given up it was on the Yanyuwa understanding that they would be educated so they could return and help their families.

The need to educate children was apparently often used by authorities to justify the removal of "half-caste" children. It was probably an effective argument for, the Yanyuwa were particularly keen for their children to be educated and receive the perceived benefits flowing from this. Eileen Yakibijna remembers<sup>23</sup> children being taken away and the Government official involved saying "take him away, that's good and we will bring him back along you. Bring back along parents when they learn about school." She notes, however, that "they didn't bring [them] back, they been tell liar ... They all [used to] cry, all the mothers for kid".

It should be noted, however, that some of those taken away now consider it was the best thing for them. Sunny Raggard, who was brought up in various institutional homes away from his Aboriginal relations, remembers<sup>24</sup> authorities "coming around raiding the black camps taking half-caste kids away" from the stations he worked on near Borroloola. He argues, however, "but they didn't understand they were taking them away for their own good". On another occasion, he argued<sup>25</sup> that "there is plenty of proof to show that the ones that been taken away they went up".

### 9.1.3 European medical system

Many Yanyuwa people have spent time in Darwin, Katherine, Cloncurry or Alice Springs hospitals (see section 7.7.5 on the scars of the cattle industry). This has had a disruptive influence on Yanyuwa life as some individuals never returned and others were away for a long time. An example of the latter comes from a mother who describes how her son was in Darwin hospital so long that he did not know her when he got back. She describes<sup>26</sup> how when he came back, "he never liked black one and he never even like me, he like that Mrs Festing.<sup>27</sup> He must have been reckon him been white person, must have reckoned his mum white one". Similarly, one woman told me her husband

<sup>23</sup>1988 Tape 2A 6 min.

<sup>24</sup>1987 Tape 19A 17 min.

<sup>25</sup>1987 Tape 20B 16 min.

<sup>26</sup>1987 Tape 60A 6 min.

<sup>27</sup>The welfare officer's wife, who describes this same incident in similar terms (1986 Tape 25A 20 min).

spent so long away in hospital in Darwin, that he got used to the way of life in hospital and had trouble adjusting when back in Borroloola. Jean Kirton, commenting on this same man, notes<sup>28</sup> how "for a period of time I am sure he went through culture shock . . . coming back to Borroloola after a year or whatever in [hospital] in such a different situation".

#### 9.1.4 Employment

Movement of Aboriginal people as a result of employment with Europeans appears to have been the most significant of all the factors causing dislocation in Yanyuwa life. This process was generally more voluntary than movements caused by the introduction of European law, welfare and medical care. The earliest employment opportunities would have been assisting Macassan trepangers and gathering turtle shell. After the end of the Macassan visits, some individuals took on employment with European trepangers and on European cargo and pearling boats.

Many Yanyuwa moved into Queensland. The first phase of this movement has already been mentioned when some Yanyuwa moved to Queensland to avoid the wild times. This move occurred between the 1880s and about 1940 and was apparently the result of the wild times around Borroloola and the less violent times offered in Queensland. In contrast, the next phase of movement was not due to better opportunities to stay alive but through greater opportunities to get a job. It involved individuals getting jobs further and further into Queensland.<sup>29</sup>

A number of Aboriginal people have also told me how they took advantage of the better conditions in Queensland. Musso Harvey<sup>30</sup> and Powder Punch both comment on going to Queensland for the better pay and conditions. Powder describes<sup>31</sup> how these better conditions were the reason

why I was going down further and further . . . more I was [going into Queensland the] better money and better treatment. You find a lot of better people when you get further down, than you was getting in the [Northern] Terri-

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<sup>28</sup>1987 Tape 72B 5 min.

<sup>29</sup>Rowley (1972b:232) comments on the better conditions offered on Queensland cattle stations.

<sup>30</sup>1987 Tape 21B 26m

<sup>31</sup>1987 Tape 68B 8 min.

tory. That's why ever since a lot of people went down, ever since that then started a movement down to Queensland, now most of them got a home in Queensland now.

Many of those who moved into Queensland in search of better employment conditions and "got a home there" have become lost from their relations still living in the Borrooloola area.

Of all the employment the Yanyuwa have had the cattle industry has played the greatest dislocating role in Yanyuwa life. The area over which Yanyuwa people have worked on cattle stations and droving is vast. Those working as drovers travelled as far afield as Western Australia and Queensland picking up and delivering cattle. Those not droving were mostly based on the cattle stations located in an arc between Lake Nash (600km to the south of Borrooloola near the Queensland border) to Elliott (300km to the west of Borrooloola) see figure 7.9.

Yanyuwa workers ended far afield as a result of various labour hiring practices. One method of obtaining workers involved taking very young boys away from their families and 'growing them up' to work cattle (see page 351 for the example of Dinny and Isaac).<sup>32</sup> As Sunny Raggard recalls,<sup>33</sup> "in years gone by they used to take little fellas away, just take them as a horse boy, clean out of their country, all together". Another practice that caused considerable dislocation was a sideline one mail contractor had, of carrying Aboriginal people from Borrooloola to stations as far afield as Lake Nash that required workers. This practice led patrol officer Harney<sup>34</sup> to write: "I have every reason to believe that this blackbirding of natives is a very lucrative business with stations and drovers and needs a careful check in the future". In the same report, Harney expresses fears for the destructive effects cattle work was having on Aboriginal culture and recommended that "Northern Territory natives . . . be used only for droving cattle from Northern Territory cattle stations . . . Tribal natives must not be sent to distant stations and then slowly moved on to other stations further out".

<sup>32</sup>Reynolds (1982:172) in discussing the cattle industry notes that "young men were kidnapped . . . and taken to be 'trained up' for stockwork" and Roth (1901:4) in his report on the Queensland - Northern Territory border area notes that "one special abuse at present being practised is to take children from Northern Territory into Queensland and to new South Wales".

<sup>33</sup>1987 Tape 18A 13 min.

<sup>34</sup>Australian Archives, Northern Territory Region, CRS F1 Item 44/275 Protector Harney's Report page 6.

Les Penhall, who was for a long period the welfare Superintendent in charge of the Barkly region, supports Harney's view that the cattle industry caused considerable dislocation. He suggests<sup>35</sup> that, before he and his staff started checking up on drovers and requiring a bond from them repayable on the return of Aboriginal workers, it was common for Aboriginal drovers not to get back home at the end of the drove. The formalisation of employment was one of the main duties of the welfare officer stationed at Borroloola. The Director of Native Affairs, indeed, lists<sup>36</sup> one of the duties of Borroloola's new welfare officer as supervising "conditions of employment of aboriginals on Stations".

The pattern of people moving further and further away from their traditional country as they take on new jobs, has probably led to many Yanyuwa people moving away and becoming lost from the community. As my contact with Yanyuwa people has always been through Aboriginal people at Borroloola it has been impossible for me to ask lost people about their experiences. The process of getting lost, nevertheless, can be examined in two ways. Firstly, a number of Yanyuwa people were lost from the community for a number of years and others have been lucky to avoid this fate. Secondly, a number of Aboriginal people from different groups have ended up at Borroloola lost from their original groups and hence provide models for lost Yanyuwa individuals.

A man originally from Oenpelli, for example, lives on an outstation near Borroloola now because, as he told me,<sup>37</sup> he got jobs further and further from home and ended up "too far away to go back". He explained<sup>38</sup> how he had moved first into Pine Creek, then got a job on Victoria River Downs and from there got a job droving to Queensland. From Queensland he managed to get back towards home only as far as the Barkly Tableland cattle stations. For a while he tried unsuccessfully to get a lift back to his country but has now given up as "all my people dead . . . my mother been dead there again behind [after he left], my father been dead behind".

A recent example of a lost individual, who was lucky to be rediscovered, involves Brian Raggard, a Borroloola teenager. In 1987, while working with a travelling rodeo

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<sup>35</sup>1988 Tape 1A 5 min.

<sup>36</sup>Australian Archives, Northern Territory Region, CRS F1 Item 48/15 "Borroloola Aged & Infirm Ration Depot". Letter to Government Secretary dated 10.11.1949.

<sup>37</sup>1986 Tape 21A 2 min.

<sup>38</sup>1987 Tape 68A 40 min.

show, he was badly injured at Coober Pedy in South Australia. During a rodeo he was thrown by a bull which then stood on him and crushed his chest. After a long period in hospital, the travelling show had moved on and he found himself with only enough funds to get to Adelaide. Subsequently, in Adelaide, it was only because he happened to meet in the street relatives from Borroloola that he managed to borrow the money to get a bus fare home.<sup>39</sup>

A decision not to return to one's country is obviously based on the forming of new allegiances that, given the distance from home, the problems of getting back and the time away, outweigh traditional allegiances. These new allegiances have occurred in a variety of ways. Marriage is clearly an important factor but so is the mateship that developed through years of working together on cattle stations. Another example of new allegiances is illustrated by one of the outstations near Borroloola, that I worked on. It houses people from a variety of different groups, who I describe how they are "countrymen" for each other as they are ex-patients of the same hospital or are spouses of those people.

## 9.2 Changing marriage patterns

With European contact polygyny quickly ended despite it being such a fundamental part of traditional culture. As discussed above (see page 223), the usurping of the traditional power base of the older men by the invaders was no doubt a major factor in this process. The new authorities made their objections to Yanyuwa marriage patterns obvious. As Annie Karrakayn recalls,<sup>40</sup> both welfare and missionaries "didn't like to see young girl with the old men". This large age difference between husband and wife made it possible for most men when they finally did marry to have multiple wives. As well as objecting to the age difference in marriages the practice of having multiple wives was equally abhorrent to the new European authorities. As Annie recalls<sup>41</sup> "that missionary said, they're not allowed to marry two wife, or three wife or five wife, not allow".

Yanyuwa marriage rules involve society being divided into eight male and eight

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<sup>39</sup>Brian Raggard personal communication, Adelaide November 1987.

<sup>40</sup>1987 Tape 48A 33 min.

<sup>41</sup>1987 Tape 48A 32 min.

female skin groups. As noted above (see page 140) this eight fold system is a post European introduction to the area. Each of these divisions has a corresponding 'right way' division to marry into (see Appendix G). Marriages were arranged long beforehand. Arranged marriages were often formalised by placing baby girls on the lap of the husband to be.<sup>42</sup> On other occasions marriages were promised even before girls were born. Annie Karrakayn, for instance, describes<sup>43</sup> how she was one man's "mother-in-law from [the time I was a] kid. He told my father and mother 'this is my mother-in-law when she get [daughter]' ". Whereas, before the arrival of Europeans, marriages not approved by the power brokers of the society were extremely unlikely to occur, the intrusion of Europeans created a new authority to which individuals could appeal. It became common for couples, who did not have Aboriginal approval to marry, to attempt to legitimise their relationship by getting a European to marry them. Also as noted above (page 285), wrong way married couples were often the ones who came in to European settlements earliest.

This practice suggests that there was some inherent tension in traditional society. Young couples had probably always considered running away together but the consequences in the past were such that they had probably actually done so rarely. With the challenge to traditional authority that European contact provided, the chances of successful elopement were greatly increased.<sup>44</sup> Moreover, Europeans often actively encouraged such relationships.

The Mission and the Welfare Branch were the two most significant new authorities in the area. As Reay (1963:114) writes: "there is continual competition between the Welfare Branch and the Mission for the allegiance of the natives". Reay also notes that both groups were regarded as bosses, but suggests welfare's standing was higher due to the control they had over the goods of the Ration Depot.<sup>45</sup> Both parties had an interest in subverting the traditional marriage patterns, to assert their own authority. The missionaries had a moral objection to a system that both promised young girls to older

<sup>42</sup>Annie Karrakayn 1987 Tape 48A 33 min.

<sup>43</sup>Ibid 43 min.

<sup>44</sup>Sunny Raggard (1987 Tape 20B 27 min.) discusses this issue and argues that people had always tried to run away together but with contact they "could get away with it".

<sup>45</sup>Tim Rakuwurlma's quote below (see page 357) on the welfare officer telling Aboriginal people that he was the boss for them and not missionaries due the "money from Government" he had for Aboriginal people supports Reay's conclusions.

men and allowed multiple wives. The Welfare Branch for its part encouraged marriages by choice and not rule as part of its assimilation goals. Reay (1963:114) goes as far to claim that "welfare Officers ... fired with the spirit of 'assimilation' actively encourage natives of inappropriate subsections to marry". Reay, however, might be crediting the welfare officer with more understanding of subsections than he had because, when I interviewed the officer in question, it became obvious he knew very little about such matters. The arithmetic of the situation, however, means that even if there was not deliberate organisation of wrong way marriages, there are seven chances in eight<sup>46</sup> that a couple marrying out of choice, and not as a result of marriage rules, is going to be marrying wrong way.

Whether they contributed to this breakdown in marriage rules deliberately or unintentionally, welfare did see the breakdown of marriage rules as a step in the "assimilation" process. Their perception was that acceptance of the right to marry by choice and not rule was a fundamental step in the transition from traditional life to European life. The successes they had in getting people to marry by choice were made possible by a decline in the authority of elders. Like so many other processes in the culture contact situation there is a cause and effect spiral here. Declining authority of the elders was a major factor in such marriages being possible and such marriages in turn contributed further to this decline in authority and in doing so made more such marriages possible. This self generating spiral would have assisted welfare's assimilation aims. In particular the aims of "assimilating" the young would have been assisted by the waning authority of the old.

Another reason for the Welfare Branch encouraging wrong way marriages was Borrooloola's reputation as "the Territory capital of cohabitation" (Lockwood 1964:144). Tim Rakuwurlma describes<sup>47</sup> how Aboriginal women "they all been sleep with white-fella for money, for tobacco". As Tim goes on to note, the resultant children<sup>48</sup> were often

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<sup>46</sup>There is in fact a hierarchy of wrong way marriages. There are seven chances in eight of not making the ideal marriage, three chances in four of not making what is usually regarded as being acceptable and at least marrying into the right semi-moiety and one chances in two of being "really wrong way" and marrying within a moiety (see figure 6.15).

<sup>47</sup>1983 14A 28 min.

<sup>48</sup>The high rate of cohabitation resulted in there being a particularly large proportion of so called "half-castes" at Borrooloola. In 1940 the "half-caste" population of Borrooloola was 43, (Australian Archives, CRS F1 Item 40/807 "Distribution of Half-Castes throughout the Northern Territory").

taken away by government officials, "Bill Harney<sup>49</sup> been take them. Welfare been come up more and more welfare and policeman been take them away all the whitefella<sup>50</sup>".

On another occasion Tim told me<sup>51</sup> how

for money, for clothes, for tobacco ... everyone, Yanyuwa people too, they sell wife long whitefella ... hungry for tobacco and tucker flour ... when he sell him wife, find a lot of yella piccaninny ... I been see lot of yella piccanniny here before ... they been take him away.

Welfare apparently felt that the answer to "half-caste" births was to encourage Aboriginal relationships and to marry as many young Aboriginal women to young Aboriginal men as possible. This process often took place as the men returned to the cattle stations after the wet season lay off. As the trucks left for the stations, men were encouraged to call out the name of a single woman to accompany them. Thelma Walwalmara, one of those whose marriage occurred as a result of her name being called out,<sup>52</sup> recalls<sup>53</sup> that the welfare officer "used to ask them, 'ah you men ... I want to find out which girlfriend you mob tell me their name and your name' " and, as a result, people used to get married this way "everytime when truck comes from [the Barkly] Tableland" to pick up workers for cattle stations. By the time the couple returned, Aboriginal objections to the marriage may have subsided, especially "when they see they have got a baby half way".<sup>54</sup>

Thelma also recalls that welfare once called a meeting at which they told the Aboriginal men,<sup>55</sup>

We have got a lot of these young girls here, lots of them single girls, now why [don't you] ... give them married to Aboriginal men instead of them

<sup>49</sup>A welfare officer at the time.

<sup>50</sup>Referring to the "half-caste" children.

<sup>51</sup>1987 Tape 23A 46 min. He tells a very similar story on 1987 Tape 12A 42 min.

<sup>52</sup>Tim Rakuwurlma, when asked about Thelma's marriage, replied, "Mr Festing [the welfare officer] been get that mob married" (1983 Tape 14A 27 min).

<sup>53</sup>1986 Tape 4B 19 min.

<sup>54</sup>Eileen Mananakurrma, personal communication.

<sup>55</sup>This reference is from a recording made in Adelaide in 1986 by Judy Hawksley that I have transcribed (BHF 7).

having half-caste children. And half-caste children won't look after you he will be working somewhere else.

Annie Karrakayn similarly responded to my question, "How come people got married wrong way?" by saying, "Just because of that [welfare] man now ... just give him like that ... he was really boss man to blackfella". Welfare, however, should not be held solely responsible for these changing patterns in marriage. The missionaries played a role too, albeit it a more subtle one than that of welfare. Annie Karrakayn, for example, on another occasion,<sup>56</sup> exclaims, "no promised wife here, no! ... he finished long time [ago] because what missionary been tell us ... missionary told us 'oh you can't have two wives' ".

The changing pattern of marriages is commonly mentioned when the Yanyuwa are discussing how things have changed. Steve Johnson describes the breakdown of marriage rules in the following terms:<sup>57</sup>

up to the [19]40s everybody was [married] straight. It was from then on they started to get crooked ... It probably would not have happened if welfare would have kept out of it. I think it was only the welfare that give them Dutch courage. They spoilt the old Aborigines tradition[al] rules ... I don't think they tried to understand them, they just didn't worry about it much ... never ever worried about trying to study what the habits ... and traditional ways. They just give to them what they thought was right.

Whereas in the "old times they been marry straight all the way",<sup>58</sup> today a large proportion of the population is married wrong way. The issue is prominent in contemporary thinking and the question of who is and who is not wrong way is a common topic of conversation. There are great complications to the skins of the children of wrong way marriages. Some people 'follow' their father and adopt the skin that follows from the father's skin, other people 'follow' their mother by assuming the marriage is

<sup>56</sup>1987 Tape 39A 19 min.

<sup>57</sup>1987 Tape 31A 45 min.

<sup>58</sup>Tim Rakuwurlma 1983 Tape 14A 22 min. The accounts of older people stress how little opportunity there was in the "old times" for such illicit affairs. Annie Karrakayn, for instance, can recall (1987 Tape 48A 44 min.) how old people used to check every morning to see if there were tracks in or out of the camp and how the same surveillance was kept up when people were out hunting. It needs to be asked, however, to what degree such views are a golden view of the past fueled by the wrong way present.

right way and adopting the skin they would have got from such a right way father. Many people also regard themselves as having two skins and when in turn two such people have children the permutations of possible skins is such that the whole system becomes unworkable. Now, many younger people cannot say what skin they are.

The ramifications of this are great as the skin system is a fundamental part of how the Yanyuwa structure both everyday and ritual life. Skins play a role in how everyone relates to each other and the role individuals take in ceremony. Hence Annie Karrakayn can exclaim<sup>59</sup> that wrong way marriages are "no good, you can't know people [and] ceremony". It is revealing to note that "you got big mob of skin" can be used in much the same way as the English expression "you bastard" as an insult.<sup>60</sup> It is often said that things have changed now that people are getting married wrong way. The introduction of irregularities in marriage is seen as both a symbol and a cause of how Yanyuwa life has changed.

Many of the individuals who bemoan the passing of the old ways and cite wrong way marriages as a cause and example of this decadence are often wrong way married themselves. For example, a Yanyuwa man in his fifties, who is wrong way married himself, told me<sup>61</sup> in glowing terms how "them old people really strict before they been keep the law really strong" and bemoaned how "all mix up skin now". This paradox can be seen in terms of the tension between private action and the collective results of private actions.

The fact that people who are wrong way married can be conscious of the destabilising effects such marriages can have, highlights two further examples of dependency. Firstly, people hanker for the authority they have rejected and secondly—and leading from the first point—people are often aware, in retrospect, of how decisions they made have created situations of dependency they could not have foreseen. The fact that the Yanyuwa are often aware that they have created themselves the situations of dependency that they are now in surely heightens their feelings of powerlessness.

An interesting aspect of the breakdown of traditional marriage patterns is that the Yanyuwa rarely blame Europeans for this but usually have an indigenous explanation.

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<sup>59</sup>1987 Tape 47A 5 min.

<sup>60</sup>Tim Rakuwurlma describes how he said this when arguing with someone whose parents were wrong way married.

<sup>61</sup>1986 Tape 11A 30 min.

The recent introduction of powerful *jarada* "love magic" is more usually held responsible. Eileen Yakibijna, for example, describes<sup>62</sup> how "that's the song make all about married wrong way".<sup>63</sup>

Sexual relationships between Aboriginal women and European men are a major new social element that contact with Europeans has brought. Relationships had existed before with Macassans but this contact was on a much smaller scale and the Yanyuwa know of only one child being born as a result. The large number of relationships between Aboriginal women and European men clearly altered previous Aboriginal power structures and social relations. Research into this whole area, however, is limited by the sensitivity of the issues for all three parties concerned; European men, Aboriginal men and Aboriginal women.<sup>64</sup> The reminiscences of individuals from within any of these groups are clearly, at least in part, structured by the relationships of power between these different groups. Such structuring of views further complicates research into this sensitive area.

A question that needs to be addressed, but which is extremely difficult to answer, is the degree of control Aboriginal women had over such relations. To what degree were they forced into them and to what degree did they willingly enter into them? There was clearly a range, from abduction under threat of being shot, to Aboriginal initiated relationships. A good example of the latter has already been given in Nora Jalirduma's quote above (page 216) and an example of the former was given to me by one Yanyuwa woman,<sup>65</sup> who describes the following exchange between her and an European man:

"You want to come?" He ask him me.

"No, I'm working I'm not going."

"No, you better come." He tell me. He make me come. I didn't like to go.

I was frightened, I think if I run away he might shoot me this man.

When examining the different views of the three groups on who was initiating

<sup>62</sup>1987 Tape 2B 25 min.

<sup>63</sup>Eileen goes on to describe (ibid 27 min.) how European men were also sung by Aboriginal women.

<sup>64</sup>There were not enough European women in the area, to think of them as a "party" and the subject of such relationships was broached only once in conversations I had with European women. On this occasion Joyce Johnson (1986 Tape 30B 20 min.) argued that Aboriginal women initiated relationships as "they'd be seeking companionship . . . a new dress, or tobacco".

<sup>65</sup>1987 Tape 55B 34 min.

relationships, the degree to which individuals are choosing to interpret the past in a way that adds to (or least weakens) their authority needs to be considered. For instance, Aboriginal men have a personal interest in stressing the role they had in sanctioning such relationships, while Aboriginal women have a strong interest in stressing their own control over the relationships. European men are, perhaps, responding to an even a more complex set of factors shaping how they see and describe such relationships. Men involved generally will not discuss their involvement directly but have no such qualms describing other European men's relationships. The stigma resulting from European attitudes attached to such relationships clearly influences what they say, causing them to downplay their own role. It is interesting to note, however, that, when describing other European men, they are quite keen to stress the assertive role they played. This is, perhaps, a kind of male bravado surfacing, as a response to the assertive role Aboriginal women themselves often played in such relationships.

In a few cases, the three parties agreed to wife sharing.<sup>66</sup> Annie Karrakayn mentions<sup>67</sup> two such arrangements in which "she had two husbands" and notes that in one case on the death of the Aboriginal husband her relationship with the European man continued in a more conventional form. Annie also describes how in both cases alcohol played a major role in these relationships. In these and in many other cases, Europeans with legal access to alcohol, but not Aboriginal women, made an exchange with Aboriginal men, whose legal status in regard to alcohol and Aboriginal women was the complete inverse of the Europeans.

To the Yanyuwa such three-way relationships represented an accommodation to changing circumstances by adapting an existing marriage pattern. It was an accepted social institution for men to have more than one wife in a stable long term relationship and, therefore, it was, perhaps, not such a cultural leap for a woman to have two husbands. For the Europeans, however, there was a double standard that half-accepted casual relationships (by pretending they did not exist) but frowned upon permanent relationships. This meant that the European men involved with Aboriginal women would have been ostracised by many Europeans. Indeed, in many accounts I have been given by Europeans of relationships between European men and Aboriginal women,

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<sup>66</sup>Elkin (1951:168) notes the common occurrence of such "loose polyandry" in "marginal regions".

<sup>67</sup>1987 Tape 39A 30 and 33 min.

the narrator went out of their way to vilify the men involved.

The Yanyuwa too have their double standards about such relationships. One woman, when noting<sup>68</sup> that Yanyuwa women "wanted to go to that [European] man, yes!", went straight on to note the different responses if a woman had an Aboriginal rather than a European boyfriend. While Aboriginal men "allow that whitefeller to take that wife" if an Aboriginal man was involved, "there was fight and trouble!". On another occasion, the same woman offered an explanation for this noting that women only got in trouble for "running after Aboriginal people" and "not for whitefeller because maybe they used to like money and grog and that".

### 9.3 Sexual harassment of Aboriginal women

Whitefella been want a woman because no [European] woman been around (Rory Wurrulbirrangunu<sup>69</sup>).

It is worth examining in more detail the sexual harassment Aboriginal women have suffered, for as illustrated in section 10.5, it has been such a significant factor in the lives of many women that it has become a major influence on how women see their past. While sexual harassment certainly occurred before women came in to town, it intensified once they made this move so it is appropriate to discuss the issue in this chapter.

From a very early age to old age many Yanyuwa women have been repeatedly sexually harassed. Girls too young to be the subject of advances were<sup>70</sup> still used by European men as 'mailmen' to deliver requests to older women. Similarly mothers and grandmothers were often forced to try and protect their daughters and grand-daughters from the demands of European men. Dinah Marrngawi, for instance, recalls<sup>71</sup> as a young girl being a mailman and being told by a European "go back and tell them girls there" that he wanted them. Eileen Yakibijna also recalls<sup>72</sup> how one European used

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<sup>68</sup>1987 Tape 48A 30 min.

<sup>69</sup>1987 Tape 67B 9 min.

<sup>70</sup>The past tense is used here only to reflect my historical approach of analysing the Yanyuwa past. Much of what is described here is relevant to the present as well as the past.

<sup>71</sup>1987 Tape 34A 47 min.

<sup>72</sup>1987 Tape 34A 45 min.

to come into Borroloola "every mail day and get drunk ... he chase him girl, any girl, young girl, little girl". She goes on to describe how two particular girls had to tell him "me little girl", to which the European replied "you not little girl, you big girl". Eileen also tells<sup>73</sup> of another European man who approached two women saying,

"Hello beautiful girl ... I'd like girl you know, I'd like marry her, one of you girl."

The women replied - "Hey we're too dear you know ... too much money old boy."

Eileen's daughter, Isa Yubuyu, also told me<sup>74</sup> how when she was at school her return back to Malarndarri camp everyday involved running the gauntlet of one European's advances. She describes how one day "he just been come from nowhere, he just been jump out of the scrub and pull [the friend she was with] hair. And that hair been come off long his hand and he been kiss that hair". She goes on to describe how each afternoon they could hear him making suggestive noises from a hiding spot in the bush and how they avoided him by jumping into the river and swimming across to their camp.

Other European men were more subtle in their approaches. Isa, for instance, recalls<sup>75</sup> one European who "used to get dressed up with dress on and put [a woman's] hat on" with the aim of convincing people that he was a "girl, but he man!". The same individual, to prevent dogs attacking him, carried a "bag full of meat" and when dogs rushed up he would "throw it around everywhere" feeding the dogs. Isa also describes another man dressing up in women's clothes including "high heel shoes".

Annie Karrakayn, when recalling her childhood at Manangoora, recalls<sup>76</sup> how when visiting Europeans arrived "we used to be frightened for whitefella too, run away when I been young girl, we used to run away bush ... when we used to see that whitefella come, we run away now". She goes on to note how people used to say to each other, "Maybe they want a girl all this whitefella coming here" and how "old lady, maybe

<sup>73</sup>1988 Tape 2A 25 min.

<sup>74</sup>1988 Tape 4A 40 min.

<sup>75</sup>Ibid 42 min.

<sup>76</sup>1987 48B 16 min.

[safe from] white people, not young lady we used to run away". As Annie notes,<sup>77</sup>

Whitefella really greedy for all the girl ... they used to go greedy for girl, just take away 'nother girl, 'nother girl, 'nother mob of girl used to run away in the bush. I saw this when I been kid. All the whitefella used to just come up "hey can I take your wife, I'll give you this one [indicates smoking tobacco]" ... and sometime rum.

Nora Jalirduma also comments on the "greediness" of European men recalling how the manager of one station she worked on had "four black one girl" and that "he alla sleep along two fella, two fella [at a time] properly that whitefella want girl".

## 9.4 Changes in camp structures

The move in from the bush, first to camps like those at Manangoora and Malarndarri and eventually into Borroloola, involved many changes in the structures of the camps in which people were living. In turn, the changing nature of these camps meant there was a gradual breakdown in many previously existing practices in them. A good example of this are the 'loudspeakers' who once not only kept everyone informed about day to day news but provided a major forum for local politics.<sup>78</sup> Such public speaking provided the opportunity for rights and interests to be asserted, grievances aired and proposals floated.

