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AUTONOMY AND RELATEDNESS:

AN ETHNOGRAPHY OF WIK PEOPLE OF AURUKUN, WESTERN CAPE YORK PENINSULA

David Fernandes Martin
February 1993

**A thesis submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy of
the Australian National University, Canberra**



*For my sons:
Bruce, who moves
between his two worlds, Wik and White,
and Rex,
who is therefore also
linked to both.*

DECLARATION

Except as acknowledged in the text, the work presented in this thesis is my own original research, and has not been submitted, in whole or in part, for a degree or diploma at this or any other tertiary institution.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'D. Martin', with a stylized, cursive script.

David F. Martin

February 1993

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

A body of work such as that in this thesis is never simply the result of the efforts of its author. In my case, I am very conscious that in so many ways the intellectual and physical endeavour represented here was only possible because of the emotional, intellectual, and physical support of many people who were a part of the enterprise.

Above all else, I am indebted to the Wik people of Aurukun, not only during the formal fieldwork period but in the years that I lived and worked there prior to undertaking anthropological studies, who incorporated me into their world and generously shared their understandings of it with me. In particular, I want to thank Dorothy Pootchemunka, my elder son's mother, whose keen insights and analysis of the principles underlying mundane life contributed immeasurably to this work.

The late George Sidney Yunkaporta not only provided great assistance in the mapping of traditional estates that I carried out between 1986 and 1987, but also with his extensive knowledge, humour, and idiosyncratic view of life enlivened and informed my time throughout the field work period. Francis Yunkaporta too spent many long hours explaining to me details of coastal *Wik Mungkan* language and traditions, and sharing his views of the contemporary situation in Aurukun. Clive Yunkaporta through his keen analytical mind and immense knowledge provided crucial assistance with the mapping of estates in the Cape Keerweer region. These three brothers, together with their sister Mrs Annie Kalkeeyorta, helped my understanding of some of the differences between coastal and inland peoples, and more generally of the richness and intellectual depth of Wik cultures.

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ABSTRACT

I seek in this thesis to provide a critical account of Wik Aboriginal people living in and near the township of Aurukun on western Cape York Peninsula, north Queensland. It is set in a period of rapid and often traumatic changes for Wik, the seeds of which were sown during the seventy-four year mission period, but which accelerated dramatically with the imposition in 1978 of a local government administrative system based on the mainstream Queensland model. The decade or so following this saw the massive and cumulative penetration of the forms and institutions of the wider, dominant society. Yet, despite this, Wik people continued to carve out a social and spatial domain established through a distinctive way of life, defined in terms of particular sets of conjoint dispositions, beliefs, and understandings and through the forms, styles and contexts of social practices.

In analysing this particular style of life, I argue that the essentially unresolved tension between personal autonomy and relatedness provided a fundamental dynamic to Wik social forms and processes. I examine the changing symbolic and material resources, such as cash and alcohol, through which autonomy could be realized but which at the same time instantiated relatedness. These new resources, I suggest, provided potent and unprecedented means through which personal autonomy could be realized. For these and other reasons, there was a trend towards increasing individuation of Wik, and the sundering of the control of the means of social reproduction which had lain essentially with senior generations. At the same time as this developing individuation, there was a rise in the importance of 'community' based forms, and of a construction of 'culture' as a set of reified practices which were posited as differentiating Wik from others, particularly Whites.

I also examine Wik political processes in detail. The Wik domain was distinguished by a high degree of fluidity and contingency in the composition of the various collectivities coalescing around social actions. Despite the attempts of the Mission and more recent secular regimes to alter the legitimate definitions of social and geographic space, the constantly ebbing and flowing currents of Wik social life acted to subvert these imposed designations of public and private spaces and their appropriate uses. This fluidity of structure and process extended to Wik political forms. Within the Wik domain, relations of domination and subordination were essentially created in and through the direct interactions between persons, rather than being mediated through objective institutions such as a legislature or bureaucracy. In such circumstances, not only political groupings but orthodoxy and legitimacy themselves were contingent and embedded in the flux of social life.

Implicit in this thesis also is an argument against theories which see phenomena such as violence, large-scale alcohol consumption, and gambling, characteristic of many remote areas of Aboriginal Australia, as in some simple causal sense resulting from dispossession and alienation. Rather, it is argued that such phenomena can only be understood in terms of the complex interaction between core cultural themes, themselves historically located, and the circumstances of settlement life which have arisen through the colonial and post-colonial periods.

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THE FIGHT

It was a Thursday evening in Aurukun in early March 1986. Thursdays were major paydaydays; some \$30,000 had been paid in Council and C.D.E.P. wages between 3pm and 4pm. There were large groups of people, mainly women, playing cards at a number of gambling schools in the village. Younger children hung around the fringes of the schools, playing their own games, fighting, teasing. Older boys and girls stood in little groups under the dark shadows of mango trees; other bands of young boys moved purposefully around the village, looking for excitement and stimulation. Being a Thursday it was a 'canteen night' too, and some 500 litres of beer were sold between 5pm and closing time at 7pm from the Council beer canteen, operating from what had been until the end of 1985 the Adult Education Centre.

At an outside table a group was drinking which included Ralph, his girlfriend Josephine, her 'big mother' Sophy, Sophy's daughter Sharon and Shaun, Sophy's younger brother. Two weeks before, Josephine's mother had died, suffering heart failure after being attacked by her husband, and her spirit had been despatched to her clan group's spirit sending centre three days before this night. While it was accepted by those discussing the matter in the village that the husband had contributed to her death by kicking her while knowing that she had a weak heart, the crux of the matter lay in what had motivated him to do such a thing. Sorcery was mooted, with whispers of sightings of two men moving around in the dead of night, and tentative blame was being assigned to a close member of Ralph's family.

Ralph lost his temper with his girlfriend near the end of the canteen session - we are not to know why but speculation was that she had refused to sit beside him - and swore at her calling her "mother fucker". Sophy and Shaun, siblings of Josephine's dead mother, immediately took umbrage and argued heatedly with him for swearing at their dead sister. "Alright then, you go and get your mob!" Ralph replied to Shaun. Shaun did just that.

The fighting started within the canteen grounds, with young men pouring over to the area, shouting, challenging; "Come on, you and me fight eh!". Someone called out "Out here, we'll fight outside!", and the crowd streamed out the gate on to the road under a pool of light from a streetlight. Others came running from the village to join the fight, followed by swarms of children eager for the thrills and excitement. There were perhaps fifty or sixty young men in a huge melee that sent swirls of dust up in the pool of light. Rings of spectators would form around particular fights; many protagonists had stripped their shirts off, many used stylish poses taken from Kung-fu films and videos, circling one another warily, backs arched, hands held ready to deliver karate chops, until lunging in for a furious exchange of blows. The noise was extraordinary, with the shouted challenges, the catcalling and cheering by men as their kin's opponents were knocked to the ground, the emphatic grunts as blows were landed, the screamed abuse from women such as Sophy and Sharon on the periphery of the central mass.

In such a confused event taking place on a dark night it was possible to isolate only certain particular occurrences. Prominent in the fighting 'on behalf of that dead body' were the pam-mul kunych, the owners; Shaun, an actual full sibling of the dead woman, classificatory brothers Benny, Dave, Hugo, Grant, and Oscar, and a nephew Harvey. Opposing them were the young men of the Flying Fox mob; Ralph, Keith, Bruce, Marty and Edward, and James and Daniel from the Brolga Foot mob. While taking place within a huge and confused melee, much of the fighting involved successive pairings off of protagonists, and in the initial stages at least if one was 'double banked' there were cries of 'fair go'. I observed Ralph being knocked to the ground after a succession of beatings from Grant, Hugo and the other brothers. Harvey played an active role, fighting first with Edward, and then with Bruce.

James was walking around and boasting of his prowess, his independence, his fearlessness. Patrick took umbrage, and he and James, both solid and powerful young men, had a furious fist fight. Desmond and Edward also exchanged blows, and Amos and Paul from the Crow mob rushed in from the dark and attacked the Flying Fox mob.

On the periphery, kin from both sides were arguing their case. Lucinda and Mary, the mother and 'small mother' of Bruce and the other young men were complaining that people always seemed to pick on their boys, everybody hated them. On the other hand, Alex and Andrew, classificatory cousins of the dead woman, and Reg, Mandy, Margaret and Julie, classificatory 'small fathers' and aunts, were loudly declaiming that Ralph had no right to use that bad swearing; the body had not yet become rotten, it was still fresh.

Paul tried to provoke a fight with Sidney, who had no direct interests involved in the fight but was standing and watching on its perimeter. Sidney's two older sisters grabbed his arms and steered him away; "It's not your fight, it is their business". Other women did the rage dance (thuunhth-thuunhthan) on the periphery and abusing those fighting their male kin, for instance Patrick's mother.

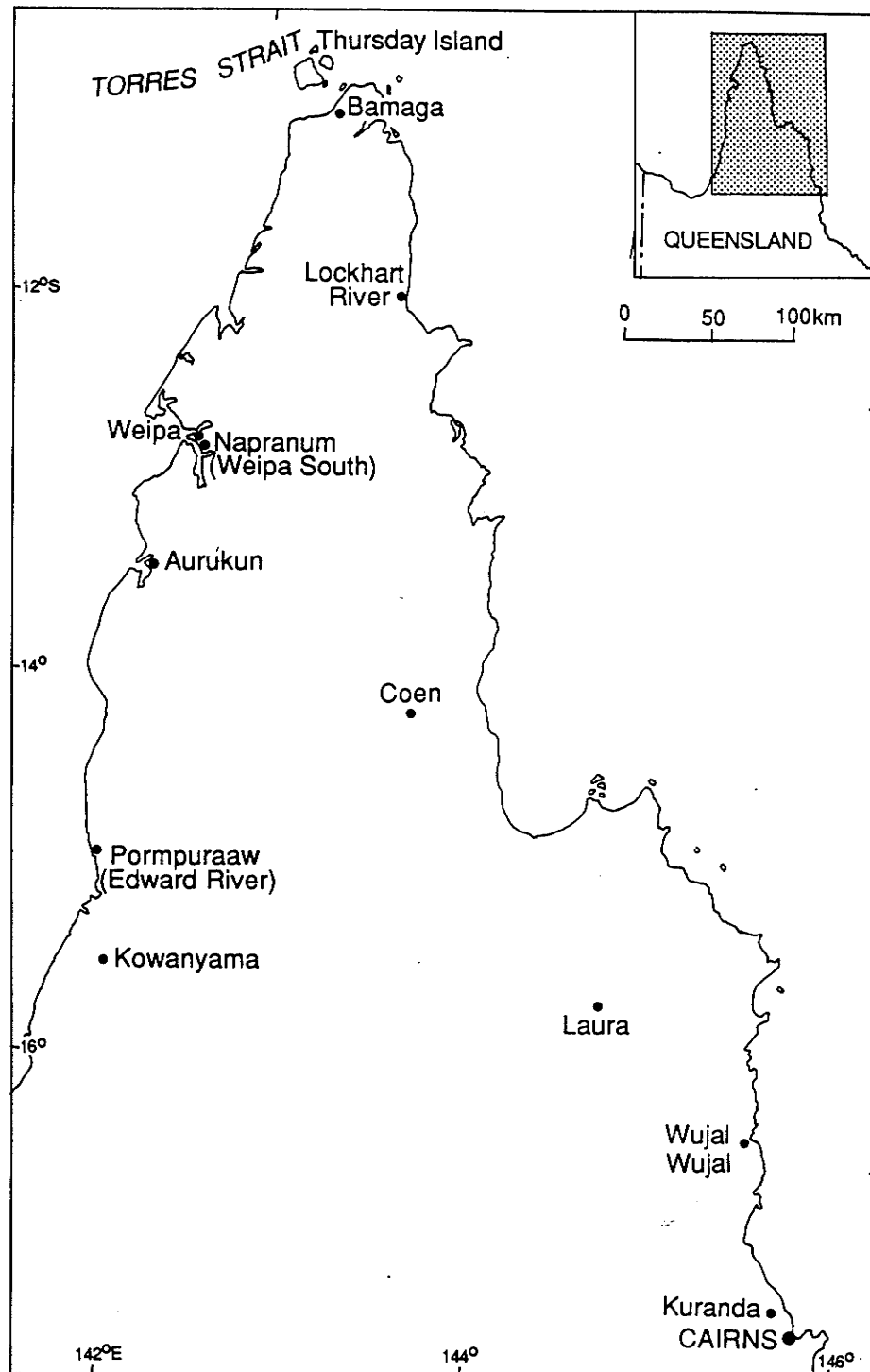
The fight became almost impossible to follow, not just for the anthropologist but for the Wik; "They were hitting anyone and anywhere". One young man, drunk but not fighting and just standing near me and watching the melee, was hit with great force across the bridge of the nose by Patrick's classificatory brother. He staggered away supported by his girlfriend, who returned later and argued vehemently with his attacker's sisters and mother. Benny despite being one of the main owners of the dead body was no longer taking part in the major central fights, and was having an argument with his girlfriend who was also drunk. His young daughter ran up and punched her father's girlfriend, who ran away from her - "maanh winyang mo' ".

By this stage, children and women were picking up sand, bottles, cans and throwing them at the fighters. The mob streamed eastwards to the fighting ground on the thoroughfare linking the east and west sides of the village, and the fighters regrouped. They were followed by the spectators and the dogs who were present for all aspects of Aboriginal public life. Rings of spectators formed around individual fights, such as that between Daniel and Desmond who were fighting again. Ruska,

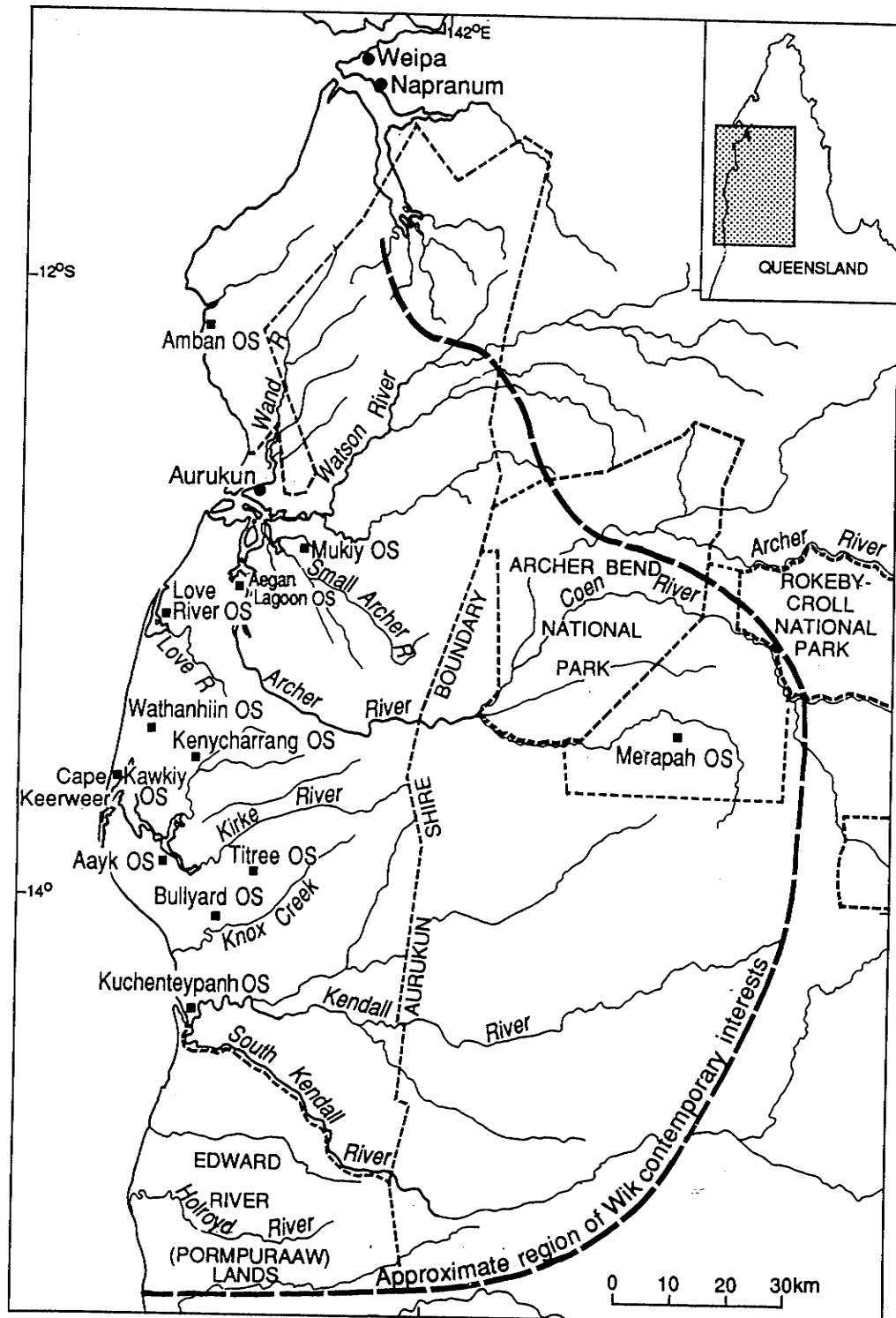
from the Territory but a long-term resident in Aurukun, fought foot to foot with a visitor from Groote Eylandt. Neither had any direct involvement with the major protagonists. "Gammon, just relations fighting" I was told. The Councillor with whom the Groote Eylandt visitors were staying was acting as thaa' pant or blocker, attempting to separate the two men, interposing himself between them as they circled around him trying to punch one another.

Some female kin of men who were not main protagonists - those who were "gammon fighting" because they were drunk but had no direct interests involved - would move into the central mass and try to drag them out from it. Other women however, such as Mary and Dulcie, goaded their men on and taunted their opponents, doing the rage dance. Meanwhile another Councillor, Jimmy, whose sons were fighting on behalf of their cousins the Flying Fox mobs, was arguing furiously with the White police, who had been totally unable to prevent the fighting from spreading and who were standing helplessly in the middle as it swirled around them. Gradually, after perhaps an hour and a half, the fighting died down and was replaced by shouted abuse and challenges as people moved away with their kin groups; "we'll fight tomorrow! Sober fight tomorrow! You were shit scared of me! I am king for Aurukun!".

The next morning the fight did start again. There were a couple of desultory fist fights between young men who had been fighting the night before, but it was mainly confined to heated arguments between kin on both sides: "My sons were innocent, it was other people that started this fight!" ; " You fella ever ready to fight drunk, sober one you nothing!". After half an hour or so, the protagonists dispersed, moving away in groups as they had come, to recount events and consolidate them.



Map 1 Major towns and Aboriginal townships in Cape York



Map 2 The Wik region, west Cape York Peninsula

Introduction

This thesis seeks to provide a contemporary account of the Aboriginal people who live in or near Aurukun on western Cape York Peninsula, and who in large part originate from the region bounded roughly by the Embley River to the north, the Edward River to the south, and the Archer Bend-Merapah area to the east (see Maps 1 and 2). The thesis is based upon 19 months of formal anthropological fieldwork I undertook in various stages between 1985 and 1988, but perhaps more importantly on the period between 1976 and 1983 when I lived in Aurukun itself or out bush, working as an adviser for Aboriginal people living on or near their traditional homelands on 'outstations'. In this introduction, I provide a brief sketch of the people and area with which this thesis is concerned, and delineate some of the major concerns which inform it.

The setting

Aurukun is an Aboriginal township which during my fieldwork period had a population of some 950 people, of whom up to 50 were White staff, contractors, and their families. It is extremely remote even by Australian standards, located some 500 kilometres north west of Cairns and 80 kilometres south of the bauxite mining township of Weipa. Being in the tropics, the region is subject to a marked seasonal cycle with heavy monsoonal rains usually falling in the period between January and March, and a protracted dry season. During and following the wet season, Aurukun is completely isolated from the rest of the Cape, apart from air and sea links.

The township itself is on the northern side of the estuary of the Archer River, which rises 200 kilometres to the east in the Great Dividing Range east of Coen. The Archer marks a major environmental boundary between the sclerophyll country stretching north past Weipa (which is underlain by some 30 percent of the western world's proven bauxite reserves), and the coastal flood plains to the south which are dissected by rivers such as the Love, Kirke and Kendall draining the savannah woodlands further inland. The Archer also loosely marks what was to some extent a cultural and linguistic boundary between the Aboriginal groups to the north and those to the south and inland. It and its tributaries formed a natural path for communication between the coastal peoples and those further inland and to the east.

Aurukun was one of a number of missions established in Cape York, in part as a result of public disquiet in the late nineteenth century concerning reports of violent conflict and ill-treatment of Aboriginal people on the colonial frontier, which included on the western Cape York region the depredations of trochus shell fishermen and pearl-ers along the coasts, and of cattlemen in the hinterland. Massacres as late as the 1930s in the region around Rokeby and Merapah are still within living memory of some of the older inland Aurukun people. Aurukun was begun in 1904 by the

German Moravian Arthur Richter as the result of requests from the Australian Presbyterian Church. The Reverend William MacKenzie was appointed Superintendent by the Presbyterian Church in 1923, and he was joined by his new wife Geraldine in 1925. There until 1965, the MacKenzies had a dominant and profound influence on Aurukun and on the lives of the Aboriginal people who came to live there, as I shall discuss throughout the body of this thesis.¹

Operating in accordance with and under the ultimate authority of the State legislation of the time directed at Aboriginal people,² MacKenzie combined strong authoritarianism with what in comparison with many other missions (such as Doomadgee) was considerable progressiveness. Great emphasis was placed of course on Christianizing, and on establishing what were seen to be self-evidently morally superior forms such as domestic units based on the nuclear family and the values of work, self reliance, and economic independence. In common with many other missions and settlements, dormitories were set up in Aurukun for children, and formed a crucial part of a systematic attempt to socialize the children into new modes of thought and behaviour. MacKenzie made a number of trips into remote areas of the Aurukun region to persuade parents to release their children to him; he would 'pay' for them with gifts of flour, sugar, tea, tobacco and calico cloth.³

Aurukun during the 40 year MacKenzie era was marked by the pervasiveness of their influence and relative coherence of its administration, which was not unrelated to its extreme isolation.⁴ At the same time, it was also marked by the almost unparalleled extent (in Queensland at least) to which indigenous cultural forms such as language, ritual life, and ties to traditional lands continued, and indeed continued to inform mundane life. The history of Aurukun after the MacKenzies left in 1965 however was one of increasingly relaxed controls (for instance, the dormitories were closed the following year), rapidly increasing exposure to the secular institutions and agencies of the outside world, and accelerating changes in the circumstances of Aboriginal people's lives. In 1975, a controversy erupted over the Queensland Government's decision, without consultation with Aurukun people or the mission, to grant bauxite mining leases over a substantial area of the northern part of the then Aurukun Reserve to an international consortium through a special piece of legislation, the *Aurukun Associates Act 1975*. A national campaign was organized, supported by

1. Geraldine MacKenzie has provided an account of this period from the mission perspective in MacKenzie (1981), as has Mary Gillan who worked as a missionary teacher in Aurukun (Gillan 1989).
2. The *Aboriginals Preservation and Protection Act 1939-1946*, which had a direct lineage back to the 1897 *Protection of Aborigines and Prevention of the Sale of Opium Act*, gave mission superintendents the same powers as those of government settlements. A regime of the control of virtually every dimension of Aboriginal people's lives was established under this Act. It was replaced in the year that the MacKenzies left Aurukun by the less draconian but still discriminatory *Aborigines' and Torres Strait Islanders' Affairs Act*. Accounts of the history of Queensland legislation directed at its indigenous populations can be found in works by analysts such as Rowley (1970a, 1970b), Fitzgerald (1982), and Loos (1982).
3. As he did for the mummified bodies of those awaiting cremation, so that they would instead be buried in Christian fashion.
4. Even when I first went to Aurukun, in 1975, it was only possible to drive in by four wheel drive even in the dry season with extreme difficulty, there was no television and only poor reception from distant radio stations, and communications were by a mail service three times a week from

the Church and involving key Aurukun people travelling throughout Australia and even overseas. A challenge by Aurukun to provisions of the Act which meant that no direct benefits would flow to Aurukun people, was ultimately lost on appeal by the State from the Supreme Court of Queensland in the Privy Council in London.⁵

Also in the mid 1970s, the move by a number of groups to re-establish on or near traditional lands (mainly south of the Archer River) gained momentum, although its seeds had been present throughout the mission era and many individuals had maintained close contact with their lands right through that period. During the 1978 and 1979 dry seasons, there were peak populations of close to 300 people on outstations. This move aroused strong opposition from the State Government and from its powerful Department of Aboriginal and Islander Advancement, whose express policy was still one of assimilation of Aboriginal people into mainstream society. In 1978, partly as the result of the outstation movement, and also the very public campaign Aurukun people which had been waged against the bauxite mining agreement with the active support and encouragement of the church, the Queensland Government attempted a pre-emptive move to bring Aurukun under the direct control of this Department.⁶ Further reasons advanced by the Government were the very low level of facilities and infrastructure in Aurukun (resulting in fact from inadequate State funding), and problems with health, law and order and education delivery (then as now the responsibilities of State agencies).

A large scale public campaign was mounted, again with the support of the Uniting Church, which attracted national attention and support from a wide range of sources. This is not the place to give a detailed account of these events; suffice it to say that after initial strong support from the Federal coalition government of Malcolm Fraser for Aurukun's desire to be independent of the State, a final compromise outcome was negotiated between the State and Federal authorities which set up Aurukun and Mornington Island as Local Government areas under the *Local Government (Aboriginal Lands) Act 1978*.⁷ Neither Aurukun people themselves nor the Uniting Church, who were administering the settlement and had the publicly expressed confidence of key Aurukun people, were directly involved in the negotiations. The Federal government claimed the final outcome as a victory, saying that it would allow Aurukun people true self management and control of their community.⁸

Cairns, or a twice-daily radio schedule through the Thursday Island office of the then Department of Aboriginal and Islander Advancement.

5. See e.g. Buckhorn (1976), Roberts and McLean (1976), McCorquodale (1984:263). Exploration had in fact been going on for a number of years, and Aurukun men had been employed on the camps during this period, as the result of negotiations between Mission authorities and the consortium.
6. Mornington Island, which was also administered by the Uniting Church, was involved in this attempted takeover.
7. Accounts of the events of the 'takeover' are given in a number of sources; e.g. Bennett (1978), Tatz (1979a, 1979b), and in the film *Takeover* produced by the Australian Institute of Aboriginal Studies.
8. Elsewhere (Martin 1990), I argue that in fact under the guise of 'self-determination' there has been a massive increase in the complexity of the administrative system at Aurukun and the consequent numbers of Europeans needed to run it; see also Sutton (1990).

As with the previous mining controversy, this political struggle involved a significant number of key Aurukun people travelling widely throughout Australia in a campaign which attracted national attention and support. As such, it arguably provided them, and Aurukun people more generally, with a window through which to view the political and social systems of the wider world in a hitherto unprecedented fashion. It might have been expected that the outcome, bitterly opposed by them at the time, would also have provided to Aurukun people an unambiguous demonstration of their ultimate lack of power. Yet, in the years that followed, most of the key people who had been so prominent in the public campaign against the imposition of Local Government became active players in it. The 'takeover' of 1978 became recast as 'the fight' through which Aurukun people had defied the Queensland Government and maintained their autonomy.

The imposition of Local Government in 1978 marked the beginning of profound changes in Aurukun. From a poorly funded and relatively simple organizational structure with a limited number of staff working for agencies actually present in Aurukun, and with comparatively clearly defined policies and practices, there quickly developed a complex (although mostly very inefficient) administrative system, with a greatly increased number of White staff working for numerous agencies and organizations, and a massive increase in funding levels. Figure 2 presents a schematic of the various agencies and departments which were involved in Aurukun in 1986 and 1987.

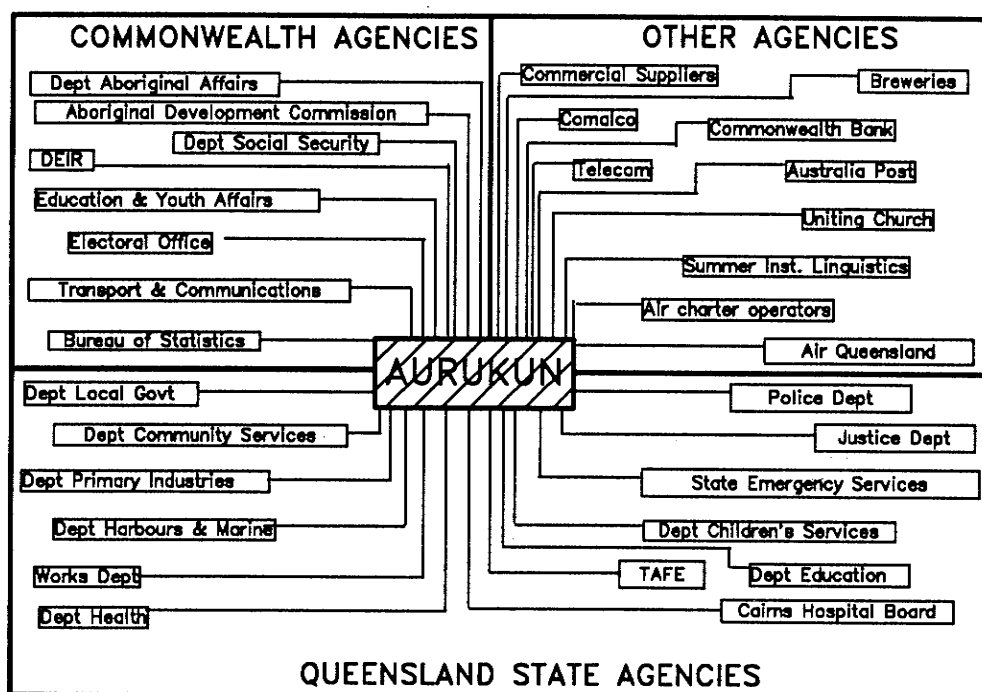


Figure 2 Agencies involved with Aurukun, 1986/87

Concomitantly with this increasing administrative complexity, Aurukun people were exposed ever more directly to the forms and institutions of the wider state; the

full introduction of a cash-based economy, alcohol, consumer goods, telephones and television,⁹ vehicles, ever greater numbers of outsiders living there or passing through, the courts and legal system - all meant that while remote, Aurukun was no longer isolated. This transition from a relatively closed system to one increasingly exposed to the material and symbolic forms of the dominant society forms a critical dimension to the background against which this thesis is situated.

The Wik people of Aurukun

Most of Aurukun's Aboriginal population were drawn from the zone shown in Map 2. The region from the Archer River north towards Weipa was not only environmentally differentiated from that to the south as discussed above, but comprised the traditional homelands of people originally speaking a separate group of languages and with distinct traditions from those to the south. However, broad similarities of cultural forms, links of marriage, ceremony and political alliance, and contemporary melding of original distinctions, allow the broad region demarcated in Map 2 to be considered to form a relatively homogeneous cultural domain. The names of the languages of the region from south of the Archer were prefixed with *Wik* or *Kugu*, roughly 'talk' or 'language', and those from north of the Archer were collectively referred to as *Wik Way*. Thus, in writing of the 'Wik' people of Aurukun, I am using a term of anthropological convenience to refer to people from a broad cultural domain who were now living in or around Aurukun, not one used in this manner by the people concerned.¹⁰

Within this broad similarity however, there was considerable local and regional differentiation. In particular, the broad division between those whose original homelands were in the inland sclerophyll forest regions and those from the coastal floodplain zone, and regional associations based on riverine groupings, were structural features which still informed much of social process. Additionally, there were cross-cutting affiliations through kin networks, to traditional estates and sites, to language, totemic institutions, and regional ritual cults, that rendered Aurukun's social matrix highly complex and particularistic. Within apparent similarity, there was a strong emphasis on diversity.

Motivations for the thesis

This work has arisen not just from the theoretical concerns regarding the nature and reproduction of the relations between contemporary Aboriginal societies and the wider state, although it does seek to address aspects of these questions. Above all else, it is informed by my own years in Aurukun, working and living with outstation people, and living in the 'village' with my Wik family. During this time, through a process almost of osmosis rather than of active and structured seeking of information,

9. As both recipients of national and commercial regional networks via satellite, and as the subjects of news items and documentaries.

I developed a degree of cultural and linguistic competence which - by the very nature of its acquisition - was flawed, deficient and largely unexamined. Yet, embedded as I was within the flux of mundane and domestic life, and thus within the networks of kin-based relationships with their demands, obligations, services and indeed their ambiguities, and operating at the interface of Wik and White political systems as I was in my formal role as Outstation Adviser, I developed a degree of what Bourdieu terms a practical mastery which allowed me to function as a quasi-insider.¹¹

Furthermore, my years in Aurukun were a time of unprecedented changes for Wik people, particularly following the imposition of Local Government in 1978. During this period, at the same time as Wik lives were ever more exposed to the values and institutions of the wider state, they were marked by what could be represented as increasing signs of social pathology - widespread and heavy alcohol consumption, endemic conflict and violence, the disintegration of many domestic and family units, and the formation of bands of disaffected and destructive children and youths. Such dimensions of contemporary life in the Aurukun township featured prominently in media portrayals of Aurukun.¹² These phenomena were not, however, simply the creations of the media, for they informed and constrained virtually every level of life for Wik, and for those such as myself who lived with them. At the same time, Wik lived their lives, if often under the most difficult of circumstances, with extraordinary zest, humour and energy, and with an outspoken commitment to perceived continuities in a distinctive way of life contrasted with that of the dominant society. Diverse and divided within their own domain, Wik could provide a formidable common front against the external world, especially where it sought to examine or judge features of their world which Wik saw as their own business and nobody else's.

This thesis is thus situated in this ambiguous and highly political world of representations, where criticism and critical evaluation could be seen as one and the same. Furthermore, it must not be seen as a completed (and thus in a sense legitimated) statement about Wik, but rather as one point in the process of a continuing dialectic between my own representations of Wik social forms and practices and my involvement in them, for while I now live permanently outside Aurukun, my links to it (including through my own son whose family still live there), are complex and ongoing, if sometimes fraught. My dual status during my years at Aurukun, at once insider and outsider, participant and observer, reflected back into how I operated in Aurukun at the level of day-to-day life, to the motivating principles which placed me there originally, and into my relationship with Wik people of which this thesis is one product.

10. See for example Sutton (1987), and Sutton, Martin et al (1990). Other Wik lived in centres such as Pormpuraaw to the south, Coen and Merapah to the east, and Napranum and Weipa to the north.

11. Bourdieu (1977a)

12. See for example Australian Broadcasting Commission (1991).

Further, in dealing with the complex and sometimes problematic areas which form the stuff of mundane life in remote Aboriginal townships such as Aurukun, the ethical responsibilities of a person such as myself towards the interests of the people with whom I work must be regarded in the light of an analysis which is not simply complicitous description. In particular, the dichotomy between the analyst as representative of the broader society and the Aboriginal people concerned is often taken as axiomatic, within both Aboriginal and White societies. This view assumes solidary and opposing interests at the two poles; the question must be asked however as to exactly whose interests are being served in the maintenance of a complicitous silence about areas of Aboriginal life that are clearly dynamic, of great significance to Aboriginal people themselves, and of immense import in terms of the nature of the articulation of Aboriginal societies with the dominant, White one.

Thesis structure and conventions

This work is situated in what was a time of rapid and continuing changes for Wik people in Aurukun, and, while based on a considerable time spent there, nonetheless abstracts from the flow of process in time and space, and objectifies what was in essence mutable and contextual. Throughout the thesis therefore, I have used past tense. While this has sometimes proved awkward, I have sought to avoid the false legitimacy and ahistoricalism which use of the ethnographic present can give, while accepting that the use of the past tense may lead to the impression that the analysis has no validity into the future.

As a heuristic device, I have structured the thesis around the description of one of the many large-scale clashes that took place on the fighting ground near my house in the village. Each chapter, a vignette of particular forms, contexts and actions rather than an elucidation of groups and categories, starts with a particular event or set of events abstracted from this description, and seeks to elucidate Wik social forms and processes which were instanced in them. My use of 'the Fight' however has a wider set of meanings which can be attributed to it, for as discussed in the body of the thesis, fighting was a practice which was deeply embedded in Wik traditions as they saw it, which played a dominant role in day-to-day life, and which was both product of and contributed to the nature of the articulation between Wik society and the wider one. To add further resonance, as discussed above Wik represented their maintenance of a degree of autonomy from the state in terms of a fight that they had won.

Throughout the thesis, where proper names are used, they are pseudonyms. Unavoidably, because there were nearly 900 Wik people, some of these pseudonyms are also the names of living Aurukun people. I have sought to ensure that in no case did these pseudonyms inadvertently correspond to Wik who were involved in the particular event being described.

In rendering words in *Wik Mungkan* and other languages of the area, I have used the practical orthography adopted by Kilham et al (1986), with some amendments (see Sutton, Martin et al 1990);

Consonants

p	close to English p
th	a stopped consonant like t, with the tongue touching the upper teeth
t	close to English t
ch	close to English ch
k	close to English k
'	glottal stop
m	close to English m
n	close to English n
ng	close to English ng in 'singer'
nh	a nasal like n, with the tongue touching the upper teeth
ny	close to English ny in 'canyon'
l	close to English l
r	close to Australian English r, with tip of tongue curled back
rr	a flapped or trilled r, like that in Scots English
y	close to English y
w	close to English w

Vowels

a	like the /u/ in English 'but'
aa	long /a/ as in English 'father'
e	like the /e/ in English 'pet'
ee	long /e/ like the vowel in English 'care'
i	like the /i/ in English 'bit'
ii	long /i/, like the vowel in English 'beet'
o	like the /o/ in English 'pot'
oo	long /o/, like the vowel in English 'poor'
u	like the /u/ in English 'put'
uu	long /u/ like the vowel in English 'do'
oe	like the vowel in German 'schön'
oe	long /oe/, like the vowel in English 'turn'

Chapter 1

An Assertive Autonomy

James was walking around and boasting of his prowess, his independence, his fearlessness. Patrick took umbrage, and he and James, both solid and powerful young men, had a furious fist fight Some female kin of men who were not main protagonists - those who were "gammon fighting" because they were drunk but had no direct interests involved - would move into the central mass and try to drag them out from it. Other women did the rage dance (thuunhth-thuunhthan) on the periphery, abusing those fighting their male kin Prominent in the fighting 'on behalf of that dead body' were the pam-mul kunych, the 'owners' ... Opposing them were the young men from the Flying Fox clan.

Assertions of uniqueness and personal autonomy such as those of James were an omnipresent feature of Wik life. Yet, also distinctive was a strong ethos of equalitarianism, a manifest pressure to conform, and an emphasis on reciprocity and on equivalence in social transactions. Furthermore, while individuals constantly asserted their autonomy, they were enmeshed in, and indeed defined as social beings through, networks of relationships to others in particular ways, especially those defined through kinship, as in the case of the women protecting and fighting for their kin. In this chapter, I wish to sketch in a number of basic themes which will inform the remainder of the thesis; in particular, I will explore in a preliminary fashion the tension between individual autonomy and relatedness, which I argue provided a fundamental dynamic to Wik society.

It can be argued that the person/society analytical dichotomy is itself the product of particular historical developments which have culminated in western individualism, and that in fact this ideological framework underpins western economic, social and political forms. Individualism, Hollis notes, is not one definable thesis, but has been most influential in social theory in the form of utilitarianism, where the unit of analysis is the individual, seen as essentially pre-social, rational and self-interested. The rationality is of a particular form, lying in the "shrewd calculation of individual advantage, with conflicts of interest reconciled in principle through a notional social contract."¹ This of course leads to the well-known Hobbesian problem of order; having postulated "a primary urge for self-preservation" and a "restless desire for power after power which ceaseth only in death"² one has to then determine the nature of the social cement which binds these pre-social individuals together.

Durkheim opposed utilitarianism strongly, and offered a resolution of this dilemma in terms of an account of the person as *homo duplex* with "a constitutional

1. Hollis (1985:225)

duality"; the individual has "a double existence ... the one purely individual and rooted in our organisms, the other social and nothing but an extension of society".³ Society is conceived of as a "moral reality", with the *conscience collective* acting to constrain individual action, obligating people to behave in certain ways. In this view there is a continuing tension between the demands of the person's social existence and those of his individual nature. Of course, this "individual nature" itself can not be conceived of in any meaningful sense separately from the forms of social representations and of the collectivities in which the particular person operates; there is no "pre-social" individual nature (although there may be pre-social, perhaps biological, potentialities such as those for instinctive physical reactions or the capacity for language).

Much of social anthropology has historically avoided or skirted uneasily around conceptions of the self as a psychological entity. Durkheim for instance saw the study of this phenomenon as the province of psychology, in contrast to sociology's task which was the analysis of what he called 'social facts'.⁴ Mauss, in his essay on the social category of the individual attempted to distinguish between what he claimed was the 'universal sense of self', the *moi*, the individual's own awareness of themselves as what we now might refer to as psychobiological beings, and the *personne*, the particular society's construction of the person.⁵ The *personne* is inherently a relative construct; the person as a social category can not be said to meaningfully exist independently from particular sets of connections that link them to others. There is of course a dialectical relationship between 'person' and 'other'; it is persons who are producing this 'other' through social practice, but are simultaneously being constituted through it. The *personne* can be seen as a conception of the individual human being as a member of a significant and ordered collectivity, whereas the *moi* on the other hand is a conception of the physical and mental individuality of human beings within a natural or spiritual cosmos, interacting with each other as moral agents.⁶ The distinction is of course problematic, even in Mauss's own essay, and it is very easy for the anthropologist, like Mauss, to slip unremarked between the *moi* and the *personne* in explanation of social facts. Nevertheless, the two are of necessity intimately related, even though not mutually reducible to each other. Both are temporal in two senses; they have historical trajectories in any given collectivity, and also just as the *personne* normally changes over the life cycle of individuals so does the *moi* as they pass through infancy, childhood and into maturity.

In common with many other Aboriginal groups, Wik gave ontological recognition to an essential duality of the individual, in conceptualizing a dual aspect to the soul. One, an individual's *maany* or "earthly shadow",⁷ was intimately linked to the person's country and to their totemic cult, and was part of the pool of the

2. *ibid*:226

3. Durkheim (1960), quoted in Lukes (1985:286).

4. Although, this arguably was polemics in order to establish a legitimate place for sociology: Durkheim's theory of religion was nothing if not psychologically based.

5. Mauss (1985 (1938))

6. Carrithers (1985:235-6)

patrilineal clan. After death, the *maany* could torment the living and had to be ritually despatched back to the clan spirit-image centre. Even so, it would remain, for a time at least, frequenting places that had been of significance to the person during their life, appearing in dreams to close kin, frightening people - an intimate part of social life. There was another dimension to the soul however, which did not have these connections to country and to kin. It could be seen as encompassing the perhaps ultimately ineffable nature of the individual being. Immediately after death, this essence travelled west, over the Gulf, to **Onycham**. It required no ritual intervention to despatch it, and **Onycham**, unlike spirit-image centres, belonged to no particular clan.⁸

Yet, while Wik conceptualized a duality of the soul, they did not elaborate it. If these two aspects could be seen as related in some sense to the *personne* and the *moi* of western thought, it was the spiritual dimensions of the *personne* which were the subject of Wik ritual attention and of commentary more generally. Furthermore, while the existence of an irreducible individuality was arguably ontologically recognized by Wik, it was ultimately subsumed by the *personne*, the essentially social being, for both were conceptualized by Wik in terms of the same material and symbolic forms. The social person was defined through such terms as their membership of descent-based corporate groupings, particularly the clan, and more generally their connectedness to others through relationships of kinship, their clan country and its sites, their gender, whether they were initiated or not, their language affiliations, and their ritual cult and clan totemic affiliations.⁹ However, the individual *moi* operated within a universe that was as much a social universe as a moral one, was conceptualized in terms of a spiritual essence that was itself embedded in the social, and had physical and emotional characteristics that were related in part to the person's totems and thus ultimately themselves socially located.

Thus for Wik, at least in the past, the *personne* and the *moi* had been intimately associated, and indeed the latter had been subsumed largely by the former. As I suggested earlier however, both were historically situated. In contemporary Aurukun, through the processes of progressive individuation and diminishing importance of the original corporate forms which are detailed through this thesis, the *moi* was becoming ever more separated from a continually redefined *personne*. Yet, what continued was the strong assertion of personal autonomy and uniqueness by Wik, existing despite the increasing individuation in tension with various forms of connectedness. This dialectical tension, I argue throughout this thesis, provided a fundamental social dynamic in particular ways, partly mediated through some cultural forms but

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7. *maany* meant image or representation; it was used also of the carvings of totemic beings fashioned for certain performances of the major ritual cults, and of photographs.
 8. As discussed in Chapter 5, Wik conceptualized a third component to the spirit, the *ngangk thanhth*. I suggest in that chapter that this related essentially to the physical presence and vitality of the person. After death, it gradually faded away as the body decomposed.
 9. Thus, for example, names for each person had originally been drawn from a stock which was itself corporate property of their clan, and which were oblique references to clan totems (see e.g. Thomson 1946, Sutton 1978:133)

essentially unresolved.¹⁰ It was implicated at every level in Wik social forms and processes, from intimate and personal to public and ritualized, from mundane and prosaic to emotionally charged, from ordered to chaotic.

"Ngay-ngay": the assertion of autonomy

The rhetoric of personal distinctiveness and autonomy was a striking and omnipresent aspect of Wik practices. I heard it from all categories of Wik, from adult men and women to small children, and in virtually all facets of life.¹¹ They constantly stressed to me their differences - of language or dialect, totems and territorial affiliation, of personal history, of idiosyncratic mannerisms or habits - rather than their similarities. In fights for instance, I frequently heard young men make declarations such as; "Me, I'm different. I'm frightened from no bastard!" When similarities were emphasized, it was generally as a rhetorical device, setting themselves up in contradistinction to White Australians. The people from this region have been characterized by previous ethnographers as having a high degree of personal individuation at the ideological level, arising from the particularistic and crosscutting nature of such structures as totemic affiliations, ritual cults, territorial affiliations, and the multiple dialects and languages of the region.¹² Sutton for instance wrote of Cape Keerweer Wik from the coastal region to the south of Aurukun; "Emphasis on personal style characterizes the whole of social ideology Each person is inherently different from all others, a fact consistently stressed in arguments, fighting and gossip."¹³ The omnipresent graffiti scrawled around Aurukun by young Wik, which was very often territorial in nature or referred to contemporary collective forms, typically incorporated themes of separation and distinctiveness.¹⁴ This took such forms as;

JD
STANDS ALONE
ATFS¹⁵

MK
TTOSG¹⁶
ONLY ME
4 EVER

-
10. Of course, this is arguably true of all collectivities of human beings; it is the particular manifestations and consequences of this tension for Wik which are of interest.
 11. I would argue that in at least one aspect of the past society this emphasis was inverted, during male initiations, when the initiates were humiliated, starved, and subjected to the absolute authority of the older men. This inversion I suggest parallels other aspects of ritual inversion during this liminal period.
 12. von Sturmer (1978); Sutton (1978); von Sturmer [Smith] (1980). See also Taylor (1984) on the *Thaayorre* and *'Mungkan'* peoples at Pormpuraaw, south of Aurukun, and Sharp (e.g. 1934b) on the *Yir yiront* further south again.
 13. Sutton (1978:161-2)
 14. Graffiti is also referred to in Chapter 5.
 15. And That's For Sure
 16. Ti Tree OutStation Girl

L.. G..
STANDS ALONE
ALWAYS BE IN AURUKUN SHIRE COUNCIL¹⁷

A pervasive rhetoric

The rhetoric of autonomy was encapsulated in the pervasive statement "*ngay-ngaya!*" Literally "I am myself", this could be rendered as "I am unique", or "I am different".¹⁸ Personal pronouns reduplicated in this manner carried notions of the referent being *sui generis*: thus "*nil-nil*"¹⁹ suggested that he/she was seen as being different from the speaker, and accordingly acted differently. In an often heard statement, people would say "*Niiy waypel, niiy-niiy! Ngan ngotan, ngan-ngan!*"²⁰ - "You Whites, you are of your own kind! We black people are different!" An important connotation was that it was not expected that the object of reference could be persuaded to change the ways that they went about things, which was in a basic sense seen as a part of them, and their own business. "That is your way," I would often be told by Wik, meaning that they would presume that I had knowledge of certain things because I was a European - for instance about western technological items - and that I acted as I did because it was appropriate to my culture as they perceived it.

This bears directly on a point to which I will return in later chapters; Wik culture was not seen by them as resulting from the actions of individual creative human beings but as having been ultimately 'left' by ancestral Heroes. While individual strategizing was a basic facet of Wik life, and was recognized explicitly at many levels, culture was represented as essentially unchangeable. The sources of European Australian culture were not clearly defined by Wik, but it too was seen as having been 'left' to Europeans, some suggested by God. Wik themselves used the English word 'culture' primarily to refer to their various rituals, their origin and other myths, their totemic institutions, their relationship to land, their languages - a usage that in fact corresponded fairly closely to the lay White Australian one in its concentration on the exotica of a people's social practices and beliefs. In referring to the more general sense of culture as mores, manners and modes of behaviour, Wik would talk in English of 'our way' or 'blackfella way', and contrast this with their perceptions of those of Whites. In *Wik Mungkan* itself however, both aspects were encompassed by certain linguistic usages. *Aak*, meaning either time or place, was one of a number of words that could refer to both of them; thus *aak thinhth* could, depending on context, refer to either (or perhaps both) a close location or to an event soon to occur. Encompassing both senses however, and implicitly acknowledging the flow of time and the intimate importance of place in their social practices, *aak* was

17. Peter Sutton (*pers.comm.*) provided me with this example.

18. See also Sutton (*loc.cit.*) and von Sturmer [Smith] (1980:269) for brief discussions of this statement.

19. *nil*; third person singular

20. *ngan*; first person plural exclusive: *niiy*; second person plural: *ngotan*; black (person): *waypel*; white person.

also used by Wik to refer to culture in its broad sense.²¹ *Aak ngant yimanang wunan!*²² - This is our way! - could be used in reference to such diverse domains of culture as the practice (and underpinning beliefs) of mortuary rituals on the one hand, or to how they saw themselves dealing with money on the other. These practices and beliefs were not explicitly seen as the product of individual creativity or will, but as reproducing and being linked through time to those of the preceding generations, *aak woyn wuut mangk. antam*,²³ and ultimately to the Creator Heroes. "*Aak yimanang want ngant!*" - "This is the form in which our culture was left us!" Wik would say to me, in explaining a particular practice or belief.²⁴

The fact that Wik represented culture as having been 'left' to them was, I suggest, entirely consistent with social practices where individuals or collectivities did not in general interfere with others' actions unless they impinged directly on their own perceived rights (a point to which I shall return shortly). Wik notions of culture included at least the potential for idiosyncrasy and wilfulness; individuality, egoism, wilfulness and self-interest were themselves incorporated within the Wik universe of moral possibilities. Furthermore, what people did - how they acted and with whom, their personal idiosyncrasies, their particular speech mannerisms - was seen as being an inextricable part of what they were in an existential sense. For instance, even amongst native *Wik Mungkan* speakers, there was a wide range of accents, speech rhythms, and varying lexical usages.²⁵ These variations however were represented as having been 'left' the different groups, along with land, sites, myths and rituals, totems and so forth, and thus were seen as an inherent part of people, not socially inculcated. I commonly heard younger people who spoke essentially only English and *Wik Mungkan*, and little or none of their nominal language claiming (in fights for instance) that they were '*Wik Ngathan*' or '*Wik Waya*' people, not *Mungkan*.

Such factors as socialization practices were given some causal status in determining what a person was like: "Too much that grandmother one bin spoil 'im," was said of a young teenage boy whose demands to be carried around on his grandmother's back were seen as being 'over mark', beyond acceptability. Adult men who had worked in the cattle or trochus shell industries saw themselves as having learned to work hard, to be self-sufficient and the value of money through the rigours of their involvement in wage-labour, and of course male initiation was seen partly as having taught young men to be less wilful and to listen to the authority of the older men. In this sense then, it could be seen that there was a recognition of the processes of the social formation of personality. Such factors, however, were not seen so much

21. It is interesting here to note the arguments of theorists, Bourdieu (1977a) and Giddens (1976) in particular, for the inclusion of time and of space in social theory.
22. *aak*; customs, culture: *ngant*; we (excl.): *yimanang*; like this, this way: *wunan*; literally lies down, equivalent here to the verb 'to be'.
23. The customs of those who have gone before: *woyn*; lit. path: *aak woyn*; customs, mores: *wuut mangk*; old people, ancestors.
24. It must be emphasized that Wik did not in any sense represent their own culture as a seamless whole, except perhaps in contradistinction to that of European Australians; Wik mythology too was replete with themes of differentiation, idiosyncrasy and wilfulness, conflict and violence. Von Sturmer (1973a) similarly argues that Aboriginal identity in the region was forged primarily as a solidary construct *vis-a-vis* that of European Australians.
25. See Sutton (1978:161) on 'idiolects' among *Wik Ngathan* speakers.

as creating or moulding an individual nature in the way that western thought envisages the socialization process, but rather as producing particular facets on an already existing person. This will be discussed in more detail later in this chapter. Essentially, people acted the way they did, in the view of Wik, because that was how they were, rather than because social circumstances were implicated in their very constitution as persons. Those from clan 17 for instance saw themselves, and were seen by others, as being particularly quick tempered fighters; their principal totems included *ngangk kul*, anger. Even physical characteristics common to members of particular clans were, to a degree, seen as flowing from transcendental rather than purely physical or genetic factors. Members of clan 21 for example, were said to be tall and slender (and the males to have long penises) because the principal mythological site in their estate was that of *yooman* the yamstick. Personal distinctiveness, then, was articulated by Wik in terms of elements which were themselves quintessentially the symbolic property of collectivities - such as descent groups, clans, and areal associations - and not as in western thought in terms of an individual psychological or spiritual uniqueness.

Assertions of *ngay-ngay*, as well as being statements of a self-perceived existential uniqueness, were also declarations of the right to act as the speaker saw fit, in keeping with this uniqueness, and free from attempts by others to control him or her. This rhetoric of autonomy was most certainly not the sole domain of adult men:

It was in the early 1980s. At the southern end of the old village, an elderly, emaciated woman lay huddled up in the foetal position on a tattered blanket. For some weeks she had been complaining of neglect, saying that her relations were not feeding her, and her condition had deteriorated to the extent that she had been intermittently hospitalized for feeding. She had stopped eating and drinking, and appeared close to death; the hospital had agreed at her own wish for her to stay out in the village so that she could die with her family near her. Sitting close together around her were her classificatory brothers and sisters and their offspring and grandchildren - mostly associated with clans from the Kendall River region from whence she came. Her cousin, an ordained minister, said a prayer and told her that she would soon be in the hands of God, finished with suffering. There was occasional ritual wailing. As with all occasions, whether profound or mundane, children boisterously played and fought on the fringes of the group. The sick woman's classificatory niece called out to her young daughter, "Be quiet, granny's sick!" "Fuck you," was the retort, "*ngay-ngaya*!" The child continued to play with her mates. A while later, when the group around her had become quite big, and the intermittent wailing and the singing of *Apalach* and *Puch* ritual had been going for some time, the old lady sat up, declared that she did not want to die, and demanded to be taken to the hospital to be fed. She ultimately lived for quite a considerable time longer.

"*Ngay-ngay*" here as elsewhere was a statement of self-defined distinctiveness, of difference and autonomy *vis-a-vis* those to whom the remark was directed. Its direct referent was the self, the speaker; implicitly but necessarily however *ngay-ngay* was always relational. While it was an assertion of autonomy, it also encompassed the second term of the self/other dichotomy, in an immediate sense those to whom it was addressed, but beyond that those in the known social world. It was not however a

statement about a unique individual organic nature, since this was not the subject of Wik discourse.

A resistance to control

Declarations of *ngay-ngay* were also rejections of attempts to control the speaker's courses of action. In contrast to many other Aboriginal peoples in Cape York and elsewhere in Australia, Wik have struck observers, including myself, as particularly forceful and outspoken. Chase, for instance, has referred to Wik as the "burgomasters of the Cape", and contrasted them to the people of Lockhart River on the east coast whom he saw as relatively stolid, without the assertive personal style of Wik, and as a result less willing to confront European authority in the contemporary situation.²⁶ This sense of assertive individualism in Wik internal social practices is reflected in the recent anthropological treatment of them - by John von Sturmer, Peter Sutton, and Diane Smith - in whose accounts individuals' abilities to mould events and institutions to further their own interests are given analytical primacy.²⁷

As I observed them, Wik practices were replete with instances of the refusal to countenance overt control by others. This was particularly noticeable at the level of rhetoric, and in this connection it is important to note here for discussion elsewhere in this thesis two important points: Firstly, that this is intimately related to the fundamental constituting role of language in social production and reproduction in what was still essentially a non-literate society, and secondly that their rhetoric of autonomy in a sense disguised from Wik their objective lack of it. In perceiving and rejecting only the level of direct control, Wik ultimately acceded to their domination by the wider society.

In the incident noted in the previous section, it is noteworthy that it was a child (and female at that) who was asserting her autonomy and uniqueness. To western observers such as myself, Wik children appeared strikingly independent and self-reliant; I shall be considering some of the factors implicated in the socialization for autonomy in the next section. Resistance by children to being controlled was often overt - "You not boss for us, you can't tell us what to do!" More commonly, perhaps, they avoided direct confrontation by simply ignoring requests or orders. Avoidance of the demands of those in authority, or more correctly of those who sought to dominate, rather than outright refusal or resistance was a widespread mechanism for maintaining autonomy, and not just for children:

It was common for card games to be played outside my small house in the village. There was a clear sandy space, water and toilets, and a strong spotlight for night games. I usually did not discourage them, as it gave me a privileged vantage point for my studies on gambling and other social processes that surround it. On this particular night, I was tired and jaded, and with drunks around the card game was especially noisy. I called out to the players, asking them to go elsewhere; they ignored me. After several futile requests, I turned out the spotlight. The players merely

26. A. K. Chase: *pers. comm.*

27. von Sturmer (1978); Sutton (1978); von Sturmer [Smith] (1980).

shifted a few metres, to where the light from the kitchen spilled out onto the ground, and continued, again completely ignoring me. I turned out all the lights in the house, and stood there in the dark, silent, angry, but hopeful. The game continued nonetheless, with the keen-eyed players reading the cards in the moonlight.

Avoiding the demands of others often took the form of merely shifting the location of one's activities, as when work gangs asked by their white supervisor to repair pot holes in the road simply moved their equipment elsewhere in the village to avoid the work, or when women evaded having to cook for their children by gambling well away from their homes. In fact, gambling was used by both men and women as a means of circumventing control by spouses and others who could potentially make demands on them.²⁸

Dennis was playing cards in a gambling school. It was well after midnight, and Dennis's small son John was sitting near his father. His mother Kathy had been trying unsuccessfully to get John to come home with her, as a vehicle to get his father to leave the game, and finally called out to him, "Come home, your father can camp with that mob!" Dennis reacted angrily to his spouse's attempts to stop his gambling, ran over to a nearby car, grabbed a shotgun and fired it twice into the air. The gamblers had scattered as he ran for the gun, but soon returned and continued playing. After firing the shots, Dennis went over to the east end of the village, where the Aboriginal police aides and the European police caught up with him. A fierce argument ensued, with Dennis saying that his wife should not have upset him by disturbing his game, where he had been causing no problems to anyone. His mother wept loudly, and his older sister also argued vehemently with the police, saying that while she did not take the side of her relations if they had done something wrong, Kathy had caused the problem by disturbing Dennis. He was eventually put in the cells by the white police. Meanwhile, Diane's spouse Fred (a European) on hearing the shots from their house had run over to the game, demanding that she come back from it and look after their small children. She called out that Fred was not a baby, and that she did not have to look after him. This aroused great mirth amongst the players. Diane continued playing, ignoring Fred.²⁹

This resistance to being controlled by others was often rendered by Wik in English as "nobody boss for me". "You can't tell me what to do, *ngath* nobody boss!"³⁰ Diane had said to Fred on another occasion when he complained about her leaving their children unattended while gambling. In this common statement, "nobody boss for me", 'boss' was pejorative; the attempt to control was seen as unwarranted and the assertion of a relation of authority inherent in that of 'boss'/subordinate rejected. In claiming that others were not 'bosses' for them, people would often add that they were 'bosses' for themselves: "*Ngay* boss *ngatharrakam*", or in Aboriginal cattle station English "Me boss mesel".³¹ Here, the assimilation of 'boss' to notions of control as well as of authority was explicit. There were elements of contradiction in the Wik concept of 'boss' however, for bosses were also nurturers; this in part related to ambiguity in the representation of hierarchy

28. See discussion of gambling in Chapter 3.

29. Fieldbook 8:113-5

30. *ngath/ngatharr*: 1st pers. sing. pronoun; 'to/for me'

itself, and in the relationship between autonomy and dependence.³² Furthermore, it was only certain forms of overt and direct control which were actively resisted by Wik, whose personal and political ideology tended not to recognize structural domination, such as that of women by men and of Wik as a whole by European Australia.

The inculcation of autonomy

In this section, I will examine certain of the processes in the production of a distinctive Wik ethos, or what Bourdieu calls a 'habitus', "cognitive and motivating structures" and sets of habituated practices and dispositions which are appropriated in the course of praxis, and which generate the practices which reproduce social forms.³³ These structures may be subjective (although not necessarily brought to the level of discourse) but they are not unique to any given individual. In Bourdieu's words:³⁴

In order to define the relations between class, habitus and the organic individuality which can never be entirely removed from sociological discourse ... the habitus could be considered as a subjective but not individual system of internalized structures, schemes of perception, conception, and action common to all members of the same group or class and constituting the precondition for all objectification and apperception...

This usage has parallels with what Myers in his analysis of the Pintupi has termed the 'cultural subject' which he distinguishes from the ultimately, perhaps, ineffable psychological self. Human subjects "come to know themselves only through practical activity ... (they) engage the world from a particular point of view." From this perspective;

Subjectivity is a representation of the social system from the point of view of an individual agent, but it is also the condition of that system. The two structures are dialectically defined, each "assuming" the other.³⁵

Self-directed activity

Children were omnipresent in Wik life, darting through the interstices of the social world - around the mourners in mortuary ceremonies, playing on the fringes of gambling schools, watching fights, riding in vehicles with kin, flocking round adults on pension and pay days to demand money. Little occurred in public life - or in much of private life either - without children being there. Noisy and disputatious,

31. Literally "I am boss for myself".

32. There is further discussion of the nature of bosses in Chapter 2 in relation to the roles of women as nurturers, and in Chapter 6.

33. Bourdieu (1977a:82-3)

34. *ibid*:86)

35. Myers (1986:105)

animated and energetic, ever observant of what was going on without seeming to be so, floods of children ebbed and flowed through Wik life, seemingly uncontrolled.

While they were often playing in the vicinity of adult activities such as gambling, children were largely self-directed, operating in a variety of groupings. Around outside domestic hearths in the village for instance, the centre of much Wik familial activity, it was very common to find close kin such as actual and close classificatory siblings and close cross cousins playing together. As with many other Wik collectivities, these could be referred to as 'peer groups' with the understanding that the idea of equal status inherent in the notion of 'peer' involved compatible kin group or clan origin rather than just similar age or experience. Thus a range of ages was usual, with often quite small infants being left in the care of older siblings. Teenage girls, less mobile than boys, played with younger children, looked after infant siblings or nephews or nieces, and in many family units did much of the domestic work such as cooking and washing.³⁶ These peer groups, as Hamilton noted for the *Anbarra* of north-central Arnhem land, played many of the functions that white Australians considered the preserve of parents. Their most important function however, in her view, lay in providing the forum for play.³⁷

Even when adults - mothers, grandparents, visitors to the hearth - were present, children played around the fringes of the domestic area in essentially autonomous games of - 'chasey', riding usually highly decrepit bicycles, mock fighting and teasing, and their own gambling games. If food such as damper or meat had been prepared, children helped themselves. If as commonly happened there was none and their demands were ignored or could not be met by the adults, they went elsewhere to other linked households if they were sufficiently hungry. Hamilton notes that it was the right of *Anbarra* children to demand, and to receive, food.³⁸ While Wik certainly conceded the right of children to demand food, they often appeared not to concede that to be given it. Increasing numbers of Wik children were anaemic and marginally malnourished.³⁹ It was the rare household which provided regular meals for its children however; they, like adults, ate when they could, soliciting food from kin when it was available, or money with which to buy food from the takeaways at the store or the beer canteen.⁴⁰ If the children's play was annoying adults, as when teasing resulted in crying or blows or when an older child was perceived as unfairly treating a younger one, adults would remonstrate and even abuse or swear at them, depending on age and relative kin status. It was comparatively rare however to see a child physically punished by adults for teasing,⁴¹ if the offending child found the

36. See also Hamilton (1981a:105ff) for similar comments regarding domestic chores of *Anbarra*, Arnhem land, girls, and von Sturmer [Smith] (1980:269) for *Kugu-Nganychara* Wik from the region to the south of the Kendall River.

37. Hamilton (*op.cit*:76)

38. *ibid*:108

39. Dr R. Streatfield, Aboriginal Health Program, Queensland Department of Health: *pers. comm.*

40. A considerable proportion of expenditure on takeaway items was directly by children (see Chapter 3).

41. see also Hamilton (*op.cit*:78)

shouting and abuse of the adults irksome, it simply went elsewhere, often after abusing the adults in return.

Much of Wik children's activity in Aurukun was not around the domestic sphere at all. Life for most Wik children was one of constant movement, from activity to activity and from group to group, often until well after midnight. As indicated previously, girls were in general less mobile than boys, and were expected to perform more of the domestic chores and to stay within more tightly defined kin groupings and activities. Those girls who did not do so, especially those who moved around at night, were the subject of disapprobation and were referred to as *yuup*. Literally "moving around, active" (e.g. of a baby crawling), the connotation of *yuup* here was that the girl was seeking sexual or other adventures rather than considering her responsibilities to her kin. Bands of boys, from 7 or 8 years in age to those in their early teens, moved around the township, looking for excitement and stimulation. These bands would draw from a wider range of kin than would those just discussed, being typically close kin or region-of-origin based. They were often comprised of classificatory (and less commonly actual) brothers who while they were from various households came from single or closely linked clans. Brothers, actual or classificatory, referred to one another as *bada*, and cousins as *kas* ('cous(in)') or *banychiy*.⁴² It was also common to find age and clan mates who were actual or classificatory uncles and nephews in these groups. Their activities varied seasonally, according to their location, and to intra-group dynamics; knocking mangoes in season, firing shanghais⁴³ at small birds and flying-foxes, mock-fighting between themselves and fighting with other bands, breaking the remaining glass and destroying the remnants of vehicles lying in the junk yard on the road to the landing.

Building sites were a particular target of bands of children, with windows and doors being smashed almost as soon as they had been installed in newly built houses:

Contractors were erecting a prefabricated house next door to an identical one just a few months old, which was in very poor repair. Living in it was a large household, comprised of an elderly couple, one of their daughters and sons-in-law and their children, and the children from another daughter who was living elsewhere. The grandparents complained constantly that they received no help from the children's parents in maintaining the household, claiming (not without justification) that they spent all their money on alcohol and gambling. Even from the view of other Wik, the children were quite out of their grandparents' control. As I watched on this particular day, and as the white contractors put up the walls and installed windows in the new, virtually identical house not 20 meters away, the children systematically smashed windows and stove in doors and walls in their own house. No adult made any attempt to stop them. A few days later the grandparents moved to the household of the other daughter, with the expressed aim of getting away from the pressure and chaos, but to no avail; the children all followed them over.

42. *bada*, pronounced 'budder' was brother (actual or classificatory), collapsing Wik *Mungkan* categories of older *wuny* and younger *pont* brothers. Equivalently, *banychiy*, pronounced 'bunji', collapsed both *kuuth* and *muuy* categories of cross cousins.

43. Australian vernacular for catapults; made from forked sticks and strips of rubber from bicycle and car tubes.

Attempts by adult Wik, or indeed European staff, to control children's behaviour were generally ignored or actively resisted. For instance, at the public dancing during house-openings,⁴⁴ adults would shout in exasperation at young children, trying in vain to prevent them running through the ranks of dancers in their games of chasing one another, or to keep them back from the tables of food. As another example, children would frequently play or sit close to where their parents or other close kin - mothers in particular - were gambling, despite demands that they leave in a futile attempt to forestall claims on winnings.

Repeated attempts over the years by the Council, the white police, teaching staff and (nominally) parents to get children to attend school met with ultimate failure. School attendances in 1987 were as low as 15% for students in the last year of high school in Aurukun (Year 10), and averaged around 30 percent for the school overall.⁴⁵ Many teachers found the problems of discipline intractable in the classrooms, particularly as the children reached their early teens. They complained of endemic and uncontrollable teasing, often escalating to fighting, and in some instances of violence directed against themselves, such as chairs being thrown by children when they attempted to restrain them.⁴⁶ Those nominally in authority, such as the Council and the police, and older kin, seemed powerless to prevent the sometimes nightly rampages by bands of children and teenagers, almost always boys. Cars and motor bikes and even large trucks were stolen from outside staff houses or from the Council security yard and driven at breakneck speed around the village. Staff houses were frequently broken into, often during holiday times or over weekends when they were not in Aurukun, and food and alcohol taken.⁴⁷ In a few instances, the houses of particularly unpopular staff were smeared with excrement and the places ransacked. The store was a frequent target, despite elaborate electronic security; great ingenuity was shown in circumventing this however, and on some occasions rifles were taken and fired into the air around the village.⁴⁸

Children were in general less destructive on the outstations or in the fluid dry season camps in the vicinity of Aurukun. Certainly, out bush on camping trips or on outstations, children were highly purposeful much of the time. On the numerous camping trips where I went out with Wik children, no sooner had camp been made than fishing lines were out, firewood gathered, camping gear laid out. They were rarely bored on these trips, lighting fires to boil tea, playing hide and seek (where the

44. House openings were major rituals in the cycles of mortuary ceremonies.

45. Source: Attendance Information summary, Aurukun State School, 1987. Samples taken in second, fifth and eighth weeks.

46. The whole question of the relations between the school and the village of course was a highly vexed one, which will not be dealt with here (but see von Sturmer 1973b). It should be pointed out though that not all teachers had these problems, and that there was an historical profile to them, with an exacerbation of them paralleling the secularization of all of Aurukun life from the late 1970s. Teachers who could establish rapport with their classes through being willing to form relationships outside of the classroom, and those who could through sheer force of character dominate and hold the attention of their students, did not have the same problems.

47. This was a phenomenon which only developed after the early 1980s. Prior to this time, houses and cars could be left unlocked and indeed open in Aurukun without any risk of theft or vandalism.

48. These practices are discussed further in Chapter 4.

place of hiding was known to the seeker, and would be used again and again).⁴⁹ Children would light their own small fires and cook little dampers on them, pretend to catch fish, play at fighting, cut small saplings with knives or run around the camp in the interminable games of 'chasey'. Diane von Sturmer saw *Kugu Nganychara* adults' authority as being reinforced in the bush environment, largely as a result of their superior knowledge of the land, its sites, and how to survive on it. While it was true as she noted that outstations were more peaceful and had less conflict than was the case in the Aurukun township, in my observation the degree of direct control of children by adults was still minimal; the relative peace was more the result of smaller and more compatible kin groupings and the comparatively restricted range of problematic activities and material and technological items, than any increase in parents' and other kin's control.⁵⁰

Acrimony and affection

Hamilton noted the low occurrence of hostile or aggressive behaviour within *Anbarra* children's peer groups.⁵¹ This was most certainly not the case for Wik children. It was true that the most obvious aggressive behaviour, such as serious fighting, occurred between individuals and groups of children from non-compatible clans. In Wik children's peer groups, particularly those which were not just teenage boys but included a range of ages and both sexes, there was certainly a great deal of laughter, co-operative play, and affection, care and responsibility directed towards young siblings.⁵²

Competition and acrimony however were constant undercurrents to co-operation and affection, existing in fact in dialectical relationship with them. Small babies were pinched or slapped by adults or older children on occasion until they screamed, in shows of affection tinged at times with barely suppressed hostility.⁵³ I observed young men in particular grabbing babies' cheeks between thumb and forefinger and pinching hard until the child screamed, while the mother looked on without comment. Older siblings and cousins smothered young babies with kisses on the face and mouth that at times almost prevented it from breathing. Adults would often pick up a baby or small child and shake it or pinch its cheek, while biting their own tongues in a gesture that was used in fights to indicate rage;⁵⁴ "*Ngay feel thepang nintang ey!*" - "I feel as if I want to hit you!"

49. This paralleled Wik children's questioning behaviour, where very often what was asked was known to both questioner and respondent; in both cases it was the familiar which was sought out and reincorporated, rather than the unfamiliar being embraced.

50. von Sturmer [Smith] (1980:151)

51. Hamilton (*op.cit*:76)

52. This was also true of much of women's life, an example of the 'quasi-female' status of Wik children - or of the quasi-child status of Wik women.

53. This practice was called 'cruelling' by Kuranda Aboriginal people (Finlayson 1991:238-9)1

54. See McKnight (1982:492). Hamilton has described similar behaviour for *Anbarra* Aboriginal people (*op.cit*:33,59).

Externalizing anger

From infancy, children - especially but certainly not uniquely boys - were encouraged to retaliate physically against perceived wrongs. The most frequent response to a child's crying by its carer, whether mother older sibling or other kin, was to ask "*Wee'anga?* - Who did it?" - and then to either encourage the child to hit another person present or for they themselves to pretend to hit someone else (or even an imaginary person):

A teenage boy asked his 4 year old brother, teased and frustrated to the point of screaming with rage by him and other children; "*Wee'anga? Wee'anga?*" - "Who did it?" The child said "*Nilama!*" - "She did!" - pointing at his mother, and was then encouraged to hit her.

In asking who was at fault, even when the child's distress or anger had no immediately apparent cause, the reasons for injury, loss, and anger were being personalized and externalized. The ultimate objects of socially inculcated suspicion and hostility were those outside one's close familial and kin network, and it was outsiders - other clans, whites - to whom blame was attributed in the case of such untoward events as sickness or death. The socialization to be willing and capable to defend one's interests however took place largely within one's close kin group, since for small children in particular this defined the limits of most social interaction. From the time they were only a few months old, children were told "*Piika! Piika!*" - "Hit (him/her)!" - in response to real or imagined wrongs inflicted by others. A lot of the games that children played within their peer groups involved either pretence or actual fighting:

Two young boys, the 4 year old just mentioned and his 8 year old actual cross cousin, were persuaded into mock fighting by older siblings, with parents watching on approvingly. Shouts of laughter were caused by the fighting styles of the two lads as they shaped up, rolled and tumbled in the sand, and knocked one another down. The unequal contest soon became more serious, and the younger one burst into tears. Kin watching thought the episode very funny, and remarked admiringly of the young boy's strength and precociousness for his age.

While in this particular case it could be argued that adults were more directly involved in the conscious inculcation of certain values, much of the learning and socialization process for Wik children took place within the relatively unhierarchical and informal peer groups. It was very rare indeed in my observations for there to be formal learning contexts established by Wik adults. Learning styles will be discussed in a later section. Of course, even in the absence of formal and explicit didactic instruction, adult activities created as it were a 'naturalized' and self-evident social agenda within which children operated. Children's play activities for instance were greatly influenced by events in the wider village world. After major fights it was common to see groups of children fighting. In some cases, they were from the clans or families who had been protagonists in the major fight, and were continuing the fight amongst themselves. Commonly however, major village fights would influence children's styles of play, so that even within peer groups children would be imitating what they had seen; small children for instance would mimic drunks, calling soft drinks 'beer' and staggering around or falling over 'drunk'. I would often see groups

of slightly older boys playing at fighting, sometimes in pairs, sometimes in melees - having fisticuffs, adopting highly stylized kung-fu poses, with modulated calls and yells, mimicking the big brawls that were such a feature of Aurukun life.

Many children had been involved in a large scale adult village fight the previous night - yelling abuse, and hurling sticks, cans and sand into the melee. A young teenage girl Lee and her classificatory cross cousin Mark were mock fighting outside my house the next morning, slapping one another, hurling sand, fighting with sticks, pulling hair, wrestling, and swearing at each other. It was all in fun, but there was a most direct relation between play and social reality.

Mark: "*Pu' uuyan we'arr ey!*" - "You big vagina!"

Lee: "*Kaa' witch, whiteman.ang ech nintang ey!*" - "You witch-nose, you've been fucked by a white man!"

Lee: (turning to her close classificatory sister of mixed racial descent)
"You white girl!"⁵⁵

Teasing; an endemic feature

Teasing in Aurukun was endemic, a basic part of a Wik child's life. It occurred within the family and the domestic unit, and within and between groups of more diverse composition, such as school classes, school camps or those forming around large gambling schools. It certainly served as a levelling mechanism; children who had been purchased expensive toys were often teased about how useless the toy was - "*Yuk ana way ey!*", "That thing's no good!" - or those who received special attention from teachers or other staff were called "whiteman crawlers". Equally however, there was teasing, if often good hearted, of those who had unfortunate personal attributes - speech impediments, a running nose, skin infections, dirty or torn clothes. In many instances, what might have started as ostensibly good hearted jesting - such as plays on the names of respective parents or joking comments on personal physical characteristics - led to actual fighting between children and in many cases to conflicts between parents. This was seen as a major problem by both Wik and by whites such as school teachers, and parents commonly rationalized the failure of their children to attend school in terms of "too much teasing". On the other hand, while parents, generally mothers, would on occasion get utterly exasperated with the teasing and fighting that resulted at least in part from each child looking after and defending itself and so forth, for a small child to be aggressive (*kulliy*) was positively valued. Furthermore, while women might abuse teasing children, along with older siblings they would often actively contribute to it as well.

It will be argued throughout this thesis that much of Wik personal interaction involved demanding of others - various services, food, tobacco or money for instance - and that this demanding was one example of the tension between personal autonomy and relatedness.⁵⁶ In demanding, one was asserting one's personal right (as a son, an aunt, a clansman) to a response from others, but one was also acknowledging, and thus substantiating through the flux of social actions and reactions, one's relationships

55. Thomson (1935) wrote a fine paper on 'Wik Mungkan' ritual and other swearing behaviour. Sutton (1978:216) also remarks on it for Cape Keerweer people, and Von Sturmer [Smith] (*op.cit*:316, footnotes 4 and 5) has commented briefly on *Kugu Nganychara* teasing and swearing. Wik swearing is further discussed in Chapter 4.

with them. Demanding was itself one case of a wider set of actions which could be termed 'testing behaviour'; little, even the most nominally basic of relationships, could be taken for granted in Wik social life, but needed to be constantly reaffirmed and recreated. Teasing needs to be viewed in this light, I suggest, as one particular form of testing behaviour. Schisms too, like relatedness, were subject to the constant flow of social process. The *Wik Mungkan* term for teasing is suggestive here. Giving food, *may aathan*, was basic to Wik sociality and the substantiation of relatedness. So too I suggest was teasing, *man aathan*. By taunting a person about their kin, particularly their father in this essentially patrilineal society, or about their country, or about their physical characteristics, one both called into question their essential identity and forced a re-evaluation of one's mutual relationship. This, I propose, was in part at least why teasing did not only take place between 'outsiders' but was also omnipresent within peer or close kin groups.

This teasing in the sense of referring to personal characteristics and country had also been a pre-eminent feature of the big *piithal* and *theechawam* singing duels of the past, rarely if ever performed in the Aurukun of the 1980s. Groups would collect at large camps specifically for these duels, with the protagonists singing the derisory songs often far into the night. While nominally innocuous, such songs often provoked anger and violent retaliation.⁵⁷ I recorded the following *theechawam*, dating from probably the 1930s, about an old man called Moses whose country had been near Cape Keerweer and included an important site called **Pooenpoenangk**.⁵⁸ Here, the physical characteristics of Moses were derided, and then the resources - game and vegetable foods - of his site alluded to. The references were not of themselves slighting, but the mere act of talking about them - *waa'an*, see discussion in Chapter 4 - was itself taken to be gratuitous personal reference.

Tha' Mowchach ee! kona thap ongk aa!
minhiy aa ngecha kuuwang aa
yukaniy waanych aa
minhiy aa ngecha kuuwang aa
yukaniy waanych aa
tha' Mowchach ee! kona thap ongk aa!
maya thaa' mang Pooenpoenangk aa
nangamiy moenychan aa
maya thaa' mang Pooenpoenangk aa
nangamiy moenychan aa
tha' Mowchach ee! kona thap ongk aa!
maya thaa' mang Pooenpoenangk aa
nangamiy moenychan aa
maya thaa' mang Pooenpoenangk aa
nangamiy
tow!
ow!

Lame Moses hey! You've long ear lobes!
 there's game to the west
 you hang it on a tree
 there's game to the west
 you hang it on a tree
 lame Moses eh! You've long ear lobes!
 so there's plenty of food at Pooenpoenangk,
 there's where you swim (for kuthal)
 so there's plenty of food at Pooenpoenangk,
 there's where you swim
 lame Moses eh! You've long ear lobes!
 so there's plenty of food at Pooenpoenangk,
 there's where you swim
 So there's plenty of food at Pooenpoenangk
 right there
 tow!
 ow!

Disputed 'possession'

A lot of the teasing between children concerned disputed 'possession' (in a particular sense on which I shall shortly elaborate) of material objects or of people.

56. To demand was *thaachan* in *Mungkan*, as in *Nila wukalak thaachan* - He is demanding money.
57. McKnight (1982:503-6) has written of *piithal* duels taking place in the Aurukun village in the early 1970s, and Sutton (1978:150, 218) refers to both *piithal* and *theechawam*. This latter is rendered in Kilham et al (1986) as *theecham*. The difference may be dialectical or even idiolectical.

This very often involved altercations over the control of such items as bicycles or the expensive toys purchased by kin from the store. There was frequent disputation over money between children, and - perhaps less commonly - over food. While children did share - e.g. a small child would often take a bite from an apple and pass the rest on to another - much more of the sharing was by demand. "*Bada, ngath aap thee*!" - "Brother, give me half!"⁵⁹ Other disputes were over less tangible items. In looking through a book of pictures for instance, children would claim objects; "*Ngath more inan truck*!" - "This truck is mine!" In journeys through the bush by truck, or on those by bus or train when travelling in the wider world, Wik children claimed as theirs objects of interest that they saw passing by: "*Bullock anan ngay mi'angana*!" - "I chose that bullock!" - or "*Bullock ngath weya*!" - "That bullock is mine!"⁶⁰ Battles often erupted over counter claims as to who saw the object first, and was thus entitled to claim it. A similar process occurred with claims concerning relations: "*Ngath more bada 'EP*!" - "'EP' is my brother!" (and by inference not that of the other) - said by one full sibling to another.⁶¹

A group of siblings, close classificatory brothers and sisters whose mothers were full sisters, were playing and mock fighting outside my house one evening. They were 'skiting for relations', that is claiming kin and attributing socially prestigious attributes to them. A teenage youth Mark and his older classificatory sister Fiona were arguing:

Fiona: "My father doesn't need *oparr*⁶² to fight!"

Mark: "My granny⁶³ has been overseas to New Guinea!"

Fiona: "My granny always keeps the place tidy, and cooks bread and cakes!"

Mark: "Don't skite for that! That's white man's food! White man keeps place tidy, we blackfellas throw things anywhere, we don't worry about that!"

I have previously argued that for Wik the sense of self, the *moi*, was ultimately subsumed by the social persona, the *personne*; one perceived oneself, and was perceived, not so much as an absolute moral entity but in terms of such forms as one's relations with other people. Furthermore, these connections - fundamentally but not exclusively those of kinship - extended to a known and personalized universe. This universe was not an objective 'other' with contingent connectedness to human society and with its own immutable processes and laws; rather it was one to which individuals were intimately connected through their very constitution as human beings and placement in social categories such as clans and kindreds, and in whose processes they could intervene through such means as the power of land-based ritual. Just as it was not conceivable to Wik that White Australians could conceive of themselves as distinct from their families, nor could it be conceived that material objects could have

58. Sutton, Martin et al (1990:417)

59. 'Half' for Wik (pron. by children *aap*) meant a portion of, not literally the fraction 1/2.

60. It is of significance here that the forms of the pronouns used here are referent rather than strictly possessive.

61. Adults used similar behaviour in fights, making denials or affirmations of certain kin connections which were objectively contrary to those normally publicly recognized.

62. *oparr* is 'bush medicine' i.e. magical substances to aid fighting, love, hunting, and also in curing sickness.

an existence outside of human society and sociality. Just as the landscape was humanized and assimilated by Wik to the social and moral universe,⁶⁴ so too were material objects by claiming 'possession' of them, even those objectively belonging to the outside world. Much of what might be termed the 'transcendent' aspects of Wik culture was not known of course to Wik children, but the practice of assimilating the external world to the social one, and categorizing it in terms of 'ownership', was just one instance of the maintenance of the form of deeply sedimented practices in vastly changed social circumstances and with radically changing, and often highly attenuated, content.

Children and independence

It has been previously mentioned that it was rare for formal contexts to be established in Wik social life for the transmission of values to children or young people. This contrasted with western education (represented in Aurukun by the state school and various youth and adult training programs) which is, as Bourdieu puts it "... clearly institutionalized as a specific, autonomous practice".⁶⁵ Furthermore, there is a relation of some tension in the wider Australian lay and political discourse between notions of the formal education system as having on the one hand a legitimate role confined to imparting purely technical and instrumental skills, and on the other a further duty to institute more basic aspects of personal social orientation.⁶⁶ In contrast, Wik pedagogy did not recognize these divisions, and with the exception perhaps of the male initiations of the past, rarely relied on formal contexts.⁶⁷ Nor was most knowledge, whether of a non-discursive and 'practical' nature or of an explicit and formal one, transmitted by specialists.

Rather, a Wik child's developing mastery of social skills and knowledge, and more basically their appropriation of fundamental cultural orientations, took place in Aurukun essentially (although not totally) within the peer groups discussed in a previous section. These fluid groupings of course did not exist in an autonomous and independent children's world. They drew upon, and contributed to, social contexts also defined through adult Wik (and ultimately wider) practices, which were generated in part by a Wik *ethos*, in the sense of ways of being and inclinations, regarding their children.

Infants and small children

Smaller children, *puk many*, while in no sense seen as being 'pre-social', were in the view of Wik by and large ignorant of the mores and understandings which

63. In fact, their common maternal grandmother.

64. see e.g. Sutton (1988b:19)

65. Bourdieu (1977a:87)

66. For instance, in the treatment of sexuality in Queensland schools; where some have argued for a broad and liberal treatment of the whole subject, including gender relations, the role of the school is seen by many traditionalists as the teaching of purely biological information, with the instilling of personal sexual morality as the prerogative of 'the family'.

67. The exception perhaps may have been male initiations, but even in terms of their supposedly 'educative' aspects, it was less a case of formal explicit knowledge being inculcated than values and orientations, a collective male *ethos*.

informed adult life. They, like older children or even adults who behaved in an inappropriate manner, were said to be 'sense *ke'anang*', to have no sense; here, 'sense' as Wik used it had the connotation of an informed sensibility as to appropriate social behaviour. I observed few active attempts by adults or older children to teach language as such to small children. The acquisition of language by a child in the course of its development was seen as unremarkable by Wik, although people would comment when a child started to say its first words; "*Nila wik kan-ngul thawaw ey!*" - "S/he is starting to speak!" What was actively inculcated, by adults and older children alike in their interactions with infants, was a familiarity with, and a sense of the importance of, the universe of appropriate kin. From when they were the tiniest of infants, children would be presented to kin and told the name and kinship relation, repetitively and in a special rising and falling intonation that was used for children: "*Bada Marty ee! Bada Marty ee!*"; "*Uncle James wey ee! Uncle James wey ee!*"⁶⁸ Responses of the infant - a nod of the head, a movement of the eyes, a smile⁶⁹ - would be eagerly seized upon by kin as evidence of their developing social abilities: "*Kan-ngul thiichan!*" - "S/he knows them now!" Interestingly, these same tones and repetitive forms were also used in gentle teasing of infants and small children about the 'possession' (in the sense used above) of kin and of material objects; "*Ngath wey ee! Ngath wey ee!*" - "It (or s/he) is mine!" - a part of the subtle processes of inculcation from the very earliest stages of consciousness, of the categorization and differentiation within a socialized world.

The mother did not have the exclusive and full-time care of and responsibility for her infant, even when it was still breast fed. In the normal course of events, infants and small children were always with people, rarely left alone; that a baby might be left crying by itself as a form of social conditioning or discipline was inconceivable for Wik. Apart from the mother, close kin such as elder siblings (particularly sisters, actual and classificatory), mother's sisters and female cousins, and mother's mother played major roles in looking after infants. Diane von Sturmer noted similarly that elder siblings were "preferred minders" for the *Kugu Nganychara*.⁷⁰ With a construction of hierarchy where relative classificatory age equated to structural authority, elder siblings were 'boss' and had the concomitant responsibility to 'look after' younger ones.⁷¹ Older brothers in particular acted occasionally as disciplinarians on behalf of their mothers, including for younger sisters before they reached puberty. However, there was no consistent application of discipline, which tended to be dependent more on particular momentary features of adult-child interaction - such as exasperation on the part of a parent - than on a philosophy of character moulding through control and restriction.⁷² While both boys and girls carried younger children around, played with them, and to a degree protected them from possible harm, it was the latter who were mainly involved in their physical nurturing and who performed the tasks appropriate to their sex such as

68. *wey*; particle indicating friendliness, good intentions

69. see Hamilton (1981a:163) for a discussion of the smiling response amongst *Anbarra* infants, and its connection with feeding and with sociability.

70. von Sturmer [Smith] (1980:277-338)

71. see Chapter 2. See also Myers (1986), von Sturmer [Smith] (*op.cit*:339).

72. See also Hamilton (1981a:80) of *Anbarra* people

preparing food, changing napkins, and washing clothes for them.⁷³ Girls in Wik society did not just work for men, but for other, structurally dominant, women too.

Older children

Once the Wik child was past the early stages of life where it was solely breast fed, totally dependent on others for physical care and feeding, and was becoming increasingly mobile, it typically spent much of its time with other children rather than with its mother or other adults. This differed somewhat from Hamilton's observations of *Anbarra* children, who up until the age of 18 months or so were rarely allowed to venture more than a few metres from their mothers. In her view, this led in conjunction with the relatively impoverished material camp environment to somewhat passive and dependent children in this age range.⁷⁴ Young Wik children appeared by contrast to be independent and exploratory from a very early age, certainly in comparison with the children of white staff in Aurukun. Increasingly, the majority of their time would be spent with other children in the peer groups referred to previously, in play activities organized by children themselves. Their access to care and resources such as food depended for most children more on their own initiative and adeptness than on active and interventionist care by parents or other kin. In most households, the feeding of children was not an activity planned in advance around regular mealtimes, but was done - if at all - in response to their demands (see previous section). In fact, by the time they were 4 or 5 years old, the interaction between children and adult kin in Aurukun was characterized less by the close physical closeness and affection of earlier childhood years than by demanding and testing behaviour on the part of the children - for food, for money to buy takeaway food or to gamble, for toys from the store. The reciprocal behaviour of adults towards these older children still continued to be characterized by a degree of indulgence, at least in the years before puberty, but was tempered at times with exasperation. While it was unusual for demands for food to be directly refused by kin, it was common for them to be ignored or deflected; "*Ngay wey may ya'am wey a! Kan nint aunty.ant iiya!*" - "I am sorry, I have no food. Try going to your aunt's!"

Indulgence

Direct physical punishment (as opposed to neglect or even abuse) was rare in Aurukun. I did on some occasions observe parents and other kin, particularly maternal uncles (MB+, *muk*, and even MB-, *kaal*) and older brothers physically punishing children. Girls in their early teens in particular were sometimes given quite severe beatings after accusations of sexual adventures. In previous times of course when female sexuality, a prime form of 'symbolic capital', was more directly controlled by the kin group, such allegations reflected on the corporate interests of the group as a whole. The accusations, and the large-scale fights that frequently resulted from them in the contemporary situation, were further examples of the processes whereby practices were being reproduced in quite radically different objective circumstances.⁷⁵ However, while adults often complained about some of the more

73. See also von Sturmer [Smith] (1980:339)

74. Hamilton (*op.cit*:56,142-3)

75. To put it another way, sexual allegations aroused keen interest in the kin of those involved, but female sexuality was not the subject of corporate material and symbolic interests that it had been in the past.

capricious and wilful behaviour of younger children that directly impinged on them, it was relatively rare that these criticisms resulted in punishment or curtailment of the activity. Wilfulness was expected of children, they had not yet learned 'sense' and so their behaviour was generally excused on the grounds of their ignorance.⁷⁶

Carol was a small girl of 4 years of age, being reared in the household of her paternal grandfather and his spouse, Vicky. Her father and mother were heavy drinkers, and until the grandparents had taken over her care after the intervention of State welfare authorities, she had been malnourished and sickly. Carol and her grandmother, whom she often called 'mama', were among a party mapping sites in Vicky's clan country with me. Vicky was constantly telling her grandchild off, complaining, at times shouting out in exasperation, but never actually stopping her from doing what she wanted. Quite often when told off, or frustrated in some way, Carol would hit her grandmother in the face or mouth, or threaten her with a knife. She also swore frequently at her; "*Mama echin ey!*" - "Mother fucker!" Despite the obvious exasperation, the child was not punished.⁷⁷

Tantrums and other signs of wilfulness were demonstrated by both boys and girls. Boys, however, were generally more successful in having their demands met than were girls. This was not least because it was female kin who provided much of the sustenance for children. While those fathers who were active in their small children's upbringing were indulgent towards their sons, relations with them often became restrained and competitive as the boy matured.⁷⁸ This was most noticeable in outstation or bush environments, where the options open to a maturing young man to express an independent male identity were more circumscribed and more easily monopolized by their fathers and older brothers. Women on the other hand showed great forbearance towards and indulgence of their sons and grandsons:⁷⁹

Les was a boy of 11 or 12 years of age. He and his younger siblings and parallel cousins were being reared by their maternal grandparents; his own parents had separated, and his mother and her new spouse had moved out from the home and played little part in active care of the children. Les tyrannized his grandmother, repeatedly demanding to be fed by hand, threatening to hit his grandmother if she did not do what he told her to, forcing her to carry him around on her back, grumbling and complaining as she did so. There had been an argument in the household over who was to get firewood. Les threw a tantrum, kicked his younger sister and his grandmother, and then grabbed an empty flour drum and threw it repeatedly at the walls and doors of the house, breaking glass and fibro-cement. He then stalked off with the declared intention of getting a gun. His uncle (MZ-H) called out to kin to hide the shotgun; apart from this, and despite the evident anger on the part of some kin, no attempt was made to control Les or prevent him damaging the house.

76. Similar conceptions have been noted by Hamilton (*op.cit*:113) of Anbarra and von Sturmer [Smith] (1980:269) of Kugu Nganychara.

77. See Hamilton (*op.cit*:100) for similar observations

78. See also von Sturmer [Smith] (*op.cit*:271), J. von Sturmer (1978:409)

79. This is further discussed in Chapter 2, where I consider the 'unwitting complicity' of women in their own domination by men.

