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ABORIGINAL WOMAN



Two women decorated for a secret corroboree.

Frontispiece.]

ABORIGINAL WOMAN

SACRED AND PROFANE

BY

PHYLLIS M. KABERRY

M.A., Ph.D. (London)

Introduction by

Professor A. P. ELKIN

Illustrated

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To
BRONISLAW MALINOWSKI

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FOREWORD

Until recently, aboriginal woman has occupied rather an obscure place in Australian anthropology ; and in popular imagination, at least, she has too often been lost to view beneath the burdens imposed upon her by her menfolk. There has been little attempt to analyse the extent to which she participates in religion, the nature and importance of her contribution to the tribal economy. It was with the object of making a more specific study of the position of women in an aboriginal community that, at the suggestion of Professor Elkin, I carried out research in North-West Australia, both in 1934 and in 1935 to 1936. In its original form my material was presented as a thesis for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy at the London School of Economics in 1938 ; but since then it has been revised and abridged, and the title changed to one that sums up my attempt to portray aboriginal woman as she really is—a complex social personality, having her own prerogatives, duties, problems, beliefs, rituals, and point of view ; making the adjustments that the social, local, and totemic organization require of her, and at the same time exercising a certain freedom of choice in matters affecting her own interests and desires.

This book lays no claim to finality, as apart from my main object I had also to make a survey of the totemism, local organization and kinship systems of North, East, and Central Kimberley. In 1934, as the holder of a research grant from the Australian National Research Council, I went to Forrest River for four months, and later visited the Miriwun tribe in East Kimberley, and also the Nyul-Nyul at Beagle Bay Mission. In May, 1935, under a fellowship, I returned to the Kimberleys, and spent six months altogether with the Lunga tribe, three months with Wolmeri, and shorter periods with the Djaru, Miriwun, Malngin, Wula, Kunian, Punaba, and Nyigina.

With the exception of those living on the missions, most of the natives in this region are concentrated about the station homesteads, and are employed in stockwork, gardening, and domestic duties. They wear European clothes and receive rations of flour, tea, beef, and tobacco. It is only during the " wet " season, when work slackens off between September and March, that they go " walk-about " in the bush to hold their inter-tribal meetings for initiation and mourning ceremonies. During the winter I had perforce to remain at the homesteads, collecting genealogies, accounts of local organization, totemism, and rites, observing life in the camp, and witnessing a few ceremonies.

However, from September to December I attended inter-tribal meetings in the North Lunga territory, where I had opportunities of seeing corroborees, and accompanying the men and women on their hunting and foraging expeditions. From December to March I was present at similar assemblies of the Wolmeri, Kunian, Punaba, and Nyigina natives in the Fitzroy River and Christmas Creek districts. As a result of my movements from one tribe to another, I had no time to master the languages. But the natives have been in contact with the whites for over forty years ; they are remarkably fluent in a pidgin-English which differs from that current in New Guinea, and approximates much more closely to spoken English. I, of course, learnt phrases, acquired large vocabularies, and used native terms wherever possible. I was also able to keep some check on native conversations and the answers of informants. I did not pay the natives, though from time to time I made gifts of food, axes, knives, and other articles. When I witnessed ceremonies, I distributed flour, tea, and a few presents to the chief participants and headmen.

All told, there are probably about 6,000 natives in the Kimberley Division, though the annual report quotes a figure of over 7,000. I roughly estimated that there were from 600 to 800 Lunga (or Kidja), who are one of the largest tribes. They are living at Moola Bulla, Bedford,

Alice Downs, Violet Valley, and Turkey Creek. The Djaru (or Nyinin) and the Wolmeri have also about the same population; the former extend to the south-west of Halls Creek and east to Gordon Downs; the latter originally occupied a belt of territory south of the Fitzroy River from Kalyeeda and Cherrabun Stations east to Sturt Creek and Billiluna. A few of their numbers are also to be found at Go Go and Noonkanbah. The others—the Miriwun, Malngin, Kunian, and Punaba—are smaller tribes and have smaller territories. For a distribution of these tribes see the accompanying map.[1] As I did not visit all the stations within the tribal boundaries, I had no means of collecting complete demographic details.

Despite the fact that I was a nomadic fieldworker, my material possesses a certain unity of content, because the tribes of the Kimberleys are similar in temperament and remarkably homogeneous in culture. Those of East and Central Kimberley have subsections, the same type of prescribed marriage and kinship obligations. The Forrest River and Wula natives have patrilineal moieties, and the Nyigina and Nyul-Nyul have sections. There are a few variations in mythology, details of ceremonial life, the rules governing descent of totems, and the manufacture of certain implements and weapons. But the women play much the same rôle in tribal economy, and exercise similar rights in marriage and social life. I have therefore been able to formulate generalizations which are valid for all these tribes. Furthermore, they probably have an even wider sphere of application. Research elsewhere has revealed that in profane activities the women enjoy a large measure of independence and make an important contribution to the economy. It is to be hoped that my own data will give a new emphasis to such factors, and that in future they will be more closely analysed in relation to the social status of women. On the other hand, my contention that aboriginal woman is not only profane but also sacred, may create some controversy; and some may assert that it is only in

[1] I have to thank Mr. Clifford Chard of Sydney for drawing the map.

North-West Australia that the women participate to any marked extent in religion. Further research may prove this assumption correct, but it is not sufficient to say that elsewhere the women are excluded from the sacred ritual of the men. In the Kimberleys there is also a striking ritual differentiation between the sexes, and the women are forbidden to witness *tʃuruŋa*, cult-totem, and initiation ceremonies on pain of death. Nevertheless they possess totems, have spiritual affiliations with the sacred past, and perform their own sacred rites from which the men are excluded. Evidence of similar phenomena is not lacking from other parts of the continent, particularly from Central Australia ; but there has been little attempt to define their place in the religion of the tribes. Until a systematic study of women's ceremonies and attitudes has been made, we have no grounds for assuming on the data now available, that the men represent the sacred element in the community and the women the profane element.

This book offers no new theory of culture ; for the moment I am substantially in agreement with that formulated by Professor Malinowski and others of his school. I have correlated my material as far as possible with the rest of Australian ethnology, and have drawn attention to the theoretical implications of my own data. My main object has been to put on record a detailed description of the life of the women, to suggest avenues for future research, and to indicate some of the problems that await the attention of the fieldworker who can spend a year or longer with one tribe and learn the language. Until this has been done, it is impossible to take up the wider theoretical issues as to why, for instance, the ceremonial life of the men is more complex and richer artistically than that of the women.

The women are the focus of attention throughout this book, but I have not achieved this at the expense of limiting myself to an account of specifically feminine pursuits. If my theme is women, it is one that has involved a contrast and comparison of their activities with those of the men,

with due recognition of the co-operation that exists between the sexes, the beliefs they share in common, and the laws to which they both conform. The women have been seen in relation to their environment and to tribal culture in all its aspects.

To my many friends among the Aborigines I owe a debt of gratitude for the privilege of witnessing their secret ceremonies, for the help, patience, and tolerance they invariably extended to me. This book will in some measure repay that debt, if it removes some of the misconceptions of which they, as an alien race, have unhappily been the victims: if it arouses some interest in their problems, and creates some appreciation of them as individuals and personalities, possessing their own values and a culture adapted to their way of life.

I am deeply grateful to the Australian National Research Council for the assistance I received from its officers, and for the research grants and fellowship which enabled me to carry out fieldwork in North-West Australia, and to write up my material later. Professor A. P. Elkin, himself an authority on Australian kinship and totemism, directed my research and gave me the benefit of his previous experience in the Kimberleys and the use of his unpublished field-notes. His criticism, encouragement, and his confidence in me were a constant stimulus while I was in the field; and his sense of justice and unfailing generosity have tided me over many difficulties. I count it a privilege to have been associated with him in my work.

My thanks are due to Mr. A. O. Neville, Chief Commissioner for Native Affairs in West Australia, for permission to work among the natives, and for the interest he displayed in my research. As most of the aborigines whom I studied were living on the sheep and cattle stations, I was particularly dependent on the goodwill and help of the European residents. With the spontaneity and kindness that is so typical of the north-west, they made me welcome at their homesteads, provided transport, and assisted me in every possible way. Where there is scarcely one individual

who did not render me a service, it is invidious to mention names ; but I should like to thank some for the hospitality they extended to me over many weeks, and for the very pleasant memories I have of my visit to the Kimberleys. Among these are the Rev. Frank Bush and Mrs. Lawrence of Forrest River Mission, the Rt. Rev. Monsignor Raible of Beagle Bay Mission, Mr. M. P. Durack of Argyle, Mr. R. Durack and the Misses Mary and Elizabeth Durack of Ivanhoe, Mr. and Mrs. A. T. Woodland of Moola Bulla, Mr. J. Bennett, head-stockman of Moola Bulla, Mr. T. Crooks of Wyndham who asisted me with my photography, Mr. and Mrs. G. Smith of Bedford, Mr. and Mrs. E. Millard of Go Go, Mr. A. Millard of Christmas Creek, Mr. A. Seaton of Brooking Creek, Mr. and Mrs. Henwood of Noonkanbah, Mr. M. Downing of Gordon Downs, Mr. and Mrs. H. McBeath of Violet Valley, and the managers of Flora Valley and Quanbun Stations.

Anthropology is a many-sided science. When the anthropologist has completed his or her fieldwork, there is still the problem of creating order out of the chaos in the notebooks, of disentangling contradictions, of presenting a culture as a living reality and of abstracting principles that have a general sociological relevance. It is impossible within the compass of an introduction to trace the spiritual ancestry of a book in the making, but in the process of writing up my material I was particularly fortunate to be able to attend the seminars of two anthropologists, Professor Malinowski and Dr. Raymond Firth, whose writings and fieldwork have considerably moulded my own approach to anthropology, and proved a constant source of stimulus. I am sincerely grateful to Dr. Firth, who supervised my thesis, for his provocative and penetrating criticism of my manuscript in its factual and theoretical aspects. I should also like to thank Professor Radcliffe-Brown, Dr. Audrey Richards, Professor Elkin, and Dr. Margaret Mead.

I can only express inadequately the value I attach to my many discussions with my friend, Dr. Margot Hentze, the historian. Her appreciation of other cultures, her

understanding of, and sensitiveness to the point of view of other nationalities, her honesty of thought and impartiality in handling facts, the qualities of imagination and style in her own writings, have been a source of inspiration to me in a subject that is so closely related to history.

I have dedicated this book to Professor Malinowski in acknowledgment of my debt to him as an anthropologist, as one who, without sacrificing scientific objectivity and integrity to fact, has been able to approach the study of culture and civilization with the imagination and sensitiveness of an artist.

P. M. K.

KALABU,
NEW GUINEA.

May, 1939.

INTRODUCTION

From the earliest days of the settlement of Australia there have been men of various interests who have recorded information about the Aborigines. The first of these was Judge-Advocate Collins who arrived with the first fleet. Explorers, particularly George Grey and J. Eyre, devoted special sections of their published reports to descriptions of Aboriginal life and manners. Many missionaries have written articles and books on the same subject, though their best contributions have been linguistic. Amongst these workers, we think chiefly of L. E. Threlkeld, C. W. Schürmann, George Taplin, W. Ridley, Otto Siebert, H. Kempe, D. McKillop, T. T. Webb, J. N. Hey, John Mathew, E. Worms, and above all Pastor Strehlow and J. R. B. Love. Then there have been compilers and editors, especially John Fraser (*An Australian Language*), G. Taplin (*The Folklore, Manners, Customs and Languages of the South Australian Aborigines*), J. E. Woods (*The Native Tribes of South Australia*), J. Brough-Smyth (*The Aborigines of Victoria*), and Curr (*The Australian Race*), who have brought together and edited the manuscripts of all types of people who had some experience of Aborigines. R. H. Mathews and A. W. Howitt bridge the gulf between compilers and independent workers, for they not only gathered much information from residents in various parts of the continent, but used the material thus collected in an endeavour to understand the principles inherent in Aboriginal social and ceremonial life ; further, in pursuance of this object they both did original fieldwork. Just before their main studies were published in the first decade of this century, Spencer and Gillen's classic *The Native Tribes of Central Australia* appeared ; this opened the eyes of the anthropological world to the vital and complex totemic and ceremonial aspect of Aboriginal life. Further contributions of the same kind were made by these authors in *The Northern Tribes of*

Central Australia and in Professor Spencer's *Native Tribes of the Northern Territory*, while Pastor Strehlow published a little later his records of the mythology, ceremonials and various customs of the Aranda and Loritja of Central Australia. Mrs. Parker placed on record her knowledge of the Aborigines of the region of New South Wales where she lived—*The Euahlayi Tribe*, and Mrs. Daisy Bates has given us useful data gained in long experience of a life of service amongst the Aborigines. Finally, Dr. W. E. Roth recorded much information regarding the Aborigines of Central-Western and North Queensland, much of it, unfortunately, in an epitomized dry-as-dust form of presentation.

Thus did the literature on the Aborigines grow in volume and with the work of Spencer, Roth, Howitt, Mathews, and Strehlow, in value. Howitt, with the help of Lorimer Fison, had drawn attention to the interesting form of social organization found in Eastern Australia, which consists of moieties and sections (then termed marriage classes); Spencer did the same for the Northern Territory, and R. H. Mathews published many papers on sections and subsections and worked out the relation of these to marriage with certain kinds of second cousin. His work, however, distributed through various learned Journals, was, and is, not very well known. It was left to A. R. Radcliffe-Brown (since Professor) to put the study of Aboriginal social organization on a sound basis, and to show the relationship of kinship, sections, subsections and moieties, local organization and totemism. This was in 1911–13.

The Great War of 1914–18 put a stop to research, and little more was done until 1926 when the Department of Anthropology was formed in the University of Sydney and Anthropological research was organized by the Australian National Research Council and financed by the Rockefeller Foundation. Many trained workers have since then been engaged in the Australian field. Readers of *Oceania* [1] are

[1] A quarterly Journal published by the Australian National Research Council for the recording of the results of fieldwork in Australia, Melanesia, and adjacent regions.

familiar with their names and some of their reports—Professors Radcliffe-Brown, Warner, Porteus, and myself, Drs. Thompson, Piddington, Hart, Stanner, Sharp, Capell, and Phyllis Kaberry, Mr. Laves, Mr. T. G. H. Strehlow, Miss McConnel, Miss Pink and Mrs. C. Kelly; in addition, there have been expeditions from the University of Adelaide, usually consisting of several members, concentrating for the most part on physical anthropology, though Dr. Fry and Mr. N. Tindale have made some contributions to social anthropology. Finally, working independently of the Australian National Research Council, Dr. Roheim made a psycho-analytical study of the Aranda, Dr. Davidson concentrated on the material culture and art, mostly in parts of the Northern Territory, and Dr. Nekes is doing linguistic research in the Southern Kimberley district. I have not enumerated all the writers, nor have I attempted to mention all their articles and books. This would take many pages. But the startling fact is that if we omit the work of Dr. Phyllis Kaberry, there has been hardly any contribution made to our knowledge of the life of Aboriginal women. The exceptions are: the simple but interesting portrayal of Euahlayi life by Mrs. Parker who obviously gained her information mainly through association with the native women, and so has something to say about childhood and motherhood and female magicians; Dr. Roheim's article on the women's life in Central Australia, which shows that the women have ceremonies of their own,[1] and the glimpses of the part played by women in ceremonial and social life, given by Miss U. McConnel in her reports on the Aborigines of Cape York Peninsula, published in *Oceania*.

There is some excuse for this dearth of information regarding women in Aboriginal life. Almost all the writers and observers, trained or not, have been males, and have somewhat naturally sought their information from, and studied native life through, the men. Further, the rigid dichotomy which exists between the sexes in the ceremonial

[1] "Women and Their Life in Central Australia," *Journal Royal Anthropological Institute*, vol. 63, 1933, pp. 207–265.

life and to a lesser degree in social and economic life, causes the male anthropologist to become identified with the men and their ceremonial life, and therefore, in principle, taboo with regard to many matters which belong to the life of the women. To question the men concerning such things brings the reply: " that woman's business, you ask along woman," and if the men are ignorant, or are up against some taboo, the male anthropologist is apt to feel, and rightly so, that he, as a man, should respect the taboo and not pry into the preserves of the other sex. That has been my own attitude. When working with a people whose way of life is their own and different from ours, it is fitting to comply with that people's normal customs and taboos and to respect its prejudices. In any case, the male worker refrains, for reasons of courtesy and delicacy, from inquiring into some aspects of a woman's life. He is not a physician.

It is obvious that if this gap in our knowledge and understanding were to remain we would be left with a one-sided view of native life, and would certainly not appreciate that life, in its fullness, nor indeed in its fundamentals. Let us remember that the men spend a great deal of their lives either directly in ritual and ceremony or else under its influence—their life is like an iceberg, nine-tenths hidden, secret. A keen Mason in our own society may have some idea of it. But the women's life, and that part of the men's life which is passed with the women and children, reveal the essential and natural humanity of the Aborigines. We must therefore strive to know it. Moreover, there are special problems, on which study through the women can throw much light, e.g. the spirit-children beliefs, the relation of sexual intercourse to conception, the marriage of young girls to old men, elopement, the position of women in a primitive society, the exchange and lending of wives, the women's religious life, if any, and so on.

My own fieldwork in Australia, 1927–8 and 1930 convinced me that valuable as my researches in social organization, totemism, initiation, and economics might be, I was hardly getting in touch with a very large section of

native life and that that would have to be done by women workers. I, therefore, appealed in an address to the Anthropological Section of the Australian and New Zealand Association for the Advancement of Science at its Melbourne meeting in January, 1935, to the wives and daughters of station-managers, settlers and officials to carry on the work of Mrs. Langloh Parker and Mrs. Aneas Gunn [1] and depict for us the life of native women and children, and urged that specially trained women who do anthropological research amongst the Aborigines, should work consistently through the native women, not to find out what a male worker can better ascertain through the men, but to get a real understanding of childhood, motherhood, the family and woman's place in society ".[2] Such inquiries constitute the special contribution of female anthropologists in addition to their study of certain aspects of the men's life.

The foregoing considerations show the special significance of Dr. Kaberry's fieldwork, and the importance of this book. At the completion of her study in 1934 for the M.A. degree in Anthropology in the University of Sydney, she expressed her desire to do fieldwork and agreed to proceed to a region in North-West Australia (the eastern part of the Kimberley Division, from the Forrest River and Wyndham down to Hall's Creek and around to Fitzroy Crossing) where I myself had done some research in 1928 through the men ; she undertook, with a full knowledge of my own results, to tackle through the women the problems of kinship, totemism, social organization in general and the religious life, and in addition to study the women's life as closely as possible. This work was financed by a grant from the Australian National Research Council. Dr. (then Miss) Kaberry spent about six months in 1934 in the Forrest River-Wyndham region ; in 1935 she was granted a Fellowship by the Council and spent a little over twelve months

[1] Authoress of a delightful classic, *The Little Black Princess.*

[2] Report of the Melbourne Meeting of the Australian and New Zealand Association for the Advancement of Science, 1935, p. 197. The preceding paragraph was also largely taken from this address.

in East Kimberley. Some of the more general of her results, dealing with social organization, totemism, spirit-children beliefs and death and burial have already been published in *Oceania*. This book, however, on *The Aboriginal Woman—Sacred and Profane*, reveals the great gap which has hitherto existed in our knowledge of Aboriginal life, and also shows how fitted Dr. Kaberry was to fill it. An S O S had, as it were, been sent out, and she answered it with great success.

Dr. Kaberry's contribution is twofold; she records facts concerning the women's life, of which we had little or no knowledge previously and in the light of these facts, she gives fresh interpretations of some aspects of native life. Take, for example, the widespread idea that Aboriginal women are mere drudges, passing a life of monotony and being shamefully ill-treated by their husbands. Dr. Kaberry, however, as a result of living in close contact with the women, accompanying them when food-gathering and watching their " home " life, is able to prove what some of us male workers have believed to be the truth, that the earlier opinion is fallacious. Dr. Kaberry examines very carefully the position of women in marriage, and concludes that while the wife is an economic asset, she is not therefore subordinate, and that " from one point of view, the conditions and obligations a man must fulfil before he takes a wife, may be an index to her value and her importance in the scheme of mundane affairs at least ".

Bearing on this point is Dr. Kaberry's statement that a man desiring children of his own, " must stand in a legal relationship to some woman, since the spirit-children beliefs confer fatherhood on the man who is living with the woman at the birth of her child." The argument still holds if, as I found in some regions, fatherhood belongs to the man who " finds " the pre-existent spirit-child, rather than is living with the woman at the time of child-birth. Usually it is the same man, and often there is only thought to be a few months between the " finding " and quickening on the one hand, and birth on the other. In spite of this,

however, children are " not a motive for marriage ", but its consequence and consolidation.

Dr. Kaberry's study of the marriage of young girls is very important. We revolt against the idea of a girl who has not reached puberty, or who has only recently done so, being married to any man, let alone to an " old " man, one of fifty and over. Where this occurs we can agree with the efforts of missionaries and others to put an end to the practice. But we must examine the facts in each region and see whether marriage in our sense of the term does occur in these cases. In East Kimberley, as in some other regions, the man to whom the young girl is betrothed, may help to " grow her up " and have her with him from time to time, but not for sexual intercourse. On the other hand, Dr. Kaberry shows that girls of nine to twelve know wifely duties in a way our girls do not, and she gives examples to show that there is no sharp transition for the girl from one type of existence to another. Marriage really begins only after puberty. This does not do away with the fact that girls are married at a younger age than in our own society, but they are fully prepared for the new state of life, as ours generally are not ; moreover, we tend to regard puberty as being reached by Aboriginal girls much earlier than by our own girls, whereas it is possibly the reverse. This needs careful recording.

In this matter of the position of women in marriage, it should also be borne in mind, as Dr. Kaberry reminds us, that a strong motive for marriage on the part of the women is the desire for sexual experience. The magical rites for the purpose of keeping their husbands and for attracting lovers is an expression of this desire which is in no way repressed.

Elopements and alternate and irregular marriages also show that the women do not meekly accept the marriage arrangements made by their elders. Over twenty years ago, R. H. Mathews drew our attention to marriages which were accepted but which broke the normal moiety and section plan of marriage. I myself came across such marriages

in 1927–8 in several parts of the Kimberley Division, and because of the bearing and effect of such irregularities and alternatives, on the descent of subsections, the application of kinship terms and on the possible alterations in behaviour, I asked Dr. Kaberry to pay special attention to this matter. This she did with the interesting results revealed in the statistics which she gathered. In six tribes alternate marriages (that is marriages which are almost of equal legality with the norm of marriage with mother's mother's brother's daughter's daughter) constitute from 7 per cent to 37 per cent of the tribal marriages, while irregular marriages range from 4 per cent to 24 per cent. Adding these together we find that the range of marriages which do not conform to the textbook ideal varies from 26 per cent to 61 per cent. There is, of course, the possibility that in former days when the tribes had not been affected culturally by white contact and had not been reduced in numbers, these figures would have been smaller. But old men assured me that the alternate marriage rules always existed and we need not doubt that some irregular marriages also were, after some conflict, accepted by society. Such marriages reveal the normal humanity of the Aborigines, which in the relationships between man and woman cannot be completely bound by narrow regulations; the latter must sometimes either bend or be broken, and if such occurs, is provided for or is accepted. Dr. Kaberry shows the range of alteration within subsections of kinship terms in the case of alternate marriages: only the immediate relations are affected, namely wife's mother and father and own daughter. She also gives examples showing that in the case of irregular marriage, the terms applied and the behaviour demanded are determined through the nearest blood relation, male or female. But in both cases, for the rest of the community, there is no change. Dr. Kaberry attributes this to the subsections which being totemic as well as kinship groups, "have the effect of stabilizing such changes and maintaining the equilibrium of relationships within the whole group." It is interesting to learn that a moon myth,

which should be a warning against wrong marriage, is quoted by the women as a sanction for the same.

This discussion of alternate and irregular marriages is one of the most important sections of the book. There has been too much tendency for anthropologists to be satisfied with establishing the norm or ideal type of marriage and codifying it in subsection and kinship formulae, with the result that the Aborigines are almost reduced to mathematical ciphers. In this book, however, we see them as the living human beings they are, exercising choice and ignoring or resisting the camp gossip and defying authority. In spite of this, there is neither disintegration or promiscuity: the ideal rules, public opinion, gossip, force, and the rules of the cult-life all serve to keep irregularities within bounds.

In spite of much argument and evidence, there are still folk who will not believe that the Aborigines deny the causal relationship between sexual intercourse and conception. It is true that some Aborigines on missions and elsewhere, will, in answer to a direct question, make a statement to the contrary, but in my own experience and I think in that of other trained workers, they are not reflecting Aboriginal belief but our opinion. Dr. Kaberry's support of the view which has been thrashed out and accepted from the days of Spencer and Gillen until now is important, because it is based on the women's evidence, and they ought to know. Dr. Kaberry does not discuss the problem whether this ignorance is the result of a repression of a former knowledge of the facts by a later theory, namely the belief in pre-existence of spirits, or whether the latter is an expression or result of a primeval ignorance. Probably we shall never know. But she does examine and combat the recent view put forward by Dr. Ashley-Montagu, that the Aborigines deny not only physiological paternity, but also physiological maternity; in other words, the view that the child pre-existed in body as well as spirit and only grew up in the mother's womb but derived from her nothing of significance. She shows quite clearly that the period spent within the womb is very important. Of course, all

such discussions can become matters of definition of words, but I think that Dr. Kaberry has produced evidence from the women to show that physiological maternity is a contributing factor to the life of the child, and that the men believe this to be so.

Further evidence that women hold a higher position in Aboriginal society than is usually believed is seen in the part played by them in economic exchanges. In 1927–8 I found that there was an ordered exchange of goods in Northern and Eastern Kimberley, certain articles passing roughly from east to west, that is, from East Kimberley tribes to those in North Kimberley, while others were passed in the opposite direction. I did not, however, have the opportunity to study this system of exchanges, though I knew that many of the articles were passed on between relations at ceremonial times. But Dr. Kaberry is able to give a good record of the institution with its "roads", partners, and rules, showing that it resembles the *Merbok* exchanges of the Daly River region, Northern Territory, and the *Kula* of the Trobriands.

A very interesting feature of the exchanges is that women play a part in them; though the articles manufactured by them are only of subsidiary importance, yet they do enter the exchanges and can hold temporally even the pearl shell pubic pendant, which is only worn by fully initiated men.

In connection with the economic life Dr. Kaberry raises a point which may lead to some discussion. She suggests that the separation of the sexes during the day in their economic pursuits may have been carried into the ritual sphere and have led to the segregation of the sexes during rites connected with physiological crises. Some may prefer to argue that both the dichotomy manifested in economic life and also in ritual life may arise from the physiological differences between men and women; but of course all these are closely connected.

Dr. Kaberry is not only concerned with determining the true position of women in Aboriginal family, social, and economic life, but also with ascertaining the degree in

which the women may be said to be sacred and spiritual personalities. Since Durkheim's analysis of Aboriginal life into two separate parts, the sacred and the profane, into the former of which with its myths, symbols, and ceremonies, the men alone are admitted, there has been a danger of accepting, without due examination, a further dichotomy according to which only the men develop sacred personalities, while the women always remain profane. Dr. Lloyd Warner in his analysis of life in North-East Arnhem Land seems to subscribe to such a view, holding that whereas the men through initiation advance in sanctity, the women make little sacred progress, remaining mostly in the profane. His views are examined and combated by Dr. Kaberry. Her own conclusions, however, may easily become the subject of argument, mainly because of the different connotations which are read into such words as sacred, spiritual, religious, and magical, and also because of the varying emotional attitudes and social experience of different investigators.

Even to the male field-worker, the women must have spiritual personalities of the same order, if not of the same degree as the men. It is true that for the most part puberty, adolescence, and early adulthood are not with them, as in the case of males, associated with admission to, and advance in, the secret and sacred inheritance of the tribe, the myths, symbols, and rituals of its eternal Dream Time, the source of life. And yet their pre-existent spirits come from that Dream Time and whether or no their death be followed by the same mourning and burial ceremonies as are given to deceased males—this varies in different regions—they have the same future after death as do the " sacred " men. Moreover, during earthly life, they are the means by which the pre-existent spirits, even of men, are incarnated and so far there is no evidence showing that the Aborigines believe that being born of woman profanes the hitherto sacred Dream Time spirit, though holders of the medieval Christian doctrine that man " is born in sin " and must be cleansed by baptism might be prepared to attribute a similar doctrine to the Aborigines ; in such a case, we would think of the

males as being sanctified by initiation and the females being prepared for marriage and child-bearing. Probably further definite inquiry into this matter would be enlightening. In any case, the woman does contribute to the development of the child both before and after birth, and as Dr. Kaberry implies, this fact has Dream Time sanction. The songs used at menstruation and childbirth are *ŋaruŋgani*, that is, possess totemic ancestral and Dream Time origin, and moreover, as she states, these songs with their rites and the taboos observed by women at such times of crises, " are a definite recognition of the physical bond between mother and child."

Women, too, have totems, even cult-totems, and therefore are recognized as being directly linked with the eternal Dream Time, even though in most regions they make no progress in knowledge of the cult-totem historical and ritual complex. In Dr. Kaberry's region, however, and also in the Karadjeri tribe of South Kimberley, old women do take part in some increase ceremonies, more particularly those concerned with species which the women collect for food. Finally, women take some part, mostly a very minor and exoteric part, in initiation ceremonies, though in a few cases an old woman performs a more important role, even to holding the dish of sacred blood of which the candidate will partake (Bard tribe, South Kimberley). Thus, in spite of not being initiated through a ritual of death and " raising ", and in spite of not being admitted to a knowledge of and participation in cult-totemism, and we can also add the *tjuruŋa* cult, it seems impossible to deny that the women do possess a sanctity of the same type as that possessed by the men, and that they have some part in Aboriginal religion.

Needless to say, Dr. Kaberry seizes on these points and clinches them. I do not think that, positively speaking, she claims for the women any greater degree of spiritual and sacred life than I have outlined, but the point is that the sacred aspect of women's life is frequently overlooked. The cumulative result of the evidence and arguments contained in her book, however, will make this less likely in the future.

Dr. Kaberry is concerned to show that women possess a higher status than is usually attributed to them and that this is true of the religious as well as of the " daily " life. In particular, she combats the idea that feminity is inextricably interwoven with uncleanliness, for after all, while women have to observe certain taboos regarding " man's business ", so too, men have to do likewise with regard to what is spoken of as " woman's business ". In this connection, Dr. Kaberry objects to Dr. Warner's statement that " the principle of the social bifurcation of the sexes has been used to create the lowest status, that of women and children ". But there is some truth in this ; the male elders in Australia do hold the highest social position and exercise the most influence, both because of their experience and of their knowledge of, and position in, the secret life. Then come the younger initiated men, then the older women, the younger women, and finally the children. And this is true in spite of the fact that a woman is sometimes influential in daily camp and horde life, and might even, as I was once assured, be a " headman ". The principle of classification is partly age, but more significantly, admission to, and place in, the secret life. It does not, or should not, mean that women and children are quasi-slaves or downtrodden, or denied a spiritual existence and what Dr. Kaberry terms " religious compensations ".

This brings us to Dr. Warner's generalization that the woman makes little sacred progress during her life, but remains mainly in the profane. Dr. Kaberry criticizes this, and yet I believe that she agrees with what I think it means, and with what, I hope, Dr. Warner implies by it, namely that because woman is not initiated into the cult life, with its secret rites, symbols (*tjuruŋa*, etc.), and totemic myths, she must and does remain outside the shrine, temple, or lodge. If she had a cult life with the same type of life-giving initiation and totemic rituals, the position would be different, but Dr. Kaberry's evidence makes quite clear that this is not the case. Even the interesting women's secret corroborees, which are being diffused into East Kimberley from the Northern Territory, do not fill up this gap ; these corroborees are not

Dream Time, but are collective rites for love magic, derived ultimately from the dead. The sacred character of the men is not derived from their rites which are performed for various magical purposes (love or death) but from the special nature of their initiation rites. We must remember that women may be independent, powerful, and spiritual, and yet be profane, or outside of that sphere of sacred belief and ritual, admission to which is by religious initiation.

I doubt whether there is as much in another point made by Dr. Kaberry as she is inclined to think. She writes: " If the men really represent the sacred or more sacred element in the community, then surely it is essential for the women to be cognizant of the fact and to accept it," but she found that they were regrettably profane in their attitude towards the men. I think that Dr. Kaberry is reading into sacred more than is meant by most anthropologists, perhaps even Dr. Warner, though he may put a value on the secret life out of proportion to its real function in native life. The point is that the men are not priests, or holy persons as distinct from the women, but are members of a secret society of a religious character, and I do not think it matters whether the women and initiated recognize the men as sacred or not; it is just " men's business ". In the same way in our own society many thousands of men belong to a secret society of religious and moral character, which ought to have the result of making its members more moral and religious, and therefore better and indeed excellent members of society, but participation in the rites of the society does not cause in the women " a sentiment of reverence " for the men, nor is it necessary for our women to be cognizant of, or to accept, the sanctity which the men could develop in the course of their secret life.

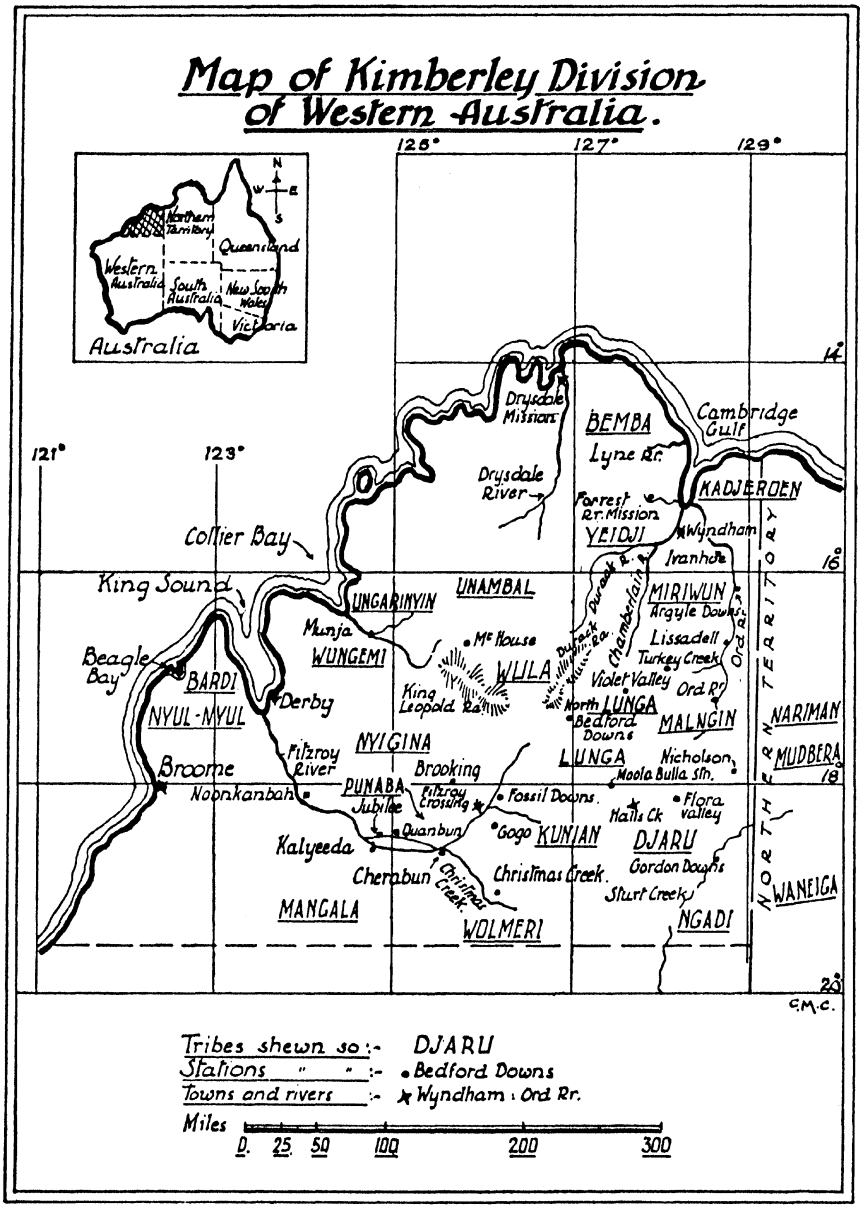
As I have already stated, I think that Dr. Kaberry will agree in the main with me, and in so far as Dr. Warner does not mean what I have tried to say, she will disagree with him and probably be right in so doing.

It is impossible in an Introduction to draw attention to all the facts and arguments put before us in this book.

Dr. Kaberry's work is a distinct contribution to our knowledge of Aboriginal life, and to our study of the position of women. I regard it as an honour not only to be privileged to write the Introduction to her book, but also to have been closely associated with her work both in the field and in the study since her post-graduate days.

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MAP OF KIMBERLEY DIVISION OF WESTERN AUSTRALIA.

CHAPTER I

WIELDERS OF THE DIGGING-STICK

PROLOGUE

Statistics of population, rainfall, and area are slender material out of which to build a picture of the Kimberleys, unless by their contrast they startle the mind into some realization of its vastness and scattered peoples. The Europeans will probably increase, the natives decrease: they are fluctuating features of a landscape that is itself unchanging. To the Europeans it is rugged, ugly, and uninteresting, and is largely valued for the freedom of life it offers, uncomplicated by world unrest, city conventions, and routine. It is a background for the pastoral industry, for profits and markets. To the native it is his world, and his horizon does not extend beyond it. At most he can name about half a dozen tribes on each boundary; the rest are unknown by name, and might to all intent and purposes be inhabitants of another planet. Yet, because he is a nomad and travels over his "world" of perhaps 4,000 square miles, his knowledge of it is possibly more extensive than that of the English farmer, who, during his lifetime, may rarely leave the confines of his village. Necessity sharpens the eye of the Aborigine to *minutiæ* of his environment, and makes significant for him changes in weather, soil, and vegetation. But if he has mastered the secret of its hidden resources, taken his toll, and in one sense subjugated it to his needs, the environment has also intruded upon his social and spiritual existence, and indeed, provided one of the bases for it. The mountains, rivers, and natural features have shaped his mythology, and in turn have become projections of The Time Long Past into the present. Out of the conflict with natural forces, a relationship has emerged which is reflected in the social

and religious organization. If I describe the landscape in detail, it is not to add the inevitable touch of local colour, nor to afford a temporary respite from scientific and formal dissertation. Native culture to be grasped in its completeness must be seen through the country, which is no mere back-cloth for tribal activities, but something much more vital and dynamic. The anthropologist and reader must come to grips with it before turning to a study of its inhabitants.

First impressions are valuable, because no matter how extraordinary the environment, its colour and contours, even its changes from season to season rapidly lose their power to imprint themselves vividly on the senses. The stranger soon strikes roots, and though one's way of looking at things is perhaps different from that of others, yet it ceases to be an angle for oneself. Even where impressions need to be revised later, they tend to throw into sharper relief the facts with which they are inconsistent. Those I had of the country which I first viewed from an aeroplane, were intensified ; but my conception of the natives and their life had to be changed in many respects.

As the aeroplane flies inland from Derby on the coast, following the course of the Fitzroy River, the country seems to be still untouched in spite of fifty years of European penetration. The soil has been turned and sown only around the white stunted homesteads, which appear as alien growths in the landscape every fifty or hundred miles or so. Extending into the distance, it has an almost timeless quality about it, with its hills rising like islands out of the plain that resembles the floor of some sea that has never known tides or men. Below, it stretches illimitable and motionless, but for the small shadow of the aeroplane and the cattle disturbed at their feeding beneath the scrub. In winter the ground is covered with yellowed grasses and is scarred by the bed of the Fitzroy, which will not come down in flood till the rains of October or November. Here and there a permanent water-hole gleams up through the white gums and paper-barks that shade it. As the crow flies, it is about seventy miles from Derby to Fitzroy

Crossing, and by road it is over two hundred miles. At this point, sixty miles to the south is the desert, as yet holding the unknown as far as the anthropologist is concerned. On the northern side, the first big ranges sweep down from the mountainous region extending up to the Indian Ocean, and east well over towards the Northern Territory. Some of these, such as the Carboyd, can only be penetrated on foot, and afford no forced landing ground for the aeroplane. They are mostly sandstone, with occasional outcrops of limestone and basalt. They appear to be bare of all vegetation, and look as though they have been cast and fired in the earth's centre, and then flung up in some upheaval to glint beneath a savage sun. Scarped and precipitous, they are gashed with valleys that from above are chasms of red light.

It seems an inhospitable, arid land for all its colour and immensity, particularly in the winter when it offers no apparent means of sustinence for any form of life. But in any case, most of the natives are now concentrated in the camps and humpies around the stations, and their fires will not be seen till the summer, when they go sometimes fifty or a hundred miles into the bush on their annual " walk-about " for inter-tribal meetings and ceremonies. Some of these natives are so " civilized " or detribalized, that they speak of going bush as a " holiday ", much as the city clerk goes into the country once a year to " rough " it for a time ! Yet this country in the past carried a much larger native population than at present. At the outset then, the anthropologist is confronted with one of the incongruities that continually arise in studying these peoples. The sparseness of natural resources and the simplicity of the consequent economic system have to be reconciled with the complexity of ritual and social organization. There is the danger of emphasizing one at the expense of the other, of failing to see that it is in the urgency of existence rather than in its simplicity, that the key lies to a world of strange ancestral figures and the elaborate rites that centre around them.

Durkheim's idea of native existence as one of monotony does not entirely tally with camp life as observed by a stranger stripped of all preconceptions of what does or does not constitute a full life. It is true that such ritual events rise to overshadow daily activities, break into established routine, provoke long preparations, bring together scattered groups, are eagerly anticipated, and create excitement and passions in onlookers and participants alike. But if this does occur we must not leap to the conclusion that in the intervening period, the Aborigines are apathetic, cease to take any more than a cursory interest in daily happenings, and withdraw into a shell of a mere grudging existence that satisfies primary needs alone. Granted all the factors mentioned above, they represent more than recreative compensation; totemism and its ceremonies reflect not so much the simplicity of economics but an unceasing struggle to maintain life even on a meagre level. But if totemism, as I shall show later, has emerged out of these conditions, the totemic ancestors have in their turn given to social existence an added richness and complexity, so that when the Aborigine reaches maturity, he does not merely acquire some control over his environment, but is also brought into contact with the spiritual forces on which his means of sustinence are believed to depend.

But to return to the land. To see it from the aeroplane is to perceive it with the eye of Thomas Hardy's Spirit of the Years: to be aware of its jagged contours; to have a vision of its vastness and some understanding of the distances the Aborigines must travel from one fertile pool to another in a region which is bounded by desert on the south, by sea on the west, and by mountains on the north and east. It is to gain some idea of the colossal canvas on which the Aborigines have conceived the exploits of the totemic heroes of the past. But sooner or later we must come to earth, and if we lose thereby a sense of perspective and remote objectivity, there is compensation in the gradual revelation of hidden resources, and in vital contact with the inhabitants.



Kimberley landscape.

[*Face p.* 4.

Close at hand, the country is not quite so arid, though the soil in winter is brown and cracked, covered with the spiked spinifex, cane, and other grasses on which the cattle feed. The trees, except by the river, are stunted, being mostly gum, beefwood, desert oak, kurrajong, corkwood, bauhinea, baobab, and an occasional pandanus near a pool in the mountains. Around the billabongs [1] are depressions in the earth, each one a family hearth where food is prepared and eaten and much of the gossip, quiet talk, and arguments are carried on.

Close by are generally billies (formerly shells) for fetching water from the pool about a hundred yards away or more, for as a rule the natives do not camp by the edge of their water supply. In summer there will be floods, and at any time there are always snakes and insects in the rank grasses. Blankets that have never been washed, and women's digging- and fighting-sticks lie scattered about. Perhaps there is a woman fashioning a fighting-stick, as she sits cross-legged, holding a piece of wood some four feet long, at an angle sloping towards her. With the other hand she takes off shavings with a tomahawk, till it is round and smooth, with both ends slightly pointed. Against a tree will be leaning spears for fishing, hunting, and fighting, and spear-throwers smeared with red ochre, and one or two boomerangs.

Early in the morning soon after sunrise, the men would have gone forth, armed with spears, and striding along with a free unhampered movement, with a dog or two at heel. The women trudge off in another direction, burdened with swags, moving like a string of pack mules off to market, and confirming the generally held opinion that they are a little better than drudges or chattels. Later only some old people and a few dogs will be in the camp. Here lies an old man prone, or an old woman most probably blind, crouching on her knees, back bent, now and again groping with twisted fingers for a pannikan of water. If the younger

[1] Billabong is an aboriginal term that has passed into general currency in Australia. It is a lake fed by a main stream, and shaded by trees.

women have been successful, they will amble into the clearing, spindle-legged, laden with a paperbark swag slung over the left shoulder. One may begin to prepare a damper [1] immediately from the lily seeds, which she gouges out from the buds with her fingers, then pounds on a flat stone, mixes with water and bakes for half an hour in the hot coals.

At midday more come in, perhaps a man with a kangaroo he has speared, and which he now proceeds to cook. And so through the afternoon most of the blacks come straggling in, the women with iguana (*varanus* lizard), lily-roots, wild-honey, and fish, and the men with larger game. Fires are made up, the evening meal is eaten, some of it being given to relatives. All settle down for a gossip, or if there is to be a corroboree,[2] men, women, and children drift up to the cleared space a hundred yards away. Women gather the dried grasses into heaps, set light to them, so that they flare up to cast jagged shadows over the singers and dancers. By midnight, unless some ceremony is in progress, most will be asleep. Fires glow out of the darkness, the blacks and their dogs huddle by them, and the silence is only broken by the crackle of a falling log. At dawn one or two bestir themselves : the women fetch water and firewood, the men talk for a while, eat any of the food remaining from the previous night, sharpen their spears, and depart for the day's hunting.

At first the camp seems to offer only the grey monotony of daily existence, of a precarious livelihood that is hunted for in the hills and grubbed for in the earth. In the Pacific Island community, the picturesqueness of the village camouflages temporarily the routine of daily tasks. Canoes drawn up on the beach fringed with palms, grass huts amongst the tropical undergrowth tend to confirm the ideas of the passing tourist that south sea savages lead the life of lotus-eaters. Such a community makes little demands on

[1] Damper is an Australian term for a large scone-loaf made from flour and water.

[2] *Corroboree* is an aboriginal term for a dance. It has passed into general usage in Australia, along with *lubra*, which means an aboriginal woman.

his or her powers of perception or understanding of anything but the obvious. On the other hand, the aboriginal camp, beginning with the dirty drab, assumes more and more complexity, variety, and interest. After one has become familiar with the background, attention at first tends to focus on the human actors, but as time passes, the camp ceases to be just a clearing littered with material objects of the simplest type. A deserted camp is just as significant as a peopled one : the depressions separated one from the other, reflect the pattern of family life : the spears are not merely primitive weapons, when one comes to realize the skill and delicacy of handling required for their making, the care lavished on them afterwards in the continual straightening of the hafts in hot ashes, and the re-setting of the blade in wax, the efficiency with which they are used, and the fact that on their slender shafts the natives depend for much of their food and for defence in war. The fires, whether a few embers or blazing high, are indicative of what is perhaps happening two miles away. The dirt ceases to obtrude, and the whole scene takes on colour as it gains in significance. One detects changes, changes which give a certain rhythm that one is not constantly aware of, but which one misses after the return to the sybaritic attractions of the homestead for a while. One becomes absorbed in the questions of food-supply, in the chatter, gossip, and quarrels, and one no longer wonders at the absence of boredom among natives of the community.

But the encampment must not be conceived as an isolated place of settlement. Although it is the focal point, it is nevertheless the centre of a rough circle, within which is some pool providing the natives with fish, lily-roots, and mussels. It is a circle that stretches out for two or five miles : its ground is known for every tree, hillock, stump, antbed, crevice, and even plants. The women wander over this day after day in their search for food, and men may go farther afield in chase of a kangaroo. About two miles from the camp is some cleared space where the men foregather for their secret life, and in another direction is one

for that of the women. In the late afternoon, scattered parties draw in towards the camp, but even then these are split up into kinship groups, and it is not until they go to the dancing ground close by that men, women, and children are massed together as the singers, whilst the dancers in front of them bring to the performance their youth, skill, and enthusiasm.

If we cannot then draw a plan of houses or huts and their occupants—in short of a village site—(unless we sketch the grouping of the depressions), we can at least conceive a circle some six miles in diameter over whose whole extent the daily activities are carried on, and within which there are certain points where the life is ceremonial, more emotional and intense. There are other natural features which may be increase sites or stones believed to have been totemic ancestors, but to deal with these, is to bring us to the environment as the Aborigine himself sees it and this will gradually emerge with our initiation into tribal life.

So much for first impressions, which are not intended to be a substitute for objective and detailed fact, nor to create in the mind of the reader some of the illusions and delusions of which the writer herself was the victim in the first stages of fieldwork. As a preliminary approach, they have more vitality and colour than the mere presentation of the harsh lineaments of structure. I have exercised the right to select those which single out the dominant aspects of the country and camp-life. Some of them may strike the note of incongruity, but they challenge attention and direct it to a closer examination of the facts. Others are important because they appear to indicate the subservience of the women and the imposition on them of the more onerous and monotonous tasks, and therefore to corroborate the findings of earlier ethnologists. But if this confirmation rests merely on impressions alone, and a more intensive study reveals an entirely different situation, then they contribute, however negatively, to the validity of my case.

This is not to say that because I saw the women go off day after day into the bush, to return laden with swags and firewood, fetch water and " feed a little life with dried tubers ", that I immediately leapt to the conclusion that they were no more than " domesticated cows " to quote the latest writer on the subject.[1] Perhaps one of the major contributions of Anthropology is that it has not only humanized the savage, but also humanized our conception of what we may expect to find in an alien race. It has engendered a sound scepticism of such a statement as " the Australian aboriginal woman stands in the relation to her husband as a slave to its master ", or of the attitudes that tend to regard her as a chattel, a harried prostitute, a Patient Griselda, or more moralistically, a lost soul. From the outset one is disposed to envisage her as an active social personality : as a human being with all the wants, desires, and needs that flesh is heir to.

Since it is as a worker that she emerges in our first impressions, let this be the point of departure into the concrete reality of her world : let us see whether the more difficult tasks are assigned her, and whether she herself considers them as drudgery. Let us establish her position in her environment and her family either as a food-provider or a dependent. To follow her along the road of pedestrian economics is not simply to tread a way consecrated by anthropological usage. The work of Professor Radcliffe-Brown, Professor Malinowski, and others has shown that religion and magic create some sort of security for the individual, and offer a solution of problems beyond the scope of empirical knowledge. Therefore an entry into the citadel of belief at this stage would be valueless without an understanding of the nature of the material and social conditions of which it is the outgrowth. From the vantage point of the tangible and the perceptible, we can turn later to totemism. Totemism from one angle, does give the woman's view of the environment, of the forces with

[1] M. F. Ashley-Montagu, *C.B.A.A.*, p. 23. For the full titles of books here and elsewhere, the reader is referred to the bibliography.

which she must grapple; but as we shall see later, it is rooted in everyday existence and has emerged from it. Therefore it is with her ordinary activities, with the unceasing struggle to maintain herself that we must first deal, if we are to approach totemism without becoming " wanderers in a middle mist " of abstractions and beliefs, clutching at shadows before we have come to know the beings and objects which have cast them.

Attitude to the Land

The reader will have gathered some idea of the character of the resources and of the country in the preceding discussion, but we must from the first grasp the fact that the attitude of the native woman differs profoundly from that of the average white woman living on a station in the same strip of territory. The country for the aboriginal woman is not so much freehold or leasehold property, but one she regards as her own because she has inherited the right to live and forage for food within its boundaries. In her patriotism, she is ready to insist that there is an abundance of game, fish, and yams, whether there is or not. To the white woman who at most takes a speculative interest in the lettuces and cabbages in the small vegetable garden by the homestead, the country is one of plains and arid hills. It seems incredible to her that the native woman can forage day after day, wandering apparently at random in the hope of finding a few tubers. Such an activity partakes of the nature of an act of faith, or else is dependent on mystical powers of divination denied to the mere European. But the Aborigine's knowledge of her environment is an intimate one of its trees, bushes, plants, crevices, and hillocks—all significant because they represent the possibility of food or are signposts to it. In a tribe which does not cultivate the earth, sow, and reap, dictate what it shall bring forth, the anthropologist is faced with the question of what the land offers of itself, to what extent its resources are exploited, and what is the woman's share in this.

The Seasons

Brief mention has been made in passing of the division of the seasons into the " wet " with its north-west winds, and the " dry " with the prevailing wind from the south-east. The natives, however, distinguish between five periods, these being in the Lunga tribe—*wa:nga*—about June and July; *zua:nda ba:ndan*—the beginning of the hot weather in August and September; *wi:rgal*—the first rains in October or November; *gulan*—the rains from November to March, and *ma:lingin*—the end of the rainy season about April or May. These terms are obviously dictated by a set of climatic conditions differing considerably from those in the southern part of the continent. There is no division of the year into a regular number of months, for the periods are more elastic. If for example it has not rained by December, then it is still *zua:nda ba:ndan* in the eyes of the natives. In the rainy season, berries, fruits, wild-honey, frogs dug out of pits, and white-ant larvæ (which are only eaten by the women and very old men,) are available in addition to game and fish. In winter, lily-roots and seeds, yams, tubers, nuts, grass seeds, pandanus and baobab nuts are collected by the women, and later in September grubs are found in the river-gums; lily-roots are dug from the caked mud of the river beds or billabongs, that have dried up. Fish, game, reptiles, porcupine, and birds are secured by the men most of the year round, though at some periods they are better in quality than at others. Increase ceremonies are performed in the spring for most species.

It is difficult to say how far the seasonal changes formerly affected the movements of the Aborigines, since most of them are employed by the whites and perforce hold their inter-tribal meetings from September to March when work slackens off on the stations. The winter—June to August—was at one time a period when the natives assembled for their ceremonies, but the rains did not prevent such an event taking place from January to March 1936 at Christmas Creek, and certainly there seemed to be plenty of food in

the camp, apart from the rations supplied by the manager of the property.

The Lunga and all the Kimberley tribes have terms for the points of the compass, for up and down the river, for periods of the night and day. The moon and stars do not enter largely into their activities, though the Wolmeri said they performed the rain-making ceremony in September at the new moon. In the Lunga and Djaru tribes, the moon belongs to the djuru subsection and figures in the myth that accounts for death and wrong marriages. In the Wolmeri, it is djangala, and is associated with a corroboree which enacts part of a myth and is only seen by the men, and belonged to the headman of the *Nambaːr* horde. The moon (*yagan*) in The Time Long Past was a man called *Maːni*, who first used the *bundu waːlu*, headband, to attract women. There is some connection with lovemaking. Later he tried to find his dogs who had chased an emu. As he walked his feet dropped off, then his knees, his thighs, his arms, his body, his neck, till finally his head rolled along the ground, leaving a track like that of a snake. It rolled into a salt pool, Baragu, near Billiluna on the edge of the desert. The corroboree which I witnessed only represented *Maːni* dancing with his headband and calling up his dogs. Some of the stars are named though I received different myths from different tribes and even hordes. The Southern Cross, *gunderu*, was Eaglehawk: his camp was in the Magellan Clouds, *naːlgunderi*, and he chased the Pleiades, *guminba*, a group of women. As opposed to this Wolmeri account, the Lunga said Magellan Clouds, *daːru*, were the fish which in The Time Long Past were poisoned and then eaten by Pelican. Orion's belt, *mugur*, is the stick that *Banaga*, a bird, threw after his bullroarer when it broke off the string and went into the sky. The bullroarer is in the dark spot in the Milky Way called the coalsack—and women are not supposed to know of its existence. Venus, *kigi*, according to the Wolmeri, came to earth and left a stone in one of the horde countries; amongst the Nyigina she is called *mandjimara*, a man who in The Time Long

Past brought a corroboree from the coast. In the Lunga she is *djigeradji*, a black bird, who played a part in the crocodile myth.

The Sun is nangala in the Lunga and djuru in the Wolmeri tribe, and is the central figure of different myths in these tribes. It is one of the most important means of reckoning time and regulating the activities of the day. A journey is estimated in terms of the number of camps which must be made, about twelve miles being covered each day. Longer periods are counted in moons or months, and in " wet " and " dry " seasons. The natives only have words for three numbers, though they use their fingers to indicate more. For events more distant in time, birth, childhood, initiation, and marriage provide points of reference. The first contact with Europeans is another ; prior to that, the Aborigines are vague though the period is sharply distinguished from The Time Long Past when there were only the totemic ancestors who wandered about as men and established customs, laws, and ceremonies.

The Division of Labour between the Sexes

Hunting.

Kangaroo and wallaby furnish the bulk of the meat supply in the Kimberleys, except when supplemented illicitly or otherwise by the white man's beef. Of the various kinds, the main are the plain-kangaroo, *wola:mba*,[1] standing four or five feet high and tawny in colour, and the hill-kangaroo, *djiriŋ*, which is smaller and a reddish-brown. They jump with amazing rapidity over the ground, and it is only when the native has " sneaked up close-fellow ", that he has much chance of pausing to take aim, before hurling his spear after his leaping victim. Sometimes he erects a screen of bushes by a waterhole, and spears the animals when they come to drink. Dogs occasionally bring

[1] Unless otherwise stated, native terms are taken from the Lunga tribe. Other languages are indicated by an initial, e.g. P. for Punaba ; W. for Wolmeri ; K. for Kunian ; Mal. for Malngin ; D. for Djaru ; Mir. for Miriwun ; N. for Nyigina.

down a kangaroo, but adolescents are not as a rule permitted to use them for hunting, since it is essential they acquire skill in the wielding of the spear as soon as possible. The Aborigines generally use a spear-thrower (*noəlal*) and a shovel-spear (*djina:l*), the fashioning of which is a long and delicate process. The blade made of iron, *mu:lagandji*, must be welded into an oval shape varying from three to five inches in length, set in wax (*ka:ldji*), which is then affixed to a shaft, part wood and part bamboo (*kama:nga:l*), which has already been straightened in hot ashes. Boys from the age of five or six begin to practise with miniature spears and spear-throwers, and it is not until after puberty that they attain anything approaching efficiency. There is also a wire-pronged spear for fishing with its specially constructed spear-thrower of bamboo, and another for hunting with a blade (*djimbila:*) manufactured from flint, quartz, or glass by the process of pressure-flaking, so that it finally resembles a laurel leaf. Birds such as turkey, eagle-hawk, cockatoo, and duck are killed with a small fish spear, boomerang, or throwing stick.

Now the long training that is necessary for the use of a spear, speed of foot and powers of endurance, are factors which make the man especially fitted to hunt. The spear is rarely out of his hands, except when he is sitting or dancing and even then it is always near by in case of emergency. In stalking the animal and racing after it, freedom of action is essential; the man must not be hampered by a swag or a dilly-bag full of lily-roots. Hence the small supply of meat (*mi:ala*) must be augmented by the more easily obtained fruits, tubers, and roots (*mai-i*—a generic term for all vegetable foods), fish and reptiles, and the task falls of necessity to the women. In short economic resources, the methods of exploiting them and physiological capacities demand a division of labour between the sexes—a division that is in a very real sense a matter of co-operation, in spite of the findings of earlier ethnologists to the contrary. I wish to stress this point, since it is one dealt with by Professor Malinowski in *The Family Among*

the Australian Aborigines. He sifted all the available evidence on this subject, and in the light of his material came to conclusions which, though valid at the time (1913), need modification in the light of further research.

"Sex division is based only partly on differences of natural capacities. Heavier work ought naturally to be performed by the men. Here the contrary obtains. Even here the women's work appears to be much more exacting inasmuch as it requires a steady strain, patience, and regularity. Such work is the most repulsive; it differs most fundamentally from sport, and is carried on only under strong compulsion. Compulsion is therefore, as we saw, the chief basis of this division of labour, and it may be said in the Australian aboriginal society the economic fact of the division of labour is rooted in a sociological status—viz., the compulsion of the weaker sex by the 'brutal' half of society. From its compulsory character it follows that the distribution of economic functions does not correspond to true co-operation, but that the relation of a husband to wife is in its economic aspect, that of a master to its slave." [1]

It is true the woman provides the larger part of the meal, but one must not automatically assume that her work is more onerous. Actually it is less so than the men's, as I can speak from experience. Merely to follow them in their hunting over rugged hills and the blazing sun left me so exhausted that after two attempts, I was content henceforth to amble with the women over the plains and along the dry river-beds. The element of sport distracts attention temporarily from fatigue, but too often it ends in the disappointment of seeing one's dinner leaping into the distance over the hills. On the other hand, women's work has its moments of excitement when a particularly toothsome comb of wild-honey is cut out of a tree, or a succulent iguana is dragged from its burrow clawing the earth, to be knocked on the ground and killed. Moreover, once the food is located, it is there for the taking.