Amy Bajamalanya's father was one of the most renowned loudspeakers and she makes the comparison between her father's oratory and that she has heard from European stall owners, trying to out shout each other in sideshow alley at the Darwin Show.<sup>79</sup> As Musso Harvey says,<sup>80</sup> loudspeakers used to address the whole camp "before daylight in the morning" and at night, keeping people informed about "fight going to be on ... some bloke gone Tableland somewhere, what happened in Tableland ... just like news". Musso went on to explain<sup>81</sup> that loudspeakers used to tell people "what is going

<sup>77</sup>1987 Tape 48A 29 min.

<sup>78</sup>Lieberman (1985:3) and Wallace (1976:50) discuss loudspeakers in other areas of Aboriginal Australia.

<sup>79</sup>1987 Tape 20A 12 min.

<sup>80</sup>1987 Tape 22A 2 min.

<sup>81</sup>1987 Tape 25A 14 min.

to happen, what business [ceremony] going on. Talks about that man his problems, not his, but for someone else, see how he can get it out". This getting problems "out" by airing them very publicly and resolving them equally publicly is a way of resolving conflict which is very distinct from most European processes.

On one occasion,<sup>82</sup> after describing what loudspeakers used to do, Musso concluded with a long sigh and added, "real good ... everything was good that time". His wife, Roddy Harvey, joined the conversation explaining that loudspeakers no longer existed because "we got a new house now". Clearly the demise of loudspeakers, like the demise of camps such as Malarndarri where they could operate, have become symbols of what has changed in Yanyuwa life.

When I asked Musso why loudspeakers had stopped he told me<sup>83</sup> that it had happened when people moved across the river as people were now "spread out". The idea that people were "spread out" once they were concentrated in town appears on the surface at least to be a contradiction. It is, however, readily explainable in terms of Yanyuwa concepts of social space. Even though in pre-contact times the Yanyuwa lived all over their country, they did so within small family groups that camped closely together. Such camps had a very tightly defined and structured social space. Moreover, for part of each year, the Yanyuwa also came together in larger groups for ceremonies. Again, the camps that existed at these times were structured according to social relationships and were on a scale that enabled loudspeakers to let everyone know what they were thinking.

A loudspeaker would require a very loud voice to be heard by many people today because of the distance between houses and because doors and walls block the sound. However, I inadvertently provided the opportunity for a revival of loudspeaking when I showed Willy Mundumundumara how my tape recorder could be used as an amplifier. He immediately took the chance to address the camp:<sup>84</sup> "my name Borroloola Willy ... listen to me" and went on to air a few grievances that he had.

Loudspeaking also involved public historical analysis. Eileen Yakibijna, for instance, recalls<sup>85</sup> how one loudspeaker at Malarndarri "used to say ... 'welfare been bring us

<sup>82</sup>1987 Tape 74A 14 min.

<sup>83</sup>1987 Tape 25A 15 min.

<sup>84</sup>1987 Tape 39B 39 min.

<sup>85</sup>1987 Tape 20A 10 min.

from Manangoora, we are now long Borroloola, eat him about porridge. We get him about ration now long welfare.' ” Unbeknown to the loudspeaker involved and to the rest of the Yanyuwa, the next major change in Yanyuwa life, the move across the McArthur river to the “white side”, would result in the end of loudspeaking itself.

An important aspect of the independence the Yanyuwa enjoyed at Malarndarri was the ability to settle their own disputes. Matters raised by loudspeakers were often resolved in formal fights. The following quote from Steve Johnson<sup>86</sup> gives a good description of the Malarndarri fighting ground (see figure 8.5) and an intriguing insight into how the Yanyuwa perceived football: “they used to even have a place where they used to go out and fight, like an oval . . . they had a fighting place . . . then in the later years they used it for football”.

Another interesting juxtaposition of Aboriginal and European institutions involved the role of the church at Malarndarri. As Jean Kirton notes,<sup>87</sup> the church formed a convenient “grandstand” to watch fights on the fighting ground. While this was partly because the church provided physical protection from flying spears and boomerangs, as well as convenient holes for viewing, it is likely that the church was also used as a grandstand because it provided neutral European ground close to the Aboriginal sphere of the fight.

Another aspect of camps that changed with the move across the river was the demise of single boys' camps. Previously, initiated boys and young men lived in such camps until they married. Because initiation seems to have occurred when boys were about twelve to fourteen years old and men often did not marry until they were in their thirties, males spent a good proportion of their time in such camps. Single women's camps have survived the move across the river and still exist in Borroloola. These camps have a core of older widowed women, who today have considerable economic independence due to their old age pensions. From what I have been told of single women's camps at Malarndarri and earlier, womens camps today appear to function as they did before European contact. Women are able to leave their husbands, if they choose, and live within such camps with their pre-initiate sons and their daughters of any age.

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<sup>86</sup>1987 Tape 30A 10 min.

<sup>87</sup>1987 Tape 73A 13 min.

Another effect of the move across the river has been language loss. Kirton (1988) claims this move as one of the major factors in Yanyuwa becoming "a dying language". As she notes,<sup>88</sup> across the river "there was not the communal situation to be constantly hearing the language all around in different age groups". Here again is an example of people living in town being socially further apart than when previously living in camps.

## 9.5 Changes in health

Health is an important issue in the changes the Yanyuwa experienced with contact. It is paradoxical that, while poor health out bush is often cited as a justification by former government officials for the policy of encouraging people to move in to town, the lowering of health standards, once people moved in to town, is commonly remarked on by the Yanyuwa. For instance, Annie Karrakayn says<sup>89</sup> "when we been sit down long bush, that been no more been have sickness ...bye and bye now ...when whitefella been come big mob now, now everything changed now we been get sickness". Similarly, Eileen Yakibijna recalls<sup>90</sup> how "when we been come from bush, and all been sit down long Borrooloola and old people been die ...when we all been settle down long Borrooloola, old people been die. That good old days in the bush". A major cause of this decrease in health was the loss of the well balanced bush diet in exchange for the sugar, jam and white flour dominated ration diet (see figure 7.7).

It should be noted that European concern for Aboriginal health has often had more to do with concerns for European welfare, than for that of the Aboriginal people. A telling remark illustrating this is found in the annual report of the Chief Protector of Aboriginals in 1936. C.E. Cook, he describes<sup>91</sup> the assistance the Northern Territory administration gave to cattle stations such as supplying "medicine chests ...free to station managements" and concludes (ibid:5) that "since the state of their [Aboriginal] health has a considerable influence on the health of the whites, no efforts are spared

<sup>88</sup>1987 Tape 73A 21 min.

<sup>89</sup>1987 Tape 34A 0 min. Annie discusses changes in health in detail on 1987 Tape 39A 7 min. and notes how Aboriginal people "reckon that white man bring all that things sickness".

<sup>90</sup>1987 Tape 62A 40 min.

<sup>91</sup>Australian Archives, Northern Territory Region, CRS F1 Item 36/387 Report of the Chief Protector of Aboriginals, pages 2-3; in the "Annual Report on the administration of the Northern Territory of Australia for the year ended 30th June 1936".

to keep the native population as healthy as possible".<sup>92</sup> A similar attitude is revealed in a letter of concern from Borroloola's European residents to the Northern Territory administration<sup>93</sup> on the poor health of the town's Aboriginal population. While mentioning blindness, yaws and "malnutrition<sup>94</sup> due to lack of full rations", the letter gives most emphasis to "the danger of venereal disease and leprosy existing amongst them".<sup>95</sup>

While European science and the Yanyuwa agree that Europeans introduced diseases, they differ in how they consider this occurred. The European explanation tells of the low resistance people had to infectious diseases, while the Yanyuwa explanation speaks of the damage the Europeans did to their country. Annie Karrakayn, for example, attributes greater illness today in town, than was the case when she was younger and living in the bush, to<sup>96</sup> "too many whitemen I suppose, and things they muck around in the country dreaming [sites]. That's what we think". In particular, she notes the damage cattle have done to a mythological site associated with ill health ("where that flu is dreaming") and the influenza epidemics this has caused.

The first records of a major outbreak are from the early 1890s with Stretton (1893:237) noting how "two years ago influenza broke out among the natives". Ruth Vincent recalls that the Australia-wide 1918-19 influenza epidemic had a dramatic impact on Aboriginal people in the region. She was at Roper River Mission at the time and remembers<sup>97</sup> how it "cleaned them out ... I was one of the lucky ones that didn't get it. Oh, they used to come in, in droves. They'd come today [and die] this afternoon or tomorrow. It was terrible that influenza". Ruth Heathcock, a trained nurse who lived at Roper Bar and later Borroloola throughout the 1930s, recalls<sup>98</sup> how in the early 1930s, before the introduction of antibiotics, Aboriginal people suffering from influenza

<sup>92</sup>European self interest in preserving their labour force was no doubt another factor in such medical assistance.

<sup>93</sup>Australian Archives, Northern Territory Region, CRS F1 36/387. Signed by Charlie Havey et al, page 2-3.

<sup>94</sup>Pat Festing, the wife of a former welfare officer at Borroloola, told me (1986 Tape 25B 6 min.) how a medical problem on some cattle stations was "starvation".

<sup>95</sup>Harrison 1979 provides a detailed study of the influence of racial ideas on Aboriginal health care and concludes (ibid:31) that in Australia in the period 1914-1950 "disease among Aborigines was seen only in terms of a threat to the public health, a term synonymous with the health of the white community".

<sup>96</sup>1987 Tape 40B 19 min.

<sup>97</sup>1987 Tape 73A 43 min.

<sup>98</sup>1986 Tape 30A 22 min.

"dropped like plague". A European, resident at Borrooloola in 1949, asked for Government assistance to aid the work he and his wife had done treating Aboriginal people affected by the outbreak of "a severe kind of influenza".<sup>99</sup> Nettie Harvey describes<sup>100</sup> how she and her husband treating more than a hundred people a day for influenza in the 1954-55 wet season. She notes how the outbreak started in December due to the return of sick cattle workers and spread quickly as "all the ones that were normally at Borrooloola would be sick because they had no resistance to it". In 1955 M. and L. Pattemore, the missionaries at Borrooloola, report (1955:8) "an Influenze [sic] epidemic raged for some 3-4 weeks in a severe form . . . two old people and two young women passed away" and their successors, the Strettons, recorded another epidemic in 1964 (Stretton and Stretton 1964:12).

The last major epidemic occurred in 1969 and Kirton (1988:5<sup>101</sup>) outlines how this epidemic started when a couple returned from Darwin by plane. At the time road transport into Borrooloola was still limited and it was possible for a major outbreak of influenza to be introduced in this way to a population with little exposure to the virus. This pattern of periodic influenza epidemics parallels that which Cronon (1983) describes in North America with European colonisation. His explanation of generations growing up without exposure to the disease perhaps can also be applied to the Borrooloola region. This pattern of epidemics, however, might just be the result of the selective nature of the available written and oral sources. It is more than likely that there were other major outbreaks that occurred in the region that I have not discovered.

In conjunction with the changing patterns of health outlined above, there has been a dramatic change in medical treatment. The Yanyuwa had their own medical treatments before contact with Europeans. Many of these treatments are still used. Borrooloola's Aboriginal health workers, for example, still place great faith in bush medicines. A native lemon grass is often collected to make a brew that is drunk to treat colds and influenza and the bark of *ma-bikiki* (see Appendix D) is used to treat skin infections by adding it to boiling water and applying it as a poultice to the skin. In the past this treatment was mainly used to treat insect bites but with the introduction of new

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<sup>99</sup>John Pearsall Australian Archives, Northern Territory Region, CRS F1 Item 48/15. Page 3 of letter to "Govt-Secretary" 14 September 1949.

<sup>100</sup>1987 Tape 2B 1 min.

<sup>101</sup>Kirton makes the same point on 1987 Tape 72B 10 min.

diseases affecting the skin, for example, leprosy, it was applied to the new irritations as well. As such it represents a good example of response to European initiated change being very much within an existing Aboriginal framework.

Prior to European medicine the Yanyuwa medicine could cope with even the most severe accidents. Lost limbs from shark or crocodile attacks, for example, were treated by cauterising the wound with hot ashes and treating the scar with various 'bush medicines'.<sup>102</sup> Sprains and muscular aches were often treated by rubbing in goanna oil. Ruth Heathcock describes<sup>103</sup> how, when she had an eye condition, it was Aboriginal and not European medicine that came to her aid. She also notes<sup>104</sup> how, despite her training in midwifery, Aboriginal women had a lot to teach her about assisting births and that, in all her time in Northern Territory Aboriginal communities, she knew of only one woman who died in childbirth.<sup>105</sup>

## 9.6 Employment with Europeans

Employment with Europeans has played a major part in changing the lives of the Yanyuwa. While the Yanyuwa involvement with the cattle industry has already been examined it is necessary to examine the whole range of Yanyuwa employment. Three aspects of this employment need to be considered in detail.

### Bosses

A fundamental aspect of the good view many Aboriginal people have of the cattle times is the close relations they had then with their bosses. Time and again I have been told about Europeans who "been grow me up". The two brothers, Dinny Nyliba and Isaac Walayungkuma, for example, were 'grown up' by Jack Keighran, from the ages of about twelve and eight years old respectively, after their father died. When talking about Keighran they still call him *kajaja* (the Yanyuwa term for father) and relate

<sup>102</sup>Musso Harvey describes his grandfather being successfully treated in this way after losing a leg to a shark.

<sup>103</sup>1986 Tape 29B 27 min.

<sup>104</sup>Ibid 6 min.

<sup>105</sup>Ibid 21 min., the woman in question was a European and died after going to Darwin hospital for the birth. Nora Jalirduma, probably the oldest Aboriginal woman I worked with, also cannot recall an Aboriginal woman dying in childbirth (1987 Tape 69B 44 min.).

to Keighran's descendants according to this relationship. In the same way, Isaac's wife, Annie Karrakayn describes<sup>106</sup> Keighran as "that father-in-law of mine". Tim Rakuwurlma similarly describes<sup>107</sup> how his boss, Captain Luff, "grew him up" and how he called Luff's wife *kujaka* (mother). Roy Hammer, also describes<sup>108</sup> how his boss (from whom he took his surname) "been grow me up . . . we used to camp in one bed sometime".<sup>109</sup>

As noted above employment experiences with European bosses were the stepping stones most Yanyuwa took on the path from bush to town life. Through successive jobs Yanyuwa individuals gradually came into more and more contact with Europeans. Tim Rakuwurlma, for example, can trace his involvement with Europeans along a path of working for pearling and trepanging boats, working on cargo boats, getting salt at Manangoora, pans, assisting surveyors, droving and working for welfare, firstly unloading cargo and, most recently, working as a kind of social worker "looking after drunken men". A pattern emerges in this and other examples of an increasing knowledge of European ways and, in particular, knowledge of English leading to further involvement with Europeans. Two cycles, one of gaining skills useful to Europeans and the other, of becoming more and more dependent on the benefits such employment gave them, worked together and combined to bring people further and further into the European world.

### Chance to see country

An important reason why Yanyuwa individuals took on work with Europeans was that it often gave them opportunities to travel and see country. In turn, such travel provided individuals with status due to the knowledge they gained by travelling. An understanding of country is high on Aboriginal assessments of intelligence and the greater someone has travelled the greater is their potential knowledge. For example, an important reason for cattle work being held in such high esteem was that it involved travel and this allowed people to stay in contact with the land (although not always

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<sup>106</sup>1987 Tape 10B 2 min.

<sup>107</sup>1987 Tape 50B 39 min.

<sup>108</sup>1987 Tape 52A 31 min.

<sup>109</sup>McGrath (1987a:103) quotes another Northern Territory Aboriginal stockmen on a white boss who a " 'good bloke' because he slept on the same bed as a black man".

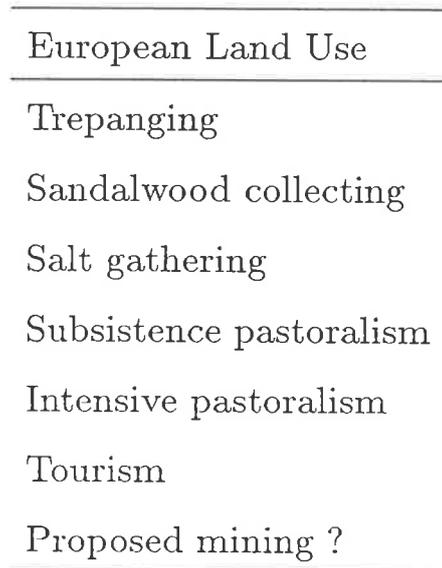


Figure 9.1: Sequence of European land uses in the Borrooloola region

their own) and this in turn enabled people to teach and learn about the land. Today the knowledge of country that workers gained is greatly valued and is a source of authority.

The status that travellers had in traditional times is another factor in this process. The main reason one would have had for travelling then would have been to attend ceremonies. In this context it is interesting to note also that at Borrooloola, as in other areas of Australia, some individuals enhanced their status by coming back with knowledge of different ceremonies. This could occur in two ways, ceremonies occurring in other areas could be observed<sup>110</sup> or, as in the case of the women's Ngadiji ritual, new rituals could come to the Borrooloola area as a result of someone dreaming it<sup>111</sup> while living away from Borrooloola.

Another means of ceremonies being introduced is through Yanyuwa people bringing spouses back from other country. Again employment with Europeans provided the usual means of such relationships. Eileen Yakibijna, for example, describes how the *jarada* ("love magic") songs were introduced to Borrooloola by a woman from the Alexandria station area, who married a Yanyuwa man whom she met on this station. Eileen

<sup>110</sup>For example, Tim Rakuwurlma describes (1987 Tape 56A 4 min.) the ceremonies he observed in Torres Strait and Arnhem Land when working on a lugger. He has often remarked (for example, 1983 Tape 3A 42 min.) to me on the lack of "young man" circumcision ceremonies on Thursday Island.

<sup>111</sup>There is a description of this ritual and its origin, including an account from the women who dreamt it, in Gale 1983:68-70.

recalls<sup>112</sup> how the woman said " 'I'm married long your boy from here, well we will give ... song for you now'".

### Reduced hunting and gathering

The succession of European land uses in the Borrooloola area is given in figure 9.1. Some of these periods overlapped but the order given represents the order in which they commenced in the region.

It is possible to make rough estimates for these periods of the changing proportion of the Yanyuwa diet that came from the bush and from European sources. From my observations of current Yanyuwa life, I would estimate that 90% of their diet is from European sources and the balance comes from bush tucker. In this bush tucker figure I have not included locally killed beef. Such beef currently makes up probably about 20% of the diet of Aboriginal people in Borrooloola. Cattle are regularly killed on the outstations around town. While clearly a relatively new item in the diet of Aboriginal people, the consumption of beef appears to be a direct replacement of meat from more traditional sources such as kangaroos and dugongs. While both these animals are still hunted a much greater proportion of the current Yanyuwa diet comes from the cattle that they kill. As noted above (page 220) in Yanyuwa eyes bullock is bush tucker. If it is included in the calculation, bush tucker makes up 30% of the current Yanyuwa diet.

The European economic activities listed above can be considered to represent a continuum during which Europeans felt an increasing need to remove Aboriginal people from their land and a generally decreasing need for their labour. From accounts I have collected from those Yanyuwa who worked for European trepangers I would estimate that during this period European food sources made up about 10% of the Yanyuwa diet. This figure probably increased to about 40% with subsistence pastoralism and 70% with intensive pastoralism.

It is important then to stress that the gradual increasing involvement the Yanyuwa had with the European economic sphere was matched by a decrease in the bush economy. Two main factors were at work here; employed Yanyuwa had less time to get food for themselves and in receiving payment for their labour (occasionally money but more commonly European food) the Yanyuwa had less need for bush tucker. Another fac-

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<sup>112</sup>1988 Tape 2B 26 min.

tor operating was that this sequence of European economic activities has increasingly altered the environment and reduced its bush tucker productivity.

## 9.7 Christianity

Whereas missionaries in many areas of Australia played a role in encouraging Aboriginal people to come in to settlements this was not the case at Borrooloola. The church was a late arrival in Borrooloola, it was not until early 1953 that a missionary was permanently based there (Pattimore 1953:6).<sup>113</sup> Before this, itinerant missionaries had occasionally visited the town. The earliest mention of such visits is David Lindsay's 1914<sup>114</sup> description:<sup>115</sup> "the Revd. Wilkinson arrived from Burketown yesterday and held a service in the evening. We all attended as a mark of respect to him and to show our sympathy for his work". From his account, however, it appears that this service was for Europeans only. No Yanyuwa have ever said anything to me that indicates missionaries were a reason for them coming in. Missionaries, however, soon became an important influence on their lives once the Yanyuwa were in town.

Borrooloola's church was established in 1953 and has been run ever since by the Aborigines Inland Mission (AIM). This organisation was established by Retta Dixon in Singleton, New South Wales in 1905 and still has its headquarters there. It has operated in the Northern Territory since 1936. In 1948 it commenced dry season "itinerary" work on isolated communities in the Northern Territory which took its missionaries to Borrooloola.<sup>116</sup> The AIM has a more evangelical and fundamentalist approach<sup>117</sup> than the established Australian churches. While it has a conservative approach to

<sup>113</sup>Mervyn Pattimore describes the setting up of the church on 1986 Tape 22A 15-18 min.

<sup>114</sup>I have been unable to locate any mention of missionary activity in the Police Journal, which covers most of the previous three decades.

<sup>115</sup>Australian Archives, Canberra A3 Item 14/2482. Page 40 of typed report "Impressions of country traversed by the Northern Territory Royal Commission as recorded by Frank Clarke Chairman" in file titled "David Lindsay - Description of country traversed by the Royal Commission on NT Rlys and Port".

<sup>116</sup>All dates and information comes from the Jubilee issue of AIM's journal *Our Aim* 17th August, 1955. A set of this journal is held by the AIAS library in Canberra. In 1985 the AIM took over the functions of the Australian Missionary Society which had churches based in Alice Springs, Camooweal and Dajarra (*Our Aim* July 1985).

<sup>117</sup>It, for example, embraced the "Dr Billy Graham Crusade" in the 1950s (*Our Aim* July 1959:18).

many Aboriginal issues,<sup>118</sup> it has made greater steps than many churches in having Aboriginal pastors. Tim Rakurwurlma's son, Nero Timothy, was a pastor for many years and served both in Borroloola and elsewhere in the Northern Territory.

The longest serving minister at Borroloola acknowledges<sup>119</sup> that Christianity has had a great impact on Yanyuwa life but attributes it not to his actions but to a higher authority:

We missionaries of course are as far as the anthropologist and all this kind of people are concerned, we are the biggest cause of the degradation of the race and all these kinds of things, take away the old customs from them. We just simply have to be prepared to accept that people do turn away from the old customs but it isn't our doings, it is the Lord's doing.

Two other Borroloola missionaries, however, do stress their role in changing "old customs":

a definite stand has been taken here on the question of the old customs, and there is no uncertainty as to what is expected of believers. All association with the Corroborree has been disclaimed" (Field and Main 1960:18).

Some idea of how the Yanyuwa responded to missionary attitudes to ceremonies is given in the following quote. A researcher, who has spent a long time in the area, told me<sup>120</sup> that because she and her assistant were Christians they were not told anything about ceremonies by Aboriginal people:

from the people's own experience of Christian workers in the area being strongly against their culture and not valuing their language and being against ceremonial life it was assumed we would be the same so there was just silence on this whole area . . . and the understanding we got . . . was that ceremonies were a thing of the past.

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<sup>118</sup>Articles have, for instance, been published in its journal in recent years attacking: (October 1981) the World Council of Churches conclusion in their 1981 report that "racism is entrenched" in Australian society and (March 1984) "the red black and yellow symbol of radicalism" of the Aboriginal flag.

<sup>119</sup>1986 Tape 22B 29 min.

<sup>120</sup>1987 Tape 72A 34 min.

Annie Karrakayn says<sup>121</sup> that, in the past, some missionaries “break all the law of the Aboriginal people ... one time they never used to let us do ... ceremony”. When I asked Annie how missionaries had done this, she gave the following summary of what the missionaries had told people and her reply:

“Don’t dance, don’t sing him.”

“Well we’re not white people.” That’s the way I talk. “We can sing our own corroboree because we black ... we can’t understand you too”.

Annie explains that ceremonies continued “without the missionary knowing ... hide it ... at Malarndarri”.

Despite the official welfare sentiment (noted on page 227) that ceremonies were an impediment to assimilation goals many individual welfare officers actively encouraged ceremonial life. Not surprisingly then ceremonies became an issue of conflict between such welfare officers and missionaries. Tim Rakuwurlma recalls<sup>122</sup> one such dispute between a welfare officer and a missionary over the continuation of ceremonies. He describes how the welfare officer said “Missionary no boss, I’m boss for you fella, you fella get money from Government ... you fella can play, make a young man, belong that law belong you fella. Missionary can’t stop him no more”. Tim, however, says<sup>123</sup> subincision and female initiations ended in the area as a result of “Government [saying] ‘leave him now’ ”. One welfare officer who particularly encouraged Aboriginal ceremonies was Ted Harvey. He told me<sup>124</sup> that missionaries “didn’t like it [ceremonies], but they weren’t game to do anything about it because I was with the Aboriginals”.

There used to be a number of female ceremonies associated with important female life stages but they have now ceased. First to stop was what was described as “female initiation” and Annie Karrakayn says<sup>125</sup> there are only a few old women still alive who went through this.<sup>126</sup> Another ceremony marked first menstruation and involved a period of seclusion spent away from camps with just a few women (often grandmothers).

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<sup>121</sup>1987 Tape 39A 21 min.

<sup>122</sup>1987 Tape 36B 16 min.

<sup>123</sup>Ibid 16 and 18 min. respectively.

<sup>124</sup>1987 Tape 2B 45 min.

<sup>125</sup>1987 Tape 39A 28 min.

<sup>126</sup>This contradicts the conclusions Stretton (1893:223) makes that these had already ceased in the 1890s.

Women have told me that, while "parties" still occur to mark this stage in a girl's life, the long period of seclusion and associated rituals have stopped.<sup>127</sup> Irene Kanjujama says<sup>128</sup> "I was the last one it happened to".<sup>129</sup> Irene's mother, Annie Karrakayn, confirms this saying<sup>130</sup> that Irene was the "last one". When I asked Annie if missionaries or welfare officers played any part in encouraging the end of such ceremonies, she replied<sup>131</sup> that they "just stopped anyway. They didn't say anything" and concludes that the Yanyuwa decided to "let it go now".

Willis (1985) gives a detailed account of the conversion process for Aboriginal people in Kununurra (Western Australia). His conclusion (1985:12) raises another example of the relevance of dependency to the analysis of contact processes. He notes "that the Catholic church within the process of its evangelisation engaged in strategic bestowals of goods and services in order to make the people grateful, dependent and reciprocal". In the same article, Willis illustrates how Aboriginal people can adopt Christianity and subsume it within traditional religious frameworks. As he notes (1985:12), "they are happy to take on another ritual system to enrich their ritual repertoire . . . at least some forms of Aboriginal Christianity can be understood as kinds of additional ceremonial sets incorporated into Aboriginal religion". Willis is writing here from a Catholic perspective and it needs to be noted that this denomination is particularly rich in ritual. In discussions with the Yanyuwa about religion, they have stressed the contrast between the local Aborigines Inland Mission Church and denominations with more ritual.<sup>132</sup>

Yanyuwa views on Christianity are perhaps best summed up by Jerry Charlie, a Yanyuwa man, who was temporarily the pastor at Borroloola. He once told me<sup>133</sup> that the Rainbow Serpent "was boss for that God and Jesus". Another example of Yanyuwa views of Christianity being subsumed within Yanyuwa law is given by Musso Harvey

<sup>127</sup>A group of women made these points in a group discussion on female ceremonies 1983 Tape 19B 34 min.

<sup>128</sup>1987 Tape 4A 18 min. She describes how she spent four months in the bush with her grandmother and aunts and how the school teachers were told she was away on a holiday.

<sup>129</sup>Irene was born in 1952 so she would have gone through this 'business' in the mid 1960s.

<sup>130</sup>1987 Tape 39A 28 min.

<sup>131</sup>Ibid 27 min.

<sup>132</sup>For example, Tim Rakuwurlma 1987 Tape 19A 3 min.

<sup>133</sup>Personal communication.

who compares<sup>134</sup> the Yanyuwa belief that people "go back to the land" when they die, to the Christian belief in heaven and concludes that Aboriginal "people used to know before, they knew god was there. I don't know how, no one told them ... they knew god was there all the time them old people, they didn't know the rules to go about it that is all". Another example of how the Yanyuwa incorporate Christianity within a Yanyuwa framework is given by Tim Rakuwurlma. He describes<sup>135</sup> how, while he is not a "Christian man, no more me",<sup>136</sup> he goes to church each week out of respect for his deceased son, who was the pastor at the church; "my son good man too, church belong my son now".<sup>137</sup> Tim's words here present another example of how the Yanyuwa have incorporated Christianity within their world view. He notes that the church belongs to his son and not vice versa.