The reproduction of 'practical knowledge'

I turn now to some brief comments on the mode of the reproduction of practical knowledge amongst Wik. Diane von Sturmer, working with *Kugu Nganychara* people in an outstation bush setting to the south of Aurukun in late 1978, saw parents in particular as being primary in both nurturance of their children and in the explicit transmission to them of sex-specific knowledge and skills,⁸⁰ although other kin were also involved.⁸¹ The father and those in his patriline had the responsibility to pass on patrilineally situated knowledge, although mothers did play some part in transmitting it.⁸² There appeared from her account to be a high degree of congruence between those kin held responsible for nurturing a child through the various stages of life (including while it was still in the womb) and those who passed on knowledge and skills to it later on.⁸³

I myself observed instances of similar processes occurring in outstation settings, although they were the exception rather than the rule and rarely as formalized as von Sturmer recorded. It most certainly could be argued that in the bush setting, there were contexts established in which certain practices and forms of knowledge and skills were seen to be appropriate and relevant in ways that were not the case in the township. As I have noted, in this latter environment the formal and explicit transmission of information or skills was minimal. Even in the bush setting however, it would be a misapprehension in my view to argue that the practical and non-discursive forms of knowledge implicated in all practices, including the most mundane, were transmitted mainly through formal exegesis; the contrary I suggest was the case for Wik. Hamilton recorded processes among the Arnhem Land *Anbarra* which appeared to closely parallel those amongst Wik. She noted:

During childhood, then, *Anbarra* children are never systematically exposed to formal models, the prescriptions and proscriptions and symbolic connections which structure the relationship between people and environment.⁸⁴

To illustrate, the respective practices undertaken by sisters and brothers in the care of younger siblings have been referred to above. These were rarely the product of the conscious adoption of adult 'roles' by children, nor from my observations did they result because they had been instructed by their parents or others in explicit rules governing the sexual division of labour. It was in fact transgressions of the limits of appropriate practices that tended on the whole to attract explicit comment, from adults as well as from peers. Rather, a sense of the appropriateness of practices, of what it meant to be male or female, had been appropriated and internalized through praxis from the earliest formation of a consciousness of self. In Bourdieu's words:⁸⁵

80. von Sturmer [Smith] (*op.cit*:269ff)

81. e.g. MM,MB+,MZ,FF,FM,FZ,FB+,FB-. See also von Sturmer [Smith] (*op.cit*:322)

82. *ibid*:273-4

83. *ibid*:i

84. Hamilton (1981a:153)

85. Bourdieu (1977a:87)

(Where) it is the whole group and a whole symbolically structured environment, without specialized agents or specific moments, which exerts an anonymous, pervasive pedagogic action, the essential part of the *modus operandi* which defines practical mastery is transmitted in practice, in its practical state, without attaining the level of discourse. The child imitates not models but other people's actions.

An equalitarian ethos

I have discussed previously the rhetoric of *ngay-ngay*, an encapsulation of the expression of autonomy and personal uniqueness. Uniqueness however was framed for Wik in terms of, and in fact existed only in dialectical relationship with, relatedness. A particular concern of Wik, expressed throughout social life, was with could be glossed as 'equality'. Much has been written about this notion in hunter-gatherer groups; Woodburn for instance has talked of an 'aggressive egalitarianism' amongst Hadza of Tanzania.⁸⁶ 'Equality' and 'egalitarianism' however are somewhat problematic analytic concepts, precisely because they are bound so intimately to western philosophical notions of the individual as a phenomenon *sui generis*, and of the intrinsic worth in an ethical and metaphysical sense of each individual. The unexplicated use of such terms may, as in Woodburn's analysis, compromise the elucidation of another culture. For Wik, and particularly for Wik men, I would argue that an ethos that has been glossed in other hunter-gatherer groups as 'equality' or 'egalitarianism' flowed not from a generally articulated rights model of humanity that saw all men as inherently equal, but rather from one articulated by individuals that asserted that they were equal to all others.

Equality and equivalence

In much of Wik social life, there was indeed evident a powerful ethos of equivalence and balance. With the appropriation of a subjective sense of self in terms of publicly available symbols rather than privately generated ones, the perceived status of other people impinged directly upon one's own, and attempts by others to gain prestige, to control resources and so forth, were actively resisted or subverted. From earliest childhood, Wik learned to watchfully monitor and appraise the flows of material and symbolic items towards themselves in comparison with those to others around them. Perceived imbalances in the allocation of resources to them - toys, lollies, money, rides in vehicles, attention and affection from kin - caused much of the demanding, teasing and fighting that I observed amongst Wik children, and also adults. There was for instance all-pervasive gossiping about and disparagement of those who had prestigious jobs within the European work system, or attempted to exert authority through their positions in contemporary structures such as the Council,

86. Woodburn (1981)

or in such Aboriginal-run work enterprises as Outstation cattle mustering. As Wik saw it, people should be *picham karrp*, literally 'shoulders together', one not higher than the other. In exchanges of material and of symbolic goods - of money, of food, of sisters between two men - the transactions, over time, should be equivalent, *ma' keelam*, or in the Torres Strait creole word used by many, *sama-sama*.⁸⁷ An imbalance in the transaction was interpreted as one in the nature of the relationship and impinged directly in how the persons concerned perceived themselves.

'Equality' for Wik then, was not an elaborated discourse abstracted from mundane practice on the moral or existential equivalence of individuals but was realized only through the pragmatic and contextual constitution of equivalent status of given individuals in their joint practices. Wik 'egalitarianism' consisted of this process of the realization of equivalence through social transactions being represented as comparable - even in fact when they were not. This portrayal contrasts with much lay discourse on Aboriginal Australian and other 'hunter-gatherer' societies, which stresses their co-operative nature, the lack of competition, and the presence of a strong sharing and generosity ethic. This discourse, based more on Rousseauian notions of pre-industrial peoples than on detailed observations of actual social practices, has in turn been incorporated into wider contemporary Aboriginal political rhetoric and indeed into public expressions by Aboriginal people, including Wik, of what is distinctively Aboriginal.

Jealousy

A perceived imbalance in socially legitimate transactions and statuses aroused strong feelings amongst Wik, adults and children alike. These feelings manifested themselves in such practices as teasing and fighting amongst children, and with adults gossip and disparagement leading frequently to outright confrontation and violence. Wik used the English word 'jealousy'⁸⁸ to represent these feelings. As in conventional English, 'jealousy' was connected intimately, but not exclusively, to sexual possessiveness, tellingly deeply embedded in the individual psyche. Some clues to the dimensions of Wik concepts of 'jealousy' can be gained by looking at the *Wik Mungkan* terms covered under their gloss of 'jealousy'.

A person who was sexually possessive was *mee'-aak-way* or *aak-pik-way*:⁸⁹ "*Nila pam aak-pik-way, wanych nungantamak ke' thaweyna!*" - "He is liable to take offence if they so much as talk to his spouse!" Such a person watched his or her spouse jealously and possessively - *mee' wunan nungant*; in Wik English usage they were 'jealousing'.⁹⁰ A violently possessive man, one who regularly bashed his spouse in jealous rages, was *ma' ngook*. 'Jealousy' also could connote the coveting, *mee' wakan*, of an object held or claimed by another. Children for instance would be told off if they attempted to take food from a younger sibling: "*May ana nungant! Ke' mee' wakana!*" - "That is his food! Don't covet it!" A person, particularly a

87. Myers (1986:170) notes a similar emphasis on balance amongst Pintupi western desert people.

88. Pronounced by some jokingly as *saalas*, mocking Torres Strait creole

89. *mee'*: eye, *aak-way* or *aak-pik-way*: apt to take offence, touchy

child, who was openly covetous was *mee' wakan aw*.⁹¹ Wik were also 'jealous' of the status of others. While 'dressing up', adorning oneself with a red head band or a bright shirt or dress, or being painted up for a ritual, could arouse admiration, those who went beyond the unspoken but nevertheless understood limits were disparaged: "*Nila ngeenak ach-umpan nungantakam ee'!*" - "Why on earth should he make himself flash!" People who attempted to exert non-legitimate authority were said to be 'acting big'. They were *meek*, perceived to be claiming superior status to others. In its unloaded sense, *meek* could just mean an unspecified 'someone'; "*Wanta! Yuk meekantam ey'!*" - "Leave that thing, it belongs to someone!" Wik also however rendered *meek* in English as 'some kind of a person', meaning someone who stood out, who was not abiding by the mostly unspoken but powerful ethos of being level in status, *picham karrp* (see previously). "*Ninta meek ya'a!*" - "You're not anybody special!"

'Jealousy' was also occasioned through the possession by others of material and symbolic resources, and was talked about in terms of *weekan*. *Weekan* related quintessentially to disputes; it basically meant to assert control or possession of, or connection with something or someone. Thus, *kampan weekan* was to claim relations as one's own, especially in a dispute; *aak weekan* was to claim possession of country (or e.g. of a house in the settlement); and *yuk weekan* was to claim the right to have possession of an object, tangible or intangible.⁹² The range of this term is significant. A person's land and sites, their relatedness to kin, and the flows of material and symbolic objects from and to them were, in my argument, central both in the process of the appropriation of a subjective sense of self and in the constitution of a social identity. In *weekan* then, claiming 'possession' of and connectedness with sites or objects or kin, a person was explicitly defining and expressing their autonomy, but doing so through forms which bound them inextricably to the social.⁹³

Pressure and sharing

Wik were different from Whites, they told me, because Whites kept things for themselves and did not share. Wik based their observations in part on staff in Aurukun who lived in better houses than they did, who in many cases owned four wheel drive vehicles and boats, who ordered their food in bulk from Cairns rather than buying it in the store, and who (Wik felt) were very reluctant to share these resources with others. Wik contrasted these characteristics of Whites unfavourably with their own, represented in terms of a generalized willingness to share.⁹⁴ "What I

90. *wunan*: to lie; *nungant*: to/for him (referent case)

91. In one of its basic meanings in *Wik Mungkan*, *aw* was a site of ritual or mythological power. It could also mean 'much' or 'plentiful'; thus *may mungkan aw* was a place where people gorged themselves.

92. *kampan*: relations, family; *aak*: site, place, land etc; *yuk*: object (material or intangible)

93. See Myers' (1986) extended discussion of Pintupi autonomy realized through status.

94. This representation by Aboriginal people more generally of their distinctiveness in terms of a claimed ethos of generosity and sharing, was a common phenomenon. For example, in the film *We Come From the Land*, made by the Jerringa and Wreck Bay Aboriginal communities in early 1989, the Aboriginal generosity and sharing ethic and the claimed willingness of Jervis Bay Aboriginal people to share access to their land with ordinary White Australians, is made a

have, I must share", said a woman who already had a dozen children to care for, in explaining to me why she provided food for a number of younger single kinsmen. "If there is food left over, then I will call over the young fellas and give them a feed". In a similar vein, a senior Cape Keerweer man told me; "Boy, what I got I must share it". Certainly, while the sharing between Wik was not generalized at all, but largely took place through ego-centred kin networks within broader groupings such as regional associations, and while one does not have to argue that there was not self-interest and strategizing in the giving, it was important to recognize that 'sharing' for Wik was more than simply a cultural rationalization. Wik were often extraordinarily generous.⁹⁵

Nonetheless, much of social transaction among Wik (including of material resources) arose as the result of demanding rather than of sharing.⁹⁶ Wik explicitly recognized the role of pressure in the sharing of resources, and would on occasion use elaborate strategies to attempt to avoid it. For instance, in the late 1970s one young man kept two savings passbooks, one with a small balance in it for public consumption (so to speak), the other where he kept his substantial savings. Often, White staff (or indeed myself) would be co-opted into holding cartons of beer, or large sums of money won at gambling, to circumvent pressure from relations. These strategies were almost never successful in the longer term however. "Too much pressure!" Wik often complained to me, and I recorded many instances such as people gambling back large winnings as the only means of avoiding the pressure to share them. In talking in *Wik Mungkan* of people pressuring someone to give money, or perhaps to fight, the word *thaachan* was used; "*Ke' thaachan ngayang, wukal.aka!*" - "Don't force me to give you money!" *Thaachan* had the connotation of forcing someone to undertake an action against their will, of putting someone in a position where they can not freely act. The powerful role of gossip about those who had resources and were perceived as not sharing them was recognized; "Too much *thaw-thawantan!* - they have too much to say!", people would complain. What was referred to by Wik in English as 'teasing' was not just used of the omnipresent aggravation, ridicule, and competition amongst children but also of the derision and sarcasm used against someone not conforming to established norms. Thus a person who held on to material resources was said to be *meek*, self important and seeking status - like a White man. Wik saw this pressure as being motivated by 'jealousy', with others coveting, *weekan*, and seeking a share in the resources. As I discuss in Chapter 3, material accumulation itself posed major dilemmas for Wik. If jealousy was occasioned by others' attempted accumulation of material capital, its counterpart

central part of their campaign against the establishment of a naval base there. Keefe (1988) discusses the claimed ethic of "caring and sharing", along with such other qualities as a spiritual connection with the land, as essential elements of Aboriginal discourse defining the commonalities of culture inherited by all people of Aboriginal descent.

95. I was particularly touched on one occasion when I travelled by helicopter to an outstation the day after a cyclone had devastated it, to take down emergency relief supplies of food. The thirty or so Wik living there had spent the night clutching the stumps of trees in a nearby patch of scrub after their sheds had been blown down, and were wet, cold and bedraggled. However, upon hearing that I was due to leave Aurukun for a couple of months holidays the following day, they collected such money as they could find and presented it to me to help me survive in the outside world.

96. Peterson (n.d.) has argued that it is demanding rather than sharing behaviour which underlies much of social transaction in Aboriginal societies.

was the discovery by the accumulator that a surplus brought intolerable demands to share.⁹⁷

Personal autonomy could be, and was, realized by Wik through the control of material and intangible resources, but relatedness itself - and indeed its emotional dimensions - were substantiated for Wik and perceived in terms of flows of these resources. The concepts of love, nurturance, respect, of obligation, had their approximate counterparts in *Wik Mungkan* linguistic terms, but it was in the sharing and exchange of material items - money, alcohol, food, consumer goods - that they were manifested.⁹⁸ Like so much of social relations this was encoded in the formal structures of kinship and its associated obligation correlates; these structures were realized in the interactions and the flows of goods and of services between kin and at the same time were reproduced by them. Conversely, a refusal by someone to share with oneself, or a perceived inadequate share, was a denial of relatedness, of one's rights and interests in that relatedness, and a denial of a set of norms and values understood and represented as axiomatic. Rather than the flows then being seen as mediating the dialectic between autonomy and relatedness for Wik, it would be more accurate to see such practices in terms of an essentially unresolved tension which provided their social dynamic. Thus, Wik demanding behaviour could not be explained simply as arising from direct and analytically unproblematic individual desires for given resources; people did not simply ask for food because of hunger, for example.⁹⁹ If demanding of others was exercising a form of autonomy, fundamental to the symbolic load carried by these material items was their implication in the production and reproduction of the social world, in part through their very constituting of relatedness. In making demands of others, Wik were explicitly seeking to assert and test their place within the social world, and to impose an order on it where the potential of possessing these goods to create and sustain hierarchy was denied. I asked a middle aged male Wik friend why people pestered one another for things. His answer was significant in terms of this discussion:

It's maybe a habit, or a relationship. They find out who hands out, who is *thayan* (hard). *Pam thayan, ke' thee'iya* (A hard man most likely does not give). You have to be tough from the start, not *ma'-micham* (a ready and generous giver). *Pam ninta ma'-micham, thana kaangk uweyn nungkarram* (If you are a generous person, they will love to get things from you).

When I then asked him why people were 'jealous' of those who had good jobs or resources gained through the European-controlled system, he answered:

I don't know, maybe want everyone to be same, not one above them.¹⁰⁰

97. a point made to me by Peter Sutton (*pers. comm.*).

98. Tellingly, to take just one example, the *Wik Mungkan* verb for like, 'love', was *kaangk*. Someone who shared their food and resources without calculation was *kaangkiy*.

99. Peterson (n.d.) and Sutton (*pers. comm.* to Peterson regarding this paper).

100. Gerrard (1989) has presented an insightful analysis on this theme.

Rights in people

In previous sections, it has been suggested that Wik social forms were produced and reproduced in an immediate and direct fashion, and that orthodoxy itself was consequently subject to a process of negotiation.¹⁰¹ Similarly, absolute notions of 'good' and 'evil' such as those of the Judaeo-Christian tradition did not exist for Wik. A person was neither inherently good nor bad; assessments of them were fluid, depending on who was making them, and varied through time according to a strong bias towards the evaluation of their practices in the present. That is, 'good' and 'bad' were established contextually and pragmatically through social practices, and thus 'moral' was essentially equivalent to 'social'. This was equally true of Wik conceptions of individual rights. Consistent with my argument that for Wik, the *moi* as a moral entity had been ultimately subsumed by the social being of the *personne*, the rights of the individual were not defined philosophically in terms of just entitlements of all human beings as unique and valued entities - to food, to shelter, to care and so forth as in the United Nations Declaration of Human Rights. This kind of construction is bound up both with conceptions of individuals as in some sense transcendent beings, and with specific political and social forms, in particular those of the modern nation state. For Wik on the contrary, people did not have inherent rights as unique individuals. Individuals could not be conceived of outside the social framework of relatedness, and neither could their rights. Rather than people having natural rights, specific others had 'rights' in and over them. Again, these 'rights' were pragmatic and contextualized, realized through social practices.

In the vignette of the elderly dying woman presented previously (see page 15), it can be seen clearly that the behavioural correlates of relatedness, the other pole of the dialectic, could not always be taken for granted, but often had to be actively demanded. The woman herself was socially peripheral, and from a regional grouping which had been historically marginal in the Aurukun settlement politics from the earliest days of the Mission. She controlled few resources, symbolic or material, apart from her fortnightly pension, and had no offspring or spouse. In being close to death, however, she became the object of ritual and political interests of a wider network of kin and ritual cult members than that of her immediate household. Her successful demands for the attention of others were based not on their recognition of her rights to food, care and consideration as an individual, or even on their feeling 'sorry' for her, but on their interests in her illness and potential death as forms of corporate ritual property.

Similarly, the differing constructions of 'rights' by white bureaucrats (and others such as myself) and by Wik caused much conflict and misunderstanding in the matter of children's welfare. There was a rising incidence of marginal nutrition, measured through indices such as stunted growth, wasting, and anaemia. Child abuse of various forms (virtually unknown only a few years previously) occurred with increasing frequency. The intervention of bureaucratic organizations, such as the Queensland Family Services Department, in the cases of children considered 'at risk' was premised ultimately on the basis of inalienable rights of the child. Admittedly, it

101. See also Sutton (1978:232-3; *passim*)

was recognized by sympathetic field officers that rights for Wik children included those to the security of a social universe based on kin, even if not those of the immediate nuclear family unit. When, however, all avenues appeared to have been exhausted for particular children and it seemed that children were going to be removed and institutionalized for a period, kin reacted extremely angrily; "No white bastard going to take my grandkid away!" one woman angrily declaimed as she stormed away from confronting the welfare officer. Great anger was also aroused at the time of the Aurukun hearings of the Royal Commission into Aboriginal deaths in custody, when the subjects of children's poor health, low attendance at school and gambling were brought out at the hearings and reported in the national press. In such instances, Wik never discussed the issues in terms of rights of their children to good health, diet, education and so forth. What aroused their anger was the perceived infringement of their collective 'rights' and interests in the good name of Aurukun *vis-a-vis* the outside world, and in their children, both forms of symbolic capital, maintained in this case by a collective form of bad faith. The only times that I heard Wik talking in terms of rights of people, tellingly, were in defining themselves in contradistinction to Whites and in making demands of them - a contingent and contextual sense of 'right' constructed in this instance *vis-a-vis* the wider society rather than an absolute one.

Conclusion

I have suggested in this chapter that for Wik both the conceptualization of a sense of self, the *moi*, and the constitution of the social identity, the *personne*, were in terms of eminently social material and symbolic forms - relatedness to kin, affiliations to land and sites on it and with language or dialect, flows of material and intangible goods, and so forth. There had been in the past, in my contention, a high degree of correlation between the two notions of self; the cultural artifacts available to the individual and private self for reflection corresponded to those through which his or her social identity were constituted. It is in the light of this construction of the self, then, that I have sought to explain the Wik preoccupation with relative status, with the relative flows of material and non-material capital between people, and with balance and equivalence in social life. Such balance as was achieved however, was always inherently unstable, oscillating between the poles of autonomy on the one hand and connectedness on the other.

I have also examined some of the mechanisms through which Wik were constituted as social persons. I have discussed the inculcation of an ethos of independence and self-reliance, which I have argued existed in a state of unresolved tension with forms of relatedness. Wik children grew to maturity in an environment with little overt transmission of formal knowledge by adults. This is why I have in general avoided the use of the term 'socialization', which would imply a more formal and explicit instillation of ethos than was the case for Wik. Most of their activities were self-directed, and took place in peer groups with a minimum of coercive, disciplinary or other formal intervention from adults. I have suggested that there had

been a high degree of correspondence between the internalized and subjective self on the one hand and the externally perceived social identity on the other. Thus, while there has been a concentration in my analysis on the individual, it has been in a particular sense; that of the culturally constituted and constituting agent.

In defining some of the parameters of the appropriation of habitus or as I have termed it, ethos, I have concentrated to some extent on Wik children. Here, I have been mindful of what Bourdieu has termed the "hysteresis of habitus". The "practical logic" involved in the generation of social practices, Bourdieu argues, differs from scientific logic in that while the latter gives weight to the most recent calculations, "practical estimates give disproportionate weight to early experiences".¹⁰² While the ethos instilled as a child is itself subject to changes over the course of an individual life history through the flux of objective circumstances, those dispositions appropriated in early childhood form the basis on which subsequent experience is evaluated, and through the principle of the recursive implication of habitus in practices, there is a tendency for changes in it to lag behind those in the objective circumstances. These had dramatically changed for Wik from pre-contact times, and from the late Mission period which lasted up until the establishment of local government in 1978. This year marked the beginning of a massive expansion in the scale of bureaucratic intervention in Aurukún in the guise of 'self-determination, with an ever increasing complexity and scale of administrative requirements, infrastructure, white staff presence, and so forth. Yet, as I shall argue through the following chapters, despite these changes a distinctively Wik way of life continued, albeit with major transformations.

102. Bourdieu (1977a:78)

Chapter 2

Engendering Domination

... Josephine's mother had died, suffering heart failure after being kicked by her husband, and her spirit had been despatched to her clan spirit sending centre three days before (the night the big fight had erupted. In the course of this fight) ... children and women were picking up sand, bottles, cans and throwing them at the fighters ... Some female kin of men who were not main protagonists - those who were "gammon fighting" because they were drunk but had no direct interests involved - would move into the central mass and try to drag them out from it. Other women however, such as Mary and Dulcie, goaded their men on and taunted their opponents, doing the rage dance.

Accounts by older Wik indicated that violence by men against women, including lethal violence such as that in the incident above, had been a phenomenon in the past. Certainly, Aurukun in the latter 1980s and in the 1990s was marked by endemic conflict and very high levels of violence, and much of that violence was perpetrated against women. Yet, to characterize gender-based domination even in contemporary Aurukun solely in terms of the ability of men to coerce women through superior force would be simplistic. Except in the most extreme circumstances, power is never unilaterally exerted; its exercise is always, in some fashion, reciprocated.¹ Furthermore, the meanings rendered to social practices by Wik men and by women - including violence - were always to some extent at least conjoint.²

However, the women who were assisting their male kin in the fight above, and indeed those who were inciting them to further violence, ultimately were contributing to the reproduction of social forms in which they were the subordinates. In exploration of this theme, I initially examine aspects of gender differentiation which were realized and played out in ritual. I then move to a discussion of the nature of intergender sociality and of certain pervasive themes in gender relations. I then consider significant changes in the nature of relations between Wik men and women in contemporary Aurukun. Finally, I explore how Wik women, through their roles as nurturers, were unwittingly complicit in their own domination by men.

Gender and the ritual domain

Wik male and female ritual spheres had not by-and-large been marked by the radical separation common among central Australian Aboriginal peoples noted by

1. e.g. Giddens (1979:93)

such observers as Bell of the semi-desert *Warlpiri*,³ but had resembled rather those reported of Arnhem Land where women took part at certain stages in male controlled rituals.⁴ There had certainly been female domains of Wik ritual from which men had been rigidly excluded, but these had related most particularly to those surrounding birth itself. Even here, it is noteworthy that while the ultimate sanction against ritual (and other) infringements, physical violence, was essentially in the hands of Wik men rather than of women, the power to maintain separate gender-based domains could not necessarily be seen to be underpinned solely by coercion. In part, explanations for compliance with such separations must be seen in the processes outlined in Chapter 1, where the sense of what was rightful and expected behaviour for men and for women was inculcated and appropriated from the earliest socialization of the child. Additionally, because the processes of parturition had been represented as highly ritually dangerous to men they would have considered it in their own interests to maintain their exclusion.

Other exclusively women's ceremonies were not dangerous as such to men, but were either directed at them, as in the case of women's love *wuungk* rites, or were represented as being for the benefit of both, as in the case of rituals led by women during mortuary ceremonies (to which I shall shortly return) or the increase rites at certain totemic centres which could only be performed by women.⁵ Thus, a rite to propagate *minh wiyumpan*, a generic term for duck species during their moulting period after the wet, could only be performed at the increase centre in the estate of the Flying Fox clan by a mature woman who had borne many children. It has been argued that across a range of societies women's ceremonies and rites pertain to particularistic and more exclusively female (and often domestic) concerns, while men's ritual is more universalistic and inclusive, and is furthermore more prestigious.⁶ Wik women's rites such as those surrounding birth or sexual attractiveness to men could perhaps be seen in this light, but mortuary and fighting *wuungk* and increase rites such as those described could not reasonably be placed under such a rubric, for their benefits were represented as accruing to the society as a whole. On the other hand, women's own ritual spheres and knowledge and responsibilities had been in a sense subsumed by and were ontogenously subordinate to those controlled by and (in the case of secret knowledge) exclusive to men. The knowledge underlying the Wik male ritual domain, exemplified in male initiations and in the male controlled ritual cults such as *Apalach*, *Nhomp*, and *Wanam*, had been seen as the more powerful and ritually dangerous by both men and women.⁷ There certainly had been exclusively male rituals, mainly those centring around initiations, and some suggestion of highly secret male cults such as that of *Unta-t(h)ich* referred

2. I discuss this question at length in Chapter 4.

3. Bell (1983)

4. e.g. Hamilton (1981b)

5. I am here differentiating between rites and ceremonial performances. Women's *wuungk* operated across the domains both of rite, in the case of love *wuungk* for instance, and of ritual, as when they were performed along with the cult cycles at mortuary ceremonies.

6. e.g. Strathern (1981)

7. See discussion in Chapter 5.

to by Sutton.⁸ Many older women however had a detailed knowledge of much of ostensibly male-led ceremony. Furthermore, with the exception of the secret-sacred stages of male initiations, most performances of the regional ritual complexes - for instance at cremations in the past and house-openings in the contemporary Wik society - had included women. They were admittedly usually in particularistic and generally subordinate roles, demonstrated for instance by the placement of a women's hands, on her head, cupped under her breasts, on her shoulders, to indicate her specific kin relationship to the male behind whom she was dancing.⁹ However, on occasion I observed certain older women take over the role of lead singer in *Apalach* mortuary rituals, a feature which was clearly not simply a contemporary phenomenon.¹⁰

Given the crucial importance of women's labour in preparing the large quantities of foods necessary to stage the rituals both in the pre-contact situation and for the present-day house-openings,¹¹ given also that men played the roles of (and in a sense became) the Creator Heroes themselves while women played ancillary roles, and given that the rituals were elements of the Totemic Hero cults which themselves were controlled by senior males and which ultimately reinforced male potency over that of women, it could be argued that women were co-opted by men (if not entirely at the conscious level) to serve male ends. However, this would be unnecessarily simplistic, for it would ignore important details at the level of the organization and control of these rituals, and also crucially the meanings which (allowing for secret uniquely male knowledge) men and women in many ways conjointly attributed to them. While the representation of orthodoxy itself was subject to great individual variation among Wik and to a process of continual re-interpretation, it would not be correct to see the existence of a subversive women's view. Keen's argument is apposite here;

... since women participate in the religious life, albeit with varying degrees of autonomy [in different Aboriginal societies], it is problematic to attribute to men sole control of belief and interpretation.¹²

This question will be taken up later in this section, in connection with what Bourdieu refers to as *méconnaissance*, misrecognition.

Even at the organizational level, in many aspects of ritual performances some older women played major roles which were nominally exclusively men's. In the case of a senior woman of the Brolga clan, this included assisting her brothers to sing *Apalach* cycles, correcting mistakes in singing, and directing male dancers as to technique. The reverse was not the case. Thus while both men and certain older women sang the *Apalach* cycles during mortuary ceremonies, men did not sing

8. Sutton (1978:150)

9. Sutton (*op.cit*:262-60) and McConnel (1934:359) present details of these *denotata* of kin relatedness.

10. In this connection, Peter Sutton drew to my attention the film *Dances at Aurukun* (Australian Commonwealth Film Unit 1964) made under the auspices of the Australian Institute of Aboriginal Studies, in which a woman from clan 6 is the lead singer for a significant portion of the *Apalach* performance at Dry Swamp, near Aurukun.

11. See also Hamilton (1987:44)

wuungk, the ritual domain of women.¹³ Certain of the 'big' *wuungk* (*wuungk pi'an*) had been sung by women during cremations, particularly just after the embers had died down and opponents were preparing to fight, and during times of dispute, as powerful territorial and clan symbols to goad their own and their menfolk's opponents.¹⁴ Others had been sung for precisely the opposite reason, during healing and hunting rituals¹⁵ and as part of a process of ritually resolving conflicts. Deaths in most cases continued to be ascribed to sorcery or other humanly occasioned causes, and this underlay in no small part the chronic feuding which characterized Aurukun.¹⁶ Events called *wuungk ma'* had been held to ritually mark the end of conflicts and revenge-taking that were such a feature of Wik society. Here again, women had played prominent roles, collecting and preparing the large quantities of sweet and bitter yams and other produce for ritual presentation to the kin of the deceased, and *pewnguchan* had danced *wuungk* as part of the settling of grievances.

The major *wuungk* rituals had been left by certain totemic phenomena - for example the two Quail sisters who were transformed to Sharks, Grass Bird, Barramundi, and Bitter Yam - at their totemic sites or *aw*, their final creative act as they "sank down" after being sung and danced by the Creator Heroes. *Wuungk* in their very creation had thus been associated with death - the sinking down of the totemic being - and yet with power and creativity. It was then entirely consistent that *wuungk* were fundamental elements of mortuary rites, particularly the final despatching of the spirit by women to the clan spirit-sending centre. They were rituals of great power, concerned at one level with conflict and with death but also ultimately with the regeneration of life. While these *wuungk pi'an* had been left by the totemic beings, there were in addition other, more secular, *wuungk* which were recognized as the creations of individual known women and were concerned with love magic and thus ultimately with another aspect of women's reproductive and sexual power. They rendered the singer sexually potent and irresistible to the man towards whom they were directed.

Wuungk thus had linked in a compelling manner broad themes of death and regeneration, in a ritual domain associated with the powers of women and under their control.¹⁷ They did not, however, constitute a distinct corpus of women's ceremonies, as had *yawulyu* of the *Warlpiri* of central Australia,¹⁸ but through the 'history of origins' represented aspects of, or episodes in, the stories associated with the various Totemic Hero cults. Like these cults, *wuungk pi'an* were intimately connected with land; each one, through having been left by a totemic species was linked with a particular place and thus was the corporate property of the site-owning

12. Keen (1989:31)

13. The only exceptions were *wuungk* associated with the Two Girls, from Poenp and Uuk-milpng in the Kirke River estuary (Sutton, *pers. comm.* and Sutton, Martin et al 1990:367).

14. On a number of occasions, rarely in latter years, I observed certain older Wik women singing *wuungk* to defy their opponents.

15. Referred to also by Sutton (1978:151).

16. See Chapter 4.

17. Bloch and Parry (1982) suggest that the linking of femaleness to these themes may be a very widespread phenomenon.

clan. While site specific however, they were not themselves linked directly in any sense into regional women's ritual cults which could be interpreted as asserting women's interests against those of men.

This had not been the case with male initiations, where a pervasive theme had been the radical separation of the young initiates from the realm of women and children and their reconstitution under the control of adult men. While initiation had been represented as engorgement and regurgitation by Taipan as previously discussed,¹⁹ it was adult men who both mediated and controlled this process. Women too had been associated with Taipan,²⁰ but through his responsibility for their menstruating, which Wik recognized was associated with their physical procreative power,²¹ and was ritually dangerous to men collectively. McKnight records that at the end of the *uchanam* ceremony, initiates had crawled through bow-shaped sticks representing Taipan the Rainbow Serpent - the regurgitation - and then through the spread legs of senior males facing them. Older men thus as it were had given birth to younger men, but through their anuses.²² These themes were taken up in mythology: it was claimed that the bamboo flutes *yuk piinhth* used in initiations had originally been the property of women, but had been stolen by men. In a myth from **Kalban** in the estate of the *Wik Mungkan* speaking Bonefish clan recorded by McConnel, the bullroarers *paka-paka* and *muuypak* (symbolizing *inter alia* male sexual potency) had also originally belonged to women, who had then given them to men for use in initiations.²³ It was also during initiation that men had gained their *komp kath* or 'unseen child' as McKnight records.²⁴ This ritual inversion and appropriation of the themes of men's social over women's physical procreative power was again a common theme in Aboriginal and many other cultures; while women may have given birth to children, it was men who gave birth to men.²⁵

Initiation ceremonies had to a great extent transected regional affiliations, with boys from widely separated estates undergoing the rites simultaneously. As Sutton notes, boys had not been initiated into their clans but into manhood.²⁶ Consociation at initiation appeared to have formed the basis of subsequent long-term relationships between individual males in some cases. The initial separation of the boys from their female kin had been accomplished by a ritually expressed forcible removal, with the women attempting to hide the boys away from the men.²⁷ Any contact whatsoever with women had been strictly forbidden during the course of the extended *uchanam*

18. Bell (1983, 1987)

19. See also Sutton (1978:150)

20. McConnel (1936:85), McConnel (1957:115), McKnight (1975:95)

21. See also D. von Sturmer [Smith] (1980). The cessation of menstruation for instance was recognized as one sign of pregnancy.

22. McKnight (1975:94)

23. McConnel (1957:119-24)

24. McKnight (*loc.cit.*)

25. As McKnight (*loc.cit.*) similarly notes.

26. Sutton (*op.cit.*:150)

27. McConnel (1934:336), McKnight (1975:92).

and *winychanam* ceremonies,²⁸ with the threat of violence or even death as a sanction.²⁹ After their completion, the initiates had been ritually presented to their female kin, and certain of the restrictions lifted;³⁰ others however, in particular food taboos between mothers and sons, had come into force once the young men had been initiated because of their increased ritually based potency.

Thus male initiations, through powerful symbolic means and a harsh regimen, had inculcated and reproduced a sense of the pre-eminence of male potency and of the separateness of essential maleness from the female domestic and mundane worlds. Initiations had emphasized men's interests collectively. Women, while they had access to ritually based potency, had no such separation or emphasis cultivated; their domains were in fact ultimately subsumed by those of men.

Sociality between the genders

Mundane interaction between the sexes for Wik was not characterized by the radical separation noted by such observers as Hamilton and Bell of central Australian Aboriginal groups.³¹ In fact, Wik appeared (at certain superficial levels at least) to be relatively equalitarian in inter-gender relations, with a great deal of joint activity by men and women, although with differing specific activities considered appropriate to each gender. In order to explore in some detail the nature of these relations, I shall examine a number of different domains of practices, beginning with some general observations on the nature of interaction between Wik men and women.

Public and private domains

Hamilton suggests that in Aboriginal societies, as in many others, relations between the genders are structured in a manner she terms 'homosociality'. By this she means "... the situation where people turn to one another for their primary social and political relationships, and personal respect and affection, strictly according to criteria of gender."³² Homosociality is characterized as being expressed through "a structured collective discourse", dependent upon gender-specific knowledge of codes, presumably including restricted linguistic codes and those elaborated through esoteric ritually based knowledge.³³ She contends that in societies where public and private spheres are sharply distinguished, it is possible for homosocial relations to predominate in the public realm, while those in the domestic sphere are primarily heterosexual. She speculates in fact that where this is the case, it may be only men who have homosocial relationships, and women's lives may be almost a-social.

28. See also McConnel (1934:337), McKnight (1975:94)

29. During these ceremonies, one's brother-in-law became one's ritual 'wife'. In a homologous inversion, women dressed as men for the performance of certain 'big' *wuungk* (see page 67).

30. McConnel (1934:337)

31. e.g. Bell (1983), Hamilton (1981b)

32. Hamilton (1981b:82)

Where there is not this rigid public/private dichotomy maintained however, she suggests that homosociality may exist for both sexes.

However, the distinction between private and public domains for Wik was by no means a straightforward one, nor could it be directly mapped onto gender-based sociality. While a sharp dichotomy between 'restricted' and 'unrestricted' had been maintained in the sphere of ritual and esoteric knowledge (a theme to which I shall shortly return), there had also been domains of privacy manifested spatially and geographically. Originally there had been the maintenance of a quite rigorous separation between 'private' and 'public' places in clan estates.³⁴ This distinction had been underlain by the hierarchy of rights of access to given sites dependent upon ownership, on various secondary means of legitimating access through affinal links, contiguity of estates and so forth, and on the ritual status of individuals as well as of the site itself. Senior men had freer access in their own estates to sites than women or children, and also a wider range than women in estates other than their own, through such ties as marriage and political and ritual alliances. Women of a clan were also considered *aak kunych*, estate (or site) owners, but at a practical level they would usually have spent more of their lives away from their own estates with husbands' kin groups, and furthermore even older women lacked the ritual basis that underlay male power.

If rights in traditional land and sites had been established in terms of 'public' and 'private' domains, in terms of degrees of restriction of access, so too had been that to material and symbolic resources of various kinds. Of particular note had been the gender-specific ritual knowledge forms referred to previously. Furthermore, there had been an elaborate system of food and speech restrictions and obligations which had depended on a complex of factors, perhaps most importantly the kinship relations of those involved in the transaction, so that for example certain categories of food could not be given between in-laws, from son to mother, or from young daughter to father.³⁵ There had equivalently been sets of restrictions in linguistic exchanges, with the adoption of particular codes such as respect registers between certain categories of kin, for example between men and their mother's younger brothers (the 'poison uncle' and potential father-in-law *kaal*).³⁶ Other restrictions and obligations related to relative status, such as those between initiated and non-initiated men, or between senior estate owners and others in residential groups. Yet others again related to relative states, such as those of bereavement, pregnancy, and novicehood in initiations. Deaths for example occasioned major dietary, speech and activity restrictions on the spouse of the deceased in particular, and on whole categories of kin rendered structurally equivalent by the use of special bereavement kinship

33. *ibid*:83

34. This is further discussed in Chapter 5; see also Sutton (1978:72).

35. Thomson (1936:385-6); McKnight (1973:*passim*). McKnight argues that underlying the various restrictions between Wik kin and between the genders there lies the principle of the superior ritual status of men.

36. Sutton (1978:186-211)

terminologies,³⁷ men could not eat food prepared by their menstruating wives or mothers, and young men undergoing initiations had been forbidden from accepting food from female kin. Thus, both food and language exchanges had marked social space into domains which could be encompassed by the terms 'public' in the sense of relatively unrestricted and 'private' in the sense of relatively restricted.³⁸

Of course, Hamilton's argument is underpinned by the fact that many societies place women and women's activities in the realm of the private or domestic, whereas men's take place in the more prestigious (at least in the eyes of the men) public domains. If sociality for each sex is centred around these gender-specific activities, then it should occasion no surprise to find that where the separation between public and private domains is marked, relations are indeed 'homosocial' in the public one as Hamilton defines it. However, the social and geographical domains which Wik rendered relatively 'public' or 'private' were analytically separable from those which Hamilton proposes.

By-and-large the varying categories of restriction on access to sites had been by their very nature particularistic, represented in the order of things as having been established through the 'history of origins', with each clan having had the right to control material and ritual resources in its own estate. Furthermore, cross-cutting ties such as kinship, marriage, and political and ritual cult associations had given individuals a range of connections to land and sites outside their own estates. While senior male estate owners may in general have had more power to control such matters than the older women of a clan,³⁹ and had enjoyed freer access to a wider range of sites, such access had not of itself established the basis for a specifically male sociality as such. In any event, this distinction between 'public' and 'private' geographical space was no longer a characteristic feature of the contemporary Wik village, as will be discussed in a later section. Again, the appropriation of geographical village space was particularistic, with specific areas being considered the domain (although not the exclusive one) of definite kin or family groupings. The exceptions were the White dominated areas, such as staff housing, the administration offices, staff common rooms and so forth, where (without the need for the overt regulation which had applied during the Missionary period) Wik by and large were noticeable by their absence. Extending Hamilton's term, we could perhaps legitimately talk here of ethnosociality.

The 'private' domains which had transcended particularistic clan, language, and kinship affiliations had been those applying to the gender-specific forms of ritual knowledge and practices previously discussed. These restricted spheres - esoteric ritual knowledge, male initiations and secret ritual cult performances, the birthing

37. See Thomson (1946:158-9); Scheffler (1972, Afterword in Thomson (1972)); Scheffler (1978:161-2); Sutton (1978: Appendix 1)

38. While the content of such practices had changed dramatically in contemporary Aurukun, these factors of kin relatedness, relative status, and state, continued to affect the rules for linguistic and other exchanges. Thus, as Sutton (*pers.comm.*) notes, drunkenness and gambling were states which demanded particular kinds of responses (see further discussion on these points in Chapters 3 and 4).

camps, the men's bough shades prior to mortuary ceremonies - had indeed provided contexts for forms of homosociality. These non-public domains however in no way corresponded to a mundane and domestic sphere in the sense that Hamilton and other writers have used it, and in fact while represented as underlying mundane life were established as distinct from it by whole sets of restrictions and other practices. Nor would it be true to either pre-contact or contemporary Wik ethnographic realities to categorize practices relating to food preparation and consumption, to child rearing, or even to family relations as 'domestic' in its formal sense,⁴⁰ as opposed for example to 'public' social, political and economic activities. While many food gathering and preparation tasks and technologies and contemporary work practices may have been largely gender-specific, they were neither necessarily private nor 'domestic' - nor did the composition of the producing or extracting groups necessarily correspond to that of those consuming them. Yet many of these secular activities also did provide the basis (at times) for intra-gender sociality. This was the case in men's hunting expeditions, in the male-only 'outside' Council and C.D.E.P. teams, and in women's fishing and shell-gathering expeditions or in their C.D.E.P. handcraft team for example. These however were not established on the basis of a 'public'/'private' dichotomy being posited as homologous with a male/female one.

Styles of engagement

Other secular activities in contradistinction were more heterosocial in character. When alcohol and fighting were not on the immediate social agenda, much of intimate familial life - adults and children sitting close together on an old blanket near the campfire, and as the sun rose breakfasting on tea and damper, spouses line fishing from a moored dinghy, mature daughters cooking and caring for their widowed fathers - involved for many Wik relatively relaxed and open relations between the sexes. Even here however, it was common to see in the fine details of the familial group arrangements a degree of gender-based structuring, with the wife and smaller children sitting close together, the husband and older sons slightly apart from each other and from the women. These 'micro-environments' were not self-contained however, with discussion, comment, admonition, humour and of course food flowing between them. In the township and larger bush camps, the big gambling schools provided a forum where neither age nor sex were determinant of involvement, except that younger children did not usually take part. In these schools, relations between the sexes as between the generations were characterized superficially by egalitarianism, humour and jocular, although older Wik still usually followed certain avoidance practices with specified kin (such as a man not betting with his close in-laws) and there was often a studied avoidance of direct interaction by Wik with individuals with whom they had been recently feuding. This seeming egalitarianism however was often coupled with the competitive assertion of their masculinity by younger Wik men in particular; by adopting an air of assurance, by being exaggeratedly jocular, and by running the cards out with skill and verve, one could

39. In fact, I noted a number of instances in the contemporary situation where women who were structurally senior siblings were consulted by the males of the group in decisions concerning such matters as access by outsiders to sites in their estates.

both attract and hold luck in the game and attract the opposite sex.⁴¹ Women who behaved publicly in this manner however were said to be *law* or 'larrikin one', looking for sexual adventure.⁴²

The style of engagement in the social world and thus of sociality appropriate to an individual's age and gender varied. Where young men were seen by many older Wik as brash, impetuous, lacking in both knowledge and self-control and essentially self-interested, older men by contrast were seen to be more knowledgeable, more considered, and represented their actions (even if objectively self-interested) in terms of their obligations and concerns for others. Young men in particular were highly mobile. Within the township, they moved from gambling school to gambling school, from house to house looking for excitement in the form of sly grog or a fight, drove around incessantly in their work gangs on the back of C.D.E.P. trucks from landing to airstrip to store to village and back again. When out bush, they travelled constantly, moving backwards and forwards between camp or outstation and township, always on the move, always looking for stimulation. Their structural marginality manifested itself spatially in terms of their mobility; it had been so in the past too. "Boy, young time we use to be traveller for woman," an old man told me in speaking of his youth in the bush south of Aurukun.

Within and between young men's groups, interaction was characterized by an emphasis on style and display, manifested through body stances and movements, for some closely cropped hair (or even in one case a Mohawk), red headbands, torn jeans and shirts, loud catcalls and whistles, exaggerated drunken behaviour and a high degree of physicality in the form of jostling, mock wrestling and punching. Conversations were dominated by discussions of their fighting and sexual exploits. Connell proffers a strikingly similar description of playful aggression within a peer group of South London boys,⁴³ and comments on similar phenomena more generally in writing of the transformation of the body through social practice, noting that the physical embeddedness of masculinity is a complex phenomenon;

It involves size and shape, habits of posture and movement, particular physical skills and the lack of others, the image of one's own body, the way it is presented to other people and the ways they respond to it, the way it operates at work and in sexual relations.⁴⁴

Masculine concerns with physical prowess and skills are statements embedded in the body, whose meanings concern ultimately the taken-for-granted superiority of men over women, and the glorification of male potency and virility, as Connell further argues;

The social definition of men as holders of power is translated not only into mental body-images and fantasies, but into muscle tensions, posture, the feel and texture of the body. This is one of the main ways in which the

40. Concise Oxford Dictionary 7th ed. (1983) 'of the house, household, or family affairs'.

41. As I argue elsewhere, these were linked domains.

42. Australian slang for an irresponsible but likeable person, used by Wik specifically of those reputed to be indiscriminate in their sexual liaisons.

43. Connell (*op.cit.*:85)

power of men becomes 'naturalized', i.e. seen as part of the order of nature.⁴⁵

Older Wik men were more circumspect about such matters, although for all men the recounting and analysing of past and contemporary fights and *maarrich* (lovers') escapades was of consuming interest. Where they did talk of themselves, older men did so very often in an oblique and self-effacing manner, one of the requisites in fact of leadership. They were expected to exhibit greater self-control than young men, including of their bodily functions; farting for example was for small children and the senile, and a man breaking wind in public occasioned secret mirth and disparagement.

Women's public physicality with other women (and with men) was of a different nature. Young sisters-in-law for instance often walked hand in hand through the village. Women groomed each other, their children or their younger siblings for head lice as part of a relaxed, feminized sociability. While women also groomed their spouses (although not usually in public), I never observed the reverse. Both men and women sat cross-legged, but most women took great care to elaborately fold their dresses between their legs before sitting, or carried small towels or pillows with them to place on their laps while seated. Women also often sat with their legs folded beside them; men never did so. Women displayed more physical intimacy and affection in public than did men, but it could not be argued that they were not willing to become actively involved in disputes and fights; it was as derogatory for a woman to be considered *maal*, timid, as it was for a man. The relationship between the expression of personal autonomy and the willingness to use physical force will be discussed in Chapter 4; suffice it to note at this point that women's fighting and arguing styles, like other aspects of their physicality, differed from those of men.

Like the modes of appropriate knowledge, body praxis, technologies, and practical activities, the use of language varied between Wik men and women. As discussed previously, men talked more in terms of exploits (very often their own), their conversations arising from and contributing to a world where individual male prestige and status was constantly asserted and contested. Some older Wik men when talking of their own clan estates did so with great feeling and emotion it is true, but by and large a whole range of words and of delivery styles relating to emotions such as sorrow, love, and caring were used much less frequently by men than by women. Women often used a particular soft and sympathetic delivery style in talking to children, and to other close kin.⁴⁶

The expression *ooywooy*, expressing sorrow or commiseration, was far more frequently used by women than by men for instance. Conversely, lexical items used by men in telling stories of spear fights for example, such as those onomatopoeic words describing the sound of the spear hitting various parts of the body and the cries of the wounded man, were not to my knowledge part of the usual repertoire of women. If the language of love was that of women, certain forms expressing aggressive and challenging hostility were more that of men. Suggestively, it was only

44. *ibid*:84

45. *ibid*:85

when drunk that I ever heard Wik men publicly use the English word 'love'; "I love my fuckin' grandfather," wept a drunk young man of his dying kinsman. Conversely, a drunken young woman passing my house one night called out to the world, "Who want to fight me eh? I frighten' from no bastard!" - quintessentially the language of men. Even the accents and delivery styles with which *Wik Mungkan* and English were spoken - while they ranged across a spectrum and (in the case of *Mungkan*) had generational, regional and idiosyncratic variations - varied between men and women. Young Wik men spoke rapidly, with less clear articulation, and often with considerable ellipsis. Contemporary women's *Wik Mungkan* tended to be more clearly articulated than men's, slower, and to have less personal and regional variation. This was true also of their English, and in both cases I would attribute this in part to the more profound and intimate influence of the dormitory system on women, with Geraldine MacKenzie having inculcated a precise, beautifully articulated English. The *Wik Mungkan* of the lower Archer River had become the Aurukun *lingua franca*,⁴⁷ and it was primarily this 'women's *Wik Mungkan*' which was studied and analysed by the Summer Institute of Linguistics.⁴⁸

It was almost as if men's and women's lives were at times parallel and contingent discourses, at other times of necessity intimately interlinked, with each side understanding the other and contributing to its reproduction but from within its own sub-cultural repertoire. Women's worldviews were not however subversive of men's, but in fact ultimately bolstered them, as I will discuss later in this chapter.

Sexuality and gender relations

Sexuality had of course provided a fundamental dynamic to relations between the genders, as well as a major arena for competition within them. Its regulation through the 'promise' marriage system had formed an important basis for social and political relations between wider Wik groupings. Just as the raw facts of sexuality provided grist for the mill of interpersonal and intergroup relations and disputes among Wik, so the early accounts provided by McConnel and Thomson on 'Wik Mungkan' kinship and marriage patterns, based on fieldwork in the area in the 1930s,⁴⁹ provided the basis for an extended anthropological commentary over their interpretations.⁵⁰ It is not my purpose here to add further to this debate on the formal structures of Wik kinship and marriage systems. What I do wish to address however in this section is the role that Wik women played in the contemporary situation in negotiating relationships, and the place of sexuality in structuring these relationships.

46. see D. von Sturmer [Smith] (1980:279)

47. Sutton (1978:185) refers to this Aurukun *Wik Mungkan*

48. e.g. Kilham (1977), Sayers (1976a, 1976b); Kilham et al (1986).

49. McConnel (1934, 1940, 1950); Thomson (1935, 1955, 1972)

50. e.g. Radcliffe-Brown (1930); Lévi-Strauss (1968:38, 1969), Needham (1962, 1963); McKnight (1971); Scheffler (1978:151-162); Scheffler, Afterword in Thomson (1972); Taylor (1984:183).

Women and the negotiation of relationships

The ideological representations of marriage relations recorded initially by McConnel and Thomson and subsequently commented on by others such as McKnight, Needham, Lévi Strauss and Scheffler,⁵¹ emphasized that the normative situation was for a Wik man to marry the daughter of his classificatory MB- (his 'poison uncle', *kaal*). However, their concentration upon 'rules' of marriage left unexamined the means and strategies through which marriages were negotiated, and which resulted in the regularities in their arrangements manifested in these very rules.⁵² Wik marriages (as opposed to sexual liaisons) had not by-and-large simply been established between the two individuals concerned.⁵³ Rather, they had involved the strategic negotiation of relations between wider groupings - including paternal and maternal kin of both parties⁵⁴ - which had been focussed through the particular individuals. Through the 'promise system', where typically kin from both sides negotiated a future wife for a young man following his initiation, such political and economic relations had usually in fact been established well before the marriage itself.

Clans, as patrilineal descent groups, were exogamous units.⁵⁵ However, statistics indicate that there had originally been a significant degree of ritual group and regional endogamy; there had been for example a high degree of intermarriage between *Apalach* clans of the Cape Keerweer region, and marriages between 'bottomside' and 'topside' Wik were relatively rare.⁵⁶ These regularities however, reflected not so much 'rules' of marriage exchanges between groups or within regions, as patterns of strategic alliances established through time so as to maximize political advantage and control of the material and ritual capital in linked clan estates. It is important also to dispel the notion given by much of the original ethnography on the Wik region, and reproduced by some of the subsequent commentary upon it, that marriage had essentially involved the exchange of women between groups of men. Female kin on both sides had been actively involved in marriage arrangements in the past, and in the contemporary situation continued to play a prominent role in the

51. See references in the above footnote.

52. Bourdieu (1977a:34-6, 58-71)

53. While sexual liaisons may well have been contracted by individuals, they were nonetheless the focus of collective interests, as demonstrated by the conflicts and revenge killings which frequently followed *maarrich* lovers' relationships in the past. Such conflict arose not only because of sexual jealousy on the part of the aggrieved spouse, but because the public knowledge of an affair could potentially disrupt political and economic relationships between wider groupings instantiated in the marriage.

54. Scheffler (1972:52) notes that McConnel (1934, 1940) refers more to the claims of 'families' through marriage arrangements than of 'clans' as such, although the distinction in fact was not unproblematic for Wik (see Sutton (1978:58), and further discussion in Chapter 6 and Appendix 2).

55. Logically, since men normatively married those in their mother's patriline. Even for the quite considerable number of marriages and liaisons which had not been between people in the cross-cousin category, it was virtually unthinkable for Wik that the actual (as opposed to classificatory) incest involved in a sexual relationship between individuals within a patriline could occur. However, even this was changing in the contemporary situation, with an increasing number of cases of sexual abuse of young female kin by older youths.

56. Detailed statistics and their discussion are presented in Appendix 2.

arrangements and conflicts that surrounded relationships between young Wik.⁵⁷ I shall return to this point shortly. Nor were clans as such the groups arranging marriages.⁵⁸ Diane von Sturmer [Smith], working with *Kugu-Nganychara* Wik to the south of the Kendall River, observes that marriage arrangements were firmly in the hands not of 'clans' but of 'families', as groups of cognatic kin.⁵⁹ She writes;

There is an emphasis on marriage as a socially situated and recognized arrangement, which for the *Kugu-Nganychara* should involve the involvement, consent and support of relatives on both "sides".⁶⁰

These wider encompassing relations had been manifested in the rights and responsibilities various kin had in offspring of the union,⁶¹ in the structural superordination of the 'wife-givers' (such as the parents and brothers of the wife) over 'wife-receivers' for a given marriage,⁶² in critical economic relations such as potential rights of access to an in-law's estate,⁶³ and often in wider social and political relations between the kin groupings concerned. As a senior man from Cape Keerweer explained to me on one occasion in detailing marriages of his group; "People used to go here and there for wife, so we class them family in marriage. We share with them, and they with us." Some of these political relationships continued to be of great importance in contemporary settlement politics.⁶⁴

As elsewhere in Australia, a primary task the missionaries had set themselves in Aurukun was social transformation as well as religious conversion. In particular, they sought to replace the indigenous concepts of kin and family with those of the orthodox Christian west, using the vehicle of the Mission as extended family.⁶⁵ The dormitory system in which Wik children were raised and which was maintained until 1966, was a prime means by which these ends were to be achieved.⁶⁶ The MacKenzies were less rigidly authoritarian than the missionaries in many other areas;⁶⁷ for instance, while they exercised the ultimate control over marriage arrangements for the young women leaving the dormitory, kin were still actively involved in the negotiation of marriages. Nonetheless, the mission had a profound effect on the 'promise' marriage

57. Taylor (*op.cit.*:175-6,179,188) records that for Pormpuraaw people, the actual negotiations over bestowal arrangements were carried out by the mothers.

58. See Appendix 2.

59. D. von Sturmer [Smith] (1980:263)

60. *ibid.*:168

61. *ibid.*:167-70, *passim*)

62. McKnight (1975:79)

63. See Sutton (1978:70,156)

64. For example, men from three Cape Keerweer clans, all associated with the *Apalach* ritual cult and which had a limited form of marriage exchange extending over several generations, had established a close political alliance by the mid 1980s within the Shire Council. In 1989, five of the nine councillors including the Chairman were from these three clans. Had Shire Council representation reflected the demographic composition of Aurukun, these three clans would have been expected to have one or at most two councillors between them.

65. See discussion by Finlayson (1991:125-6) of Mona Mona mission.

66. See discussion in Appendix 2. The role of missions in reformulating Aboriginal familial and other social relations as well as in evangelizing has been addressed by, for example, Burbank (1988:60-77), Finlayson (1991:106, 125ff), Hamilton (1989), and Loos (1988).

system, through direct intervention at almost every level of family life including the control and expression of sexuality. While the MacKenzies may have been relatively sympathetic to Wik cultural mores, their enterprise was still ultimately a hegemonic one; the usurpation of indigenous modes of thought and practice by those of the dominant society. Once the control exercised through the dormitory system was removed, with the replacement of the MacKenzies by John Gillanders in 1965, formal marriages rapidly disappeared and young Wik increasingly exercised their own discretion in the choice of long-term partners and in sexual liaisons.⁶⁸ The gradual disappearance of the 'promise' marriage system and its replacement by one essentially of individual choice⁶⁹ was however but one instance of the increasing individuation evident in contemporary Aurukun, the replacement of indigenous collective forms by ones focussed upon the individual.⁷⁰

This meant that the often volatile relationships contracted between young Wik without the active support of their kin, became focal points around which schisms developed between kin on each side, and furthermore without social validation were liable to rupture from within.

The mother of the child in the genealogy given in figure 2.1 for example was classified as the 'small mother' (MZ-, *kaath ikampungun*) of its genitor. The child carried its maternal grandfather's Christian name, its mother's clan surname rather than that of its genitor,⁷¹ and lived almost entirely with its maternal grandparents. Because of the long history of inter-marriage between the two families which had been incestuously reproduced in this union and which is indicated in this partial genealogy, it would have confronted legitimate representations of family relations too much to have changed them. That is, the contemporary political relationship between these two families was not sacrificed to render the position of one small child putatively legitimate, and ultimately after much acrimony between the young couple and without family support for them, the relationship foundered.

67. See for example the account by Trigger (1992:69-73) of the operation of the almost prison-like girl's dormitory at Doomadgee.

68. See the discussion in Appendix 2, where the removal of socially validated controls (both indigenous and mission) over sexuality is shown as manifesting itself in a decrease in the age at which Wik women were having their first child, and in changes to the patterns of relationships within and between regional groupings.

69. This is not to say that the choices of long-term partners by young Wik were completely unfettered. Knowledge of the patterns of alliance or of enmity between kin groupings, an awareness of the structuring of social and political relationships between collectivities (such as regional groupings), and a sense of the categories of kin who were potential sexual partners and those who were not, were instilled in and appropriated by younger Wik through the reproduction of habitus (see page 59).

70. Morris (1989:148).

71. In fact, the mother (born in the 1960s) carried the clan 'big name' of her father. In the past, before the MacKenzies had instituted western Christian forms, women would have carried the names ('big' and 'small') as their father's sisters, as each patriline had a corpus of specifically male and female names as part of its corporate ritual property. See e.g. Thomson (1946)

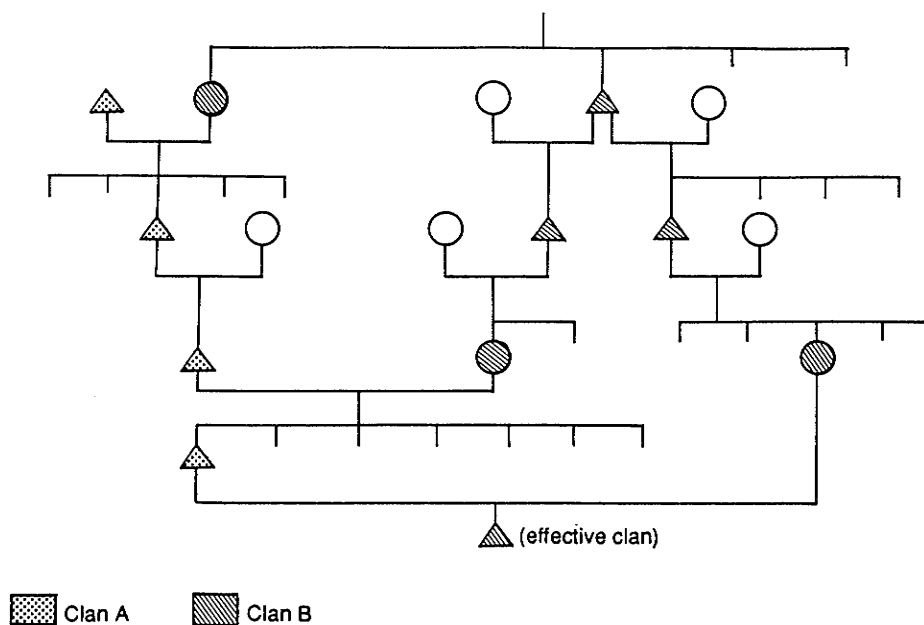


Figure 2.1 'Wrong-head' incestuous relationship

While collective controls over marriage and sexuality may have been attenuated however, this did not mean that Wik did not maintain an active interest in the relationships of their young female kin. This was evidenced for example in the fights which regularly erupted between brothers and their sister's lovers.⁷² Women too maintained an active interest in their close female kin's relationships. Even though many teenagers had few restraints on their activities, some mothers were highly protective of their teenage daughters and actively sought to prevent their having affairs. Their reasons were couched in such terms as shielding them from drunken men, or because they were too young yet to bear children. It should be noted that there was certainly a degree of suppressed competition, including sexual, in the Wik mother-daughter relationship.⁷³ Their mature but still single daughters and granddaughters could provide an important material resource for older women; female labour was not only appropriated by men but by other, structurally superordinate, women.⁷⁴ Attempts to control these young women's sexuality by older women thus must also be seen in part as strategies to maintain control of important sources of labour within the household. The good name and reputation of their daughters could also provided a symbolic resource for women in times of dispute:

Lily was a woman who was highly protective and proud of her sixteen year old daughter Mary. Wherever Mary went in the village - to the store, to play cards at the gambling school, to visit her female cousins - Lily was close behind. She boasted loudly and publicly about how her

72. See discussion in Chapter 4.

73. Referred to also by D. von Sturmer [Smith] (1980:281)

74. D. von Sturmer [Smith] (*op.cit*:151) makes similar comments regarding the labour of young *Kugu Nganycharra* women.

daughter was not like the other young girls in Aurukun, and was not "interesting in boys". As with people who publicly displayed material items such as their new cars only to have them wrecked by others, Mary's pride in their symbolic asset was quickly followed by its very public destruction. Humiliation in Aurukun was very often swift, public, and final. Just after sunset one evening, Lily was unable to find her daughter, despite urgently searching from house to house. It soon became apparent that she had run off with Dan who was notorious for his philandering. Her father stalked up and down the streets until late that night, rattling his spears and threatening to spear Dan when he found him. The next morning, Mary's elder brother Robert had a public fist fight with Dan, who was also warned by the White police sergeant to whom Lily had complained not to run off with Mary again on threat of gaol.

Women continued as in the past to play a prominent role in validating and legitimating - if not actually negotiating - relationships. In fact, with the increasing marginalization of Wik men from responsibility for the establishment of their own domestic units and rearing of children, the role of women in these matters was becoming even more significant. Many contemporary relationships were traced entirely through the respective mothers, ignoring links through fathers:

In the genealogy shown in Figure 2.2 below for example, Deborah and Anna were cross-cousins of Mary and Jean, their kin relationship being traced through their mothers Myrtle and Alison respectively. Myrtle was *kuuth* and Alison *muuy*, that is cross-cousins who were offspring from younger and older siblings respectively.⁷⁵ Relations between the two sets of cousins were warm and companionable with quite frequent social interaction, as was commonly the case for female cousins. This was notwithstanding the fact that while Mary and Jean's patrilineal affiliation was to an inland 'topside' clan, Deborah and Anna's was to a coastal 'bottomside' one. Deborah had been the promised wife of Mary and Jean's oldest brother, but both had been married as young adults to other partners by MacKenzie, albeit with the approval of their families. Deborah and her promised husband had nevertheless conducted an extended *maarrich* love affair during the early years of their respective marriages.

75. see McKnight (1971:151), Scheffler (1978:151)

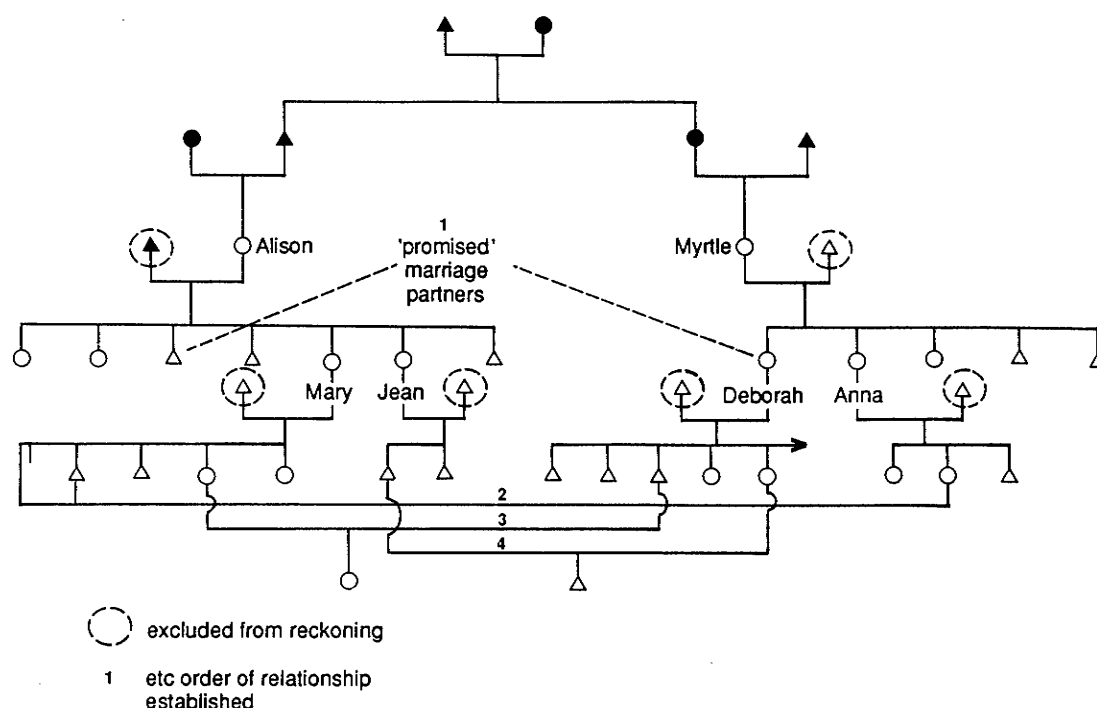


Figure 2.2 Relationships traced through women

Anna's daughter and Mary's son, also cross cousins, established a relationship, initiated by them but with the full approval of the mothers and mother's sisters. "That's why it's good those two living," said Deborah, "because if they fight, it is just those two who argue; the families don't fight because they are that close." It was made clear that the relationship between the offspring was traced entirely through the mothers; "He's out!" (i.e. his kin relationship was not relevant) said Deborah of Mary's husband. Not long after, one of Deborah's sons established a *maarrich* relationship with a much younger daughter of Mary, aged only 14 at the time. Mary's sons had a fight with the lad, but once it was obvious that the young girl was pregnant, conflict eased, and the child once born was accepted by both families, although the couple did not live together on a permanent basis until a year or so later. Subsequently, one of Deborah's daughters and Jean's oldest son established a *maarrich* relationship, which at first was bitterly opposed by Deborah ostensibly because her daughter, aged 16, was "still a schoolgirl". There were heated arguments between Deborah and Jean's younger sister, and fisticuffs between Deborah's elder sons and Jean's younger brother (i.e. the young man's MB-, his *kaal*). These were however soon settled once the young couple's persistence made it obvious that they were setting up a more permanent relationship, and particularly once a child was born, and Deborah's and Jean's relationship returned to its original warmth.

The concern with minimising potential conflict between the respective kin groups expressed by Deborah in this instance, continued to be a major factor in the responses of kin to the relationships of their children. Ideally the couple would be *koochan* or 'straight-head' - that is, in the *kuuth-muuy* cross-cousin categories - but

not related too closely.⁷⁶ At the same time, it was an important consideration that the kin responsible on each side were not too distantly related, so that when the inevitable quarrels or fights erupted between the couple there would not be the same potential for schism between the families. "They won't say, 'Go on, bring your brothers!'" it was explained to me.

Sexuality

Sexuality in contemporary Aurukun had become much less a symbolic good transacted between collectivities than one negotiated between individuals. This increasing individuation in the choice of sexual partners and the attenuation of the original patterns of political and economic relations established between clans and families through marriages, did not mean however that choices by young Wik of casual or long term partners were entirely arbitrary. The expression of sexual desire itself, like friendship or enmity, is in part the product of socially inculcated and appropriated values. From the earliest stages of childhood, Wik children had the ethos of the kin-based social universe cultivated in them, and as part of this process mothers, siblings and other close kin would point out cross-cousins to small children and make teasing references to them as future *maarrich* partners. "*Cheymch* boyfriend *nungkalam ey?*" - So James is your boyfriend?⁷⁷ Stories about old *maarrich* escapades between cousins and the resulting fights, the recounting by older kin of genealogical connections, and their attitudes towards their own cousins, all would have played a part in the establishment of an ethos whereby one's cross-cousins were seen to be desirable. At the same time, there was a degree of reserve and distance established in mundane behaviour between a child as it grew up and its more distant cross-cousins (as opposed to parallel ones, who were classified as siblings) and they were rarely familiar playmates or part of the domestic or household units between which the child moved. Familiar and known, part of one's kin yet also tantalisingly distinct, these cousins formed a pool of potentially available *maarrich* and sexual partners for young Wik, as they had in the case of extra-marital affairs for the generations before them. 'Cousin' or 'bunji' then as Wik used them were not just address terms denoting formal genealogical relationship, but were also ones loaded with potential sexual significance for those relationships that were also cross-gender.

Wik male attitudes towards women and more generally femaleness exhibited a profound ambivalence. This ambivalence had been expressed in mythological and ritual terms as well as in mundane life. In the myth of the *ngalp-ngalpan* 'Devil' woman from **Waayang** north of Titree for example,⁷⁸ a Titree man is enticed by her flagrant sexuality as she lies down with her legs open and her sexual organs exposed.

76. See D. von Sturmer [Smith] (1980:169) for similar views expressed by *Kugu Nganycharra* Wik. Many Wik expressed the view that relationships between close or actual cross-cousins were undesirable, since the resulting offspring would be unhealthy. I was not able to determine if this belief had arisen as the result of the strongly held opinions of Geraldine MacKenzie in this regard (see MacKenzie 1981). Interestingly however, the marriages and relationships established between a *Wik Mungkan* clan from the Titree area, and a *Wik Ngatharr* clan from the Kenycharrang area to its north, showed a consistent preference for first cousin relationships.

77. 'Baby talk' (see also Sutton 1978:171) changed English sounds such as that in *James* to *Ch*, and the flap or trill *rr* to *l*.

Yet, by partaking of her devilish sexuality, he ultimately loses his life, speared by her *ngalp-ngalpan* husband *Ma'-ipow-wuut* despite the attempts by his own kin to protect him. In the initiations, as already discussed, male social reproductive capacities had been represented as superior to, although ultimately appropriated from, those of women. The initiates had been removed from their female kin in dramatic and ritualized circumstances with the women protesting and weeping, in a process of radical separation from the world of women and of an intimate and mostly indulgent feminized domesticity to a totally masculine environment with a harsh and often arbitrarily enforced regimen. Yet, the initiations had rendered them legitimately able to have wives - that is to be able to establish their own domesticity - and made them sexually as well as ritually potent. As an old Wik man said to me of the power imparted through initiations, "He for woman, that one."

Desire and denigration

In secular life men both desired and denigrated women; they desired them for their labour and for their sexuality, yet resented being seen as entrapped by them. Objectively, most contemporary Wik men relied on women - wives, girlfriends, mothers, grandmothers - for much of the maintenance of their daily lives; washing, cooking, and maintaining a modicum of domestic tidiness were almost always tasks performed in the township by women. Yet, young men would claim to me that "I don't depend on woman!" Admitting to being dependent on women's work would threaten to enmesh Wik masculinity in feminine domesticity, and men often claimed that women were in fact dependent on them, especially for money. "Woman only follow man for money. Every woman they fuckin' shit!" declaimed a man walking home one night from the canteen and airing his grievances publicly, as was the wont of Wik drunks.

While he may have felt aggrieved in this instance because his spouse was having an affair, this early middle-aged man's drunken complaints reflected a common depiction of women by many Wik men. This was especially true of younger men, many of whom had what could only be described as a highly utilitarian view of women. "You married man ey?" I jokingly asked one youth, whose *maarrich* affair was public knowledge. "No, just renting!" was his reply. Encounters with girls were described with relish and in graphic detail, with many young men boasting of having made their partners cry out during intercourse, and of how many 'rounds' (repeated acts of coitus) they had achieved. Sex, like much of the rest of life for many young men, was a matter of performance. Many sexual encounters were not referred to by them as *maarrich* at all, but in much more instrumental terms. *Maarrich* carried strong connotations of passion and of emotional attachment, but in talking of these more casual and fleeting encounters, young men would often boast to me of 'using' the girl; "I bin use that one last night." In fact, it was not uncommon for a number of men (including on occasion married men) to sequentially have intercourse with the one girl on a given night; "*Than yotang double.im nunang*" - "that big mob gang-

banged her." Not infrequently, this was with the willing participation of the girl.⁷⁹ In such cases, women were investing their sexuality in establishing multiplex and cross-cutting relationships which could be called upon in the future, if only for exchanges of money, tobacco, and other such items; sexual intercourse as it were being exchanged for the stuff of social intercourse.⁸⁰ For the young men involved in such episodes on the other hand, what was being reinforced was a collective identity, most particularly sexual, in opposition to that of women.⁸¹

On other occasions, especially where alcohol was involved, there was considerable coercion which in some instances led to men being formally charged through the State court system with rape. Wik men explicitly recognized the role of alcohol in reducing possible female resistance to their sexual demands; they jocularly referred to the beer that they gave women as 'leg opener'. Women also recognized the role of alcohol in making them more vulnerable to men, sexually and in terms of physical violence; but rather than denigrating men women often in contradistinction seemed to view them with an almost amused and sardonic eye. One young woman, discussing with friends drunken males and what White Australians humorously refer to as 'brewer's droop', said of them, "They want it, but they can't do it."

Just as there was a denial by men of their dependence on women's labour, so at certain levels by denigrating women and their sexuality they could deny their own need for them. If male ritual potency could endanger women and children, female sexuality could compromise men. An over-indulgence in intercourse was held to reduce a man's physical strength, and caused him to become 'poor'.⁸² As mentioned previously, the female processes of menstruation and parturition had been *ngenyth*, taboo, to men. In the past, women had camped separately from their husbands and older male children during their periods.⁸³ Contact with a menstruating woman or eating food prepared by her, could it was said cause men to become *weenhth*, deaf or crazy, and husbands were expected to cook for their wives and children during this time if other female kin could not.⁸⁴ If she had a male infant who was still not weaned, a woman would 'warm' its ears (*kon parrkathan*) so that it would not be harmed while suckling or sleeping beside her.

While many men actively sought sexual encounters, a frequent claim was "I don't worry from woman!" Those women who had many sexual partners were said

79. Sutton (*pers.comm.*) observes that such girls were referred to as "them ready made", the analogy being between tailor made and (so to speak) roll your own cigarettes.
80. McGrath (1987) gives evidence of Aboriginal women on cattle stations in the Northern Territory in the earlier part of this century, similarly using their sexuality to establish long-term connectedness with Whites.
81. The use of their sexuality by women to forge multiplex relations with men could be seen as the obverse of the practice of Wik men of making their mark upon their girlfriends in jealous rages through physical injury.
82. see also D. von Sturmer [Smith] (1980:174)
83. see McKnight (1975:85-6) Sutton (1978:204)
84. My own information differs here from that of Diane von Sturmer [Smith], whose *Kugu Nganychara* informants told her that while contact with other men was restricted, a menstruating woman remained in her husband's camp and continued to cook for him and their children (D. von Sturmer [Smith] 1980:166). This variation may have been a part of systematic

by men to be 'easy one' or 'sluts', this latter being a term of abuse frequently used in disputes. 'Slut' had the connotations that it did in conventional contemporary English of sexual promiscuity, but with the added resonance that Wik used the term for female dogs - what White Australians called bitches.⁸⁵ While dogs were incorporated into the kinship system (as the children of their owners) and carried gender-specific names which, like those of their owners, were oblique references to clan totems, they were notoriously indiscriminate in their copulation. Female dogs on heat had numbers of males following them, fighting over them, and copulating with them. By analogy, women who were called 'sluts' would have sex with anyone, 'no matter *kampan* (close family)'. Men who were indiscriminate in their sexual partners were equivalently on occasion said by women to be *ku'* (dogs), but there was no corresponding derogatory term for 'easy one' used by either men or women of men who had been involved in multiple sexual relationships. They may have desired and sought after what women had to offer, including those they called 'sluts', but at the same time it was seen to be potentially dangerous to them.

I did hear women referring to certain men as *pu'-weenhth* (literally vagina-crazy) or *wanych-weenhth* (woman-crazy), but the connotations were rather different from those of the epithet 'easy one' or for that matter *kunych-weenhth* (penis-crazy) applied to women. All these terms shared a degree of opprobrium or at least of disparagement, but *pu'-weenhth* carried more the connotation of a man's imputed high sexual drive, whereas women who were *kunych-weenhth* were not so much seen as expressing their own libido as distributing their sexual favours in an indiscriminate and uncontrolled response to male demands. Furthermore, when women referred to a man as *pu'-weenhth* it was very often more sardonically or even with almost amused tolerance, whereas when they described another woman as *kunych-weenhth* or 'slut' it was always highly pejorative and, in fights, used as a direct form of abuse. It was very often older women who complained publicly about younger ones, saying that they were *kunych-weenhth* and slept with anyone. These same older women had often had very active sexual lives themselves; "*Ngaya ngep-kaaw, ngep-kuuw kanam minychathangan thanang!*" - "those (men) from the east and west sides of the village, I finished them all off" - claimed one woman to me. These women however contrasted themselves with the present-day young girls precisely in terms of their perceived control of their own sexuality, in particular of their extra-marital relationships. They may have had extra-marital sexual liaisons, but they were not 'easy one'; they had lovers because they were attractive to men or, sometimes perhaps, because men's love magic had been used on them.⁸⁶ On the other hand, women had their own love magic too which they controlled, in *oparr* ('bush medicine') and through love *wuungk*. These extra-marital relationships, even for the generation of women reared in the dormitories, had been very common, and in many cases an accommodation appeared to have been reached between the spouse and the lover. While any long-term affair would certainly have been public knowledge, so

differences between the *Kugu Nganychara* and the Wik with whom I worked; more likely though was idiosyncratic variation in practices and explanations between informants.

85. Although 'slut' is an archaic version.

86. See Taylor (1984:267-9) regarding *maarrich* relationships and love magic for the people of Pormpuraaw.

long as it was not flaunted or brought directly to the attention of the wronged spouse (whether male or female) he or she often seemed content to maintain the status quo.

A late middle-aged woman, Jane had eight children. The four older ones' genitor was her husband Peter, but the last four children's genitor was George. The situation had existed for some considerable time, since the youngest of the children was in their mid-teens at the time of my fieldwork, and Jane's oldest child by George was in the mid-twenties. Jane continued to live with Peter and her single children as a domestic unit, but George visited the household quite frequently. Relations were amicable between him and Peter, although by all accounts there had been considerable turmoil and many fights at the initial stages of George's and Jane's relationship. All the offspring carried Peter's surname, traced their patrilineal totems and estate affiliations through him, and were classified by most people including his kin through him although George's other daughter by his own marriage called her half-siblings 'brother' and 'sister'.

However, most relationships and liaisons did not result in such apparently amicable accommodation. Jealousy occasioned by *maarrich* and more casual sexual relationships was a very common cause of conflict and violence among Wik, a matter to which I shall return at more length in Chapter 4.

Relations between brothers and sisters (particularly B+ / Z-) continued to be characterized for most young Wik by reserve and even avoidance; although most younger Wik did not appear to adhere to the original food and formal speech restrictions between these categories of kin,⁸⁷ the question of a woman's sexuality was certainly taboo for a brother, as for a father. Yet, young men such as Robert who had little mundane interaction with their sisters and certainly virtually no role in their care and direct nurturance were expected to fight their sisters' lovers over *maarrich* affairs, and on occasion to bash their sisters in punishment. A woman said to her small granddaughter who had been teasing her baby classificatory brother and making him cry; "When you run away in *maarrich*, it will be your brother who fights over you." Such fighting, for example for one's sister or daughter, paralleled the construction of emotions such as love and caring in terms of the flows of goods, both material and symbolic; by fighting for her, a man was demonstrating his concern for his female kinswoman. Of course, while men may have fought for their own sisters' honour, in the cycles of exchange and retribution between families and clans they actively pursued other men's sisters. It was common for instance for young men to initiate sexual relationships with the sisters of those men who were having affairs with their sisters.

Gender as hierarchical classifier

These dialectical poles of desirability and danger for men in female sexuality were also linked at the level of mundane practices by the very real threat of physical

87. While relations between the older sister *yap* and her younger brother *pont* were relatively open even in adulthood, those between older brother *wuny* and younger sister *wiil* were characterized by considerable restraint as the children matured; See e.g. McKnight (1971:169) and Thomson (1972:20) for discussions on this matter.

violence from the brothers, husbands or competing sweethearts of their lovers. Much conflict was engendered over *maarrich* and other sexual liaisons, and this had been very much the case in the past as well. However, if female sexuality had an element of danger for men, femaleness as a category was often associated by men with weakness and timidity; "*Ngaya wanych ya'a, ngaya winyang ke' mo'yinga!*" - "I'm not a woman, I'm won't run away frightened!" This was despite the fact that (as many men well knew to their cost) women were as willing as were men to seek redress for perceived wrongs by physical means. A young man who early one morning had smashed every window in a house in an attempt to get his opponent to come out and fight him, eventually gave up in disgust; "Ah, you mob of woman, you all got pussy!" There is a need here to separate at the analytical level at least, the character of particular relationships between men and women from the use of these gender-based distinctions by men (and also women) to categorize certain personal attributes and values. As Strathern noted of gender imagery used by Mt Hagen people of the New Guinea Highlands:

The attachment of these other ideas to gender employs gender as a ranking mechanism. It is essential to such a mechanism that one sex should carry connotations of inferior status.⁸⁸

It could not be assumed that there was a necessary homology or correspondence between hierarchically ordered gender-based symbolism and the character of mundane relationships between given men and women. Wik men did not necessarily dominate women at this day-to-day level;

Andrew was an late middle aged man who was an acknowledged ritual specialist, with a great depth of knowledge of pre-contact life. His wife, Sandra, also highly knowledgeable and a leader in *wuungk* performances at mortuary ceremonies, totally dominated their domestic life at the mundane level, ordering her husband around, intervening in his explanations to me of ritual matters, constantly telling him that he was *weenhth* (silly). Yet, on one occasion when we were all sitting and watching a large group of drunken young men brawling nearby, he commented to me; "When they sober, they walk around like woman, they *maal* (timid, quiet). But when they drink, they become man now, they fight. My time, spear or woomera. They only fight with fist now."

This relative evaluation of maleness and femaleness (and of male and female sexuality) by men themselves should occasion no surprise, since at the ideological level as men represented it at least, women's sexuality had been the object of corporate male interest. Nor should it occasion surprise that there were powerful resonances between the relative evaluations by men of male and female sexuality in the wider Australian society and that of the contemporary Wik, the former feeding into the latter at every level including through television and pornographic magazines and videos, in wide circulation within Aurukun. Figure 2.3 below gives an indication of the homologies between superordinate male sexual and ritual potency, and male denigration of women's sexuality.

88. Strathern (1981:177). Bourdieu (1977a:164) writes equivalently but more generally of the "political function of classification".

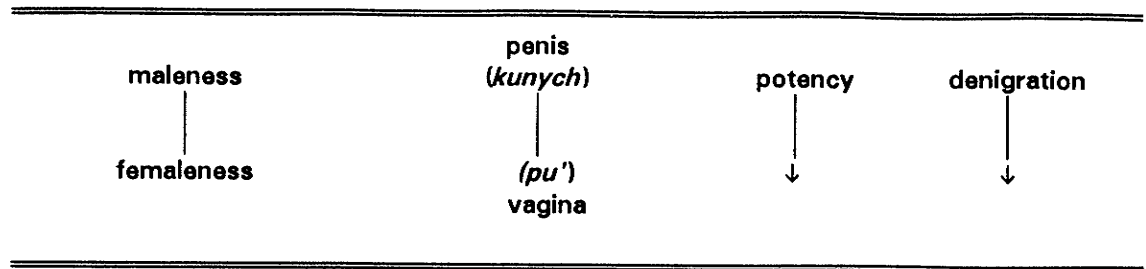


Figure 2.3 Gender-based homologies

As discussed above, it was not only men however who used these derogatory terms. In using epithets denigratory of female sexuality, women themselves were arguably participating in the reproduction of practices and of symbolic forms which contributed to their subordinate position in Wik society. For it is clear I suggest from the ethnography that it is not simply a matter of Wik men directly dominating Wik women, nor of the imposition of a dominant male ideology on them; to argue in such terms would be to ignore the involvement of women themselves in the reproduction of these very forms. As Thompson, in a critique of Bourdieu, puts it;

.. it would be misguided to approach a society on the assumption that its unity and stability were secured by a 'dominant ideology'. For ideology operates, not so much as a coherent system of statements imposed on a population from above, but rather through a complex series of mechanisms whereby meaning is mobilized, in the discursive practices of everyday life, for the maintenance of relations of domination.⁸⁹

This theme, which could be portrayed in terms of people's unwitting complicity in their own domination, is one to which I will return in the last section of this chapter.

Productive activities

In Chapter 1, I argued that in the absence of formal pedagogy it was not so much a matter of Wik children being instructed in gender-specific roles, but rather that through praxis a sense of the appropriateness and limits of behaviour for each sex had been inculcated and internalized from earliest childhood. Children imitated not models but others' actions, from which they derived implicit models.⁹⁰ The 'division of labour' for Wik thus did not simply entail the control and direction of productive activity by the dominant gender in the light of explicit rules (men should hunt and drive trucks, women must gather and do the washing) but arose more basically from this sense of the appropriateness of specific activities. In detailing these, I turn first to a consideration of practices away from the settlement, when for instance camping or living on outstations.

89. Thompson (1984:63) is here criticizing what he sees as Bourdieu's overly consensual model of social reproduction.

90. Bourdieu (1977a:87)

The division of labour out bush

McConnel recorded an outline of the respective productive activities of Wik men and women as she observed them in the 1920s and 1930s.⁹¹ The men hunted and fished with spears for wallaby, flying fox, emu, large fish, stingray and so forth, depending on local environment and season, and manufactured the items required - spears, woomeras, messmate bark canoes and so forth. Women searched for small game - digging out swamp turtles from the mud, using nets and lines to catch small fish, gathering mudshells from the mangrove fringes, catching crabs. They also (according to season and location) dug for yams, arrowroot and other tubers, swam for waterlily roots and stems, collected bush fruits and dug in the mud for 'panjies'.⁹² During their foraging, women collected the materials necessary for manufacturing their dilly bags, fishing nets and other items. Her observations would seem to indicate that men and women conducted their activities separately,⁹³ returning to camp at the end of the day with produce to be shared out amongst appropriate kin.⁹⁴ Women were accompanied by the small children and babies,⁹⁵ and she notes that women spent time in these foraging trips gossiping and relaxing.⁹⁶ The missionary Geraldine MacKenzie records similarly, but with a rather more subjective tone;

His wife, meanwhile, looked round for roots, fruits and nuts in their season, and small marsupials or the little turtles ... She was bound to feed him and their children, but not he her.

Any feminist, reading those last four words, whose heart fills with wrath and perhaps compassion for her hapless dark sister, will breathe again and perhaps gain wisdom, when she learns that the woman (*sic*) had, if they felt like it, a little rest on the long way back to the main camp, and cooked and ate some little animal ... that had fallen victim to their almost unerring aim with a stick ...⁹⁷

The gender-based activities which McConnel noted (and which in changed forms continued to be reproduced in the contemporary situation) were underpinned and legitimated by mythology⁹⁸ and by certain symbolic constructs. Male initiations rendered the psychological component *ngangk chaaprr* more potent; it was seen as underlying men's capacities in such homologous domains as hunting, sexual prowess and fighting.⁹⁹ The hunting and fighting spears such as *kek anychathan* and *kek wopan* and the woomera *thul* were the material symbols of manhood; McKnight notes

91. McConnel (1930a:100-4, 1953:6-15, 1957:3-9)

92. *may kuthal*, the corms of a rush species.

93. McConnel (1930a:102,103)

94. *ibid*:103

95. *ibid*:102. See also photograph in McConnel (1957:8)

96. McConnel (1930a:102)

97. MacKenzie (1981:141)

98. e.g. McConnel (1957:54)

99. See discussion in Chapter 5. These domains are also arguably linked in certain Australian English expressions. With "game" having the core reference to hunted meat, "she's fair game" can be used of a woman seen to be sexually available, and "he's not game" of someone afraid to fight.

that the spear was associated with the penis,¹⁰⁰ and even more so was the woomera, *thul* being a common euphemism for penis. Where the spear and woomera had symbolized masculinity, the various dillybags *waangk* and the digging stick *kechan* were the material symbols of womanhood.¹⁰¹ The digging stick symbolized both female productivity - utilized as it was for digging yams - and women's own fighting style, where it had been used to divert spears away from their menfolk and also to cripple and blind opponents.

The spear or woomera, actual or metaphorical, had been the instrument through which male prowess had been realized. In 1933, Donald Thomson photographed *pewnguchan* female mourners elaborately dressed for *wuungk* ritual in male *Apalach* paint, holding spears and firesticks in their left hands and woomeras in their right.¹⁰² *Pewnguchan* performed only for deceased males. There was in this ritual inversion a symmetry, a form of logical homology, with the stage in initiation rituals where senior men had 'given birth' to younger ones. Senior men became quasi-female in giving social birth to young men, while women became quasi-male in mortuary rites for men.

The general patterns of activity appropriate to each gender continued amongst the contemporary Wik in their forays into the bush from outstations and long term camps around the Archer River estuary, and in weekend camps and on day trips round Aurukun itself. Spears were rarely used by most contemporary Wik, except for large fish like barramundi and for sea turtles and stingray, having been replaced by rifles. Many young men were quite unskilled in the use of a spear. Whereas rifles were exclusively used by boys and men, pronged fish spears were occasionally used by women for crabs or swamp turtle, but never in my observation in conjunction with a woomera. Men quite often used fishing lines, and it was not uncommon to see men, women and children fishing down at the Aurukun landing, or off a dinghy moored in the estuary. Such activities - hunting for the men, fishing or gathering mudshell for the women - were highly valued in themselves, not least for the relaxed sociability that was an intrinsic part of the process, as well as for the foods themselves, a welcome and prized change from store-purchased goods. People often told me that they felt 'fresh' out bush; women who were incessant gamblers in town out bush assiduously prepared dampers, or fished and collected shell, and some of the young men who spent their days in desultory compliance with C.D.E.P. work requirements while waiting for the canteen to open, could on weekends expend considerable energy in seeking, butchering and cooking game such as pigs.

Store foods such as soft drinks, tea and sugar, syrup and honey, bread and (particularly) flour provided the bulk of carbohydrates in the bush as in the township. Bush fruits in season were sometimes collected, mainly by women and children, although they rarely constituted a major item in terms of quantity or of subsequent redistribution; what were collected (whether by men or women) was generally for individual and immediate consumption. During the mid to late dry season, some

100. McKnight (1973:202)

101. See also McConnel (1930a:102)

women still dug for the long yams (*may wathiy*), but other tubers such as *may nam* and *may ka'arr* were rarely collected, and then only by older women. The easy availability of flour had a major impact on women's productive activities, releasing them from the necessity for the often arduous work involved in obtaining and processing the bush foods. Twenty kilogram drums of flour were the omnipresent accompaniments of Wik trips to the bush, along with tea, powdered milk and sugar. Empty, the drums provided water storage containers, obviating the necessity to dig water soaks on shorter trips. A large damper - a dough made from flour, water and baking soda cooked in the ashes of the campfire or on a hot metal plate - could be prepared by a woman with a fraction of the labour she would have required to dig long yams (*wathiy*), to dig and prepare bitter yams (*ka'arr*), or to dive for and prepare water lily roots (*umpiy*), some of the mainstays of the past.¹⁰³ Furthermore, the vagaries of seasonal fluctuations in food supplies were no longer the problem they had been before flour became a staple.

With the simply prepared dampers along with heavily sweetened tea providing basic sustenance for groups out bush, both men and women had more time there to devote to other activities, whether productive or purely social. Women and children of the groups camping on the rich estuarine fringes for instance collected mudshells and crabs, caught small bait fish with castnets, and fished with lines. Women spent much of their freed time however in spirited discussion of the minutiae of social life - fights, lovers' escapades, drunks' exploits - in playing with small children, playing cards, or just in desultory relaxation. The differences between the generations of Wik women were apparent in how time was used away from the township. The older generation who had spent considerable portions of their lives out bush were rarely doing nothing productive, unless actually asleep; even when engaged in animated conversation they were busy with such tasks as making string from fan palm fibre, weaving baskets or making dilly bags for sale to the A.C.I. as handcrafts. Only a handful of young women had these skills, essentially because neither the objective requirements for their maintenance nor the social contexts in which they could be transmitted existed.¹⁰⁴

It was rare for a Wik man to make damper with women present in camp, even out bush. It was not that they lacked the technical competence, because many knew how to cook damper and johnny cakes from their cattle days,¹⁰⁵ and in hunting expeditions men would often cook these for themselves. Equally, when only men were present they would on occasion dig for yams, although those such as *may wathiy* (long yam) and *may ka'arra* (bitter yams) dug by a man were reclassified as *may*

102. Held in the Donald Thomson collection at the Museum of Victoria, and published in Sutton (1988b:27).

103. Morris (1989:86-7) equivalently notes that the use of flour entails no changes in cooking techniques as such, but simplifies the process significantly. Morris however rejects the 'principle of utility as the agency of change'; for *Dhan-Gadi* Aboriginal people of northern New South Wales, the campfire remained one of the few areas of life in which cultural knowledge had not been usurped and displaced. Cooking on the campfire is seen by Morris as transformative, mediating European foodstuffs and indigenizing their consumption.

104. Although there was an intermittently operating C.D.E.P. handcrafts team where some young women were learning some of these skills

105. Similar to damper, but thinner and often cooked directly on the coals.

ampanam and were taboo for his wife.¹⁰⁶ That women should cook dampers for a kin group at a camp or for a household in the township was unquestioned, just as it was that men should hunt, prepare and cook the larger game such as pig and wallaby that they brought back to the camp or the township. It was noted in the first chapter that most activity for Wik children was self-directed, with an absence of overt and hierarchically organized controls. This ethos of self-direction (and its concomitant, the resistance to control) was strongly maintained in Wik adults, whether women or men, and was reflected in hunting, gathering, food preparation and many other such productive tasks out bush. Men organized themselves to go on hunting expeditions, and equally women decided whether or not to fish, to gather mudshell, or dig for yams. Children too, made their own decisions as to what to do, joining in with the appropriate adult activity depending on age and sex (the young boys setting off hunting with older males for instance) or playing, teasing and fighting amongst themselves around the women's activities. I rarely observed men directly ordering women to undertake these particular tasks, although young men in particular quite often did demand of a girlfriend that she cook for him; the angry disputes that erupted, often involving the bashing of the girl by her boyfriend, were manifestations of the sexual jealousy and possessiveness that characterized many such relationships between Wik teenagers. Once the foods had been gathered and prepared however, there was very strong pressure to distribute them and (depending on restrictions applying to the particular food)¹⁰⁷ to give a share to male kin or spouse. This offers a suggestive clue to the nature of gender-based domination to which I shall return, in considering the construction of intergender relations in terms of nurturance.