[1] B. Malinowski, *F.A.A.A.*, p. 287.

The element of chance in hunting immediately raises the question of whether there is any magic associated with it. The men sometimes smear themselves with yellow ochre, *gundulzi*, so that their quarry will not be able to scent them. But this is scarcely a magical rite, since ochre is astringent and closes the pores.[1] It is therefore probable that it performs the function the natives believe it to possess, though here I cannot speak with authority. Less rational is its application to a spear, which will then find its mark more easily. The practice is not always followed, especially as ochre may not be available. Yet it is not thought that the man will then have no luck. During the discussion of the day's hunting, failure was not attributed to absence of ochre but was summed up in terms of unfavourable wind, of the game being disturbed by something else in the vicinity, or by the awkward lie of the land. On the other hand, success was not accredited to the ochre. The expert hunter was called *mula:rin* (D.), one who had " a good arm ". There was always a very definite recognition of skill, experience, and the craftsmanship involved in the making of an efficient weapon. This is partly reflected in the Lunga myth which describes how once kangaroos were tame, but one day some of the totemic ancestors neglected to share their meat with Flying Fox. In revenge he taught the kangaroo all the tricks to elude his pursuers, so that the others were unable to spear him. Fortunately Flying Fox also passed on his knowledge to the Aborigines, so that while the greed of some of the totemic ancestors was responsible for the difficulties of hunting, the Aborigines were provided with the skill to overcome them. All this is additional evidence of Professor Malinowski's theory that where primitive man can depend on his skill and knowledge, he does not resort to magic until factors enter over which he has no control. Hunting still has its uncertainty. The ochre is not indispensable ; but the possession of a *tʃuruŋa*,

[1] Khory and Katarek in *The Materia Medica of India and Their Therapeutics*, Bombay, 1903, p. 138, declare that ochres are astringent and cooling, and are used as a local application for burns, ulcers, and boils.

believed to endow him with endurance and insure success, gives him an abiding sense of confidence in his own powers. The Central Kimberleys are relatively arid as compared with the more fertile coastal belts, and are occasionally subjected to droughts from September to December. In this region there are rainmaking ceremonies and increase rites for kangaroo, reptiles, roots, and lilies, which insure the means of sustinence for the approaching season. For their exploitation he can depend largely on his own experience.

Foraging.

In woman's work there is less uncertainty and she uses no magic at all. In reply to my query as to whether she had any for iguana and wild-honey, she answered in a matter-of-fact tone " me find 'em that one sugar-bag (wild-honey), me can't lose 'em ". When I pressed her further with " suppose you no bin find 'em ", she looked contemptuous and said, " me find 'em alright ; me savvy." Like the man she apparently judged herself capable of relying on her powers of observation and familiarity with the country to secure what food she needed. Day after day much the same scene was enacted anywhere in the Kimberleys. The men go out to hunt, the women to forage. The camp, fourteen miles to the north-east of Bedford station, was typical. It was a clearing between hills of red-sandstone covered with spinifex and small scrub ; at one end was a waterhole, which at that time of the year, September to October 1935, was only a foot deep ; at the other end, three hundred yards away, was the corroboree ground. There were over seventy Aborigines here on their summer " walkabout ", mostly Lunga, with a sprinkling of Kunian and Wula from the ranges to the west. For the sake of its vividness I shall use the present tense in the following description.

The natives wake at dawn, stir up the embers of the fire, eat a little food and then begin to think about the search for more. The process of departure is apt to prolong

itself indefinitely. There is a gradual break-up of the groups standing round the fires, a drift out towards the periphery of the clearing, the men pausing to discuss the direction they will take, gossiping, joking, and even when a hundred yards away, turning to call out some remark or question.[1] It is a leisurely business possibly taking two hours, and if livelihood is sometimes precarious, it is belied by the absence of any feverish haste, and by a departure so casual as to seem reluctant. But the whole day is before them, possibly a strenuous one, and it is pleasant near the fire in the company of others. Contrary to the practice in many communities, organization in hunting and fishing is limited to a minimum. The men occasionally hunt together in a band; the more elderly and experienced decide on the route, arrange who will drive the kangaroos towards a certain spot and who will post themselves there to spear them. Or at the end of the dry season, they encircle a stretch of country, burn off the grass and spear the game, while the women come behind and collect the reptiles and marsupials. Towards the close of the " wet ", a dam may be constructed of mud six or eight inches high, so that the men and women can scoop out the fish. When the pools are shallow, bark from certain trees may be thrown in to stupefy the fish, which then float to the surface. Women may help, but young children are excluded. One type of bark is effective after a few hours; another takes three or four days. Sometimes a man and his wife travel together; more generally the men go out in pairs and the same applies to the women.

Meanwhile the women are rolling up their swags in just the same leisurely fashion, playing with a baby or idly talking amongst themselves and with their dilatory menfolk. An old woman called Duelil, of fifty or fifty-five, with a cropped head of grey curly hair, rather small features, a

[1] When I teased the men about their slowness, they said, " Whitefellow go quick, but blackfellow him all day talk-talk." And this was invariably the case, even when we had decided on the route the night before.

kindly expression, but a querulous voice, walks slowly up to her daughter's camp, now that the latter's husband has proceeded fifty yards on his journey. Bulagil, the daughter, is of medium height like her mother, has neat features, slender hands, and brown eyes that are apt to sparkle with laughter. She is about twenty-two, very poised and sure of herself, partly because she is valued by the whites as a " good house gin ", partly because she is pretty and as the elder of two wives is accustomed to make decisions and distribute the food. There is nothing submissive in her attitude towards her husband, Lanburidjen, a man of about thirty-four, who is inclined to be bumptious and complacent on the score that he was once a police-boy and is now headstockboy at Bedford. Nevertheless he was destined to lose Bulagil, who eloped with her tribal son-in-law two weeks later. Finally the old woman moves off following the path to the south of the camp; Bulagil shoulders her swag, and says she will go and cut a comb of wild-honey from a tree a mile away that she has seen the day before. The other two, wife and step-daughter, pick up their digging-sticks and accompany her. In the camp close by, a middle-aged woman, Burul, who conforms more to the average aboriginal type, with her pronounced forehead, wide mouth, squat nose, and teeth so small that they seem to have been ground down to the gums, swings her baby girl on to her shoulders where she sits quite at home with little support from her mother. Farther up, a woman sets off in another direction with two dogs scampering ahead of her. At last the camp is deserted, but for an old man who is ill. By 8.30, a stranger coming suddenly upon the clearing would see only depressions in the ground, dying embers and, perhaps faintly in the sunlight, a wisp of smoke drifting into the white gum close by the pool where the old man is sleeping in the shade. There are few signs of inhabitation: it is almost as though the Aborigines had rested here for the night, slept, eaten their food and disappeared again into the plains and gorges: claiming no place as their own, establishing no permanent dwellings,

nor anything that might bear tangible witness to their possession of the land.

The women do not follow any set direction, nor has each family a monopoly of certain pools and paths. Their choice will depend primarily on knowledge of the more fertile spots and whether their possibilities have been exhausted. It is a matter of combing the country, its crevices and crannies, cutting into its trees and ant-bed mounds for honey, and of digging in the earth for roots, iguana, and porcupine. It is not the steady strenuous labour of the German peasant woman bending from dawn to dusk over her fields, hoeing, weeding, sowing, and reaping. The aboriginal woman has greater freedom of movement and more variety. Her sources of nourishment are scattered and often invisible; she has not the apparent security of seeing beneath her eyes the crops which when harvested will maintain her for the season. But at the same time the agriculturist may be left destitute and almost starving if they fail or are destroyed by drought, flood, fire, locusts, or grasshoppers, as sometimes happens in China and in Europe. I never saw an aboriginal woman come in empty-handed, though in 1935 there was a drought, and only seven inches of rain fell as against the customary eighteen or twenty-two. The cattle died or became mere walking skeletons, only a few being dispatched to the meatworks in Wyndham. In other parts of the State, probably in those bordering on the desert,[1] natives had difficulty in warding off starvation; but in the Kimberleys they still brought in food though it was supplemented, as is customary, by station beef from time to time. However, on those days when they were dependent on their own efforts they always found enough to satisfy their needs.

But to return to the women who are just leaving the camp at Bedford. I generally accompany Bulagil, since she is the most intelligent of the women, and has a good command of English. We set off at a quick pace, since it

[1] *Annual Report of the Chief Protector of Aborigines, Western Australia*, 1936, pp. 3 and 4.

is early and we are covering ground that has already been ransacked. About a quarter of a mile away the younger wife sees what looks to me to be a dead root. She digs around it and finally drags out a long reddish tuber, *wa:ndi*. In the meantime the other two have gone ahead, leaving the path to walk through the grasses to an ant-bed, containing wild-honey. The step-daughter nearby is scraping the earth for some greyish seeds—*djunda:*, which are also the food of the native-companion. In the "wet" season there will be fruits of various kinds, the round conkaberries —*brɛldji*, black plums—*minzara*, and also frogs dug out of pits three or four feet deep, and cooked on the hot ashes. Farther on we pass a species of gum tree with a sugary white substance—*pinga:*—on the back of the leaves. The youngest climbs up, cuts off a few branches, and the others scrape off the *pinga:* in flakes, eating a little and putting the remainder into a billy. Earlier in the year in August, there would be the baobab nuts, *tʃimili*, shaped like an emu's egg, covered with a green sort of fur, containing a white kernel, which is pounded up, mixed with water, and eaten with the fingers. The younger wife, who has been digging for the yam, is still in the rear, so the others call out and tell her to hurry. Actually she is quite capable of looking after herself, but the younger women prefer company if it is to be had, since there is always the possibility of a man hanging about with motives other than those of hunting. Sometimes he may receive a welcome, but evidently not in this case. Co-wives, two sisters, mother and daughter, sisters-in-law, a woman and her husband's mother, or perhaps a younger woman in a tribal relationship who camps near her, may travel together. An older woman frequently goes off alone, though if tired, the others wait for her if she has been in the vicinity during the day. Children accompany their mother, so that from an early age they begin to absorb the details of their environment. She points out the tracks of game and reptiles, and the children constantly question her about the names of different bushes and plants. On the whole there is little explicit instruction, and younger

children are not considered capable of supporting themselves until after puberty. They generally managed to find something, however, which they ate on the spot, if it did not need cooking.

It should be mentioned here that most of these women did not belong to the country in which they were foraging; nevertheless in this particular pursuit they had the same rights as those who did. There was never any question of the sister of the headman, for instance, taking precedence over the wife of a younger man, when a clump of yams or the tracks of an iguana were discovered. A more detailed discussion of ownership of resources will be dealt with later in a study of local organization.

After three or four miles we approach a billabong where the lubras dive in, swim, and incidentally gather lily-roots and buds. There is much chatter and teasing on such occasions, and the coolness is a welcome respite after the heat. Bulagil leaves the others after a time, and goes higher up to fish, and to search for mussels and crabs. She catches about fifteen perch and with this haul will not bother to look very diligently for food for the rest of the day. The same applies to the other wife, who has collected a *kulamon* [1] of lily-roots. They lie for a time in the shade, gossip, eat some of the fish and roots, sleep, and about three o'clock move homeward. For all their desultory searching, there is little that they miss, or fail to note for a future occasion. Sometimes their dogs bring down a kangaroo. The women may singe and disembowel it, eat the heart and liver—delicacies—and carry the rest back to the camp. There is no taboo on their doing this; as far as I could discover they ate whatever part of the kangaroo they liked though at Forrest River the men alone drank the blood.[2]

Certainly from the European point of view there is a

[1] *Kulamon* is an aboriginal term that has passed into general currency in Australia. It is a shallow boat-shaped vessel made of wood.

[2] For a fuller discussion of this, see my report on the Forrest River tribes in *Oceania*, v, 1935, p. 415.



Digging for iguana.

[*Face p.* 22.

good deal of routine in the foraging for food every day; certainly it demands skill, knowledge, and patience, but I never heard the women grumble, except in one instance, when I sympathetically brought the subject round to this point, and my informant was too human to resist the temptation. It was not a permanent attitude on her part. If so, it would have manifested itself in an obvious sullenness, weariness, possibly timidity and chronic resentment. The facts were otherwise. Some of the women, when confronted with the anthropologist, were apt to be shy; yet if they were less assertive and articulate than others, they still entered with zest into the play and chatter at the waterholes and around the fires. Monotony was to some extent counterbalanced, as I have already said, by the variety of the daily provender, and by the fact that they generally traversed new ground each day. If it was compulsory to search for food, at least they did not travel like beasts of burden, with timorous docility and bovine resignation. They were not driven forth by the men; they departed just as leisurely, chose their own routes, and in this department of economic activities were left in undisputed sway. If it was left to them alone to provide certain goods, at least it was a province in which they were their own mistresses, acquired their skill from the older women, and served no weary apprenticeship to an exacting husband or father. The men, once they had killed their kangaroo, had finished their labours for the day. The women's work, on the other hand, might be more protracted but it was less strenuous, and compares favourably with a European eight-hour day and possibly overtime as well.

It is also of interest in view of the theory put forward by O. T. Mason and R. Briffault that women were the first agriculturists,[1] to raise the question here whether the Aborigines display any tendency to plant seeds. On the Forrest River Mission both sexes worked in the vegetable gardens, but the women were not better gardeners, nor

[1] O. T. Mason, *Woman's Share in Primitive Culture*, p. 116; R. Briffault, *The Mothers*, vol. iii, p. 2.

did they seem to manifest any more enthusiasm and interest. They never bothered to take seeds and start their own little plots. One white man told me he had given them grain to sow, but when he asked them later what they had done with it, they had replied caustically and realistically : " Me bin eat him. Suppose me plant him, white-ant eat him. More better me eat him first time." Unanswerable logic. I was told, however, by the manager of the Munja on the coast, that men and women often planted watermelon seeds of their own accord, but I never met an instance of this in the region to the east. Women then do not appear to be embryonic agriculturists in this part of Australia, in spite of the fact that many have worked on the stations and know something of gardening.[1]

Economic Co-operation between the Sexes

But to return to our main argument. We can dismiss the statement that the women's work involves more drudgery than that of the men, even though it may take longer. It is compulsory only in the sense that it is an occupation that is of vital importance for the maintenance of life ; but there is no question of the " brutal imposition of the heavier tasks on the weaker sex ". That of the men is also compulsory from the tribal point of view as I shall show later. However, there is still the point made by Professor Malinowski that there is no real co-operation, since the women contribute the greater portion of the food-supply. It seems to me that there is a danger in such a statement of confusing the qualitative with the quantitative. A woman would bring in her *kulamon* five or eight yams,

[1] Anthropologists working in other parts of the continent have noted the same thing. *Vide* B. Spencer, *N.T.N.T.A.*, p. 27 ; E. M. Curr, *T.A.R.*, vol. ii, p. 79, on natives of Victoria ; A. P. Elkin, " The Social Life and Intelligence of the Australian Aborigine," *Oceania*, iii, 1932–3, p. 103. He attributes this, rightly I think, to the " native philosophy of the pre-existence of spirits of natural species with its corollary that the increase of the species and therefore the maintenance of the food supply depends not on digging and sowing, but on the performance of the prescribed rites at the sacred places at right times ".

perhaps a dozen fish and lily-roots. Her husband may have brought in a kangaroo which, if he has meat or is in debt to some affinal relative, he gives away without keeping any for himself. But very often he cooks it, sending portions of the animal—head, tail, or shoulder—to different relatives, retaining the rest for family use and possibly distributing a little more the next day.

In actual quantity, the woman probably provides more over a fixed period than the man, since hunting is not always successful. She always manages to bring in something, and hence the family is dependent on her efforts to a greater extent than on those of her husband. Without the constant foraging for smaller foods, something like a state of starvation would ensue if the small quantities of meat were the sole means of subsistence. If a woman is lazy then her husband grumbles, and if he has had a tiring day himself he quarrels, and perhaps attempts to beat her. I say attempt, because there is no question of her submissively accepting punishment for unwifely conduct. She may even attack him first with any weapon that comes to hand. The husband in such a case is acknowledged to be in the right : it is a recognized part of the wife's duties to gather the smaller foods. One Aborigine to whom I was talking said he would not marry a station half-caste, because " him all right to sleep alonga, but him no good catch 'em sugar-bag and yam ".

On the other hand, whatever may be the argument of dieticians and vegetarians as to the necessity for meat, there is no doubt about the native attitude. Meat is regarded as an essential element of diet, and it is just as incumbent on the man to contribute this whenever possible, as it is for the women to go out for roots and tubers. It is not left to caprice, inclination, and the stimulation provided by sport to drive him forth ; he does not loll in the shade waiting to be fed by his devoted wife. He goes out day after day and generally returns with something if only an iguana, a frill lizard, a wild cat, or some larger fish obtained by spearing. If there is beef he may remain in the camp

and paint himself up for some corroboree. Still kangaroo never comes amiss, and he often hunts if only for a short time.

The possibility of ill-luck in the chase was admitted, but on the few occasions when a man was consistently unfortunate or lazy, his wife berated him, and if particularly exasperated attacked him with both tongue and tomahawk. In fact, effort on his part was as compulsory as it was for the woman. This is not dogmatism ; it is based on observation of the camp when there was little meat to be had or none at all. The Aborigines continually craved for meat, and any man was apt to declare " me hungry alonga bingy ", though he had had a good meal of yams and damper a few minutes before. The camp on such occasions became glum, lethargic, and unenthusiastic about dancing. " Me can't go alonga corroboree ; me weak along legs, me hungry alonga meat," was a typical reply to the inquiry as to whether there would be a dance that night. When I went with ten Aborigines to visit a tribe seventy miles away from Forrest River Mission, after two days the men refused to go farther without calling a halt and hunting for kangaroo, although the women were bringing in the usual contribution, and there was plenty of flour for dampers. Moreover, there is another sanction—that of *amour propre.* The good hunter is called *mula:rin* (D.), while the man who has caught nothing, though he receives his share from the others, feels ashamed. While I was with them on this expedition, a good hunter happened to be unsuccessful on one occasion. He came in disconsolately, sat in a morose silence which was not broken till his sister-in-law inquired quite unnecessarily and tactlessly—" You no bin catchem kangaroo ? " and received a glare in reply. He remained subdued for the rest of the night. The others had brought in something, one a kangaroo, another a small wallaby, another a frill lizard, and the fourth three small emus. They had been greeted with excitement and all were in a festive mood, except the unlucky hunter, although his craving for meat had been satisfied. The mistaken view

has been advanced that kangaroo is not very important to the natives since it is generally shared, while the woman's contribution is mostly retained for family use. Now quite apart from the evidence we have discussed, there is the point that the comparatively small quantities of meat make its division with others an established rule, in accordance with the principles of native life that relatives should never go in need of what one has oneself. These rules of distribution in their turn emphasize its social importance. Again, because of its value it constitutes one of the most frequent items of exchange between affinal relatives.

There are still one or two points to be discussed on the labour of the women, which have been mentioned as evidence of their servile position in the tribe. The first is that they generally have the loads to carry, whilst the men go off gaily with only a spear, and perhaps a tomahawk stuck in their hair-belts. But we have already seen that for hunting the man must be untrammelled, and that actually the loads consist only of chattels and belongings. The phrase, without closer analysis, suggests that the woman is a miniature pantechnicon, whereas in reality the household effects usually comprise blanket, *kulamon*, digging-stick, a frock, shirt, knife, twine, and perhaps a small axe, the whole weighing about thirty or forty pounds at most, and less than the enthusiastic walker carries in his rucksack. Freedom from such a burden would be pleasant, but it does not tax the strength unduly, and is less tiring probably than the load the European housewife often carries home from the market, with perhaps a child in her arms as well. Certainly it cannot be singled out as a stigma of the aboriginal woman's servility. In short, the only conclusion that can be deduced from this somewhat lengthy discussion of activities and attitudes, is that there is a very real co-operation between man and wife, and that it is an expected and recognized feature of marital life.

The Return to the Camp.

So far our attention has been fixed on the small groups of individuals wandering through the scrub. Seen from a hill, the spare, dark forms of the women pass slowly over the brown soil, stooping to dig or climbing a tree for honey. There is little or no contact with the men, each sex devoting its energies to its own particular task. In another direction, the thin, lithe figures of the men can be seen racing after a kangaroo ; one pauses to look intently over the plain, spear in hand, and then signals to his companion to approach. As the day wears on, the fierce heat abates, and the hills that were an aching red, darken to deep shadow. Men and women converge upon the camp which is the other pole to the axis of their activities. So far we have viewed it as a point of departure, deserted during the day, but now it is restless with moving figures, its stillness broken by the yapping of dogs, the screaming of children and the murmur of talk ; its fires have awakened, and the smoke twists lazily into the late afternoon air.

Already in the preceding section certain questions have suggested themselves : what does the woman do with the food she has gathered, what economic tasks must she still carry out in the camp, and finally what rights does she exercise over her fireplace. In describing the way in which the rest of the day is spent the treatment will of necessity be elliptical ; it will deal with one phase only—the economic —ignoring in the main those social relationships which assert themselves within the confines of the camp.

We have mentioned in passing that during the day there is little or nothing to demarcate one fireplace from another. Yet a woman who is perhaps weary, does not squat down by the nearest depression. She makes for the one where she slept the night before. Here her children sit or play, and here she is joined by her husband. The subsequent arrangement of families is not a promiscuous one. Each group owns its fireplace to this extent, though it has no inalienable right to it on the next visit to the

pool, yet temporarily possession is sacrosanct. Only a few people sit by it and touch the belongings scattered about.

The camp is not necessarily circular in shape. Much depends on locality. At Moola Bulla, a creek ran down by the side of the garden, goat yard, homestead, and out into the plain beyond, till it entered a small pool between the hills. In winter the banks of the creek offered protection against the winds, and were built up with branches. Most of the Aborigines camped in its bed, and any symmetry in the disposal of their fires was due rather to chance than to set intention. An individual is found among his close relatives who are members of the same horde. Strangers make their fireplaces on the side nearest their own horde country, a principle of local organization that has been noted by Professors Radcliffe-Brown and Elkin and others. Although a man avoids close contact with his wife's mother and his sister, it may happen that both are married to men of adjacent territories and therefore may only be twenty yards apart or less. At Moola Bulla the direction taken by the creek precluded a tendency towards an oval arrangement of sites. The grouping resolves itself first of all into that of hordes; when these are examined individually, they are found to comprise a man and his family separated from other horde members by his own blood relatives on his father's side. Generally we find that if two women have been foraging together, they either share the one fireplace as co-wives or are mother and unmarried daughter; or else they are neighbours and affinal relatives. Sometimes they may be married to men of the same horde, and youth, temperament, and common interests may forge a bond of companionship between them. They are *djalindja:ru* or "mates". In most camps two principles are in operation—those of kinship and local organization. Exceptions occur where a man working for a European has to live near a windmill, a goat yard, or perhaps within easy call. At Gordon Downs in the East Djaru territory, a shortage of firewood compelled some Waneiga natives to shift to a place opposite their

country; still they were at some little distance from the owners of the surrounding region. Nowadays, according to native statements, there is a greater intermixture of hordes than formerly; but even then relatives frequently paid visits, and had the right to hunt and camp while in the horde-country.

The question arises how far the camp can be considered a permanent unit in regard to its personnel and the territory it occupies. Actually the main factors controlling the duration of time spent in one particular spot are those of water and food supply. Towards the end of the winter in September, the billabongs begin to dry up and frequent movements are necessary. This also entails the splitting up of a large gathering into smaller units. At the Bedford Camp, the Aborigines only stayed by one pool for two weeks and then had to shift to another a mile away. In the summer when the rivers are in flood, an almost unlimited supply of fish, an abundance of game, roots, and berries may permit a large inter-tribal meeting of one hundred and fifty or more to camp for two or three months in the one place. The size of the camp then depends on the food available and the season of the year. Initiation ceremonies lead to a concentration in one area of the members of a horde and only a few old people are scattered about the territory. The camp may vary from three or four up to two hundred individuals. Around the homestead a number of hordes may be living together, but in the summer these separate to attend ceremonies in their own countries perhaps sixty miles away. Close relatives are still together; the alignment of their camps is almost as fixed as the relation between the stars of a constellation, except that the human constellation pursues a more erratic course over the earth.

A comparison of the word for camp—*da:m*, with those for horde-country—*noəra:m da:m*, big camp, and spirit centre—*wanyegoara da:m* (little camp), can be taken up at this point. The repetition of *da:m* would seem to indicate a similar attitude adopted towards all three localities. They are places where a native makes his fire, sleeps and

searches for food. This is borne out by the difficulty, frequently encountered, of discovering a man's or a woman's *noəra:m da:m*. It has well defined boundaries and is named, yet very often he replies with the names of half a dozen pools, i.e. places where he has camped and which offer a plentiful supply of game and food. They are vital points in his territory; in part they constitute its significance and value for him. Of these, one generally is more important than the others—his *wanyegoara da:m*, the pool where his father found him as a spirit child. This he regards as peculiarly his own though others may camp by it. He visits it frequently, mentions it with pride, and will be buried with his head pointing towards it. The tie is a spiritual rather than a purely economic one. Occasionally the spirit centre may lie outside his horde territory, in which case he is allowed to hunt there. It follows that a woman living with her husband in his country, adopts different attitudes towards it. She exercises rights over the temporary camp, which she refers to as *ŋagumba: da:m*, "my own camp"; by her fireside she cooks, distributes food, keeps her belongings with security, receives visits from her relatives and those of her husband. But the stretch of country over which she daily forages for food, she does not regard as her own.

Distribution and Consumption of Food

We can now return to watch the women who have just come into the camp. Bulagil swings down her swag, takes out the fish and wild-honey, a portion of which she gives to her mother. She is under no obligation to ask her husband's permission, nor is there any question of her placing the fruits of labour at his feet for his disposal. She talks for a while, commenting on another woman who saw a porcupine but did not catch it, and laughs at another who has carried honey in a *kulamon*, an unusual practice nowadays, when most possess a billycan for the purpose. Leaving her, she walks down to the pool for

water, and on her return finds the other women standing up to watch a man approaching who has caught some sort of kangaroo. They speculate whether it is a male or a female, until he signals that it is a female plain-kangaroo by clenching his fist, bending his elbow, and then moving his arm straight out to one side. Besides this sign, there are others for male and female hill-kangaroo, iguana, turkey, native companion, emu, mussel, bream, barramundi, turtle, crocodile, and porcupine ; others for nothing, to bring water and firewood, to indicate male or female child, to inquire direction and to give an answer to this.

If aboriginal food is unappetizing to the European, at least it makes few demands on the culinary skill or time of the woman. Fruits, berries, nuts, and lily stalks are eaten raw ; fish, turtle, grubs, white-ant larvæ are laid on the coals ; an iguana is buried in hot sand for a little longer ; roots, bulbs, tubers, and seeds are roasted. Damper made from grass or lily seeds is more complicated, but it always looked and tasted stodgy to me. Kangaroo must cook for three or four hours ; a man as a rule sees to its preparation. He singes it, breaks the legs at the joints, cuts off the tail, and removes the internal organs. He places it on hot stones in a pit, and when it is ready, carves and distributes the portions. Sometimes he gives the head and front legs to his son, the back to his brother-in-law, the hind-legs to his sister's son, and keeps the liver, heart, and underpart of the animal for himself and his wife. If there is an iguana, he may reserve the back and the main part of it for himself and give the tail to a brother-in-law. A man who has caught a bird shares it with his wife.

The woman, however, has prepared and provided the bulk of the meal. What is her share in it ? It would be pointless and a waste of time to summon forth again the ghost of primitive communism, merely for the pleasure of banishing it once more from anthropological theory, for there are few fieldworkers who seriously attribute to it a flesh and blood reality. More relevant than these ancient issues of individualism versus primitive communism, are

the differences in the mode of distribution and consumption of the various food supplies.

As we have already seen the husband must from time to time give kangaroo to his wife's parents and brothers; besides this he always distributes a little among his blood relatives. Most of what the woman has obtained is consumed by herself, husband, and children; if she has a little extra she takes some to her mother, sister, mother's mother, father, in fact to any close relative. She on another occasion receives similar offerings from them, and also meat from her male relatives, which she shares with her husband and children. These gifts are not compulsory as are her husband's to her people. They are dictated by tribal sentiment and her own affection for these individuals; by a kinship system which finds concrete expression not only in attitudes and linguistic usage, but also in the exchange of the limited food resources and the material and ritual objects which are found in the community. Kinship as seen in Australia is practical altruism or enlightened self-interest.

Up to puberty children are dependent on their parents. After this the boy and girl make their contributions, the brother providing meat for his sister, whilst she reciprocates with a portion of whatever she finds. If she later becomes a widow he, his mother's brother, and other male relatives keep her supplied with meat once the mourning taboos are relaxed. When she is old, tribal usage and sentiment demand that she be supported by her children, or failing them her nearest relatives. But she eats little and no great drain is placed on the resources in this region. During her marriage, however, the gifts between brother and sister become more irregular, and it is the new group constituted by herself, her husband, and her children that consume most of what she obtains, together with a percentage of the game speared by her husband. In this, the new family is almost an independent economic unit. But in distributing food to others, gifts are not made by the family as such, but by the woman to her relatives, and by the husband to his own and to hers. Emphasis is always placed on the obligation

to share what one can with kinsfolk. Greed is despised, whilst generosity is admired and commended. One old man received an unlooked-for gift of kangaroo from his son-in-law. He was openly pleased and said jokingly, "I can't call you *lambera* (d.h.); me got to call you *ŋa:buŋ* (son)." In short it was a gift dictated by affection rather than by compulsion to fulfil obligations to affinal relatives. Many myths illustrate the fate that befalls the man who is greedy; that of Flying Fox and Eagle Hawk described previously being a case in point; others describe the care and protection lavished on the child by its mother or on a boy by his elder brother.

Little of the food is wasted, intestines and scraps being eagerly snapped up by the dogs in the camp. The bones, head, and tail of the kangaroo are pounded up with some of the flesh and eaten. The women bring in just sufficient for the midday and evening meals: storing, if it can be called such, is limited to the occasion of an inter-tribal or horde meeting, when the women of the boy's horde gather the wild-honey, store it in a *kulamon*, and later hand it over to his initiators. Similarly at the deferred mourning ceremonies, wild-honey is given to those who have brought back the bones of the dead to his relatives. Kangaroo is also exchanged among the various hordes, generally through the medium of those men who stand in closer relationship, be it blood or affinal. In considering the amount eaten by the woman, it must be remembered that although she only takes about one third herself, she has nevertheless partially satisfied her hunger during the day. There may also be the same delicate assumption as in our own society that a woman's appetite is smaller than that of a man. The men, if they are far from the camp, often cook and eat a little of the game they have caught, and then bring the rest home. An absence of pots and pans simplifies domestic arrangements, and once the meal is finished, the woman is free to talk or to wander up to the corroboree ground. The woman then fetches firewood and water, and sees to all that pertains to the hearth; but if this is to

be considered humiliating drudgery, it is a fate that she shares with many a European woman.

A word may be added here on health of the women, since this might be taken as an index of the heaviness of their work. They were no thinner than the men, did not sicken more frequently, and were capable even when old of going out to search for food, and covering the long distances that a move from camp to camp sometimes entailed. More positively we can say that their way of life would seem to contribute to their health, endow them with a store of vitality and physical fitness which enable them to grapple with the exacting conditions of environment and climate.

Rôle of Women in Economics

This chapter has concerned itself with developing, deepening, and giving content to the impressions of the country, camp, and activities of the women received in the prologue. The facts given become obvious during the first few weeks of fieldwork. Of the social, religious, and local ties which have moulded the woman as she has appeared to us in this section, little has been said, since they are less tangible, less immediately apparent, and demand more interpretation. Some of these can be best studied in relationship to childhood, puberty, and adolescence; and hence establishing on a firm foundation the binding character and validity that they have for the adult woman.

But sufficient has emerged from our survey to enable us to generalize on the economic position of women, though I have not yet touched upon the kinship exchanges and also those which resemble the *Merbok*, described by Dr. Stanner on the Daly River. There is a division of labour between the sexes—one which is dictated by the food resources available, the methods of exploiting them and physiological capacities. Her work cannot be characterized as drudgery. After the detailed examination that has been made, we are not justified in saying even from the viewpoint of European standards, that to her lot fall the more onerous

tasks. The division of labour is not rooted in a sociological status. Equally important is her own attitude, which is never one of chronic resentment, weariness or boredom. Foraging by its very nature in this region presents a certain amount of variety in the type of country traversed each day, in the foods that ripen from season to season, in the excitement of finding smaller game and reptiles, and in the pleasure of the company of others of her sex. There is co-operation between man and wife in that meat is regarded as an essential part of diet, and it is the man's task to supply this. Co-operation is expected, and both will support their claims if necessary by force.

Having established this, we can say now without falling into paradox or vitiating the validity of these conclusions, that in so far as the woman brings in food every day, in so far as her labour is usually productive, as compared with the uncertainty attendant on the hunting of the man, the family is primarily dependent on her efforts. This state of affairs can now be approached positively as the fulfilment by the woman of an important rôle in economics, and not as the imposition of the heavier work on the weaker sex. Moreover this rôle is a highly individualized one, since she relies on her own capacities and skill. Her knowledge acquired during childhood and puberty, is capital on which she can always draw successfully even in times of drought. It places a premium on her as a food-gatherer, and makes her eligible as a marital partner, no doubt affording some compensation to the man for the lack of choice which a somewhat rigid kinship system involves. If she deserts her husband, he has lost not merely a sexual partner, which he could soon rectify, but also one who will attend to his hearth. Her economic skill is not only a weapon for subsistence, but also a means of enforcing good treatment and justice. How far her initiative and individuality are developed in other respects and how far her influence in other spheres of life can be attributed to her indispensability as an economic partner, will emerge during the course of this book.

CHAPTER II

THE SOCIAL AND SPIRITUAL BACKGROUND OF THE ABORIGINAL CHILD

The last chapter has built up some picture of the conditions under which life must be lived, of the daily duties that a woman must carry out. We have described the camp and peopled it, for it is in this context that the child is subjected to those factors which enable her to play her part later in the community as an active social personality. By this phrase I mean that her rôle is not simply one of drudgery and reproduction; it is also an active participation in the events which affect the tribe as a whole; an assumption of responsibilities and assertion of rights in spheres other than the economic, an affiliation with certain groups, and some conformity to the norms and patterns of behaviour of those around her.

In tracing the childhood of the average woman, it is not a matter of listing the *rites de passage* associated with birth, maturation, puberty, marriage and death, in which she is alternately ejected from and received back into the fold; nor of capitalizing the events which seem to provide the one touch of interest in a life devoted apparently to the provision of food, the rearing of children, and the ministration to the wants of her family. The dramatic significance of such ceremonies is not divorced from the realities of daily routine, but represents an emphasis on these when they are either threatened by external, social or supernatural dangers, or else become particularly relevant to the individual or the community in certain situations. Nevertheless it would be wrong to estimate the importance of a man or a woman in terms of the ceremonies of which they happened to be the central figures, or to expect to find in these a crystallization of all social values. There are enduring and fundamental factors which may not

receive the same spectacular expression. Values may be implicit, and may only emerge when a number of ceremonies have been studied in conjunction with ordinary activities in the camp.

To illustrate. The importance of women in daily life is already evident from the material presented so far. Yet there is no ceremony in which she proudly produces her first yam or grub. But as we shall see later, her co-operation in economics is a necessity, and enables her on the basis of this to demand rights in marriage. Further, marriage becomes a privilege for the man, which he only acquires after he has passed through certain stages of initiation. Ostensibly during this period, contact with women is taboo and a danger; implicitly there is, however, a reference to marriage as a right to be obtained only after certain conditions have been fulfilled. Less spectacular, but constituting a constant drain on a man's resources throughout his lifetime, is the passage of gifts from him to his wife's people—a definite recognition of the value of the woman as his sexual and economic partner. Hence we shall deal primarily with the assertion of rights and the carrying out of duties and the sanctions behind them. At certain periods, new responsibilities emerge which may be acknowledged by ceremony. As such it represents a summation of certain values; it is possibly an index to the attitudes adopted towards them, and a clue to others that may be overlooked by the fieldworker in the daily activities in the camp. It is from this point of view that rites and ceremonies must be approached, rather than in an attempt to establish *a priori* a correlation between their spectacular character and the corresponding importance of the individuals concerned in society.

Moreover, we have already shown that sympathy on the grounds of the apparent monotony of the woman's pursuits is gratuitous and misplaced. There is drama in the relationships between husband and wife, parents and children, in so far as an element of emotional tension is likely to enter into any of these. It is important for the anthropologist

and will have its place in any account of aboriginal life. A difficulty lies in the presentation of such dramatic facts, with journalistic sensationalism to be avoided on the one hand, and mere pedestrianism on the other. The task is to recreate native existence in its mundane and dramatic aspects, and if necessary to employ all the artifices of style and language to do so. The anthropologist needs the eye of a novelist for a selection of incident which will illuminate the characteristics, temperament, and motives of a people, the general context of situation, and the underlying relationships which must be made explicit. A James Joycean discursiveness and accumulation of endless details from endless notebooks is just as much to be avoided here as in the novel, in so far as they do not contribute to the understanding of social processes and personal relationships, obscure essentials, and clog the development of a theme. This, however, raises the problem of drawing conclusions on the basis of one or two instances cited. But the difficulty can in a large measure be surmounted by a statement to the effect that the incident was only observed once or was typical of many.

Anthropology as a science must have its laws and abstractions : yet human beings in such moments of drama are apt to prove intractable to scientific manipulation, and the fieldworker is faced continually with the problem of the degree of emphasis to be laid on the crude ore of experience, and the generalizations which may be extracted from it, and which may not be necessarily representative of all its characteristics. For example, the subsection system may be expressed in terms of A, B, C, and D, which in a specific arrangement denote certain sequences of relationships and generation levels. But if this is a useful method of approach, it still does not cover all the facts, nor does it convey the reality of the system for the native. A balance must be struck between the significant detail of daily life, and the principles of the system as they emerge from the genealogy chart. If no relation can be established, then our abstractions exist *in vacuo* and lose their validity.

The Anthropologist must be Janus-faced: he must look with the eyes of the European—the alien—and grasp the main outlines of the system, seizing on recurring elements which may be said to constitute the principles or structure. But he must also look with the eyes of the natives, taking into account their categories of thought and experience. His final conclusions must be a synthesis of the two points of view: the presentation of the culture in terms of its historical background where possible, its own problems, institutions, and values on the one hand; and on the other the establishment of those aspects which occur in other human societies, and which arise out of the operation of the same or similar sociological laws.

An examination of the ceremonies and attitudes has its place here because they condition the development of the child, and give some hint of her future as an adult. We are concerned with how far a young girl enters into a common heritage with the boy of the same age; how far her education sets her apart as a member of her sex. The shortness of my stay with any one tribe in the Kimberleys precludes a purely biographical account but there is sufficient material to generalize. These experiences if amalgamated probably constitute the history of most children in the region, though allowance must be made for differences in temperament which would alter the intensity of some social relationships. Even so this account will have its obvious *lacunæ*, since children in the camps were few, with the exception of Moola Bulla, the Government native station, where there were about 40 attending the school. During the day parents, who were for the most part engaged in tasks about the homestead, saw little of their progeny. However, I was able to expand my material and verify my preliminary conclusions from September to March when big assemblies of natives took place in the bush for initiation ceremonies. Having a limited time at my disposal, it was not possible for me to make the detailed linguistic study which would have yielded valuable data similar to that collected by Dr. Firth on the kinship speech of children

in Tikopia.[1] Consequently I am not in a position to comment on any " time lag in the application of terms to specific individuals ". The small child whom I shall take as my central figure in the following narrative was about two years old, and could half pronounce the word for mother. But as other relatives were continually picking her up and repeating kinship terms to her, it would seem that after she had acquired those for use within the immediate family, she does not learn the others in any particular order.

The aboriginal child is born into a milieu of kinship: she is the object of attention by her parents, her brothers and sisters: she is from the first brought into contact with people who stand in a kinship relation to her, and whose conduct is largely dictated by this. This is no arbitrary formulation on the basis of genealogies, but can be observed in any camp. Hence a study of childhood is in the main a study of kinship in action with the child as the focal point. The factors of age, sex and locality, if they are operative in determining the place she will occupy in future, are nevertheless beyond the range of her awareness at this stage. Any sphere of aboriginal life is likely to prove an open sesame to kinship. A discussion of the position of women in economics impinged on the marital relationship, and the distribution and consumption of food were found to occur for the most part within the family circle. This chapter, whilst it raises the problems of these ties once again, will do so obliquely, since we are concerned primarily with their significance for the growing child.

Spirit-children Beliefs.

Before plunging into an account of the less spectacular aspects, it is necessary to draw attention to a set of beliefs which postulate an existence as a spirit-child prior to birth, and which bear very directly on the meaning attributed to paternity and maternity by the natives of this region. These spirit-children, *djinganara:ny*, are not ancestors, as is

[1] R. Firth, *We, the Tikopia*, pp. 272–5.

thought among the Arunta, but were placed in the pools by *Kaleru*, the rainbow serpent in the *ŋaruŋgani* or Time Long Past, before there were any natives. Often they are temporarily incarnated in animals, birds, fish, reptiles, but they also wander over the country, play in the pools, and live on a green weed called *ginda:l*. Descriptions vary; some say the *djinganara:ny* are like little children about the size of a walnut; others, that they resemble small red frogs. Conception occurs when one of these enters a woman. Its presence in the food given her by her husband makes her vomit, and later he dreams of it or else of some animal which he associates with it. It enters his wife by the foot and she becomes pregnant. The food which made her ill becomes the *djɛriŋ*, conception totem of her child. Scars, moles or dimples are the wounds where some animal or fish was speared by the man.[1]

Now these beliefs may suggest parallels with the stories of a stork occasionally told to children in our own culture. But they do not spring from any prurience or shame on the subject of sex, which natives were willing to discuss with freedom. They arise out of an ignorance of physical paternity. The husband of the woman is the social father of the child and as a rule its spiritual *genitor*, for it sometimes happens that the woman finds the *djɛriŋ* herself or that it is given to her by another man. The latter, however, will not dream of the spirit-child, nor have access to the woman sexually, nor exercise any rights over the child, who will take the country and the totems of the mother's husband.[2] There were also instances where although the husband himself, had found the *djɛriŋ*, he did not afterwards dream of the child. But his wife would then assert that

[1] In East and South Kimberley (but not at Forrest River), *djinganara:ny* were sometimes associated with material objects and even with dances. A woman might become ill on handling a dilly-bag, or when a corroboree was being performed, or when her husband was fashioning a *ʧuruŋa*. This then became the totem of the child, since it was connected with conception.

[2] There were only three cases of this in my genealogies. For a similar belief, see the writer's report in *Oceania*, vi, 395. These facts should be noted by those who deny individual parenthood among the Aborigines.

she had done so, with the result that the belief in " spiritual conception " was practically logic-proof.

The relationship with the mother is both social and physical, though this point will be raised later, in view of its contradiction by Dr. Ashley-Montagu in *Coming into Being Among the Australian Aborigines*. In this book he has weighed and summed up the evidence for an ignorance of physical paternity, and my own researches confirm his conclusions in this matter. I investigated the problem as exhaustively as possible, and these natives in spite of over thirty years contact with the whites had still no idea of the true relation between sexual intercourse and conception. The Aborigines asserted that a young girl could not bear children ; after puberty conception only occurred when a man, generally her husband, found a spirit-child. Questioned on the function of sexual intercourse natives admitted that it prepared the way for the entry of the *djinganara:ny*. " Him make 'em road belonga picaninny : young girl no got 'em road." Most women believed that the semen remained in the vagina and had nothing to do with the child. " Him nothing," was the trenchant reply, when after circuitous inquiry I finally suggested the facts of the case. Several women thought that the semen, *ŋandö*, entered the uterus, and that the embryo floated in it " like a water-lily ", as one expressed it. Natives with a hint of ridicule for the illogicality of the white would declare impatiently—" All day me bin sleep alonga him. Me no more bin catch 'em picaninny." A Forrest River woman whose child was born some months after her husband's death, advanced this as evidence of the irrelevance of sexual intercourse, which all natives, apart from its preparatory function, regarded simply as an erotic pastime. My inquiries into the causes of procreation at Forrest River suggested only one other alternative to them—namely, that the woman might find the child ; and this they brushed aside with an emphatic denial : " lubra can't find 'em meself."

Another belief that the natives possess might be cited

as further evidence in this matter. A spirit of the dead may follow a woman about who is wearing string around her neck in mourning for the deceased. It may transfer its attentions to another woman who receives food from the mourner, and enter her to be born as her child. A woman who does not desire pregnancy will thus refuse to take tea, tobacco, etc., from such a woman. This actually occurred twice during my stay. The attitude towards half-castes should prove a crucial instance, but here again the system proved water-tight. It was asserted that the white man was the father, since the woman was living with him at the time, and that he must have found a spirit-child. The *djɛriŋ* was some European food; the *guniŋ*, dream totem, which a person inherits from the father, was open to doubt: "Might be him whitefellow tucker—tomato, pumpkin, lolly: him no bin tell me." Pressed about the reason for the resemblance of the child to its father in colouring and features, lubras would say: "Too much me bin sleep alonga him," and the same explanation was given in the case of full-bloods. By this, my informants meant that it was the constant proximity of the man that externally moulded the child within the womb.[1]

At Moola Bulla only two old men had some inkling of the facts but their version was not held by the generality of natives. They had evolved a compromise along the following lines. *Kaleru* made the *djinganara:ny* from his semen in the Time Long Past, and then placed them in the pools. Both denied, however, that the semen of a living man had anything to do with conception.

These two men were exceptions. After eighteen months contact with over 500 natives, my conclusions were that they had no empirical knowledge of the facts of procreation. This means that a child's relationship with her father is a

[1] Spencer in *N.T.N.T.A.*, pp. 25–6, mentions that the natives gave as explanation for half-castes: "too much me bin eat 'em white man's flour"; and he comments that the chief difference in contact with the white men was not the fact that they had intercourse with (them) instead of blacks, but that they ate white flour and that this naturally affected the colour of their offspring.

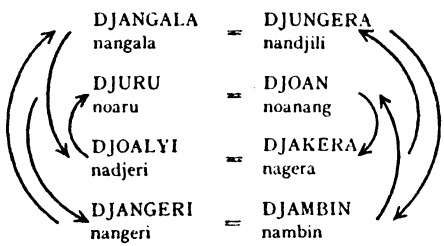
derivative one; he is the husband of her mother; he has most probably found her as a spirit-child; he rears and protects her; arranges her marriage and bestows on her rights to his horde country and his dream totem. The absence of an explicit recognition of the physical tie does not interfere with the establishment of a strong bond of affection between them.

Apart from their bearing on the mother- and father-child relationship, these beliefs have another context in totemism, which will be dealt with later in discussing the part of women in religion. Here they are significant for the attitudes they engender towards the child even before it is born. Her background is a spiritual one, for she was a *djinganara:ny* created by *Kaleru*; she was a denizen of the Time Long Past and has now become a human being in the present. The pool in which she was found is one by which her parents have often camped, and which she will now regard as peculiarly her own—her *wanyegoara da:m*. *Ngaruŋgani* provides a sanction for custom and belief; its reality, confirmed by the finding of the *djinganara:ny*, is brought within reach of the individual consciousness or awareness. The story of her finding, the possession of a *djeriŋ* and a specific pool forge a personal link between her and the Time Long Past: a link that is more immediate than that among the Arunta, for the child is not the reincarnation of individuals stretching back in a long line to the *Alchera*. In the Kimberleys she was a *djinganara:ny*, who had been created long ago by one of the totemic ancestors. However, once she has entered a woman she becomes a human being, is called *dja:rgil*, most probably embryo, and after birth is referred to as *guna:l* or infant.

Subsections.

There remains one further point to elucidate—the significance and functioning of the subsection system—since it enters largely into any discussion of kinship in this region. Professor Radcliffe-Brown standardized the term

" subsections " for the eight subdivisions of a tribe, which were formerly referred to as " marriage classes " by most of the earlier writers.[1] Everyone in the East and South Kimberley tribes bears a sub-section name which is indirectly determined through that of the mother, that of the father being irrelevant. If one knows the sub-section of a person, one can automatically deduce that of the mother, mother's brother, mother's mother, and her brother.
To illustrate :



Masculine forms are written in capitals, and feminine in small type ; the arrows indicate the mother-child relationship, and the sign (=) is marriage into the correct subsection. If we take a djambin man, then his mother is nandjili, and his mother's mother, nagera. Noanang is his sister's child. A similar sequence could be worked out for djangeri on the other side. Marriage is with a tribal second cousin, either mother's mother's brother's daughter's daughter, or father's father's sister's son's daughter. Therefore for djambin his wife will be nangeri, and his father djangala. Failing a wife in this subsection, he may choose one in an alternate subsection. In the Lunga this would be nagera, tribal mother's mother, tribal mother's mother's brother's son's daughter, or father's father's sister's daughter's daughter.

[1] Professor Elkin informs me that the terms " section " and " subsection " were first employed by R. H. Mathews for the division of the tribe into four and eight groups respectively ; but Professor Radcliffe-Brown standardized their use in Australian Anthropology, *vide S.O.A.T.*, pp. 6–8.

Three points must be made here. First of all, any native when asked whom he may marry does not answer in so many words, mother's mother's brother's daughter's daughter. He either says: "The woman I call *ŋulŋna,*" wife, or he gives the name of her subsection. The average Englishman as a rule has no doubt about the identity of his second cousin, but he would be considerably mystified if he were asked to name his m.m.b.d.d. Similarly the Aborigine waxed impatient, was perplexed, probably thought I was being tiresomely pedantic, and cut short the train of reasoning with a: "I got to call all about nangeri, *ŋulŋna.* Him proper *ŋulŋna* belonga me." Hence it was only by collecting a sufficient number of genealogies together with the subsections of the individuals included in them, that I was able to deduce the fact that a man who marries a woman of a certain subsection is marrying some type of second cousin.

There is a certain amount of identity between the subsection names and kinship terms. For classificatory relatives ego uses eight for the males and eight for the females. Ego is djambin [1]:

Subsection	*Kinship Term*	*Subsection*	*Kinship Term*
nangala	*goa:ŋil* f.sis or m.b.w.	djangala	*ŋa:buŋ* father or son.
nambin	*na:djil* sister	djambin	*na:djiŋ* brother
nagera	*kanga:l* m.m. or m.m.b.s.d. or f.f.sis.d.d.	djakera	*kangainy* m.m.b. or m.m.b.s.s. or f.f.sis.d.s.
nadjeri	*damanyil* m.b.d. or f.sis.d. or m.f.sis.	djoalyi	*damandji* m.b.s. or f.sis.s. or m.f.

[1] The abbreviations used here are m. for mother; w. for wife; b. for brother; sis. for sister; s. for son; d. for daughter; h. for husband; and f. for father.

Subsection	*Kinship Term*	*Subsection*	*Kinship Term*
nangeri	*ŋulyna* wife or b.w. or m.m.b.d.d. or f.f.sis.s.d.	djangeri	*ŋu:mbana* w.b. or sis.h. or m.m.b.d.s. or f.f.sis.s.s.
noaru	*damberu* w.m. or sis.s.w.	djuru	*damberu* w.m.b. or sis.s.w.b.
noanang	*galyil* sis.d.	djoan	*galyi* sis.s.
nandjili	*gura:l* mother or s.w.	djungera	*ŋa:rgandji* m.b.

It follows that once the subsection of another man or woman is known, the relationship can be established, irrespective of whether he or she belongs to the tribe or not. But since ego uses not sixteen but twenty-three terms for blood and affinal relatives, it happens that there are some individuals within the subsections who are singled out for especial reference. If marriages have been regular, then djambin calls all other djambin, *na:djiŋ* or brother; but own father's father who also belongs to this subsection is addressed as *kila:gi*. Similarly own father's mother instead of being wife, is *noədjil*. Own wife's mother's mother is distinguished from female cross-cousin by the term *bunga:li*; own wife's mother's father is *ŋu:mara* instead of *kangainy*, and own wife's father is *lambera* instead of *galyi*. Djambin also has separate terms for his own younger and elder brothers. Irregular marriages and local organization may lead to dissimilar kinship terms being applied to people with the same subsection name.

In view of these distinctions, it is obvious that the native does not think of the subsection as a group of individuals who function as such in his life. To adopt the contrary view is to commit the mistake of earlier writers who considered that classificatory terms were applied to groups of individuals, who shared the same functions and towards whom an identical attitude was adopted. Here, as in most

parts of the world, the Aborigine makes a very clear distinction between near and distant relatives. All do not possess the same rights and fulfil the same duties; nor are they objects of the same sentiments. Likewise, within the subsection, the native makes distinctions between relatives. The subsection names refer to specific individuals who behave in a certain way, have certain privileges and obligations, belong to different territories, possess certain totems. Viewed from the aspect of social organization, they are classificatory terms with a wider reference than the ordinary kinship usages. In other words, it is better not to think of these tribes as being divided into eight groups. The society can be viewed as a number of individuals who bear subsection names, which are determined indirectly through the mother. A correlation exists between these names and kinship terms, and they may often be used as an alternative mode of address.[1]

Infancy.

With these details in mind we can turn to Bedford where a woman, Burul, with a two-year-old child, Dimal, was amongst those women whom we watched leaving the camp in the early morning. Dimal was generally referred to by her subsection name of Nambin, as was also her half-sister, Buma, aged about nine. The mother belonged therefore to the nandjili subsection, and her father to the djangala. Dimal like all others had a *djɛriŋ*, in this case, dilly-bag, and was found at Mindjari, a water-hole in her father's horde country of Bidiban, lying about 40 miles to the north-west of the camp in the Lunga territory. Her subsection totem was opossum, and from her father she had inherited his *guniŋ*, dream totems, which were *tʃimili* (baobab tree) and *ŋali* (paper-bark). Buma, since she had another father, possessed a different horde country and a different *guniŋ*, but like Dimal had the right to live in her mother's horde country, her *kamərə*.

[1] Those who desire a fuller exposition of the subsection system in this region are referred to the writer's article in *Oceania*, vii, p. 436 et seq.

Dimal's name was that of another woman of the same tribe and subsection whom she had never seen, but whom she would regard henceforth as her *naragu* or namesake (the same term being used also for the subsection totem). The elder woman on hearing that the small child had been named after her, had sent a frock and for the rest of their lives, the two would continue to exchange gifts and visit one another when possible. By this mechanism, certain names are retained within the subsections, and further a relationship is established between two individuals, who would otherwise be merely tribal sisters. If the one died, then the name would become taboo, and another would be bestowed. Not all people have *naragu*, some being called after their conception totem, the pool where they were found, their mother's mother, or some incident associated with infancy.

Dimal then, from the moment of her birth was equipped with a *noəra:m da:m*, a *wanyegoara da:m*, four totems, a namesake, and a subsection; i.e. her relationships were already defined in regard to certain strips of territory, the totemic system, and to individuals, since the subsections stand in a kinship relation to one another. These factors all conditioned the attitude of the community towards her, but at this stage the most relevant was that of kinship and her own particular subsection.

Dimal rarely left her mother's side, who, in spite of this encumbrance, made her daily contribution of food for the household. She carried Dimal on her shoulders, handing her over to the charge of Buma when she paused to dig for roots or to cut wild-honey. Reaching a pool, she placed Dimal in the shade in a *kulamon*, or on a blanket, while she fished. Buma pottered about humming a corroboree chant or swimming on the other side of the pool. The morning often passed in this fashion, until some of the other women arrived, hot and glad to seek the shadows beneath the cliff-face. They used to sit and gossip quietly till the baby woke and claimed the attention of her mother. She was fed, there being no regular hours for this; nor would she

be weaned until she was three or four years old, much depending on whether another child was born in the interval. Dimal was also given tea from a pannikan, and might often be seen chewing or rather sucking a lump of fat bestowed on her by an indulgent parent. She slept, fed, played, and was bathed at odd times, constantly picked up and nursed in defiance of all clinical rules, and yet thrived. And this was the fate of most children.

Dimal was fat and sagged awkwardly when sitting. She was a favourite with all, particularly her tribal mother's mother, nagera, a middle-aged woman, square-featured, beady-eyed, and with an unusually raucous voice for a native. In spite of this unprepossessing appearance, the child never evinced any reluctance to go to her arms. At midday, the air was heavy with dust and heat, and either the mother or nagera would pour a little water from time to time on Dimal's head to cool it, and brush the flies out of her eyes. Passers-by might stop to speak to her, no matter what the relationship (excepting tribal son-in-law, whom she must avoid even at this age). However, her contacts within the family were more constant, and of these that with the mother was the most important, for during the period of lactation, she was rarely absent from her side for more than three or four hours at a stretch.

In common with facts noted in other primitive communities, Dimal, as well as other small children, had learnt the word for mother first. The latter was never tired of repeating, "*gura:l*," though the child as a rule got no further than a "*gura*", which was apt to end in a gurgle. Relatives would be pointed out to her continuously: "There's your *ŋa:rgandji* (mother's brother), your *na:djiŋ* (brother), or your *ŋu:mbana* (husband), the last term generally provoking a laugh because of the incongruity of age. Or these people themselves would pick up the child and say: "You know me, djungera, *ŋa:rgandji* belonga you," and so on.

With no exact means of determining the age of children in the camp, it was impossible to say what terms were learnt

after those for father, mother, and perhaps brother and sister. Children see these and other individuals daily, and are taken to visit them at their fire-places. One can only assert that by the time they have reached five or six, they can distinguish between own father, mother, brother, and classificatory relatives. Further, since the subsection names are often repeated in conjunction with kinship words, the two become almost synonymous. The taboo between young brothers and sisters is not stringent, and they play together till the boy is circumcized, and possibly later. The tribal son-in-law relationship, however, takes effect from the first, and I, who had been adopted into one subsection (nadjeri), was upbraided for addressing a diminutive son-in-law by his personal name.

Individuals can be divided roughly into three groups for the small child : the first containing her parents, brothers, and sisters ; the second—various blood relatives with a proprietary interest and the right to visit the camp ; and the more distant relatives attracted by the presence of a child. Thirdly, there are the few who must avoid physical contact with her, in this instance the male members of the djuru subsection.

So the day passed for the child, some of it being spent on her mother's shoulders, as she wandered about searching for food. From this somewhat elevated position, Dimal had a bird's-eye view of the river-beds and scrub in which she would later play and ransack for roots and tubers. When sufficient had been found, the two would return to the shade of the camp ; in the evening they would go to the dancing ground, there to watch the jaggedly-lit figures of the dancers, hear the stamping of feet, the rise and fall of the voices chanting and the rapid beating of sticks. At this early age, then, Dimal was introduced to the rhythm that daily life has for the adult—the companionship of only a few people during the day : the movement, talk, laughter, and scattered groups in the camp in the late afternoon : and with darkness, the close proximity of others massed together at the dancing-ground.

There is little need to emphasize the difference between this and the relatively cloistered existence of the European child, who with the exception of a daily-outing in a pram, passes most of her time within the four walls of the house or garden. She is swaddled in clothes, bathed, fed, and put to bed at regular hours, and sees only her family and a few reluctant or doting visitors. This regimentation of habits does not necessarily point to a greater regard for her welfare. The aboriginal woman probably spends more time with her child, but the difference in up-bringing means that her child is brought into contact with the environment and activities of the adult from the first; hence her education in its practical aspects—the assimilation of facts of her surroundings, and the reactions to forces with which she must later grapple, begins sooner. Since there are no walls in the camp beyond the barrier of tufted grass on the outskirts, the native child is with people all day, and this no doubt conditions her attitude to strangers and to the community at an earlier age. Children from our point of view are spoilt; they are constantly the centre of attention, are petted and rarely punished. Yet they are good-tempered, easily amused, and rarely cry or winge. In spite of the close dependence on the mother during childhood, they are later independent and self-reliant. This may be due to the fact that they move about in the environment of the adult, are familiar with it, absorb its lore and gain self-confidence from the first.

These factors apply to the boy and girl alike. There was never, as far as I could discover, any discrimination on the grounds of sex, and parents when questioned on their preference would answer according to the children they possessed. If a boy, then in some such phrase as: "Me like 'em boy, one day he catch plenty kangaroo"; or if a girl, then "Me want 'em that one girl; might be she find 'em plenty wild-honey alonga me". The emphasis on the economic aspect is illuminating in that it demarcates clearly between the functions of man and woman, and shows that the parents look forward to the time when they will have a

helpmate. This may be one of the reasons why they desire children, but it is possible to overstress what is a formula or a conventional attitude; firstly, because women often resort to abortion, and secondly, because it gives the impression of deliberate exploitation removed from the sphere of sentiment. Granted an element of prospective pleasure in rearing a child, the foregoing account has indicated indubitably that there is much to content them in the immediate present. Nor is there ever any question of the children being driven forth to support their parents, or of bearing heavy burdens before puberty.