The active church goers at Borrooloola are mostly women and the few men attending have usually become involved through the influence of their wives. For many Aboriginal people at Borrooloola, Christianity is more of a social identification than an acceptance of religious teachings. People define themselves as Christian and therefore non-drinkers. Similarly, not being a gambler is sometimes a definition of being a Christian.<sup>138</sup> Likewise, when I once explained I did not smoke, I was told "ah you're a Christian". It needs to be noted that there is a historical precedent in the region for such a definition of Christianity, as at one time the missions on Groote Eylandt and Roper River had a no-tobacco policy.<sup>139</sup>

The establishment of a school at Borrooloola was a particular request the Yanyuwa made of missionaries.<sup>140</sup> Some Yanyuwa see Christianity as part of a reciprocal relation-

<sup>134</sup>1987 Tape 21B 32 min.

<sup>135</sup>1987 Tape 19A 1 min.

<sup>136</sup>Elsewhere 1983 13A 35 min., Tim describes the minister offering to baptise him and make him a Christian and how he refused " 'you leave me here. I want to look after them corroboree'. He try to make me Christina but I been tell him 'I might wrong, you leave me here, I'm not Christian' ".

<sup>137</sup>Annie Karrakayn (1987 Tape 39B 9 min.) quotes Tim saying, "because my son been here long this place we better come".

<sup>138</sup>Such a definition is not surprising as the Aborigines Inland Missionaries based at Borrooloola stress that gambling is a sin. The influence of "Satan" is cited when "gambling ... reared its ugly head and swept through the camp like fire" (Pattimore and Pattimore 1961:11). In Aboriginal eyes the distinction is not so clear cut as some people who identify themselves as Christians do gamble.

<sup>139</sup>The lack of tobacco at these missions and the apparent acceptance of this by Aboriginal people is noted with some surprise in, Australian Archives, Northern Territory Region, CRS F1 Item 50/10. Page 2 of J.R. Ryan's report "Routine Patrol 11 June 1950 to 3rd November 1950".

<sup>140</sup>Merv Pattimore describes (1987 Tape 45B 35 min.) how a school was the first thing the Yanyuwa

ship, with missionaries providing schooling and the Yanyuwa for their part accepting aspects of missionary teaching. People also feel indebted to missionaries for the financial and emotional support they have received from Christians, particularly when they have been in hospitals away from Borroloola. Borroloola Willy, for example, told me<sup>141</sup> of the help he received when in Alice Springs hospital. When I asked Eileen Yakibijna, "What was better Christian way or blackfella way?" she replied "I reckon it's best that Christian life because when I was sick nearly died . . . all the missionary been come and pray for me . . . in Darwin that time I went for operation".

Christianity to the Yanyuwa does not necessarily involve giving up their own belief system. Belief is maintained in many things missionaries would regard as un-christian. Belief in sorcery and the ability of Aboriginal doctors to cure those who are inflicted by sorcery are particular cases in point. Every Yanyuwa person I worked with still holds such views. Beckett (1987:96) examines the issue of sorcery and Christianity and concludes that sorcery is "the Achilles heel of [Torres Strait] Island Christianity, for while white people seemed not to be vulnerable to it, Islanders were". From the point of view of missionaries this "Achilles heel" is real but for many Yanyuwa it is not because the two systems are seen to be independent and not contradictory. While not supporting Beckett's "Achilles heel" conclusion the Yanyuwa example does support his general conclusion (ibid:87-100) that for the Torres Strait Islanders, Christianity has been both incorporated into existing frameworks and has become an intellectual tool with which to analyse the inequalities of colonialism.

Indeed the Yanyuwa use Christianity to examine the contradictions in the Christianity they are taught. Annie Karrakayn, for instance, describes how she quoted the bible to the missionary for examples of circumcision ceremonies when he tried to stop Yanyuwa circumcision ceremonies. She pointed out<sup>142</sup> that "Old Abraham he was a little man<sup>143</sup> and later he became a man like a *rdaru*<sup>144</sup> now". On another occasion she recalled<sup>145</sup> how she asked the missionary why he was telling them not to have multiple

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asked for from missionaries.

<sup>141</sup>1987 Tape 66A 28 min.

<sup>142</sup>1987 Tape 39A 22 min.

<sup>143</sup>An Aboriginal English term for uninitiated males.

<sup>144</sup>The Yanyuwa term for boys undergoing preparation for circumcision.

<sup>145</sup>1987 Tape 48A 33 min.

wives when the old testament documented the same practice.<sup>146</sup>

In a similar way, for many Yanyuwa people Christianity provides an intellectual framework that is used with devastating logic to analyse inequitable situations in which they find themselves. Consider Annie Karrakayn's conclusions after describing<sup>147</sup> how welfare had virtually complete control (including as Annie notes separating couples) over peoples lives.

Welfare time we didn't speak to welfare just because we used to frighten to talk, so welfare used, to say: "Right you can stay, your husband can go", stay now just take word for welfare, notice ... we didn't thinking about what's going on. [Only] later on, later on [we said to ourselves] "how this whitefella came over us?" we been think, ... we just think ourselves ... later on when I became a Christian now, I think a lot, think lot of things about whitefella and blackfellas, all that. And I'm still here too, you've got to think wrong and right, which ones the better ways, that's when I changed my mind now, thinking about things, and way back what we used to live our lives ...

As Annie's comments illustrate the Christian doctrine of equality provides a particularly revealing perspective to analyse the inequitable situations the Yanyuwa find themselves in. The irony of the fact that a European based moral code (not to mention Yanyuwa ones) highlights the injustices the Yanyuwa feel is not lost on Yanyuwa intellectuals like Annie.

## 9.8 School

Too much whitefella tongue [language] they use in school all the time.<sup>148</sup>

As discussed above, school had a important role in bringing people in from the bush and keeping them in town once they had made this move. The Yanyuwa were very

<sup>146</sup>Annie added with a laugh that the only answer she got was "That is a good question".

<sup>147</sup>1987 48B 14 min.

<sup>148</sup>Annie Karrakayn 1983 19A 61 min.

keen for their children to learn skills they considered essential in the changing world they lived in. This section examines some of the influence school had on people, once they had made the move to town. The Borroloola school also provides a good focus to draw out the conflicts between missionaries and welfare.

Merv and Lelane Pattemore, the first permanent missionaries, established a school in Borroloola in 1954 (Pattemore and Pattemore 1954b:14). The school soon proved a source of conflict between welfare and the missionaries. The initial welfare attitude is well illustrated in the words of the District Superintendent,<sup>149</sup> "I do not think that Mr Pattemore is doing any harm, and by the same token I do not think he will do any good". The Superintendent, then goes on to note how older boys at the school "are too old to receive any serious education, and will be better off out working". This issue of work versus schooling was to become a recurring conflict and is one much commented on by the Yanyuwa.<sup>150</sup> As noted above, the cattle period is one well remembered by many Yanyuwa but they tended to regard schooling as more important and resented welfare sending them to work when they wished to continue at school. As Bella Marrajabu recalls,<sup>151</sup> when the Pattemores started the school "that welfare been no more like that missionary now ... when missionary been find that school first, before welfare. And government man been come and hunt him away missionary and take all the kid away". As Bella notes, the Government soon took over the schooling from the missionaries.

The school has had a major impact on Yanyuwa culture. It has, for example, played a major role in the decline of Aboriginal languages in the area. As Kirton (1988) discusses in detail, when children are removed from the Aboriginal world of the camps, the time they have listening to people speaking languages other than English is dramatically reduced. As well as this time factor some individual teachers actively discouraged children from speaking their own language. Annie Karrakayn, for instance, describes<sup>152</sup> how one long-serving headmaster used to "tell kid not to talk language ... he always smack them for talk, he treat kid like missionary".<sup>153</sup>

<sup>149</sup>Les Penhall, report on Borroloola, 27 July 1954. Australian Archives, Northern Territory Region, F1 Item 52/606.

<sup>150</sup>Don Manarra, for example, (1987 Tape 34B 43 min.), describes how he wanted to stay at school but had to go to work.

<sup>151</sup>1986 Tape 15A 66 min.

<sup>152</sup>1987 Tape 37A 43 min.

<sup>153</sup>Annie goes on to note "Like missionary stop kid now [from] talk [language] and no ceremony".

## 9.9 Aboriginal influences on Europeans

Borrooloola was always a place where the drifters drifted<sup>154</sup>.

In section 8.4.4 on big places, a large scale example of how Aboriginal cultural landscapes influenced Europeans was offered. This section examines some very specific examples of how Aboriginal people also influenced the European residents of Borrooloola.

By analysing contact and change through the structure of coming in, I have constructed a false impression that contact only involved Aboriginal people changing. While Australian history is not marked by accommodations Europeans made to Aboriginal culture, the few Europeans who lived in the Borrooloola area present an example of such European accommodation. It is thus necessary to develop a model of contact that includes the role of two way cultural exchange. The relationships these Europeans developed with Aboriginal people are a direct result of Aboriginal people coming in.

After its wild west days Borrooloola's European population was so low that the town became well known as a ghost town. Farwell (1962:149) describes Borrooloola as a "decaying ghost town of half a dozen ramshackle buildings". After a trip made to Borrooloola in 1955, Fuller (1978:62) wrote that "Borrooloola had nothing resembling a main, or any street". Those few Europeans who chose to remain at Borrooloola after its wild west times achieved legendary status in Northern Territory folklore. Except for a brief increase during World War Two, the European population of Borrooloola varied between three and ten. Significantly most of these individuals spent many decades living in the town and their lifestyle reflected a strong Aboriginal influence. Most of these men<sup>155</sup> lived with Aboriginal women and relied at least partly on the bush tucker obtained for them. As Attenborough (1963:122) documents with his account of Roger Jose's woven pandanus hat, these men benefited from the bush skills of their wives. Presumably this hat was either made by his Aboriginal wife or she had taught him how to weave pandanus.

European observers of these men are full of comments usually saved for Aboriginal people: criticising their lack of interest in employment, marvelling at their philosophies

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<sup>154</sup>Ted Egan 1988 Tape 6B 14 min.

<sup>155</sup>For a long period the only European woman in the area was the wife of the policeman and, after the police left the area, the wife of the welfare officer. Griffin (1941:29) describes how the policeman's wife "is referred to as the loneliest white woman in Australia, her nearest white woman neighbour being 190 miles south, at Anthony Lagoon".

of life and making comment on the bush tucker in their diet. One long-serving welfare officer, for instance, remembers<sup>156</sup> that when he was there "there was nobody who did anything in the Borroloola area at all" and goes on to suggest that the most active of the Europeans "just sat on his bum and did nothing".

Attenborough (1963) gives an evocative account of his visit to Borroloola in 1962 that resulted in his film *The Hermits of Borroloola*. He describes his interest in "no-hopers", a term he defines (1963:105) as "a man who has forsworn the comforts of civilization, shunned society and gone to live in solitude". On expressing this interest to the Darwin journalist, Douglas Lockwood, he was advised (Attenborough, 1963:108) "if you want to see three together, then the place to go is Borroloola. It's a ghost town. Just a few crumbling shacks and among the ruin, these three blokes". While two of the "no-hopers" stress how they have chosen their lifestyle, the third is perhaps more honest and certainly more revealing. "Jack the Mad Fiddler" describes how he was (ibid:124) "sent out of England for England's good" and comments on the other two Europeans (ibid:127):

They're hatters, just the same as I am. They're miserable blokes most of the time, just like me. But a man comes out here for a bit for one reason or another, he stays on and before he knows what has happened, he's got to a stage where he can't change his way of life, even if he wanted to.

It is interesting to note that Jack's comment on what kept him in Borroloola closely parallels the factors I have outlined that kept the Yanyuwa in town. Like them he says he came not intending to stay but now finds himself unable to go back to his pre-Borroloola life.

Attenborough's film and book, like many other accounts of Borroloola, gloss over the fact that the ghost town had a substantial Aboriginal population. This disregard of Aboriginal people is, no doubt, partly the result of what Stanner (1979:214) has called a "cult of forgetfulness", when it comes to considering Aboriginal people. Another factor, however, in this "forgetfulness" is to avoid the need for discussing the sexual relationships between these men and Aboriginal women. Two of Attenborough's "no-hopers" were in openly acknowledged long standing relationships with Aboriginal women and

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<sup>156</sup>1987 Tape 3B 9 min.

the third at least occasionally tried to entice women to his camp.<sup>157</sup>

The Native Affairs Branch<sup>158</sup> officials were more forthright in their comments and stress the association these men had with Aboriginal women. Bill Harney, for example, writes<sup>159</sup> of Borroloola, "the Residents of this place are unique, each living on his own hill as it were with his own group of natives".<sup>160</sup> It is illuminating to note that, while acknowledging the existence of Aboriginal people (he could hardly do otherwise as it was his job to check on their living conditions), Harney does not give them the status of residents. Despite the forthright and straightforward nature of all his reports, he also does not comment on the sexual nature of some of these relationships between Aboriginal and European people. Perhaps he felt these were so obvious it did not need to be said. More likely, however, he felt an affinity to the lifestyle of these men and did not want to do anything that might lead to charges of "co-habitation" being laid against them. He had in fact in the area lived with Aboriginal women. The stories of his moral lectures, on the theme that "it is not what I do, it is what I tell you to do",<sup>161</sup> have become part of the European folklore of the area. A number of Aboriginal people that I interviewed also commented on the incongruity of Harney's new policing role but with bemusement rather than the humour Europeans expressed.

Men who were open about their relationships with Aboriginal women were branded "combos".<sup>162</sup> They usually accepted their children as their own and had to fight running battles with the Government to keep them. Clara and Elma Johnson, for instance, proudly tell<sup>163</sup> how their father "was a tough old man" and when a policeman visited their camp on Vanderlin Island and told their father, "I can take them kids of yours,

<sup>157</sup>Discussed at length by Aboriginal women on 1987 Tape 34B 1 min. and 1988 Tape 2A 24 min.

<sup>158</sup>The predecessor to Welfare Branch.

<sup>159</sup>Australian Archives, Northern Territory Region, F1 44/275, page 2.

<sup>160</sup>A long term European resident, Mick Baker, describes (1987 Tape 61A 6 min.) a similar situation in the early 1960s when each European resident lived in a separate camp and kept to themselves.

<sup>161</sup>Sunny Raggard 1987 Tape 19A 9 min. Sunny goes on to describe how Harney "was an experienced man, a reformed combo" and how if you were "caught cohabiting with a dark woman [you got] six months". Mary Joe Webb, when asked if she remembered Harney, replied (1987 Tape 18B 21 min.) "Oh Bill Harney he was a larrikin bugger . . . he wanta make friend long me and I been talk 'No!'. "

<sup>162</sup>Ransom (1988) notes the long history of the use of this word to describe such men, the origin of the term is unclear but Ransom notes that the Australian use of the term pre-dates its use with the same meaning in the United States.

<sup>163</sup>1987 Tape 42A 1 min.

I've got six 'boys'<sup>164</sup>", he replied "Yeah, well I've got six cartridges".<sup>165</sup>

The absurdity of the legal position of these men is well illustrated in attempts they made (or that were made on their behalf) to get married to their Aboriginal spouses. Patrol officer Kyle-Little attempted<sup>166</sup> to get Andy Anderson married and "to adopt his sons [so that] they would inherit the salt pans".<sup>167</sup> Sunny Raggard, who is of mixed Aboriginal and European descent<sup>168</sup> described to me<sup>169</sup> how despite the fact that he had "acted as an alter boy at St. Peters cathedral in Adelaide" and had been confirmed in Adelaide, a Church of England minister visiting Borrooloola refused to marry him on the grounds that as Sunny was an Aborigine he "was a heathen". The Borrooloola welfare officer later arranged for an itinerant Salvation Army minister to marry Sunny and his wife. Similarly Gordon Birt recalls<sup>170</sup> how another of Borrooloola's long term European residents Albert Morcom was refused permission to marry the Aboriginal woman he was living with.

Employment opportunities for Europeans at Borrooloola were very limited. Some individuals made a living out of killing dingoes for the bounty paid for them and during the brief crocodile shooting boom a number of shooters were based at Borrooloola. Others managed to eke out a living by trading items with Aboriginal people. Roger Jose, for example, "used to get a lot of stuff, parcel post, hair oil, combs and tobacco"<sup>171</sup> and sold these to (or traded them with) Aboriginal people. The European residents of the area also proved particularly resourceful at lobbying for subsidised shipping services and then tendering to provide related infrastructure such as wharves, beacons and clearing of sandbanks in the McArthur River.<sup>172</sup> The river had to be re-beaconed after each wet season and sandbars similarly had to be cleared annually. Considerable

<sup>164</sup>Referring to his six Aboriginal trackers.

<sup>165</sup>Their brother, Steve, told me the same story virtually verbatim except that he says there were four "boys" not six.

<sup>166</sup>Australian Archives, Northern Territory Region, F315 43/393 A2.

<sup>167</sup>His son Lenin Anderson does now hold the Manangoora pastoral lease.

<sup>168</sup>One of his grandmothers was a "full blood" Aborigine.

<sup>169</sup>1987 Tape 15A 3 min.

<sup>170</sup>1986 Tape 32A 20 min.

<sup>171</sup>Mick Baker 1987 Tape 60A 32 min. Fullwood (1986:7) gives a similar description of Roger trading "dugong meat and native artefacts from the Aborigines for tobacco and fishing lines".

<sup>172</sup>Australian Archives, Northern Territory Region, CRS F1 Item 48/34. "Beacons - McArthur, Roper, Wearyan and Robertson (sic) River", is a large file dealing with such matters.

sums<sup>173</sup> were paid to the European tenderers who in turn got Aboriginal people to do most, if not all the work. Some individuals took ingenious steps to guarantee a yearly income from such work. Les James, for instance, describes<sup>174</sup> how for a while the wharf was rebuilt each year, as the Europeans with the contract to rebuild it made sure of their yearly employment by burning it down.

Steve Johnson's following description of Freddie Blitner<sup>175</sup> stresses the degree to which one European was able to adopt an Aboriginal way of life: "He used to go out bush with just a cock rag and join up with the blacks, take off bush for a few days, got nothing, only a spear, woomera and that's it. He could talk the language too". Blitner is remembered by many Yanyuwa people for the elements of their culture he adopted, these included hunting kangaroo and cooking it in ground ovens.<sup>176</sup> Tim Rakuwurlma recalls<sup>177</sup> that Blitner was a "good man he feed blackfella for tucker, him been feed me, him been call me my name<sup>178</sup> when I been start work young fella ... he learn me for job and him been call my name, Tim". This naming process was reciprocated by the Yanyuwa. Freddie Blitner was called<sup>179</sup> *ja-mirirrimayaranja*, literally "the one who sat growling under the mayaranja (*Ficus* sp.) tree". As Annie Karrakayn recalls,

He was cheeky, swear too from Yanyuwa, from Alawa, from Mara ... he good fighter in nulla nulla too ... used to swear to her [his wife] in Garawa, in Yanyuwa and fight (with her) straight away got stick ...

Blitner's "growling" was such that the Yanyuwa attribute his death to his having been 'sung' to death for his multi-lingual swearing at Aboriginal people.<sup>180</sup>

The Yanyuwa gave most of the long time residents nick-names based on particular physical or social characteristics. Hence Charlie Bethune, who had part of an ear

<sup>173</sup>Payment of fifty pounds, for instance, is approved to Blitner in 1941 to clear two river crossings (Australian Archives, Northern Territory Region, CRS F1 Item 48/34. Telegram sent 24 April 1941).

<sup>174</sup>1987 Tape 17A 35 min.

<sup>175</sup>1987 Tape 29B 32 min.

<sup>176</sup>Discussed by Annie Karrakayn 1987 Tape 40B 4 min.

<sup>177</sup>1983 Tape 10A 2 min. Again on 1987 Tape 14B 25 min. Tim notes "Freddie Blitner been call my name".

<sup>178</sup>Blitner gave many other Yanyuwa people their European names, Tim's wife Judy Marrngawi and his classificatory niece Annie Karrakayn were, for example, both given their names by him (discussed by Annie 1987 Tape 40A 35 min.).

<sup>179</sup>Tim Rakuwurlma 1983 Tape 10A 1 min. and Annie Karrakayn 1987 Tape 40B 3 min.

<sup>180</sup>Discussed on 1987 Tape 13B 3 min.

missing was known as *wumu-anma*,<sup>181</sup> literally "no ear". Another man, due to the size of his behind, and the amount of this that was usually visible over his baggy pants, was known by the Yanyuwa term for "all arse and pocket".<sup>182</sup>

As discussed earlier, World War Two brought to northern Australia an influx of southern Australian Europeans with different values and experiences. It is illuminating to note that the servicemen I interviewed, who were based in the Borrooloola area, expressed culture shock not so much about the Aboriginal culture of the area, but about the European culture. Jack Twyford, for instance, recalls<sup>183</sup> that arriving in Borrooloola "was a bit of a surprise it took us back in time ... we were back in another era ... the civilisation of Sydney seemed long way away". He goes on to note<sup>184</sup> that "a lot of the characters up there ... were a bit lawless ... I know some were wanted by police down south". He goes on to describe<sup>185</sup> one European who, when in a pub fight "could not get his temper up so he charged the wall with his head, bashing his head until he got his temper up and then he could fight". He also recalls<sup>186</sup> "Borrooloola Bob the brumby runner" who, when drunk, "would get on his horse and gallop around the police station shooting in the air [and shout out to the police] 'come and get me you khaki so and so's. I'm Borrooloola Bob the brumby runner' ". The police responded by "just let[ting] him run out of ammunition". Steve Johnson, similarly, can recall<sup>187</sup> "the days [when] they used to sit out in the front of the pub and do a bit of target practice ... off the verandah".

The fact that some of these characters were wanted by the police<sup>188</sup> explains why so many Europeans in the area used pseudonyms. For example, the mailman mentioned

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<sup>181</sup>1987 Tape 69B 35 min.

<sup>182</sup>1986 Tape 31A 8 min. Joyce Johnson.

<sup>183</sup>1987 Tape 75A 1 min.

<sup>184</sup>1987 Tape 75B 18 min.

<sup>185</sup>1987 Tape 75B 37 min.

<sup>186</sup>Ibid 38 min.

<sup>187</sup>1987 Tape 30A 43 min.

<sup>188</sup>Attenborough 1963:121 describes how how one of the European residents went bush when a police officer visited Borrooloola.

by Harney (see page 214) was, as Harney notes,<sup>189</sup> known as West as well as Hudson.<sup>190</sup>

### Bush tucker

Stores arrived at Borrooloola infrequently and when European food supplies ran out, everyone there "was in the same boat" and had to rely on bush tucker. Joyce Johnson recalls that,<sup>191</sup> when she arrived in Borrooloola in 1946 with her husband, the new police officer, their supplies were sought after as the town was completely out of European food. Joyce goes on to discuss how the Aboriginal wives provided food for their European husbands and concludes that they "would have helped them a lot". H.M. Ellis writes<sup>192</sup> that when he arrived in Borrooloola in 1924 the supply boat was long overdue and "there was only one subject of conversation in Borrooloola. Everybody talked about it. Flour – flour – flour." Ellis goes on to show how the small European population of the area "chorused in indignation at Government dilatoriness. Old and forgotten this township, and very hungry".

Cycads and water lilies were important standbys at such times. J.T. Beckett, one time resident of Vanderlin Island and later Chief Protector of Aborigines in the Northern Territory, comments on the importance of cycads:<sup>193</sup> "white bushmen who know its uses often carry it in their packbags as a standby". H.M. Ellis also describes<sup>194</sup> how the European residents "with not a pound of flour between them, were subsisting on beef and water-lily seeds".

Hill (1951:426) also stresses the importance of cycads and goes on to list some of the other bush foods used by Europeans:

Horace Foster, Tom Kieran, Andy Anderson, Roger Jose and the one or two

<sup>189</sup>A report to the Director of Native Affairs by patrol officer Bill Harney dated 7 November 1944 Australian Archives, Northern Territory Region, CRS F1 Item 44/275. "Report on movement of natives - Borrooloola".

<sup>190</sup>Sunny Raggard who was working at Anthony Lagoon station in the 1930s (1987 Tape 14B 37 min.) also notes Hudson/West change in names as does Lenin Anderson (1987 Tape 28A 8 min). Gordon Birt (1986 Tape 32A 7 min.) and Arthur Mawson (1988 Tape 7A 28 min.) discuss other Europeans with more than one name.

<sup>191</sup>1986 Tape 30B 9 min.

<sup>192</sup>*Adelaide Advertiser* 18 September 1924

<sup>193</sup>Article in the *Sydney Morning Herald* 31 March 1923 and also in Australian Archives, Canberra A1 1934/5247 as a cutting.

<sup>194</sup>*Adelaide Advertiser* 21 August 1924 and also as a cutting in Mitchell Library Mss 1336.

others down there lived for months on *munja* flour johnnie cakes fried in goat or dugong fat, with fish and wild honey, while waiting for the Borroloola boat.

Gordon Birt, who visited Manangoora in 1939, describes<sup>195</sup> how he saw cycads being prepared by Foster. Eileen Yakibijna recalls<sup>196</sup> how, when she used to work trepanging with Steve Johnson (senior) on Vanderlin Island, they used to go to Manangoora and get a dinghy load of cycads which they took back to Vanderlin Island to process. Annie Karrakayn also recalls<sup>197</sup> how Andy Anderson "used to live on that *munja* ... all the time his wife been teach him to eat ... bush tucker goanna too, lily, sugar bag, because that time no tucker been around the station".

Andy Anderson, at other times, was known to live on flying foxes cooked up in large boilers.<sup>198</sup> The trepang stews of another European resident, Albert Morcom, are still remembered well.<sup>199</sup> People have also told me about Morcom's crocodile egg cakes.<sup>200</sup> Similarly, Mick Baker recalls<sup>201</sup> how "when times got tough" he and other Europeans lived on "goanna and sugar bag" which their Aboriginal spouses found for them.

It appears that this reliance on the traditional knowledge of their spouses forced these Europeans to gain some understanding and respect for Aboriginal culture. As well as being fed by their wives, some of these men worked with their wives. Mick Baker, for instance, describes<sup>202</sup> how he did most of his crocodile shooting as a team with his wife. Such an arrangement had economic as well as social advantages, as it enabled Europeans to avoid paying the licence fee that had to be paid to employ Aboriginal people. Mick Baker also acknowledges the technological debt he owes the Yanyuwa, noting<sup>203</sup> how he learnt to use a harpoon to pull ashore shot crocodiles, by observing how the Yanyuwa harpooned turtle and dugong.

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<sup>195</sup>1986 Tape 32A 3 min.

<sup>196</sup>1987 Tape 62B 30 min.

<sup>197</sup>1987 Tape 37B 10 min.

<sup>198</sup>Described in detail by Annie Karrakayn 1987 Tape 46B 44 min.

<sup>199</sup>Discussed by Eileen Yakibijna 1987 Tape 62B 25 min.

<sup>200</sup>Annie Karrakayn 1987 Tape 37A 43 min.

<sup>201</sup>1987 Tape 26B 12 min.

<sup>202</sup>1987 Tape 61A 33 min.

<sup>203</sup>1987 Tape 25A 43 min.

Bill Harney, the best known of Borroloola's hermits, makes the point that not only did the white population of Borroloola rely heavily on Aboriginal resources but when they did have European resources they exchanged them with each other in an Aboriginal way. His summary (1946:93) of the barter that went on in the area between Europeans for the essentials of life (which he defines as salt, vegetables, food and beer) is a good example of accommodations Europeans made to Yanyuwa life. He concludes that "the barter at the 'Loo was a survival of the old days of the Malays and the natives".

### Going Aboriginal

It is important to note that while European observers tended to be critical of Borroloola's "no-hopers" for "going Aboriginal" the Yanyuwa were appreciative of the way these men fitted in with their society. A particularly perceptive comment<sup>204</sup> comes from Ted Egan who got to know the local Europeans well when he was the relieving welfare officer at Borroloola during the 1950s:<sup>205</sup>

Something should be said about the types of white people that were in the [Borroloola] region, because it's sort of dead beat no hoper stuff and the dead beat no hoper people were prepared to roll along with the punches and blend into the Aboriginal thing . . . it wasn't rich station owner managers, it was dead beats and deros and fortunately a lot of them were benign dead beats and deros who had read the books in the like of the Harneys . . .

As far as the Yanyuwa were concerned perhaps the most significant aspect of these European's lifestyles were their long term residency. Decades of contact with the same small group of Europeans gave the Yanyuwa the opportunity to integrate these men into Aboriginal social and economic spheres. Long term relationships these men had with Aboriginal women provided a key to this integration. Tim Rakuwurlma, for example, talks fondly of his boss, Charlie Havey, whom he worked for on and off for some 40 years. Havey, however, was more than just an employer; he was Tim's brother-in-law, as he lived with Tim's sister for much of this period. Tim describes<sup>206</sup> how he assisted Havey in various ways, including making a dugout canoe and catching and salting

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<sup>204</sup>1988 Tape 6A 30 min.

<sup>205</sup>Egan has immortalised one in his song on Roger Jose's drinking habits.