Two sisters and their classificatory niece, all women in their forties from clan 6, had organized a day trip by truck from the township up to **Woor-kung-enych** on the Watson River.¹⁰⁸ The party also included their spouses, and some of their smaller children, grandchildren and teenaged daughters. The women cooked dampers and made tea, and then along with the children and girls went into the mosquito infested mangroves to look for mudshell *minh ochangan*. Some of the shells they kept whole, others were smashed open and the flesh put in billycans to be washed later. While they were gone, the men relaxed in the shade, drinking tea, helping themselves to damper and chatting in a desultory fashion. The gathering party returned an hour or so later; the whole shells were cooked by the women on the coals until they opened, some of the meat was threaded onto reeds and grilled on coals, and the remainder boiled in the billycans to be eaten with the damper. The men ate the shell collected by their respective wives, since there were restrictions on their eating those collected by their children.¹⁰⁹

At one level, such practices could be seen as evidence of both Hamilton's 'homosociality' and of the appropriation of women's labour by men. Yet when the women and children had returned to the day camp, couples from the various domestic

106. McKnight (1973:200) records similarly that when dug by men, the yam species *may nam* was referred to as *may umpinum*, was reclassified as *ngenyeh* (taboo), and could not be eaten by women but had to be shared with senior males.

107. McKnight (1973:passim)

108. Site # DM-315, S.A. Museum # 2315 (Sutton, Martin et al 1990).

109. See McKnight (1973:198-9)

units shared the same shade, and there was relaxed conversation and laughter which involved all, women men and children. It was certainly true that the men had consumed the food gathered by the women. On the other hand, the trip had been initiated and organized by the women, and the truck had been provided and driven by one of the men at the request of his wife. The men on this occasion had not gone hunting, but on most trips out bush men would take guns and more often than not come back with pig, wildfowl or other game. This they would usually prepare and cook, and women and children would have a share. Very often too, women who had collected crabs or shell or caught fish on a foray out from a base camp, or on a day trip from the township, would relax at a day shade and prepare and cook and eat their fill before taking the balance back for spouses, children and other kin. Admittedly, very often men asserted priority, appropriating a greater portion of their own production than did women of theirs. Furthermore, not all groups evinced the same relaxed relations between the sexes as this one, but in terms of considering the nature of domination and subordination between the genders, it is essential that the full range of contexts in which productive and other activities took place are considered.

Productive activities in the township

Life for Wik in the bush camps and outstations was of a different order from that in the Aurukun township, where the objective structures within which they operated were determined much more directly by outside forces. The tempo of life was established largely by the flows of money into the settlement, the parameters within which the spatial organization of much of life took place were set by the township layout, and the social and temporal structuring of significant portions of the day were determined for many Wik by instituted forms such as work and school. Life took place in contexts where there was of necessity interaction with a far greater number of people than was the case for the self-organized bush camps, in circumstances where Wik's own structuring principles based on such factors as kin links were at best severely compromised. While Wik may have adapted and subverted these instituted structures to their own ends, none-the-less at the deepest of levels Aurukun was the creature of White Australian social and political imperatives.

These factors had important consequences for *inter alia*, relations between the genders (as well as the generations). Furthermore, except for what was intermittently brought in to some households through hunting and fishing, food for those living in the township now came almost entirely from the A.C.I. store, with some fresh beef from the butcher shop which slaughtered a beast at most once or twice a week. Money had become the dominant medium of exchange within and between the material and symbolic economies, and (as discussed in Chapter 3) even children had access to comparatively large amounts of cash. It was increasingly common for adult male household members to contribute little from their cash incomes directly towards the purchase of food for the household unit, but to buy only sufficient convenience foods for their own immediate needs. While women spent a higher proportion of their incomes than men on food,¹¹⁰ total village-wide food expenditures were

110. As shown in Chapter 3.

declining as a proportion of total cash income.¹¹¹ There was a strong trend towards 'convenience' foods, with bread (when available) replacing damper, tinned meats replacing fresh beef and game, and a considerable proportion of cash being spent on takeaway foods, which by September 1986 amounted to some 40 percent of total store takings.¹¹² The relatively poor nutritional value of many of these foods of course coupled with such factors as an increasingly sedentary lifestyle for most Wik had a major detrimental effect on health, particularly that of children.

As noted in the first chapter, by the time many children were 4 or 5 years old, their relationships with adults (including their mothers) were characterized less by physical care and affection than by demanding behaviour on the part of the child for food, money and so forth. Through the flows of money to them from kin, children in fact directly commanded a significant part of the village cash income, in 1986 perhaps 7 percent.¹¹³ Given the construction of love and nurturance in terms of the flows of material items, particularly money, mothers and others such as older female siblings and grandparents could give cash to children and claim to have legitimately discharged their obligations to provide sustenance.

A mother was reproached by her spouse for not cooking for her younger children, aged between four and twelve. She asserted that she had given them money from her Family Allowance cheque. In any case, she argued, "They're not babies, they can look after themselves!"

As a result, children increasingly provided for themselves by moving from house to house in search of food or purchasing items such as chips and soft drinks from the takeaways, rather than having food directly prepared for them.

In certain senses then, the township situation gave women more autonomy than had been the case in the past, or still was the case in the camps and outstations where they were directly responsible for much of basic domestic unit sustenance. Widowed or separated women were able to remain single in the contemporary township, whereas in the past they would have been expected to remarry.¹¹⁴ Certainly, they had greater sexual freedom than had been the case in the past. This could be seen as one aspect of the greater emphasis on individuation amongst Wik that I have previously referred to. In Aurukun, women could, and often did, avoid demands on their labour within the household, they had a range of valued activities such as card playing where they could assert their independence of demands on them, and while they commanded a smaller share of material resources than did men, it was none-the-less a significant one.¹¹⁵ On the other hand, the situation in the township engendered very high levels of conflict and violence by men against women, including sexual assaults, from which women had little protection. The very lack of rigidly separated male and female secular domains compounded this; there were for instance, none of

111. See Chapters 3 and 4.

112. See Chapter 3. Source: D.F. Martin economic census, 1986.

113. See Chapter 3.

114. See McConnel (1934:327), von Sturmer [Smith] (1980b)

115. See Chapter 3

the single women's camps acting as quasi-refuges that Bell describes for the desert *Warlpiri*, *Kaytej* and *Arrernte*.¹¹⁶

Men's and women's participation in formal 'work'

The nature of involvement by men and women in various categories of 'work' within the township arose from the intersection between what both Wik and White constituted as appropriate modes of behaviour. More Wik men than women had employment, either full time or under C.D.E.P. As shown in Table 2.1 below, of the 195 C.D.E.P. employees in February 1986, only 21 were female and all seven supervisors (who oversaw the operations of each team) were male. Wik men worked in the 'outside' teams involved in the C.D.E.P. 'town cleanup', 'parks and gardens', 'cemetery cleanup', 'fencing' and other teams. It was exclusively men who drove trucks and operated heavy machinery such as graders and rollers, who unloaded the trucks and barges bringing supplies, and who worked as mechanics and assistants in the Shire and Company workshops. It was mostly (although not exclusively) men who raked and burned the leaves under the old mango trees in the administration area and manicured the lawns and gardens around the new Shire Council office - clear demonstration if it were needed of the quasi-colonial nature of Aurukun - whereas Wik women and girls mopped and cleaned inside, in the offices and the school.

Table 2.1 Gender involvement in formal employment

		C.D.E.P. general	C.D.E.P. supervisor	Full-time workers ^c
Male	Wik ^a	163	6	41
	Other ^b	4	1	5
Female	Wik ^a	21	0	21
	Other ^b	0	0	1
Total		188	7	68

Source: Aurukun Shire records, and D.F. Martin census Feb. 1986

a) Including non-Wik long-term Aboriginal residents

b) Including non-staff Whites living in village and shorter-term Aboriginal visitors

c) Including a number of full time workers paid under C.D.E.P.

In part because of personal preferences and relationships developed by the Hospital matron and her husband however, the situation was to a degree reversed there, with male orderlies cleaning and mopping while women acted as cooks, receptionists and nursing aides. The roles assigned to Wik paralleled to a degree those of the matron and her husband, who was the groundsman and general handyman. Furthermore, in mainstream Australia the general pattern is for the more prestigious roles in the health area to be held by males; doctors and administrators tend to be male, nurses and hospital cleaners to be female (although these patterns are

116. Bell (1978, 1983). Attempts by Wik women from about 1990 to have a women's shelter

now changing to some extent). These more traditional mainstream female roles were considered appropriate for Wik from Mission days, and all Wik health workers, both in the hospital and in the Aboriginal Health Team which monitored child health, the elderly and so forth, were women. In the village on the other hand, Wik *noyan*, healers, with extremely few exceptions were men. Both Wik men and women worked as teaching aides in the school, although until the mid 1980s this had been an exclusively female domain. In the Shire and company offices, there was a preponderance of Wik men working as pay clerk assistants Community workers and travel booking agents, both men and women operated the telephone switchboard, while in the store it was mostly women who operated the tills and men who brought goods out from the bulk store out for display and sale.

In these work patterns, there was a general (although not complete) assignment of women to inside jobs, and of men to the outside ones. In February 1986, of the 20 Wik women in full-time employment, 9 worked in the hospital or Aboriginal Health Team, 4 in the school as teacher aides, 2 on the till at the store, 4 were cleaners and 1 worked for the Handcraft store.¹¹⁷ Of the 21 women under the C.D.E.P. scheme, 3 received a proportion of their spouse's C.D.E.P. wages under split-pay arrangements, while the remainder worked as cleaners, as Council police aides, and making handcrafts. Most men, whether in full-time employment or under C.D.E.P. worked in manual and outside jobs; the exceptions were the Shire Community Workers, and the relatively few young men who worked in the store, travel agency, and Shire office. However, it would not be correct to assimilate 'inside' work necessarily with a domestic and lower prestige domain and 'outside' with the public and higher prestige one in any simple way as far as Wik themselves constructed it.

It is instructive here to also look at the ownership of capital items within the Aurukun village. As part of a household census conducted in February 1986, I obtained information on the assigned ownership of various categories of consumer goods; the results are summarized in Table 2.2. It should be emphasized that 'ownership' was that assigned by members of the particular household approached during the survey. This would not necessarily be directly correlated with relative amounts of cash contributed by various people to the purchase of the item concerned; for instance, while siblings may have contributed to the purchase price of a car, it may still be assigned as primarily owned by a particular man. Nor did assigned (or claimed) ownership have any necessary correlation with exclusive control of a given item.

financed and constructed by the Shire Council were frustrated by a lack of will on the part of the predominantly male Council and its staff.

117. Source: D.F. Martin Household census February 1986

Table 2.2 Ownership of consumer goods by gender

Item	Number	Male owned (%)	Female owned (%)	Joint owned (%)
Washing machine	62	47	40	13
Other domestic ^a	60	60	26	14
Television	49	63	25	12
Refrigerator	62	63	27	10
Video recorder	24	64	18	18
Car	20	78	11	11
4WD	16	79	7	14
Outboard	31	81	16	3
Dinghy	35	90	5	5

Source: D.F. Martin, household survey February 1986.

a) Small appliances such as electric frying pans, fans, kettles etc.

If this table is examined, it can be seen that for all of these consumer items men were the majority of designated owners. It can also be seen that men's ownership was the lowest for those goods which were essentially domestic, such as washing machines and small electric appliances, and highest for prestigious items used in the public domain such as cars and boats. What is also interesting is the proportion of assigned joint ownership of certain goods, although again it was highest for domestic items. That Wik women were assigned quite a high proportion of the ownership of outboard motors and vehicles is not surprising, given that in comparison to other Aboriginal groups the day-to-day relations between the sexes were relatively equalitarian among Wik.¹¹⁸

Nurturance and the domination of women

I have argued in this chapter that while Wik male and female ritual domains had not been characterized by a radical separation, those particular to women had ultimately been subsumed by those of men, and male ritually based potency had been represented as pre-eminent. Men and women had complementary areas of knowledge and responsibilities, and (noting the ever-present feature of idiosyncratic interpretations) meanings had been attributed conjointly to ritual and mythological forms. There had been the same pattern in the more mundane spheres of life, without the more extreme forms of 'homosociality' reported of some other Aboriginal groups. Appropriate and essentially complementary technical skills, activities and knowledge had existed for each gender. The essential features of this gender-based division of the world continued to be reproduced in the contemporary situation, with Wik men for example monopolizing paid employment and that under C.D.E.P. What were considered by both Wik men and women to be appropriate roles in the domestic sphere or in the workforce, technical knowledge and skills, and modes of behaviour

118. It should be noted that a significant proportion of vehicles and other consumer goods were not in operating condition, in no small part because of the difficulties Wik faced in controlling their use by other kin.

continued to be broadly gender-specific. At the same time, I have suggested that in certain respects women had more autonomy in the contemporary situation than had been the case in the past. However, it was women's labour which still underpinned the maintenance of households and of basic subsistence for their members, but such features of the contemporary situation as convenience foods, women's independent access to cash and their distribution of it to the children for whom they had responsibilities, meant they were not tied to productive activities to the same extent as in the past. Joint meanings continued to be attributed to broad classifications of human attributes based on gender, such as those relating to timidity and aggression. I also discussed what I characterized as a profound male ambivalence to female sexuality, manifested at all levels, mundane and ritual.

It could be argued that underlying all compliance by Wik women with demands on resources such as their labour, their money and their sexuality, was the threat (and admittedly far from infrequent use) of physical violence by men.¹¹⁹ However, it would in my view be quite erroneous to assume that physical coercion by men was a necessary condition of domination; to do so would be to ignore the kinds of conjoint meanings attributed by both men and women to social practices and representations such as those mentioned above. It would also ignore the fundamental role of women in the social reproduction of men and of masculinity, for while there may have been degrees of both complementarity and separation in gender-based domains, at the deepest and most intimate levels, men's and women's lives were inextricably intertwined.

In fact, with the reduction of the importance of male productive activity in the maintenance of domestic units, and with the sundering of autogenous mechanisms of control by senior men of junior ones due (in part at least) to the disappearance of forms such as male initiations and other ritual practices, and their replacement with the powerful symbolic media of cash and alcohol, there was a fundamental diminution in the role of older men in reproducing a socialized male ethos. Women continued to give birth to and be involved as the principal nurturers of children, but senior men increasingly had little direct involvement in the social reproduction of younger ones. Whereas initiations and the constitution of masculinity through them had social value attributed by both men and women, this was not the case for the new forms (like heavy drinking and stealing cars), which were seen by many older Wik as highly problematic. The initiatory context in which young men had been removed from the world of indulged childhood to be reconstituted as men had been replaced by others which young men themselves created, and the inculcation and appropriation of the contemporary ethos for younger Wik men was increasingly taking place within these peer groups. However this new ethos was as I shall shortly argue profoundly influenced by indulgent nurturing from female kin, and I now turn to a brief consideration of nurturing as a principal means through which Wik male superordination was being reproduced in contemporary Aurukun, through examining the role of women in the social reproduction of contemporary forms of masculinity.

119. See Burbank (1988)

Hierarchy and nurturance

Myers, in a doctoral thesis, a number of articles and an important book has dealt at length with the question of social reproduction for *Pintupi* of the Western Desert.¹²⁰ In Myers' analysis, the *Pintupi* concept of *kanyininpa* or 'looking after' integrated multiple domains of life - familial and kinship relations, those between super- and sub-ordinates such as between senior men and juniors in initiations, and those to land - and placed hierarchy and authority within a moral framework. The social world was represented by *Pintupi* as a succession of generations each 'holding' or 'looking after' the succeeding ones.¹²¹ There was a construction and legitimation of male hierarchy as nurturant, based on older men transmitting valued ritual knowledge to younger ones.¹²² A 'boss' was not someone who held an office of authority or formal leadership, but was represented as one who 'looked after' his subordinates.¹²³

This correlation of authority and 'looking after' in the use of the English term 'boss' is by all accounts a pervasive theme in Aboriginal Australia. Diane von Sturmer [Smith], in her study of the *Kugu Nganycharra* Wik from south of the Kendall River, similarly argues as her central thesis that what she terms the 'idiom of nurturing' lay at the centre of social relations of reproduction.¹²⁴ Nurturing she defines as "the giving and receiving of care, nourishment, protection and support".¹²⁵ This idiom of nurturing she posits as central to *Kugu Nganycharra* conceptions of hierarchy and of the moral basis of the exercise of power. Thus, women's elder sisters were 'boss' for them and for their children, in the sense of being in a position of moral authority over them,¹²⁶ and more generally senior and super-ordinate individuals were 'boss for' those junior and subordinate to them. As 'bosses', individuals were expected to 'look after' others and in return required them to 'work for' them.¹²⁷ She clearly demonstrates a flexible system whereby reciprocal rights and obligations between care-giving kin and children as they matured were established through involvement in giving and receiving nurture.¹²⁸ This idiom of nurturing not only expressed *Kugu Nganycharra* conceptions of relationships within kindreds, but also those of people to land:

Kugu Nganycharra people are said to be "boss for" and thereby have the duty to "look after" land in the same way that they are "boss for" and must "look after" specific people.¹²⁹

120. Myers (1976; 1979; 1986;)

121. Myers (1986:217-55)

122. *ibid*:220

123. *ibid*:223

124. D. Von Sturmer [Smith] (1980:396)

125. *ibid*:i

126. *ibid*:342

127. *ibid*:397

128. *ibid*:384,369; *passim*

129. *ibid*:396

Sutton writes equivalently although more briefly of parallel themes among the Cape Keerweer Wik. Older people used a special 'respect register' in speaking to children. Power was represented as dangerous to junior or younger people, and "bosses" maintained their position as custodians of power;

... by acting ... with solicitude and care in relation to the young, protecting them from "big meats" by reserving them to themselves, protecting them from ritual danger by the giving of armpit smell and by preventing them from visiting dangerous places, giving them licence (freedom from many taboos or restraints) while young, and then giving them knowledge as they (became) adults.¹³⁰

Cape Keerweer Wik also spoke of 'owning' land in *Wik Ngathan* in terms of *kooepanha*,¹³¹ meaning "to look after, wait for, wait upon, guard",¹³² while a 'boss for country' was the estate owner who was the most prominent in relation to clan and estate affairs.¹³³ Europeans such as Sutton or myself who were adopted into the kinship system were frequently referred to as 'boss', which in that context was not someone who gave orders but "our boy, who works for us".¹³⁴

The pressure to disburse material items was an active and all-pervasive feature of Wik sociality, but while both men and women demanded, men (and male children - see Chapter 1) were more successful in appropriating money and other goods held by women than the reverse. "*Mama, ninta minh ya' ey?*" - "Mama, have you got meat?" - asked one man of his classificatory mother after the canteen had closed one night. Despite the fact that the food had been set aside for her youngest daughter, the woman fed her 'son', recently returned from another settlement. Both positive and negative sanctions applied to sharing. Given the construction of love and nurturance in terms of the dispensing of material items, a woman who gave to her brothers, sons and other male kin was demonstrating her love for them. On the other hand, the refusal to give could attract negative sanctions from men, including violence and destruction;

Jimmy, after drinking cask wine that his non-drinking mother had brought in for him from Cairns, went down to the canteen and drank two jugs of beer there. After being refused permission to purchase a further jug by the canteen management, he went up to his grandmother Rachel's house and smashed most of the glass louvres, gashing his hand badly in the process. He claimed it was because Rachel had promised him money from her pension cheque but had not done so. He spent the night in gaol. While Rachel denied having promised him the money, she went down to the Police station early the next morning and paid the bail money to get him out of the cells. She and Jimmy's mother looked after him unselfishly after his release, giving him breakfast and fussing attentively and contritely around him.

130. Sutton (1978:197)

131. *kuupan* in *Wik Mungkan*.

132. *ibid*:57

133. *ibid*:61

134. *ibid*:197

On another occasion, Jimmy's elder brother Stanley, aged in his mid-twenties and with his own spouse and infant child, broke into his mother's house when she was away on a camping trip and emptied all the cupboards of most of their food. When the mother's present spouse complained, saying that her younger children were dependent on the food, her reply was, "*Nila puk ngatharram, ngaya mak thee'angant!*" - He is my child, it is up to me to give to him! Women in fact often talked almost in terms of compulsion, of an extremely strong moral imperative, in describing their giving to men. "I must give," said one woman of her cooking and providing food for her mostly late-adolescent sons. "He is my son, he came from half of my body. I have to forgive him," explained Stanley's mother of her son's taking food from the house in the incident above.

The pressure by men on women for both material and symbolic resources was particularly strong when alcohol was involved. This was not only so for meat or other food when men were drunk and searching from house to house for a feed, but also for money with which to purchase the alcohol. Much male drinking was financed by money given them by female kin from pensions, supporting mothers' benefits, and family allowance incomes as well as from women's own gambling winnings. Very often too, non-drinking women would line up and purchase beer for their drinking male kin, to circumvent limits intermittently enforced by the canteen management. In providing material resources, and also in caring for drunk sons, grandsons or spouses, protecting them from harming themselves, fighting for them, women were demonstrating their nurturant behaviour;

Byron was extremely drunk. In fact, he had not even got as far as the canteen that night, because he had ordered in six cartons of beer by plane and had been drinking steadily all afternoon. As he staggered from house to house, breaking incoherently into snatches of song, and swearing and cursing, his wife Jeanie followed him, trying to smooth his passage, interceding with others who potentially threatened him and mollifying him when he became aggressive. He eventually collapsed on the ground, under a light near where Jeanie's sister had spread out a blanket on which he could lie. At one stage, he staggered to his feet and moved threateningly towards Jeanie, accusing her of being unfaithful to him. When he fell back to the ground, she tenderly leaned over him, brushing the sand off his face, back and sides.

Conclusion: Nurturers as subordinates

In the accounts of Myers and von Sturmer [Smith], it was the nurturers who were super-ordinate; it was they who mediated and gave access to valued goods, whether symbolic (as in the case of male ritual knowledge) or material (food, physical care and so forth). There is no doubt that the observations of *Kugu Nganycharra* concepts by von Sturmer [Smith] were true of other Wik groups as well; there was the same pervasive theme of authority being represented in terms of nurturance and caring. "You our boss, you got to look after us," I was told frequently by older people in my years as a Community Adviser. Yet of course, the ideological assimilation of authority and nurturance must of necessity be dependent upon two

factors; the material or symbolic items being transacted must be valued by both giver and recipient, and the locus of control of the transaction must lie with the 'nurturers' rather than with the recipient.

There was a radical attenuation in the role of autogenous forms of knowledge among younger generations of Wik. Although they were still of importance to many older people they no longer, in any substantive sense, provided a basis whereby hierarchy continued to be reproduced in Aurukun. The ultimate sources of the new valued symbolic and material forms for men - in particular money and alcohol - lay outside Wik society, and no longer required senior males to mediate access to them, except insofar as they controlled in a secular sense agencies such as the Shire Council and the canteen. The nurturant role of men for their juniors - primarily expressed as it had been in the mediation of ritual and other autogenous forms of knowledge - was no longer valued, nor indeed objectively possible.

This was not however the case for women. Their nurturant roles for and emotional attachment to male kin had been primarily expressed through physical care, nourishment and support rather than by transmitting knowledge or mediating ritual power.¹³⁵ Emotions such as love and care were substantiated by and culturally represented by Wik in terms of the flows of material items, in particular in contemporary Aurukun cash. Women, through their affection for their male kin and their own access to cash incomes and to gambling winnings, and through their roles as the basic maintainers of domestic sustenance, continued to play central roles as nurturers of men, spending proportionately more of their incomes on providing for kin than did men. Whereas the material items which women furnished such as money and food were publicly valued by men, the symbolic components of feminized nurturance - love and emotional attachment - were not. As has been argued, at both symbolic and mundane levels femaleness was disparaged by many Wik men. Thus, while women expressed their nurturance and love for male kin through providing their labour, giving them cash and protecting and defending them in conflicts, men were able to draw upon the virtually inexhaustible stores of symbolic capital they possessed in women's emotional bonds to them, and more generally in the super-ordinate ranking of maleness to femaleness as symbolic constructs, to appropriate women's labour, money and other items. In Thompson's words:¹³⁶

"... in interpersonal relationships, for example, it is the affection of the other which is often employed as a resource by agents in pursuit of divergent aims."

That is, in an inversion of the ideological representation of male authority as nurturance, here it was the female nurturers who were subordinate, and the nurtured and (at certain levels, the dependent) who were the dominant. Finlayson has written along similar lines of Aboriginal gender relations in 'Rubyville' in north Queensland. In considering the impact of welfare incomes on the distribution of power between the genders, she writes;

135. von Sturmer [Smith] (1980:277) claims that in most daily situations and over time, *Kugu Nganycharra* women were more central to the nurturance of children than were men.

136. Thompson (1984:69)

In Rubyville, women's economic potential to dominate is subverted by a socialization process encouraging a symbiotic relationship of nurturance and dependence between the genders. This principle is intended to forge sociality through a flow of resources (goods, knowledge, cash) monitored by claims, rights, requests, and demands.¹³⁷

In relations between the genders in Aurukun, as in Rubyville, power did not inhere so much in the material goods - cash and so on - which each gender potentially at least controlled, but in the symbolic assets which were brought to bear in competing for these material resources. The power then that was being exercised by men was not perceived by women as such, but as legitimate demands on their services, both material and symbolic.¹³⁸ The social representation of such relationships in terms of nurturance nonetheless *misrecognized* them, socially repressed the objective truth of the appropriation of labour and symbolic services by the super-ordinate.¹³⁹

The paradox was that it was primarily Wik women, along with the children for whom they were the principal care givers, who directly bore the brunt of much of men's drinking and violence, and more indirectly the consequences (such as poor health and even malnutrition) of their appropriation of resources such as food and money. It is here then that I suggest it is legitimate to argue in terms of women being complicit in their own domination by men. It was a domination in whose reproduction women were themselves unwittingly participating; in Thompson's words it was a "collective deception without a deceiver, for it (was) a misrecognition embodied in the *habitus* of the group".¹⁴⁰ Furthermore, in the absence of autogenous or introduced social mechanisms to re-form males from dependent children into social and material producers as they matured, Wik women's nurturance assisted in the production of men who in many cases seemed mired in a state of permanent, indulged, but dangerous infantilism.

137. Finlayson (1989:115; see also 1991:258ff). I am indebted to Julie Finlayson for many fruitful discussions on this theme.

138. This form of power, which Bourdieu terms *symbolic power*, will be discussed at greater length in Chapter 6.

139. Bourdieu (1977a:171-2)

140. Thompson (1984:56)

Chapter 3

'Money Nothing For Us': Gambling On The Future

It was a Thursday evening in Aurukun in early March 1986. Thursdays were major payday; some \$30,000 had been paid in Council and C.D.E.P. wages between 3pm and 4pm. There were large groups of people, mainly women, playing cards at a number of gambling schools in the village ... Being a Thursday it was a 'canteen night' too, and some 500 litres of beer were sold between 5pm and closing time at 7pm from the Council beer canteen ...

Wik living in Aurukun had had little exposure to money throughout the mission years. As late as 1970, Long reported that cash was rarely seen there.¹ Access to the basic necessities of life for Wik had essentially been predicated upon a system where they had exchanged compliance with the mission authorities, including a requirement to work, directly for food, shelter and the like. Such exchanges were not mediated by money, and consumer goods had barely penetrated Aurukun. Concomitantly with the continuing exposure to the institutions of the wider state, most particularly after 1978, was the progressive monetarization of Aurukun. This was not just true of its administrative and infrastructural funding, which escalated dramatically after the demise of the mission and the establishment of local government, and with the more commercial orientation of the Aurukun Community Incorporated from the early 1980s. Increasing amounts of cash flowed into the Aurukun village economy following the active program by the Commonwealth Department of Social Security from the mid 1970s to ensure that all Aboriginal people who were entitled to benefits received them.² By 1986, an average of some \$50,000 nett per week was received directly by Wik themselves, for some as wages but mostly in the form of various government transfer payments and C.D.E.P. wages. These transfer payments were not predicated at all upon a notion of reciprocal exchange, but upon the rights of specified categories of individuals (pensioners, supporting mothers, and so forth) to

1. Long (1970:148). Women had been entitled to Commonwealth child endowment benefits from 1946, but mission administrations had been legally entitled to use the money to defray the costs of raising the children in dormitories (Finlayson 1991:124). Wik men who worked on cattle stations were required to send a proportion of their limited earnings back for their wives and children. Nonetheless, although MacKenzie had instituted a system whereby what seem to have been nominal amounts of money were exchanged for items such as sugar and tea, cash was not a major part of the village economy until the mid 1970s.
2. Paradoxically, the increase in cash incomes followed a reduction in opportunities for full time work for Wik men at least, with the collapse of the cattle industry. Access to cash incomes for most Wik resulted from involvement with the government welfare system, rather than wages employment within the wider market economy.

welfare incomes.³ Access by Wik to food, to many of the services provided within Aurukun, and to the highly valued consumer goods and so forth was ultimately dependent upon money.

Despite the fact that average per capita and household incomes were low by Australian standards,⁴ Wik invested considerable cash in such areas as gambling, the purchase of alcohol, and travel - expenditure which might at first glance be seen as discretionary. Cash figured prominently in transactions of all kinds between Wik, as well as forming a fundamental means of articulating their society with the wider one; as Kesteven has written of western Arnhem land Aboriginal people, money had "gripped [their] imagination."⁵ Yet, Wik rhetoric explicitly denied the centrality of money to their lives. In this chapter, I first briefly examine the characteristics of money in the wider Australian society, in order to provide a basis for my arguments on how Wik had assimilated it to their domain. I then present data on the flows of cash into and out of this domain to establish the broad dynamics and patterns of Wik use of cash, before examining some of the internal mechanisms by which cash was dealt with, using gambling as an extended case study. Finally, I turn to a more general consideration of the manner in which cash acted as a fundamental constituting agent in Wik social processes, and yet was assimilated and transformed by them into something very different from the money stuff of the wider society.

The Australian dollar

In concentrating upon cash in this analysis, and ignoring such areas as food production from fishing, hunting and gathering, it could be argued that critical dimensions of Wik economic life are being ignored. The reasons for this emphasis however are two-fold. Firstly, in contrast to the Aboriginal groups with whom for instance Altman and Anderson worked,⁶ and indeed to many Wik themselves up until the late 1970s, subsistence production for most contemporary Wik households during the sample period contributed a relatively small amount to overall household consumption. It was true that residents of Aurukun outstations gained significant quantities of food, mainly meat and fish, from the bush, but at the time of my economic survey very few Wik were living on outstations. Whereas in 1978 there were up to 250 people living out bush for extended periods, during 1986 the maximum numbers were no more than 50, and for much of the time there were no

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3. The exception was the C.D.E.P. scheme, where work was undertaken (if in desultory fashion) for an income for each individual equivalent to unemployment benefits. Unlike work for the mission in the past however, labour was exchanged for cash, whose expenditure was essentially discretionary. Collmann (1979d) argues that the criteria adopted by the state in determining eligibility for welfare incomes, predicated as they are on familial and gender relations of the mainstream society, have contributed to major changes in Aboriginal domestic relations and structures.
 4. Of the same order as those in mainstream Australian society whose principal source of income was unemployment and sickness benefits; see discussion on page 102.
 5. Kesteven (1983:373)
 6. Altman (1987) of Arnhem land outstation residents, and Anderson (1984) of the people of Wujalwujal settlement in south east Cape York peninsula.

people out bush at all.⁷ It was also true that at certain periods when game was plentiful - particularly after the monsoon season - many Wik did obtain food, particularly fish, outside the cash nexus. I have made no attempt to do a social accounting analysis like that of Altman,⁸ with imputed money values being given to foodstuffs gained from subsistence production. In part this was because of the logistics involved in undertaking this for 900 or so people. Essentially however, Wik activities increasingly centred around the township itself, and it was relatively rare for any household that I observed to gain more than a very small proportion of its food by fishing and hunting.

Secondly, and most importantly, my concern in this chapter is not to delineate the Wik economy as such, but rather to examine the manner in which the Australian dollar, with its take-for-granted character, was assimilated by Wik to their particular social modalities, and in so doing transformed by them into something other than what it is in the markets and transactions of mainstream Australia. Crucially, in the wider society money integrates otherwise disparate processes in a multitude of domains. Money in its construction and its uses is linked intimately to the dominant sphere of market exchange, in fact is not analytically separable from it, and its other uses such as in gifts or governmental transfer payments are subservient to this mode.⁹ Money serves in an economy of this nature, in one standard formulation, as medium of exchange, mode of payment, as unit of account and as a store of wealth.¹⁰ Money permits the establishment of a fixed relative value between goods or services; as Simmel has expressed it:¹¹

As a visible object, money is the substance that embodies abstract economic value ... If the economic value of objects is constituted by their mutual relationship of exchangeability, then money is the autonomous expression of this relationship. Money is the representative of abstract value. (It) is a specific realization of what is common to economic objects ...

Money in this formulation then not only mediates but serves to represent relations between objects. In fact, it also comes to objectify relations between persons. Again

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7. During the latter part of the economic survey period, August 1986, I was also involved in site and estate mapping in the Kendall River region in the southern portion of the Aurukun shire (see Sutton, Martin et al, 1990). While the size of the mapping party varied, during this period at least half of those Wik out bush were there specifically to take part in the mapping, an indication of the importance placed on this enterprise.
 8. Altman (*op.cit*) Altman in his study used imputed money values of resources gained from the 'traditional' sphere - gathering, hunting, fishing and so forth - to show that these formed a significant proportion of the total incomes of these outstation residents. While this was also the case in certain of the Aurukun outstations on the occasions when they were occupied, and while certain families in Aurukun itself did have members who fished or hunted in times of seasonal plenty, from my own observations the total contribution from this sector had been diminishing rapidly since at least 1976.
 9. see e.g. Dalton (1965:45-48)
 10. Although in Codere's view, these functions were "overlapping, redundant and confused" (Codere 1968:558).
 11. Simmel 1978 (1900):120

in Simmel's words it "... is conducive to the removal of the personal element from human relationships through its indifferent and objective nature".¹²

To account for differences between this form of money, found essentially in the developed market-based economies, and the various kinds and uses of 'money stuff' found in certain other societies, economists and economic anthropologists have adopted such usages as 'special' and 'general purpose' monies¹³ and 'spheres of exchange'.¹⁴ The former dichotomy seeks to distinguish between money stuff that may be used for specific categories of transactions only, like Tiv brass rods, in comparison with western money which can be used in - and links - multiple domains. The latter is a means of conceptualizing the fact that in certain societies such as that of the Tiv, there were particular exchanges of goods and services that occurred essentially within specified transactive domains, but not as a rule between them.¹⁵ Codere on the other hand specifically examines money rather than economy more generally, and treats it as "... a semantic system similar to speech, writing or weights and measures".¹⁶ She develops a general model of money as a symbolic system which sees it as potentially comprised of a number of sub-systems. These are the money stuff itself, goods, a numeric or counting system, an amounts or weights and measures system, and writing.¹⁷ Western money has all these "co-ordinate sub-systems"; other forms of money may have only certain of them. Codere sees this typification as being more precise than labelling a given money stuff as 'general' or 'special purpose' money.

Writers using the above concepts have in part adopted them in order to explain not just the features of a particular economic order, but also the effects of the penetration of western economic forms; Bohannan's treatment of the repercussions on Tiv society of the introduction of English general purpose money is perhaps the classic.

12. Simmel (*op.cit*:297). See also Dalton (*op. cit*:49).

13. Polanyi (1957)

14. Bohannan (1959)

15. Thus Palmer (1982), in writing of the economy of an Aboriginal cattle station in Western Australia, has defined three economic spheres, ranked in terms of prestige. The first and lowest concerns involvement in the wider market system - the exchange of labour for cash and of cash for goods. In the second sphere, the control of consumer goods realizes political power or status within the group. The third sphere however concerns "community" as opposed to "individual" well-being, and involves the conversion of money into corporate property and labour into community beef. Conversions down between the spheres are, Palmer argues, strongly opposed. Commodities are however not used to maximize profits within a sphere nor employed to maximise profits and so forth, but are converted up and "... used in ways which Aborigines consider important, that is for the ordering of their social relations." (*op.cit*:51)

16. Codere (*op.cit*:557)

17. Stock (1983:85-7) notes the parallels in the historical development in medieval Europe of, and the analogous principles underlying, writing as a fundamental mode of objectifying thought, and money as one of objectifying material concerns; see discussion in Appendix 3.

Village-wide income and expenditure patterns

In this section, I present data on the flows of cash into and out of what I term the 'village system', essentially the Wik domain which included the actual Wik residential area in the Aurukun township (called "the village" by both Wik and White) together with the outstations.¹⁸ Despite the major changes following the introduction of Local Government in 1978, including the development of an improved access road, increased complexity of administrative structures, and greatly increased infrastructural and other funding, the Aurukun Wik domain was still a relatively bounded system, both socially and economically. Most social interaction between Wik and staff tended to be mediated through contexts defined by the roles staff played in the formal institutions such as the Shire Council or Aurukun Community Incorporated. Equally, it was primarily through these same institutions that Wik were linked to the wider Australian cash based economic system, through the payment of wages and C.D.E.P. payments, the cashing of cheques, the sale of food and of various consumer goods, the sale of airline tickets, the provision of certain services for money, and so forth.¹⁹

One could therefore legitimately analyse the Aurukun village cash economy in terms of cash flows through what might be envisaged as a permeable 'boundary' drawn around the Wik domain of the 'village system', as shown in Figure 3.1, page 89. In order to develop an understanding of how the Wik cash economy operated, the flows of cash into and out of the Aurukun village were monitored for 52 weeks of the period I spent in the field there, from September 1985 to August 1986. Monitoring flows in this fashion allowed for a far more complete understanding of the processes involved than the mere establishment of annual averages.

Methodology: the monitoring of cash flows

Almost all cash that entered the Aurukun village system did so through one of the two major institutions, the Aurukun Shire Council (A.S.C.) and the Aurukun Community Incorporated (A.C.I.). In addition there were nett cash flows into and out of the village system through transactions in the Commonwealth Savings Bank agency.²⁰ These organizations were situated appropriately enough on the boundary between what had been the old mission area and the village, which continued essentially to demarcate the staff area from that of Wik residents.²¹ With few exceptions, cheques that came into Aurukun, for its Aboriginal inhabitants at least,

18. Outstations could be considered part of the 'village system' in terms of monitoring income and expenditure patterns, since all flows of cash (apart from those on non-canteen alcohol) were ultimately handled through and recorded by the same agencies as for the actual township itself.

19. However, the Aurukun economy was a highly distorted one. Most of the services provided to Wik (such as housing, water, sewerage and power) were subsidized, and virtually all incomes (Wik and White) were ultimately directly or indirectly dependent upon Government transfer payments of one form or another. Even the profits of the Aurukun Community Incorporated (apart from cattle sales when that industry was functioning) were based on a redistribution of wages paid from government sources, as Dale (1992:230) has noted.

20. This bank agency was subsequently closed, because the low level of nett savings and high numbers of deposits and withdrawals made it uneconomic.

21. See Chapter 5, and also Buckley (1980:28-35).

could be cashed only at the Shire office. This was a conscious policy on the part of the Shire Council administration, tacitly accepted at that time by the A.C.I., for by controlling the cashing of cheques the Council could deduct the 6 percent levied on practically all incomes of Aboriginal residents in lieu of Local Government rates,²² and could also deduct rents for the housing it controlled or managed, and thus avoid Wik strategies to circumvent these charges. On occasions, people deposited very large cheques, such as income tax rebates, into their savings bank passbooks. These cheques did not attract the 6 percent community levy. Small personal cheques, such as those involved in my payments to informants, were sometimes cashed at the store or latterly in the beer canteen. Wages for those who worked in the hospital and the school were in the form of government cheques, and were all cashed at the Shire office. Aboriginal Shire Council employees were paid in cash from the office, through a computerized pay system. A.C.I. Aboriginal office and store staff were paid in cash directly from the Company office, and those who were working out bush on the cattle industry were also paid directly in cash.

Apart from these relatively few full time workers, totalling some 68 in February 1986 out of a population of some 550 Wik between 16 and 65,²³ all others were recipients of either Commonwealth Social Security payments of various kinds, or of wages under the C.D.E.P. scheme.²⁴ All of these payments, whether of wages or cash for cheques, were made through the Shire Council office.²⁵ For both A.C.I. and the Council, and of course for the banking agency, all transactions were recorded. Pays for A.C.I. workers were recorded in ledgers, and for Council employees and C.D.E.P. workers the records were computerized, with summaries of the various categories also available through ledger books. Cheques cashed were recorded by A.S.C. in terms of their category (pension, income tax rebate, hospital wage etc). Accordingly, virtually all cash inputs to the village and their sources could be determined.

It is important to note that these were nett cash inflows to the village, after the 6 percent community levy, rents, repayments for any loans advanced, and income tax had been deducted where applicable. This nett cash inflow, cash in hand for Wik as it were, could validly be used in monitoring the flows of money through the village economy. However, for such purposes as comparing allocations to various categories of expenditure by Wik with those in wider Australian society, A.S.C. financial statements allowed estimates of the total amounts deducted from pays and cheques for rents and for the community levy. Income tax payments provided a problem of a different order. C.D.E.P. payments as well as wages attracted the standard levels of

22. This 'community levy' in lieu of rates was not technically legal, and was ultimately discontinued by the Council.
23. Source: D.F. Martin, household and census survey, February 1986. This situation did not change markedly in later years; Dale estimated that some 71 Wik were in full time employment in 1989 (Dale 1992:227).
24. The total cash inflow to the village was somewhat less than it would have been if all otherwise entitled to them had instead been receiving unemployment benefits. This was because there were certain young men who in specific weeks, or even semi-permanently, preferred not to work at all, and who depended entirely upon cash, food and alcohol from kin.
25. By 1992 however, both the Shire Council and A.C.I. operated C.D.E.P. schemes within Aurukun, and many Wik had voluntarily moved over to the Company.

income tax. However, because Aurukun was in a special tax zone and therefore through various allowable deductions residents effectively paid lower levels of tax than those applicable in less remote areas, and because general income levels were in any case low, most income tax deducted through the Commonwealth Pay-As-You-Earn system could be reasonably assumed to return to Aurukun in the form of income tax rebate cheques. These in any case were deposited in savings accounts or were cashed at the Shire office and recorded. Certainly, errors in this assumption would be in the form of a slightly lower calculated average income for Wik rather than in the essential element being monitored, cash flows into the village system.

Given the relatively bounded nature of the system, cash outflows could equally be monitored for the village system as a whole, with expenditures at various major points registered in cash receipt and reconciliation books. A.C.I. ran a store selling both foodstuffs and basic hardware items, a takeaway food outlet, a clothing store, and operated an agency for the airline then servicing Aurukun. They also operated a workshop, selling fuel and providing limited facilities for the repair of vehicles and outboard motors and so on. The Council also ran its own workshop, primarily for the maintenance of its large fleet of vehicles, but from which fuel was sold, mainly to Council employees. They also sold consumer goods such as televisions and electric frypans from the Council office in opposition to A.C.I. through an operation termed 'Community Trading'. During the course of my fieldwork, the Council opened a beer canteen; additionally soft drinks and confectionery were sold from a small takeaway here. All of the above enterprises kept records which allowed for accurate determination of weekly expenditure levels.

There were other miscellaneous flows of capital out of the village system which could be monitored. People frequently would telegram money through the state Department of Community Affairs²⁶ to relations undergoing medical treatment or held up for lack of funds in Cairns or on other settlements on the Peninsula. Certain White staff ran small private businesses; for instance one sold foods such as jellies and custards, and the light aircraft servicing outstations was operated by two A.C.I. staff members.²⁷ Reasonably reliable estimates could be made of the amounts taken each week by these services. On several occasions, cars and boats were bought, usually from staff members such as teachers leaving Aurukun, but in two cases involving hire purchase payments to Cairns finance companies. The sums involved in these transactions were common knowledge in the village, if not their precise flows over time, but again reasonable estimates could be made.

The Whites employed in Aurukun in most cases had substantially higher per capita incomes than did Wik. However, because of the high prices of goods in Aurukun, they purchased most of their food and household items purchased in bulk

26. From 1989, the Division of Aboriginal and Islander Affairs within the Department of Family Services and Aboriginal and Islander Affairs.

27. Aurukun Community Incorporated eventually purchased its own planes and ran a charter operation, mainly to service the outstations but also to assist in the transport requirements of A.C.I. and Aurukun people more generally.

from Cairns, and either flown, trucked or barged in to Aurukun.²⁸ Nonetheless, a proportion of takings at various enterprises within Aurukun did come from White staff. A number of other Whites, in particular commercial fishermen moored in the rivers near Aurukun, also spent money within Aurukun, particularly at the canteen. After a small number of random samples, and discussions with staff at each enterprise, the following proportions of takings were assumed to have been due to expenditure by Whites:

Table 3.1 Proportion of takings expended by Whites

Enterprise	% spent by Whites
A.C.I. store	2
A.C.I. takeaway	2
Workshops	20
Handcrafts shop	50
Air travel agency	4
Beer canteen	4

The total weekly cash takings recorded for each enterprise were then reduced by the relevant percentage in order to estimate expenditure by Wik.

The major area of expenditure that could not be consistently accurately quantified was that on 'outside grog', both alcohol legally purchased through the hotel in Weipa for example rather than from the Shire canteen, and the 'sly grog' sold by entrepreneurs coming down from Weipa and taking the cash back with them.²⁹ The sheer volume of this trade and its inherently clandestine nature made it difficult to quantify, even in those weeks where attempts were made to record the amounts of alcohol involved. However, later in this chapter (see page 108), I suggest that what I have termed the 'surplus' of cash inflow each week over identified expenditure ended up effectively allocated to obtaining 'outside' and 'sly' alcohol.

A schematic diagram of the cash flows into and out of the Aurukun village system is presented in Figure 3.1. A detailed tabulation of the data is given in Tables 3.3 to 3.7.

28. At one level of course, this was merely one manifestation of the essentially colonial position of White staff; having higher incomes in part gave them the power to exercise discrimination in where they purchased their goods. However, even more than this the very acts of 'shopping around' for cost-effective purchases, ordering in bulk, and organizing the logistics of transport into Aurukun were themselves practices dependent for their logic upon sets of assumptions and dispositions which were those of the Whites in Aurukun rather than the Wik.

29. Sly grog was also sold by Wik entrepreneurs. In this case, the immediate nett outflow would be for the price of the alcohol legally purchased in Weipa. Ultimately, however, as was the case with gambling winnings this money either entered the Aurukun cash economy directly and was spent there, or left it again in the form of alcohol purchases from outside.

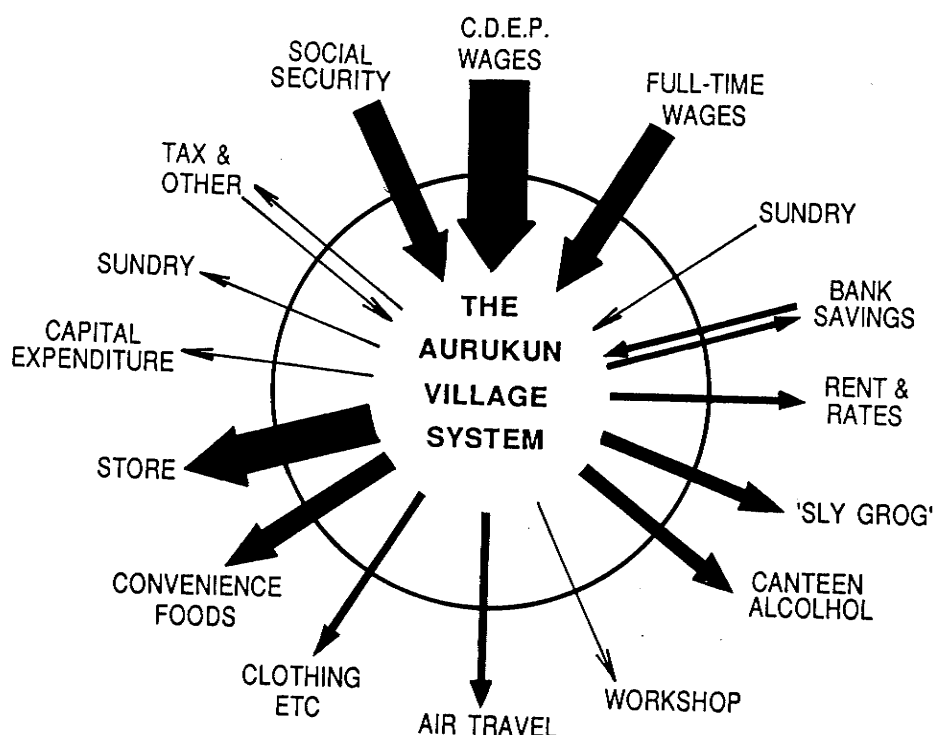


Figure 3.1 Analytic system: the Aurukun village

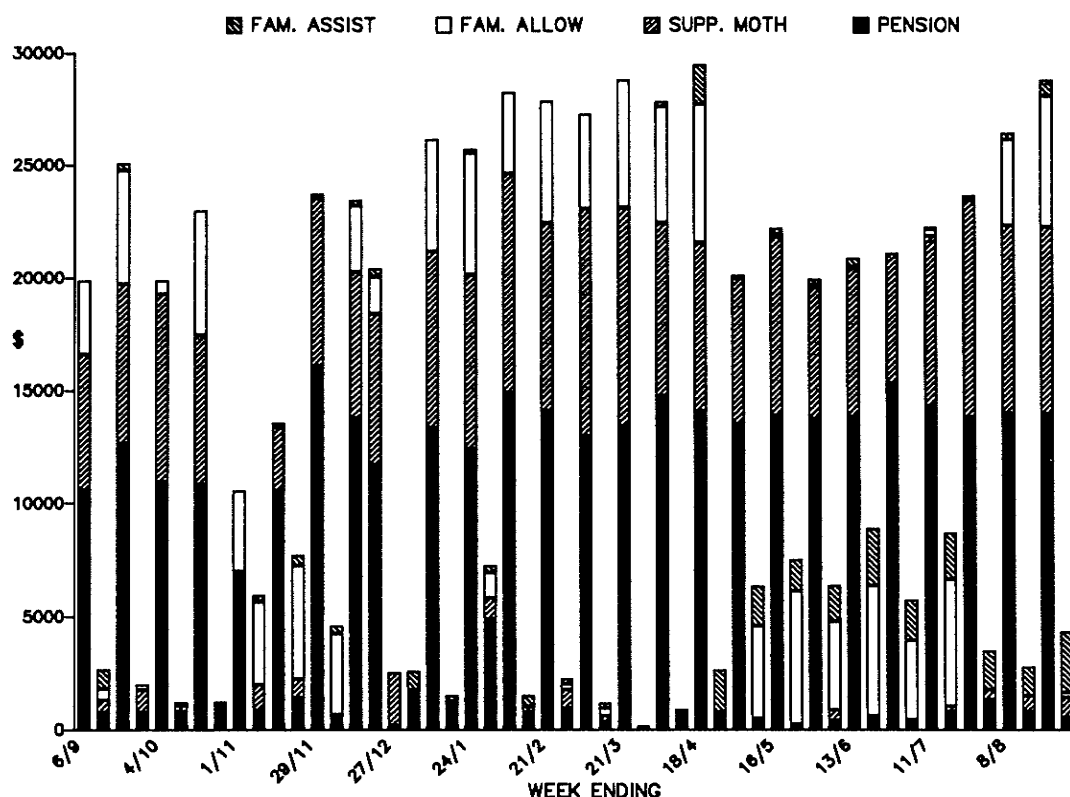
The cycles of cash flows into the village system

Life in contemporary Aurukun was conditioned by many factors, and one of the most crucial was the pattern of flows of cash into the village. The major determinants of this flow were set by the weekly payments of wages to Shire Council, A.C.I., Hospital and School employees, C.D.E.P. payments (also on a weekly basis) and the various Commonwealth social security cheques.³⁰ These benefits, old age pensions, together with sickness and supporting mothers' benefits, were paid fortnightly. Family Allowance, invariably paid to a woman rather than her spouse, was paid on a sliding scale dependent on the number of children under 18 supposedly in her care. The Family Income Supplement, a Commonwealth low income supplement scheme, was paid only for dependents of those who were working, as opposed to those on unemployment benefits. Since people working under the C.D.E.P. scheme were technically employees of the Council, their spouses were entitled to receive the supplement, which was paid fortnightly on a sliding scale dependent on the family income and number of children.³¹

30. The Department of Social Security had ensured that its own officers on field visits, and also the Council community workers, actively encouraged all those Wik entitled to benefits to claim for them.

31. The pay that each C.D.E.P. worker received corresponded to what they would have been entitled to on the Unemployment Benefit scale; thus, a man who had a dependent spouse and a

There were also various miscellaneous sources of income flowing into the village, primarily small fortnightly allowances paid to the mothers of high school students, and a small fortnightly payment to the students themselves. Miscellaneous sums also came in from such sources as one-off compensation payments and income tax rebates (almost all in the last quarter of the year). The 20 directors of A.C.I. and 9 members of the Shire Council also received payments for attendance at official meetings; there was at least one meeting a month of each organization, sometimes more.



Source: D.F. Martin, income and expenditure survey 1985/86

Figure 3.2 Social security fortnightly cycle

The pattern of 'big' and 'slack' weeks for Social Security benefits, fortnightly except for the monthly Family Allowance (formerly referred to as Child Endowment and still called 'endowment' by Wik) has been previously mentioned, and can be seen clearly in Figure 3.2. Here, old age and sickness pensions have been consolidated as

number of children would be paid more for the same two days work than would a single man. This arrangement was peculiar to Aurukun, and was seen as problematic by the staff of the Department of Aboriginal Affairs who oversaw the scheme; other communities on C.D.E.P. had relatively fixed pay rates, so that a man wishing to support a family would have to work more days than would a single man. As with unemployment benefits however, C.D.E.P. was paid to the person that was considered under bureaucratic guidelines to be the breadwinner, always the male in the case of family units (although a small number of women received 'split payments', viz. the proportion of their husband's C.D.E.P. paid for his spouse and children). A man with a large number of dependent children then could command quite an income. In February 1986, incomes paid under C.D.E.P. in Aurukun ranged from \$57 per week gross for a

'Pension'; big pension days were usually Thursdays, subject to the vagaries of the mail service into Aurukun. The other Social Security benefits - Family Income Assistance, Supporting Mothers benefit, and Family Allowance - have been separately shown, as 'Fam.ass', 'Supp.moth' and 'Fam.all' respectively. Virtually all of this income was paid to Wik women.

As shown in Figure 3.3 following, C.D.E.P. pays were essentially constant each week; there were some fluctuations as people moved between settlements in the Cape, or for various reasons did not work under the scheme in a given week. Prior to 10th April 1986, there were two staggered pays for C.D.E.P. workers; those who worked on Mondays and Tuesdays were paid on Thursday, and those who worked Wednesdays and Thursdays were paid on Tuesdays. After this date however, for administrative convenience Council office staff changed to one pay day, Thursday. Those employed full time by the Council, such as workshop employees, were also paid in cash on Thursdays. A.C.I. staff, mostly working in the office and the store, received their pays on Tuesdays in cash, while employees of the School and the Hospital were paid by cheques that arrived from the central administration concerned and were cashed at the Council offices. These three categories, wages paid for full-time labour, have been consolidated in Figure 3.3 as 'Wages'. This category too was essentially constant each week. However, as previously mentioned, A.C.I. Directors and Shire Councillors received meeting fees on a reasonably regular basis, and on the 8th April, \$2300 was paid to directors of A.C.I.; this has been included as wages, since in a sense it was payment for services rendered, and outside of the social security system.

In Figure 3.3, the total cash inflows to the Aurukun village system are presented for the full 52 week sample period. The general pattern of 'slack' and 'big' weeks can be seen clearly. On average, the total cash inflow in a slack week was some 60 percent that in a big week. In this figure, all forms of social security income have for clarity been consolidated into the one category 'Soc sec'. 'Wages' refers to nett cash payments to full-time employees of the various organizations in Aurukun, 'CDEP.' to nett cash payments to workers under the C.D.E.P. scheme, and 'Other' to sundry sources of cash income to the system, including income tax rebate cheques. Tables 3.3 and 3.4 following tabulate the detailed data upon which Figure 3.3 is based. These data are summarized in Table 3.2.

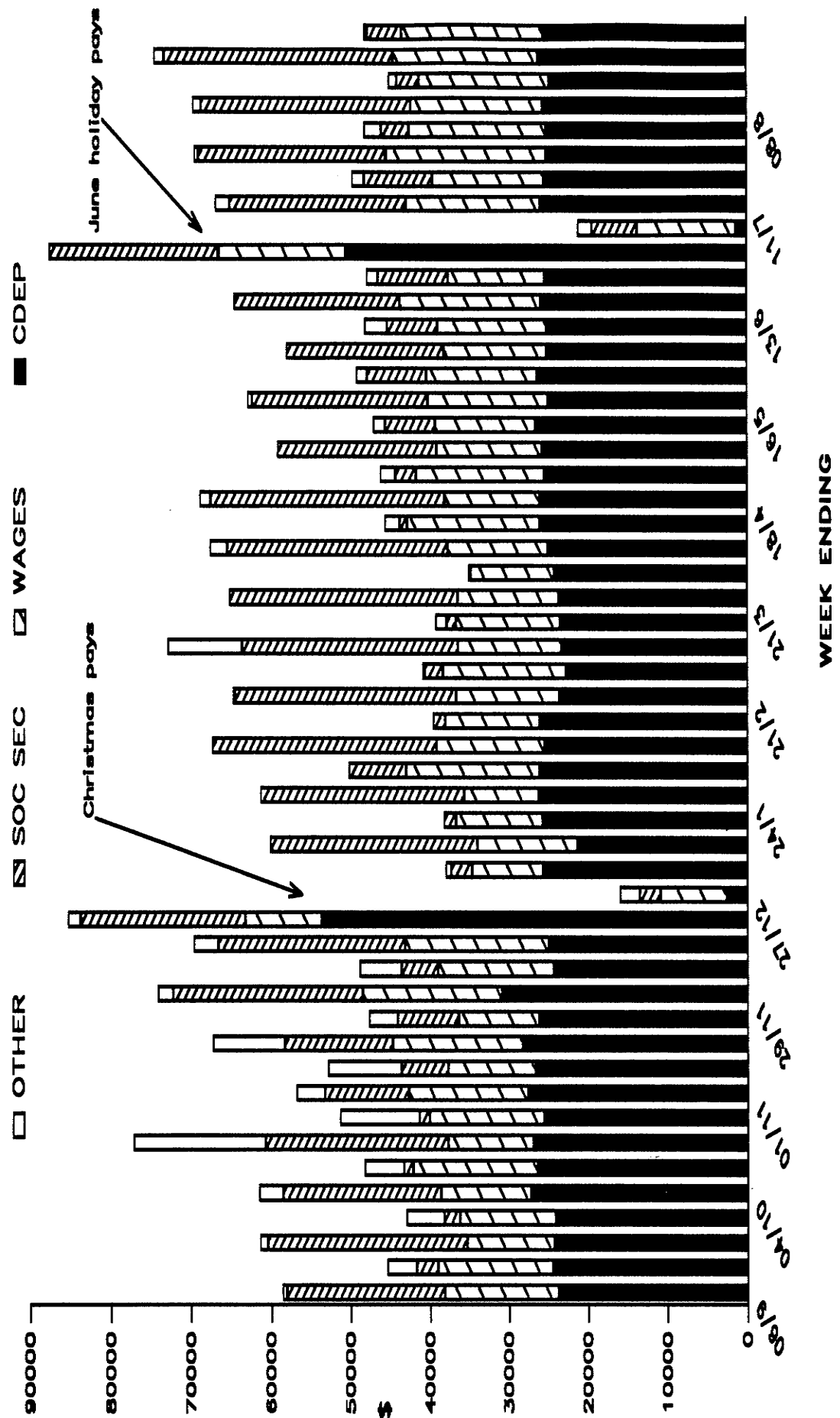


Figure 3.3 Nett village cash inflows

Table 3.2 Summary data, weekly incomes

DATE	C.D.E.P.	WAGES ^a	SOC SEC ^b	OTHER ^c
06/9	23770	14441	19884	533
13/9	24553	14512	2704	3676
20/9	24366	11002	25090	988
27/9	24190	12083	2004	4755
04/10	27278	11426	19883	2983
11/10	26420	15757	1218	4945
18/10	26971	10818	22992	16457
25/10	25661	14461	1253	10034
01/11	27639	15129	10562	3564
08/11	26700	11041	5931	9265
15/11	28377	16405	13588	8997
22/11	26251	10196	7708	3623
29/11	30914	17693	23732	1942
06/12	24397	14660	4603	5332
13/12	25000	18258	23444	3043
20/12	53729	9656	20436	1588
27/12	2637	8286	2597	2527
03/1	25771	8999	2610	688
10/1	21419	12649	26150	0
17/1	25844	10940	1545	90
24/1	26318	9404	25706	3
31/1	26195	16905	7242	0
07/2	25556	13672	28258	0
14/2	26206	11915	1525	143
21/2	23696	13100	27852	247
28/2	22833	15607	2266	333
07/3	23405	13136	27259	9275
14/3	23616	13164	1202	1402
21/3	23830	12760	28813	51
28/3	24332	10638	223	134
04/4	25117	12718	27833	2105
11/4	26190	16778	981	1870
18/4	26200	12033	29513	1347
25/4	25578	16259	2659	1900
02/5	25878	13354	20107	0
09/5	26773	12654	6331	1472
16/5	25114	15238	22200	550
23/5	26481	14079	7487	1356
30/5	25281	13056	19951	3
06/6	25281	13857	6365	2852
13/6	26006	17942	20881	66
20/6	25501	12293	8899	1402
27/6	50771	16002	21120	118
04/7	1374	12400	5736	1773
11/7	26092	17026	22276	1820
18/7	25658	14080	8693	1493
25/7	25310	20359	23649	523
01/8	25319	17437	3511	2177
08/8	25775	16746	26419	1066
15/8	24893	16585	2818	1052
22/8	26398	18373	28833	1289
29/8	25658	18023	4355	370

- a) Wages paid by A.C.I., A.S.C. and other employers, and the meeting allowances paid to Councillors and Directors.
- b) Pensions, supporting mothers benefits, Family Allowance and Family Income Supplement.
- c) Sundry income, including various lump sums such as income tax rebates.

Table 3.3 Cash inflows September 1985 - February 1986

WEEK	ASC WAGES	ACI WAGES	CHEQUE WAGES	CDEP WAGES	PENSIONS	SUPP. MOTHERS	FAMILY ALLOW.	LUMP SUMS	COUNCIL ALLOW.	FAM. ASSIST	OTHER INCOME	NETT INCOME ^a	BANK WITHDR.	NETT INFLOW ^b
06/09/85	5298	3510	5633	23770	10616	5992	3276	378	0	0	155	58628	1718	60346
13/09/85	5298	3653	3261	24553	798	527	517	3077	2300	862	599	45445	3182	48627
20/09/85	3958	3134	3910	24366	12710	7038	5036	709	0	306	279	61446	4841	66287
27/09/85	3466	2585	3632	24190	809	990	205	4727	2400	0	28	43032	10163	53195
04/10/85	3391	2569	5466	27278	10980	8317	586	2983	0	0	0	61570	8534	70104
11/10/85	3054	4716	5687	26420	826	258	0	4945	2300	134	0	48340	4259	52599
18/10/85	4521	2690	3607	26971	10854	6593	5545	16457	0	0	0	77238	7429	84667
25/10/85	3729	2945	5387	25661	1068	0	69	10034	2400	116	0	51409	9680	61089
01/11/85	4720	3851	6558	27639	6943	55	3564	3564	0	0	0	56894	13209	70103
08/11/85	3768	1439	3434	26700	875	1150	3650	9265	2400	256	0	52937	6870	59807
15/11/85	4370	3115	6620	28377	10574	2814	200	8997	2300	0	0	67367	8537	75904
22/11/85	4693	3425	2078	25251	1430	830	4977	3568	0	471	55	47778	4830	52608
29/11/85	4991	4126	6176	30914	16086	7457	189	1645	2400	0	297	74281	4732	79013
06/12/85	4514	6004	4142	24397	666	0	3603	5201	0	334	131	48992	4052	53044
13/12/85	3962	2130	9866	25000	13802	6478	2945	3043	2300	219	0	69745	3603	73348
20/12/85	4712	1914	3030	53729	11732	6666	1668	1585	0	370	3	85409	4971	90380
27/12/85	5251	1215	1820	2637	185	2366	46	2482	0	0	45	16047	7320	23367
03/01/86	5779	1552	1668	25771	1792	0	0	688	0	818	0	38068	1835	39903
10/01/86	6118	1771	4760	21419	13378	7807	4965	0	0	0	0	60218	1175	61393
17/01/86	6092	1833	3015	25844	1181	0	94	0	0	270	90	38419	3226	41645
24/01/86	6361	1350	1693	26318	12456	7700	5390	0	0	160	3	61431	1175	62606
31/01/86	6175	1455	6875	26195	4911	912	1115	0	2400	304	0	50342	2654	52996
07/02/86	5662	1757	6253	25556	14909	9730	3619	0	0	0	0	67486	3238	70724
14/02/86	5402	1356	2857	26206	787	248	23	0	2300	467	143	39789	3032	42821
21/02/86	5854	1540	5706	23696	14122	8327	5403	0	0	0	247	64895	3169	68064
28/02/86	6180	2222	4805	22833	961	827	254	0	2400	224	333	41039	4049	45088

a) i.e. total of nett cash incomes

b) i.e. total nett incomes plus savings bank withdrawals

Table 3.4 Cash inflows March 1986 - September 1986

WEEK	ASC WAGES	ACI WAGES	CHEQUE WAGES	CDEP WAGES	PENSIONS	SUPP. MOTHERS	FAMILY ALLOW.	LUMP SUMS	COUNCIL ALLOW.	FAM. ASSIST	OTHER INCOME	NETT INCOME ^a	BANK WITHDR.	NETT INFLOW ^b
07/03/86	5214	2103	5819	23405	13016	10067	4176	7500	0	0	1775	73075	1244	74319
14/03/86	5796	1454	3614	23616	374	248	356	0	2300	224	1402	39384	3860	43244
21/03/86	4902	1500	6358	23830	13469	9656	5688	0	0	0	51	65454	3431	68885
28/03/86	4888	1926	1424	24332	177	0	46	0	2400	0	134	35327	4213	39540
04/04/86	5479	1415	5824	25117	14759	7683	5167	0	0	224	2105	67773	3039	70812
11/04/86	7990	3290	3198	26190	806	21	90	0	2300	64	1870	45819	2013	47832
18/04/86	4271	1185	6577	26200	14113	7458	6147	1122	0	1795	225	69093	2414	71507
25/04/86	6022	1339	5598	25578	779	0	0	0	3300	1880	1900	46396	2266	48662
02/05/86	5347	1557	6450	25878	13549	6412	23	0	0	123	0	59339	2083	61422
09/05/86	5136	1555	3663	26773	524	0	4089	22	2300	1718	1450	47230	1504	48734
16/05/86	7285	1396	6557	25114	13926	7885	145	0	0	244	550	63102	2746	65848
23/05/86	5497	1421	7161	26481	174	95	5868	0	0	1350	1356	49403	2401	51804
30/05/86	5772	1250	3634	25281	13787	5795	99	0	2400	270	3	58291	4111	62402
06/06/86	5772	1444	6641	25281	433	444	3936	1615	0	1552	1237	48355	2065	50420
13/06/86	7699	1357	6586	26006	13866	6628	0	0	2300	387	66	64895	2752	67647
20/06/86	6746	1360	4187	25501	638	0	5728	0	0	2533	1402	48095	2435	50530
27/06/86	7303	1381	4918	50771	15328	5769	23	0	2400	0	118	88011	2453	90464
04/07/86	6812	1501	4087	1374	395	68	3538	0	0	1735	1773	21283	2997	24280
11/07/86	7503	2486	4737	26092	14340	7531	313	1491	2300	92	329	67214	3961	71175
18/07/86	8172	2712	3196	25658	823	233	5591	0	0	2046	1493	49924	1695	51619
25/07/86	7883	4024	6052	25310	13862	9591	46	0	2400	150	523	69841	3825	73666
01/08/86	7670	4076	5691	25319	1372	415	0	250	0	1724	1927	48444	2174	50618
08/08/86	6535	3607	6604	25775	14030	8319	3799	500	0	271	566	70006	3053	73059
15/08/86	8830	2901	4854	24893	816	683	23	0	0	1296	1052	45348	2113	47461
22/08/86	6924	3518	6131	26398	14015	8270	5813	984	1800	735	305	74893	2554	77447
29/08/86	6160	3348	5315	25658	570	883	212	0	3200	2690	370	48406	2934	51340

a) i.e. total of nett cash incomes

b) i.e. total nett incomes plus savings bank withdrawals

It can be seen from Figure 3.3 that there were two major perturbations in the regular fortnightly cycle of slack and big weeks, in mid December 1985 and in June 1986. These arose through the payment of advance 'holiday pay' for both C.D.E.P. and full-time Council workers. In addition, pensioners and supporting mothers received double payments before Christmas, and it was not in fact until the first week in January that a more regular cycle recommenced. Particularly after the Christmas pays, but also in June, there were real shortages of cash and consequently of food for Wik. This can only be understood by looking in detail firstly at the mechanisms by which cash flowed out through the village 'boundary' - that is, at village-wide expenditure patterns - and then at the ways in which cash was utilized by Wik within the village.

Village-wide expenditure patterns

A brief summary of the various outlets for Wik cash expenditure has been given above, and presented diagrammatically in Figure 3.1, page 89. In Figure 3.4 below, a summary of expenditures for the 52 week sample period is presented. Tables 3.6 and 3.7 following tabulate the detailed data upon which Figure 3.4 is based. These data are also presented in summary form in Table 3.5. It must be noted that the data refer to allocations from nett income received by Wik; that is, after deductions for house rentals and the 6 percent community levy had been made by the Council administration. Furthermore, adjustments in accordance with Table 3.1 for expenditures by non-Wik have been made. In this figure, expenditure at the A.C.I. store - mainly foodstuffs - and at the two takeaways are grouped under '**Essent**'. One takeaway outlet was run by A.C.I., and sold soft drinks, cigarettes and tobacco, confectionery, and convenience foods such as cooked chickens, pies, chips and so forth. The other was run at the canteen by A.S.C., and sold only soft drinks and cigarettes. The purchase of foods sold by White staff in small private businesses was also included in this category, as was that of convenience foods sold at the State school 'tuckshop'. The 'Essentials' category in this figure includes also fuel, purchased for outboard motors and for vehicles, their repairs, and clothing. Purchase of beer from the Council canteen is covered under '**Canteen**'; it should be noted that it opened on 17th December, just after the large pre-Christmas holiday pays. The category '**Travel**' refers to money spent on purchasing Air Queensland tickets through the A.C.I. agency, and on air charters, mainly to Weipa for alcohol (see later in this section). '**Cap exp**' includes expenditure on televisions, video recorders, electric frying pans and other consumer goods, mainly from the community trading scheme run by the Council. There was some expenditure on this type of consumer good in the A.C.I. store, but it was not possible to extract this information from store records. 'Capital expenditure' however does include that on outboard motors and dinghies and on motor vehicles, both those bought for cash and through hire purchase schemes. Under the grouping '**Other**' there have been included a number of smaller miscellaneous allocations; these include money telegraphed to relations in other centres through the Department of Community Services office, fines paid to the Clerk of the Court in Aurukun, and various sums paid into the Council offices for miscellaneous services.

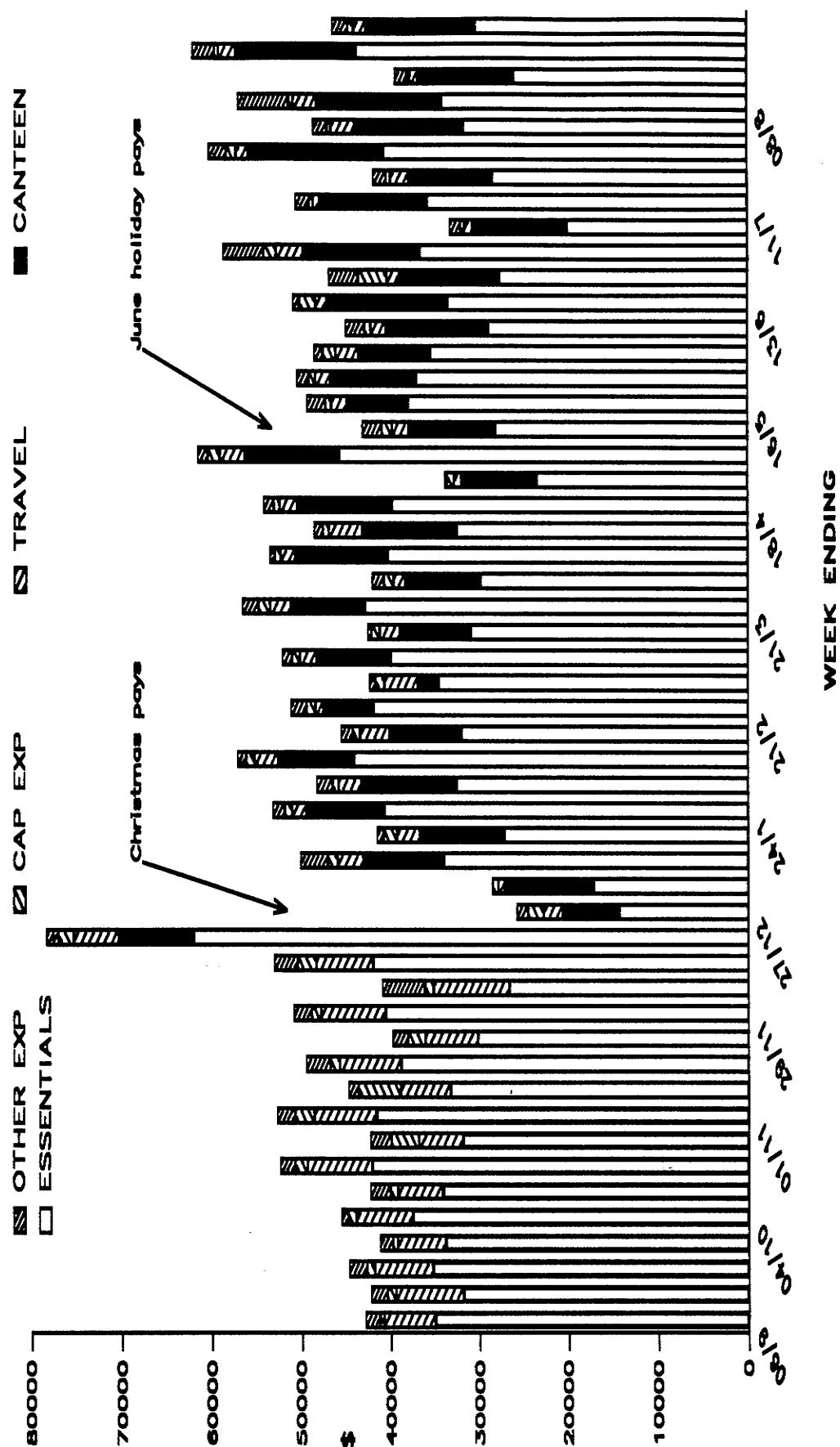


Figure 3.4 Nett village cash allocations

Table 3.5 Summary data, weekly expenditures

DATE	ESSENTIALS ^a	CANTEEN	TRAVEL	CAPITAL EXPEND ^b	OTHER ^c
06/9	35021	0	5781	470	1666
13/9	31894	0	7584	920	1881
20/9	35319	0	6528	920	1986
27/9	33862	0	5414	570	1409
04/10	37596	0	6293	972	744
11/10	34189	0	5073	838	2285
18/10	42160	0	7213	1432	1682
25/10	31962	0	4943	3113	2387
01/11	41720	0	6930	2158	2047
08/11	33304	0	5659	4714	1164
15/11	38872	0	6907	1036	2784
22/11	30264	0	5909	1946	1794
29/11	40664	0	7197	1044	2097
06/12	26698	0	8496	1030	4821
13/12	42049	0	6356	2098	2606
20/12	62136	8324	4963	1697	1353
27/12	14385	6312	2133	1780	1264
03/1	17231	9977	697	630	140
10/1	34032	9097	2896	1112	3107
17/1	27223	9558	2580	1503	750
24/1	40749	8855	1565	798	1340
31/1	32659	10684	2568	695	1817
07/2	44155	8541	2661	952	971
14/2	32032	8171	3301	817	1350
21/2	41967	5696	882	985	1792
28/2	34608	2407	3727	1065	668
07/3	40041	8365	1859	854	1117
14/3	30994	8035	2230	963	480
21/3	42946	8310	2366	1278	1834
28/3	29925	8525	1233	1130	1360
04/4	40361	10468	1589	630	617
11/4	32583	10682	3732	630	1103
18/4	39911	10656	1999	630	1149
25/4	23592	8449	837	790	311
02/5	45854	10634	2749	1380	1079
09/5	28207	9819	1872	1180	2171
16/5	38069	6903	1764	630	2174
23/5	37159	9683	1679	750	1330
30/5	35593	8062	2610	1455	977
06/6	29005	11543	1752	695	2115
13/6	33573	13673	1269	1795	772
20/6	27720	11362	1400	3225	3376
27/6	36740	13181	3046	1375	4555
04/7	20076	10682	974	370	1292
11/7	35926	12148	684	471	1569
18/7	28575	9422	2067	445	1524
25/7	40820	15315	1322	1115	1968
01/8	31828	12243	2720	415	1629
08/8	34305	14078	2647	545	5700
15/8	26167	10801	860	345	1451
22/8	43907	13632	1919	375	2551
29/8	30494	12322	1392	655	1780

- a) Expenditure in the store, takeaways, workshops, clothing store and handcraft shop.
- b) Expenditure on consumer goods and other capital items, including that through the Council community trading scheme.
- c) Various outstation related expenditure, money despatched to relations in other places, and sundry identified expenditures.

Table 3.6 Cash Outflows September 1985 - February 1986

DATE	STORE	ACI T'WAY	ASC T'WAY	CANTEN BEER	CLOTH. SALES	H'CRAFT SALES	W'SHOP	COMM. TRADING	AIR TRAVEL	CAPITAL ITEMS	OTHER EXPEND	C.O.D ITEMS	CASH DESP	O'STNS	NETT EXPEND	BANK DEPOS	NETT OUTFLOW ^a
6/9/85	24800	4449	0	0	4959	114	662	0	5781	470	1212	37	170	284	42938	1963	44901
13/9/85	22011	2933	0	0	2962	138	2043	450	7584	470	1064	1807	533	284	42279	5090	47369
20/9/85	23825	6452	0	0	4397	228	417	450	6528	470	620	0	1082	284	44753	4389	49142
27/9/85	23947	4995	0	0	2486	170	1482	100	5414	470	445	782	680	284	41255	9712	50967
4/10/85	26895	6055	0	0	3411	250	985	342	6293	630	360	0	100	284	45605	6063	51668
11/10/85	23847	5303	0	0	2848	411	1780	208	5073	630	1915	0	86	284	42385	7501	49886
18/10/85	29305	6447	0	0	3941	107	1360	802	7213	630	1218	1000	180	284	52487	26584	79071
25/10/85	21265	5670	0	0	3714	147	901	483	4943	2630	1022	265	1081	284	42405	11186	53691
1/11/85	29221	6244	0	0	3310	185	2760	1528	6930	630	1407	0	640	0	52855	1689	54544
8/11/85	20586	5307	0	0	5637	310	634	584	5659	4130	536	830	628	0	44841	10252	55093
15/11/85	26259	6059	0	0	5039	225	1290	406	6907	630	1948	0	836	0	49599	4837	54436
22/11/85	19664	5733	0	0	3077	111	1679	1316	5909	630	1659	0	135	0	39913	3532	43445
29/11/85	24101	6801	0	0	5521	363	1971	414	7197	630	941	1907	1156	0	51002	1230	52232
6/12/85	18305	5237	0	0	2436	224	496	400	8496	630	2205	0	2616	0	41045	2311	43356
13/12/85	29457	7879	0	0	2863	224	1626	1468	6356	630	1914	0	692	0	53109	3134	56243
20/12/85	38172	5911	2764	8324	11066	166	2138	1067	4963	630	850	1919	503	0	78473	8382	86855
27/12/85	6870	4618	1920	6312	794	0	183	1150	2133	630	1009	0	255	0	25874	1100	26974
3/1/86	12752	1679	1933	9977	581	0	286	0	697	630	140	0	0	0	28675	1282	29957
10/1/86	22223	5279	2683	9097	3386	0	461	482	2896	630	1951	0	1156	0	50244	478	50722
17/1/86	15991	4635	2651	9558	2186	0	1658	873	2580	630	600	102	150	0	41614	1067	42681
24/1/86	29562	4203	2820	8855	2909	0	1255	168	1565	630	1140	0	200	0	53307	3340	56647
31/1/86	20075	5851	2904	10684	3185	72	470	65	2568	630	856	102	961	0	48423	4663	53086
7/2/86	25173	7868	3512	8541	6068	30	1504	322	2661	630	661	0	310	0	57280	3482	60762
14/2/86	14845	6416	2256	8171	5210	99	1543	187	3301	630	650	1663	700	0	45671	1661	47332
21/2/86	23143	8584	2303	5696	6085	221	1631	355	882	630	658	0	1134	0	51322	3881	55203
28/2/86	19986	7094	1076	2407	3471	0	1052	435	3727	630	616	1929	52	0	42475	2051	44526

a) i.e. total nett expenditure plus bank deposits

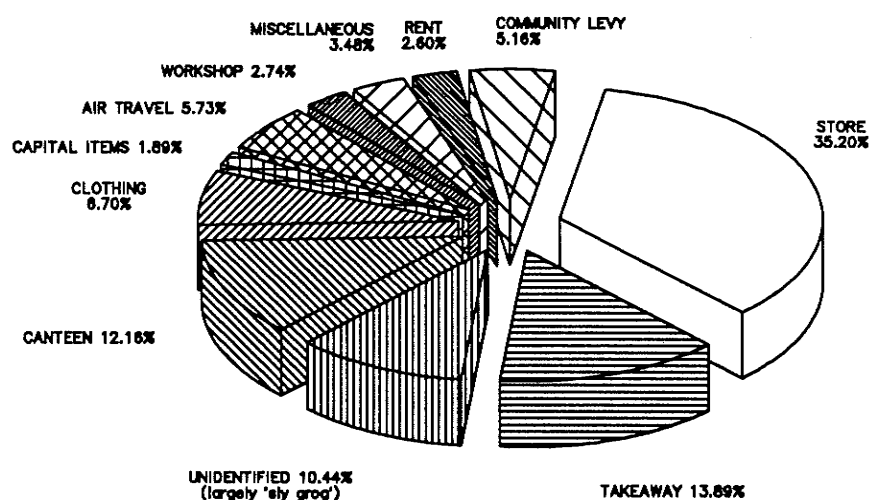
Table 3.7 Cash Outflows March 1986 - September 1986

DATE	STORE	ACI TWAY	ASC TWAY	CANTEEN BEER	CLOTH. SALES	H/CRAFT SALES	W/SHOP	COMM. TRADING	AIR TRAVEL	CAPITAL ITEMS	OTHER EXPEND	C.O.D. ITEMS	CASH DESP	O'STNS	NETT EXPEND	BANK DEPOS	NETT OUTFLOW ^a
7/3/86	23137	7495	3091	8365	5586	80	652	224	1859	630	645	0	472	0	52236	10368	62604
14/3/86	15877	5897	2774	8035	3708	247	2491	333	2230	630	230	0	250	0	42702	1985	44687
21/3/86	23734	6586	3302	8310	7376	256	1692	648	2366	630	824	0	1010	0	56734	2866	59600
28/3/86	19773	4802	1942	8525	1826	21	1561	500	1233	630	928	0	432	0	42173	1007	43180
4/4/86	22586	5720	3998	10468	4728	140	1200	0	1589	630	407	1989	210	0	53665	2352	56017
11/4/86	19381	7952	2721	10682	1363	120	1046	0	3732	630	488	0	615	0	48730	1322	50052
18/4/86	22765	8190	3232	10656	3484	280	1960	0	1999	630	682	0	467	0	54345	3078	57423
25/4/86	13950	4506	2557	8449	1176	256	480	160	837	630	161	667	150	0	33979	1172	35151
2/5/86	28611	7288	4093	10634	4031	131	1700	750	2749	630	319	0	560	200	61696	3182	64878
9/5/86	16022	5177	2702	9819	1470	140	1814	550	1872	630	1721	882	250	200	43249	939	44188
16/5/86	21273	7650	3800	6903	3792	160	1394	0	1764	630	1334	0	640	200	49540	4052	53592
23/5/86	19581	6906	2376	9683	4122	755	2468	120	1679	630	605	951	525	200	50601	799	51400
30/5/86	20629	7900	2140	8062	3164	142	1618	325	2610	1130	487	0	290	200	48697	3181	51878
6/6/86	16799	6305	2385	11543	1994	105	1417	225	1752	470	1130	0	625	360	45110	2065	47175
13/6/86	18587	6327	3331	13673	2565	196	1530	325	1269	1470	302	1037	110	360	51082	2752	53834
20/6/86	15580	6036	3006	11362	912	49	1104	255	1400	2970	1819	1033	1197	360	47083	2435	49518
27/6/86	21954	6907	2363	13181	3111	60	2345	305	3046	1070	3775	0	420	360	58897	2453	61350
4/7/86	10895	3960	2938	10682	685	242	1356	0	974	370	732	0	200	360	33394	2354	35748
11/7/86	20332	6428	3052	12148	4538	35	1541	101	684	370	524	0	685	360	50798	2685	53483
18/7/86	14884	6802	2224	9422	2747	215	529	75	2067	370	504	1174	660	360	42033	710	42743
25/7/86	20061	10143	3899	15315	5726	118	873	145	1322	970	650	0	958	360	60540	3636	64176
1/8/86	16213	6602	2536	12243	3552	290	1512	70	2720	345	809	1123	200	620	48835	944	49779
8/8/86	16954	8050	2516	14078	5534	194	1057	200	2647	345	4680	0	400	620	57275	4079	61354
15/8/86	14980	6685	2303	10801	1426	143	1056	0	860	345	831	474	0	620	39624	762	40386
22/8/86	21716	10570	3986	13632	5738	358	1539	30	1919	345	980	0	951	620	62384	4108	66492
29/8/86	15920	7959	2943	12322	2813	115	744	310	1392	345	1060	0	100	620	46643	1085	47728

a) i.e. total nett expenditure plus bank deposits

It can be seen from Figure 3.4 that the pattern of identified expenditure follows closely that of nett income, with the same basic alternating high-low pattern; there was no 'smoothing' in expenditure patterns of the fortnightly fluctuations in income. This can be explained in part by the lack of cash accumulation - savings could theoretically have been used to average out lean periods. This lack of capital accumulation was a crucial feature of Wik economy; it will merely be noted here, but will be dealt with in more detail later in this chapter.

As noted above, Figure 3.4 concerns only the allocations from nett cash income. In Figure 3.5, the overall total expenditure by Wik for the sample 52 weeks is presented by category, including that on house rentals and the 6 percent community levy.³²



Source: D.F. Martin, income and expenditure survey 1985/86

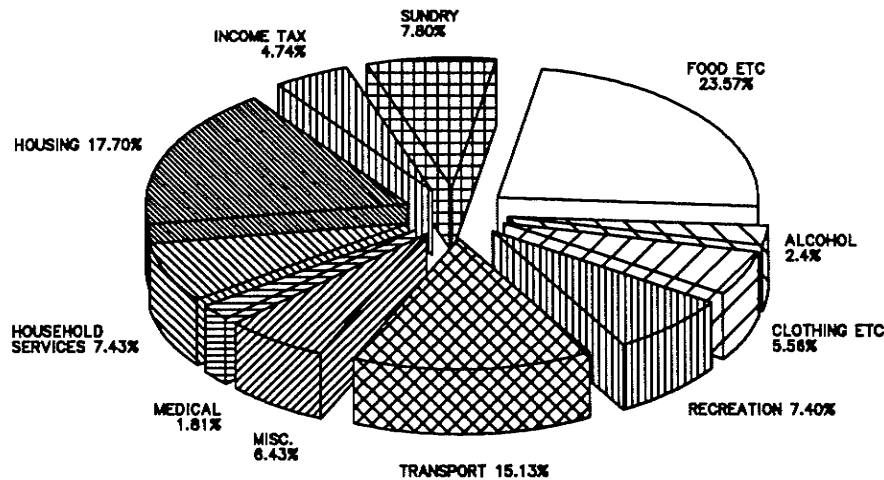
Figure 3.5 Proportions of total expenditure Sept '85 - Aug '86

For comparative purposes, in Figure 3.6 broadly comparable data for 1984 from the Australian Bureau of Statistics are presented for Australian households whose major source of income was unemployment and sickness benefits.³³ Per capita income in these households (\$62.10 per week in 1984 dollars) was similar to that in the Aurukun sample (\$65.80). Certain of the categories were fairly directly comparable between the two surveys, others were not; for example, there was no one category in the Bureau of Statistics sample that corresponds to my 'Capital expenditure', and the

32. It will be noted that in fact the proportion of this levy was slightly less than 6 percent; this was because certain incomes such as Family Allowance were exempt from it.

33. Australian Bureau of Statistics (1984:14).

purchase of cars in the ABS survey was incorporated in their 'transport' category, while televisions and video machines came under 'recreation'.



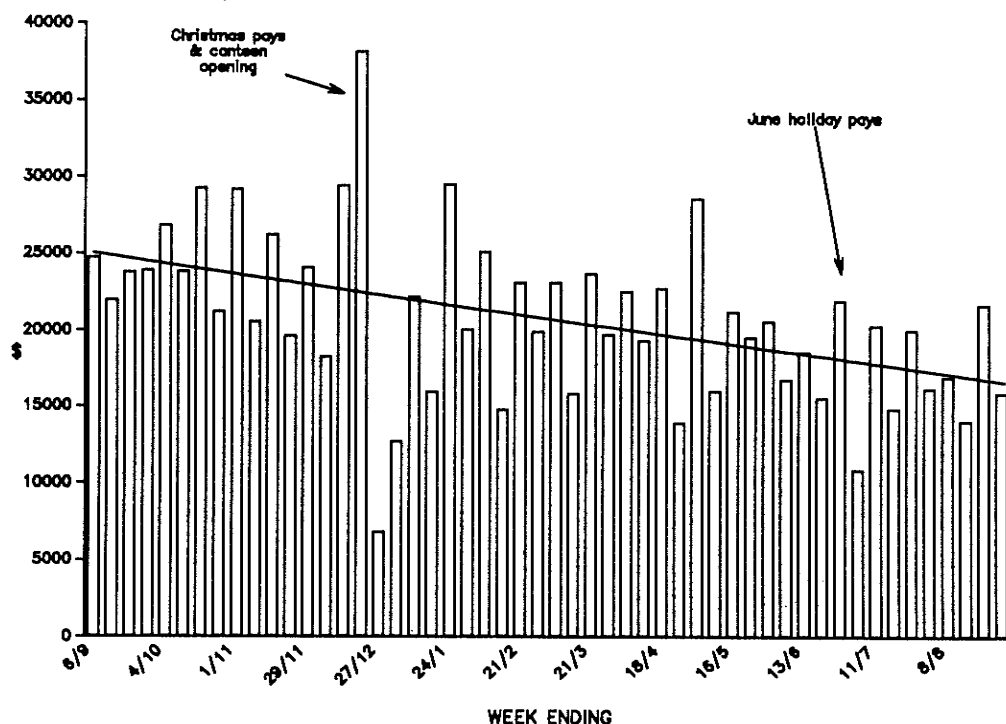
Source: Australian Bureau of Statistics (1984)

Figure 3.6 Australia wide Household expenditure, Principal income source unemployment and sickness benefits

Certain preliminary comments about these figures can be made at this point. There was a relatively high proportion of income spent by Wik during the sample period at the store and on takeaway foods, over 49 percent. This figure compares with under 24 percent on the same category in 1984 by households in the Australia-wide survey. This was attributable partly to the fact previously mentioned that it was not possible to separate out store expenditures on non-food items, though these latter were a fairly small proportion. It should also be emphasized that prices in the A.C.I. store were very high when compared to the major urban centres where the bulk of the Australian population live; there was an A.C.I. pricing policy of a mark-up of 40 - 50 percent over Cairns prices, with the freight component added to that. It was also worth noting the very high proportion of income spent on convenience foods, confectionery, soft drinks and tobacco from takeaways, nearly 14 percent of total income and over 28 percent of total food expenditure. Of course, a great proportion of the foodstuffs purchased from the store itself could be considered convenience food - tinned meats, packaged foods, flour for baking the ubiquitous dampers for instance. A little under 6 percent of income went to air travel, both by scheduled flights to other centres on the Cape and charter flights to Weipa for alcohol and to the outstations. Over 12 percent of nett income over the period in question was spent in the Council beer canteen; it should be noted again that this only opened 17 weeks into the sample period.

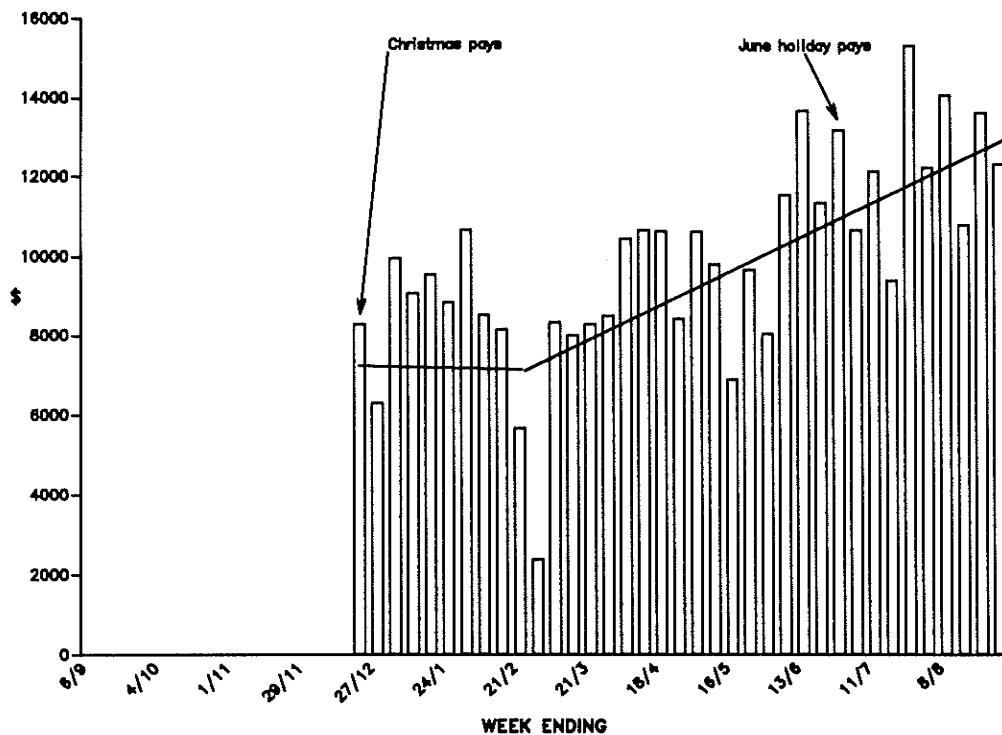
The relative amounts spent on housing - 2.6 percent in Aurukun as opposed to 17.7 percent in the Australia-wide sample, on household services - 5.18 percent in Aurukun versus 7.43 percent, and on medical services - provided free in Aurukun under the Queensland free hospital scheme and costing the ABS survey sample 1.81 percent of their income, indicate the highly subsidized nature of the provision of certain services in Aurukun as a result of various Governmental policies. None-the-less, their view of the world constructed from within Aurukun and its distorted cash economy, Wik complained often about the costs of rent and about the 6 percent community services levy.