It seems credible that during lactation a very strong tie is established between mother and child. Affection is clearly present and is manifest later in the fact that a girl turns readily to her mother for advice, help, protection, and sympathy, frequently visits her after marriage and makes presents of food and clothes from time to time. One woman at Forrest River carried her mother, who was blind and old, part of the way on a journey to her horde country. Even the presence of a mother's sister in the camp as a second wife of the father does not seem to lead to a partial supplanting of the mother in the affections of her children. A boy of three or four years old was in this position at Moola Bulla. His mother's sister tended him in his mother's absence and called him son; yet there was no doubt as to whom he turned by preference. His mother could quieten him when her sister failed. A son, though he is separated from his mother during periods of initiation, cherishes a strong affection for her during his lifetime. He gives her food and cares for her in old age.

The Tie between Mother and Child.

The significance of the biological factor of maternity in culture has been continually and rightly stressed by Professor Malinowski in his earliest and latest works that have dealt with kinship. He has stated that "maternity is determined in anticipation by a whole cultural apparatus of rules and prescriptions, it is established by society as a

moral fact, and in all this the tie of kinship between mother and child is defined by tradition long before birth, and defined as an individual bond ".[1] Facts from North-West Australia confirm this. Unfortunately, however, he appears to accept Dr. Ashley-Montagu's contention that there is no recognition of physical maternity in Australian tribes.[2] With this generalization my own material conflicts on a number of points. Dr. Ashley-Montagu, mainly on the score of evidence drawn from the Arunta, proceeds to generalize for the whole of the continent : " In Australia the concepts of motherhood and fatherhood are viewed as of an essentially non-biological, exclusively *social* nature." [3] Or again, " We have seen . . . that everywhere in Australia . . . that the relationship which the mother bears to the child is regarded as being, from the physical standpoint, none at all." [4]

Now, granted that the natives have no knowledge of physiological generation, we still cannot infer from this alone that there is no recognition of a physical tie between mother and child. In support of his argument he claims that among the Arunta, for instance, there are certain factors which militate against the existence of an explicit physical bond. " Once the child is delivered the chief function of the woman through whose medium it has passed into the tribe, is to nurse it and to attend to its wants generally until the time comes, when at or shortly before puberty, the child departs from the family circle, and her parental duties are at an end." " The actual experience involved in giving birth to a child is so minimized, and the social implications of the result of the birth so magnified, that the former wilts away into the obscure background before the all-embracing consequences of the latter. It must be noted in this connection that childbirth among the Australians . . . is a comparatively light affair for the woman. . . . There is no period of confinement before the

[1] B. Malinowski, *Parenthood*, p. 125.
[2] Introduction to *C.B.A.A.*, by M. Ashley-Montgau, p. xxvi.
[3] M. Ashley-Montagu, *C.B.A.A.*, p. 307.
[4] Ibid., p. 313.

birth of the child, and there is no period of convalescence afterwards, so that the actual experience of birth is by no means the traumatically impressive experience that it is generally for the white woman. There is, therefore, no great affect normally associated with childbirth, nor is it in any way climactic, but it is cumulative, for it represents the culmination of a cycle of events all of which have been known and taken for granted for some months previous to the final event. . . . With the appearance of the child, there is an end to the whole matter." [1]

As the expectation of a certain "cycle of events" is also found in our own society, it cannot be accepted as a differentiating criterion here. Other statements made by this writer are not applicable to the whole of Australia, and probably not to the Arunta. In the Kimberley tribes, once a woman becomes aware that she is pregnant, she refrains from sexual intercourse with her husband, and abstains from certain foods. It is the native belief that the child is nourished by whatever the mother eats, and that, therefore, particular items of diet may injure it within the womb. What closer physical association could there be than this? The taboos set her apart from other women in the camp, and emphasize her condition. Though confinement and convalescence are absent, delivery, according to native statements, is not always easy, and there exist special rites and songs to facilitate birth. These are known only to the married women and are guarded with great secrecy from the men. A woman goes away from the camp for parturition: no men and no unmarried girls may be present: after delivery the woman stays away from her husband for five days, nor does he see the child until this period has elapsed.[2] The food taboos are kept until the child is a year old or even later. Such facts cannot be

[1] M. F. Ashley-Montagu, op. cit., pp. 72–3.

[2] I did not witness a birth during my stay, unfortunately arriving the day after one had occurred at Violet Valley camp. However, I was able to observe that the woman did remain apart from her husband for this period, and that she kept the taboos strictly. These rites will be dealt with more fully later in discussing the ceremonial life of the women.

characterized as " a lack of emphasis on childbirth " or as the " absence of any great affect ". The observance of taboos after childbirth, bound up with the conception that the activities of the mother influence the child, reaffirms the existence of a physical tie, rather than minimizes it. The woman also takes care of the umbilical cord until the child can walk ; a woman will say " Me mind 'em that one string belonga picaninny ; suppose me lose 'em, might be him get sickfellow ". It was difficult to discover whether it was regarded as a part of the child alone, or was recognized to be a relic of the former link with the mother, which she preserved as a means of continuing to protect the child through infancy and its attendant dangers. It is a probable interpretation.[1] But in any case, harm can strike at the child through her, for the food she consumes is still thought to affect it.

These facts demonstrate the existence of a recognized physical tie between mother and child : but no less important are the statements made by the natives themselves. The event of birth is not permitted " to wilt into an obscure background ", but serves as the basis for the distinction between own mother and mother's sister, even if the former has died in delivering the child. " That own mother belonga me ; me bin come out alonga bingy," will be said by an informant when asked for his mother's name. A similar reply will be made by a man to explain why he calls another person brother who has the same mother as himself but a different father. " We two fellow got 'em one mother ; two fellow bin come out alonga bingy." It is a phrase one constantly hears in the camp. In short, the emphasis was placed on the physical tie in a discussion of sentiment for, and relationship with, the mother.

Professor Elkin, who is able to speak with authority on Australian kinship and totemism, has said again and again

[1] Spencer, in *N.T.N.T.A.*, mentions that the Kakadu follow a similar practice. If the child sickens while the mother is wearing the string, it is said that she must have eaten taboo foods or washed in deep water, " so that the child's spirit has gone from it," p. 325.

that the natives of South and Central Australia believe that a person inherits his body, his flesh and blood from his mother.[1] He has further pointed out that there is nothing in the statements made by Spencer and Gillen that would contradict this view.[2]

Particularly significant in regard to this whole problem is the attitude of the mother towards her child. Dr. Ashley-Montagu speaks of the Arunta woman merely being the medium through which a spirit-child is transformed into a baby,[3] but this certainly does not represent the native point of view in North-West Australia, and I very much doubt whether it would apply also to the Arunta themselves. In the Kimberleys, women do not regard themselves as mere mechanisms for the transmission of spirit-children, nor do they desire, nor do they view marriage as a means of accomplishing it. Women had no general conception of doing their duty by the Time Long Past and the *djinganara:ny*, with an Ave at pregnancy, a Salve during maturation, and a Vale at puberty, as Ashley-Montagu would seem to imply when he speaks of parental duties coming to an end after this period.[4]

If a woman becomes pregnant and does not want a child, she attempts and as a rule encompasses its abortion; if she wants one, she submits to natural processes. Her attitude is as fiercely personal as that of the European mother; the physical tie is overtly stressed. Nor does she ever allow this to drop into obscurity. We have already mentioned the visits of a woman to her mother after marriage or *vice versa*; the constant economic exchanges between them, and the care in old age. In noting that procreation is not attributed

[1] A. P. Elkin, *S.A.T.*, pp. 120; 136; *vide* also *S.O.K.D.*, p. 327; *S.O.S.A.*, p. 58; and *The Australian Aborigines*, pp. 79–80. Miss McConnel notes that amongst the Wikmunkan it is said that a child "gets bone" from its mother. *Vide* W. A. T., *Oceania*, iii, p. 318. In one of my own earlier articles, I also suggested that the determination of the subsection through the mother might be correlated with the close physical tie between mother and child.

[2] A. P. Elkin, Review of "Coming Into Being among the Australian Aborigines," *Oceania*, viii, p. 378.

[3] M. Ashley-Montagu, op. cit., pp. 71–2.

[4] *Vide* citation from *C.B.A.A.*, quoted on p. 55 of this chapter.

to the physical association of two individuals, the tendency has been to ignore the intensely personal attitudes in the general situation. A woman observes taboos not for the altruistic and somewhat abstract reason that a *djinganara:ny* may enter the world, but because she wishes to deliver her own child safely.

One may well ask whether a woman in consequence of her part in reproduction, does not feel that she has a greater claim over the child than the man ; whether she does not resent his authority, particularly where another man has found the conception totem ? In short, what is her attitude towards her husband as the social parent of her child ? In this matter, I regret that I have no data beyond statements obtained in other contexts. I can only say that a woman accepted his status without apparent question, and though she might re-marry later, he was still regarded as the true father of her child. As a rule, he had found the *djinganara:ny* and had been living with her during pregnancy and lactation. His claims were recognized, but they were based on his relation to her. This, as I have already mentioned, is borne out by the determination of the child's subsection through the mother in the event of an irregular marriage.

This purely social relationship, however, does not mitigate the affection that exists between father and offspring. Certainly he sees less of her, owing to the division of labour between the sexes ; but if he is in the camp, he pets the child, carries her to visit other relatives, listens with pride to any comments about her, and upbraids his wife if she is temporarily negligent in the course of animated gossip with others. His position is reinforced by propinquity, and by the fact that it is from him that his child inherits horde country and dream totems. If paternity determines the affiliation with the major group of the horde, and *ipso facto* with the tribe, it cannot on that account be asserted bluntly either here or elsewhere that " a greater degree of meaning is given to the relationship between father and child, than that which should exist between a mother and child to which

she has given birth ".[1] The significance attributed to the tie with the mother and her kindred throughout the life of the individual will emerge during the following chapters. Suffice it to say that it refutes the sweeping assertions made by Dr. Ashley-Montagu on the question of the unimportance of the matrilineal principle in social and local organization.

To sum up the results of this chapter, which has had as its object the creation of the milieu of infancy, the revealing of those factors which might indicate the position a child will be expected to take later, and to contrast the attitude of the mother, *qua* woman, with that of the father. Evidence has shown that there is no discrimination against the female child on the grounds of sex ; that it is favoured and petted by the generality of the community ; and that a particularly strong tie is established with the mother during the period of lactation. The existence of the family as a distinct unit in the camp leads to the formation of strong bonds within it. Mother's brother, father's sister and brother, mother's sister, mother's mother, and other blood relatives are often visitors ; but it is difficult at this stage to differentiate their behaviour from that of more distant relatives, except for a greater degree of contact, the use of the phrase—" my own sister's daughter "—and so on, and an occasional gift of a frock. Yet the interest operating at this stage will become more clearly defined later in terms of continued association, economic exchanges, and possible interference in her activities as she assumes a more prominent rôle in the community.

Obviously the physical element in the relationship between mother and child can only be recognized by the adult at this stage. Spirit-children beliefs, if they ignore certain physiological processes, do not depersonalize the parental relationship. They can be regarded as providing an explanation of procreation rather than as defining the function of women in the aboriginal cosmogony. They do not minimize the effects of pregnancy, parturition, and lactation. They leave the physical tie intact. From

[1] Dr. Ashley-Montagu makes this statement in reference to the Arunta on p. 74 of *C.B.A.A.*

the native point of view, they explain conception, and equip the child with a totem, a water-hole generally in her father's territory (but not necessarily), and a link with the Time Long Past. They thus define her position in regard to the totemic system and local organization of the tribe. These facts, however, are of little significance to the infant; they remain latent for her, if not for her relatives. The main thing is that she is brought into contact with individuals who stand in a kinship relationship, and whose attitudes are largely determined by this, and also by the wide interest that the presence of a child in the camp excites. Finally, her surroundings are not those of seclusion within a household, but those of the adult women.

CHAPTER III

CHILDHOOD

The childhood of the average aboriginal woman is spent in an environment that from our point of view offers little variety ; yet it will come to impinge more and more on her life. We can visualize it as a wide circle over which she moves with increasing familiarity, as she learns to exploit its resources, and to realize the threat that it may hold to her means of sustinence. Her horizon is not serrated by bricks and chimneys : it extends far into the distance, broken here and there by the long curve of a sandstone ridge. She has seen whirlwinds—gyrating columns of red dust—rise like genii out of the motionless plain and swirl past in a scatter of leaves. In summer she has felt the winds that suddenly blow cold and bring the tang and smell of storms that have fallen to the east and north. She has watched the first rains streak a sullen sky, and has heard them drum into the parched soil. At midday she has crouched in the stunted shadow of small scrub, or has camped by the river under the white gums which stand cool and still beneath the shower of their own green leaves.

But what of the social forces which must inevitably mould her into an individual who conforms to the norms of behaviour and takes her part in the activities of the tribe ? They are less apparent during early childhood. Certainly in her journeys with her parents she meets people from other hordes, hears different languages spoken, becomes aware of the significance of the word *kaməli*, strangers or aliens, and of her own affinity with her countrymen or *do-a:ny*. She comes to believe in the rainbow serpent which inhabits the deep pools, and in the existence of spirits of the dead, *djua:ri*, and the beings who are to be feared in the darkness beyond the ring of fires. She gradually learns what forces lie behind the tangible and perceptible in her environment.

But it is with her parents that her days are spent; it is they who tend to her wants and exert the little discipline that is to be found in these tribes. In discussing the factors which are brought to bear on children, differences in their operation for a boy and a girl are significant; but it is equally essential to establish similarities in upbringing, if we are to avoid the notion that culture is divided piecemeal between the sexes. If it can be shown that both boy and girl are dependent on their parents until puberty, and that strong bonds of affection are created between them, something may be done to discount the emphasis that has been laid on the complete severance of the woman from her parents, her relatives, and her country at marriage; and to show why these ties continue to exist throughout the life of a woman as well as that of a man.

Kinship emerges as one of the controlling factors of childhood, and education in all its aspects is undertaken by specific relatives. Since the family still dominates the situation in this early period, we can begin our examination by indicating the character of the relationships between parents and their offspring, their economic responsibilities, and the extent of their authority.

A girl of four or five spends much of her time with her mother, since all the women must go out daily to gather food, and there is rarely anyone left in the camp in the morning with whom she might remain. Children walk part of the way before it becomes too hot; they are quite ready to run on ahead playing about in the undergrowth, and nibbling at any fruits that have been found. If an elder child is present, she sees that they do not go out of sight, and carries them from time to time. Buma did this frequently when she was with her mother and the little Dimal. There were two other children in the Bedford camp—a boy and a girl—both aged about four, belonging to the djungera subsection, and hence standing respectively in the relationship of a diminutive mother's brother and mother to Dimal. The boy was an obstreperous imp, who would cry to be picked up and who gained his point by the simple expedient

of sitting down and howling. He would be dragged along in this manner for a few yards until his mother put him on her shoulders, where he would remain for about half a mile. If another woman were with her, she would occasionally lend a hand and would at least wait for her to catch up. Under these circumstances the progress, which was in any case likely to be a leisurely one, was still further impeded. I was several times scolded for walking too quickly, although I had stopped to watch each time the women dug for roots. I had not realized that I was setting the pace between one yam and another, till a woman drew my attention to the fact that they were already tired, and that we must walk more slowly, not only for the sake of the children, but because they were all unaccustomed to travelling at that speed.

As I have already mentioned before, the days spent with the women lead to a growing familiarity with the details of their environment and a knowledge of the different types of food. More often than not, this is accomplished by watching rather than by formal instruction. Boys leave their mother for a time at circumcision, but under conditions of white contact this has been shortened to a few weeks; after this they will, as a rule, accompany her until they are less likely to be an encumbrance to the men. Moreover, there is always the chance of receiving titbits, sneaking a little wild-honey, or finding fruits and berries for themselves. Children at the age of six or seven know the names of many of the foods they consume daily, where to find them, and how to distinguish between tracks of various animals, birds and reptiles. In the hot weather, they would sometimes make small expeditions from the camp or the station, to gather a particular fruit called conkaberries, which they were not compelled to distribute among their elders, but shared amongst themselves. It is not until after puberty that the economic obligations of kinship come into operation. In the meantime, the children are still largely dependent on the efforts of their elders though they are free to supplement these with what food they can find or cadge from

others. The uncertainty of the supply is no doubt a strong incentive to the children to learn for themselves the whereabouts of food, and their daily excursions with the women provide the opportunity.[1]

The gradual education of children in the natural resources of their country should be taken into consideration by missionaries, who often separate them from their parents, and place them in a compound with little chance of getting to know the possibilities of food in their environment. How far this will act as a serious disadvantage after puberty, when children are normally expected to make their contribution, it is difficult to say; the problem may not arise if they are still fed and supported by the mission. On the cattle stations, the position is different since the children remain with their parents, and at least attend the yearly inter-tribal gatherings away from the homestead, where the daily search for food once more becomes a necessity. Even on the stations, women who are not employed will still go out, though the children may not always accompany them if there is likely to be someone in the camp.

There are more opportunities for a boy to become familiar with territories other than his own, since at circumcision he is very often taken on a visit to another tribe, and so passes through various horde countries. How detailed his knowledge is and of what value it is to him later, I did not ascertain. For a girl of the same age the occasions are more limited, unless her parents have attended inter-tribal meetings elsewhere. But both girl and boy would seem to develop a strong sentiment for their country at an early age, possibly because most of their time was spent within its confines; possibly because they overheard the adults discussing the abundance of game and deep water-holes in their own particular territories. At any rate, it was not unusual to hear a child of seven or nine declare proudly: " this own country belonga me."

[1] *Vide* B. Malinowski, *F.A.A.A.*, p. 256, for the importance of parents in the education of their children.

After the return to camp at midday or late afternoon, children are free to leave their mother and wander about. Close relatives still take a strong interest in their doings, and the child learns to address them by kinship terms at the age of four or five. But with the ability to walk, they are no longer dependent on their parents for the range of their casual contacts, and wander about at will into other camps, where they are petted, made much of, and more often than not, given a scrap of food. Behaviour only becomes formalized later; taboos are not stringently enforced[1] (apart from mother-in-law, son-in-law relationships); and economic rights and duties, the interests created by blood ties, have not yet asserted themselves to limit activities to a relatively small group of people. Later they will not be able to go to any fire-place, pick up objects lying about, and receive food. Nevertheless, the presence of children creates temporary and pleasant relationships between individuals who generally have little contact; as, for example, when a mother sets out in search of her absent offspring, and finding her in another camp stops for a moment to talk and hear of her escapades. Interest in children is particularly manifest at birth, when those women who are permitted to visit the mother will do so, arranging the shelter to protect her from the sun, fetching firewood and water, making much of the newly-born babe, and asking for details of the delivery. Children are generally treated with tolerance, amusement, and affection, and their childhood on the whole is a happy one—a fact which has been corroborated by most writers on Australian ethnography.[2]

Children of both sexes romp about together, fight, squabble, wrestle, and indulge in crude sexual play. Boys imitate men in throwing miniature spears made by an indulgent parent or mother's brother. Girls make small fires and pretend to cook food. After seven or eight, girls tend

[1] *Vide* W. E. H. Stanner, D.R.T., *Oceania*, iv, on p. 10 notes the same fact.

[2] *Vide* B. Malinowski, op. cit., ch. vii, pp. 238 ff., for numerous examples of this.

to play together, but there is no rigid bar between them and the boys; and I have seen a girl of twelve running about and chasing a small lad of nine or eleven. Much, of course, depends on the number of children in the camp, and where there are a few, the separation of the sexes is not so apparent. In the East and South Kimberleys the boys do not camp apart until after subincision. A separation of the sexes would seem to occur at an earlier age in other parts of Australia.[1]

In the camp in the late afternoon, a boy and a girl, the djungera and the nandjili to whom we have referred, would be tumbling about. Djungera, who was spoilt by everyone, was an impudent little urchin with tow-coloured hair and a lithe body. Nandjili was taller, with black hair cropped close to her head, her one claim to vesture being a piece of opossum string tied around her waist. The two were inseparable and were a constant source of amusement and sometimes of irritation to the adults. They would mysteriously disappear behind bushes and about half an hour later would emerge daubed with mud or with ochre if they could cadge it from the men. Djungera would begin to dance, stamping his feet up and down, whilst Nandjili would beat two sticks together and sing. Tiring of this somewhat passive rôle, she would leap up and dance, to the merriment and pride of the adults, who delighted in the incongruity of a girl performing the same steps as a man. Even at this age, the children had grasped the rhythm that characterized most native corroborees. Finally, the women would tire of watchng them and turn to gossip, only to be recalled by a squeal for more attention and applause. At last the two children would scamper off to a distant mother's brother who was eating kangaroo. They would hang about his legs, pestering him till he good-humouredly gave them a piece each, which they would take down to the pool to eat. Then they would splash about in the water, though at the age of six or seven most of the children were able to swim and dive for lily roots.

[1] B. Malinowski, op. cit., p. 263 et seq.

The Use of Kinship Terms

At the time I did not realize the importance of taking up the study of children from certain angles in particular, which would undoubtedly have thrown light on the working of the kinship system, and possibly on the status of women. For instance, it would have been of interest to have obtained more genealogies from the children apart from the observations I made on their correct use of kinship terms in daily life. At Forrest River I did in fact write down about six genealogies from girls from seven to ten years of age, in the hope of establishing first contacts and learning the kinship terms. I desisted after a while, since they could only give me the names of mother, father, brother, and sister, mother's mother, perhaps father's sister, if these people happened to be in the camp. They were not only ignorant of the names of relatives whom they had never seen, but they could not volunteer the correct kinship terms they would employ for the children of such individuals.

But against this ignorance must be stressed the fact that they called by kinship terms most of the elders in the camp with whom they had any intercourse, and other children in the compound. This is an important and illuminating distinction as far as my material goes. The children did not seem to be able to infer relationships once they had been taught others, and hence had not grasped the logic of the kinship system. Unfortunately, I did not realize the significance of these incomplete genealogies at the time, and after half a dozen efforts abandoned the attempt and concentrated on the adults.

In the region of Forrest River, the children had learnt the kinship terms which must be used for those with whom they associated. This may be correlated with the fact that in Australia, personal names are rarely used in address, and rights and duties are governed by kinship status. This must not be interpreted as implying that conduct varies distinctly with each relationship, even allowing for difference in blood and affinal ties. In a child's behaviour, distinctions

are even less apparent, apart from the attitude adopted towards the parents. It is not until the age of seven or eight, during initiation ceremonies, that the importance of certain relationships impresses itself on the mind of the child, because of the functions performed by certain men and women at the time.

Rivers was the first who thought to establish an absolute correlation between kinship terminology and sociological function,[1] and to erect on this basis his theory of primitive promiscuity and anomalous marriages. These theories have since been disproved by the careful work of Professors Malinowski, Radcliffe-Brown, and Elkin, Dr. Firth and others, who have shown that the correlation is not absolute. Distinctions are made between near and distant relatives, though the same terms may be applied to both. Nevertheless, linguistic usage does often reflect behaviour. This is not only illustrated in Australian practices, but also in Tikopia where, for instance, in a case of making a selection between two terms, a man will decide in favour of one, because of the type of behaviour that will follow as a result of his choice.[2]

There seems little doubt that kinship terms come to be associated by the children with certain individuals who act in a certain way. The whole problem of whether they are simply names and alternative modes of address for a child, or whether their genealogical implications have been grasped, is a question that has not yet been tackled by anthropologists. Children from about the age of six onwards realized that a physical tie existed with the mother, and distinguished between " own mother " and other " mothers ". Some of them at the age of nine knew that their father had found them in some sort of conception totem and were aware of the sexual relationship existing between their parents. My information on these points is scanty, but what there is of it, would indicate that apart from these exceptions, the terms had little or no biological significance

[1] W. H. Rivers, *Kinship and Social Organization.*
[2] R. Firth, M.C.S.R., *JRAI.*, 1930, p. 262.

for the child. Either they were modes of address means of claiming and receiving attention, being more likely to succeed with some persons than with others; or else there was some inkling that they referred to a specific, though undefined, relationship.

Discipline

Authority is wielded by both parents till the boy reaches the age of seven or eight, when he is circumcised; but since the mother is with her children for the greater part of the day, it is she who disciplines them. There is no sadistic postponement of punishment till the father returns in the late afternoon. Beatings are rare and never severe, are given immediately and are apparently soon forgotten, for the children never seemed to cry or sulk for long. During early childhood there is little to prepare the individual for the subjection to the authority of others. There is no easy transition from the submission to the parents to that enforced by the tribal elders. It is true that the authority wielded by the latter is based on kinship status, but it is of a different character, and no analogy can be drawn between the two types, as has sometimes been done. Later the father will negotiate the marriage for his son or daughter, but women asserted that they would also have a voice in the decisions. Certainly both mother and mother's mother, if they came to hear of the illicit affairs of their sons or daughters, would submit them to a tongue-lashing and make the matter public.[1]

Yet if this period is to some extent an untrammelled one and discipline is at a minimum, the identification of the child with the family is all-important. To the parents, the child looks primarily for food, protection, sympathy, and help. Others will only assume such duties in the event of one or both parents dying. No cases of adoption during

[1] A very young girl at Moola Bulla, who was betrothed to a man of forty living five miles away, was carrying on an affair with another young stockman. Her mother discovered that they were meeting and scolded them so much that for a time they obeyed her commands.

the life time of the parents came to my notice. Ties of loyalty are established, and on two occasions a small assertive girl of eight or nine, called Wonuwa, attacked another girl who had gossiped about her mother, and had said that she was lazy and a wanton. Wonuwa, angered, pulled her hair, beat her until the screams brought an adult on the scene to separate them. The bond between brother and sister is especially strong, in spite of avoidance after puberty.[1] A girl of about seventeen living at the mission refused to work when her brother of about eleven had been beaten with some justification by the missionary. On the other hand, his plight had left the other children indifferent. A brother provides his sister with meat till she marries, and receives a portion of the food she finds. After marriage gifts are less frequent, but she can always turn to him for help when she is ill-treated by, or quarrels with, her husband. There were no instances of children defending their father, which is not to say that affection was non-existent. Children were always anxious to point him out to me, declaring with pride : " that own father belonga me," if I happened to be a stranger in the camp.

Education

The material given here might be paralleled almost word for word by facts from other parts of the continent, and indeed, from other primitive communities. The comparative freedom of children to do as they like, the reluctance of parents to punish, the affection lavished on them by the family, close relatives, and the generality of the camp, the significance of kinship bonds, are characteristic of many native peoples. To some extent they offer a contrast with our own society, where though affection is undoubtedly

[1] Professor Malinowski, op. cit., p. 273, reaches the opposite conclusion for other parts of the continent : " We may only conjecture, although with a high degree of probability, that the tie (between brother and sister) is not a very strong one and does not play an important part in family life ; if it were otherwise we would probably know more about it." For data on the strength of the tie elsewhere, *vide* L. Sharp, S.O.Y.Y., *Oceania*, iii, p. 415 ; W. L. Warner, M.F.A.M., *Amer. Anth.*, xxxiii, n.s., 1931, pp. 175–9 ; U. McConnel, W.A.T., *Oceania*, iii, pp. 332, 333.

present, children are kept apart from the activities of adults, subjected to a more rigid discipline and later to the regimentation of a school. But this somewhat prosaic account of the unspectacular events of childhood can be given a new emphasis if viewed, not simply as a series of commonplace incidents, but as factors operative in the process of adaptation to the conditions of life in the community. With the absence of much that is explicit or formal in the instruction, the question arises whether education itself may be said to take place, and how far it is efficient.

If we take education to be the means by which the individual is equipped to maintain himself within his social and physical environment, then one aspect of this problem is an analysis of the circumstances under which the adult must live. The description in the first chapter of the resources and the rôle played by men and women in the economy has already accomplished this in part. How far then does childhood provide the individual with the knowledge and practical experience to carry out the necessary activities for the maintenance of existence later ?

At one level, education is a training either in the securing of food, or in some trade or profession by which services and labour may be exchanged for money or the necessities of life. As in a European society, the child is as a rule dependent on its parents till puberty, but there are marked differences. The aboriginal girl acquires much of her knowledge about her environment and the means of exploiting it prior to puberty ; whereas the European child receives a general education that does not become specialized till later. When the latter enters a firm or a factory, she may have had no previous contact with the surroundings or the individuals with whom she must work in future. The transactions of the business world are remote from the interests of childhood, and there is an abrupt transition from the home and the school to the sphere where henceforth she must earn her living.

In a native community the position is otherwise, since knowledge is obtained in circumstances resembling those

in which it will later be turned to practical account. The boy generally hunts with men whom he has known from infancy. For a girl the situation varies according to whether her husband belongs to her horde or not ; but in any case, her environment is similar, and though the people are strangers, behaviour is determined by kinship status and first contacts are made easier. Children see the food distributed, the continual exchange of gifts between blood and affinal relatives, and the quarrels that break out when obligations are not fulfilled. They are rarely excluded from the ordinary events of everyday life : they grow up witnessing the modes of conduct and activities which they will later follow as adults. Though there is little formality in the instruction given at this period, it is educative, for when the time comes for them to assume the responsibilities of an adult, they are in part prepared for it.

Education at the economic and technical level involves some measure of conformity to the norms of conduct, and this is to some extent imposed during the dependency of childhood. It is just as important later. The individual belongs to a tribe occupying land with well-defined boundaries ; but he or she cannot wander at will. The territory is divided among patrilineal hordes, and hence a child must be affiliated with one horde in order to claim the right to hunt, collect food, and camp over a stretch of country. This claim is asserted through the father, that is, through the man with whom the mother was living when her child was born. Though this is considered a right, the possibility of remaining in the horde and of turning to practical advantage one's economic knowledge, depends on obedience to the laws, rules, and regulations which hedge about kinship ties. Since the supply of food varies, and different kinds are collected by the two sexes, some measure of co-operation is essential. The individual contribution must be supplemented from time to time by gifts from close relatives, who expect a similar return later. While the individual is single he is fed by his family, but as he is one of many, there is a strong economic incentive to marry.

But marriage is not only a matter of securing the consent of a woman of the right subsection. He must be a proficient hunter to spear sufficient game not only for their own needs, but also to make gifts from time to time to his affinal relatives. He must first of all have passed through stages of initiation, in which he is subjected to a severe discipline, a training in the norms of conduct and in certain ritual beliefs and practices. More often than not he is about twenty or twenty-five before he is considered fit to assume the responsibilities of marriage.

For the girl the forces which compel conformity are less evident; her education is less formalized; her childhood is less exacting; and she reaches adult status sooner. The knowledge that she has acquired is of more immediate use to her in conferring status than to the boy of the same age. How far this apparent lack of attention is a reflection of her unimportance in tribal life will be considered later. At the same time it can be noted for future reference that the discipline and discomfort which a boy has to undergo to secure a wife may point to the high value placed upon women. Some of these differences of education in the ritual sphere will now be discussed.

In an earlier chapter I mentioned that all children have totems. But until the age of six or seven they themselves appeared to be indifferent about the identity of their own. Children of eight or nine as a rule knew their *djeriŋ*, and were interested in the fact that they had once been a fish, bird, reptile, or animal prior to the entry of the spirit child in the mother. Wonuwa, the little vixen who attacked the other girl for abusing her mother, related to me with pride: "I bin sit down alonga fish first time. Father bin come close up alonga water. He bin spear 'em me. Me bin go alonga camp; me bin go alonga mother; me bin come out alonga bingy." Very few were aware of their subsection or dream totems. Ignorance about the latter could probably be accounted for by their lack of interest in the movements of adults, whose approach to the camp would be indicated by the presence of their totems in the dreams of other

individuals. Children were absorbed in their own affairs and were content to play during most of the day, tease the adults, and wheedle what food they could from them. In contrast with this indifference on the subject of totems, they were only too willing to talk about *djua:ri*, the spirits of the dead, dwelling with relish on their more gruesome characteristics, their red eyes and their horns. During the day, one boy would pretend to be a *djua:ri*, hide in the bush and spring out on the others: but any untoward rustling in the scrub at night would bring them screaming to the side of their parents.

They listened to the stories of the totemic ancestors, remembered only one or two myths and forgot most of the details. They knew that the word "*ŋaruŋgani*" referred to the Time Long Past when there were no Aborigines but only animals, reptiles, and birds, who walked about the country like human beings. They might also be able to point out the whereabouts of one or two increase sites and stones believed to have been totemic ancestors. It is difficult to assess how far *ŋaruŋgani* is used not only as a sanction, but also as a threat of supernatural punishment for the infringement of taboos. For instance, a girl must avoid all contact with her tribal son-in-law because she feels *kambulö* or shame. This rule is *ŋaruŋgani*. Questioned further as to what would happen if it were disregarded, a reason would be given that the culprits might suffer from sore eyes. I only received this answer three times: once in reply to my demand for an explanation: another time when the sore eyes of a woman were attributed to close contact with a *damberu*, son-in-law: and lastly, when I was warned not to mention the name of my own tribal *damberu*. The feeling of shame and the habit of avoidance were inculcated at an early age, and even children of seven or eight would look discomforted when I pressed them for the name of a sibling of the opposite sex or for their *damberu*. The others round about would giggle at their embarrassment and would finally whisper the name to me. The threat of sore eyes seemed generally to remain in abeyance, and certainly when

a girl ran off with her tribal son-in-law I did not hear it mentioned as a penalty, all the emphasis being placed instead on the overriding of the avoidance situation and the shame experienced by her parents and close relatives. Actually, when some laws are disobeyed, punishment is inflicted by the old men who are concerned with maintaining the *status quo* and conformity to tradition. They are the instruments of justice, but their authority is based on the fact that they are the repositories of lore about the *ŋaruŋgani* and posses ritual objects believed to have originated at that period.

I did not hear, as far as my experience went, frequent injunctions to the child to do this or that because it was *ŋaruŋgani*. It was not used as a scourge to bigger and better righteousness. It was an ultimate sanction ; but in everyday activities, children were told what to do without any preamble, and were slapped if they disobeyed beyond the limits of endurance or to the detriment of somebody's property. If a man finds his wife has not brought in enough lily-roots, he does not preface his beating with the story of the *ŋaruŋgani* woman who served her husband more attentively ; his observations, obscene and otherwise, on her conduct have a very specific reference to her and to the present situation.

Nevertheless, as has already been said, children were familiar with the concept because of the references to it in connection with myths and particular features of the environment, which bear witness as it were to its reality. For the boy it probably assumes greater definition when he undergoes circumcision. Part of his education at this period is the acquisition of further knowledge of what happened in *ŋaruŋgani*, and of the corroborees in which the totemic ancestors are impersonated. With the details of these myths and dances I shall not deal as they will be referred to later in the discussion of the position of women in religion. The rites, however, possess a social relevance, in that they are a necessary stage in the life of a boy before he marries.

Ceremonies of Childhood

Infant betrothal is associated with no ceremony,[1] apart from the negotiations entered into by the parents of the children concerned, and the presentation of spears, boomerangs, and food by the father of the boy to the parents of the girl. While I was in the East and South Kimberleys, no betrothal took place, but I heard a woman discussing the future of her daughter and she said that she would not allow her to marry anyone on the Station, since they all belonged to the wrong subsections. She had in mind, however, a *damberu* at another Station sixty miles away. The women, according to statements made by them, did take a share in all such transactions, and apparently the same obtains in other parts of the continent.[2]

At the age of six or seven, boys and girls had their nasal septum bored by the father or else by the mother's brother or even brother-in-law. Its purpose was purely decorative in this region, and on the Stations and missions it is no longer practised. Cicatrization, which generally occurred after puberty and was done by an affinal relative (by the husband's mother for a girl, and by the wife's father or her brother for a boy), has now fallen into abeyance, the victims protesting against the infliction of the pain, and their mothers upholding them. Most of the older women had scars on the chest, arms, hips, and thighs, but they had no totemic significance and were said to be decorative. It is possible that clothing now offers a less painful means of making oneself attractive.

Of these earlier rites, betrothal obviously has more consequences for the child, in that specific individuals amongst those addressed by affinal terms are singled out for special attention. For the boy, avoidance is even more strict for his own mother-in-law than for other women who stand in the same classificatory relationship. His father

[1] *Vide* B. Malinowski, op. cit., p. 52, who states that betrothal ceremonies appear to have been simple and insignificant.

[2] *Vide* L. Sharp, op. cit., p. 427 : " a woman usually selects a husband for daughters by arrangement with one of the sisters of her husband."

continues to hand over gifts to her from time to time, and wife's father and her brothers will play the determining part in the rites to which he is subjected. For the girl, the position is easier since she does not avoid her parents-in-law.

Babies are called *djaŋidany* if boys, or *djaŋida:l* if girls; once they can walk they are addressed as *gunauwarin* but at the age of five or six when the septum is pierced, they are called *djuŋulu*. At puberty a girl is referred to as *wuleminil*; the boy, however, may be referred to by terms which reflect his status rather than his age. When he is taken away for circumcision he is spoken of as *wuna:ru*; after the rite he is *ŋambai* or circumcised boy. The application of these terms is determined not so much by age in years, but by the development of physical characteristics, the performance of certain activities, and the participation in certain ceremonies.

When the boy is old enough to go through circumcision he becomes the focus of attention and conversation. He is separated from his mother and sisters, taken by his mother's brother and tribal brothers-in-law on a visit or "grand tour" to other hordes and tribes to summon some of the members to the ceremony. There was a djangeri boy of about seven at Violet Valley, who was accompanied by his mother's brother, djuru, and by five djambin men, or brothers-in-law, to the Malngin tribe two hundred miles away beyond the Ord River. The boy, who had formerly played about his mother's brother, teased and worried him for food, was now placed directly under his authority. He was painted by his tribal brothers-in-law, kept apart from the women, and made to feel the seriousness of the situation. He observed food taboos which practically limited his diet to small fish, fruits, berries, yams, and other tubers.[1] He was told stories of the totemic ancestors, referred to collectively as the *diŋari*, who wandered about the country with the first *wuna:ru*, and assembled with

[1] These taboos may have a latent motive in making the boy realize the value of food, or may be an additional means of discipline and of increasing his powers of endurance. But actually, it was said that such foods were dangerous to the boy for various reasons; and since a girl

other tribes to carry out the ceremony. He was away three months and on his return I saw him take part in a ceremony in which he was shown some of the secret *tʃuruŋa-biliaŋa*—though he still might not touch them nor call them by name. He witnessed the corroboree in which the elder men emerged from the undergrowth carrying and displaying them. During his absence the men, women, and children held eternal discussions about the " ring " of *ba:ru:ru*, i.e. the gathering together of people to perform the circumcision rite. They speculated on the number of people who were likely to come and the relatives whom they had not seen for many months or even years. Wild-honey, tobacco, flour, and tea were stored for the visitors who were to take a main part in the ceremony ; whilst the brothers-in-law and the wife's fathers made the hair-belts, which would be given to the boy and his parents. Women knew he would be circumcised and were familiar with some of the details of the actual operation, but not with the songs that were chanted or the complete mythology associated with the ceremonies. The father and mother chafed at the long absence of their son, believing that he might be ill and that this was the reason of the delay. For weeks the return party was expected long before they actually put in an appearance. I arrived at Violet Valley where the ceremony was to be held on the 20th October, and it was not until the end of November that the group finally entered the camp and the operation took place. Men of the two tribes lined up on opposite sides of the fighting ground, with the women on the side-lines or at the back ; the father made accusations that the boy had been sick, whilst the women wailed over their relatives or settled their own disputes. For a few days there was dancing at night ; sometimes the men sang the *Yoelyu* and the women hopped around them, the tribal mother-in-law carrying a firestick, which was to summon up the *wuna:ru*. The mother from

must abstain from many of these till marriage, and observe them again at pregnancy, during lactation, and mourning, the probable context of explanation for the natives lies in the sphere of magical and totemic belief.

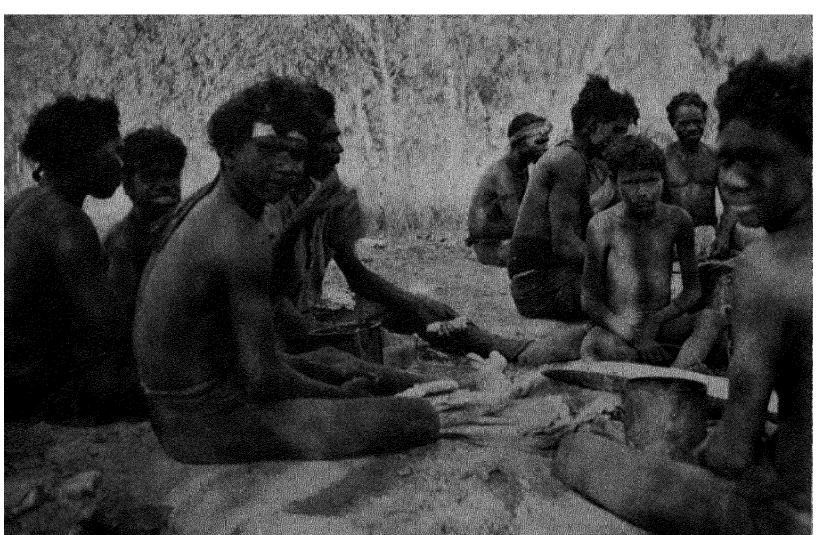
time to time would burst into a fit of weeping, tried to gash herself with stones or any other weapon, and was prevented by the other women. The men and especially the mother's brother were particularly angry if the women did not dance well, since this was believed to affect the success of the ceremony.

The boy still remained with the men with whom he had travelled and who daily painted and decorated him, sometimes beginning a fight if all had not been summoned to the scene. It was impressed on the boy that everything that he witnessed was *ŋaruŋgani*, and must not be revealed to the women on pain of death ; that he was being initiated into " proper blackfellow business ". The operation was performed finally at dawn when the rest of the camp was supposed to be asleep ; later the boy was brought back to his father and mother. Hair-belts and spears, dresses and handkerchiefs were given to the parents, who kept some and distributed the rest amongst close relatives. Normally he would have remained apart from the camp for a few more weeks, but as the men had to return to work, he resumed his normal life immediately. Another boy, a half-caste, who was circumcised at Christmas Creek in the following January, camped apart from the others after the operation, and had not seen his mother when I left three weeks later.

There has been a tendency to overlook the social implications of initiation, with which this chapter is primarily concerned, and to place all the emphasis on its totemic significance. Certainly writers have pointed out that particular relatives perform the operation and assume responsibility ; but too much has been made of the exclusion of the women, without giving sufficient weight to the prospective reference to such a secular matter as marriage. Too much emphasis has been laid on the profaneness of women, and too little on their value as wives. Professor Elkin has rightly asserted that " the child only becomes a complete social personality as he enters into this inheritance after initiation and takes his part in preserving that section



(*a*) A woman and her subincised son.



(*b*) A feast for the initiated.

[*Face p.* 80.

of the tribal beliefs and rites which belong to his own horde country ".[1] But he adds: " A girl is not admitted to this sacred realm, but since she was found by her father, she does belong to his country, and moreover, receives a totemic name which links her on to the sacred life of the tribe. But her real mission is to be the means of incarnation of other pre-existent spirit-children." [1] We should not assume from this, however, that a woman has no social personality; nor that it has been abruptly truncated in childhood; nor that it is but a pale reflection of her brother's, existing only by virtue of her membership with her father's horde, her totemic name, and her maternal functions.

Aboriginal women very definitely do possess social personalities. But without any *a priori* conceptions of inferiority or incompleteness, the analysis must be driven deeper to see in what way they differ from those of the men, whether they are subjected to different influences, and whether they are bound up with a different set of kinship rights and duties. This will be taken up later in greater detail, when we have examined the position of women in marriage and ritual life. It is necessary to make the point here, and to guard against any premature generalizations.

The particular relevance of initiation in this chapter is the social consequences for the boy as distinct from those for a girl. He had undergone a painful operation; he had seen things set apart for the men only and he had been brought under the authority not only of his mother's brother, but also of tribal brothers-in-law and father-in-law. These affinal relatives, with whom up to this time his contacts had been of the casual type, were not only people from whom he might demand a wife; they were those with whom he had camped for three months, who had subjected him to various food taboos and rites, who had fought over any slighting of their privileges in the ceremonies of which

[1] A. P. Elkin, S.O.K.D., *Oceania*, ii, p. 330, referring to the relation of the ceremonial life to local organization.

he was the central figure. In terms of kinship, there are relatives who acquire authority and assume a measure of responsibility for him.

Now at this age a girl is not placed in a similar situation, nor is there a symmetrical and comparable relationship between her and her husband's mother and sisters. The family and close relatives still dominate her activities, whilst the boy has been brought under the control of the group into which he may marry. His father may have arranged for the operation to be performed; but once the boy has set out to bring others to the meeting, the father and mother must, however reluctantly, relinquish their supervision and authority temporarily to those from whom the boy may expect to obtain a wife. There is thus a very close association with affinal relatives, a prospective reference to his marriage. It should be remembered also that in the *Yoelyu* corroboree, it is the tribal mother-in-law who carries a firestick to summon the tribal son-in-law. Again, both men and women emphasize that the ceremony is " to make the boy grow up ", " to make him into a man so that he can marry ". Without the rite it is believed he cannot reach maturity or perform the sexual act.

There is, of course, the ritual side with its negative and positive aspects. Negative, in that he must have no contact with women and must observe certain food taboos. Positive, in that he witnesses some of the men's secret ceremonies, is initiated into tribal life, and that this in turn is regarded as a stage on the way to marriage.

The women did not regard the ceremonies as a desirable privilege from which they were set aside, but rather as a necessary operation; and they told me that they would not marry a man who had not been circumcised and subincised. Their exclusion was, as far as I could ascertain, no cause for resentment, though they were frankly curious as to what had taken place. The boy's sister, as a member to her sex, had been excluded from any direct participation in the " ring " events, but had shared with the others in the general excitement and had been interested in the

disputes and corroborees.[1] Education for the boy at this age then, if of a severer character, is more formalized in its ritual aspect, provides him with the knowledge of certain beliefs, and includes participation in certain totemic ceremonies.

[1] Unfortunately I did not obtain any information on the attitude of the girls towards the initiation of their brothers or other boys in the camp; the extent of their knowledge of what was happening, whether they experienced any jealousy, envy, or curiosity, or whether their ideas had already crystallized into the formula used by the women—" that one blackfellow business."

CHAPTER IV

ON THE THRESHOLD OF MARRIAGE

The childhood of a girl up to the age of nine or twelve passes with little restraint on her activities and play: she enjoys the freedom of most of the camp and there are few restrictions on her contacts with her relatives, always excluding of course the son-in-law, be he a crinkled baby who has just emerged from his mother's womb, or a wizened greybeard. With the affinal group into which she will someday marry, her associations have been of the slightest. But at the age of nine or possibly later, she is suddenly handed over to her future husband and sleeps at his fireside from time to time, though she will be close to her parents' camp. On the surface, the change seems so radical that some writers have not hesitated to call it "child-marriage". But immediately a whole phalanx of questions confronts us, before we can accept this assumption finally. Does she in reality assume the responsibilities of an adult before puberty? What does marriage involve for the individual in this community: what are its functions and advantages? What are the attitudes adopted by men and women towards it, and how far is a girl prepared for marriage before, during, and after puberty? These are problems which must be settled before we can decide whether in fact a girl's childhood is abruptly truncated in order that she may become a child-wife.

To judge by the amount that has been written on aboriginal marriage, from the time of Grey in 1840 onwards, such questions as the sanctions behind it, the modes of obtaining a wife, the rights and duties of the parties to the contract, the effect of sexual licence (ceremonial and illicit) on the stability of the contract, the possibilities of conflict and the methods of reconciling opposing interests and

desires—all these should not only have been defined with precision and clarity, but should have thrown light on the position of women in everyday existence, since this is almost synonymous with marital life. Unfortunately writers such as Howitt, while they collected information on the points mentioned above, were too often preoccupied with whether or not the institution of the *pirrauru* indicated a previous sate of primitive promiscuity or group marriage. Others such as Beveridge, Lumholtz, Gason, Brough-Smyth, Gribble and Curr, if they went in blissful ignorance of such theories, were apt to paint in somewhat lurid terms the fate of the young girl handed over to the patriarch of fifty or sixty; they dwelt darkly on the cruelty inflicted upon her; they dismissed the conditions under which she lived as drudgery and slavery; and some hinted at ceremonies so bestial that they were unfit to appear in print.[1] The term slavery was used in these contexts,[2] incongruously enough since, after all, marriage implies a certain status for the woman, a certain minimum of rights and privileges. The two cannot legally be identified however much in actual practice the position of a wife may approximate to that of a slave. The slave is without any rights in the tribe, apart from those conferred out of kindliness or expediency by the master. If this were the position of the aboriginal woman, then the gifts handed over by the man to her parents would partake of the nature of a purchase,

[1] "Polygamy is practised in an exceedingly barbarous manner unfit for publication." S. Gason on the Dieri in *F.M.C.L.*, ed. G. Taplin, p. 81. *Vide* also E. R. Gribble, *Forty Years with the Aborigines*: "Within these (marriage) classes things unspeakable may happen," pp. 175–6.

[2] G. Taplin: "The man, regarding them (the wives) more as slaves than in any other light, employs them in every possible way to his own advantage." *The Narrinyeri*, p. 9. E. M. Curr: "She is not the relative, but the property of her husband," *T.A.R.*, vol. i, p. 107. C. Lumholtz: "He may take her life if he desires. . . . She is oppressed but is as a rule contented with slavery, having no knowledge of a freer condition." *Among Cannibals*, pp. 161–2.

C. Hodgson: "The gins were the slaves of their men and had all the drudgery of the camp." Quoted in *F.A.A.A.* by Malinowski, p. 71.

Bishop Salvado: "L'état d'esclavage dans lequel toutes sont retenues est vraiment déplorable," quoted in *F.A.A.A.*, p. 74. C. Chewings, *Back in the Stone Age*, p. 7: "She becomes his absolute property with the right to treat her as his slave."

and we could not then speak of marriage at all. He would have complete powers of life and death over her, and she would surrender all claims on her people and her country.

But however incomplete and inconsistent these earlier records may be, they give no grounds in the majority of cases for such assumptions. Whatever the degree of submission of the woman to the will of her husband, she would seem to preserve a basic minimum of rights, though the need of carefully defining them was often obscured by the moral prejudices of the observers and their preconceptions as to what marriage should entail; and further by the absence of an actual division of the women into those who were free and those who were not.

Professor Malinowski in 1913 carefully sifted the available material, and exorcized once and for all from Australia the phantom of primitive promiscuity or group marriage, showing that the individual family of husband, wife, and child was a well-defined unit in the tribe. He dealt with the methods of obtaining a wife, the marriage ceremony, the extent of the husband's authority over his children, his economic, property and sexual rights over his wife, the mutual relationship between them and the character of the marital tie in everyday life, in so far as his material permitted. "It seems beyond doubt that in the aboriginal society the husband exercised almost complete authority over his wife; she was entirely in his hands and he might ill-treat her, provided he did not kill her." [1] "By closer analysis we find that ill-treatment is—in the primitive state of the aboriginal society—in most cases a form of regulated intra-family justice; and that although the methods of treatment in general are very harsh, still they are applied to more resistant natures and should not be measured by the standard of our ideas and nerves." [2] "He had well-nigh complete authority over his wife; that he treated her in harmony with the low standard of culture, harshly, but

[1] B. Malinowski, *F.A.A.A.*, p. 77.
[2] Ibid., p. 82.

not excessively harshly ; that apparently the more tender feelings of love and affection and attachment were not entirely absent. But it must be added that, on these last two points, the information is contradictory and insufficient." [1] " The husband had a definite sexual ' over-right ' over his wife, which secured to him the privilege of disposing of his wife or at least exercising a certain control over her conduct in sexual matters." [2] " Some caution must be used in accepting the above-mentioned cases of absolute faithfulness and chastity required from the woman." [3]

Judged in terms of the facts at Professor Malinowski's disposal the woman would appear to have had the worst of the bargain. She provided the major part of the food, and received apparently a grudging portion in return. She reared his children, but the privilege of disposing of them in marriage seemed to be vested in him ; and only in cases of excessive ill-treatment might she appeal successfully for the intervention of her own kin. If she were killed, then they would avenge her death. In other words the emphasis is placed on the rights of the husband, whilse those of the woman only seem to emerge in the limitations to the bounds of his authority. Instances of her assertion tend to read as acts of defiance rather than as those based on law or in conformity with social norms.

If this is a true picture of marriage, then it represents a severe and abrupt transition from the period of childhood, which is an untrammelled one of little discipline and much affection. Even though we admit that the aboriginal woman has stronger nerves and greater powers of resistance than her European sister, the change is sufficiently striking to necessitate a complete and painful adjustment in her personal relationships at least. Unfortunately the issues raised by Professor Malinowski were not taken up immediately, discussions tending to centre henceforth on the intricacies of the section and subsection system ; and

[1] B. Malinowski, *F.A.A.A.*, p. 84.
[2] Ibid., p. 101.
[3] Ibid., p. 102.

it is not until 1930 that Miss McConnel, Lloyd Warner, Sharp and Stanner provided more data on the points mentioned above, and which contradicted, modified, corroborated, or amplified his conclusions. There are more references to the mutual affection existing between husband and wife; the woman is no longer stigmatized as a slave; her work is shown not to be particularly onerous; she does assert herself on occasion; she retains her rights to her country; and she does not assume the full responsibilities of marriage until after puberty.[1]

Nevertheless the woman's attitude to marriage and a detailed survey of her position as wife have been barely touched upon. As yet these problems remain to be clarified: (1) How far can we speak of child marriage when the girl is handed over to her husband at the age of ten or twelve? (2) Just what are the rights claimed by the married woman apart from her demands that she shall receive a modicum of food, and that a beating shall not prostrate her to the point of severe injury or death? In our own society with the emphasis on the rights of the husband, and a convention that condones laxity in the man, but condemns it in the woman, the wife may still institute proceedings for divorce in the case of ill-treatment, infidelity, desertion, or failure to make adequate provision for her needs. But in the last century more particularly, the moral and religious prejudice against divorce and the economic dependency of women often placed her in a position where she preferred to submit to her marriage rather than be socially ostracized or flung back on her own efforts to support herself. How far then do such factors operate in a native community and prevent a woman from claiming her rights; how far does her more limited rôle in other aspects of life—the religious and the

[1] *Vide* U. McConnel, W.A.T., *Oceania*, iii, pp. 316 ff. W. L. Warner, "Murngin Warfare," *Oceania*, vol. i, p. 457. He asserts, however, p. 481, that although sexual intercourse does not occur until after puberty, the young girl is treated as a wife; but he gives no account of her duties.
L. Sharp, S.O.Y.Y., *Oceania*, iii, p. 415; also R.L.E.Y., *Oceania*, v, pp. 36 ff.
W. E. H. Stanner, D.R.T., *Oceania*, iv, pp. 10 ff.

political—place her in a situation where she is afraid to assert her claims ?

A Definition of Marriage and its Functions

In considering the problem of child-marriage, it is desirable to arrive at a working definition of marriage, which we may take to be a socially recognized union between a man and a woman, undertaken with some idea of permanency, to meet the demands of social and economic existence, and the need of legitimatizing and rearing children. The sexual element plays a fundamental rôle, and marriage is one of the means of regulating sexual relationship which would otherwise be a disruptive factor in the community. But it would be wrong to view marriage purely from this angle ; it is a much more complex phenomenon.[1] Since men and women indulge in casual affairs outside the marriage tie, and since marriage involves the handing over of gifts by the man to the girl's people, and a number of services and duties, there must be other factors in the situation which compensate for these exactions and limitations to his liberty. The nature of these, the conditions regulating marriage, the range of readjustments to be made by both man and wife, will obviously vary from community to community according to the environment, its resources, the economic and social structure, the religious and moral beliefs and sanctions. None of these are necessarily primary, but all have a contributory effect in giving marriage the characteristics peculiar to the region.

Now we have already noted the type of environment and its economic resources for whose exploitation a division of labour between the sexes is necessary. In the carrying of burdens, the fetching of water and firewood, the preparation of food, the wife becomes an economic asset, apart from any other considerations. From these facts we must not immediately infer a subordinate position for

[1] Professor Malinowski has given a very complete analysis of the complexity of the institution of marriage in *The Sexual Life of the Savages*. In this he also takes up the problem of the position of women in the Trobriands, *vide* Chapter II.

the women. From one point of view the conditions and obligations a man must fulfil before he takes a wife may be an index to her value and her importance in the scheme of mundane affairs at least. Whether she is able to capitalize her value for her own benefit and purpose is another question. It will emerge later, together with a discussion of whether or not marriage presents definite advantages to the woman. We have already seen in Chapter I that in the economic sphere she demands that her husband make his contribution to the supply of food, and that she has some voice in its distribution.

Besides this factor, there is that of sex. Granted that all indulge in casual affairs, nevertheless the number of girls who are unbetrothed or unmarried in the camp are few, and a liaison with others involves a man in a series of quarrels and disputes not only with his own relatives, but also with those of the girl. Such a state of affairs is obviously unsatisfactory, and provides another incentive to marriage. But since his choice is limited by the classificatory system and polygamy, this places a further premium on the woman whom he does eventually secure as his wife.

Moreover, if a man desires children of his own, he must stand in a legal relationship to some woman, since the spirit-children beliefs confer fatherhood on the man who is living with the woman at the birth of her child. The wish for heirs, for someone on whom a man can bestow his name, status, and property, is apparent in many societies including our own. There is little careful documentation on this point in Australia, though Professor Elkin has mentioned the necessity of handing on the knowledge of certain ceremonies and ritual objects if the tribe is to survive.[1] These general factors—the economic, sexual, procreative—impose a certain character on the marital relationship, and to some extent can be considered apart from mutual attraction and the desire for companionship. They become important where there exists little opportunity for freedom of choice.

[1] A. P. Elkin, S.O.K.D., *Oceania*, vol. ii, p. 331.

Childhood as a Preparation for Marriage

The question now arises how far these come into operation when the child of eleven or twelve is handed over to her husband ? How far is the childhood of a girl an orientation towards such responsibilities, with the marriage ceremony as the gateway through which she passes into a sphere of new duties and a wider participation in social life ? Taplin, in speaking of the Narrinyeri and quoting Meyer, states that girls " are given in marriage at a very early age (ten or twelve years) ",[1] but adds that they visit their parents from time to time. In regard to the Kukatha tribe he declares there is no sexual intercourse till after puberty.[2] Lumholtz speaks of a girl being handed over to her husband when she is about nine or ten years old. " She lives with her husband, who may be said to rear her, the two being at the same time really married." [3] Brough-Smyth, dealing with the tribes of Victoria, mentions that " as girls are usually given in marriage at a very early age, many have the cares of maternity added to their other heavy duties at the age of thirteen or even younger ".[4] One feels inclined to assume that either nature or Brough-Smyth has made a slip in calculating the age of the girls. If, however, she does not assume the responsibilities of marriage until after puberty, then these writers were not justified in speaking of her marriage at the age of ten or twelve.

First of all it is necessary to review in part some of the conclusions reached in the last chapter to show that the transition from childhood to the situation in which she lives temporarily with her affianced husband is not an abrupt one and that she has been in some measure prepared for it. As soon as the girl and boy can speak, they begin to learn terms for affinal relatives. A girl calls all the men husband, who stand in the relationship of mother's mother's

[1] G. Taplin, *The Narrinyeri*, p. 8.
[2] *Idem*, *The F.M.C.L.*, p. 93.
[3] C. Lumholtz, *Among Cannibals*, p. 164.
[4] R. Brough-Smyth, *A.V.*, vol. i, p. 78.
Vide also E. R. Gribble, op. cit., pp. 175–6.

brother's daughter's son, or father's father's sister's son's son to her; but it must not be thought that this status is arrived at through any elaborate mental calculations or tracing of descent. The subsection provides the clue, unless there has been an irregular marriage amongst close relatives, in which case the necessary readjustments in terminology will have been made. Thus Buma, nambin calls most djangeri men—*ŋu:mbana* or husband. But she does not view them *en masse* as a battalion of possible husbands. The classificatory terms indicate potential relationships, and it is realized that only one of these will be actualized for the individual; distinctions are made if only for the reason that some of the men are very old, or married or affianced. If a girl is already betrothed, she most probably has met her affinal relatives, and does not avoid her future husband as so often happens in other primitive communities. Crawley in his discussion of betrothal speaks as though avoidance were always the case between a young girl and boy during their engagement [1] and goes on to say that this reproduces the taboo between a brother and sister.[2] The marriage ceremony obviates the dangers of the new relationship and of the sexual taboo.[3] His generalization would not hold for the whole of Australia, however, and would be difficult to maintain where the fear of sexual intercourse has obviously been overridden or suppressed in a community that condones it between the young people prior to marriage, and where there is no especial emphasis placed on chastity. Unless the boy and his parents belong to her horde, the girl sees them but rarely before her marriage, but her relationships with them are of a pleasant character, and lack the element of strain that enters into those of the boy with her parents and brothers. She receives an occasional gift from him, but the bulk of the presents go to her mother and father, though she has her share of some of the food.