<sup>206</sup>1987 Tape 23B 10 min.

dugong for him and how at the same time Havey assisted him and other Aboriginal people. As the local Justice of the Peace, Havey was in a particularly good position to help many of his Aboriginal relatives when it came to legal matters.

Borrooloola provides then a good example of what Meinig (1986:208) describes as a zone of articulation (see discussion above, page 106) where the intruding cultural group is in part dependent on the existing cultural group. Europeans in the Borrooloola area relied on Aboriginal people in many ways, including supplying bush tucker, sexual partners, making dugout canoes for European use (see Baker 1988), bringing supplies up the river in dugout canoes and guiding boats to the Landing.

The examples in this section show how the Aboriginal cultural landscape has clearly played a role in the contact process. This situation of Aboriginal people for a long period being valued by the European population of Borrooloola was an important factor in the process of Yanyuwa contact.

## 9.10 Conclusion

This chapter has examined some of the major results of coming in. I have illustrated how relocation and dislocation brought many changes to Yanyuwa life. At the core of these changes was a fundamental shift in their relationships with the land. Life in town meant economic and religious links with the land were weakened. There is an obvious parallel to be drawn between the shift welfare initiated from a bush tucker land based economy to a European based economy and the attempts missionaries made to shift religious life from being land based to being based on a European belief system. As explored in section 10.2 most older Yanyuwa people still hold a ceremonial view of their past and their Yanyuwa identity is very much defined within such a ceremonial view. In recent years, however, ceremonial life at Borrooloola has declined. For many younger Yanyuwa people ceremony is not at the core of their identity. Many younger people have what might be called a bush tucker view of their identity.

The contrast should also be drawn between influences such as trepangers and pastoralists that did not necessarily fundamentally alter Yanyuwa relationships with their land and influences such as missionaries and welfare that did fundamentally alter such relationships. As discussed in sections 6.3 and 7.7 the former in some ways extended

existing patterns of land use and ceremonial associations with the land. In contrast this chapter has highlighted how the latter two influences caused fundamental changes in Yanyuwa relationships with the land. This chapter has also highlighted the significance of Borroloola having for so long a small European population that was, as Egan puts it, prepared to "blend into the Aboriginal thing".

**Part V**

**Conclusions**

## Chapter 10

# Different Ways of Seeing the Yanyuwa Past

### 10.1 Aboriginal - European

#### 10.1.1 History

Throughout this thesis examples have been given of how Aboriginal and European people see the past differently. As understandings of the past play such an important role in how people act in the present, such understandings themselves influence history.

Vastly different cultural perceptions have been a major factor in Aboriginal and European views on the history of contact being different. The Yanyuwa and Europeans living in the Borroloola area, while having been in the same place at the same time, clearly do not share the same past. At the most fundamental level these differences are based on the fact that one group once had total control of the area and the history of contact has involved a loss of this authority. It is, for example, a distinctively Aboriginal view to look back on the past and recall<sup>1</sup> a time when “we still have that country, my father, my grandfather been have that country”.

One Yanyuwa response to their rapidly changing contact world has been to develop a historical perspective that highlights periods of stability. Hence the two relatively stable periods of Macassan times and cattle times are often stressed when the past is discussed. It should be noted too that the pattern of stressing stable periods within an

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<sup>1</sup>1987 Tape 56A 18 min.

otherwise rapidly changing past can be seen within some other phases of the Yanyuwa past. Hence, when discussing the welfare times, the Yanyuwa inevitably mention the two longest serving officers, Ted Harvey and Tas Festing. It was during such stable periods that the Yanyuwa could work out their own terms of response to contact. This Yanyuwa search for stability provides an interesting contrast with European views of the area that stress the changes Europeans brought to the area.

Another obvious contrast between European and Aboriginal ways of seeing the past is the Aboriginal tendency to personalise history. Brutal fact has been blended with a particularising process to produce stories that often portray an individual as being responsible for group actions. Both European and Aboriginal explanations of the past are sought from the known universe of information. For Europeans this includes all kinds of written records while for Aboriginal people such information has either come from direct experience or word of mouth. With such different sources, it is hardly surprising that the end views of the two groups can be so different.

The Aboriginal stories of Captain Cook provide a good example of how different Aboriginal and European views of the past can be. This story, which is well known in the Borroloola area and elsewhere in northern Australia (Anderson 1984:336, Chase 1980:88 and 1981:11, Kolig 1987:20, Middleton 1977:7, Rose 1984 and Trigger 1985b:134), has Captain Cook riding through the area shooting all the "blackfellas", so he can stock the country with cattle (see figure 10.1). As Eileen Yakibijna puts it,<sup>2</sup> "Captain Cook been take away all the Aboriginal land and shot all the people".<sup>3</sup> Maddock (1988) explores the Captain Cook myths and notes that they can be seen as (1988:16) "an assimilation of oral narrative about an historical character to the forms of the Dreamtime mythology". While he concludes that the myths "judged as history ... are inexcusably cavalier" (ibid:27), it is more important to take note of his comment that they are "clearly saying something about Aboriginal contact" (ibid:2). They provide a charter of European immorality that while not accurate in European historical detail, is morally accurate. Names might be transposed, and chronologies

<sup>2</sup>1987 Tape 69B 34 min.

<sup>3</sup>As Sutton (1988:256) illustrates with the examples of Noah's ark and Jesus of Nazareth, Aboriginal people have incorporated other European figures into their history, by placing their actions within the local landscape. Ned Kelly also has been incorporated into northern Australian historical narratives (Middleton 1977:7).



Figure 10.1: Dinny Nyliba's drawings of the Captain Cook story

collapsed but the history of dispossession and violence that made up the Aboriginal contact is starkly and realistically recorded.

Another example of this process of personalisation whereby an individual is held responsible for more than his own actions is indicated by the status now held by the archetypal welfare officer Bill Harney. Harney is well remembered due to his long period of residence in the area, his legendary cattle duffing exploits (see page 211) and his remarkable transformation (see page 365) from a "combo" to a government representative charged with stamping out "cohabitation". Actions of other government officials before and after his time are often attributed to him.<sup>4</sup>

Contrasts in views about whole eras in the past also exist. A good case in point is World War Two. From a European perspective war time was a brief period in which European presence in the Borrooloola area temporarily increased. In contrast, from the perspective of the Yanyuwa, the war heralded a period of major changes in where and how they lived. Another significant contrast in views concerning this period involves differing attitudes towards the Japanese enemy. The Yanyuwa, as a result of the close relationships many Yanyuwa men had established with Japanese crew members on pearling and trepanging boats, saw the Japanese very differently from the way Europeans did. Tim Rakuwurlma, for example, describes<sup>5</sup> how the war started due to the ill treatment he saw of Japanese crew members by "English" bosses.<sup>6</sup> With this perspective of a shared experience of being ill treated by the "English", it is not surprising that the Yanyuwa, if not actually siding with the Japanese in the war, were at least ambivalent about taking sides. The prospect of a Japanese invasion was considered very differently by Aboriginal people, who had just lost the wild times war, and Europeans who had recently established their control of the Borrooloola area by winning the wild times war.<sup>7</sup> Members of the army were certainly conscious of

<sup>4</sup>Tim Rakuwurlma's quote above (page 338) which holds Harney generally responsible for the removal of "half-caste" children is a good example of this process. Harney's name also lives on in the area as the name of one of the four wheel drive adventure tour buses (see figure 7.18) that regularly tours the area.

<sup>5</sup>1983 Tape 13A 2 min.

<sup>6</sup>Chase (1980:353), from his historical anthropological work at Lockhart River on Cape York, notes that Aboriginal people in the area who worked on boats before World War Two "favoured Japanese employers" because of the better conditions they offered: "unlike Europeans, the Japanese were considered hard masters but fair: they paid the wages due and delivered people home at the end of a voyage".

<sup>7</sup>Biskup (1973), in his work on Western Australia, documents the pro-Japanese feelings of some Aboriginal people and quotes (ibid:209) one man as saying "we will be better off when the Japs come". He also notes how in Western Australia the army, in response to such pro-Japanese sentiments, resisted

Aboriginal ambivalence. One soldier based at Borrooloola during the war recalls<sup>8</sup> that the officer in charge “was a bit worried that if the Japs came they’d use the Aboriginals . . . against us” and he added “I don’t know how their loyalties would have been as they weren’t always treated that well by the whites . . . up there”.

The wild times in both senses discussed above, is a distinctively Aboriginal view of the past.<sup>9</sup> European perceptions of the same times are focused on explorers and pioneers, who are seen to have “opened up” the country. The full scale of Aboriginal resistance to European settlement is not usually acknowledged. When it is mentioned it is often misunderstood and seen, not as a response to loss of control over land and resources, but rather as being due to inherent savagery.

European historical views have been structured by a pervading belief in a dualism between “civilised” and “uncivilised” man. Such beliefs led to the construction of views of European superiority and god-given right to civilise the uncivilised. These same dualistic views have also led to the “myall - civilised” divide in how Aboriginal people are seen. As illustrated above (page 294), such a divide is very much an artificial one. It needs to be noted also that this divide belittles Aboriginal culture on the “myall” side (they are dismissed as wild) and glosses over Aboriginal culture on the “civilised” side (it fails to acknowledge the way Aboriginal culture continues to influence the lives of the civilised).

European views, being predicated by this dualistic civilised - uncivilised view, place great emphasis on the significance of the civilising role of Europeans. Hence Europeans tend to see their arrival as a turning point in Aboriginal history. As I have demonstrated, however, to the Yanyuwa the moment of European arrival is not seen as particularly significant. For the Yanyuwa this was but one moment in a continuum of increasing contact with non-Aboriginal people. It should be noted too that the length of Macassan contact with the area is such that the moment of first Macassan contact is beyond known Yanyuwa history. Therefore, neither first contact with Macassans or Europeans features as a turning point in Yanyuwa thinking of the past. Instead, from calls to arm Aboriginal people (ibid:209) and in some areas interned unemployed Aboriginal people (ibid:210).

<sup>8</sup>1987 Tape 75A 3 min.

<sup>9</sup>I have heard only one European use this term and he used it in a unique sense basing it on the state of (un)dress. He describes the 1950s (1987 Tape 25B 42 min.) as the wild times because, when he was crocodile shooting around the coast, he would meet men still only wearing a “cock rag”.

the Yanyuwa viewpoint, coming in is the single most important event in their contact history.

Mythological explanations abound in Yanyuwa reconstructions of the past. There are stories of ancestors who had mythological powers to stop bullets with their woomeras and 'sing' guns so they did not fire<sup>10</sup> and of others who could outrun horses.<sup>11</sup> While sceptical Europeans dismiss such stories as ridiculous, Aboriginal people accept them as describing what happened. Moreover, they are "facts" that illustrate Aboriginal superiority over Europeans. While Europeans eventually won out, Aboriginal people do not see this as the result of attributes they value, such as their understanding of mythology or country, but due to sheer numbers, their access to guns and horses and, in many cases, European ability to get Aboriginal people to assist them in their conflict with other Aboriginal people.<sup>12</sup> It is also illuminating to note the contrasting European attitude to individuals who succeeded, albeit briefly, in resisting the European invasion of their land; it is not their mythological powers that Europeans stress but attributes such as treachery, savagery and a perverse refusal to embrace the benefits of civilisation.

There is a similar contrast between Aboriginal and European attitudes, especially those of welfare officers, towards particular stations during the cattle times. The stations Aboriginal people have the best memories of, are not surprisingly, the ones where they were treated as equals. Powder Punch, for example, speaks<sup>13</sup> in glowing terms of a station, where the Europeans were "really living with Aboriginal people together, work together, live together". In contrast the welfare officers, in both their written reports and interviews, tend to be most critical of the same stations. Amongst other things, they criticise the European managers for having "gone Aboriginal" and "setting a bad example". For instance, while McArthur River station is remembered by the Yanyuwa as one of the best stations to live on, welfare reports about it were particularly damning. Patrol officer, Ted Evans, for instance, after visiting McArthur River station reported,<sup>14</sup> on the need "for an effective policing of employment in the Borroloola area"

<sup>10</sup>1987 Tape 63A 7 min.

<sup>11</sup>1987 Tape 67B 36 min.

<sup>12</sup>Coulthard (1986) outlines the same set of factors operating in the contact history of his Flinders Ranges country in South Australia. He outlines the role "cunning blackfellows" (ibid:218) played in resisting European occupation but notes how European violence eventually won out.

<sup>13</sup>1987 Tape 68B 6 min.

<sup>14</sup>"Report on visit to Borroloola District". Page 3 of a report to the Director of Native Affairs dated

on the grounds that the “station has practically no improvements of any nature. The homestead is one of the most dilapidated buildings of its kind I have seen”.<sup>15</sup> The Yanyuwa, in contrast, were not offended by their boss living in a “dilapidated” homestead. The boss, Sunny Raggard, lived much as they did, and this egalitarianism was part of the reason why this station was regarded in high esteem. Through his Aboriginal wife, Sunny was incorporated into the Aboriginal world and he allowed many facets of Aboriginal ceremonial and economic life to continue on the station. In the Yanyuwa view of history bosses like Sunny and those discussed above at Manangoora and Yukuyi who were incorporated into Aboriginal life are well remembered.

The tendency to construct a view of the past that is flattering to one’s own group is common to both European and Aboriginal people. From the European side, on a broad scale it can be noted that the long held social-Darwinist view, that saw Aboriginal people as a doomed dying race, minimises European responsibilities for the hand they played in decreasing Aboriginal numbers. Likewise, the tendency to call massacres “dispersals”, provides another example of Europeans creating a favourable view of their own actions. Such false views, in turn, have often been magnified by subsequent glossing over these incidents altogether.

The Yanyuwa interpret their past in what seems a flattering light (when examined from a European perspective) in the way they stress the control they have over the past. In many situations they stress their active role where, from a European perspective, there is little evidence to support it. The departure of individual policemen, missionaries or welfare officers who were unpopular is inevitably interpreted as being the result of Aboriginal actions. Such action is sometimes said to be sorcery<sup>16</sup> but more often is considered to be the result of Aboriginal pleas to European authorities. For instance, the end of the police times is seen as the result of complaints to the Government, about how the police were too rough, which in turn led to the “Government been

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9.8.49. Australian Archives, Northern Territory Region, CA 1078 Native Affairs Branch, CRS F315 Item 49/393 A2 (a copy is also in F1 48/15).

<sup>15</sup>Patrol officer, John Bray, makes similar comments in his report of 8 July 1953, “Aboriginals (Pastoral Industry) Regulations. McArthur River Station. Australian Archives, Northern Territory, CRS F1, Item 52/731.

<sup>16</sup>Tim Rakuwurlma, for example, describes (1987 Tape 14B 22 min.) how this was used against a welfare officer, and is considered to be responsible for him leaving the area, because “he been take bloody piccanniny from their mother, he no good one”.

hunt him away".<sup>17</sup> The European record provides little evidence for this view. There is a substantial correspondence in police files documenting official views that there were not enough people in the area to justify the stationing of an officer.<sup>18</sup> In asserting their role in past events the Yanyuwa are attempting to gain some control over the process and reassert their ability to cope with change. This process also needs to be seen as an attempt by older Yanyuwa people to assert their authority. By asserting the control Aboriginal people have had in the past they are attempting to assert control over the present and resist contemporary challenges to their authority.

The Borroloola police records also highlight one of the most dramatic examples of how the Aboriginal and European people see things differently. The calculations of whether Borroloola had enough people to support a policeman assumed that only Europeans counted as people.<sup>19</sup> A similar attitude, that Aboriginal people do not count (or do not exist), is given in the already mentioned history of the Borroloola area (see footnote on page 170), which has only one mention of Aboriginal people.

This thesis has shown the stark contrast in the way European historical views tend to gloss over the violent past of the area, while Aboriginal accounts do not avoid the ghastly details of atrocities committed on their ancestors. The directness and matter-of-factness of such accounts is shocking to an outsider.<sup>20</sup> Such attitudes reflect how common such violent incidents were in the area and also reflect a general Aboriginal trend not to attach moral commentary on narrated events. Every Aboriginal person

<sup>17</sup>1986 Tape 21B 4 min.

<sup>18</sup>A cyclone in 1948 also played a role in closing the station. The Northern Territory Administrator reported (Australian Archives, Northern Territory Region, CRS F1 Item 48/15), in a telegram sent to the Department of Interior in Canberra, "this [cyclone] almost completely wrecked Borroloola and I am giving serious consideration to the closing permanently of this station". The cyclone appears to have provided the final excuse officials were looking for to close the station. Five years previously the Superintendent of Police visited Borroloola and concluded "the Borroloola station has dwindled very considerably in importance during recent years, so much so that I cannot justify the retention of a sergeant there" (Australian Archives, Northern Territory Region, CRS F1 Item 48/15, 7 October 1943).

<sup>19</sup>An interesting example of this attitude is contained in the "Police station Borroloola" file, Australian Archives, Northern Territory Region, CRS F1 Item 48/15. A request by Ruth Heathcock (26 September 1941) to the Department of Administration for medical equipment to treat people at Borroloola is refused by the Acting Government Secretary "in view of the small population at Borroloola" and only a later cover-note from someone else in the Darwin office points out "I should think the bulk of the patients are natives".

<sup>20</sup>Schebeck (1986) makes this same point in his introduction to Coulthard's story of Flinders Ranges contact. He notes how the stories "completely lack any hint at a generalised resentful aggression against White people".

I worked with knew of relatives who had been killed by Europeans. The violent past of the area is, therefore, very immediate. The openness in describing such details stretches to a wry understanding that can see black humour within the most dreadful situations.<sup>21</sup>

Similarly it was surprising to find Aboriginal descriptions of the wild times in general lack animosity. As noted above (see page 202) the wild times are seen as a period of misunderstandings when European and Aboriginal people did not know each other. Nevertheless, it would be an overstatement to say Aboriginal people in the Borroloola area feel impartial about the violent past of the area. The period of misunderstandings was short and when individuals proudly recount details of how in subsequent times their ancestors managed to outsmart Europeans in one way or another<sup>22</sup> it is clear where allegiances lie.

### 10.1.2 Environment

Attachment to country has been a major factor in past Aboriginal actions and also a factor influencing how the Aboriginal people see the past. Aboriginal mythological explanations as well as producing different views of history result in different Aboriginal and European views of the environment. To the Yanyuwa, land and people are linked through religious belief to the degree that landscape change is usually attributed to spiritual causes. Hence recent environmental change is often attributed to the fact that log coffin funeral practices have ceased and therefore spirits are unable to return and revitalise the country;<sup>23</sup> "land's getting weak, [because] no people, no spirit come back now". Similarly the drying up of numerous waterholes in recent years is often blamed on "country not being held by people".

From a European perspective, however, it is obvious that cattle have played a major role in drying out lagoons. Their combined actions of drinking water, breaking banks and destroying vegetation are major factors in this process. In seeking a spiritual explanation, the Yanyuwa, however, tend to blame themselves and in the process, as has so often been the case during contact, the role Europeans have had in changing

<sup>21</sup>An Aboriginal author who has explored this aspect of Aboriginal humour is Huggins (1988:8).

<sup>22</sup>Billy Kid, for example, gives a detailed description (1987 Tape 63A 6 min.) of how his grandfather, "Murdering Tommy", successfully fought Europeans for some time.

<sup>23</sup>1987 Tape 72A 4 min.

things is minimised in Aboriginal thinking. Individual Aboriginal land owners are often blamed for such events and tensions are created within Yanyuwa society as a result of this pattern of internal spiritual factors being sought to explain environmental changes.

Mythological explanations for environmental change is seen in the Yanyuwa belief that a severe cyclone (Kathy on 24 March 1984)<sup>24</sup> was caused by European fisherman desecrating sacred sites on the Pellew Islands. In this case the Yanyuwa again blame to a degree themselves for these events, as the owners of the damaged sites are held to be partly responsible due to their failure to look after them.

This internalisation of blame is the result of the continuing influence of Aboriginal religion. In a landscape still dominated by the power of the Dreaming, European fisherman, tourists or cattle are religiously insignificant and therefore not seen as causative factors. Such explanations of environmental change have from a Yanyuwa viewpoint the effect of restoring Aboriginal control over the landscape but this "control" is illusory when examined from a European perspective.

Another example of land based Aboriginal views of the past comes in the concept of being "scattered". Billy Kid, for example describes<sup>25</sup> being brought up in the bush but how "we been all scattered come to Borroloola stop here". Ricket makes this same point in regard to Manangoora (page 306). In fact people are now actually more concentrated with town based life than before, but in a land based view of the world they are scattered from their country.

Land based views are also evident in Aboriginal comments that they do not know Europeans because they do not know what country they come from. Rory Wurrulbirrangunu, for example, in describing the wild times, notes<sup>26</sup> "I don't know where that whitefella been come from". This view is also evident in Eileen Yakibijna's words on page 264 that she does not know European tourists as she does not know where they are from and Ricket's comment on page 306 that he does not know where the Europeans

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<sup>24</sup>Thom (1984:150) notes that Kathy was the most severe cyclone in the Australian region in 1984 and that the Centre Island meteorological station recorded a gust of 232 km/hour before the anemometer was destroyed by the wind. Maximum wind speed is estimated to have reached 277 km/hour (Bureau of Meteorology 1984:12). The cyclone produced a storm surge of 4.2 m on the east coast of Vanderlin Island. After crossing the coast at the mouth of the McArthur River the cyclone caused damage to trees over an area of 1.3 million hectares (Thom 1984:137).

<sup>25</sup>1987 Tape 63B 21 min.

<sup>26</sup>1986 Tape 64A 14 min.

who came to Manangoora came from.

## 10.2 A ceremonial view of the past

A ceremonial view of the past is one in which land plays a major role. Ceremonies are about land and clearly the two factors are intimately intertwined in structuring how the Yanyuwa see things. Ceremonies simultaneously are about the land and provide the forum in which versions of landscape history are renegotiated. If ceremonies lapse, the Aboriginal understandings of landscape history becomes less important and coherent. This general loss of meaning, is fueled by very specific loss of meaning from sites intimately tied to ceremonies.<sup>27</sup>

The Yanyuwa ceremonial view of history goes beyond just seeing how ceremonies influenced the past and how they often evaluate the past in terms of where ceremonies could and could not continue. People see ceremony as history. Embedded in ceremonies are understandings of the land and the past. Eileen Yakibijna notes<sup>28</sup> that ceremonies are history because “that’s from those days, they got to keep it all the time like that”. Ceremonies are then, an Aboriginal form of historical geography, they are like geography “a special way of looking at the world” (Meinig 1986:xv).

In conversations with me, men stressed this ceremonial view of the past more than women. This contrast, however, is probably more the result of the inability of women to talk to me about many other aspects of their ceremonial life, than an indication that this factor is more important for men than women.

It has already been shown how the ability to continue ceremonial life on cattle stations was an important factor in this period now being considered as a kind of golden age in the past. A major factor in Yanyuwa lives has been learning about land and the ceremonies that explain the land. Those who moved to other areas, such as the Barkly Tableland, often talk about the process of learning about this “strange country, strange land ... too different country” and how it took time “to get used to

<sup>27</sup>There is, for example, a Yanyuwa ceremony that was related to a very specific location on the Sir Pellew Group which has long ceased. The power of this specific location has greatly waned and only a few very old individuals remember the full power the location once had.

<sup>28</sup>1988 Tape 2A 12 min.

it”.<sup>29</sup> Ceremonies played a vital role in people coming to know strange land. It needs to be stressed that although ceremonial life continued on cattle stations, it was transformed. They were on new country and learnt about ceremony related to these new areas and during the wet season lay offs ceremonies held in Borrooloola were also different as they were not held out bush as they had been before.

The importance of ceremony influences Yanyuwa thinking about the past in many ways. Musso Harvey, for instance, recalls<sup>30</sup> how the “old [Aboriginal] people” did not mind Borrooloola being an open town with Europeans living there as they used to say “white [and black] people can live together, as long as they don’t want to disturb all our ceremony and things like that for country”. Musso remembers that the few Europeans in Borrooloola “never used to interfere in anything”. The importance of ceremonies affecting how people see the past is also well illustrated by Johnson Babarramila’s comments on why Malarndarri was such a good camp. He argues<sup>31</sup> that it was a “good camp, good life” because there were “plenty of corroboree, there used to be a lot of people, one time, play all sort of corroboree, dance, ceremony”.

The degree to which the Yanyuwa have been able to maintain ceremonial life is a great source of Yanyuwa self esteem. When I asked him why he thought the former Director of the Welfare Branch would say Aboriginal people at Borrooloola were different from those elsewhere in the Northern Territory,<sup>32</sup> Musso replied without hesitation that it was due to the strength of ceremonial life in the region.<sup>33</sup> Annie Karrakayn gave a very similar answer<sup>34</sup> to the same question: “because we been learn from our father . . . through our *kujika* . . . strong we can talk about land”.

Most of the contrasts noted above in how differently Europeans and Aboriginal people see the past, arise from the paramount importance of land to Aboriginal people. Examples such as those given above (see page 248) of people seeing the past embodied in the windmills and fences they built are good examples of how Aboriginal people

<sup>29</sup>Both quotes from Musso Harvey 1987 Tape 51B 44 min.

<sup>30</sup>1987 Tape 52A 6 min.

<sup>31</sup>1987 Tape 21B 1 min.

<sup>32</sup>The expression Harry Giese used was that the Yanyuwa had “a special sense of purpose” (1986 Tape 26B 23 min).

<sup>33</sup>Personal communication.

<sup>34</sup>1987 Tape 40B 12 min.

tend to see history through the focus of land. It must be emphasised here that this pattern of seeing the past through the marks individuals have made on the landscape is a direct continuation of mythological beliefs, that see the power of ancestral beings through the marks they left on the landscape.

This direct link in Aboriginal thinking between history and ceremony provides a further clue to why ceremony can be considered to be history. Seeing the land and history as intimately linked is not something unique to the Aboriginal perspectives. What needs to be stressed is that while such understandings pervade Aboriginal life, they are held by few Europeans. Cultural geographers from Sauer to Lowenthal (1985) have attempted to develop such understandings but they can hardly be said to be a basis for European life as they are for Aboriginal people. While Sorre's statement (1961:269)<sup>35</sup> that the landscape should be seen as the sum of the "material and spiritual expression of a culture" would not be questioned by Aboriginal people, it is certainly a novel idea for most Europeans.

### 10.3 A cattle view of the past

One important way the Yanyuwa see their past is through the focus of their cattle experience. Their cattle identity has shaped their history and continues to influence contemporary life. Cattle identity also provides a very good example of the interactive nature of contact. The cattle identity of many northern Australian Europeans has been greatly shaped by the Aboriginal influence on the cattle industry.<sup>36</sup>

As a result of the great pride Aboriginal people have in their cattle work many have adopted aspects of a cattle identity, that in many ways transcends previous social identity. A contemporary example of this is that aspirations for most outstations focus on running cattle on them.<sup>37</sup> Another good indicator of how cattle station identity permeates virtually every aspect of some people's thinking is illustrated in one conversation I had with Rory Wurrulbirrangunu.<sup>38</sup> Cattle station work clearly plays a part in

<sup>35</sup>Translated and quoted by Wells 1984:377.

<sup>36</sup>Ted Egan discusses this Aboriginal influence on the European cattle ethos at length on 1988 Tape 6B 37 min.

<sup>37</sup>As Young (1988) illustrates, such aspirations often do not centre on profit as is the case for European owned stations.

<sup>38</sup>1987 Tape 67B 7 min.

how he sees personal relationships. He describes how his wife “been have good man, he been have me, good rider, I been ride wild breed horse . . . that’s why woman been like me”. It also plays a role in how he perceives his forbears, he describes his father who could “talk [English] all right, he work all right [for Europeans]” as a “myall buggar” because he could not ride. Rory is also the person who gave me the cattle version of history stories I quoted previously (see page 72).

A fascinating historical example of the strength of cattle station identity is given by Ted Egan’s account<sup>39</sup> of the wet season camps he saw Aboriginal people establish at Borrooloola during the 1950s: “The stations would have their own camps, the Cresswell mob would camp here and cooks would have little triangular dinner bells and the cooks would cook damper for the mobs”. Such separate allegiances were based on the pride Aboriginal people had in their work and were fueled by station owners who encouraged rivalry between different station employees.<sup>40</sup> Hence, as well as identifying with the cattle industry in general, Aboriginal people identified with specific stations. This identification with specific blocks of land closely parallels more traditional land based Aboriginal identity.

The fullest expression of identity with a specific station came each year with the Brunette races. Aboriginal people from different stations camped together and competed against other station mobs. The Brunette mob, for example, would compete using Brunette horses against mobs from other stations. On show was both cattle skills and pride in one’s station. Les Penhall describes<sup>41</sup> fights that occasionally occurred between different mobs and concludes that “station loyalties . . . were much stronger” than language group loyalties. In passing, it should be noted that the annual gatherings at the Brunette races provided the same kind of social opportunities as large Aboriginal ceremonial gatherings. Helen Larsen, for instance, describes<sup>42</sup> how she “found” her husband at one race meeting.

An important aspect of identification with specific cattle stations was the length of time people spent on them. Tim Rakuwurlma, for example, describes<sup>43</sup> how his

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<sup>39</sup>1988 Tape 6B 22 min.