Data on expenditure presented in Figure 3.5 are those for the whole year; they accordingly present only a static picture, and do not give any indication of trends in expenditures. In Figures 3.7 - 3.12, the weekly expenditures in the store, in the beer canteen, on takeaway foods, on air travel, and in the workshops and on clothing are presented for the sample year. These graphs are given here for completeness only: Figures 3.7 to 3.10 are discussed in detail in Chapter 4, in connection with the major shift in expenditure away from the store and other areas to the canteen. Data on expenditure in the workshops and on clothing in Figures 3.11 and 3.12 below indicate that while there was a drop in expenditure on these items following the opening of the canteen, it was not as marked as in other areas.



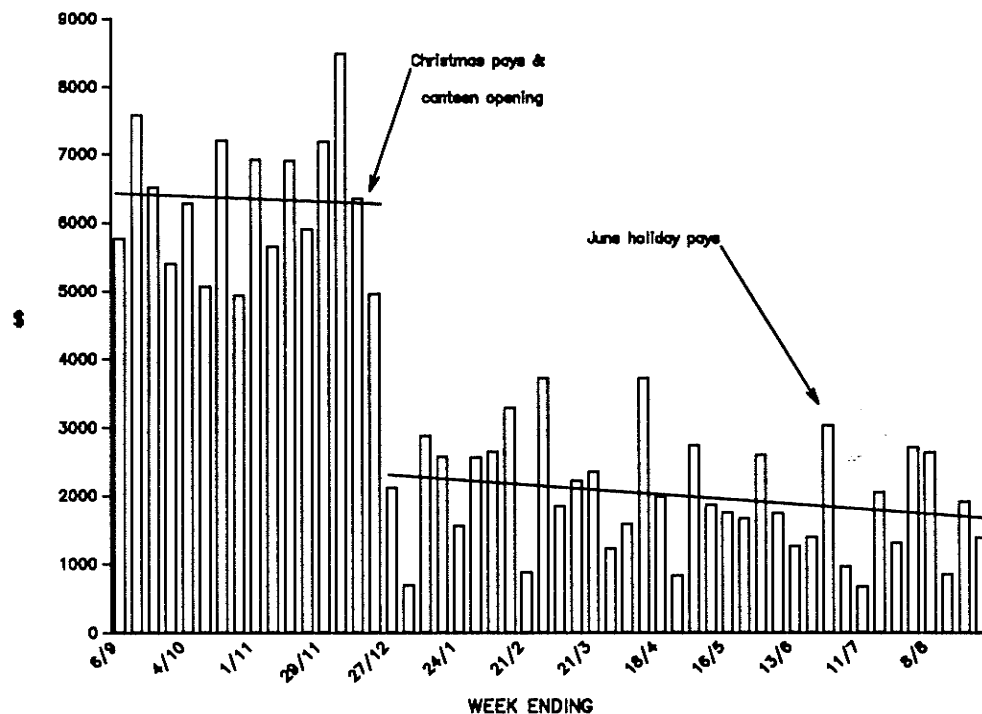
Source: D.F. Martin, income and expenditure survey 1985/86

Figure 3.7 Store takings, Sep 1985 - Aug 1986



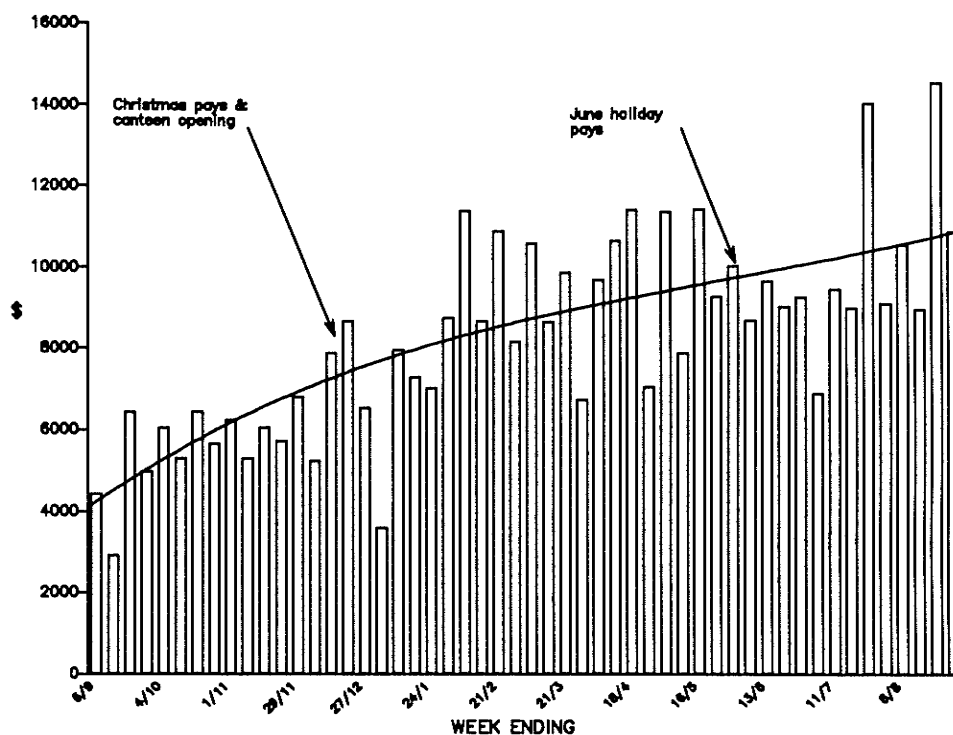
Source: D.F. Martin, income and expenditure survey 1985/86

Figure 3.8 Canteen alcohol expenditure, Sep 1985 - Aug 1986



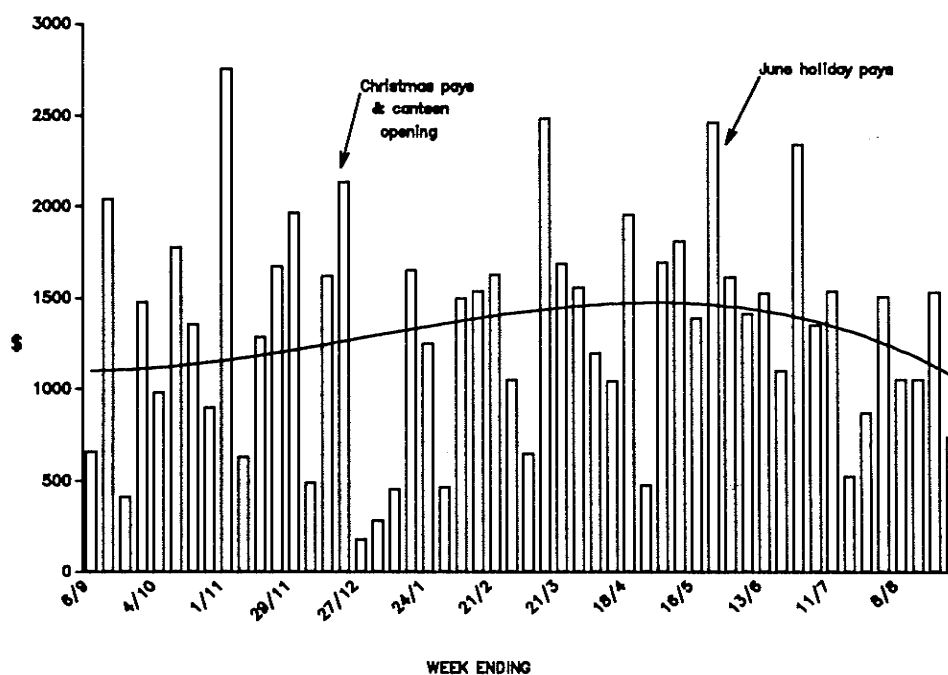
Source: D.F. Martin, income and expenditure survey 1985/86

Figure 3.9 Air travel expenditure, Sep 1985 - Aug 1986



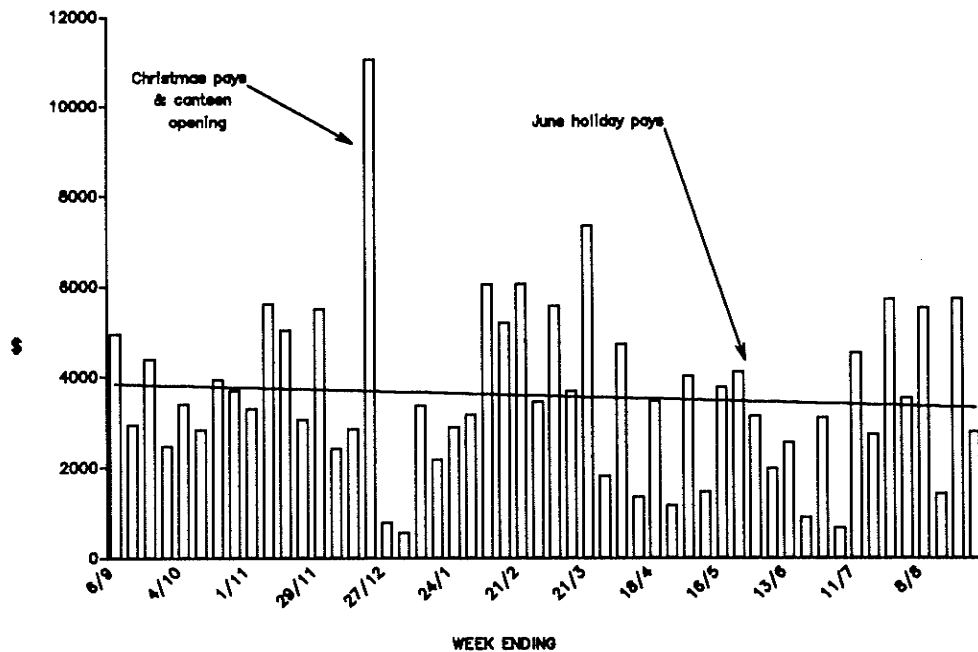
Source: D.F. Martin, income and expenditure survey 1985/86

Figure 3.10 Takeaway food expenditure, Sep 1985 - Aug 1986



Source: D.F. Martin, income and expenditure survey 1985/86

Figure 3.11 Expenditure in workshops, Sep 1985 - Aug 1986

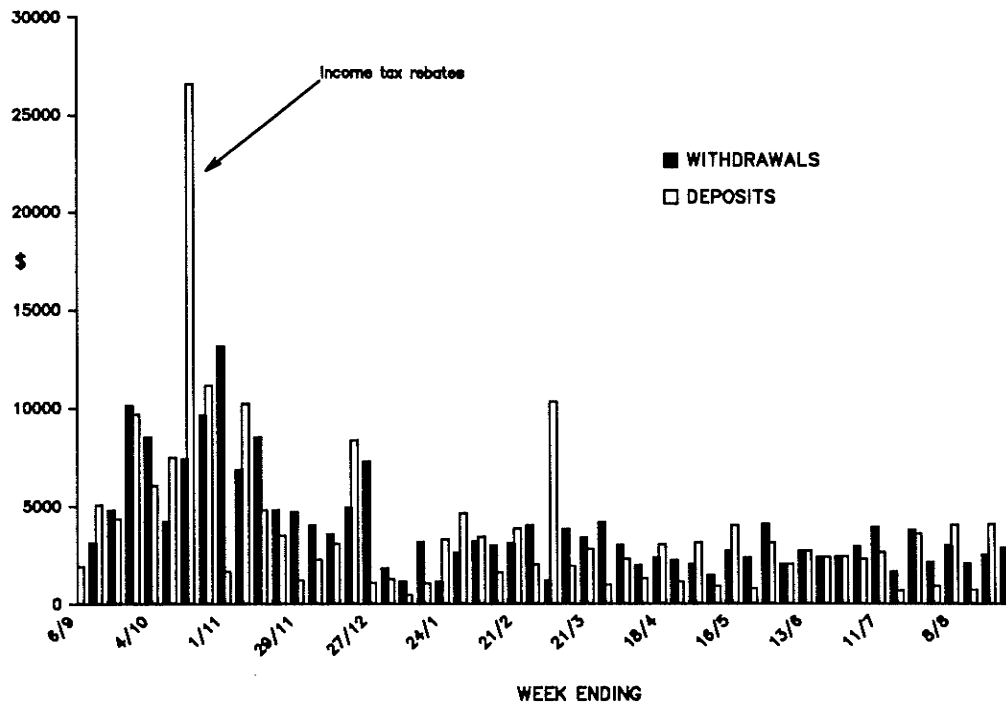


Source: D.F. Martin, income and expenditure survey 1985/86

Figure 3.12 Expenditure on clothing, Sep 1985 - Aug 1986

There was a significant proportion of expenditure (over 10 percent, amounting to some \$290,000 for the sample year) which has been categorized in Figure 3.5 as 'Unidentified'. For each given week, there was a difference between the total of all identified sources of income to the village and of all identified expenditures. In general, this was a cash surplus each week, though in certain weeks, such as that following the June holiday pays, a cash surplus was carried over from one week to fund a nett 'deficit' between income and expenditure in the next one. It was conceivable that this difference could have been due to a major avenue of unrecognized expenditure. Great care however was exercised in identifying and monitoring cash flows out of the village system to account for every possible avenue of expenditure, and the relatively bounded nature of the Aurukun cash system meant that it was not likely that such a large percentage would be missed entirely. The possibility that this excess of cash was being deposited in savings accounts was investigated. To quantify this possibility, the nett totals of deposits and of withdrawals from these accounts were monitored for each of the 52 weeks, and are presented in Figure 3.13 below.³⁴

34. As with all these data, I recorded no individual identifying information, merely the totals of the Bank agency reconciliations each week.

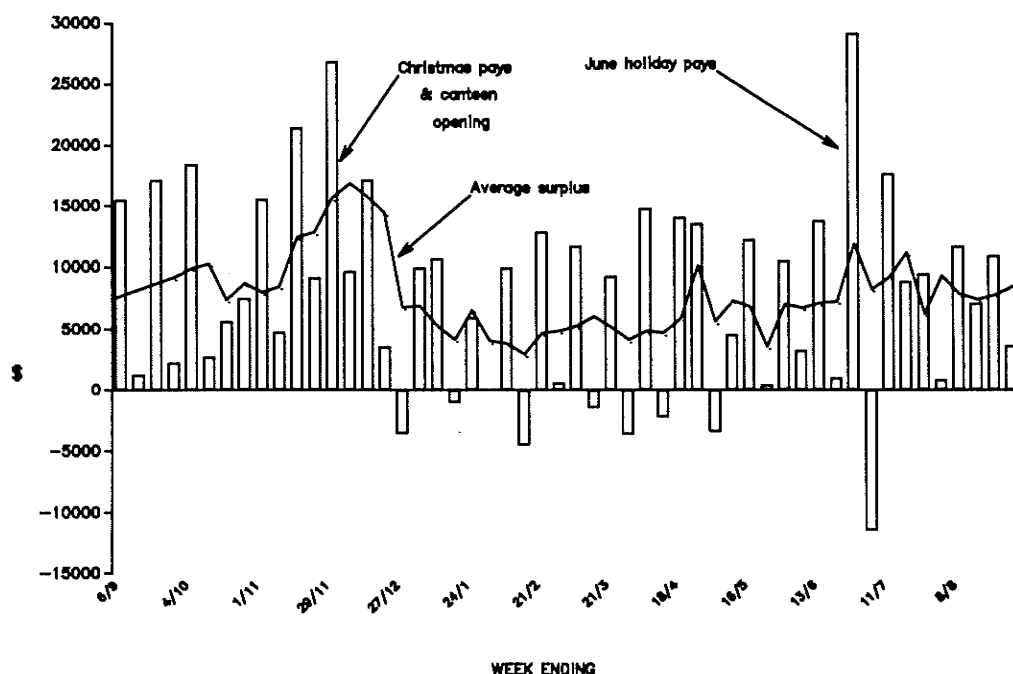


Source: D.F. Martin, income and expenditure survey 1985/86

Figure 3.13 Savings Bank deposits and withdrawals, Sep 1985 - Aug 1986

It can be seen from Figure 3.13 that periods of high deposits, such as when income tax rebate cheques were being received, were invariably followed by a steady attrition of the savings. The nett savings increase over the 52 weeks, as a percentage of total transactions, was only 1.6 percent, and this could well be due to the particular sample period in any case. It was also conceivable that individual Wik could have used their savings accounts to build up capital for the purchase of a large item, such as an outboard motor. However, my observations over the years spent in Aurukun indicated that in general those few people who did put money aside for such items, mostly old aged pensioners, tended to deposit it with the A.C.I. office staff rather than in a savings account. Demands for cash from kin could then be more easily circumvented. Almost invariably, large deposits in accounts were followed by a series of withdrawals to the maximum allowed under bank policy, \$500 per week, until funds in the account were exhausted.

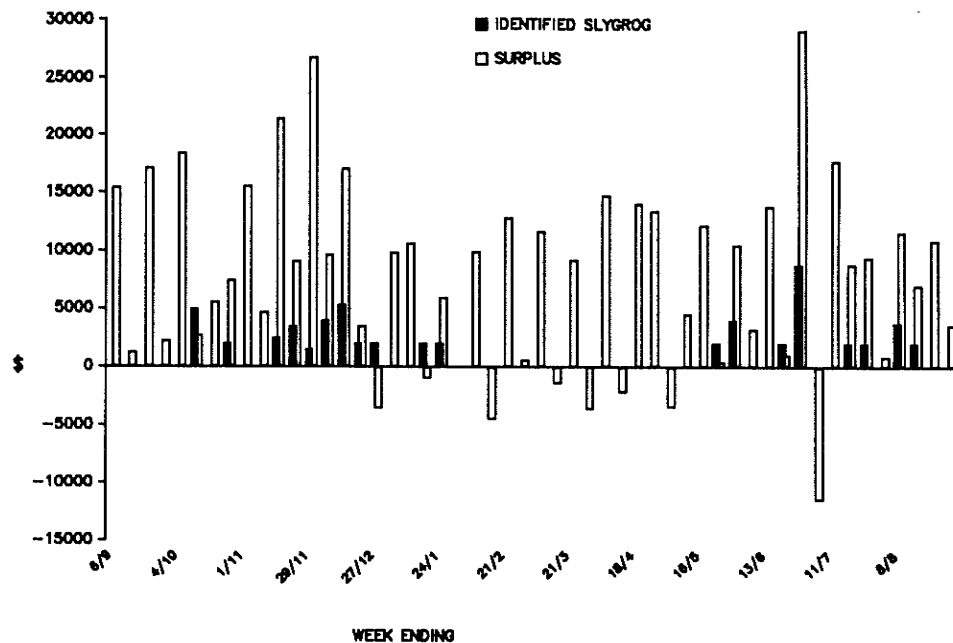
This nett weekly cash 'surplus', the difference between the cash flowing in to the village and identified expenditures, is presented in Figure 3.14. The general pattern of 'big' and 'slack' weeks can again be clearly seen here. The relatively high surpluses in the two holiday pay weeks were in each case carried over to the following week to fund an effective deficit in income versus expenditure. It was also noteworthy that surpluses tended to be lower after the opening of the canteen; in fact, there were regular cash deficits from this time. The average level of surpluses was also higher before the canteen opened. I suggest that this was essentially due to a shift in allocation of cash from 'sly grog' to beer purchased from the canteen.



Source: D.F. Martin, income and expenditure survey 1985/86

Figure 3.14 Nett weekly difference between income and expenditure, Sep 1985 - Aug 1986

It is my contention that the bulk of this 'surplus' cash, unidentified expenditure, flowed to Weipa and Cairns for alcohol, directly in the case of those who travelled themselves, or indirectly to the Weipa residents who conducted the flourishing 'sly grog' trade in Aurukun. This will be discussed further in Chapter 4. It is important to note the prices at which this alcohol was being sold within Aurukun. A standard carton of beer, 24 cans, sold for \$240; its retail price in Weipa was around \$20 at the time. Bottles of rum sold for upwards of \$100, and flagons of cheap wine for as much as \$50-\$100. The profits to be made were very high indeed, and at least one Weipa resident was stated by Wik to have financed the purchase of a new four wheel drive vehicle, worth over \$25,000, from the profits made in the dry season of 1986. As previously noted, the trade in alcohol was difficult to quantify, because of its scale and inherently clandestine nature. At certain times however when I was actually in Aurukun rather than in the bush, the quantities of alcohol returning on Air Queensland or charter flights were recorded and costs estimated. These data are graphed in Figure 3.15 below, along with that of the notional 'surplus' each week. Since the data are only partial, refer only to certain weeks, and only to the alcohol consumed within Aurukun (not, for instance, to that consumed in Weipa or other centres), they are indicative only. They do show however that at least in the periods sampled, identified purchases of sly grog account for quite significant proportions of the notional surplus.



Source: D.F. Martin, income and expenditure survey 1985/86

Figure 3.15 Identified 'sly grog' expenditure, Sep 1985 - Aug 1986

Summary of data

Certain significant trends are evident from the data. Nett cash inflows to the village system showed a quite regular cyclic pattern, due to the fortnightly social security income component superimposed on an essentially constant wages and C.D.E.P. base income. Expenditure overall, and in such particular areas as the store and takeaway food outlets, followed this same pattern very closely. When the difference for each week of the sample period between nett incomes and total identified expenditures was plotted, it too showed a fortnightly cyclic pattern of highs and lows. This nett outflow of 'surplus' cash amounted to a little over 10 percent of the total nett village income, and was basically a leakage of cash to Weipa and other centres for alcohol. An examination of total weekly savings bank deposits and withdrawals demonstrates clearly that Wik did not use the bank for capital accumulation, nor to any great extent for savings for the purchase of consumer goods or other such purposes.

This close correspondence between income and expenditure patterns, the fact that little if any money was saved on a long term basis, and the low proportion (less than 2 percent) of total income that was invested in consumer durables, vehicles, boats and so forth, indicated quite clearly that cash was used by Wik as it became

available.³⁵ The data also demonstrate that following the opening of the Council run beer canteen in late December 1985, there was a strong trend in expenditure away from foodstuffs from the store to convenience foods from takeaways, and away from food and other items in general to alcohol.³⁶ In comparison with those people in the broader Australian community living in households dependent on unemployment and sickness benefits, who had a similar per capita income, Wik on average spent much more on food - twice as much in fact. Their expenditure on clothing was comparable but a much lower proportion of it was spent on housing, general services and so on; this was due to the subsidized provision of these services in Aurukun. However, at least five times and possibly up to nine times as much of their income was used to obtain alcohol as was the case for those in the broader community.³⁷

Cash and the tempo of life

In contemporary Aurukun, life hummed to a tune set by the supply of cash. Wik explicitly recognized this; in talking about the state of social flux in Aurukun at any given time, they used in English two fundamental encapsulations; 'slack week' and 'big week'. These terms referred at the overt level to the quantity of cash entering the village system, and derived from the time in the late 1970s when fortnightly social security benefits, including the unemployment payments no longer paid in contemporary Aurukun, gave a distinct fortnightly cycle to cash inflow.³⁸ 'Slack' had some of the connotations it did in conventional Australian slang; life was boring, unexciting, little was happening. When there was not much money around, the events that were the most exciting and which were so central to contemporary life - the big drunken binges, the fights, and the large gambling schools - were far less common. When there was a lot of cash however in a 'big week', when pensions and other benefits arrived in addition to the weekly C.D.E.P. and wages payments, life lost its humdrum character, there was a sense of anticipation and purposefulness, and the intensity of social interaction reached a peak.

'Big' days and weeks

Days when there were big social security or C.D.E.P. payments were exciting days. On the mail days when pension, supporting mothers or family allowance cheques were expected, knots of the recipients gathered under the mango trees near the Council office, waiting for the Wik community workers to hand out the cheques. Many of those waiting would sit with their own coterie of kin; mothers typically were accompanied by the children of their household, actual and classificatory, pensioners

35. These data provide some contemporary substance then for what has been termed by Sahlins (1976) as an 'anti-surplus principle' in many simpler economies; see also Altman (1987).

36. This expenditure pattern and the factors underlying it are discussed in detail in Chapter 4.

37. Because, however, of the highly inflated prices for 'sly grog', this did not mean that actual consumption was of this order of magnitude: see Chapter 4.

by their grandchildren. Younger children played round the scene with typical exuberance while the more mature ones, particularly sons and grandsons, stood a short distance away with studied indifference. On pension days young relations - particularly grandchildren - would in many cases lead the old people in, or collect the cheques for those who were infirm or perhaps not in the township for some reason. Wik themselves commented to me with some acerbity on the fact that for many of the old people, the only time they saw certain of their close kin was on pension day.³⁹

There would be a clamouring press of people round those dispensing the cheques. Once received, they were taken to the Shire Council office, and here rental payments, the 6 percent community levy, and any other outstanding sums were deducted by the White office staff before the nett cash was dispensed, and people streamed across the road to the store. There was always the possibility on this short journey however of being waylaid by one's kin, or those to whom one owed debts, and asked for money. If it was not also a C.D.E.P. pay day, younger men would be waiting to demand 'beer price', the cost of one or two jugs of beer, from their non-drinking sisters, mothers or pensioner grandparents. These requests were seldom refused in my observation, even when the dispenser of the cash had been the recent recipient of drunken aggression from the importuning young man. If a mother or pensioner had specific important purposes in mind for the cash, such as buying an air ticket to accompany a sick relation to Cairns, they were better able to divert requests from more distant kin with an appropriately framed excuse that still acknowledged the right of the person to ask for the money; "I could of give you, my boy, but I got to go Cairns with that sick uncle yours." Without a legitimate excuse however, requests for money from close kin - particularly those in their own household or in one linked to it - were difficult for Wik to circumvent. Having emerged in full view of everybody from cashing a cheque, they could hardly deny having any money.⁴⁰ As I have argued in Chapter 1, relatedness for Wik was perceived in terms of, and substantiated through, flows of material as well as symbolic resources. Particularly where a woman's spouse, actual or close classificatory offspring, siblings or grandchildren were involved, the denial of a request for money, while it asserted her right to control the distribution of her resources, was also a denial of her relationship with the other person and nurturant obligations it entailed. Those who did not share risked violent retribution,⁴¹ or at the very least being accused of being *thaa' thayan*, in this context hard and unwilling to share, or even of acting 'like white man'.

38. As shown in Figure 3.3 page 92, fortnightly social security payments on top of a relatively consistent weekly C.D.E.P. and wages income still provided a distinct cycle to cash inflows, if less accentuated than before the introduction of weekly C.D.E.P. payments.

39. Social Security payments in particular, and western notions of income and property ownership more generally, focus on the individual and his or her rights to income and to its control; Wik had different conceptions. While individuals most certainly did attempt to control resources, including money from wages and government payments, as discussed in Chapter 1 kin had rights in them as individuals and in their resources.

40. Sansom (1980:232-3) proffers a rather similar description of pension days for Darwin Aboriginal fringe dwellers. However, Sansom portrays the business of collecting debts and making demands for credit as involving not only debtors and creditors but their supporters, who form "groups of demand and groups for defence against demand". For Wik on the contrary, the business of settling a cash debt was essentially a matter for the individuals concerned.

41. As discussed in Chapters 2 and 4.

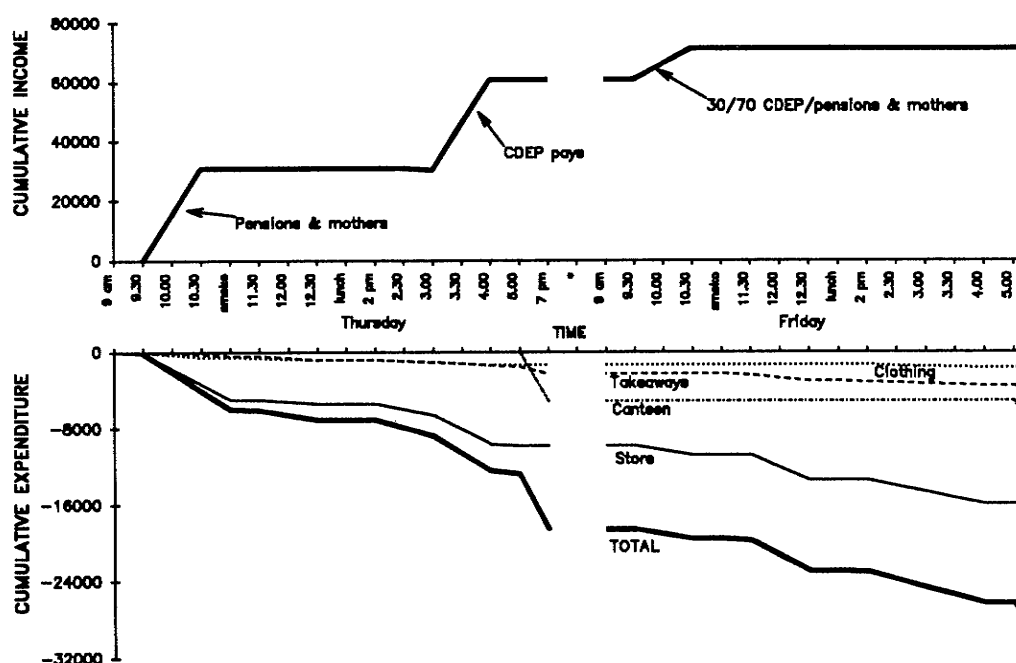
C.D.E.P. and full-time worker pay days were rather different. From 2pm men would start to gather, sitting and standing in knots on the lawn inside the fence around the Council office. There would usually be a great deal of joviality and banter, an almost palpable sense of anticipation that contrasted strongly with the desultory fashion with which most of the C.D.E.P. work gangs operated during the rest of the week. There were relatively few women working under C.D.E.P. (20 out of 222 in February 1986), and thus almost everyone who received pay under the C.D.E.P. scheme was male.⁴² Pays were distributed from the Council office between 3pm and 4pm, and the A.C.I. store would generally be shut by soon after 4.30pm, and the canteen opened at 5pm. There was thus little time on the pay day itself for those receiving C.D.E.P. and full-time wages to shop.⁴³

As a result, in this relatively short period there was frenetic activity in the store, in contrast to 'slack days' when there were no pays or cheques and virtually no one apart from bored staff would be in the shop. Women and pensioners tended to buy the staples which would last through the next one or two weeks - 20 kilogram drums of flour, baking powder, 16 kilogram cartons of sugar, packets of tea, tins of instant milk powder, and cigarettes or tobacco.⁴⁴ Some men purchased these items, others might only buy for themselves goods such as tobacco, packets of rice, condiments like Holbrooks sauce and tinned meats such as stews or corned beef, and store them away in safe places (such as my house) to keep for when they returned from the canteen. These foods required a minimum of preparation.⁴⁵ Foodstuffs such as soft drinks, biscuits, fresh fruit, cakes, ice-creams and so forth (bought from both the store and the A.C.I. takeaway) were usually distributed and consumed immediately, mainly by children. Daughters, nieces and younger nephews might accompany a woman to the clothing store, and have dresses, shirts, underwear and so forth purchased for them. Usually as the result of demands being strenuously expressed, expensive radio-controlled model cars were often bought for boys, or bicycles, cassette players and other such items. Generally though, these more expensive goods were purchased from gambling winnings or from other larger cash amounts than were obtained from a single cheque or wage. Children, even babies, were often given twenty dollar or even fifty dollar notes by their actual or classificatory mothers and uncles, and (more rarely) fathers, by older siblings, by grandparents, or by other kin in the case of

42. Certain women had obtained agreement from their spouses to have 'split pay' arranged. In these cases, the woman received a proportion of her spouse's C.D.E.P. pay directly; he might receive only what he would as a single man. This mostly resulted from complaints by a woman to the Wik Community Workers that her husband drank or gambled all his income, and used none of it for supporting her or their children. I do not have figures for the number of Wik who received 'split payments', but it was a relatively small proportion of the total.
43. After a few months of operation, the Shire Council advanced its canteen opening time to 4.30pm, restricting even further the time that men allocated to purchasing food and other goods from the A.C.I. store. This was not just as the result of pressure from drinkers for longer drinking hours; it also arose from the intense competition between these two organizations for the money controlled by Wik.
44. Anderson (1982:119-20) reported similarly that at Wujulwujal, women's food purchases from the store were almost always food related and that they were the major buyers for their households, whereas men bought tobacco or soft drinks or non-food items such as kerosene and fuel. Children's purchases were almost entirely confectionary and soft drinks.
45. After the canteen closed at 7pm, and if there were no major fights, a procession of inebriated men would move from house to house asking "Nint tin-meat ya' ey?" - "Do you have any tinned

especially favoured small children. Older children used this money directly at the takeaway, or took it to the video games parlour near the canteen, which was run in what had been the bakery, and which also sold soft drinks and confectionery.

In order to quantify overall expenditure patterns on pay days, sample data were gathered over two days in September 1987, a Thursday and Friday, from the store, the clothing store, the A.C.I. takeaway, and the Council beer canteen and takeaway. The totals on each till was noted at various times during each day. The store, clothing store and A.C.I. takeaway closed at around 4.30pm, and the canteen and Council takeaway opened at this time, and subsequently closed at 7pm. Pension and supporting mothers' cheques that would normally have been delivered on the Wednesday were accidentally offloaded at Weipa on this occasion, and were not



Source: D.F. Martin, Store purchases survey 17-18th Sept 1987.

Figure 3.16 Expenditure patterns on pay days

brought down to Aurukun until the Thursday morning on a specially commissioned air charter. A nett \$30,811 worth of pension and supporting mothers' cheques was cashed on Thursday morning. The C.D.E.P. pays had all been made up the day before in anticipation of this double day; they totalled \$37,506. In fact, 51 people left their pays until Friday to be collected, with an estimated total of some \$7,500.⁴⁶

meat?". Those who were not drinkers often complained about how drinking men spent all their money in the canteen and then looked around for tinned meat.

46. This leaving of pays or cheques for later collection occurred quite frequently, and was a conscious strategy on the part of many young Wik men. They knew that there was always an excess of cash on pay days, and that they were sure of being able to get beer in the canteen on this day either by direct 'shouting' or through cash gifts or loans.

There was also on this occasion a further \$2,943 in cash dispensed on the Friday morning for additional pension and supporting mothers' cheques. The flows of income and of expenditure during this sample period at the A.C.I. store and clothing store, the takeaways and the canteen are shown graphically in Figure 3.16.

In Table 3.8 below, the percentage of total nett income received over the two days which had been expended in each of the four areas by Friday night, is compared with the proportion of nett income allocated to each area over a full year.

Table 3.8 Expenditures immediately following pays

	Store	Clothing	Takeaway	Canteen
% income expended immediately	22.5	2.4	5.9	14.0
Yearly expenditure (%) ⁴⁷	38.2	7.2	15.1	20.0 ⁴⁸
% yearly allocation immediately spent	60	30	40	70

Source: D.F. Martin, Store purchases survey 17-18th Sept 1987.

It can be seen that after the first two days, already some 60 percent of the income that would (on average) go to the store had been spent, and some 70 percent of that which would go to the canteen;⁴⁹ that is, the bulk of expenditure in these areas was immediate and direct.⁵⁰ Both the clothing store and the takeaway however had much lower percentages. Caution has to be exercised in interpreting these data in that particular unidentified contingencies may have caused expenditures to deviate from the average. In the case of the clothing store however, much of the expenditure during the year was by women from windfall income such as gambling wins, which allowed the purchase of goods that could not be afforded from any one particular week's income, and I suggest that this underlay the lower relative proportion spent immediately on clothing. For the takeaways, the data bear out that in Table 3.9 page

47. These were nett income totals: i.e. excluding the 6% levy and rents (c.f. Figure 3.5, page 101).
48. In the case of the canteen, since it was open only 35 of the 52 weeks in the yearly sample, the measured yearly percentage has been multiplied by a factor of 52/35 to give an estimate of a full year's expenditure.
49. This of course assumes that none of the expenditure over the two days in question was of cash that was circulating at the start of the two day sample period. It also assumes that the overall expenditure patterns in 1987 were similar to those of 1985/85 when the full year's data were collected.
50. Not only was cash disbursed very quickly, and alcohol drunk immediately, but almost invariably all the food purchased apart from the basic flour, sugar and tea was consumed immediately; even those Wik with refrigerators used them mainly for storing cold water, butter, jam and other such items, and not for keeping 'left-overs', nor indeed for storing large amounts of food. A refrigerator full of food was an invitation to hungry children or drunks to raid it, or to demands from kin for a share, just as the possessor of a large sum of cash from gambling winnings or a tax rebate cheque was invariably subject to intense pressure to disburse it; see also the discussion on pressure and sharing in Chapter 1.

116 which suggests that Wik spent relatively more of their remaining cash reserves on convenience foodstuffs when money was in short supply

After stores had been purchased and the immediate demands for distribution around the office and store area met, people would stream home with their remaining cash and their goods. Some women would then prepare food, but most would make their way to the gambling schools that were at their peak of numbers, size and cash pools on big pay and social security days.⁵¹ Some men would go directly from the pay office down to the gambling schools, but would normally continue on to the canteen after no more than an hour, usually less; the canteen exerted an even more powerful attraction than did gambling. Canteen takings showed less fluctuation between big and slack weeks than did those of, for instance, the store,⁵² suggesting the carryover from big to slack weeks of cash preferentially for expenditure on alcohol. Nevertheless, C.D.E.P. and cheque days - usually Thursdays - were by far the biggest nights at the canteen. These were the nights of chaotic conditions inside the canteen as closing time drew near, of the big brawls, and also of the big, fast moving gambling schools with the very high stakes, which were however often disrupted by drunks, accusations of cheating and so on.

'Slack' weeks

The patterns of expenditure, and the flux of social life in general, were quite different by the end of 'slack' weeks. Life was genuinely 'slack', in the sense the idiom implied; it was humdrum, uneventful, fights were fewer and everything moved with a slower pace. There were real shortages of both cash and food in the village. Gambling schools were smaller and generally desultory; people played the more social games such as *kuunkan* using small change and \$2 notes rather than the big betting *katan*. If seasonal conditions warranted it, on the weekends some Wik fished at the landing or further out in the case of those who had money for fuel and access to a vehicle or boat, to supplement dwindling food supplies. There were relatively few large denomination notes in circulation; adults and children came to the takeaways with coins and two dollar notes and very little was expended in the store, which would be virtually empty most of the time. Because most Wik had very little cash, such food as was bought was low cost items from the takeaways like drinks, chips, and cooked chicken legs that cost only one or two dollars. Canteen beer sales were lower than on a big pay or cheque day, and in fact were often greater than those of the store. This is clearly illustrated in data for the week ending July 4th 1986, which followed that of the June holiday pays. This week was one of particularly low cash inflows as can be seen in Figure 3.3, page 92.

51. Gambling will be discussed at length later in this chapter. I will merely note at this point that while gambling can be seen as one of the mechanisms by which cash was circulated through the village, it was not sufficient to analyse it solely in these terms; it did not I will argue serve principally to redistribute unequal cash holdings.

52. Compare Figures 3.7 page 103 and 3.8 page 104.

Table 3.9 Sample 'slack week' expenditures⁵³

	Store sales	Canteen beer	Takeaway foods	Clothing store
1/7/86	3144	3561	2747	254
2/7/86	1157	2036	922	131
3/7/86	1959	3548	1782	152
4/7/86	1933	1983	1528	148

Source: D.F. Martin, field records July 1986.

In Table 3.9, store, takeaway food (including cigarettes and softdrinks sold through the canteen), clothing store and canteen beer sales are shown for this particular week. Cash held by most women was not sufficient for them to purchase goods from the clothing store. The preferential expenditure in times of cash shortage on convenience foods and on alcohol can be clearly seen here. Again, I suggest, this was in part attributable to the monopolization of remaining cash reserves by men.

Cash within the Wik domain

The dialectical tension between the autonomous individual and wider collectivities provided a fundamental dynamic to Wik social forms and processes, I have suggested in Chapter 1. While such a constituting dynamic must of necessity be a factor in all societies, it was the very high stress on individual autonomy and the fluid nature of social and political groupings which gave a particular character to this tension for Wik.⁵⁴ Furthermore, while autonomy could be realized in part through the control of symbolic and material resources, relatedness was substantiated through flows of these items (including cash) between individuals and collectivities. Thus, while the introduction of money as such in relatively limited contexts within Aurukun in the latter years of the MacKenzie era had not of itself created fundamental changes, that of a cash-based economy based on welfare payments from the mid 1970s did.⁵⁵ This was not simply a matter of demands being created in an analytically unproblematic fashion by the increased availability of consumer goods, vehicles, alcohol and the like; as Douglas and Isherwood have observed, commodities are not simply needed for subsistence or indeed for competitive display, but "(make) visible and stable the categories of culture".⁵⁶ More basically, with virtually all Wik having ready access to a cash income, through social security payments and C.D.E.P. and other wages, money offered a powerful medium through which the basic themes of autonomy and relatedness could be played out in the flux of daily life.

53. The Friday of this particular week was a holiday.

54. This fluidity in process, including group composition and structures, is the subject of Chapter 6.

55. One senior man described to me MacKenzie's introduction of cash as a "bluff game". There were very limited amounts of money in circulation, and MacKenzie had an 'order sheet' on which each person's purchases of the basic items sold would be entered. "He would give us the money, then take it back again," I was told.

Cash, autonomy and relatedness

When Wik still primarily lived out bush rather than in the mission, access by each person to the basic necessities of life had been dependent upon the complex human/landscape association expressed in the land tenure system, mediated through relationships of exchange and distribution, over which had been superimposed such factors as restrictions on consumption of specific items occasioned by particularities of age, ritual status, seniority and so forth. Under the mission regime, a form of quasi-personalized reciprocity had been established in which Wik had exchanged compliance with the requirements of the MacKenzies (to work, to send their children to the dormitories and to school, to attend church, and so forth) in return for access to basic needs such as food and shelter, within the settlement at least.⁵⁷ With the advent of the welfare-based cash economy however, access to money and to the goods and services it could purchase was no longer mediated through any such system of personal relationships, either with administration staff or within the Wik domain, but was predicated upon a person's rights as a citizen of the wider state in a particular category.⁵⁸ Wik were thus increasingly able to assert their independence from others - men from responsibilities towards their domestic units, wives from their spouses, younger men from older ones - through the means which cash offered.

Furthermore, it was not just that having an independent cash income allowed individuals - if they so chose - to obtain basic necessities such as food outside the network of reciprocal rights and obligations of the Wik domain. Especially in the case of men, it enabled them to become involved as relatively autonomous actors in establishing credit and prestige, through the direct distribution of cash from their wages, the purchase and sharing of alcohol, the distribution of gambling winnings, and so forth. Many young men in particular used the bulk of their C.D.E.P. incomes for gambling, alcohol (both canteen beer and outside grog), and travel. Cash thus was one critical factor in the sundering of the reproduction of relations of domination and subordination between older men and younger ones; neither access to it nor its use needed to be mediated by senior generations.⁵⁹ Of course, once having spent all

56. Douglas and Isherwood (1978:59); see also Bourdieu (1984) in his classic study of consumption patterns and their relationship to status groups in France.

57. The mission itself was associated for Wik with the persona of the MacKenzies (and secondarily with other staff, relatively few in number). In contemporary Aurukun however, staff almost without exception interacted with Wik only in terms of their formal work roles, and no such personalized reciprocity between them and Wik existed. Paradoxically, while more than ever before Wik society was being overwhelmed by the institutions of the wider state, there was less direct personal intervention in their mundane lives. This may have been a part a function of demographic factors, since there were far more Wik in contemporary times than when the MacKenzies were there, and it was easier for them to know everyone. Additionally, with access to resources no longer being mediated through personalized relationships with Whites, but rather via cash directed mainly through the welfare state, Wik had a higher degree of autonomy from Whites at the level of day to day interaction than in the past.

58. at least in the first instance; access to cash once it was circulating within the village economy was mediated through the networks of social and material debts and credits within which each Wik individual operated.

59. Because consumption is the end of an economic process, it creates the need for reproduction. It is therefore intimately related to production (Gregory and Altman 1989). However, Wik were increasingly consumers rather than producers, of material capital as well as symbolic forms (see

their money young men were dependent upon others for their basic sustenance, and these others were usually women - their mothers, grandmothers, and older sisters.

This was not a case however of young men exchanging as it were dependence upon senior men for access to valued knowledge for dependence upon women for material items. As discussed in Chapter 2 women's nurturance of men was expressed through the provision of support, care and physical sustenance for them; in drawing upon the symbolic resource of women's affections for and bonds with them in order to appropriate their labour and money, Wik men were inverting the ideological representation of male authority as nurturant. It was through this mechanism that the potential of women's independent cash incomes to generate increasing autonomy and independence from men was, in part at least, subverted. Of the order of 30 percent of nett cash incomes flowing into the Wik domain was paid directly to women (see footnote 61). However, my observations in the store, and of the sets of linked households with which my own in the village was linked, demonstrated that it was primarily women who were responsible not only for the labour which maintained domestic units - cooking, washing, cleaning and so forth - but also for their basic provisioning. Comparatively more of what women expended in the store was for foodstuffs such as flour, sugar, milk powder and tea which was for basic household subsistence than was the case for men.⁶⁰

Data from my overall cash balances did not allow of a precise breakdown of relative expenditures by men and women, or indeed by households. If anything, at first glance they suggested that roughly equal proportions of men's and women's initial incomes - that is, their welfare, wage or C.D.E.P. incomes - were spent in the store, takeaways and clothing store.⁶¹ However, the effects of gambling on the distribution of cash need to be taken into account here. Women were the more assiduous gamblers over the full cash inflow cycle, and their winnings were distributed back into the Wik cash economy directly to kin or spouses, or spent on stores, clothing and so forth. Men's winnings on the other hand were on occasion

Chapter 5), and the locus of control of production - and therefore ultimately of reproduction - lay outside in the dominant society.

60. Similar patterns for other Aboriginal groups have been reported by Anderson (1982:119-20; 1984:424), Finlayson (1991:193), and Hamilton (1981b:105). See also page 112.
61. A consideration of the data presented in the first section of this chapter demonstrates that considerable total inputs to this household support must have come directly or indirectly from men. Over the sample 52 weeks, the total nett male incomes - full time workers, C.D.E.P. workers and male pensioners - totalled in the vicinity of \$2,250,000, that of women just under \$900,000. This can be obtained by using the totals for the various categories of income (C.D.E.P. etc) and estimating the percentage for each category of income going to men and women. The exact figures here were \$2,249,433 for men and \$899,904 for women. The store takings etc over this period amounted to \$1,873,495. Overall, some 71 percent of total nett income was directed to men. The total expenditure in the store, takeaways and clothing store (which I will for my purposes here use as an estimate of 'domestic' expenditure) was of the order of \$1,900,000 over the same period. Simple calculation shows that if for argument's sake women were assumed to have spent 60 percent of their nett wage and social security incomes in these 'domestic' areas, then men also would have had to spend just under 60 percent of their incomes in these areas. It should also be noted that of the income received by male C.D.E.P. workers, just over \$1,000,000 would have been paid to them had they all been single men, (200 men x 52 weeks x single man's C.D.E.P. rate of \$98.45/week) and the balance, of the order of \$400,000, was paid to them specifically for the support of their dependent spouses and children.

used for stores or for large capital items such as refrigerators or vehicles,⁶² but most often they were used to purchase alcohol, either within Aurukun in the form of sly grog or outside Aurukun through trips to Weipa or other centres by plane.⁶³ This expenditure on alcohol which flowed out of Aurukun I have estimated to be over 10 percent of total village income,⁶⁴ amounting to some \$290,000, and I would estimate that 95 percent of this trade was due to men. Thus, if it is assumed from the proportions of men and women drinkers that men accounted for 80 percent of canteen takings, almost one third of their total nett cash incomes was spent on alcohol. Additionally, men - especially young men - spent far more on travel than did women, particularly through the charter of planes to fly to Weipa for alcohol. My contention then is that in the initial allocation of cash incomes women (and pensioners) spent proportionately more than did men on the basic staples that enabled a household to survive through slack weeks, and that proportionately more of their gambling winnings were channelled into domestic subsistence.

Much alcohol consumption and most of the drinking trips to Weipa overland or by plane involved almost exclusively men; that is, considerable proportions of their own incomes and gambling winnings were being used to finance activities whose values and meanings lay largely within an essentially male domain, and not within the domestic one. Such activities and income allocations, conjoined with their ability to draw upon the labour and sustenance of female kin, allowed men to carve out effectively autonomous domains of practices; that is, men's access to cash incomes allowed them to create a contemporary style of life defined in opposition to that of women and the requirements and demands of the domestic sphere. In this sense, cash (and alcohol) could be seen as implicated in the increasing ability of men to assert their autonomy collectively *vis a vis* women, just as it enabled young men to assert their independence from older generations.

However, most particularly within these domains, the strong emphasis on equality and the relentless pressure on those with resources, subverted the potential of money and consumer goods purchased with it to create either perduring hierarchies or real personal autonomy.⁶⁵ In the words of a Wik Community Worker, in explaining

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62. The purchase of vehicles or boats could be seen as productive investment in that they increased the ability of people to leave the township or to move out bush to hunt and fish. However, they also served social functions, in allowing visits between outstations or between Aurukun and other centres such as Coen and Weipa (see Altman 1987:185-6; Gregory and Altman (1989:196). Mostly however, vehicles were used by Wik for travel to Weipa to drink and to purchase alcohol, and secondarily for general shopping. The investment in vehicles then was less to do with material productivity and more with generating social relationships through the conjoint (and mostly male) practices surrounding the consumption of alcohol.
 63. Goodale (1988:19) has made similar observations of the use of Tiwi men's and women's gambling winnings.
 64. See Figure 3.5 page 101.
 65. The paradox was that while the accumulation of tangible resources was staunchly opposed, there was high - although decreasing - value placed on the accumulation of intangible resources such as ritual knowledge. I think the answer lies in what Bourdieu (1977) calls the "perfect interconvertibility of symbolic and material capital", and in themes of nurturance and responsibility of those with ritual and esoteric knowledge to others. Men might accrue esoteric knowledge in part for reasons of personal prestige and for power, (and this knowledge and its performance was explicitly referred to by Wik as *bisnis*), but their doing so was legitimated very much through their using this knowledge for the benefit of others, as in crucial dimensions of

to me the manner in which large income tax rebate cheques were being rapidly spent; "Too much pressure from families - next morning, nothing! (biting his finger to signify abject poverty)." Such pressure was almost impossible to withstand, even for those who wished to do so.

James received his income tax rebate cheque in the mail. He came over to my house, opened it, and looking very pleased showed it to me: it was over \$1,000. His mother came over and told him to hold on to the money, and not to spend it on grog or let others pressure him into going to Weipa with it. Not five minutes elapsed before his maternal uncles arrived. James left the house, but returned a little later followed at a distance by his classificatory brother Benjamin, who sat outside for some time gazing into space while James sat inside the house gazing at the television. Eventually Benjamin came into the house and sat down close to James and spoke *sotto voce* with him. James did not respond. He was clearly using my house as a sanctuary from pressure on him for the money - but he had to venture outside in order to cash the cheque at the Council office. When he did so, his mother followed him to the office, calling out to him not to listen to his uncles, who were waiting outside the office, and to use the money to buy a washing machine or bank it for later. If he went to Weipa, she told him, he would have no money the next day and be sick with a headache. Her fears were realized. James had travelled to Weipa the week before on an air charter trip paid for by Benjamin's sister, and so was in no position himself to refuse to fund a trip.

Such demands were not only on those with money or alcohol.⁶⁶ An outboard motor bought by one elderly man from his war service cheque was appropriated and used by a wide range of kin until it seized, including his sons, grandsons, and the spouses of his daughters and granddaughters.⁶⁷ The purchase of a video recorder meant that for most owners, their house would be full of children and young adults watching movies. In fact, one man installed his video machine and television on a table outside his house, as the only way he could circumvent the entry of crowds of children inside. Those who bought a washing machine had a constant stream of kin using it; in one instance, the machine itself was even moved to a new location and used there by other kin until the owners reclaimed it.

Expressions of autonomy existed in dialectical tension with those of relatedness, which was realized through the flows of material and symbolic items. Money, because of such factors as its relatively freely available supply, its portability, and its capacity to be exchanged for foodstuffs, prestigious items such as alcohol and consumer goods, had become intimately woven into the fabric of Wik mundane life, including in the networks of exchange and distribution between individuals and between collectivities. Cash was used for example in payments in redress of

mortuary rites necessary to the despatching of the totemic spirit essence to its spirit sending centre.

- 66. Although Collmann (1979a) represents the distribution of alcohol more in terms of a desire to share as a means of establishing social credit.
- 67. Chase (1980:87) equivalently notes of Lockhart River people that 'countrymen' have almost unlimited claims upon outboards, so long as the prestige foods such as dugong are distributed back to the owner and his close kin.

inadvertent ritual infringements.⁶⁸ It was collected by the patrikin of a deceased person to fund house openings and other ceremonies in the mortuary cycle,⁶⁹ which were important contemporary elements in the competitive struggle over relative status between groups.⁷⁰ It was also collected by the kin of the deceased's spouse to fund the purchase of food for ceremonial presentation to the deceased's agnates.⁷¹ Money also figured at every level in mundane transactions between Wik; gifts of cash from wage and welfare incomes and gambling winnings (and their correlate, distribution arising from demands) were the stuff of everyday life, realizing and reproducing the complex of social, political and economic relationships in the Wik domain.

For instance, unlike mainstream Australian society where most expenditure for children was done on their behalf by adults, principally parents, Wik children directly controlled a significant (though difficult to quantify) segment of the cash economy. Children had a high degree of personal autonomy; they had a right to be given or to demand money, and those who had responsibility for them had the obligation to give it. In fact by giving valued cash directly to a child who had reached the age of effective independence from its mother, around three or four years old, a woman was both discharging her nurturing responsibilities and accepting the right of the child to make autonomous choices about the allocation of resources.

Cindy and her husband had just received their pension cheques. Four of her grandchildren, ranging in age from about 5 to 13 and for whom she was the main provider of food and care, followed her over to the store, demanding money for the takeaway. After protestations she dispensed a few dollars each. Having bought basic foods such as flour, sugar, tea and tobacco, she emerged from the store to be surrounded by the grandchildren again, demanding more money. The youngest child - a girl - threw a temper tantrum, screaming and rolling on the store verandah, hitting and pinching her grandmother. Cindy abused her and the others roundly for being greedy for money and for following her around, but distributed most of the remainder of her cash to them.

It should be noted too that it involved considerably less effort on the part of a mother to give a child \$5 from her gambling stake or pension than to cook a meal, and so her own independence was also being asserted as well. "They are not babies, they can look after themselves", said a mother accused of not preparing food for her children ranging from four to twelve years in age. The sums given to children could be considerable. Distributions of \$5 and \$10 notes to children from kin on pay and

68. e.g. a man whose three year old child accidentally touched his classificatory daughter's pudenda in play, was asked to make a payment to the girl's father.

69. Various strategies were used to try to accumulate the relatively large sums of money required to fund a big house opening. Sometimes, arrangements were made with the A.C.I. and Council offices to have pay deductions made from kin over a period of several weeks before the actual opening, with the money being held in the office. On other occasions, trusted people would wait outside the office on pay days to collect cash from relations as they left the building. Many Wik tried to raise funds through investing cash in gambling, but this was a course of action fraught with the possibility of disaster. Additionally, all strategies had to compete with the demands on accumulated cash by drinkers. It was not unknown for money saved for a house opening to be appropriated - including by close male kin of the deceased - and used to finance an air charter and the purchase of large quantities of alcohol in Weipa.

70. See discussion in Chapter 5.

71. The food involved in this ceremonial prestation was called *may orangam*.

cheque days were common,⁷² but I recorded many instances of larger sums of \$20 or \$50 being given to quite young children. Even larger amounts however occasionally given to children - sometimes of the order of \$100 or \$200 - were generally part of distributions from gambling winnings by women or from other windfall cash incomes such as tax rebate cheques. Older children were themselves avid gamblers, on occasion in card games which involved adults, but also in their own games - cards, 'heads and tails' and 'holey'. I observed pools of cash in children's card games of several hundred dollars, and it was not uncommon for a child to win sums of one or two hundred dollars. While a mother or older siblings might well be successful in demanding a proportion of a child's winnings, they did not necessarily have the ultimate control over its allocation. Larger sums would most often be spent by young boys on prized articles like radio controlled toy cars, but considerable cash was spent by children directly in the takeaways and at the video parlour. I would estimate that perhaps half of the expenditure on takeaway foods, comprising some 7 percent of total community income, was by children.

It would not be correct however to portray such processes in terms of a generalized distribution of cash within the Wik domain.⁷³ The majority of transactions in cash (as with those of other portable items such as alcohol, tobacco, sugar, tea, and so forth) occurred between kin who were living in the same household, or were associated with the same household cluster or broader *kampaniy* alliances or mobs.⁷⁴ However, as discussed in Chapter 6, these Wik groupings were not relatively bounded and solidary units in the manner of those reported of Wujalwujal *Kuku-Yalanji* by Anderson,⁷⁵ but rather loose consociations of cognatic kin whose boundaries were contextual and permeable. Because each individual was linked in a network of kin relations which extended beyond the boundaries of household and mob, such groupings did not form solidary economic units within which cash and other such transactions were confined.⁷⁶ Furthermore, while flows of cash did reflect and instantiate asymmetries of power, as in the appropriation of elderly pensioners' incomes by younger kin or of women's incomes by men, much distribution through demanding behaviour specifically was within groupings such as those of young men associated with a particular mob, and as such reflected competition for status as much as power.

72. The amounts rose over the years with the increased monetization of the Aurukun economy (and perhaps in part with general inflation), and where \$1 or \$2 was an acceptable disbursement from a cheque to a child in the early 1980s, by 1986 this was considered *wukal many* (small money) by children.

73. although gambling had this consequence - see later discussion.

74. *Kampaniys* are discussed later in this chapter.

75. Anderson (1982, 1984)

76. However, relatively unrestricted access to the most prestigious consumer goods of all, vehicles, was largely confined to close cognatic kin of their 'boss' (with men having more access than women). Outsiders who needed transport would usually have to hire them; in such transactions then, Wik were removing money from the nexus of personal relationships and rendering it more akin to the money stuff of the wider society.

A calculating business

The flows of material and symbolic items - cash, food, alcohol, labour, etiquette and so forth - not only instantiated relationships of amicability, mutual sharing, and cooperation but indeed in their structures marked social differentiation and separateness.⁷⁷ Within the Wik domain, whether or not cash was exchanged for the use of consumer goods or vehicles such as has been referred to above, or in payments for services or labour, was dependent upon contingent social calculation. Usually, money was only proffered by Wik for services sought from those outside their own active kin network.⁷⁸ Thus, one man paid a non-kinsman to erect a fence around his house, and those whose mobs did not include owners of a vehicle would pay for transport to the landing, being driven out to collect a load of firewood, or being taken out and left at a camping place over a weekend. That is, while Wik would proffer cash for services to those who were in other mobs, they would almost never in my experience do so to close *kampan* or 'family'.⁷⁹ Nonetheless, even where cash was used by Wik as exchange for labour or other services, there was not the formal calculation of the amount of money involved against an objective set of relationships between money, goods and labour and other costs, as there is with the mechanisms of the wider market system. Rather, the calculation was in terms of subjective and contingent assessments by individuals of the current status of their relationship with the other person or collectivity. Thus, a woman expressed her willingness to share resources such as food and cash with one brother in terms of his being "ever ready to give" but not with another who was a "hard man" and kept his income for himself and his wife. Thus, this process of social calculation correlated only in broad terms with kin distance, in that people's monitoring of the flows of goods and services became less calculating for close relations. This is the phenomenon for which Sahlins advanced his model of "generalized reciprocity" between close kin, "balanced reciprocity" or direct exchange between more distant ones, and "negative reciprocity" ("the attempt to get something for nothing") at the other extreme.⁸⁰ Yet, even here the detailed picture for Wik was far more complex and conditioned by a host of factors, including personal preferences and histories, the ages and genders of those concerned,⁸¹ and other such contingencies.⁸²

77. Sutton argues that relationships are generated by the practices of etiquette. The use of particular speech terminologies for instance is always a matter of strategic and contingent choice, and therefore orthodox social relationships are not indexed in these practices as such, but in the structure of their symbolic media (Sutton 1982:197-8).

78. Although I saw one mother giving her teenage daughter money for having helped with domestic duties during the previous weeks.

79. See Chapter 6 for a discussion of *kampan*, loosely one's close cognatic kin.

80. Sahlins (1972:193-210)

81. There was for instance asymmetry in the flows between men and women in the favour of men, and women were in general much less calculating for their male kin than they were for female relations.

82. Altman (1987:129) notes of *Gunwinggu* outstation dwellers that it is a truism that people were more altruistic in their dealings with close kin, but kinship was only one factor influencing distribution of and access to resources; others such as seasonal factors and co-residence were also crucial. Anderson (1984) makes similar observations of *Kuku-Yalanji* people of Wujalwujal. For Wik in Aurukun however, kinship appeared to inform social practices at a

Much of the demanding for money was expressed in terms of 'loans'. "*Ngath loan thee'a!*" - "Give me a loan!" - was a common demand, particularly but certainly not exclusively by children. In the wider western society, loans are essentially cash transactions within the market economy, usually negotiated between an individual or corporate body and an institution such as a bank. The institution's objective is to make a financial profit on its capital investment in the loan, and it has no personal relationship with the borrower, even though this fact might be disguised by referring to the transaction as a 'personal' loan. There are truly 'personal' loans (for instance those from family to impecunious doctoral students) but these are of relatively small significance and in general specifically do not involve the charging of commercial interest. They do however involve repayments - otherwise they would be gifts rather than loans - even if involving close family. This practice of Whites repaying money lent by their own families was a constant source of astonishment to and adverse comment by Wik; "*Niiy ep wukal-weenhth!*" - "You [Whites] are really crazy for money!" I was told on more than one occasion. A request for cash by a close relation was often framed in terms of its being a loan,⁸³ but the expectation was not that it would be repaid. The use of the term 'loan' allowed the person requesting the money to preserve their autonomy, for it inferred that they were not mendicant but would eventually be in a position to reciprocate. However, in such cases involving close kin, demands by the giver for repayment were seen as gross infringements of the orthodoxy of uncalculating flows of resources between close kin. Only if the arrangement was between more distant relations from different mobs who did not normally participate in the mundane transactions underpinning social life, or if there had been a major rift in a kin relationship, would loans be publicly called up. It was common during disputes between family members to hear people angrily complaining that the other party owed them 'big money', and that they wanted it repaid. Thus, the differentiation by Wik between loans and other forms of cash transactions, especially gifts, served to mark out and to instantiate fluid and contextual relations of inclusivity and exclusivity between individuals and collectivities.

Organizing for business

There was a constant striving and strategizing by Wik, particularly men, to gain access to resources such as cash, alcohol, vehicles and so on. It is important to note however that in general it was individuals who were doing this strategizing, not corporate entities as such. The collectivities that formed around productive and other activities must be understood against the background of the omnipresent stress on personal autonomy, the fluid nature of the Wik polity, and the contingent nature of group composition (themes dealt with in Chapter 6). While the legitimating rhetoric of collective rights to a resource might well have been used, the activity involved rather the contingent conjoining of individual courses of action to realize individual goals in concert.

At the end of June, 1986, the Shire Council elected to give their C.D.E.P. workers two weeks 'holiday pay'. Staff explained that it was not

more fundamental level than was the case in many other cases; in Chapter 6 I argue that Wik residence and other groupings were realizations in social practice of relations of kinship.

83. Although not between spouses and usually not between those within a household; such transactions were seen as gifts.

technically a holiday; people were still to come in on the following pay day and collect that week's pay, it was just that they did not have to do their two day's work for it. Notices to this effect were posted around the township, and staff explained that the rationale for not paying the full two week's wages together was to avoid the problem of a severe shortage of cash for essentials such as food that had occurred over the previous Christmas holiday pay period.

Wik strongly objected. A series of men, many inebriated, came in to the office, demanding to see the Shire Clerk for 'early pay', that is, an advance on the next week's wages. Ben, a forthright middle-aged man, went in first and came out having gained the necessary approval to get the next week's pay for himself: "See, we got to fight for our rights my people, see! You have any trouble, just come and see me!" Reg and his father Colin wanted the money to go to Cairns so that Reg could buy a Toyota with \$7,000 of finance arranged through a credit union. Reg had been standing outside and declaiming in a loud and aggressive voice; "We going back to MacKenzie time here. It's our money, we entitled to it. We not animals, we human beings just like you." When he came out, he said to those waiting outside the office; "I bin talk for my right. If a little bit more, I would of smash that bookie!" When Reg was eventually given the money, he stumped off into the village carrying the roll of money, followed plaintively by his father who was pleading with him (to no avail) to purchase the ticket to Cairns. With the office besieged by men seeking their pay advances, staff gave in and made up pays for all C.D.E.P. workers.

Wik had assimilated certain of the terms of the wider society to their own economic modalities. For example, people involved in certain forms of cooperative economic activity in the Wik domain were referred to as 'customers'. In the market economy of the wider society, a customer is a person who purchases commodities or services from another person or organization. The relationship between the vendor and the customer is not necessarily an impersonal one; in fact, we can talk of someone as being a 'good customer' of an organization, and as well as implying a certain scale to the purchases, this has connotations of friendly relations.⁸⁴ Nevertheless, the transaction in the final analysis is one of commercial exchange within the market economy - that of money for goods or services - and the term itself refers to only one of the transactors, the purchaser. For Wik on the other hand, 'customers' were individuals in dyadic and personalized partnerships involving exchanges of cash such as stakes for gambling and loans,⁸⁵ and essential elements were both reciprocity and public sociability between the partners. Suggestively, both partners in the relationship referred to each other as 'customers'. A man who was a good friend of mine and a general cultural guide and informant over several years, prefaced a request to me for a loan by saying; "I gammon talk to you, you might say no, but we good customer."⁸⁶ Similarly, a woman explained to me that she and her classificatory granddaughter were good customers, in referring to the fact that over the previous few weeks, they had been in a gambling partnership which involved

84. Advertizing of course attempts to convert the objective reality of impersonal consumer to the subjective perception of valued and personalized customer.

85. 'Customer' partnerships for Wik appeared to be similar to the gambling alliances known as *den.gat* by *Gunwinggu*, as described by Altman (1987:166-7).

some degree of pooling of winnings as a strategy to overcome temporary setbacks, and the advancing of cash for starting stakes in games. While most categories of kin could establish 'customer' partnerships with each other - many for instance were between classificatory sisters or between *kuuth-muuy* cross-cousins - I did not observe any between those with strong avoidance behaviour correlates. Explicitly a part of such relationships was that there was no overt calculation of the flows of cash, that if one customer requested cash it would be advanced if the other had it. Such partnerships foundered if one partner felt that the other was not acting in a spirit of full and open generosity. Customer partnerships were usually transitory, although some that were also underpinned by close mob and kinship ties, such as one I recorded between two close classificatory sisters from a Cape Keerweer mob, were much longer term.

'Customer' partnerships were essentially dyadic relationships between Wik individuals; political and economic alliances involving broader groupings of Wik were referred to as *kampaniy*,⁸⁷ a term used all over Aboriginal Australia particularly with reference to joint interests of various kinds in land or sites, or in actions or events.⁸⁸ It had these connotations for Wik as well. Certain estate owning groups formed *kampaniys* through marriage exchange over the years.⁸⁹ Particular sites or areas were spoken of as being *kampaniy* places, held jointly or with joint access for hunting and foraging by two or more clans, such as an extensive flood plain south east of Cape Keerweer called *Pintal-um-we'arra* in which four neighbouring clans had usufructuary rights,⁹⁰ or cremation grounds in the coastal region which typically lay on the boundaries between clan estates. Contemporary goods such as the government funded tractors provided to outstations were seen as being held in *kampaniy* by those associated with the outstation.⁹¹ Wik also joined together in *kampaniy* for various enterprises, for example when in the late 1970s certain outstation groups attempted to jointly muster cattle off their estates, they were "making *kampaniy*".⁹²

Suggestively in terms of this discussion, there were resonances between the Wik concept of *kampaniy* and those relating to the world of kinship, which underpinned its assimilation to Wik thought and practices. In *Wik Mungkan*, people who were one's

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86. 'Gammon' (*Wik Mungkan* equivalent *yaan* or *yaa'an*) is used widely in Aboriginal English, and had here the connotations of 'to no real purpose' (thus rendering a possible refusal less slighting); in other contexts it could mean 'pretending' or 'feigning'.
 87. that is, the English 'company'. Both this term and *bisnis* (see page 127) were pronounced as in English, but have been rendered in italics here to emphasize that there were important Wik conceptual differences at issue.
 88. See e.g. Altman (*op.cit*:166), Sansom (1980:35, 259-67), von Sturmer (1978:246ff).
 89. See McConnel (1940:451)
 90. Sutton, Martin et al (1990:415). After the monsoonal wet season, those from each adjoining estate would meet here for the taking of geese and collection of geese eggs. McKnight (1981:91) similarly refers to neighbouring Wik 'clans' forming companies.
 91. An item such as a television set jointly owned for example by a husband and wife though was not *kampaniy*, it was private. *Kampaniy* referred more to the joint activities and property of collectivities than of individuals.
 92. Altman (*op. cit*:167) writes of *Gunwinggu* having *kampaniy* alliances between people of the same band or clan in interband gambling. I did not observe this type of gambling at Aurukun, nor heard the term *kampaniy* used in this context. Wik gambling alliances were more often between individuals.

kampan were one's close cognatic kin, referred to in English by Wik as 'family'.⁹³ Thus, the English term 'company', quintessentially belonging to the world of commerce,⁹⁴ was immediately transposed into the personalized Wik universe of relatedness and kinship. Crucially, the alliances covered under the rubric of *kampaniy*, like so much of Wik social process, were not in general perduring corporations but fluid and transitory, constituted and maintained through interpersonal negotiation.⁹⁵ They were as Altman notes of *Gunwinggu* gambling alliances "... relationships of convenience that suit a particular ... scenario".⁹⁶

Wik '*Bisnis*'

Not all conjoint actions however were referred to by Wik as *kampaniy*. Disputes or fights for instance were not *kampaniy* concerns, even though they involved groupings drawn from disparate groups with interests in the matter. Thus, while Wik collectivities were "companies for business" or action sets in Sansom's characterization,⁹⁷ those engaged in specifically *kampaniy* undertakings did so in a domain of practices which Wik referred to as *bisnis*.⁹⁸ This domain related to the organization and control of autogenous ritual forms, to politicking about land and sites, and to the strategies to acquire or control contemporary forms of material and symbolic capital - particularly cash.⁹⁹ A '*bisnis* man' was someone who was engaged in activity involving the acquisition of or dealings in socially prestigious goods, tangible or intangible, as part of creating a career for themselves.

For example, when I returned to the Aurukun township after an extended stay out bush mapping clan estates in 1986, several people approached me and told me that I was now a *bisnis* man. Others told me that once I had finished my Doctorate, I would obviously become a rich *bisnis* man. During the late 1970s, a number of Wik entrepreneurs who were establishing political careers as outstation bosses, successfully sought loans from the then Aboriginal Development Corporation¹⁰⁰ for equipment such as saddles, bridles, stock whips, boots and so forth, on the basis that they and their respective outstation mobs would establish their own *bisnis* in mustering and marketing cattle from their clan estates. Intense interest was evinced in the scheme by many Wik men, with a high level of discussions and negotiations. Meetings were held between certain of the groups at which arrangements were agreed upon to muster particular areas in *kampaniy* and concerning the labour and material support which

93. I discuss *kampan* kindreds in Chapter 6.

94. Although of course not exclusively so; for example, there are family companies or incorporated bodies whose primary aims are not concerned with commerce as such.

95. The exception to this related to *kampaniys* centered around certain autogenous forms of symbolic and material capital, such as particular sites and rituals, which were not subject to the same fluidity.

96. Altman (*op.cit*:166)

97. Sansom (1980:259)

98. See footnote 87 regarding the rationale for spelling this term in this manner.

99. These more secular Wik usages contrasted with Northern Territory Aboriginal English, where *bisnis* is generally used of ceremony and the secret/sacred life.

100. From 1989, incorporated into the enterprises section of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission.

each cooperating mob would provide.¹⁰¹ Virtually no cattle were ever mustered however, in part because of the almost insurmountable difficulties in co-opting younger Wik men from each group to accept the authority of the older men and undertake the necessary physical labour, and also in no small part because most of the groups did not have critical infrastructure, including horses on which to put the saddles. Other Wik entrepreneurs within the township at various times over the years attempted to set themselves up as *bisnis* men, by establishing family-based enterprises; these included a small store selling leather goods, one selling confectionery and the like, and a small general store on one particular outstation. These small enterprises formed focal points for sociality within the groups running them, and for the unremitting struggle over status between them and others. All these enterprises failed, usually after quite short periods of operation, in that the income from sales failed to meet costs and other outflows of cash and goods. White staff saw these failures as resulting from the inability of the individuals concerned and their kin to manage money, to understand the technical notions of profit, markups on cost price and so forth, and to withstand demands from kin to share the resources that needed to be re-invested in the businesses to make them commercially viable.

These Wik enterprises however had little to do with financial profit, material productivity or commercial viability in the western business sense, although the Wik establishing them certainly legitimated their actions to Whites in terms of making a living and becoming independent of welfare incomes. In the wider society, 'business' is situated within the market system, underpinned by and evaluated against the objective institution of money, and notions like 'profit' are specifically constituted as objective indicators of performance and relative efficiency within that system. Wik *bisnis* on the other hand was personalized business, embedded within the matrix of social, political and economic relationships of the Wik domain, and the currency against which it was evaluated was not an objectifying and abstracting money stuff but rather the contingent, negotiated and performative capital of social relationships.¹⁰² Thus, the resources that were invested in Wik enterprises - labour, creativity, government cash grants or loans, equipment such as saddles or vehicles - were not used to develop a capital base for re-investment, expansion, and material productivity, but in the accumulation of social capital.¹⁰³ The Wik enterprises described above which failed in commercial terms, nonetheless, for their duration served to produce wealth in the form of relationships and alliances in a world that was fluid, contingent, and demanding of unremitting constitution through the flows of services and of material resources.

101. In Chapter 6, I discuss this example in terms of the relationship between decisions made at public meetings and the actions which may flow out of them, arguing that often what such political discourse served was the constitution (if ephemerally) of a polity, rather than the intention to undertake a course of action. It is also discussed in Chapter 5 in terms of the pre-eminent importance of the symbolic accoutrements of work rather than of materially productive outcomes. See also Martin (1984).

102. Sansom (1988) adopted the term 'performative kinship' (applied by Goody (1982) of Inuit) in writing of the fluidity and negotiability of relationships amongst Darwin fringe dwellers.

103. Chase (1980:87) equivalently notes that in the distribution of high prestige items (including cash), eastern Cape York people are placing value on sociality and investing in the future in

This was the fundamental principle underlying Wik *bisnis* involvement with the world of cash and consumer goods, and this underlay in my opinion the somewhat ambiguous nature of the concept of '*bisnis* man' for Wik. They would often talk sarcastically of someone who was seen to be engaged in trying to make money, such as an inveterate gambler, or someone charging passengers for trips in a private vehicle. "Must be he *bisnis* man!" one middle aged Cape Keerweer man commented to me of one such person, and went on to talk of how he would soon be wearing knee-length socks, shorts, and a white shirt with a pen in his pocket.¹⁰⁴ In the case of John, an ineffectual and socially marginal man who was an obsessive gambler, men from other mobs jokingly referred to him as a 'big *bisnis* man' and the gambling school he frequented as "John's *kampaniy*". Elaborate stories arousing great mirth were constructed about the long hours people worked for this *kampaniy*, the low rates of pay, the poor office building (i.e. the shade of a mango tree) and so forth. In both instances, humour revealed important points about Wik concepts. Wik *bisnis* was very much a male preserve; this I suggest was connected with another domain of *bisnis*, that of ritual and esoteric knowledge, which was largely the preserve of men. John gambled both obsessively and pointlessly from the point of view of the men commenting on him, since he did not drink and therefore would not be distributing his winnings through the prestigious domain of alcohol sharing amongst men. He gambled like a woman, his activity in fact was not *bisnis* because it had no status attached to it. Furthermore, both sets of comments drew upon elements from the perceived White business world and its accoutrements, and implicitly made contrastive statements about the Wik one.

Case study: Gambling

Gambling with cards was a major activity in Aurukun, and although like drinking using a medium appropriated from the dominant society, it was essentially organized and conducted by Wik themselves within their domain. Like so much of Wik life, gambling was almost always public, highly fluid in terms of social composition and location, was often noisy and disputatious, and constructed a complex social phenomenon from a simple technical base, in this case a limited repertoire of relatively unsophisticated card games. Its intensity, in terms of the numbers of games and people involved in them, the money circulating through them, and the animation and enthusiasm of the players, was a direct function of the stage in the periodic cycle of cash inflows discussed in earlier sections of this chapter. Games were relatively small and more desultory during a slack week, whereas big pay or pension cheque days saw the establishment of numbers of large, tumultuous games which could last for days, until the cash had been siphoned off by winners. Even which card games were played depended largely on the state of the money supply.

The games played

There were five main card gambling games played by Wik. That played when there were large quantities of cash in the village such as on pay days, and which

terms of social and material support. See also Kesteven (1983:373) who writes of western Arnhem land Aboriginal people "amassing social capital" from mining royalty payments.

104. The accoutrements then of the typical north Queensland public servant.

involved the most people and greatest potential for big winnings, was *katan*.¹⁰⁵ In all big games of *katan* there were large numbers of people in a tight, jostling mass who were watching, as well as those actually laying bets. Some would be those who had lost their stakes and were waiting for kin to win so that they could demand enough to get them back into the game; others were biding their time until they felt they had a better chance of a run of luck. There were always children playing round the periphery, watching to see if their parents or other kin were winning and then demanding cash for the takeaway, teasing and fighting, or playing their own gambling games such as 'holey' nearby. Mothers often had smaller children or babies asleep on their laps, with younger daughters close beside them, watching every move and helping with the laying of bets. *Katan* gambling schools could involve 50 or more people, and especially when there were large amounts of cash involved were nodal points in both spatial and temporal terms for intensive social interaction, excitement and stimulation. They formed as soon as social security cheques were cashed or C.D.E.P. or full time workers paid. The usual pattern was for several schools to be established, with at least one at each of the top and bottom ends of the village. These schools could be under a shade tree on the outskirts of the village, under a high set house, in open spaces within the village, or (during the wet season) even inside a house. The location of gambling schools however varied with time, over a particular cash inflow cycle as their cash pools waxed and waned with the fortunes of gamblers, and over the longer term as preferences changed, alliances dissolved and reformed, house residents tired of the incessant noise and disputation and moved gamblers on, and so forth.¹⁰⁶ Games could go on all night, and sometimes for days at a time if the pool of cash had not been diminished by winnings being removed.

Katan in essence was a game of chance in rather the same way that the traditional Australian 'Heads and Tails' is, with who won or lost a deal being dependent upon the fall of a particular card into one of two piles. Each player had their own card value (e.g. five, or Jack), which they considered to be lucky for them, and which in general would not change over time. The 'dealer' - the person who had won the previous deal - would shuffle the pack and proffer it to the 'cutter', the player whose turn it was. The cutter would then divide ('cut') the pack into two portions and place the original bottom segment of the deck on top. The dealer, or if the cutter was on the other side of the ring of players perhaps someone acting for them, would then 'run' the cards into two piles, referred to as 'outside' or 'bush' for that further from the dealer and 'inside' for the nearer one.¹⁰⁷ If the cutter's card of any suit was dealt into the inside pile, the dealer won and kept the deal for the next

105. McKnight (n.d) also discusses this game for Aurukun, and Taylor (1984:395-6) has described the identical 'cut' played in Pormpuraaw.

106. The owner of a house could demonstrate their hospitality and accrue some status by hosting a large gambling school. Some even installed spot lights so that the games could go on all night. However, the costs were high. Sleep would be impossible because of the noise, fighting frequently would break out if it was also a canteen night or sly grog was around, and there were constant demands for cups of tea and for food. Eventually, even the most dedicated aficionados of gambling would find ways of moving schools away from their homes.

107. These were two basic spatial ordering concepts for Wik. Outside and inside (*yoon* and *pek*) were the apaces exterior to and within the domestic hearth area of the bush camps, while in the township, they were the village and the staff and administration areas respectively. They therefore reflected classifications of both social space and of power differentials.

cutter; if on the other hand the card 'jumped out' into the outside pile, the cutter had won and took over dealing for the next player.¹⁰⁸

While the game itself then was straightforward, the betting and social dynamics were very complex. There were 'centre' bets for and against the particular dealer of the time, and 'side' bets which were between other players. As the dealer shuffled the pack, people sitting and standing round the blanket or groundsheet would call out for takers to their bets: "Twenty bush!", i.e. twenty dollars on the card being dealt into the outside pile; "Fifty win!", fifty dollars on its going into the inside one. Players could continue to call for side bets even as the cards were dealt into the two piles; the dealer would pause until the bet was taken up, or it was obvious that there were no takers. The pool of cash in both centre and side bets would rise as unsuccessful players lost their stakes, or until large winnings were removed, and it was common to have several thousand dollars circulating in a big game on a pay day. Players with 'heart' and for whom the luck was running frequently bet several hundred dollars on a particular deal.

In most big *katan* games, the often considerable pool of cash in centre bets, called the 'bank', was managed by a person referred to as the 'banker'. They essentially acted as manager for the centre bets being laid for and against the dealer of the time and for the dealer's winnings; he or she placed side and centre bets on their behalf, counted the cash, and monitored play to call any cheats to public account. The dealer would usually give a proportion of their winnings to the banker, and so becoming the banker in a big game was a strategic means of gaining an initial stake. The amount paid to the banker was determined through subjective and contingent social calculation, rather than being based on market-based rates. Furthermore, to become the 'banker' in the first place required one to have the self-assurance and brashness (and not be of an inappropriate kin category) to convince the dealer of the time that his or her interests in the game were best served by having one manage the bank. The role of a banker was for Wik then a personally negotiated and fluid position, and the bank a pool of cash whose ownership was continually changing in the course of the game.¹⁰⁹ While in the initial stages of a game of *katan* the cash pool would be dispersed among players whose individual fortunes would fluctuate from round to round, after sufficient time the laws of chance dictated that winnings would tend to accumulate in the hands of one or two people, and others would lose their stakes, since the more money a player had the better they could withstand the vagaries of particular runs of bad luck.¹¹⁰ Eventually during most games someone would 'do the main'; that is, win a succession of bets against all the other players still

108. McKnight (*op.cit*) had a statistician calculate the odds of the first occurrence of a particular value being dealt onto the 'bush' and 'inside' piles. Intuitively one would presume them to be 50 percent either way, as in the case of throwing heads or tails with a coin. In fact, the odds were very close to that, but they did change gradually in favour of the particular card being dealt into the 'out' pile as the dealer ran through the pack. It would appear from betting patterns that some Wik did recognize this, and delayed their bets on the dealer until well down a long run.

109. Thus, Wik abstracted 'bank' and 'banker' from the values given them in the impersonal market economy of the dominant society, and assimilated them to their own modalities of social practice, as personalized, fluid and contingent forms. It is interesting to speculate how a suburban bank manager would cope with being the banker at a big *katan* game.

in the game, and potentially clear up virtually the whole cash pool - 'break the bank'. These winnings could be considerable; the biggest one I saw was over \$4,000.

The composition of *katan* gambling schools was highly fluid and virtually open. While some smaller games consisted of mainly players from either the top or bottom ends of the village, the bigger ones drew gamblers from all groupings. Even those who had been involved in recent fights would often be seen playing in the same *katan* game not long after. I recorded most categories of kin playing in the same game at one time or the other. However the nature of the game did allow for avoidance strategies. Its size admitted of physical separation of players between whom there was hostility for any reason, or a formal avoidance relationship.¹¹¹ Participants adopted individual styles and younger men in particular played with great public verve and display. The personal attributes engaged in gambling (and other activities such as hunting) will be discussed in Chapter 5. A good card player, like a good hunter, was *thup*, and the ability of an individual to control the outcome of events was seen in terms of the power conferred through their 'heart blood', *ngangk chaaprr* (as well as through the knowledge and effective use of such magical means as *oparr*, 'bush medicine').¹¹² The stylistic poses and display of the men in the big *katan* games was in part I suggest the public claim to this power, and the affirmations of the outcomes of their bets - "OK boys and girls, he gonna jump out now!" i.e. the card was going to be dealt into the out pile - part of the process of tapping into this power to influence the course of events.

Kuunkan was a smaller scale game played by those who had less money to invest in cards at the time, or were possibly looking to make a big enough stake to enter a big *katan* game. The object of *kuunkan* was to discard sets of three or four cards of the same value, or runs of at least three consecutive cards in suits.¹¹³ As in

110. In fact, this was dependent upon people continuing to play until there were big winners; this could entail playing all night.

111. These were of decreasing importance generally, as discussed in Chapter 5. For instance, I was told that one should not cut the pack with kin such as one's poison uncle (MB-) or cousin (MB-D), or mother-in-law, nor should a father cut with his actual or classificatory daughter. If money destined for a person should fall into the lap of a player in an avoidance category, the notes had to be exchanged for others. However, my observations indicated that Wik regularly played in games with kin with whom they nominally had avoidance relationships, and indeed laid bets with them; "Ways are changing!" it was explained to me.

112. *Thup* related to a domain of actions that could be covered loosely in English as 'hunting', where that sought - an animal, a sexual partner, or money - could be understood as 'fair game'. One could see the element of luck entering here, and in fact Wik themselves often rendered *thup* as 'lucky'. Here though the Wik use of 'luck' was embedded in their notions of causality in a very different fashion to that in conventional English usage, where 'luck' carries more the scientific notion of chance or probability. This point can be made further by reference to factors which Wik saw as influencing their luck in the activities of hunting, fishing, attracting the opposite sex, and card playing. While the matter can not be discussed here in great detail, it is noteworthy that in all these activities people could use *oparr*, ('bush medicine') or other such magical means to influence the course of events, that spirits of the dead (*minyichalam*) could intervene on behalf of a particular person, and that certain qualities of the individual concerned, particularly the *ngangk chaaprr*, also had a bearing on the outcome.

113. The game appeared to be a variant of gin rummy, and identical with the 'pick' version of *kuunkan* played by Tiwi of Melville Island, as noted by Goodale (1988). It has also been described in McKnight (*op.cit.*) and by Pyper (1978), and Altman (1987:166) examines the almost identical *kunt* played by Gunwinggu in Arnhem land. Players were dealt a number of

katan there were centre bets and side bets between players. These tended however to be smaller than in *katan* - games were commonly '\$2 knock', '\$5 knock' and perhaps up to \$20 for the centre bets. There was no banker, nor were players obliged to bet in the centre, since side bets of any mutually agreed amount could be placed with any other players. Quite considerable winnings could nonetheless be taken from a *kuunkan* game, in the order of several hundred dollars, but not the massive winnings of thousands of dollars as in *katan* since only a limited number of people could participate in a game, and non players did not bet on the results. The whole game was smaller in scale, slower in pace, more sociable and relaxed, and less open in composition than was the often frenetic *katan*. While the scale and nature of *katan* allowed of virtually no limitations on who could take part, players in a *kuunkan* game were more likely to be compatible in formal kinship and social terms; for instance, close female cousins, siblings, and 'mates' (grandparents/grandchildren) from within the same or allied mobs. *Kuunkan* also allowed of partnerships between players, and it was common for two players to form a partnership with each other by using strategies of joint betting, by discarding cards of use to the other partner, and so on. Such alliances would sometimes last over some period of time, in which case they referred to one another as 'customers'.¹¹⁴ At the end of slack weeks, a game might last for just an hour or so with only a few dollars in coins and \$2 notes circulating. After big pay days though, when despite large amounts having been siphoned off in the *katan* games there was still considerable cash around, a *kuunkan* game could involve a pool of hundreds of dollars and last a full 24 hours, with players leaving only for calls of nature or food and drink. Even food was obtained by sending children off with spare cash to the takeaway, or was provided by the women of the house where the game was being played.

Other games played were less important in terms of their frequency and numbers of players, and the cash involved. One, 'Three-card' called *kabu* by Wik, was a variant of 'Five card' (*paipkad*) played in many areas of the Northern Territory,¹¹⁵ and described by Goodale for Tiwi people of Melville Island.¹¹⁶ It was a game purely of chance. In the Aurukun variant, each player was dealt three cards from the pack, and totalled the value of the cards, with the winner being the person with the highest score.¹¹⁷ Three card was not played very often by Wik, since it

cards according to how many were in the game - if there were three players, each got nine cards, four players received eight cards, and so on. The maximum feasible number of players was six. The remainder of the deck was placed in the centre, with the topmost card face up. Players in turn could either take the topmost card from the central pile, or the last card discarded by the player to their right; in the latter case, they were obliged to use this card only to complete a suit run or a set which had then to be put down face up in the centre. Where no player was able to discard all their cards in runs, the winner was the one whose remaining cards had the lowest total. Most particularly when more than three were playing and the chances of any player getting all their cards down in runs or sets was reduced, high value cards were discarded early in the game, and therefore this game involved both chance and strategy.

114. See discussion of the concept of customer on page 125.

115. e.g. Groote Eylandt, which quite a number of Wik had visited and with whom social and political connections (including through marriage) existed.

116. Goodale (1987). See also Altman (1987:166) for a description of the similar *butakat* played amongst Gunwinggu.

117. 'Picture' cards (King, Queen, Jack) were given the value of 10, the Ace was worth 1, and all other cards took their face value. However, as for Tiwi it was not a matter of simple addition, since in adding the cards dealt to each player, any multiple of 10 counted as zero, *butha*. This

offered neither the big betting opportunities of *katan* nor the sociability of *kuunkan* games. A more social game than 'Three card', but one not normally played with the frequency or intensity of *kuunkan*, was 'Twenty-five'.¹¹⁸ In this game there were usually four or five players, and the rules were essentially similar to those of Five Hundred.¹¹⁹ It was not a high betting game, and people often played with coins or small notes, on occasion \$5 or \$10. There were both side and centre bets, but no 'bank' as such. Twenty Five allowed of gambling partnerships rather in the fashion of 'Five hundred'.

Redistribution and accumulation of cash

Both Altman and Goodale portray gambling as an adaptation to contemporary settlement life which is embedded within distinctive modes of Aboriginal practice,¹²⁰ in contradistinction to the Berndts who over forty years earlier saw gambling as a major contributory factor in the collapse of Aboriginal society.¹²¹ Altman analyses it as a response to the increasing amounts of cash available following the introduction of welfare and other payments to the outstation community he studied. It is in his view;

"... a mode of distributing cash. It seems to function fairly effectively both as a redistributive mechanism and as a mechanism that facilitates small-scale capital accumulation."¹²²

As discussed earlier in this chapter, much of the allocation of cash to household subsistence expenditure was made immediately after receiving it. The greater proportion of the remaining income which was not then directly expended in the canteen - perhaps 40 percent or so - went into the gambling schools. On a big pay day there were often several major games, each with initial cash pools of several thousand dollars circulating. The pattern of play in the big *katan* games which predominated while there was still a lot of cash around, meant that the nett result was generally that a few individuals ended up with large sums of money from big wins, another rather larger group finished with much the same or somewhat more than the stakes they started with,¹²³ but most players finished with no cash at all or at least considerably less than they had started with.

was a loan word, possibly from the Torres Straits, which had humorous connotations; for instance a young man bemoaning having no girl friend to his mates would say "*Ngaya butha ey!*". Thus a deal of 3, 5 and 9 counted as 7, and two 'picture' cards and a 4 totalled 4. It seemed that the process of arriving at the total during the game was not arithmetical, but rather involved pattern recognition (see Davidson 1979 for an analysis of the cognitive processes used by players of *paipkad*). Certainly Wik, even children once they had been playing a while, were lightning quick in their determinations.

118. Although I did record one game which lasted several days of virtually continuous play.

119. Each player was dealt five cards and the top card of the remainder of the deck turned face up. This suit then became trumps. Players had to follow suit as a particular round of cards were laid out, unless as in the European game 'Five hundred' they had none of the particular suit in which case they could 'trump' it. The order of cards (from the highest value) was the Five, the Ace of Hearts, the Jack, then the remainder of the suit in order, with the Ace being the lowest.

120. Altman (1985, 1987:163-8); Goodale (*op.cit*:19)

121. Berndt and Berndt (1947)

122. Altman (*op. cit*:168). See also Peterson (1977) for a discussion of the role of gambling as a mode of redistribution amongst Central Reserve Aboriginal people in the 1970s.

123. including those of course who started with nothing.

Gambling therefore undoubtedly played a major role in the initial redistribution of cash, from a more general dispersion amongst those who had received cash incomes to a relatively few winners. Once gamblers had left the schools with their winnings however, further redistribution took place, with transfers of cash to creditors and kin through gifts and through demands made to them.

It was a Thursday, a C.D.E.P. pay day. Most of the men were already in the canteen drinking, and the gambling school at Jeanette's place was almost exclusively women, although Jim was there playing for 'beer price' having lost all his pay at another school. Susan had been playing for some time, betting on every deal in lots of \$20 and \$30. However, she gradually lost all her stake because, she later told me, she was sitting next to her cousin Sandra whose 'blood' did not agree with her. She was then advanced \$60 by Margaret, Sandra's daughter; Margaret and Susan were not only close in kin terms but good 'customers' of each other. Her luck changed dramatically for the better, and she left the game not long after with some \$1,500 having 'done the main'. \$400 was given to Margaret for having given her the 'start', \$300 was used to buy food for her own household, \$200 was given to her sister and brother-in-law towards the mortuary ceremony of their son, and some \$550 altogether was given to her younger children and grandchildren. There was an immediate exodus to the takeaway, although one older daughter gambled her \$50 back in the game. Susan used the remaining 'oddy' \$50 as a stake to get back into another game, but eventually lost it.

The use of gambling winnings by women to purchase stocks of basic items for household subsistence - drums of flour, cartons of sugar etc - or even large capital items such as a freezer was common. However, as in the above instance their winnings also ended up in subsistence expenditure for the extended household indirectly through secondary expenditure by the children to whom they gave money, as much as through direct expenditure by the women themselves. In a previous section it was argued that children, through this redistribution by kin - primarily although not exclusively women - directly controlled a significant proportion of community cash income. Children used cash mainly to buy takeaway foods, although young boys would buy expensive toys from the store, and children themselves would also gamble money back. It was also argued that takeaway expenditure was proportionately higher in times of relative cash shortage. A key factor behind this I suggest was the distribution of women's gambling winnings to the children for whom they were responsible for providing care and nurturance.

Some men did distribute a proportion of their gambling winnings or other large windfalls to children, or join with their spouses in perhaps buying a washing machine or other household appliance.¹²⁴ In the majority of cases however, their money was distributed directly to other male kin, or more often used to finance the large-scale purchase of canteen and 'outside' alcohol, which was consumed largely, although not exclusively, by men. Thus, the major redistribution of gambling winnings from the

124. See the data in Chapter 2 on joint ownership of consumer goods.

big *katan* games at least was from women's incomes to men and from non-drinkers to drinkers, rather than simply re-dispersing it throughout the village.¹²⁵

There is also no doubt that Wik used gambling as a means of accumulating large sums of money for specific purposes. Other mechanisms potentially available, such as depositing a proportion of each pay in bank savings accounts or having it held by staff in the office, were fraught with the risk that demands from kin over time would be ultimately irresistible.¹²⁶ The data on bank withdrawals and deposits presented in Figure 3.13 page 107 demonstrate that while Wik used the bank as a means of temporarily storing surpluses of cash, it was not used to accumulate savings over time. As Altman notes for Gunwinggu, the public expression of a legitimate goal was one strategy to try to avoid pressure to share winnings or other large sums of cash.¹²⁷ Unlike Gunwinggu however, Wik could withdraw from a game at any point with their winnings without disapprobation from the players. While children would often demand money from a mother or (less commonly a father) during a game and even have a screaming tantrum over it, it was generally only after a winner had left the game that the all-pervasive pressure from kin to share resources was brought (so to speak) into play.

Jane had won some \$200 at a *katan* gambling school that had been running off and on at her close classificatory sister's house for several weeks. It was her birthday, and she was on her way back to purchase something from the store for herself. However, she was followed by a pressing, clamouring, group of kin, demanding a share. In exasperation, she returned to the game and played the whole lot back.