Again, she is familiar with the general routine of family

[1] E. Crawley, *The Mystic Rose*, vol. ii, p. 25.
[2] Ibid., p. 27.
[3] Ibid., p. 25.

life associated with the procuring and distributing of food; she has seen the quarrels that arise when her father does not perform his part, or when her mother neglects her duties. Finally in the sphere of sex we have already mentioned that she is familiar with the facts of intercourse, and that young girls of eight or ten play with the boys in the camp when the others are asleep at midday or away in the bush. Young Buma would sing the *Kuluwa:dö* or love song, until she was teased by the adults for wanting a " sweetheart " or *djibönir*, when she would get up sulkily and go away to chant it in peace under a distant tree. Inter-tribal meetings and the presence of a number of young men provide numerous opportunities for such affairs, and all the young girls in the camp were linked in name with the men, though few expected a development of the relationships.

When, therefore, the child of nine or twelve is handed over to her future husband, we must remember that her education has been of a practical kind in the economic sphere; that she is familiar with the types of conduct expected of her; and that she already has some knowledge of sex. Therefore the situation is entirely different from that of a young girl in our own community, who would probably be unfitted to assume similar responsibilities. In the case of the latter, if she has decided not to take up any career, she may be taught cooking, sewing, and some elements of domestic science; but there is as a rule a careful avoidance of education in other aspects of the wifely duties; she may be given instruction in the bathing of a baby but not in its production.

If marriage is an inescapable fate for the aboriginal woman, it is one that she generally desires as much as the man; and one for which her childhood and education have in some measure equipped her. Actually when she is handed over to her husband before puberty, she is not called upon to fulfil all the duties of a wife, and we may regard this as another period of preparation. This has been corroborated or paralleled by material from other parts of the continent,

though such writers have not committed themselves on the question as to whether or not this can be called marriage.[1]

I did not witness the ceremony in which the girl is delivered to the care of her future husband, but it was described to me by over a score of natives. The man must live in the camp of her parents; he has for some time been making gifts to them, and finally her father decides to take her to him. This preliminary ceremony differs from the one that occurs after puberty, when the man comes to the girl's camp and takes her by the arm, *malaːm nunengəni*. The two go into the bush for a few days, and when they return, having painted themselves with red ochre, they are received by the girl's parents, who make them presents of spears, handkerchiefs, and other articles. Some of the taboos on food which the girl must observe until marriage are broken, and she is given hill-kangaroo, wild-cat, and a small kind of iguana. A year or so after she eats a large type of iguana, but all these become taboo again at menstruation and at pregnancy, or during the dancing of the women's secret corroboree. There were four cases of young girls who were living with their future husbands. Didjibara, who was about thirteen, belonged to the Wolmeri tribe, and had been handed over to Bugomana, who was also a Wolmeri. She was short, scraggy, with tow-coloured hair that was always in her eyes; she was sulky and not particularly assertive. She slept in her husband's camp most of the time, but when she felt lonely, which seemed to be about once a week, she would go to her mother. Full sexual intercourse was not allowed until after puberty; and my suggestion that it did occur was indignantly repudiated by the parents, and the boy and girl as well. Sexual intercourse without penetration did take place but only infrequently. The sanction behind this prohibition was the belief that it would be dangerous to the girl, and furthermore,

[1] *Vide* U. McConnel, op. cit., p. 311. L. Sharp, S.O.Y.Y., p. 427. W. E. H. Stanner, D.R.T., p. 19, mentions, however, that "before puberty children begin to assume the economic rôles which normally become so important in later life". He does not state the extent of a young girl's duties. W. L. Warner, *A Black Civilization*, pp. 75, 76.

in the myths I collected from the various tribes, intercourse was always said to follow menstruation and never to precede it. Didjibara spent most of the day in the bush with her mother, but what she found could scarcely be called a contribution to the maintenance of the household, nor was it expected to be; for in view of her youth and slender store of knowledge, no exacting demands were made upon her. She still depended on her mother for the bulk of her vegetable food and for meat as well, since the boy handed over most of the game he caught to her father. She brought in a little wood, made the fires, and sometimes cooked a few yams. Like all children she joined with zest in corroborees, but she was still too young to take much interest in the gossip of the women, and would wander away and play with the other children.

Another case was that of Wolambal at Bedford in the Lunga country, who was married to a man who already had two wives. She was tall, with closely-cropped hair, and rather shifty eyes for a native. She was aggressive and talkative in comparison with Didjibara, and was continually carrying scandal to the men about the infidelities of their wives. She assisted the elder wife in foraging for food, but was apt to grumble if told off to fetch firewood. Her parents had died, which probably accounted for her living away from her country at that age, but there was also the elder wife to take the bulk of the responsibilities. She played with the other young men in the camp, and finally helped the elder wife to elope with a tribal son-in-law during her husband's absence. The remaining instance was that of a child of six, who had only stayed in her future husband's camp for one night. He was about fifty, and had been making gifts to her parents since her birth. The manager of the station heard of it, and told him he could not have the girl; whereupon he protested that he had made the presents for years, and said: "Me bin grow 'em up; him bin piccaninny first time." This phrase "me bin grow 'em up" is frequently used by individuals who have helped in the rearing of a child after a parent's death,

and is also uttered constantly by the mother's brother. These people made the statement with pride and affection, and there was implicit in it the assumption of responsibility. It is not legitimate to suppose that it had exactly the same significance when used by a girl's future husband, but the attitude of the man to the girl would seem to be one of protection and of affection, rather than of a crude assertion of rights. In fact the explanation given for this residence with the man before puberty was that it would accustom the girl to him, so that she would not be frightened when she had to leave her parents and go to his country. It may also have been a gesture of good faith on the part of the parents to the man—a confirming of rights—since he had been making gifts to them for some years without any immediate reward.

Now these cases were typical of the general pattern of behaviour according to the men and women I questioned about their own experiences. It is important to stress these facts, since they clearly show there is no sharp transition from one type of existence to another for the girl, and that her childhood is not truncated abruptly. She remains in the same encampment as her parents : she is still dependent on them for food and protection : she has no full sexual intercourse with the man : and she is gradually accustomed to his presence. Granted the conditions under which she lives, there is nothing fundamentally revolting or onerous in this gradual introduction into married life. By the time she reached puberty she would be fitted to take up her residence with her husband and fulfil her rôle as his economic and sexual partner.

In view of these facts, we are certainly not justified in speaking of " child marriage ". Only one objection could be lodged against this assumption, however, namely that the man calls the girl, wife ; but it must be remembered that he has done so from the moment she was born, and no one would admit that married life began in the cradle. We can say that in this region at least, and probably elsewhere, marriage for a girl does not begin until after puberty.

Puberty

In many communities the onset of puberty is associated with a ritual uncleanliness, in which the girl is believed to be a danger to the society, and is therefore excluded from it temporarily. Where, moreover, it is followed soon after by marriage, menstruation would have a double social significance, and one might anticipate an elaborate series of rites. In Australia, however, the collector of strange practices will be disappointed in his expectation. This may be correlated with the fact that such ceremonies as there are, involve no extensive initiation into esoteric lore, as in the case of a boy. The handing over of ritual knowledge is a tribal concern and therefore this may account for the large inter-tribal or inter-horde gatherings that take place at circumcision and subincision. The taboos and seclusion of the girl at menstruation indicate that she has now reached sexual maturity; the marriage that follows is the business of her relatives and those of the husband. Nevertheless the importance of this crisis in her life is reflected in the singing of magical songs beforehand to hasten the development of puberty, and the practice of introcision either before or afterwards as a preparation for marriage.

In the Djaru tribe in East Kimberley, the father of the girl tells the future husband to take a certain type of *tʃuruŋa*, called a *munguaːna*, and sing the songs which will make her breasts develop and her pubic hair grow.[1] It was difficult to obtain a translation of these in pidgin-English, but I include it here for what it is worth.

1.	*wudirburu*	*munguaːn*	*ŋaːli ŋaːli*
	markings of	name of	woman woman
	tʃuruŋa	*tʃuruŋa*	

My informants explained this simply as the "name" of the *tʃuruŋa*, and it is characteristic of most of the songs associated with other types of bullroarer.

[1] Spencer and Gillen mention a similar but more elaborate rite among the Arunta, in which men sing songs that will make the breasts develop, and later smear the girl with fat and red ochre. She is secluded until the pain wears off, *The Arunta*, vol. ii, pp. 480–1.

2.	*ŋa:bulu:*	*bura*	*bura:nga:*	*wolua:ngur*
	breasts	ground	sun	burns

The sun is mentioned because it makes the girl grow up. It burns upon the ground. I could not obtain any further explanation about the part of the sun, nor any myth that would throw light on its mention here.

3.	*yunda:li*	*ma:du ma:du*	*yula:mara*
	bush tucker	nipples	grow up

The nipples would grow round like a small wild berry.

4.	*yunda:li*	*na:nda*	*mo:ru*
	wild berries	?	blood

I could obtain no adequate translation of this, but it refers to the onset of menstruation. It is possible that the Wolmeri have the same song, since the *mungua:na* originally came from there, but I heard no reference to it, and I visited them before I went to the Djaru. The Wolmeri women had a secret corroboree, which I will describe in detail in a later chapter, and which, while it centred round the obtaining of lovers, did in the first songs focus on the development of puberty in the young girls. These latter were not, however, permitted to be present. Here it was not only a question of hastening the development for the sake of her husband, but so that she might soon have *djibönir*, or lovers.

The Wolmeri also at one time practised introcision; it was done by the old women, as in the Ngadi tribe as well, but I prefer to postpone a discussion of this till the chapter on the position of women in ritual life.[1] I did not visit the Ngadi tribe which has its territory in Central Australia near Tanami and the Granites, but some of them were camping at Gordon Downs near the boundary of West

[1] Spencer and Gillen mention a similar rite among the Kaitish, performed by the elder sisters of the girl. The blood was collected in a *pitchi*, and the women, mother, father's sister, smeared their bodies with it and drank some. *The Arunta*, vol. ii, p. 484.

E. Hassell mentions defloration carried out by the old women in the Wheelman Tribe. *Vide* "Notes on the Ethnology of the Wheelman Tribe of South-West Australia," ed. D. Davidson, *Anthropos*, 1936, p. 486.

Australia, and I was able to secure an account of the ceremony from two old women. These rites differ from those of the Wula, and according to Professor Elkin also the King River tribes,[1] and those of Central Australia and Queensland,[2] where defloration is performed by the men, and is generally followed by sexual intercourse.

The significance of these Wolmeri and Ngadi ceremonies is that they are carried out by the women themselves to hasten the development of puberty, which is regarded as essentially desirable since a girl can then take lovers. In those tribes where introcision was deemed necessary before marriage it would seem to be the counterpart of subincision. Amongst the Ngadi the resemblances were marked in that the details were kept secret from the men; they were *ŋaruŋgani*; the girl was told the myth that accounted for their origin, and hence acquired additional esoteric knowledge about the *ŋaruŋgani*, denied to the men. She was moreover brought temporarily under the authority of the older women for the first time in her life. Mathew goes so far as to say that wherever "subincision is practised vaginal introcision becomes inevitable",[3] whilst Roth notes that it is only practised where there is male introcision.[4] The correlation would on the whole seem to obtain in most tribes, but the Lunga do not practise introcision at present and it was denied that it ever occurred in the past. Whatever the truth of this, the fact remains that they perform subincision now without introcision of the women. The Ngadi said that the rite was to facilitate sexual intercourse and delivery at birth, and the same reason was put forward by Roth in regard to the Queensland tribes.[5]

[1] A. P. Elkin, unpublished field notes.

[2] *Vide* Spencer, *N.T.N.T.A.*, p. 22. *The Arunta*, vol. ii, pp. 472–4, in the Arunta, South Arunta, and Ilpirra tribes. R. H. Mathews, "Ethnological Notes on the Aboriginal Tribes of the Northern Territory," *Queens. Geog. J.*, 1901, xvi, p. 76. A. W. Howitt, "The Dieri and Other Kindred Tribes of Central Australia," *J.R.A.I.*, xx, 1891, p. 61. W. E. Roth, *E.S.*, section 305, pp. 174–5, in Pitta-Pitta, Ulaolinya, Yaroinga tribes.

[3] J. Mathew, *Eaglehawk and Crow*, p. 121.

[4] Ibid., p. 179.

[5] W. E. Roth, op. cit., p. 175.

Ceremonial in these regions would seem to centre around the periods prior to and after menstruation, which is regarded with some fear by the men, in that contact with a menstruating woman is believed to cause sickness. At her first menses the girl goes apart with her mother, away from the men and young children. She must not eat certain foods—porcupine, long-necked turtle, emu, native companion, little kangaroo, dog, opossum, snake, turkey, iguana, barramundi and wild cat. These taboos are observed at every period, and during pregnancy; and they apply also to the boy during initiation. They obtain in all tribes discussed in this book. Since all meat caught by the men is *gunbu*, taboo, it follows that her diet is practically restricted to vegetable foods, fruits, and small fish procured by the women. She remains apart from the camp for three or five days, is then painted with red ochre, and returns to her own fireside. The main feature of her seclusion is that she may not have any contact with the men, their property, or anything that has been touched by them.

Women's Attitude to Marriage

With the reasons why a man desires a wife we have already dealt [1] and the mere fact that he is prepared to hand over gifts to her parents from betrothal onwards is some indication of the urgency of his needs and the value he places upon her. But since the woman is not called upon to make any sacrifices in material goods her intentions are less obvious. In the case of Didjibara, Wolambal, and the others, their wishes appear on the surface to be largely irrelevant, apart from the recognition by their parents that marriage, in the sense in which we have defined it, is possible only under certain conditions—those of physical maturity. Even so I was told about girls who were both betrothed and married after puberty, and who had run away from their husbands because the latter were too old or had frightened them. They were generally sent back, but a few persisted and finally the project was abandoned. Here,

[1] *Vide* pp. 89–90 of this chapter.

dislike of the particular individuals coupled with separation from parents and country, contributed to the dissolution of such unions. This did not mean that henceforth such girls were in the mood to hie them to a nunnery had it existed, or that a neurosis developed as might have occurred in our own community. According to the women I questioned, they had still wished for marriage, but not with the middle-aged men chosen by their parents. They admitted to having taken lovers afterwards, and had finally married one of these. Barudjil of the Lunga had been promised to an old man, had run away twice, and had had her own way in the end. Later she engaged in an affair with her tribal brother, eloped, and finally married him, and was living quietly at Moola Bulla. In other words, although her inclinations had not coincided with those of her relatives, she still desired marriage, preferably with a younger man.

In our own society marriage is often undertaken for reasons of economic security, a desire for children, for sexual experience which has been blessed by the church or has the moral sanction of the community, though any one of these motives may be interpreted as romantic love by the individuals concerned or by their relatives. Now economics cannot be ruled out altogether even for an aboriginal woman, though it may not be such an urgent matter for her as for the city girl who is barely subsisting on the basic wage. Whether the aboriginal is married or not, once she has passed puberty she has to forage for food ; the difference being that her contribution is made to the family-supplies, for which she receives a share of the meat procured by her father's brother, and perhaps her mother's brother. When married, she and her husband eat most of what she finds and her portion of meat is increased. This is an advantage which has been overlooked by most observers, who have bewailed the lot of the married woman, and failed to realize that actually in terms of the amount of food eaten, she is better off than when single, unless of course there are no brothers and sisters.

On the sexual side, the aboriginal girl has fewer inhibitions than the European of the same age, but a series of affairs in the long run prove unsatisfactory, unless linked with the solid advantages of marriage. As in the case of the man, they plunge her into disputes with her parents and relatives. One woman who had given up her lover said to me: "Me finish longa him; too much all about make 'em row alonga me—all day him talk-talk." A more stable union, to judge by what happened in the camp, did not mean the cessation of extra-marital adventures nor a rigid curtailing of her liberties. Still it was true that a woman would have to deal with the jealousy of her husband; she generally availed herself of the opportunity created by his absence from the camp, and whether she had an affair or not the rest of the community was not inclined to give her the benefit of the doubt. This is not to say that she entered marriage with one eye on her lover and the other on her husband. Genuine affection and fidelity over a period of time did exist; and so in summing up the reasons for marriage, we must make a distinction, as in our own community, between its general functions on the one hand, and its advantages and the immediate desires of the individuals who were able to exercise some freedom of choice on the other.

Over and above the economic aspects, there was the pressure of public opinion that expected every girl to marry, and the same may be said of most other communities. However, in England, owing to a romantic conception of marriage, the absence of polygamy, and a greater number of women than men, all are not able to fulfil their "mission"; whilst in the aboriginal society, if there is only one profession —that of wife—at least they are certain to practise it, the existence of polygamy being one of the methods by which this is assured. In fact I did not meet with one case of a woman who had not been married at some time or other in her life. Didjibara and Wolambal were contented with their lot and found my questions difficult to answer when I inquired whether they were happy. They would say

with emphasis: "*ŋu:mbana* all right—him own *ŋu:mbana* belonga me." The girl of about 18 who was betrothed (see page 70 in Ch. III) certainly did not want to marry the man, but in the meantime she was carrying on an affair with a young stockboy in spite of the protests of her family, and it was likely that she would marry him in the end. The other married women, apart from periodic outbursts of grumbling on domestic matters, were apparently contented also with their fate, and seemed unable to conceive of any existence without marriage. One woman whom I questioned gave me the following reply, when I asked her whether she liked being married to her boy: "me like 'em boy; we walkabout, we *muŋa-muŋa* (have sexual intercourse); got 'em one camp belonga twofellow; might be we catchem kangaroo, fish." The degree of emphasis on any one of these factors by other individuals was likely to depend on the state of mind or body, the craving for meat, or a longing to leave the station and "go bush" for a while.

Women certainly stressed the sexual aspect of marriage, and it is time that this was given more weight in a discussion of these problems, since there is now no danger of our falling into the mistake of postulating group marriage on the score of sexual licence. When such theories were taken seriously it was necessary to show that sex was only one aspect of marriage, that husband and wife in Australia often did find satisfaction elsewhere, and that the union involved an economic co-operation and the legitimatization of children. But there is little doubt about the importance of sex in native eyes; the women were quite unequivocal on the point, and when I asked if they married because they wanted children, they laughed and frankly ridiculed me: "No more want 'em piccaninny: me bin want to sleep alonga boy." And the same aspect was stressed as a reason for reconciliation after a temporary separation because of a quarrel: "Me stop alonga boy: too much me bin sleep alonga him."

At the same time it must be remembered that they themselves make a distinction between a casual affair and

" proper marriage ", which involves a union with a man generally in the correct relationship who will hand over gifts to her parents and with whom she will share food and a common fire-place. It so happens under present conditions and perhaps previously that temporary unions do sometimes develop into marriage,[1] and several instances occured whilst I was in the camp at Moola Bulla. In other words, apart from the general advantages that favour marriage, mutual attraction is sometimes the basis for a union as in our own society.

There remains the question of children, whose belated appearance at this stage does not indicate their relative unimportance in native eyes. The possibility of children resulting from marriage, the necessity for a man to assume responsibility for mother and child, and hence the need for co-operation between the parents has been recognized as one of the bases of marriage. We can still say with Westermarck that marriage is rooted in the family rather than the family in marriage. Indeed, Bertrand Russell would go so far as to say that in " a rational ethic in the absence of children there is no marriage " [2] but this presupposes at least means of economic support for the woman apart from those provided by the males of the community. It can be argued on a rational basis, that during pregnancy and confinement and in the rearing of the child for the first two or three years, there must be someone who is prepared to look after the child and its mother. Unless there are other institutions to meet this need, it is difficult to see how the family can be destroyed or replaced. In Russia an attempt was made to do away with it, and the state apparently was to assume the functions of an " All Father " ; but as reports were biased on moralistic or communistic grounds, it was difficult to discover the degree of success ; certainly at the present moment the family seems to have been restored to grace.

[1] W. E. H. Stanner maintains the same thing for the Daly River tribes, op. cit., pp. 459–460.

[2] B. Russell, *Marriage and Morals*, p. 125.

In many communities where prenuptial licence is permitted or condoned, birth out of wedlock is either frowned upon or more actively penalized unless it is regarded as a test of fertility as in some African communities and is then followed by marriage. Hence apart from all such considerations as to whether children are regarded as a nemesis or as a blessing, their appearance demands a legal and stabilized union between parents afterwards. Professor Malinowski would go so far as to say " that between the freedom of sexual life and the freedom of becoming a mother, a sharp distinction is drawn in all societies including our own ".[1] And again: " The most important legal rule concerning the physiological side of kinship is that no child can be brought into the world without a man, and one man at that, assuming the rôle of sociological father, i.e. guardian and protector, the male link between the child and the rest of the community.[2] Again, " marriage cannot be defined as the licensing of sexual intercourse but rather as the licensing of parenthood." [3]

In Australia, where there is no recognition of physiological fatherhood, the question arises whether we can speak of the existence of illegitimate children. Dr. Stanner has said of the Daly River tribes that " there is no illegitimacy ",[4] and that for a woman who conceives after the death of her husband and does not remarry there is always a mother's brother to give the child social status.[5] Miss McConnel states that if a woman is deserted by her lover the child is adopted by her clan [6]; but as the child will still marry into her clan, the affiliation cannot therefore be said to be complete. Dr. Sharp noted that there were no instances

[1] B. Malinowski, *Parenthood*, p. 135.
[2] Ibid., pp. 137–8.
[3] Ibid., p. 140. In another context the same writer comments: " Traditional sentiment regards illegitimate children as improper on the part of the mother. When asked why it is so considered, they will answer, ' because there is no father to the child, there is no man to take it in his arms.' " Reference to Trobiands, *S.O.S.*, p. 166.
[4] W. E. H. Stanner, D.R.T., *Oceania*, iv, p. 17.
[5] Ibid., p. 17.
[6] U. McConnel, The W.A.T., *Oceania*, iii, p. 325.

of children born out of wedlock in the Yir-Yiront, but that if a woman were divorced from her husband, the younger children would live with her clan.[1] In all these tribes we are given no information on the part played by a boy later in the ritual life of his mother's clan, data, which without doubt, would have indicated the extent to which he was accepted as a full member. In the tribes which I studied there were no illegitimate children, and the particular character of the spirit-children beliefs made it almost an impossibility. There seemed to be a dogma that no unmarried girl could have a child. " Me no bin catch 'em piccaninny alonga boy—me single fellow. Only *ŋu:mbana* (husband) catch 'em piccaninny."

As a rule a girl was living with her husband at puberty, and since there was no recognition of physical paternity, all the children she bore were regarded as his. There is of course the problem of the adolescent girls who are having a casual affair and yet who do not conceive. Dr. Ashley-Montagu, in discussing evidence from other native races, and also the tests carried out on the mouse, the macaque, and the chimpanzee, has suggested that between the outset of the first menstruation and reproductive maturity, there is a period in which individuals are relatively sterile.[2] We can say then that marriage legitimatizes the children in that it provides them with a social father and affiliates them with his horde. But apparently in the Daly River and some of the Queensland tribes, a child born out of wedlock is not illegitimate in so far as it has a mother's brother to assume responsibility and is permitted to enter his clan. Such a position obviously differs from the protection afforded a child by its mother's relatives in our community, where the law does not automatically allow the child to claim a share in the inheritance of property, unless the mother's brother of his own accord makes provision.

It is, then, one thing to say that marriage affiliates the

[1] L. Sharp, S.O.Y.Y., *Oceania*, iii, p. 428.
[2] M. Ashley-Montagu, " Infertility of the Unmarried in Primitive Societies," *Oceania*, viii, p. 26.

child with a social father and his group: another to infer from this that a child without a social father in Australia is an outcast from the community in the sense that it has no recognized ties with any social group. This does not mean that there would be no bar to bearing children out of wedlock, for it seems likely that the mother's brother would scarcely welcome the additional responsibility of another woman and her child besides his own family. So much then for the functions of marriage in regard to children. Apparently, however, children are not necessarily desired, as was made clear in the statements of numerous women. They disliked the prospect of child-bearing; its pain and trouble, and the burden of carrying the baby about afterwards. There were few children in the camps and many of the women confessed to having committed abortion to avoid the contingency.

The prevalence of venereal disease, particularly *granuloma pudendum*, may be responsible for sterility in a number of cases, but in a recent survey made by Dr. A. P. Davis, Medical Inspector for West Australia, over 4,000 natives were examined in the Kimberleys (these including the majority of natives with whom I had contact on the stations and mission). Of these, 145 had venereal disease or approximately 4 per cent. He suggests that *granuloma pudendum* is " a purely native complaint ", and that it was probably introduced from the northern tropical or oceanic islands.[1] With the possibility of it having been in operation for a relatively long period, and further, the small percentage of natives suffering from it, it can scarcely be considered to account entirely for the decline in population and the infrequency of births in the Kimberleys.

Certainly there were some children, and on these their mothers lavished a care and affection that would have satisfied the staunchest advocates of the existence of a maternal instinct. But as far as I could gauge, children were one of the consequences, and not necessarily one of

[1] *Annual Report of the Commissioner of Native Affairs of West Australia*, 1937, pp. 8–9.

the motives for marriage. It is significant that even before there was much white contact, the early ethnologists commented on the small size of the families (five being generally the largest) and on the frequent recourse to infanticide. In the desert, where existence was precarious, the Aborigines by this limitation of the population revealed a foresight and wisdom that is not always manifest in our own community, where individuals under the worst conditions, either with a religious sanction or through ignorance, indulge the maternal instinct to the extent of having a child every year or so. Of course with the previous decimation of the aboriginal population, and a further decrease every year,[1] the practice of abortion under present conditions must ultimately lead to the extinction of the natives. How far the reluctance of the women to bear children goes deeper than an objection to the pain and trouble involved it is difficult to say. I never met with the attitude that might be interpreted as a deliberate race suicide, or apathy in the face of the breakdown of their culture. But it does seem very likely that the injury to the social structure and activities contingent on white contact may lie at the basis of the problem.

[1] *Annual Reports of the Chief Protector of Aborigines, Western Australia*, 1934, p. 1 ; 1935, p. 6 ; 1936, p. 3 ; 1937, p. 5. In the last annual report, 1937, there was a slight increase in full-bloods, but the Commissioner for Native Affairs attributes this to the inclusion of those not deemed formerly to be Aborigines. *Vide* p. 5.

CHAPTER V

THE LAWS OF MARRIAGE AND THE NEEDS OF THE INDIVIDUAL

The functions of marriage in North-West Australia are similar to those in our own community, but there is one aspect which we have only mentioned in passing, and that is the tribal law that prescribes the relationship of those who may marry. Does this limitation of choice vitiate the advantages we have discussed? To answer this we must study the working of the kinship system in regard to marriage, the attitudes adopted by individuals towards it, the extent to which they regard it as curtailing their liberties or as a means of attaining their desires; the circumstances under which the law is set aside, the frequency with which this happens, the adjustments that are made and the reactions of community. These are problems which must be considered before we can examine in detail the rights, privileges, and duties that are inherent in the marital bond.

Out of the discontent, disputes, reconciliations, co-operation, and affection between those who are married in the Kimberley tribes, a relationship would seem to emerge which has in it the elements of permanency and the advantages which have been in part deduced, and in part directly formulated by the natives themselves. Europeans have laid much emphasis on freedom of choice as the basis for a happy and lasting union. And the question immediately arises as to whether it is entirely absent in the aboriginal community, whether the kinship system permits of the play of individual desire within wider limits than is generally supposed. At the risk of being obvious, one may add that freedom of choice is not absolute in our own society. Probably there would be no need to state such a truism in any other context; but when attention is directed to primitive marriage, it is likely to concentrate on the fact that a man

marries his mother's mother's brother's daughter's daughter, and to be oblivious of the limiting factors of age, close relationship, possible range of contacts, social and class distinctions, means of economic support, religion and so forth in our own community. However, granted that there is more scope for individual preference in European society, there is the point that the motives which led to a union in the first place may have long since been supplanted by reasons of a more practical kind, e.g. economic security, presence of children, status or dislike of a divorce on grounds of religion, morality or social expediency. It is very necessary to bear such commonplaces in mind in order to avoid a tendency to prejudge similar issues in another guise elsewhere. In short, are the conditions of aboriginal marriage so exacting as we imagine; do they militate against its success, stability and happiness?

Attitudes to the Kinship System

Because the majority of marriages occur within the right subsection, we need not immediately conclude that the Aborigines are lacking in our own "normal" instincts: that they are the slaves of custom, albeit unwilling ones: that they are repressed: that when occasionally they do marry into the wrong subsection they are really giving overt expression to the desires of the less fortunate. It is just possible that "straight" marriages, granted the premises that exist within the culture, offer as much satisfaction as our own and do not necessarily entail the subjection of the women. For the majority there is little freedom of choice in our sense of the phrase, except in so far as it is exercised by parents on behalf of their children. Such a law may seem automatic in its functioning, but it must be remembered that from childhood onwards, men and women expect to marry individuals of a certain subsection, and the existence of a number of regular unions around them confirms this expectation. Linguistic usage and behaviour channel interest desires and attitudes from an early age. This social conditioning is important; we

can even go so far as to say that the men regard it as a right to marry those women who are eligible in the correct relationship. A man who has been betrothed since infancy is bitterly resentful of anyone who attempts to override his claims.[1] The attitude of the women is similar; they will assert: " me marry straight fellow; no more wrong fellow." When Wungenil, who was carrying on an affair with a man of the right subsection, was meeting with some opposition from her relatives, she said to me—" me like him; we two fellow want to marry. Him straight belonga me." Certainly the last was not the primary motive for the marriage, but it clinched her argument effectively and in the end she had her way.

Marriage by capture of the women after a raid on another tribe and the killing of some of its male members, is rarely practised now as a result of the severe penalties inflicted by the government for death. Elopements happen frequently, but the majority of marriages are arranged either by the parents through infant betrothal, or by the boy and girl after puberty. The latter allows of more freedom of choice and there is a tendency nowadays at least for boys and girls to have a series of affairs, and then for one to become permanent in marriage. Even where this is not so, however, the lack of choice may be counterbalanced by a positive desire to marry " straight ".

There is a recognized procedure in courtship, in which either the man or the woman may take the initiative. The girl may send a gift of tobacco to a boy through her mate, *djalindja:ru*. Bulagil, who finally eloped with her tribal son-in-law, was said to have done this. If the man is agreeable he will keep the tobacco and later make a similar gift, and this continues until a meeting is arranged and the two have an affair. There is also love magic, with which I shall deal later, that of the men being different from the type practised

[1] Dr. Warner mentions that among the Murngin " a proper marriage is preferred because a Murngin man and woman feel that they have a right to each other since their relationship has destined them to marriage ". M.F.A.M., *Amer. Anth.*, xxxii, n.s., 1930, p. 255.

by the women. The latter have very definite ideas as to what are the desirable qualities in a husband or a lover. They include a good physique, an elegant coiffure, bodily adornment, and prowess in dancing and hunting. The appearance of some of the young men visiting the tribe used to arouse even the middle-aged and soberly married to overt admiration and enthusiasm.

Dr. Warner would seem to imply that in the Murngin " there is always an unconscious desire and frequently a conscious desire ' to keep the *gurratu* straight ' ".[1] " Each individual feels it his right rather than his duty to keep his part of the system functioning, hence the proper functioning of the whole." [2] In the Kimberleys a djambin man will say : " I got to marry nangeri ; that one straight fellow belonga me." But it is open to doubt whether this is sheer altruism on his part, or that when it comes to his own particular case, a heightened sense of duty is involved. The position is somewhat analogous to the declining birth-rate in our own community. Everyone is quite ready to assert that it should be arrested, but when they have children it is probably not for the perpetuation of the race, but for personal reasons, or the inescapable facts of nature. Marriage in the Kimberleys springs from economic, sexual, and social motives. The system is a lawful means by which he fulfils certain needs of his existence, rather than a delicately articulated and symmetrical structure which is to be preserved irrespective of its adaptation to anything so mundane as the satisfaction of daily wants.

Dr. Warner makes a similar point when discussing the reluctance of the girl's relatives to countenance her separation from her husband. " The necessity of keeping a woman with her husband to protect the kinship structure of Murngin society is thus clearly felt by all people, including the members of her own family and clan whose structure has been damaged by her going to a new family and clan." [3]

[1] W. L. Warner, op. cit., p. 212.
[2] Ibid., p. 255.
[3] *Idem*, M.F.A.M., *Amer. Anth.*, xxxiii, n.s., 1931, p. 175.

In all such statements there is the danger of eliminating or ignoring the native's penchant for the concrete situation, his tendency to think with reference to particular cases and individuals and the immediate and personal antagonisms likely to result. Another point that may be made in regard to his question of the disruption of the kinship structure, is the frequency in the Northern Territory and in the Kimberleys of alternate marriages which necessitate a readjustment of kinship terms; yet such unions are not merely condoned but are also in the latter region sanctioned by myth and custom.

Polygamy

So far we have postulated that the native attitude towards his kinship system is a practical rather than an æsthetic or altruistic one. How far then does it serve his needs; how far does he adapt it to his purposes in daily life? In East and South Kimberley there is an alternate type of marriage and therefore the number of women available as wives is potentially greater. On the other hand, unfortunately, there is a numerical predominance of men over women,[1] and the practice of polygyny limits the choice still further. Miss McConnel for the Wikmunkan tribe states that "the sharing of the burden of pregnancy, child-rearing and food-gathering is one of the benefits of polygamy. . . . This custom is an economic necessity. . . . A woman left to her own devices cannot possibly be a mate to her husband, bear, rear and carry babies and young children, collect food and firewood and prepare the daily meals".[2] Yet in the Kimberleys the majority of women perform all these functions without the aid of a co-wife. Nor does the writer give any information on the proportion of polygamous to monogamous unions, nor the number of unmarried men and women in the camp.

Dr. Warner for the Murngin declares that "polygamy is a decided factor in stimulating open conflict because of

[1] *Annual Reports for West Australia*, 1936, 1937.
[2] U. McConnel, W.A.T., *Oceania*, iii, p. 479.

the scarcity of women resulting from the consequent intense struggle to acquire mates by the younger men ".[1] The killing of the young men below twenty-five makes up the balance between men and women.[2] There were a hundred deaths amongst the Murngin men due to war over the last twenty years; " warfare then is one of the mechanisms on which polygamy is based. Otherwise the pressure of men looking for wives could not be resisted. . . . Warfare is partly responsible for the solid foundations of the kinship structure in Murngin society." [3] But he does not say explicitly whether the hundred men were all under twenty-five, and whether they already had wives. If they include some of the older men then we must take into account the deaths amongst the women, some of whom may have been speared for a wrong marriage or because they have seen ritual objects.[4] Nor does he give the percentage of polygamous unions: furthermore a hundred deaths over twenty years is only five a year, and it is doubtful if this would diminish the competition to any appreciable extent. In Queensland Dr. Sharp asserts that "the majority of marriages are monogamous " and that a man only takes wives who are acceptable to the first wife.[5] In 1913, Professor Malinowski, on the basis of the evidence then available, concluded that " polygyny seems to be restricted to the older and more influential men, and to be rather an exception, although it seems to be found in all tribes ".[6]

In my own genealogies, I found in a total of 174 unions at Moola Bulla in the Lunga territory, that there were roughly 150 monogamous unions and twenty-two polygamous or 12·6 per cent of the total. Of these, nineteen men had two wives, one had four, and two had five. In the Djaru tribe, there were 130 monogamous marriages and only nine polygamous, i.e. 7·4 per cent of the total.

[1] W. L. Warner, " Murngin Warfare," *Oceania*, i, p. 479.
[2] Ibid., p. 481.
[3] Ibid., p. 482.
[4] Ibid., pp. 459–460.
[5] L. Sharp, S.O.Y.Y., *Oceania*, iii, pp. 429–430.
[6] B. Malinowski, *F.A.A.A.*, p. 307.

The majority of these were older men, though under conditions of white contact, the young stockboys occasionally had two wives, their position as employees with additional supplies of food, tobacco, clothes, ornaments, tools, giving them a wealth and prestige they would not otherwise have enjoyed. The whites favoured an early marriage, in the hope of keeping them on the station: in this respect, they have undermined the authority of the headmen, although the latter are still supreme in the sphere of ritual life. Actually the possibility of polygyny, particularly where there are fewer women than men, rests in the Lunga tribe, not on the decimation of the males in warfare, but on the less spectacular fact that the girls marry at puberty, and the boys at the age of twenty or twenty-five.

Alternate Marriages

So much for polygyny as a limiting factor of choice. Do the alternate marriages occur only in isolated cases or are they frequent? The following figures, though only approximate, give some indication of the position.

Type of Union	Lunga at M.B. Station	Lunga at Bedfd. Station	Djaru	Kunian	Punaba	Wolmeri
Regular .	157 or 65·9%	154 or 63·4%	114 or 73·1%	77 or 64·4%	61 or 47·2%	139 or 61·2%
Alternate .	41 17·2%	49 20·3%	12 7·6%	33 27·2%	36 37·8%	78 34·3%
Wrong .	40 16·8%	38 15·7%	30 19·3%	11 9·1%	32 24·8%	10 4·4%

Some may be inclined to suggest that the number of alternate marriages is indicative of the extent of detribalization in these areas. But I found just as many in the first and second ascending generations as in the younger generation. But this does not apply to the number of wrong marriages, and the infringements of tribal law in this regard would seem to be due to culture contact. Under the heading of wrong marriages, I have included unions

with m.b.d. (for the Lunga alone), m.m.b.s.d. (with the exception of the Lunga), sister, sis.d., mother, daughter or f. sister, and wife's mother. These were of course all tribal relatives. Some of these unions met with a greater degree of condemnation than others; for example, that with m.m.b.s.d. in the Djaru tribe was not such a serious offence as marriage with tribal sister or wife's mother, where a strong avoidance taboo had been broken.

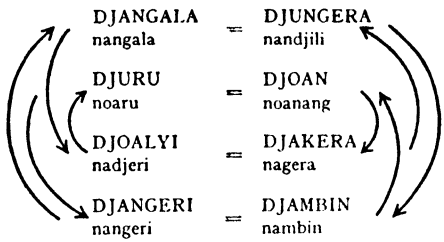
Such cases, however, occurred less frequently than the other types of marriage. These figures do not include all the members of the tribe, but only those with whom I had contact and from whom I obtained details of their relatives.

The large percentage of alternate marriages must give pause to those who think to find in the aboriginal mind a faculty which delights in complexity for its own sake and which has devised a system to manacle desire and natural inclination. Actually, as Professor Radcliffe-Brown [1] and others have stated, it is kinship and not the subsections or sections which regulate marriage. In certain tribes such as the Nyul-Nyul at Beagle Bay, marriage may only occur with the m.m.b.d.d., though the m.b.d. happens to belong to the same section. As Professor Elkin had said, subsections so far from increasing complexity, simplify kinship,[2] in that they make more immediate the distinctions between the different types of cousin mentioned, and facilitate the establishment of a relationship with strangers without any elaborated retracing of ancestry.

It is considered right to marry into a certain subsection, but where there are not sufficient women, young men have not been condemned to permanent bachelorhood. The alternate marriages are "straight", and in this the natives have shown more adaptability and practical wisdom than they are usually given credit for. It is doubtful whether this custom is a recent one, for R. H. Mathews mentioned it as early as 1901 for the Margaret, Fitzroy, and Ord River

[1] A. R. Radcliffe-Brown, *S.O.A.T.*, p. 15 and pp. 27–8.
[2] A. P. Elkin, "The Social Life and Intelligence of the Australian Aborigine," *Oceania*, iii, 1932–3, p. 105.

tribes.[1] Professors Radcliffe-Brown [2] and Elkin, Dr. Stanner and others have drawn attention to the same phenomena.[3] Alternate marriage is less desirable in native eyes: " him little bit wrong, but him all right. Him straight." And it is never confused with marriage into subsections containing mother, daughter, father's sister, mother-in-law, sister, etc., which are categorically stigmatized as *wa:djji* or " wrong ". The main objection is that they involve a dislocation of previously existing relationships, and a change of kinship terminology. This is accepted for practical purposes, but it is still recognized as being inconsistent with general subsection ruling for tribal relatives, and is expressed in pidgin-English by the use of the word " half " in conjunction with the kinship term. To illustrate from the Lunga tribe. The subsections are as follows, the arrows indicating mother-child relationship, and the sign = the regular union for husband and wife. Kinship terms are given on the following page.



A djambin man marries a woman of the alternate subsection, nagera. Normally he would call her mother, noanang, *galyil* (m.m.b.s.w. or sis.d.), but she is now his *own* mother-in-law, half-*damberu*, whom he must avoid. The point to stress here is that he does not apply the term to all women of her subsection, and he will still call all noaru *damberu*. Her husband, djuru, formerly *damberu* to djambin, becomes half-*lambera* or wife's father. The male *damberu* is never avoided so strictly as wife's mother, and hence the difference is not so great, as in any case formality

[1] R. H. Mathews, *R. Soc. N.S.W.*, xxxv, 1901, p. 218.
[2] A. R. Radcliffe-Brown, op. cit., p. 81.
[3] A. P. Elkin, *The Australian Aborigines*, pp. 96–7.

is the keynote of the *lambera* relationship. His own daughter, nandjili, will according to subsection ruling be his mother, yet he will call her *ŋa:bul,* daughter, with no qualification of half-*ŋa:bul.* When I suggested this, it was thrust aside decisively with : " no more half-*ŋa:bul* ; she own *ŋa:bul* belonga me." The parent-child relationship is an absolute

KINSHIP TERMS IN THE LUNGA TRIBE

gura:l	mother ; mother's sister.
ŋa:buŋ	father ; father's brother ; son(ms) ; brother's son.
ŋa:bul	father's sister ; daughter(ms) ; brother's daughter.
goa:ŋil	father's sister ; mother's brother's wife.
ŋa:rgandji	mother's brother ; father's sister's husband.
ŋa:laŋa	son(ws) ; sis.s.(ws) ; daughter(ws) ; sis.d.(ws).
na:djiŋ	brother (sometimes applied to m.b.s. ; f.sis.s.).
na:djil	sister (sometimes applied to m.b.d. ; f.sis.d.).
ba:riŋ	younger brother.
ba:ril	younger sister.
buluŋu	elder brother.
buluŋul	elder sister.
kanga:l	m.m. ; m.m.sis. ; m.m.b.s.d. ; f.f.sis.d.d.
kangainy	m.m.b. ; m.m.b.s.s. ; f.f.sis.d.s.
damandji	m.f. ; m.f.b. ; m.b.s. ; f.sis.s.
damanyil	m.f.sis. ; m.b.d. ; f.sis.d.
kila:gi	f.f. ; f.f.sis. ; s.s.(ms) ; b.s.s. ; s.d.(ms).
noa:djі	f.m. ; f.m.b. ; s.d.(ws) ; s.s.(ws) ; sis.s.s. and sis.s.d.(ms).
galyi	sister's son.
galyil	sister's daughter.
ŋulŋna	wife(ms) ; b.w.(ms).
ŋu:mbana	husband(ws) ; sis.h. ; w.b.(ms) ; m.m.b.d.s. ; f.f.sis.s.s.
mandiri	h.sis.(ws) ; b.w.(ws).
damberu	w.m.(ms) ; d.h.(ws) ; w.m.b.(ms) ; sis.d.h.(ms) ; h.m.b.(ws).
lambera	w.f.(ms) ; d.h.(ms) ; w.f.sis.(ms) ; s.w.(ms) ; h.f.(ws).
kuridji	h.m.(ws) ; s.w.(ws).
bunga:li	w.m.m.(ms) ; d.d.h.(ws).
ŋu:mara	w.m.f.(ms) ; d.d.h.(ms).

one, a new relationship has been created and there is no need to change a former tie : and the same holds good for djambin's own brothers and sisters. Other individuals not

connected by blood will call her by the term normally linked with her subsection. The importance of the family tie is illustrated again in the case where djambin's mother's brother, djungera, marries a noanang woman. Her daughter will be nagera and hence in the appropriate subsection for an alternate marriage with djambin. He will not, however, call her *kanga:l*, m.m.b.s.d., but *damanyil*, m.b.d. "She own piccaninny belonga *ŋa:rgandji* (m.b.). Me not marry that one. Can't call him *ŋulŋna*; no more half-*ŋulŋna*." The relationship is traced not through the woman but through the nearest blood relative and Dr. Stanner has noted a similar ruling for the Daly River tribes.[1]

This precedence of the parental bond is also seen in the case where djambin marries nadjeri (tribal m.b.d. and the recognized alternate marriage amongst the Djaru). His daughter, according to subsection ruling, would be *damberu*, but here again she is *ŋa:bul*. This is significant if we remember that marriage with *damberu* is the only other occasion when this term may be substituted by another. The brothers of djambin will still retain the avoidance relationship and will not call her half-*ŋulŋna* as in other types of wrong marriage. The habit of avoidance and the feeling of shame are not so easily repressed, and in the absence of a blood tie or actual marriage cannot be overridden. Similarly the avoidance between brother and sister, though not so stringent as that between *damberu*, is not supplanted by a less formal relationship when a man's brother marries tribal sister.

To make this a little less abstract we can take some of the instances on which these generalizations have been based. Kalban, djakera, head stockboy at Moola Bulla, about twenty-five, of good physique, vain, proud of his position and always ready to cut a figure before the women, had been carrying on an affair with Wolabal about three years previously. She was about twenty, round-faced, fat and complacent, and given to interfering in the affairs of others. She had had then two half-castes. Malgbera, her sister,

[1] W. E. H. Stanner, D.R.T., *Oceania*, iii, *passim*.

was quieter and altogether under her domination. She worked for the whites and provided food for Wolabal, who rarely left the camp to search for additional supplies. When Kalban and Wolabal were discovered, they were beaten by their parents and then ran away to another tribe. Kalban had not yet been given a *gunari*, the last stage of initiation before marriage, and therefore his brother-in-law threatened that he would never be able to see one, because " too much him bin run alonga *lubra* ". This was tantamount to a threat of excommunication from the ritual life of the horde. However, Kalban persuaded a tribal brother at another station to show him his *tʃuruŋa*, and he finally returned to Moola Bulla, where the marriage was accepted. Later he was also given Malgbera and had two children by her. He called his wives' parents half-*damberu* and half-*lambera*, and his wives called his parents, half-*kuridji* and *damberu*, the latter being a former term they had used. They avoided him, though had he been a father-in-law of the right subsection, this would not have occurred. I give here a list of cases taken from genealogies at Moola Bulla, which also indicate similar principles at work.

(1) Laidberin, djuru, married nangala, whose mother had died long before and had been in the sister's daughter subsection. He said he called her *galyil*, sis.d., because she was dead, and the kinship terminology was of no practical significance. No adjustment was necessary, and in any case there was a taboo on her name.

(2) An interesting wrong marriage between tribal brother and sister was that of Barudjil and Wanbierin. She called his mother half-*kuridji* (husband's mother), though technically she was tribal mother to her. His father became half-*lambera*, though formerly father. But she still called husband's mother's brother *ŋa:rgandji* (m.b.). The latter had married a woman of the wrong subsection, noanang, whom Barudjil could have called half-*goa:ŋil* (f.sis., or m.b.w.), or half-*kuridji* (h.m.), but she did neither because the principle of local organization came into operation. This woman was half-sister to Barudjil's mother,

since they both belonged to the one horde country, and therefore Barudjil called her half-*gura:l* (mother).

(3) The term *damberu* was retained where djambin, Dirbagi, had a brother married to nadjeri. The latter already had noaru and djuru children by another husband, and since they were not *own* brother's children, Dirbagi called them *damberu* and avoided them.

(4) The *damberu* was waived, however, where Karabal's father's sister had married a man of the alternate subsection who had been *damberu* to Karabal. She called him half-*ŋa:rgandji* (m.b.), because they were both very old, and the avoidance in such cases tends to lapse.

(5) Djulail, noaru, was married to a man of the alternate subsection, djangala. Her father-in-law did not become half-*lambera*, because he was already *damberu*, and this could not be substituted by a less formal relationship. Her own father's sister's son had married a tribal sister. In common with the Lunga practice, Djulail had called him *na:djiŋ* (brother), but she retained the subsection term, *damanyil* (m.b.d.), for his wife as the relationship was more remote. Her husband's sister, nangala, had married Djulaili's own mother's brother, djoalvi. There were three terms open for selection, *kanga:l* (subsection ruling), half-*goa:ŋil* (m.b.w.), or half-*mandiri* (husband's sister); the last was chosen because apparently the tie through the husband was felt to be more immediate.

(6) Ludbarir's sister, nadjeri, married a tribal brother, djoalyi, whom she had avoided previously. In any other marriage but this or that of djoan (*damberu*), Ludbarir would have called him half-*ŋu:mbana*, but here again the avoidance held. In another case, where a man married his tribal sister, his own brother still continued to call her sister. They had a child, whom the brother did not call sister's child, but own brother's child or *ŋa:bul*.

(7) An example of partial adjustment of kinship terminology and subsections through two alternate marriages was that of Ladjel, nandjili. Her mother was married into the alternate subsection, djambin. Her father's sister,

nambin, had also married into the alternate subsection, djakera. Hence the latter became by marriage and subsection, *ŋa:rgandji* (m.b. or f.sis.h.). Their son, however, was djoan, or *kangainy* (d.son), by subsection to Ladjel but she called him *damandji*, or own f.sis.s.

(8) Guindji, djungera, a son of the headman of the Djuria horde, had married a tribal sister, nandjili. He called her mother, who was nagera, half-*damberu* and avoided her. Nagera herself was married to a djambin man, who could have been *galyi* (sis.son), or half-*ŋa:buŋ* (father), to Guindji, but owing to the affinal situation he became half-*lambera*.

(9) Deragi, djakera, had a mother's brother, djoan, who was married wrongly to nangala. She, therefore, did not become half-*goa:ŋil* to *Deragi*, as would be customary in other cases, but was still *damberu*. She had, however, a half-caste, nadjeri, before her marriage, whom Deragi called wife, because she was not *own* m.b.d. His other m.b. had married a nandjili, formerly sis.d. to Deragi, but she was now called half-*goa:ŋil*, because there had been no previous avoidance.

Numerous other examples could be quoted, but from these alone certain principles emerge which are of interest to the student of kinship in Australia. In wrong marriages, new relationships are created which are at variance with the old ; but the individuals concerned are not thereby inflicted with multiple personalities, and forced to be three in one and one in three. Certainly the new kinship terms are a reminder that an unusual type of marriage has been contracted, but it does not seem to be a thorn in the flesh, and if it ever were, it has long since been grafted into the tissues of daily relationships without much inconvenience. The subsection, however, remains fixed. It is always determined by the simple expedient of "throwing away the father", and hence wrong marriages do not affect the number of individuals who would belong to a subsection. As has been remarked by other writers, the women are the pivots of the system and make possible its perpetuation. The choice of the woman as the determining factor in the

subsection is, I think, closely linked with the recognition of the physical tie between her and her child.[1] The subsection is more than a kinship term: it is totemic; it establishes a person's identity within the community; and, therefore, where kinship terms alter after an irregular union, the subsections have the effect of stabilizing such changes and maintaining the equilibrium of relationship within the whole group.

The kinship terms, since they refer first and foremost to relationships within the family, tend to reflect more closely any change in its constitution. In the event of a wrong marriage, three families are affected, that of the man, the girl, and their own once children are born. The adjustments are based on the realities of the situation within these groups, unless there has been previous avoidance and feelings of shame are involved. An example of their pragmatic approach to kinship is that of a man who had a mother's brother whom he had never seen and who was living about three hundred miles away. The mother's brother had married wrongly. Ego was an intelligent person and had had no hesitation in giving me the kinship terms in other wrong marriages, but he did not know what he would call his m.b.w. I, having a knowledge of the general principles, suggested first the kinship term associated with her subsection which would have been m.b.d.; then half-*goaːŋil* (m.b.w.), to which he replied petulantly: "me no savvy, me *no more bin see him.*" It was illuminating because it showed that unless he had been confronted with the actual situation in which decision had to be made and an adjustment effected, he was not sure of the term he would employ. Actually, if the other genealogies were any guide at all, he would probably have called her half-*goaːŋil*. But to return to the main point. Outside these limits of the family and own affinal relatives, kinship terms are less closely linked with behaviour and individuals are not thrust as a rule into

[1] Professor Elkin has made a similar comment: "It is associated with the belief in the inheritance of the body from the mother—not from the father—and with the importance of the mother's brother in native thought." *Oceania*, ii, 325.

intimate association with one another. Therefore, the new marriage has not changed the situation materially for them, and the old kinship terms are retained, the change being made with a minimum of repercussion throughout the group.

Principles of the Adjustment of Kinship Terminology

We may generalize to this extent: blood ties and the marital relationship take precedence over all others[1]; the principle of avoidance is next in importance, and outside these limits is never overridden, unless both individuals are very old.

The third principle to which the subsections offer no clue, is that of local organization to which I have already referred in Chapter II. Members of the mother's horde are regarded as mothers, or mother's brothers: and those belonging to the father's horde are fathers or father's sisters.[2] Marriages apparently may occur within the horde,

[1] One interesting fact emerges in a comparison of the Lunga and Djaru types of alternate marriage. In the Lunga tribe, m.b.d., *damanyil* is sometimes called sister, *naːdjil*. The natives give in explanation the closeness of the tie between mother and mother's brother: "Him own piccaninny belonga *ŋaːrgandji*. *ŋaːrgandji, guraːl*—two fellow got 'em one *kangaːl*" (i.e. m.m. to Ego). Professor Elkin has suggested that the use of the term sister for m.b.d. or f.sis.d. may reflect a prohibition of marriage with her.

This links up with Professor Radcliffe-Brown's theory that mother's brother is sometimes thought of as a male "mother" and father's sister as a female "father" (*vide S.O.A.T.*, p. 100). In the Lunga, the alternative term for f.sis. is *ŋaːbul*, the feminine form of *ŋaːbuŋ* (father), and her daughter is also called sister. Distant m.b.d. and f.sis.d. are, however, called by the customary term *damanyil*. In the Djaru tribe, where alternate marriage is with the m.b.d., I never heard this relative referred to as sister. She was always *bangi* (m.b.d.), and this may be correlated with the alternate marriage into that subsection. Professor Elkin, in his unpublished field notes, also suggested the same explanation, and my genealogies confirmed it. Nowadays, however, a number of marriages occur in the Djaru tribe which are of the Lunga alternate type. Of 114 regular unions, twelve were alternate marriages, eighteen were of the Lunga alternate kind, and twelve were "wrong". It is possible, since they adjoin the Lunga, that they may come to accept the Lunga ruling; but the Lunga themselves had forty-one alternate marriages and only twelve of the Djaru type. In the Wolmeri, who have less contact with the Lunga, there were only three, and in the Kunian only four.

[2] Professor Elkin also remarks that: "There is a tendency more marked in some tribes than in others . . . to regard all the members of any one horde as brothers and sisters and to observe the same attitude to all alike." *Vide S.O.K.T.*, p. 328.

but the only instances I had of this (four from Moola Bulla and two from Bedford) were dubious. They were given me by persons whose parents or grandparents were dead, and I did not meet with one case of intra-horde marriage in the younger generation or amongst those with whom I had personal contact. Moreover, there is the special term *kamərə* for mother's country as distinct from that for father's—*noərə:m da:m*, a usage that points to different horde countries for the parents. Of course, if this ruling from local organization were carried out consistently, then a man could never have a *damberu* in his own country. Certainly I never met with an instance. However, the converse of this principle does not apply in general practice, namely, that a man has no brothers or sisters outside his own or his mother's sister's hordes. Therefore, local organization does not dictate kinship in all cases. Where it does operate, it is probably felt that the closeness of a bond between a man and his country creates an intimate relation between himself and other individuals who are members of it also. This may point to exogamous marriages outside the horde previously, possibly before the adoption of subsections, for I could not detect in the numerous genealogies which I took, any tendency for the hordes to be divided up amongst the father-son subsections as has been suggested by Professor Elkin.[1]

Native Reactions to Adultery and Wrong Marriages

So far we have enumerated cases of alternate and wrong marriages, but their one claim to flesh and blood reality is that we have given them a local habitation and a name. We have seen that the system is essentially elastic, and it is adapted to daily life—a fact which is not altogether astounding if we accept the proposition that in the first place it was evolved in response to a complex set of needs. It cannot, therefore, be regarded as a nemesis that the natives have brought upon themselves: as a mechanism

[1] A. P. Elkin, *S.A.T.*, p. 95.

which, designed primarily to control and satisfy desires within the limits of environment and society, has ended by dominating existence and destroying the means of satisfaction. In one sense it is more rigid than our own system, but we must remember that the less complex character of aboriginal society enables us to see more clearly the restrictions imposed on the individual, whereas in our own society they tend to be camouflaged to a certain extent by an overt cult of individuality, and such tags as liberty, freedom and equality.

But what is the attitude of the community towards these marriages which we have only studied from the viewpoint of adjustments in terminology. Are the women primarily the upholders of the moral law, the unwilling parties to the contract, or do they contravene it, even take the initiative and condone its infringement? We have already seen that one of the main emphases in the culture is the establishment of unions between individuals of the correct relationship. The majority abide by this, and amongst the Lunga out of 238 unions at Moola Bulla, 198 fulfilled these conditions, that is, 83·7 per cent. The same held good of members of the tribe at Bedford. In the Wolmeri the percentage was even higher, being 95·5 per cent. In the Kunian, it was 91·6 per cent, in the Djaru 80·7 per cent, and in the Punaba, 74 per cent.[1]

The attitude of society towards wrong marriages that had occurred two or more years previously was not one of brooding antagonism, though occasionally they might be

[1] There may be a correlation between the number of regular unions and the extent of detribilization, though it would be difficult to prove this in the present instance. Certainly the Wolmeri seemed to have retained more of their ritual life both among the men and women. In the Punaba I found it difficult to obtain much from the women, though it must be admitted that I was only there ten days. Professor Elkin places the Punaba amongst the section tribes (*S.O.K.D.*, p. 324), but I collected genealogies from 17 individuals with 121 unions in all, and it was denied emphatically by these and the headmen that they had ever had sections. Those Punaba living near the Nyigina Tribe who have sections, were able to equate the subsections with the sections; but those at Brooking Station in the heart of the territory were often in doubt. Furthermore, the Punaba state they originally came from the north, and moved south after the Djabu tribe became virtually extinct.

resurrected in an argument out of personal malice or self justification. Wolamban, djungera, an elderly man, had married a woman of the wrong subsection, nadjeri (tribal daughter), and had a daughter by her, noaru. He wished to take another wife, who was also in the wrong subsection, this time, nandjili and tribal sister to him. As a result his wife instituted an economic boycott and refused to bring in any vegetable food for him. He retaliated by not giving her any meat; whereupon she left him and went to her brother. That night a heated argument broke out between the two camps which were about thirty yards apart. Nadjeri tackled nandjili, saying: " You two fellow go sleep. You nangala you straight fellow, eh ! " And then lest her sarcasm should not find its mark, " You not nangala—you nandjili." To which nadjeri retorted: " You not straight fellow—you nadjeri."

Burul, who was sitting near by and considered herself a virtuous woman, a guardian of morality and like all such given to gossip and interference, now interjected with a remark to djungera:

" You not djangala " (correct husband for nandjili), " you not djakera " (correct spouse for nadjeri): " You djungera." Then nandjili cut in with a: " not my fault, I no bin want him. Him bin come alonga me first time." Then the daughter, noaru, leapt into the argument with, " Why you no bin feed 'em nadjeri. You no more bin get 'em straight fellow *now*. I can't call you *ŋa:buŋ* (father) you not djakera; I got to call you *damandji* (m.b.s.)." Actually, of course, they called one another father and daughter. The other women began to laugh at his discomfiture, and he went off with what dignity he could muster to another camp farther down the creek.

Where the marriage has been established for some years it excites little comment, and the partners to it exhibit no shame when taxed with it. The Barudjil, whom we mentioned in case (2), had run away from her first husband because he was too old, and had married her tribal brother. When I pretended to be shocked, she giggled and said: " I can't

find 'em djakera (manifestly untrue here), I got to marry djoalyi," and giggled again. The men were just as unrepentant, and would say, " me bin get wrong marriage from moon"; and then, if asked for a further explanation, would recount to me the myth of how the moon, djuru, had tried to marry his mother-in-law, nambin, and had been attacked by the infuriated woman and her mates. In revenge he had said, " I shall die now, but I shall come back in five days. But when you die, you will not come back." This, according to the natives, was the origin of death and wrong marriage. " We got to follow that one moon," they would say with a grin, and pervert what should serve as a warning against the infringement of tribal law into a sanction for their own behaviour.