<sup>40</sup>Ted Tonkin (1987 Tape 64B 29 min.) describes stations encouraging such rivalry.

<sup>41</sup>1988 Tape 1A 14 min.

<sup>42</sup>1987 Tape 18A 41 min.

<sup>43</sup>1987 Tape 71A 24 min.

son, Johnson and his brother's sons, Whylo and Napper "all been grow up long that McArthur station . . . all belong McArthur station". It should be noted, that this is the second location that Tim says these men belong to. As noted above (page 189), Tim cites the birth of these same men in Borrooloola, as the reason he and his brother had the spiritual authority for Borrooloola handed over to them. This pattern in contact times of being attached to different bits of land is a direct continuation of pre-contact patterns.

The term "been grow up" encompasses many aspects of learning about the area and, as a result, becoming attached to the place to the degree that they 'belong' to it. A fundamental part of this learning about new places involves learning about the mythology of the area which in turn involves learning the local language and ceremonies. 'Been grow up' involved physical growing up—boys were usually young teenagers when they went to work—and spiritual growing up. On the cattle stations they made the spiritual transition from childhood to manhood. They knew little of the law when they left Borrooloola. Don Manarra gives a good example of this physical growing up that occurred on stations noting<sup>44</sup> that when he began he was "like a green colt" but, as he worked, his body became strong; "I been keep work, work, work, my body been [grow] strong, bone inside strong".

A good indication of this view, that the cattle stations were a kind of proving ground for boys to become men, is given by Johnson Babarramila when he told me<sup>45</sup> how his son was a "proper man" because he had gone to work on a cattle station. Johnson contrasted his son with others who had stayed in Borrooloola "always hanging around their mums". As Johnson alludes to here, the cattle experience provides many parallels to male initiation. Both involve teenage boys moving from the female sphere of their mothers to a male one. Both involved considerable mental and physical endurance and an initial period of intense learning. An even more important parallel is that both involved travelling across country and learning about this country.<sup>46</sup> The end result of both processes in Yanyuwa eyes is "proper men". Prior to the cattle times, initiation

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<sup>44</sup>1987 Tape 35A 21 min.

<sup>45</sup>Personal communication, 1987.

<sup>46</sup>Initiation ceremonies once involved long journeys from one important mythological site to another during which the initiates were instructed on the mythology of the areas they travelled along. For Borrooloola initiates contemporary initiations no longer involve such travel.

was followed by a long period of seclusion from females which was used to teach many of the spiritual and economic skills a man needed. In the cattle times, the hard work and the usually all-male nature of stock camps enabled a similar process to continue. Boys learnt new skills taught to them by their male relatives. Obviously, the economic skills boys now learnt were different from those they learnt in the past but the new skills were, like the old skills, part of knowledge they needed to survive economically. These new skills obviously centred on cattle work. The mythological skills, however, did not change and an important aspect of the golden age view of the cattle times was the ability of the Yanyuwa to pass on and learn these things.

The cattle view of the past, that I have so far outlined, has essentially been a male view. It is important to note that the cattle view of the past held by Aboriginal women is distinct from that held by Aboriginal men. On the cattle stations, in contrast to their husbands and sons who worked out bush, women were exposed to the mysteries of European households. The ritual of table setting, the use of napkins, the order of courses and use of appliances, such as electric polishers, are still points raised in fireside conversations. Annie Karrakayn recalls her work on cattle stations in the following terms:<sup>47</sup> “set the table for people, just wait for them, making everything ready for them. Wear good clothes when you got to serve people. I used to serve them now”.

McGrath (1987a) gives an excellent analysis of the role of women on cattle stations and (*ibid*:50) details the range of duties domestic workers carried out:

The homestead domestics scrubbed, cleaned the house and verandahs, did the laundry—bleaching, starching and ironing—cooked meals or helped the cook, sewed, washed dishes, polished the silverware and cutlery, and cared for the manager’s children.

Catherine Berndt (1963:339) also examines the role of women on cattle stations and argues that access to the European world of the homestead gave Aboriginal women the opportunity of “upward mobility”.

Yanyuwa women who talked to me about such domestic work did not stress the significance of this access to the European world but they all did stress how long their working hours were. Edna Bob, for example, describes how she had to “get up early

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<sup>47</sup>1987 Tape 37A 45 min.

morning ... really dark, make tea and take him to bed and give to manager in bed".<sup>48</sup> Similarly Dinah Marrngawi, when asked if she liked working on cattle stations, without hesitation answered,<sup>49</sup> "oh too much work ... everyday cleaning up washing up ... get up in the morning before sun getting up ... [worked until] supper time, dinner time just little bit have rest ... too hard really". While, on average, Aboriginal men and women probably worked the same long hours, men rarely cited this as a disadvantage though women often did.

In general Aboriginal men have a higher opinion of the cattle times. It is significant to note that the exceptions to this rule are women who had the opportunity to be out bush doing stock work with their husbands. An explanation of these differing views held by men and women probably lies in a number of factors. Women had more work to do than just their European employment, as most were also raising their families, often in the absence of their husbands who were away on stockcamps. They worked nearly always under supervision, and it was often tedious and repetitive. Their involvement with European homesteads and the absence of their husbands increased the sexual demands placed on them by European men.<sup>50</sup> In contrast, the work done by Aboriginal men was often exciting and fulfilling. Significantly also it involved being out bush and using bush skills and hence such work had a lot in common with pre-contact Aboriginal bush life. The same obviously cannot be said for the domestic work women did.

Dinah Marrngawi notes<sup>51</sup> the case of a wife who refused to go with her husband to a tableland cattle station. Dinah recalls how "she didn't want to go too much work she reckon and cold<sup>52</sup> that way, she run away". The daughter of the woman referred to makes the same point<sup>53</sup> and describes how later she also stayed behind "when we been have big mob of kid I been stay behind". She attributes her staying to "welfare", "I been stay because of welfare. And welfare used [to] send [couples with] just one kid

<sup>48</sup>1988 Tape 4B 2 min.

<sup>49</sup>1987 Tape 61B 27 min.

<sup>50</sup>Huggins 1988:17 examines this issue and concludes that "sexual harrassment was common ... in domestic service".

<sup>51</sup>1987 Tape 61B 32 min.

<sup>52</sup>Referring to the cold weather on the Barkly Tableland.

<sup>53</sup>1987 Tape 66B 41 min.

... because welfare used to feed them [and] give them clothes”.

## 10.4 Male and female views

Whilst European tend to see the past in terms of Aboriginal versus European contrasts a common Yanyuwa focus is according to whether men or women were the key players. For this reason Aboriginal men and women tend to see the period of contact in different terms due to their different experiences. For example, when discussing elopements men and women often give radically different accounts of the same incident. Both sexes tend to blame the other for elopements and the resulting wrong way marriages. One woman, for example, describes<sup>54</sup> how her mother left her father for another man because he was “no good he cheeky for woman”. Men describing the same incident tend to blame the woman. For example, Ricket describes<sup>55</sup> how the woman “he always make a trouble ... he [always] run away long another fella” and Tim Rakuwurlma comments<sup>56</sup> how she “alla run away with anybody ... he no good!”

Men and women also have different perspectives on the changing marriage patterns (see section 9.2) as a result of their different views about the breakdown in marriage rules. Many women who have spoken to me about the subject would concur with Bella’s comment that<sup>57</sup> “when you married free no promise girl ... anymore well that’s good”. She adds that the breaking of marriage rules is a good thing because it avoids the bloody fights that occurred when people attempted to form wrong way liaisons and concludes that “blackfella way hard way, they got to fight all the time for that woman”.

The contact experience has clearly influenced male and female lives differently and this has had many striking contemporary consequences. A good case in point is the gulf in experience of the European world between many middle aged couples. The traditional age gap between husband and wife of about 20 years has resulted in many women in their 40s and 50s having husbands in their 60s and 70s. In many cases there is a considerable contrast in the outlook of the two, the women having entered the European sphere to a greater extent than their more traditionally orientated husbands.

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<sup>54</sup>1987 Tape 40B 37 min.

<sup>55</sup>1987 Tape 35B 26 min.

<sup>56</sup>1987 Tape 12A 41 min.

<sup>57</sup>1987 Tape 60A 2 min.

The women have had European schooling and can read and write while the men have spent 20 years more of their lives in the school of the bush. Many women also gained further knowledge of European ways by working for long periods in European homes as domestics, while their husbands worked out bush on stock camps. As discussed in section 9.3 many women also had sexual relationships (wanted and unwanted) with European men, which gave them further insights into the workings of European culture.

This combination of factors has given women a much greater confidence in dealing with Europeans. In recent years this confidence has been further added to by visits to Australian cities for conferences and dance festivals. While retaining a traditional diffidence ("too shamed" being the usual Aboriginal English expression for this) some women have gained an extraordinary confidence in dealing with Europeans.<sup>58</sup> In contrast, the world that these women's husbands know is restricted to just the Borroloola area and indeed many of the men are uncomfortable in Borroloola itself and spend most of their time on outstations. Their wives tend to spend most of their time in town where they work, some officially but most unofficially, assisting the community.

It is, therefore, surprising that most European officials liaising with the Aboriginal community, have little to do with women. As a result Europeans usually do not learn of the differences in male and female views. As noted above, women are in fact often the best group for Europeans to consult with due to the knowledge women have built up of European life. The male dominated nature of the European bureaucracy clearly influences how officials interact with Aboriginal people. Yanyuwa women stress how male Europeans have always tended to seek out views just from Aboriginal men. As Annie Karrakayn puts<sup>59</sup> it: "Gammon [see Appendix A], that Government in Darwin he reckon we are not important womans, because that man all the time go talk [to] Aboriginal man". Annie goes on to note that both government and land council officials often fail to consult with Yanyuwa women.

A good example of the ramifications of women not being consulted about issues comes with the current pressing issue of tourism. If women as well as men were con-

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<sup>58</sup>Eileen Yakibijna, for instance, recalls (1987 Tape 62A 39 min.) how she dealt with the stares her dark black skin continually attracts when she travels south. She describes how when she stood up in the plane to Adelaide "too much they stare, goodness!" and that she responded by saying "Ah don't stare along me please . . . what you never see Aboriginal before".

<sup>59</sup>1983 Tape 19B 43 min.

sulted about this radically different views would be revealed. The dramatic effects outlined in section 7.9 that tourists are having on Aboriginal life are felt by Aboriginal men and women very differently. Women are upset about having lost many of their hunting grounds and fishing spots. By contrast their husbands have often told me how useful the tourists in the area are! When they are out at sea hunting and run out of fuel or have mechanical problems, a tourist will always pass within a day or two to tow them back. As Whylo puts it,<sup>60</sup> tourists are "all right. They help people when they run out of petrol".

### 10.5 A 'humberging' view of the past

When listening to Aboriginal women discuss their past, I became aware that many structured their accounts at least partly in terms of the history of the sexual harassment from European men, that had been such a major part of their lives. This humberging view of history is not surprising, given the history of harassment outlined above in section 9.3.

Different periods in their past are often compared on the basis of the comparative degree of humberging. Consider, for example, how Nora Jalirduma contrasts<sup>61</sup> the Macassans with Europeans. She stresses that the Macassans were "all about good one, good one, all that mob" because they did not humberg for women but that Europeans were "cheeky one, cheeky one" due to their sexual demands.

Women likewise have different views on the wild times and describes Borroloola as a "wild place" due to the sexual demands placed on Aboriginal women by white men.<sup>62</sup> Women also have a different view on how the wild times ended. Significantly again, it is relationships between Aboriginal women and European men that they stress. Dulcie, for example, argues<sup>63</sup> that the wild times ended when European men started to live with Aboriginal women. As she describes it, "whitefella been catch one women, him been married long him, that's the way they been quietem everybody, that whitefella". In contrast, men tend to stress that the wild times ended when people started working

<sup>60</sup>1987 Tape 13A 12 min.

<sup>61</sup>1987 Tape 13A 30 min.

<sup>62</sup>Nora Jalirduma makes this point on 1986 Tape 6B 46 min.

<sup>63</sup>1987 Tape 66B 1 min.

to earn supplies.<sup>64</sup>

Men and women also have contrasting views on the respective merits of cattle times and welfare times. The different work experiences on cattle stations for Aboriginal men and women is perhaps the major factor in this, as indicated in figure 7.11 in 1956 while there was much more opportunity for men to get jobs on cattle stations, more women than men were working for welfare at Borroloola. Humbugging men is another important factor for women regarding welfare times as better than cattle times. The fact that welfare was largely successful in stopping humbugging men<sup>65</sup> is a major reason for women generally considering welfare days in higher regard than most men do. The description in section 7.4 of the increased opportunities for Aboriginal people during World War Two also needs to be qualified in terms of male and female differences. As Bell (1983:70) notes, the war, while it “widened male horizons” meant for many women a “narrowing of opportunities”.

A humbugging view of the past was also illustrated by the Eileen Yakibijna quote above (page 306) on life at Manangoora. She noted that it was a good place for her but qualifies this by pointing out that it was only because the boss when “looking for girl all the time” left her alone. Eileen also gave a humbugging view of history when she attributed the move from Manangoora to Borroloola to the sexual harrasment experienced at Manangoora. Another example of men and women having different views of the past was noted above (page 342) with European men, Aboriginal men and Aboriginal women all having different views on the three-way relationships that sometimes existed.

## 10.6 Different views due to age and status

In Yanyuwa society, individuals with age gain spiritual and economic knowledge that gives them considerable status. Individuals are keen to assert their authority over others pointing out their greater age as evidence of this. Hence one old woman stressed<sup>66</sup> that

<sup>64</sup>Tim Rakuwurlma (1983 Tape 9B 43 min), for example, describes “Bye and bye, policeman, big man belong Government man been come up now send letter, up this way . . . no more shoot blackfellas, we want blackfellas to work . . . Government been stop him no more fight, no more shoot blackfellas”.

<sup>65</sup>Two Yanyuwa women discuss this point on 1987 Tape 13B 11 min.

<sup>66</sup>1987 Tape 17B 22 min.

she was older than the male community leader, Musso Harvey, and could, therefore, tell him what to do and “straighten” him up. The example has already been given (page 75) of a man in his 80s being called a little baby by an older man.

It is important to note that one of the most significant results of contact with Europeans has been the weakening of the authority of Aboriginal elders. As one older man puts it,<sup>67</sup> young people today “can’t listen to the leader, we . . . old people been learn . . . olden time way, we tried to learn him [young people today] what we been learn from the old people before . . . can’t wheel them around because they are very hard to wheel out now”. This breakdown in authority of elders can be directly attributed to the way in which their authority has been challenged by Europeans. The breakdown in marriage rules outlined above in section 9.2 is a good example of how aspects of Aboriginal life once controlled by elders have been undermined by European authority.

A consequence of the respect Yanyuwa people had for their own authority has been a degree of respect for European authority. Not surprisingly, it is those individuals who command great respect within their own society who tend to respect European authority. Jean Kirton, with the benefit of her long experience at Borroloola, highlights this, arguing<sup>68</sup> “there were certain men who stood out<sup>69</sup> as being law men, men of authority, men who had a strong respect for the law and these ones I think had a respect for other laws”. Hence Tim Rakuwurlma, who has been a notable Yanyuwa leader since at least the 1940s,<sup>70</sup> has considerable respect for European authorities and has often called upon them to take actions when he has seen fit. A former welfare officer describes<sup>71</sup> how Tim reported an individual abusing social security payments. Tim himself describes numerous examples of his appeals for authorities to take action. These include him reporting one missionary to the Government: “too rough . . . I been report him”<sup>72</sup>, sending a telegram to the Government in Darwin reporting fishermen for desecrating sacred sites<sup>73</sup> and complaining to the police when he was left stranded

<sup>67</sup>1987 Tape 17B 37 min.

<sup>68</sup>1987 Tape 72B 0 min.

<sup>69</sup>She goes on to describe Tim Rakuwurlma as the most outstanding of these.

<sup>70</sup>Don Mclean (1988 Tape 3A 17 min.) comments on this, as does Ted Harvey (1987 Tape 2A 30 min.) who describes how in the 1950s “he was old Tim then”.

<sup>71</sup>1987 Tape 5A 24 min.

<sup>72</sup>1987 Tape 23A 13 min.

<sup>73</sup>1984 Tape 10A 12 min.

at Anthony Lagoon by the drover he had been working for.

## 10.7 Individual and collective views

When constructing their views of the past, the Yanyuwa like everyone else, make assessments of forces operating in the past. In this process collective understandings are often used to interpret specific events. By examining the details of a few specific events and looking at the contrast between individual and collective understandings of these events it is possible to highlight how collective interpretation is constantly redefining historical understandings.

A good example comes in Pyro's description of why Tim Rakuwurlma ran away from his European boss. While Tim says he ran away because he heard his father was in jail, Pyro, with less knowledge of what actually happened but with the Yanyuwa view that attachment to country is paramount, makes the presumption<sup>74</sup> that Tim ran away because he "must have been worried for country".

As outlined in section 8.2.1 tobacco played an important role in Yanyuwa history. As a result, like attachment to land, it has been a factor that has not only shaped the events of the past but has been a factor in understandings of the past being redefined. A good example of this is seen in the earlier mentioned (see page 67) example, of changing views on why a group of Europeans were killed by a Yanyuwa man. Tim Rakuwurlma describes how his father did this because the Europeans had shot at Aboriginal people. Tim's son, however, gives a tobacco version of history describing how the incident occurred to procure "tucker off them or smoke".

The humbugging view of history similarly results in changing interpretation of the past. The quote given above (page 216) highlights how two women can give contrasting views on whether European men or Aboriginal women initiated sexual relationships during war time. Nora Jalirduma, who is old enough to remember what happened at the time, stresses that Yanyuwa women "been want to go properly", while Annie, who was under ten years old and therefore probably not fully aware of who was initiating these relationships, stresses the fact that Europeans were pursuing Yanyuwa women. Annie's view is probably based more on what she heard about these times and what

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<sup>74</sup>1987 Tape 63B 16 min.

she has subsequently experienced and seen than on what she saw at the time.

## 10.8 Conclusion

This chapter has illustrated some of the different ways of seeing the Yanyuwa past. The value of a cultural geographic perspective in revealing such variations has been highlighted. In addition the example of individual and collective differences has great relevance to the coming in issue addressed in the two previous chapters. As outlined on page 287, to come to an understanding of the coming in process one must consider the contradictions between individual and collective views of this process. People came in as individuals and there were, therefore, numerous reasons why different people came in. Clearly, however, these individual actions collectively caused a radical change in Yanyuwa life. The rounding up view is essentially a retrospective collective explanation to explain these collective results.

Contrasts in individual and collective ways of seeing are relevant to many other processes that cultural geographers have studied. Such contrasts have, however, to date not been adequately considered in the debate within cultural geography on “ways of seeing”.

# Chapter 11

## Conclusion

### 11.1 Methodological contribution

This thesis has demonstrated, by adopting a cultural geographic framework, the important role Yanyuwa culture has had in shaping the Yanyuwa contact experience. This finding has significance for an understanding of Aboriginal Australia in general because the role of Aboriginal culture in shaping contact has rarely been acknowledged. There was little room for such an understanding within the accepted notions that Aboriginal people simply withered away under the onslaught of a superior culture. Contemporary historical work has largely failed to consider this and has often centred on debating the relative degree of Aboriginal resistance or accommodation to Europeans. In doing so, it has failed to acknowledge the intrinsic role that Aboriginal culture has played in the whole process. The more productive line of enquiry taken in this thesis is to acknowledge that there was a wide range of responses and then to examine the processes shaping those responses.

The study has also demonstrated the ability of cultural geography to cover the inter-disciplinary gaps that have often left the study of contact processes stranded between history, prehistory and anthropology. The concept of the cultural landscape is a powerful analytical tool in revealing how culture is a way of seeing the landscape and how, as a result, different meanings are embedded in this landscape. In turn I have demonstrated how different culturally determined views of land have played a major role in the contact process. The examples given of welfare officers considering that the bush is inhospitable is a good case in point.

The relevance of the four broad strands of geography outlined on page 82 has been demonstrated. The human-land focus of geography is particularly relevant. Geography, with its combined focus on how people see and use the landscape, is clearly in a unique position to study the interaction of these two factors. I have also demonstrated the relevance of mapping as both a method of studying process and as a means of presenting the results of such study.

The thesis has demonstrated a valuable methodology for collecting and analysing diverse perceptions. It has identified key issues in which geography both as a tradition and a dynamic contemporary discipline has a role to play in explaining social change. The integration of social, cultural, ecological, economic and spatial dimensions of change has contributed to a more holistic understanding of the contact process.

The geographic research technique of field work being carried out over time with periods between to analyse and consider the data is particularly appropriate to the study of contact processes. This method provided a sufficient time span for me to observe changes that occurred in the study area over time and also provided the opportunity for the analysis of collected data before further field work was carried out. Understandings so developed informed subsequent research and led to an evolving research technique. This would not have been possible if my research had been carried out in one long block as is often the case in anthropological fieldwork.

The thesis has also contributed to cultural geographic methodology by illustrating the value of oral sources to a study of cultural contact and the processes of cultural change. Oral sources point towards the need to construct an ethnogeography. Such an ethnogeography has a vital role to play in extending cultural geography. This thesis has also illustrated how oral sources are particularly useful in documenting the range of different ways of seeing the relationships between land and life both between different cultural groups and within the same group. The role oral sources have in complementing written sources and observations has also been demonstrated. In particular I have highlighted the vital role oral sources can play in documenting attempts (by both Aboriginal and European people) to subvert authority. This is of fundamental significance to the study of Aboriginal contact processes for, as I have illustrated, subtle subversion of authority has been a major Aboriginal response to contact. The examples I have documented of a tracker subverting a policeman's efforts to arrest people and the variety of

cattle killing techniques are only to be found in the oral record. Likewise I have given examples of how the oral record reveals examples of how Europeans also subverted authority. Examples such as, the methods to avoid getting caught "co-habiting" and for getting the contract each year for re-building the wharf are similarly not to be found in written documents.

The thesis has developed a guide to the practicalities of collecting and interrelating oral and written sources. The thesis has also shown the need for researchers to be particularly self-conscious about their methods of collecting oral sources because modes of communication are so culturally specific. By making explicit the processes by which I developed my project from my initial two informants to the wider community and the way I attempted to be sensitive to Yanyuwa modes of communication I have given guidelines to others considering such work. In this process I have also demonstrated the value of combining the research skills and methods of anthropology and other social sciences with the rigour of documentation of the historians.

The empirical contribution of this thesis should not be overlooked. By recording a wide range of information on the contact process that was otherwise in danger of being lost, a significant resource has been established. By rigorously documenting the oral material collected, I have provided other researchers with the opportunity to both assess my efforts at interpreting the data, and to analyse it themselves. It is also a significant resource for the Yanyuwa which some younger Yanyuwa people have already used to learn about their past.

## 11.2 Continuity in change

The impact of Europeans on the Yanyuwa was considerable, but it is misleading in the extreme to see change within Aboriginal society solely as something Europeans introduced. The false view that Aboriginal society was a fixed entity unable to cope with change, led in turn to the equally false view that Aboriginal society could only respond to Europeans through resisting change until a point of catastrophic cultural collapse was reached. As Stanner (1979:47) notes such views of Aboriginal society led them to be "depicted as so rigid and delicate, with everything so interdependent, that to interfere with any part of it ... is to topple the whole, in rationale, design and

structure.”<sup>1</sup>

This thesis has illustrated the need to go beyond dualistic views of a static traditional Aboriginal life and changing non-traditional life. By rejecting this usual approach and concentrating on the dynamic nature of the changing cultural landscape in the area, a fuller understanding of contact processes has been achieved. The dynamic Yanyuwa response to Macassan contact indicates just how wrong are both the views that it was Europeans who introduced change into Aboriginal life and that Aboriginal society was inherently unable to cope with outside influences.

The Yanyuwa case study from which this thesis is built has highlighted the general Aboriginal belief that land is life. Without land, both physically and spiritually, there is no life. This belief has played an important role in many of the processes of culture contact and change. The analysis presented has considered how this belief has influenced the whole contact process and in particular has illustrated how it has been responsible for continuity in change. The concept of countrymen provides a good illustration of how land based views have continued in changed circumstances. Whereas countrymen were once defined in terms of individuals who shared connections to country through birth, conception or mythology, contact has extended the opportunities for such connections to include shared links formed through employment and travel.

Aboriginal responses to contact must be seen in terms of how they have been shaped by distinctively Aboriginal practices and processes. As Stanner (1979:62) notes, “Aborigines . . . work out terms of life they know how to handle. This is why they develop rather than alter, substitute rather than forgo”. As with all Aboriginal groups the Yanyuwa attempted to incorporate new items, concepts and institutions within their own cultural framework. The examples given in section 6.5.5 on material culture and section 6.5.1 on language, detail the way the Yanyuwa creatively adapted both the new into the old and incorporated the old into the new. The patterns of change in these two aspects of Yanyuwa life mirror more general changes in Yanyuwa life. For example, as section 9.7 illustrates, Christianity offers a similar pattern of change. The Yanyuwa clearly adopted aspects of a European belief system into their own belief system.

The Yanyuwa example illustrates the way indigenous people’s responses to contact have been guided by the logic of their own societies. For example, prior to European

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<sup>1</sup>Morphy and Layton 1981 also document the significance of such views of the rigid nature of Aboriginal society and the related belief that cultural collapse was inevitable.

contact, the Yanyuwa had gathered at areas of abundant food, and stayed while food resources remained. This pattern of moving to where there was abundant food played a major part in both the move towards more sedentary lifestyles at big places which had European bosses at them and in the subsequent move into Borroloola when the welfare ration station was open. As illustrated on page 166 the Yanyuwa had developed various methods of storing food and the move to using more easily storable items such as flour must again be seen as being guided by the logic of their culture. However, as I have illustrated, these moves to take advantage of European food sources had many unforeseen ramifications and in particular led to the creation of many levels of dependency. A society based on inter-dependence was, as I have outlined, particularly prone to becoming dependent when existing authority was undermined. The Yanyuwa as a result became dependent on many aspects of European culture.

It is in retrospect possible to see how by acting within a logical and consistent cultural context, the Yanyuwa have been doubly dispossessed. They gave up living on their land by moving into town. From there they were recruited to work on cattle stations. These two steps no doubt at the time seemed an attractive and sensible continuation of the traditional movement to food sources. However, although they were not aware of it at the time, they had given up life on their land for jobs on other land to which they had no ties or rights. The subsequent lay offs from cattle stations, meant they lost their jobs as well as many of their links with their land.

This thesis has thus illustrated how the logical process of coming in led to the creation of many levels of dependency for Aboriginal people and radically changed their access to and relationships with land. The fact that in many cases Europeans went to the locations of Aboriginal mythological and economic importance meant that Aboriginal people had little choice but to come into contact with Europeans. The contemporary examples of dependency discussed in section 7.8.1 on outstations highlight how this process has operated in the past.

An important aspect of the process of dependency is the closing up of options that have occurred with coming in. The issue of reversibility is a key one. When examining changes in Aboriginal life that came with contact fundamental points to consider are:

1. To what degree did Aboriginal people control the change?
2. Conversely, to what degree was change forced upon Aboriginal people?

### 3. Was the change reversible?

Both the nature and speed of change determined the degree to which each separate Aboriginal group in Australia managed to salvage some control over the contact processes and the degree to which they were rendered powerless. One demonstration of powerlessness is contained in the issue of reversibility. The concept of reversibility is obviously a key issue in the question of coming in that was examined in detail in chapter 8. People stayed in once they had come in as a result of the irreversibility of many of the changes that came with town based life. As outlined (on page 286) coming in led to reliance on European food, medicine and schooling at the expense of Aboriginal equivalents. As a result of coming in people were brought up away from their traditional country and a cycle began of a decreased passing on of traditional knowledge between generations.

The irreversible loss of knowledge about land has been a major factor in the creation of situations of dependency. Dinny Nyliba highlights this issue in his statement (on page 276) about the ramifications of getting used to the supplies that came with working with a European boss. As he notes, people could not "run away when they used to it along white man". Another reason why coming in led to irreversible changes in Yanyuwa life was highlighted in Annie's quote on there not being enough bush tucker within walking distance of Borroloola once a large number of Aboriginal people had moved in. As a result hunting and gathering decreased and in turn the passing on of these skills to the next generation declined. This example also highlights how dependency often has a spatial element. Dependency was in part the result of people being distant from their country and living in one place in larger groups.

This study has shown that creative adaptation and dependence are two contrasting processes, whose complex interactions are responsible for the relative degree of cultural continuity and change in any one group of people.

## 11.3 From the unique to the universal

The Yanyuwa case study works at a range of levels, from the unique to the universal. On the one hand the case study provides examples of general processes and events that also occurred elsewhere and at the other extreme it highlights the degree to which

specific factors shaped contact experiences in different areas. The Yanyuwa case study thus highlights both the specific locational and temporal nature of different contact processes and also raises issues with wider relevance. This section briefly reviews the relevance of the Yanyuwa example at these different levels. The discussion begins with the unique and deals in turn with a series of examples raised by the Yanyuwa study that have progressively wider relevance.