Gambling thus offered to every player who could obtain an initial stake the possibility of rapidly accumulating a significant sum of money. It was certainly the case that both women and men would often publicly state that they were gambling to raise money for specific purposes or projects which could not be funded directly from weekly incomes. In contradistinction to men however, for women these purposes were almost always couched in terms of their roles as providers and nurturers of kin. Women would often explicitly claim for instance that they were gambling to raise money for food for their children. It is important however in the first instance to assess statements such as this against the background of styles and motivations of public rhetoric, and the axiomatic nature of women's roles in the nurturance of children. Furthermore, even women were not necessarily expressly gambling for the purpose of getting cash to buy subsistence or domestic items. I noted numerous cases of women rationalizing their playing cards in terms of raising money for buying fuel to go fishing, paying large court fines for a son, or sending 'pocket money' out with a child going to boarding school and so forth. Men would also often recruit

125. The distribution of winnings from *kabu* and the other card games was somewhat different. Because these games were usually played when the overall money supply was less, with smaller stakes, and amongst smaller more compatible groups of kin, very large wins were rare. They therefore did serve to redistribute cash more in the manner described by Altman of Gunwinggu gambling.

126. Such strategies were used up until the early 1980s, particularly by Wik saving up for items such as outboard motors. However, once alcohol became regularly available the pressure to disburse savings became all the more difficult to resist.

127. Altman (1987:167)

kinswomen who were known to be good gamblers to raise money for these sorts of purposes; one man for instance financed a small group of his close female kin over several days gambling in order to raise money to bring up his daughter from another settlement for the funeral of a close relation.

Nonetheless, to accept Wik's own public accounts of their reasons for gambling uncritically would be both to ignore crucial features of the social field of gambling in Aurukun and of course to be naive sociologically. While it was true that women did spend more proportionately of their incomes ultimately on household subsistence, it would be inaccurate to simply assert that women gambled in order to raise money for this purpose. Such a proposition would be in the same category as that of Collmann, who argues that fringe dwellers in Alice Springs use alcohol to build up stores of credit for times of resource shortage.¹²⁸ Certainly, alcohol is as Collmann argues divisible, a store of social value and so on - but so is money, and the reasons why men chose to convert money into alcohol are left unresolved at a quite fundamental level. If Wik women were solely concerned on the material level with the provision of household subsistence, then the utilization of the potential provided by their social security incomes would have been the obvious strategy to use. Given that nurturance and relatedness were constructed in terms of flows of material resources and services, then one must ask the question as to why it was gambling which was a dominant mode of redistribution of cash, rather than simply its direct distribution to kin, a process that did occur frequently amongst Wik in any event. There was no doubt that gambling was an important mode of distribution of cash within the Aurukun village economy, and that Wik men and women did use gambling as a means for raising relatively large sums of money for specific projects, but a considerable amount of my field data shows that whatever rationales people might have offered for their gambling, playing cards for money with its excitement, sociability, and stimulation was an end in itself for many players.

Similar questions were raised by Wik men's gambling, and by the distribution of their winnings. Wik women were the more avid gamblers, as was the case for the Tiwi described by Goodale, but men still spent considerable amounts of their time playing cards. Unlike Tiwi however, it was common to find men also involved in the smaller social *kuunkan* and *kabu* games that predominated at the end of slack weeks. I cannot however ever recall hearing a man state that he was gambling in order to raise money to feed his children or for household subsistence.¹²⁹ Most commonly men's reasons for gambling would be given as *yaan*, for no particular reason, or beer-price.*ak*, to get the price of a beer. They would on occasion play to raise money for a purpose such as a mortuary feast, and might recruit female kin to the same enterprise as noted above, but men's public expressions of reasons were couched very much in such terms as respect due to and rights of the kin group as a collective.

128. Collmann (1979a, 1979b, 1988)

129. As discussed in Chapter 2 the rhetoric of nurturance and care was quintessentially that of women.

The management of social relationships

McKnight contends that for Wik, gambling was "hunting for money",¹³⁰ and Goodale extends this theme in an analysis of gambling amongst Tiwi people of Melville Island. Both use in part notions of prestige and other linguistic usages to argue for an essential isomorphy between the two sets of activities, hunting and gathering on the one hand, and gambling on the other. Goodale further places gambling within a broader discussion of the anthropology of work. She suggests that Tiwi have not adopted western notions of work which contrast it with leisure in terms of productive activity. While they do differentiate between serious gambling, which is considered hard work, and smaller-scale relaxed games, she argues that gambling and hunting and gathering are all considered "... significant productive activities contributing to the subsistence economy of the household (by women) and community and personal inter-community prestige networks (by the men)."¹³¹ Goodale ties Tiwi gambling in to their notions of personal prestige and equality, and argues that for women gambling for money can be equated with gathering, which she characterizes as a low-risk activity directed at basic extended household sustenance, the domain within which women's status is defined. Tiwi women in her view gamble to provide basic subsistence for their households. For men on the other hand she contends, gambling can be equated to hunting, a high risk activity connected to male prestige, whose proceeds are distributed to a wider network of kin outside the household.

While Wik did differentiate between large-scale and smaller, more desultory gambling, they did not (except humorously) refer to gambling as work; in fact it was seen on the contrary as quintessentially an enjoyable and stimulating activity - along with the ever-present hope of a big win, it was played 'for relax'.¹³² In contrast 'work' was used almost always of activity within domains associated with White concerns - the offices, store, the cattle industry - although tellingly women would often refer to domestic activities such as the preparation of food and washing clothes as 'work'. I cannot on the other hand ever recall hearing a man refer to hunting in this fashion. 'Work' as Wik perceived it lay in a distinct domain of activity and involved different attributes of the person than did hunting.¹³³

Comparisons such as Goodale and McKnight make need to be treated with caution for more basic reasons. Both attempt to show from linguistic and other data

130. McKnight (n.d.)

131. Goodale (*op. cit.*:19)

132. Thus, in a Shire Council meeting called to discuss the problems with alcohol-related fighting, the subject of the relationship between gambling winnings and sly grog purchases was raised by one Councillor. Another Councillor objected; how else, he asked, were people to enjoy themselves in Aurukun?

133. While this point can not be explored at length here, Wik did not conceptualize a single domain of actions on the material world that could be labelled 'productive activity'. A consideration of the personal attributes that people were seen to bring to bear shows rather that there were at least three implicit spheres. In one, intellect and manual dexterity were conjoined for such activities as fabricating artifacts, building, and repairing machinery. Another related primarily to the gathering of vegetable foodstuffs in the traditional subsistence sector and also to accumulating wealth in food or money. In this latter sense it crossed the gender boundary to include men. The final domain, and the most prestigious for men, was that concerned with hunting game. However, this domain of production also included such activities as gambling and attracting sexual partners, as well as fishing, and it too crossed the gender boundary in these instances.

that certain aspects of the individual relating to such factors as prestige were seen to be engaged in a parallel fashion in gambling and in hunting and gathering. Goodale's argument is the more sophisticated in that she examines in rather more detail the differing involvements and constructions of men and of women in these activities at both a practical and conceptual level. This is undoubtedly worthy of analysis, even though it should not occasion surprise that activities in a new and contemporary order are at least partially rendered meaningful to their participants from within a framework engendered originally under very different circumstances - this is after all precisely the import of Bourdieu's analysis of the role of *habitus* in social production and reproduction. The fact that the contemporary world was quite fundamentally different must however never be glossed over in an analysis. To do so, as have both McKnight and Goodale, is naive at best, and ultimately compromises the conclusions of any analysis. It is only by ignoring the full dimensions of the present worlds of Tiwi or Wik that one can see gambling as fully isomorphic with the activities of hunting and gathering, even if informants make the comparisons themselves. It seems to me that it is more fruitful to examine phenomena such as gambling and drinking in terms of basic principles and existential dilemmas which continue to underlie social forms in Aboriginal societies, albeit it in often vastly changed circumstances, rather than in terms of apparent isomorphy between practices whose genesis lies in the pre-contact society on the one hand and post-colonial one on the other.

Firstly, gambling, like drinking and fighting, was for Wik a collective activity; collective in the sense that the games were public, involved a significant proportion of the Aboriginal population of Aurukun, and drew upon and collectivized resources (in particular cash and time) from disparate individuals and households. As such, it was a practice which stood in structural opposition to those of the dominant society, based as they were on individual rights and property.¹³⁴ Furthermore, internal hierarchies and divisions (including those between age groups and between the genders) could be replaced for the duration of the game at least with egalitarian relations amongst the whole group of players. Secondly, gambling was a means by which Wik managed relationships in a situation of high stress. Wik social forms and practices had evolved in contexts where much of life took place in small fluid groups of closely linked kin, and once the number of people having to interact with each other on a long term basis increased to more than 20 or 30, tensions rose significantly. There were some 900 Wik living in the Aurukun township, and as I argue in some detail in Chapter 4 one factor underlying the high levels of conflict there was the difficulty Wik encountered in managing the inevitable tensions in interpersonal and intergroup relations. Gambling (especially *katan*), allowed the complexities and ambiguities in relationships between people - taboos, resentments, hostilities, obligations and so forth - to be temporarily avoided and submerged in an almost ritualized context of enjoyment and even euphoria.¹³⁵ Even on outstations, a rise in resident population was almost inevitably accompanied by an increase in card games and gambling.¹³⁶

134. Morris (1989:147-9). See also my discussion on drinking in Chapter 4.

135. Unless alcohol was also involved, in which case gambling schools themselves became focal points of conflict.

136. This has been observed also by Sutton (1978:104-5).

Finally, I have argued that a fundamental dynamic underlying much of Wik social process was the dialectical tension between autonomy and relatedness, and that cash provided a powerful new symbolic medium through which these themes could be played out. Cash allowed for the expression of autonomy in its accumulation and use in the purchase of alcohol, airline tickets, consumer goods, vehicles and so forth, in a quite unprecedented manner in Wik society. Yet, anyone who attempted to circumvent ideals of sharing material resources and accrue capital or maintain exclusive control and use of a resource, was subjected to intense pressure and even violence. In the axiomatic world of relatedness, inevitably, Wik had to succumb to the pressure to distribute cash and other material resources. Thus, if autonomy could be sought through accumulation, relatedness was instantiated through distribution, as indicated in the homologies presented below;

AUTONOMY:RELATEDNESS :: ACCUMULATION:DISTRIBUTION

Gambling then, as the primary collective practice surrounding cash, was not so much a mode of accumulating cash surpluses nor of distributing cash incomes, as of accumulating, maintaining and managing social relationships, a means of transforming surplus cash above that required to maintain basic subsistence levels into social capital. This I suggest, for Wik at least, was the locus of what writers such as Sahlins have labelled the 'anti-surplus principle' in 'primitive' economies.¹³⁷ As it stands, Sahlins' formulation has the cultural genesis of the term set firmly in the domain of economy. I would argue that the principle lay for Wik not at all in the domain of economy as such but in that of a performative sociality, substantiated as it was by the constant flows of goods and services.

Conclusion: the transformation of the Australian dollar

Contemporary Wik society was highly monetarized, and the traditional subsistence sphere of marginal significance on the village-wide level when compared for instance with the outstation group Altman studied in western Arnhem land.¹³⁸ Yet, Wik dealt with money in particular ways which sharply differentiated them from the mainstream society. Western money stuff objectifies and impersonalizes human relations and transactions, and serves to represent relationships between objects, and between people and the material world. Wik subverted these characteristics of what

137. Sahlins (1972)

138. Altman (1987) in his study used imputed money values of resources gained from the 'traditional' sphere - gathering, hunting, fishing and so forth - to show that these formed a significant proportion of the total incomes of these people. While this was most likely true to some extent in certain of the Aurukun outstations on the occasions when they were occupied, and while certain families in Aurukun itself did have members who fished or hunted in times of seasonal plenty, from my own observations the total contribution from this sector had been diminishing rapidly since at least 1976.

money is in the markets and transactions of wider Australia; in Sansom's words there was a "... resistance to the monetisation of mind."¹³⁹

It was not as if Wik were not adept at dealing with money in a formal technical sense. In Codere's terms, the Australian dollar used within the Wik internal economy would still be treated as full general purpose money stuff, since almost all Wik had the numeracy and other 'symbolic sub-systems' that Codere regards as inhering to one.¹⁴⁰ Within the store and clothing shop for instance, Wik were well aware of the massive markup on goods over Cairns prices, and often complained of it. Most Wik were highly adept in counting, calculating change and so on. Codere's formulation however ignores the most important symbolic construct of all and its practical realization, that of the relationship between money and social relationships.

Money and its characteristics have a 'taken-for-granted' nature in the wider society which can obscure the capacity to truly understand its potentially different construction and uses in a small society such as that of Wik - particularly as the money stuff itself was the same Australian currency that was used in the dominant society, not something seemingly exotic like shells or stones. "The coons just can't handle money!" said one canteen manager to me, reflecting - if in offensive and racist terminology - the views of a large section of the Australian population. I have sought to show that Wik dealt with money and consumer goods in ways that were in keeping with distinctive notions of personal identity, autonomy and relatedness; that by imposing their own cultural constructions of economy and sociality on cash and consumer goods they subverted its nature as constructed in the wider society. Furthermore, despite the centrality of cash in constituting contemporary Wik social forms, Wik denied its importance to them. Not only was being *wukal-weenhth* (obsessed with money) an epithet used by Wik of those amongst them who resisted sharing their cash, it was applied to Whites in general. "We don't worry from money, money nothing for us," I was told on many occasions. Unlike themselves, Wik believed, Whites were greedy and possessive of their money, and used it only for themselves. Here, money had taken on for Wik a symbolic value which marked distinct styles of life between themselves and the wider society.

My argument has been that central to the particular ways in which Wik used money was a performative sociality, relatedness unremittingly instantiated through the flows of services and material items - particularly consumer goods and money - between kin.¹⁴¹ Money here then no longer was the object of formal calculation governed by the impersonal principles of the market place. It became on the contrary

139. Sansom (1988:159). In his elegant paper Sansom uses the methodology of Kenneth Burke to draw up a "grammar of service", and argues money "take(s) on character as an amount subject to valuation on acts of help, helping and helping out." (*loc.cit.*). In many respects, Sansom's conclusions parallel my own. I would suggest though that his analysis suffers from two major flaws. The phenomenological approach he adopts here, as in all his work, compromises the study; the fringe camp was more than a "world of discourse" (*op. cit.*:3). Secondly, there is an almost naive gloss in the treatment of camp life, and thus of the etic concepts drawn from it. Where "help" is offered as an unexamined basis for valuation, calculation is difficult to deal with.

140. Codere (1968); see discussion at beginning of this chapter.

for Wik the subject of contingent social calculation, a means through which a distinctive order was stamped upon their social world. If money transformed Wik social relations, so too did Wik transform it within their own domain, in a dialectic of profound implications.

141. Sansom (1988) argues for a similar though slightly more restricted notion of "performative kinship", a term he draws from the work of Goody (1982) on Inuit.

Chapter 4

'From Before': Conflict And Social Reproduction¹

There were perhaps fifty or sixty young men in a huge melee that sent swirls of dust up in the pool of light. Rings of spectators would form around particular fights; many protagonists had stripped their shirts off ... The noise was extraordinary, with the shouted challenges, the catcalling and cheering by men as their kin's opponents were knocked to the ground, the emphatic grunts as blows were landed, the screamed abuse from women such as Sophy and Sharon on the periphery of the central mass.

Perhaps the most dynamic of all areas of Wik collective practices were those associated with alcohol consumption and fighting, along with gambling. Critically, unlike much else of mundane life such as work, these practices were organized almost entirely within the Wik domain, although they were fundamental to the nature of its articulation with the wider state, and indeed served to reproduce it. By the late 1980s, they had become the dominant activities in Aurukun in terms of the allocation of time and the mobilization of social and material resources. Such activities were at the core of representations of Aurukun by Whites living and working there. They certainly dominated my own experiences, particularly from the mid 1980s, both in terms of practical consequences for the organization of my domestic and research life, and also in sedimenting sets of dominant images through which I interpreted Wik. However, they themselves gave great prominence to conflict, violence, and alcohol consumption in their own understandings and characterizations of their situation. While explicitly positing a link between alcohol consumption and aggression, many Wik asserted that conflict and violence were 'from before', practices which they themselves saw as part of their culture and as having a strong continuity with the past.

Yet, there were of course fundamental differences between the worlds of contemporary Wik and those of the past. Aggression and violence as such may well have resonated with certain deeply sedimented cultural views and practices, but its massive and chronic scale and domination of the social, intellectual and emotional agendas were entirely contemporary phenomena. Wik life in Aurukun at least seemed to be increasingly characterized by disputation, violence, trauma and chaos on a quite unprecedented scale. Complex questions were raised by this characterization; what

1. Material in this chapter has drawn upon and extended that in two unpublished papers (Martin 1987; Martin 1992) and that in a written submission to the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Deaths in Custody (Martin 1988a).

for instance was to be understood by social reproduction in a situation of such radical transformation?

Furthermore, dealing with the consequences of these practices was a matter of dominant concern to Wik themselves. It was also of major consideration to the Whites who lived and worked there and to wider State and Federal bureaucratic organizations. Not only did these features of Wik life provide a central role in constituting White views of Wik, and their own views of themselves, but ultimately, as an unintended consequence, they served to legitimate an ever-increasing bureaucratic presence and consequent further political marginalization of Wik.

Assertiveness, anger and aggression

In their dealings amongst themselves and with the wider world, Wik - adults and children - were marked by a style that was usually direct and outspoken, and often confrontational. As discussed in Chapter 1, an omnipresent feature of Wik social life was the emphasis on personal autonomy and on resistance to overt control by others, encapsulated in the expression "*ngay-ngaya*", "nobody boss for me". Wik were highly individualistic, strongly assertive, and quick to adopt direct and often violent action to redress perceived wrongs against themselves or their kin. I turn now to explore certain aspects of the nexus between this socially inculcated individualistic ethos, its subjective experience, and its expression through aggression and violence.

Kuliy: a valued trait

Wik placed a high value on assertiveness, aggression and the willingness to defend their perceived rights. From the time they could crawl, babies were encouraged through teasing and play acting by older siblings to retaliate against real or imagined wrongs, as discussed in Chapter 1. Strong aggressive male children in particular were boasted of: "*Nila ma'-punhth yuk!* (His arms are as hard as logs!)". Children like this were called admiringly *kuliy*; *kul* referred to anger or aggression. *Kuliy*ness more generally was expressed in the willingness to argue forcefully for one's interests or those of one's kin, to abuse one's opponents and their kin, and to use physical force in the defence or furtherance of those interests. Being aggressive (*ngangk kuliy*) and courageous (*ngangk thayan*) were attributes valued by both men and women. Women would boast that their male kin were *kuliy*. I heard one mother for instance, drunk, declaiming; "My son is a fighter, I love my son, *nil ep kuliy* (he above all others is *kuliy*).". While women would claim of themselves that they were not afraid to fight, being a good fighter was an intrinsic dimension of masculine identity in a way which it was not for the female one. This was particularly so for young men, whose paths to prominence were often constructed upon their ability to mobilize kin in fights.

On the other hand, someone who was unnecessarily argumentative, who (from the perspective of the speaker at least) fought for no good reason, who went beyond the bounds of convention in asserting their rights through conflict, was *kul-weenhth*,

'fight crazy'. The antonym of *kuliy* was *maal* which encompassed qualities of timidity, of lack of aggression and unwillingness to confront others for one's rights, of passivity. While there were contexts in which it was used in a positive sense,² it was essentially derogatory; it was an insult hurled during fights - "*Ninta maal ey!* (You are weak and timid!)", or in its negative form used as an assertion of one's lack of fear - "*Ngay maal ya'a!* (Don't take me for a timid person!)". People who could not fight effectively - men or women - were usually socially insignificant and derided; "You not a man, you can't fight, you fuck-all!"

As previously discussed, an individual's *ngangk chaaprr* ('heart blood') underlay their potency and vitality in a number of linked domains of mundane practices, including hunting, attracting the opposite sex, and fighting.³ Those Wik who had this potency were *thup* - skilful, forceful, lucky. Men who were good hunters or fighters were *thup* or *thup-thul*.⁴ While men and women (and indeed children) could be *thup*, men's *ngangk chaaprr* was the more ritually dangerous and therefore they were more potent. *Ngangk chaaprr* was manifested *inter alia* in a lack of fear, a single-mindedness in fighting (*ngangk thonam*, 'one-heart') and in physical adeptness and prowess - the attributes of being *kuliy*.⁵

The expression of anger

Reser, in a research submission to the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody, argues that there is a significant difference between Aboriginal and White Australian cultures in the domain of the emotions, and in particular in the socialization of emotional expression and coping.⁶ In his view this is markedly so in the case of anger; he suggests that the "substantial cultural elaboration of expressed anger" is a general phenomenon amongst many Aboriginal people.⁷ This was certainly true of Wik, for whom the forceful expression of anger provided both a central dimension of the individual ethos and a constituting dynamic of social life. There was a very strong emphasis on expressing one's grievances and anger, rather than restraining them. In disputes, Wik would exhort one another to "spit it out", in its highly provocative *Mungkan* form "*maan tha'a!* - let out that aggression!"⁸ Wik (men and women) explained to me that when they became really angry, the emotion

2. e.g. of a dog that did not bite, or of a European boss who was not hostile and authoritarian towards Aboriginal workers. Suggestively, it also had connotations of a lack of 'heat'; thus bland food was referred to as *maal*, the sun was *maal* during the cooler times of the morning and late afternoon, and *kayaman maal* was the cooler part of the dry season. In this association of 'heat' with anger, Wik *Mungkan* paralleled English.
3. See Chapter 5
4. *Thul* referred to the spear thrower or woomera, the quintessential male symbol. Significantly, the same link across the domains of fighting and hunting was established in the phrase "*minya mine*", "(he is) my meat". *Minya* (*Mungkan* equivalent *minh*) was adopted from other Aboriginal languages, such as Kaandju spoken in Coen and Lockhart River.
5. Taylor (1984:263) writes similarly of the men of Pormpuraaw (Edward River) south of Aurukun (loosely part of a 'Wik' cultural domain)..
6. Reser (1990:53)
7. Reser (*op. cit*:29)

was irresistible. I asked a woman why she had joined in a fight and sworn at her opponents. She told me:

That anger just chokes your throat, that's how it feels. That temper (*man kul*) comes to you here (indicates throat). One's heart beats furiously. That's why I swore!

People would often say in English that they 'fight for satisfy' - fight until they felt that their anger had been assuaged. The following was the translation of a response to my question as to why:

It's like this, let's say there are two people fighting. Alright, his heart, that anger in his heart, in English you call it temper ... it is as if his heart were crying. He feels as if he could do damage to that other person, he thinks to himself; what did that person say to me, he treated me as if I were timid and frightened (*maal*) when he confronted me ... He has to settle that heart, he has to keep on fighting.⁹

Rejection

I have previously argued that for Wik, crucial dimensions of individual autonomy and personal identity were defined through relatedness, and existed in dialectical relationship with it.¹⁰ While autonomy could be realized through the control of material and symbolic resources, and individuality asserted through their display and utilization, relatedness to others - and indeed its emotional dimensions - were constructed in terms of, and substantiated by, the flows of these same resources. Rather than this dialectic between autonomy and relatedness being mediated by such flows, I have suggested that there was an essentially unresolved tension between them which underlay much of Wik social dynamics.

The denial of a request of one's kin - for money, for help, for food, - could therefore be construed as a rejection of one's connections to them, and thus of who and what one was in an existential sense. Since love and care were expressed in terms of, and realized through, the flows of material and symbolic goods, rejection of a request for them was a rejection of love itself.¹¹ Such denials could arouse intense jealousy or anger, with the possibility of violence always present. A senior man from the Cape Keerweer region explained it to me in this way:

It is part of our culture to share. (He then threw a packet of cigarettes on the ground to illustrate) See this? If there are three cigarettes left, I might give one to my missus. I might have one. If someone ask me for that last one, I must give, it's our way. It goes for money too. We can't say, 'It's mine, I won't give it,' no. Same as before, if someone lend me dillybag or yamstick, we must give them half of those yams or bitter yams. If we lend that woomera though - big trouble. Meat too, we must share. From

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8. *Maanh* was a word of highly sexual connotations (see discussion on page 156) whose public use related quintessentially to conflict.
 9. Tape DM-36A, Fieldnotes 7-119. This statement also brings out the cultural stress on venting one's grievances, and doing so in public. One should not repress anger - to do so indicated one was *maal*. People arguing would tell each other not to keep it on their minds, to 'spit it out'.
 10. see discussion in Chapter 1.
 11. Myers (1988:594-5) reports that Pintupi Aboriginal people interpret anger as arising from a response to the rejection of relatedness.

long time, fight come from these things now, if people won't share them.¹²

Whether the resentment occasioned by the refusal of a request resulted in violence was dependent upon many contingent factors, including very importantly the gender of the aggrieved. Women were far less likely than were men to demonstrate their anger through violence over a denial of resources. For them, the weapons were more often words; on occasion public declamations, but more often verbalized in contexts of relatively limited social extent - such as between husband and wife or in gossiping groups of female siblings or cousins - where the subject of disapprobation was not present. For example, one woman complained bitterly to her husband that her classificatory sister was *thaa' thayan* (mean, hard hearted)¹³ for not allowing her to use her new washing machine. The same woman complained on another occasion to a group of kin about her youngest brother; he would not give money or food to her, it all went for his girlfriend as if they had been married in church.¹⁴ Consequently, she said, she did not bother much about him. On the other hand, another brother who was always ready to give her and her children money was referred to as "my ever-loving brother". The airing of such grievances was far from trivial, for it was in part through gossip, complaints and negative comments on others in such quasi-public contexts that Wik monitored the flux of social life, and through which basic dispositions and perceptions were produced and reproduced.¹⁵

Men, on the other hand - adolescent and young men in particular - were more likely to express their anger at rejection through violence. Suggestively, they were akin to Wik children (both boys and girls) who when refused money or lollies or a coveted toy from the store, would display their outrage and rejection through spectacular tantrums, screaming, rolling around on the ground, biting and kicking their mothers. Frequently, young Wik men too would go into paroxysms of rage at being denied such items as food, money, or alcohol by spouses or kin. Their rage was manifested through such means as attacks on kin and destruction of their property, stealing vehicles for high speed and often life-threatening rides, and discharging firearms as they ran through the village.¹⁶ One young man for instance, when his non-drinking girlfriend failed to purchase him beer at the canteen, went berserk. He systematically smashed the walls and louvres of his parent's house, strewed the contents of their drums of flour on the ground, attacked and punched his

12. Rendition from *Wik Mungkan*/English, Fieldbook 5:125. Collier and Rosaldo (1981:297-8) suggest that this may be a wider phenomenon amongst hunter-gatherer 'simple' societies; where inequality causes conflict and potentially leads to violence, people are reluctant to provoke it by refusing requests for goods.

13. *thaa'* intensifier; *thayan* hard, unyielding

14. Those women socialized under the Mission regime with its strong emphasis on Christian marriage as legitimating sexual relations would often use the 'de-facto' status of their contemporary relationships as a means of legitimating their resistance to a partner's attempts to control them.

15. McKnight (1982:503-6) notes the role of gossip in instigating violence amongst Wik in Aurukun, and Taylor (1984:259) equivalently notes its role in enforcing conformity amongst the people of Pompuuraaw (Edward River) to the south of Aurukun.

16. Incidents recorded in the Aurukun police charge sheets for arrests in these categories of behaviour are shown in Figure 4.3, page 180.

father and nine year old brother, and belted his small sister with a broom handle. Such public berserks by young men were commonplace occurrences:

A youth had been promised a share of his maternal grandmother's pension cheque. In the event, before he arrived at her house, it had all been spent on food or distributed to other kin. A normally taciturn and non-aggressive person, he became violently angry, and finding a large length of wood systematically smashed all the glass louvres in her house. His grandmother was contrite; she had promised him money, she told me, and it was her own fault for not carrying out that promise.

In this case, the closeness of the kin relationship and the nurturance of and caring for her grandson that was the conventionalized expression of that link, prevented a rupturing of it; paradoxically it was in fact reaffirmed. The grandson was demonstrating his outrage at the denial of love, and his grandmother was reaffirming her care and concern for him by being sorry - proffering the symbolic resource of sympathy and contrition in compensation for not giving money.

Disputed status

Intimately associated with the unresolved tension between autonomy and relatedness previously discussed, was an all-pervading stress on parity in every dimension of life. All Wik vigilantly monitored the flows of material and symbolic items to themselves and their kindreds and assessed them against those to others, and sought to ensure that, over time, the transactions were *ma' keelam*, equivalent, and that they and their kin remained *picham karrp*,¹⁷ equal, with others. Any perceived imbalances in transactions or attempts by others at personal accumulation or display were taken as threats to their own or their kindred's relative status and autonomy.¹⁸ Open and often bitter conflict frequently erupted between groups of Wik over access to and control of resources such as houses, vehicles, and boats.

A major and long-running dispute occurred in the late 1980s between two senior male Shire Councillors over rights to use a boat belonging to the Council. Acrimonious arguments took place within Council meetings and in the wider public arena over who had control of the boat and over the mechanisms of access to its use. A series of large-scale fights erupted in the township, and on one occasion a brawl took place out bush when one of the protagonists and his supporters sought out their opponents where they were camping several kilometres away from the town.

This dispute reflected in part conflict between the two individuals over power and influence in the Council, but was also a manifestation of the tension between the struggle by individuals and groups to appropriate and control material and symbolic resources (including people) on the one hand, and to subvert the potential of such resources to create hierarchies on the other.

Grief

Anger was also closely associated with grief; both were expressed by kin following deaths and at certain stages of subsequent mortuary ceremonies, when the

17. Literally 'shoulders level'.

very ill were being sent out to Cairns on the aerial ambulance, and when men were sentenced to long prison terms following convictions for serious crimes.¹⁹ Like the Pintupi of the Western Desert, Wik interpreted loss as resulting from unjustifiable harm caused by others,²⁰ a severing of connection to a person which demanded a response.

The event, or news of it, would result in the immediate gathering of kin and loud public wailing, particularly by women. The keening would typically follow a pattern that began with a sorrowful recounting of the relationship of the mourner to and characteristics of the deceased or absent person, and ultimately turned to angry (although usually non-specific) denunciations against those who were assigned blame for the loss. This was usually attributed to sorcery when death or illness was involved. On one occasion however, when two men had been sentenced in Cairns to prison terms for the rape of a woman in Aurukun, their angry relations directly blamed the woman and her kin and violently assaulted them.

While men also wept and keened, their subsequent anger (especially in the case of close patrilineal kin of the deceased) often manifested itself in violence or threats of it. Senior men would run for their weapons, and, hooking spear in woomera, stand menacingly at the ready, shouting abuse at those who were believed responsible for the death.²¹ Young men on the other hand often looked for guns. At the news of a death it was not uncommon for Wik to be urgently despatched to hide weapons from their angry kinsmen.

Both grief and anger were emotions which demanded a response of other Wik, a "primary idiom for defining and negotiating social relations of the self in a moral order."²² As such then, they were structurally akin to the demanding for food, money and other material goods which has been discussed in Chapter 1; that sought, whether tangible item (money) or symbolic one (sympathy) served to substantiate and indeed define the individual's connections to others. Demanding however was not simply the province of the individual, but also of collectivities. The kin of the

18. Collier and Rosaldo (1981:298) argue that this is a feature in 'brideservice' societies (such as most hunter-gatherer ones) where parity is the object of male achievement, and inequality leads to conflict.

19. The dead, the seriously ill and those absent in gaol were all *ngenyich-thayan*. Thomson (1946) (see also Scheffler 1978:161) recorded that "wall'wala" (*waal-waal*), referred to a deceased wC, wZC, or mZC, and that "oimp'watjaman" (*uuymp-wachaman*) referred to a deceased mC, mBC, wBC. I never heard the latter term used. *Uuymp* was the avoidance language form of *puk*, child, and *wachaman* was a respectful euphemism for anything of ritual danger or taboo. *Waal-waal* appeared to be used by contemporary Wik at least as a general reference term for the deceased. In some instances, it was replacing more specific avoidance terminology; e.g. "budda *waal-waal*" had replaced *wunywun* and *muk waal-waal* was more commonly used than *kaathwun* (see Thomson (*op.cit.*) and Scheffler (*op.cit.*) for an account of Wik Mungkan mourning terminology).

Young men in gaol or sick people were often referred to as *ngeenwi*. McKnight (1981:99) equivalently notes that absent relations were referred to as "nganwi" (*ngeenwi*). The latter term was used more generally as an oblique reference to objects, persons or beings of ritual power. Morphologically *ngeenwi* and *waal-waal* were similar; *ngeen* meant 'what', *wi* meant 'some', and *waal* was the respect form of 'who'.

20. Myers (1988:599)

21. Similarly noted of Wik men by Thomson (1935:473) and McKnight (1982:492)

deceased, particularly the *pam-mul kunych*, the 'owners of the dead body',²³ were entitled to have their sorrow and loss recognized by others, including affines and more distant kin. More distant relations approaching bereaved kin during the mourning period would ostentatiously weep, thereby demonstrating their connection to the deceased and their own sorrow. The various dietary, linguistic and other behavioural restrictions on different categories of kin which came into operation after death,²⁴ and the avoidance of places and objects the deceased had used, were vigilantly policed by the *pam-mul kunych*, and infringements invited angry retribution.

The link between grief and anger was also shown through the *wuungk* rituals. Quintessentially the province of women,²⁵ the major *wuungk pi'an* cycles were mourning rites performed at various stages of mortuary observances, such as around the coffin, by the *pewnguchan* ritual mourners, and at the spirit-sending ceremony. *Pewnguchan*, kinswomen of the deceased man, would move through the village, parodying the dead man, performing *wuungk* and ostentatiously demanding food and money of those they encountered. To give was to demonstrate one's shared grief and sympathy; to refuse was to invite retribution, either through physical violence or sorcery. As well as being associated with mourning however, *wuungk pi'an* were intimately related to disputes, powerful symbols of clan identity and territoriality sung by senior women to taunt their opponents during major conflicts and to goad their own clansmen in fighting.²⁶

Akan: swearing

The *pam-mul kunych* not only vigilantly monitored the demonstrations of sorrow and respect by others. They were actively involved in the apportioning of blame for the death and the defence of rights in the body and the exactment of retribution for slights against it. Gratuitous mention by other 'outside' Wik of the dead person during the mourning period, and above all else slighting references to or swearing of them, invariably led to violent retaliation.²⁷ The massive fight around which this thesis is constructed started when a young man called his girlfriend, whose mother had recently died, 'mother-fucker'. What legitimated violent retaliation by the patrilineal kin was not that this was a reflection on the girl herself, but rather that the insulting context in which reference had been made by an outsider to the dead woman was an affront to them collectively. Few of those aggrieved men taking the most

22. Lutz and White (1986:417)

23. See Chapter 5

24. Although this dimension of mortuary practices, and more generally the whole elaborated structure of appropriate behaviours between kin categories which had been encoded through dietary, linguistic and other exchanges (see e.g. McConnel (1937); McKnight (1971, 1973); Sutton (1978:186-211); Thomson (1935:483-6, 1936), was increasingly attenuated among Wik in Aurukun by the late 1980s.

25. With one exception, the Shark *wuungk* from Man-yelk in the Kirke River estuary (Sutton, Martin et al 1990:362).

26. These matters have been discussed previously in Chapter 5. As noted in that chapter, only a small number of senior women from a handful of clans knew *wuungk*, and their performance (especially in fights) became increasingly rare. *Pewnguchan* rituals too were rarely performed by the late 1980s.

prominent part in the subsequent fighting had had any great degree of social interaction with the dead woman during her life.²⁸ However, they were fighting for 'good reason', and the reason people advanced was that they were owners of that body, and had every right to take action against those who swore at it - ritual and social property in which they had interests.

While outsiders could be severely punished for swearing at or even disrespectfully referring to a recently deceased person, close kin (particularly children and grandchildren) or on some occasions spouses could legitimately swear on their dead relatives. One could curse on the *kaanych* (bones) of one's relation, or - most potent of all - on the *kunych maanh* or *pu' maanh* of one's dead kin.²⁹ This was a major form of ritualized cursing, *ngenyth-thayan* (highly dangerous, ritually potent), and in using it Wik attempted to set up axiomatic demands on those to whom it was directed.³⁰ For instance, one could close access by others to sites in one's estate by swearing on one's deceased father's bones. One woman, outraged by the huge amounts of illicit alcohol being purchased in Weipa and brought into Aurukun, ritually cursed the Weipa hotel on the *pu' maanh* of her deceased mother. She hoped that by so doing, young Wik men would be constrained from going to the hotel; they were not.

The young man whose swearing precipitated the particular fight previously referred to had been drinking in the canteen at the time, as had most of the male protagonists, and alcohol undoubtedly fanned the flames of subsequent events. However, such occurrences were understood by Wik in terms of, and helped reproduce, patterns of provocation and violent reprisal which were deeply embedded in personal and collective dispositions. A middle-aged Wik woman explained this to me as follows:

They use the name of a recently dead person, or even the name of a long dead person. Whether it was a man, woman or a child, they (the aggrieved relations) swear at them (the offenders). A really big fight (*kul tha'iy*) comes from that. Mothers, fathers, grandmothers, relations wherever they are from, they join together in abusing (the perpetrators). Really big fights arise from this. It spreads out everywhere, the fighting, it just can't be predicted. They seek revenge on behalf of that dead man or woman. Those others should not talk about that dead person, it is prohibited (*ngenyth-thayan*).³¹ It used to be like this before too, it is not

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27. See McKnight (1975:83, 1982:492). Taylor (1984:272-3) also notes this feature of Pormpuraaw Aboriginal people, but says that during his field work among them such abusive references were very rare. This contrasts then with my experience of Aurukun Wik.
 28. This is in itself a complex question. For instance relations between fathers and daughters, and between male and female siblings, were reserved and even socially fraught as the daughter matures. This can be related back to the construction in this society of sexuality and its control.
 29. *Kunych maanh* and *pu' maanh* had highly sexual connotations; They are discussed in more detail on page 156.
 30. Such swearing on dead relations was the most potent example of ritual cursing. Wik could also for instance curse a relation's hands to render them *ngenyth*, taboo, and thus preventing them from fighting or giving food. This is discussed at some length in McKnight (1975:81-4).
 31. *Ngenyth-thayan* had connotations of ritually dangerous, forbidden, sacred.

a recent thing. This is how the customs were; they followed them, men, women and children. It is the same now as it was long ago.³²

The rights of kin in the deceased were paralleled by those in seriously ill or absent kin. Whites could unwittingly transgress such conventions. One staff member for instance was severely (and traumatically) abused in a highly public context by the kin of a dying man, after she had made unguarded references to a supposed lack of physical care of their relative by family members. The anger of kin was caused not by the imputations regarding their care and concern for their relative, but by the gratuitous reference to him. His illness and impending death were the corporate property of his patrikin, and as such any infringement of their rights to sympathy and respect was justifiable cause for anger. Wik themselves however well understood such conventions, and breaking a mourning restriction (such as using the name of a recently dead person or above all else referring to them in swearing) was very often used as intentional provocation, *kul kenhthanak*.³³

There was in addition ritualized joking between certain categories of kin (particularly classificatory grandparents / grandchildren) (*akwunan kee'athanak*)³⁴ centred largely on explicit sexual references to the genitalia, which Thomson recorded in the 1930s and which still, if in more tenuous form, was a feature of Wik social life.³⁵ These highly conventionalized exchanges of obscenities and ribald references between specific kin, marked by exaggerated joviality and bonhomie, contrasted sharply however with the restrictions of other relationships, such as those with in-laws, as Thomson also notes.³⁶ They also stood in contradistinction to the use in *kul kenhthanak* swearing of the repertoire of derisory sexual references and other forms of ridicule of personal attributes, through which conflict more broadly was initiated and played out. Such abusive swearing by both men and women was an almost invariable precursor (so to speak) to fighting; women however were the more verbal while men were quicker to resort to physical violence. The following table presents examples of the extensive repertoire of Wik sexual and personal invective. It was rare for a man to use these sexual terms of abuse to goad his opponents, although men did swear sexually at their spouses or girlfriends. They tended rather to use English swear words, or to proceed directly to physical retribution.³⁷ Examples of *Wik Mungkan* sexual and personal abuse terms are presented in Table 4.1 following.

32. Translation from *Wik Mungkan*, Tape DM-22

33. *kul*; anger, fight; *kenhthan* to force out. See also Thomson (1935:469,473).

34. *Akan* meant to swear or curse. *Akwunan* was the reciprocal form (i.e. to swear at one another). *Kee'an* meant to play or joke. See also Thomson (*op.cit*:483).

35. Thomson (*op.cit*).

36. Thomson (*op.cit*:469). Additional information is provided by Sutton (1978:194).

37. Sutton (1978:189) notes that the use of English swearing, especially when alcohol was involved, was very common for Wik, and Brady and Palmer (1984:24) report a similar phenomenon for the Aboriginal people of Yalata, South Australia.

Table 4.1 *Wik Mungkan* sexual and personal abuse terms

To a male:	
<i>pu'a wanych weenhth</i>	vagina woman crazy; obsessed with sex
<i>kunychathiy</i>	penis big
<i>kunych ongk</i>	penis long
<i>kunych otang</i>	penis short
<i>kunych thanhthathiy</i>	penis fatty
<i>kunych mangkathiy</i>	penis shaft big
<i>kunych pe'anhthiy</i>	penis foreskin big
<i>kunych kon we'arr</i>	penis ears big
<i>kunych kuchekathiy</i>	penis head big; big glans
<i>kunych uuyan we'arr</i>	penis orifice wide
<i>kunych ipathiy</i>	penis fluid plenty
<i>kunych thangkarrathiy</i>	penis semen plenty
<i>untathiy</i>	scrotum big
<i>unt laapathiy</i>	scrotum big
<i>mun uuyan we'arr</i>	anus extended; i.e. imputation of resulting from anal intercourse
<i>kunych maanhathiy</i> ³⁸	penile orifice red
To a female:	
<i>pam weenhth</i>	man crazy; promiscuous
<i>nhok we'arr</i>	groin open wide; i.e. inviting intercourse
<i>pu'a pach</i>	pudenda no hair
<i>pu'a kaa' ongk</i>	clitoris long
<i>pu'a kathathiy</i>	vagina very rotten
<i>pu'a ipathiy</i>	vagina fluids plenty
<i>pu'a thanhthathiy</i>	vagina fatty
<i>pu'a konathiy</i>	labia minora big
<i>pu' uuyan we'arr</i>	vagina extended; i.e. imputation of resulting from repeated intercourse
<i>pu' maanhathiy</i>	vagina red
<i>puk yot thaa' yeechan</i>	children many bred;
To male or female:	
<i>maanh winyang</i>	<i>maanh</i> frightened; 'shit scared'
<i>ngotan uth</i>	black dense (skin); 'nigger tar' in Wik English
<i>kaa' ngotan uth</i>	nose (face) black
<i>kuchek pamp</i>	head flat
<i>kuchekathiy</i>	head big
<i>yangk many</i>	lower legs thin
<i>mee' pungkathiy</i>	eyes bulbous
<i>mee'athiy</i>	eyes big; i.e. staring rudely
<i>thip-pukathiy</i>	belly big
<i>mee' ko'anych</i>	eyes blind
<i>kaa' manych</i>	nose flat
<i>kaa'wal kaanychathiy</i>	face bony

Adapted and extended from Thomson (1935)

The use of personal abuse and swearing has been noted as a general characteristic of Aboriginal disputing styles by various observers, including Warner in writing of the Murngin, Taylor of the people of Pormpuraaw, and Thomson of a number of linguistic groups in the northern Cape York peninsula region, including

38. See further discussion on page 156.

Mungkan people.³⁹ Langton claims that this feature extends to Aboriginal societies in 'settled' Australia, and suggests that swearing - particularly sexual swearing - is "an important *leitmotif* of Aboriginal life" with strong historical and cultural links to traditional practices and beliefs.⁴⁰ Swearing, Langton argues, is a mode of Aboriginal discourse which is based in particular processes of social organization and associated values, such as the right of each person to seek redress for grievances.⁴¹

This right itself arises from a fundamental feature of Aboriginal societies, I suggest. For Wik, and arguably for urban Aboriginal societies, social forms and relations were primarily created and recreated in a direct and immediate fashion through the interactions between persons, rather than mediated through objective institutions as is the case with complex and hierarchical societies.⁴² Furthermore, in the absence of perduring formalized institutions (such as a legal system with its judiciary, encoded laws and so forth), orality had a fundamental role in the production and reproduction of Aboriginal social forms, as I shall argue in Chapter 6. It is in this context where words have the pre-eminent power to define and constitute social reality that Aboriginal swearing and other verbal personal abuse must be understood, I suggest.

Wik swearing, like fighting, almost always took place in public contexts, before an audience who whether protagonists or mere onlookers were part of the known social universe.⁴³ Significantly, the derisory references to an opponent's physical and sexual attributes and sexual habits, took what was quintessentially in the domain of the psychobiological individual and displayed it mockingly before an audience.⁴⁴ The *ad hominem* taunts which characterized Wik swearing therefore were a tool in the maintenance of equivalence and the subversion of hierarchy, belittling those against whom it was addressed. Precisely analogously, the *piithal* and *theechawam* singing duels of the past had centred on disparaging or gratuitous references to personal attributes and ritual and territorial property.⁴⁵

In a cultural logic then which both sides understood perfectly, perpetrators and targets of swearing, such personal abuse was justifiable cause for anger and

39. Warner (1958:150-3); Taylor (1984:272-3); Thomson (1935). Interestingly however, while Sansom's otherwise suggestive analysis of Darwin Aboriginal fringe dwellers examines in detail 'styles' for drinking and fighting, he portrays swearing as a borrowing from the colourful vernacular of frontier White Australia (Sansom 1980:30).

40. Langton (1988:208)

41. Langton (*op.cit*:210,214)

42. Bourdieu (1977a:96)

43. Observers such as Sansom (1980), MacDonald (1988) and Langton (1983) have argued that the presence of the audience is a critical dimension to Aboriginal disputing processes. MacDonald, for instance, in writing of Wiradjuri fighting, maintains that the audience acts both as an instrument of control, ensuring that the dispute does not get out of hand, and as a legitimation of the activity (*op.cit*:188).

44. This is not to argue that sexuality as such was in the private domain in the same way as in (for instance) bourgeois White Australian society. Young women's sexuality for example was the object of corporate interests, as discussed in Chapter 2. This is to be differentiated however from an individual's reactions to derogatory public sexual references to themselves.

45. See discussion in Chapter 1

retribution, for public humiliation made one 'shame' (*kuchek nyaa*) or 'feel small', and thus attacked the very basis of one's autonomy.⁴⁶

***Waa'an*: divulging information**

Even in the apparently desultory periods in the township when there appeared to be little activity, as in a 'slack week', there was an intense watchfulness concerning the doings of others equal to that with which territoriality was policed.⁴⁷ Where people - including Whites - were going, with whom, what they had been overheard to say, what this might mean in terms of new liaisons or political alliances, what their motives might be, how one's own interests might be affected by what was happening, who was disputing with whom and what had been said - these were the topics which formed the grist for the mill of Wik social commentary and analysis.⁴⁸ Wik might well have been sitting under the shade of the mango trees for extended periods apparently 'doing nothing' in the view of Whites, but it was rare indeed that they were not intellectualizing about the world around them.

Knowledge of the mundane doings of others, of personal peccadillos, of events such as fights, of lovers' antics and so forth, was thus widely disseminated. This knowledge however, representations of social life abstracted from it, was owned, for both events and their verbal representations were the symbolic property of the participants and of their kindreds.⁴⁹ Such verbal objectifications were central to the constitution and reproduction of Wik social forms. Similarly, a person's name (in the senses of both appellation and reputation), actions, and (as described above) sickness and death were property held in lien by particular individuals and collectivities.⁵⁰ Thus arose one of the contradictions underlying Wik social forms, because while discussion of the doings of others provided much of the dynamic of social intercourse, there was always the very real possibility that with the cross-cutting nature of kinship and other ties, such talk would come to the attention of someone with an interest in the matter. A very common source of conflict among Wik was the complaint that someone gave out information or commented on them or their close kin without the right to do so. "*Nintang alangan waa' ow!* - You were talked about by that person!" was a cry that signalled many heated arguments or fights.

Waa'an in essence referred to divulging information; it pertained not only to the narrating of stories (*wik kath waa'an*), the describing of sites or country (*aak waa'an*), and more generally the communication of information, but also to gossiping

46. Morris (1988:57-8; 1989:154-6) discusses shame among the Dhan-gadi Aboriginal people of the Macleay Valley as both an indigenous regulatory mechanism typical of small scale non-hierarchical societies, and as a mechanism used to subvert the appropriation of European ways by community members. See also Macdonald (1988:193).

47. See Chapter 5

48. It was this combination of zest and stress which made living with Wik both stimulating and demanding for a White Australian such as myself, socialized into the need for a sense of private psychological (as well as geographic) space. Yet, it was only by participating in (and being the object of) this all-pervasive scrutiny that its importance was brought home to me; there could be no Wik for the rested, so to speak.

49. This is discussed further in Chapter 6.

50. There were of course a range of rights in such things; for example, it was primarily close patrilineal kin (the *pam-mul kunych*, see above and Chapter 5) who had rights in the deceased. Maternal kin also had rights, particularly where there were no senior paternal kin.

or complaining about people (*aak-pik waa'an*),⁵¹ and assigning blame to them (*way waa'an* or *kaa' thayanang waa'an*). It was not necessary for what was said to have been derogatory, scurrilous, or even for its factuality to be at issue; one infringed the proprietary rights of the owners of the event, the name or whatever merely in the action of talking about it when one did not have the right to the information.

A furious argument resulted when Peter (who worked in the beer canteen) informed Grace's spouse that she had purchased two jugs of beer that night. Her drinking was a matter of great contention between Grace and her partner. After having an argument and fighting with other people in the canteen, Grace and her sister, together with other relations, came over to Peter's house and shouted abuse at Peter and his spouse. Grace claimed that Peter was the cause of the fight in the canteen, because she had got angry when her husband told her Peter had informed him of her buying beer.

In terms of Grace's assigning a cause for the fight in the canteen, the fact that Peter had not even been there was immaterial. His action in passing on information about her without having the right to do so, was justifiable cause for her becoming angry and upset. This had led to her becoming involved in fighting at the canteen, and her subsequent abuse of Peter and his spouse was demonstrating this anger and publicly apportioning blame for it before an audience of her kin. Grace's actions were also an instance of the vigorous resistance by all Wik, adult and children, to any attempt at evaluation and moral judgement of themselves and their kin; unwarranted or gratuitous commentaries were seen as impinging on their own or their kindred's relative status and autonomy.⁵²

Sexuality and violence

References to and expressions of sexuality constituted a significant dimension of conflict and fighting. The use of sexual swearing in provoking and in the course of conflict has already been discussed, and examples of terms typically used given in Table 4.1. Particularly highly loaded terms of abuse were *pu' maanhathiy* and *kunych maanhathiy*; *pu'* was the pudenda or vagina and *kunych* the penis. *Maanh* could be rendered as 'red'; it was a word of high sexual connotation and specifically referred to the red colour of the anus, penile and vaginal orifices.⁵³ In swearing their opponent's *maanh* then, Wik were exposing to public scrutiny so to speak the innermost dimensions of the individual, referring to something which was *ngenych-*

51. The English equivalent of *aak-pik waa'an* used by Wik was 'talking this and that', gratuitously referring to events or individuals.

52. This was also just one particular instance of the 'externalization of causality', a feature deeply embedded in Wik practices and beliefs.

53. One clan estate has an increase centre for *mun maanh*, (*mun* meaning buttocks, but here more specifically anus) referred to euphemistically and humorously by one senior site owner as 'Big Jim Story Place' (Site 2225, Sutton, Martin et al 1990). 'Big Jim' torches, popular in the bush, had a red flashing light on their rear ends.

thayan and at the same time intensely private. Significantly, Wik referred to the use of such terms as really 'deep' swearing.⁵⁴

There was an explicit connection between male sexuality and aggression. For instance, young men walking drunk around the village would often declaim on the subject of their own bravery and willingness to fight in the form; "Me, I'm man, I got frick and ball, I'm afraid from no bastard". Women too would goad men holding back from fighting by taunting them in similar terms. Female sexuality on the other hand was associated with provocation, and this could be seen most clearly in the women's rage dancing (*thuunhth-thuunhthan*). In this ritualized provocation, the angry woman would chant personal and sexual abuse at her opponents, rhythmically beat her elbows against her sides, and stamp her feet while opening and closing her legs in a kind of sexual parody. She might also lift up her skirt and flaunt her buttocks at her opponents, and thrust a long stick rhythmically between her legs.⁵⁵ The following is an example of a woman's abusive chanting during *thuunhth-thuunhthan*.⁵⁶

*pu' uuyan we'arra, pu' maanhathiy, pu' ipathiy
niyaley!
pu' maanh ngotan ey! pu' thanhth ngotan ey!
kunych maanhathiy, kunych ipathiy, kunych
thangkarathiy! pu', kunych kathathiy niyaley!
kunych uuyan we'arra niyal ey!
kunych uuy.am ey!
pu' wenychathiy, kunych wenychathiy ey!
way ey! kunych olmp ey! kunycha kaanych pentan
ey!*

You have big vaginas, you have red vaginas, you
have slippery vaginas, you people hey!
Your vaginas are black, your vaginal fat is black!
Your penile orifices are red, you have lots of
sexual fluids, your penises and vaginas stink!
Your penile orifices are big, you people!
You have had intercourse with lots of men!
Your vaginas and penises are covered in sores!
You're all no good! You have skinny penises!
The bones stick out of your penises!

Sexual relationships and jealousy were a constant source of conflict and violence in contemporary Aurukun.⁵⁷ I recorded numerous fights between women over 'jealousy' from boyfriends or husbands, between men - mainly young men - over girlfriends, and between partners over actual or alleged sexual relationships involving the other person. Many large-scale brawls were precipitated by fights involving aggrieved partners or male kin of young women. Heated argument or violent retribution arising from a partner's infidelity was not the sole prerogative of either gender; I witnessed both men and women being assaulted by their spouses over sexual affairs, women fighting one another over boyfriends, and men over girlfriends. It could be tempting to infer from such features, and from women's own assertions that they freely chose their *maarrich* partners, that control over sexuality had been and still was relatively evenly distributed between the genders. However, there were underlying structural features which would compromise this view.

54. Swearing on something of ritual significance or danger (*ngenych-thayan*) was termed 'deep' swearing (see also McKnight 1975:83). In fact, so sexually significant was *maanh* that at the request of the Wik women working with the Summer Institute of Linguistics translators, it was not included in the *Wik Mungkan* dictionary (Kilham et al:1986)

55. See also McKnight (1982:493) of Wik living in Aurukun, and Taylor (1984:288) for a similar description of women's rage dancing at Pormpuraaw, south of Aurukun. The stick was often a yamstick, *kechan yooman*, itself of sexual significance.

56. Fieldbook 3:6-7

Firstly, while both men and women angered by their partner's affairs frequently sought retribution through violence, men's assaults were the more dangerous and more often lethal.⁵⁸ This was because of their greater strength (on average), because of the weapons they used - in the past spears, and latterly knives, as well as sticks and other implements - and not least because of the expression of the male ethos in the intense passion and single-mindedness of jealous rages.⁵⁹ Furthermore, contemporary lethal male violence was more often directed against their unfaithful female partners than against the other men who had aggrieved them.

Older Wik made it clear to me that conflict and violence over the control of sexuality was no recent phenomenon. Although they often made complaints about contemporary young girls ("too much they run around"), in the past major arguments, fights and homicide had resulted from *woynpiy* or *maarrich*, the non-sanctioned lovers' relationship. Both men and women had died in the past as the result of retribution from *maarrich* affairs, but to my knowledge at least, always at male hands. If a woman's *maarrich* affairs were brought to public notice, she and her partner ran the risk of being severely punished; I was told for instance of cases in which husbands killed their unfaithful wives in the past, of *woynpiy* leading to retribution against the offending man through sorcery, and of a woman's brothers and maternal uncle joining to spear her through the leg as the result of an affair.⁶⁰ An elderly Cape Keerweer man recounted an incident that took place round the 1930s;

She was my aunty, [from clan 18]. Old Jack was middle-aged then. This aunty a good looking woman. Jack sent word for her, while aunty squeezing bitter yams. "You're my woman!" "I don't like you!" Grab her arm, kill her with short-handle axe. Carry her now, to scrub turkey nest, hide her body there. Jack bin go now, kill freshwater shark there near Green Point. Two white police looking for track. Jack climb up tree now, meat cooked. They surround him, put darby [handcuffs] on him. Make him run, walk, run, till find grave. They bring him here [Aurukun] then walk to Laura. He die Palm Island.⁶¹

Secondly, there were corporate interests in women's sexuality that did not exist equivalently for that of males. Male sexuality appeared to be largely placed within the domain of the individual's interests;⁶² female sexuality had this component too, but it and its regulation were also seen as the property and legitimate interest of her male kin. In contemporary Aurukun, fights almost invariably erupted once knowledge of an affair between a young girl and her lover came into the public

57. Collier and Rosaldo argue that it is characteristic of 'brideservice' societies such as most hunter-gatherer ones that "... men's conflicts have sexual interpretations and that these tend, in turn, to lead to escalating threats of force" (1981:292).

58. Myers (1986:253) makes a similar observation regarding Western Desert Pintupi people. This is a feature of course that extends far wider than Aboriginal societies; Strang (1991:24) for instance reports that between 1989 and 1990 only 10 per cent of homicides Australia wide involved male victims and female offenders. However, the overall homicide rates are far higher for Aboriginal women, particularly those in remote areas (Wilson 1982:4-5; Atkinson 1989; Aboriginal Coordinating Council 1990; Bolger 1991).

59. See Chapter 1

60. The 'poison uncle' (*kaal*, MB-), the potential father-in-law.

61. Rendition of *Wik Mungkan*/English narrative, Fieldbook 4:33.

62. Except perhaps within the context of male initiations and certain other rituals.

domain. Such fights typically involved the girl's brothers on the one hand and her lover and his brothers on the other. Not infrequently, the girl would be bashed by her brothers as well, and in 'payback' they would conduct affairs with her lover's sisters.⁶³ This raises interesting questions; for instance, mention has already been made in Chapter 2 of the bearing of sexuality on the reserved relationship between brothers and sisters. Furthermore, the original system of promised marriages had all but disappeared, and with it the formal system of negotiated alliances between kin groups that it had represented.

The continuation in the contemporary situation of this practice of fighting one's sisters' lovers or of conducting affairs with their sisters,⁶⁴ like that of cross-cousins being seen as desirable sex partners, was another example of the reproduction of the forms of social practices when the objective circumstances and the underpinning ideological representations had radically changed. This was an instance of what Bourdieu refers to as the 'hysteresis of habitus', the lag between changes in objective circumstances and those in individual ethos, which applies not only to individuals as they mature but also to individuals and collectivities in times of large-scale social change such as was the case in Aurukun.

Reciprocity and retaliation

All Wik closely monitored the transactions of material and symbolic items between individuals and collectivities through which relationships and relative status were constructed and reproduced. While hierarchies did exist (such as those between the genders, or those based on age), there was a powerful ethos of equalitarianism (*picham karrp*) and stress on parity in such transactions (*ma' keelam*) which pervaded all dimensions of life. With social relations and forms being in large part created and reproduced in an immediate fashion through the interactions between persons, rather than being mediated through objective institutions, both personal autonomy and parity among individuals and collectivities could be maintained only through direct and personal action on others.

The refusal of positively valued material or symbolic goods - food, cash, alcohol, help, respect - or equivalently the proffering of negatively valued ones - insults, public shame, gratuitous references, injury, infringements of ritual or territorial property - was a denial of one's own or one's group's autonomy and status in a society where all asserted they were equals. As such, a response was demanded, for to not seek redress was to accept inequality and compromise one's autonomy. This principle of retributive action in kind (*lex talionis*) pervaded all dimensions of Wik life, from relations within the familial domain, to those between kindreds and other collectivities. Robinson has made a similar observation of the Tiwi people of Bathurst Island:

63. Hiatt (1965:112) noted of Arnhem Land Gidjingali people that a man hearing someone swearing at his sister would become angry and often violently assault her.

64. in both cases, making one's mark on the body corporate as it were of those who had injured one's own symbolic interests.

The talion principle is fundamental to processes of psychosocial response to aggression in Tiwi life. This means that, where aggression leads to an attack on a member or part of the group, then individual, or sometimes collective retaliation in kind is the principle of redress, even in many cases where the wrong or injury is unintended. This aspect of Tiwi "law-ways" is fairly well documented. It is observable in almost any area of social life, including in family life, where it plays a fundamental part in the management of aggression by children.⁶⁵

At the same time, retaliation was itself a particular instance of more general principles, those of reciprocity and equivalence in the transactions of material and symbolic items, through which Wik autonomy and equality were realized. The *Wik Mungkan* term describing such reciprocal actions was *puth-puthangk*; to retaliate physically was *puth-puthangk piikan*, to reciprocate a gift of money or food was *puth-puthangk thee'an*, to return the verbal abuse of one's opponents was *puth-puthangk akan*, and so on. Wik saw retaliation, (*wiinhthan* or 'payback'), as an intrinsic part of the way they had always dealt with the world; "This thing going to continue for ever. This payback, it part of our culture," I was told by one man. Like the flows of material goods, the symbolic item of retribution served to structure and reproduce not only the relationships between individuals but between collectivities. One woman stated this particularly clearly:

(Those fights at the beer canteen and so on) are from long before, from when they used to fight one another. They are not fighting just from immediate causes. They keep the anger in their hearts, or in their minds. (... This is what you call 'payback' in English.) They would say to one another, "Don't be open and friendly with that person, he hurt our relation." They would tell the families as they grew up about the grudge, and that next generation carries it on, just by word of mouth, not by writing as you do, and keeps it in their hearts and minds.

(Why do we take part for our families?) Because that is the Aboriginal culture, from the old people who went before. Don't treat that particular person well, eventually they will pay you back. It is like a will given to that family, passed on ... because that person ensorcelled one of our relations. So stick together and speak as one. So then all the relations - siblings, mother, uncle, sisters' children - keep aware, keep their eyes open, and then the anger builds up for talking as one. Because that is the custom that was left us. It is from way back, from the beginning. White people are different, they just look out for themselves.⁶⁶

From infancy, Wik children were encouraged to retaliate physically against real or imagined wrongs.⁶⁷ Denials of demands for food or money led often to violent retaliatory action by young men against (in particular) female kin or partners. The rebuff of requests for alcohol from other male kin frequently resulted in severe retributive action. The refusal to allow kin to use a tractor, car or boat regularly led to heated arguments and fights. A young man whose sister had become involved in a *maarrich* lovers relation would usually retaliate by fighting her lover and his kin, and often seek to establish sexual liaisons with his sisters in retaliation. Sexual infidelity (particularly by a woman) invited severe sanctions, including ensorcellment, physical

65. Robinson (1988:12)

66. Rendition of *Wik Mungkan*/English statement, Tape DM-29A.

violence and even death. Swearing or gratuitous references to an individual or group almost inevitably resulted in vehement arguments or physical retaliation.

Retribution, Wik said, could either be undertaken openly (*mee' kaa' yoon*) through fighting, or it could be done secretly through sorcery, *purriy-purriy*.⁶⁸ Suggestively, to ensorcel was *pekan* whereas to fight was the reciprocal form *pekwunan*; to fight openly by definition was to have mutual engagement of protagonists, whereas sorcery was practiced in secrecy and unilaterally. Explanations for illness and death were almost always couched in terms of mystical agency; through *ngeenwiw* sickness caused accidentally by senior men,⁶⁹ through infringement of ritual taboos such as those relating to 'poison' country, or through sorcery.⁷⁰ Only men could be sorcerers; to become the victim of a sorcerer was to 'get caught'. The sorcerer (*ma' wop* or *ma' menychan*) used a variety of magical powers to attack his opponent.⁷¹ Most dangerously, he would find his target alone or asleep and place him or her in a trance. He would then operate on his victim, making an incision and withdrawing blood (the *ngangk chaaprr*) and then placing it in a small container - nowadays a small tin, in the past a parcel of paperbark tied with vines. He would leave a small opening, because like its owner, the blood has life and must have air. The sorcerer would then hide the parcel, perhaps in the side of an antbed or by burying it in sand. The victim would awaken from their trance, but would be unable to tell others of what had happened. Nothing out of the ordinary in the victim's demeanour or health would be immediately apparent.

However, the sorcerer, malevolent and cruel, would secretly return to where he had hidden the blood and heat it over a fire, or place hot stones on it. As he did so, the man or woman would writhe in pain. The sorcerer might continue to do this over a long period, playing with his victim (*ma'a kee'athan*), who would be getting weaker and weaker. The victim's kin would now begin to notice that the person was ailing, and enlist the help of a healer (*noyan*) who might divine that the person had been ensorcelled (*ma' pam.am* or *ma' weechan nunang*). The anger and distress caused by the perception that sorcerers had been at work was palpable. Kin would actively seek for the container of blood; if they found it, they would wash the congealed blood in water, and the victim would be immediately revitalized.⁷² If they did not, and if the healing of the *noyan* was to no avail, the victim's condition worsened and they became dreadfully ill (*man-way* or *wenych-thaa'*). When the sorcerer finally took the hot stones and seared the package right where the small hole had been left, the person would convulse and die.

67. This has been discussed in Chapter 1.

68. *Purriy-purriy* was almost certainly a loan word from the Torres Straits. While there was an extensive *Wik Mungkan* lexicon dealing with various aspects of the practice of sorcery, I am not aware of any which could be directly translated as 'sorcery' as such.

69. McKnight (1981) has provided an account of 'nganwiw' (*ngeenwiw*) sickness.

70. Hiatt (1965:119) has made a similar observation of northern Arnhem land peoples.

71. Space precludes a full account of sorcery here. McKnight (1982) has provided some details for Aurukun Wik, and Taylor (1984:240-4) discusses the very similar beliefs of Pormpuraaw people.

I asked a Wik friend why sorcery was still strong, but not initiations:

Young fellows grow up, and young women. This dangerous custom is not a recent one. It is a hidden custom. People are told to be careful, to keep aware - that's how it keeps going. With initiations, they didn't tell them like that; the mother did not say "I'll tell your father, so that you can go through bora." It was not like that at all. But this thing (sorcery), they are told to be aware of it, it is still strong.⁷³

The attribution of blame for deaths to the work of sorcerers had featured prominently at the cremations of the mummified corpse which had been the culmination of the complex of mortuary ceremonies before the Mission had stopped them. Accusations of sorcery together with the raising of past grievances would lead to formalized conflict and fighting between opposing groups which often ended in serious injury and death.⁷⁴ Virtually all deaths in contemporary Aurukun continued to be attributed to human agency, either directly through physical violence or indirectly through the malevolent magical means of sorcery.⁷⁵ The words of a dying person, their gestures, any twitches of their eyelids, the final position of their limbs in death, all were closely watched for signs by which the identity of the sorcerer could be divined. Even where the immediate cause of death was recognized as physical trauma, sorcery was often implicated:

A woman died after being violently assaulted by her husband in a jealous rage provoked by her alleged infidelity. His kin did not dispute that the attack had caused her death. The question raised by them however was what had led to his homicidal rage. He was a quiet, unassuming man (*thaa' mochan*) they said; clearly, he had been ensorcelled as a means of exacting retribution against his wife and her kin.

The allegations served here to unite the husband's kin and those of his wife against a common external enemy, the alleged sorcerer and his kin, who were from one of the politically and socially marginal clans from the Knox River area south of Aurukun. In the ten years I lived in the Aurukun region, virtually all sorcery accusations were made against men from this region, which significantly was environmentally relatively marginal and was situated between two large, resource-rich river systems. The few accusations that were not directed against men from this region were against equally marginal men from elsewhere.

72. Wik did not simply believe in such practices. I recorded parties of men setting out to seek the sorcerer's parcel containing the blood of an ensorcelled kinsman, thus manifesting the belief.

73. Translation of *Wik Mungkan*, Tape DM-29.

74. See Sutton (1978:149). Among Wik of the coastal floodplains at least, cremation grounds were always associated with nearby fighting grounds at which these almost ritualized 'payback' confrontations took place (see also Sutton, Martin et al 1990).

75. McKnight (1982:497) states that not all deaths were attributed to sorcery, and that Wik recognized deaths could be accidental or from 'natural causes' such as age. This does not accord with what I was told and observed. Even when old and frail people died, one could not assume that sorcery would not be mooted as a cause. The determining factor was rather the social and political importance of the individual and of their patrikin. The deaths of socially peripheral aged people from politically marginal clans were less likely to result in at least public accusations of sorcery than those of equally aged people from powerful clans.

All Wik actively and suspiciously monitored events for signs that a sorcerer might have been at work. Not only did they closely observe a dying or ill person for signs by which the work and identity of a sorcerer could be established, but they also scrutinised Wik from other groups for evidence of untoward behaviour which could point to their being a sorcerer. Such signs were said to include a preference to travel or camp out in the bush on their own. One Knox River man was accused of being a sorcerer because when he took part in an expedition to seek the blood of an ensorcelled Cape Keerweer man, he would not take his shirt off in the mangroves as had all the other men. While he said there were too many mosquitoes, all agreed that this was only an excuse, and that he must have had other reasons. Wik accusations of sorcery therefore were more than a mechanism for assigning causality to the otherwise inexplicable. They were a means by which causality was both externalized and personalized, by which social conformity was maintained, and by which relations between dominant and marginal individuals and groups were sustained and reproduced.

'Topside' and 'bottomside'

While bureaucratic institutions continued to attempt to deal with Wik living in Aurukun as a "community", Wik themselves constantly stressed differentiation within Aurukun, and asserted their ties to various regional and other social and political groupings. For instance, they analysed major fights in terms of "mobs" - essentially cognatic kin groupings⁷⁶ - and, as an overarching dichotomy, in terms of "topside" people (*ngep kaaw*) versus "bottomside" ones (*ngep kuuw*). The former were essentially those whose clan territories of origin lay in the inland sclerophyll forest country between the Archer and Holroyd Rivers, and the latter were from the coastal floodplain region between the Archer/Love River complex and the Kendall River.⁷⁷ This duality had pervaded not only differences in principles of ritual and social and political organization between coastal and inland groups, but also provided a basic political fault line across which conflicts regularly erupted in contemporary Aurukun as they had in the past.⁷⁸ As will be discussed below, the residential locations of Wik in the Mission village had essentially reflected their territories of origin, with topside and bottomside people living on the eastern and western sides of the village respectively. With the new housing programs however, this was no longer the case. Additionally, the high degree of regional endogamy that had originally prevailed was increasingly attenuated, and many younger Wik were contracting relationships across this social divide.

Nonetheless, Wik continued to use 'topside' and 'bottomside' both to denote geographically based regional social and political collectivities on the one hand and areas of the village on the other, despite the fact that they were increasingly non-

76. In Chapter 6 I argue that these formed the basic social, economic and political units within Wik society.

77. See detailed discussion in Chapter 6.

78. As for instance in the ritual pitched battles following cremations - see Sutton (1978:57).

coterminous. This can be demonstrated by considering the genealogical links of the protagonists in the major fight around which this thesis is organized.

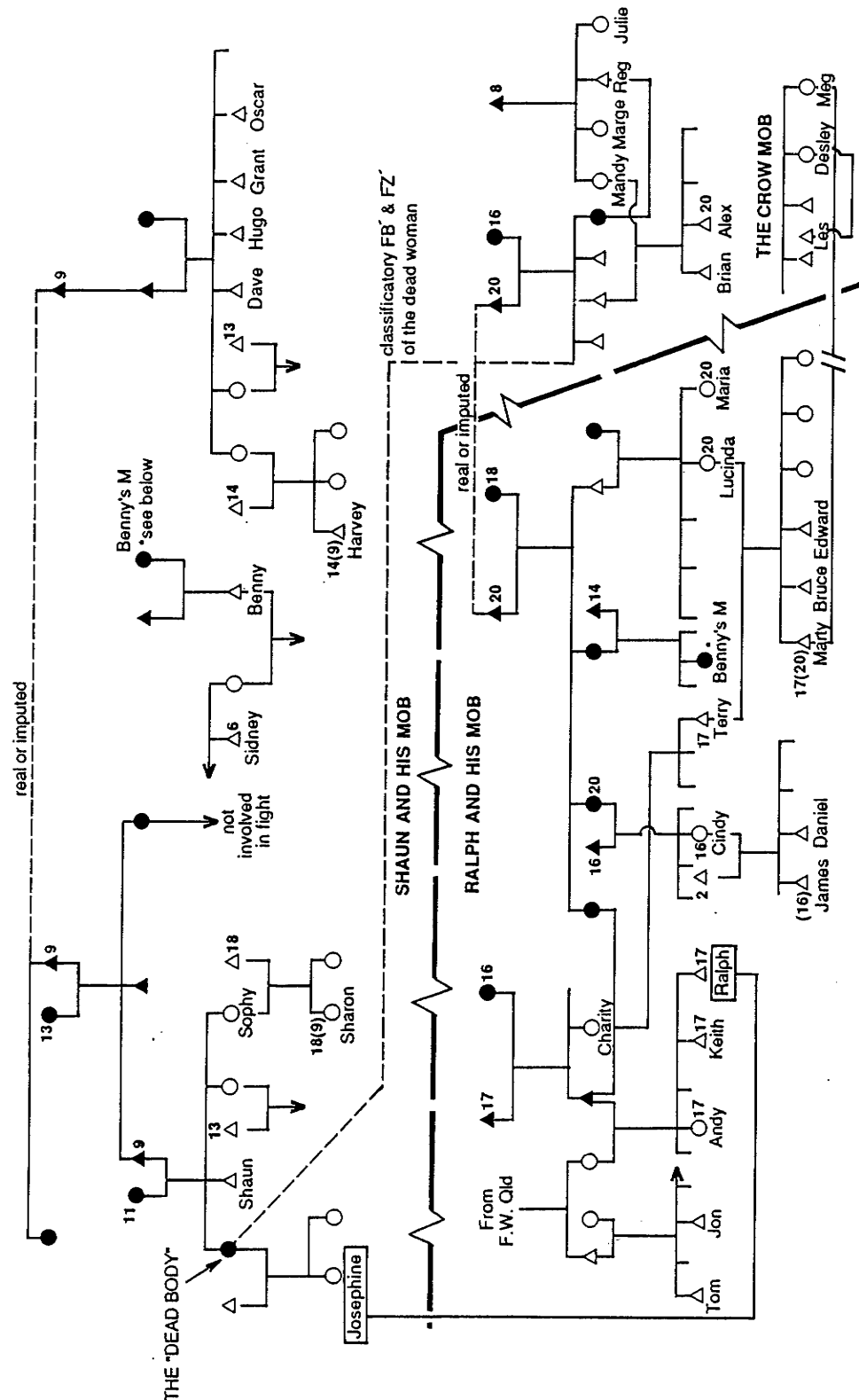


Figure 4.1 Kin links of protagonists in major fight

The nominal patriclan affiliation of each person is shown; the bracketed figures show (where applicable) maternal clan affiliations. Ralph and his mob were topside people, from the headwaters of the Knox River. His girlfriend Josephine was also

nominally topside (*Wik Iiyany*) through her father, but her deceased mother was from the southern Cape Keerweer region, and it was her maternal bottomside kin who mobilized to revenge the insult offered by Ralph when he called Josephine "mother fucker".

A closer examination of the kin links demonstrates that it was not so much the topside/bottomside dichotomy which formed the dividing line between the protagonists, but one based on links of kinship and political alliance which had their origins in riverine and sub-regional groupings. Furthermore, there were crosscutting links of marriage which led to internal schisms between quite close kin; this was demonstrated particularly clearly in the case of those associated with clan 20, whose links to both coastal people and other clans in the Knox region underlay their ambiguous position.⁷⁹

From Law to outlaw: Conflict and social control

I have sought to demonstrate thus far that for the Wik the expression of anger and aggression resulted from deeply sedimented views and practices which related to such matters as the high stress placed on individual autonomy, on relations between and appropriate behaviours for the genders, on how individuals were seen to be related to wider social groupings, and on how individuals and collectivities acted upon the world in order to achieve their ends or redress perceived wrongs done them. Competition and conflict were seen by Wik as intrinsic to the human condition, reflected in ritual and mythology as they were in mundane practices.⁸⁰ The use of violence was not perceived as a last resort for the advancement of interests or the resolution of conflicting ones; on the contrary, all conflict was seen as containing the potential for violence, which was just as much an inherent part of social life as was conflict itself.⁸¹ Yet, while aggression and violence may have had deep resonances with autogenous Wik cultural forms, there had been fundamental changes to the objective circumstances of Wik life, initially through the Mission, but most dramatically since the imposition of Local Government in 1978.

79. Clans 8, 9 and 13 were originally from nearby or contiguous estates in the southern Cape Keerweer region. People from clan 20 were coastal *Wik Mungkan* speakers from the southern side of the Knox River, but they had major ritual, political and marriage links with those the other Knox clans from further inland (16, 17, and 18). Clan 14 were also *Wik Mungkan* speakers, but archetypal topside people, whose estate was contiguous with those of both 13 and 17 (Sutton, Martin et al 1990).

80. For instance, the foundation myth of the *Apalach* ritual cult from the Cape Keerweer region includes a segment involving a fight over stingray meat between the two *Pungk-Apalacha* brothers at *Okanych-konangam*, south of the Kendall River. One brother went south, leaving *Wanam* ritual, the other returned north creating further *Apalach* (Sutton 1978:322; Sutton, Martin et al 1990, Site 466)

81. Martin (1988a:16). Taylor (1984:263) writes equivalently of the Aboriginal people of Pompuaraaw (Edward River).

Sedentarization and conflict

The process of sedentarization - that is, of the attempt to physically and psychosocially encapsulate Wik within the bounds of the township - which had been instituted by the missionaries from the turn of the century gathered ever increasing momentum after 1978, when Local Government was imposed. Under the Mission regime, residence patterns had in large part reflected a conjoining of indigenous social and political principles on the one hand and power differentials created by the Mission itself on the other. Thus, Wik from the major riverine grouping of the Kendall and those from further south towards the Holroyd River for instance, lived in the southern end of the village, those from the inland sclerophyll country lived on the eastern, 'topside' of the village, and the politically dominant Archer River people lived close to the Mission area itself.⁸² This pattern was still clearly evident in the mid 1970s. The large scale housing programs instituted in the 1980s and 1990s however did not simply dramatically increase the number of houses in Aurukun, but disrupted the relative homology between indigenous principles of spatial organization and settlement layout.⁸³ Members of the cognatic kin clusters which continued to form the basic social, political and economic units within the broad regional groupings,⁸⁴ were dispersed therefore throughout the township. When arguments and conflicts erupted, kin who were recruited to the opposing sides could come from throughout the village, and rather than being relatively contained conflicts very often flared up from a number of nodes.

Furthermore, Wik psychosocial, economic and political forms and processes had been established essentially in the context of relatively small, dispersed and fluid groups of closely linked kin. While settlement life offered excitement and stimulation, in part because of the higher population, Wik often complained that there were just too many people there living close together. Hiatt similarly records that Maningrida Aboriginal men complained of too many people living there.⁸⁵ Within small groups, the number of dyadic relationships for a given individual was bounded, and lines of legitimate authority and mutual obligations and responsibilities comparatively clearly demarcated. This was not the case in Aurukun itself. With some nine hundred Wik living there, what McKnight has termed the "relational density" was orders of magnitude higher.⁸⁶ McKnight argues that for the kin-based society of the Aboriginal residents of Mornington Island, conflict and violence has been greatly exacerbated by their move from small, dispersed groups to the "supercamp" of the settlement. Sutton equivalently notes that for Cape Keerweer Wik, tension and conflict on Peret outstation rose significantly as group size increased

82. See von Sturmer (1973b:5-6) and Martin (1984:23, 1988a:6).

83. This was not simply a matter of such new arrangements being foisted on Wik against their wishes. The locations of new houses were determined by the all Wik Shire Council (after advice from White staff) and they were actively sought after, with their allocation subject to considerable politicking. This is discussed in Chapter 5.

84. See Chapter 6.

85. Hiatt (1962:281)

86. McKnight (1986:157-60); see also Sutton (1978:105).

over about fifty people.⁸⁷ My own observations bear this out, although for other, less solidary groups than the Cape Keerweer people, the critical size of a group before conflict threatened its viability was much lower. Accounts by older Wik indicated that in the extended wet season camps of the past, where mobility was restricted and numbers often comparatively high, tensions arose as the result of the relatively close living conditions, and as soon as conditions permitted people would disperse. In contemporary times, on both outstations and in the township the level and scale of disputation was directly related *inter alia* to the number of Wik resident there; when large numbers of people moved out to live on outstations, conflict diminished significantly in Aurukun itself, but as noted above could then be transferred to the outstation if its population was large enough.

Before sedentarization, one of the key factors underlying the constant fission of Wik residential and other groupings and the consequent movement of individuals and groups across the landscape, had been the response to conflict and violence.⁸⁸ In contemporary times, many Wik still used the option of leaving town for varying periods after major fights; camping out, moving to an outstation, or (especially for young men) travelling to other Aboriginal townships in the region where they had kin, such as Coen, Napranum, Pormpuraaw or Kowanyama. Within the Aurukun township itself, a principal factor underlying the quite remarkable fluidity of household compositions was Wik shifting residence after disputations. Between February and June 1986, for instance, over one third of the total population of Aurukun had changed their place of residence; just under half of the men aged between 15 and 24 had shifted. A significant proportion of those moving had done so as a response to disputes within the household.⁸⁹

The effectiveness of this mechanism of resolving conflict by fission however was severely compromised in the contemporary Aurukun township, for two crucial reasons. Firstly, as discussed above, one's protagonists in a fight were most likely to be from households which were dispersed throughout the township, which was small in area, with housing set out close together in a bizarre version of suburban Australia.⁹⁰ As well, the distinction between restricted and relatively unrestricted places which had been vigilantly monitored on traditional lands had little legitimate basis in the township.⁹¹ With almost all of life lived under intense public scrutiny, there was simply nowhere to avoid the hostile watchfulness of one's opponents, other than to leave town.

87. Sutton (1978:104-5).

88. Martin (1988a:12,17); Sutton (1978:91)

89. Source: D.F. Martin, Aurukun censuses February and June 1986. There is more detailed discussion and statistical information on this subject in Chapter 6.

90. This is further discussed in Chapter 5; see also Martin (1988a:17; 1990).

91. Sutton (1978:72) writes of Cape Keerweer Wik clearly maintaining the distinction between public and private places on traditional lands, with the latter in the overwhelming majority. While space within the Aurukun township was unceasingly contested (see Chapter 5), the chaotic flux of social life constantly eroded people's ability to establish legitimate control of private space.

From *doxa* to dissent

Secondly, and perhaps most importantly, virtually all Wik born after the 1950s (and indeed the majority of the living older generations born before that) had been primarily raised within Aurukun itself rather than out bush. For older Wik, most especially those of the generations born before 1940 who had been raised or had lived for extended periods out there, life in the contemporary township was interpreted through views and perspectives which had been established in that world. For the following generations on the other hand, it was in the social flux of township life that basic dispositions were inculcated and sedimented, and it was through these "cognitive and motivating structures" that social reality was interpreted.⁹²

Concomitantly with the processes of physical and social encapsulation, were those of the progressive encroachment of the forms and institutions of the wider state into the Wik domain. This had initially taken place through the missionary endeavours of evangelization, rudimentary formal education, and (for the men at least) work on cattle stations and in the Torres Straits. More recently there had been the introduction of the cash economy, consumer goods, education,⁹³ health delivery, child and social welfare programs, and so forth. The Queensland State police and judicial system, their presence legitimated by the endemic conflict and violence, were increasingly supplanting the seemingly ineffectual indigenous mechanisms of social control. Political, governance, and service delivery bodies had been imposed, whose structures were derived from and linked to those of the dominant society, resulting in ever more complex administrative structures with their self-fulfilling requirement for progressively larger numbers of White staff to run them. From the 1980s, the dramatic improvements in communications - roads into Aurukun, regular air services, radio, telephones, and satellite television - meant that travel to other centres, in particular Cairns, was commonplace for Wik, and that they were exposed at all levels to the symbolic forms and the practices of the dominant outside society.

Many of these were rejected by Wik, or indeed were assimilated to their way of life as I have argued was the case with cash;⁹⁴ nonetheless they established the objective conditions within which Wik social forms were created and reproduced, and which produced individuals' dispositions, views, and motivations. It was not simply that the authority of the older generations - in particular that of the 'Elders' - was ignored by younger people, although this was how older Wik themselves often represented it. "Too much them young fella goin' their own way, they can't listen," I was told on more than one occasion. Rather, those Wik structurally in authority no longer controlled either the objectively necessary conditions of material existence, or

92. Bourdieu (1977a:78). Of course, these differing dispositions were intimately related as "structural variants" of each other (*op.cit*:86), through the processes of inculcation and appropriation of values by the older generations in younger ones, and through their recursive involvement in the production and reproduction of Wik social forms.

93. The State Education Department took over the Aurukun school from the church in the early 1970s. However, it has in my view been singularly unsuccessful in resolving the dilemma which von Sturmer identified nearly twenty years ago: whether to equip Wik with the skills necessary to enable them to deal with the complexities of their articulation with the wider world from within Aurukun, or to reformulate Wik children's worldviews to comply with those of the dominant society (von Sturmer 1973b).

the production of the systems of symbols and meaning which informed social life. Wik had become as much consumers of symbolic forms as producers of them.⁹⁵ An important consequence was the increasing individuation of Wik; with contemporary personal identity and status (particularly for males) defined in part through the appropriation of these externally generated symbols, autonomy and individuality could be asserted over their ideologically defined concomitant, relatedness.

The original social formation had been characterized by what Bourdieu refers to as *doxa*; the established symbolic and political order had not been perceived as arbitrary, one possible order among many, but as a self-evident and natural one which went unquestioned.⁹⁶ For the younger generations of Wik growing up in contemporary Aurukun however, unwitting reproduction of the original arbitrary, naturalized order had been replaced by conscious non-compliance with and dissent from it - and indeed from that which the wider state was seeking to institute.

"Them kid runnin' wild"

Concomitantly with the progressively increasing exposure to the institutions and values of the dominant outside society, and intimately associated with it, were major demographic changes within Aurukun. The population of Aurukun had increased significantly over the years. In 1949 for instance the official population estimate for the Aurukun reserve was 650, but the actual resident population in the mission itself was only some 250, and in 1965 it was 603.⁹⁷ By 1988, the population of Aboriginal people in Aurukun had risen to be 876.⁹⁸ An analysis of birth statistics indicates that there were significant increases in the birthrate in Aurukun in 1967, just after MacKenzie left and a less authoritarian mission regime was instituted, and what appeared to be another rise beginning a year or so after the opening of the beer canteen in late 1985. Women were not only having children in greater numbers, but at younger ages.⁹⁹ In 1988, those under 20 years of age comprised just over 49 percent of the Aurukun Aboriginal population, compared with some 31 percent for the same age group in the Australian population as a whole.¹⁰⁰ Wik themselves explicitly talked at times of the problems of there being just too many children. Diane Smith recorded similar perceptions for *Kugu Nganychara* Wik women with whom she worked south of the Kendall River;

94. See Chapter 3.

95. See discussion in Chapter 5. Of course, this dilemma was not unique to the Wik; the question of what constitutes an 'Australian identity' in what is arguably an essentially derivative society is the subject of much debate.

96. Bourdieu (1977a:166)

97. Long (1970:144-5), quoted by Sutton (1978:101)

98. D.F. Martin, census 1988. The population fluctuated considerably with the movement of Aboriginal people to and from other settlements in the region.

99. Sources: Aurukun Mission personal card index and D.F. Martin, censuses 1986-88. See also graph in Appendix 2.

100. Sources: D.F. Martin, census 1988 and Australian Bureau of Statistics. The relatively higher proportion of young people is a feature of the Aboriginal population as a whole (Smyth 1989:19-20).

Thus, it is explained that there are "too many babies coming up" not only because there has been a perceived loss of personal control over certain biological and social dimensions, but also because the involvement and influence of the spiritual world and the force of fertility in nature in general are seen to have become unmanageable by individuals at certain levels.¹⁰¹

Mobility of people, including children, and consequent fluid domestic and residence group composition, continued to be a feature of Wik social process in the contemporary situation as it had been in the past.¹⁰² However, the increasingly fractured nature of domestic life left many children with no clearly defined primary caregivers or even household. With so many of the adults who had nominal obligations to provide food and care for them involved in gambling, drinking, and fighting or dealing with their consequences, all of which entailed considerable material and social resources (including time), many children suffered real physical deprivation. The consequences of adult preoccupation with such practices were not only physical. Life for many younger Wik was one of largely self-directed activity, constantly moving between kin in various households seeking food and money, looking for excitement and stimulation, carving niches for themselves within the often chaotic flux of social life in the township.¹⁰³ Much of their activity - particularly for boys once they had reached six or seven years of age - took place in small bands, typically of close kin (such as actual and classificatory siblings) or region-of-origin based. Many Wik children no longer had the consistent involvement in interaction with a range of adult nurturers, which Smith saw as crucial to the system of reciprocal rights and responsibilities underlying an individual's social identity.¹⁰⁴ Instead, it was primarily within this world of younger Wik that sets of meanings attributed to practices and relationships gained their primary focus. This world could be accurately portrayed as a 'sub-culture', for while it necessarily derived from and was linked to those of older generations, its relationship to them mirrored in a sense that of the Wik world as a whole with the dominant outside society.

For many Wik boys in particular, there had been a radical sundering of the roles of adult males - kin such as fathers and maternal uncles, and those (such as cousins) who took responsibility for them through initiations - in the direct and conscious inculcation of an appropriate and socially validated male ethos.¹⁰⁵ Furthermore, for these young men, their paths to autonomy and status now no longer depended upon

101. D. von Sturmer [Smith] (1980a:402)

102. The matter of fluidity underlying Wik social process, including residence group composition, is discussed in detail in Chapter 6.

103. This has been discussed in Chapter 1.

104. D. von Sturmer [Smith] (1980a:i; *passim*)

105. Mothers had been sent as a matter of hospital policy to the Cairns Base Hospital for births since the mid 1970s, and almost all babies' surnames were registered there under those of their mothers when their parents were not legally married, even when the father was socially recognized in Aurukun. Thus by the early 1970s amongst younger Wik there was a sundering of the oblique references to their patritotems carried in their names; most Wik under 20 years of age whom I questioned knew very few if any of their totems. The fact that virtually all children were being born in Cairns also meant that the various rituals incorporating the infant into the matrix of maternal and paternal kin who could be expected to be involved in their care and nurturance no longer took place (see also Diane von Sturmer [Smith] 1980a). For instance, the

the establishment of their own domestic units when they were considered to have the necessary maturity and responsibility. Many Wik youths had liaisons or established relationships with girls when they were still in their early or mid teens, and it was common for men to have a series of relationships in which they fathered children, but took little responsibility for their physical care or rearing. There was a continuing process of the marginalization of men in the rearing of their own children, with the "identity and role of men as genitors and paters becoming increasingly disconnected."¹⁰⁶ The dissociation of men in particular from the domestic units within which their children lived, can be seen clearly in Table 4.2. Of children aged between 5 and 9 at the time of the survey for example, 47 percent were not living in the same household as their genitor. Almost one third of children in this age group lived in households which included neither genitor nor mother.

Table 4.2 Children not living with genitor or mother

Age	Percent	not in household of	parent	Sample size
0-4	31%	"	genitor	36/115 ^a
"	9%	"	mother	10/115 ^b
5-9	47%	"	genitor	48/103 ^c
"	15%	"	mother	15/103 ^d

Source: D.F. Martin, census figures October 1987

- a Of these: 15 were in households including both M and MM
13 were with M but not MM
3 were with MM only
1 was with FM
4 were with other kin
- b Of these: 0 were in households including both F and FM
0 were with F but not FM
3 were with MM only
1 was with FM
6 were with other kin
- c Of these: 13 were in households including both M and MM
22 were with M but not MM
9 were with MM only
2 were with FM
2 were with other kin
- d Of these: 0 were in households including both F and FM
2 were with F but not FM
9 were with MM only
2 were with FM
2 were with other kin

Of course, this table is based on a census at a particular moment in time, and thus freezes and subjects to analytic discussion what was fluid and temporal social process. However, it can not even be assumed that those children who were in their mother's or father's households were being provided for there - from my observations, many were not. As can be seen from these census figures (see footnotes

practice of bestowing the *kuutan* or 'navel' name by the midwife was no longer possible, and this ritually and socially important relationship was not therefore available to younger Wik.

106 to 106), significant numbers of children lived in households with their maternal grandmothers. As parents became younger, and as men withdrew from the economic support and other responsibilities for the rearing of their children, grandmothers played ever more crucial roles in maintaining household viability and in the nurturance of their grandchildren. Wik youths therefore no longer became men through a socially validated process where power was represented as being mediated through mature men, where social identity was established progressively through childhood by means of the processes of care and nurturance, and where the establishment of an independent domestic unit had a fundamental place in the development of autonomy and status. Rather, they grew to maturity in a world where most older men essentially played little direct part in rearing them, and where there was no formal, socially legitimated means by which they were removed from the indulged world of women.¹⁰⁷

In such circumstances, they created their own worlds of meaning and significant practices, such as fighting, drinking, and damage to staff or 'community' property. Bands of young boys and adolescent youths repeatedly broke into the school, the store, Council chambers, maintenance workshops, and staff houses. Over the Christmas period in 1986 for example, the Aurukun Community Incorporated store was broken into on 28 occasions, and its offices on six.¹⁰⁸ The houses of White staff were frequent targets. Not only were food and alcohol often taken, but the houses were regularly ransacked, and on at least one occasion smeared with excrement. The store, workshops, and virtually every staff house was surrounded with high fences, and many had guard dogs. On numerous occasions, young men stole motor bikes, cars or even large Shire Council trucks and went on wild high-speed drives through the village streets, with little apparent regard for potential damage to themselves or to others. It became an almost regular occurrence that in the course of disputes, young men carrying loaded firearms would run through the village firing them into the air, scattering everyone and causing a preternatural quiet to descend in place of the normal clamour.

Many Wik adults were upset by these events; one older woman for instance said to me, "They think it's fun, but easy they have accident." While women however worried, sometimes wept, and anxiously watched the vehicles tearing through the township, hordes of children would pour on to the streets, cheering and whistling as the drivers gunned the engines, screeched around corners and blew the horns. Many of the older men disparaged such practices and the chronic drunken brawling of the young ones. "Ah! They fuck-all, they just like bloody women!" remarked one old man to me, watching teenage drunks fist-fighting outside his home. Yet, as I have argued, conflict was inherent in Wik social life at all levels, and was involved in the practices of the older as much as of the younger generations. What was objected to,

106. D. von Sturmer [Smith] (1980a:366)

107. I have argued elsewhere (Martin 1988b) that being sent to corrective institutions for many young Wik men marked a contemporary transition from youth to manhood, structurally serving a similar function in this regard to initiations. Significantly of course, whereas the latter was under the control of Wik men, the former was controlled by the judicial apparatus of the wider state.

108. Dale (1992:229)

and disparaged, by the mature men was more the seemingly haphazard, uncontrolled and mostly drunken nature of the strife, rather than fighting itself.¹⁰⁹

It was significant that most (although certainly not all) of the damage caused by these young men was to property of the school, of White staff, or of the so-called 'community' organizations, the Shire Council and the Aurukun Community Incorporated.¹¹⁰ Other collective property, such as the equipment of the C.D.E.P. fishing team which involved Wik from particular family groups and had considerable support from them, was not subject to damage. As such, what the media represented as vandalism and social breakdown could be construed as political action, attacks on the material symbols of the institutions of the dominant society. The destruction of such symbols, it could be argued, along with the drinking, the fighting, and the massive rejection of imposed institutions such as the education system by younger Wik, were not individual but collective actions, amounting to a denial of the hegemonic enterprise of the dominant society.¹¹¹ However, such an argument would be only a partial truth, for it would ignore crucial sets of meanings attributed to such practices by young Wik men. In particular, the almost inevitable result of involvement in them was court and, for repeated offences, despatch to a correctional institution, and this was itself a reason frequently advanced by young men for undertaking the actions. For instance, one particular youth, threatened by a magistrate that one more offence would lead to his being sent out to an institution, ensured that he would be by breaking into the store that very night. Despite the excitement and stimulation of the fighting, the drinking, defeating the electronic alarm system in the store yet again and so on, many young Wik men were hugely disenchanted with life in Aurukun, and being sent out to gaol or some other correctional facility got them away from it for a while at least.