Women in these matters are ready to laugh at their own delinquencies, gossip about those of others and as a rule condone laxity unless they happen to be near relatives, when they showed some shame and embarrassment. But even then they accepted it like the others once the disputes had been thrashed out. While at Bedford camp, I was fortunate enough to see an elopement between a woman and her tribal son-in-law, whom she should have been avoiding assiduously. The camp was aroused one morning by the discovery that she, Bulagil, nagera, had left her rightful husband, djoalyi, and fled with her djangala lover. Noanang, her mother, wailed, struck her head, and beat Bulagil's co-wives, accusing them of having aided the runaways. Over and over again she lamented: " I can't call that one djoalyi; I got to call him djangala." The whole moral enormity of the situation was crystallized in those terms for the old woman and the bystanders. Later in the evening, djoalyi returned to his camp, found it deserted and demanded an explanation from me. When it was volunteered somewhat haltingly, he carefully curbed his anger, and pushed me behind a tree out of harm's way with a : " You stop there ; me make 'em big row ; chuck 'em boomerang, spear." He proceeded to make it, beat his other two wives *and* his mother-in-law whom he should not have touched, and threw spears at

the men, accusing them of conniving in the affair. The result was that public opinion, which outwardly at least had unconditionally condemned Bulagil, began to veer round, and before the week was out the general view was: "Oh well, what else can the man expect when he goes away and leaves three wives behind. If he is not careful he will lose the other two." Spasmodic attempts were made to track the guilty pair, but they had gone to another station about 100 miles to the south-west, and they were still there when I left six months later. General opinion has been alternately shocked and titillated by the event. It gave the men who prided themselves on their own strength of mind and well-ordered households an opportunity to air their views on the treatment of wives. One of the most belligerent of these was nothing if not submissive, however, in the actual presence of his wife; handed over tobacco to her without a demur; and when she became restless and wished to return to her own country to visit her mother, he picked up his spears and went. The situation was more complex for those closely related to the culprits. Here shame, moral indignation, and, on the part of the mother at least, genuine grief conflicted. The husband's attitude was more difficult to analyse. Probably his affections had been wounded; but a greater blow had been struck at his vanity, and he sought compensation in outbursts of blustering rage which guttered out into idle threats of what he would do if he ever caught his wife and her lover. Furthermore, he had lost a good economic partner in Bulagil, and this was probably another potent cause of his natural resentment.[1]

Even the headmen had taken wrong wives. Dalbundji, djangeri, of the Djuria horde had married a nagera woman; Djulin who was djoalyi and headman of another horde had married noaru and had had three children by her. But such unions had not affected their prestige nor the bases of their authority; and when Djulin's brother-in-law, Kalban, went and did likewise, he was quite ready to punish him. At Bedford, Malburir, a noanang woman, sister to the

[1] Quoted from my own article S.M.K.T., *Oceania*, vii, pp. 454–6.

headman and in mourning for her brother, carried out increase ceremonies for lily-roots and yams, but before and after this, she was having an affair with a tribal brother, thus performing rites on which economic existence was believed to depend and infringing tribal law at the same time. In fact those who are the guardians of tribal law frequently break it, though it is doubtful if they are using their position as a cloak for this.

As far as I could see, authority was vested in the family group in such matters; whilst that of the headman was associated with the conduct of ritual life. This is an important distinction, because if the women are excluded from many religious ceremonies, it does necessarily place them at a disadvantage in other secular spheres and in marital relationships. For the man, the position is different, because, as we have seen, Djulin tried to prevent his brother-in-law, Kalban, from taking any further part in the secrets of the *tʃuruŋa*. By this means an older relative may be able to bring pressure to bear on a man in his marital life, but the woman has nothing to lose and therefore her exclusion from such ceremonies is an advantage in this instance at least.

Exchange of Gifts at Marriage

Once the union is accepted, the man makes the customary gifts to the parents of the girl, though in this region the exchanges are not so elaborate as those described by Dr. Stanner for the Daly River, where several feasts—*kue*—are given by the man to her parents and her relatives after two children have been born.[1] The exchanges in Kimberley cannot altogether be identified with the African bride-price, nor with a business transaction. The point is a relevant one here, because of its bearing on the rights exercised by the husband over the wife, which have yet to be discussed. If we find that the woman claims similar privileges, then these gifts cannot be regarded as a purchase.

[1] W. E. H. Stanner, C.E.M.M., *Oceania*, iv, p. 460 et seq.

First of all they set a seal on the union, distinguish it from a casual liaison, give the man the right to take his wife away to his horde country, and to claim any children that are born as his own. Soon after betrothal, the first gifts are made—hair-belts, pearl-shell, spears, axes, formerly dog-tail fringes, necklaces of bamboo, boomerangs and dilly-bags. It is important to note that the mother of the girl receives a share of these, and that she will pass some of them on to her parents and her brothers. The father does not reap all the benefit, and the woman would seem to exercise equal rights over her child. The husband continues to make these presents together with game as long as he is married to the girl. They are handed over through the medium of his wife, since he cannot approach her parents directly. The gifts are reciprocated in kind, but the balance is in favour of her parents. They are performed with a characteristic lack of effusiveness, and the onlooker would be unlikely to guess their importance in maintaining social relationships. These gifts define the status of the man as the future husband of the woman, and some of the bitterest disputes occurred when another man attempted to marry the girl. When this happens the parents do all they can to compel her to marry the rightful suitor, but they are not always successful, even where the father is a headman. It is significant that the natives themselves never use the word " sell " or to " buy " in this connection, though they employ it in regard to the other exchanges which resemble the *merbok* of the Daly River.

There would seem to be a definite element of compensation present, as expressed in the phrase : " Me bin catch daughter from *damberu* ; me got to give 'em spear, boomerang." The woman is taken away from her kindred, but I do not think the gifts are regarded as a compensation to the horde for a temporary loss of a member, since it is the girl's parents who mainly benefit. In their absence, m.m., m.f., m.m.b. receive them and are held responsible for the union. It is doubtful if Dr. Warner's remarks on the Murngin would apply to the Lunga and other Kimberley tribes. He

speaks of " the family and clan whose structure has been damaged by her (the woman) going to another family and clan.[1]

In the Lunga, the bond with relatives and country still persists after marriage, and it is questionable whether she is really an economic loss, particularly if marriage is not permitted within the horde in any case. Moreover, her people secure the alliance of individuals in another horde, the right to visit them, and possibly additional partners in the *wunan* (*merbok*) exchanges. These latter advantages also hold good for the man and his relatives.

More important, I think, is the emotional wrench that her departure entails. A woman separated from her daughter or discussing the marriage ceremony often says : " Me sorry belonga him " ; and when the Ngadi women prepare a girl at puberty, they said they would cry because she must leave them soon. The mother is often reluctant to hand over her daughter to her future husband, tends to side with her if she runs away ; and in one case to my knowledge, refused to allow a man to take her away, although he had been making presents for a year, and had asked for her three times. He said she was " hard-fellow ", but the other women were more sympathetic and declared : " She sorry fellow alonga piccaninny : no more want to lose 'em." [2] There is no mistaking the joy experienced when a mother meets her daughter after a long absence, and for weeks beforehand, she frequently refers with pleasure to the impending visit. The daughter herself often travels fifty miles or more to see her mother.

These exchanges then, seem to be a compensation for the emotional loss that her marriage entails on the one hand, and a recognition of her value on the other, though this latter was never explicitly stated. But in justification of this, there are the facts that she is an economic asset, a legal

[1] W. L. Warner, M.F.A.M., *Amer. Anthrop.*, 1931, p. 175.

[2] Professor Radcliffe-Brown mentions that the personal bond between a child, even a son, and the mother is regarded as stronger than that between a child and the father," op. cit., p. 99.

sexual partner, the bearer of his children,[1] and that he sometimes has difficulty in securing a wife. He rarely sends her away unless he has another wife. But this is not to say that the man secures a monopoly of her services, without being expected to reciprocate in turn. He simply acquires the right to be her husband.

In Africa, the bride-price may be said to legalize the marriage and legitimatize the children that are born from it. Certainly it performs a similar function in the Kimberley tribes, but I never heard the expression that occurs so frequently in the literature of the Central Congo, that the father thereby acquires "ownership" of the children. I doubt if the natives regard the gifts as compensation to the group for the children lost to it. They inherit their father's country and the right to participate in certain horde ceremonies, but the relationships with the mother's group are retained and emphasized, as opposed to the view that the society is purely patrilineal.

[1] Professor Radcliffe-Brown also emphasizes that "quite apart from the question of children, a man without a wife is in an unsatisfactory position since he has no one to supply him regularly with vegetable food, to provide his firewood, and so on", *idem*, op. cit., p. 103.

CHAPTER VI

RIGHTS AND DUTIES OF WOMEN IN MARRIAGE

The anthropologist works on genealogies, sifts and winnows data, delves into the technicalities of adjustments in kinship terminology and discovers principles. In the process, the day-to-day existence in the camp with its play of temperament, the foraging for food, the discussions of scandal that are rarely virulent and generally tolerant, the moments of excitement and tension—all these tend to recede into the remote background. The dust and heat of native life are replaced by the somewhat sterile atmosphere, precision, order, and cloistral quiet of the laboratory. Natives are gradually denuded of their humanity as the anthropologist strives to cut to the bone of truth; vital personalities are reduced to skeletons to give an almost diagrammatic representation of the principles enunciated. Unfortunately the attempt to explain occupies more time and space than the bare description. It is one of the penalties that the scientist has to pay that he cannot take statements at their face value, but must endlessly seek to burrow to their inner significance. In so doing he is likely to be plunged into a bottomless pit of analysis and never touch reality again.

In the camp, married men and women are going about their work, often oblivious of the fact that a casual phrase of theirs is seized upon with avidity, sublimated into a principle, and developed into a theory. One woman sits idly gossiping with her sister and mentions a comb of wild-honey she intends to collect the next day. Beside her, the husband sleeps, grimed with the red ochre with which he had decorated himself for a corroboree the night before. He wakes, demands some of the tea which had been brewed about three hours previously, and strolls off to where a group of men are sitting under a tree. Near by another

woman plays with her baby daughter, repeating the words she utters again and again. Another woman, fat and good-tempered, squats by her diminutive husband and teaches him to spin hair-thread. He is clumsy ; she teases him and finally takes it away. In another camp, a man has returned from the hunt and is grumbling because his wife has not brought in sufficient lily-roots ; she retorts angrily that they were all that she could find. Fifty feet away another man is lying with his head in his wife's lap, while she plucks the whiskers out of his chin.

In such a group it is almost impossible to distinguish by behaviour alone those women who outraged their relatives by eloping with a man of the wrong subsection, and those, who as young girls, were handed over to their husbands and have remained with them ever since. How far the duties of marriage were accepted willingly in the one case, or involved hardship in the other, is a matter of conjecture ; but some idea of the changes that marriage entails can be inferred by a comparison of the young girls living with their parents, those who are residing temporarily with their future husbands, and those who have been married for some years and are away from their own horde territories.

Patrilocal Residence

As we have already seen, discipline is at a minimum during childhood, apart from the fact that a girl may have little or no voice in the selection of a husband. If this has been arranged in infancy, then she may have camped with him from time to time, and is already familiar with his habits and temperament when she has to leave her parents after puberty. Perhaps one of the fundamental alterations in her life is that she must go to her husband's country ; but it may happen under present conditions that he is working for whites in her own horde-country and therefore the wrench is not so great. There were fourteen cases of this at Moola Bulla ; it is also possible that his horde-country may adjoin hers, and that she may be within a

short day's journey of her relatives. This is not to say that she sinks all claims to her horde-country or that the husband is exerting arbitrary rights over his wife as a movable piece of property, so to speak. Patrilocal residence is based on economic, social, and religious factors. Professor Radcliffe-Brown in discussing the horde in Australia has stated that it is " the primary land-owning or land-holding group. The woman at marriage leaves her horde and joins that of her husband. . . . The horde as an existing group at any moment consists of (1) male members of all ages whose fathers and father's fathers belonged to the horde, (2) unmarried girls who are sisters or daughters or son's daughters of the male members, (3) married women, all of whom in some regions, and most of whom in others, belonged originally to other hordes and have become attached to the horde by marrige ".[1] He seems to imply in this statement that the women actually adopt the hordes of their husband and therefore his territory as their own. If this is so, then it would not apply to the Forrest River, East and South Kimberley tribes. The same writer is more correct when he makes the point that, " the woman seems to have retained something of her rights to her country." [2] In my own region, the women move about in their husbands' territories, forage for food, come to know the sacred sites and stones for increase ceremonies ; but they do not regard it as their own, though they exercise most of the privileges of membership. The term horde as used in this book refers specifically to the patrilineal group of men and women who own a stretch of territory, though some of them may be living elsewhere.

Professor Radcliffe-Brown has cited as one of the reasons for patrilineal descent, that " in his adaptation to a somewhat unfavourable environment the Australian native has to rely on accumulated detailed knowledge of the animals and plants he uses for food and for other purposes. A most important part of this knowledge is topographical, i.e. consists

[1] A. R. Radcliffe-Brown, S.O.A.T., *Oceania*, Mon. I, p. 45
[2] *Idem*, T.T.W.A., p. 147.

of the detailed knowledge of a certain piece of country.... If he left his own country, say at marriage, this knowledge would be lost and he would have to start all over again to learn all that he would require to know about the country to which he moved ".[1] The issue raised here by Professor Radcliffe-Brown is not simply the function of patrilineal descent as opposed to matrilineal descent, since in the event of the latter, a man would be able to pass on his knowledge to his sister's son. Professor Radcliffe-Brown has himself referred to the possibility of a man leaving his country at marriage, and the problem is thus the probable economic effects of matrilocal residence combined with patrilineal descent of the horde-country.

Now if we approach the question of the Aborigine's adaptation to a limited set of environmental conditions, we find that a man frequently lives and hunts in the horde-countries of his mother, his mother's mother, his father's mother, his daughter's husband, his brother's wife, and his own wife. Dr. Stanner, in his material for the Daly River, has shown that the hordes temporarily camp in one another's territories, and Dr. Warner reports the same thing for the Murngin.[2] Moreover, since ecological conditions are similar throughout the Kimberleys, it is improbable that a man could not support himself outside his own territory. Three men who accompanied me on an expedition beyond the Lyne River were strangers to that region, and yet were able to provide sufficient game for themselves and their wives, as well as to distribute the rest in accordance with kinship obligations. Actually patrilocal residence combined with patrilineal descent of the horde-country may offer greater hardships for a woman, since the man mainly hunts kangaroo or wallaby, and it is a matter of following their tracks, and knowing something of the lie of the country—a knowledge that he could acquire in a relatively short period. But for the woman the greater variety of foodstuffs she gathers, and the intimate knowledge of soil and vegetation

[1] *Idem*, S.O.A.T., p. 107.
[2] W. L. Warner, *A Black Civilization*, pp. 139, 140, 389.

required, would seem on the face of it to necessitate a longer period of adaptation. If economics were a predominant factor there would be more to be said for matrilocal residence.

More important are the ritual factors, for each territory possesses its increase spots, its sacred stones and corroborees associated with the totemic ancestors, who journeyed through the country in the Time Long Past. And whereas knowledge of the kangaroo is interchangeable throughout these regions, the particular myths and ceremonies are unique and completely specialist, in so far as a man's lineage binds him to sacred sites in a particular territory. A man develops a possessive attitude towards his horde-country, because it was his father's and his father's father's before him. Members of the one horde constitute a loose kinship unit as we have already shown. If, of course, residence were matrilocal, then links with one's kindred would be severed. What is even more important is the fact that increase ceremonies can only be carried out by members of the horde, or the old women who are wives of the headmen. The totemic corroborees can only be performed by members of the horde. Now, if a man were to live permanently in the horde of his wife, he would be cut off from active participation in the corroborees which he has inherited from his father. He does attend ceremonies elsewhere, but as an onlooker and not as a dancer. Now, this factor would not operate to the same extent for a woman, and therefore, a removal from her country, though it means the partial severing of social and intimate ties, has not the same consequences in the religious sphere.[1]

Interesting in this respect is the problem why a horde living on the border of the desert does not attempt the conquest of a more fertile region either within the same tribe (as could happen amongst the Wolmeri), or else that of another tribe. What lies at the bottom of this respect for others' rights; why this reluctance to leave one's own

[1] Professor Elkin in *The Australian Aborigines* emphasizes the ritual factors which bind a man to his horde-country. *Vide* pp. 26–7.

territory except to seek employment under the whites? Land-hunger has so often served as an excuse in Europe and elsewhere to occupy territory of one's more favoured neighbours, that it is perhaps difficult to understand the Aborigine's hesitation or rather refusal to do likewise. I think the answer is to be found in the ritual sphere. Totemism interpenetrates the whole of social life: through his totems and the belief in the totemic ancestors of the Time Long Past, a man is bound by spiritual ties to his country apart from economic considerations. This is further reflected in the fact that the increase ceremonies on which existence is felt to depend are performed by the members of the horde. A stranger in the country cannot approach these sites without exposing himself to the risk of sickness, unless he has been subjected to a special rite under the auspices of the headman. Even then he would not have the power to control the increase in the species. For much the same reasons, he must not hunt kangaroo in alien territory for three days. He may be given meat by the "owners" of the country, and he will probably bring a gift of game with him. Permission to camp must be received from the headman. So that if the horde took up residence permanently in another district after first driving out the possessors of it, they would leave behind their country in which the stones and other natural features vouched for the truth of the myths confirming their ownership and the right to perform certain corroborees and increase ceremonies given them by the totemic ancestors.[1] Earlier writers have commented on this absence of a desire to acquire new territories by conquest, and Dr. Warner has said that among the Murngin "land is not outside the clan, but is an integral part of it. . . . The names of the country, the names of the wells, the list of totems as well as the names of the mythological ancestors

[1] Professor Elkin, however, has mentioned that where a tribe has died out, another tribe may take possession of the deserted territory. But "until a mythology grows up, or is transplanted, linking the migrating group to its new tribal home, it regards itself as a sojourner only, for the true tribal home is the territory in which the old-time mythical tribal heroes or ancestors travelled and performed exploits and instituted rituals". *Vide The Australian Aborigines*, p. 26.

all form fundamental parts of clan unity".[1] We can, therefore, say in summary that over a strip of territory a patrilineal group exercises well-defined rights, which are guarded and enforced by the headman. The ties are based on factors of an economic, kinship, and ritual character. The body of totemic myth not only strengthens these, but provides a legal and religious charter for land tenure in these tribes.

This has represented something of a digression into land tenure, but one that at the same time reveals the basis for patrilocal residence. From this point of view, the latter does not, therefore, indicate an arbitary authority over the woman, but a choice between two alternatives, in which ritual associations would seem to take precedence over all others. The husband in consultation with his wife decides when to shift camp, but this again is largely dictated by the whereabouts of food and the movements of others in the group. She, moreover, visits her own country from time to time, either alone, with her husband, or some other relative, and it is felt that she has a right to do so. I know of one case where a man was reluctant to leave an inter-tribal gathering, but finally gave in to his wife's desire to go and see her mother.[2]

Affinal Relatives

As far as specific changes are concerned, it may happen that she has close relatives in the new horde, or that others are known to her. In any case, since behaviour is determined largely by kinship status, first contacts are eased, for the normative pattern of conduct does not vary within the tribe, and very little outside it in this region. She is aided by her mother-in-law and sisters-in-law; but here again there is no question of the elder woman interfering in the domestic arrangements of husband and wife, nor of the younger girl fetching and carrying for her. She is not made to

[1] W. L. Warner, *A Black Civilization*, p. 389.

[2] Dr. Warner notes that in the Murngin a young wife may be accompanied by a brother as protection and he in turn will be cared for by the husband who acts as a father to him. *Vide* M.F.M.K., *Amer. Anthrop.*, 1930, p. 241.

feel an outsider—an appendage of her husband's group. Moreover, there are all the other women who have married into the horde and who occupy a position similar to herself. In fact, horde "clannishness" only becomes markedly evident at inter-tribal meetings, when hordes may be lined up on opposite sides of the arena; even then a man may fight by the side of his mother's relative and against his own horde. In daily life it is the immediate family and affinal relatives who matter.

But if her relationships with her relatives-in-law are friendly, has she, in escaping from the tutelage of her family, found a harsher and more exacting one under her husband? With the economic position we have already dealt, the conclusion being that although she provides the bulk of the staple diet, yet a very real co-operation exists between them. He is expected to make his contribution, and he does not direct her activities as has sometimes been maintained. She is the keeper of the hearth, gatherer of firewood, bearer of his burdens (and her own), which are not of a numerous nature. She has, moreover, the right to her own property such as *kulamon*, billies, handkerchiefs, axe, knife, dilly-bags and fighting-stick; and in the event of a quarrel she takes these with her. At death those articles which are not destroyed are distributed to her relatives, his having no lien upon them. The husband is the protector as a rule, but she takes his part in the arguments at the inter-horde meetings. The women would urge the men to fight on such occasions; they delighted in the excitement and carried on their own private disputes on the side-lines so to speak. If a husband looked as though he were getting the worst of it, the wife might rush in regardless of her own danger, and either wrest the spears and boomerangs from him, or else bodily drag him, reluctant and still struggling, off the field of battle. On one occasion when I was present, one woman received a wire spear through her foot for her pains. There is a very definite sentiment of loyalty present between husband and wife, where either becomes involved in a dispute with other people.

The Exercise of Authority

The problem of authority cannot be discussed apart from the particular spheres in which it is exercised—those of residence, economics, property, sex, and children. Such statements as the husband has almost complete authority, are meaningless, unless we are ready to assume that the wife has no recognized rights at all. In the absence of a written code of law, it is difficult sometimes to make a distinction between the legal investiture of power in the man and that wielded by him in practice. Evidence must be based on statements made by men and women on the one hand, and the extent to which both are able to establish the validity of their assertions successfully and with one section of the community behind them on the other. Ill-treatment and a beating cannot be immediately assumed to be the sign-manual of authority, unless we are under the impression that we are dealing with a race of sadists and masochists. A further examination might reveal the fact that they were the penalties inflicted only on an occasion of non-fulfilment of the duties with which we have already become familiar. Earlier writers,[1] though prejudiced in many ways, nevertheless admitted that the husband might not put his wife to death without active revenge being taken by her relatives; but they considered the standard of treatment meted out to her a very low one. They failed, however, as a rule to analyse in detail the situations likely to provoke uxorial anger, and tended to regard them simply as instances of a display of male despotism. I, personally, have seen too many women attack their husbands with a tomahawk or even their own boomerangs, to feel that they are invariably the victims of ill-treatment. A man may perhaps try to beat his wife if she has not brought in sufficient food, but I never saw a wife stand by in submission to receive punishment for her culpable conduct. In the quarrel she might even strike the first blow, and if she

[1] Professor Malinowski sums up the earlier material as follows: "she (the wife) was entirely in his hands, and he might ill-treat her, provided he did not kill her." *F.A.A.A.*, p. 77.

were clearly in danger of being seriously hurt, then one of the bystanders might intervene, in fact, always did within my experience. Such disputes owing to the separation of the sexes during the greater part of the day, generally took place in the camp, and since the country was comparatively fertile, a number of people would be living together, and, therefore, she was not without protection that might otherwise have lacked in the desert regions, where husband and wife may be isolated.[1] Ultimately, the man's superior physical strength tells in such a struggle, but then most probably she will pack up her goods and chattels and move to the camp of a relative, perhaps even her sister-in-law, till the loss of an economic partner, someone to fetch firewood and water, and carry his burdens, brings the man to his senses, and he attempts a reconciliation. Such economic sanctions, based on her indispensability, are more effective in her hands than in those of the League of Nations. The point to stress is not only her great importance in economics, but also her power to utilize this to her own advantage in other spheres of marital life. If we are to speak of authority at all, it must be defined not only in terms of his privileges on the one hand, but also by hers on the other—in short, by those reciprocal rights and duties that are recognized to be inherent in marriage. The wider question of tribal authority will be dealt with later.

Sexual Rights

In the sphere of sex, mutual fidelity was demanded, and there was no question of the husband's laxities being condoned. Both guarded their rights jealously, though it was said that if a woman reported to her husband that she had been seduced against her will, reprisals would only be taken against the man. However, in the quarrels that I witnessed, the husband's suspicions had been aroused first,

[1] Professor Malinowski, in discussing this question of authority, has suggested that since " single families lived in considerable isolation . . . it would be difficult to assume any intervention from outside in matters of family life ", op. cit., p. 79. But this would, of course, not refer to the more fertile parts of the continent where larger camps are the rule.

and the woman's assertions of her innocence were not heeded. But the woman generally had ready her counter-charge of infidelity on his part. If, however, she has run away with her lover, he might pursue her with his brothers and mother's brothers, fight the man, beat his wife, and return with her to the camp. On the other hand, if he were unsuccessful in his pursuit, the matter was postponed to the next inter-tribal meeting. If the woman and her lover had doubts about the issue, they would not put in an appearance; if some time had elapsed then they would come with the people who had given them sanctuary, camp with them till the disputes were held in the "ring-place" when a formal charge would be made and possibly a few weapons thrown. Compensation was arranged and the lover kept the woman. Women, on their side, were equally tenacious of their rights, and if the husband persisted in his infidelity, they might leave him permanently. There was the instance of Barudjil and Wanbierin who were tribal brother and sister. They were a most devoted couple when I arrived, yet they quarrelled five months later, and she accused him of going with another woman who lived twenty miles away.

Barudjil, in the heat of the argument, picked up his boomerang, banged him, then grabbed a tomahawk to enforce her point and pummelled him with the blunt edge on his arms and shoulders, till the situation became dangerous, and an old man wrested it from her. Wanbierin rolled up his swag and departed, hurling obscenities and an occasional boomerang at her, which she avoided easily, but which came unpleasantly near where I was standing diligently making notes. After a temporary reconciliation she again made the same accusation of infidelity, and left him for good. Two months later, she had found another husband, and Wanbierin was living with the other girl. It should be mentioned that her parents and his tried to bring pressure to bear upon them, because of the ill-feeling and disturbance that resulted in the camp, and because of the severing of an established relationship, which, however, in the beginning

had been strictly contrary to tribal law. But no force was used to send the girl back to him, and it was felt that he was in the wrong.

Another instance was Yudubein at Forrest River, who had had four husbands and had helped the second to kill the first. Her last was going with another woman, whom Yudubein attacked. But together they were a match for her, and Yudubein emerged with a gashed head and foot. She left him, and even when his mistress, who was known to be a prostitute, deserted him, she refused to return and finally married her fifth husband.

With the whole system of magic by which a woman obtains new lovers, or inflicts sickness upon her unfaithful spouse and his mistress, I shall deal later. At the same time, a woman, also either out of cynicism or realism, takes measures to insure her husband's fidelity during his absence or when she must camp apart during menstruation.

While the man is away, his relatives and hers are supposed to see that she remains faithful. They remonstrate if they discover anything to arouse their suspicions, and report it to her husband, but they do not take physical measures against her. When Bulagil ran away, her husband returned and accused his relatives of conniving with her. " You know she not single fellow ; why you no bin stop him ? You bin help him." The last charge alienated any sympathy he had received. A girl does not invariably have all her relatives against her in an illicit affair. Wungenil had found a confidante in her mother—a tacit if not open supporter. But her husband's mother's brother and husband's brother did all they could to protect the husband's rights since he had been sent away to a leprosarium in Derby, on the coast. In the end she had her way and married the man.

Most of the discussions at an inter-tribal meeting were concerned with such illicit affairs, though the issues had generally been thrashed out beforehand in the camp between husband, wife, and lover. For instance, at Violet Valley in the North Lunga country, a " ring-place " was held for the initiation of a boy ; but previous to the operation, the

eastern hordes lined up on the eastern side of the arena or " ring ", as the natives term it in pidgin-English. There they waited for the western Lunga and the Wula who had been camped about seventeen miles distant. The latter came to the pool about a mile away, the men running on ahead, the women following more leisurely with the children and dogs. They sat down thankfully in the shade, and went to fetch water and temporarily were impervious to the efforts of the men to gain their admiration for the figures they were cutting in their war-paint. The men made a fire, placed green branches upon it, and leaned over the smoke as a means of securing magical protection against wounds. They rubbed themselves all over with some of the leaves and stuck them into their hair-belts ; the women did likewise, since they take a minor part in the fights on the edge of the " ring ". The men who belonged to the eastern hordes went on ahead to join their countrymen. The rest slept or talked, for it was midday, and the heat rose in shimmering waves from the earth. About three hours later, the men moved off, running together with their spears raised, pausing to shout and to clash the shafts together. Some of the women ran in front, waving green branches and urging them to fight well. In such moments they were infected with the belligerency of the men, and were potential warriors in spirit at least.

Finally all reached the " ring " and took up their position at its western end. A number of women from the opposing groups embraced and wept together for the joy of meeting after a long separation ; others wailed and tried to gash their heads in mourning for a relative recently dead. Slightly to one side the headmen were talking quietly, directing operations, commanding that there were to be no deaths as a result of the disputes. A man who had lost his son a few months previously accused another of practising sorcery ; he ran the length of the arena, fitting his spear into his spear-thrower, feinting to throw it, prancing up and down before the other hordes, and finally returning without further action. The proceedings had the formality



Kimberley warriors.

[*Face p.* **146.**

of a medieval tournament and provided much the same opportunity for a display of aggression and prowess. The accused, after a pause, approached his accuser, denied the charges, threatened him with his spear, and ran back to his own group. Then the husband of Bulagil (see pp. 128–29) charged her tribal mother's brother with having committed adultery with her some months ago. He was supported by his brother. Actually, the resurrection of her other infidelities seemed, on the face of it, to be irrelevant as she was already lost to her husband and was a hundred miles away. The mother's brother probably received some of the enmity that her husband would willingly have directed towards her present lover. Of course the accused indignantly repudiated the charge and hurled his spear; the husband retaliated, but no wounds were inflicted on either party.

In the meantime, Bulagil's mother was attacked by her sister, on the score that she had not prevented the elopement, though actually she had been more grief-stricken than anyone else at the time, and had wailed night after night in the camp, till the others, whose rest was being disturbed, told her to be quiet. Another woman attacked her brother's former wife for living with another man. They both carried fighting-sticks and wielded them effectively, till one cracked and the woman had to go off and borrow another. Abuse was bandied backwards and forwards, and there was much flourishing of the stick in the face of the opponent. Then the women, in the midst of their quarrel, remembered a mutual relative who had died; both dropped their weapons and wept together. Another warrior had begun to growl because his sister's daughter's daughter was married to a man of the wrong subsection. Since the marriage was now accepted, however, he demanded from the husband's mother's father the customary gifts that should pass from the husband's group to the bride's relatives.

Amongst the others, fresh grievances had been brought to light. A small bantam of a man, djangala, was leaping

up and down in anger before djungera who towered above him, and who had taken the nandjili woman whom we have already mentioned in the argument between djungera and his former wife (see p. 127). Djangala asserted that nandjili had been promised to him by his brother before he died, and that djungera had stolen her and had also committed a breach of tribal law by marrying his tribal sister. " You have seen the genitals of your sister," was the accusation ; whereupon djungera angrily retorted that she had been promised to him, and clinched his statement with a boomerang, which was returned by djangala, and followed immediately by a wire-spear. During this dispute, djangala's wife, who was fat, short, but immensely energetic, was carrying on an argument with the guilty nandjili, and punctuating her remarks with a fighting-stick. Finally, they were separated by a tribal father when it seemed as though both would be severely hurt. Amongst the men, djoalyi, brother to djungera's former wife, now came forward in defence of his sister and wanted to know why djungera had not fed her, and why he had taken another woman of the wrong subsection. By this time, most of the men with any grievances were involved in an exchange of weapons, and the headman of the western hordes intervened and declared the fighting must cease, particularly as some of them had to decorate themselves for a corroboree, which was to be performed that night. Djangala was still saying to djungera : " Nandjili belonga me ; me own brother belonga dead fellow ; you bin have 'em wrong one, noaru, nadjeri ; you not ' straight ' "—all of which did not seem to induce any shame at all in djungera. The mother's mother's brother of the woman who had married wrongly was left in the " ring " demanding tea from the mother's father of her husband ; the women went off to make their fires and to fetch water ; the rest of the men massed together, clashed their spear-shafts, and ran off to the edge of the creek, to make their preparations for the dance. The headman to whom I was talking said " all good friends now " ; and certainly the disputes that had

been raised were not brought forward at another fight two days later.

Such discussions probably provide one of the most valuable sources of material on the attitudes and comments of all parties, the number of illicit unions, the camp's reception of them, the rôles of men and women and of various relatives. Certainly such a settlement lacks the formality of legal proceedings for a divorce in our own community, the setting up of a jury, prosecutors for defence and plaintiff. It lacks the embodiment of justice in an official with the power to regulate the marital affairs of individuals of whom he may have no intimate knowledge. In this primitive society, relatives in the beginning would be interested in effecting a reconciliation if possible, since a legal union had been severed, and perhaps another contracted that under any circumstances would be contrary to marriage law. The men may help the husband to bring back the runaway wife. Certainly, they are held responsible ; but beyond the initial effort to prevent the liaison or elopement, to remonstrate with the culprits and to help the husband, they themselves do not *en masse* inflict physical punishment on the woman, nor carry her forcibly back to her husband's camp. If the headman intervenes at all, it is not in his official capacity, but as a blood or affinal relative. Authority, when wielded, is in the hands of those who are closely connected with the individuals, and who have a more comprehensive knowledge of the facts of the situation.

Ultimately it rested with the husband to convince his wife that it was in her own interests to remain faithful at least for the time being ; or if she had run away and returned to him, that it was to her advantage to remain with him. If he failed and she left him again, as a rule he accepted the inevitable, though he would resurrect the matter at the next inter-tribal meeting, when the two, if they judged it expedient, would arrive with the horde with whom they had been staying.

There were no crude conceptions of inalienable rights over a piece of human property, of an irrevocable contract

irrespective of difficulties, incompatibility, laziness, and infidelity. If the husband took steps to regain his wife, it was because he had lost a valuable partner: and this in turn demanded from him a measure of fair treatment, a reciprocity of the duties which were an inherent element in any stable marriage within this culture. If then the defined rights and obligations in marriage lacked the sanction of a religious sacrament, at least in the event of their non-fulfilment, there were no further complications and impediment to divorce on the grounds that the tie was indissoluble and holy, however unhappy the relationship. If the man and the woman had to deal with a complex of divergent claims, at least they were of a practical kind, and were settled in terms of the pragmatic factors in the situation.

As a rule, a decision was made immediately or soon after the discovery of a liaison; and unless the woman was fundamentally dissatisfied with her husband, because of his cruelty, infidelity, or laziness (in which case she would have the support of her relatives), or was really in love with the other man, a reconciliation would be effected. If she ran away for good, then a compensation would be arranged later, in which the new husband would pay over spears and boomerangs to the old one. After six months or a year, the formal indictment would be made at the "ring-place", when the husband and wife would not fight together, but it would be a question of man against man, whilst the woman coped with her ex-husband's female relatives. In this respect, it was quite distinct from the usual camp-brawl.

The position was not altered materially. What satisfaction then did it afford the husband? There was no denying the pleasure he took beforehand in the prospect of the fight; he would declare aggressively and proudly: "Me make 'em row alonga lubra." Often his vanity as much as anything had been injured, as I discovered when I tactlessly but deliberately asked a man why his wife had run away. I received a glare for my pains, and the angry statement: "Me no savvy; me no more bin beat him;

me bin catch 'em plenty kangaroo; no more bin sulk, growl alonga him." The ring-place gives such a man the opportunity to state publicly that his rights have been infringed: to make his accusations, and literally drive home his argument with the point of his spear. It is an opportunity to regain his self-respect by declaring that his opponent has acted wrongly: to play a spectacular part, to adopt aggressive attitudes, and to reinstate himself in his own estimation by cutting a warlike figure. Certainly the culprits did not register the appropriate degree of shame. They vigorously asserted the purity of their motives, and dragged a red herring across the dispute by resurrecting irregularities in the life of their aggressor. As in most communities, it was left to the relatives to voice moral indignation. The net result would seem to be that the grievances were properly aired, and the camp was able to settle down to a peaceful existence until the next quarrel.

Scandal or resentment, though present, are not permitted, or at any rate do not corrode relationships in a subterranean fashion for months on end. Sooner or later, it finds an outlet and is then dismissed. Moreover, the natives have not evolved that perverted form of moral judgment that expresses itself in social ostracism. When the new union is established there is no drawing together of the righteous to exclude the culprits from ordinary social contacts and activities. Once the disputes have been settled publicly, the new marriage is accepted *de facto*, if not *de jure*. Gossip there will be, but it lacks rancour and exaggerated hypocrisy, since all have been at one time or another more or less culpable. Furthermore, politeness restrains comment in the presence of close relatives.[1] But if an occasional affair is condoned, the Aborigines distinguish very sharply between this and promiscuity. The woman who is promiscuous is called by a special term—*kaia-buŋa*, and is regarded with a good deal of contempt, though generally there were only one or two of them in the camp.

[1] Dr. Firth notes the same attitude among the Tikopians in the event of an irregular union. *Vide* M.C.S.R., *J.R.A.I.*, xxxiii, n.s., p. 248.

But to return to the consideration of the sexual rights of a man over his wife. These must be waived during the night following the initiation of a boy, when sexual licence is indulged in by all who have been present at the meeting. Among the Wula and north Lunga, at the conclusion of certain corroborees, one woman remains behind to have intercourse with some of the dancers. Sometimes a husband may be reluctant to give up his wife, and compulsion will be brought to bear upon him by the headman or a close elder relative. Here the individual must subordinate his claims to the group. The women, from their comments, did not seem to be unwilling: they stigmatized the recalcitrant husbands as "stingy", whilst those who were more compliant were praised as "proper good fellows". The husband would appear to possess the right to send his wife to the group of men who are intent on putting him to death for some breach of tribal law. They have intercourse with her, and return home without taking further steps against him. Some of the women seemed to regard this particular practice with dislike and disgust. However, they could not give me a recent case, and as the same custom has not been analysed in detail elsewhere, it may either be a sexual overright of the husband or else a duty of both husband and wife to sacrifice their privileges, so that peace is preserved, and the relatives and the horde are not involved in a dispute with another tribe. Dr. Stanner, in discussing native attitudes towards the women in the Daly River tribes, says that in divorce the "fault is invariably construed to be on the woman's side. In fact, the entire psychic relationship of the sexes is one of great social significance: there is much distrust, hostility, and insinuation of misconduct between them; jealousy, suspicion of infidelity and endless quarrelling with and over women strike a constant strident note in the *dirawur* life; and the working of social mechanisms which function to subordinate women socially (e.g. abduction, sexual licence, and certain conventions of love-making) tend to induce psychic unrest. Men generally attribute a series of

undesirable qualities to women. They are held to be faithless, untrustworthy, sexually insatiable, and talk too much ".[1] But as must be clearly evident from the data I have produced, such conclusions could not be applied as they stand to the Kimberleys, apart from a certain measure of distrust and charges of misconduct in a few cases. We cannot assert that the general sexual licence that follows a corroboree subordinates and degrades the woman any more than it does the man ; and in love-making the woman sometimes takes the initiative. Whether or not the men regarded the women as sexually insatiable, I did not discover ; but certainly the charge was made against the men, and I met with two instances where wives had deserted their husbands on this account. Dr. Stanner's statement sums up neatly the attitude of the men, but can scarcely be said to take into consideration that of the women, and therefore only gives one side of the picture.

Affection between Husband and Wife

But at this point it is necessary to remove any misconceptions that may have crept in during the somewhat detailed analysis of sexual rights. From time to time, the camp would be disturbed by outbursts of quarrelling, but it would be wrong to assume that it existed in a permanent state of tension and distrust, in an atmosphere of jealousy resembling the conditions, for instance, amongst the Dobuans. The women did not pass from one extra-marital affair to another ; the majority lived in peace with their husbands, and much depended on the individual temperament, the degree of assertion and submission. If a woman had an affair and was discovered, then it temporarily disrupted the union : but where it remained secret, or only happened once or twice, it probably did much to reconcile her to a marriage with a man who was no longer or perhaps never had been sexually attractive to her : it

[1] W. E. H. Stanner, D.R.T., *Oceania*, iv, pp. 15–16.

presented a possible source of compensation for the lack of freedom of choice in the first place.

The natives were rarely demonstrative, but there undoubtedly seemed to be present a bond of affection that manifested itself when either husband or wife was in danger or ill. A man would sit for hours by the side of his sick wife, stroking her arm, moving the branches so that they cast more shade, and fetching her water. At other times they would remain quietly in the camp, apparently content with one another's company. An old man would help his old and enfeebled wife with her burdens, and gather firewood for her. Both seemed to take pride in the length of time they had been married. One woman I knew would say with a reminiscent chuckle—" Him bin catch me when me piccaninny; me bin stop long, long time alonga him ". Such a wife would not be cast aside because she was sexually and economically useless, though if possible he might take another wife as well. This raises the question of polygamy. As elsewhere, a woman often welcomes an additional helper, and in the unions I encountered, the co-wives seemed to be on excellent terms, particularly where they were sisters. On the other hand the taboo on sexual intercourse during menstruation and pregnancy, the precarious nature of the food supplies, made another wife an asset to the man.

Children

In discussing the husband's rights, there still remains the sphere of his authority over his children. With most of these we have already dealt in Chapters II and III, but for the sake of clarity, we can sum them up at this point. Children of both sexes inherit their father's horde-country and his dream totems; the boy is also initiated into the secret life of the horde, that is, into the cult-totem corroborees and the *tʃuruŋa* in its possession. On the other hand, education and discipline during childhood are largely in the hands of the mother; they have a right to visit her horde; the tie with her relatives is a close and

affectionate one, the mother's brother and mother's mother acting as advisers and confidants, whilst the former may be sponsor to the boy at his initiation. The mother receives a share of the gifts distributed at the circumcision and subincision of her sons, and presents are handed over to her by her son-in-law during his marriage to her daughter. Some of these she later passes on to her own relatives. She has a part in the marriage negotiations of her daughters, and in one case to my knowledge, a woman refused to allow her younger daughter to camp with her betrothed, in spite of his frequent requests. These facts are important, because they show that the marriage gifts do not establish the man as the absolute owner of his children. The latter are bound to the mother's people not only in the sphere of kinship, but also in that of economics and local organization. There is little doubt that the presence of children makes a marriage more stable, for the occasional divorces in the Kimberleys were in the main limited to childless couples. Moreover, until the child is able to crawl, sexual intercourse is forbidden between the mother and her husband ; and this, together with the fact that a child is rarely out of its mother's arms, limits her opportunities for a casual affair and ensures a certain amount of domestic peace. The common interests they share in their children would seem, on the face of things, to be one of the elements which consolidate the marital relationship.

Bertrand Russell has suggested that " the discovery of fatherhood led to the subjection of women as the only means of securing their virtue ".[1] A man was unwilling to assume responsibility for children who were not his own. It is a contention that might be supported in our own community, but it would be difficult to maintain it elsewhere, and it is in any case an over-simplification of a number of factors of a different order. However, the statement is of interest in that it raises the question of whether child-bearing does limit the activities of the

[1] B. Russell, op. cit., p. 26.

aboriginal woman ; whether her value is assessed statistically in terms of the number of children she has reared.

Dr. Stanner mentioned that in the Daly River tribes, " whether polygynous or not, a permanent union following betrothal does not receive full public sanction until after the birth of children." [1] But the same would not apply to the tribes I visited, since as far as I could ascertain, there was no distinction made between a childless marriage and one that had been prolific. In many primitive societies, divorce may be instituted on the grounds of impotence or sterility, but I never met with an instance where a Kimberley native separated from his wife for such a reason, though it may account for polygynous unions in some cases. It is a point that has been overlooked in Australian ethnography, and its investigation might do something to throw light on the vexed question of whether the Aborigines do or do not recognize physical paternity and maternity. Dr. Warner has mentioned that the absence of children may be attributed to the punishment inflicted by totemic beings for the infringement of taboos during certain ceremonies,[2] but this would still leave the origin of barrenness in the supernatural sphere. In my own tribes, if a husband learns that his wife has frequently committed abortion, he may be angered and beat her, as happened in the case of Dolowei at Forrest River, who had done so five times. Some said that the husband actually helped the wife, though generally she would see to it herself, or else enlist the aid of another woman to pummel her belly or place hot stones upon it.

From the negative point of view, a woman's failure, either through physical causes or deliberate choice, to identify in herself the functions of wife and mother does not affect the legality of her marriage, nor does it involve generally the imposition of punitive sanctions by her husband. On the other hand, where she does bear children, they do not anchor her the more securely in a position of inferiority, nor circumscribe her activities. As a mother

[1] W. E. H. Stanner, op. cit., p. 1.
[2] W. L. Warner, *A Black Civilization*, p. 131.

she enjoys some status in the community, not simply because she has done her duty by her husband, or provided the means of increasing his prestige, but because she can literally capitalize her "maternal achievement". When middle-aged, she plays a more authoritative rôle among the women, particularly in the ritual sphere as I shall demonstrate later. She also makes provision for herself in old age: there were many widowed women living with their married daughters and sons. In any case, she receives gifts from them once they have reached maturity, and also from their affinal relatives. Through their marriage, she acquires more intimate relationships with individuals in other hordes, together with the right to visit them. If she experiences some grief and anxiety during the circumcision and subincision of her son, at least she is a person of some consequence and a recipient of the presents handed over to her and her husband by the initiators. Lastly from her own point of view, there is the focus of interest that her children's activities and lives create for her, as anyone can testify who has watched a mother and infant in the camp, the pride and possessiveness with which she treats it, and the delight of relatives and onlookers alike in the performance.

For the young woman in the community, these are probably the aspects of motherhood which are continually present within the context of her daily life, and which provide compensations and an incentive sufficiently attractive to overcome the preliminary reluctance to endure the discomfort of pregnancy and the pain of delivery. They may not, with the exception of the economic, be explicitly stated by the natives, but they can be deduced from behaviour in the camp on varying occasions; and it is legitimate to assume that they do exert a cumulative influence in determining whether a woman will submit to the consequences of conception. These are factors which form part of the sociological context of childbirth, and it is time that more emphasis was placed upon them. We cannot assume the existence of a maternal instinct prior

to pregnancy or even immediately after conception, since so many aboriginal women resort to abortion. We must now recognize the social conditioning of the motives for childbearing, motives which cannot be reduced simply to the functioning of an instinct. In the aboriginal community, the advantages are of an economic, affective, kinship, territorial, and possibly ritual order.

The women are not viewed collectively as mechanisms for the mass production of the species; nor are their biological functions a means of enforcing their ultimate subordination in the sphere of practical affairs. Neither do they waive all claims to a voice in the direction of the lives of their offspring. If the husband has secured his quiver-full, he has not thereby acquired further weapons for the subjugation of his wife, but has actually made his contribution to and strengthened her armoury as well. So far from reducing the woman to a position of inferiority, children are one of the means by which she becomes a person of consequence, economically and socially, as defined within that culture. One aspect does remain to be discussed: the extent to which her physiological functions are linked with her exclusion from the religious ceremonies of the men, or whether they are sacralized. This must be taken up later.

To those without insight into the aboriginal culture of North-West Australia, the kinship system seems to clamp together individuals in a marital union irrespective of incompatibility and sexual attraction. Its enduring character is apt to be interpreted as the rigidity that arises out of a fixed relationship of the autocracy of the male and the vassalage of the female. But in the light of the material presented in this book, the bare statements that a man marries his m.m.b.d.d., or that he wields the authority, have been shown to be an over-simplification of the facts in one case, a misrepresentation in the other. Courtship, polygyny, the existence of a marriage into an alternate subsection, the persistent opposition of a woman to a marriage that is repugnant to her, the ultimate acceptance by the tribe

of a wrong marriage—all these reveal a wider play of individual factors than was at first evident. The permanency of the majority of unions is not rigidity, but stability with all its implications of an equilibrium of reciprocal rights and duties, of readjustments made on the basis of personality, and the degree of individual assertion and submission.

The stability of aboriginal marriage cannot be understood if it is approached negatively in terms of an absence of freedom of choice; it must be viewed as a partnership, which though it sometimes emerges out of a situation of mutual sexual attraction, is ultimately based on the necessity of satisfying sexual, economic, procreative, and social needs dictated by the culture and the environment. Marriage brings with it a certain status, companionship, protection, and a settled existence which has the sanction of the community. The fulfilment of kinship duties, the presence of children, and a more or less constant, or else apparent fidelity on both sides contribute to the permanency of the union. If there is little freedom of choice in most marriages, at least the tie is not an indissoluble one for better or for worse. The Aborigines are not compelled to be satisfied with the form of a stable marriage without the content that gives it value. It involves co-operation in economics, and concessions to the wants, desires, and attitudes of the other. Where this is absent, or a temporary separation brings no change in unpleasant habits, then the tie is severed permanently. Or else one individual may fall in love with another, and their passion is sufficiently strong to lead to an elopement. Efforts are made to prevent this, but where the culprits persist, the new situation, involving a change in relationships, is not only reflected in the adjustment of kinship terms, in the material compensation that is effected, but also in the change of attitudes. The stability of most unions is not due to the ruthless subordination of the female, but to her place in economics and procreation, which renders her indispensable, and therefore ensures that the man submits to the curtailing of his own liberties when necessary. If the Aborigines

follow a prescribed rule of marriage, they have also brought to it a flexibility of attitude, a submission to the demands of personality and temperament, a sanity and wisdom in the ordering of human relationships, that only too often are absent in other communities.

CHAPTER VII

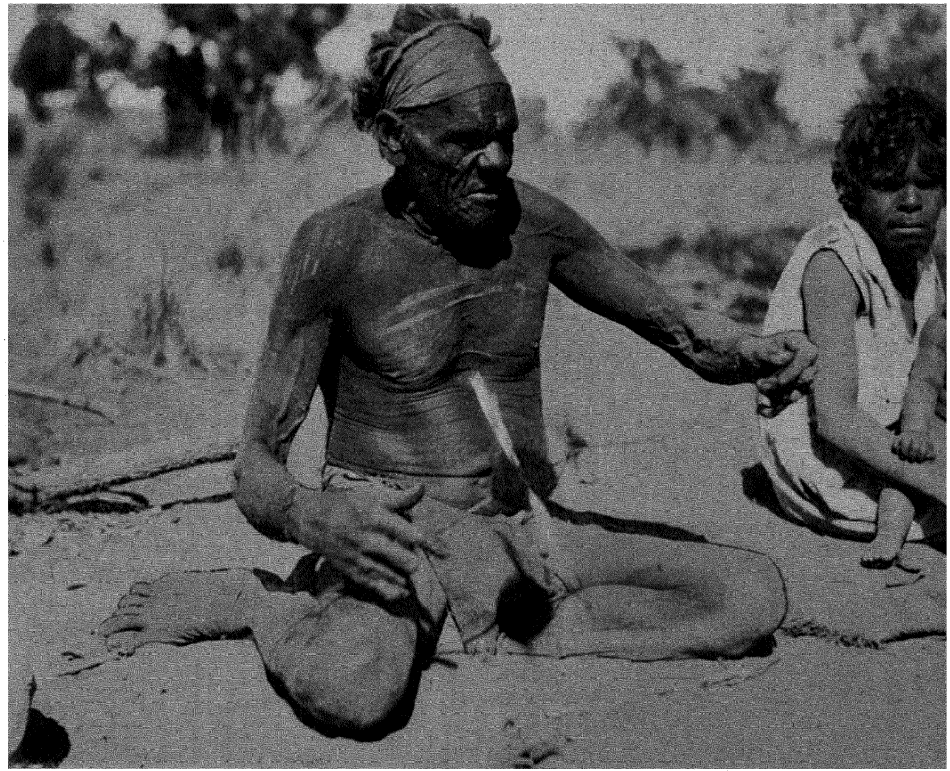
THE FUNCTIONS OF WOMEN IN THE LARGER SOCIAL GROUPS

From the vantage point of the anthropologist we have been able in the preceding chapters to follow the life of a woman from birth to marriage, during which she has passed from the more or less untrammelled freedom and irresponsibility of childhood to a growing sense of tribal values and their relevance to her : to the gradual assumption of adult status : and finally, to a union which brings her economic, sexual, and social satisfaction. As a wife she claims certain privileges ; as an individual, her personality may be said to take on a greater complexity by reason of the extension of her activities, her handling of human relationships, the adjustments they require of her and her appreciation of her own importance. We have till now directed our telescope upon those constellations in the community which in the main represent the paramount influences in her existence. These are the groups constituted by kindred, her affinal relatives, and lastly her husband and her children. These constellations of relationship, however, are not her universe : they are the points of radiation for interests in other directions. The situations which we have taken also revealed large groupings as impinging on her freedom, deflecting or reinforcing a decision, and voicing approval or disapprobation of her actions. If we are to make as complete a study as possible of the position of a woman in aboriginal culture then it is necessary to analyse her functions as a member of these groups—the economic, kinship, and political organization, the horde and the tribe. Do these wider groupings conflict with her immediate family ties : do they demand the fulfilment of other obligations : do they impose or create other loyalties, and what part they play in her daily life ?

When these questions are answered, it should be possible to draw together the generalizations already implicit in the material presented so far, and to define the rôle of women in the more mundane affairs of the community. This, however, is not to say that totemism with its ethical and religious implications does not interlock with the social organization. It provides some of the sanctions behind marriage, the ceremonies of birth, puberty, and death, the authority of the old men and women, and the economic and local organization. Its importance is, in fact, all-pervasive; and must be considered in its effects on both men and women. Mythology, in so far as it has entered the discussion at all, has sanctioned the practices that are carried out in the present. Therefore one of the most adequate and fruitful methods of approach to religion is through those modes of life of which it is the sacralization. We must study the intangible realm of religious belief through the concrete substratum of social and economic realities. This enables us to view those ceremonies from which the women are excluded with a greater measure of perspective than if we had made the rites the starting point for our survey. We have established the solid privileges and rights that the women enjoy not only *de facto* but *de jure* in those activities that intimately concern their physical, economic, and social welfare. It remains to consider their other activities in the secular sphere before defining their rôle in religion and magic.

Technology

The discussion of economics has centred around environment, methods of securing food and its distribution within the family and wider kinship groups. But there are also the questions of the degree of specialization in technology and the extent of the exchanges outside those contracted through marriage. On the whole, the women make the articles which they need for their own purposes—fighting- and digging-sticks, dilly-bags, string, paper-bark " swags ", and necklaces. The men make spears for fishing, hunting,



Spinning human hair.

[*Face p.* 162.

and fighting, spear-throwers, firesticks, boomerangs, shields, necklaces of bamboo, pearl-shell ornaments, armbands, *kulamons* and *tʃuruŋa*. Men and women spin human hair, or kangaroo and opossum fur into thread and twist this into belts, tassels, and headbands. All are not equally proficient, as was revealed in the instance of the woman teaching her husband to spin, and then abandoning the attempt temporarily because of his clumsiness. On the other hand, girls of twelve may have mastered the technique, though I never saw them twining the thread into belts. Women as a rule provide string and rope by cutting fibre from certain kinds of gum trees or the baobab, soaking, beating, and then rolling it on their thighs. The weaving of dilly-bags requires a good deal of skill and this is not acquired until after puberty; the same applies to the making of spears by the man. A boy is not given weapons with which to practise by his father until he is about sixteen. At this age he receives the cockatoo feather, *da:rga*, as the insignia of another stage in his initiation, and he is instructed in the techniques belonging to the men. The manufacture of articles requiring the axe, the adze, or working with stone is mainly confined to the men, apart from the digging-sticks of the women. Boomerangs are rarely made in such tribes as the Punaba and the Lunga, who prefer to secure them from the east, west, or south-west. As one man explained to me: "Lunga can't make 'em boomerang; no savvy which way him go; might be him go crooked." There are various curved types, and another kind, the *mandei*, which has a long and a short side. Shields, *karu:na*, are traded by the Wolmeri to the eastern tribes, who are considered to lack skill in wielding them. *Kulamons* or *walineri*, although part of the equipment of the women, are carved by the men; but it is felt that better specimens are made by the eastern tribes. The hooked spears, *warama:n*, from the Northern Territory are not used by the Kimberley tribes in a fight, but are valued as objects of exchange for the intricacy of their workmanship. With the varying kinds of *tʃuruŋa* I shall deal in another

context, but the majority come from the south and south-west.

From the list of these articles, it is obvious that apart from the manufacture of dilly-bags, belts, fighting- and digging-sticks, the more skilled crafts are in the hands of the men. Do, however, Dr. Warner's generalizations on technology among the Murngin apply also to the Kimberleys? He claims that the importance of their work is reflected in the predominant rôle played by the men in the social and religious organization of the tribe. " The first principle of age-grading, the sexual bifurcation by which women are excluded from participation in the totemic mysteries, immediately limits the female behaviour in the society and tends to simplify their personalities. The man's social personality, on the contrary, becomes more complex by his participation in the various elaborate age-graded rituals. There seems to be considerable evidence for a relationship between this and a man's comparatively complex technical behaviour and a woman's more simple type. Murngin man handles more complicated tools and weapons and uses more complex techniques in making and using them than does his female kinswoman ; it is one of the theses of this book that a man's social value is correspondingly more important and his place in the rituals is partly due to and expresses this fact.[1]

I question whether in the Kimberleys at least, the factor of skill is the first link in the chain that ultimately leads to the apotheosis of the male in the community ; or that the women do in fact play a subordinate part in economics, because they lack an elaborate technology. In our own society, the technicians, the carpenters, and mechanics are accredited, however speciously, with less psychological complexity than the professional word-mongers, and certainly they do not occupy the dominating rôle that this argument should secure for them. More within our scope, is the relation of technical skill to status and economic advantage. But in such a context, technology cannot be

[1] W. L. Warner, *A Black Civilization*, pp. 6–7.

considered apart from the pursuits that have necessitated the evolution of such weapons as the spear and the boomerang, and the efficiency of such objects as a means to an end. In evaluating the importance of an article, the use to which it is put is a vital question, besides the degree of specialization entailed, æsthetic standards, and the reputation that accrues from it. In the Kimberleys there is little specialization and little economic competition, but some men enjoy respect as craftsmen and were esteemed by their own sex. The women's admiration was more utilitarian, and went to the successful hunter. Similarly, as far as I could ascertain, the men did not especially commend the women's work, though the women themselves would be generous in their praise of a well-designed and woven dilly-bag. Workmanship as a rule was appreciated by those who were practitioners.

This is not to say that such articles possessed no worth in the eyes of the opposite sex. Many were important items in the economic transactions with which I shall shortly deal. Technical skill may be one of the determinants of value, but there are other criteria as well—scarcity of raw materials and ultimately the degree of utility are deciding factors in a nomadic community, where objects cannot be accumulated irrespective of the difficulties of transport. Dr. Warner's proposition must also be considered in terms of the general position of women in all aspects of economics; the degree to which women's tools and ornaments figure in economic exchanges; and finally how far the women take part in these.

The women's implements are effective in satisfying the nutritive needs of herself and the men with whom she is associated. We have continually stressed the indispensability of women in this aspect of tribal economy as a means by which she secures privileges, good treatment, and kindness. Therefore the technical skill of the men (which as a rule is also devoted to utilitarian ends) does not immediately imply that their activities in regard to the commissariat at least are of greater importance.

Besides this factor, the source of raw materials may be an index to value. The country varies in regard to its supplies of timber, deposits of clay and iron oxides, pearl-shell, flint, quartz, and bamboo. Secondly, the manufacture of some implements is mainly confined to certain tribes. Pearl-shell of course comes from the western coast together with bamboo necklaces; boomerangs are made in the east and south-west. *Kulamons*, though used everywhere, are obtained as a rule from the east: bamboo is cut in the hills along the rivers and by the big springs. Clay and ochre are traded from the east. European contact has added European goods and materials such as glass, steel, and cloth to the resources of the Aborigine.

Economic Exchanges

Apart from the fulfilment of kinship obligations there is a special system of economic transactions resembling the *Merbok* as described by Dr. Stanner for the Daly River,[1] and to a less extent the *Kula* of the Trobriands. It occurs throughout the whole of Kimberley and was first reported by Professor Elkin in the north.[2] The *bulba:* or valuables comprise *djaguli* (pearl-shell), *pindjauwindja* (oval pearl-shell ornaments), *kalawa:lu:* (bamboo necklaces), and certain types of boomerang, the *baŋa-baŋa* and *djaranga:r*. These always pass from west to east across the Kimberleys. *Milinyin* (shovel spears with shafts of Chinese bamboo), *warama:n* (hooked spears), *karabri* (boomerangs), *kulamons*, dilly-bags, and *padö* (red ochre) are handed on from east to west. When the objects form part of the ordinary kinship

[1] W. E. Stanner, C.E.M.M., *Oceania*, iv. The Kimberley system bears so many resemblances to that of the Daly River that it is most probably an extension of the trading routes into West Australia. Certainly many of the articles come from the Northern Territory, and are dispatched to it.