Specific local factors that have shaped the Yanyuwa contact experience include their particular culture, their land, the rapid decline in the size of the groups originally in the Borroloola area and the timing and chronology of their contact with non-Aboriginal people. The long history of Macassan contact, and the fact that government officials preceded missionaries to Borroloola, are both, for example, vital factors determining the nature of Yanyuwa contact. The massive early impact of Europeans on groups around Borroloola, the subsequent decline in European numbers and the long period when only a handful of Europeans lived in the area have greatly shaped the Yanyuwa contact experience. Their isolation on the Sir Edward Pellew Group protected them from much of the early violence of early European contact and when they subsequently moved into Borroloola they greatly outnumbered the few Europeans in town. The fact that there were only a few Europeans in town who were mostly very long term residents helped the Yanyuwa successfully to incorporate these Europeans to a degree into their society.

The contrasting history of contact of different local Aboriginal groups is highlighted in the way the Yanyuwa have become a ceremonial resource for surrounding Aboriginal groups. As noted above, groups from as far afield as Mornington Island have come to Borroloola to go through ceremonies that the Yanyuwa have maintained but which other groups have lost. The way the Yanyuwa have managed to maintain ceremony is a great source of group esteem. The Yanyuwa were more successful than other groups in the region in continuing ceremonial life for a variety of reasons. A major one was that they were not "scattered" to the same degree as other groups. Musso Harvey, for example, makes the point<sup>2</sup> that the Mara who were scattered between a number of settlements, now have "ceremony on different places Numbulwar, Roper and here ... not at the same place". While, as I have illustrated, contact has greatly dislocated

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<sup>2</sup>1987 Tape 74A 1 min.

the Yanyuwa, this dislocation has not been to the same extent as for other local groups. The Yanyuwa are very much centred on Borrooloola and there are not large numbers in several other places as is the case with surrounding groups. The "Yanyuwisation" of Borrooloola is clearly an important feature in the Yanyuwa contact process. As noted above they have long been the dominant group in Borrooloola. As positions such as welfare aides, health workers and police assistants became available it has invariably been Yanyuwa people who have filled these jobs.

The long contact the Yanyuwa had with outsiders in small usually manageable numbers has been a major factor in their contact history. The Borrooloola welfare officers all agreed that the Yanyuwa were very different from other groups. Ted Egan noted<sup>3</sup> "they were certainly different" and suggests a major aspect of this was that<sup>4</sup> at Borrooloola the welfare officer "did not have much to do at Borrooloola except feel important, there were so many smart black fellows, that did the usual things white fellows did. If the pump went bung Barney fixed it, if the motor car would not run Musso would fix it, they could weld". Egan goes on to note that the only thing he was required to do to run the place was to read and write the correspondence to and from head office. Ted Harvey similarly noted<sup>5</sup> how the Yanyuwa were different from the many other Aboriginal groups he dealt with in the Northern Territory and suggests that this was due to their confidence in dealing with Europeans and "the fact that most of them spoke pretty good English".

The skills Harvey and Egan describe are the result of a long period of contact with Europeans. Individuals like Musso Harvey, whom Egan refers to, learnt a lot about Europeans when young. Musso's mother and sisters worked for a European store owner and he spent part of his childhood living at this store. Subsequently when work opportunities became available on the Barkly Tablelands people like Musso, with the skills for dealing with Europeans and knowledge of English, were able to learn a wide variety of European-type skills. It is important to stress that in the process people like Musso did not lose their ceremonial view of the world. Indeed as I have noted (page 245) their ceremonial knowledge was extended by the cattle experience.

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<sup>3</sup>1987 Tape 6A 28 min.

<sup>4</sup>1987 Tape 6A 26 min.

<sup>5</sup>1987 Tape 2B 46 min.

It is important to note that the Yanyuwa also had an important mythological resource in their islands which were largely untouched by European contact. The most important ceremonies in the area are about physically and spiritually returning the dead to their country. The Yanyuwa could do this with more confidence than other groups as caves on their islands provided a safe place for log coffins and other ceremonial items to be returned to. It has only been in the last ten years, with the growth of tourism and the activities of professional fisherman and adventurers, that this situation has changed.

The particular contact experience of the Yanyuwa thus produced a situation where they were able to maintain ceremony to a greater degree than many surrounding groups and at the same time, through their long history of contact with outsiders, were very successful in managing their contact with Europeans. This combination of factors has produced individuals with a depth of knowledge of both the Aboriginal and the European worlds they live in.

The importance of the localised factors I have outlined above, points towards the need for more detailed case studies to be carried out elsewhere in Australia. While further highlighting regional diversity such case studies are also likely to raise some recurring themes. From the Yanyuwa example it is possible to suggest that:

1. The role of ceremony in linking Aboriginal people to their land makes it likely that land and ceremony were crucial factors generally in the contact experience.
2. The general European ignorance of the significance of land to Aboriginal people has shaped many contact processes.
3. The way that Aboriginal people, in seeking internal Aboriginal explanations, have disregarded Europeans as causative factors is also likely to be a recurring theme in contact processes. As a result Europeans are often not held to be responsible for many of the changes they have caused in Aboriginal life.
4. The role of the particular environment in shaping contact processes is certain to have been repeated elsewhere. The highly seasonal climate of tropical Australia has, for example, resulted in seasonal European land uses and this in turn had a major role in determining the contact experience of the area. The seasonal nature of Macassan trepanging, salt gathering and the cattle industry allowed for

existing aspects of Yanyuwa culture to continue during breaks in their employment. The environment also played an important role in determining the degree to which Aboriginal people could successfully resist the European invasion of their land. In areas that Europeans find inhospitable, such as the mangrove delta of the McArthur River and the rugged sandstone escarpment of the McArthur's headwaters, Aboriginal people could for a long period successfully take action against Europeans.<sup>6</sup>

Of more general relevance still are the processes I have charted of conflicts over land and indigenous loss of control over the land. The coming in process that I have documented in detail, has, as Reynolds (1987:63) notes, been "repeated a hundred times over". The Yanyuwa example is clearly relevant to the other times and places that it occurred. As I have highlighted, coming in was a complex process which needs to be understood in terms of the general processes at work and specific local factors that shaped the course of the general processes. The value of a geographic approach in revealing the complexity of coming in has also been demonstrated.

Another very broad issue that has been highlighted in the way every society is ethnocentric. The Yanyuwa illustrate this in the way they give internal Yanyuwa explanations to changes in features as diverse as marriage patterns (page 341) and the environment (page 383). This pattern of seeking internal explanations for their past is but one of many examples of Yanyuwa ethnocentrism raised in this thesis.

The Yanyuwa case study works at the broadest scale as an example of the world wide pattern of what happened when cultures with radically different religious and economic systems came into contact. European colonisation has a thousand times over produced a pattern of indigenous people losing control over land and becoming economically and politically marginalised within the new dominant culture. The growth of economic dependence on European society and the resultant decline in traditional economic knowledge is again a recurring pattern.

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<sup>6</sup>Tim Rakuwurlma's description (see page 212) of his father's retaliation after European shootings and the police journal accounts of Aboriginal actions at Bauhina Downs (see footnote on page 209) provide examples of the success of Aboriginal actions against Europeans in these two environments.

## 11.4 The past in the present, the present in the past

The way the past can be seen in the present has been highlighted. For example, many of the current “specific geographic expressions” of the Borroloola region are the result of past Aboriginal cultural landscapes. Likewise much of current Aboriginal life is shaped by their past dealings with Europeans. For example, settlement patterns today are the result of past Aboriginal cultural landscapes. I have illustrated how Turner’s example (see page 99) of Indian trails and villages respectively becoming European roads and settlements is equally applicable to Australia. As I have noted Leichhardt followed Aboriginal footpaths, the drovers followed Leichhardt’s route, the road from Borroloola to Queensland follows the droving route and many tourists are now following the same route.

As well as illustrating how pre-contact Aboriginal cultural landscapes influenced the current cultural landscape this same example also illustrates how Aboriginal responses to contact were shaped by existing aspects of their culture. As noted above (page 284) this same route appears to have been an important pre-contact trade route and with European contact became a route of Aboriginal migration. The pattern of Yanyuwa movement into big places similarly illustrates how the pre-existing Aboriginal cultural landscape influenced Aboriginal responses to contact. As illustrated this pattern was the result of people spending more of each year at places they already regularly visited. Aboriginal people also shaped the current landscapes of the local cattle stations both physically and economically. As Splinter Waranduwa aptly puts it<sup>7</sup> “I’m the man that been make him up that station”. As well as having made the posts and yards, Aboriginal people for decades made the stations financially viable.<sup>8</sup> It needs to be stressed that the interaction between different cultural landscapes continually redefined the processes of contact. Throughout Yanyuwa contact history it is possible to see examples of how their past experiences shaped their actions. As I have argued, their responses to Europeans were influenced by their contact with Macassans. Likewise, welfare could “round up” people as the Yanyuwa felt they had no option but to act

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<sup>7</sup>1986 Tape 2A 59 mins.

<sup>8</sup>This fact has rarely been acknowledged by Europeans but Barker (1966:141) is an exception.

as welfare suggested. The experience the Yanyuwa had of the dangers involved in not doing what European authorities told them to do gave them little option but to do as welfare said. It needs to be remembered that the 'rounding up' time was in the era when an Aboriginal person could be whipped for trying to leave a cattle station (see page 252) and less than 20 years since a policeman could kill a prisoner (see footnote page 219). The fact that one Aboriginal woman (see page 263) says she will not go hunting anymore in the Borrooloola as she fears she "might get shot" by tourists illustrates how past violence still structures life in the Borrooloola area.

The quote (on page 330) from one of the "half-castes" who was taken from Borrooloola illustrates another example of the past living in the present. Her views that her Borrooloola relatives "did not want" her illustrate the lack of knowledge she has about her lost family's reactions to her removal. The effectiveness of the government's past divide and rule tactics is well illustrated by this.

The thesis has also shown that present day conflicts over land in the area are often a restatement of past conflicts. For example, the influence tourists are having respectively on male and female hunting and gathering provides fascinating parallels to what happened when pastoralists made demands on land.

By drawing out the issues, summarised in this chapter, at both specific and the general levels, the thesis has made both a methodological and empirical contribution to knowledge.

## 11.5 The future?

This thesis has illustrated how past events and processes have shaped contemporary life in the Borrooloola area. The processes of continuity in change will no doubt continue in the future for the Yanyuwa. With the granting of land rights to the Yanyuwa over limited areas, the process that I have charted of decreasing control over their land has been, for some individuals at least, dramatically reversed.

The major themes that I have addressed are going to have a continuing relevance to the outstation movement that has started in the Borrooloola area since the granting of land rights. The desire people have to return to specific locations that are important to them highlights the continuing relevance of the land is life theme. The outstation

movement also highlights how the Yanyuwa, despite living in town, never lost their links with their land or gave up their claims for it.

The fact that it is not a "traditional" life style that people are returning to but in many ways they are recreating the big camp lifestyle of the 1930s and 1940s illustrates the continuity and change theme well. The integration of aspects of European and Aboriginal lifestyles that these camps represent illustrates how change was structured by the existing Aboriginal cultural landscape.

The problems outstations face highlights the other major theme running through this study, dependency. Whether outstations attract a growing number of residents or become solely camps for the decreasing number of old people left alive who lived in the big places 50 years ago depends very much if the cycles of dependency I have described can be broken.

Moreover, the growth of tourism in the Borroloola area has opened up a new phase of adaptation and change for the Yanyuwa which will have an increasing impact on both town and outstation life. The evidence presented here suggests that the Yanyuwa response to this new phase will follow a similar pattern of incorporation and cultural adaptation. It is likely, however, that concurrently there will be new patterns of dependency created. It remains to be seen how future generations of the Yanyuwa will shape their identity in the light of these changing circumstances.

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**Part VI**

**Appendixes**

# Appendix A

## Glossary

Listed below are Yanyuwa and Aboriginal English terms that have been used in the text. The Yanyuwa terms have appeared in the text in *italics* while the Aboriginal English terms were placed in single quotation marks on their first appearance and subsequently appeared without any marking.

**Aboriginal English** A term used in this thesis to refer to the creole (kriol) spoken by Aboriginal people in northern Australia. Many English words within this language have distinctively Aboriginal meanings.

**alla** Aboriginal English term for everything.

**all about** Aboriginal English term that can mean; they, them, those or everyone.

**behind** Aboriginal English term meaning after or afterwards.

**boss** Aboriginal English term used both to refer to a European employer and as a general term of address for most European adult males. The more general usage originates in colonial situations of European dominance. Also used to describe owners of certain ceremonies and Dreamings.

**boy** A colonial term for indigenous workers that was in common European usage in Northern Australia. Now tends only to be used by older Europeans but it is very commonly used by Aboriginal people, particularly when describing past events. The comment on the origin of "boss" applies to this term as well.

**business** Ceremony.

**bough shade** Structure made out of tree trunks or branches to provide shade.

**bush tucker** Aboriginal English term for plant and animal food found in the bush, as distinct from “whitefella tucker” that can be purchased in town.

**call** Aboriginal English term for how one addresses a classificatory relation. Hence “I call her mum”.

**cheeky** Aboriginal English term used for both plants and people that are dangerous or troublesome. Indicates in both cases that caution is necessary. Plants so defined usually need leaching or similar treatment to remove toxic or unpleasant tastes. Many policemen and other European authorities are seen as ‘cheeky’.

**Dreaming** Term often used by Europeans in a general sense to cover the complex range of religious beliefs of different Aboriginal groups which explain the creation of land, life and social order. When used by Aboriginal people it is usually used in a more specific sense to indicate the activity of particular ancestral beings. Can also be used to describe the place where the power of an ancestral being is located.

**flash** Aboriginal English term for Aboriginal people who, in obtaining the ways of Europeans, forget their obligations to Aboriginal kin. It is usually used to refer to “half-caste” relatives who are seen to have become insensitive to kin.

**footwalking** Aboriginal English term for travelling by foot.

**gammon** In common usage in northern Australia meaning “falsehood” or “to lie”, see Dixon 1980:70. Shorter Oxford defines it as “To pretend . . . to stuff with nonsense, to humbug, hoax” and dates this usage as 1812.

**grow up, grew up** Aboriginal English term for bringing up of children. It involves educating them about the ways of the world. Often it is used in regard to adults, either Aboriginal or European, apart from biological parents, who assumed such responsibility.

**humbugging** Aboriginal English term for sexual harrasment. It is usually used in the form “humbugging whitefellas”. Also used to describe the activities of people who are making life difficult, for example, politicians, drunks etc.

**jarrada** Yanyuwa term for “love magic” songs.

**jungkayi** Yanyuwa term for ritual managers of ones mother’s country.

**koori** The term Aboriginal people from south east Australia use to refer to themselves.

**kujika** Yanyuwa term for ceremonial song cycles related to country and the activities of ancestral beings.

**language** Aboriginal English term used to signify Aboriginal languages as opposed to English.

**Law** Aboriginal English term for the sum total of Aboriginal mythology and ceremony and the rules it provides guiding ceremonial and everyday life.

**Leichhardt tree** Common term used by Aboriginal and European people in northern Australia for the species *Nauclea orientalis* (see Brock 1988:264).

**libaliba** Aboriginal term for dugout canoe used in Aboriginal languages over much of the Northern Territory coast line. The term is Macassan in origin. Used in avoidance dialect by the Yanyuwa.

**looking after** Aboriginal English term often used in the context of the kind of care of children that is involved in "growing up" someone (see above). As well as meaning nurturing people it is also often used in a similar way in regard to nurturing country.

**mimi** Yanyuwa kinship term for mother's father.

**mob** Collective noun often used to identify groups, hence that "Yanyuwa mob" meaning all the Yanyuwa people. "Big mob" indicates a large group. Derived from use to describe groups of cattle. Also used to describe a semi-moiety.

**munja** Term used by Aboriginal people in the Borroloola area for food obtained from cycads.

**mungskul** Garawa term for a ground oven that was used before contact for cooking large animals and now also used for cattle. The Yanyuwa equivalent is rabarr.

**nulla nulla** Australia wide Aboriginal English term for fighting stick.

**ngimarringki** Yanyuwa term for traditional land owners.

**piccaninny** Australia wide Aboriginal English term for children.

**quietened down** The term used in the cattle industry for taming wild horses and cattle. It is often also used by the Yanyuwa to describe what happened to Aboriginal people in the process of the ending of the wild times.

**skin** Aboriginal English term for subdivisions that are used to establish marriage rules. As Kirton and Timothy (1977) outline, the Yanyuwa usage of this term encompasses much

more than just marriage rule subdivison. They suggest that "skin" can be most closely translated into English as (1977:321) "essence".

**skiting** Aboriginal English term for boasting.

**warrki** Yanyuwa term meaning "greedy".

**wrong way** Aboriginal English for relationships that do not comply with Aboriginal marriage rules.

# Appendix B

## Historical Photographs Relating to Borrooloola

As discussed in section 2.4.5, taking old photographs back to Borrooloola was a productive research technique. Listed below are the sources of these photographs. The first two listed are collections that I located in institutions. I collected the other photographs during the course of my research when locating and interviewing Europeans who had formerly lived in the Borrooloola area. Biographical details of these people are included in Appendix I. In most cases I was able to arrange for copies of these photographs to be made and for originals or copies to be lodged, with documentation I collected, with the Australian Institute of Aboriginal Studies.

- Spencer and Gillen collection taken 1901, held by National Museum of Victoria. The documentation of these photographs that I recorded is held by this Museum and the Australian Institute of Aboriginal Studies.
- MacIntosh collection, held by Australian Institute of Aboriginal Studies, taken in the Borrooloola region in the 1930s.
- Pattemore collection, covering 1955 - to the present.
- Harvey collection, covering 1955 - 1962.
- Ted Evans collection, taken when he made a Native Affairs patrol to the area in 1949.
- Jack Twyford collection, photographs he took while based as a soldier in the area in World War 2.
- Steve Johnson collection, taken by Steve in the Borrooloola area from about 1950 to 1960.

# Appendix C

## Population Estimates

Section 6.5.3 offered a number of alternative ways of reconstructing Aboriginal population figures. In this appendix the range of oral and written population estimates collected are listed.

**Pre-contact** Steve Johnson (senior), told his son Steve Johnson (junior), that Vanderlin Island “could have supported 50 people” prior to contact.<sup>1</sup> Steve (senior), was the first permanent European resident of Vanderlin Island and based this estimate on observations on how many people were living there in the 1920s and from conversations with these people.

**1890s** Stretton (1893:249) gives population figures for various groups including 100 for the Garawa who he calls the “Leearrawa” and says are located at Robinson River. He subdivides the Yanyuwa into the “Leewaloo”, with 130 people just from Vanderlin Island, and the “Leeanuwa”, with 110 people in the “McArthur River, Borroloola” area. He locates the Binbingka at “McArthur River, 40 miles up river” and numbers them at 100. He also describes the “Leewillungarra” who presumably are Wilangarra but locates them at Eva Downs.

**1913** “Between here [Borroloola] and Calvert River there are perhaps 400 natives”. From a report by Mounted Constable Dempsey after a patrol through the area in May and June.<sup>2</sup>

**1939** Former policeman, Gordon Birt, says<sup>3</sup> that there were 100 Aboriginal people living at Borroloola in the Malarndarri camp and that of these 20 to 30 received rations from the police.

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<sup>1</sup>Steve recounts this on 1987 Tape 29B 10 min.

<sup>2</sup>Borroloola Police Records Northern Territory Archives F275, 8 August 1913.

<sup>3</sup>1986 Tape 32A 6 min.

1942 Jack Twyford, recalls<sup>4</sup> that 100 people lived at Malarndarri camp.

1952-53 Wet Season "Up to 200 natives congregate in the Depot during the Wet Season" as part of a total of "300 natives in the Borrooloola district from Tanumbirini station to the Queensland border".<sup>5</sup>

1953-54 Resident in Borrooloola "80 native people" and in wet season with returning workers from cattle stations "200 people" (Pattemore L. and M. 1954a: 8).

1954 Former welfare officer, Ted Harvey, says<sup>6</sup> that when he arrived in Borrooloola in the dry season of 1954 there were 50 Aboriginal people in the Malarndarri camp and that this built up to 250 in the wet season cattle station lay off.

1960 Reay (1963:90-91) lists the following Aboriginal residents of Borrooloola.

- Garawa 119
- Anyula (sic) 76

31 December 1972 Milliken (1976:241) presents the results of a Northern Territory wide census and estimates the sizes of each Northern Territory language group. His figures include the following estimates:

- Binbinga 12
- Garawa 310
- Mara 107
- Yanula (sic) 188
- Gudanji 80

Milliken also maps the distribution of each of these groups in 1972. The Yanyuwa are centred on Borrooloola but many are also living on three Barkly Tableland cattle stations; Alexandria, Cresswell Downs and Brunette Downs. The Garawa in contrast are spread out further to the east, with a concentration at Doomadgee in Queensland, and further west to Elliott.

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<sup>4</sup>1987 Tape 75A 13 min.

<sup>5</sup>G. Sweeney, "Native Depot at Borrooloola and its future" page 1, Australian Archives, Northern Territory Region, CRS FI Item 53/352.

<sup>6</sup>1987 Tape 1A 1 min.

**1975 Dry Season** Avery (1985:175) estimates the Aboriginal population of Borroloola as “between about two hundred and eighty-five and about three hundred and fifty people”. He gives figures indicating that about 40% of these are Garawa, 40% Yanyuwa, 10% Maralawa and 10% other language groups.

# Appendix D

## Bush Tucker

This appendix lists some of the plants the Yanyuwa use. Emphasis is given to food plants as the information was collected by taking people out bush and observing the plants gathered. Samples of these plants were collected and from these in most cases Latin botanical names could be identified. In some cases no identification could be made by the Darwin botanists whom I consulted. It should also be noted that the Yanyuwa sometimes have more than one name for different life stages of the one species (for example, ma-lhalhaki) and sometimes (for example, ma-marlalyi), the plant and the edible section have different Yanyuwa names.

**a-binjirri** *Melaleuca* sp. probably *leucadendra*

Large tree, small leaf. Flower eaten by flying foxes, bark used for wrapping food for cooking. Bark also used for cigarette paper.<sup>1</sup> Canoes made from trunk (see Baker 1988).

**a-bunungkurr** *Cuarium australiaum*

Big spreading tree with white trunk. Grows in sandy country, by rivers (and near store locally at Borroloola). Birds eat flesh of fruit, if the stone is cracked open the kernel is edible, nut-like. Used as a "canoe making tree".

**a-dawal**

Tree, 3-5 metres high, with thin flaking bark that is easily removed. Found near the road into Manangoora and "big mob around Borroloola, right up to the jump up". Bark boiled, water used to bathe ringworm.

**a-kalwakalwa**

Tree, grows by rivers, creeks or on higher ground. Yellow flower, white edible berry, ready early in cold season (same time as jubardirri). Grows along the McArthur River "big mob at Surprise Creek".

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<sup>1</sup>Eileen Yakibijna 1987 Tape 69B 26 min.

**alawuma** *Planchenia careya*

Cocky Apple, a large tree with small fruit ready in November. The fruit is green but goes pink at the top and yellow inside when ripe.

**a-marrabala** *Grevillea pteridifolia*

Small tree, silver leaves, orange flowers with sweet nectar. The flowers are collected into a container to eat, "chew him just like a lolly". Usually collected early in the morning, ready cold weather time (June-July).

**arndiny**

Mangrove, soft wood used for firewood only, poison fruit.

**barlbaji** possibly *Hakea arborescens*

Small tree, good firewood.

**bukuyabukuya** *Cassytha filiformis*

Shrub with edible fruit, green when young, white in November when ripe. Also eaten by emus.

**jaburarri**

Small tree, grows by rivers. Wood used for "making fire" and for making "wire spear". Small purple flower, sage-like smell.

**jubardirri**

Tree with small black/purple edible berry. Fruit juice made from crushed berries. Flowers November, berries ready to eat in March. Juice like ink "your tongue goes purple if you eat him".

**karraki** *Wrightia saligna*

Small tree, grows in sandy ground. Fruit and sap poisonous. Wood used to make woomeras, wire spears, digging sticks, fibre used for making dugong rope.

**kuwawu**

Small tree 3-5m high, with rough bark. Has edible gum, seen glistening at sunrise and sunset.

**lilyarr** *Grevillea sp.* probably *striata*

Tall shrub, long straight leaf (like blade of grass in shape). Grows in the salt pans around Manangoora, and on plains around Borroloola. Used for timber and firewood.

**ma-arnbaka**<sup>2</sup> *Cycas angulata*

Cycad, a large palm like plant up to 10 metres high. Large pineapple like fruit in the late dry season on female plants. The fruit is toxic and can only be eaten after lengthy treatment.<sup>3</sup> Dense stands of this plant exist in the Manangoora area and large ceremonial gatherings held

<sup>2</sup>This is a general term for the plant. There are numerous terms for the fruit at various stages of growth and preparation (see Bradley 1988:xvi). "Munja" is a term also used for the cycad.

<sup>3</sup>A detailed description of their preparation is given by Steve Johnson 1987 Tape 30B 17-22 min.

there were provisioned with this food. It was also traded over large distances, Steve Johnson, for instance, recalls<sup>4</sup> it being taken away as far as Arnhem Land.

**ma-bikiki** *Buchanania obovata*

Tree with edible fruit known as "bush plum". The inner layer of bark is pounded and boiled, and the water used to bathe itching skin. Judy Marrngawi, for example, prepared this for her grandson when he had chicken-pox and Steve Johnson<sup>5</sup> describes it being used to treat various sores.

**ma-bunkurri**

Tree, grows in hill country and stony country. Small fruit, yellow when ripe, white inside. Like bikiki special care is taken in obtaining the fruit, otherwise there is danger of a flood, according to tradition. It is, therefore, known as "mate for ma-bikiki".

**ma-kawurrka** *Acacia torulosa*

Small tree, grows by springs. Yellow flower. Good wood for digging sticks. Seed "like a bean", known as "bush rice", when dry is soaked and cooked, or crushed to make damper.<sup>6</sup> Is also the favoured species for bark to make dugong ropes. There are, however, other species (noted in this appendix) that occur on or nearer the islands, which would have been used for rope making prior to people moving into Borroloola.

**ma-lhalba** *Diospyros sp.*

Shrub. Small yellow/orange berries, turn red when ready to eat in the wet season, outer skin is eaten and the centre part thrown away. When the ma-lhalba is ready to eat, the sharks and rays are fat and ready for hunting and eating (at other times the fat is black and meat not so good to eat).

**ma-lhalhaki (also ma-murndurrarra)** *Brachychiton diversifolius*

Immature kurrajong. A small tree, the juvenile has large leaves and is known as ma-lhalhaki. When fullgrown it is called ma-murdurrarru and the bark used for making dugong rope and straps used to carry babies and tucker. Fruit is clubbed or cut off the tree. If the fruit is burnt, the shell comes open and the food inside is then safe to eat, the "poison burns out". Grows in the same areas as ma-rdardaki. Found near the road into Manangoora

**ma-marlalyi** *Terminalia carpentariae*

Tree with broad leaves. "Bush plum", black when ripe in the cold season, fruit called ma-wunjurrwunjurr. Black cockatoo feed on the flowers. Bark used to make putty to patch up

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<sup>4</sup>1987 Tape 27A 12 min.

<sup>5</sup>1987 Tape 30B 26 min.

<sup>6</sup>Bella Marrajabu 1987 Tape 60A 18 min. discusses how it is prepared.

dugout canoes.<sup>7</sup>

**ma-mayarranja** *Ficus* sp. probably *opposita*

Small tree. Edible "plum", ripe in November, hot/sharp flavour. Black when ripe, green beforehand. The leaf is so rough that it is used as sandpaper; wood used for "making fire". Found near the road into Manangoora.

**ma-murndurrarra** *Brachychiton diversifolius*

"Kurrajong", is the full grown tree of ma-lyalhaki see above; grows in same areas as ma-rdardaki.

**ma-ngalany**

Tree grows by river. Edible red fruit, "really red like a tomato", picked off the tree or from the ground. Ripens at various times.

**ma-nganhaku**

Vine, bush potato, "bitter one". Must be cooked before it is safe to eat, peppery taste. Grows by springs; vine used as a tourniquet for snake-bite.

**ma-ngawaka**

Tree, grows on hillsides. Yellow fruit, edible but hot taste, "burns the tongue".

**manjaba**

Tree, hanging branches like weeping willow. Has poison sap ("milk"). It provides nothing edible except sugar bag if bees make a hive in it.

**ma-rdardaki/ma-yatha** *Brachychiton paradoxus*

Tree, inner stringy-bark layer is used for a carrying strap, also used for making dugong rope. Fruit is harmful to the eyes unless cleaned in water first and put into the flames, "the poison falls from it, you burn him like singeing hair off a wallaby". Ripe in the wet season after Christmas.