Endemic disputation

As has been discussed previously, Wik asserted that disputation and violence were 'from before', part of their law and customs. Certainly, unelicited accounts to me of the period out bush in the 1920s and 1930s by older Wik men almost always centred upon such matters as spear fights, homicides and revenge expeditions. In the Mission period, the ultimate power under Queensland legislation had resided with the Superintendent, who had the formal delegated powers of the Director of the Department of Native Affairs and its successors.¹¹² MacKenzie, the missionary in Aurukun for some forty years until 1966, directed particular attention to violence and fighting, and those involved were punished in minor cases through the local Aboriginal court he had established or by removal to Palm Island for major ones, including murder. The ever-present possibility of violence in the village was

109. However, as can be seen from Figure 4.3 on page 180, activities such as drunkenness and fighting which came to the attention of the Queensland justice system were not the sole prerogative of young men.

110. Brady (1987:222-4) reports a similar phenomenon at Yalata, South Australia.

111. Hutchings (1988:9) has advanced comparable arguments for the Aboriginal youth of Port Augusta, South Australia, whose property destruction was essentially confined to that associated with Whites.

essentially controlled by MacKenzie through his willingness to use physical force himself, by his effective co-opting of Aboriginal councillors who saw their own interests and those of their families being served by their status and by the reduced levels of violence, and very importantly by the sheer psychological force of the man which allowed him to achieve what brute force could not have, given the few staff and the remoteness of Aurukun.¹¹³ Wik willingly it appears traded the loss of a degree of personal autonomy for the reduction in violence which Mission life then entailed compared with that out bush. Older Wik frequently alluded to this in talking of the Mission era; "MacKenzie was a tough man, but he stopped the fighting."¹¹⁴

In the mid-1970s, when I first lived in Aurukun, conflict and fights in the village were far from infrequent. As well as the inevitable disputes between spouses or within households, there was considerable tension between certain of the major regional groupings, reflecting in no small part the attempts by the original Mission elite established in the MacKenzie regime to maintain hegemony in the new circumstances. This underlying tension erupted into major brawls involving dozens of people on many occasions. There can be no doubt that this conflict was a significant factor in the move by the then politically marginal southern Wik groups to establish outstations from the late 1960s and early 1970s, paradoxically reversing one rationale for the move in to the Mission by the generations before.

While conflict and indeed violence were features of Aurukun during this period, its character was more sporadic than chronic. Furthermore, there was still no real road access at this time, and alcohol was only intermittently smuggled in, by plane or boat. Yet, the situation even then was of sufficient concern to Wik that they sought in 1976 to have State police stationed in Aurukun. The Uniting Church's Board of Ecumenical Missions and Relations (BOEMAR) responded by employing a security consultant there for a period. The supposed deterioration of 'law and order' and in particular "public drunkenness and anti-social behaviour" in Aurukun during this period was one of the primary reasons advanced by the Queensland government for its attempt to directly take it over in March 1978.¹¹⁵ In August 1978, following further complaints by Government Ministers who had visited Aurukun about the 'breakdown in law and order', the Aurukun Council was sacked by Russell Hinze the Minister for Local Government, an administrator appointed, and State police ordered there.¹¹⁶ Aurukun people had finally got the police presence they had been asking for - but arguably more to ensure State government control of political agitation by both Wik and supportive White staff against the imposition of Local Government, than to assist with the problems of internal conflict.

The years following 1978 were marked by a continuing deterioration in the apparent ability of Wik themselves to deal with the questions of both alcohol and large scale social conflict. After their heyday in the late 1970s, outstation populations declined significantly as core people from certain groups died, or in other cases

112. Long (1970:148); Rowley (1970b:108)

113. Bos (1974:1) and Buckley (1980:15) make similar observations.

114. Martin (1988a:5)

115. Discussed in the Introduction to this thesis. See also Fitzgerald (1984) and Tatz (1979:68).

established alternative political bases within the township. Daily life in Aurukun itself, despite (or perhaps because of) endemic conflict, provided excitement and stimulation, particularly for young Wik, which outstations could not offer. There were regular episodes of binge drinking of imported 'sly grog' prior to and leading up to 1985, but the introduction in December of that year of the legal sale of alcohol within Aurukun itself, through a Council-run beer canteen, had a profound effect on social life, including on levels of conflict and violence. Arrest rates, admittedly crude measures of this, increased significantly after the canteen had been opened, as shown by Table 4.3 below.¹¹⁷

Table 4.3 Arrests in Aurukun, 1985 - 1988

	1985	1986	1987	1988
Drunkenness	approx. 50	429	514	522
Criminal/ street offences	0	316	275	384
Total arrests	approx. 50	745	789	906

Source: Dale (1992:229), from Aurukun Police Records

Not only did conflict increase dramatically within domestic units and households, with for instance escalating levels of violence by men against women including their partners, but also between the wider regionally based and other groupings. With the canteen open initially four nights a week, and with an additional \$10,000 or so per week still being spent on 'sly grog',¹¹⁸ arguments, assaults, fights between individuals and kin groups, and large-scale brawls became almost daily events, punctuated by periods of uneasy calm on those weekends when there was no alcohol available. In the course of major drunken fights and the numerous smaller melees, houses were "blasted from within"¹¹⁹ with windows smashed, holes punched in doors and fibro walls, and household equipment wrecked. Severe injuries were frequent; the Aurukun Hospital Matron reported to the Shire Council meeting in October 1987 that over the previous few months, 87 percent of out of hours calls had involved alcohol related injuries such as bashings, fractures, and cuts.¹²⁰ Violent deaths became an all-too-common occurrence.

I have noted in an earlier section that the presence of a public audience was fundamental to Wik disputation, and specific areas in the village were used as arenas for major fights. Significantly, these were almost always in interstitial open areas between the major sociogeographic divisions of the town, reproducing in the contemporary situation the fighting grounds which had been associated with each

116. Tatz (*op.cit*:77).

117. The introduction of the canteen will be returned to in detail shortly (see page 190).

118. See Chapter 3.

119. Von Sturmer (1982), writing of Oenpelli in western Arnhem land.

120. Record of Aurukun Shire Council monthly meeting, October 13, 1987 (Field Book 16:31-3).

cremation centre in the past, and which typically had been situated on the borders of clan estates. Figure 4.2 below shows the major fighting grounds in the village between 1985 and 1987.

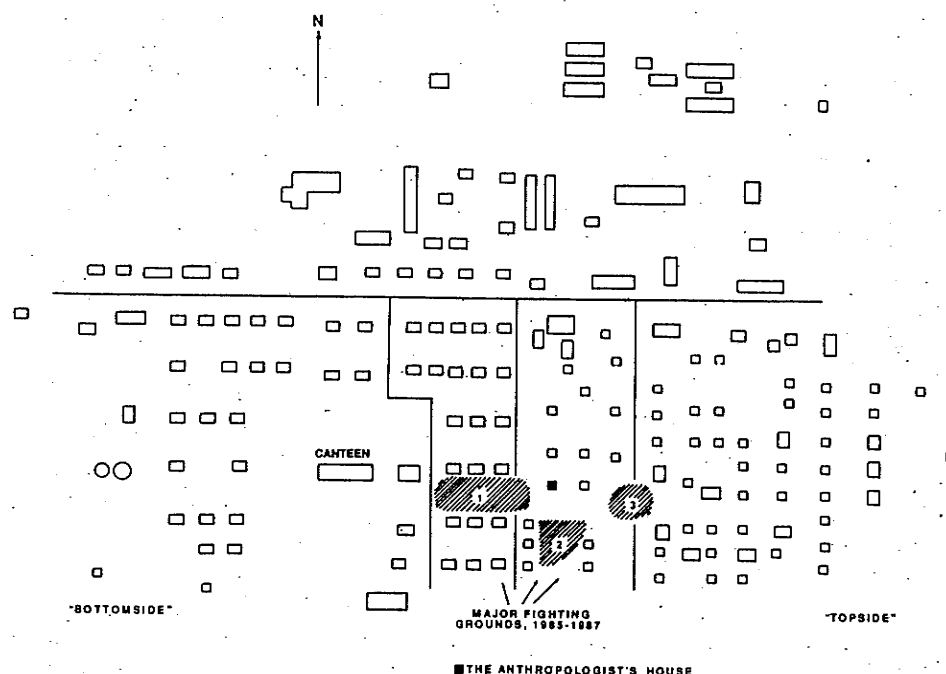


Figure 4.2 Major fighting grounds, Aurukun village, 1985-1987

As can be seen from this figure, one major disputing area lay immediately outside the small house where I and my Wik family lived. During 1986 in particular, huge brawls involving two hundred Wik or more would regularly take place here. Three or four nights of most weeks, sleep would be impossible until the early hours of the morning because of the sounds of smashing windows, the blows and grunts of the protagonists, the cries of encouragement, and the abuse and swearing by those fighting and their supporters. Centre stage was invariably occupied by young men, fighting in a swirling core which could involve either successive protagonists slugging it out two by two surrounded by a ring of onlookers or, if this relatively regulated pattern broke down, in a furious melee in which attacks were the more random and therefore dangerous. Women would on occasion dart into this core of fighting men, to try to remove a brother or son, or more rarely to assault their kinsmen's opponents with fighting sticks or throw sand at them in an attempt to blind them. More often however, they would be on the periphery of the men's fight, taunting and goading their male opponents, rage dancing (*thuunhth-thuunhthan*), and arguing or fighting with their female opponents, hairpulling, kicking, biting and wrestling.

Such major conflicts would have a life history of their own, erupting from a particular incident and drawing in Wik recruited through kin links to each of the protagonists, so that what had begun as an individual dispute would frequently become collective feuding between kindreds, retribution and counter-retribution

carried on over weeks, months, or even years.¹²¹ In some cases, such extended feuds would be overtaken by others, with the fissioning and coalescing of conflicting groups over time paralleling that of the residence and the other labile groupings which characterized Wik social forms.¹²² In other instances, conflicts took place across social fault lines which appeared to be almost permanent fixtures of the contemporary situation, such as that between certain inland and coastal groups, and which had existed from at least the earlier part of the century. For example, I was given an account of a spear fight at **Yu'angk** near Cape Keerweer which involved the grandparental generation of groups still feuding in the late 1980s.

The ability of Wik themselves to restrict the extent and consequences of these large-scale conflicts was severely limited. This was not only because of the role of alcohol in them, although (as I shall argue shortly) it and violence had become inextricably intertwined. In part, indigenous control mechanisms had been compromised by the factors to which I have previously alluded - the close confines of life in the township and the residence patterns instituted in it, and more broadly the rupturing of the original naturalized political order and its replacement by one increasingly subject to dissent and rejection. Endemic conflict, both the fighting involving large groupings of protagonists and the smaller-scale violent assaults and clashes, had become itself taken for granted and assimilated to the natural order of things.

Furthermore, more specific indigenous control mechanisms had been compromised. The gradations in the expression of grievances, from the public 'growl' where a person would air their complaints to the world at large,¹²³ to the calculated use (or lack of use) of respect language and personal names or references in arguing with opponents, to the use of carefully chosen insults or oblique references to extraneous matters to provoke anger without necessarily escalating the dispute to violent retaliation - seemed in very many instances in the contemporary situation to have been collapsed. While there had always been the potential for disputation to lead to violence, it appeared in contemporary Aurukun that it was an almost inevitable outcome. Furthermore, the capacity of non-protagonist kin to defuse or limit the extent of fighting was increasingly compromised, particularly in the major brawls. Such people were termed 'blockers' by Wik. Typically, they had links to both sides of a dispute which enabled them to counsel restraint, to physically interpose themselves between opponents, to remove dangerous weapons, and ultimately to extradite protagonists to a distance where physical violence and potential serious injury could be replaced by shouted verbal abuse and defiance, and ultimately disengagement.¹²⁴ With so many people from different kin groupings being involved

121. This appears to be similar to contemporary Tiwi fighting, which Robinson describes as having the appearance of "chronic, extended family conflict" (1988:30).

122. This is discussed at length in Chapter 6.

123. See for example von Sturmer (1981:16) of Aurukun Wik and Taylor (1984:286) of Pormpuraaw people, and Brady and Palmer (1984:26-7) of Yalata Aboriginal people. Thomson (1956) similarly refers to the "harangue" as a method used by senior Aboriginal men to influence public opinion.

124. Taylor (1984:287) discusses in some detail the role of 'blockers' in containing fighting for Pormpuraaw people; see also von Sturmer (1981:18). Brady and Palmer (1984:26-7) discuss the

in the large brawls however, and with a considerable proportion of men at least having been drinking, the few that were able or willing to try to defuse the situation were always totally ineffectual.

Neither were the police able to control fighting, especially when large numbers of people had been drinking. There were as a rule three or four Queensland State police resident in Aurukun, almost invariably White, and the Shire Council employed some ten Aboriginal Police Aides, working on shifts. The Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody, in its findings on the death in the Aurukun cells, observed that the Police Aides were almost totally untrained in such crucial matters as the formal aspects of the legal system in which they were supposed to operate, as well as arrest procedures and so on, and that they had no formal career structure.¹²⁵ Of even more significance was that they had little legitimacy, structural or personal, within the Wik domain. MacKenzie had attempted to coalesce indigenous authority with that established by him in the Mission through a council of senior men who were involved in adjudicating misdemeanours and assigning punishment. The Police Aides on the other hand nominally worked for the Shire Council, but were under the control of the State Police; their roles were predicated upon their working for the common good, and ignored the fact that each one was embedded not in 'the community', but in particular networks of kin with their associated rights and obligations. Furthermore, the Aides with few exceptions were younger Wik men and women and Aboriginal men from elsewhere with little legitimate authority of their own. Their roles in mediating or controlling disputes were largely ineffectual. For instance, as discussed on page 182, a disproportionate number of the arrests by Police Aides - especially during the major fights - were those of politically marginal Wik, who were very often not even the main protagonists. With their own links and consequent obligations to kin involved in disputation, the Police Aides were often placed in an invidious position, and this was one factor which underlay the regular turnover of Wik in these positions.

Arresting statistics

Despite the comparatively large police presence in Aurukun (roughly one State police officer or police aide per 70 Wik), there were many events - fights, assaults, property damage and so forth - which for various reasons did not attract the attention of the police, or if they did, did not result in the detention or arrest of the people involved.¹²⁶ Some of the reasons have already been briefly mentioned, others related to the inability of the police to deal with the sheer pace of events during periods when numerous fights and arguments including major brawls could be taking place throughout the village. In addition, many incidents were not reported to the police at all. The statistics on incidents kept by the Aurukun State police therefore have to be seen if anything as understating the extent of the particular behaviours recorded.

role of kin in containing conflict for Yalata Aboriginal people, as does Hiatt (1965:138) for northern Arnhem Land people.

125. Wyvill (1990:37)

126. With the sheer scale of the violence, and for quite understandable reasons of self-preservation, the State Police were reluctant to intervene in the major brawls as well.

Furthermore, statistics on arrest rates for various categories of offences by definition reflect the construction of such practices by the state; they measure not simply the breakdown of social order but also the intervention of the judicial apparatus of the dominant society into the Aboriginal domain. Nonetheless, a consideration of such figures can, in my view, offer insights into particular sets of practices which, by any objective measure, had come to dominate mundane life within Aurukun.

Information was gathered on all incidents recorded in the Aurukun Police station charge sheets for one particular sample year, 1987.¹²⁷ These data are presented in Figures 4.3 to 4.5. Apart from the removal of any reference by which individuals could be identified, there has been one significant alteration made in the way in which data were transferred from the charge sheets themselves. A given set of incidents - perhaps a spree by a group of young men involving stealing alcohol, appropriating a vehicle, and driving it at high speed round the village - would often attract multiple and repetitive charges, such as three or four separate ones for breaking and entering. Where this was the case, only one offence in each category was included. It should also be noted that while many incidents involved people who had been consuming alcohol, as a rule they were only charged with the specific offence (such as assault), and not necessarily with being drunk in a public place.

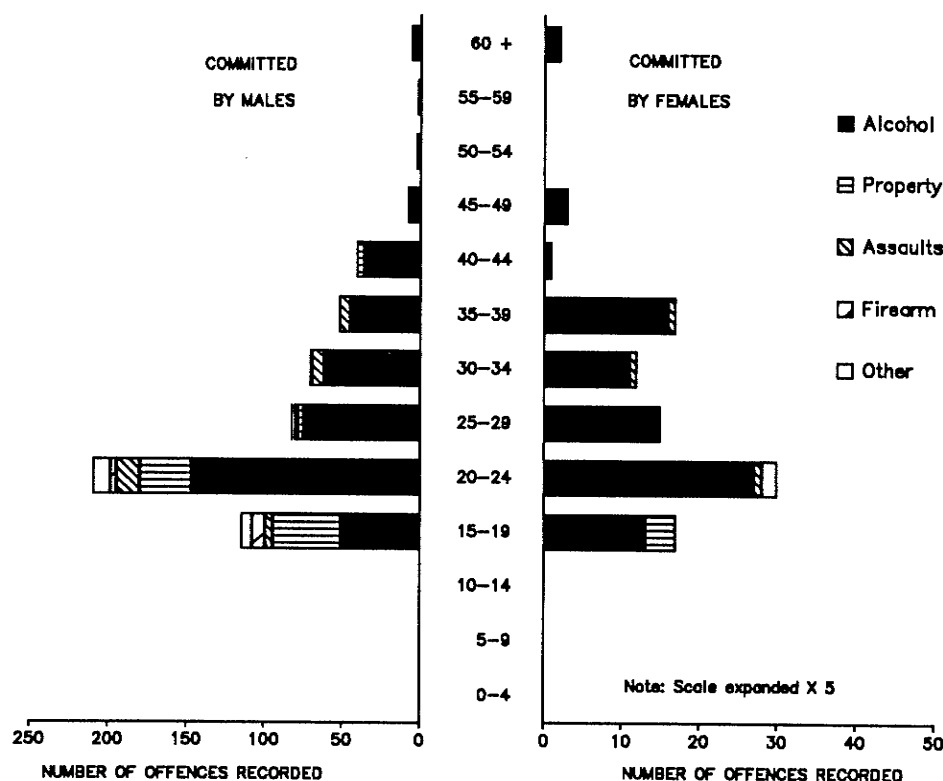
The incidents recorded have been classified as follows:

<u>Alcohol</u>	specific charges of drunkenness, being drunk in a public place, etc;
<u>Property</u>	offences such as smashing windows, break and entry, stealing, receiving (usually drinking alcohol stolen by others), stealing a vehicle or driving one without a licence;
<u>Assaults</u>	violence against other persons (but not including resisting arrest);
<u>Firearm</u>	discharging of guns in public, discharging of guns so as to cause fear, etc;
<u>Other</u>	sexual offences (such as rape and sexual offences against juniors), resisting arrest, and sundry other offences:

In Figure 4.3 below, incidents culminating in charges being recorded are shown by categories of offence and age and gender of the person arrested.¹²⁸ It should be noted that for reasons of clarity in the graph, the scale for offences recorded for women has been expanded five times; this then leads to the first noteworthy point that overall, arrests of Wik women for all categories of offences including drunkenness was less than a fifth that of men. For almost all age and gender groups, drunkenness was overwhelmingly the most common reason for being arrested. The only exception was for young men between 15 and 19 years old, for whom property offences were equally common; mention has previously been made of young men demonstrating anger, loss and rejection by smashing windows and other items, and of the bands of youths who regularly broke into the store and offices, and who appropriated vehicles for wild car chases through the township. Firearms related offences were almost exclusively the province of this same age group of youths, and to a lesser extent those aged between 20 and 24. Young men aged between 15 and 24, comprising some 16 percent of the population, were responsible for almost a third

127. This was undertaken as part of research for the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody hearings in Aurukun (Martin 1988).

of all incidents recorded. They were overwhelmingly the most frequently arrested for drunkenness, property damage, and assaults.



Source: Aurukun Police Records

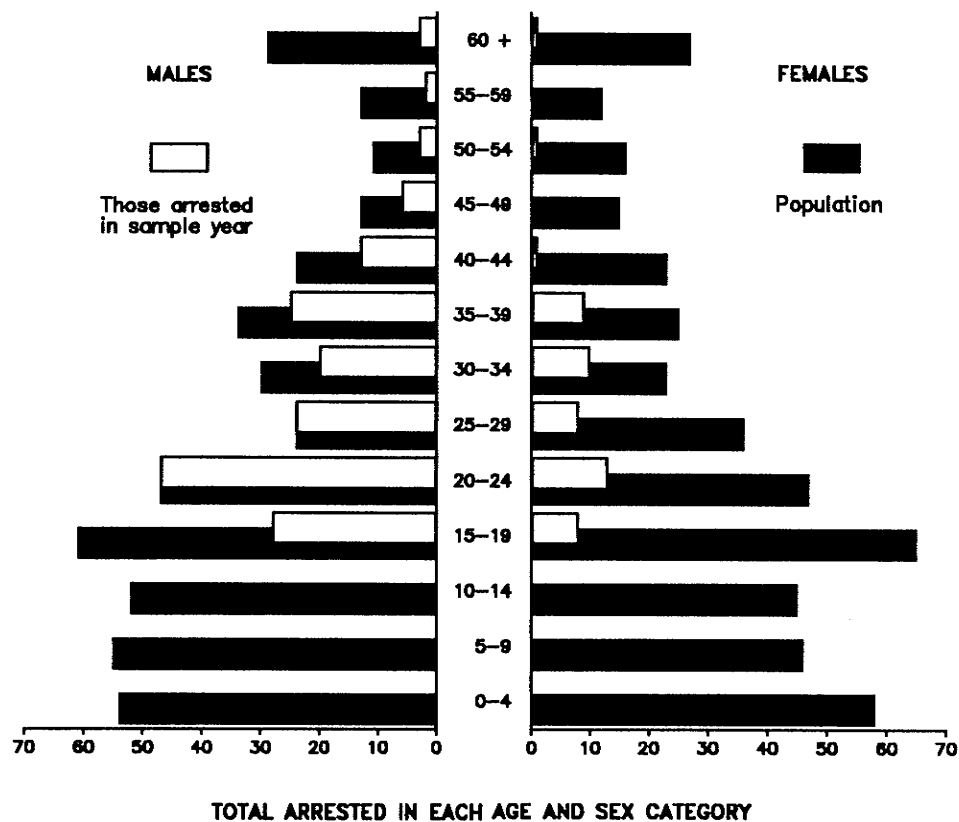
Figure 4.3 Offence categories by age and gender, 1987

Women of all ages on the other hand were arrested at rates of one fifth or less than men of the same age group, apart from those between 35 and 39 who were arrested at about one quarter the rate of their male counterparts. Women were occasionally responsible for property offences, and a small number of assaults were recorded by those between 15 and 19. However, even more so than for men - but at far lower overall rates - it was drunkenness that was responsible for bringing Wik women to the attention of the police.

In Figure 4.4 below, the number of individual Wik in each age group arrested at least once for an offence during 1987 has been superimposed on a population distribution based on a census taken in October of that year. It can be seen that nearly 45 percent of young men aged between 15 and 19, and all men between 20 and 29, were arrested at least once in this year. These figures need to be slightly qualified. Because the actual date of each incident was not recorded by me in order to further preserve the anonymity of the people concerned, calculation of the age of an individual at the time of the incident could be up to one year different from that in my own more precise total population distribution, over which the arrest numbers have been superimposed. Secondly, the population census was taken over just a few days

128. An insignificant proportion of arrests were of non-Wik Aboriginal people or Whites.

in October, and given the high mobility of Wik moving between Aboriginal townships in the region, particularly young men, there may have been Wik recorded in the police statistics at different times in that year who were not in Aurukun in October. None-the-less, given these relatively minor caveats, it is clear that virtually every young Wik man between the ages of 20 and 29 came to the attention of the justice system for drunkenness and other offences in the sample year.¹²⁹ In the case of youths aged between 15 and 19, it should be noted that while those under 18 were able to obtain 'sly grog', they could not legally purchase alcohol from the canteen. The relative arrest rates for this group as a whole were therefore higher than Figures 4.3 and 4.4 might appear to indicate, disproportionately based as they were on the activities of the 18 and 19 year olds. The proportions of women arrested at least once are much lower for all ages groups, particularly for those over 40, the products of the Mission era.



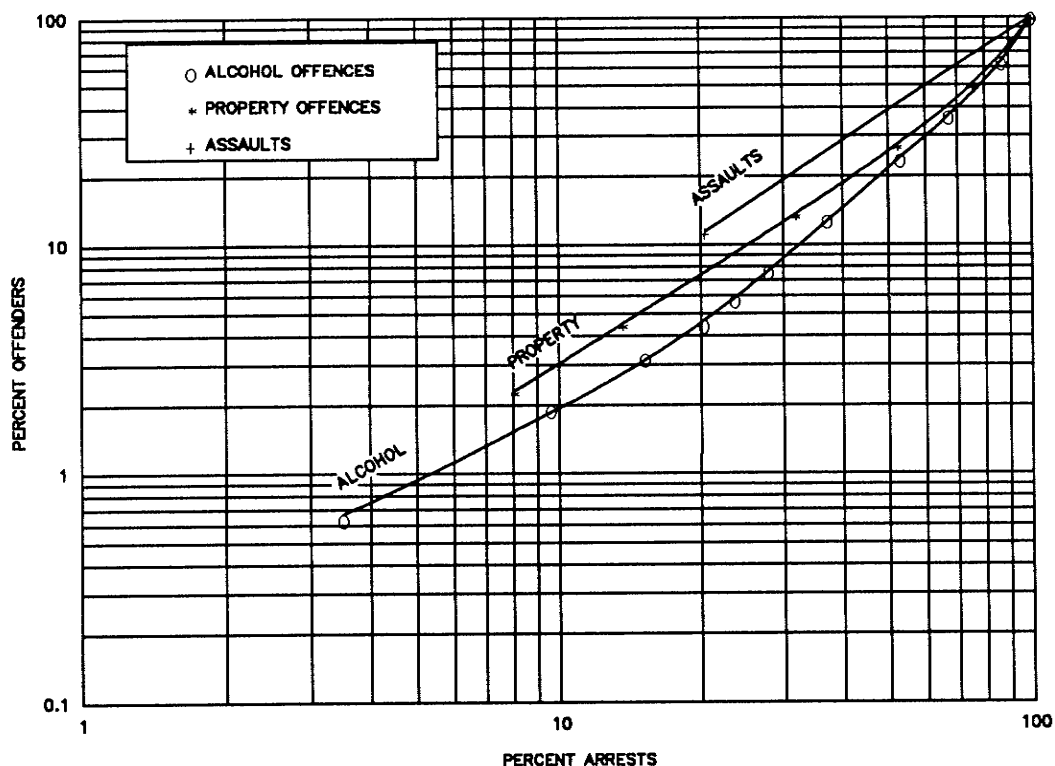
Source: Aurukun Police Records and D.F. Martin, October 1987 census

Figure 4.4 Those arrested at least once by age and gender, 1987

In Figure 4.5, the percentage of arrests of men for various categories of offence have been plotted against the percentage of offenders responsible for them. It can be seen that a relatively small number of Wik men were disproportionately represented in the arrest statistics; for example, 4 percent of all men arrested for drunkenness during

129. Many were repeat offenders, as shown in Figure 4.5. However, the data in Figure 4.4 relate to the number of individuals arrested at least once in the sample year, not to the number of arrests

1987 were responsible for nearly 20 percent of the arrests, and 10 percent of those arrested for property offences were responsible for some 28 percent of the total arrests for this category. The majority of arrests, particularly for drunkenness, were carried out by the Police Aides, operating as I have described above in the problematic zone between their obligations to kin and those to their White supervisors. These data thus do not just indicate that certain Wik men were heavier and more problematic drinkers or more prone to commit assaults or property offences; they also represent the specific targeting of certain more marginal Wik men for arrest. On numerous occasions during major fights, for instance, I saw young men being arrested who were quite peripheral to the main event and who had had little part in it.



Source: Aurukun Police Records

Figure 4.5 Cumulative distribution of offences for men arrested, 1987

These three figures present only the raw data on the numbers of Wik who were brought to the Aurukun Police station and charged with various categories of offences during the sample year. They give no indication of the large numbers of young men who, as a result of charges on the more serious offences, were sentenced to varying terms in correctional institutions such as the Lotus Glen prison near Mareeba. They are crude indicators at best of the actual levels of such practices in Aurukun, and arguably they demonstrate more the extent of the penetration of the state judicial apparatus into the Wik domain than they indicate anomie. In addition, because

as such (cf Figure 4.3).

longitudinal studies were not undertaken, assumptions can not be made concerning the practices of particular cohorts as they move through the age grades.

Nonetheless, these figures paint a suggestive picture. They indicate that there were major differences in the way Wik men and women had responded to the imposed changes in objective circumstances in the past decade or so. They also indicate that particular forms of behaviour - firearms offences, property damage, and assaults - were the province of particular groups of Wik. No women were arrested for firearms offences for instance, and assaults were largely the province of men under the age of 30. Such practices then did not simply arise through the collective and undifferentiated responses of Wik to imposed and alienating changes. They were enculturated and specific practices of particular groups of Wik, which were both responses to the objective circumstances of their lives and contributors to them. For Wik growing up in contemporary Aurukun, endemic conflict, chronic violence, and heavy drinking had been naturalized, assimilated to the rightful order of things. Dissension, by and large, concerned the particular circumstances of these practices rather than their existence as institutionalized social forms.¹³⁰

'Ngak way': Alcohol, power and destruction

Thus far, while I have alluded to the role of alcohol in conflict and violence, I have not directly examined it. I turn now to a relatively abbreviated consideration of this exceedingly complex (and very political) matter, presenting first a brief account of the history of Wik dealings with alcohol, turning then to an examination of the effects of the establishment of a beer canteen on expenditure patterns within Aurukun, and then examining factors underlying the dominant role alcohol played in the reproduction of Wik social forms.

From skilling to sculling¹³¹

Under *The Aboriginals Preservation and Protection Act 1939-1946* and its predecessors,¹³² the Director of Native Affairs became the Chief Protector, and was responsible *inter alia* for the management of Aboriginal settlements and for the supervision of the missionaries who were appointed under the legislation as superintendents of mission settlements such as Aurukun, and who had the powers of the government superintendents.¹³³ A regime of control of virtually every dimension of Aboriginal people's lives was established under the Act, with the Superintendent being responsible for the 'welfare and discipline' of the inhabitants of the reserves. The provision of alcohol to Aborigines was prohibited, and Intoxication was an

130. Similarly, I argued in Chapter 2 that Wik women complained about specific instances of men assaulting them or their female kin, but not about the structures of male domination.

131. "Sculling" is an Australian slang expression for the swigging of beer, often competitively.

132. The 1939 Act (amended in 1946) had a direct lineage back to the 1897 legislation, *The Protection of Aborigines and Prevention of the Sale of Opium Act* (Rowley 1970a:182-3).

offence, as was the possession of alcohol.¹³⁴ The *Aborigines' and Torres Strait Islanders' Affairs Act 1965* replaced many of the more draconian and discriminatory aspects of the 1939 one, although many of the changes were more cosmetic than actual; access to liquor was provided but only off the reserves, the 'settlement' became the 'community', and the Superintendent the 'manager'. Under the Regulations, Aboriginal Councils were formally established for each community, and were vested with local government and other powers.¹³⁵ The 1965 Act was replaced in 1971 by the *Aborigines Act*, but the Aboriginal residents of reserves were still not able to regulate the sale of alcohol themselves, although the Director could grant permission for beer to be sold under restrictive licensing conditions, and the Council was obligated to use beer canteen profits for community welfare.¹³⁶

The authoritarian regime exercised within Aurukun itself by MacKenzie as Superintendent, ensured that tight restrictions were maintained on the supply of alcohol there. This control was rendered possible in no small part by the isolation of Aurukun and the absence of roads and regular transport links. However, Wik men had intermittent encounters with alcohol. Those who had worked as stockmen on cattle stations in north Queensland or in the Torres Straits on the beche-de-mer boats, told of being involved in occasional drinking sprees, including on methylated spirits. With MacKenzie's departure in 1965, a more open and liberal regime was instituted, but alcohol was still not permitted within Aurukun. However, this period was marked by other, wider changes. The demand for Aboriginal labour in the north Queensland cattle and beche-de-mer industries had essentially collapsed, as had Aurukun's own cattle enterprise, so that men were largely back and living in Aurukun itself, although some gained employment with the bauxite survey teams working between Aurukun and Weipa (where limited access to alcohol was allowed), and others worked in Weipa itself.¹³⁷ This had become an established mining town, with a hotel (aptly named the Albatross), and by the mid 1970s Aurukun men were making regular trips there by boat or air charter to drink.¹³⁸ People also purchased alcohol in Weipa or Cairns, particularly spirits which were preferred because of their higher alcohol content per unit volume of container, to smuggle back into Aurukun. Highly creative means were used to avoid detection by the Manager or Aboriginal police; bottles of softdrink were partially consumed, then topped up with spirits; loaves of bread were hollowed out and small bottles of liquor hidden inside; spirits were artfully hidden in bags of shopping. The alcohol brought back was consumed immediately and rapidly, by the groups of almost exclusively male kin who converged on those who had brought it in.

133. Rowley (1970b:108)

134. *Ibid*:110-11; Barber et al (1988:89);

135. Rowley (*op.cit*:122-3). However, as Long (1970:148) notes, the mission Superintendent and the Board of Missions still had the real power.

136. Barber et al (*op.cit*:91)

137. Rowley (1970c:143); MacKenzie (1981).

138. The development of huge bauxite deposits in the area from the late 1950s involved the excision of extensive areas from the original Aboriginal reserve in the region, and the construction of a deep water port and township to service the mine. The Aboriginal residents of the original

Up until the early 1980s then, drinking within Aurukun was characterized by episodic and usually relatively limited binges amongst groups of male kin, although there were some instances of larger scale consumption and consequent sizable fights when sizable amounts of liquor had been smuggled in. While most of these major binges occurred within the township, there were occasions when alcohol reached outstations, smuggled in by Wik by vehicle from Coen or purchased by them from barramundi fishermen moored in the river estuaries.¹³⁹ Once an access road had been constructed by the Shire Council however, linking the Aurukun township during the dry season at least with the Peninsula Development Highway and Weipa, the supply of alcohol dramatically increased. By the latter part of 1985, regular vehicle and plane trips were being made to Weipa to purchase alcohol; I estimated that each week during this period, an average of \$6,500 was being spent on air travel, mostly to Weipa, and some \$15,000 on the purchase of alcohol, a considerable proportion of which was now being brought back openly to Aurukun.¹⁴⁰ Not all of the alcohol brought back in was for direct consumption either; there was a flourishing market in 'sly grog', alcohol purchased outside and illegally sold within Aurukun for extremely high profits. The standard price was \$10 per can of beer or \$240 per carton (which retailed at that time at around \$25 in Weipa), and a small bottle of rum or whiskey could fetch at least \$100. Some of those selling alcohol were residents of Weipa South who ran a regular supply service into Aurukun, but many were Wik themselves; they included non-drinking women who sold sly grog to finance trips to Cairns, and on at least one occasion children raising money for school excursions.

For many years there had been considerable pressure exerted by drinkers to have legitimate access to alcohol within Aurukun, and specifically to have a beer canteen opened. However, at public meetings called to discuss the matter, there had always been a consistent majority opposed to opening a canteen, essentially comprising women (of whom only a handful drank at that stage), a core of non-drinking men, and a number of other men who, while they drank themselves, thought that having a canteen would lead to the kinds of problems that were all too evident in Weipa South. Such community meetings, held under the mango trees in front of the old Mission building, had been a feature of Aurukun public political process for many years.¹⁴¹ However, public input into the decision making process was pre-empted when in November 1985 the Shire Clerk called a Committee meeting of the Council (which meant that only Councillors could attend), and with a majority at that time being men who drank, the vote was taken to establish a beer canteen.¹⁴² This process

Presbyterian mission up the Embley River were relocated to a new site, Weipa South (after 1985 called Napranum), which was several kilometres from the main mining township.

139. At certain coastal outstations, there was a lucrative market in sly grog in the late 1970s and early 1980s from which the more unscrupulous of the fishermen made considerable profits. Most, however, refused to engage in this highly illegal (although essentially risk free) enterprise, despite considerable pressure from some male outstation residents to do so.

140. Source: D.F. Martin, economic survey, September 1985-October 1986. See discussion in Chapter 3.

141. Noted also by Buckley (1980:30, footnote 6)

142. It was a paradox indeed that a primary reason advanced by the State Government for its attempted takeover of Aurukun in 1978 was the supposed breakdown of 'law and order' due to public drunkenness, but that the Local Government regime imposed then was ultimately

of by-passing substantial Aboriginal opposition to the introduction of a beer canteen in Aurukun paralleled that 13 years earlier on Palm Island.¹⁴³

In a move of supreme irony and quite unintended but nonetheless immense symbolic import, it was decided to establish the canteen in what had been up to that point the Adult Education centre, changing the function of the building from being supposedly devoted to adult education and training to being devoted to adult drinking. In an unprecedented demonstration of commitment and efficiency, the Council White staff and their full time and C.D.E.P. workforce combined to have the centre converted, cool rooms and other equipment installed, and the canteen officially opened by the week of December 20th, when full time and C.D.E.P. workers received their Christmas holiday pays.

Expenditure on alcohol

Initially, the canteen was opened only three nights a week, from 5pm to 7pm, and each drinker was limited to two 'jugs' of beer, each of 1.14 litres and selling at \$6 per jug. The Council established rules whereby non-drinkers were not allowed to purchase beer on behalf of their drinking relations or partners, and a check list was kept at each session to monitor and police the amount bought by each person.¹⁴⁴ Gradually however, under pressure from male kin on Councillors and as the result of the incentive to maximize Council profits, these rules were relaxed and amended.¹⁴⁵ The 'two jug limit' was no longer enforced, and the number of trading days was increased in mid June 1986 from three to four per week.¹⁴⁶ The canteen as a result showed a steady increase in takings, as can be seen in Figure 4.6. With the nominal two-jugs per drinker limit, a price of \$6 per jug and just over 250 people who were known drinkers, there should have been a maximum taken in any one week of some \$9000. By the end of the sample period however, weekly takings were on occasion reaching over \$15,000. If Council policy had been enforced, the theoretical maximum takings per week at that stage would have been \$12,000, even if all drinkers had consumed their full quota. By this time however, increasing numbers of women were also drinking. The figures clearly indicate too that virtually all drinkers within the canteen consumed alcohol up to the allowable limit.

With the opening of the canteen, air travel expenditure dropped significantly, on average some \$4,500 per week; this was due in part to the initial enforcing by the Council of a ban on charter flights to Weipa, but also reflected the fact that the

responsible for bypassing the opposition of a clear majority of Wik at the time to having the supply of alcohol institutionalized within Aurukun.

143. Barber et al (1988:92)

144. I was asked to undertake this task by the Council. Somewhat unwillingly I did so, but left the work in February 1986 when the pressure from men wanting more than their allocation of beer started to compromise my relationships with people. Canteen takings showed a steady increase from March that year, as demonstrated in Figure 6.

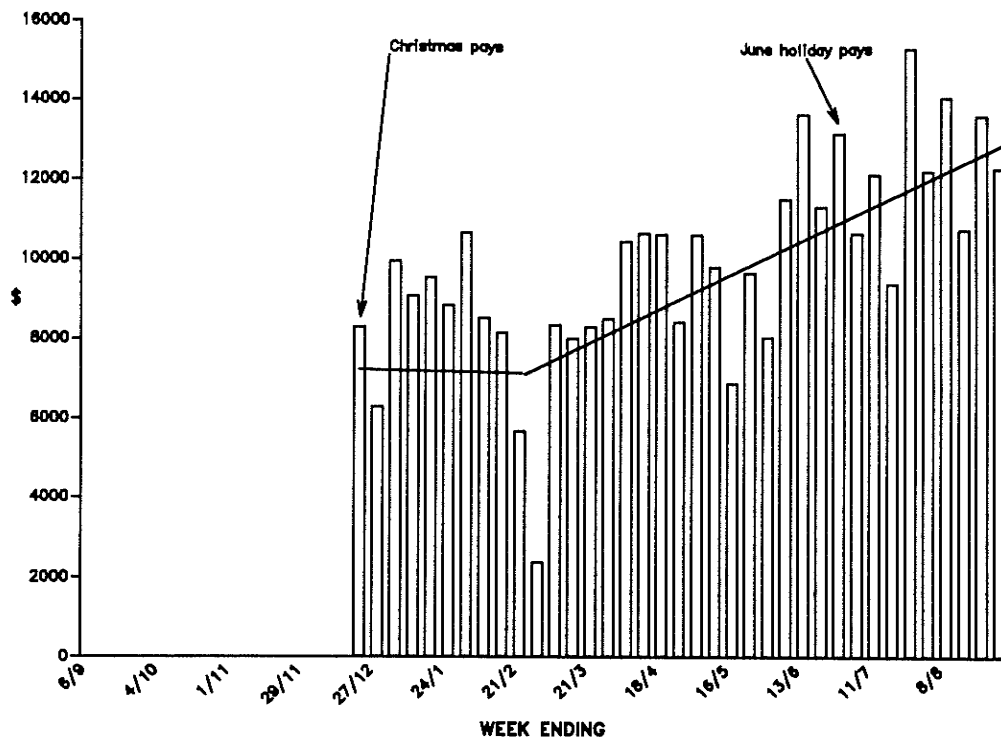
145. Profits from the canteen, although under the *Local Government (Aboriginal Lands) Amendment Act 1978* required to be used for the "welfare of residents of the Shire", were the largest source of untied moneys which the Council received.

majority of air travel (particularly that to Weipa) had been to purchase alcohol. Clearly, a considerable proportion of the discretionary cash income which had been spent on travel to Weipa to purchase alcohol was now being spent in the canteen. It can also be seen from Figure 4.8 that there was a significant shift of expenditure away from the ACI store over the period concerned, with average weekly takings falling some \$8,000 or 35 percent over the year.

On the other hand, weekly expenditure on convenience takeaway foods (such as cooked chicken pieces, chips, softdrinks and sweets, as well as cigarettes and tobacco) rose almost the same amount, by a total of some \$7,000 per week or 140 percent, as can be seen in Figure 4.9. By September 1986, expenditure on convenience foods amounted to over 40 percent of that on all food. This was due to a number of factors: firstly, as the proportion of total income directed to the purchase of alcohol increased, the supply of cash diminished for the original larger staple food items - drums of flour, meat from the butcher shop, and so forth - and for also for such items as fuel for outboard motors to go camping and fishing. Secondly, because people tended to have smaller sums of cash on hand ('oddy ones'), and because the dynamics of social life became ever further centred around alcohol consumption and its consequences, even for non-drinkers, the simplest way to get food was to buy items such as cooked chicken legs, pies and softdrinks from the takeaways. Furthermore, as domestic life became progressively fragmented and chaotic, children were given money rather than food by caregivers, or won it themselves in gambling, and spent it on softdrinks, sweets, and other items from the takeaways.

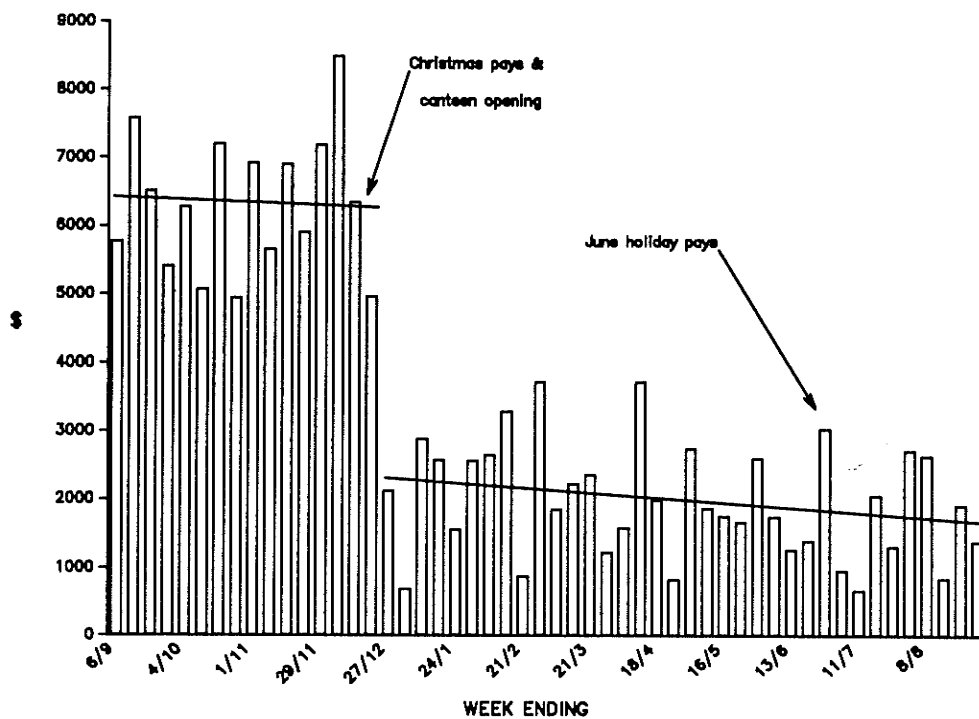
As discussed in Chapter 3, the apparent cash 'surplus' each week, that is the difference between identified cash inflows to the village economy and identified expenditures, was largely money which was taken out of Aurukun as profits by outsiders selling sly grog or which was spent by Wik themselves in Weipa or Cairns on alcohol to be brought back into Aurukun. One of the reasons which had been advanced by both Councillors and staff for the opening of the beer canteen was that it would reduce the expenditure on sly grog, and would thus reduce the drain of money out of Aurukun. This proved to be only partially realized. It is apparent from Figure 4.10 that the average weekly 'surplus' diminished from varying between \$7,000 and \$15,000 prior to the canteen opening, to about \$5,000 on average for the months immediately afterwards, but gradually rose after that point to be roughly the same on average by the end of the sample year as it had been at the beginning of it.

146. Eventually, in 1987, canned beer was sold on Saturday mornings 'so that people could have a quiet drink out bush when they went fishing'.



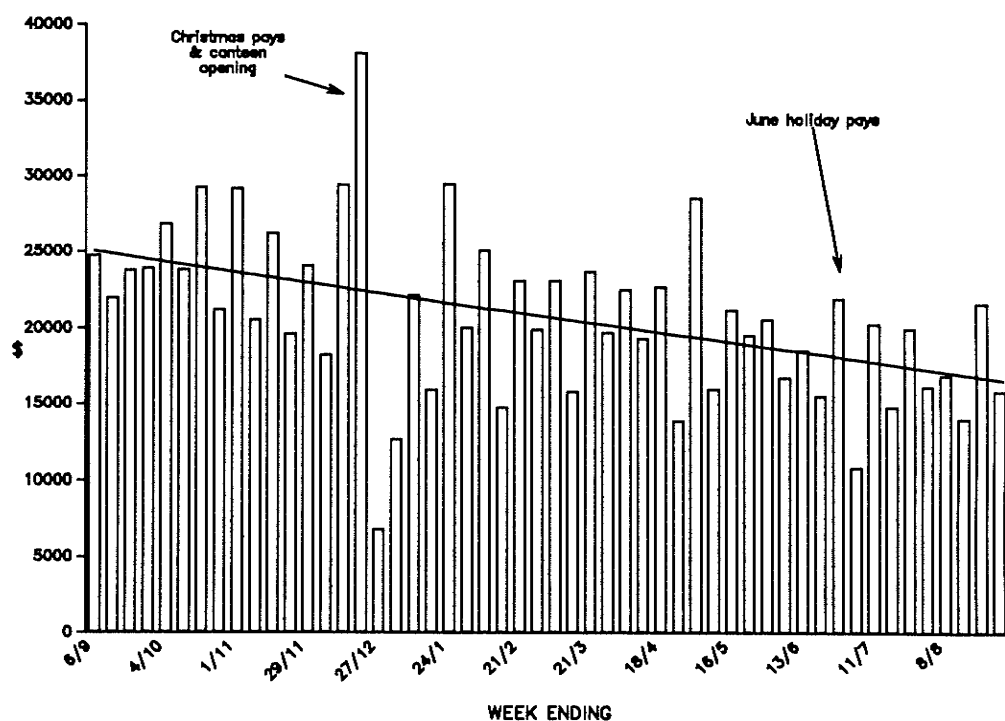
Source: D.F. Martin, economic survey, 1985/86,

Figure 4.6 Canteen takings, Sept 1985 - Aug 1986



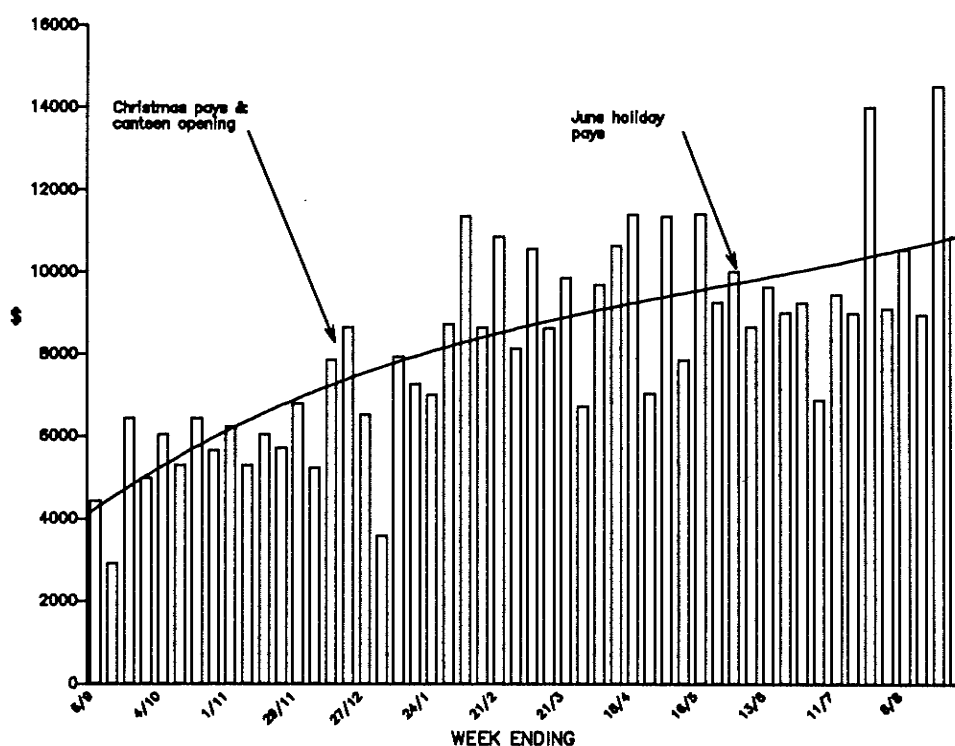
Source: D.F. Martin, economic survey, 1985/86,

Figure 4.7 Air travel expenditure, Sept 1985 - Aug 1986



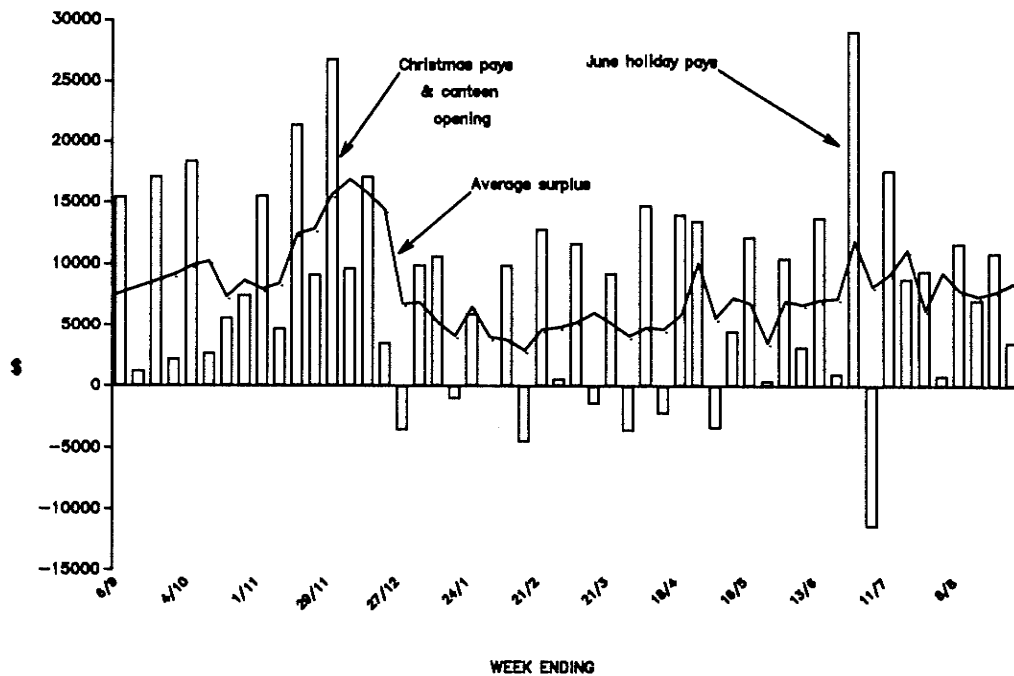
Source: D.F. Martin, economic survey, 1985/86,

Figure 4.8 Store takings, Sept 1985 - Aug 1986



Source: D.F. Martin, economic survey, 1985/86,

Figure 4.9 Takeaway food expenditure, Sept 1985 - Aug 1986



Source: D.F. Martin, economic survey, 1985/86,

Figure 4.10 Weekly cash 'surplus', Sept 1985 - Aug 1986

In summary then, the establishment of the beer canteen was clearly implicated in a major shift in expenditure patterns by Wik. Less was being spent on basic food and other items from the store, although significantly more went on convenience items from takeaways; less was being spent on air travel to regional centres such as Cairns and Weipa; but despite some initial reduction on sly grog expenditure, overall the allocation of income to alcohol had increased considerably. As discussed in Chapter 3, for the sample twelve months between September 1985 and August 1986, total direct spending on alcohol accounted for some 23 percent of total expenditure. Given the low levels of per capita income for Wik as a whole, the magnitude of this shift was such that it clearly reflected not only an allocation of discretionary expenditure by drinkers away from other items towards alcohol, but indeed an appropriation of income from non-drinkers - most particularly from non-drinking women and children.

A consuming passion

The above statistics are suggestive, because they underscore a distinctive feature of Wik drinking; virtually every person who was not an abstainer or who was not refraining from drinking for the moment, drank to the limit of available alcohol. Within the canteen, this meant that those who could afford to purchased the two or three jugs that had been decreed as the limit while this was still enforced, or organized for non-drinking partners, mothers or other close female relations to purchase extra jugs on their behalf. Once the limit was no longer enforced, it was

common to see men sitting at tables at closing time with 5 or 6 jugs in front of them or under their chairs. This was not sufficient however for many drinkers. Men in particular frequently told me that they drank 'for satisfy'; that is, until they were completely inebriated or 'full drunk'. The beer they could obtain from the canteen was just not enough for this. In the early months while a limit was still enforced, several young men went down for extended periods to Pormpuraaw, where there was no limit. Those men who had the cash would organize trips to Weipa to obtain wine and spirits which they brought back to Aurukun, or purchased sly grog on the frequent occasions when it was being sold in town. Drinkers would often get 'charged up' before heading off to the canteen, and then after it had closed return for all-night drinking sessions. The limits on the amount of alcohol that an individual would consume were determined in part by personal factors - those women who drank for instance consumed far less alcohol than men, and there were men who were 'steady drinkers' who once they had got drunk, did not continue to search for further alcohol. They were also determined by the ability of the particular individual to command resources, either in the form of cash (from wages or gambling winnings) or through demands made of kin for cash or directly for alcohol purchased by them, and thus ultimately to the amount of alcohol that could be obtained.¹⁴⁷

Drunken comportment

Consumption of alcohol from the Council beer canteen alone over the first year of its operation equated to some 15.7 litres of absolute alcohol per year per person over the age of 15.¹⁴⁸ This figure does not include the consumption of alcohol purchased from sources other than the canteen, including legitimately imported beer as well as sly grog. Although it was not possible to accurately quantify the consumption of such 'outside' alcohol, it would not be unreasonable to assume that total alcohol consumption was at least 20 litres of absolute alcohol per person over 15.¹⁴⁹ This was considerably higher than that for Australia as a whole (11.1 litres per person in 1988/89), but significantly less than that for Alice Springs residents (of all races) of 27.1 litres.¹⁵⁰ That is, while Wik consumption of alcohol was very high, it was less than that in some other areas of Australia. Yet Wik drunken behaviour was not simply a function of the amount of alcohol consumed; being inebriated was as much a socially located and legitimated condition as it was a physiological response to the amount of alcohol consumed. As MacAndrew and Edgerton note:

... the way people comport themselves when they are drunk is determined not by alcohol's toxic assault upon the seat of moral judgement,

147. The Aboriginal analyst and activist Langton claims that levels of alcohol consumption amongst Northern Territory Aboriginal people are related specifically to the accessibility of alcohol, rather than to alienation and dispossession (1991:302).

148. Source: D.F. Martin, economic and census surveys, 1985/86.

149. Although the analysis of cash flows provided an estimate of a cash 'surplus' each week which was essentially expenditure on such liquor, the actual quantity of alcohol involved could not be accurately estimated, since its price varied dramatically according to whether it was legitimately purchased in Weipa or as sly grog in Aurukun. Nonetheless, a figure of some 80 cartons of beer per week, as well as spirits, would be a conservative estimate of the alcohol consumed in Aurukun additional to that supplied from the canteen.

150. Lyon (1990); Session Committee on the Use and Abuse of Alcohol by the Community (1991)

conscience, or the like, but by what their society makes of and imparts to them concerning the state of drunkenness.¹⁵¹

At the individual level, there were typically a number of distinct phases which Wik drinkers went through, with the early stages being characterized by a relaxed joviality. As more alcohol was consumed however and drinkers became 'half shot', this was replaced by bellicosity, anger over apparently inconsequential matters, and ultimately often physical aggression. This belligerence alternated with crying and maudlin self-pity; men would weep for their children or over other relations, recount their close kin, and lament their being alone in the world, abandoned by deceased older generations. Suggestively, this same pattern of alternating weeping and aggression was a feature of male public mourning, where keening for the deceased would be followed by angry accusations of blame and threats of retribution. Suggestively too, it was only while 'half shot' that men openly talked of affection, proclaiming their love for their kin; I can not recollect ever hearing a Wik man publicly use the word 'love' (or its *Wik* equivalents) when sober - such language normally was the province of women. Women on the other hand when drunk would adopt the aggressive language of men, denouncing their opponents and threatening violent retribution against them. Being 'half shot' then, especially for Wik men, was a state of high emotional intensity, where one grieved at one's aloneness and abandonment by others, proclaimed one's connections to and love for kin, and at the same time angrily sought retribution against those others - often generalized - who were responsible for causing one harm. When even more alcohol had been consumed and people were approaching 'full drunk', the periods of self-pity and proclamations of affection would be replaced by anger, belligerence, and most notably in the case of men, a hair-trigger readiness to take offence. Finally, for those who could get enough alcohol, even the combativeness would give way to incoherence, collapse, and sleep.

Wik recognized the ability of alcohol to affect individuals' perceptions and emotional states. Non-drinkers would frequently complain that drunks were *weenhth*, (a word meaning both deaf and crazy) - that they were oblivious of the needs and requests of others and that they consistently broke established norms of behaviour. Drunks used the names of deceased people, they disrupted everything from ceremonies to gambling games, they publicly flaunted their sexuality and made inappropriate advances. Most particularly, Wik acknowledged the link between drinking and aggression, especially for men. "When he's drunk, he talks big," people would disparagingly say of a young man who was quiet and withdrawn when sober, but who became vociferous and argumentative after drinking. Older men complained about the drunken behaviour of young ones; "When they sober, they walk around like woman, when they drink they become man now," one senior man commented to me, watching young drunks fighting outside his yard. One elderly man, himself a non-drinker all his life, commented to me on the difference between drinking patterns of younger and older men, as we sat on his verandah watching people streaming home from the canteen; "Those old fellas, they drink steady, but these young ones they no good, they drink for fight." In a society with a high level of tension and suppressed

151. MacAndrew and Edgerton (1969:165)

conflict, alcohol consumption provided a vehicle and indeed a legitimation for acting in otherwise inappropriate or outrageous ways. Drinkers themselves talked of how alcohol released feelings otherwise suppressed. "When I drink, things that are at the back of my mind come to the front," one woman explained to me when I asked her about what had led to her having a furious argument with her partner and smashing the windscreen of a vehicle. Another woman, an occasional drinker, made a similar observation, in talking of how drunken fights often started from sorcery accusations:

When they drink, all sorts of things come to their minds, they get reminded of those things and the matter comes out. Before it was kept quiet, or someone with a big family or who was good with spears, would fight from the sorcery. Now, with grog everything comes out. People threaten sorcery openly! MacKenzie would send people to Palm Island for that sort of thing before. It was the same before he came - it was ritually dangerous talk, not to be discussed openly. In the past, whoever spoke openly about it would risk retribution. They would ensorcell him in return.¹⁵²

Drunken comportment however was not simply a function of the individual, for it was quintessentially a social practice. In the case of the kin groupings (mostly men) who gathered to drink sly grog or other imported liquor inside houses or in secluded places in the bush outside the township, drinking initially would involve bonhomie, joviality, and often an air of expectation and excitement. In these contexts, Wik usually drank at a relatively steady but relaxed pace. The initial stages were different in the canteen however, with two or three hundred Wik confined within its high perimeter fence; rather than there being an air of relaxation and bonhomie, each table or area of ground would be occupied by its own group,¹⁵³ and in the early stages before much alcohol had been consumed most people would drink in cautious silence, watchfully monitoring who else was there, with whom they were drinking, and how much beer they had bought. Wik drank rapidly in the canteen, sharing their beer within their drinking group but jealously protecting it from those others who went from group to group soliciting a share, or who tried to steal it - and in particular from any attempt by sorcerers to slip magical potions into their drinks.

As people continued drinking, they would become increasingly vociferous. They would frequently burst into songs such as those of the Island dances or (for older Wik) dirgeful Presbyterian hymns, and in and around the canteen perform *malpa*, the secular fun dance. Gradually however, as the amount of alcohol consumed mounted and supplies dwindled, the relaxed and jovial air in these groups would be replaced by anger and acrimony, with shouted challenges to the world to fight, disputation as to the ownership of the remaining alcohol, and often internal fighting. Such groups would often erupt from within a house on to the public arena as the drinkers scattered through the township, alternately weeping and shouting defiance and abuse, and almost invariably seeking for further supplies of alcohol. In the case of the canteen, by closing time, especially on a pay day when there was plenty of cash around and large numbers of people had purchased beer, there would

152. Translation from *Wik Mungkan*, Tape DM-29.

be absolute bedlam when the steel shutters were closed over the bar, with drinkers arguing, swearing, shouting defiance, and proclaiming their willingness to fight. Heated arguments frequently erupted over the unconsumed alcohol. Many non-drinking women waited outside the canteen, in usually fruitless attempts to escort their inebriated and typically bellicose spouses, brothers or sons home and keep them from getting involved in fighting. Although the Council at various times decreed that the canteen would be closed for a period if there was fighting within its grounds, major brawls regularly erupted around closing time. In deference to the threat to temporarily close off the beer supplies however, men would call out to their mobs to continue the fight outside under the street lights on the fighting ground close by (see Figure 4.2 page 176), and a seething mass of brawling, shouting drinkers would spill out of the canteen. Even when violence did not break out in the canteen itself, as drinkers made their way home they would often become embroiled in fights, which themselves frequently escalated into major brawls. Enraged men returning home would regularly vent their anger by bashing their spouses, or smashing windows or walls of their houses.

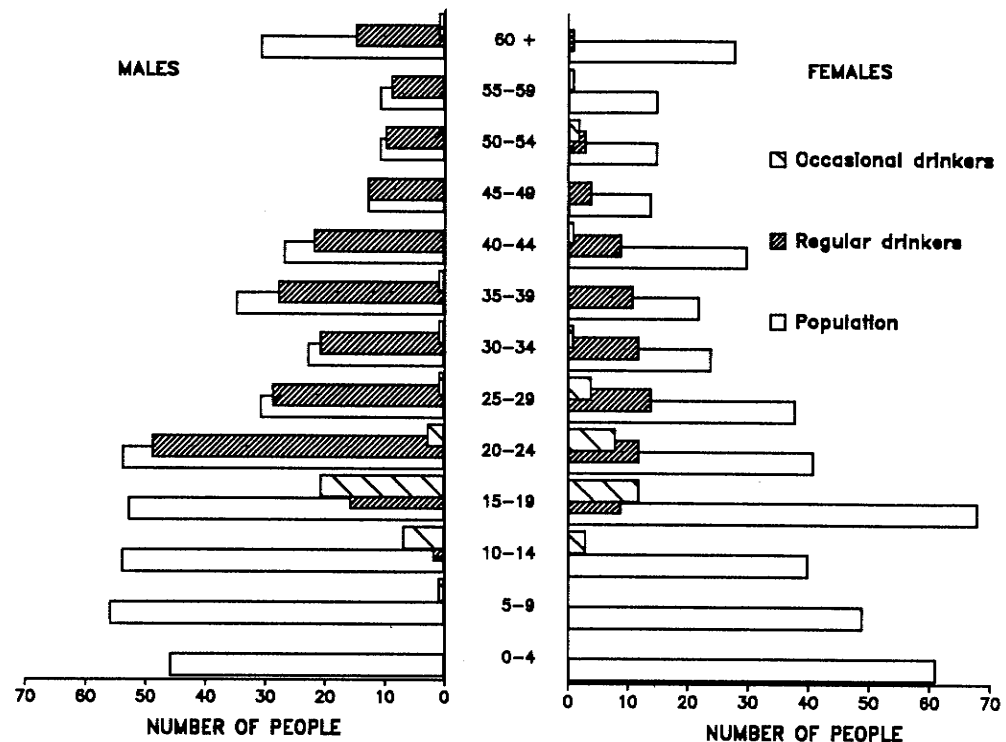
A predominant practice

Obtaining alcohol, its consumption, and dealing with its consequences, were increasingly the activities around which much of Wik economic, social and political life revolved. As previously discussed, a significant proportion of total cash income was devoted to expenditure on alcohol. Dealing with the consequences of alcohol consumption, even for those who were themselves non-drinkers, demanded a massive investment in time and emotional and physical energy; protecting drinking kin from harming themselves, trying to remove them from fights or indeed supporting them when they did get involved, supplying food to drunken kin when they demanded it, caring for the children of those who were drinking, and perhaps more basically coping with chronic disorder, conflict and fighting with few avenues of escape, placed immense stress on Wik.

Yet with so many Wik drinking, the burden of providing the basic core of support and sustenance for the society increasingly fell on fewer and fewer people. Figure 4.11 shows the percentage of drinkers in each age category for Wik men and women as it was in September, 1988. The data are subjective in that they arise from a survey in which a small group of non-drinking Wik women were asked to categorize Aurukun's Aboriginal population in terms of whether they were regular drinkers, occasional ones, or abstainers. 'Regular' drinkers were defined as those who were to be seen in the canteen on almost every night that it was open, and 'occasional' ones were those who drank only intermittently in the canteen, or who might never drink there but did so sporadically elsewhere. Given that if alcohol was available, most people drank in order to get drunk, regular drinkers could be drunk several times a week. It should however be noted that these figures are not only subjective, but indeed represent a slice of subjectivity at a particular point in time. There were regular drinkers who gave up alcohol, sometimes for extended periods or even

153. These groups were mostly kin or region of origin based, but some were clearly based on other factors such as consociation through a Council work team, even though Wik themselves rationalized their composition to me in terms of kin relationships.

permanently, and there were other hitherto abstainers who took up drinking. Nonetheless, the latter appeared to greatly outnumber the former.



Source: D.F. Martin, survey, September 1988

Figure 4.11 Drinking patterns by age and gender, Aurukun, 1988

Of particular significance were the changes in drinking patterns of Wik women. When I first went to Aurukun in the mid 1970s, hardly a single woman drank, even when sly grog was available. Those that did drink tended to do so when out in Cairns. Even in late 1985, before the introduction of the canteen, there was only a small number of women who consumed alcohol, and there were even fewer who drank with any regularity; it was primarily women's votes at public meetings which had stopped the introduction of a canteen up to that time. However, once drinking was removed from being essentially confined to male groups in relatively secluded places, to being legitimately in the public domain of the canteen, and once drinking itself had become an established part of the social dynamics of the township, there was a significant increase in the number of younger women in particular who consumed alcohol on a regular basis. By the time of my survey, less than three years after the canteen was opened, 40 percent of women between 20 and 39 drank regularly. Figure 4.11 indicates clearly that there were proportionately far fewer women in the grandparental generation who were drinkers in comparison with either younger women - the mothers - or, most noticeably, men of all ages. Furthermore, as indicated in Table 4.2, page 171, significant numbers of younger children lived in the households of their grandmothers. However, it can also be seen from Figure 4.11 that there were relatively few of these older women compared to the large numbers of children, and as household life became ever more fragmented and disjunctive, a

considerable economic, logistic and indeed emotional load was placed on many of these women as they attempted to carve out domains of relative order and care for younger children in the midst of highly fraught circumstances.

Figure 4.11 also indicates that for men, regular consumption of alcohol was overwhelmingly normative behaviour; only for men over the age of 60 and youths under 20 were there substantial numbers who did not drink, or drank only occasionally. In this last group however, it must be noted that under Queensland legislation people could not legally be served alcohol unless they were 18,¹⁵⁴ and that what the figure in fact shows is that many of those under this age consumed outside grog intermittently, but once they had become old enough to do so, most 18 and 19 year olds drank regularly in the canteen. It was very common for a *rite de passage* to be performed for young men turning 18, with their kin (including non-drinking women) escorting them in to the canteen and purchasing beer for them.

Alcohol and contemporary Wik culture

The heavy drinking of some Aboriginal groups, especially those currently in remote Australia, has frequently been portrayed as the historical product of dispossession and alienation arising from the colonizing process.¹⁵⁵ Certainly, the evidence from Aurukun indicates unambiguously that a dramatic escalation in alcohol consumption, social dislocation and violence occurred concurrently with increasing contact with and penetration of the institutions of the wider state, particularly post-1978. Also unambiguous was the association between the availability of alcohol and the commercial imperatives of the wider society, including the brewing industry. Yet, the relationship between anomie - if indeed that is how it is to be characterized - and dispossession was not a simple causal one; social practices including substantial alcohol consumption and endemic violence were generated by individual and collective dispositions and ethos which themselves were the recursive product of the objective conditions.¹⁵⁶

That is, to represent such practices as solely the product of alienation would be to deny the active role of Wik themselves as enculturated social actors, who rendered them meaningful through historically located dispositions and perceptions from which they arose, and which together with those practices constituted a particular 'way of life'. Drinking and drunken behaviour took on their own meanings and dynamics for Wik, so that they became integrated into distinctive cultural repertoires of emotional expression, expected and appropriate behaviours, and strategic actions. These meanings and practices related both to factors internal to Wik society, and to those articulating it with the wider one. In relation to the former, Wik fighting and drinking, like gambling, were organized almost entirely within the Wik domain, and as Morris argues for the Dhan-Gadi of Northern New South Wales were collective activities. As such, they stood in opposition to relationships based on individual rights and property and to the values of sobriety, industry and self-discipline, and therefore constituted a structural opposition to the attempted hegemony of the wider

154. although underage drinking within the canteen became increasingly common as controls were relaxed by those running it.

155. e.g. Aboriginal Coordinating Council (1990), Atkinson (1989), Wilson (1982).

state.¹⁵⁷ Drunken behaviour could therefore be seen as what Sackett terms a 'drunken rejoinder' to the values and practices of the wider state.¹⁵⁸ As collective activities too, fighting and drinking served to reintegrate the increasingly individualized Wik self into the group, if fleetingly, in circumstances of great moment and drama. As such, they could be seen to be contemporary replacements for the original collective and emotionally charged forms which had become radically attenuated, particularly for men.¹⁵⁹

In terms of internal dynamics, it was not simply that large numbers of Wik drank, including almost all men, and that they drank to get drunk;¹⁶⁰ alcohol consumption and drunkenness had become normative, deeply embedded constituting features of mundane life whose role in the reproduction of social forms was rendered all the more powerful by their largely taken-for-granted nature. Even toddlers would play at being 'dunken man', staggering about holding cans of softdrink and falling over to lie immobile on the ground. An apparently drunken demeanour was not infrequently adopted by young men when in fact they had not consumed much alcohol at all.¹⁶¹ For example, one youth who had apparently consumed so much that he could barely stagger down the road past my house, swearing and calling out challenges to fight, greeted me warmly when he saw me and conducted a perfectly lucid conversation. The conjoint activities of obtaining alcohol, drinking it, and being drunk had become assimilated to Wik modalities of social process as had the use of cash. In particular, alcohol provided a powerful medium through which the tension between the autonomy of individuals and their embeddedness in systems of relatedness could be played out. Being inebriated allowed Wik to make existential statements about themselves, to express their anger and alienation, and to make extravagant demands on others' sympathy and resources that were not possible in routine mundane life; significantly, such behaviours and demands were normally the province of the bereaved. Drunkenness then in a sense marked out a quasi-ritualized domain of behaviours in which Wik individuals could exert a power of sorts over others that they could not do in mundane life.¹⁶²

Intoxication also defined a domain within which individuals could legitimately assert an independence from the demands of others and from their responsibilities for

156. Bourdieu (1977a:78-87)

157. Morris (1989:147-9)

158. Sackett (1988:76) of Willuna Aboriginal people.

159. A point made to me by Peter Sutton (*pers. comm.*).

160. A pattern of Aboriginal drinking also noted by Beckett (1965), Millar and Leung (1971) and Sackett (1977).

161. Sackett (1988:69) notes that for Willuna Aboriginal people, to drink is to get drunk, and people may stagger around after just one beer.

162. Barber et al (1988:99-100) argue that intoxication for Palm Island Aboriginal people provides a brief if illusory experience of personal empowerment, and Brady and Palmer (1984:69) see drinking as a "ritual act of transformation" where the Aboriginal people of Diamond Well attempt to redress their perceived powerlessness. However, both these arguments are couched in terms of a perceived powerlessness vis a vis the outside world. Many Wik (particularly younger men) on the contrary felt a profound contempt for the institutions and values of the White world, and I do not believe felt powerless in relation to it at all. As always for Wik, it was internal dynamics which were of paramount concern, and it was the ability of alcohol to transform relative power within this domain, if ephemerally, that rendered it so potent.

and obligations to them. Drunks, both men and women, vociferously asserted their autonomy and fiercely resisted any attempts to control their drinking or their behaviour; as Sackett so cogently expressed it in writing of Willuna Aboriginal people, "... drinkers wield drunkenness to signal to others, both Black and White, they neither accept nor intend living in accordance with any form of hegemony."¹⁶³ Drunken behaviour then was fundamentally implicated in the increasing ability of young men to reject attempts by older generations to control them, and to carve out their own domains of meaning and appropriate behaviours in the contemporary world. Wik drinkers also constantly stressed that they had the right to drink as they saw fit, and indeed marked the change from the authoritarian Mission regime to the contemporary secular one by having the right to drink openly as did Whites.¹⁶⁴

However, while being intoxicated allowed Wik individuals to assert autonomy, the locus of drinking behaviour lay in the society rather than in the individual.¹⁶⁵ There was intense pressure to drink, on men far more so than on women, exerted both directly and via the all-pervasive suasion of conformity; to belong to the group meant that one was a drinker, and abstainers were the ones who were aberrant.¹⁶⁶ The complex matrices of debts, obligations and responsibilities within which Wik were embedded meant that it was difficult for individuals to avoid heavy drinking.¹⁶⁷ Relatedness itself was constructed in terms of the flows of resources and services between individuals and collectivities, and alcohol was used by Wik as a critical medium through which relationships were negotiated; a refusal to share or indeed to receive it ran the risk of being seen as a denial of relatedness. Wik men who shared their outside grog amongst kin in binge drinking sessions, developed reserves of symbolic credit in the manner described for Alice Springs fringe camp dwellers by Collmann,¹⁶⁸ and alcohol was used as a quasi-currency linked to cash and involved in transactions in goods and services of all kinds, including sex. Yet much of the sharing of alcohol resulted from demands from others for access to it rather than from conscious strategies to establish credit.

The power of alcohol lay not so much as Collmann argues in its ability to function as a form of money-stuff, capable like cash of being divided into units of varying value against which the worth of relationships between giver and recipient could be measured,¹⁶⁹ but in the resonances between drunken behaviour and core cultural themes relating to such matters as the expression of emotions and the tension between autonomy and relatedness. If Wik demonstrated that the nexus between alcohol consumption and violence was unequivocal, the relationship was not one of simple causality but arose in the context of an emergent set of cultural practices in

163. Sackett (1988:75). Brady (1988, 1990) and Macdonald (1988) also relate drinking to the high value placed in Aboriginal societies on personal autonomy.

164. This use of the right to drink to symbolize wider sets of freedoms is also noted by writers such as Brady and Palmer (1984), Sackett (1988:66), Sansom (1980:49,75).

165. O'Connor (1984:179-81)

166. See also O'Connor (1984:176,181), Sansom (1980:49)

167. See e.g. Brady (1988); Collmann (1979a); Gibson (1987); O'Connor (1984).

168. Collmann (1979a:211-15)

169. *ibid*:216ff

which alcohol and violence were mutually interrelated and recursively implicated in the production and reproduction of distinctive Wik social forms.¹⁷⁰

Conclusion: Fighting, drinking and social reproduction

I have argued in this chapter that for Wik, fighting and drinking were not just pathological manifestations of a system undergoing dramatic changes; they could not be analysed satisfactorily from within a framework that treated them primarily as products of alienation, frustration and powerlessness. Conflict, violence, and drunken behaviour had deep resonances with autogenous Wik cultural forms. Wik themselves explicitly saw fighting as part of their culture, their 'customs'. On numerous occasions people told me "that is our way", and stressed its continuity with the past. This continuity was seen both in terms of tracing the imputed causes of particular contemporary fights to events in the past, and more basically as the Wik way of redressing wrongs.

Bourdieu talks of the "perfect interconvertibility of economic and symbolic capital" and argues that we should "see the science of economic practices as a particular case of the general science of the economy of practices, which were directed towards the maximizing of material or symbolic profit."¹⁷¹ Yet fighting in Aurukun destroyed much social and material capital. There was an uncalculating rage with which fights were prosecuted (and which was culturally valued). Political and social relationships carefully built up over quite long periods were abruptly sundered just as quickly as television sets and video machines with a high capital investment were smashed during arguments.¹⁷² However, while it was tempting to see fighting as wholly destructive, it was in part through public arguments and fighting that the Wik sought at the conscious level to maintain an intelligible and 'right' world order, and through which social relationships were constructed and legitimated.

While fighting involved conscious attempts to restructure the world for the Wik, it also had unintended consequences in reproducing the conditions of its own production. Fighting for instance drew upon kinship at the most intimate of levels. In their own descriptions of fighting, the roles of combatants and their rights to take part were phrased in terms of kin relations to the original aggrieved parties. Associated with the formal genealogical structures of the kinship system were sets of mutual normative rights and obligations of kin in specified relationships, and like the flows of material goods, fighting was a critical context in which these were realized and given meaning. Thus, while fighting could destroy social capital in rupturing particular relationships, it also acted to confirm or establish others; further, and crucially, it contributed at the ideological level to the reproduction of the very

170. See Reser (1990:13,24,54) and Barber et al (1988:95) for similar arguments.

171. Bourdieu (*op. cit.*:175)

172. One can always renegotiate fractured relationships of course; this is a little more problematic with \$900 worth of video recorder.

structures of relatedness through kinship that were manifested through such practices as fighting.

Of course, it was not just kinship that was being drawn on and reproduced through fighting. There were for instance other forms of relatedness brought into play such as the pre-contact dichotomy between coastal floodplain and sclerophyll forest dwellers which figured prominently in disputes and was reflected in the 'bottom' and 'topside' conflicts in the contemporary Aurukun village. To take another example, fighting by autonomous, aggressive individuals willing to confront others in the defence of their interests was a part of the reproduction of those very ideological and symbolic structures that were manifested in the nature of the individual here.

As with the analysis of all such 'dominant ideologies', one of the interesting questions was the manner in which the dominated group internalize, and connive unwittingly in the reproduction of, the dominant ideology. I consistently found amongst Wik women an ability at one level to offer more penetrating analyses of fighting and its consequences to them and their kin than could men. Yet I do not think it would be accurate to see women as having an alternative, subversive, view of the world. Their understandings were drawn from the same systems of meaning and values as were those of the men. For example, while women would assert as individuals their rights to control their own sexuality, in the form of their abusive sexually orientated rhetoric during fights, in their sexually related anger dances, and in their roles as provokers of males to fight, they were contributing to the reproduction of the same relations of domination which men realized in their power over women.

Most devastatingly, the endemic fighting in Aurukun served I suggest to perpetuate the relations of domination between Wik society and the wider one. My discussion in this chapter has been largely focussed on conflict and fighting within the Wik domain of Aurukun. A full analysis would have to also take account of conflicts between the two sectors, and look at how the Wik attempted to air their grievances vis-a-vis the wider system, and attempted to define and restructure their relations with it through the use of abuse, physical force and so forth. It would also have to recognize that the context in which the fighting occurs was intimately related to the whole nature of the articulation of Wik society with the wider one; for example, that access to many of the resources over which conflict arises was mediated through Whites and White institutions, and more broadly that Aurukun and places like it were a part of a far wider set of political and social relations that render their Aboriginal inhabitants objectively peripheral despite their own constructions of their situation.

None-the-less, most conflict and fighting in Aurukun was internal to Wik society, it was essentially organized from within it as noted at the beginning of this chapter, and over recent years it had come increasingly to dominate the social agenda in terms of interest, time, and social and material capital invested. At the same time, Aurukun had become administratively far more complex in recent years, particularly since the introduction of Local Government under the guise of 'self-management' in 1978. There were rapidly burgeoning numbers of White bureaucrats, teachers, nurses, policemen, mechanics and other service personnel, and there was deep

resentment of this among the Wik. Yet the endemic conflict and fighting that was the dominating feature of present day Aurukun, served to perpetuate the conditions of their own dependence. The massive internal social dislocations that resulted from fighting and their huge investment of time, energy and social resources into it pre-empted attempts by the Wik to change the circumstances of their dependence on the wider society. In fact, the fighting legitimated ever increasing bureaucratic control of Aurukun, and ever increasing numbers of White staff, including police.¹⁷³

For Australians of European descent, fire is essentially anti-social. It destroys our homes, our crops, our farm animals, it kills people; it is untamed Nature striking back at Man. For Wik however, fire was pre-eminently socializing. The domestic hearth symbolized the domesticated aspects of marriage, the preparing and exchanges of food, the camping together of husband and wife; the *Wik Mungkan* terms for 'husband' and 'wife' were in fact *pam thum* and *wanych thum*, literally man-fire and woman-fire. The regular burning-off of country not only served practical purposes such as driving game or clearing rank growth after the wet season to allow easier movement and the regrowth of sweet shoots for game to feed off, it made the country less 'wild', it helped affirm particular groups' claims over defined territories and above all was a part of the process of assimilating land to society, of stamping a human presence on to country.

It is suggestive that the Wik metaphor for the spread of major fights was that of *ngo'anych*, the bushfire. This metaphor not only represented the speed with which fire moves through country and the way in which small spot fires can spread out and link into large-scale conflagrations, it also encapsulated the Wik perception of the socializing aspects of fighting as well as its destructive ones; just as the annual burning off was part of the cycle of the reproduction of the human-environment relationship, so fights reaffirmed and reformed the social environment and allowed the regrowth of new possibilities while reproducing the old ones. Beyond the understandings of Aurukun people themselves however, the metaphor suggested that the winds of contemporary changes had fanned the flames out of control.

173. By 1991, the largest and most expensive building by far in Aurukun was the police station complex.

Chapter 5

From Culture To 'Culture'

Older boys and girls stood in little groups under the dark shadows of mango trees; other bands of young boys moved purposefully around the village, looking for excitement and stimulation ... [in the fight] there were perhaps fifty or sixty young men in a huge melee that sent swirls of dust up in the pool of light. Rings of spectators would form around particular fights; many protagonists had stripped their shirts off, many used stylish poses taken from Kung-fu films and videos, circling one another warily, backs arched, hands held ready to deliver karate chops, until lunging in for a furious exchange of blows.

All Wik, whether men or women, older or younger generations, emphatically asserted that their culture was strong and vital. Claims to traditional knowledge, such as that relating to estates and sites, mythology, and ritual cult performance, certainly played a crucial role for older generations at least in interpersonal and inter-group politicking within Aurukun. However, it was in the field of political relations between Wik collectively and the dominant White society, and between them and other Aboriginal groups, that their claims to have maintained their culture carried most import. Such contentions were expressed in a variety of contexts and forums; for example, in the public speeches in 1978 by prominent Wik to church and other groups down south after the proposed government takeover of Aurukun, in arguments and discussions with government and mining company officials, in interpersonal interactions with Whites, and in public forums such as that provided by the Aboriginal Coordinating Council¹ where Wik delegates portrayed themselves to other Aboriginal groups as the bearers of a legitimate traditional culture which was more intact than those of other places.

Wik used a variety of elements in publicly defining this culture; in particular, their continuing use of indigenous language, knowledge of and spiritual ties to land, and performance of dances from the various ritual cults. These elements were similar to those of what Keefe has termed "Aboriginality-as-persistence", the maintenance of identity in the face of attempted cultural and political hegemony.² Yet, as with all ideological representations, there were ambiguities and contradictions in these Wik representations. In the affirmation of continuity in cultural practices was the assumption of immutability and therefore negation of the actuality of creative

1. A body established under the Queensland *Community Services (Aborigines) Act 1984*, comprising the Chairpersons of each of the Aboriginal Deed of Grant in Trust communities. Aurukun, as a Shire Council established under the *Local Government (Aboriginal Lands) Act 1978*, has essentially 'observer' status on this body.

incorporation by Wik themselves of new elements in the development of contemporary culture. Equally, in the denial by older Wik of the reality and vitality of contemporary phenomena in youth culture was the negation of their potency for younger Wik, for whom the pantheon of Kung-fu heroes and other such images had deep resonances. In this chapter, I explore certain dimensions of the move from culture, as habituated sets of beliefs and practices which constituted a particular 'way of life', to 'culture', as a set of reified principles by which identity was defined *vis-a-vis* the outside world.

The ritual underpinning of mundane life

In Chapter 1, I argued that Wik represented their culture (in the broad sense used above, as a 'way of life') as resulting not from human creativity but from the activities of Creator Heroes who 'left' (*want*) it. Despite the fact that it was portrayed as essentially unchangeable, Wik cosmology however did not provide a seamless and unitary corpus of belief and explanation; in addition to regional diversity, especially between the coastal and the inland peoples,³ it was fragmented, discontinuous, and even individualized and idiosyncratic with conflicting versions and interpretations.⁴ Nor were there the real equivalents of the extensive mythological 'Dreaming' tracks of central Australia,⁵ where groups across large areas are linked through holding specific segments of larger mythic cycles and their associated rituals, and where rights to perform a given ritual are vested in the 'owning' and 'managing' groups.⁶ The exploits of the *Pungk-Apalacha* or *Pul-uchan* brothers along the coastal floodplain region, it is true, did form mythic linkages between clans, in that as they travelled they 'left' site based myths and rituals which were the corporate property of the particular site-owning clans in the Love River - Knox Creek region.⁷ Thus, in one version at least, they left Dingo ritual for the *Ngangk-chaaprr* (Blood) clan of Knox Creek.⁸ However, Sutton argues that the ritual cycles linked coastal Wik clans not as totemic (and myth-holding) corporate entities but as "landholders in charge of totemic centres".⁹

Nonetheless, despite conflicting versions, the various ritual forms ranging from clan totems, totemic and other sites, language, site based myths and rituals, localized

2. Keefe (1988). Keefe contrasts this with the dialectically entailed "Aboriginality-as-resistance", identity constructed in opposition to the hegemonic state.
3. Von Sturmer (1978) criticizes the original ethnographers McConnel and Thomson for ignoring divergent forms within the general region.
4. Sutton (1978:131-54, 1987). Brunton (n.d.) has argued that this 'cultural fluidity' is a necessary feature of the egalitarianism of immediate-return societies. I would argue that it is more a corollary to the features of oral societies discussed in Appendix 3.
5. Sutton (1988a:255) also makes this point.
6. E.g. *Warlpiri* (Meggitt 1962) and *Pintupi* (Myers 1986).
7. Equivalently, *Chivirriy* was left for coastal groups north of the Archer estuary, and *Wanam* was left by the two *Kaa-ungkan* Heroes for those south of the Kendall River (von Sturmer (1978, 1985).
8. See also Sutton (*op.cit*:141)

totemic cults,¹⁰ *wuungk* rituals, and finally in the coastal zone the broader regional cults,¹¹ had established a loose hierarchy of ritual forms linked epistemologically through the 'history of origins' in which they, along with human society, were 'left'.¹² It is noteworthy that the elements which Wik themselves incorporated under the rubric of the English word 'culture' were precisely these symbolic forms, which as Sutton clearly demonstrates in his major study were, as symbolic and material resources, the subject of constant struggle between individuals and corporate groupings, at least amongst the older generation of Cape Keerweer Wik with whom he worked in the late 1970s.¹³ Sutton demonstrates how these forms of ritual property (in addition to kinship) were fundamental means through which individual social identity was realized and expressed, an identity which in Chapter 1 I termed 'relational' because its dimensions were perceived in terms of symbolic and material forms which were the property of collectivities rather than of unique individual and interior psychologies. In addition however, and crucially in Sutton's analysis, they formed the basis for legitimating the inclusion and exclusion of people from various social groupings. For instance, the sharing of clan totems and (to a lesser extent) of dialect could form the basis for political alliances, temporary co-residence and so forth,¹⁴ and the ritual cult groups, in terms of the contradictory versions of the creation of culture, also had political dimensions, "reflecting areal power games".¹⁵

Initiations and male potency

Male initiations in pre-contact times had not been given the prominence in west Cape York that they had in many other areas of Aboriginal Australia. Nonetheless, the series of *uchanam* and *winychanam* initiations, and the higher and more restricted *Unta-thich* rituals for advanced novices who had been through the first two stages, had provided the major formalized contexts in which young males were incorporated into adult manhood through processes defined by and under the control of mature men collectively. Accounts I was given indicated a relative absence of formal instruction in esoteric lore and so forth during initiations, in keeping with the general form of Wik pedagogy outlined in the first chapter, but stressed their harshness, coerciveness and dramaturgical nature. Through them, the wilful expression of childish licence had been, to some degree at least, channelled into socially appropriate forms of adult independence. Implicit in Wik initiations had been a theory of personhood involving the directing of individual ethos through a traumatic physical and emotional regimen,

9. *ibid*:151

10. such as Dingo (*Ku'*) and Yamstick (*Yooman*) on the coast, or Wedge-tailed Eagle (*Nhomp*) inland.

11. Where coastal Wik had regional cults such as *Apalach*, *Puch*, and *Wanam* superimposed over localized ones, inland Wik peoples (McConnel's 'Wik Munkan') had the localized totemic cults only.

12. 'History of origins' is a term is used by Sutton (*op.cit*:138).

13. Sutton (*op.cit*, see esp. pp. 131-54)

14. *ibid*:142-4. It is of significance here that as Sutton (*op.cit*:137) also notes Wik referred to both language (or dialect) and totem, as well as to speech or talk in general.

15. *ibid*:142,153

diametrically opposed to that of mundane life previously encountered by the young initiate.

Furthermore, this radical process had been referenced in initiations to the ultimate legitimating power of a transcendent realm, that of the creation and maintenance, through the power of the Culture and Totemic heroes, of the world as it was then known. This power had been represented as underlying the ordering of social life as it then existed and the very constitution of individuals, although in a rather different and more fragmented way than did the "Dreaming" for many other Aboriginal Australian groups. It had been primarily through participation in the series of initiations that male ritual - and ultimately secular - potency had been legitimated. Male initiates, *yayp*, were said to have been swallowed by the Rainbow Serpent Taipan (*Thaypan*)¹⁶ during the course of the extended ritual, and the bough shelters in which they were confined for long periods were referred to as Taipan's belly.¹⁷ McKnight records that...

At the conclusion of the *uchanam* ceremony, the youths carry bow-shaped sticks which symbolize the Rainbow Serpent. These are stuck into the ground and the youths crawl through them, just as if they were passing through the Rainbow Serpent.¹⁸

It was *Thaypan*'s power which was represented as having underlain the initiates' transformation by older men from mere boys into *pam komp*, young men. They were refashioned, distinguished from that time not just by the travails of the initiation process or by ritually potent knowledge they had gained, but by the potency they had derived from being swallowed and regurgitated by *Thaypan*.

As Wik understood it, an individual's *ngangk chaaprr* (literally 'heart blood')¹⁹ provided vitality and potency in activities in the linked domains of fighting, hunting and sexual relations. While idiosyncratic personality and differential force of character were recognized and in fact strongly emphasized by Wik, the ability to causally intervene in the flow of events was seen as arising in large part at least from tapping into externally located sources of power, in particular those rendered available through initiations. Women and uninitiated men also had *ngangk chaaprr* it is true, but through undergoing *uchanam* and *winychanam* that of adult men had been rendered the more forceful and potent. They accordingly collectively became at a certain level *ngenyich* (ritually potent and dangerous) to women and to children.²⁰ "That *winychanam*, he draw woman, wallaby - that's what that *winychanam* meant for - but *ach-kumathiy* (dangerous)!" an elderly initiated Wik man explained to me

16. The common name for this highly venomous snake was in fact taken into English by Donald Thomson from Wik languages, where it was called by this term over a wide region.
17. A euphemistic way of referring to the initiatory process was *iimpan ngoonychan* (coastal *Mungkan* equivalent *iimpan ngoonychany*), entering the belly; see also McKnight (1975:93) and McConnel (1957:111-2)
18. McKnight (*loc. cit.*)
19. The *ngangk*, loosely the heart area, was seen as the seat of strong emotions - anger, passion, sadness, greed and so on. *Chaaprr* or blood was associated with the viability of life. The sorcerer could cause the sickness and eventual death of his victim by stealing his or her blood and performing certain actions on it.
20. McKnight (1975:95)

once.²¹ *Ngeenwiy* sickness for instance, characterized by stomach cramps and associated with Taipan or other totemic beings, could be imparted by these men to others (such as male juniors and women and children) if their power was not acknowledged, or was even inadvertently infringed. Older women who had a large number of children also could, on occasion, impart *ngeenwiy*.²²

Intimately associated with *ngangk chaaprr* was the spirit component *ngangk thanhth*, which gave the individual vitality and the ability to influence events and people in the world. The *ngangk thanhth* was accordingly the more powerful for initiated men, and thus more dangerous after death. *Thanhth* at the surface level meant fat, as in the fat of animals, but was of considerable symbolic and ritual significance. In hunting, the game was always examined and the abundance of body fat commented on: "*Minh wachaman ey!*" - "The game is fat!"²³ Game which was not *wachaman* was referred to as "poor". It could be suggested of course that this was purely utilitarian usage. Fat figured however in major ("deep") swearing, as in *pu' thanhthathiy* (greasy vagina) and *kunych thanhthathiy* (greasy penis).²⁴ A myth of the *ngalp-ngalpan* devil from *Waayang* in estate 10, whose wife enticed a Titree man to have sexual intercourse with her, stresses her extremely greasy body and sexual organs; "That devil woman bin almost grease!" declared the elderly man recounting the story to me. A shining, oily skin was an indication of health and physical beauty for Wik. Mothers would frequently complete the dressing up of their younger children for important occasions by rubbing their skin and hair with coconut oil. In ritual matters, body fat could be used in sorcery, and the greasy fluid dripping from the corpse on its platform during the early stages of mortuary ceremonies, and during the cremation months or years later, had been a source of great ritual pollution.²⁵ As the fluids left the body, so did the life and vitality incorporated in the *ngangk thanhth*.