[2] A. P. Elkin, unpublished field-notes. I dealt with this in a report on the Forrest River tribes; *vide Oceania*, v, pp. 412 et seq., but was under the impression then that it was a different system. However, on my second expedition I was able to obtain additional data from a Forrest River man and Wula natives away from their country. There is little doubt that the exchanges are the same as those to the east and south of them.

exchanges they are not referred to as *bulbaː*, and possibly have another significance and evoke different attitudes.

The exchanges involve a chain of partners, both men and women,[1] which if traced would go from the western coast east to the N. Territory and would probably link up with the Madngella and Mulluk Mulluk. Such a chain is called a "road", *wandɛriŋ* (Wolmeri and Djaru), or *banaːndji* (Lunga). The individual will only be able to name eight or ten of his partners who belong to the "road" extending to the east and west of his horde; but most probably he has never seen and never will see the partners at the extreme ends. One's immediate *wunan* (partners) are often living in the same horde or in adjoining territories, and are usually blood relatives. If the latter are not within easy distance, or have not a good reputation as traders, then either affinal or classificatory relatives are chosen, though of course all three may belong to the one "road". Marriage may bring others into the exchanges or an inter-tribal meeting may provide an opportunity for seeking out a new alliance, if the old is unsatisfactory or has fallen into abeyance through the death of some of its members.

A potential partner is often secured for a child by conferring on it the name of another individual of the same subsection living in another horde or tribe. Such namesakes are called *naragu* (see p. 50) and in any case the tie is a more intimate one than with others of the same subsection, outside the immediate kinship group. It involves the sharing of hospitality. Where this develops into a *wunan* relationship, it is implemented by more frequent contact and the exchange of *bulbaː*. A *wunan* is a friend, and although in the event of non-fulfilment of obligations he or she becomes a potential sorcerer, the emphasis is laid on the more positive aspect of reciprocity and friendship.

[1] The Lunga women play an important part in these exchanges, and the following account refers to them primarily. Whether it would apply in the same degree to women of other tribes in this region I cannot say. Certainly they had partners, but I did not investigate this problem so intensively as among the Lunga where I did a longer period of fieldwork.

When the name is conferred, the *naragu* sends a shell or a boomerang as a sign that the relationship has been accepted, or he or she may possibly take the initiative and send word together with a gift that he wants his name given to the child. All men and women do not have *naragus* or *wunan*, and during childhood at least, the exchanges are effected by the parents, till they are of age and the family then acts as a unit of *wunan* against another family group of *wunan*. This often happens where either the mother or the father traded with the man before his name was bestowed on their child.

An individual may belong to two or more " roads " and is called a " middleman ", i.e. one who stands at the point of intersection of various trading routes across the Kimberleys. It is significant that European employment has concentrated most of the natives around the stations and missions, and that the *bulba:* therefore pass from one to the other, with perhaps a " middleman " in the bush.

The *bulba:* are handed over with a typical lack of formality, though there may be an injunction—" you no want to keep him long time. Send him quick fellow. Let him catch 'em up dilly-bag, *milinyin* ". The recipient either immediately or a day or two afterwards makes a present of wild-honey or flour, partly as some sort of compensation and partly as an earnest of good faith. If the *wunan* is dilatory in complying with this rule, the *bulba:* is taken back and given to the next relative living in the horde who happens to belong to the same " road ". The unfortunate *wunan* who has no wild-honey is said to merely " eye " the *bulba:* and hand it back regretfully. Most of the quarrels over exchanges in the camp at Violet Valley broke out over this vexed question of failure to supply wild-honey. A fight would result if the disputants were men, but the women found their tongues effective lashes, and invariably received satisfaction or retrieved their *djaguli* (shells). The food was eaten by the woman and those with whom she chose to share it ; a man took the opportunity to assemble the men under a tree to sing secret

songs, while they regaled themselves with the tea or damper provided by him. Thus, in a limited way the exchanges provide a means for a display of hospitality outside the ordinary kinship obligations to share food.

Where *bulba:* change hands within the horde, possession may be limited to a month or less, except where a man or a woman has a surplus of *djaguli* or *pindjauwindja*, in which case he or she may keep it for a longer period or even permanently. Much depends on the type of article and its practical value. Thus one woman had accumulated three *djaguli* and several *pindjauwindja* which she carried about in a dilly-bag. She was often asked to show them to others, who voiced their admiration and handled them rather enviously. She could afford to be more exacting with her partners, and more pre-emptory in demanding a fulfilment of obligations from them. She was one of those who took back her shell because there was no wild-honey or flour forthcoming.[1] Ultimately, however, she would pass on the shells, whereas a man in her position might retain one as a pubic ornament or else bestow it on a boy to whom he stood as initiator at subincision. As far as I saw, a woman did not keep the *milinyin* or boomerangs; they would go to her next partner, her husband, son, or brother-in-law as the case might be. She might retain red ochre, dilly-bags, a *kulamon* or a necklace for a longer period, provided she had other articles with which to pay her commitments. A set of *bulba:* that passes from the Northern Territory to the coast may be augmented or diminished on the way. Debts to one partner on the east may be less than those to another on the west. The main thing is that within a year the partner should eventually receive the equivalent of what he or she has given previously. If he is dissatisfied, he will grumble until the difference is

[1] A pregnant woman, or one with young children cannot eat wild-honey received for pearl-shells because of their association with *Kaleru*, who may harm the child and cause her to sicken. This, though a disadvantage, falls into the general category of tabooed foods during this period, though she may eat the wild-honey she gathers herself. The man of course is under no such restrictions.

made up, for failure to do so ultimately leads to quarrels and the severing of the relationship.

What are the sanctions that enforce the fulfilment of these obligations? An unsatisfactory *wunan* soon involves himself in disputes that may result in the use of sorcery against him, and ultimately the loss of his partner. Some had a reputation for cheating, more particularly the middlemen, who diverted *bulba:* meant for one road along another. On one such occasion, the irate partner declared that he would no longer trade with him, and that at the first opportunity he was going to visit the man's horde and find another in his place. But the generality carry out the exchanges fairly, because the profits exceed the disadvantages; prestige, pleasure and pride of possession, the expectation of future gifts—all are incentives to honest dealing. The *wunan* who incurs a bad name finds it difficult to secure another partner and is thus excluded from one of the most important aspects of an economy which otherwise offers little chance of aggrandisement. There were three instances at Violet Valley of sickness which was attributed to sorcery over *bulba:*. The partners who had been kept waiting an inordinate length of time caused the victims to dream of *djaguli* or *pindjauwindja*; and since these are said to belong to *Kaleru* who cannot be approached with impunity by any but the elders or the "medicine-man", illness was the result. Actually the victims were the intermediaries between the "medicine-men" and the real culprits who were holding up the exchange. In each case, they brought pressure to bear on the guilty partners by sending a message stick as a warning; in each case, the shells arrived soon after, and the recovery from the illness was attributed to this. It is significant that women may practise this type of sorcery, and therefore they are not at the mercy of the unscrupulous; moreover they are valued as *wunan* for reasons to be discussed later.

European goods have swelled the stream of *bulba:*, though generally they pass from east to west. Again, other articles such as the hooked boomerang-*wilgi* from

the desert were considered to be *bulba:* by some, and not by others. Possibly, as suggested by Dr. Stanner for the Mulluk Mulluk, they had been sent along the road as an experiment to see whether they would be accepted. I was not in a position at the time to realize that this might be a possible interpretation of the conflicting statements. The *djaguli* is the most valuable of all, for it is used as a pubic ornament, is a sign of initiation, and is only obtained on the western coast. It was said disparagingly of the eastern tribes that they were " poor ", since they had no *djaguli* but must import them from the west. In return for one of these they had to give several *milinyin*, dilly-bags, and pieces of red ochre. The following examples provide some clue to the scale of values in this region. One small *djaguli* brought in two *milinyin*, three boomerangs, and a dilly-bag. A smallish *djaguli* and three *pindjauwindja* were given in return for two red cloths and five *djina:l* (ordinary shovel spears). This provoked a strong protest and the *wunan* had to give a *milinyin* as well. On another occasion, one *djaguli* was exchanged for three *milinyin*; and another time, one large elaborately carved *djaguli* was given for five dilly-bags, three lumps of red ochre and five *milinyin.*

Besides these articles and those which we have mentioned as figuring in the exchanges, there are some which are not, properly speaking, *bulba:*. I refer to *tʃuruŋa* and corroborees which are often exchanged between *wunan*. Participation in the former is of course denied to the women on account of their sex, but they did obtain corroborees from their own *wunan*. Thus *Djinargu*, a Lunga woman of Moola Bulla, received from her Djaru *wunan* at Flora Valley Station a women's secret corroboree in return for a *djaguli* and a dress. She then taught it to the other Lunga women who gave her tea, dresses, and handkerchiefs, though she continued to direct operations, to enjoy considerable authority and prestige, and to retain the right of " selling " it to her *wunan* in another horde to the north-west of Moola Bulla.

There are few articles then which are not drawn into

these transactions, more notably the digging-stick and paper-bark swag, both of which can be fashioned at a moment's notice. But it is not simply an exchange of objects which can just as well be manufactured within the tribe. The *bulba: par excellence,* those which are first mentioned when the subject crops up in conversation, are the *djaguli, pindjauwindja, waramaːn, milinyin,* boomerangs, and red ochre. These are the rarer objects and with the exception of the last, involve time, labour, and skill in their carving. Together with these, an assortment of articles are handed on, which although desirable, do not in themselves constitute *bulbaː,* or rather would not alone be accepted as an adequate return for *djaguli* or *milinyin.* In the Wolmeri myth that sanctions this trade it is recounted how the totemic ancestors attending the first initiation ceremony brought *milinyin* for those who had come from the west, and received *djaguli* in return. In the Djaru tribe, the totemic ancestors such as Crow, Native Companion, Pelican and Jabiroo brought *milinyin* to other animals and birds, and received *djaguli* for them.

At the same time, the way of life followed by these peoples is against the accumulation of a number of possessions, and these exchanges permit of the circulation of a number of valuables over a distance of 400 miles or more. Ultimately they are drawn into daily use by the more affluent *wunan,* but in transit they afford pride, prestige, and pleasure to their temporary owners. In this particular context, the articles manufactured by the women or used by them have a subsidiary importance, but this does not mean that the women are excluded from the exchanges or that their activities are limited to a trafficking in articles of female utility or workmanship. We have already mentioned that women have a right to their own property. A woman supplements her *bulbaː* by the manufacture of dilly-bags, fighting-sticks, necklaces, and hair-belts, but these alone would not be sufficient. She has other sources from which to augment her possessions. She receives gifts from her son-in-law, some of which she will

hand on to her brother, sister, mother, mother's brother, and father; some she may utilize as *bulba:*. Her commitments are small: an occasional gift to a blood relative whom she may visit; small gifts to her son-in-law, although the balance is always in her favour; assistance of her husband in making hair-belts for initiation and mourning ceremonies. She is thus able to take an effective part in these exchanges not simply as the wife, daughter, or mother of a man, but as a *wunan*. Her partners may be women, often they are men.

As an unmarried girl her possessions are small, a digging-stick, dress, ornaments, and dilly-bags—gifts from her blood relatives She may already have a *wunan* if she has a *naragu*, or she may belong to the " road " of her parents. But as her resources are few, her share in the exchanges is limited to a short possession of the *bulba:* in return for the usual gift of wild-honey. As a married woman, and with the skill acquired with maturity, she continues to make articles, to give and receive others and she may be drawn into her husband's " road " or that of his relatives. If she bears a son, and he is betrothed, she helps him with his first marriage payments till he is married. At his initiation she has her share of the objects presented to her husband by the initiators; and as the mother, sister, or daughter of a deceased man she also receives gifts. As the mother of a betrothed daughter she continues to acquire presents from her son-in-law during his marriage to her daughter. She is thus able to play an even more important part in the exchanges. Her relationship to her son-in-law is not merely one of avoidance and respect on his side, but of economic advantage which she utilizes for *bulba:* exchanges.

This is not to say that women are more dominant than the men in these exchanges or that they are the pivots of the system. The man is able to manufacture the more valuable articles, pearl-shell ornaments, the different types of spears and boomerangs, which possess a greater utility for him than for the woman. It is probable that more of

the wealth of the tribe passes through his hands, though his gifts to his affinal relatives do represent a drain on his resources and place him at a disadvantage in this respect as compared with his wife.

Kinship Groups

The discussion of woman as *wunan* has revealed another aspect of her activities that fall outside the usual fulfilment of obligations and exchanges between relatives. But we have not yet completed an examination of her functions in the other groups which form part of the social organization of the tribe. What rights and duties does she assume by virtue of her membership of an endogamous moiety, clan, horde, or a group of women bearing the same subsection name ?

Subsections

We have already pointed out that the subsection is associated with a totem and that it is determined through the mother. Where the marriage has been a regular one, the patterning of the subsections within the family provides the basis for an extension of the kinship terms associated with them to other individuals with the same subsection names. A boy during his initiation is cared for principally by a small group of men who are *yu:mbana* and *lambera* to him, and who belong as a rule neither to his own nor to his mother's horde. The subsections are the means by which the relationship is determined, and hence they assume a particular significance for the boy in these first stages of his ritual life. They never play a comparable part in the life of a girl up till puberty or even afterwards. And neither for the man nor the woman does the situation ever arise where all the members of one particular subsection in a tribe act together to control affairs or where they are in a position to impose their will on the individual. There is no division of loyalties between the subsections ; there is never an occasion when a man or a woman may feel him or herself to be more strongly identified with the

interests of all the members of one subsection as opposed to those of another. There is, however, an alignment of the subsections into two groups (endogamous moieties) [1] for the performance of the corroborees associated with initiation or the women's love-magic. And the same occurs in the rainmaking ceremony in the Wolmeri tribe. Apart from these ceremonial functions, however, the moieties have no place in the ordinary economic and social activities of the community.

Patrilineal and Matrilineal Principles

But in the system of kinship groupings are there then no occasions in which conflicts may arise? Much has been written on the patrilineal character of Australian tribes, but there is a growing tendency among anthropologists to speak of patrilineal and matrilineal principles operating in certain aspects of the culture rather than to classify society in terms of one or the other. This more subtle approach to the subject hinges on the importance attributed to the family in the more recent studies of kinship, and the recognition that in most societies there is a delicate equilibrium maintained between the rights of the father and his relatives on the one hand, and those of the mother and hers on the other. As Professor Radcliffe-Brown has expressed it: "If we gave up applying the terms matrilineal and patrilineal to societies and confined them instead to institutions (descent, inheritance, succession) we should perhaps think a little more clearly and not let these words and the preconceived theories attaching to them prevent us from seeing facts as they are." [2]

In these north-west Australian tribes something

[1] One moiety comprises the djangala, djungera, djuru, and djoan subsections, and the other moiety consists of the djoalyi, djakera, djangeri, and djambin subsections. This is a fixed grouping of the subsections recognized by the natives of the Wolmeri, Punaba, Kunian, Lunga, Djaru, and Malngin tribes. I have used the word moiety here to describe what is essentially a kinship group, since membership is determined primarily by the subsection, which in its turn is determined by indirect matrilineal descent.

[2] A. R. Radcliffe-Brown, "A Further Note on Ambrym," *Man*, lix, 1929, p. 52.

approaching an equilibrium has been established between these two principles of descent. One may assume more importance in certain activities or institutions, but it never completely excludes the other. The existence of clans may emphasize the distinction between the two and even create conflicting interests, but there were none associated with totems in the Lunga, Miriwun, Djaru, and Punaba tribes, unless we regard the hordes as such. Even so the patrilineal principle which determines the inheritance of the land does not insulate a man and a woman from contact with their mother's relatives. Both have the right to camp, hunt, and forage in her country. The affection felt for her brothers, sisters, and parents would seem to be just as intense as that for the father's kindred. It is reinforced by frequent visits, by mutual care, support, and hospitality throughout the lifetime of the individual.

Women and the Horde

However, the bond that unites a woman to her own horde-country is not simply one of economic over-right: it is one of spiritual affiliation. She can approach the increase sites without danger and when old carry out some of the ceremonies.[1] She belongs to her country almost physically, for when she dies her bones will find a final resting-place there. But with her countrymen she has less continuous contact than her brother, for at marriage she goes to reside with her husband. As a married woman the opportunities are few when she engages in any concerted activity with the rest of her horde. While she is accompanied by her husband she camps with him on the side nearest his country, though she may spend much of her time during the day and the evening with her own relatives. A man stands with his father's horde at the "ring-place", but the whole group never launches an indiscriminate attack

[1] This is true of the Forrest River, East and South Kimberley tribes. Many increase sites were shown to me by women, and others were pointed out to me by the men in the presence of the women. I was also given to understand by Dr. Stanner that there is no taboo against women approaching such sites in the Daly River tribes.

on the members of another horde. Disputes are limited to those who have actually a grievance, though they may be aided by their parents and some of their relatives. The women occupied a rather indeterminate position behind their husbands and sons, or else on the outskirts midway between the conflicting groups. Unless a woman has had a quarrel with her husband, she looks to him for protection and feels herself to be in a large measure identified with his interests.

In the Wolmeri and Malngin tribes, the men perform corroborees associated with the cult-totems, and it seems probable that these do intensify the sentiment for the horde. But horde-patriotism is not solely dependent on participation in organized collective ritual. For the women take no part in these cult-totem corroborees, and yet have a strong sentiment for the horde-country. It would be difficult from mere observation alone to discover any difference in the attitude between the men and the women, and its relation to the strength of emotional ties. The women seemed to be just as desirous as the men, when the opportunity offered, of visiting their horde-countries, the increase sites, and *guniŋ* of the totemic ancestors; they seemed just as deeply convinced of the economic superiority of their territories over all others, including even those of their husbands. This sentiment probably springs from long residence during childhood, knowledge of economic resources, sacred sites, myths, totemic affiliations and kinship ties with other individuals who also belong to the country. Patriotism, however, had not reached the stage when it could be reduced to the formula—my country right or wrong—in any disputes that might arise. Kinship ties with the mother carried weight and were a check to any militant expression of local sentiment.

Women and the Political Organization

Since women after puberty are in the very great majority of cases living away in the territories of their husbands, it is inevitable that the conduct of the activities of horde

as a group and its relations with other hordes should reside in the hands of the men. Thus patrilocal residence is one of the most important factors that would militate against, if not preclude the possibility of women exerting direct political control. Affairs must be administered by those on the spot, and since it is the horde and not the tribe that is the political unit, the men make the decisions in those matters which affect it as a whole. This authority is vested in the headman, *noera:ny*, and the elders, *bulga:*. He, while in possession of his faculties, continues to direct operations. There is a tendency for the son eventually to succeed his father, but this is not invariable, a premium being placed on intelligence and the position achieved in the sphere of ritual life. He is assisted by the old men: it is an aristocracy, a government by the best, by those who are fitted for the task by their knowledge, experience, and personality.

In Europe political authority by the Government can mean so much and so little. In a strongly centralized state it may cover a wide range of institutions—the church, army, industry, and even the family. On the other hand, it may be limited to a relatively narrow sphere, and the actual power may be wielded by those who nominally stand outside the government. Therefore such a statement as the political subordination of the women means little unless we define carefully the type of political organization and the extent to which it controls their activities, rights, and duties.

The headman arranges when and where the meetings for the deferred mourning ceremonies and initiation will be held, and what tribes will be invited to attend. He and the elders conduct the proceedings centring around the ceremonies and watch over the settlement of disputes at the " ring-place ". A boy's initiation sets in train a number of events. It is made the occasion for an assembly of hordes under the ægis of the headmen; it provides not only an opportunity for the thrashing out of grievances, but also for the men to show their prowess as fighters and their

skill as dancers. They occupy the centre of the stage except for the few moments when a mother receives in the camp her son who has been circumcised or subincised; or when she is chief mourner over the bones of the dead. The only occasion when the women appear as rivals on the scene is after the performance of their own secret corroborees. They return to the camp still decorated with red ochre, charcoal, and clay; they are awaited by the men; they create a certain amount of jealousy and mistrust among some of them, and arouse pleasant expectations in others. But as the dances have only reached the Lunga recently, the women of this tribe apparently had no opportunities formerly for spectacular display as a sex; and in any case they lack the political control to assemble the hordes purely for the purpose of performing their own rites and ceremonies.

In dealing with cases of murder or the divination of the sorcerer and the revenge to be taken, the elders who are relatives of the victim assume judicial authority. Once the guilt is established, it is they who commission someone to avenge the death. But in this the mother's kindred are just as intent on seeing justice done as the brothers, father, and father's father of the dead man or woman. The women, though they have no direct part in the infliction of punishment, nevertheless have the right of claiming protection and justice, and it is the duty of the male relatives to give it. Warfare is primarily in the hands of the men. It is carried out in retaliation for the death of a relative or the theft of a woman from her tribe. It is never the means of blazing the way for the colonization of a territory, the development of its economic resources, together with the dispossessing of its original inhabitants.

To sum up: we can say that the old men had the right to assemble the hordes for initiation and mourning ceremonies, to conduct the proceedings, and to handle cases of sorcery. One of the chief effects of the control wielded by the elders is that the men have more opportunities for spectacular display as a sex, and their ceremonies call for an organization

of the economic and social activities of the hordes comprising the tribe on a large scale. The women, however, were just as anxious to attend the meetings as the men, to renew contact with relatives, to see that the boy was initiated into the rites by which he might attain manhood, even though at the particular moment of separation they experienced grief at the thought of the pain he must undergo. It is doubtful if the women were conscious of their political subordination as a disadvantage. I never encountered any suffragettes, potential or militant; possibly they were not needed apart from the desirability of a little more publicity for feminine pursuits. Certainly it did not undermine their status and the rights they enjoyed in other spheres.

Leadership among the Women

But if patrilocal residence removes the majority of women from the centre of political control, this is not to say that they have no joint activities of their own, that they are undifferentiated as a group, that they do not wield authority in other spheres of secular life, that they have no means of making their weight felt either as individuals or as a sex. They do not simply squat submissively in the camp and congregate docilely as the singers at the corroboree ground. They do not constitute a drab and permanent background for the glory of the men. Apart from their own dances and rites, with which we shall deal in the chapters on magic and religion, there are always women of developed character who exercise an influence beyond their own families, dominate conversation, and direct the secret corroborees.

We have already defined the spheres in which the headman has authority and administers the law. But it is necessary to draw attention again to the distribution of responsibilities throughout the kinship groups comprising both men and women. Persons who have not fulfilled their obligations contracted in the *wunan* exchanges, others who have married irregularly or who have engaged in a temporary liaison or who seek divorce, do not come before any tribunal

presided over by the headman or appointed by him. Such matters are settled by the individuals concerned in conjunction with close male and female relatives. It is important to stress that some of the laws are not administered by the headman but by the men and women directly involved. The kinship groups thus assume functions that in other communities are undertaken by a chief or a king. It is a point to bear this in mind in assessing such problems as the degree of political control vested in the headman and elders in these north-west Australian tribes.

We have seen that the woman rears her children and exerts what discipline is necessary. She helps her husband to negotiate the marriage of her sons and daughters; she intervenes and if possible prevents any illicit affairs they may have. In general she exercises her influence to enforce conformity to tribal law. Once, however, the irregular marriage is an accepted fact she does not resurrect the scandal as a weapon for vituperation in any subsequent quarrels. She is no rigid authoritarian whose adherence to the letter of the law is permitted to warp her relationships with her close kindred or indeed, with others. Ultimately, tolerance and a desire for peace determine her attitude and she will do all in her power to make the marriage of her son or daughter a permanent one.

As the women become older they often assume more authority, become more assertive, tender their advice more frequently and interfere where the activities of any of their kindred are likely to run contrary to the tribal law. On the other hand, when anger mounts high and threatens the peace, even safety of others in the camp, they take the initiative in stemming the disputes and temporarily establishing order again. Amidst the shouting, the barking of dogs, the voice of an old woman will make itself heard above the uproar as she harangues men and women impartially. Such a woman as a rule has had children who have married and who have formed relationships in other hordes. She exchanges *bulba:*; she has a profounder knowledge and interest in mythology than the average

person ; she possesses a fund of experience drawn from her journeys over wide regions, her attendance at inter-tribal meetings and the quarrels she has witnessed over marriage, wife-stealing, sorcery, and death. She and other women of her age enjoy a great measure of authority, though this will vary according to assertiveness and temperament. Some of the more striking personalities in the Lunga tribe I shall have occasion to discuss in connection with the women's secret corroborees. It is significant, however, that age of itself does not automatically command respect, if it happens to be linked with undesirable qualities. There was Logbir in the Lunga tribe, a noaru woman who took an inordinate pleasure in attempting to interfere in every conceivable situation. She was rough-tongued, morose, had a grudge against all and sundry. She knew little of the mythology and her comments were often ignored by the others. She was called Charcoal by the whites, and the name suited her gritty temperament. On the other hand, Laidbir, the wife of the headman of the Djulin horde, was a little younger, but was gentle-voiced and kindly. She was regarded with affection by all and when she did assert herself was listened to with attention. Of course old women who were blind and too weak to travel far had almost ceased to take any interest in the activities of the tribe. They were content to sleep in the shade most of the day, or crouch on their knees almost motionlessly for hours at a time, occasionally picking up a pannikin of tea at their side, fingering it awkwardly, brushing away flies, and then lying down to sleep again. Their wants were reduced to a minimum, but they were cared for by their relatives and led out of harm's way during the squabbles.

At Forrest River, Amel, the wife of the headman, was unobtrusive and dignified yet she was heard with respect by men and women alike. When occasion demanded she would intervene and intervene effectively in the interests of peace when the camp was disturbed by a dispute. Bangudenangga, an Andedja woman, was a little younger, more assertive in manner and very independent. She had

a pronounced gift of mimicry. She had a reputation as a wit and kept the women in laughter. She had an eye for the foibles of the men and for overwheening vanity. She would dismiss a boaster in such terms as " That man got 'em big throat ", a view in which the other women would concur with chuckles of amusement. She, like Amel, was a mine of information on tribal lore and also performed some of the increase ceremonies for her horde. Some of the middle-aged women were always to the fore in discussion, and had often had a checkered marital career and were experts in love magic. Wungenil at Moola Bulla was one, Melba, a Wolmeri woman who had married her tribal brother in spite of opposition, was another. Birbalma, a *barumaynari* (medicine-woman), and Yudubein at Forrest River were dominating figures in the camp. The latter had killed her first husband some years previously and had married four others since. She was a favourite with the old women, who would talk to her about myths and the ceremonies they had seen. She herself was something of an authority on such matters, was liked and consulted for advice by the others, who possibly had some admiration for her experience, her initiative, and her refusal to tolerate ill-treatment or infidelity from her successive husbands.

Where the women are flung together in so many of their pursuits it is perhaps natural that such personalities should emerge. This division of the sexes is not only apparent during certain rites when temporarily contact may be *gunbu*, but it is an ordinary feature of everyday life. The unity the women share as a group is not simply one of ritual uncleanliness as some writers would have us believe, nor of exclusion from the men's ceremonies. It is also based on more positive factors of identity of interests and problems and a system of economics which results in the women spending much of their time together while foraging for food. It is just possible that this separation of the sexes during the greater part of the day has been carried over into the ritual sphere, and that it has led to the segregation of the sexes during those rites which are concerned with

the physiological crises. This is not to underestimate the affection and the co-operation that exist between husband and wife, brother and sister, son and mother. But it is to some extent inevitable that a woman should turn to her mother or to one of the more assertive personalities we have mentioned, for advice in her problems or in a difficult love-affair, rather than to her father or her other male relatives.

The women then exert authority over their children and with advancing age, over their other relatives as well. Their advice is sought, and when necessary they protect a younger relative who through inexperience may be at a disadvantage in a dispute with affinal relatives. They are generally informed about all that is afoot, and they on the whole seek to maintain peace and quiet in the camp. As we shall describe later, they preside over the rites associated with women's activities, birth, and puberty. Together with the old men, they are the repositories of myth, are responsible for the handing on of tribal law and custom, and are one of the forces which make possible the stability and continuity of tribal life.

Women and the Tribe

Like the men, the women were fully conscious of their membership of a tribe which constitutes a territorial, linguistic, and cultural unit, though affinities with neighbouring peoples are recognized to exist in language, kinship, totemism, and local organization. The Nyigina and Wula stand outside the rest of the group. The former possess only sections, and the latter are more closely related to the Forrest River tribes, though they have for the last few years been in the process of adopting the subsection system. Corroborees and articles of material culture are handed on from one tribe to another, and most of the *tʃuruŋa* comes from the south-west or the Wolmeri. Contacts among the tribes are mainly of an economic and ceremonial character, though they may be implemented by an occasional marriage. Men and women were proud of their language

and their country, and had a certain amount of contempt for others who possessed a different kinship system. They would frequently remark that in such and such a tribe: "Allabout marry anyway; marry mother, sister, cousin; no got 'em skin (subsections). This one way more proper right; all mad alonga mission (Forrest River)." There was a general disinclination to admit the existence of a sorcerer within the tribal boundaries. He was projected into another tribe some distance away. A local habitation, however, was given to the "medicine-man", who could cure illness, divine the murderer, and visit the spirits of the dead. Nevertheless in spite of this, men and women manifested a keen interest in the customs, myths, and forms of totemism in other tribes. They were spoken of around the fires at night, and visitors were questioned and listened to with attention. The inter-tribal meetings provided one of the main means by which anecdotes, tales, myths, corroborees, wealth, magical remedies, and rites were circulated over the wide region of the Kimberleys by men and women.

At this point, I only wish to indicate briefly the position of women in secular life, before turning to that field of controversy—religion. Politically they are subordinate to the headman and elders in those matters affecting the group as a whole and its relations with the rest of the tribe. While the women have just as strong a sentiment for their country as the men and visit it whenever opportunity permits; still, after marriage, patrilocal residence precludes the possibility of their taking much part in any communal activities of the horde. It is one of the factors responsible for their political subordination. The women do not engage in warfare, but their fighting-sticks serve them as adequate weapons of defence in their own private disputes.

As a sex their ceremonies have never the same spectacular effects as the men's, nor are they the means by which the activities of a number of hordes are organized and co-ordinated towards a specific end. They are of little importance in terms of the economic and social life of the tribe as a

whole. But this is not to say that in the sphere of religion their ceremonies are less important, less essential. Obviously it is just as necessary that a woman should observe ritual precautions for the safe delivery of her child, as that there should be other ceremonies to develop puberty and bring him to manhood. But here we are concerned simply with the effects of such ceremonies in the secular activities of the tribe. Nevertheless, women as members of the horde, as relatives of the dead or the boy to be initiated have a right to attend these assemblies, which provide them also with the opportunity to perform their own corroborees, watch those of the men, and act as singers, to settle their own outstanding grievances, to meet kindred, to exchange *bulbar*, and share in the general excitement and the break with daily routine.

But if a woman has little voice in public affairs, this does not undermine her position in other aspects of secular life. She has her part in the exchanges between *wunan*. As one who will provide the bulk of the food in the event of marriage, she has value as an economic partner, and is able to consolidate her position as wife and mother, to ensure good treatment and a measure of fidelity from her husband. When this is not forthcoming, she either refuses to bring him food, or leaves him temporarily, sure of the protection of her kindred. She is capable as a rule of showing initiative and competence in the handling of relationships and those problems that confront her in daily life. A strong sense of identity is created with the other women, but there is nevertheless a large measure of co-operation with her husband and her male relatives in economic and social duties. While her children are young she instructs them in the means of securing food, and the rules of behaviour to which they must conform. As an older woman she acquires considerable authority with the right to intervene not only in the affairs of her children but in those of her other relatives. With the men she hands on tradition, customs, rights, and the myths which underlie and sanction activities.

CHAPTER VIII

THE SPIRITUAL HERITAGE OF ABORIGINAL WOMAN

The Lunga or Wolmeri woman has emerged as an individual who possesses well-defined rights and privileges in marriage, who moves with familiarity over her country, maintains herself and her family, rears her children to be as competent, self-reliant, and independent as she is herself. We have seen how she grapples with difficulties and solves them in accordance with her physical ability, her intelligence, and experience. The situations on which attention has been concentrated are those in which the social or economic aspects have been dominant, or else have been isolated for consideration. This has been an essential method of approach, for one first knocks one's shins, so to speak, against the facts of the environment, the camp, and the activities carried on there. Fragments of myth, shadowy configurations of the Time Long Past loom up suddenly in talk ; one catches a fleeting glimpse of the totemic ancestors, hears them mentioned as the originators of some custom. But the anthropologist can really only enter the spiritual world of the Aborigines through the gateway of the physical and social world around him. The significance of the former is derived from the concrete character of the present, and the extent of one's knowledge of it. Armed with this, one is in a better position to understand the interplay between past and present, mythical and actual.

But what is the woman's relationship to the whole realm of religion. Is she an intruder ? Is her footing less secure here ? What contact has she with the supernatural forces on which existence is felt to depend ? More fundamental perhaps is the question of the nature of her problems where empirical knowledge is of little avail.

Anthropology owes a debt to Professor Malinowski for

his valuable contribution to the theory of religion. He has based his approach on the difficulties that confront mankind. " Religion is not born out of speculation or reflection, still less out of illusion and misapprehension, but rather out of the real tragedies of human life, out of the conflict between human plans and realities." [1] " The substance of all religion is thus deeply rooted in human life ; it grows out of the necessities of life. . . . Another empirical approach shows how magical and religious phenomena are directly dictated to men by the stresses and strains of life, and the necessity of facing heavy odds ; how faith and ritual must follow the darker, more dangerous, and more tragic aspects of man's practical labours." [2]

Man varies in regard to his capacity to face unpleasant facts and the inevitable ; to admit the transient nature of all things including himself ; to be content with the limitations of existence and also its values. He may attach an overwhelming importance to a belief in the compensations of an after-life ; he may or may not be willing to assume responsibility for his own actions without seeking to shelve it through a doctrine of vicarious atonement. He differs in the degree of realism, consistency, humanity, bigotry, and fanaticism he brings to his religion as a dogma, a ritual, and an ethical code. But whatever the type of religion, it is an answer to certain problems, a means of regulating conduct, and of effecting a readjustment when science and realism are abandoned. Man dons the armour of religion because it offers him a protection against fate and misfortune, however much it may hamper his movements, limit his activities, and obscure his vision.

To assert as some writers have done that religion affords no compensations to aboriginal woman, is to deny that she ever finds a solution for problems, which go beyond her scientific knowledge. For instance, Dr. Roheim demands : " What is her religion ? . . . We might just as well put this question in another form and ask what are her fears,

[1] B. Malinowski, *Culture*, p. 641.
[2] *Idem, The Foundations of Faith and Morals*, pp. 59–60.

anxieties ? For it is only this phase of religion that is open to women. All aspects of religion that contain any hint at a supernatural world that protects mankind . . . or any element of identification are limited to the male half of the population. For a woman, religion means a supernatural or semi-supernatural danger, it means demons . . . or demon-like avengers or foreign tribes."[1] Does she then face with complete fatalism her own destruction and that of her relatives ; does she never experience an emotional wrench, grief and despair when they die ? Do they cease to exist even as spiritual entities from whom she has nothing more to hope or fear ? Is she indifferent to the possibility of drought and starvation ? These are problems which she shares in common with the men, and in fact with human beings the world over. To these problems apparently the Central Australian religion alone provides no answer for the woman. If such were indeed the state of affairs it would be almost pointless to ask whether she has means of safeguarding the child developing within her womb ; whether she is so sure of the fidelity of her husband that she need take no measures to ensure it in his absence ; whether she is ever motivated by anger and revenge without the physical strength to inflict it ; and whether finally her subjugation to custom and law is so complete that no religious sanctions are necessary to enforce it. Actually, Spencer and Gillen in *The Arunta* have provided sufficient data on the increase ceremonies, death and mourning rites, and those others centring round birth and puberty to completely refute Roheim's contention that the women are left without spiritual protection. Certainly aboriginal woman has her fears, but so has aboriginal man. And religion is partly based on the fear of the unknown and insecurity ; it has its function in culture because it substitutes for these, however irrationally, faith and hope and security. It is rooted in the conditions of existence and these are just as fundamental for the man as for the woman.

It is not surprising then that in the Kimberleys, men and

[1] G. Roheim, W.L.C.A., *J.R.A.I.*, lxiii, 1933, p. 259.

women share a religion in common. What is astonishing here and elsewhere is the failure to co-ordinate the various elements in it ; or else to place an overwhelming emphasis on the initiation and *tʃuruŋa* ceremonies which have been elaborated to meet the particular needs of the male sex. Insufficient stress has been laid on the importance of religion to women in their daily life, the benefits they derive from it. Too often we find a cursory mention of their totems, their spirit-centres, their function to incarnate the spirit-children, and the subordinate part they play in the men's initiation rites. From an analysis of the facts, it appears that there are similarities in upbringing, outlook, and environment of the men and women. The approach to religion must be made through the range of problems which confront them both, the necessity of maintaining existence in a region that is relatively arid, and of coping with the grief, suffering, and disruption of social ties that follow upon death. Only thus can we avoid the mistake of attaching a disproportionate importance to particular rites which have been designed to meet the difficulties of one sex ; of estimating the position of women in terms of the part they play in these ; and of imposing generalizations drawn from one aspect of religion upon the total social structure.

Totemism

I do not wish to limit myself to a list of women's totems and ceremonies, to dismember the culture and label portions as " purely feminine ", even if that were possible. If this study is to have validity and reality, then women must be seen as integral units of society. They cannot be viewed entirely apart from their cultural context. Their ceremonies and beliefs are interrelated with those of the men. My aim has been to use, not the dissecting knife, but the searchlight ; to let it play over one aspect of culture, and then to concentrate it on those features which are of particular significance for the women. Therefore, although at first sight a discussion of totemism and mythology does not

seem to bear directly on the position of women, it is utterly essential for an understanding of their share in the spiritual life of the community, and of the sanctions which govern their behaviour. We shall realize that though perhaps they only have a minor rôle in some of the ceremonies, still, nevertheless, like the men, they have a direct link with the spiritual forces on which existence depends ; they have a right to receive benefits from those ceremonies first instituted by the totemic ancestors for aboriginal men and women to come.

In the study of totemism, Professor Radcliffe-Brown has indicated the economic value of the majority of the totems, and has brought the theorists down to earth, back to the primary environmental conditions out of which it has emerged. One of these is " the dependence (of society) wholly or in part on natural productions for subsistence ". The more important animals, plants, and natural phenomena, in so far as they affect the well-being (material and spiritual) of the community, tend to become objects of a ritual attitude.[1] It has its foundations in the stress of providing sufficient food in a country that can be ravaged by drought, flood, and fire. We have already said that we could only come to grips with the native life through an understanding of the environment ; we have been insistently conscious of its presence as the aboriginal woman wanders over its precipitous hills, its winding river-beds in search for roots and tubers ; or as she camps by its water-holes, where she sleeps, gossips, prepares and distributes food and rears her children. But her point of view is not a purely pragmatic one. We have realized that she is bound to her country by ties of sentiment created by ownership and familiarity with its resources ; by her kinship with other individuals who live, hunt, and forage over its extent. Totemism presents yet another aspect of her attitude to its natural features, species, and forces. For Australian totemism is not to be defined in terms of similar phenomena in Africa, Melanesia, and America. The class of objects, the attitudes and activities

[1] A. R. Radcliffe-Brown, *S.T.T.*, pp. 304 et seq.

of a social group in regard to them, the legal and mythical sanctions underlying them and the social group itself, will vary from community to community and can only be understood if placed within the culture of which they are an integral part. An explanation or exposition of the phenomenon must be found in terms of the principles operative in Australian aboriginal society, and to do this it is essential that we should view the matter as far as possible through native eyes.[1]

The Time Long Past

We have already seen that these people are utterly dependent on the summer rains to bring down the rivers, fill the billabongs and pools, replenish them with fish and lily-roots, and provide an abundance of fat game. Their relationship with the environment is constant, immediate, and absolute. Such is the strength of the bond between a woman and her own particular region, that anyone who shares it must perforce stand in an intimate relation to her. It has been stated previously that a woman calls a horde-countryman by the term for father, even though according to the subsection name he has another status. Common participation in the territorial rights forges an emotional and social tie between two individuals. Furthermore, this relation between a woman and her country creates a ritual bond between herself and those natural forces and species which also belong to it. This dependence on environment is projected back into the mythical past or *ŋaruŋgani*, in the belief that the ancestors were beings who united in themselves the qualities of man and animal. For the Aborigine the belief in the pre-existence of totemic ancestors is basic to her conception of the validity of all customs and institutions. Hence totems are not merely

[1] This and the following discussion are based substantially on my article, " Totemism in North-West Australia," *Oceania*, viii, No. 3. *Vide* pp. 268, 272–4, 278–287 in particular. Since we are mainly concerned with the women I shall refer specifically to them throughout this account of totemism ; but what I have to say is equally applicable to the men.

objects appropriated by groups as a badge or crest, or name ; they are a particular expression of this kinship with her environment.

The *ŋaruŋgani* is also the source of another link with the environment. The Aborigine does not view her country as so much geological strata, as so much sand, stone, and spinifex. The boulders and the pools are *ŋaruŋgani* ; that is, they belong to the past and to the totemic ancestors. When this word is used it always implies unquestionable finality on the subject at issue ; *ŋaruŋgani* stamps a practice as legal ; it invokes a religious sanction for its performance. Now, when a woman describes *ŋaruŋgani*, she speaks as though revealing an irrefutable dogma of the utmost importance. " In *ŋaruŋgani* there were no blackfellow ; but kangaroo, iguana, bird—all bin walk like blackfellow. Him all the same blackfellow. After he bin turn into kangaroo, iguana, bird." These ancestors did not have the physical characteristics of animals or birds, but they did possess some quality which made their transformation later into real birds and animals possible. The myths attribute superhuman feats to them. Under the hands of the marsupial, the hills rose to their colossal immobility, and the river courses were carved out by the rainbow snake. There are myths of fire and flood, of totemic-ancestors that wandered over vast tracts of country, hurled spears from one mountain to another, and left their footprints in solid slabs of rock. These must be distinguished from the birds and animals already existing at that time, which also possessed remarkable powers, as pictured by the native companion scooping up a pond in a *kulamon* and flying into the air with it. But in the myths the inauguration of certain customs, methods of carrying kangaroo and cooking it, marriage laws, initiation, rain-making, corroborees, and certain natural features of the country are accredited to the intervention of the totemic ancestors, who stood in a kinship relation to one another, and who had subsection names bestowed on them by the rainbow serpent. Having performed their task, they changed into birds, animals, and reptiles,

and some into stones as well. It is these boulders, these depressions in the rock where they camped that bear tangible witness to their previous existence. Such stones are called *guniŋ* (the term also used for dream totem), whose function it is to represent some of the totemic ancestors. A man or a woman on " walkabout " visit the *guniŋ*, often enduring hardship and short rations to do so, and pointing them out to the stranger with pride. They reinforce and focalize the sentiments felt for the country while at the same time they confirm belief in the ancestors and are a continual reminder of the past. They bring the totemic ancestors within the range of everyday life in that the native shares with them the possession of the one country.

Conception Totems

An additional link with *ŋaruŋgani* is established through the different kinds of totems which both men and women possess. I have already described how the Aborigine relies on the scattered rockholes and pools. Now this dependence on the fertility power of rain has been sacralized and made the basis of a cult centring around the rainbow serpent, who is one of the most important totemic ancestors in this region. He first gave man the rain-making rites and is believed to dwell in the deeper water-holes. But these pools are not only a means of sustenance ; they are for the native literally a source of human life, for in them are the spirit-children placed there by the rainbow serpent in the *ŋaruŋgani*. These children become temporarily incarnated in fish, or in animals and birds near the pool, and after conception the species becomes the *djeriŋ* of the individual (see p. 42). The pool is her *wanyegoara da:m* ; so that within the circumference of the wide tract of country over which she wanders there is this one place which has a significance reaching back into her pre-natal existence as a spirit-child, and which links her as an individual with the rainbow serpent, who embodies in himself those powers of fertility on which man is dependent. In other words,

we are confronted once more with this belief in some quality shared in common by man and the natural forces—a belief which has its own inescapable logic. These spirit-children made by the rainbow-serpent, half reptile and half human himself, still preserve their kinship as it were with the natural species, in that they can inhabit temporarily the body of some fish, animal, bird, or anything that can be eaten as food. And the nexus between spirit-child and natural species persists through the lifetime of the individual. It is singled out from all other species by a particular term, *djɛriŋ*, and thus a social identity is bestowed upon it. The man or woman does not associate every member of the species with the *djɛriŋ*, but only the one killed at his or her "finding", and as in this region there is no taboo upon eating it. Amongst the Malngin tribe a man avoids using his sister's name, and he will also refuse to give the name of her *wibəliri* (*djɛriŋ*, *L.*) when asked for it, although he will name the species in any other context. The instance is illuminating. It shows in the first place that only the animal or fish, etc., killed by her father is the subject of the taboo for her brother; and secondly, that the *wibəliri* is not merely associated with spirit-child but also with the personality. The *djɛriŋ*, or *wibəliri*, is a totem, for there exists between it and the individual a permanent, socially recognized or institutionalized relationship. Moreover, the latter is another manifestation of the affinity which is believed to exist between man and nature and has developed out of, and is determined by, the native beliefs about *ŋaruŋgani* and spirit-children.

Subsection Totems

We have already mentioned the totems, *naragu*, connected with the subsections. In the Wolmeri and Lunga tribes, the totemic ancestors belonged to different subsections, and they retained the subsection names after they changed into birds, animals, and plants. To phrase it differently we might say that man and animal were identified in *ŋaruŋgani*, and that membership of a common subsection in the present

still preserves the nexus between them. These totems are not treated with any marked respect; nor are they taboo as food; nor do they serve as a badge for a group since several are connected with the one subsection; nor do they control marriage. The attitude would seem to be that adopted towards one's human namesake or *naragu*.[1]

Moiety Totems

There also exists another type of kinship totem in the Wolmeri tribe—that associated with the endogamous moiety. *Kaleru* after he had called the totemic ancestors by their subsection names divided these again into two groups, one *gidör*, a little red bird, and the other *wi:r*, a little black bird.[2] They are not used as food but their social relevance would seem to lie in the fact that they are linked with the quarters from which the rain comes; *wi:r* brings it from the north-west, and *gidör* from the north-east. Each moiety has a specific rôle in the rain-making ceremony performed at a pool, where *wi:r* men and women occupy the west, and *gidör* the east side of it. It is because certain totemic ancestors under the direction of the rainbow serpent carried out the ceremony in the past that a repetition in the present by *wi:r* and *gidör* men and women has the same potency and efficiency.

The Dream Totem

With the *guniŋ* or dream totem I shall deal briefly. In some tribes it is inherited from the mother; in others from the father; elsewhere it may be some object dreamed of by either parent after finding the spirit-child in a *djɛriŋ*. It may be any natural species or material object, and acts as the representative of the individual in the dreams of

[1] A point of interest is a myth I obtained among the North Lunga, which describes how *Kaleru* rubbed a crocodile, a hill-kangaroo, a crow, and other species. From these came forth djuru, djangeri, nangeri, and other Aborigines bearing subsection names. The rite bears some resemblance to the ordinary increase ceremonies.

[2] One endogamous moiety comprises djangala, djungera, djuru, and djoan, and the other moiety, djakera, djoalyi, djangeri, and djambin.

other people. Its main function is to render some dreams significant, indicate the presence of a man or a woman to others, and in some cases to serve as a protector and warn of approaching danger.

The Cult Totem

In the Wolmeri, Kunian, and Malngin tribes there are cult totems (*wabiri*—Malngin term; *waldjiri*—Wolmeri and Kunian term) associated with the hordes and with certain secret corroborees performed by the men which the women never witness, though they have the totems. They are often performed during the initiation ceremonies, but are not connected with the increase rites as they are in Central Australia.

Now men *and* women through the possession of these totems, the *djɛriŋ*, *naragu*, *moiety*, *guniŋ*, *waldjiri* or *wabiri*, are linked directly with the totemic ancestors and the *ŋaruŋgani*. If we accept the view that totem and totemite possess some sacred quality in common because of their relation to the totemic ancestors of the *ŋaruŋgani*, then women as well as men have their share in this sacred heritage.[1] The totems have not only an economic significance, but have come to assume characters and functions other than the primary one. The relationship is permanent, intimate, and socially recognized, and in each case is determined by the institutions or system of beliefs of which the totem and totemite are integral elements.

Myths

Besides the totems, the myths are another medium through which *ŋaruŋgani* assumes its reality for men and women and becomes a regulative factor in their existence. The Aborigines regard the myths as the history of certain supernatural beings and events in a period preceding the

[1] Durkheim suggests that both man and the animals or plants whose name he bears belong to the same sacred world, *vide E.F.R.L.*, p. 139. Durkheim, however, overstresses the clan, and assumes that the totemic principle is the manifestation of the moral force of the clan.

appearance of ordinary men and women. The myths are also an explanation of the present, of natural features, strange characteristics of birds and animals, material objects, customs and institutions. On the other hand, the scientist cannot accept them as history, but a meeting point between the native and the anthropologist is that the myths are viewed as a precedent, as a sanction for present-day activities. " It justifies by precedent the existing order and it supplies a retrospective pattern of moral values, of social discriminations and burdens and of magical beliefs. In this consists its main cultural function. . . . The function of myth is to strengthen tradition and to endow it with a greater value and prestige by tracing it back to a higher, better, more supernatural, and more effective reality of initial events." [1] Since myths provide a sanction for beliefs, customs, rites, and ceremonies, it is especially important to discover the extent of the knowledge of, and the attitudes adopted by, the women towards them ; the part played by the female totemic ancestors in the events of the *ŋarúŋgani*.

There is no myth of the creation of a totemic Adam, followed by the emergence of a totemic Eve as an afterthought. Male and female totemic ancestors seemed to have existed together from the first, to have wandered over the country, camped, loved, fought, and quarrelled. The women gathered lily-roots, wild-honey, and plums, carried their husband's belongings, bore children, and even committed abortion. At least this is attributed to *Bilibeliril* (a bird) by the Lunga tribe. The men hunted, had their disputes, manufactured the first boomerangs and spears, and held the first initiation ceremonies. Towards the more human foibles and passions of some of the totemic ancestors, the Aborigines adopt much the same attitude as they do towards quarrels, peace-making, and irregular unions in the camp, when they are not close relatives of the parties involved. It is an attitude of frank enjoyment in the excitement and clash of interests, seasoned by a certain amount of ribald comment. But if there is sympathy and

[1] B. Malinowski, *Culture*, p. 640.

comprehension for the weaknesses of some of the totemic ancestors on the one hand, there is on the other, an equally marked respect, even reverence for the manifestation of their supernatural power in other myths. The telling of these evokes much the same seriousness that a discussion of the increase ceremonies or birth rites does in everyday life. The distinction is an important one. The first attitude does not undermine the second. It is complementary to it. For the natives in " humanizing their environment " have also done the same for the totemic ancestors. It is thus possible that the customs and institutions which regulate the lives of Aborigines cease to be mere arbitrary actions of beings remote from the difficulties, emotions, and conflicts that beset men and women from the cradle to the grave. At the same time the supernatural power of those beings to change the environment, to perform superhuman feats, gives the laws they have established a ritual sanction which they might not otherwise possess.

The stories are told with a keen appreciation of their drama ; they are recounted with pride by the people that own them. Yet, withal, there is a certain tolerance for the myths of other tribes which offer a different explanation of the same event. A Wolmeri man will listen to the Lunga myth of how the Moon brought death into the world. Then he will say : " This country, we got 'em different. Moon no more bin do it : that belonga another one country." There is no dogmatic assertion that the myth is wrong ; simply the recognition that in other tribes the totemic ancestors were responsible for different customs. The actual story was that Moon, a djuru man in the *ŋaruŋgani*, had one wife, but then tried to seduce Snake who, as a nambin woman, was his mother-in-law and hence taboo to him. She and the other women with her attacked him in fury and cut off his organs which changed to stone. Then he declared angrily : " When I die, I shall come back in five days ; when you die you will not come back ; you will stop dead." The breaking of one of the most important kinship laws had disastrous consequences, but the Aborigines seemed

to accept the fact philosophically, and perhaps derived some satisfaction from the thought that they at least were not to blame. Now we have already encountered an actual example of a marriage between a woman and her tribal son-in-law, and the different sentiments and comments it aroused in the camp. Much the same outlook is apparent in the recounting of the moon myth ; no very deep expression of regret, a delight in certain obscene features of the story, a mock horror assumed for the moral enormity of his action, but this is likely to resolve itself into a chuckle of amusement. Perhaps it is followed by the comment : " We bin get wrong marriage from that one moon ; now all about die ; no more come back." The myth has its distinct ethical aspect ; it is probably told for the edification of the young but on all the occasions when I heard it the narrator was scarcely ever able to conceal a grin. This tolerance for the misdemeanours of those not closely connected with them, or else the complete acceptance of the situation afterwards, is characteristic of the Aborigines and perhaps increases the difficulties of the missionary who attempts to inculcate a sense of sin in his converts.

Other myths account for peculiarities of certain animals and birds, as for example, the scales on the back of the crocodile. This story is told frequently and invariably creates intense interest because it centres round a fight ; the tricking of his enemies by Flying Fox ; the carrying of Crocodile by Turtle, his mother, until she found a pool for him to enter ; and the establishment of an increase site at this place.

But if the breaking of the law does not always induce the requisite degree of solemnity, this is not to say that the laws are any the less firmly believed in, or that they are not obeyed. For one thing, there is the punishment inflicted on the culprits in the myths ; and secondly, there are other myths which centre round the establishment of the laws, often by *Kaleru* himself, who is the most sacred of the totemic ancestors and is revered as such. He figures as the maker of rivers, rain, spirit-children, subsections, and the

marriage laws. He is the source of magical power not only in the past but also in the present. Unlike the other ancestors he still exists, though not as a man. He is a huge serpent invisible to the majority, but none the less feared for that. Other myths partake of a similarly sacred character and are known as a rule only to the initiated among the men, or to the middle-aged and old among the women. There are myths of the first initiation ceremonies in the *ŋaruŋgani*, the *ʧuruŋa*, birth, menstruation, and introcision. In short, they are concerned with the rites elaborated around the crises in the life of the individual.

Curiously enough, some of the female totemic ancestors are believed to have been given *ʧuruŋa* by *Djulargal.* Later these were stolen from them by Porcupine. Soon after this, an old nangala woman tried to subincise young girls and "make them into men". But they developed into young women, and she said: "Can't make 'em djangala; I got to call you nangala." These myths are interesting, because the Arunta who possess *ʧuruŋa* with similar markings and much the same significance, have myths that describe female totemic ancestors as owning and carrying *ʧuruŋa.* There is, however, an important difference, for in this tribe the latter are associated with the *kuruna* or spiritual counterpart of an individual, whilst in the Kimberleys they are not. This may account for the fact that in the Arunta each woman has a *ʧuruŋa*, which, however, she never sees; it is kept by her father or brother for her.[1]

The myths would seem rather to emphasize the fact that the *ʧuruŋa* belong exclusively to the men; they are a validation of their privileges and bestow an additional value on the sacred objects as something eminently desirable. The female totemic ancestors are also imagined to have been envious of initiation. Certainly the women in the camp displayed a gift for extracting illicit information about

[1] Spencer and Gillen, *The Arunta*, vol. i, pp. 104–6. The Nyul-Nyul at Beagle Bay also said that the women of the Time Long Past had *ʧuruŋa* of their own.

things forbidden to them. But most certainly they were not jealous of the subincision rites; their attitude was one of pity for the victims, and their most frequent comment was "poor fellow", though the mother of the boy was often proud that her son should be the central figure of an inter-tribal meeting.

However, the women had myths in which female totemic ancestors were responsible for birth, the development of puberty, menstruation, and introcision. Apart from that accounting for birth, others were known only to the old women and possibly to a few old men, though I could obtain nothing from the latter. There was no reason why they should have kept the knowledge back, as they discussed the men's secret rites freely and showed me the *tʃuruŋa*; but they would say: "that one *lubra* business, me no savvy. You want to ask 'em old, old woman." Some of these myths will be given within the context of the rites associated with them in the following chapter. At this point it is necessary to stress that the younger men and women, though familiar with some myths, were rarely conversant with all the details and were often ignorant of those concerned with the rites which were carried out under the direction of the old people. The latter had often the reputation of being the "antiquarians" of the tribe. As the upholders of the law they were interested in the myths that sanctioned it.

To sum up. These myths would seem to be divided into the sacred and profane, though I did not meet with two separate terms for them. Some are told seriously, often before or after the performance of a ceremony, or perhaps when either the old men or the old women are by themselves. Others are repeated frequently in the hearing of the old and young of both sexes, as much for their narrative interest and drama as for anything else. Through this constant repetition, men and women have a knowledge of some myths; the totemic ancestors become familiar figures, often associated with particular features of the horde-countries or some custom that is often carried out

daily. Through their humanity the totemic ancestors are brought within the range of comprehension of the Aborigines. In one sense, it vouches for their reality, and therefore indirectly makes their superhuman feats more credible. Moreover, the efficacy which the rites appear to possess and which enable the natives to grapple with the difficulties of life, illness, starvation, and death—all these are practical proof for them of the former existence of the totemic ancestors and of their supernatural qualities over and above their more human traits which they share with man. This body of mythology is not merely significant to the men alone ; it is just as important to the women ; it provides a sanction not only for the marriage laws which they must obey, the kinship obligations they must fulfil, but also for those ceremonies on which economic existence depends, and for those rites established by the female totemic ancestors to meet the problems of their own sex.

Increase Ceremonies

Having built up in some detail the background of religious belief and mythology, we can now turn to those rites which intimately affect the community as a whole. They are concerned with the all-important problems of the food-supply and an adequate rainfall on the one hand, and with death on the other. As the totemic ancestors passed through the country they left stones or sometimes a tree, each of which is supposed to contain the *guniŋ* of some animal, bird, fish, reptile, tuber, and so on. These sites are called *bud-bud* at Forrest River, and *wulwiny* among the Lunga. By rubbing one of these or striking it with bushes and uttering a spell, the *guniŋ* will go forth and cause the species with which it is associated to multiply. The Aborigine has no granaries, but he has, if we may use the term, these " spiritual " storehouses, in that they insure him against starvation, and give him a sense of security and confidence in regard to his food-supply for the coming year.

If strangers approach the *wulwiny* without due ritual

precautions, they are likely to sicken or contract some permanent deformity. For the same reason any food they obtain in the vicinity must be given to the headman. The ceremony is performed by the latter, his wife if she be old enough, or his sister at the beginning of the hot weather. If there are no old people in the horde, then the rite must lapse until there are. I was told of other *wulwiny*—those for flies, mosquitoes, lice, and snakes—which had not been touched for some years because they would be a plague to the community. The Djaru, Malngin, and one or two other tribes said the pests could be sent to their enemies; but they, too, did not carry out ceremonies. This in itself is an admission of the deeply-rooted belief in their efficacy.

The headman alone is responsible for the kangaroo, wallaby, and generally marsupials, because as one woman put it: "That one belonga blackfellow; that proper blackfellow business." But the old women often attended to the ceremonies for lily-roots, fish, wild-honey, yams, and fruits—in fact, most of the foods for which they forage.[1] At Forrest River I saw the headman and Amel his wife, rub the *bud-bud* for crocodiles, fish, and the bark for poisoning them. In other tribes the women were responsible. The point is an important one in considering the position of women in religion, for they not only benefit with the rest of the community from the results of these ceremonies, but in old age they take part in them.[2]

As the stone is rubbed, the species is commanded to increase in the pools in the horde-country and in adjoining territories. A north Lunga woman uttered the following spell for *pinga:*: *ʧa: ʧa: budbudmaŋin pinga: ʧa: ʧa:*

? come up *pinga:*

Meruin Winbidji.
(names of pools)

[1] The Nyigina told me, however, that when the men made rain, they also smeared the stones with blood and performed the increase ceremony for lily-roots, frogs, and river-birds.

[2] Dr. Sharp mentions that the women in the Yiryiront also carry out the rites. *Vide* R.L.E.Y., *Oceania*, v, p. 30.
Dr. Piddington also mentions that the women assist in some of the rites, *vide* T.S.K.T., *Oceania*, ii, p. 376.