**ma-rlibulu** *Cochlospermum fraseri*

"Kapok", small tree, edible root like cassava. The fruit (ma-wurlbu) is poisonous. If growing in stony country, it is pulled up and eaten in the wet season when the ground softens, in softer ground it can be pulled up and eaten at any time.

**ma-wanjarrngu**

Tree mangrove, grows in saltwater areas, bigger than the other mangroves. Green flower and fruit. Fruit is collected after it has fallen.

**ma-wararru**

Shrub, grows on island and mainland. Black edible fruit, hot tasting.

<sup>7</sup>Steve Johnson 1987 Tape 27A 27 min.

**ma-warrangayi** *Grewia sp.*

Small shrub with small sweet black fruit, ripe in the cold season. The leaves are used as a bush tobacco in time of tobacco shortage.<sup>8</sup> The European leaseholder of Manangoora, Andy Anderson, also used to grind up the fruit of this plant to make "coffee" when supplies ran out.<sup>9</sup>

**ma-wukarra** *Pandanus spiralis*

Distinctive palm like tree. The fruit kernel (*ma-kurdiridi* and *ma-kambalngu* for old ones) is an important food source. This cashew like nut is eaten raw when mature or roasted "to hurry things up"<sup>10</sup> if not quite mature. A beverage is also prepared from a red substance on the outside of the kernel "soak it in a coolamon . . . until it went like a cordial"<sup>11</sup>

**ma-yikarri** probably *Asparagus racemosus*

Tree/shrub, fine leaves, small thorns. Found along the road into Manangoora near Cycad groves. Roots are poisonous but are pounded, boiled, to make a solution to treat sores.

**muda/bijiri/warnu**

Shrub, leaves chewed to smoked in a pipe, "bush tobacco".

**mujbayi**

Cabbage palm, an important food source on the islands. Said to only grow on the mainland at Mt. Creek on Wologorang station.

**munda**

Shrub found on the islands. Poisonous red berries used for making necklaces.

**mungkamungka** *Melaleuca sp.* probably *leucadeudrun*

Tree with yellow flowers which the flying foxes eat. Bark used in former times to make nabununu (coolamon) or bark water-carrier about 35cm long tied at both ends.

**na-wubulu**

Tree with wood used to make the *na-marlbi* spike for the dugong harpoon. Found at Bing Bong.

**nuwara** *Pouteria sericea*

Shrub, grows only on the islands, in sandy areas. Small, poisonous fruit, black and hard, used only for necklaces. Found on front dune on South West Island.

**nguwa**

Tree growing on the islands, poisonous fruit. Good firewood.

<sup>8</sup>Discussed on 1987 Tape 69B 23 min. and 1987 Tape 37B 10 min.

<sup>9</sup>Annie Karrakayn 1987 Tape 37B 10 min.

<sup>10</sup>Steve Johnson 1987 Tape 30B 13 min. .

<sup>11</sup>Ibid.

**waraji** *Melaleuca sp.*

Large paperbark tree with easily peeled bark. Bark used for torches "make a bright light torch".<sup>12</sup>

**warrankurli**

Vine, grows on the islands and mainland. Fruit like little grapes.

**wibi**

Milky mangrove. Sap harmful to the eyes. Can be used to poison fish.

**wulantharr** probably *Ceriops sp.*

Mangrove, good timber, wood used for digging sticks for the women.

**wulban** *Melaleuca sp.*

Small tree, small leaf, papery bark. Leaves boiled and water used to bathe someone with flu or a cold. Small branches used to cover dugong, turtle meat when cooking in the underground oven; put in the water when cooking oysters, mussels. The bark is also used for wrapping up cooked fish and for making sleeping mats. Has a particularly pungent smell when burnt. Hard timber was used for dugong points and fish hooks<sup>13</sup>

**wurku**

Tree, wood used for 'making fire', also for handles of spears and fishing spears, the dry wood is light and floats.

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<sup>12</sup>Ricket Murnudu 1987 Tape 35A 47 min.

<sup>13</sup>Nora Jalirduma 1987 Tape 70A 3 min.

# Appendix E

## History of Oral History

Oral history has been recently rediscovered. In a controversial critique<sup>1</sup> of oral history, O'Farrell (1979:4) suggests that the term was coined in 1948. In fact, the technique if not the term, has been around much longer than this, but had for about a century been largely ignored by the written word historians. As Paul Thompson, one of the recent champions<sup>2</sup> of oral history writes (1982-83:41), it is "at the same time the newest and the oldest form of history". What is new about oral history is the use of the tape recorder and the opportunities it provides to record conversations more accurately. As Thompson shows, oral history has played an important role in the European historical tradition and he traces its use back to the ancient Greek historians. Finley (1986:11-14) notes that the so called "fathers of history" the ancient Greeks, stressed the importance of the orally relayed epic tradition. Finley (1986:13) also notes that "the atmosphere in which the Fathers of History set to work was saturated with myth".

A good nineteenth century example of the use of oral sources in history is contained in Bancroft's extraordinary encyclopaedic history of California. Faced with the lack of archival records associated with the short European history of the state he went out and created his own archives by using a team of "twenty skilled *collaborateurs* employed directly by me" (1886:vii) who took statements "varying in size from six to two thousand pages each, from many hundreds of the early inhabitants" (1886:55). Most of those interviewed were politically prominent men such as former state governors. Only eleven of those interviewed were women, and Bancroft condescendingly concedes that "the dictation of one of these . . . compares favorably in accuracy,

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<sup>1</sup>See *Quadrant* March 1980: 79-80, for comments on this article by G.C. Bolton and the Oral History Association of Australia Journal 1982-1983 for several responses.

<sup>2</sup>Thompson and others who have recently publicised oral history have tended to lose sight of the fact that some contemporary researchers have been carrying out oral history research before the recent re-discovery of oral history. The work of Evans' (1960, 1961, 1966, 1970 and 1975), for example, illustrates a long term use of such research methods.

interest, and completeness, with the best of my collection" (1886:55). "Natives" were also interviewed (see 1886:56) to get an indigenous perspective on the state's history. In a section entitled the "Dictations of Natives and Pioneers—Value of Reminiscences" he assessed the value of these sources in a manner similar to that in which he dealt with his written sources.

In an earlier work, his massive five volume *The Native Races of the Pacific States of North America*, Bancroft devotes a section to "Tradition as Authority" and examines at length the value of indigenous oral sources. Even though he is dismissive of their value, in actually acknowledging the existence of indigenous views of history and spending the time to examine their methodological value, he is a lot more progressive than most historians working in the century after him.

Another nineteenth century example of an epic oral history work is Mayhew's *London Labour and London Poor*. In the preface to the first volume (Mayhew 1851) he notes that his work "surely may be considered curious as being the first attempt to publish the history of a people, from the lips of the people themselves".

While the ancient Greeks are often heralded as the "fathers" of modern history, it is illuminating to note the similarities in the role myth and history have in the Yanyuwa world and that of the ancient Greeks. Finley, for example, describes (1986:13) how in ancient Greece "annually the mythical heroes re-appeared at the great religious festivals . . . and they re-created for their audiences the unbroken web of all life, stretching back over the generations of men to the gods". This description could equally be written about Yanyuwa ceremonial life. Despite having an origin similar to Aboriginal views of the past, history very much turned its back on the study of people without written records. Thompson (1982-83:41) charts the turning away from oral sources to "the development of professional academic history during the nineteenth century", when the historical method turned its attention firmly to the written word. As he goes on to note "hence the slogan of the new history became, 'No Documents, no history' ". Much of history became a documentation of powerful, ruling groups and this, in association with the developing perspective of seeing history as progress, took history further away from "ordinary people". Only in recent years with the development of various branches of social history have steps been taken to rectify this imbalance in the perspective of history.

# Appendix F

## Aboriginal Cattle Killing Techniques

This appendix outlines further examples to the one given on page 211 of the subtly of Aboriginal cattle killings. This subject provides a particularly good example of how oral sources are often more useful than written ones in documenting how individuals resisted authority.

Isaac Walayungkuma stresses<sup>1</sup> the need Aboriginal people had to kill cattle because they were hungry and gives further evidence on techniques to hide the evidence of their activities from Europeans:

**Isaac Walayungkuma** - I'll tell you something, bullock stealing, throw him down and cut him. And all them Willy Shadforth mob been come looking for killer<sup>2</sup> ... I just about been cut him up and I been seen that man coming now and I been let him go that strap, let him go that fat cow, live one he been get away now ... I been throw him down ... because I was hungry ... I was very hungry that time. We were stealing nanny goats too, poor bugger, quiet one ... [we used to go] long way away from the station we caught him there now, nanny goat.

**Richard Baker** - What did you do with the bones?

**Isaac Walayungkuma** - Chuck him away along water ... level him out bone everything chuck away bones in the water, he never know anything ...<sup>3</sup> cover him up ... [with] sand, just ground or take big hole and chuck him down and cover him up ...

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<sup>1</sup>1986 Tape 9A 14 min.

<sup>2</sup>Term in general usage in northern Australia for young cattle particularly suitable for eating.

<sup>3</sup>The rest of this quote comes from *ibid* 19 min.

It is worth quoting from Isaac again at length for another detailed description<sup>4</sup> of cattle killing that highlights the Aboriginal resourcefulness in this field:

We been go down make that bridle<sup>5</sup> now . . . Make him, we been tail up two quiet horses . . . reins we been make him, go out see big mob of bullock, big mob of bullock we been see him, oh we been very hungry kataja [son]. "We will have to go naked, no trousers" nothing, no trousers, no shirt, through the wet chasing now, "bruluk, bruluk, bruluk", chasing him bullock, I been get off, throw him down, naked, I been throw him down. Right now got him. Tie him up, got a strap . . . and we been leave him there for tomorrow, go to Seven Emu [the homestead where everyone was camped]. All right we been leave that bullock right there in the river, Robinson River, we been leave him there. We been come back and that alligator<sup>6</sup> been come now, they been grab him and pull him down long river . . . They just been take him down and I been come quick and I been seen them alligator grab that leg, and pull him down. And I been sing out "Wait, wait." And he been [makes banging noise] drop everybody, and all the alligator been run away now. They just been pull him down in river and tuck out<sup>7</sup> now, feed. And too quick I been sing out "Hey wait that is mine bullock". He been tied down, all the alligator four fella, and big mob been coming behind now . . .

**Richard Baker** - And you killed that bullock because you were hungry?

**Isaac Walayungkuma** - Yeah, we been kill that bullock and my mother and my *mimi* I been tell them all about [see Appendix A], "We've got a killer down there." "Oh we will have to go down there now got a swag everything." We go camp there long that killer now. And Old Keighran [the European owner of the property] he never know. It was through the wet [season] we been very hungry. Come up got an axe, I been hit him here [indicates the head] and knock him out . . . we been tuck out now, we been cut him up . . . [and cooked it in a] mungul [see Appendix A] have a feed now. And that old fella, Old Keighran he never come through there, see that everything, nothing. We been just chuck him down long river, [from] on top of river. Just chuck him, all the blood and bone and head, chuck him down

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<sup>4</sup>1987 Tape 71B 7-10 min.

<sup>5</sup>Such a bridle is illustrated above in figure 7.2. It was made from 'kurrajong' (see *ma-murndurrarra* in Appendix D) bark in the same way rope was made prior to the availability of European manufactured rope.

<sup>6</sup>The term used by Aboriginal people in the Borroloola area for salt water crocodiles.

<sup>7</sup>Meaning "to eat", derived from "tucker" an Australian colloquialism for food.

give it [to] alligator now.

**Richard Baker** - What about the blood?

**Isaac Walayungkuma** - ...we been cover him up ...got a ground ...sand and make a fire hide that blood ...we camped there four nights, tuck out [eat] that bullock now we very hungry, we never sit down at Seven Emu, nothing.

A Yanyuwa woman has also described<sup>8</sup> how men used such bridles to “go out now, look about bullocky, hungry time ...they used to ride bare back, no saddle just jump on”. Kurrajong bridles and ‘quiet’ horses<sup>9</sup> were also used to hunt kangaroos on horseback with spears.<sup>10</sup>

Pyro tells a similar story<sup>11</sup> about killing bullocks and hiding bones from the station owners “We don’t leave him [bones] anywhere, because he [the European manager] know straight away”. Blood from the slaughtered animal was also carefully hidden “cover him up, dig a hole, chuck the blood in”.<sup>12</sup> Pyro stresses that such action was necessary because they were hungry and, like others, says this usually occurred in the wet season.<sup>13</sup> Pyro was “still working for station” but

station won’t give you corn beef anything much ...oh we were hungry looking for beef ...nothing much that day, just half a bag of flour, half a packet of tea leaf ...sometime nothing, he never used to give them boy<sup>14</sup> [food] when they live in the bush only the working man, working that’s all ... I been live in the bush for a while ...one of the time you get a job you might work in the station, ’till you [go] bush again, go bush ...just living off bush tucker [including bullocky] away from the station long way.

Two other cattle killing techniques need comment. First, as Rory suggests,<sup>15</sup> “blackfella cunning bugger, him go away kill bullock at night”. He goes on to note that his father used this method and used to “cut him beef and walk away long way ... [and put the bones] long cave”.

<sup>8</sup>1987 Tape 66B 37 min.

<sup>9</sup>Broken in horses that are out bush away from the European homestead.

<sup>10</sup>1987 Tape 71A 1 min.

<sup>11</sup>1987 Tape 63B 33 min.

<sup>12</sup>Ibid 37 min.

<sup>13</sup>Roth (1901:6) in discussing the Wollogorang area, some 200 km east of Borroloola, provides a further clue to why cattle killing was concentrated in the wet season. He notes how in the wet season Aboriginal people could “drive the cattle into the bog-holes under the ridges along the coast-line, – and spear them”.

<sup>14</sup>Pyro here uses the term “boy” to mean an Aboriginal man [see Appendix A].

<sup>15</sup>1987 Tape 64A 15 min.

Second, as Isaac<sup>16</sup> and Oscar Wunyunya<sup>17</sup> describe, bush fires were lit to hide the evidence of their cattle killing.

The success of techniques for hiding the evidence is emphasised by the fact that those individuals (such as Tyson Walayungkuma), who were actually arrested for cattle killing, stress that they had not killed the beast on that occasion and that they were caught for "nothing". They claim that the cattle involved died of natural causes or that evidence was deliberately fabricated by Europeans keen to implicate Aboriginal people in cattle killings, so that they had a legal pretext to assist their attempts to clear them off the land. Tom Nawurrungu, for example, describes how station managers<sup>18</sup>

would go out and camp and take out rib bone and leave the bone anywhere. Police would go out and camp and take out and see bones by blackfella camp and he would go along station and tell the manager about the bullock bones. "They killed him!" [The police would say to the managers] "O.K. you chaps can jail him". [The managers replied.] They would put big chain on neck and make him walk to Borroloola, then Katherine and then Darwin.

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<sup>16</sup>1987 Tape 71B 12 min.

<sup>17</sup>1987 Tape 48A 9 min.

<sup>18</sup>This quote was supplied by John Bradley who recorded it in Yanyuwa and translated it for me.

# Appendix G

## Question Prompt and Recording Sheet

The two page sheet used to assist in questioning and recording information during the 1987 field work is reproduced below. This sheet is the most refined of a series of such sheets used on each field trip. It incorporates useful lines of questioning and reference points in Yanyuwa history. It allowed the collection of a range of comparable data from each person interviewed and for this material to be readily recorded and subsequently entered into the DBASE 3 database outlined in the next appendix.

Page one records information on the informant and their siblings, children, parents and grandparents. Birth dates were rarely known but could usually be established approximately from knowing the dates of important events in the Yanyuwa past. The bottom left box on page two has some of the main events. "Nurse" refers to the principal assistant at the birth and this is usually known. The list of skins at the bottom of the page includes a guide to 'right way' spouses. As indicated (skin A) Bulanyi is right way for (skin M) Nangalama. This guide enabled me to quickly assess if the relationships the informant was describing were right way or not.

Page two records the work and ceremonial history of the informant and their spouse, parents and grandparents. "Who grew them up" describes the person who played the biggest role in raising them. Page two also records information on when and why the informant first came to Borrooloola and some key locations. Details on the person's health record and important social identifiers (smoker, drinker, gambler and christian) are also recorded. The two boxes on "ever been to/lived at" respectively list a number of former 'big places' in the vicinity of Borrooloola and cattle stations in the wider region that many Yanyuwa worked on.



Self	Who grew them up	Where	Who gave name	JOBS				Mandiarr/young girl	Kunabibi	Wambuyanqu	
				When	Where	What	Boss				
				1st Job							
								Organised	Organised		
							who with	For	For		
Spouse Kajaja Kujaka Kangu Ngabuji Mimi Kurkurdi											
When 1st in	Borrooloola Katherine Darwin Isa South	What for?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Ever been really sick</li> <li>- break a bone</li> <li>- been to hospital, where</li> </ul>				Ever been to	lived at	Ever been to	lived at	
Where	Police time when Foster shot Germany war		Started	Stopped	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Bing Bong</li> <li>Manangoora</li> <li>Yukuyi</li> <li>Anthawarra</li> <li>Malarndarri</li> <li>Kangaroo Is</li> <li>Lurriyarri/ Wubunjawa</li> <li>Wardawardala</li> <li>other stations</li> </ul>					<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Robinson</li> <li>Wollogorang</li> <li>7 Emus</li> <li>Calvert</li> <li>Mallapunyah</li> <li>Tanunbrini</li> <li>Anthony</li> <li>Cresswell</li> <li>Brunette</li> <li>Eva Downs</li> <li>Roper</li> <li>Numbulwar</li> </ul>	
End of	Police, start welfare Mr Harvey Mr Festing New money Cyclone Tracy Land Rights court Cyclone Kathy Where married		Notes								

Figure G.2: Page 2 of prompt/recording sheet

# Appendix H

## Information Stored by DBASE 3 Program

A database using DBASE 3 was developed to store and sort the information collected on the prompt sheet shown above. The database used an on screen prompt display similar to the field prompt sheet. This enabled easy entry of the data. A summary data sheet can be printed out for each person. Figure H.1 illustrates the first page of Tim Rakuwurlma's entry. "Call name" refers to the kinship term I call him. "Listen" refers to the languages he says he can "hear" but is not fluent in. The "where and when" section lists where Tim was during various well remembered times in the Yanyuwa past.

Using the database correlations of the stored data can be made. This can be viewed on the computer or printed out. Figure H.2 illustrates, for example, a section of the print out of people whose birth place and conception site are known. Figure H.3 illustrates a section of the print out correlating birth places and birth dates.

## Full Details Report

European Name : Tim Timothy / Bush Name : Rakuwurlma  
 Call Name : kuku / Clan : Erumburiaya / Sex : M  
 Languages Spoken : Yanyuwa /Mara /Garawa /Alawa /English  
 Listen : Nunguibul / / Skin Class : Bangarrinji  
 Conception : Lardinma / Birth Date : 1900?  
 Birth Place : Walala  
 Fathers Name : Vanderlin Jack Rakuwurlma  
 Mothers Name : Polly Wundirrimara N2  
 Initiation : Kalakinda N1 / Kun : Manangoora  
 With Whom :  
 Boss :

-----  
Employment Details

(1)	When	: 1915	(2)	1917-22
	Where	: yukuyi		Arnhem Land
	What	: Trepanging		Running Cargo
	Boss	: De Cembo		Capt Luff
(3)	When	:	(4)	
	Where	:		
	What	:		
	Boss	:		

-----  
Where & When

Hospital :  
 Police : Vanderlin / Foster : Manangoora / War : South West  
 Pcs : Borr / Harvey : Borr / Tracy : Borr  
 Kathy : Borr / New Money : Borr

-----  
Audio Tapes

Photographs:

Figure H.1: Section of DBASE 3 print out, Tim Rakuwurlma

Page No. 1

## Conception Sites

NAME	BIRTHPLACE	CONCEPTION SITE
Tim Timothy	Walala	Lardinma
Annie Issac	Wilirila Vanderlin	Gondhis N1
Johny Issac	Kulakinda	Eva Downs
Irene Gillette	Kulakinda N2	Kanjulumarra N1
David Issac	Malarndarri	Jarrka
Eunice	Limarrajka Hill (Borro.)	Windiyakarri
Louise Issac	Malarndarri	Rocky Junction
Gloria	Malarndarri	Malarndarri
Danny Charlie	Malarndarri	Malarndarri
Maisie Charlie	Manangoora (Kati,ji,ji)	Kunimitiji
Janette Charlie	Malarndarri	Malarndarri
Rebecca	Gallipoli	Gallipoli
Miriam Charlie	Old bore (Borro.)	Old bore (Borro.)
Rosemary Charlie	Katherine Hospital	Old bore (Borro.)
Narelle Charlie	Darwin Hospital	House behind c.sh
Raymond Charlie	Malarndarri	Malarndarri
Silas Charlie	Malarndarri	Malarndarri
Jonathon Charlie	Wallhallow	Gallipoli
Dinah Norman	near Marani (in canoe)	Liwurriya
Eileen McDinny	Westmoreland	Old Doomadgee
Myra Rory	Anthony Lagoon	Anthony Lagoon?
Joan	Robinson River	Manangoora
Emmalina Evans	Kangaroo Island	Minyadawiji
Violet Hammer	Bing Bong	Manangoora
Heather	Malarndarri	Malarndarri
Joyce	Malarndarri	Malarndarri
Peggy Butcher	Malarndarri	Malarndarri
Samuel Evans	Malarndarri	Malarndarri
Judy Timothy	Anthawarra	Erumburin
Judy's father	Ruwarrabarrarala	Wathangka
Mavis Timothy	Borrooloola	Muluwa
Warren Timothy	Tennant Creek	Tennant Creek
Ivan Timothy	Darwin Hospital	Borrooloola
Velma Timothy	Tennant Creek	Tennant Creek
Josephine Timothy	Tennant Creek	Tennant Creek
Elaine Timothy	Tennant Creek	Tennant Creek
Luric Noble	Robinson River Station	Robinson River St
Damien	Cresswell	Cresswell
Aaron	Borrooloola	Borrooloola
Rosie (for Tyson)	Snake Lagoon	Snake Lagoon
Lorraine Miller	Darwin Hospital	Calvert Hills
Rhonda Miller	Darwin Hospital	Calvert Hill
Gavin Miller	Borrooloola Clinic	Kangaroo Island
Walter Miller	Borrooloola Clinic	Ben Mara
Stephanie Miller	Borrooloola Clinic	Kangaroo Island
Bruce Joy	McArthur River	McArthur River
Yella Fred	Borrooloola	Borrooloola
Don Miller	Wathangka?	Lubundalha KangIs
Georgie Miller	Brunette	Brunette
Mathew Miller	Malarndarri	Malarndarri
Harold Miller	Darwin	Borrooloola

Figure H.2: Section of DBASE 3 print out, birth places and conception sites

## Birth Place Grouping

European Name/Bush Name	Birth Place	Date of Birth
Gloria Issac	Malarndarri	24.2.73
Benjamin	Malarndarri	3.10.64
Judy's ngabuji Fanny Malarndirrimara	Malarndirri	1860 by 20&40y gen
Gordon's ngabuji	Malarndirri	1860 by 20&40y gen
Linda Rory Wambadurma	Manangoora	
Rickett's kangu Bakudukudu	Manangoora	1847 by 40&40y gen
Rita's ngabuji	Manangoora	1860 by 20&40y gen
Rickett's mimi	Manangoora	1867 by 20&40y gen
Rickett's ngabuji Wunbarri?	Manangoora	1867 by 40&20y gen
Don Miller's mimi	Manangoora	1877 by 20&40y gen
Jack Wulbinku	Manangoora	1887 by 40y gen
Mabil (Ricket's sist Jawirrabaruma	Manangoora	1915 apr
Minnie (Don's mother Wulbulinimara	Manangoora	1917 by 20y gen
Rickett (Ron) Murnudu	Manangoora	1927 apr
Angeline (Ricket sis Wabujibina	Manangoora	1930 apr
Eileen Anderson Yakijibina	Manangoora	1930 apr
Isa McDinna Yubuyu	Manangoora	27.4.52
Maisie Charlie	Manangoora (Katiji ji)	1953

Figure H.3: Section of DBASE 3 print out, birth places and birth dates

# Appendix I

## Biographical Details of Those Interviewed

Individuals interviewed are listed in alphabetical order according to first names. This allows easy cross checking with the information in Appendix J. European first names are used in preference to European surnames or Aboriginal names as some Aboriginal people interviewed lack one or the other. Hence European first names are the only means of being consistent. Using first names also avoids confusion when, as is common practice in the area, surnames are changed when kin with the same name die. Where people identify as Yanyuwa this is indicated. Where informants are European this is indicated. In most cases the ages of Aboriginal people listed are approximate but sometimes more detailed information is known through various government records or from comparative information. For example, certain people know they were born on or near the same day as others whose birth date is more accurately known. Birth dates based on my educated guess are prefaced by "c". Guesses by welfare officers which are recorded in official documents are indicated by "w" and when exact birth dates have been obtained from official records "b" is used. **Length of contact** refers to the length of time I knew and worked with the person concerned.

**Alec Riley.** Born: c1940. Mara. Length of contact: I interviewed Alec on the one occasion that I met him. He was in Borroloola visiting his father, he usually lives elsewhere. Close relations interviewed: Father: Mack Manguji.

**Amy Bajamalanya.** Born: w1938. Yanyuwa. Other names: Amy Friday. Length of contact: One of the people I have had most contact with at Borroloola, since my first visit there. Close relations interviewed: Sister: Bella Marrajabu.

## NOTE:

This figure/table/image has been removed to comply with copyright regulations. It is included in the print copy of the thesis held by the University of Adelaide Library.

## Figure I.1: Annie Karrakayn

**Andrew Dodd.** Born: c1945. Kurdanji. Length of contact: Known well socially around Borroloola but interviewed only once. Close relations interviewed: Sister: May Dodd:

**Annie Karrakayn.** Born: w1934. Yanyuwa. Other names: Annie Isaac. Length of contact: One of the people I have had most contact with at Borroloola, since my first visit there. In 1984 I drove Annie and her husband Isaac from Borroloola to Canberra, where they stayed with me for two weeks. During 1986 and 1987 field season I spent a number of weeks at Wardawardala outstation where Annie and her husband Isaac were living. Close relations interviewed: Husband: Isaac Walayungkuma. Daughter: Irene Kanjujamarara.

**Arthur Mawson.** Born: 1917. European. Length of contact: I first met Arthur Mawson when he was in hospital in Adelaide in 1988. After a series of informal conversations I recorded an interview with him in July 1988. Comments: First arrived in the Borroloola area in 1939, employed by Sunny Raggard at McArthur River station as a cook.

**Babe Damaso.** Born: 1910, on his father's lugger at mouth of Roper River. Yanyuwa/Filipino. Length of contact: I met Babe in Darwin, where he lives, a number of times. Comments: Article in *Land Rights News* July 1988, pages 42-43, on his involvement with the Aboriginal

Half Caste Progress Association in Darwin in the 1950s.

**Barney Walamungkumungku.** Born: c1925. Yanyuwa. Other names: Barney Long  
Length of contact: One-off interview at Kuminyini outstation.

**Bella Marrajabu.** Born: w1935. Yanyuwa. Other names: Bella Charlie. Length of  
contact: Frequent close personal contact since my first visit to Borroloola. I often accompanied  
Bella on bush tucker trips. Close relations interviewed: Sister: Amy Bajamalanya.

**Bessie Kithiburla.** Born: c1930. Yanyuwa. Other names: Bessie Marshall. Length of  
contact: Known since early in fieldwork, but only interviewed in 1987. Comments: Generally  
lives in Katherine.

**Billy Kid.** Born: c1935. Garawa. Length of contact: Known by sight around Borroloola  
but interviewed only once.

**Billy Rijirngu.** Born: c1945. Yanyuwa. Other names: Billy Miller. Length  
of contact: I had mainly social contact with Billy, generally when working with relatives in  
the camp. Close relations interviewed: Brothers: Don Manarra, Splinter Waranduwa, Tom  
Wambarirri. Sisters: Dinah Marrngawi, Emmalina Wanajabi.

**Bruce Joy.** Born: c1917. Yanyuwa/European/Macassan. Length of contact: I had  
regular contact with Bruce as Tim Rakuwurlma often requested that I drive him out to Bruce's  
Yungurri outstation. Comments: Bruce's father was known as Yella Fred as his father was  
Macassan. Bruce was the long time head stockmen at McArthur River station.

**Carrie Scrutton.** Born: 1903, McArthur River station area. Kurdanji/European.  
Length of contact: Single interview in Adelaide/gelma when Hilda Muir introduced me to her.  
Comments: Was taken away from Borroloola in about 1916 and lived in a home for "half-caste"  
children on Bathurst Island.

**Clara Johnson.** Born: 1927, Babangki, Vanderlin Island. Yanyuwa/European.  
Length of contact: Frequent. Clara has lived for many years at Bagot in Darwin. I met her in  
1982 as a result of my contact with her brother, Steve Johnson. Close relations interviewed:  
Sister: Elma Anderson. Brother: Steve Johnson.

**Conkleberry Jack.** Born: c1910. Jawoyn. Length of contact: I had frequent social  
contact with Conkleberry, particularly when working with other people in the camp. Close  
relations interviewed: Ex-Wife: Edna Bob.