The spirit component *ngangk thanhth* and the psychological attribute *ngangk chaaprr* could be seen therefore as individual characteristics relating to potency and vitality which, in the case of men, had been rendered more powerful through the processes of initiation. This power had been seen as an intrinsic part of adult masculinity, allowing for and being reinforced by participation in the more esoteric rituals and knowledge of their associated deeper, less public meanings, and was seen as resulting in the valued male attributes such as courage, forceful character, fighting and hunting prowess, and ritual potency. While women's *ngangk chaaprr* strengthened with age, it was not socially instilled through ritual intervention but

21. *Ach-kum* was a type of sorcerer who blinded his victims with nails, marbles or similar objects. That is, while initiations gave access to power, infringements of proscriptions attracted severe sanctions, including those of sorcery.
22. See discussion in footnote 19, Chapter 4.
23. *Wachaman* was an avoidance term used for ritually dangerous or problematic objects or states which could not be directly talked about; in this context it thus meant fat.
24. Wik swearing and obscenities are discussed at length in Chapter 4.
25. In at least certain parts of the Wik region (e.g. *Wik Iyany* speaking people from the upper Kendall River), the complex of restrictions on the widow of a deceased man included her having to sit under the platform on which the corpse, bound in bark, lay (see also McConnel 1937). Such phenomena have been discussed by Bloch and Parry (1982), who have noted a common

rather individually achieved through the processes of bearing children.²⁶ This potency could be realized in certain linked domains of mundane practices, where those that had it were referred to as *thup*. In a sense, the rendition of *thup* is encompassed by aspects of the semantic domains in English of 'skilful', 'forceful' and 'lucky'. A good fighter was *thup* or *thup-thul* as was a skilled hunter,²⁷ one adept at attracting the opposite sex was *maarrich-thup*,²⁸ and in the contemporary situation a good card player was said to be *card-thup*.²⁹ Both men and women could be *thup*, but it was used of women skilled in activities such as fishing or card playing, specifically not of their success in gathering vegetable foods, where the term *ma'-mangkiy* was used.³⁰

Thaypan himself, whose power as discussed above had underlain initiations, was also a powerful healer³¹ - "he Doctor too" - and one way of gaining the ability to be a 'Murri doctor' or healer (*pam noyan*) was to be swallowed and then regurgitated by *Taipan*. *Taipan*'s spirit familiar, the *komp kath*, who was his 'boss', then collected the bones and reassembled the person. In fact, in the past it would almost certainly have been the case that for men to become Murri doctors they would have had to have undergone at least the first *uchanam* series of initiations. I am not certain whether women could have become *noyan* in the past. I noted only one case in my time at Aurukun, significantly that of a woman in early middle age who had a large number of children, and who additionally was seen as being somewhat 'different', coming from a family with some mildly intellectually or physically handicapped members. One of her male siblings was also reputed to be a *noyan*. Here again, a woman's ability to have power, and in particular to have ritual power, was dependent upon her having had children; that is, having undergone a change of status, a re-formulation.³²

theme in many societies of the ideological assimilation of women to death and pollution, denying as it were their fecundity and role in reproduction.

26. See discussion in Chapter 2. *Ngeenwi* sickness, previously mentioned, arose from the power of the *ngangk chaaprr*. *Contra* McKnight (1981), it could therefore on occasion be caused by older women.
27. The spear thrower *thul* stood as a fundamental symbol of masculinity and of male prowess and potency. It also stood as a euphemism for the penis.
28. *maarrich* refers to the relationship of lovers.
29. One's ability at hunting, card playing (and attracting women) were influenced by one's *ngangk chaaprr*, and there were certain people with whom if possible one did not undertake these activities because one's "blood doesn't 'gree". Luck was associated with a concentration of mind, a singlemindedness of purpose and a willingness to throw caution to the winds - being "one-hearted" - and could be changed for the worse by other people disturbing one. A common complaint of gamblers was that others, particularly children, demanding money during the course of a game ruined their luck, and people arriving back from unsuccessful hunting or fishing trips would complain that teasing children or a companion whose 'blood' did not agree with theirs had ruined their luck.
30. See also McKnight (n.d.). Significantly, *thup* was not used in relation to contemporary activities considered 'work'. While one could work energetically or lazily, with success or not, it was the mind and the body that were engaged, not the *ngangk chaaprr*.
31. See also McConnel (1957:111), and McKnight (1982:499)
32. In contemporary times, as in the past, having a large number of children was objective demonstration of a woman's potency. Masculine sexual potency however was not similarly singled out in terms of having fathered many children, but rather in terms of sexual performance itself. Put another way, where female reproductive potency related to fecundity, that of men related to the ritual domain, particularly the reproduction of men from boys through initiations.

In contemporary Aurukun, with almost no-one under the age of forty or so having gone through even a rudimentary initiation, alternative mechanisms were spoken of as allowing younger men to become *noyan*;

An *oony* or *minyichalam*, (a bullock-footed devil) came to John at night at the house - not in a dream, it actually came to him. It took him down to the cemetery and right down inside a grave, near that of the missionary Mrs MacKenzie. There was a very long table down there, heaped with money, with *oparr* (magical substances, 'medicines')³³ for attracting women, for gambling, and for killing and fighting, along with rusty knives, sharp knives - all kind of things. The *oony* asked him if he wanted to be a rich man, or did he want *oparr* for women, or to kill people, or did he want to become a 'Murri doctor' healer, a *noyan*. John said that he wanted to become a *noyan*. The *oony* took out John's eyes, and put his own in John's eye sockets. With these eyes, he could then see right through walls and over great distances. Then he showed John tricks; he took his own head off, walked around, then put it back on - all sorts of tricks. The devil then took him out of the grave and they walked back together. When John subsequently healed people, his own spirit shade (*maany*) travelled in company with his *komp kath* spirit familiar to the sick person as they lay sleeping, but his bodily presence (*ngurrrp*) remained. He is now half *minyichalam* himself, with piercing eyes like those of the bullock-footed devil, and long ears.³⁴

As with the original initiations themselves, the gaining of potency was seen here as involving the destruction and subsequent reformulation of the person. One could speculate in fact that this was one example of a wider principle of Wik social process, whereby the new was formed from the dissolution and reformation of the original elements of the old. Thus, the constant fission and fusion of residence and other groupings, and the role of violence and conflict in re-constituting new social realities, could be seen as realizing this same principle.

There were other sources of power indicated in the options offered by the *komp kath* however. John was offered money, or potent substances (*oparr*) to attract women, aid in fighting, or gain money through gambling; suggestively, precisely the linked domains of mundane practices previously discussed. For John as a young (and marginal) man in the contemporary society, it was no longer possible to gain personal potency through undergoing initiation; the *komp kath* however offered him an alternative route. Significantly, while framed in culturally appropriate and appropriated terms, power was not to be gained through a collectively based practice as had been the case with initiations, but through an individually situated one.

The offer of *oparr* by the devil reflected this increasing individuation of Wik in other ways as well, because while the notion of potent magical substances which would enable a person to effect their will on others or on events had certainly been reproduced from the pre-contact society, by their very nature the knowledge of such

33. The Bible and the teachings of the church were often referred to by Wik Christians as *oparr min* - good, or powerful, 'medicine'. 'Medicine' as Wik used it referred not just to western pharmaceuticals but to their own herbal remedies, to substances used for love, hunting and card magic, and to the potions of the sorcerer.

34. Free English transcription of informant speaking in *Wik Mungkan*, Fieldbook 11-181-3. See also Stevens (1985:121ff) for a similar account of becoming a Murri doctor in Aurukun.

substances and of their use was highly idiosyncratic. All manner of *oparr* for gambling were tried by people in the hope of gaining luck - crushed bark and leaves of various trees, perfumes and lotions from pharmacies in Cairns, even lucky charms such as rabbits' feet. Similar substances were used by both men and women to attract the opposite sex. However, while the use of *oparr* was idiosyncratic in nature, and nominally available to both men and women and to young and old, what was in common with the concept of male power inculcated through initiations, and reproduced in the contemporary society, was the notion of an external source of power that could be tapped by appropriate and knowledgeable human actions. That is, certain forms of causal intervention in mundane events were seen as being potentially effected by gaining access through ritual means to the external sources of power.

Initiations had continued into the latter years of the mission era, if in attenuated form; in fact, MacKenzie himself had undergone at least some of the *uchanam* rites at **Penychanng** near **Yaanang**, on the south side of the Archer River estuary.³⁵ The last initiations however took place in the late 1960s, not long after MacKenzie had left Aurukun. It was no accident that this period presaged an inter-related complex of major changes for Wik in Aurukun. One consequence of the removal of the dormitory system at this time and the system of control over sexuality which it entailed, was an expanding demographic base which by the 1980s had profound implications for the control of younger generations by the older ones.³⁶ With the introduction of cash, and latterly of even more consequence alcohol, new and powerful symbolic forms were available through which younger Wik men in particular could seek to establish autonomy, unmediated by senior generations.³⁷ The original transcendent realm was becoming increasingly irrelevant, and no longer informed and explained the objective realities of contemporary mundane life for young Wik men in any substantive sense. They thus grew to maturity in a world where older men played little direct part in rearing them, and where masculine power was no longer underpinned by a ritual domain which mature men controlled.³⁸ In this world, Wik youths created their own worlds of meaning essentially independently of older Wik, centred on such practices as the destruction of 'community' and staff property, fighting, and drinking; worlds where personal style and public presence increasingly defined the self. Personal power and potency were no longer referred to a transcendent ritual realm, but were matters of image and presentation. To take one instance, for a number of young men joining the Australian Army Reserves provided a prestigious contemporary route to a masculine identity. After their return from a few weeks basic army training - removed from their families and instructed in new and powerful symbolic forms in a completely masculine environment, suggestively paralleling the original initiations³⁹ - the young men wore their khaki army fatigues and heavy boots on all possible occasions, moving with purposeful demeanour and

35. Site 2620 in Sutton, Martin et al (1990:151)

36. This is discussed in Chapter 4 and Appendix 2.

37. See discussions in Chapters 3 and 4.

38. As argued in Chapter 4.

self-conscious presence around the village. This prestige was not only self-ascribed; individual prestige to a degree became collectivized, so that the symbolic resource that these young men represented was used in the competition for status between wider groupings;

At a mortuary ceremony for an elderly man who had served on Thursday Island during World War Two, the coffin stood under the mango trees outside his oldest daughter's house, draped with an Australian flag which the family had petitioned the army to provide. After *Apalach* and *wuungk* cycles had been performed by senior ritual leaders, the "army boys" dressed in their uniforms and with a grandson of the deceased as their "sergeant", paraded past the coffin, stood rigidly to attention, and saluted it.

If mortuary ceremonies had provided contexts for the competitive display of symbols "emblematic of territorialism",⁴⁰ then the 'army boys' were masters of the new contemporary symbolic forms, incorporating symbols not of territorialism as such but nonetheless still of *distinction*, whereby social space was constituted as a space of life-styles, organized by the logic of difference.⁴¹

Mortuary ceremonies

The political dimension of the ritual cults had perhaps been nowhere more clearly demonstrated than in the complex of mortuary practices, most particularly in the original cremations of the coastal zone. These latter events figured strongly in accounts to me by older Wik of the period during the 1920s and 1930s, when many of them still lived essentially in the bush in the Cape Keerweer - Kendall region where MacKenzie's influence had not yet been consolidated. The totemic cults were not however just regional associations with some political import but had also been linked to the spiritual essence of the individual. Specific cycles for example had been performed during certain stages of male initiations, and continued to be performed in contemporary Aurukun during various stages of mortuary ceremonies. As coastal Wik at least viewed it, immediately upon death the life essence of a person travelled to the west, over the sea to Onycham.⁴² There was also another spirit essence, the *ngangk thanhth*, which was related to the physical vitality of the person and which gradually faded away after death as the body decayed.⁴³ An individual's *maany* or "earthly shadow" as Wik called it on the other hand, was intimately linked to both the

39. But also suggestively, the army instilled not autogenous modes of thought and practices, but those of the dominant society, another instance of Wik being consumers of symbolic forms produced outside their society.

40. Sutton (*op.cit*:149). This is discussed in the next section.

41. Bourdieu (1984; 1985:730-1)

42. Consistent with the perspective of a people who were shore based rather than sea-faring, this was where the sea could be seen apparently breaking just at the horizon.

43. This spirit essence is further discussed on page 207.

homeland of the person and to their totemic cult, and after their death it had to be despatched back to their clan spirit-image centre.⁴⁴

There was a complex of mortuary ceremonies which dealt with the despatching of the *maany* (as well as with the ritual purification of places and objects used by the dead person, with the purification of and lifting of restrictions from various categories of kin and affines of the deceased, and divination of the causes of death and attribution of blame). In addition to ritual cult cycles, *wuungk* mourning rituals were sung by older women at various stages of the mortuary ceremonies, including around the dying person.⁴⁵ In the actual spirit-sending ceremony,⁴⁶ usually held three days or so after the death,⁴⁷ cult and *wuungk* cycles relating to sites in the deceased's own estate, to others in their maternal estate, as well as in the country between the ceremony and the spirit-image centre, were sung near the house or major places used by the deceased. The *maany* would hear and recognize these cycles, and the power instantiated through the recreation of the Creator Heroes' exploits would gradually strengthen it, weak after death,⁴⁸ for the journey to sink down in the spirit-image centre. The spirit would finally be persuaded to emerge by the repeated performances, and travel along ahead of the singers and other kin as they moved out of the village and into the bush away from all lights. Further ritual cycles would be sung; after each one an expectant hush would fall over people as they looked into the dark bush ahead for the pale image of the *maany* to appear.

At the last, it was women who took over, singing amidst a profound silence the powerful *wuungk* that finally drew the spirit out when it had gained enough strength to be visible to the participants, and prepared it to go to the clan totemic centre. A senior woman would cry out, usually in the language of the deceased's clan, "Go to your place!" and call the name of the *aw* or spirit sending site to which the *maany* was being despatched. At this moment of final separation, wailing would burst out as kin and ritual performers moved back to the village. There was a beautiful symmetry reflected in the ceremony; it was women who brought children into the world, and while it was (or had been) men who through initiations had created men out of boys,

44. This has been discussed at more length in Chapter 1. For some Wik clans, principally those on the western edge of the sclerophyll country bordering the coastal flood plain, spirit-image centres appeared to have been on the clan's own estate. For many coastal groups however, spirit-image centres were held in company by two or more clans. They were always close to if not in a clan's estate however (see Sutton, Martin et al 1990:48).

45. *Wuungk* rituals were left by the totemic phenomena at certain of the totemic sites or *aw*, as they "sank down" after being sung and danced by the Creator Heroes. Thus for example, the Two Sisters who became Shark, Grass Bird, Barramundi, and Bitter Yam each sang their particular *wuungk* as they sank down into their own *aw*.

46. *kaa' kuchan*, respect form *wuup poochan*, literally 'nose/face sending'.

47. In contemporary times, this ritual was held a few days after the Church funeral and burial. Because of the requirements of State laws regarding the issuance of death certificates, it was often the case that bodies were sent to Cairns for post-mortems before they could be interred. This not only led to delays in the funerals and subsequent ceremonies, but to large costs for kin in paying for the coffin to be flown back to Aurukun.

48. except for those who had died a violent death. Wik were very frightened of the spirits of those who had been murdered or killed in accidents, as they were still strong and could harm living people.

at that final moment, it was women who despatched the spirits back to their totemic centres.

In the past, before MacKenzie had put a stop to the practice in the 1930s, bodies had been mummified⁴⁹ and carried around by kin until cremation following a period of a year or more.⁵⁰ Cremations themselves had been large scale events requiring considerable organization, involving *inter alia* ceremonial prestations of food, the lifting of restrictions on various categories of kin (in particular, the widow or widower and structural equivalents, such as the cross-cousins), and had culminated after the actual cremations in semi-ritualized spear fights which would arise from sorcery accusations and other grievances. These fights had often led to further deaths in the spiral of violence and retribution which older Wik so often talked about as being part of those times. In Sutton's argument;

The keynote of cremations is territorialism ... They were attended by formal ritual acts (painting of bodies, singing of *Wuungka*, dance, fighting), all of which were infused with symbols emblematic of territorialism or words and acts blatant in their expression of it.⁵¹

Cremations, and mortuary ceremonies and the mourning period in general, had also involved the exercise of control over other groups - particularly in-laws - by the close agnates of the deceased, referred to by Wik as 'owners of the dead body', the *pam-mul kunych*.⁵² A dead person - or indeed the serious illness of a living one - was for Wik not simply the object of individual sorrow, but an important form of corporate ritual property, one that allowed the making of demands by the immediate kin of the patriclan to be placed on an axiomatic plane. This occurred in a number of ways. At various stages after death, and also after the despatching of the *maany* to the clan spirit sending centre, women known as *pewnguchan* or *iithun-kalantan*,⁵³ said to be carrying the spirit with them, moved around amongst kin performing *wuungk*. They mimicked in exaggerated fashion the dead man's characteristics including his language, and made demands for food (and latterly money) from kin which supposedly could not be refused, on pain of violent retribution from the *pam-mul kunych*. It is important to reiterate here that love, nurturance, care were seen by Wik as being substantiated through the flows of goods and of services that were a part of daily life, and in demanding food and so on from relatives, the *pewnguchan* were ensuring that people discharged their obligations not so much to the dead person but to the living relatives. "When we ask for food, we are showing our sympathy, and in giving it, relations are showing theirs," I was told by a woman who frequently played

49. by disembowelment, desiccation on a platform over a fire while wrapped in titree bark, and then wrapping in a messmate or titree bark bundle fastened with vine (see also the account in McConnel 1937:350-1)

50. See also Sutton (*op.cit*:148-9); von Sturmer (1978)

51. Sutton (*op.cit*:149)

52. *pam-mul*: dead person: *kunych*; own. Thus, just as *aak kunych* were the owners of an estate or site and had the right to exercise control over it and its material and symbolic resources, so too did the *pam-mul kunych* have the right to control the symbolic resource of the deceased person. Sutton (*pers.comm*) notes that in *Wik Ngathan* the equivalent term *aak-oenhth* referred to certain others besides the estate owners; 'countrymen' who knew the place well and who were closely connected with the owners. I can not recollect hearing the *Mungkan* term being used with this rather broader meaning.

the role of a *pewnguchan*. This point was ignored or not understood by the MacKenzies, who forbade the *pewnguchan* from demanding food because it was "greedy".⁵⁴ In contemporary Aurukun, it was increasingly rare to see *pewnguchan* moving around the village demanding food and singing *wuungk*, not least of all because so few women now knew the songs. Other demands on the other hand were frequently made by the owners of the dead body, and the extent of the demands and the range of people to which they were applicable reflected the relative power of the deceased's kin rather than the status the deceased person had had *per se*. On one occasion for example, the whole outstation of a relatively marginal clan was closed for a year by the kin of a young man from a different clan who had worked there for a short period and who had died some time later in the township. In another instance, there had been a long-running dispute concerning rights of one politically marginal segment of the Shark clan over estate 6, most particularly the right to run an outstation in the absence of the major land-holding segment who had moved back into town.⁵⁵ Those involved in the outstation, it was alleged, were not even from this estate but from further south, and had moved up after a major fight there the generation before. After the death of a senior (although ineffectual) man of the major segment, his kin attempted - eventually unsuccessfully - to prevent these other Shark people from returning to live at the outstation. Amongst Wik, dogged persistence often won out over nominally superior power.

While politicking about clan estates continued to be a preoccupation of older generations of Wik (albeit mostly from within Aurukun itself), attempts were increasingly made to exert demands on resources and sites near the settlement itself, reflecting its position as the dominant focus of lived reality for most Wik. Areas used by the deceased in and around the township itself - roads, camping places, shades for example - were often closed. In one instance, the middle-aged daughter of a deceased woman whose clan territory had been on the coast some thirty kilometres north of the township closed the entire area from Aurukun north to all southern people. This included the heavily used region around the Ward River near the township, a prime area (for those Wik who still used bush resources) for hunting and camping and for estuarine resources such as fish, crabs and shellfish. This woman herself, while her father's clan estate was from near the Knox River well to the south, was married to a powerful man from a northern *Wik Way* group.⁵⁶ These Wik were from homelands in the region broadly between Aurukun and the Embley River to its north, and had originally spoken a number of languages which were quite distinct from those such as *Wik Ngathan* or *Wik Mungkan*, in both of which they were collectively referred to as *Wik Way* ('no-good', difficult, language). In appropriating the appellation of *Wik Way*, and using it to collectivize not only languages and other cultural forms over a

53. *iithun*; lower abdomen (avoid.): *kalantan*; they are carrying

54. It is interesting also that *pewnguchan* did not dance for deceased women, only for men. As I interpret it, this flowed from the recognition of the superior ritual potency of men, and thus of their spirits after death, and could further be seen as a symbolic re-appropriation of men after their deaths by women.

55. As previously indicated, the clan and estate numbers used follow those of Sutton (*op.cit*) and Sutton, Martin et al (1990); see list in the Conventions section at the beginning of the thesis.

region but also the originally disparate clan estates, these northern Wik were forging a new corporate identity in the contemporary world of the settlement *vis-a-vis* both outsiders such as mining companies and the coastal and inland Wik from south of the Archer who formed the majority of Aurukun residents.⁵⁷

The politics of death also reached out on occasion to encompass resources and sites controlled by Whites. Shire Council vehicles, the Health team vehicle, hospital wards and gaol cells for instance were at various times closed by the kin of deceased who had used them. These were usually closed for at most a few days however, with the purification ceremonies generally being held a few days after the death. Despite the generally poor knowledge of Wik cultural forms by White staff, by and large they acquiesced willingly enough to these requests for closing of certain facilities. This could not always on the other hand be said of certain Wik power brokers themselves. The attempts by kin to close the canteen for any length of time after a relation had died were almost always unsuccessful; in most cases, it was female kin who were attempting to close the canteen, and drinking male kin and Councillors who were bringing pressure to bear to not close it, or to do so for only a limited period.⁵⁸

While initiations had not been undertaken for at least twenty years, performances of particular segments from the major totemic cults continued on the other hand to be prominent features of Wik ritual practices in the contemporary settlement, but almost exclusively in connection with the complex of mortuary rites, of which the most public and large-scale were the 'house openings'.⁵⁹ These often large-scale occasions, usually held (like the pre-contact cremations) some months or even years after the actual death, involved *inter alia* the lifting of restrictions on various categories of kin of the deceased and the reincorporation into legitimate social use of the rooms or house(s) which had been used by that person, and had become the major events in the Wik ritual repertoire. Certainly, they were virtually the only forms of Wik ritual practice of which White residents of Aurukun had any knowledge. In many ways, it could be argued, house openings were structurally equivalent to the pre-contact cremations, but they were set firmly within the interests

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56. Genealogies indicate that marriages between northern people and coastal Wik had been a feature predating the establishment of the mission. This woman's marriage to a *Wik way* man, and her *Wik way* mother's marriage to a Knox River man, were thus part of a wider pattern of alliances.
 57. See Table 5.2, page 230. The formation of the *Wik Way* regional grouping thus represented an historical transformation based in part on factors such as co-residence within Aurukun itself and on an oppositionally defined collective identity. It could also be seen as an example of the manner in which new regional groupings were coalescing around material and symbolic resources, as noted by Sutton (*op.cit.*:125) of outstation groups.
 58. Sutton (*pers.comm.*) noted two occasions during 1989 when kin successfully closed the canteen, in each case following the violent death of a woman. Such closures were always for short periods, and instituted after strenuous negotiations with drinking Councillors and others. Suggestions by women that the canteen should be permanently closed after such deaths were strenuously resisted. After the election of a female-dominated Council in 1991 however, the beer canteen was closed.
 59. Documentation of house opening ceremonies exists in the film *House Opening*, (Australian Institute of Aboriginal Studies), and also in Sutton (1988b:26).

and possibilities of the contemporary settlement, including the addition of materials and practices introduced from Torres Strait and Christian cultural traditions.⁶⁰

Without viable mechanisms for the transmission of the necessary formal knowledge however, the performances of the *wuungk* and ritual cult dances at mortuary ceremonies must have a problematic future. The knowledge required to perform crucial segments of these rituals was increasingly restricted to a small core of late middle-aged and elderly people, particularly a group of brothers and sisters from the *Wik Mungkan* speaking Brolga clan from south of Cape Keerweer who had become the *Apalach* ritual specialists. Together with a group of *Wanam* cult members from south of the Kendall River, these people led almost all performances of the cult cycles and (in the case of the women) the *wuungk* in mortuary ceremonies. Interestingly, this clan was from a small coastal estate with little ecological diversity, but with a large number of sites of mythological significance; they thus continued to successfully monopolize ritual property in the settlement situation.⁶¹ These *Apalach* ritual leaders would often complain to me that young people took no interest in learning the song cycles of *Apalach* or the mourning *wuungk* (*wuungk pi'an*); when they were gone there would be no-one to take their place, I was told on many occasions. There have already been instances where I have been present when the performance of certain crucial segments of the mortuary rites, such as the despatching of the spirit to the totemic centre, was almost aborted because no-one could be found at the crucial time to sing the necessary ritual.

The continuation of these and other mortuary practices (albeit in modified forms), as opposed to those surrounding male initiations, can be understood, I suggest, in terms of the wider changes and objective potentialities of the settlement situation. The pre-contact situation had been what Bourdieu refers to as *doxic*; the social world, objectively both creation and producer of individuals, had had a taken-for-granted character where dissent from its basic forms (as opposed to strategizing based on them) had been literally inconceivable. The contemporary situation was vastly different, as has been indicated throughout this thesis, and the incorporation of succeeding generations into the original *doxic* mode of perception was no longer possible. In the Aurukun settlement of the 1980s, with mundane life dominated as it was by practices such as massive drinking and public brawling, contexts in which the transmission of much of the more formal, esoteric and prestigious aspects of autogenous Wik culture could take place were increasingly rare.

In contemporary Aurukun, with the radical sundering of relations between senior and junior generations, the expanded opportunities for the expression of autonomy and individualism, and the possibilities for younger Wik to create and define their own worlds of meaningful practices and beliefs, increasingly it was the individual who reproduced the group, rather than as under the old law the group reproducing the individual.⁶² In such circumstances, initiations were not only not performed but were not even objectively possible, despite discussion by a number of

60. Martin (1984)

61. Sutton (*op.cit*:154) refers to the senior male of this clan having taken over *Apalach* leadership from the Shark clan (central to the cult) on the death of the previous 'boss'.

older men about re-introducing them.⁶³ House-openings on the other hand continued precisely because the relinquishing of individual autonomy to the control of older generations was not necessary, and yet the new symbolic and material resources allowed for the continuation of the struggle over corporate symbolic forms and the display of both individual and group prestige. To take one example, the performances of elements of the ritual cycles were becoming increasingly perfunctory at house openings, and except for crucial segments were replaced by lengthy and repetitious dances adapted from the Torres Straits. These in contradistinction to *Apalach* and other cult performances embraced secular themes, were the creations of identified historically located individuals (almost all men),⁶⁴ were in specific local languages,⁶⁵ and were not corporate ritual property. They were concerned with the competitive display of individual dancing technique and dress rather than with the instantiation of transcendent ritual power into the mundane world; when Wik danced Island dances, they were themselves, not the Creator Heroes.

At the same time however as they represented a transition from an emphasis on groups to one on the individual, Island dances also marked a move from the original forms of ritual groupings, based on membership of clans and regional ritual cults, to new ones based only loosely on region of origin and more on membership of the 'community'. As such, Island dance, and its female counterpart Hula, could be seen as attempts to forge a new form of ritual unity, recruited not from the original corporate groupings, but from the increasingly individualized residents of the contemporary 'community'.⁶⁶

Language as 'culture'

Wik living in Aurukun had originally come from groups speaking many languages and dialects within a region of diversity of specific forms within broad cultural similarity. Thus, without presenting an exhaustive compilation, *Wik Way* people from north of Aurukun had spoken *Alangithiy* and *Linngathiy*, those from the area between the upper Watson and Archer Rivers had spoken *Wik Ompam*, *Wik Iiyany* had been the primary language of those from the area from the Coen River south through Merapah to the upper Kendall River, and various dialects of *Wik Mungkan* had been spoken by a range of groups, from the lower-middle Archer and Small Archer Rivers, the upper Kirke and Knox Creek areas, and in two enclaves on the coast south of Cape Keerweer. On the coastal floodplain between the Archer and Kendall Rivers a virtual plethora of languages had been spoken, from *Wik Paach* and

62. I am indebted to Peter Sutton (*pers. comm.*) for this insight.

63. The failure of attempts to re-institute such forms served only to reinforce their loss of control over junior generations.

64. Similarly, *piithal* and *theechawam* songs were indigenous forms which were recognized as the creations of specific individuals; see discussion and an example in Chapter 1.

65. Regional ritual cult songs were frequently in a mixture of languages or in fact in no particular language at all. Bloch (1974) argues that the use of archaic or obscure language in ritual is one means by which control over critical elements of social reproduction is maintained by an elite.

66. I am indebted to Peter Sutton (*pers. comm.*) for perceptive comments on these questions.

Wik Ayangenyeh in the Love River area, to *Wik Ngatharr*, *Wik Elkan*, *Wik Ep*, *Wik Me'anh*, *Wik Ngathan* and a dialect of *Wik Mungkan* in the broad Cape Keerweer region. On the north side of the Kendall River, *Wik Ngathan*, *Wik Keyanganh*, and further upstream *Wik Me'anh* had been spoken. In the coastal region south of the Kendall, there had been languages such as *Kugu Uwanh* and *Kugu Muminh*.⁶⁷

In the coastal region, almost all Wik would have spoken several languages and dialects, and would have had a passive hearing knowledge of a number of others. The majority of marriages in this region had involved language or dialect exogamy,⁶⁸ and children would have grown up speaking at least their parent's languages. While inland cultural forms did not include the intensely particularistic and cross-cutting nature of language, totemic cult, estate and other affiliations that was such a feature of the coastal region, nonetheless marriage, trading and other relationships between inland *Mungkan*, *Iiyany*, *Pakanh*, *Kaandju* and other peoples meant that here too, Wik had been multilingual.

The history of the mission in Aurukun could at one level be seen as one of ambiguity in missionary endeavour, for it was both a history of attempted individualization,⁶⁹ with the replacement of indigenous Wik links to kin and corporate groups such as clans and ritual cults by those to the nuclear family unit, as well as of collectivization, attempting to replace these original corporate entities with one based more broadly on the mission community as a whole, with the missionaries as the parents of an extended family.⁷⁰ Institutions such as the dormitory system played a critical role in this latter process, along with others such as the mission school, work practices, the establishment of a council of elders, and of course the church itself.⁷¹ It is not clear from accounts provided by Wik themselves or by the MacKenzies if in fact there was a conscious attempt by the mission to have *Wik Mungkan* established as the dominant language in Aurukun.⁷² Geraldine MacKenzie claims that initially *Wik Mungkan* became the language of the girls in their dormitory, and *Wik Elkan* that of the boys, and that gradually *Mungkan* became the *lingua franca* of the mission.⁷³ Certainly, a number of the individuals who became part of the elite were from *Mungkan* speaking clans whose countries were close to the mission. It appears too that *Wik Mungkan* had been a *lingua franca* in the region from before the establishment of the mission,⁷⁴ and it may be that with the complex cross-cutting

67. See McConnel (1930), Sutton (1978:172-3; map 14), von Sturmer (1978) and Taylor (1984) for further details on the distribution of languages in this region.

68. Sutton (*op.cit*:107-12)

69. See discussion on page 228

70. Hence, they were called *piipa* and Mother. The dormitory system was a particular manifestation of this attempt to refashion a new collective ideology.

71. There were of course ambiguities in this process; MacKenzie in many ways was supportive of Wik maintaining ties to traditional lands and other dimensions of the original culture.

72. MacKenzie (1981:47) for instance, notes that early attempts to translate the bible into *Wik Mungkan* were resisted by speakers of other languages, and so they themselves stopped trying to systematically learn *Mungkan*.

73. *ibid*.

74. See also Sutton (*op.cit*:175). Sutton notes that *Mungkan* is structurally a simpler dialect than most of the others in the region, and that its relative formal simplicity may have contributed to its success as a *lingua franca*.

nature of ties within the very high (by Wik standards) residential population in the settlement, together with demographic changes with certain language groups dropping below a viable population, an inevitable outcome was the establishment of a common language.⁷⁵

Certainly, a simplified form of *Wik Mungkan* with many loan words incorporated from English, and a range of non-standard English, had become the predominant languages in almost all social contexts by the 1980s,⁷⁶ and *Wik Mungkan* was the first language for all Wik children. Sutton observed something of a resurgence in *Wik Ngathan* in the late 1970s, coinciding with his own study of it and the establishment of outstations by *Ngathan* speakers. However, while there were numbers of younger men who could speak it with at least some degree of fluency, the social conditions for its reproduction as a viable language in everyday use arguably did not exist in Aurukun by the end of the 1980s. As part of a census conducted in February, 1986, people were asked which languages were spoken in their households; the results are given in Table 5.1 below. It should be noted that given the strong Wik rhetoric on how their 'culture' was being maintained, actual (as opposed to claimed) usage of non-*Mungkan* languages and dialects would be expected if anything to be less than indicated in the table. Even so, languages other than English, *Mungkan* or *Ngathan* were claimed as being spoken in only 8 percent of 118 village households.

Table 5.1 Languages claimed as used in Wik households

Language(s) spoken	% Households
<i>Mungkan</i>	93
English	97
English & <i>Mungkan</i>	90
<i>Ngathan</i>	12
Other	8

Source: D.F. Martin, household census, February 1986

While languages other than *Wik Mungkan* were of diminishing importance down the generations in terms of their practical use in mundane communication, nominal language affiliation was still of practical significance in another sense within the Wik domain, in that it was used as an emblematic marker of differentiation between individuals and between collectivities. Even when they could not speak their language, younger Wik still generally referred to themselves as *Wik Ngathan* or *Wik Ngatharr* and so forth, particularly as emblematic marker of differentiation in conflicts.

75. Nonetheless, *Wik Mungkan* itself was not a single language, but comprised a number of closely related dialects. Coastal speakers from the Cape Keerweer region self-consciously preserved into the 1990s lexical items and phonetic and morphological features which distinguished their dialect from that of 'topside' clans studied by the Summer Institute of Linguistics (e.g Kilham et al, 1986).

76. For instance, the subtleties and complexities of speech etiquette in reflecting and instantiating relationships which have been documented by Sutton (*op.cit*:211-23, 1982) were rapidly disappearing amongst most speakers.

Nonetheless, it was *vis-a-vis* the wider world that 'language', portrayed as a distinctive Wik collective form, was most strongly articulated. The internal divisions, the attenuation or loss of a whole range of Wik languages and dialects, were elided in the presentation by Aurukun people of themselves as having, unlike Whites and most other Aboriginal people, 'language'. In this sense, *Wik Mungkan*, which had come to dominate the internal Wik domain through a process whereby difference had been submerged, served as a symbolic resource in the assertion of difference from the wider society, at a level of community which in a sense only existed in opposition to that society.

The use and appropriation of space

The use of the landscape by Wik, of course, had never been simply a matter of practical activity directed to material needs - hunting, fishing, travelling, camping or whatever. It had been a socialized landscape, a narrative imbued with significance which had been constantly extended and re-interpreted through these same practical activities. Unlike written texts, in fact, the narratives of the land required constant re-creation to sustain their place in the social world.⁷⁷ As the range of practical use of land and sites by Wik contracted in contemporary times, and as older and knowledgeable Wik who had helped create and perpetuate the sets of narratives died, so too did much of the original immense complexity of this view of land held in the minds of Wik become attenuated, fragmentary, and often lost entirely. It was however being replaced by new episodes, increasingly centred in and around the Aurukun township itself. Some of the themes of the earlier narratives were continued in the new ones - those focussed on conflicts and fights 'and lovers' escapades for instance - while others were peculiar to the settlement itself, such as the dominant theme of alcohol consumption and related behaviour. What continued was what might be termed placedness in Wik conceptions, the centrality of place in social action and to individual and corporate identity.⁷⁸ Intrinsic to this placedness was the constant struggle over the appropriation of geographic space and its symbols, a struggle waged amongst Wik but also between them and Whites in the township. While many of the older generations continued to politick over the ownership of and rights over clan estates and sites, for most Wik in contemporary Aurukun the dominant focus of the politics of place was increasingly on the use and control of space within the township and its immediate surrounds, but interpreted through dispositions reproduced from the past. In this section, I trace the move from the contesting of space on traditional lands to that within the township.

Traditional lands as symbolic resource

Land, its associated sites and its material resources - food species, water, raw materials for tools and so on - had provided the primary means of objectifying social

77. See discussion in Appendix 3.

capital for Wik before the penetration of western forms in the settlement situation;⁷⁹ in fact this arguably continued to be the case for many of the older Wik that I knew. Land was indeed (in part) a form of purely 'economic' capital, the material means through which Wik provided for sustenance and thus physical, and ultimately social, reproduction. Most Wik, particularly those from the coastal floodplain zone, had exploited this ecologically rich and complex area in patterns of mobility which have been characterized as 'foraging' rather than nomadic.⁸⁰ As the work of other and earlier researchers in the area has shown,⁸¹ Wik had an intimate and comprehensive knowledge of the physical environment and of food and other resources and their seasonal availability from the various ecological zones they exploited. In the various *Wik Mungkan* dialects (and in other languages of the area) there was an extensive terminology for specifying ecological zones and plant, fish, bird and animal species.⁸² This of course should not occasion surprise, given that it is common for languages to be lexically complex in the areas of utilitarian and philosophical interest to its speakers.

However, land and its tangible resources were also symbolic resources. This symbolic quality of land had a number of different dimensions for Wik. Land itself was not an external 'other', the mere object of the human struggle for subsistence, but was itself a cultural artifact, assimilated to human sociality in a multitude of ways. For many Wik, particularly older people who had spent considerable periods (including often their childhood) on and around their clan estates, there was undoubtedly a strong degree of affect in their relationship to land and to sites on it. On several occasions I witnessed the deep emotion of older men and women on visiting country that they had not been in for many years. This was not as I understood it at least sentiment for 'land' itself,⁸³ but rather was aroused by the recollections of the people - in many cases long deceased - who had been associated with the sites, and the events that had taken place there; gatherings for wallaby drives, fights and spearings, crocodile attacks, lovers' escapades, cattle mustering camps and so forth.

The symbolic load carried by land and sites was not however confined to these forms of personal affect and emotion. By and large, in fact, Wik were highly pragmatic in the ways that they talked about their own lands and their relationship with it. Bourdieu points out that even ostensibly 'economic' capital always has an

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- 78. Sansom (1982) has written of this sense of place as an important element of an Aboriginal commonality across Australia.
 - 79. Myers (1986:127) advances a similar argument for the Western Desert Pintupi.
 - 80. Chase and Sutton (1981:1850); see also Thomson (1939).
 - 81. Thomson (*op.cit.*); Chase and Sutton (*op.cit.*); Sutton (1978); von Sturmer (1978); Sutton (1981); Smyth n.d.; see also Sutton, Martin et al (1990), which includes data on sites mapped by myself in the Kendall, Knox River and Cape Keerweer regions.
 - 82. See Chase and Sutton (*op.cit.*), Sutton (1978, 1981) for examples in *Wik Ngathan* and von Sturmer (1978) in *Kugu Uwanh* and *Kugu Muminh*.
 - 83. Land has been posited as the mystical source of Aboriginal spirituality by the discourse of contemporary Aboriginal activism (see Keefe 1988). This discourse seeks to legitimate in the political arena controlled by the dominant White society the (arguably just) demands of Aboriginal people for rights to control their traditional lands, by placing them on a 'spiritual', and thus apolitical and axiomatic, plane.

associated symbolic value,⁸⁴ and land was for Wik also a fundamental form of symbolic capital in a number of senses. Firstly, land was quintessentially a political and social resource for Wik, a form of capital whose distribution and control were the subject of unremitting struggle and disputation.⁸⁵ Secondly, land and its nominally 'economic' resources had symbolic correlates. The claimed uniqueness of their own estates in terms of its environmental features, and its richness - for example the variety of its food resources, its sweet well water and its good shade trees - were sources of pride to Wik estate owners, and were used often in the rhetorical expression of individuality and in the abuse of others during conflicts; "You mob are from that black sand place - we are from that clean estuarine sand country!" Furthermore, and more basically, if there has been any underlying theme in the notably eclectic anthropological study of human societies, it has lain in the detailing of mechanisms through which particular environments are precisely not unmarked objective and unexceptionable material givens, but are structured, classified, and rendered meaningful by human agents operating within specific cultural frameworks.

For Wik, this imposition of meaningful order upon the landscape took place in a myriad of ways: For example, in the symbolic meanings of certain animal and plant species (detailed by McKnight)⁸⁶ and more generally in clan totemism whereby natural species were assimilated to Wik social ordering;⁸⁷ in the conceptualizations and uses of space (of which some account will be given later in this chapter; in the uses of food and other resources in the exchanges which substantiated personal and collective relations, and in the elaborate food restrictions relating to these exchanges between various categories of kin or at particular stages in the life cycle;⁸⁸ and significantly of course in the land and site based mythology in which the Creator and Totemic Heroes 'left' both the landscape with its features and resources and the human, social, one.⁸⁹ Thus, the other forms of symbolic capital - mythology, dance and songs, body paint designs and rights to certain totemic carvings - and to a degree even language - were referenced to land and to specific sites, through the creation myths.

The land was itself then a map for those Wik with intimate knowledge of it, not only a physical but of a socialized landscape, with every known site "saturated with significations".⁹⁰ In Sutton's words, true of Wik as of other Aboriginal Australian groups; "... there is no geography without meaning or without history ... The land is

84. See also Sahlins (1976)

85. While a detailed study of Wik land tenure systems is beyond the scope of this thesis, a number of other analysts have presented accounts, including the early ethnographers McConnel (1930a, 1934, 1940), and Thomson (1939). For a detailed critique of their models of the 'Wik Mungkan', see von Sturmer (1978). Sutton (1978) has presented a complex study of, *inter alia*, land tenure for Wik of the Cape Keerweer area. See also Sutton, Martin et al (1990).

86. McKnight (1973, 1973)

87. for discussions of Wik totemism see *inter alia* McConnel (1930b, 1936), Thomson (1946), Lévi Strauss (1963), McKnight (1981), von Sturmer (1978), and Sutton (1978).

88. See for instance McKnight (1973, 1975), McConnel (1934a), Thomson (1936).

89. see also Sutton (1978:61,138,305ff)

already a narrative - an artifact of intellect - before people represent it [in art]. There is no wilderness."⁹¹ Like the texts in literate societies, this narrative of the land existed as an objectified form of social capital, intimately involved in the mode of societal reproduction, projecting immediate human concerns and social forms on to an external plane.⁹²

Just as texts in literate societies are subject to varying exegeses according to contingent personal, historical, political and other factors, so could the narrative of the land be interpreted differently in altered circumstances or even given quite disparate renditions.⁹³ For, while the landscape may in an objective sense have itself been essentially unchanging, knowledge of it, of its sites and of their material and symbolic resources was still ultimately held in human minds. The land may too have been a socialized landscape, and have acted as a form of mnemonic device for maintaining and reproducing knowledge in this oral society,⁹⁴ but it was not the product of human endeavour and subject to a continuing process of recursive exegetical elaboration in the same sense as are texts. In fact, since Wik cosmology explicitly denied the role of human creativity in cultural production and objectification - land based myths, rituals, language affiliation and so on - it served to maintain the *doxic* mode of quasi-perfect reproduction of social forms, rather than offering as do texts the possibility of heterodoxy or of dissent.⁹⁵

For the pre-contact Wik, much of the practical knowledge required for the production of the material necessities of life - for instance tool and weapon technology, food extraction and preparation techniques, the seasonal and geographical distribution of food supplies and of other resources - had been relatively evenly distributed. The crucial exception was the allocation of productive technologies between the genders, but while the products of men's and of women's labour were to a degree differentially symbolically loaded,⁹⁶ and while arguments could be advanced that men appropriated the products of women's labour, gender-based productive activities had not provided of themselves the basis for a marked sexual hierarchy.⁹⁷ Thus, social capital in the form of this practical knowledge itself had not formed the basis of elaborated hierarchy and differentiation.

In general (and in particular for much of the coastal zone), the region exploited by Wik was characterized by predictable and abundant resources supporting

90. Stanner (1963:227), quoted in Sutton (1988b:19)

91. Sutton (1988b:19)

92. Myers (1986:127ff) offers a parallel analysis of land, seen as a structure transcending the immediacies of mundane social process.

93. Sutton (1978:141) refers to different versions of mythological 'charter' myths given by different informants, and in my own fieldwork I recorded opposing interpretations of the locations and ownership of particular increase centres.

94. Goody (1986) refers to the importance of mnemonic devices in the reproduction of knowledge in oral societies.

95. Bourdieu (1977a:168-70); see also discussion in Appendix (?).

96. See McKnight (1973)

97. See Chapter 2.

apparently quite high populations.⁹⁸ A number of studies of various Wik groups have presented analyses of such relevant features as seasonal mobility, the extraction and utilization of food resources, and modes whereby Wik gained access to resources and sites in clan countries other than their own.⁹⁹ Food and other material resources were most certainly not evenly distributed between estates, even within the environmentally rich coastal zone.¹⁰⁰ Furthermore, access to sites and resources by others in one's own estate had been vigilantly policed in the past,¹⁰¹ and still was in the contemporary situation even when the estate owners were living essentially permanently within the township. There had been a rigorous distinction maintained between public and private places in clan estates, with the latter overwhelmingly predominating as Sutton notes.¹⁰² Even within estates, access had been dependent upon such factors as age, status (so that senior male estate owners had relatively unconstrained access compared with others), and ritual state (e.g. menstruating women could not use certain wells).¹⁰³ Women were not allowed near the cremation ground **Thakak** in estate 17 on the upper Knox for instance,¹⁰⁴ nor to take yams from the nearby scrubs, but could with permission from senior estate owners dig them from the southern end of the ridge. This distinction between public and private spaces was also maintained within certain major resource or camping sites, with specific shade trees and wells assigned for the use of neighbouring clans, the estate-owning clan having the central location.¹⁰⁵ In an other instance, each family group had exclusive rights to the sweet fruit (*may keelp*) of specific Leichardt pines at **Aampang**, the major wet season camp site in the King Salmon clan's estate on the Kendall River. In general, while there were relatively fewer restrictions on older women than on younger women and children, senior males of the land-holding clans had the freest access to sites and their resources. These included material items, such as yams from certain sites in some estates which had been reserved for senior estate owners, and intangible ones such as the right to access to certain sites classified as *ngenyth-thayan*, highly restricted, such as the *aak penychiy* or ritually dangerous 'poison' grounds.¹⁰⁶ One such site, **Moolanyth** behind Cape Keerweer,¹⁰⁷ had provided a hiding place from pursuit by aggrieved in-laws for a senior man of clan 15 who had murdered his wife.

98. Chase and Sutton (*op.cit*:1845-6)

99. for Wik of the Cape Keerweer region see Sutton (1978:69-74); Chase and Sutton (1981), See also von Sturmer (1978), Thomson (1939), McConnel (1930a).

100. For instance, Wik from between Cape Keerweer and the Knox Creek referred to their country as *aak meeck*, hungry country. Work yet to be undertaken using computerized site data (Sutton, Martin et al 1990) may indicate whether estates were such that they each encompassed an optimal range of resources. Given the high mobility of people, the fluid residence groupings, and the varied ties which could be used to gain access to estates other than their own (as Sutton shows), it would not be surprising if particular estates were in fact far from optimal.

101. See also Sutton (1978:69)

102. *ibid*:72

103. See also Sutton (*op.cit*:69)

104. Site # DM-109, S.A. Museum # 2102 (Sutton, Martin et al 1990).

105. For example Aayk in estate 6 (S.A. Museum site # 85) (Sutton 1978:72) and Walangal in estate 17 (Site DM-108, S.A. Museum site # 2101) (Sutton, Martin et al 1990).

106. Sutton (1978:68)

Nonetheless, it would appear that Wik did not establish permanent and reproducing hierarchical relations primarily on the basis of differential material resource control. Given this, and given the very high stress amongst Wik on personal autonomy and the particular form of Wik egalitarianism outlined in Chapter 1, the question of the precise nature of power relations is at first glance rendered somewhat problematic. My contention is that rather than through the control of material capital, it was largely through the struggle to appropriate the various forms of symbolic capital that relations of domination and subordination were established (including those between the genders and generations), and the studies of Sutton and of von Sturmer on such features as Wik language, totemism, and territoriality can, I suggest, be read in these terms.¹⁰⁸ This theme is dealt with further in Chapter 6.

The control of economic capital of course had a degree of effect, since there were a whole range of mechanisms through which symbolic forms of capital could be converted to material ones, and *vice versa*. Some of these have been discussed elsewhere; a crucial one was the means by which exchanges of material resources substantiated relations of affect between kin.¹⁰⁹ Clans in the less ecologically diverse estates in the Knox River area were peripheral to the major ritual cults centred on the rich estuarine regions of the Kendall River to the south and the Kirke to the north,¹¹⁰ and were politically and socially marginal. Virtually all sorcery accusations for instance that I noted while I was in Aurukun were against men from this region. Sutton also presents evidence that strongly suggests a long history of marriage and political alliances between clans from these richer estuarine estates extending to ones on coastal estates well north and south of the Kendall-Kirke region.¹¹¹ One could be tempted to infer that there was a fair degree of congruence between the control of physical resources and that of ritual property. However, as a counter argument, the Brolga clan from the Cape Keerweer region had a small coastal estate without any great ecological diversity. Much of their time had been spent in fact living on other estates such as those of their neighbours the Masked Plover clan and of the Shark clan on the Kirke estuary, with whom they were linked by marriage exchange. The Brolga clan - an enclave of *Wik Mungkan* speakers in this coastal region - nonetheless had a large number of important ritual sites on their own estate, including increase centres and several major sites figuring in the *Apalach* ritual cycle.¹¹² They were a central clan in this cult, and by the early 1980s a senior man of this clan had become the *Apalach* ritual leader, and his sisters the main performers of *wuungk* mortuary ritual in Aurukun.

107. Mapped by both Peter Sutton and myself, this is site # 2179 in the South Australian Museum database. It was claimed by both clans 12 and 15.

108. von Sturmer (1978); Sutton (1978). See, for example, Sutton pp160-1, where he talks of the leadership of "big men" amongst the Cape Keerweer Wik in terms of "qualities of political astuteness, verbal ability in arguments, fighting skill, knowledgeability and, perhaps above all, the ability to mobilize large numbers of kinspeople as supporters." He also notes that political leaders in can also be leaders of style as well, including linguistic style. These are, *par excellence*, symbolic resources, even arguably in the case of fighting skill (see Chapter 6).

109. See Chapter 3

110. See also Sutton (1978:141)

111. *ibid*:75

Intimate knowledge of and ties to clan lands had been sundered for almost all Wik reaching maturity in the dormitories by the latter part of the MacKenzie era, in the mid 1960s. There were still Wik from the preceding generations, men and women born in the last few years of the 19th century or early in this one, who had maintained a detailed knowledge of their own and other estates, their sites, personal histories, and mythology. This was the case too for a few people born in the 1930s and early 1940s who for one reason or another had spent considerable periods of time out bush. It was these key individuals who provided the dynamic behind the establishment of outstations in the 1970s, who mapped sites with anthropologists such as Sutton, von Sturmer, Chase and myself in the region, and who continued to politick about land and sites despite living virtually permanently within the Aurukun settlement.

Outstations were the major focus of contemporary interests in traditional lands. The numbers of Wik living out bush from the mid-1970s fluctuated widely, both *in toto* and on individual outstations. Their history was a complex one, and can not be detailed here.¹¹³ In essence, in the mid and late 1970s, Peret (*Watha-nhiin*) and Titree outstations (see Map 2) were not only centres for those groups who had core members with direct ties to them, but served also as 'staging centres' for Wik wanting to establish their own outstations. At this stage, *Watha-nhiin*'s core population was comprised largely of Wik from Cape Keerweer clans, while Titree's was composed (until 1978) of those from clans of that area, from the upper and lower Knox River region, and from the Kendall River and further south.¹¹⁴ As the populations at these two centres grew, tensions increased significantly,¹¹⁵ and by 1983 outstations of varying degrees of permanence had been established at eight or nine centres, including three north of the Archer River. Populations on these outstations themselves varied greatly, according to a number of factors; the season (with populations at their peak during the late dry season), deaths of outstation residents or of their kin (particularly those of focal individuals) levels of conflict within and between outstations, the situation in Aurukun itself - especially the levels of conflict there¹¹⁶ - and the standard of logistic support offered to outstation residents by Aurukun Community Incorporated.

The use by Wik of the landscape since the establishment of the mission just after the turn of the century, involved a general contraction of the areas actively used in practical day-to-day activity to those centred around the Mission itself and the river systems nearby. There were exceptions: most Wik spent the war years out bush, sent

112. See also *ibid*:152

113. Dale (1992) and Sutton (1978) give some details of the history of the origins and establishment of outstations.

114. See Sutton (1978, Map 13). This map was drawn up after the north and south Kendall River outstations had been established.

115. See Sutton (*op.cit*:104-5) and discussion in Chapter 4.

116. For example, prior to the establishment of the beer canteen in Aurukun, many Wik said that they would live on outstations once it was opened. In fact, what happened was that the canteen soon provided the primary focal point around which Wik life revolved as I argued in Chapter 4, and outstation populations declined. For significant periods, no Wik at all lived out bush in fact.

there for safety by MacKenzie, and the cattle industry in the periods it operated took men over a wide area of the Aurukun reserve. The knowledge of country gained by stockmen and other workers however, while intimate in terms of topography, resources, and even place names, was in general of an essentially secular nature. More recently, the move to establish outstations mentioned above, which had its greatest momentum in the 1970s, saw at times considerable numbers of Wik living on or near their clan estates. Even with this move however, the use of country tended to be concentrated around the outstations themselves and the travel routes back to Aurukun, people were highly mobile and travelled by vehicle and aircraft (which meant a far less intimate view of country than that given by travelling on foot), and outstations had a preponderance of the late middle-aged and elderly and children, with young men for much of the time conspicuous by their absence.

The contraction in the use of space accelerated from the early 1980s. In the 1975 and 1976 dry seasons when I first went to Aurukun, there were several hundred Wik camped up and down the Archer River and its tributaries, along the coast, and at outstations, and in 1978 and 1979 there were up to 300 people on outstations in the dry season, with substantial numbers staying through the wet season. Small dinghies and outboard motors were the most prestigious items of capital expenditure, and there were large numbers of boats lining the Aurukun landing, replacing the messmate bark canoes (*thoon*) and dugouts of the Mission times. "That landing used to be shut¹¹⁷ with *kinuw* (canoes) boy!" I was frequently told.

The contesting of space within Aurukun

Fundamental changes had occurred with the centralisation of the Wik in Aurukun, but traditional lands, as both material and symbolic resources - their physical resources, their sites, associated myths, rituals and totemic geography - still figured prominently in political life, if mainly for older generations. However, the struggle to appropriate and control space as both material and symbolic resource within and around the township itself was an omnipresent feature of contemporary Wik political life.

By the mid 1980s, almost all Wik based their lives in the Aurukun township itself, apart from the quite significant numbers (98 in February 1986)¹¹⁸ who lived in other settlements such as Edward River and Kowanyama to the south. The outstation movement had at this stage largely lost momentum, not least because of the deaths of many of the older Wik who had provided it with its impetus.¹¹⁹ While many people still camped out for periods during the dry season, their total numbers were fewer, the duration of their stays shorter, and most camps were within a few kilometres of Aurukun, at places easily reached by vehicle such as *Yagalmungkan* and *Uwbun* on

117. 'shut' in Aurukun English meant that the place was congested with the item under discussion

118. Source: D.F. Martin, Aurukun census, February 1986.

119. There has been something of a resurgence in more recent years, with populations in the dry season nearing the levels of the late 1970s. This has reflected dramatically increased tensions within Aurukun, and improved logistic support and infrastructure supplied through A.C.I.

the Ward River just west of the township, and Wooriy on the Watson.¹²⁰ There were by now very few serviceable outboards owned by Wik, with large cash surpluses that were not immediately spent on alcohol going to purchase vehicles that could be used to drive to Weipa rather than outboard motors.

The area around the old mission building on the northern side of Aurukun (see Figure 5.1 page 235) had been where the Moravian missionary Richter established his residence in 1904, and when Wik were moved up from the original village at the landing, it was to the site of the present east ('top') side of the village. The MacKenzies had maintained this separation, with staff living areas, the Mission building, the old school, the dispensary, feeding kitchens and store and (significantly) the dormitories clustered together, the church standing between them and the village. The dormitories in fact had been on the northern side of the staff area and of the church, which thus was interposed between Wik children in the dormitories and Wik parents and families in the village. The power of the Mission to separate Wik children from their families had thereby been symbolically effected spatially as it was practically effected socially. Virtually the only non-Whites living outside the village in MacKenzie's time, apart from the children in the dormitories, had been a mixed descent family from Mapoon mission to the north of Weipa. Men from this family worked in the Mission cattle industry, one being the manager for a considerable period of time. Even so, reflecting their liminal position, neither White nor Wik, they lived near Big Swamp (Ngaka-thip-pampang), a hundred metres or so east of the present school.

As Attwood notes more generally of the missionizing process, for missionaries the location of Aborigines in houses by 'family' (in its western domestic unit sense) was a fundamental part of the attempt to civilize. Just as mission areas themselves were defined and delineated by boundaries, so too were the new social forms for Aborigines to be constructed by enclosing them in houses, weakening kin and other links to the wider community and replacing them with ideals of individual separateness, autonomy, and working productively for oneself and one's family household.¹²¹ The mission village then was a structured landscape, a place;

... where the empty spaces between the Aborigines' cottages had as much meaning as the physical constructions themselves, both speaking clearly of the missionaries' attempt to structure Aborigines as *individuals* and to redefine their notions of social space ... the individual was to replace the group as the crucial moral or ethical unit ...¹²²

The basic pattern of the allocation of space by the Mission authorities continued to be reproduced into contemporary times, with almost all staff living on the northern side of the settlement, and most facilities, such as the hospital and the new school, being placed there as well. The main exception up until 1981 were four duplexes for teachers, constructed for the Queensland Education Department, which had been built

120. These sites are documented in Sutton, Martin et al (1990)

121. Attwood (1989:20). Finlayson (1991) has developed a similar argument in relation to Mona Mona mission near Kuranda. I suggested earlier (page 218) that this process took place at the same time as one of the collectivization of certain Wik social forms.

122. Attwood (*op.cit*:18-19)

on what was at the time of their construction the western fringes of the then new village. The Police station, the gaol, and accommodation for the Sergeant and constables, and the Health Clinic and associated residence had all been built after the institution of Local Government on what was the continuation of an existing axis, the road running from the new airstrip to the administration area, which broadly separated White and Wik domains (see Figure 5.1).

The administration and staff area continued to be referred to as *pek*, 'inside', by Wik, with the village being *yoon*, 'outside'. 'Inside' more generally was a fluid and contextual concept referring to the space of immediate and dominant social interest; it could be as small as the blanket on the ground on which a family were sitting (thus dogs or children being shouted at to go 'outside'), or as large as the cleared space of outstation encampment. It was suggestive that it was the village that was the 'outside' space in the township, given that it was the primary realm of lived experience for Wik; there was, perhaps, in this apparent reversal an awareness of the objective distribution of power between the two domains, dating from Mission times.

Within the village on the other hand, a basic dichotomy of 'top side' and 'bottom side' continued to be used to orientate both geographical and social realms. The primary referent of these terms was the pre-contact dichotomy between coastal floodplain (western, or 'bottomside') and sclerophyll forest (eastern, or 'topside') geographical zones and clans. This division between coastal and inland peoples had figured at many levels in the area - in marriage and political relations, in conflicts and fighting, and in ritual cult affiliations for instance. In the original Mission village, the spatial distribution of housing had reflected fairly closely both geographical origin and political and social standing. *Wik Way* (northern) and Archer River people, who held the bulk of the positions such as councillors and church elders, lived closest to the staff area, topside clans lived on the eastern side of the village, and clans from the Kendall and Holroyd rivers at the extreme southern end of the Aurukun reserve, the most dispossessed of all from established Mission power structures, lived at the very southern end of the village. The old village at this time, then, in a sense paralleled in its allocation of space the arrangements of a camp out bush, with the centre of the lived-in space being defined by the camp of the estate owners, and orientation and distance of other camps reflecting social and geographical orientation and distance of the people concerned relative to the central group. As with the camps, it was not just living areas but appropriate and accepted travel routes between living spaces, closeness to and use of resource extractions areas (wells out bush for instance, and the mission store in the village), meeting and fighting grounds, which were apportioned and whose use was implicated in the reproduction of the social relations which produced them in the first place.

In the contemporary village however, the east-west dichotomy had become looser and more fluid in its application. As will be shortly discussed, by the early 1980s there had been large numbers of new houses built in new areas to the west of the old Mission village, and 'topside' and 'bottomside' people in terms of their original patrician affiliations were not necessarily living on the east or the west sides of the village at all. This is clearly demonstrated in Table 5.2 below.

Table 5.2 Bottomside and topside clan distributions, 1986

	'Bottomside' (West)	Central	'Topside' (East)	Whole Village
Inland clans ^a	58 (20%)	63 (23%)	48 (15%)	169 (19%)
Coastal clans ^b	213 (73%)	172 (63%)	250 (78%)	635 (71%)
Other clans ^c	22 (7%)	40 (14%)	23 (7%)	85 (10%)
TOTALS	293	275	321	889

a) clans 30-41, 80-89 (Sutton, Martin et al 1990)

b) clans 1-29, 42, 90-98

c) including Northern (*Wik Way*) clans and non-Wik village residents

The continuing struggle by Wik over symbolic and material resources within the township was exemplified in the appropriation of new houses, particularly post-1978 when there was a massive injection of funding into the construction of houses to replace the old two-roomed cottages built in the mission era. It should not of course be assumed (as it was by the bureaucrats and administrators overseeing the 'development' of Aurukun into a quasi-rural township) that a house - or indeed any other item of western material culture - necessarily served the same practical and symbolic ends for Wik as it may have in the culture of wider Australian suburbia. The intense competition for new houses certainly demonstrated that they served valued Wik ends, just as their very construction (in neat rows, by outside contractors, along with that of sealed roads and kerbing) self-evidently served certain ends of White Australian bureaucratic culture. There were indeed many Wik who, while the option remained open to them, preferred to stay in the old village houses, which by then had outside toilet and washing facilities and power points on the small verandahs. An often mentioned reason for not moving was to avoid having to pay rent, which was not required for these old, privately owned dwellings. A few continued by preference to live in self-built huts on the fringes of the township, often with the expressed reason of keeping away from the noise and fighting of the village. The new houses undoubtedly had utilitarian value in themselves for Wik who competed for them; the potential increased space and privacy in them, and the availability of power, light and hot water were all seen as desirable. A few Wik took the opportunity presented by a new house to buy curtains, some furniture, and refrigerators and freezers, but most of the new houses remained as bare inside as the original ones had been. While the dimensions and basic structures of much of the new Wik housing were similar to those of the Whites, the latter could always be distinguished by the facilities inside, the lawns and gardens, the four-wheel drive vehicles parked inside the locked gates or underneath the house, the relative absence of people moving through, and (latterly), the high wire-mesh fences and the guard dogs.

For the Wik who competed for them, the prestige in having one did not lie in the elaboration and perpetuation of personal and status group distinctions through garden styles, type and expense of interior furnishings, house designs and so forth, in the manner of suburban Australia. Wik did not appear to rank the different new housing styles by such criteria. Nor did the desire for new houses lie in any developed ideology of ownership and control of a 'home'. In part, the desire by Wik for new houses, like that for many other consumer goods and items of modern

material technology, arose as much from the omnipresent stress on equality of status as from a desire for the convenience of the house itself; once some Wik had such resources, there was intense jealousy and pressure from others to have similar ones themselves. As with all such resources however, exclusive possession and use was not possible; if houses, like cash, promised a measure of autonomy for their owners, this was ultimately subverted by demands for access to and use of them by others. The care and control by most nominal owners of houses (or virtually any other material item) was highly problematic in the contemporary township. The notion in suburban Australia of the bounded use of domestic living space defined as their 'home' by a nuclear family unit was not held by Wik. Almost all Wik house owners who moved into new dwellings, often with great expectations, found themselves quite unable to control the constant movement of people through them and the chaos surrounding drinking and fighting and consequent destruction of the houses and their contents.¹²³ The personal and social ramifications of being granted a new house were very often not perceived by Wik themselves, at least until after they had moved into it.

An elderly couple had been allocated the prefabricated house for which they had applied to the Council, built on the site of their original small village dwelling. With them into the new home moved one of their daughters, her spouse and their three children, and five children of another daughter who played little part in their day-to-day care. The couple complained frequently to me that it was left to them to pay the rent on the house, to provide the bulk of the food for the household, and to look after the children, while the parents spent their money and time on cards and alcohol. They also found it impossible to control the children, who on a number of occasions during arguments amongst themselves or with parents or grandparents, systematically went through the house smashing windows, doors and walls. Eventually, the elderly couple moved to another house, but to no avail, since the children followed them.

The struggle over the appropriation of space by Wik did not concern just the houses *per se*, because the flux of Wik social life was not, and could not be, contained by such a boundedness. It also concerned certain shade and rest areas, paths and roadways connecting lived-in spaces, open public spaces such as those used for fighting grounds, and the new desirable spaces, around the A.C.I. store, and the newly developed housing areas near the airstrip. Even where people sat within the beer canteen was the subject of watchful monitoring. The fluid use of geographical space and the mapping onto it of social groupings continued to be reproduced, albeit it in changed circumstances, as it had in pre-contact times. The distinctions between public and private sites on traditional land had been underlain by three intersecting sets of beliefs arising from the 'history of origins'; those concerning the creation of the physical and mythological landscape, including sites of particular danger and potency; those concerning the social landscape including rights vested in estate and site owners; and those relating to the predominant ritual power and potency of senior males. The Aurukun township, unlike the world of the traditional lands, was by contrast self-evidently the creation of people, Wik and others (if not the land on which it stood), not of the Creator Heroes. While it too was "saturated with

123. Reser (1979) has written of similar themes in relation to Yolngu housing in eastern Arnhem

significations",¹²⁴ most of these meanings were secular and historical, not referred back to and drawing upon a pre-existing and super-ordinate realm. The new territoriality for younger Wik however was centred firmly around the township itself, and relationships to it were not underpinned by a transcendent realm mediated by older knowledgeable people as had been the case for traditional lands. Neither did land continue to provide more than a small proportion of subsistence needs for most Wik. Additionally, the means to control space in the contemporary situation were severely compromised, as discussed in Chapter 4. There were few of the equivalents in the contemporary Wik village to the restricted domains that had existed in clan estates. In certain instances on the peripheries of the village, as in the exclusively male stages of initiations up to the late 1960s or in the activities in the men's bough shades in preparation for ritual cult performances at contemporary mortuary ceremonies, spaces were defined which had restrictions on public access. By and large however, the ability of Wik to control the flux of mundane life - particularly conflict - as it ebbed and flowed through both social and geographical spaces was becoming ever more problematic.

The domains where private space in the township was sharply defined were those under the control of staff. The patterns of usage by staff of resources such as houses, vehicles and boats in general reproduced those of the mainstream Australian culture from which they had come, centring on nuclear domestic units and on work based alliances, almost always rigidly racially based. It was rare to have socializing between Wik and White outside of the various work environments, which themselves were often quite sharply defined in racial terms. Even within the school, the hospital and the administration offices, there existed marked (but none-the-less unremarked) social and geographical spaces within which Wik and White separately operated.

The new housing for Wik was of several different types, and was constructed over a period of nearly 15 years. In the latter stages of the Mission period, in the early 1970s, some 19 high-set houses had been built on the western side of the village, on what had been a vegetable garden in MacKenzie's time, with funding provided by the Federal Department of Aboriginal Affairs. By 1981, a further set of D.A.A. funded houses had been built, mostly by contractors but one by a team of Wik working with an outside supervisor. These had been designed by an architect from the Aboriginal Housing Panel, who had spent a great deal of time consulting with Aurukun people about preferred housing styles. They continued to be the only housing built in contemporary Aurukun which reflected any consideration of Wik values in their design if not their placement. While these houses were built further west still, towards the airstrip, the basic division between administrative and White residential areas of the town and what both sides called the 'village' was still maintained, with the only encroachments on either side being a set of teachers' houses.

The allocation of housing was nominally under the control of the Shire Councillors by this stage; before that, it had been under that of the old Mission

land.

124. Stanner (1963:227)

council. The broad parameters constraining decisions on new housing however were set essentially by outside agencies, particular the Local Government Department, and by White staff within Aurukun. Like so much policy implemented in Aurukun, Wik were reduced to skirmishing on the fringes; not deciding what type of housing was appropriate, whether it should be built in the Aurukun township at all or possibly decentralize to outstations, whether they themselves should be involved in its construction or whether there were more appropriate designs that could be utilized, but only who would get to live in it.

Figure 5.1 shows quite clearly that by 1981, three years after the establishment of Local Government, there had been a significant move by members of the Shire Council and their immediate kin¹²⁵ to the new houses. Also shown in this figure is the housing controlled by what I have termed the "Mission elite". While somewhat loose, this term refers to those key immediate families (mostly *Mungkan* people from Archer River and nearby clans) who had formed the core of the Mission Councils, the Church elders, and other prestigious positions within the Mission, and who had in the old village clustered around the area closest to the staff domain.¹²⁶ It can be seen in the diagram that there was a fair degree of correlation between these people and the composition of the Shire Council at this time; this suggests that incipiently at least, the pattern of hierarchical control of prestigious positions and desirable space established in the MacKenzie era was being reproduced well after its demise. It can also be seen that the Councillors and their immediate kin at this time had continued to move on past the first set of new houses built, and were establishing themselves in the latest housing, that funded by the D.A.A., with "mission elite" continuing to monopolize the early D.A.A. housing.

This pattern continued and in fact was further consolidated by 1986, as shown in Figure 5.2. At first glance, there appear to have been more immediate kin of councillors living in the old village area than had been the case five years previously, but by then new houses ("Logan" prefabricated homes) were being erected in the old village area, and five of the eight families of Councillors in this area were in these new homes. Immediate kin of Councillors in fact had expanded their control of both early and post-1978 housing, in some cases having multiple (up to six) dwellings under the control of the one immediate family group. It is also noteworthy that there were some Wik moving into what had up until then been staff areas. The Chairperson of the Council was living in a staff flat while waiting for a new house to be completed, and a past Chairperson had moved into a house ostensibly built for the caretaker of the aged pensioners' quarters, near the hospital.

Those employed on full-time jobs were also surveyed in 1986, and the distribution shown on Figure 5.2. Results are tabulated in Table 5.3 following, along with the data for Whites living in Aurukun and the numbers of households and residents involved. The great disparity in the distribution of employment and housing

125. Defined as those directly genealogically related to Councillors, as parents, siblings or children. While in general terms this definition of close kin would be problematically restricted for Wik, it is useful here in demonstrating patterns of control of space of key families over time.

126. See also Bos (1974) who refers to the concentration of power in a relatively few families under the mission regime.

between White and Wik, instituted it will be remembered under the guise of 'self-determination' for Wik, is blatantly obvious. The disparities in employment within the village, while overshadowed by those between White and Wik domains, are none-the-less suggestive. As shown in the table, 11 percent of adults over 18 years of age living in the old village area were employed full-time, compared with 19 percent in the newer areas. The control of the newer houses exercised by the old mission and new political elites and their immediate kin was reflected also in access to full-time jobs, with 0.78 persons per household being employed, compared with 0.49 persons for other Wik.

Table 5.3 Relative employment levels, Aurukun, 1986

	New Village	Old Village	Whites
Houses	50	70	36
Residents	371	482	50 ^a
Adults	202	269	50 ^a
Under 18	169	213	5 ^a
Employed	38	30	43
% employed ^b	19%	11%	96%

Source: D.F. Martin, Aurukun census, February 1986

a) Figures for Whites approximate only

b) Percentage of Wik 18 and over

That these figures are suggestive of trends rather than conclusive results from a multiplicity of factors, most importantly, perhaps, the involvement of Whites in much of the decision making concerning the allocation of housing and full-time employment. After my 1986 housing census was completed for instance, I was requested to prepare a list of large families still in old village houses for consideration by the Council in its allocation of the next set of new homes. In the case of employment, almost all jobs were under the supervision of Whites, working for a number of different agencies as well as the Council, who had often a fair degree of autonomy in who they chose to work under them. Many Wik in fact attempted to cultivate personal relationships with staff which (amongst other things) increased their chances of employment.

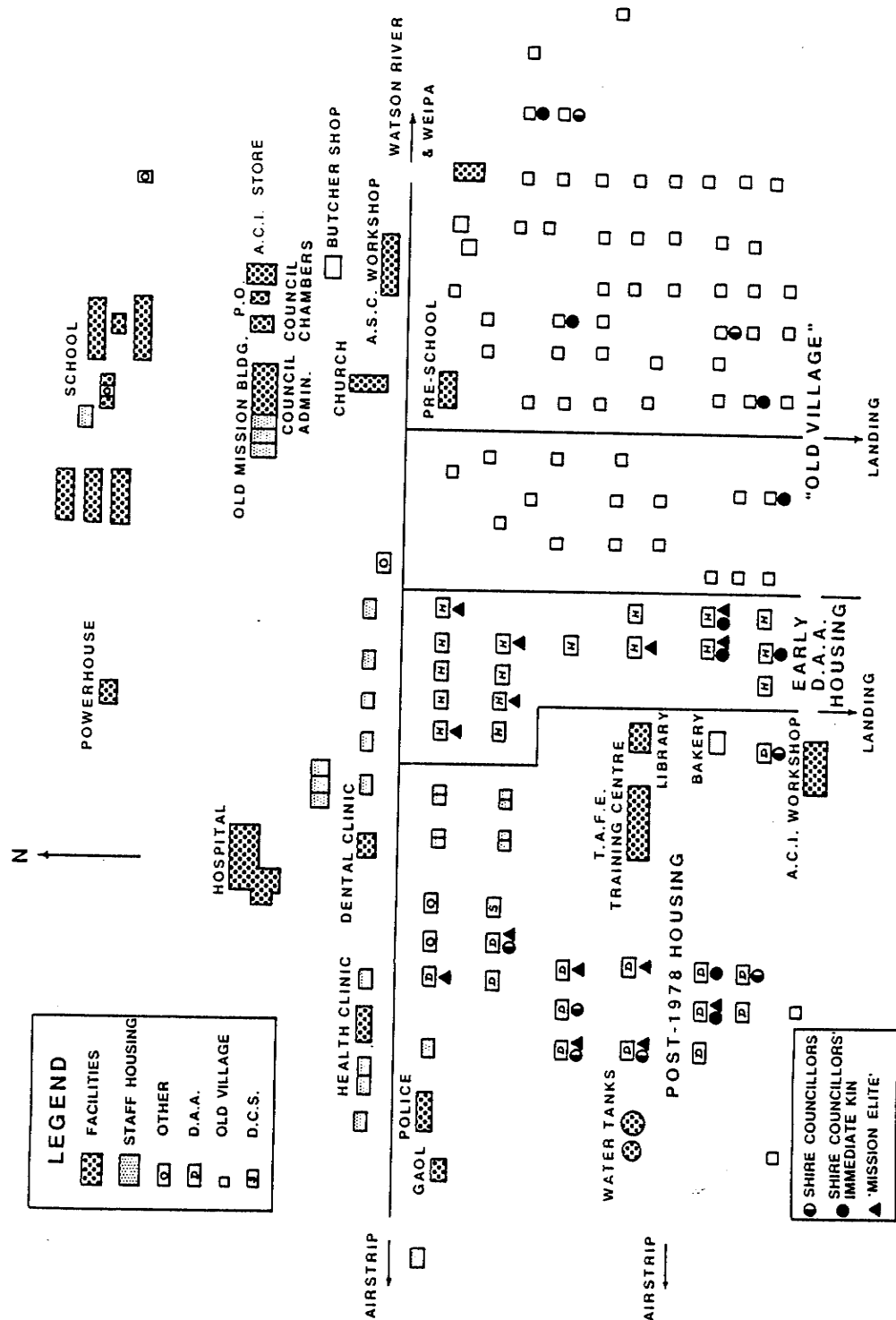


Figure 5.1 Aurukun housing - 1981

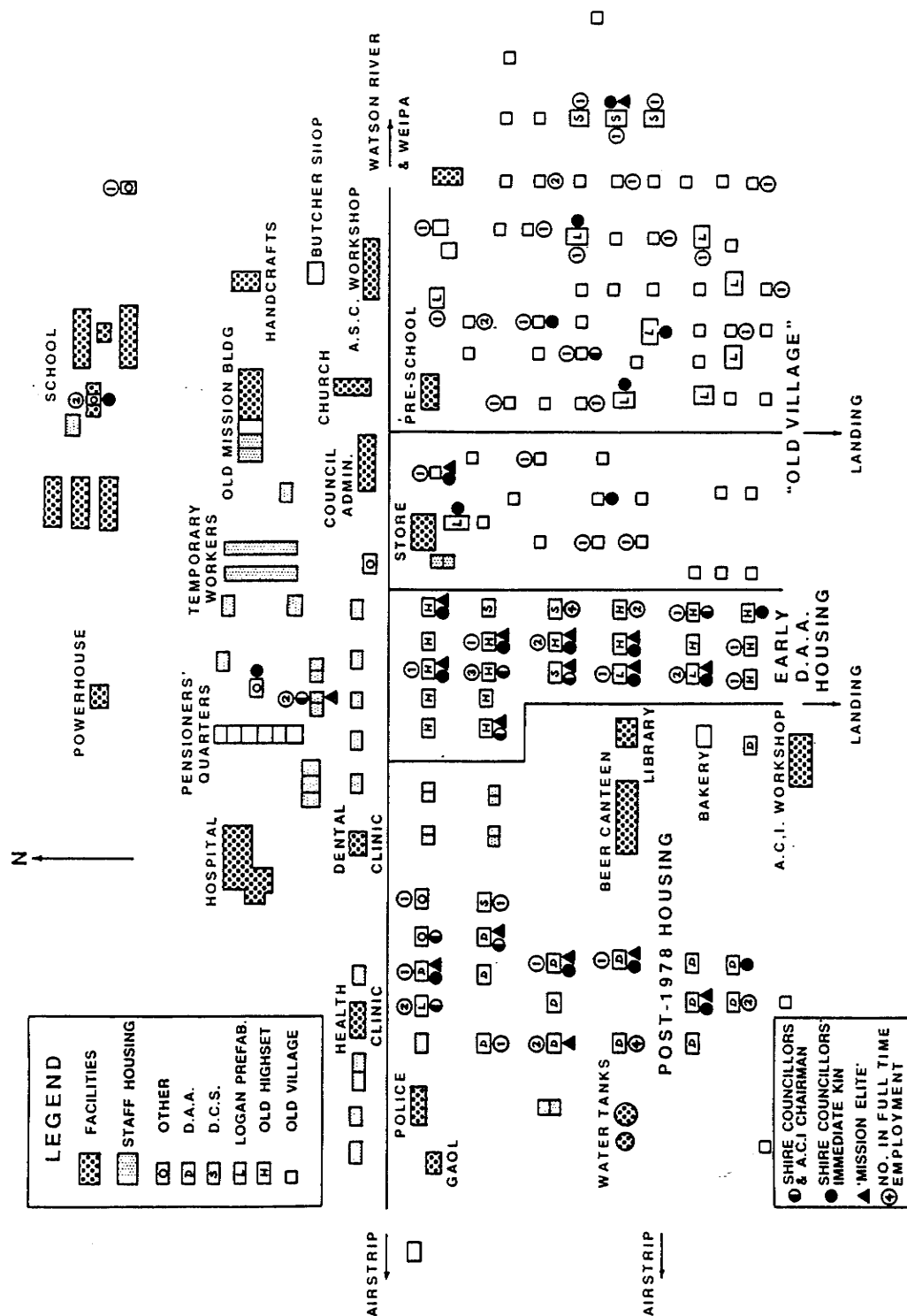


Figure 5.2 Aurukun housing - 1986

A year later, in 1987, more housing had been built for Wik, both in the old village area and to the west of the water towers, towards the airstrip. These latter were substantial concrete block homes funded by the Aboriginal Development Commission, each with a chain-mesh fence around it, lying in a neat suburban row. It can be seen from Figure 5.3 that the same pattern of Councillors and immediate family moving into new housing and leaving kin behind them in their original dwellings continued. By this time however, the numbers of newer houses were such that some 15 old village dwellings had either been demolished and replaced by prefabricated buildings or were no longer used. The dominant focus of village life was moving inexorably away from the old village area. At the same time, the number of staff houses had also increased, with the Education Department and Aurukun Community Incorporated each placing another two duplexes in the western village area.

The reification of 'culture'

The competence and intimate knowledge of many older Wik in autogenous ritual forms and in many contemporary ones no longer existed for young Wik growing to adulthood in the 1980s. Not only did by far the greater majority not receive more than cursory schooling in Western technical skills and modes of intellectual practice (including those of the church, dominant for the preceding generations), but also the content, importance and sources of ritual and other forms of intangible property were undergoing continuing processes of change in the contemporary settlement. In particular, knowledge of traditional lands, of pre-contact cosmology and of the details of many of the original site-based ritual forms had become radically attenuated amongst almost all younger Wik, most noticeably in those individuals born after the mid 1960s, at the end of the MacKenzie era.

'Culture' as Wik themselves used the English word, referring to such features as their languages, site based myths and rituals and the totemic and ritual cults, was increasingly becoming divorced from the practices of everyday Wik life. There was still a core of older Wik - in particular the ritual specialists - who maintained not only a basic competence in the autogenous cultural forms but more importantly a view of the world framed primarily by those terms. For these people, settlement Aurukun was perceived and interpreted through a cultural lens moulded in the bush some four or five decades previously, as well as in the MacKenzie era in the Mission. For younger generations however, the reverse was the case. It was their own life histories almost exclusively within the settlement, the ebb and flow of day-to-day village life, its demands and excitements and imperatives, more broadly its emergent cultural forms, which provided the means by which the world, including the bush, was interpreted.

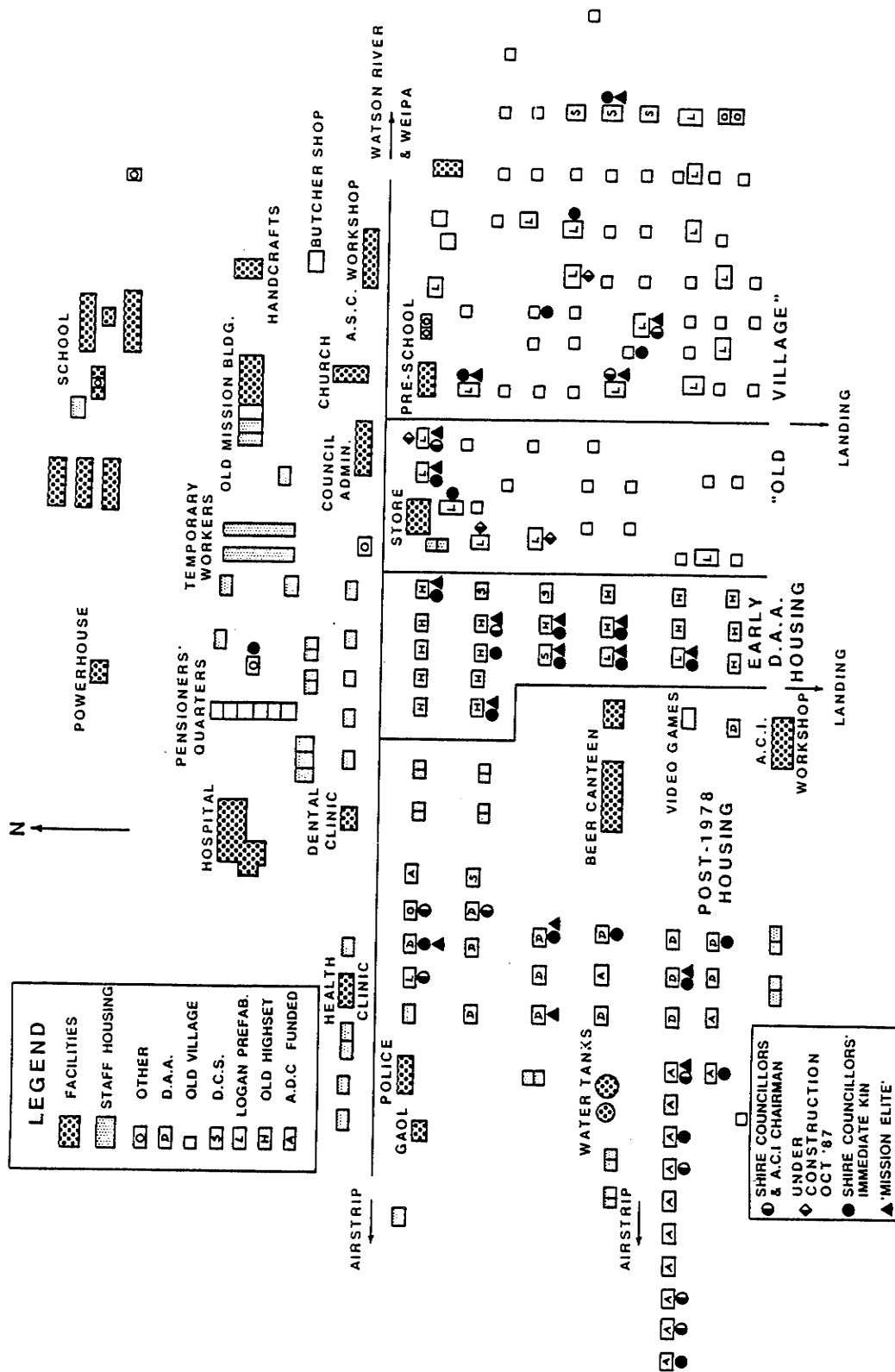


Figure 5.3 Aurukun housing - 1987

However, the original forms still served practical ends, as symbolic resources in the politics of identification and differentiation within the Wik domain, as evidenced for example by the rhetoric in fights, and by the graffiti and messages which young Wik emblazoned on their clothing and on walls. These took the form of cryptic acronyms, and typically emphasized the nominal homeland of the person concerned, even for those who had rarely if ever been there;

JP
TTOSG
ATFS

J... P...
TiTree OutStation Girl
And That's for Sure.

Within the Wik domain, then, 'culture' was increasingly a matter of emblematic forms. Male potency was still understood in terms of being *thup*, of having *ngangk chaaprr*, and so forth, but these were not ritually inculcated but individually determined through personal style and *machismo*. The intrinsically competitive aspect of the cults allowed even formerly restricted (*ngenyich*) dances to be "brought out" publicly by performers for contemporary house openings in attempts to upstage those from other cults. It also underlay the entirely willing co-opting of both senior ritual leaders and other Wik in such venues as performances in southern capital cities, and at the inter-community dance competitions organized by the former State Department of Aboriginal and Islander Affairs at the annual Laura festival in central Cape York. At this festival, organized until 1990 by the State Aboriginal and Islander Affairs Department and placed on the Cape York dry season tourist agenda by Departmental brochures and other advertising, Aboriginal dance 'teams' from settlements and towns competed for prizes. Aurukun dancers consistently won.¹²⁷ Within Aurukun itself, such events occurred in the dancing competitions at the beer canteen organized by White staff;

It was the occasion of the formal opening of the beer canteen, several months after it had in fact been opened for business, and paradoxically scheduled for the same week as the dedication of the *Wik Mungkan* translation of the bible. A large number of guests had been invited by Council staff, including representatives from the brewery, a Police sergeant who had been stationed at Aurukun in the past, bureaucrats from State government departments, and the manager of the hotel in Weipa. Their wives were also present, hair styled, made up and dressed for the occasion, looking ill at ease; this did not however stop them photographing Wik painted up for the dancing to be held later in the evening. A formal speech was made by the Council administrator, and then the rush was on, for this night the beer was free.

The Shire Clerk had organized a dance competition, with a prize of \$100 for the 'best team'. Dances from *Wanam*, *Chivirriy*, *Apalach*, *Pucha* and *Winychanam* were performed. Three judges were assigned, all in fact associated with *Apalach*, who exhorted the dancers to perform with enthusiasm and to face the Whites so that photographs could be taken.

127. While it also served diverse Aboriginal ends, the festival must be placed in the historical context of bureaucratic attempts to control the legitimate expression of Aboriginality in Queensland. Distinctive modes of Aboriginal practices and thought were to be replaced under the policy of 'assimilation' by those of the mainstream society. Only the exotica of Aboriginal 'culture' were to be maintained, divorced from practical life, preserved largely for the entertainment of tourists and other visitors as part of what was posited as the cultural heritage of all Queenslanders.

They also proffered running commentaries on the meanings of the dances. The *Pucha* mob from Kendall in the days before the opening had been practising a hitherto secret dance which they planned to perform publicly for the first time, but in the event failed to do so.

In such forums, new secular meanings were being generated by these performances; meanings which referred both to internal dynamics of the Wik domain and to the articulation between it and the dominant society. In the case of the former, the meanings related to the use of these symbolic forms in the incessant struggle over relative prestige between Wik individuals and collectivities. In the latter, they related to the role of 'culture' as symbolic commodity in the political articulation of Wik and White societies, and as rhetorical rallying point for Wik in the emergent politics of differentiation.

For the younger generations, as for the new secular leaders of Aurukun, 'culture' in its understood limited sense was not so much a matter of lived experience as of a set of reified practices, a means by which they differentiated themselves at the rhetorical level from the wider and dominant Australian society. Whites, I was frequently told, although we were admittedly clever had no 'culture' - no language, no sacred dances, no rituals. Yet, Wik were profoundly ambivalent about Whites and their social and economic forms, as evidenced by such features as their assimilation of cash to distinctively Wik modes of practice while denying its central constituting role, and by the patterns of movement of the power elite in forming constellations around the White administration areas within Aurukun. It would not be correct however to typify Wik culture as essentially oppositional, as has Cowlishaw for the Aboriginal people of "Brindleton" in western New South Wales.¹²⁸ Such contemporary cultures derive their forms from the intersection of systems of meanings and practices, and exist in an historically situated dialectic between indigenous forms and those of the dominant society.¹²⁹

This reification of particular sets of practices as a distinctively and uniquely Wik 'culture' allowed them to ignore the objective and distinctive realities of emergent Wik settlement culture, including those centring on the use of cash and on violence and alcohol consumption. It also however placed outside the rubric of culture, practices such as the continuing use of geographic space to demarcate social space in ways which clearly link contemporary Wik to their past. Finally, the fact that such practices as for instance mortuary rituals, albeit in attenuated form, were still performed regularly in Aurukun allowed Wik to claim that they still kept their 'culture', but ultimately to ignore the fact that increasing numbers of the rituals were held for those who were the victims of alcohol related violence, posited as it were out of 'culture'.

128. Cowlishaw (1988:232-44)

129. See Keefe (1988)

Chapter 6

A Fluid Polity

Someone shouted "Out here, we'll fight outside!" and the crowd streamed out the gate on to the road under a pool of light from a streetlight. Others came running from the village to join the fight, followed by swarms of children eager for the thrills and excitement. There were perhaps fifty or sixty young men in a huge melee that sent swirls of dust up in the pool of light ... The Shire councillor with whom the Northern Territory visitors were staying was acting as thaa' pant or 'blocker', attempting to separate the two men, interposing himself between them as they circled around him trying to punch one another Meanwhile another councillor, Jimmy, whose sons were fighting on behalf of their cousins the Flying Fox mob, was arguing furiously with the White police, who had been totally unable to prevent the fighting from spreading and who were standing helplessly in the middle as it swirled around them.

Encapsulated in this scene were a number of important principles underlying Wik social forms. The streaming of protagonists and spectators to the fight as it started within the Shire canteen and its transference from there by essentially unspoken consensus to a public space under the street light, the highly fluid ebb and flow of action and the resulting apparent chaos of the scene, and the co-ordination of individual actions in conjoint purpose without the exercise of overt direction, characterized much of Wik life. So too was the essential ambiguity of the Councillors' roles as both kin of protagonists and as nominal bearers of law and responsibility through the Shire, with all that each role entailed. The inability of the State police to control the situation too was merely one instance of the wider impotence of the agencies of the State to contain the fluidity of so much of Wik social process.

The church and more recent secular régimes had attempted at a number of levels to contain this fluidity. In both the Mission village and its successor, the Shire township, there had been the imposition of forms of spatial order and coherence based on that of the external society. The original messmate bark and, later, milled timber and aluminium sheet huts of the Mission village had been erected in neat rows to the south of the administration and staff areas (see Chapter 5). There had however been a fair degree of congruence between autogenous Wik social and geographic categories and those reflected in the village layout up until the mid 1970s; for instance those from the southern Kendall and Holroyd River clans had lived at the southern end of the village, while those from inland sclerophyll forest clans lived preponderantly on the east side of the village and those from coastal clans by and large on its west. This degree of coherence was no longer the case by the late 1980s, with the distribution of the Wik through the village having little relationship to their original clan affiliations.

Furthermore, the new housing developments on the western side of the township in particular reflected in their house designs and layout the aesthetic and political values of archetypical Australian suburbia - prefabricated or concrete block homes with 3 or 4 bedrooms separated from kitchen and living rooms, each one with its own fenced off regulation sized yard (containing as a concession to contemporary environmental considerations one or two of the original trees left when the site was cleared), with separate gates for personal and vehicular entry, standing along streets which were gradually being kerbed and sealed.¹

Just as the establishment over time of the township, with its grid pattern, its designated 'parks', administrative, service and staff areas and the designs of Wik housing, incorporated an attempt to impose on the Wik the sense of order in physical space of the dominant society, so too was the history of the establishment of Aurukun and its reproduction into contemporary times one of attempts to control the definitions of social space. Controls instituted in Mission times over marriage and sexuality, over child socialization through such means as the imposition of the dormitory system and the disciplining of children, direct intervention in disputes and the co-opting of senior men as Councillors or church elders to further expedite social control by the Mission, and latterly the introduction of organizations such as the Shire Council to facilitate administration, were all attempts to intervene in and alter the legitimate definitions by which Wik constructed their social worlds. So, too, did the introduction of money into the village economy potentially at least (as argued in chapter 3) intervene in the fluid nature of Wik economic modes. Precisely analogously, the division of time into the eight hour working day, into work days and weekends or holidays, and into pension and 'slack' weeks, attempted to impose both the sense of the flow through time of social process of the dominant society and the definitions of what were legitimate productive 'work' activities and what were private 'leisure' ones.

Wik, however, could not be contained within these physical and ideological structures. The ever-moving currents of Wik social life, ebbing and flowing within and between houses and through the township, acted to subvert the designations of public and private space and appropriate uses of it implicit in White Australian practices and representations. This same fluidity of social process constantly threatened to breach the boundaries of the structures and time schedules instituted by the agents of wider state - the Shire, the Company, and the school for instance. Similarly, as argued in Chapter 3, the Wik reconstituted the Australian dollar, subverting much of its potential to objectify human relations by assimilating it to their own modes of sociality.