For lily-roots in the southern Lunga these words were spoken: *bənaida yɛra maiːi do-aːnyɛra kandu waːbɛr*
? food countrymen lilies grow
malagoyaː gəlur
plenty up
or as they gave it to me in free translation: "I am countryman; you come-up plenty tucker, lily-roots."

The horde may perform the rite for the whole tribe. Sometimes *wulwiny* for wild-honey and iguana may exist in several hordes; sometimes there may only be one in the whole tribal territory. This division of ritual labours points to a strong sense of tribal unity; it is an additional means of emphasizing the cultural interdependence of the hordes. The individual is also aware of it, and can always name a number of *wulwiny* outside his or her own particular country. Where there are no sites, say, for stars, sun, or moon, the statement will often be made that another tribe performs the ceremony. Hence, in spite of differences in custom, mythology, and social organization there is yet the recognition that fundamentally Aborigines with whom they have little or no contact share the same belief in the *ŋaruŋgani*, in totemic ancestors who have provided means for ensuring the continued existence of natural species and phenomena.

Professor Elkin has suggested that man does not think "he has magical control over natural species, but that he has a sanctified method of expressing that mutual need which man and nature has, the one of the other. And he does his part at the appropriate seasons towards maintaining the life and regularity of nature by means of ritual. . . ."[1] When the natives "increase" for kangaroo, the motive would seem to be definitely economic; but there are so many inedible and even dangerous species which also come in for attention, that it is likely that the ceremonies are also performed with intent to perpetuate the existence of natural phenomena in his environment as he knows it.

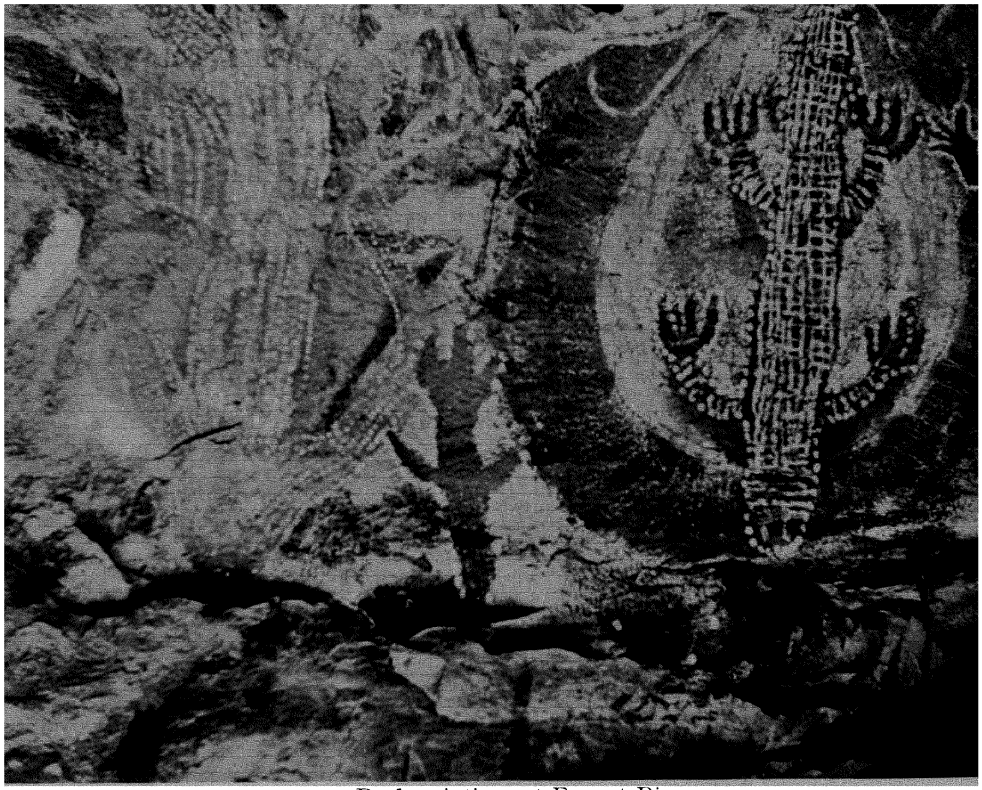
[1] A. P. Elkin, S.L.A.A., *Oceania*, iii, p. 132.

At Forrest River there were rock-paintings of kangaroo, crocodile, emu, rainbow-snake, and other species. Their purpose was known only to the old men and women. They were painted as an additional means of securing the increase of the species they depicted. This was in the hands of the headman, but I was told by an old woman of a more northerly horde (and this was confirmed by the old men present), that she touched up the painting of the rainbow-serpent in her country so that the spirit-children might increase.

Rain-making

The overwhelming need for rain on which existence depends is a problem beyond empirical means of solution for the Aborigines; they have met it by sacralizing and embodying the power to create rain and the rivers in *Kaleru*, the rainbow-serpent, who is depicted more frequently than any other species in all the drawings I saw. He is also the maker of the spirit-children. As Professor Elkin has suggested, the process of personifying natural forces in the past gives man some measure of control over them in the present.[1] The long coils of the snake are charged with the power that is the source of human life, of magic and of the fertility brought to the earth by the rains. He can only be approached by the old men and women or those initiated in magic. The others fear to bathe in the deeper parts of the pools where he dwells. Even to dream of a *djaguli* (said to belong to *Kaleru*) is fraught with danger to the *wunan* who has not fulfilled his obligations, or to a person who has not observed precautions before a rite. At particular crises in the life of the individual, certain foods are tabooed, some of them because they "belong to *Kaleru*", who first carried them around inside him in the *ŋaruŋgani*. The same applies to the white-ant larvæ which must never be eaten by men until old age, lest *Kaleru* send floods, as he did in the *ŋaruŋgani* when the taboo was broken by two young boys. Fish also are associated with him, and

[1] A. P. Elkin, *The Australian Aborigines*, p. 177.



Rock-paintings at Forrest River.

[*Face p.* 206.

for this reason children must not be present when the bark to poison fish is being placed in the shallow pools.

Rain-making is also a danger to the younger generation and it is the headman as the representative of the horde who obtains the white stones or *djalundji* of *Kaleru*, breaks them up and wraps them in a grass bundle to be put into a water-hole to make the rain. Only in the Wolmeri is there a rite in which men and women participate; even then, certain sections are performed by two old men of different moieties. They construct a figure to represent *Yɛruwiri* (the rainbow-serpent), and also a grass circlet decorated with cockatoo feathers to represent *Tʃandera:*, another important totemic ancestor. *Yɛruwiri* himself was a *wi:r* man and *Tʃandera:* was a *gidör*.

Age and Ritual Responsibilities

Now it is the old people who have the right and duty to carry out the increase and rain-making ceremonies. We have already pointed out the respect for age when it is united with knowledge and personality, and the reliance on the wisdom of the old men and women for the ordering of social and economic destinies. They are particularly fitted to direct those ceremonies on which the welfare of the horde, even the tribe is felt to depend. They have endured raids, illness, droughts; they have witnessed the temporary dislocation of society wrought by wrong marriages and death. They have seen and learnt much in their journeys over the tribal territory and other regions. They are fully conversant with the myths and with the law. If they no longer take an active part in warfare, dances, and intrigues, at least they have their compensations. Taboos have been relaxed and social restrictions weigh but lightly upon them. The man has passed through the successive stages of initiation: the woman has surmounted the dangers believed to be inherent in the approach of puberty, introcision, child-birth, and lactation. Both have little to fear from the supernatural and much to hope. It may be that their life is set at a lower potential, and that they are less vulnerable

to sorcery and the mishaps that may befall the able-bodied. The spirits of the dead hold no terrors for them, and I have seen an old man wax indignant because his sleep had been disturbed by the shouting of others in the camp who feared that there were *djua:ri* in the undergrowth. There is compensation in the respect they enjoy and in the authority they wield over the secular activities of the younger generation ; in their control of the ritual life. They have managed to find food for themselves and their dependants during the preceding years.

The headman as the representative of the horde performs the rain-making ceremony and those for kangaroo, sun, moon, and stars. His old wife or his sister often carry out those for the species with which women are most immediately concerned in foraging for food. These *wulwiny*, enduring almost unchanged through the centuries, present their immobility against all the insecurity of drought and the uncertainty of the passing seasons. The rite is simple—the rubbing of the stone, the utterance of a short formula—but it is sanctified by myth. The action creates faith that there will be sufficient for the coming year. Totemism, then, generates the belief that man and woman can cope with the problems of their environment, and that the old men and women who perform the rites will release the supernatural power in the stones and the pools to bring fertility to the earth.

Whether these rites are religious or magical is a question subordinate to their actual function. Frazer has declared that in themselves they appear to be purely magical [1] ; and in so far as they automatically achieve an increase, they fall within Frazer's definition of magic, in which there is no prayer for the intervention of a supernatural being.[2] But the increase ceremonies cannot be considered apart from the rest of totemism. In the myths that sanction them, the totemic ancestors are described as having interceded once, and as having made provision for all time. Their

[1] J. Frazer, *Totemica*, p. 257.
[2] *Idem, The Golden Bough*, abd. edtn., pp. 48–50.

supernatural power has been concentrated, stored as it were, in certain stones, rites, and spells; and their utilization under certain conditions releases the power once again for the benefit of aboriginal men and women. It is an intervention in the past, and, therefore, the distinction between this and a prayer for intercession in the present is one of chronology and possibly of greater certainty of success. But whether we ultimately call the increase ceremony magic or religion, it is obviously rooted in religious belief. For totemism is a religion, in so far as it comprises a set of beliefs in supernatural beings of the mythical past; in so far as these beings exercise an ethical control over the behaviour of aboriginal men and women through the laws they have established for marriage, kinship, local and political organization; in so far as these beliefs centre around man's relationship to nature and sacrilize it in a system of ritual and mythology.

Death

These ceremonies then, centre mainly on the means of sustenance. Others, as we shall see later, take the individual through the physiological crises of birth, maturation, puberty, and adolescence. But these are two poles to the axis of religion—life and also death. The belief in immortality, the rites for the dead and for the welfare of the relatives who are living, have been evolved to meet the shock of the rending of emotional ties, the cessation of personal contact. The repercussions through the kinship groups are the more intense when the dead is an adult. Perhaps the blow falls heaviest on the surviving spouse. For a woman whose husband dies, the association of perhaps thirty or forty years is broken; they have camped, reared children, loved, quarrelled, and faced all the exigencies of existence together. A focus for her activities, interests, and sentiments has suddenly been removed. And for the widower there is a similar disruption of ties. The new situation demands a reorientation of habits, a change in life, the creation of new interests, and possibly a drawing

closer to surviving kindred and a greater dependence upon them.

How do the natives of the Kimberleys meet death? As in most communities there is a reluctance to face complete extinction, or as Professor Malinowski has phrased it, a "deep need to deny personal destruction, a need which is not a psychological instinct, but is determined by culture, by co-operation and by the growth of human sentiments." [1]

But the belief in immortality, if it brings compensations, exacts its own nemesis; for it has given the spirits of the dead (*djua:ri*) the power to influence the living either malevolently or benignly. Rites must be performed for them, taboos observed by the kindred, for it is on the relatives that the most serious responsibilities fall. The living also have their needs. They must be braced against the shock of suffering, grief, and fear, that follow in the train of death. Moreover, kinship ties are so strong that the *djua:ri* may seek to take the surviving relatives with them.[2] The mourner must be protected, not by the spear nor the fighting-stick, for these are of little avail here, but by a barrier of taboos and ritual observances, by the performance of rites for the final disposal of the remains of the dead.

The attitude is a complex one. Because of the closeness of a former tie, the mourner is likely to sicken and depart from the world. On the other hand, it is only by a partial withdrawal from the ordinary activities of the community, by attaining some measure of identity with the dead, by emphasizing sorrow and undiminished affection, by reaffirming the strength and the importance of those kinship ties that are basic to life, that the mourner can protect him or herself against death.

There is little interest manifested in the Land of the Dead. It does not offer compensations and benefits to those who have been denied them during their lifetime;

[1] B. Malinowski, *Culture*, p. 641.

[2] Professor Radcliffe-Brown has described a similar reaction to death among the Andaman Islanders. The ceremonies and taboos also bear comparison. *Vide The Andaman Islanders*, p. 287 et seq.

perhaps because there is little or no economic inequality in the aboriginal community where all are assured of care, protection, and food during childhood, or when they are too weak to fend for themselves in old age. Both men and women, in the course of their existence, fulfil obligations, submit to restrictions, but they also enjoy rights and privileges. There is no question of spending this life in preparation for the next ; of devoting it to a cult of death. The Land of the Dead lies to the west. The spirits, however, occasionally return to their own country, to their graves or to the gorges where their bones have been hidden. They are sometimes seen at night, generally by the " medicine-man " and " medicine-woman " who can visit and obtain from them the magical power to effect cures and even inflict injury.

I witnessed two sets of deferred mourning ceremonies at Forrest River ; they corresponded in most details with the descriptions I received of the rites in east and south Kimberley. I was present at only one death, that of an old woman at Moola Bulla who was buried in a ravine about two miles away. The accounts of death then are based largely on statements given me by the natives. Here we are mainly concerned with, firstly, the rites for the disposal of the corpse of a woman and any light they may throw on her value to her kin and to the community ; and secondly, the behaviour of her surviving female relatives.

Sorcery

It is accepted that death is imminent in old age, but when an able-bodied adolescent or adult dies, the normal course of life has been subjected to interference, and the reason is sought in the abnormal or the supernatural sphere. The breaking of a taboo, contact with supernatural forces or sacred objects without ritual precautions may result in sickness ; but death itself is due to the malevolent agency of the sorcerer who has misused powers obtained from *Kaleru* and the *djua:ri*, and has directed them against

individuals who have no defence at the time. This belief in turn entails a whole system of activities devoted to the discovery of the sorcerer. The *baramambin*, who has himself obtained his craft from the rainbow-snake and the *djua:ri*, will look at the stones which have been touched by the juices fallen from the platform on which the corpse has been placed. From these he may be able to indicate the direction from which the sorcery has come. If the guilt is established definitely, the relatives will seek to kill the murderer. If it is inconclusive, the elder relatives and *baramambin* will go apart secretly about a year later, take a bone or the skull, paint it with red ochre and blood from their forearm, bury it in an ant-bed with a fire, and chant a particular spell. It is believed that the murderer will sicken and die. It is not always left to supernatural vengeance to take its course, however, and if a suspected man falls ill, he may have to answer to the charge of murder. I witnessed three cases of this, but each time the man was successful in proving his innocence.

Aboriginal woman is never the sorcerer. She will take her revenge by inflicting illness on her enemies, but its effects are never mortal. She, as a *baramambil*, may secure *wuridji* (magical stones) from *Kaleru*, but she can never use her power as the sorcerer does. The reasons for this remain speculative, as the natives simply assert : " *Lubra* can't kill 'em ; no more *moəŋnari* (murderer)." It may be that she is never accredited with motives that would impel her to resort to sorcery ; but the more probable explanation may lie in the fact that the men are the warriors ; they are primarily responsible for the defence of the community and the revenge to be taken when one of its members is injured. If the guilty man cannot be identified or is not within striking distance of a spear then they have other methods in which magical power is utilized to achieve the same object. This form of " sorcery " is thus a means of administering justice. When it begins at home it is legitimate. But it will not be regarded as such by the relatives of the supposed murderer if he dies. For one thing

they may not be convinced of his guilt ; but whether he is culpable or not, the loss of a member to the horde demands retaliation in kind. Moreover, sorcery can be used for illegitimate ends, to satisfy a grudge against a man or a woman which does not warrant such extreme measures. The women know the general form of the rite, but not the songs. These are known to the men alone. It is for this reason that the sorcerer must always be a man. But there is also the belief that such magic is used for legal purposes within the tribe ; therefore the sorcerer is sought outside it.

Of course, the function of this conviction is obvious in a community where the men and women who are relatives of the dead have not had the satisfaction of seeing the murderer struck down by a spear. They can derive comfort from the thought that magical steps have been taken which will ultimately encompass his death. It is a checkmate to the malevolent sorcerer who is working against the security of the community.

Ritual at Death

But to return to the immediate moment of death itself. The relatives gash their heads and wail, but they do not approach the body or see to its disposal. As the Aborigines say : " Him sorry alonga dead fellow ; no more go alonga him." In the extremity of their grief they cannot endure to have any close contact with the body. More distant relatives remove the hair from the corpse, weave it into a *ŋa:mbi* (hair-belt) and keep it till the deferred mourning ceremonies are performed. If the person is very old or a mere infant, burial is in the ground ; otherwise the body is placed on a platform in a tree, covered with paper-bark, branches, and stones, and left till the flesh has rotted away. The reason given for this different form of interment was that an old person " was close-up dead ". The tree-burial may be an index to social value, but its purpose according to the natives was to permit the body-juices to fall on the stones beneath for the divination of the murderer.

In the meantime, the husband or wife and affinal relatives have smeared themselves with mud-*kaleraːl*; the mother, father, brother, sister, son, and daughter, paint themselves with red ochre, which is not renewed when it wears off. The wife shaves off her own hair, and at Forrest River she leaves her husband's country until after the deferred mourning ceremonies have taken place. She may afterwards remarry, often becoming the wife of her late husband's brother. In some of the tribes, I was given special terms for the bereaved relatives. In the Lunga the mother is called *daːlubany*; the widow or widower, *duːmboən*; the son or daughter, *ŋaməni*. A certain hiatus occurs in ordinary activities and speech. The camp of the dead is deserted; the belongings, such as *kulamons*, fighting-sticks, boomerangs, spears, and blankets, are burnt. The dogs, if they are a woman's, are given to her daughter or mother; if a man's then to his son or brother. Some said that dilly-bags and dresses would not be destroyed, but at least, some of the personal effects are. The name of the dead is avoided by men and women, partly out of sorrow, and partly out of fear that if this is not done the *djuaːri* will come to the side of the person who breaks the taboo. Moreover, other relatives in the vicinity would be angered at this lack of respect and affection for the dead. If the latter has invented any corroborees during his lifetime, they are not performed by his horde again, though this does not apply to the rest of the tribe.

Mourning Taboos

But those who stand in particular danger would seem to be the female relatives; therefore, they must make their grief the more obvious and adopt additional precautions. They observe a taboo on meat-*mi-aːla*, and their diet is mainly limited to vegetable foods, small fish, snakes, and witchetty grubs (*ladjɛl*), the last two being never eaten by the rest of the community, except once by the men during

[1] In the Nyigina tribe, the brother and sister, however, paint themselves with charcoal.

their initiation. The mourning women may not even smell flesh, and if a kangaroo is being roasted near by, they stuff their nostrils with grass. If they are old enough to perform increase ceremonies for the smaller marsupials, they refrain from doing so at this period. They also have string, *dungul* (*djagül*-D.), smeared with fat and red ochre which they coil around their necks. They are *ma:du*, or in pidgin-English "*lubra* got 'em string". This custom was attributed to Porcupine who mourned in this fashion for her husband, Magpie, in the *ŋaruŋgani*. If the women fail to do this, the *djua:ri* cause them to sicken from the food they eat. The taboo is only relaxed when the deferred mourning ceremonies are over; a male relative touches their mouths with the fat of kangaroo and other meat and they are then permitted to eat it. The string is a visible sign that the taboo is being observed: it, as it were, insulates them against the unwelcome attentions of the dead. Even nowadays most women keep the custom faithfully. There were three in the camp at Bedford who were wearing string, one for her mother, another for her mother's brother and another for her mother's mother's brother. I heard of only one instance of a woman failing to do so, and she was afraid to come to the inter-tribal meeting because of the punishment she would receive from those who were more scrupulous in their duties to the dead.

Now apart from the fact that these mourning ceremonies throw into sharp relief a set of kinship relations, they also emphasize, like so many other features of cultural life, the importance of the tie with the mother and her kindred. They must be carried out just as completely for them as for the father's line of descent. The rites are also a recognition of the binding character of the marital relationship, of the sentiment of affection that is assumed to exist between husband and wife. But why is it that the most exacting taboos should fall on the women, irrespective of whether the deceased is male or female? Natives couch their explanation in terms of the greater danger that threatens them. Why are the women more vulnerable?

If the rites were more stringent when the deceased was a man, then they might be indicative of his greater importance or value to the community; but this is not the case. Are they then a reflection of the value of the women, the dependence of the group upon them in economics and child-bearing? If this is one factor in the explanation, then the *djua:ri* may wish to have their company in the Land of the Dead, and so the women must adopt additional measures to protect themselves against sickness.

Equally significant for its bearing on the position of women is the fact that the deferred mourning ceremonies for them are just as elaborate as those for the men.[1] When the flesh has rotted away, the more distant male relatives first " smoke " themselves, take the bones, paint and wrap them in paper-bark. They then bring a bundle to the relatives for the last rites to be performed. The ceremonies are one of the few occasions when a woman, albeit a dead one, is the object for the organization of an inter-tribal meeting. Furthermore, the mother, if she is alive, (failing her, the son and daughter) is the chief mourner and the first to wail over the bones. The hair-belt of the deceased, together with gifts of spears, dilly-bags, and other articles are given to her by those who have brought the bundle. She keeps one or two for herself, and distributes the rest among the other relatives, who have provided wild-honey for the visitors. She carries the bones around after the others have mourned, and finally deposits them in the horde-country of the deceased close to his or her spirit-centre if possible. At Lyne River, some of them were placed where the umbilical cord had been buried, others where he had been initiated, and the rest at his spirit-centre. And the same was done for a woman with the exception that the camp where she was born took the place of the centre for initiation. It is no matter that she has lived the major part of her life in her husband's country. Eventually, she returns to her own country.

[1] *Vide* my article on " Death and Deferred Mourning Ceremonies " in *Oceania*, vi, pp. 39–47, for an account of these practices at Forrest River.

The ceremonies then are a means of ensuring that all the duties will be carried out for the dead. They erect a barrier of faith against the unknown and all that is to be feared in death : they provide the survivors with a dogma of comfort, security, and a belief in immortality. In the end some sort of equilibrium is established between the living and the dead. When the mourning has been completed and the first extremity of grief has passed, the relatives have little to fear from their own kin who are *djua:ri*. They keep a small piece of one of the bones or a lock of hair, and through this medium, the *djua:ri* are able to warn them of the approach of an enemy. The *djua:ri* also teach their kindred new corroborees, and instruct the person who wishes to become a *baramambin* or *baramambil* in his or her craft.

I have tried to convey some idea of the *ŋaruŋgani* and the totemic ancestors, to show that aboriginal men and women are linked with these through their totems and their spirit-centres, that they are born with a spiritual heritage. Through their parents, they enter into a relation of kinship with the rest of the community ; through them they contract rights of ownership over certain horde-countries, which are again associated with certain totemic ancestors. But the latter are not fantastic beings of a mythical past having little relevance for present-day actualities. They moulded the contours of the country, channelled the hills with streams, and splintered the plains with rivers and billabongs. They laid down the pattern which life must follow ; they instituted the law of marriage, the kinship obligations, and methods of obtaining food. Through the reciprocity of kinship rights and duties the individual is helped and supported in his daily activities, in the satisfying of needs with a minimum of social conflict. But where human care and experience fail, the totemic ancestors have left in the keeping of the old men and women of the horde the power to ensure by ritual means a normal supply of game, fish, and food, and an adequate

rainfall for the coming season. With the rites that protect the individual against the supernatural dangers and illness, with those that endow with strength and success I shall deal later.

But when sorcery breaks through the ritual guard, or when the spear inflicts a mortal wound, then the intervention of the totemic ancestors in the past has provided a whole cycle of ceremonies in which those ties that are basic to existence receive a final, ritual, and symbolic expression. On the one hand the ties with kindred are reaffirmed in the mourning rites by the duties performed for the corpse ; on the other, the imperishable link with the horde-country is acknowledged in the necessity of bringing the bones of a man or a woman back to it, and if possible to the spirit-centre, where he or she was found as a spirit-child prior to conception. Some of the *djuarri* are reincarnated in the living : others continue to wander over the land and are a source of protection to their kindred. Religious beliefs and ritual then tend to buttress life at those points where it is most vulnerable. The responsibility of performing rites is not in the hands of the younger generation of either sex. It is age that is important, because of its experience, its record of past dangers surmounted. To the old men and women is entrusted the duty of handing on mythology, ritual, and sacred formulae which are felt to be vital to existence.

In the light of these facts, we cannot speak of women as either lacking a religion or as possessing one that is compact of fears and anxieties. Nor can we speak of them as representing the profane element in the community. Like the men they have their spiritual affiliations, their totems, their beliefs, their links with the Time Long Past. By virtue of this, they have a right to the compensations which religion affords and to the sense of security it engenders.

CHAPTER IX

WOMEN'S CEREMONIES

We have shown that totemism has its roots in the needs that aboriginal men and women share in common with many other primitive peoples. Too often, however, discussion has tended to centre on the initiation ceremonies and the *tʃuruŋa* ; the women's rites associated with childbirth and menstruation have often been unrelated to the general context of religion, treated cursorily, and as a minor feature of native life. Spencer and Gillen tuck them away unobtrusively in a small chapter entitled " Peculiar Native Customs ".[1] Certainly the men's rites are more elaborate and have wider social repercussions ; but some writers have been so dazzled by their spectacular character that they have overlooked the significance of women's ceremonies, with their sparse economy of spell, taboos, social organization, and bodily ornamentation. They have been tempted to view the men's ceremonies as the nucleus, as the crystallization of religious values in society.

In one of the latest books on the Aborigines, Dr. Warner has given an excellent account of the ritual life of the men. But while he is ready to admit that a " woman has considerable independence ",[2] at the same time he considers her to represent the profane section of the community. " The personality before birth is purely spiritual ; it becomes almost completely profane or unspiritual in the earlier period of its life when it is classed socially with the females, gradually becoming more and more ritualized and sacred as the individual grows older and approaches death, and at death once more becomes completely spiritual and sacred. This is the life of all Murngin men. A woman, on

[1] Spencer and Gillen, *The Arunta*, vol. ii, p. 480 et seq.
[2] W. L. Warner, *A Black Civilization*, p. 91.

the other hand, passes out of the sacred existence of the unborn to the profane existence of the born and the living, and back again to the sacred existence of the dead; but little sacred progress is made during her lifetime." [1] Or again: "Obviously the principle of the social bifurcation of the sexes has been used to create the lowest status, that of women and children." [2] How far are these generalizations applicable to the Kimberleys and to other Australian tribes?

The economic background, the belief in a mythical past and the totemic ancestors, the complicated initiation ceremonies for the men—all these present striking similarities in the two regions. But apparently the Murngin have no increase ceremonies corresponding to those found elsewhere in the Northern Territory. In their place is a highly complex cult centring around the snake, *Yurlunggur*,[3] the ritual purification of men and women, and the regulation of the alternation of the "wet" and "dry" seasons.[4] The only *tʃuruŋa* mentioned are of the bull-roarer type, the *mandel-prindi*, which are associated with the snake and are used in the Gunabibi ceremony.[5] There are also rites for the "higher totems" or *rangas*, in which the women have no part.[6] Unfortunately he has given little material on the particular ceremonies of the women, how far these are considered sacred and linked with the totemic ancestors, and what is the attitude adopted by the women towards the men and their activities. Nor has he shown the extent to which the division into initiated and uninitiated operates throughout the total social structure, and how far it determines the position that the women occupy in marriage and other spheres of secular life. By reducing a complex of factors to a simple antinomy of initiated and uninitiated, he develops the theory of male sanctity as opposed to female

[1] *Idem*, op. cit., pp. 5–6.
[2] Ibid., p. 6.
[3] Ibid., p. 387.
[4] Ibid., p. 386.
[5] *Idem*, op. cit., pp. 290–6.
[6] These so-called "higher totems" may be similar to the cult totems described by Professor Elkin in the South Australian tribes (*vide S.A.T.*, pp. 139–141), and to the *waldjiri* and *wabiri* of the Kimberleys, which are represented in the corroborees never seen by the women.

profaneness. "Masculinity is inextricably interwoven with ritual cleanliness, and femininity is equally entwined with the concept of uncleanliness, the former being the sacred principle, and the latter the profane. This sexual dichotomy and its correlation with the Murngin beliefs of what are the sacred and profane elements of the group, are again connected with a further principle of human relations, namely, that of superordination and subordination. The superordinate male group made sacred through the ritual initiation of its individual members into the sacred group, and maintained as a unit by continual participation in the rituals, subordinates the female group which is unified by virtue of exclusion from the ceremonies and of ritual uncleanliness." [1]

In the Kimberleys the men have initiation and *tʃuruŋa* ceremonies besides the corroborees centring around certain cult totems. On the basis of the exclusion of the women from these rites, it might also be possible to speak of male sanctity and female profaneness, had we not already seen that in its broader aspects, religion meets the problems of both men and women. The *tʃuruŋa* are particularly sacred elements in the whole totemic complex, but the cult is rooted in and derives its validity from the beliefs about the *ŋaruŋgani* and totemic ancestors—beliefs we have seen to be shared by men and women. There is the further point that has been overlooked, namely, that the men represent the uninitiated in the community in regard to the women's secret ceremonies which, if less spectacular, are, from the women's point of view, just as sacred.

We can now discuss those ceremonies associated with childhood, maturation, and puberty, some of which we have touched on already because of their social implications and their relationship to the physiological development of the individual. Here we are primarily concerned with their ritual aspect. I shall deal as briefly as possible with the ceremonies of the men by way of the similarities and contrasts

[1] W. L. Warner, op. cit., p. 394.

they offer with those of the women. If we are to understand the position of women in ritual life, it is essential to analyse the nature of, and wherein lies the particular sacredness of the rites from which they are excluded. While I was in the field, four boys were initiated and I witnessed the subincision ceremony once. I was shown and given *tʃuruŋa* in all the tribes I visited on my second expedition, with the exception of the Nyigina, Miriwun, Malngin, where I only spent a short time. I also saw cult totem corroborees in the Lunga, Wolmeri, and Djaru tribes. Hence I was in a position to appreciate the importance of these ceremonies to the men and to estimate how much was really known to the women.

Initiation of a Boy

A boy begins his initiation into the ritual life of the men at the age of seven or thereabouts. He witnesses ceremonies which are *dara:gu* or sacred, and, which are fraught with a certain amount of supernatural danger for those who see them for the first time. Yet while they are more elaborate than those for a girl, children of both sexes are subjected during various food taboos during maturation. These we have mentioned in an earlier chapter ; they are also observed by women during menstruation, pregnancy, lactation, mourning, and prior to the performance of their own secret corroborees. Can we detect any belief that is fundamental to their operation in all instances ? [1] There is possibly a parallel in terms of immaturity between the embryo developing in the womb and the child who has not acquired the strength of an adult. There may be some idea that neither can offer much resistance to illness and to magical powers. But this obviously does not apply to the taboos where adults are involved. Still in all such cases there is

[1] Bearing on this question of food taboos is the prohibition for a young person to take food and fire from old men and women, lest these latter should develop sore eyes. Here I think the explanation is a practical one, for it underlines the obligation of the young to care and support aged relatives who are too weak to obtain food and firewood for themselves.

contact with the supernatural and therefore ritual precautions must be taken.

Function of Food Taboos

There is little doubt that the food taboos have the effect of subjecting the boy and girl to the authority of their elders ; and that for the boy in particular they are a method of discipline, which is only relaxed by order of the old men. They place an additional value on the status of manhood and the ceremonies by which it is achieved. Nevertheless I do not think they generate a sentiment of dependence on society as Professor Radcliffe-Brown would assert in regard to the Andaman Islanders.[1] The boy and girl are supplied with food by their parents. During the period of his initiation the boy looks to the group who are initiating him for his necessities. Later, it is his wife who will contribute the bulk of the provender for the daily meals. As an old man he will be supported by his close relatives. An analysis would show that at different times he is under an obligation to different individuals, either blood or affinal relatives for his food. The sentiment of dependency is directed towards specific sets of individuals rather than to some vague entity called society.

When we examined the taboos for pregnancy in an earlier chapter, we saw that the emphasis was primarily upon the welfare of the child and bringing it safely into the world ; and that this was linked with the belief that it is affected by whatever the mother eats. She is denied certain kinds of meat, but she relies mainly on her own efforts to support herself, her husband, and her children even during this period. The family is almost an independent economic unit. The taboos single her out from the rest of the community, and possibly make her aware of the importance of motherhood, but not necessarily of her dependence on society.

[1] *Vide* A. R. Radcliffe-Brown, *The Andaman Islanders*, pp. 276–284, for a discussion of initiation in reference to food taboos.

The natives stress the supernatural dangers attendant on certain crises or on the performance of certain rites. The health, even the life of the individual may be affected by the class of foods eaten. The question does arise as to why certain foods in particular are dangerous. The hypothesis put forward by Professor Radcliffe-Brown provides a clue. Those which are difficult or dangerous to obtain or are highly prized come to be associated with magical properties.[1] This generalization apart from one or two exceptions would seem to apply to the Kimberley tribes as well. I can only raise the issue here, as it would require a more detailed study than is possible within the survey of this book. Suffice it to say, that on the occasions we have mentioned the individual is believed to have something to fear from the supernatural, and that certain foods are the medium by which he or she may be endangered. But if we are ready to admit that the native believes in a supernatural, that it is an important concept in regulating his conduct, then one aspect of the problem of taboo is the way in which it determines the attitude towards the forces on which welfare is felt to depend. By taking measures to protect himself, he comes to realize something of the nature of the powers which control existence. One of the functions of the taboo is to generate sentiments of fear, reverence and probably dependence with regard to the supernatural; and we cannot at the last minute substitute for it that amorphous being "society".

Besides these taboos the boy both prior to and immediately after circumcision and subincision must avoid direct contact with women, lest he sicken, for the ceremonies in their ritual aspect are exclusively male, and centre around the attaining of manhood. He is warned that on pain of death he must not reveal anything he has seen to them, for it is "proper blackfellow business". He is instructed in tribal law, and before circumcision is permitted to see a corroboree in which the old men dance with *biliaŋa* (a small type of *ʧuruŋa*), though he may not yet touch nor call it by name.

[1] Op. cit., p. 269.

He also watches some of the cult totem corroborees, and others performed on the night before the operation. His introduction to all these rites is marked by ritual safeguards: he must be held over the smoke of a fire, and after the dances he must touch the heads of the old men.

The operation has already been described in relation to the kinship groups which take part. There is only one point I would wish to make here, namely, that there was no delight in torturing the boy or prolonging the agony unduly, as some of the earlier writers have claimed. There was even one song which was chanted to make the knife cut easily and quickly. Afterwards, food provided by close relatives of his parents was eaten by the *ŋu:mbana* and *lambera* who were present at the ceremony. It was never shared with the women, for like the ceremonies, it was *dara:gu*.[1] Before the initiators leave, they smear the boy with sweat from their armpits so that he will have no bad after-effects.

At the age of fourteen or fifteen he undergoes subincision with a similar observance of taboos, avoidance of women, and witnessing of more corroborees. He is now *wara:ny*. He is given a pubic pearl-shell (*djaguli*), armbands (*wi:la*), and a *biliaŋa* or *buluwa:nu* to swing. When about seventeen or eighteen he is presented with the white cockatoo feather (*da:rga*) and is classed with the young men or *djiliŋ*. Later he eats white-ant larvæ (*djamindil*), though this is attended with particular danger because of the fear of floods from *Kaleru*. He is segregated for five days in the charge of an old man, and he must not drink from the river, lest *Kaleru* should seize him. This is the last of the food taboos to be relaxed. However, he will not eat the larvæ again until he is old, for it is women's food. Its significance here is that he is probably ready to resume contact with the women and take a wife shortly. After this he is given a *gunari*

[1] J. G. Withnell mentions that the old women in the Pilbarra district of Western Australia may join in the feast after the operation on the boy. *Vide The Customs and Traditions of the Aboriginal Natives of North-West Australia*, p. 11.

(another type of *tʃuruŋa*), and when married he is referred to as *wanəma:*.

Now the women can describe the operation; they know by whom it is performed, but they are ignorant of the songs which are sung, the full details of the myths and of the fact that concentric circles are drawn on the backs of the initiators with the blood from the wound of the subincised boy. Their rôle is one limited to the dancing of the *yoelyu*, and to the gathering of food for the visitors. In the Wolmeri tribe after the cycle of corroborees has been enacted by the men in secret, the women are summoned to the dancing ground, where they throw burning grass at the men and seek to take the boy away from them. At certain stages the kinship bonds with the mother and her relatives assert themselves. She tries to keep back the boy; and when the operation is over, she receives him in the camp, strikes him with a tassel commanding him not to fight and not to run after women.[1]

The boy is made to feel his identity with the men and their activities. He is initiated into rites which are sacred and the means by which he reaches adult status. The excitement of a large inter-tribal gathering, the emotional tension that the ceremonies generate, the care bestowed on him—all impress the occasion on the boy as a momentous stage in his life, and give some inkling of the responsibilities to be assumed later.

[1] Spencer in *N.T.N.T.A.*, p. 167, mentions that in the Mungarai tribe, the mother sees the blood which has fallen from the wound of her son at circumcision, and which has been collected on a piece of paper-bark. Later she also sees the foreskin. On p. 168 he notes that the mother is given a piece of bark on which has fallen blood from the subincision ceremony. This she buries in the bank of a lagoon. This place is taboo to other women for two years, when the grass is then burned off. The blood makes the lilies grow. The Nullakun have a similar practice, *vide* p. 175. In the Kaitish the blood is smeared over the elder sisters and mother of the boy, *vide The Arunta*, vol. ii, p. 484. Dr. Warner also says that in the Murngin tribe, the mother is consulted about the holding of the circumcision ceremony, M.F.M.K., *Amer. Anth.*, 1930, p. 246. Professor Elkin has also said that in the Bardi tribe, an old woman may approach the boy just initiated and anointed with the blood from the veins of the men. She holds close to his abdomen a dish in which there is some of his blood. *Vide S.A.T.*, p. 33. All these practices, with the exception of the last, indicate the importance and recognition of the tie with the mother.

TʃURUŋA

Before returning to the rites for women, I shall consider the *tʃuruŋa*, since they constitute the most sacred objects in a cult evolved by the men on the basis of totemism and beliefs about *yaruŋgani*. They are not associated with spirit children, nor with increase ceremonies, though the markings possess a significance similar to those found among the Arunta.[1] They represent the water-holes by which the totemic ancestors camped, fire and flood encountered, the tracks of the ancestors themselves. They are of different sizes, shapes, designs, and importance. Ranging from the least to the most sacred, these are the *buluwa:nu* or *biliaŋa*, *mandeki*, *gunari*, *kroga*, *djabany*, *miriri*, *yinba:du*, *mungu-ana*, *ba:rgala kandila:*, and *wadia:*. The last three are only seen by the very old men. They were all handled with extreme reverence, they were hidden in a storehouse or *wu:dgu* (D.) and were never seen by the women. A man might be given his first *gunari* by his *yu:mbana* or *lambera*, and he inherited others from his father and his brothers. They were occasionally lent, or one might be given to a man as a reward for and as a means of successfully carrying out vengeance on a murderer.

Now these objects are not simply relics of the Time Long Past, to be worshipped without reference to the problems of ordinary existence. Emphasis must be laid on their practical value for we are dealing with an essentially practical people. In the first place, they are shown to the young circumcised boy " to make him strong fellow ; to make him grow-up ". They endow the owners with strength, prestige, success in warfare, hunting, and in love.[2] Their sacredness is utilized for male purposes, for secular and practical ends.

Since the women are supposed officially to be ignorant

[1] Spencer and Gillen, *The Arunta*, vol. i, pp. 124–131.

[2] Spencer also notes for the Arunta that *churinga* have similar qualities, *vide* op. cit., vol. i, pp. 107, 110 et seq. Professor Elkin has also pointed out similar functions of the *tʃuruŋa*, *vide The Australian Aborigines*, p. 172.

of even the existence of the *tʃuruŋa*, they cannot be expected to attach the same overwhelming importance to them as the men do ; nor even to view the men as being particularly sacred on the score of their ownership of these objects. Certainly the women never applied the word *dara:gu* to the men ; nor did the latter as far as I was aware ever refer to the initiated and elders by this term. It was reserved for the *tʃuruŋa*, certain ceremonies, and the food eaten on those occasions. To the women the *tʃuruŋa* were *dara:gu* and *gunbu*, but their own beliefs about the *ŋaruŋgini* and the acceptance of the supernatural sanctions for their conduct were not dependent on a knowledge and possession of such sacred objects.

Only in extreme old age were the Nyigina women permitted to eat some of the *dara:gu* food, though the Djaru, Lunga, Malngin, and Wolmeri women might see the *gunari*.[1] The men said jokingly in explanation : " Him close-up dead, might be him die anyway." There was probably a recognition of the danger of the *tʃuruŋa* present to the uninitiated ; but it would be unfair to attribute to the men a desire to hasten the departure of the aged from the world. Moreover, the old women perform the increase ceremonies, and like the old men have actually less to fear from the supernatural than the younger generation. They have almost reached a stage of invulnerability, for they are unlikely to provoke sorcery, or to commit those actions which might result in the infliction of penalties. There may even be some idea of conferring strength upon them, though unfortunately I did not ask for information on this point.

But the other women were not entirely ignorant of the existence of the *tʃuruŋa*. They had obtained illicit knowledge from the men. Sometimes the names of the *gunari* and *kroga* were mentioned casually in their presence, though the women would look embarrassed and refuse to say anything. They were extremely reluctant to discuss the

[1] R. Piddington in *F.N.A.*, p. 353, mentions that the old women might partake of the food eaten by the men on the occasion of a *tʃuruŋa* ceremony. Spencer and Gillen in *The Arunta* say that the women sometimes saw the *churinga* from a distance, vol. i, p. 100, f.n. 1.

matter with me even when we were alone, for they feared they might sicken, and that the men might also get to know about it. One woman, Wungenil, reiterated again and again: "*Lubra* can't call 'em; *lubra* can't know, can't know." Finally, she said: "That blackfellow business. Man go away; sing him; *lubra* know. Old woman got 'em flour-bag (grey-hair), that one see him." The Lunga women referred to the *tʃuruŋa* as *goaːlburu*; the Wolmeri as *ubi-ubi*; and the Djaru as *limbaːl*. They knew that they were made of wood, that they had markings on them that were *ŋaruŋgani*, that they were associated with corroborees, that they promoted growth, and endowed with strength. One woman when she heard the bullroarers which the boys were using about half a mile away, said they were *yinəraːri* and *daraːgu*. Another woman of the Miriwun tribe asserted that the *tʃuruŋa* were *gugbu* (taboo) and that women also had "marks" of their own. These statements are significant as revealing an attitude that places the *tʃuruŋa*, the women's secret corroborees, and the wooden objects used during their performance into the same category. "Marks" is the pidgin-English for small message sticks owned by either sex. Here, however, I discovered that the reference was to a different type of wooden object—the *miliri*—which was never seen by the men.

Illicit use was supposed sometimes to be made of the *tʃuruŋa* by the men. I was told how, long ago, a man called Bridjeri in the Wolmeri tribe took a *wadiaː* and showed it to his tribal mother-in-law saying: "Suppose you no come alonga me, me kill you." The woman was terrified and submitted to his wishes. The Djaru admitted that men sometimes used the *gunari* to compel women to have intercourse. Of course the risk run is very great, and if discovered would result in death. How often this happens it is impossible to say, for there is every reason for concealing the occurrence. But it is probably unusual, for the men view the *tʃuruŋa* as something sacred never to be seen by the women. I should imagine that it would be a last resource,

especially since they possess more legitimate forms of love magic.

Attitude of Women to the Men and their Rites

Especially significant is the attitude adopted by the women towards the men and their rites. How far do they acknowledge the superiority and sacredness of the male in practice? For if the men really represent the sacred or more sacred element in the community, then one might expect the women to be cognizant of the fact and to accept it. We have already reiterated that both men and women are sacred in so far as they are linked by their totems and spirit-centres to the *ŋaruŋgani*. This is the birthright of every individual. It is open to question whether the simple recognition of the specialized religious character of some of the men's rites does necessarily generate a sentiment of reverence for the actual participants. The women, as far as I could judge from their comments, remained regrettably profane in their attitude towards the men. Respect, however, was given to the headman and the elders as seniors and authorities. When the younger men paraded in their feathers and paint after one of their ceremonies, they were certainly the object of admiration; but the spectacle was enjoyed as a dramatic one, and the praise uttered was in terms that suggested that the spectators regarded the men as potential lovers, and not as individuals near unto gods. Ultimately, respect and esteem were based on a knowledge of the younger men in mundane affairs, their temperamental qualities desirable and otherwise, their prowess in war, hunting, and the dance. On this problem of the women's attitude among the Murngin, Dr. Warner has little to say.

To sum up then. The *ʧuruŋa* from the native point of view are in the nature of historical documents, since on them are inscribed events of the Time Long Past. They are the prototypes of those first made by the totemic ancestors. In this lies their peculiarly sacred character. These, together with the cult totem corroborees, constitute

one of the focal points around which the ritual, the recreative, and artistic life of the men revolves. They also possess an economic aspect; when the young men see the *gunari*, *kroga*, and other *tʃuruŋa* for the first time, they must hand over kangaroo to the initiators. When the *tʃuruŋa* are returned after being borrowed a gift of food accompanies them. They may also be given to a man who has to revenge a death on behalf of another relative; and finally they bring success in hunting.

They are associated with the education of the adolescents in the ritual activities of the men, with the acquisition of further knowledge about the *ŋaruŋgani* and the totemic ancestors. They are linked with the political control wielded by the old men. They are a means of buttressing their authority in other spheres, for if the young men marry at an earlier age than is prescribed by law, they are likely to be excluded from further participation in the secret and sacred rites. As one man expressed it: "Too much him bin go alonga *lubra*. Can't see 'em *gunari* now." In this respect such a man would occupy much the same rôle as the women, but without the hope of initiation into the women's secret rites. He would be a ritual outcast. According to native lights, he would be at a serious disadvantage, for the *tʃuruŋa* represent one of the main sources of interest in the life of the men. They are a means of acquiring prestige, success in fighting, hunting, and love affairs.

The *tʃuruŋa* thus touch on every aspect of culture; kinship, education, religion, magic, sex, political and local organization, economics, recreation, and art. They meet definite needs, create confidence, security, and a sense of well-being at those points where the men are vulnerable—in sex, hunting, warfare, and the period of adolescence when manhood and its strength have yet to be attained. To the women the *tʃuruŋa* are *dara:gu*, *gunbu*, blackfellow business, and like other ritual objects or rites they are associated with the totemic ancestors. The men's secret corroborees were also *gunbu* to the women, but the latter

also possessed cult totems, though their ownership was never given the ritual expression, never couched in the same dramatic terms as it was for the men.

Women's Rites

Admittedly the rites of the men present a somewhat formidable, imposing, if not awe-inspiring array. But before we place aboriginal man on a monument and call him sacred, and put aboriginal woman at the foot of it and call her profane, let us consider the rites which she herself carries out. These are certainly less spectacular and fewer in number, but they bear much the same close relation to her problems as the ceremonies of the men do to theirs.

The women seem to have the same deeply rooted belief in the *ŋaruŋgani* and the totemic ancestors as the men. The explanation is to be sought in the conditions of existence out of which totemism has developed. These are still in a large measure operative for all members of the aboriginal community. As long as natives lack the scientific knowledge to control events, to reclaim the unknown and its dangers from the supernatural, there will be a need for certain rites, though their performance and their apparent efficiency will also result in the strengthening of belief in those powers who were responsible for them in the Time Long Past.

The absence of elaborate ceremonies during the adolescence of a girl may be due in part to the different rôle played by women in the secular life, and to the conditions of marriage in north-west Australia.[1] The adolescent boy does not reach the social status of an adult till he is eighteen or twenty. In the intervening period between puberty and marriage, he is learning how to track and stalk game; he is acquiring proficiency in the making and use of the spear and boomerang, for it is not until he is a skilled hunter and fighter and is able to defend a wife, provide her and her parents with game, that he is considered fit

[1] Initiation rites for girls seem to have been more protracted in the Boulia District in Queensland, *vide* W. Roth, *E.S.*, sectn. 310.

to marry. Parallel with this, he is taken step by step through a series of rites, which implant in him a sense of identity with the men and their interests, and which according to native belief will endow him with strength to meet the new demands that are made on his endurance, and which will equip him with the power to face and assume the responsibilities of manhood.

Now the position of a girl is fundamentally different. After the first menstruation, she is able to assume the functions of a wife as a food-gatherer, a sexual partner, and a bearer of children. There is little uncertainty in her work. She needs no magical net to snare the yam and the iguana. She has acquired the knowledge of the various types of tubers, roots, and berries that serve for food, and she can rely on her own powers of observation to obtain them. In warfare, she has little or no part ; nor does she require the moral support of a ritual weapon or *gunari*. Her fighting-stick is adequate for the disputes in which she is likely to be involved. Therefore her first menstruation represents a crucial turning point in her life. Just as it is believed that circumcision and its attendant ritual will stimulate growth in a boy, so there are rites either performed by the old men or women, which will promote the development of puberty in a girl. After her first menstruation there are no further stages of initiation comparable with those for a boy, probably because she is now capable of shouldering some of the duties of an adult. There are rites associated with childbirth itself, but none to increase fertility, though such do occur in other communities. The reason probably lies in the nature of the spirit-children beliefs, and an ignorance of the true relation between sexual intercourse and conception. The onus is upon the man to find and dream of a spirit-child, and it is doubtful if the notion of female sterility exists.

The period of her life between infancy and the approach of puberty holds few radical changes for a girl in regard to activities and associates. The norms of conduct are inculcated : in company with her mother and other female

relatives she steadily acquires a knowledge of economic resources and methods of exploiting them. But she also learns that the country was moulded to its present form by the totemic ancestors, and that at certain places they camped, fought, changed into stones or made *wulwiny*. She hears about events of the Time Long Past; how a certain totemic ancestor fashioned a digging-stick to unearth a yam; how another carved out the first *kulamon*, and another used a large shell to carry water. She is told that she has totemic affiliations with some of the animals, birds, fish, reptiles, or plants. Thus on the concrete basis of her environment is reared another spiritual world. The remote past was the crucible in which were wrought those strange beings the totemic ancestors, within whose human forms were leashed the powers that could sculpture the hills, cut a course for the rivers through the plains, create man himself, institute the rites believed to ensure his existence, protect him from pain and sickness, control the normal procession of the seasons and perpetuate natural forces and species. For the children the mourning rites present mainly a dramatic spectacle; their tragic import remains latent till they are older. Nor do they probably realize the importance of the increase ceremonies, till they cease to be completely dependent on their parents. With maturity comes the close interlocking of spiritual, physical, and social realities; the integration of ritual, economic, and social activities.

Pre-puberty Rites

During early childhood a girl is faced with no major crisis that has its pronounced ritual background, though like the boy she refrains from eating certain foods, because it is thought they may injure her until she is fully developed. However, as the signs of puberty appear—the swelling of the breasts, the growth of pubic hair—she is referred to as *wuleminil*; and some of the elders in such tribes as the Lunga, Djaru, and Wolmeri, take *mungua:na* and chant

songs to bring her to sexual maturity. In the Ngadi and Waneiga tribes, the old women have rites to fulfil a similar purpose. Now just as certain totemic ancestors possess a particular significance for the men, so others such as Native-Companion, a small type of Chicken-Hawk, Crow, Porcupine, and a small Lizard have importance for the women. Some of these were responsible for the formation of the female genitals, and others for menstruation. The Malngin offer a different version from that obtaining in most other tribes. Two female snakes, *Wuyuwud* and *Djalŋi*, were making digging-sticks by the fire. *Djalŋi* pierced her hymen and then did the same to *Wuyuwud*. In the Djaru, Lunga, and Wolmeri tribes, the myth describes how Native-Companion cut Crow and small Chicken-Hawk and so caused a flow of blood and menstruation. The Ngadi and Waneiga, who possess a similar myth, also declare that there is a stone where the rite was carried out, and that songs now known only to the women were sung by the female totemic ancestors to stop the flow of blood. Apart from the details of the last one, none of these myths were *gunbu* to the men; but in general it was the women who were familiar with them and displayed the most interest.

Unfortunately, as I was never at Tanami and could only obtain accounts from the women living with the eastern Djaru, it is impossible to say whether the puberty rites were in any way comparable with the subincision ceremonies in the organization they might entail and the extent of their social repercussions.[1] According to accounts given to me, the girl was taken away just before puberty by the old women and smeared with charcoal. Then the old women sang:

1.	*bin bin*	*garilu*	*yara*	*garilu*
	breasts	grow	up	grow
2.	*guma:n*	*ga:ra*	*gumara*	*gara*
	pubic hair	grow		

[1] For introcision rites in other tribes see footnotes pp. 97–99, in Chapter IV. The Nyigina at one time practised introcision, and an old woman performed the rite, but none of my informants knew the songs. Amongst the Wula it was performed by the *baramambin*, but one old woman was able to give me two of the songs.

3.	*kangara*	*ba:l ba:l*	*yeliman*	*djururu*
	long grow		clitoris	hymen (?)
4.	*djalirba:*	*na:ra:ri*		

I could not always obtain a word for word translation. My informants would give me a sentence in explanation for one term or else describe what was actually done, as for example in No. 3 where they said the old woman would feel the vulva of the young girl and then break the hymen. In the last song the women were supposed to throw bushes at the girl and sing so that she would soon find a *djibönir* or lover.

In a later rite, the girl would be painted with red ochre and the old woman, probably her mother's mother, would lacerate the vaginal orifice, singing as she did so :

Kadi kadi	*yeliman bula:*
sexual intercourse	clitoris

The rite must be performed secretly away from the men or else it has injurious after-effects on the girl. The men, too, sicken if they heard songs which are *dara:gu* and also *gunbu.* Like subincision, introcision is looked on by the natives as a preparation for marriage : it is carried out under the direction of the old women : it has its taboos and mythical sanctions : it has its ritual which sacralizes the operation and at the same time, according to the women, allows of its performance with a minimum of danger to the girl.

At her first menstruation a girl is secluded from the men, for any sort of contact would be injurious to her and to them. She remains with her mother or her mother's mother. At its conclusion she is painted with red ochre and brought back into the camp. During her later periods, she herself stands in no particular danger from association with the men, but she must not have sexual intercourse, nor touch their belongings and food, lest they sicken.[1]

[1] Similar rites are observed throughout the greater part of Australia at menstruation. They are reported by Spencer, *N.T.N.T.A.*, p. 326 ; *The Arunta*, ii, p. 481 ; W. Roth, *E.S.*, p. 184 ; G. Taplin, *F.M.C.*, p. 96 ; R. B. Smyth, *A.V.*, i, p. 46, for the Encounter Bay natives, and p. 65

The latter have a special term *damba:lnu* for menstruation, as distinct from that used by the women, *buru:buru:*.

The girl may now eat some of the foods hitherto forbidden her; she is now ready to assume the responsibilities of an adult. If she does not marry she is called *balilmal*. With marriage, she becomes *karelil*, and when she has a child, she is *ŋalil* or *waliʒəro:l*. In middle-age she is called *ŋamenil*; and as an old woman she is *bulga:l*. These terms have a social and physiological reference, and present almost as many distinctions as those applied to the men during the different stages of their life.

Menstruation

There are then for the girl rites that vary in complexity in the different tribes, and which take her through the later stages of maturation and her first menstruation. How far the seclusion in the latter crisis is accompanied by emotional tension and even fear I had no opportunity of investigating during my fieldwork. Obviously, however, it must represent a new and important stage in her physiological, social, and ritual life. With the social readjustments it involves I have dealt in an earlier chapter. But there also exists a certain amount of ritual differentiation amongst the women, though it lacks the finely graded stages of initiation into a cult corresponding to that of the *tʃuruŋa*. With sexual maturity the girl may take part in the women's secret corroborees. After she has had a child, she may assist at the rites carried out for her female relatives. Later she gradually learns the songs that are *d'ara:gu* and *gunbu* to the men; and in old age, she directs proceedings and becomes responsible for the handing on of her knowledge to the generation of women below her.

What is important is that the onset of menstruation

for the Upper Yarra women; W. Stanner, *D.R.T.*, pp. 13–14; U. McConnel, *W.M.A.T.*, p. 317; W. L. Warner, *A Black Civilization*, pp. 75–6; K. L. Parker, *E.T.*, pp. 56–7, and many other writers. At Forrest River, menstruation was thought to have its potential dangers and the women at such times would not climb trees for wild-honey, lest they should fall.

does not brand the girl once and for all with the mark of ritual uncleanliness: it does not unite her with the rest of her sex in a common bond of impurity as Briffault would seem to imply. Certainly menstruation is linked with femaleness as such. And in so far as it is a function that is not properly understood: in so far as it is associated with blood and the genitals, it has become associated with taboos and rites, and has been identified with certain magical properties. But I never detected in the attitude of the men any disgust and horror of a menstruating woman. She kept unobtrusively out of the way, and camped apart; but unless one were familiar with the general habits of social intercourse, her segregation would not have been noticeable except at night, when she slept on the other side of the fire some few feet away from her husband. She was never spoken of as being "dirty" or "unclean", though she was *gunbu*. I was not able to obtain from these natives any term for "filth" or "dirt" with a moral implication of ritual uncleanliness.[1] *Gunbu* itself is used in a number of different contexts and means forbidden on pain of sickness or death.

Of course in some communities, there is the idea that a menstruating woman is unclean, and that quite apart from any possible danger to others, she must purify herself at the close of each period. But I did not encounter this practice in North-West Australia. The blood would cause the men to sicken; hence she avoided participation in those activities where men were involved. Particularly significant was the fact that she herself never referred to menstruation as *kambulŏ* or shameful; nor did she consider herself unclean. Had this been the attitude of the men one would have expected to find it reflected in the attitude of the women; but this was not the case. It is difficult to subscribe to Briffault's statement that "the notion of her impurity . . . which pervades the ideas not only of

[1] Dr. Stanner told me in conversation that he also could not discover any word for "dirt" as used in a moral sense among the Daly River tribes.

the savage, but also of the peoples who regard themselves as most remote from him, have their roots in the primitive taboo attaching to the menstrual function ".[1] We have no grounds for assuming it to be the prototype of all taboos. The assertion is based on an extraordinarily limited approach to religion and magic, to the foundations of belief in the supernatural, and to the wide series of factors and situations which affect the security and life of both men and women.

There is, however, the question of the extent to which prohibition of sexual intercourse during pregnancy and menstruation places the aboriginal woman at a disadvantage as compared with the man. If her husband has not another wife, he may be tempted to seek satisfaction elsewhere. However, according to her own lights, she is not left defenceless, for she has certain magical songs which she believes will secure his fidelity, and with these I shall deal in the next chapter. The Ngadi and Waneiga women also perform a rite so that menstruation may end the sooner. Near Tanami, there is a small stone where Crow and Native-Companion first menstruated in the Time Long Past. The women now visit it towards the end of their period, smear blood on their hair and sit on the stone, then rub it, chanting as they do so :

1.	*baːrgamaːn*	*ɣliman*	*djadjei*
	finish quickly	" dry one " clitoris	backbone (blood running from backbone)
2.	*badːi*	*djɣliba*	*kadi*
	head	blood	copulate

The women said that the blood on the hair was " belonga play for boy " ; that it would arouse sexual desire. The last song was :

3.	*Kaːrgany*	*bana*	*ɣliman*	*djaraːra*
	chicken hawk	husband	" dry one " clitoris	sleep

The woman then washes the blood from her hair and seeks out her husband.

The native belief that menstrual blood has magical properties is revealed again in those cases where the taboo is

[1] R. Briffault, *The Mothers*, vol. ii, p. 407.

broken either unintentionally or deliberately. A man who had sore eyes recalled that inadvertently he had taken tea from a menstruating woman. He mentioned this casually and expressed neither horror nor disgust. Sometimes, however, a woman wishes to have revenge on a man who has tired of her, or on another who has refused to become her lover. During her courses she walks across his camp and touches his belongings. I heard of this practice in the Djaru, Malngin, Wolmeri, and other tribes; and a case occurred while I was in the camp with the North Lunga. A widow had desired intercourse with a certain man who was already married, He had refused, and she walked over his camp in his absence when she was menstruating. Two other women said they saw her do it. About two weeks later he sickened and I was told that he could only be cured by acceding to her wishes. But he was so soundly berated by his wife that he endured the lesser evil until the manager of the station came to his aid with medicine. Two women belonging to other tribes admitted that they had resorted to this method when they were deserted by their lovers. Now these cases suggest a parallel to that of the man who showed a *gunari* to a woman. A taboo was broken involving the opposite sex. The power inherent in a material object on the one hand, and in a physiological process on the other, was utilized to further illegitimate ends. Of course, the man's behaviour was the more serious: he was committing a sacrilege in revealing the secrets of others. Whereas, although the woman was known to have broken the menstrual taboo, no action was taken against her apart from a tongue-lashing from her brother and a fight with the wife of the man who had sickened. But the instances are illuminating in that they show both a man and a woman will break a taboo to obtain their desires.