**Dan Roper.** Born: c1910. Mara. Other names: Dan Roper. Length of contact:  
One-off interview at Kuminyini outstation.

**Davey Yibuwana.** Born: c1910. Garawa. Other names: Old Davey. Length of contact: One-off interview. I spent a day with Davey in 1987 when I drove him back to Bujana outstation where he usually lives.

**Dennis Waliyangkayangka.** Born: c1945. Yanyuwa. Other names: Dennis McKinnon. Length of contact: One-off interview. Close relations interviewed: Brother: Whylo Widamara.

**Diamond.** Born: c1910. Garawa. Died: July, 1986. Length of contact: One-off interview.

**Dinah Marrngawi.** Born: c1935. Yanyuwa. Other names: Dinah Norman. Length of contact: Frequent close personal contact since my first visit to Borroloola. I often accompanied Dinah on bush tucker trips.

**Dinny Nyliba.** Born: w1929. Garawa/Yanyuwa. Other names: Dinny McDinny. Length of contact: Frequent personal contact since my first visit to Borroloola. Close relations interviewed: Wife: Eileen Yakibijna, Daughter: Isa Yubuyu. Brother: Isaac Walayungkuma.

**Dolly.** Born: c1905. Garawa. Other names: Old Dolly. Length of contact: Single interview in 1987.

**Don Bubuji.** Born: c1935. Garawa. Other names: Don Rory. Length of contact: I had frequent social contact with Don, particularly when working with relatives in the camp. In 1984 Don showed me around his Robinson River Station country. Close relations interviewed: Wife: Eileen Barrungka.

**Don Manarra.** Born: c1935. Yanyuwa. Died: May 1989. Other names: Don Miller. Length of contact: Frequent personal contact since my first visit to Borroloola. I made a number of bush trips with Don and his family. Close relations interviewed: Wife: Jemima.

**Don Mclean.** Born: c1920. European. Length of contact: I met Don in Sydney in February 1988 and talked to him over three days about his experiences as a soldier in the Borroloola area during World War Two. On the last occasion we met I recorded our conversation.

**Dulcie Walwalmara.** Born: w1920. Garawa. Length of contact: I had frequent social contact with Dulcie, particularly when working with relatives in the camp. Close relations interviewed: Son: Pyro Dirdiyalma.

**Edna Bob.** Born: c1930. Garawa. Length of contact: I knew Edna by sight but had not talked to her until she spent a long period in Adelaide in 1988 when her son was in hospital there. Isa Yubuyu was also in Adelaide for medical treatment and on one occasion I recorded

a conversation I had with them both.

**Eileen Barrungka.** Born: c1945. Garawa. Other names: Eileen Rory. Length of contact: I had frequent social contact with Eileen, particularly when working with relatives in the camp. Close relations interviewed: Husband: Don Bubuji.

**Eileen Yakibijna.** Born: w1938. Yanyuwa. Other names: Eileen McDinny. Length of contact: One of the people I have had most contact with at Borroloola, since my first visit there. I also interviewed Eileen in Adelaide when she was holidaying with me there. Close relations interviewed: Husband: Dinny Nyliba. Daughters: Isa Yubuyu, Nancy Ninganga.

**Elizabeth Walngayiji.** Born: c1955. Yanyuwa. Other names: Elizabeth McCracken. Length of contact: I had frequent social contact with Elizabeth, particularly when working with relatives in the camp.

**Elma Anderson.** Born: c1931. Yanyuwa/European. Other names: Elma Johnson. Length of contact: Occasional contact at Manangoora, where she usually lives. Close relations interviewed: Brother: Steve Johnson. Sister: Clara Johnson.

**Elma Bunubunu.** Born: c1915. Yanyuwa. Died: 1987. Length of contact: I spent a considerable period of time with Elma and her husband Jerry Rrawajinda. Comments: She was ceremonially very important and before her death passed on control of ceremonies that she was "boss for" to Eileen Yikibinjna.

**Emmalina Wanajabi.** Born: w1927. Yanyuwa. Other names: Emmalina Evans. Length of contact: I had frequent social contact with Emmalina, particularly when working with relatives in the camp.

**Emily Wirdiwidinya.** Born: 1915. Mara. Length of contact: Emily was usually with her husband Mack Manguji when I worked with him. However, I only formally interviewed her once in July 1986.

**Fred Gray.** Born: 28 December 1899. European. Length of contact: Since first meeting Fred in 1982 I have worked regularly with him recording his memories of trepanging in Arnhem Land during the 1930s and his subsequent 20 years running Umbakumba settlement on Groote Eylandt.

**Gilbert Julumungku.** Born: c1940. Garawa. Other names: Gilbert Rory. Length of contact: Occasional contact each fieldtrip. Close relations interviewed: Brother: Don Bubuji.

**Ginger Bunaja.** Born: c1915. Yanyuwa. Died: May 1985. Length of contact: I met and interviewed Ginger the first day I was in Borroloola. He was a constant companion of Tim

Rakuwurlma, so we had frequent contact on early fieldtrips.

**Gordon Birt.** Born: c1905. European. Length of contact: I got to know Gordon by visiting him regularly at his house in Adelaide. On a number of different occasions I recorded our conversations. Comments: Served as a policeman at Borrooloola in the 1930s.

**Gordon Milyindirri.** Born: c1925. Yanyuwa. Other names: Gordon Lansen. Length of contact: Frequent social contact. Close relations interviewed: Wife: Helen Lansen.

**Harry Giese.** Born: c1920. European. Length of contact: I recorded an interview with Harry the one time I met him at his Darwin house in August 1986. Comments: Harry was the head of the Northern Territory Welfare Branch from 1954 to 1973.

**Harry Jabarlya.** Born: c1945. Kurdanji. Other names: Harry Lansen. Length of contact: I went on a bush trip with Harry in 1984 to his McArthur River country and interviewed him then. In 1987 I recorded a longer conversation with him.

**Helen Lansen.** Born: c1945. Wambaya. Length of contact: Occasional contact, one-off interview. Close relations interviewed: Husband: Gordon Milyindirri.

**Hilda Muir.** Born: c1920. Yanyuwa/European. Length of contact: I met Hilda in Darwin during 1987 and spent a number of days working with her. Comments: The Borrooloola Police Journal (Northern Territory Archives F268) on 11 April 1928 notes that Hilda's mother brought her to the police station and on the 14th she left Borrooloola with a party taken by the police to Darwin.

**Irene Kanjujamarra.** Born: w1952. Yanyuwa. Other names: Irene Gillette. Length of contact: Long social contact, mainly in Darwin where she usually lives. Interviewed when she was in Adelaide for medical treatment. Close relations interviewed: Father: Isaac Walayungkuma. Mother: Annie Karrakayn.

**Isa Yubuyu.** Born: b1952. Yanyuwa. Other names: Isa McDinny. Length of contact: I had frequent social contact with Isa. Interviewed when she was in Adelaide for medical treatment. Close relations interviewed: Father: Dinny Nyliba, Mother: Eileen Yakibijna.

**Isaac Walayungkuma.** Born: w1927. Garawa/Yanyuwa. Other names: Isaac Isaac. Length of contact: Frequent personal contact since my first visit to Borrooloola. Isaac and I often spent many days camping alone at his outstation when his wife Annie was in town. In 1984 I drove Isaac and Annie to Canberra where they stayed with me for two weeks. Close relations interviewed: Wife: Annie Karrakayn. Daughters: Irene Kanjujamarra.

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Figure I.2: Isaac Walayungkuma

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Figure I.3: Jerry Rrawajinda

**Jack Twyford.** Born: c1920. European. Length of contact: Single interview at Hall, ACT, in November 1987. Comments: Was a soldier based at Borrooloola during WWII.

**Jack Yuwalinji.** Born: w1937. Yanyuwa. Other names: Jack Isaac. Length of contact: Known through his brother, Musso. One-off interview. Close relations interviewed: Brother: Musso Harvey.

**Jean Kirton.** Born: c1935. European. Length of contact: Frequent personal contact since my first visit to Borrooloola. Comments: Worked as a linguist at Borrooloola from 1963 to 1988.

**Jemima Wuwarlu.** Born: w1948. Yanyuwa. Other names: Jemima Miller. Length of contact: Frequent contact since my first visit to Borrooloola. I made a number of bush trips with Jemima and her husband. Close relations interviewed: Husband: Don Manarra.

**Jerry Charlie.** Born: c1915. Yanyuwa. Died: 1983. Length of contact: Jerry was a close friend of Tim Rakuwurlma and Tim often got me to take him to see Jerry. Close relations interviewed: Wife: Bella Marrajabu. Comments: Was temporarily the pastor at Borrooloola.

**Jerry Rrawajinda.** Born: w1919. Yanyuwa. Other names: Jerry Brown. Length of contact: I got to know Jerry first when he and 20 others from the Borrooloola dancing troupe

stayed with me in Darwin. I spent time with him on each trip I made to Borroloola and in 1984 he took me out bush to show me his country. Close relations interviewed: Sister: Nora Jalirduma. Wife: Elma Bunubunu.

**John Francis.** Born: c1935. European. Length of contact: Single interview at his Darwin home in 1987. Comments: Was the policeman for the Borroloola area from 1964 to 1967.

**Johnny Naliba.** Born: c1920. Aboriginal. Length of contact: I spent one day interviewing Johnny in March 1982 at Maningrida. Comments: Johnny had worked for European trepangers in the Maningrida area and had heard details of how the Macassans had previously worked trepang there.

**Johnson Babarramila.** Born: c1930. Yanyuwa. Other names: Johnson Timothy. Length of contact: Frequent contact since my first visit to Borroloola. In 1984 we spent two weeks together travelling around Johnson's Vanderlin Island country. Close relations interviewed: Father: Tim Rakuwurlma.

**Joy Pollard.** Born: c1940. European. Length of contact: I met Joy and her husband Mick at their home in Alice Springs in July 1988 and recorded an interview with them. They were the last couple employed as welfare officers at Borroloola before the Department of Aboriginal Affairs assumed authority from the Welfare Branch. They were at Borroloola in the late 1960s and early 1970s.

**Joyce Johnson.** Born: c1925. European. Length of contact: I visited Joyce at her home in Adelaide a number of times. Comments: Lived at Borroloola in the 1940s when her husband was policeman there.

**Judy Marrngawi.** Born: c1915. Mara/Yanyuwa. Other names: Judy Timothy. Length of contact: I had very frequent contact with Judy, as she was generally present when I worked with her husband, Tim. However, I only interviewed her once, with Annie Karrakayn translating. Close relations interviewed: Husband: Tim Rakuwurlma. Sons: Nero, Johnson.

**Kathleen O'Keefe.** Born: c1925. Yanyuwa. Length of contact: Known well socially but interviewed only once.

**Keith Arthur.** Born: c1945. Yanyuwa. Length of contact: Known by sight around Borroloola but interviewed only once.

**Lelean Pattemore.** Born: c1930. European. Other names: (nee) Stewart. Length of contact: I first met Lelean and her husband Mervyn in 1986 in Darwin. I conducted a long

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## Figure I.4: Judy Marrngawi

interview in 1986 and subsequently checked on details by mail and again in person in 1987. Close relations interviewed: Husband: Mervyn Pattemore. Comments: She and her husband were the first missionaries based at Borrooloola.

**Lenin Anderson.** Born: c1930. Garawa/European. Length of contact: I was first introduced to Lenin by his brother-in-law Steve Johnson in 1982 and spent time with him on each subsequent field trip. To reach Vanderlin Island to work with Steve I camped at Lenin's Manangoora property and waited for Steve to come in from the island and pick me up. On such occasions I usually had at least a day to talk to Lenin. Comments: As he has lived his whole life at Manangoora he has a unique perspective on the Aboriginal move from there to Borrooloola.

**Les James.** Born: c1930. European. Died: 1987. Length of contact: I first met Les in 1986 and subsequently visited him regularly when in Borrooloola to buy vegetables from his market garden. He was always keen to have a chat about old days and I conducted a formal taped interview in June 1987. Comments: Was the manager of Tarwallah station from 1964 to 1971.

**Les Penhall.** Born: c1920. European. Length of contact: I first met Les in 1987 and interviewed him at his house near Darwin with Ted Evans. In 1988 I interviewed him again when he was staying in Adelaide. Comments: Les worked for the Welfare Department and for a long period was the District Superintendent for the area that included Borroloola.

**Lina Riley.** Born: c1920. Mara. Length of contact: Lina lives at Kumininyi and I interviewed her there in 1986, the first time I met her.

**Luric Noble.** Born: w1944. Garawa. Other names: Length of contact: Luric and his family spent much of 1986 and 1987 at Wardawardala outstation where I was camped for several weeks and he and I talked together on a number of occasions there.

**Mack Manguji.** Born: c1905. Mara. Died: July 1988. Other names: Mack Riley. Length of contact: My contact with Mack was originally through Tim Rakuwurlma. Tim often got me to drive him to Mack's place so they could organize ceremonial matters. Close relations interviewed: Son: Alec. Wife: Lina. Comments: Heath (1981:369) quotes from Mack.

**Mary Joe Webb.** Born: c1910. Kurdanji. Length of contact: I met Mary in 1987 and interviewed her the first time I met her.

**Mathew Gordon.** Born: c1920. Garawa. Length of contact: I met Mathew in 1987 when he was staying at Wardawardala outstation and interviewed him then.

**Mavis Hogan.** Born: c1935. Garawa. Length of contact: I interviewed Mavis and her husband Les the only time I visited their house in Borroloola. We had not talked to each other before this but knew each other well by sight as they lived close to Annie Karrakayn and Isaac Walayungkuma's house which I often visited. Close relations interviewed: Husband: Les Hogan.

**May Dodd.** Born: c1945. Kurdanji. Length of contact: Known well socially but interviewed only once. Close relations interviewed: Brother: Andrew Dodd.

**Mervyn Pattemore.** Born: c1925. European. Length of contact: As for Lelean Pattemore. Close relations interviewed: Wife: Lelean Pattemore. Comments: An AIM missionary since June 1947. First served at Fingal and Cherbourg before moving to the Northern Territory. First visited Borroloola in 1950. Lived at Borroloola from 1953 to 1962. Has been in regular contact with Borroloola since in his capacity first as Director of the Retta Dixon home for Aboriginal people and more recently as Northern Territory Superintendent for AIM.

**Mick Baker.** Born: c1930. European. Length of contact: We met in 1987 and I interviewed him on a number of occasions. Comments: He was a crocodile shooter in the area



Source: Ted Harvey collection. Note: Taken when Musso was working for Harvey.

Figure I.5: Musso Harvey, circa 1955

in the 1950s and subsequently settled in Borroloola.

**Mick Pollard.** Born: c1925. European. Length of contact: I met Mick and his wife at their home in Alice Springs in July 1988 and recorded an interview with them. Comments: They were the last couple employed as welfare officers at Borroloola before the Department of Aboriginal Affairs assumed authority from the Welfare Branch. They were at Borroloola in the late 1960s and early 1970s.

**Morland Attenborough.** Born: c1905. Garawa. Length of contact: We first met in 1987 and I interviewed him twice. Comments: Was the head stockman at Pungalina in 1948.<sup>1</sup>

**Musso Bangkirrinu.** Born: c1920. Yanyuwa/Mara. Other names: Musso Harvey. Length of contact: Frequent contact since 1982. One of the people I have had most contact with at Borroloola, since my first visit there. Close relations interviewed: Wife: Roddy Bayuma. Comments: In 1982 Musso assisted me in my Macassan site survey and on subsequent field trips I have spent a number of weeks camping out bush with Musso and his family.

<sup>1</sup>Australian Archives, Northern Territory Region, CA 1078 Native Affairs Branch CRS: F315 Item: 49/393 A2. Page 4 of "Report relative to mines and cattle stations employing native labour in the Borroloola district".



Figure I.6: Ninganga and Kylie Marikbalinya

**Nancy Ninganga.** Born: b1958. Yanyuwa. Other names: Nancy McDinny. Length of contact: Frequent social contact since 1982, particularly when working with relatives in the camp. Close relations interviewed: Mother: Eileen Yakibijna. Father: Dinny Nyliba.

**Nero Wangkarrawi.** Born: c1938. Yanyuwa. Died: 7 April 1984. Other names: Nero Timothy. Length of contact: Frequent contact over the period 1982-1984. Comments: Nero often assisted me when I was interviewing his father, Tim Rakuwurlma. Obituary in *The Aim*<sup>2</sup> June 1984 and November 1986.

**Nettie Harvey.** Born: c1930. European. Length of contact: Single interview with her and her husband Ted Harvey at their home in Perth.

**Ninganga.** Born: c1910. Yanyuwa. Other names: Ida Hampton. Length of contact: We have had frequent contact since my first visit to Borroloola. In 1987 I spent 4 weeks camped with Ninganga, Annie Karrakayn and Isaac Walayungkuma while they made a dugout canoe (see Baker 1988). Comments: I have never heard Ninganga referred to as Ida but this is the name that some Europeans call her by and it is the name on her pension cheques.

**Nora Jalirduma.** Born: c1910. Yanyuwa. Length of contact: Frequent contact since my first visit to Borroloola. Close relations interviewed: Daughters: Eileen Yakibijna, Jemima Wuwarlu. Sons: Young Paddy.

<sup>2</sup>This is the new name for what was previously *Our Aim*



Nora is seated, Left to right are her great grand daughter Caroline, her grand daughter Isa, her daughter Eileen, and great great grandson Conrad.

Figure I.7: Nora Jalirduma

**Norma Anthawarramara.** Born: c1945. Yanyuwa. Length of contact: We have had frequent social contact, particularly when I was working with relatives in the camp. Close relations interviewed: Husband: Nero.

**Oscar Wungunya.** Born: c1935. Garawa. Died: October 1988. Other names: Oscar Anderson. Length of contact: Single interview in 1987.

**Paddy Brown.** Born: c1950. Yanyuwa. Other names: Young Paddy. Length of contact: I only met Paddy once in June 1986, when he was visiting his mother Nora Jalirduma. He has spent most of the last 20 years living away from Borroloola in Queensland.

**Pat Festing.** Born: c1930. European. Length of contact: Interviewed on a number of occasions with her husband, Tas, at their home at Batchelor, Northern Territory

**Powder Punch.** Born: c1930. Alyawarra. Length of contact: Frequent social contact on most fieldtrips.

**Pyro Dirdiyalma.** Born: c1933. Yanyuwa. Other names: Jimmy Pyro. Length of contact: I had brief dealings with Pyro in early field trips but it was not until 1987 when he and his wife were camped at Wardawardala outstation that I had a long conversation with



Figure I.8: Powder Punch

them. Close relations interviewed: Wife: Topsy.

**Queenie Ngarambulirri.** Born: c1920. Nunggubuyu. Other names: Queenie Simon. Close relations interviewed: Daughter: Norma Anthawarramara. Length of contact: Frequent social contact, particularly when I was working with relatives in the camp.

**Rachel Muyurkulmanya.** Born: c1970. Yanyuwa. Other names: Rachel McDinny. Length of contact: Mainly social contact, generally when working with relatives in the camp.

**Rex Hume.** Born: c1940. European. Length of contact: Frequent contact on most fieldtrips. Comments: Rex is the outstation resource manager at Borroloola, and a long term resident.

**Ricket Murundu.** Born: w1927. Yanyuwa. Other names: Ron Ricket. Length of contact: I had frequent social contact with Ricket, particularly when I visited Manangoora where he was usually camped. Ricket greatly assisted my research at Manangoora by showing me around the ruins of the old camp here.

**Rita Anthawarramara.** Born: w1920. Garawa. Other names: Rita Noble. Length of contact: Known by sight around Borroloola but interviewed only once.

**Roddy Bayuma-Birribalanja.** Born: c1935. Yanyuwa. Other names: Roddy Harvey. Length of contact: I had frequent social contact with Roddy, as she usually came with us when

I went bush with her husband Musso. Close relations interviewed: Husband: Musso Harvey.

**Roger Makaranyi.** Born: c1935. Garawa. Other names: Roger Charlie. Length of contact: Known well socially from the time I spent at Wandangnula outstation where he usually lives.

**Rory Wurrulbirrangunu.** Born: c1915. Garawa. Other names: Old Rory. Length of contact: I first met Rory in 1984 when he showed me a number of archaeological sites in his country. Subsequently I had contact with him every field trip. Close relations interviewed: Sons: Gilbert, Don B. Daughter: Edna Bob.

**Rosie a-Makundurna.** Born: c1945. Yanyuwa. Length of contact: Known by sight around Borroloola but interviewed only once. Close relations interviewed: Husband: Luric.

**Rosie Marikbalinya.** Born: w1920. Garawa. Length of contact: We had frequent social contact, usually when I was working with her husband. Close relations interviewed: Husband: Tyson Walayungkuma.

**Roy Abaju.** Born: c1935. Mara. Other names: Roy Hammer. Length of contact: From my earliest field trips on I had frequent contact with Roy but it was only in 1987 that I recorded an interview with him and his wife Violet. Close relations interviewed: Wife: Violet Ringalinya.

**Roy Kakiyamaji.** Born: c1935. Garawa. Other names: Wujakuwi, Roy Ross. Length of contact: Frequent contact on most fieldtrips.

**Ruth Heathcock.** Born: 1903. European. Length of contact: I met Ruth at her home in Adelaide a number of times and interviewed her there. Comments: Her husband was a Policeman in Borroloola in the 1930s. Ruth is a trained nurse.

**Ruth Vincent.** Born: c1905. Mara. Length of contact: Single interview in 1987 in Darwin. Ruth was born in the Borroloola area but spent most of her childhood in institutions for "half-caste" children elsewhere.

**Sambo Fowler.** Born: c1935. Kunwingku. Length of contact: Sambo lives at Yungurri with his mate Bruce Joy. He originally came from the Oenpelli area of west Arnhem Land but has not been back for over 40 years. On a number of occasions when I worked with Bruce Joy, Sambo was with us and occasionally added comments. I interviewed him once in September 1987.

**Splinter Waranduwa.** Born: c1925. Yanyuwa. Other names: Splinter Woody. Length of contact: Known by sight around Borroloola but interviewed only once.

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## Figure I.9: Sunny Raggard

**Steve Johnson.** Born: c1938. Yanyuwa/European. Other names: Steve Jamarndarrka. Length of contact: I first worked with Steve in 1982 when he assisted me in locating Macassan sites on the Pellews. On subsequent field trips I spent a considerable time staying with Steve at his home at Yukuyi on Vanderlin Island. In 1987 we spent an intensive week together during which about 10 hours of Steve's recollections on Yanyuwa history were recorded. Comments: Steve is a life time resident of Vanderlin Island. Steve's father (also Steve Johnson) was a European trepanger, who lived much of his life on Vanderlin Island and raised a family there with his wife Harriet Mambalwarrka, a Yanyuwa woman. Steve (junior) has a deep interest in both the European and Aboriginal history of the area. From his father he heard details of the "grand old days" of Borrooloola and some of the famous (and infamous) European characters who frequented the area. He was schooled in English by his father and is an avid reader, particularly keen on any books to do with history. At the same time, from his mother's side of the family, Steve learnt the Yanyuwa language and 'law'. With these combined perspectives Steve was an invaluable source on the history of the area. Close relations interviewed: Sisters: Elma Anderson and Clara Johnson.

**Sunny Raggard.** Born: 1911, Glen Helen Station. Died 20.7.88. Arrente / European. Length of contact: I spent a number of days in July and August 1987 talking to Sunny at

Kuminyini outstation where he was staying at the time visiting his son and grandchildren. Comments: Was the long time manager of McArthur River station, lived and worked on this station from 1939 to his retirement in 1981. Worked at Anthony Lagoon 1934-1939. Wife was a Kurdanji woman, they were legally married in 1951 after considerable effort on Sunny's behalf to get permission. Obituary appeared in August 1988 *Paper Bark Post*.<sup>3</sup>

**Syd Kyle-Little.** Born: c1920. European. Length of contact: I spent one day interviewing Syd in March 1982 at Maningrida. Comment: Syd was a patrol officer for the Native Affairs Branch and made a trip to the Borroloola area in 1948.

**Tas Festing.** Born: c1920. European. Length of contact: As for Pat Festing. Close relations interviewed: Wife: Pat Festing. Comments: Was a long serving welfare officer at Borroloola in the 1950s.

**Ted Egan.** Born: c1935. European. Length of contact: I spent a morning interviewing Ted at his Alice Springs home the one time I met him. Comments: Was the relieving welfare officer at Borroloola on a number of occasions in the 1950s.

**Ted Evans.** Born: c1920. European. Length of contact: I first met Ted at the end of my 1986 field work. He subsequently provided me with a great deal of assistance by giving me contact addresses for a number of other former welfare officers. In 1987 I interviewed him and Les Penhall together. Comments: Joined Native Affairs Branch in 1946. Was the first welfare officer posted at Borroloola. Was there from December to March 1949-1950.

**Ted Harvey.** Born: c1920. European. Length of contact: Single interview at his house in Perth in April 1987. Close relations interviewed: Wife: Nettie Harvey - interviewed at same time. Comments: Was the welfare officer at Borroloola for 12 months in 1954 and again from 1956-59. Worked on various other Northern Territory settlements until 1967. Left the Northern Territory in 1969.

**Ted Tonkin.** Born: c1945. European. Length of contact: Frequent contact on most fieldtrips. Comments: Ted was a Welfare Branch and Department of Aboriginal Affairs officer. He now lives on an outstation near Borroloola with his Yanyuwa wife.

**Thelma Walwalmara.** Born: c1945. Yanyuwa. Other names: Thelma Douglas. Length of contact: Frequent contact since my first visit to Borroloola. In her capacity as adult educator, Thelma greatly assisted me in the early days of my fieldwork by introducing me to relevant people and explaining my research. Comments: There is a photograph of Thelma

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<sup>3</sup>A monthly newsletter published in Borroloola since 1987. I hold a set of these newsletters.

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Figure I.10: Tim Rakawurlma

and her deceased husband in *Evangel*, June 1962: 15.

**Tim Rakuwurlma.** Born: Vanderlin Island c1900. Yanyuwa. Other names: Tim Timothy, Old Tim. Length of contact: Tim was the first person I worked with in the Borroloola area and was a key source of information. Close relations interviewed. Sons: Johnson, Nero. Wife: Judy Marrngawi.

**Tommy Dodd.** Born: c1915. Garawa. Length of contact: I first had contact with Tommy on my 1986 field season and had a number of conversations with him in that year, one of which was taped. Comments: Tommy is a renowned 'medicine man'.

**Tom Wambarirri.** Born: c1935. Yanyuwa. Other names: Tom Friday. Length of contact: I spent a fortnight with Tom in 1984 when he showed me around his country on South West Island. I had contact with him on subsequent field trips and taped an interview with him towards the end of the 1987 field season.

**Tom Nawurrungu.** Born: c1910. Mara. Died: 18 May 1987. Other names: Tom Riley. Length of contact: Known by sight around Borroloola but interviewed only once. Close relations interviewed: Brother: Mack Manguji.

**Topsy Pyro.** Born: c1945. Wambaya. Length of contact: I had brief dealings with Topsy in early field trips but it was not until 1987 when she and her husband were camped at Wardawardala outstation that I had a long conversation with them. Close relations interviewed: Husband: Pyro.

**Tyson Walayungkuma/Nguliya.** Born: c1905. Yanyuwa. Length of contact: Frequent social contact on most fieldtrips. Close relations interviewed: Wife: Rosie.

**Violet Ringalinya.** Born: w1948. Yanyuwa. Other names: Violet Hammer. Length of contact: From my earliest field trips on I had contact with Violet and her husband Roy Abaju but it was only in 1987 that I recorded an interview with them. Close relations interviewed: Husband: Roy Abaju. Mother: Emmalina Wanajabi.

**Whylo Widamara.** Born: c1940. Yanyuwa. Other names: Whylo McKinnon. Length of contact: I had frequent social contact with Whylo, particularly when working with relatives in the camp.

**Willy Mundumundumara.** Born: c1920. Yanyuwa. Other names: Borroloola Willy. Length of contact: I met Borroloola Willy for the first time at the start of my 1987 field season. On my previous trips he had been living at Roper River. We spent a number of days together in 1987 and I recorded conversations on a number of occasions. Comments: There is a photo of Willy and his daughter Wendy taken at Katherine in 1951 in 'Our Aim' March 17 1951 page 9.

**Willy Shadforth.** Born: c1915. Garawa. Length of contact: I first met Willy in 1987 and conducted a number of interviews with him during this field trip.

**Willy Yuwalinji.** Born: c1920. Kurdanji. Other names: Willy O'Keefe. Length of contact: Frequent contact on most fieldtrips. Close relations interviewed: Wife: Kathleen.

*APPENDIX J. DATE AND PLACE THAT TAPES WERE RECORDED*

**NOTE:**

Appendix J does not appear in this copy to protect the anonymity of speakers. It should be noted that as there is more than one speaker on most tapes, it can not be assumed that an individual cited as speaking on that tape is also the speaker when a reference to the same tape is anonymous.