Birth

Apart from the limitations imposed on her association with the men during menstruation, a girl is not seriously

handicapped as she would seem to be in other communities.[1] With pregnancy, however, she is subjected once more to the food taboos which she observed during maturation. They are a means of protecting the child developing within her womb, though she herself may sicken if she disregards them. It is not until the moment of delivery that she stands in any particular danger ; she goes about her work, prepares food for her husband, makes the customary gifts, and has her usual social contacts. She may not have sexual intercourse, but my general impression was that the women were not always scrupulous in this matter.

Unlike the male ceremonies, many of the women's had not the additional function of being both collective and recreative. From one point of view they were severely practical, in that they appeared to be solely concerned with solving a particular problem, protecting from danger and alleviating pain. As far as I am aware, birth songs have not been reported from other parts of the continent, and I did not know that there were any in North-West Australia. But it seemed highly probable that the women might have some secret ritual for dealing with prolonged labour and the possibility of hæmorrhage. I had more difficulty in obtaining and account of the songs for childbirth from the women, than I had in discussing initiation and the *tʃuruŋa* with the men, perhaps because I did not know for certain whether they existed, and perhaps because they were known only in full detail to the advanced in middle-age or the very old women, who guarded them jealously. It was not until I had been seven months in the country that I finally heard the first songs, although I had seen a women's secret corroboree about three months previously. An old Wolmeri woman began by saying decisively : " no got 'em song, no got 'em ; me no savvy." By dint of sitting in front of her for half an hour and declaring just as decisively : " You savvy, you got 'em ; me bin hear alonga 'nother one tribe you got

[1] Dr. Granquist in regard to the women in Palestine states that " it draws narrow limits to their participation in life and religion . . . and that it cuts them off from many things ". *Marriage Conditions in a Palestinian Village*, ii, 163–4.

'em " (a lie on my part), I finally heard her begin to chant in a low rather hoarse voice words which were at first unrecognizable. But she became more confident, and I was then able to take them down and obtain a translation. Once I was successful in one tribe, I was able to secure them without much persuasion in other tribes.

According to the Wolmeri, the old women and those who had children went apart with a pregnant woman and danced around her. These songs were sung :

1. *lumbuːŋa djalgara manyaːnda*
born big woman big milk (breasts)
2. *djindil ŋagulilaːŋy baliŋnaːn dimaːnu*
clitoris I look show me vulva

The old woman examined her and then would sing :

3. *lumbuːŋa manyaːnda kalbuːkalbuː djɛlbi*
born (?) breasts hurts ?

The women said it would make birth easier and charm the pelvis and the genital organs ; in short make her " good fellow alonga bingy ".

As the moment of birth approached the pregnant woman left the camp with her mother and an old female relative, one of whom would act as midwife. During labour, songs were sung to facilitate delivery and prevent hæmorrhage, the umbilical cord was cut and the placenta was buried secretly. The baby was then dusted with charcoal, and string was tied around its wrists to strengthen them. It and the mother were rubbed with conkaberry bushes which had been smoked over a fire and which were applied to ease the pain, prevent bad after-effects and ensure a flow of milk. Mother and child were secluded from the men for about five days during which time she was fed and cared for by her mother and other female relatives. When the cord dropped off it was wrapped in rag or string and worn around the neck. At the conclusion of this period the mother took the child to its father. The following were songs I obtained from the tribes I visited :

1. West Djaru . *djireiny ɣɛlbəraːdj waːndi djireiny*
child (male) fall down umbilical cord child
2. West Djaru . *djabinbaːru djindil*
stop (blood) clitoris
3. East Djaru . *yildjirin djiraːl waːndi*
pull child (female) cord
4. . . . *laːlgaːru laːru laːlga baiːəraː laːlgaː baiːəra budjuː*
dry cut dry cut vulva
5. . . . *kaːngu naːba ŋuːmbana yängulaː*
water husband take to
6. Waneiga . *ɣɛlbaːra waːndi yildiriŋ ɣɛlbaːridjaː larinbala*
fall down cord pull fall down blood flowing from vagina
7. Malngin . *waːnduː burinaː yariaːr bili yandaːl*
cord hanging down quick fall down
8. . . . *bili yandaːl garaːly wanːdi*
quick fell down grab cord
9. Malngin . *kandulin ŋaːdjara djaːr gundu gundu*
stop vagina
10. . . . *daːbu wuringəru daburu maŋari ŋaːdja*
blood blood vagina

Another version :

11. . . . *djinaː mala waːndi karaːl waːndi*
foot hand cord grab cord
12. . . . *djibili waːndi yariaːr bili*
pelvis cord hanging down quick
13. . . . *guaːri lumba bəlumbaː baːlum baluŋ*
stop born (?) born
14. . . . *djaːningaːr bunaːngaːr*
ashes
15. Wolmeri . *maːnba kanin muraŋu duda biːnya windjädi*
pubes close to delivery vagina hurt comes out
bindaːnu
child
16. . . . *ɣɛlbaraːdj kandei waːndi*
fall down almost out cord
17. . . . *yuːbənaː gudidaː djuguru bandö bandö nunaːŋaniny*
vagina placenta cord blood falling hurt
18. . . . *badina dud baːndjaː gunyaːr ra manyaːnda*
vulva breasts
19. Punaba . *mudu dur kalaːbi*
child outside
20. Wula . *waːndi baːlma kaːnin*
cord almost out
21. . . . *ɣɛlaːləlu dindi* [1]

[1] For many of these songs I was unable to obtain a literal translation, though the women would give the import of a whole phrase in such words as : " him hurt alonga bingy ; piccaninny him close up come out ; him outside." Often, in spite of my persistence, I could get no more than this, especially when my informant was a very old woman, and I had to use an interpreter. However, as these songs have never been reported before from North-West Australia, I considered it best to put them on record here.

This ritual is characterized by features which would seem to be typical of that associated with most of the physiological crises of the individual:

(1) The observance of food taboos—this time by the mother on behalf of the child; (2) the spells and rites to safeguard them both during parturition. These things in themselves belie the general impression that childbirth among the Aborigines invariably occurs without complications and without much pain. (3) The remedial use of smoked conkaberry bushes—a practice that occurs in many other situations of imminent danger or actual sickness. (4) The belief that the blood from the female genitals is dangerous to the men; hence the secret burial of the placenta and the refusal of the women to discuss it in the presence of the men. (5) Finally, the segregation of the woman—a prohibition that is paralleled by the seclusion of a girl at her first menstruation and introcision, and by isolation of a boy after circumcision and subincision. These two factors are so closely interlocked that they can scarcely be considered apart. On the one hand the child itself may sicken if the placenta is found by the men or if the cord is lost; on the other hand, both mother *and* child, whether the latter is a boy or a girl, may be harmed if they have contact with the men until four or five days afterwards. The cord and the placenta are part of the child; but they are also the tangible and visible manifestation of the link with the mother, who herself sees to their safe disposal. But because of the physical intimacy of the maternal tie, the child would to some extent seem to be threatened by the same dangers that menace its mother, and therefore it shares with her the seclusion from the main part of the camp, and more particularly from the men. Until the child is weaned, the woman continues to observe the food taboos, in the belief that whatever she eats may harm the child indirectly through the milk it takes from her breast.

Now although the men know some of the details of childbirth, such as the severing of the umbilical cord by

the female relative who acts as midwife, the rubbing of the child with charcoal and the use of conkaberry bushes, still they are ignorant of those songs which are sacred or *dara:gu*, songs which for all their simplicity are fraught with the power that they possess by virtue of their supernatural origin. In so far as they are commands which appear to achieve their result automatically, they may be considered magical; but their efficacy is attributed to the fact that they are *ŋaruŋgani*; that they were first uttered by the female totemic ancestors. They have the same sanctions as the increase ceremonies, the rites for the *tʃuruŋa*, the cult totems, subincision, and circumcision. What is of particular interest is the distribution of some of the songs among a number of tribes or else the recurrence of certain words. The resemblance is particularly marked in those designed to hasten birth, as in numbers 1, 3, and 6, in the Djaru, Waneiga, and Wolmeri tribes; and the reappearance of the word for umbilical cord—*wa:ndi* in Nos. 7, 8, 11, 12, and 20. Differences arise in those to prevent hæmorrhage and injurious after-effects.

The whole of the ritual surrounding pregnancy, parturition, and lactation does not represent the last step of initiation into a cult, but it has its sacred and esoteric aspects, which are of the most vital importance to the women, and which are associated specifically with female functions. They are believed to be a spiritual or supernatural guarantee from the Totemic Ancestors that a woman will be able to surmount the dangers of childbirth, bear her child safely, recover from the shock of parturition, and resume once more her usual activities. They emphasize the value of the child to the community; they are a definite recognition of the physical bond between mother and child.

Black Magic

We have presented a crystallization as it were of many of the religious beliefs and practices of these North-West Australian tribes. It was necessary to consider them in

juxtaposition in order to realize the underlying principles and common facts which were operative. At the same time, we have stressed their relation to the conditions of existence ; to the problems created by environment, and the need for social readjustment. But the pendulum of daily life does not swing from one crisis to another. True, there will be a quickening of tempo at certain periods. In the " dry " season between June and August the bush natives assemble for mourning and initiation ceremonies. Kinship status, age, and local affiliations determine the rôle to be played by each individual. But for a number of persons, the meeting simply provides the opportunity to see relatives again, to talk, to gossip, watch new corroborees, to be spectators of the disputes and some of the ritual events. During the " wet " season, there is a lull in such activities, and the hordes are scattered into small groups.[1] The foraging and hunting for food, the care of children, the exchanges between relatives, an occasional intrigue with the gossip it provokes, matrimonial disputes—all these constitute the general tenor of daily life.

This is not to say that religion ceases to impinge on existence. There are still the young children, the pregnant and menstruating women and others in mourning who continue to observe the various types of taboos. There are the myths told around the fires at night. A birth may occur ; the men may go apart to look at their *tʃuruŋa*, or they may dance one of their cult totem corroborees. A man smears his spears with red ochre before he hunts ; or a woman whose child cries constantly may place green leaves on a fire, and hold the child over the smoke for a moment, believing that this will cure the unknown malady. Food is gathered each day with the assurance that the increase ceremonies have been performed in the preceding spring and that there will be sufficient to meet their needs.

A study of the rites has revealed the difficulties associated with the different periods in the life of the individual,

[1] The station natives, however, have their gatherings in " wet " season, and work during the winter about the homesteads.

and the problems likely to confront at least large sections of the community. But it would be wrong to assume that the Aborigines live in a perpetual state of cringing fear, that they believe themselves to be constantly threatened by evil forces. In the camp there was generally much laughter, joking, and good feeling. They certainly disliked to go far into the darkness alone, but in the groups sitting around the fires or singing at the corroboree-ground there was no apparent tension, unless they were visiting another tribe and were near a burial gorge or a grave. Then any untoward rustling in the scrub might be interpreted as *djua:ri.*

At certain crises in physiological development, or at the death of a relative, the individual is thought to stand in some danger. The rites anticipate and forestall it. Sickness, if it occurs at such a time, may be attributed to failure to perform these rites correctly or completely. But these crises occur at only infrequent intervals, and normally men and women do not believe that they will sicken, as long as they live in conformity with tribal law. Here we are concerned primarily with those situations which a woman believes may have evil consequences for herself; those in which she is likely to practise black magic, and finally, the position of the woman *baramambil.*

She may sicken if she sees things which are sacred to the men; if she breaks a taboo, or has contact with supernatural beings such as *djua:ri* or *Kaleru* without due ritual precautions; if she arouses the enmity of some person either unwittingly or through failure to fulfil *bulba:* obligations, through adultery, suspicion of having resorted to black magic, or having had an active part in some murder. In most cases of sickness she is thus (like the man) held partly responsible for the actions which have led to it. At the same time the sickness is explained, and according to the native viewpoint, can be dealt with by taking medicines or submitting to the ministrations of some older relative; and, if the situation demands it, by fulfilling those obligations previously ignored. When Bungurei developed

an acute pain after dreaming of a *djaguli* a few days before, she was rubbed with green leaves by her husband, and she also sent word to her *wunan* to send the pearl-shell, which she might then hand on to the irate partner who had in his impatience caused her to dream of it in the first place.

Malaria and constipation are treated by drinking an infusion made from the bark of the coolibah, white river-gum, sandal-wood, or leichardt pine. Sometimes less rational methods are employed, such as the singing of a song to cure toothache, or the pounding up of a bone of a dead relative, mixing it with red ochre and applying it to the afflicted portions of the body. As an additional precaution, green leaves are often held over the smoke of a fire, applied to the sweat under the armpits of the operator, and then rubbed on the patient. If this is unsuccessful, sweat from the armpits of a male *damberu* may be mixed with water and sent to a woman patient to be drunk. Possibly there is the idea that the excretion from the body of a healthy person may have curative properties; and as far as I could discover, there was no idea that the *damberu* might be under suspicion of having caused the malaise.

If a woman has committed adultery with a married man, or has left her husband to elope with her lover, then either her ex-husband or the wronged woman may practise magic against her. But this is not inevitable. We have already discussed the practical measures taken by the aggrieved parties to deal with such culprits. If these fail nothing more may be done. For instance, it was denied that the husband of Bulagil would "sing" her and her lover; though had either of them sickened there is little doubt that it would have been traced back to the husband. The possibility of black magic then may be one of the risks that those who break the law have to run. It is therefore a sanction of tribal law, though perhaps only a latent one. I was given one case of a woman who had committed adultery and died. She was a widow who had married the brother of her late husband. She had a child by him, and then eloped with another man. The husband was said to have enlisted the help of an old

man, who took some feathers to a spot in the south-east of the Kunian territory where a snake was believed to dwell. He cast the feathers towards this spot, summoning the snake to come and kill the woman. Later she was bitten by an adder and died. Her infidelity was linked with the cause of her death, which was then attributed to the man who was most likely to resort to magic against her. He had, of course, to fly the vengeance of her relatives who were convinced of his guilt.

Sometimes other methods might be employed against her. A stone may be taken, painted, covered with feathers, and "sung"; or the sorcerer may insert *pindjauwindja* into her body while she is dreaming, and their removal will necessitate the services of a *baramambin*. The illness of a woman caused just as much anxiety and concern amongst her relatives as that of a man. They would storm through the camp, lodge accusations against anyone they thought might be possessed of malevolent intentions against her. Sickness does not have its primary origin in some organic maladjustment, but rather in a disturbance of the normal functioning of social relationships. When a cure is not effected, the *baramambin* postulates the working of an evil force such as that of the sorcerer, who is impeding the normal success of the measures which have been taken. When the person who is sick is camped with relatives in a strange tribal territory, a tension arises between the two groups, and a desire to move beyond the sphere of the source of magic makes itself manifest. Continued illness leads to a further rupture of social relationships. In other words, we have what appears to be a very definite concept of normality; of the smooth functioning of physical or bodily processes and of the social organization. Where there is a probability of danger, ritual reinforces the strength of the individual or the resources of the community. Normality is the expected, sanctioned state of affairs. The person or the sorcerer whose actions infringe tribal law or impugn the rights of others is an abnormal agency who temporarily causes a disorganization of the social life, which in turn may

lead to further reprisals, though ultimately an equilibrium is achieved between the individuals concerned.

If a woman may be the victim of black magic, she may also employ it herself in defence of her own rights. The Malngin, Djaru, Miriwun, and some of the Forrest River tribes have a white substance or " poison ", *moiyə*, which comes from the Northern Territory. It is being adopted by surrounding tribes, and more distant ones have at least heard of it. The woman takes a little of it, and places it on the belongings of the man or woman she wishes to punish and injure. If she is middle-aged and deserted by her husband, she may take more drastic measures, and cause the man to contract venereal disease. Two men had this in an acute form at Bedford camp, and in both cases it was attributed to women who had " sung " them. One man had left his wife and married his tribal sister. Another married man was consistently unfaithful, the women spoke of him with contempt as one " who all day run alonga young *lubra* ". His wife left him eventually and went to the Miriwun tribe, but she was said to have taken her revenge, for which action she had the sympathy of the other women at least. She had, according to them, taken a stone, painted on it a penis and testicles, covered it with feathers, "sung" it, and placed it in an ant-bed with a fire. Another method was to paint the phallic symbol on the stone, smear it with blood from her arm, rub it with a small stone, singing as she did so : " let him finish *giliyim* (penis) quick. Let him finish *yalːudji* (testicles). Don't you have penis, testicles." The women would not give me the actual spell, because they said they would sicken. The woman with whom her husband is living may also be included in the magic and a symbolic representation of her genitals is painted on another stone and " sung ". Now the women who had practised this magic were not condemned by most of the others of their sex, even though it was believed that the victim could not be cured by the *baramambin*. The general opinion was that they had received their deserts.

Sometimes, as we have seen, magic may be used for

less legitimate purposes, as in the case of the woman who when her overtures to a man were refused, walked across his camp while she was menstruating. Such a woman might also use a little *moiyə* for the same purpose.

Besides these measures taken by individuals, there is also the *baramambil* who makes a profession of healing. Her initiation into her craft is similar throughout the whole of the Kimberleys. She is visited by the *djua:ri*, taken away in her sleep, given instruction and then returned to the camp, where for a few days she may be in a stupefied state or as the Aborigines say, " little bit mad ; him deaf, can't hear." Later, she bathes in a pool where *Kaleru* is known to dwell, and receives from him *pindjauwindja* and *wuradji*, or they may even be inserted in her side. A woman if she is a *baramambil* may teach her daughter further details of her profession. She can see the dead, visit them by going up into the sky on a string. The *baramambil* cures illness by extracting *pindjauwindja* from the patient, but it was recognized that there were imposters, who carried such magical objects in their mouths. If the *baramambil* is not successful in curing the patient, then the counter-magic has been too " strong " and its effects irremediable. Just as the Christian scientist advances the magical hypothesis that " mortal mind " is working against the patient and the practitioner, so the *baramambil* attributes failure to evil forces over which she has no control in an advanced stage of the illness.

When a person dies after all efforts to save him or her have been fruitless, then there is no doubt that a sorcerer has been responsible. A male *baramambin* is this time called in to take charge of the proceedings for the detection of the murderer.

The *baramambin* is distinct from the sorcerer, and his more socially valuable qualities are stressed in conversation, though it is recognized that he has methods to secure revenge, and that these may on occasion be used illegitimately. There are, as a rule, only three or four practitioners in a tribe, for in the earlier stages the initiation

is fraught with a certain amount of danger because of contact with *djua:rri* and *Kaleru*. Moreover, they are individuals possessing from my experience, self-assurance and powers of initiative. They enjoy a certain amount of prestige as befits those who are on speaking terms with the dead, who can approach *Kaleru* with impunity, and who can effect cures. For their services they receive gifts of food, tobacco, boomerangs, dilly-bags, and other articles. The woman, since she cannot deal with the sorcerer, has not the reputation of her male colleague, but she also has her prestige. There was Birbalmal who was a married woman of the Arawari tribe at Forrest River. She had a dominating personality, and took the lead in most discussions. She was fairly tall, had long, wavy hair, and a determined mouth and chin. She was competent in all that she did, made decisions quickly and acted upon them in a short time. She had had various love affairs and was engaged in one while I was at Forrest River. It led to frequent quarrels with her husband, who had good reason to be jealous of her. He was most reluctant to let her go far even to forage for food, and accompanied her whenever possible. It was she who had arranged to take over the women's secret corroboree from the King River tribes when they had learnt it. She had the admiration and respect of the women, who described with zest her exploits, her love affairs, her visits to the *djua:rri*, and the cases of sickness she had healed.

These aboriginal women then have a body of ritual believed to derive from the Time Long Past. With this they grapple confidently with their problems, and feel themselves protected from danger. When, however, they fall sick either through their own carelessness, some immoral or illegal action, or through the malevolent intent of some other person, they can be cured by magical methods. When they themselves have a grievance, and their rights have been challenged, like the men they can take the offensive and by means of black magic secure their revenge.

CHAPTER X

WOMEN'S SECRET CORROBOREES

So far women's ritual, apart from the introcision of the Ngadi and possibly the birth corroboree of the Wolmeri, has been characterized by its bare economy. It has been an application to an immediate problem, shorn of all those features which, in the male ceremonies, make it also a medium for recreation and artistic expression. But there is one aspect which we have mentioned in the previous chapters, and which does provide an outlet for organized activity, display, and dancing; and that is love magic. An understanding of this lies in a grasp of the whole context of sexual relationships and marriage.

We have seen that the majority of marriages are stable and that affection often exists between husband and wife. But with a prescribed form of marriage that takes little cognizance of previous attachments or mutual attraction, it is inevitable that sooner or later husband or wife should have a casual affair, which, though it creates disputes at the time, seldom results in a permanent separation. The ceremonial licence which occurs after some of the corroborees is, together with its other functions, another means by which mutual passion may be indulged. This feature of native life occurs frequently throughout Australia and is probably correlated with the operation of kinship systems that permit of little freedom of choice in marriage. Dr. Roheim and Mr. Strehlow have reported such corroborees, the *ltata* from Central Australia, in which both men and women participate. The aim " is to make the women desire men who are not their husbands. At the end of the dance this desire is satisfied in a manner that is a ' mockery of all morals ' ".[1] What is important here is that some of these songs contain

[1] G. Roheim, W.T.L.C., *J.R.A.I.*, pp. 209–212.

references to the *Alchera*,[1] and hence have apparently much the same mythological background as other ceremonies, and are presumably a sanctioned activity within the culture. As such, they cannot be characterized as immoral if judged in terms of the values which obtain in that tribe.

It is in the sphere of sexual relationships, with the passions, jealousy, possessiveness, and uncertainty, to which they give rise that there is a fertile field for magic. We have already noted that the aboriginal woman has means of avenging herself on an unfaithful lover or spouse. But she is not only wise after the event. She is pardonably sceptical of her husband's fidelity in his absence, and with characteristic realism takes measures to ensure that he will not run after other women. The Djaru, Malngin, and Miriwun have songs which they sing while their husbands are away, or while they have to observe a taboo on sexual intercourse during pregnancy and menstruation. These are :

Djaru and Malngin . *munda:munda:* *waluma:li djirindi:* *ria:ni*
sexual intercourse flying fox stick desire (?)
ma:djul *worumbör* *djama:da* *kuruma:*
stomach fire(?) lover man

This song is *ŋaruŋgani* and was explained to me in these terms. The boy is asleep and dreaming. Flying Fox comes to him, makes him sick and sorry to be away from his wife ; he wakes and goes to her.

1. Mudbera and Djaru *djalam* *dja:rba:ny* *kandji kandji* *ŋura:*
quiet stomach thighs camp
djuləmi
quiet fellow
2. *lugumba:* *karinya:* *bindiga:* *ramərа:*
sleep sit alone one side (not alonga lubra)
3. *mada* *gida:gi* *ba:lginda:*
sit one place " alonga blanket "

These songs were supposed to have the effect of making the husband sleep alone if he were away on a journey without his wife. The men knew of their existence, but not the actual words. When a group of Malngin were in the Lunga territory for the initiation of a boy, they suddenly

[1] Ibid., p. 215.

decided after the operation to return home, because they said their wives had been singing these songs, and they wanted to see them again.

The woman as we have seen is capable of taking the initiative in courtship. She has her ornaments—headbands, fringes, cicatrices, necklaces, and nowadays perhaps one or two dresses, skirts, and red handkerchiefs. Occasionally she uses red ochre and grease; and when she desires a lover, she very practically sends a gift of tobacco by some intermediary. As such gifts are usually made to blood or affinal relatives, the implication is obvious. But she has also other methods. The women of the East and South Kimberleys have taken over corroborees which are devoted to love magic.

These dances differ from those already discussed in that, according to my informants, they were not followed by general licence. Some of the women danced because they wished to arouse sexual desire in their husbands; they were content with them as sexual partners. Others openly admitted that they either wished to obtain a new lover or else retain the affection of an old one. One of the results of the corroborees, then, was to perpetuate love-affairs in which the women were engaged at the time, or if they were satisfied with their husbands the dances probably had the effect of strengthening the marital tie.

Dr. Roheim has mentioned similar corroborees—*ununtu* [1]—from Central Australia, but he does not state whether they were followed by ceremonial licence on the subsequent night or whether a more permanent relationship was sought.[2] Apparently he had no chance of actually witnessing the corroborees, and so can give next to nothing about the organization they entailed, the mode of decoration adopted, and the effect created on the camp. What with introcision, puberty rites, and these dances, Central Australia presents

[1] G. Roheim, op. cit., pp. 215–230.

[2] In reference to one set of songs, however, Dr. Roheim says that a woman was singing them to bring her husband back who had deserted her some time previously. *Vide* p. 227.

a rich field for an investigation of women's ritual by anthropologists working in that region. As most of the corroborees I saw came originally from the Northern Territory and Central Australia, there may well be striking resemblances. Dr. Roheim is mainly concerned with an interpretation of the symbolism from a psycho-analytical point of view—an aspect with which I am not competent to deal, and which in any case would necessitate long residence with one tribe, and an intensive study of all aspects of the culture if the generalizations are to be valid.

I saw six of these corroborees, three of them, *yirbindji*, being practically identical, though they were done by different groups of women, the South Lunga, the East and West Djaru. These circumstances provided an excellent opportunity to check variations in performance and texts. It has been taken over from the Mudbera women at Wave Hill. Another of these corroborees, also called *yirbindji*, belonged to the Miriwun who had obtained it from the Victoria River women, and though most of the songs were different, their general purport and the conditions surrounding the performance were similar to the Mudbera one. The Ngadi and Waneiga had another *yirbindji* which they had secured from the Ngambuladja ; it, however, deviated from the rest in containing references to the totemic ancestors. These *yirbindji* possibly constitute a whole cycle of songs corresponding to the *ununtu* and *ilpindja* of the Arunta and neighbouring tribes. The sixth corroboree was the *yinəra:ri* of the Wolmeri women. It also was given to them by the totemic ancestors, the *djugura:ndi*, and was only attended by the married women.

The *yirbindji* was spreading across the Kimberleys. The south Lunga had received theirs from the Djaru about four years ago, and intend teaching it to the northern hordes and to the Kunian. The Miriwun will pass theirs on to the King River tribes. News of the dances had passed far to the west of these tribes, and their arrival was eagerly anticipated. The more enterprising leaders amongst the women had already possessed themselves of the details of

the patterns painted on the dancers, the different steps, the general organization and the taboos observed. They relished the thought that the corroboree was strictly " *lubra* business ", that the men might not attend, and that if the latter interfered in any way they would sicken. The Eastern Djaru witnessed the Waneiga *yirbindji* for the first time in 1936, and they were to take an active part in the next performance and make the customary gifts.

Now, like the *ununtu*, these *yirbindji* are kept secret from the men; they present certain homosexual features.[1] They originated in dreams, which in the Kimberleys, at least, were attributed to the spirits of the dead. The men, when they invented a new corroboree, also stamped it with a supernatural origin. Therefore, although the *yirbindji* represented something of an innovation in the life of the Kimberley women, it nevertheless conformed to established patterns, not only in this respect, but also in the economic exchanges involved, the division of the dancers into moieties, the initiation of strangers and young girls, the taboos to be observed, the part played by the older women in the organization of the proceedings. The *yirbindji* is also " poison " or magical. The uninitiated sicken unless they adopt ritual precautions; and the men fall ill if they see or hear it performed, quite apart from the fact that their presence would prejudice its success and efficacy.

The leader, *maŋanbəra:l*, who was either middle-aged or an old woman, had generally obtained the corroboree from another horde or tribe on the occasion of a visit or an inter-tribal meeting. For instance, Djinargu of Moola Bulla had taken it over from her *wunan* at Flora Valley (Djaru), in exchange for a dress and a *djaguli*. Initiates and strangers,

[1] *Idem*, ibid., p. 226. Dr. Roheim remarks that in these two aspects, the *ununtu* resemble the male type of ritual. But as the men in the Kimberley tribes had not, as far as I could discover, any corroborees for love magic, the parallel would not hold good. However, homosexuality amongst the men did exist. The youths of 17 or 18 who were still unmarried would take boys of 10 or 11 as lovers. The women had no hesitation in discussing the matter with me, did not regard it as shameful, gave the names of different boys, and seemed to regard the practice as a temporary substitute for marriage.

moəra:, had then to make a gift of a dress or a red handkerchief together with flour and tea with which the other women regaled themselves after the dance. This food was never eaten by the men; it was *gunbu.* The dance was only attended by those girls who had reached puberty; and at Moola Bulla women with small boys could not be present, lest the children should sicken. Since the latter were still being fed from the breast, they might be poisoned by the magic with which their mothers had become impregnated as a result of the corroboree. This belief in the magic or "poison" generated by the corroboree was reflected in the taboos, which the neophytes had to observe beforehand on those foods also forbidden at pregnancy and during childhood. It was their first contact with the magical power of the dance, and the occasion was fraught with some danger.

The younger women would express a desire to have the corroboree and the *mayanbəra:l* would then decide, perhaps in consultation with the other old women, when it would take place. They might wait till the next inter-tribal meeting, but often there were sufficient women living on the larger stations to make a more frequent performance possible. The women when alone discussed the event eagerly, described ones they had seen, teased one another about their lovers. They enthused over the designs painted on the dancers, and continually stressed the fact to me that this was "proper *lubra* business; blackfellow can't see him. This one play belonga *djibönir* (sweetheart). *Lubra* no more want him old *ŋu:mbana* (husband); him get 'em young boy". A statement that can be readily understood if it is remembered that some of the younger women were married to men considerably older than themselves. The corroboree was also *wa:dji.* Now *wa:dji* is a term applied to a man or a woman who married into the wrong subsection. The marriage *par excellence,* which is *wa:dji,* is that with mother-in-law. Now in the songs the tribal son-in-law is cited as a particularly desirable lover—a man, in short, whom the women should have been most assiduously

avoiding. They giggled when they explained this and seemed to delight in the illicit character of the dance and the fact that they were breaking one of the strictest tribal taboos.

I cannot describe all the dances, but apart from the words of the songs, the time taken and some of the designs, all were similar in intention. I shall deal with the Miriwun *yirbindji* as the translations of the songs are more complete.

Viewed simply in terms of the startling effect on the spectator, the men's corroborees outblazoned those of the women. This was particularly so when the men danced at night, and their bizarre fantastic figures were thrown up luridly in the leaping firelight against the shadowed masses of the trees. But at least the women brought to their own performance excitement, keenness, and an appreciative and critical eye. The spectacle was a dramatic and vivid one. It took place in the brilliant sunlight, against a background of red sandstone, the long yellow grasses and the bauhinea trees with their crimson seed-pods. The women themselves were greased with fat till their skins glistened ; bold designs in charcoal, red ochre, and clay were drawn on their bodies, so that they seemed the living incarnation of the landscape itself ; almost as though they had been impregnated with its harsh and vital colouring.

Each time these corroborees were performed, we went about a mile and a half or two miles from the camp where the men were. For the Miriwun dance, we left early in the morning, after the children had been sent back. The old women did not dance, but they acted as singers and helped with the painting. The women had requisitioned their husbands' boomerangs ; they had brought their own fighting-sticks,[1] red handkerchiefs, and a plentiful supply of fat, red ochre, clay, and charcoal. We reached a clearing beneath some trees, and a fire was made to represent the camp of the lover, for there were frequent references to it in the songs. The preparations were begun in a leisurely manner with a good deal of desultory conversation on subjects remote

[1] The Djaru on the last day brought their *kulamons* and propped them up against fighting-sticks which had been put into the ground.

from the matter in hand. There was no furtiveness and no timidity. The Miriwun men knew that the dance was to take place, and had been warned to keep out of the way. The women had left the camp openly, laughing, excited, proud of themselves and conscious that they had the men definitely at a disadvantage. And this was true of the six corroborees I witnessed.

The leader was a nangala woman, who was middle-aged but not too old to dance. Another younger woman, Djundwi from the Kadjeroen tribe in north-east Kimberley, was also much to the fore, commenting critically on the painting and taking a lead in the singing, though she referred to nangala when in doubt. Two young girls were to be initiated and they were painted first, with different designs since they belonged to different patrilineal moieties.[1] The majority complied with this rule, though some who had only seen the dance once before were uncertain of all the details and occasionally made a mistake, which provoked a grumble from the dancer and the caustic comment from the others, " So and so bin lose 'em head."

All were smeared with fat, *mulungu*, and the painting was begun. The pattern for the crane moiety (nambin, nagera, nangala, and nola) consisted of a broad charcoal line outlined in red on each breast; horizontal red lines above and between the breasts; a semicircle below them and a vertical black line above the navel which was a phallic symbol representing the lover. On the back, there were two charcoal lines down the shoulder blades and three black lines outlined in red joining them. Below this was a curved line that the women said was the boomerang of the sweetheart. Other lines were drawn in red across the forehead and cheeks. The

[1] In the other tribes, the Djaru, Lunga, and Wolmeri, there are two recognized groups consisting of certain subsections. These I have called endogamous moieties. They comprise the nadjeri, nagera, nangeri, and nambin subsections on the one hand, and the noaru, noanang, nangala, and nandjili subsections on the other. The Forrest River tribes have no subsections, but they possess patrilineal moieties, and when they described the *yirbindji* to me, they referred to the two groups of the performers as native-companion and wild turkey. Each tribe, then, follows the practice of dividing the dancers into two groups, but the way in which this is done differs in each case, in so far as different types of moieties are involved.

eagle moiety (naliri, nangeri, nandjili, and noanang) had red lines drawn down the breasts; a black line below the collar-bone paralleled by two red lines. There were red horizontal lines across the belly and on the arms and legs, and a charcoal line above the navel again to represent the lover. On the back there were red horizontal lines and another charcoal mark resembling the phallic symbol in front.

Some of the women were more artistic than others, displaying a boldness of execution and a marked sense of rhythm.[1] Two or three produced crooked patchy lines, but on the whole the simplicity of the design and the vividness of the colours transformed the younger women, in spite of the ugliness of skirts or pants made from white flour bags, which they insisted on wearing. Some of the older women who were fat and had long pendulous breasts were definitely repulsive, since the patterns tended to emphasize such characteristics. But they were in the minority, and did not detract from the general dramatic effect. There was no solemnity; the mood was a festive one, and in between the songs there was much laughter, joking, and teasing. Two women would pretend to be rivals for the one lover, or one would say she was after the husband of a friend. They were not, of course, taken seriously, and the badinage was returned with interest.

The preparations took about two hours, for the painting was no mere preliminary, but an essential part of the whole corroboree and much of the success depended on it. A few of the older women bedaubed themselves with red ochre, because they said it would contribute to making the performance "a good one". Most of the songs were sung

[1] There was a marked similarity in the designs of all the *yirbindji* with the exception of the Waneiga and Ngadi. Certain characteristics appeared in all—the lines on the breasts and the phallic symbol above the navel. More variation occurred in the paintings for the back, though the south Lunga also had boomerangs drawn in charcoal; whilst the Wolmeri and East Djaru had red vertical lines. The latter (and the Lunga) took three days to complete the *yirbindji*. They used red ochre and charcoal the first day; red ochre and clay on the second, and ochre and charcoal again on the third day.

in order to impregnate the bodily decorations, ornaments, and weapons with magic. Specific references to the cicatrices of the women and the headbands of the men occurred in the first songs.

1. *dalimaːn*	*djönar*	*malimali*		
cicatrices	lover	son-in-law		
2. *bagöriri*	*kandaːldjara*		*dora*	*lindjin*
headband	thighs			penis
3. *lagöraːn*	*wilaːri*	*baːni*		
paint	play			

The fighting-sticks, boomerangs, and two flat short sticks called *miliri* were also striped with red ochre and charcoal. The *miliri* were never seen by the men, because they were *daraːgu*—a fact which suggests a comparison with the *tʃuruŋa*, though I doubt whether they were associated with any one totemic ancestor. They were most probably phallic objects. The boomerangs were to be used by the men in their disputes. The victim who was struck by one, would, according to native belief, sicken quite apart from any wounds inflicted. The fighting-sticks had also this magical property and retained it for some time afterwards, so that the men were afraid to carry arguments with the women to the point of blows. The situation created by the corroboree was recognized to hold the possibility of danger and tension. The women, therefore, by implementing their strength with the supernatural power generated by the dance, believed themselves to be forearmed against any punitive measures likely to be taken by a deserted lover or a suspicious husband.

The songs resembled the spells used in other primitive communities in that they were an assertion of what was desired to happen, and what, according to native belief, would happen. They were in the Ngaliwerun language and were as follows :

4. *waːdji*	*mara*	*mara*		
" wrong "	penis	penis		
5. *gunduː*	*maːr*	*maːr*	*rendiː*	
long one	penis	penis	vulva	
6. *diriː*	*diriː*	*maːr*	*maːr*	
grow	grow	penis	penis	

7. *daːrga migara kuraːndja*
cockatoo-feather cry (for) sexual intercourse
8. *madjilaː kurirbaː*
boy thinking of girl
9. *kunduna:ː walyuwaːl waːndi*
long one to the ground cord
10. *kuraːndja yiŋaːrli*
coitus quickens (trembles)
11. *kaldör mɛruin ŋanyan ŋaːr*
labia opens sees (?) clitoris
12. *ɣɛlb idaː liraː ŋanyan ŋaːr*
I see clitoris
13. *bagöriri kandaːldjɛra dɔra lindji kana*
(*bunduwalu*)
headband thighs penis stick
14. *girin girin yimaːndəri yanaːr wolumaːnda*
copulate boy goes dizzy
15. *kuraːndja rɛndi djalirmaːr*
coitus vulva semen
16. *djibaː daːla magöra ŋänimaː*
bed of leaves semen (?) face
17. *ŋalimaːra maran waːlimaːr yiməraːn djönan*
my penis penis boy lover
18. *miliri lindjina*
miliri penis (?)
19. *yidbɔra laːrgaː*
(the lover opens the legs of the woman)

Summed up briefly, the songs refer to the painting, the other forms of bodily decoration, and to the male and female genitals. The women constantly used in explanation the word " sing ", which in pidgin-English has the significance of magic directed towards or into a particular object or person. So they would say : " Me sing that one *djibönir* ; me sing that one *mari* (penis)." The lover is pictured as sitting in the camp. He thinks of the girl and trembles with sexual excitement. The woman then " sings " his penis, so that it will grow long, so that she can say " that my penis now ". The boy cries for the girl, and his penis grows so long that it falls to the ground like an umbilical cord. The girl trembles with desire and goes to him. He opens her legs and sees her clitoris. The boy is symbolized by his headband, he becomes dizzy with desire, and the woman says " that my headband now ". The woman " sings " her own genitals, and the man ejaculates. She makes a bed of leaves. The song now reverts to the use of the *miliri* which is rubbed between her legs in the dance " to make her

genitals long ; to make them ' poison ', to make them good fellow alonga boy ". Finally the boy opens her legs and they have intercourse.

If the dance were thrown onto a screen without commentary and without explanation of the symbolism of the various movements, of the whole context of the situation, the background of life in the camp and marital relationships, the spectacle after the first few moments might pall and prove disappointing. The women, on the whole, have not the vigour and fire of the men. Their steps alternate between a kind of a shuffle and a half-skip. Some of the other movements are more graceful—the swaying of the body from side to side from the hips, the gestures with the arms, or with sticks carried in both hands, and the response to the rhythm of the singing.

The singers, who were sitting before the cleared space, began with *wa:dji mara mara* ; the dancers ran out in a line from the bushes where they had been hidden, beckoning with their arms as though to summon their lovers, and uttering at intervals a sharp *drrr . . . drrr . . . drrr. . . .* After a song had been repeated several times there was a pause until the leader signalled for the next. In this dance, they carried fighting-sticks and boomerangs, swinging them from side to side and finally laying them down in the sand, swaying over them with heads bowed. Whilst the others sang *miliri lindjina,* the two leaders carried the *miliri,* halting for a moment and bending their knees in and out imitating coitus movements. For the next dance, the *miliri* were put aside, and the performers shuffled forward with their hands held before them, so that the fingers curved in towards the breasts, and the chorus sang, *girin girin yima:ndəri,* etc. After this there was a rest ; the red head-bands were tied on and the woman beckoned with their arms once more. For the next song, *miliri lindjina:,* the leaders had a fighting-stick between their thighs and pushed it backwards and forwards. This was followed by the singing of *djiba: da:la,* etc., all the dancers rubbing their thighs with their hands. They said this was to " call up *mari*



(*a*) " A dance of bizarre, fantastic figures."



(*b*) Woman's love-magic.

[*Face p.* 264.

(penis) belonga *djibŏnir*". Then the rhythm quickened for the last song—*yidbəra la:rga*, the women of opposite moieties faced each other, grasping one another's shoulders, jumping backwards and forwards, and finally simulated intercourse.[1]

This brought the corroboree to an end; the *miliri* were hidden in the grasses and the women returned in a laughing talkative group to the camp. They were naïvely vain of the designs painted on their bodies, proud of the fact that they were the centre of attention and that the men for once were in the background. The young stockboys grinned and joked with them; some of the older men stood by rather silently and in one or two cases seemed subdued. I left the Miriwun two days later, and so did not witness the developments; but much the same attention was paid to the Lunga, Djaru, and Wolmeri women on their arrival in the camp after the *yirbindji* had been performed. At Moola Bulla on the following day there was an outburst of quarrelling among some of the younger men and women, because the former thought that their personal names had been called, that the "poison" in its more malignant form had been directed against them so that they would eventually sicken. Djinargu (the leader), Laidbir, and Barudjil angrily refuted the charge, and accused the men of trouble-making; Wungenil furiously declared: "All day you pick 'em up rubbish," and she summed up the opinion of the other dancers. Although the men knew that part of the *yirbindji* was devoted to love-magic, they could never be sure whether or no they had been "sung" by some revengeful woman. They were frankly curious as to what had taken place, and tried to pump me for information. Wungenil and another young girl said they had slept with their lovers on the following night, and some of the others declared that

[1] Some of the steps, the beckoning gestures, the rubbing of the thighs occurred in the other *yirbindji* I saw. But the south Lunga dance, apart from the time taken and the different songs, had features that were peculiar to it alone; for instance, the carrying of a firebrand, and later a stick to represent the penis of the lover. They had also a special term for the initiated, *bundanari*, and one for the dancing ground, *badədi*, as distinct from the ordinary dancing ground used by the men, *ba:ruru*.

although they had not secured lovers immediately, they were confident of their success later. For days afterwards, when the women were alone, conversation was apt to centre on the dance; they would tease the middle-aged woman who had carried the fire stick, and speculate on whether two of the other dancers who had returned to a camp five miles away had already had lovers.

The *yirbindji* had two aspects: first, it involved the charming of ornaments, painting, weapons, male and female genitals so that they became impregnated with magic; secondly, it was a rehearsal of what was believed would happen. By virtue of the songs, secrecy, painting, taboos, and supernatural origin, it had a compulsive character. It conditioned or determined particular events; it created the context of situation in which the women might realize their desires. It symbolized the whole procedure of courtship culminating in the act of coitus. These features were all present in the other corroborees which I saw.

Since the *yirbindji* is an innovation in the Kimberleys, some may be tempted to claim that the women have only been able to assert themselves because of the detribalization in these areas; if it indicates a higher status for women than was generally assumed to exist, this is not necessarily true of the past. The argument would be a valid one, had we not already established the privileges a woman enjoys as a wife and mother; her participation in the *bulba:* exchanges; the magical methods she employs to secure revenge; her authority as an old woman and her rôle in the increase ceremonies and other rituals of the tribe. Before the advent of the *yirbindji*, she on occasion took the initiative in courtship, and even when married had lovers. The *yirbindji* is thus consonant with the attitudes already existent in the tribe, and reveals much the same features of cultural life in another guise. It is an additional means of securing an object which the women, according to my informants, have always pursued with other methods. These differences are important. For the first time apparently, the women have the opportunity to go apart to paint and decorate themselves;

to dance under the direction of the old women, away from the supervision of the men. The psychological effects were obvious in the confidence with which the women claimed they would realize their desires ; in the pleasure they took in performing a ceremony, which was secret, magical, and bound to influence the men.

The Lunga, Djaru, and Miriwun *yirbindji*, as distinct from the rites for birth, menstruation, and puberty, would seem to fall outside the ordinary totemic complex in that the women held no mandate from the totemic ancestors to perform it. But they did not seem to have any doubts about its efficacy, for it derived from the *djua:ri*, who endow the " medicine-man " and the sorcerer with their power. The *yinəra:ri*, the Waneiga *yirbindji*, and the *miliri* (used by the Miriwun women) were all said to be *dara:gu* and *ŋaruŋgani*. If this is so, they represent a sanctioned method of partially circumventing some of the disadvantages of a law that prescribes the relationship of those who shall marry, irrespective of mutual desire. The dance is thus a safety-valve ; a means of mitigating the dissatisfaction of the younger women (and indirectly that of the men).

The same applies to the Miriwun and Lunga *yirbindji*. Although their origin is attibuted to the *djua:ri*, nevertheless the women felt they had a right to perform the dances in spite of the opposition and jealousy of some of the men. Their attitude was summed up in the phrase which I have already quoted, and which I heard frequently in discussion : " *lubra* no more want 'em old *ŋu:mbana* ; she get 'em young boy." For a woman who is satisfied with her husband, there is probably the fear that he may be unfaithful or that if she is approaching middle-age, that she may cease to attract him. The dance may thus be a means by which the marital tie is strengthened or it may be a means by which temporary sexual satisfaction is found elsewhere, so that the marriage can be endured for the other advantages it offers—a settled stable existence in conformity with tribal law. Provided such an affair is carried on with discretion, its discovery does not as a rule lead to a permanent rupture

in the relationships between husband and wife, though there may be quarrels and a short separation. An occasional liaison is not in any sense regarded as promiscuity, for which there is a special term ; nor is it considered as an alternative form of marriage ; nor is it polyandry. It does not involve the sharing of a common hearth and food, the care and rearing of children.

The *yirbindji* does not confer sexual rights on a woman of which she did not illicitly avail herself before. But it does give her the moral or a-moral support of the other women ; it does generate additional confidence in her powers to arouse desire in a lover or a husband ; it does sheathe her in a protective magical armour ; and it is an opportunity for display and recreation corresponding to that enjoyed by the men. The corroborees have been eagerly accepted by the women of the East Kimberleys ; those living farther to the west anticipate their arrival with pleasure. Obviously the dances will come to play an important rôle in the life of the women.

CHAPTER XI

ABORIGINAL WOMAN—SACRED AND PROFANE

I left the women's ritual and corroborees to the last, partly because I did not want their more spectacular and exotic character to overshadow and possibly obliterate the humdrum prosaic reality and importance of daily life; and partly because they have emerged out of the struggle to provide sufficient food, to face drought, fire, flood, and death, to prepare the individual for the responsibilities of adult status, to lessen pain, to protect from danger and to inspire with confidence and security. As far as possible I have tried to go to the roots of religion and to describe the conditions which have brought it into being, and which contribute to its persistence. Unless we relate these myths, dogmas, and rituals to the needs of the Aborigines, to their relationships with one another and their environment, we have missed their significance, and they become grotesque figments of the primitive mind: the meaningless and perhaps barbarous activities of primitive man. If we have grasped the underlying factors of daily life, the interests that constitute it, we are in a better position to realize how religion is a means of consolidating advantages already held, of reinforcing strength where control is less sure, of resolving conflicting claims. I have indicated the sanctions it provides for customs, laws, and those rites which either bear directly on the welfare of the community as a whole, or on the life-crises of the individual.

We have done this without detracting from the practical and adaptable qualities of the Aborigines. Much of this book has been devoted to the profane life of a woman—marriage, relations with kin, foraging for food, economic exchanges, the rearing of children, the acquiring of a knowledge of the environment and its resources—in short

with many of those activities which are basic to existence in an aboriginal community. It is difficult to reconcile the facts as they have emerged from our study, with such a sweeping opinion as that put forward by Briffault: "Among the Australian Aborigines the condition of the women is utterly degraded." [1] "In West Australia the degraded condition of women at present is perhaps more uniformly reported and emphasized than in regard to any other portion of the continent. But it has also been noticed that the old women enjoy an extraordinary influence, which is in marked contrast with the abject and oppressed condition of the younger ones." [2] Such generalizations savour of the moralist rather than the scientist: as an unqualified summing up of sexual relationships, they have little validity in view of the material I have presented.

Briffault of course is concerned with proving his thesis of the pre-existence of mother-right and a higher status of women. He asserts that "there is little doubt that the patriarchal character of Australian society, the dominance of the men and the debased condition of the women are features of a comparatively late origin, and that these have supplanted a social state in which women occupied a more influential if not actually dominant position".[3] But as Professor Radcliffe-Brown has pointed out, in West Australia kinship through the mother is only slightly less important than in the so-called matrilineal tribes to the east.[4] Nor is there anything to indicate that the women have had a higher status in the latter tribes. Unfortunately for his argument, Briffault also claims that "so long as woman remained economically productive, it was impossible for complete patriarchal supremacy to become established. The primitive woman is independent because and not in spite of her labour".[5] Now as I have shown, the women supply the bulk of the food and their work is more important

[1] R. Briffault, *The Mothers*, vol. i, p. 311.
[2] Ibid., p. 339.
[3] R. Briffault, op. cit., p. 338.
[4] A. R. Radcliffe-Brown, *A Further Note on Ambrym*, p. 52.
[5] R. Briffault, ibid., p. 436.

than that of the men because it is more consistently productive.

My aim in this book has been to approach the problem of the position of women from a positive point of view; the emphasis has been on those privileges and duties which she either shares in common with the men, or which are peculiar to her sex alone; on those means which are open to her of satisfying her physical, social, and spiritual needs in a manner consonant with environmental and cultural conditions. No one index can serve as a final criterion of the status of aboriginal woman. We must define, and if necessary define at length, the whole network of relationships of which she is an integral unit. We must examine her functions as a wife, a mother, and a daughter; as a member of the kinship, local, and totemic groups; we must see what claims she makes on her environment, on society, on her gods.

The results of the previous chapters can now be summed up. We find that for all her apparently untethered existence, aboriginal woman, in common with her brother, exercises well-defined rights of ownership over certain regions of the tribal territory. Her work is of the utmost importance: it makes her an indispensable unit in the tribal economy: an invaluable asset as a wife. Reports from other parts of the continent indicate the significance of her economic activities, and it is time that this factor, which so closely interlocks with the marital relationship, should be considered as one of the determinants of the status of aboriginal woman.

If a girl has little freedom of choice in marriage, at least the young man is in the same position. Both as a rule expect to marry a person of the prescribed relationship. Marriage is more than a sexual union: it involves economic co-operation, the sharing of food and a common hearth, the rearing of children. We have found that apart from the choice of residence, husband and wife claim reciprocal privileges, fulfil reciprocal duties. Marriage confers status on both, and leads to the establishment of relationships

with other hordes, with increased opportunities for *bulba:* exchanges, the right to attend certain ceremonies, and all the advantages of a stable permanent union, that ultimately outweigh the attractions of a temporary liaison with the disputes and quarrels it provokes.

In the matter of children, the man's claim to fatherhood rests on his status as the husband of their mother. The physical tie with the mother is recognized and emphasized. She exercises much authority and influence over them, and they may be said to buttress her position in the tribe. There is no question of the tribe being exclusively patrilineal. The maternal relatives have an important rôle in the ceremonial, economic, and social life of an individual.

Marriage for an aboriginal woman is a means of living a full life, of finding economic, sexual, social, and sentimental satisfaction. The responsibilities and interests it creates absorb much of her time, and therefore it is essential to give full weight to the privileges she has as a wife, and to those factors by which she generally manages to obtain for herself a measure of good treatment. Her contentment is not inertia in the face of a destiny from which there is no escape. It is not passive acquiescence in the only lot she can know. It is based on active participation in the life of the community, and on the recognition of her rights as an individual and as a social personality.

So much for her more intimate and personal relationships. There are, however, aspects of public life in which she has a subordinate rôle. Warfare and judicial functions in cases of death are the prerogatives of the men. Political control is vested in the hands of the headman and the elders, but here again the statement must be qualified by those situations in which it is wielded. It has a limited sphere of operation—the assembling of hordes for inter-tribal meetings, the conduct of proceedings, and the handling of cases of sorcery or the theft of women from their tribe. In many other matters, responsibility is delegated amongst the older men and women in the kinship groups. The men, however, have more opportunities for display and

their ceremonies have wider repercussions throughout the entire social group. Nevertheless the women are not excluded from these occasions. If they are relatives of the dead or of the boy to be initiated, they have a personal interest in the proceedings and functions to carry out. As onlookers, they look forward to the excitement, the contact with relatives, the possibility of *bulba:* exchanges, the witnessing of corroborees, and the settlement of their own grievances.[1]

When we turn to religion, we find that aboriginal woman has a reverence for, and yet a sense of kinship with the totemic ancestors, a reliance on the rites which they have instituted for her needs. She has the same religious beliefs, the same totemic affiliations with the Time Long Past as the men. She has her spiritual heritage, and her exclusion from certain male rituals can neither diminish nor depreciate it. Her conduct is regulated by similar ethical sanctions; she benefits from the increase ceremonies, and as an old woman may perform those for the foods which fall within her particular province. By the mourning rites she is fortified and protected when death disrupts her closest ties. On the other hand, the men have evolved secret ceremonies centring around the *tʃuruŋa*, cult totems, circumcision, and subincision. They are designed to further male pursuits. On this basis, I have as far as my material permitted, indicated some of the economic, social, and physiological factors which have contributed to their elaborate character as compared with those of the women. The women's rites, however, are important: they for the most part deal with crises when a woman is believed to be particularly vulnerable either because of actual physical dangers, or because of those believed to be inherent in the situation. They are *dara:gu* or sacred and are kept secret from the men. The

[1] Miss Camilla Wedgwood, in discussing the position of women in Manam, makes a similar point on their functions in a ceremony in which the men have the spectacular rôles. "It seems clear that the women do not regard themselves, and indeed are not regarded by the men, as mere spectators in a primarily masculine affair, but as active participants in a social and ritual event affecting the members of two communities irrespective of sex." *Oceania*, viii, p. 186.

woman also practises black magic as a means of revenge, and she takes part in the secret corroborees which are performed by the women and which are devoted to love magic.

We have been able to penetrate beyond first impressions of a dirty and unprepossessing camp, a simple material culture, and the apparent insecurity of nomadic conditions. The texture of native life is woven of much the same interests as preoccupy the average European. What seemed a humdrum treadmill of existence at the lowest economic level has revealed its moments of drama, clashes of conflicting claims and personalities. The women, whom in the prologue we saw going out to forage laden with their swags, have proved on closer acquaintance to be complex individuals, fulfilling certain duties and possessing certain privileges. Were it not for her matter-of-fact acceptance of her lot, one might be tempted to cast aboriginal woman in the heroic mould. She faces life with none of the civilized amenities, the scientific inventions, and labour-saving devices that the modern European woman enjoys. She brings to her work qualities of patience, tenacity, adaptability, competence, trained powers of observation and an intimate knowledge of the country and its resources. With her slender digging-stick, she exacts sustenance from the earth for herself and her dependants. But she has also the support and protection of her kindred. She receives food from them occasionally, and makes a return in kind. The kinship system operates to ensure that none shall go in need, and that there is provision for the young and old. It is neither primitive communism nor promiscuous altruism. It is based on reciprocity, on an equilibrium of rights and duties; for he who does not give, does not receive. Besides the assistance afforded by relatives, a woman has a religion which emphasizes her kinship with her environment, and which generates faith and security at those points where her practical knowledge fails her.

There are striking differences in personality, arising out of qualities of self-assertion, experience, and knowledge of

ritual and mythology. And though like the majority of men the women obey custom and law as a rule, still there is no complete subservience to tradition and authority. If they are often jealous of their rights, and are up-holders of morality when their relatives are likely to override it, they generally tend to adopt a tolerant attitude towards the misdemeanours and intrigues of others, apart from the pleasure they derive from the gossip that such subjects provoke.[1] In view of this flexibility of response Briffault's generalization is of interest. He states that " woman is constitutionally orthodox; all heresy is alien to her character. The established sentiment has for her a two-fold greater force than it has for the man; its authority is for her absolute, her devotion to it passionate ".[2]

This certainly does not apply to aboriginal woman as distinct from aboriginal man; and indeed one wonders to what society it would apply. It does not appear to be based on a dispassionate and detailed analysis of the material which is to be found in the more recent anthropological studies of primitive cultures. Among the aboriginal women there is no complete uniformity of response. Factors of locality, closeness of kinship ties, interests involved, age, experience, and temperament determine the reactions of both men and women as individuals to the various situations that arise in daily life.

In the course of our survey, a marked economic, social, and ritual differentiation between the sexes has emerged: but the factors underlying it are complex and diverse, and

[1] In the discussion both here and elsewhere in the book of the absence of any standardized reaction upon the part of the community to infringements of the law, it is worth while noting that Dr. Hogbin in his study of the Schouten Is. came to a similar conclusion. He found that the " reaction to crime is not in any sense a unanimous rising in support of accepted moral principles, but consists rather in every person having a greater or less readiness to act, or to find extenuating circumstances, according to the complex situation which relates him to the actors of the drama. The factors of most weight are the ties of blood and neighbourhood uniting the actors to one another and the spectator. Others include such questions as rank, whether the criminal had provocation, whether he is a first offender, and personal considerations like jealousy or pride ". *Vide* " Social Reaction to Crime ", *J.R.A.I.*, lxviii, 1938, p. 262.

[2] R. Briffault, op. cit., vol. iii, p. 254.

there is difficulty in subsuming them under any one principle. This is not to say that they do not interlock at certain points; but we cannot infer from this a fixed relationship between the sexes, which operates throughout the entire social structure. Economic, procreative, and social functions establish the identity of each sex as a social group; but they also define the contribution which each has to make to society. The relationship may be, as in economics, one of co-operation towards a common end, the provision of food for the family and its dependants. Sometimes it may involve the subordination of one sex, as happens in the political organization of the Aborigines. Control over certain spheres of life is vested in the hands of the elders, and the women have no complementary rights. Elsewhere men and women may have their own ceremonies, which refer to the specific problems and interests of their respective sex.

Religion, through mythology, sanctions and therefore tends to perpetuate the economic, social, and political differentiation between the sexes. It also from the native point of view offers an explanation of physiological functions. But in the Kimberley tribes, it does not set up a rigid division in society, in which the men represent the sacred element and the women the profane element. Both men and women have their spiritual ties with the Time Long Past and the totemic ancestors. Both take part in sacred ceremonies. A ritual differentiation does exist, however, and is expressed in the exclusion of the women from some of the secret rituals of the men; and the exclusion of the men from some of the secret rituals of the women. The nature of these ceremonies is important: they occur at crucial periods in the life of a man or a woman, crucial either in terms of physiological development, or in the acquiring of skill and mastery in those activities which play an important part in existence. For the man, these are circumcision, subincision, the *tʃuruŋa* and cult totem corroborees, whose function in endowing him with strength and success in male pursuits I have already discussed. For the woman, there are the menstruation, pre-puberty,

introcision, and childbirth rites, black magic and the secret corroborees devoted to love-magic. The individual is secluded temporarily from contact with members of the opposite sex; the supernatural power believed to be engendered by the ceremonies is safeguarded and utilized for specifically male or female purposes as the case may be. The male and female principles in some contexts are mutually dangerous and mutually antagonistic. The women with regard to the men's rituals are profane and uninitiated: the men with regard to the women's ritual are profane and uninitiated.

The "sacred inheritance of the tribe" includes the system of totemism, a number of myths of the totemic ancestors and the *ŋaruŋgani*, the mourning and increase ceremonies, in which both men and women are associated and have their part. Dr. Warner's statement that the Murngin woman makes little sacred progress during her lifetime,[1] can in the Kimberleys only refer to the fact that the women remain uninitiated into most of the secret rituals of the men. *But*, there can be no question of identifying the sacred inheritance of the tribe only with the men's ceremonies. Those of the women belong to it also: they have the same supernatural sanctions of the totemic ancestors and the Time Long Past; and they bear much the same practical relation to problems and difficulties. They do not constitute a cult; but they do represent a body of sacred knowledge to which the men have no access; they are a set of sacred activities in which the men do not participate.

Aboriginal woman like aboriginal man is both sacred and profane. By virtue of her procreative, sexual, economic, and social functions, she claims certain privileges and fulfils certain duties in the community. She has value as a social personality, and takes her place in the profane activities of the tribe. But she has also her spiritual affiliations. The system of totemism and spirit-children beliefs link her with the Time Long Past and the totemic ancestors.

[1] W. L. Warner, *A Black Civilization*, pp. 5–6.

The increase ceremonies and mourning ritual create confidence and security in the struggle for existence. Finally as a spiritual individual, she is also able to participate in those secret and sacred ceremonies which have been evolved to meet the particular problems and difficulties of women as a sex.

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