Given this fluidity, given the nature of the bases on which domination could be exercised (as outlined in the preceding chapters) and also given the high stress on personal autonomy and the resistance to control by others which I have identified as being so pronounced, the question I now wish to address is that of the distribution of power within the Wik polity. Imposed institutions such as those of the Mission and (later) Shire Councils and the Company, and the introduction of a wide range of

1. See Attwood (1989:18-19) for a discussion of Missionary attempts to reformulate the Aboriginal

material and capital items from the dominant outside society - money, houses, alcohol, consumer goods, cars and so forth - arguably vastly expanded the potential for the objectification of social capital and for relations of domination to be increasingly mediated through these new social manifestations, rather than directly exercised in their 'elementary forms' in the interactions between persons.² I shall contend however that relations of domination were still essentially (although not wholly) exercised in their elementary form amongst the Wik themselves - although most certainly not between Whites and Wik - despite the objective potentialities of the changed circumstances. It was still the struggle to control symbolic capital that predominated; potentially available mechanisms for its objectification were essentially not realized, and the consequent continuing need for Wik to continually create and recreate it underlay the fluidity of so much of social process.

Bourdieu's 'sociology of interest' offers a suggestive metatheory for sociological analyses of social practices. However, in charting the course he does around the despised 'subjectivism',³ Bourdieu leaves a lacuna where individual motivations, emotions and representations are neglected. If we are concerned with explaining social practices, we are of necessity also concerned with examining the agent's intentions and therefore also the agent's beliefs, as Skinner argues.⁴ The distribution of power in a given social formation may well, as Bourdieu asserts, objectively correspond to that of the various forms of capital - material, cultural and symbolic - but the particular nature of representations of power and of beliefs about causal intervention in social life must also be examined as an intrinsic part of sociological enquiry. This is the strength of analyses such as that of Myers on the Western Desert Pintupi, which shows how specific forms of cultural logic render hierarchy meaningful.⁵ Where Myers' analysis fails conversely is in not bringing to the explicit level of sociological analysis the misrecognition inherent in the naturalization of such forms of hierarchy.

In considering these questions, I first explore the nature of Wik leadership by examining the bases on which authority and influence were established and the means through which they were exercised. I then examine the extent of the spatial, social and temporal domains in which leaders' authority and influence operated, before turning to a consideration of the limitations on the extent of their exercise. In the final section, I consider the nature and structures of the groups which coalesced around events and leaders' activities.

sense of social and physical space at Ramahyuck, Victoria, and also discussion in Chapter 5.

2. Bourdieu (1977a:190)

3. e.g. Bourdieu (*op.cit*:82,84)

4. See for example Skinner (1972). His argument is advanced in terms of Austin's category of 'ritual actions', but given the problematic nature of the ritual/non-ritual dichotomy the argument can I suggest be extended.

5. e.g. Myers (1986)

The nature of Wik leadership

Both Sutton and J. von Sturmer, quite rightly in my view, emphasize the pivotal place of 'bosses' or 'big men' in much of Wik social and political life.⁶ However, it is necessary to situate an analysis of the political roles of such individuals in the context of a more broadly-based consideration of the distribution of power within Wik society - that is, of the various forms of material and symbolic resources, and their modes of utilization. For, while 'bosses' may have been more successful in exercising power, all Wik, to a greater or lesser extent, were engaged in an unceasing struggle over the appropriation and control of the various forms of capital. In writing of Western Desert Pintupi, Myers claims that they exhibit little interest in domination.⁷ In contrast, Wik political life was characterized by overt attempts to control the actions of others. Furthermore, in the absence of clearly defined and reproducing hierarchical structures, and in a society in which the notion of 'groupness' itself presents analytical challenges, there are questions to be raised about how it was that certain individuals at particular times and in particular arenas became 'bosses'.

In seeking to answer these questions, I first recapitulate on previous discussions of the nature and forms of the material and symbolic resources that were brought to bear by individuals in the attempted exercise of power or control. Secondly, I describe the means by which these resources were brought to bear, and thirdly I examine the limitations on the exercise of personal control imposed by the cultural construction of autonomy.

The autogenous bases of personal power and status

Historically, Wik social wealth had resided in broad terms in the forms of territorial affiliations, of ritual and language associations, and perhaps most importantly of links to networks and groupings of kin (such as 'clans'). These original forms had also been major constituting elements of Wik social identity, the *personne*, as I argued in Chapter 1 and as Trigger equivalently notes of the Aboriginal residents of Doomadgee in north-western Queensland.⁸ Furthermore, I argued that the socially ascribed Wik identity had originally essentially coincided with the interior awareness of themselves as affective and cognitive individuals, the *moi* (although in contemporary times they were becoming separated). Rather than being understood in terms of the unique psychobiological individual of (most notably) the middle-class and educated West, for Wik the individual had been both socially constructed and individually and internally perceived in terms of these quintessentially social symbolic forms.

6. Sutton (1978:160-1,197; 1987); J. von Sturmer (1978: *passim*, 1987)

7. Myers (1986:220)

8. Trigger (1988:551)

These autogenous components of identity were thus significant dimensions of both an individual's perceived sense of self and of his or her socially ascribed status, if increasingly in an emblematic fashion through the generations. However, these symbolic forms were in a sense available to all Wik, by birthright as it were, since as convention represented it each was born into particular sets of potentially realizable links to land, to language, to ritual associations, and to kin. These constituent elements of social and individual identities were "sociosyncratically" and even idiosyncratically and contextually ranked. That is to say, while each individual or each social collectivity primarily affiliated with a particular language, ritual cult, territory and so forth would affirm its intrinsic and superior worth over other structurally equivalent forms, there was no generally agreed-upon ranking throughout Wik society.⁹ In fact, the relative status of these symbolic media was the subject of constant contestation;

Through complex historical and political processes, *Wik Mungkan* had become the primary language of the Mission and subsequent township. It was the language of (or in some instances adopted by) those clans from nearby estates who constituted the dominant elite in the MacKenzie era, and the *Wik Mungkan* spoken in the township was, quite correctly, associated by *Wik Ngathan* clans with the original power elite which had marginalized them in the settlement.¹⁰

A considerable political coup was scored by 'topside' *Wik Mungkan* people with the translation of the New Testament into their language after many years of work by women from the Summer Institute of Linguistics. A major occasion was organized to celebrate its dedication, with formal *Iinych* dancing,¹¹ a service, and a feast; a large chartered aircraft brought church visitors from far afield. The rhetoric used by the Whites during the occasion centred around the significance of the bringing of God's Word to all Aurukun people in their own language, and of the power of this Word to change their lives for the better.

The ordained Aurukun Minister was however a senior man from a *Wik Ngathan* clan. Not long after the Bible dedication, he had to conduct a funeral service for a person from a *Mungkan* clan central to the original Mission elite. He did not read from the *Wik Mungkan* Bible at all (although the *Mungkan*-affiliated lay preacher did) and his whole service from beginning to end was conducted in *Wik Ngathan*, and thus would have been largely incomprehensible to most of his audience.

The ritual cults even more than language provided forums for intense intergroup and interpersonal competition. While for essentially historical and demographic reasons over sixty percent of Aurukun Wik were affiliated with *Apalach* (see Appendix 2) those older Wik from other cults such as *Pucha* or *Wanam* or associated with the inland *Winychanam* rituals emphasized the distinctiveness of their own body paint designs, the singular nature of their dances, and their unique body of ritual knowledge. Like the cremations of the past, house openings in particular provided

9. This point is also made by Trigger (*op.cit.*:125) of Doomadgee people.

10. See discussion on this matter in Chapter 5, and in Bos (1974). Interestingly, closely associated with these *Wik Ngathan* clans was a coastal *Wik-Mungkan* clan with close territorial ritual, economic and marriage connections. Tellingly, older members of this clan were at great pains to differentiate their dialect of *Wik Mungkan* from that spoken by the original Mission elite.

contexts for the formalized competitive display of these dimensions of the cults (as discussed in Chapter 5). It is important to note too, that while there was a strong (if diminishing) Wik ideology of patrification to such elements (thus, one's own country, totems, and language were normally said to be those of one's father and father's sisters), each individual had potential links through his or her mother primarily but also through father's mother and mother's mother to their constituting elements of social identity. "Me including in that *Wik Ngathan* too, me *Wik Ngathan*," I was frequently told by a senior man of clan 12, whose own language was a coastal dialect of *Wik Mungkan* but whose mother's language had been *Wik Ngathan*. Such symbolic media, while constituting systems of meaning, therefore also had political functions. The emphasis on one set of links over another in a given context provided means by which social and political relationships could be attested to, or alternatively denied.¹²

The Knox River was a tidal creek situated between the large and more ecologically complex Kirke and Kendall River systems. This relative ecological poverty was paralleled, in contemporary times at least, by the political marginality of clans of the region. Where senior figures of the powerful lower Kirke *Apalach* clans tended more to emphasize exclusivity, the senior man of clan 17 from the upper Knox, emphasized links; those of common language with coastal *Mungkan* speakers (including those of clan 12 from the lower Kirke), common totemic affiliations and associated clan names with other Knox clans, and furthermore regularly danced in *Apalach* ritual at mortuary ceremonies. While he was nominally associated with *Winychanam* ritual of the inland sclerophyll forests, this man's mother had been from a coastal clan on the periphery of *Apalach*, and thus he asserted that he was "part of that *Apalach* too".

Not infrequently, certain objectively existing connections were ignored or even denied;

Clan 33 was quintessentially *Wik Mungkan*. Their estate lay just over the river from, and virtually in sight of, the Aurukun township. The senior member of that clan was a woman, who had been a dominant force in the Mission era under the patronage of the MacKenzies, and continued with her family to be a major force in Council and township politics. The original *Wik Ayngenyich* owners of the Aurukun area itself had died long before, and this woman (and to a lesser extent her junior siblings) asserted rights of traditional ownership to the township area. She had married a man from clan 14, a *Wik Mungkan* speaking 'topside' group whose estate was on the upper Kirke River, and had borne a large number of children; had the ideology of patrification therefore been adhered to, her children would have identified themselves through and had claims on this estate. However, they all claimed her estate as their own country. While genealogical connections to other segments of their patrilineage were socially acknowledged, links to their patri-estate were completely ignored. This pattern continued in the following generation of children, with the grandchildren too being seen as primarily or totally affiliated with their grandmother's estate. Most members of the kindred group - the senior woman, her siblings, and their children and grandchildren - made

11. Originally used in the formal presentation of new initiates to their kin.

12. See also Martin (1984) and Sutton (1978) for analyses of this element of political strategizing among Wik.

relatively regular visits to their country for day trips, and for short and longer term camping.

Settlement politics, rather than that centred on traditional lands, was the dominant focus for this woman and her kindred, and emphasizing links to this nearby estate while suppressing those to other more distant ones, had practical and political consequences.

Structural and achieved dimensions of power

These autogenous bases of personal status therefore were not perduring and hierarchically ranked institutions which took on the appearance of tangible reality (as with "the bureaucracy" or "the church" in the wider society), but were constantly contested, their meanings and forms unceasingly negotiated, and their ranking chauvinistically conferred. Furthermore, there were crucial prerequisites to the practical use of these symbolic media in the incessant contesting of status. In this regard, von Sturmer, Sutton, Trigger and Anderson have all found it analytically useful to separate 'structural' from 'achieved' or 'processual' dimensions of status and power, in considering the nature of leadership in north Queensland Aboriginal societies; Anderson for *Kuku-Yalanji* of south-eastern Cape York peninsula, Sutton for Cape Keerweer Wik, Trigger for Doomadgee people and von Sturmer for *Kugu-Nganychara* Wik.¹³ By the former are meant such factors as age, generation, sex, clan membership and affinity, having large numbers of kin and offspring, and having substantial descent ties with significant sites, estates, or tracts of country of contemporary significance.¹⁴ By the latter are meant such features as a willingness to assume familial and decision-making responsibilities, a capacity to make one's own goals appear to be those of one's followers, being seen as a focus or even instantiation of one's group or 'mob', and (underlying all of these according to Anderson) appearing to nurture or 'look after' one's people in various ritual, physical and economic ways. These dimensions of 'achieved' status are seen as dependent upon personal qualities such as intelligence, forcefulness, physical stature and attractiveness, eloquence, political acumen, determination, a willingness to be aggressive, skill in hunting and working, and most importantly in Anderson's view, a self-conscious belief in one's own importance.¹⁵

'Structural' and 'achieved' dimensions of personal power however were necessarily and intimately related. This was not simply in the sense that an individual's capacity to realize achieved status or power (in the wider domain) was dependent upon structural factors as Anderson observes. Those Wik who sought to use symbolic media such as their ritual cult or territorial affiliation without both

13. von Sturmer (1978); Sutton (1982); Trigger (1988); Anderson (1988).

14. Anderson (*op.cit*:516) argues that while a 'mob' needed to have strong ties to significant country, its boss did not necessarily have to have them. This was not the case with older Wik, although younger leaders were emerging whose ties to country were not a significant dimension of their position.

15. Anderson (*op. cit*:516-8); von Sturmer (*op. cit*:421-2); Sutton (1982:184)

structural and achieved legitimacy risked failure. Thus, an elderly woman who was from a southern inland clan in terms of her patrilineal links, but who had been raised in the Mission from a very young child and had never visited her patricountry, was ridiculed by her own children when in the course of a dispute she attempted to call the names of the story places in her country.

Nor was it because for example a large kin network was the realization of the assiduous cultivation of the range of potentially useful links, rather than being merely the sum of one's genealogically based kinship connections. Such *practical* networks existed only in so far as they were effectively mobilized by particular individuals for particular functions, and they continued to exist only because they were assiduously maintained through practical use, and because they rested on the community of dispositions, values and interests (*habitus*) underlying the distribution of material and symbolic capital.¹⁶

Structural and processual dimensions of personal power and status were more basically related because, as Wik represented it at least, *both were realizations of the same underlying principles*. Wik recognized - and in fact placed great emphasis on - idiosyncratic personality and force of character.¹⁷ The capacity of an individual to causally intervene in either ritual or mundane spheres of life to further their own aims however, was seen in part at least as arising from their being able to tap into externally located sources of power through appropriate, legitimate and knowledgeable actions. The psychological attribute *ngangk chaaprr*, or 'heart blood', provided the necessary vitality, forcefulness of character, and potency; while women and uninitiated men also had *ngangk chaaprr*, initiations had rendered that of mature men the more powerful. Mature initiated men had been rendered both individually potent and collectively ritually *ngenyh* (dangerous and surrounded with restrictions) to their male juniors, to children, and to women.¹⁸

Because this potency was represented as ritually dangerous to subordinates, older men had a responsibility to 'look after' them and to nurture and protect them - controlling their access to dangerous knowledge, restricting their consumption of 'big' foods, and so forth.¹⁹ They were referred to as *wuut man-thayan*, senior men carrying authority. Senior women, while of less potency than the men, were equivalently *wanychinhth man-thayan*.²⁰ *Man* meant throat or voice, *thayan* powerful and compelling; *man-thayan* thus carried the implication that their words had force and legitimacy and were to be taken account of.²¹ This principle whereby structural authority was legitimated and understood through ritually based potency and carried with it the obligation to 'look after' juniors, was extended more generally so that

16. Bourdieu (1977a:350)

17. As argued in Chapter 1.

18. These matters have been explored in Chapter 5.

19. See Sutton (1978:197)

20. *Wuut* and *wanychinhth* meant here man and woman respectively of structural seniority. They could mean grandfather and grandmother, or just elderly man and elderly woman, depending on context. See J. von Sturmer (1978:419) for the equivalent *pama manu thayan* of the Kugu-Nganychara Wik.

older siblings were *man-thayan* or 'boss' for younger ones, and senior generations for junior ones. In return, juniors owed deference and respect to their seniors. This idiom of nurturing was central to Wik conceptions of hierarchy, and of the moral and therefore social basis for the exercise of power.²² It was reflected too in Wik kinship terminologies, where for instance senior siblings of ego were differentiated from junior ones.²³

It was therefore the social representation of this ritually based potency, a form of highly restricted symbolic capital, that underlay both the individual prerequisites for personal power discussed above and the "classificatory principles of asymmetry" which Sutton noted for the Cape Keerweer Wik;

Males dominate females. Higher generations dominate lower generations. Older people dominate younger people. And politically powerful individuals dominate politically weaker individuals, including those in the same generation who are older.²⁴

An 'elementary' domination

A fundamental dimension of Wik life, as I observed it, lay in the intense competition over resources of various kinds, both tangible and intangible. In Bourdieu's "sociology of interest",²⁵ social capital in its diverse manifestations - economic, symbolic, cultural, linguistic - is the object of a constant struggle over its appropriation and control, and forms the basis for the exercise of the various forms of power.²⁶ In his argument, in each of the various 'fields' constituting a society, the nature of the particular relations of domination and subordination varies according to the specific form of capital within that field - its type, its distribution, and the degree of its objectification.²⁷ His account of what he terms the 'economy of practices' contends that while symbolic and material forms of capital are analytically distinct, they are mutually interconvertible, although through mechanisms which vary in different situations and in different social formations. In 'archaic' economies, he argues, economic calculation extends "to all the goods, material and symbolic, without distinction, that present themselves as *rare* and worthy of being sought after in a particular social formation ..." ²⁸ That is, as Brubaker notes in a commentary on Bourdieu's work, self-interest is not reducible to material self-interest, and power (of

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21. Kilham et al (1986) on the other hand, render this phrase as *manth-thayan*. I suggest that given the equivalent *Kugu-Nganychara* term, *man-thayan* is more likely to be correct.
 22. See D. von Sturmer [Smith] (1980:*passim*) and discussion in Chapter 2. Wik morality itself could not be understood in terms of some axiomatic plane of abstract principles, but was intrinsically bound to the social.
 23. e.g. McConnel (1934); Sutton (1982); Thomson (1972); Scheffler (1978)
 24. Sutton (1978:155; (1982:183)
 25. Brubaker (1985:749)
 26. This parallels Giddens' (1976:122) concept of resources, drawn upon in the realization of domination as power at the level of interaction.
 27. Bourdieu (1977a:184)
 28. *ibid*:178; emphasis author's.

varying forms) can be realized through the control of symbolic as well as of economic capital.²⁹

Bourdieu contends that in those social formations with a relatively low extent of objectification of social capital, conditions do not exist for "a mediated, lasting appropriation of other agents' labour, services, or homage", and there is a necessity "to work directly, daily, personally, to produce and reproduce conditions of domination which even then are never entirely trustworthy."³⁰ I argue in Appendix 3 (following analysts such as Bourdieu, Goody, and Stock),³¹ that in the absence of overarching, perduring and solidary institutions,³² and most particularly in the absence of writing, objectifications of social capital were maintained in Wik society in what Bourdieu terms an embodied and incorporated state,³³ that is as systems of individual and collective dispositions and perceptions. In such circumstances, oral forms themselves, as objectifications of and abstractions from social process, played a critical role in production and reproduction. Orality thus underlay the direct and immediate manner in which Wik social forms and relations were generated. It also underlay the contextualization of orthodoxy and of legitimate representations of reality, themselves contested, fluid, and embedded in the social flux of mundane particularities.

It is against this argument that the prerequisites for Wik personal power need to be placed, for domination could only be sustained through its constant assertion and re-assertion in practices which complied with values of the group - that is, inscribed in Wik *habitus*. In these conditions, power was exercised primarily in the form of what Bourdieu terms an *elementary domination*, that is "the direct domination of one person by another".³⁴ There is in his argument then a distinction between;

... on the one hand, social universes in which *relations of domination are made, unmade, and remade in and by the interactions between persons*, and on the other hand, social formations in which, mediated by objective, institutionalized mechanisms ... relations of domination have the opacity and permanence of things and escape the grasp of individual consciousness and power.³⁵ (*emphasis added*)

When domination can only be exercised in its elementary form, between persons rather than through institutions, overt violence - direct economic domination or physical violence - coexists alongside what Bourdieu terms *symbolic violence*, a censored, disguised and thus misrecognized form of violence. Such 'violence' does

29. Brubaker (*op.cit*:755-6)

30. Bourdieu (*op.cit*:183). See also Thompson (1984:56). Of course, power is not only exerted by the super-ordinate but is dependent upon the compliance, witting or not, of the dominated, for almost always the exercise of power is a relationship of mutuality; see discussion on page 253.

31. e.g. in Bourdieu (1977a), Goody (1986), and Stock (1983).

32. It could be argued that clans were perduring institutions; however, while they were implicated in competitive status relations, they could not form the basis for reproducing relations of domination.

33. Bourdieu (*op.cit*:186)

34. *ibid*:190

35. *ibid*:184

not take place overtly, but is euphemized in terms of moral and affective obligations, in particular those of the "enchanted relationships" of kinship.³⁶

It is here that the centrality of Wik symbolic structures such as those of kinship and representations of age and of gender can be understood in the systematic production and reproduction of relations of domination and subordination. Such social representations both expressed and produced power relations between genders, kin categories and generations, and thus were among the institutionalized mechanisms for the maintenance of the symbolic order, and hence the social order.³⁷ By representing the flows of material and symbolic items between kin or between the genders and generations in moral and affective terms (and *vice versa*), they assisted in the transformation of what were objectively interested relations into ostensibly disinterested ones, arbitrary relations into collectively sanctioned ones.³⁸ Through this process of euphemization, relations of domination were rendered naturalized, part of the taken-for-granted order of the world.

Symbolic power and the constitution of reality

Symbolic violence is but the outcome of *symbolic power*, the "power to constitute the given by stating it", a "misrecognized, transfigured, and legitimated ... form of the other forms of power."³⁹ I have previously noted (following Anderson, see page 247) that one attribute of Wik leadership was the ability to act as a focus for or even in a sense instantiate the group. A group could not be understood as simply an aggregation of physical individuals, but was comprised of both physical and symbolic components. Thus, when other Wik spoke for instance of 'that Wik Way mob', they were not just referring to those contemporary individuals whose traditional clan estates lay between Aurukun and Weipa. They were also implying such collectively ascribed attributes as group kinship and clan estate links, to their relatively solidary power *vis a vis* other Wik, to their prestige as fighters, to their prominent position in the township workforce and in township politics - that is, to the history of their relations with Whites and with other Wik - to the vehicles they controlled and to the money they handled through those jobs and through the gambling skills of prominent members; in other words, to the material and symbolic capital which the group 'possessed', and which also constituted and defined it. Sansom rather equivalently sees Darwin Aboriginal fringe-dweller 'mobs' as being the sum of their component individuals and mob property in the form of the verbal objectifications of happenings in which they were engaged, but such representations are in fact but one form of a mob's symbolic capital.⁴⁰

Mobs then, as Wik perceived them, were aggregates of persons and the material and symbolic resources which they individually and collectively brought to bear in political struggle. Wik leaders therefore, or even more so bosses, did not simply encapsulate those symbolic attributes which were seen as prestigious by the group, or act as focal points in the distribution and redistribution of valued material items;

36. *ibid*:191; 1990:126

37. *ibid*:165

38. Bourdieu (1990:125)

39. Bourdieu (1979:82,83)

because the group itself was defined in part in terms of those very same material and symbolic forms epitomized by the leader, this person in a very real sense instantiated the group. "Jim wee'anang" therefore was not just 'Jim and his mob' because Jim was the instigator of their conjoint activities, involving in this case stealing vehicles with bravado, flair, regularity and apparent impunity. Jim in a sense was the mob, he defined the parameters of its existence and reality for those practices - although not necessarily in other contexts. This was one sense, albeit a fundamental one, in which leaders exercised symbolic power, for they defined both their group in terms of its externally perceived reality,⁴¹ and the dominant symbolic means - whether fighting prowess, bravado, or 'traditional' territorial and ritual knowledge - by which it internally defined itself. Such people, therefore, formed critical points in the dialectic between autonomy and connectedness, for the conjoint actions which coalesced around them involved the relinquishment of autonomy, if for a limited time, in collective action.⁴²

The domains across which such power was exercised depended upon the distribution of the particular symbolic forms and practices which underlay it. In Jim's case above, while they naturally drew upon the symbolic resources available to the whole society (such as those relating to masculinity), the symbolic means by which the group defined itself were of relatively limited distribution, socially and temporally. It was almost exclusively youths who stole vehicles, and such practices had meaning and symbolic efficacy essentially (if not entirely) within the peer groups which coalesced around them, and as they matured the cohort moved on to different practices. The domains over which Wik 'bosses' exercised symbolic power were - originally at least - more extensive. Von Sturmer (writing in the late 1970s) identified certain *Kugu-Nganychara* individuals whose authority was recognized in both familial and supra-familial domains. He observes:

While every individual has the right to air his or her views on all issues of moment, the "big man" speaks only after all others have spoken. His is literally the final word. While others speak, he is heard. Fights are a common, almost daily occurrence; yet, he sits aloof and intervenes only as a final measure. The major decision-maker and instructor in matters of ceremony, he is also the arbiter of what constitutes correct or incorrect knowledge. To a large extent he can be seen as defining the social universe of a number of people, not only with respect to which people regularly interact with each other, but also in terms of what constitutes the 'official version' of stories, songs, dances, personal names, genealogies, languages, totemic affiliations, and land ownership.⁴³

The sense of defining reality and orthodoxy, the natural order of things, is expressed very cogently here by von Sturmer. Anderson has written equivalently of

40. Sansom (1980:40)

41. von Sturmer (1978:445-6) writes in similar terms of the ceremonial bosses of ritual cults, and elsewhere (1987:74) writes of the 'definitional quality' of certain key individuals.

42. Whites who were appropriated by Wik as 'bosses' (in contradistinction to those who simply acted as bosses of work teams and so forth), equivalently provided an externality around which Wik social process and collectivities coalesced.

43. von Sturmer (1978:450)

Kuku-Yalanji bosses being "the interpreters of tradition and the 'editors' of history".⁴⁴ However, such power and the authority that flowed from it was socially bounded, even if on a 'supra-familial' level, and temporally restricted in two senses; firstly, even in situations where such leadership was possible (as for instance in the bush where von Sturmer did much of his work) it was always potentially at least open to challenge. Additionally, Wik were living in quite fundamentally different circumstances by the late 1980s to those von Sturmer observed, and within the Aurukun township at least the original autogenous symbolic and social orders within which such bosses had played pivotal roles had been supplanted by new ones, where their roles were not just of increasingly less relevance but were in a sense not even objectively possible.

Other forms of symbolic power continued however to be exercised over extensive domains, socially and temporally; thus, Wik males as a category continued to be able to draw upon the seemingly inexhaustible resource of their masculinity to legitimate their demands on the material and symbolic services provided by women (see Chapter 2). As Brubaker notes in a commentary on Bourdieu;

Power in the form of symbolic capital is perceived not as power, but as *a source of legitimate demands on the services of others*, whether material ... or symbolic ... and it is precisely this perception or misrecognition that makes it effective as a form of power.⁴⁵ (*emphasis added*)

Brubaker (following Bourdieu) argues that this can be seen as a more general feature of pre-market economies;

[In these economies] purely economic power is powerless, and must be converted into symbolic power in order that it may be misperceived, legitimated, and thereby exercised.⁴⁶

It is thus that one can legitimately speak of the complicity of subordinates in their own domination, for symbolic violence is as much acceded to as it is imposed, a collective deception without a deceiver, whose logic is located in that of the *habitus*.⁴⁷

'Bosses' and 'leaders'

I will turn now to a more detailed examination of the characteristics of leadership mentioned above (page 247). It is useful in this context to extend Bourdieu's analysis somewhat and return to his own Weberian roots in distinguishing between influence and authority. Where Bourdieu collapses these two concepts,⁴⁸ it is in my view desirable to distinguish them; influence should be seen as related to the Weberian concept of *charisma*, and thus status, while authority should be seen as

44. Anderson (1988:519)

45. Brubaker (1985:756)

46. Brubaker (*loc. cit.*)

47. Bourdieu (1990:127)

48. See e.g. Bourdieu (1977a:236, footnote 42)

associated with *legitimacy* and thus control.⁴⁹ These concepts can be seen as related respectively to those of achieved and structural status and power discussed above. Trigger, following Weber, defines authority as the "power of command" entailing the "duty to obey", and concludes therefore of senior Doomadgee ritual experts that their position was characterized by relations of competitive *status* rather than by those of enduring authority.⁵⁰ Even in mortuary rituals, Trigger argues, they directed affairs only at the choice of others.

However, the notion of control implicit here needs in my view to be extended beyond simply referring to the overt direction of others' actions. The authority of even senior Wik men and women, *wuut man-thayan* and *wanychinhth man-thayan*, among older generations at least was related more to their perceived legitimate control of crucial and valued forms of symbolic capital such as esoteric 'cultural' knowledge of land, sites, mythology and ritual, than to their capacity to direct others' actions in either ritual or mundane spheres. Furthermore, the *domains* across which authority could be exercised could not be taken for granted, as will be discussed on page 265.

Wik certainly did frequently assert such direct control over others; for instance where the senior *pam-mul kunych* - close patrikin of a deceased person - closed off all access to houses, vehicles, shade trees, sites or even whole tracts of land and outstations used by their kinsman.⁵¹ Still, with the omnipresent Wik stress on personal autonomy, overt attempts at control even by senior people were fraught with the risk that they would be resisted or ignored - and authority flouted was authority diminished. If the basic notion of control however is extended to include that over the *legitimate definitions and distribution of the dominant symbolic forms*, then indeed Wik ritual experts - or those Wik well versed in the language of White bureaucratic or religious structures for that matter - could be said to possess authority. In this broader sense, control could be seen as one aspect of symbolic power, the power to constitute and define reality.⁵²

I shall use this distinction between influence and authority to differentiate between what I term *leaders* and *bosses*. Leaders were Wik who exercised domination primarily (although not exclusively) through influence, by their possessing or instantiating the valued traits such as forcefulness, aggression, eloquence and

49. Both authority and influence are simultaneously exercised (by the super-ordinate) and attributed (by the sub-ordinate), but where authority is more usually seen to be tied closely to a particular mode of overt control, influence is more indirect and subtle. People can have influence over others without attempting directly to exercise control over them. Additionally, authority entails influence, but the reverse is not necessarily the case.

50. Trigger (1988:531-2), Weber (1968 III:943). The perduring institutions implicated in hierarchical power relations were those of the White society, with reproducing relations of domination/subordination between Wik and White.

51. See Chapter 5.

52. This broader sense of control parallels that adopted by Keen (1989); viz. "action taken by one person or group A with the purpose of causing the action or dispositions (*beliefs, values, propensities etc.*) of another person or group B to conform with a goal or action-plan of A" (emphasis added). However, I depart from Keen in including *unintended* consequences of actions of A on B's actions or dispositions under the rubric of control. Many practices for instance resulting in the socialization of Wik children into autonomous and self-reliant adults, or in the maintenance of male domination over women, could not be construed as intentionally taking place for these purposes - see Chapters 1 and 2.

physical presence previously alluded to. Leaders acted as focal points around which conjoint actions and their representations coalesced; fights for example, such as the one at the core of this thesis, were almost always initiated and their dynamics largely determined, by young men around whom others rallied. Their fighting prowess and rhetoric and public *macho* style allowed them to instantiate as it were the prestige of their kindred or mob that lay in its ability and willingness to defend itself. The bands of young men and boys who regularly broke into staff houses and the store and offices, or who commandeered vehicles for high-drama chases through the village, similarly centred on particular youths who initiated the actions, and who established considerable reputation and prestige among their peers through their exploits. Island-style dancing 'teams' coalesced around individual men whose influence arose through their acknowledged creativity, dance style, and presence. Gambling schools similarly frequently were initiated by men or women whose single-minded commitment to card playing and risking their money was recognized, along with their flair and style in the games.

Leaders thus were individuals who were able to initiate or focus actions by virtue of their personal attributes. They could be young or mature, male or female, or from junior or senior generations. Additionally however, to be what I am terming a boss, a Wik individual needed to both possess or cultivate these attributes of a leader and be structurally super-ordinate. Bosses therefore were also of necessity leaders, but it was this latter structural dimension which gave them legitimate authority, and which differentiated them from the category of preeminent and influential individuals I have termed leaders. Bosses' domains of influence also were in general more extensive than that of leaders.⁵³ It was this legitimacy which rendered what were objectively similar practices, as the exercise of wilful individualism by some, and as the exercise of leadership and authority by others. Thus, teenaged youths could have considerable prestige within their own peer groups, or even beyond them if they were powerful fighters, or men in their thirties who were eloquent and powerful speakers adept in White ways could wield significant influence, but in neither case could they be considered bosses.

What essentially distinguished bosses from leaders then was their legitimate socially sanctioned authority, and the wider domain of their influence. Such authority was derived ultimately from autogenous 'cultural' forms such as knowledge of ritual and traditional lands; bosses were leaders in the politics of these domains,⁵⁴ not leaders of the gangs of youths nor of secular Council politics. The sense in which I am using boss here then has clear resonance, and deliberately so, with the Wik concept of 'boss' which has been discussed in a number of places in this thesis; in essence, the structurally senior were 'boss' or *man-thayan* for their juniors and had the responsibility to 'look after' them, and in return subordinates owed them respect

53. In this sense, my category of 'leader' corresponds roughly to Anderson's (1988:515-6) 'focal individual', but his notion of the 'mobs' which form around these individuals differs from mine - see later discussion.

54. e.g. leaders of ceremonies were called by Wik 'field bosses' - see J. von Sturmer (1978:419)

and deference and were expected to 'work for' them. There were contradiction however in the Wik construction of 'boss', to which I shall return.

'Style' and leadership

In a general sense, the totality of the dispositions, thoughts, perceptions, and practices which constitute the individual *habitus* can be said to be characterized by a certain life-style, since a *practical logic* organizes them in diverse domains by means of a relatively few generative principles.⁵⁵ The individual *habitus* itself can be seen as a structural variant of that of the class or group;⁵⁶ thus one could legitimately speak of distinctive Wik styles of thought and practices in contradistinction to those of, say, middle-class White Australians or of the Whites working in Aurukun.

A conscious emphasis on 'style' or 'stylization of life'⁵⁷, in the related but more limited sense of modes of public presentation of individuality through such aspects as dress, physical demeanour and speech, was an all-important dimension of Wik everyday life. This accent on style was also reflected in the ritual and mythological spheres - homologous principles in different domains. For instance, the female *pewnguchan* mourners⁵⁸ dancing the final *wuungk* ritual prior to the lifting of restrictions and the presentation of food by kin of the deceased, were elaborately attired, in grass skirts, shell pendants, and carefully applied body paint designs according to - but elaborating on - their ritual cult affiliation. They made themselves attractive and stylish - *ach umpiyin thantakam* - and in so doing rendered themselves desirable to men; life and vitality expressed even in ritual for the dead.⁵⁹

While *ach umpan* meant to make oneself good-looking, 'flash', to be *achanthup* was to be self-consciously and compellingly attractive. The notion of *thup* - ability in domains such as hunting, sex and card playing arising ultimately from ritually based potency - has been previously discussed. The mythological *ngalp-ngalpan* Emu Hunters were also *achanthup*, splendidly adorned with bands around their upper arms and with feathers, and decorated with body paint.⁶⁰ Suggestively here, an alternative (but rarely used) form of *achanthup* was *achamp-thup*, literally meaning powerful hunter of emus. The emu was *minh ngenych*, surrounded with ritual proscriptions. *Achanthup* / *achamp-thup* then was not simply attractiveness, but potent attractiveness. The cultivation of an appropriate style was a fundamental aspect of the struggle for prestige and status, and was a prerequisite for the assertion of leadership. In the case of young men for instance, the *macho* images disseminated through comics, television and videos, such as Rambo, resonated powerfully with the already existing Wik stress on male autonomy, ready recourse to physical violence,

55. Bourdieu (1977a:109-114). See also discussion in Appendix 3.

56. Bourdieu (1977a:86)

57. Bourdieu (1990:139)

58. See Chapter 5

59. See for example the photograph of the elaborately dressed young female *pewnguchan* mourners, photographed by Donald Thomson in 1933 and reproduced in Sutton (1988b:27). The themes of death and sexuality were subtly intertwined in the roles of such women, with the *wuungk* rituals they sang relating both to mourning and to sexual potency. The introduction of Hula dancing by younger women at house openings is arguably a continuation of this association of sexuality with death.

sexual prowess, and single-mindedness.⁶¹ Their style was characterized by display and exaggeration in the use of language, in physical demeanour and stances, and in conspicuous dress - shaven heads, red headbands, ostentatiously slashed shirts and jeans and so forth.⁶²

Leaders were instigators and often interpreters of new styles and vogues, in diverse domains. Leaders often cultivated their own personal linguistic styles, in Wik languages⁶³ or indeed in English. A young man who had travelled to New York returned not only with accounts of his trip but with a set of expressions in American English including "Hey, man!" which swept Wik youths for a period. Other innovative practices were introduced by certain individuals. Island-style dancing and singing was brought back to Aurukun in the 1950s and 1960s by men who had worked on the trochus shell and pearling industries in the Torres Straits. A number of these original 'field bosses' for Island dancing were also important ritual leaders, but while the restricted nature of autogenous ritual forms allowed a small number of specialists to maintain their dominant position in that domain, the secular nature of Island dancing meant that a wider range of men could achieve prestige through it.

In another example of the instigation and emulation of new forms of practices, a small group of youths, when stealing staff motor vehicles and wrecking them had become commonplace and therefore no longer prestigious, initiated a new fashion by breaking in to the Shire Council security yard on numerous occasions and commandeering heavy trucks for joy rides. Extraordinary creativity and ingenuity was demonstrated by these young men in circumventing the ever-increasing security instituted by frustrated White staff.⁶⁴ The wild rides and occasional accidents, the consequent court-cases and even confinement for some in State institutions served only to reinforce their prestige and generate emulation by more and more Wik youths and even comparatively young children.

However, if leaders operated through influence and by inspiring emulation, they also had recourse to more overt forms of control, and domination was often exercised through the direct imposition of one person's will on others. Wik talked here of *thaachan*, or *force-impungan*,⁶⁵ carrying a sense of what might in English be termed 'psychological coercion'.⁶⁶ Sheer 'force of personality' - determination, aggressiveness, eloquence and so forth, very often coupled with a mastery of belittling and abusive language - was directed at overcoming people's resistance to coercion and their desire for autonomy. Its successful and long-term exercise

60. A more oblique synonym for *ngalp-ngalpan* was *punhth-kathanang*, literally one who has his arm tied (with a decorative band).

61. See the Conclusion to this thesis.

62. See discussion in Chapter 2, and a parallel one in Connell (1987:85) in the case of a group of youths from south London..

63. See Sutton (1978:161; 1982:197)

64. As shown in the Four Corners documentary *Six-pack Politics* (Australian Broadcasting Commission 1991).

65. Transitive verbs are often formed from English loan words by adding *-impungan* to them.

66. See Wrong (1979:79)

depended on possessing structurally based authority as well, for it involved the attempt to impose the legitimate construction of reality in a very direct manner.

It was also recognized however that in group interactions, collective and mutual peer pressure, a subtle form of persuasion bordering on coercion, could result in actions being undertaken by people that otherwise might not have been. When I asked why a group of young boys had stolen a motor cycle and careered dangerously around the village one night, I was told "*Than thaachwin thantakam!*" - "They forced themselves!" The implication was that collectively the group imposed its will upon its members, that individual youths had not resisted the suggestion to steal the bike because they had been pressured into compliance by the others. Wik also used the English term 'coaching' in such contexts, probably adopted from the cattle camps, where coachers were docile cattle used in mustering to entice feral cattle into the yards. A common response by Wik to wrongdoings by close kin - such as breaking into the store, or behaving indefensibly while drunk - was to assert that they had been coached into doing it by others, thus externalizing the causes beyond the bounds of the particular grouping.

The missionary MacKenzie exercised power over Wik primarily through this 'psychological coercion'. By all accounts he was certainly willing and able to use physical violence against those who opposed him, and ultimately of course, the power of the state underlay his own, evidenced for instance by his bringing in police from Coen on occasion to remove recalcitrant and rebellious Wik to Palm Island. Nonetheless, in the early days of the Mission MacKenzie was virtually on his own, living among a large number of Wik who were assertively autonomous, skilled and determined fighters for whom homicide was no rare event. In order to explain his co-opting senior Wik leaders to his purposes, imposing new forms of social control and reducing the endemic fighting, imposing new patterns of living, economic activity and so forth, his ability to redefine reality through sheer imposition of his will must be taken into account. Wik talked of him as *pam way*, in one sense a 'no good man' but also having great knowledge and power and potential for adverse or even malevolent influence.⁶⁷ Similarly, and probably consequently as she had been a leading protegee of the MacKenzies, the senior woman who asserted traditional ownership over the Aurukun township area itself (referred to on page 246), dominated township politics and demolished opponents with her combination of keen intellect, ruthless political ambition, and vituperative and widely feared tongue. While it is true she had sons and nephews who could threaten or use violence, it was not this which underlay her preeminence so much as her ability to utilize her structural position (in both Wik and White domains) and forceful personal attributes to impose her will on others.

Coercion certainly was often physical. The threat, and use, of physical force was an omnipresent feature of Wik life. It must be remarked here though that not all violence could be considered attempts to control people; in fact, much of it could be seen on the contrary as efforts to assert autonomy and to avoid the control of others. Being aggressive and willing to forcefully defend one's position - *kulliy* - was highly

67. Thus, *aak way* depending on context could mean a 'no-good' place, perhaps without shade or water, or one that contained potentially dangerous spirit forces.

valued for Wik, whether men women or children.⁶⁸ Nonetheless, to become a leader or even more a 'boss' over a wider domain meant cultivating appropriate behaviour for the different stages of one's social trajectory. It was fitting for a younger man to claim and achieve prominence through his fighting ability ("Me king for Aurukun town, you bastard all frighten' from me!"), but a mature man who became directly and unselectively involved in physical fights or in arguments risked being dismissed as 'silly' or even *kul-weenhth*, crazy for fighting. Bosses directed their aggression and forcefulness, and selected appropriate forums for their deployment.

In this regard, as in others, a boss usually carefully cultivated restraint. As young men however, most such men would have begun their careers as it were by becoming a 'fighting man'⁶⁹ for their mob, and more than one senior man spoke to me of how they had been fighters in their youth. Physical power and presence were very important, but again while young men might have displayed this through flamboyance and exaggeration, for a mature man such means of display were considered juvenile. Display and style were certainly essential components in the symbolic accoutrements of being a boss, but in fitting domains, such as those of ritual cult dance performances, and also in the more secular arena in Island style dancing.⁷⁰ The hallmark of the *wuut man-thayan* was in general a carefully cultivated containment and a controlled demeanour. In public discussion or political rhetoric, bosses statements were typically prefaced by comments such as "*Ngay yaa'an thawang niyant*" - "I gammon talk for youfella",⁷¹ disclaiming any real authority or knowledge. A senior and extremely knowledgeable man with whom I extensively mapped clan territories in the Cape Keerweer region would frequently embark on his commentaries by disavowing his competence; "Must be me myall (ignorant savage), them 'nother fella might be know this country!" Very often too, it was the real boss who was the last to speak at a public discussion, setting the seal on what was the final legitimate version.⁷² In this as more generally, bosses were the arbiters and interpreters of orthodoxy.

While understatement and self-effacement were commonly cultivated by Wik bosses, as Anderson observes of the *Kugu-Yalanji* it was necessary for them to have a highly developed sense of their own importance.⁷³ Overt demonstrations of conceit or ego however were not part of their appropriate style of leadership, and other symbolic vehicles were often used:

A house-opening was being held for an *Apalach* man from clan 6. The choice of which particular song cycles were performed during a house-opening was contingent on many factors, including the territorial affiliations of the deceased person, since each cycle referred to mythological events at specific sites. However, the choice also reflected power asymmetries between the deceased and his kindred and those who

68. See discussions in Chapter 1 and Chapter 4.

69. The term used by Sansom (1980) in relation to Darwin Aboriginal fringe-dwellers.

70. Where many senior men, even leaders of ritual cults, were prominent performers.

71. That is, "There is no particular import in what I am saying to you."

72. See Trigger (1988:535), von Sturmer (1978:450)

73. Anderson (1988)

controlled the ceremony - in this case the main singer who was 'boss' for *Apalach*. On this occasion, he sang the *Apalach* where the older *Pul-uchan* brother has returned alone from *Okanych-konangam* to the south of the Kendall, and looking back down the beach reflects on his heroic deeds. The *Pul-uchan* sings of them, and of his own importance; "What a big man I am!"

"Why," I asked, "did Old Man sing this one?" "Must be because he big man himself," I was told.

That is, the choice of the song was itself a political act, using a powerful symbolic medium to assert preeminence and authority in this domain.

Emergent forms of leadership

Given that younger men - and even more so women - had always been excluded from the deeper levels of valued knowledge and precluded from positions of real power within the internal Wik polity, it is difficult to make confident predictions about what the nature of leadership might become in the future, when it is they who are the senior generations. Certainly, as discussed in Chapter 5, the complexity and subtlety of the symbolic media forming the original bases - links to land, ritual and so forth - were rapidly attenuating, as the mechanisms of their transmission and reproduction became sundered. The objective circumstances within which such schemes of thought, perceptions and practices were being reproduced were dramatically changing, and the wider society offered powerful new symbolic means through which power could be realized.

However, the appropriation of all such externally derived symbolic forms was mediated through socially inculcated Wik dispositions, schemes of thought and actions - the *habitus* - itself both product and producer of individual and group history. Consequently, distinctively Wik social and cultural forms were being reproduced through time and through social space, albeit with major changes and in vastly different objective circumstances. In particular, there were continuities in Wik understandings of the nature of knowledge and of personal power and potency, the means used to gain access to them, and the mechanisms of their use in causal intervention in mundane life.⁷⁴

In this latter regard, there was a view of knowledge being reproduced, like that of power, which saw it as existing externally to the individual, and in a sense prior to him or her. The power flowing from this knowledge could be instantiated in mundane life through the correct formulaic application of ritualized actions. Just as cash had been incorporated into the Wik economic modality, so these new symbolic forms were being assimilated to the Wik political modality. Competition over them then was not so much concerned with the possibilities the new introduced systems of knowledge and technical skills objectively offered to change the circumstances of Wik political and economic articulation with the wider state. Rather, the *practical*

74. See discussion in Appendix 3.

purposes served by the new forms lay with their role as symbolic resources in the establishment of personal status within the internal Wik domain.⁷⁵

Both the structural dimensions of personal power - the ranking by age, generation, sex and so forth - and the achieved ones had originally been represented as manifestations of ritually based and inculcated potency. Increasingly however, male potency was manifested through the almost unfettered expression of *machismo* and physical aggression, essentially individually appropriated (although socially understood and located), rather than socially and thus legitimately inculcated. The control of access to potency had originally lain with the 'old men', the *wuut man-thayan*; one consequence of the new secular potency was the loss of the ideological underpinning for the structural domination by senior generations. The original structurally based forms of power which were being reproduced were those based on gender, legitimated through the new forms of male potency, and on being able to mobilize large numbers of people for mortuary ceremonies, fights, and other conjoint actions.

Additionally, the original sources of personal power had been referred to elaborate and subtle intellectual constructions to which access had been controlled and restricted by senior generations. The new male potency however drew in many ways upon images appropriated from the wider society for its symbolic efficacy - including those disseminated through popular media such as Rambo and his ilk - and its essence lay in stylized form rather than in intellectual content. Not only were specific autogenous Wik knowledge systems largely not being reproduced through the generations, but more generally the role of intellect as such, the place of knowledge and the high stress put on it originally, were diminishing in the contemporary situation. Thus, the dominant locus of production in the Wik symbolic economy lay increasingly outside Aurukun, in the wider Australian and Western worlds, and Wik were becoming consumers of symbolic forms rather than producers of them. With the vast majority of younger Wik also barely competent in the new, increasingly secular and often externally derived knowledge forms, such as those promulgated by the school and the adult education and training institutions, Wik 'culture' in its broadest sense was increasingly characterized by what can only be described as intellectual impoverishment from both White and Wik perspectives.

Furthermore, the original Wik universe of practices and beliefs, characterized by self-evidence and relative coherence - what Bourdieu terms *doxa*⁷⁶ - had been replaced by one where powerful symbolic and practical forms appropriated from the wider society competed directly with autogenous ones. No longer was there "the pre-verbal taking-for-granted of the world that flows from practical sense"⁷⁷ but reformulation, questioning, and rejection of much of the very foundations of that original world; that is, the contemporary universe was characterized by heterodoxy rather than *doxa*. Compounding this, there was no relatively solidary set of symbolic

75. This different concept of knowledge was not at all understood by those responsible for education in Aurukun, whose policies seemed to be predicated on the notion that Wik, children and adults, were empty vessels into which new skills could be unproblematically poured.

76. Bourdieu (1977a:164; 1990:36)

forms presented by the outside world, as had been the case in all but the latter days of the mission. Each of the institutions imposed on Wik, formal (such as the Shire Council, Aurukun Community Incorporated and the Church) and otherwise, themselves provided alternative representations of orthodoxy and legitimacy. They thus constituted forums for competition over symbolic and material resources without (from the Wik perspective at least) any coherent underlying principles by which these various domains of struggle could be conceptually or practically unified.

Thus, the emergent Wik leadership, in the interstitial sphere at least, was increasingly characterized by struggles over the symbols of status in a whole array of disparate and fragmented domains, and achieved status within any one of them - as a Shire Councillor for instance, or a Director of the Company - mostly had little apparent intrinsic connection to that in any other. This fragmentation was not only a consequence of the diverse administrative and service organizations involved in Aurukun, each with their own imperatives, goals, policies and implementation practices; it was a function even more of the often overt competition among their White staff within Aurukun, vigorously and often venomously competing over funds, legitimate spheres of operation, and their domains of influence among Wik. Those Wik who achieved pre-eminence in such interstitial fields were almost always individuals who were adept at assiduously cultivating White patrons. Their success however was always dependent on balancing the demands and imperatives of their dual political constituencies.

A number of Wik men and women - often in their thirties or early forties - had established themselves as influential brokers and cultural interpreters at the interface between Wik and wider political systems, and in a number of cases had been elected as Shire Councillors at different times. Demands made against the White administration or in the wider political domain were often initiated by or focussed through such individuals. They too were leaders in the particular sense that I have been using the term; forceful and eloquent public speakers (*thaa' ay*) with a good command of English and of White political and bureaucratic symbolic forms - demeanour, rhetorical style, jargon and so forth⁷⁸ - as well as the ability to articulate Wik concerns and perspectives to Whites in such a manner that they were perceived by outsiders as legitimate and knowledgeable spokesmen for Wik. Thus, they were usually portrayed by Whites as 'leaders' in the more general sense of the term, that is as occupying positions of authority within the Wik polity, with the ability to speak on behalf of or control 'their people'. In many cases however these 'leaders' did not have any extensive authority within the internal Wik domain, or often even within their own kindreds; they were commonly junior siblings for instance, or from relatively less powerful clans or clan segments.⁷⁹

It is true that there were young men (and some young women) who on a regular basis took part in the dancing of their ritual cult cycles at house-openings and other mortuary ceremonies; among them, a small number knew some of the songs and

77. Bourdieu (1990:68)

78. See Appendix 3.

associated myths. However, like much other knowledge, such as that related to the mythological landscape and to the practical use and categorization of the physical environment and its resources, ritual knowledge was rapidly attenuating. This was not a matter of such cultural forms simply being 'lost'; rather, the nexus between them as forms of *practical* knowledge and the objective circumstances of Wik mundane lives had been radically sundered in contemporary Aurukun. Such knowledge was increasingly divorced from the imperatives and necessities of everyday life within the Wik domain; culture was being transformed and reified into 'culture' (as discussed in Chapter 5). These young men, who will in the normal course of events eventually become the experts and leaders in this sphere, will not just know less than their predecessors; much of the meaning of their knowledge and ritual practices will be drawn from the emergent politics of Wik identity and differentiation *vis a vis* the dominant Australian society.⁸⁰ These leaders then, unlike the 'field bosses' of the past but analogously to those in the interstitial spheres previously discussed, will draw their authority and power as much from the White political domain as they will from the Wik.

Furthermore, it will in all probability be a restricted form of authority, for while 'culture' will continue to be a powerful rallying point in the politics of racial differentiation, within this internal Wik domain western consumer goods and most particularly cash and alcohol will in all probability remain the dominant foci of both material and symbolic interests for younger Wik.⁸¹ This likelihood was clearly if poignantly demonstrated in the response of a group of young boys asked by a television reporter what they wanted to become as adults. They replied "policeman". When he asked why, the answer was that they wanted to earn money, in order to "buy six-pack".⁸²

Leadership based upon the prestige gained through cash and alcohol however was of necessity problematic. In the case of cash, the almost total dependence of Aurukun on governmental transfer payments meant that its initial distribution at least into the Wik domain was essentially determined by the policies and administrative practices of the Australian welfare state.⁸³ Its predication upon such notions as equity in access to welfare incomes, structures of domestic and household units, and the importance of women's roles in the care of children meant that there were not gross disparities in income levels, measured at the individual level at least. It is true that single men received lower incomes under the C.D.E.P. scheme than did married men with children, and that pensioners and supporting mothers could command comparatively higher incomes from welfare payments, and that those relatively few Wik in full-time employment received higher wages. There were also particular

79. This mismatch in understandings and expectations between Wik and White had significant ramifications for the Shire Council and the role it was expected to play.

80. On a related theme, von Sturmer (1973a) has argued that "Aboriginality" has meaning for Cape York Aboriginal people only as an oppositional construct. Keefe (1988) on the other hand analyses it in terms of a dialectic between Aboriginality-as-persistence and Aboriginality-as-resistance.

81. As discussed in Chapters 3 and 4

82. *Six-pack Politics*, Australian Broadcasting Commission 1991.

kindred groups at certain stages in the ebb and flow of group status and power, such as those centred around some pre-eminent Shire Councillors, who collectively dominated access to housing and full-time positions.

However, cash had been assimilated to Wik economic and social modes of thought and practices; Wik resisted as Sansom so aptly puts it the "monetization of mind".⁸⁴ I have referred in previous chapters to such factors as the intense pressure to share, to the couching of the idiom of nurturance and the substantiation of relatedness through flows of cash and other material resources, to the 'jealousy' occasioned by perceived imbalances in the flows of goods and services, and to the stress on being equal (*ma' keelam*) in social and material transactions. Gambling, perhaps the principal internal Wik economic activity, acted as a forum where these values could be manifested and reproduced, and where the potential for cash to form the basis for new forms of domination was subverted. Those Wik who saw this potential of cash and sought to accumulate it had severe and unremitting pressure brought to bear on them; ultimately, all succumbed.

Additionally, in return for public respect, services and so forth, those who were bosses had to 'look after' their subordinates. Cash and the goods it could be exchanged for - consumer items, vehicles, food and alcohol - played a fundamental role here, for if bosses were able to control or have greater access to such resources, they were obliged in order to maintain their position to distribute them in looking after their followers. Cash and other material items then were not then purely 'economic' capital, but were also symbolic resources in the establishment and maintenance of leadership. In this regard however, they were fundamentally different from the autogenous forms of 'cultural' symbolic capital - ritually inculcated knowledge and so forth - which had underpinned the original hierarchies, and which had been restricted and accumulated by individuals in the pursuit of power. Cash, while certainly rendered particular Wik meanings, was firmly and unequivocally secular, essentially available to all irrespective of position, mediated through the White system, and moreover disparaged and its objective centrality to Wik life at all levels denied at the ideological level.⁸⁵

Alcohol, too, provided a highly problematic basis upon which to build leadership. In many regards, it too functioned as did cash, a currency of social intercourse, and as a vehicle for instantiation of relatedness. It was far more than this though; it had become a powerful medium through which a whole range of values and emotions could be expressed. Personal autonomy, display and bravado, the desire to be omnipotent, aggression, anger, grief, frustration - all could be more easily and in a sense legitimately expressed through consuming alcohol.

Rather than providing a basis for sustainable leadership however, alcohol ultimately compromised it. The reputation gained through drinking exploits, and in

83. The existence of the C.D.E.P. programme in place of unemployment benefits did not in any significant sense alter this fact.

84. Sansom (1988:159); see also discussion in Chapter 3.

85. This has been discussed in Chapter 3.

distributing windfall gains through sharing one's grog, was at best ephemeral in nature. Social gains quickly and almost inevitably were followed by their disintegration in the resultant violence and chaos. Furthermore, through alcohol's long-term physical and mental effects and highly addictive nature, heavy drinkers ultimately risked impairing those personal qualities essential to leadership. Wik in a sense recognized this; heavy drinking, or the use of the wrong sort of alcohol such as methylated spirits or hard liquor, was believed to reduce men's ritually-based potency. Thus, one healer (*pam noyan*) was said by his family to have lost his powers through drinking too much at the canteen. Certainly, the older generation of senior leaders invariably cultivated restraint in their drinking as in other domains of their lives.

In contemporary Aurukun, politics increasingly centred on symbolic and material resources introduced and appropriated from the wider society, rather than on the autogenous forms. In particular, alcohol and cash provided the fundamental dynamics of mundane Wik life, and the dominant focus of the struggle for prestige and personal power within the internal Wik domain. Leadership based on these forms however was by its very nature ephemeral and compromised. In the interstitial domain between Wik and White politics, the new generations of leaders were those of style rather than of substance, masters perhaps of the forms of the new symbolic media but not of their intellectual content. Wik struggled in disparate and fragmented domains for power and status, which nonetheless ultimately depended for their legitimacy on the wider society; there were no more 'bosses'.

The domains of leadership

The exercise of domination in its various manifestations is located in social, physical and temporal domains; thus, its analysis must of necessity involve an account of the extent and nature of these domains.⁸⁶ I have previously touched upon this matter, noting for instance that the preeminence of leaders of bands of Wik youths did not in any meaningful sense extend beyond the particular activities and those individuals associated with them. I will now turn to an examination of these domains in somewhat more detail.

The domains of power

McConnel (writing in the 1930s) places the Wik family - which she defines as a man, his wife or wives and offspring - as the basic social unit. The camp fire was the centre of family life and commensality.⁸⁷ There could be subsidiary families attached to a man's camp, such as those of a brother, a widowed sister, his elderly parents, or parents-in-law,⁸⁸ and there was always a single men's camp.⁸⁹ These residential

86. See e.g. Keen (1989:22), Sutton (1982:184).

87. McConnel (1930b:104; 1934:316)

88. McConnel (1934:325-6)

groups she terms *hordes*, which following the Radcliffe-Brownian orthodoxy of the time she describes as having comprised members of the local patrilineal clan, plus women who had married in to that clan, less those clan women who had married out, plus various visitors.⁹⁰ The total Wik society, for McConnel, was comprised of families linked by ties of marriage, brotherhood, and generation in varying degrees of intimacy.⁹¹ While the Wik family was to a great extent a self-supporting economic unit,⁹² and while marriages (and thus of course wider political and economic links) were contracted between families,⁹³ McConnel sees the clan as the basic land holding and political unit.⁹⁴ For Thomson however, while the land holding unit was the localized patrilineal totemic clan,⁹⁵ the economic, ritual and war-making group was the horde, which unlike the patrilineal clan was a "sociological entity the membership of which is constantly changing".⁹⁶

Such forms would not have been conducive to overarching leadership. Scheffler, in a commentary on Thomson's work, writes:

Government in these groups is vested in a loosely organised council of old men, and sometimes one man may, by virtue of exceptional experience, especially in matters of initiation or on account of special prowess in fighting and hunting, carry more weight in the deliberations of these old men. But there is no chieftainship.⁹⁷

Writing in the same period as McConnel and Thomson, R. Lauriston Sharp offers a rather different analysis of the *Yir-Yoront* from south-western Cape York.⁹⁸ Where McConnel (heavily influenced by Radcliffe-Brownian structural-functionalism) stressed the solidary nature of 'clans' and 'tribes', Sharp describes the *Yir-Yoront* as having been not so much a society as an ego-centred set of societies. The networks and chains centred on individuals did not overlap isotypically with anyone else's, and kinship provided the idiom through which ego-centred trade, ritual and other networks were understood.⁹⁹ He sees *Yir-Yoront* as having been organized essentially on principles based on those of familial relations; there was no bounded "society" as such, but an "open social system of which each individual was the centre of his own universe of interaction".¹⁰⁰ The principles of the kinship system meant that virtually all dyadic relations were at the structural level at least inherently hierarchical (as was

89. *ibid*:336. See also Sutton (1978:98)

90. McConnel (1930b:181-2). Thomson (1939:211) describes the "residential horde" in similar terms.

91. McConnel (1934:316)

92. *ibid*:325. See also von Sturmer [Smith] (1980:285)

93. von Sturmer [Smith] (*op.cit*:336); but cf pp. 338, 349 which talk of marriage exchanges between clans rather than families. Scheffler, in Thomson (1972:52), addresses this point further.

94. See e.g. McConnel (*op.cit*:323, 1930b:181)

95. Thomson (1933:499-505; 1939:211)

96. Thomson (1935:462-3). Von Sturmer (1978:66-82) offers a detailed critique of both McConnel's and Thomson's analyses.

97. Scheffler (1972:1)

98. Most of whom now live at Kowanyama some 200 kilometres south of Aurukun - see Map 1.

99. Sharp (1968:159-60)

the case with Wik to their north), but *Yir-Yoront* could not tolerate any form of chief or headman, while a leader with absolute authority over the whole group would have been unthinkable without, in his estimation, radical changes in the kinship system.¹⁰¹ Heads of domestic units or the senior males of patrilineages were the only possessors of absolute authority, but they acknowledged no superior overarching political authority, nor exercised any general authority to rule or decide or negotiate beyond the limits of their family groups.¹⁰²

Whereas Sharp's analysis of the *Yir-Yoront* contrasts with that of the 'Wik Mungkan' proffered by McConnel and Thomson, in certain important respects it prefigures those of the major contemporary analysts of the region, von Sturmer and Sutton. Sutton notes that Sharp's portrayal of *Yir-Yoront* ego-centred networks was also essentially true of Cape Keerweer Wik society,¹⁰³ which he describes as "if anything a set of ego-centred personal networks which are regionally clustered."¹⁰⁴ Von Sturmer writes of the similarly high degree of group segmentation and personal individuation among *Kugu-Nganychara* Wik.¹⁰⁵ He further observes that political life operated essentially at the level of families or of family-based structures¹⁰⁶ and that familial interests almost always took precedence over others, such as those of the descent group.¹⁰⁷ The 'family' in fact was the key unit at both actual and conceptual levels of *Kugu-Nganychara* social life.¹⁰⁸ Yet, the nature and structures of this entity are left largely unexplored by von Sturmer, as he himself notes.¹⁰⁹

Kampan groupings

Certainly, in the contemporary Aurukun township and on the outstations, the main unit in representations of social process by Wik themselves was 'family'. This could not be understood, however, as being simply McConnel's essentially nuclear domestic unit. For one thing, there had been major changes in such areas as the nature and structures of domestic and residential groupings and in the role of men in the rearing of their children. Thus, only 61 percent of Wik households surveyed in February 1986 had at their core a nuclear family of the type McConnel describes, and (as discussed in Chapter 4) almost one third of children under ten years of age did not live in the household of their genitor.¹¹⁰

More basically though, 'family' as a Wik conceptual and practical entity extended well beyond the bounded unit of the nuclear family - although it derived its

100. Sharp (1958:7)

101. *ibid*:5

102. *ibid*:7

103. Sutton (1978:116)

104. *ibid*:32

105. von Sturmer (1973a:21; 1978:449)

106. von Sturmer (1978:557)

107. *ibid*:282, 401

108. *ibid*:413

109. *loc.cit.*

110. Source: Household census, D.F. Martin, February 1986

primary force and meaning from it¹¹¹ - to embrace one's *kampan* or cognatically reckoned kin. A *kampan* could be considered a kindred, in the sense in which Freeman defines it as a conceptual set of a particular individual's kin from which subsets coalesced around particular actions centred on that person.¹¹² However, kindreds can be analytically distinguished from more broadly based cognatic groupings in that the former are established and act with reference to an individual, whereas the latter are polycentrically structured aggregates of cognatic kin. Wik used *kampan* in this sense as well, of groupings of cognatic kin who were involved in particular conjoint actions.

Much of life in the internal Wik domain - social interaction, economic transactions, political action - continued to be rationalized and legitimated by Wik in terms of relations of kinship. This should occasion no surprise: Who one was as an individual, even how one perceived oneself, was culturally constructed in terms of essentially public symbolic forms, above all else kinship. Wik kinship systems placed each individual at the centre of an open network of essentially genealogical connections, traced upwards through both mother and father, although with a patrilineal bias through clan membership, and downwards through one's own and one's siblings' offspring.¹¹³ Wik imposed a set of binary oppositions on this network of kin; one's 'own family' and 'close relations' were contrasted with 'outside families', 'full-blood' or 'proper-one' relations with classificatory ones, and 'mother's side' kin with 'father's side'.¹¹⁴ In-laws could be *kampan*, but the reckoning here was not through the marriage as such but through the actual or putative kinship relation. Family and in-laws were sometimes distinguished when the latter were more distantly related; "People used to go here and there for wife. So, we class them as family in marriage. We share with them, and they with us," a senior Wik man explained to me. Essentially, one's *kampan* was a cognatic kindred comprised of 'close relations', including genealogically close classificatory kin.

However, just as 'close' and 'distant' in their spatial senses were not absolute but provisional and contextual constructs for Wik, so too were 'close' and 'outside' kin relative (so to speak) constructs. Who one classified as close *kampan* at a particular time and in particular circumstances was dependent on whole sets of contingent factors. Von Sturmer quite rightly characterizes the Wik view of kinship as a resource to be manipulated and exploited like other resources.¹¹⁵ Thus, for example, a senior man of the Cape Keerweer Wik *Mungkan* Brolga clan justified to me why he stayed with the *Thaa'yorr* Foot family at Edward River to the south of Aurukun, rather than *Mungkan* people:

My great grandfather got married to Wik *Muminh* mob. Like that he go.
That's where we related to that Foot mob, who married my *Muminh*

111. von Sturmer [Smith] (1980:261)

112. Freeman (1968)

113. See also von Sturmer (1978:418)

114. See also von Sturmer [Smith] (1980:260)

115. von Sturmer (1978:401, 418)

relation. When I go visit [Edward River], I don't stop with this side [Mungkan] mob, I stay with Foot mob.¹¹⁶

Yet of course, in this very manipulation the kinship structures themselves were being produced and reproduced. I shall return to this point; suffice it to say for the moment that it is necessary to distinguish analytically between kinship as a structure of actual or putative genealogical relations, and kinship as a set of lived relationships; that is, in Bourdieu's terms to separate official from practical kinship.¹¹⁷ *Kampan* therefore could be seen at the structural level as cognatic kindreds comprising 'close' kin. As such, each individual was potentially a member of many overlapping kindreds,¹¹⁸ and as a general principle no two individuals shared precisely the same kindred.¹¹⁹ At this structural level then, an individual could be in many kindreds. The senior Cape Keerweer man mentioned above explained the connections between himself, and between his cousin Deborah (from a *Wik Ngathan* Cape Keerweer clan) and Beulah, from an Archer River *Wik Mungkan* clan:

Deborah and Beulah they one group, because their grandfathers they both cousin-brothers. That old Archer fella married woman from Cape Keerweer. I included in that mob too, because my grandfather from there. We fella, we part of *Mungkan*, *Ayngenyh*, *Ngathan*, *Thaa'yorr*, *Muminh* because we descended from all those mobs.¹²⁰

However, what was being emphasized here was sets of potential claims of relatedness (even though the terms 'group' and 'mob' were being used), not necessarily groups as such involved in conjoint actions. In fact, while Deborah and Beulah maintained friendly social relations, they had relatively little to do with each other.

Kampan however were also practical realizations of these structures, kin groups coalescing around conjoint actions and their subsequent representations who understood and legitimated their collective practices in terms of kin relatedness, and thereby produced and reproduced those very structures. Thus, while an individual's *kampan* was at the structural level relatively unbounded (so that *vis a vis* the outside world Wik could claim that all Aurukun people were *kampan*), at the practical level *kampan* were the more or less identifiable but fluid groups involved in particular collective social practices. D. von Sturmer [Smith] writes of the *Kugu-Nganychara* Wik:

[A] *kampan* ... is the kind of group which one finds (and would have expected to find in the past) forming the focus of a residential group over time, interacting at a particular campsite, co-operating in economic pursuits and the distribution of food, organizing and carrying out

116. Interestingly, on other occasions the same man proffered the shared Brolga totem as an explanation for his alliance. His own 'big' clan name referred to the lower leg of the brolga, whereas the *Thaa'yorr* family's English name referred to the brolga's foot.

117. Bourdieu (1977a:35)

118. Thus Keesing (1975:14-15) suggests that they can not function as effective corporate groups. However, (leaving aside the question of what is meant by 'corporate') Wik demonstrated that such groups could be basic to social, economic and political life, as Freeman (1968) argues.

119. Even full siblings would only have shared the same kindred if they married another set of full siblings.

120. Fieldbook 4:125

ceremonies, establishing an outstation together, and involved in arrangements for and settling disputes over marriage contracts.¹²¹

It is noteworthy that the terms in which von Sturmer [Smith] characterizes the *kampan* group here are virtually identical to those which Thomson used in the 1930s of the 'horde' in differentiating it from the 'clan'.¹²² Such groups corresponded in a general sense to what both Sansom in writing of Darwin fringe-dwellers and Anderson of Wujalwujal people call 'mobs' (although there are differences to which I shall return).¹²³ I will illustrate the nature of *kampan* groups by examples from three contexts; residence groups on outstations, those within the Aurukun township itself, and the 'mobs' involved in fighting.

Outstation households: Depending on their populations at the time, most outstations were comprised of a number of *kampan* groups which were relatively discrete, although of more or less fluid composition. Each group could comprise one or more linked familial units, or more generally 'hearth groups' as Sansom terms them;¹²⁴ that is, kin who shared the same camp for sleeping and most (but not all) eating, centred normally around a cooking fire. As such, 'hearth' groups in the outstation settings (or in the Darwin fringe camps Sansom writes of), could be said to be structurally equivalent to 'households' in the Aurukun township, and Sutton in fact uses 'household' in describing a similar situation at Peret outstation in 1976.¹²⁵ Altman in his major study of Momega outstation in Arnhem land, also terms these groups 'households', and what I have termed *kampan* groups he refers to as 'household clusters'. He shows that these were the basic commensal unit,¹²⁶ and argues these were also the minimum viable economic unit.¹²⁷ Anderson similarly demonstrates that the basic economic unit at Wujalwujal was the group of linked households.¹²⁸

Such hearth groups could well consist of a nuclear family unit, but equally comprise more complex associations of kin. Each kindred group would typically be referred to by Wik in terms of one or more focal individuals (e.g. "John *wee'anang*", John and his mob), who were usually (but not always) men.¹²⁹ In Figure 6.1 below, an example is given of the politically dominant residence group at North Kendall (*Kuchenteypanh*) outstation, just after its establishment in July 1978. At that time, there were three kindred groups there, with the focal individual of two of them being

121. von Sturmer [Smith] (*op.cit*:263)

122. Thomson (1935:462-3)

123. Sansom (1980; 1981); Anderson (1984; 1988; 1989). However, Finlayson (1991) argues that Kuranda households could comprise more than one 'economic unit', which appear to correspond loosely to 'hearth groups'.

124. Sansom (1980)

125. Sutton (1978:97-101)

126. Altman (1987:182)

127. *ibid*:102

128. Anderson (1982:143-6)

129. Sutton (*loc.cit.*) paints a parallel picture of residence groups at Peret outstation. While he is correct in saying that usually it was men who were seen as focal individuals, when the group included a senior woman from the dominant clan on the outstation, her name was often used to refer to the group.

classificatory brothers, and the other group using North Kendall as a staging point before moving to the south side of the river to establish an outpost near their own clan country there.

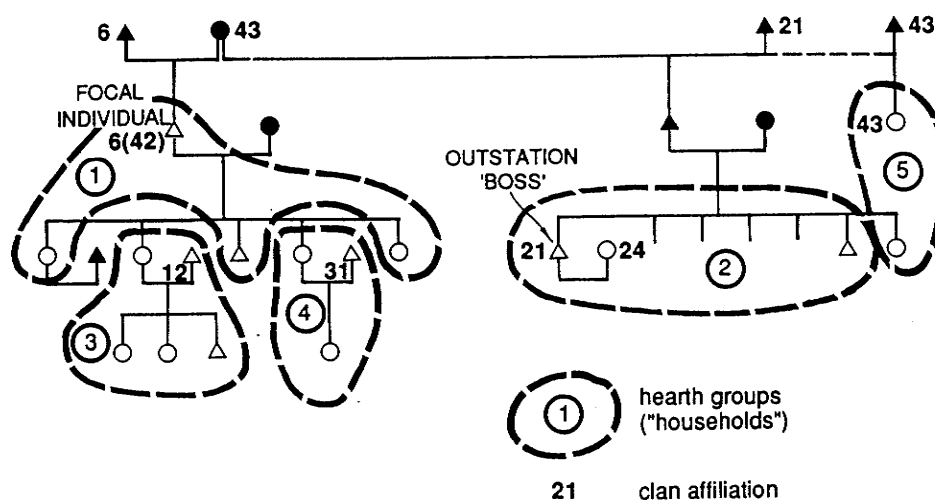


Figure 6.1 Composition of the major household cluster, *Kuchenteypanh* outpost, July 1978¹³⁰

This outpost was established on a focal site in the estate of clan 21, near the mouth of the river. It is noteworthy here that while the acknowledged 'boss' for the outpost was an early middle-aged man from this clan who was its senior male, the focal individual for his residence group was his elderly classificatory father (FB+). Although this man claimed to be from clan 6 from the Cape Keerweer area,¹³¹ he was a uterine sibling of the boss's father, and had spent much of his childhood in this estate. He was much more knowledgeable of it as a cultural landscape than was the estate 'boss' as well. It is also noteworthy that the hearth groups, while clearly kin-based, crosscut sibling sets and their offspring in a complex fashion.

From the perspective of outsiders, all those living at this outpost (and in fact all those with primary affiliations to estates in this region) were portrayed as 'that Kendall mob'. In the oppositional politics of outstations, and in the politics of the township, they did form in some senses a solidary unit. Yet, internally they formed quite discrete, often conflicting, social and political units, each of which could be referred to as a mob. 'Mob' therefore itself, was a contextual and fluid term. While the three kindred groups at *Kuchenteypanh* were linked by ties of kinship and ceremonial affiliation, most economic exchanges (apart from gambling), most sharing of food with the exception of large game and the occasional bullock, and most social

130. Anderson (1982:147) gives a similar schematic of two linked household clusters at Wujalwujal.

131. Although this in fact was contested by most in that clan, who argued that while he shared the same language (*Wik Ngathan*) and most totems and totemic names with them, he was in fact from an estate between the Kendall and Knox rivers.

interaction between adults, was within them. As such, these kindred groups were the basic social, economic and commensal unit, rather than their constituent hearth or familial groups.

Township residential groupings: Sutton's and Altman's uses of the term 'household' referred to above, based on research on outstations, link it to groups sharing a hearth and who camp together. Anderson on the other hand while he defines household as "a group of persons who eat together on a regular and permanent basis", says that its members may or may not share the same camp or house, but contribute to it and are fed by it.¹³² Finlayson, in her work on Aboriginal urban-fringe households at Kuranda in north Queensland, takes a different stance again: A household is simply those people who are co-residents in a dwelling. There would in general be a group of longer-term core residents, and others who moved through the household for varying lengths of time.¹³³ A household might consist of a number of 'economic units', that is sub-sets of the household (perhaps a married couple, or a single mother and her child) who shared food and other such resources. These however were not fixed in composition; they functioned as partially discrete units in times of economic plenty, but primarily through demands couched in terms of boss-dependent nurturing relations, resources such as food and money were shared between these units within the household in lean times. Households themselves were not discrete groups either, since members were linked socially and economically in a fluid fashion with other such units in Kuranda and in the broader region.¹³⁴

It is my view that it is useful to follow Finlayson in this regard, and to confine the term 'household' to its conventional dictionary sense of co-residents, while allowing for the fluidity of its composition and the complex nature of the economic and social links within it and between it and other such units. My reasons are twofold; firstly, such a measure allows for comparison with the wider data collected by the Australian Bureau of Statistics on such matters as household expenditure patterns,¹³⁵ and secondly the fact that people choose to reside together (even if only temporarily) is itself a significant fact deserving of explanation.

In the case of Wik, household composition like so much of social process was almost always spoken of and legitimated in terms of kinship relations. Almost all households I surveyed over the course of three separate censuses could be said to have been kindred groups. It could not be assumed however that households as such formed solidary economic and social units. For one thing, members of Wik households were not living in independent and self-sustaining units, but were linked to others in a variety of ways. These links were not however between households as such but between individuals - particularly focal individuals - within them. Households could in a sense be said to have formed clusters in somewhat the same fashion as Anderson and Altman noted, but only in the sense that each household was (at any given time) a realization of a sub-set of a *kampan* kindred, and the 'cluster'

132. Anderson (1982:96)

133. Finlayson (1991)

134. *ibid*:213-21

135. See e.g. Australian Bureau of Statistics (1984)

was a realization of a more inclusive set of *kampan*. In figure 6.2 below, an example is given of such a cluster of households in Aurukun.

This particular cluster of households is of interest, in that it focussed around a powerful man whose father and father's brother had been prominent in the Mission era, and who was now a central player in Shire Council politics. His position and prestige enabled him to have a major influence on the allocation of new housing in the township, and consequently he and his family lived dispersed across a number of the newer Council houses, and had significantly fewer residents per house than was the case for other Wik.

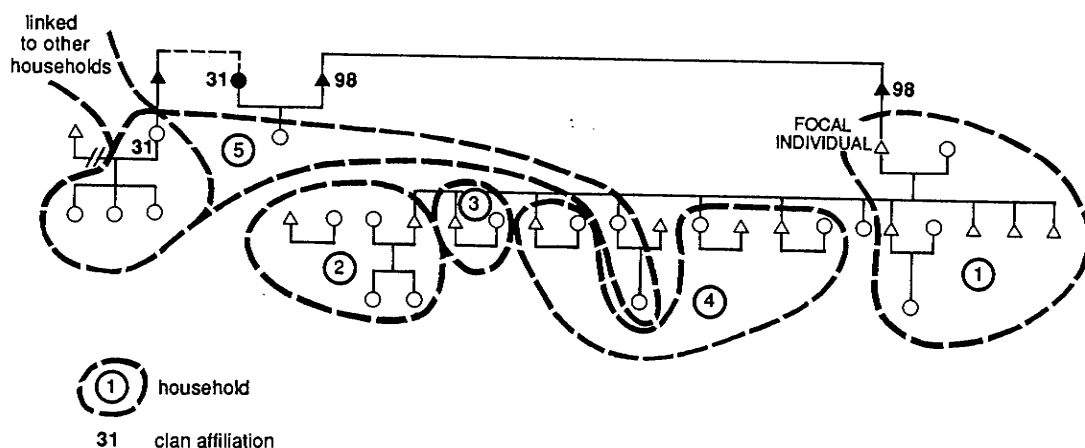


Figure 6.2 Sample household cluster composition, Aurukun township, February 1986

This 'mob' was relatively solidary in nature, a formidably cohesive political and economic unit whose solidarity arose from their ability to consolidate their power. There were certain other mobs who were equally solidary, such as one drawing its constituents from marginal Knox River groups. The target of social disapprobation, including sorcery accusations against certain of its members, this group's relative solidarity was one constructed in adversity.

In general however, these linked Wik household clusters were not the relatively solidary units reported in Wujalwujal by Anderson. The very nature of *kampan* kindreds as ego-centred networks at one conceptual level, meant that individuals within any given household had links that were at least potentially realizable with a whole range of others.¹³⁶ As a result, the clusters of households were themselves not bounded, solidary collectivities, but loose consociations whose boundaries (whether social, political or economic) were fluid and permeable. To illustrate the scale of intra-household mobility and the high degree of optation that Wik were able to exercise in drawing upon kin networks, the results of censuses taken in February and June 1986 are shown in Table 6.1 and Figure 6.3.

136. Kindred-based groupings, argues Freeman (*op.cit*:266), are very flexible and characterized by a high degree of optation.

Table 6.1 Residential mobility by age and gender, February - June 1986

Age	Male population	Males shifted residence	Female population	Females shifted residence
0-4	47	13	54	17
5-9	58	19	40	17
10-14	60	21	63	28
15-19	60	29	52	22
20-24	46	21	42	16
25-29	23	4	33	9
30-34	28	7	25	13
35-39	38	24	25	5
40-44	22	7	19	9
45-49	12	3	18	4
50-54	12	5	16	4
55-59	13	3	13	5
60-64	12	2	6	1
65-70	12	4	9	4
70-74	6	0	6	0
75 +	0	0	6	2

Source: D.F. Martin, Household censuses, February and June 1986.

Some 316 Wik - 36 percent of the entire population - had changed residence over this four month period. Only 11 of these people had moved to additional new houses constructed during this period. Others had moved because of fights or arguments with household members, or (in the case of children) to households where there was food available. An examination of the household compositions for each of the two censuses reveals that in many cases, a residential core remained relatively constant, with a more mobile group of kin moving between households. Many, but not all, of these were indeed children and young men, a pattern noted by a number of writers for Aboriginal households.¹³⁷ A surprising figure however was the number of mature men between 35 and 40 - 63 percent of men in this age group - who moved residence. It is precisely this group that one would have expected to have been consolidating their positions as heads of family or household units.

Households themselves were not undifferentiated economic and residential units. As Finlayson equivalently observes of Kuranda people, there could be a number of 'economic units' within a given household. These could be termed 'hearth groups' in the sense of a group who cooked and ate together. However, the economic and social relationship between these units and others in the household in which they were living was not fixed, but depended on such factors as the availability of food and money according to whether it was a 'slack week' or not, and (not unrelated to this) the level of conflict within the household. Additionally, as pointed out already, individuals within these hearth groups were linked to other households; figure 6.2 shows an example of this.

137. e.g. Anderson (1982), Birdsall (1988), Finlayson (1991), Sansom (1988:170-72).

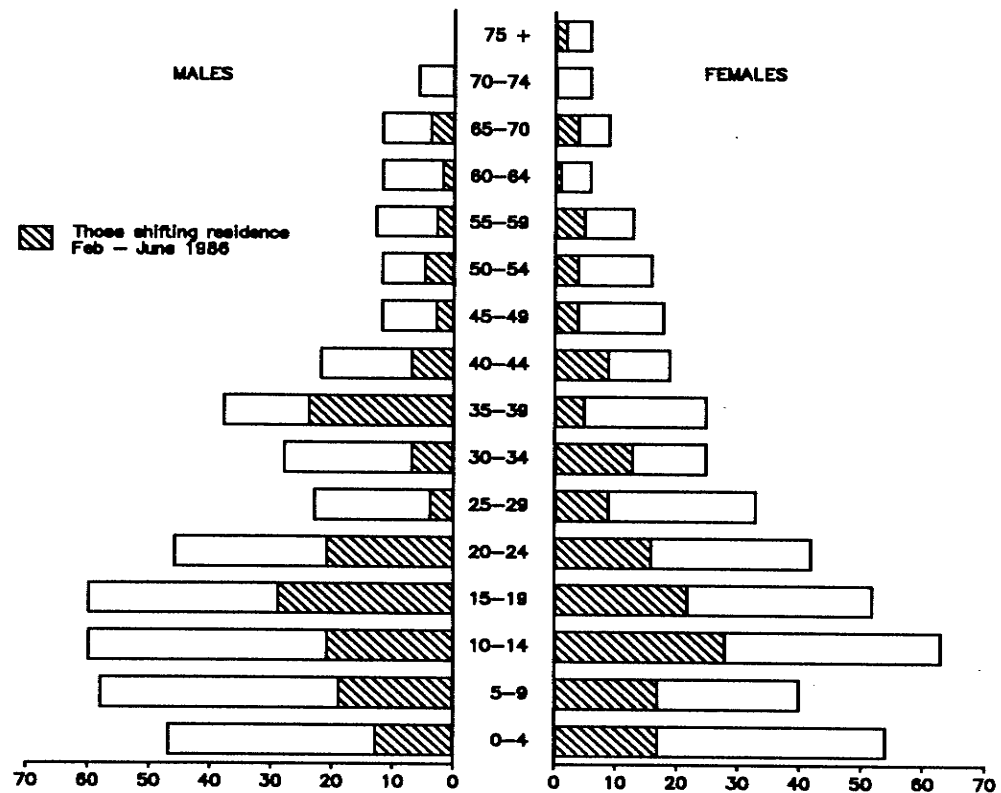


Figure 6.3 Residential mobility by age and gender, February - June 1986

Source: D.F. Martin, Household censuses, February and June 1986.

Fighting mobs: As has been argued in Chapter 4, fighting was a major activity for Wik, an arena which was still essentially organized within the Wik domain rather than by the institutions of the wider state, one in which core Wik values were expressed. Nonetheless, contemporary large-scale fighting in part arose from and played a profound role in the way in which Wik society articulated with the wider one. Fights, such as the one that forms the core around which this thesis is organized, provided points in the flow of social process around which collective action precipitated, and around which aggregates of *kampan* formed. Wik themselves explained recruitment to such actions in terms of kin relatedness.¹³⁸ "Dave wee'anang" - Dave and his mob - thus formed an identifiable unit for the duration of that action, and for the subsequent time that their joint activity in this and other exploits were part of the currency of Wik social intercourse.¹³⁹

138. More correctly, the objective structures such as those of kinship produced the dispositions of the *habitus*, itself the generating principle of practice. Thus, Wik fought alongside or against one another not because this was the behaviour specified in the formal kinship rules, but because patterns of gender-appropriate behaviour, of intimacy or avoidance, of amicability or hostility, had been sedimented in the individuals concerned through the inculcation of *habitus*.

139. Fights of course, particularly big fights such as this one, usually had a number of mobs involved, and as such involved several, overlapping, kindred groups.

As an actual event, the major fight referred to above and its aftermath took place over a few hours. As such, then, it could be argued that it was a relatively ephemeral and inconsequential affair. Such fights however were just as much instances and realizations of *kampan*s as were households or hearth groups. Crucially, the households in which the protagonists were living at the time of this fight could not be mapped in any simple way on to the genealogical ties linking the mobs, nor could the mobs be considered to be people living in household clusters, with the possible exception of Terry and his sons (see Figure 4.1, Chapter 4. I shall return to this theme: my argument here though is that the household (or the household cluster) was no more the analytically prime unit than any other on-the-ground group.

Yet, while such aggregations might have been fluid entities with apparently almost totally permeable boundaries, there was a sense in which Wik correctly talked of "the Kendall mob", or "the Cape Keerweer mob" or "[the Chairman] and his mob". This was because while kin links may have been potentially almost infinitely realizable for any individual, in practice it was mostly close rather than distant kin from whom groups were drawn. Whether in the township or on outstations, it was this social domain of close *kampan* within which a Wik child would spend virtually all of its time, being cared for when an infant or toddler, from whom playmates would later be drawn, from whom food, money and attention could be demanded as he or she grew. Sentiment, familiarity, the appropriateness of his or her interactions with these kin in comparison with the inappropriateness and even danger of those with 'outside' people - the centrality of one's *kampan* to one's very being - were inculcated and reinforced at every point through the unremarked minutiae of daily life.

More generally, it was within the *kampan* groupings and particularly within the families and households that were subsets of them, that most social and economic exchanges continued to take place. It was within these entities too that the primary relations of domination and subordination between seniors and juniors and between the genders were established and reproduced. In these senses, *kampan* thus formed the fundamental social, political and economic Wik unit. Contested representation on the Shire Council or on the Board of Directors of the Company, competition over resources such as Shire vehicles or housing, antagonism over actions of Wik police aides, rivalry over resources allocated to outstations, children's fights within the school and the major brawls in the village - all these processes involved groups recruited from various kindreds.

***Kampan* and 'clans'**

As discussed earlier, McConnel's and Thomson's early work on Wik placed great emphasis on the solidary nature of clans. Von Sturmer has observed that the relationship between cognatic *kampan* kindreds and patrilineal descent-based clans is

not a simple one.¹⁴⁰ For Wik themselves, too, there was some slippage between the notions of 'clan' and 'family'. The senior man of clan 21 in explaining how structurally complex Aurukun was, told me that "each family has its own culture". By 'culture' he meant dances, totems, languages and so forth. Primary rights in these forms of course were transmitted patrilineally and thus were held by the descent group rather than a cognatic one; 'family' as this man used it referred to close patrikin in particular rather than to *kampan* in general.

In any event, the notion of the Wik 'clan' as a corporate, bounded social group is highly problematic. The major contemporary analysts of the Wik, Sutton and von Sturmer, place rather different emphases on this concept. For Sutton, 'clan' is a convenient cover term, rather than a clearly definable Wik social structure.¹⁴¹ A 'clan' consisted of those individuals who recognized each other as being in the same patrilineage and had the same totems, language, and primary country. A clan could contain more than one patriline. Through such processes as the extinction of some estate owning groups and lineage segmentation, clans were not so much fixed bodies as;

... entities at different points on a processual continuum ... 'clan' may be more neatly applicable in some cases than others; not all clansmen are clansmen in relation to all the country claimed by any one of them, and not all territories have "a clan" in possession of primary and unique rights over them. But ... the clan as a patrilineal land-holding totemic unit with a unique country is the target towards which the flux of reality is continually pushed.¹⁴²

Von Sturmer's analysis parallels Sutton's in giving *Kugu-Nganychara* 'clans' some ideological reality, and he similarly argues that among these southern Wik people there were real problems in defining the descent-based corporate 'clan' as the effective land-owning unit;

There is a strong patrilineal descent ideology among the *Kugu-Nganychara*; consequently corporative structures based on the notion of descent must be considered incipient, or potential realities. However, my argument is that corporations based on descent are unlikely to sustain the intense pressures to which they appear subject among the *Kugu-Nganychara*: the proprietary and political aspirations of individual entrepreneurs; the conflict between contrasting sets of loyalties - familial versus descent group loyalties; sibling rivalry; and instabilities based on demographic and environmental factors.¹⁴³

Sutton's and von Sturmer's differences may well reflect regional variations between Cape Keerweer and *Kugu-Nganychara* Wik (but see page 280), but in any event the role of clans as patrilineal descent-based corporations in much of contemporary Wik life was increasingly peripheral compared with that of *kampan*. Much of the original corporate property of clans had focussed on ritual forms, as well as on land (at least for Wik north of the Kendall River). These forms - totems, song

140. von Sturmer (1978:66)

141. Sutton (1978:58)

142. *ibid*:58-9

cycles and dances, clan names, languages and so forth - were becoming increasingly attenuated; that is, they seldom had a practical efficacy in the contemporary township.¹⁴⁴ If the same distinction between clans as ideological constructs and clans as practical realizations of these structures can be made as I have done for *kampan* kindreds, then undertakings involving clan groups as such were relatively rare.

Two possible exceptions involved the politics of death, and those of traditional lands. An important dimension of Wik politics involved the assertion of the rights of patrikin in a deceased person. The 'owners of the dead body', the *pam-mul kunych*,¹⁴⁵ had corporate interests in the dead person; in their names (and in their good name), in the manner and ascribed cause of their death, in the places and objects used by them during their lifetimes, and in the appropriate demeanours and observances of mourners. These matters were almost always vigilantly policed by the *pam-mul kunych*. As a category they comprised all members of the deceased's clan, but not all clan members took equal prominence in asserting these rights. Close actual and classificatory patrilineal kin - fathers, siblings, sons and daughters - were the ones who initiated actions against infringements, and it was usually the young fighting men of the clan, assisted by women, who actually took redress.

Nevertheless, while it was arguably the clan who had these corporate interests in the deceased, and while certain elements of mortuary ritual such as the spirit-sending ceremony were suffused with ritual symbolism that related to clan corporate property (such as site-specific *Apalach* and *wuungk* cycles), other major segments in mortuary rituals involved not the clan but categories of kin. Thus, the purification by washing of the 'widows' (*wukal-ongk* or *wuup-keyelpa*n, actual and classificatory male and female cross-cousins of the deceased), and the lifting of restrictions between maternal and paternal kin or between paternal kin and those in the *kuutan* relationship with the deceased,¹⁴⁶ involved categories of kin such as the 'father side' *maakiy* (F, FB, FZ), 'mother side' *aaymiy* (M, MB, MZ), and the cross-cousin 'widow' *wukal-ongk*. That is, these ceremonies involved 'superclass' categories of the extended *kampan* kindred of the deceased from a number of clans, not clans as such.¹⁴⁷

While the 'owners of the dead body' were *pam-mul kunych*, owners of sites and country were *aak kunych*.¹⁴⁸ In cases where the transmission of primary rights over

143. von Sturmer (1978:245-6)

144. As argued in Chapter 5

145. See discussion in Chapter 5

146. *kuutan* referred to the umbilical cord and placenta. The *kuutan* relationship in its primary focus was between an individual and the kinsman whose name was called as the afterbirth came clear (see e.g. McConnel (1957:140); Thomson (1936:350; 1946:160); von Sturmer [Smith] (1980:235-32); von Sturmer (1978:331-2); Sutton (1978:210);), but extended also to the patrikin of the individuals concerned and therefore embraced a relationship between groups of people.

147. See Thomson (1946:58-9), Scheffler (1972:39; 1978:161) and Sutton (1978:253-60) on Wik mourning categories as kinship 'superclasses'.

148. von Sturmer renders what appears to be the *Kugu-Mu'inh* equivalent *agu kunyji* as "full country" (1978:251,274). That is, where I have rendered the *Mungkan* term *aak kunych* as owners of country, von Sturmer gives the *Mu'inh* term as referring to the country itself. This may well be a linguistic or regional difference, or it may be that the term refers in a sense to the relationship, and thus to both country and owner. However, Sutton (1978:128-9) gives the *Wik Ngathan*

country had followed the norm, *aak kunych* thus referred to all those in the patrilineal clan. Where transmission had been by other means (such as when an estate or part of it was willed by the last remaining senior estate owner to another group, or when a vacant estate was taken over),¹⁴⁹ *aak kunych* essentially referred to those people with contemporarily recognized preeminent rights over that estate or sites.

In the contemporary situation, outstations were the focal points around which interests in traditional lands centred, and (when occupied) the residential core of each outstation would typically include Wik who had or who claimed close ties to that estate or to nearby ones; that is, *aak kunych*. The 'boss' of the outstation would usually be drawn from these people. However, it can not be assumed from this that 'clans' as such were the groups involved in outstations in any simple sense. For one thing, as discussed in more detail on page 271, actual residence groups were often quite complex in composition. Prominent members of estate owning clans would usually (but not always) form the core of the dominant residence group, but there were typically a number of other kindred groups in residence who did not necessarily include estate owners. Social interaction and economic cooperation operated primarily within the bounds of these *kampan* residence groups rather than those of the clan owners. In fact, there was often considerable rivalry and a high degree of reserve between male siblings, with the potential for overt conflict and schism always present.¹⁵⁰ Social interaction was often between their spouses and entourages rather than between mature male *aak kunych* as such.

Additionally, while in general estate owners formed the core of outstation residence groups, not all *aak kunych* were necessarily living there; in fact, the majority of most clans at most times were to be found in the township rather than on their outstations. Again, while *aak kunych* were those who had the legitimacy to speak for their lands, not all *aak kunych* were involved in such matters as disputes over country, and neither did they usually act as a solidary unit even in these instances. In fact, there were often disputes between individuals or clan segments over rights of control (such as that referred to in Chapter 5), and Sutton presents a number of case studies of such clan schisms.¹⁵¹ The 'clan' involved as a solidary, corporate unit in social, economic or political action was difficult, if not impossible, to find. Yet, it continued to be invoked as a legitimation in proposing and defending certain social actions, particularly disputes and the discourse surrounding land interests.

Regional political domains

While the *kampan* groupings may have been the basic social political, and economic units, both Sutton and von Sturmer make it clear that it was not simply the

term for "owners of the land" as *aak (k)oenhtha*, and that for the "home country" of a kindred as *aak uu'atha*, which parallels my interpretation of the *Mungkan* terms. I do not recollect ever hearing the *Mungkan* term (or other such constructions such as *yuk kunych* (owner of the [tangible or intangible] object), *may kunych* (owner of specific food) and *pam-mul kunych*) used of the object owned. See also entry in Kilham et al (1986:76).

149. See Sutton (*op.cit*:74-9)

150. As von Sturmer (*op.cit*:246,283) also notes. It is no accident that much Wik mythology, such as that of the *Pul-uchan* brothers who left *Apalach*, incorporates accounts of competition between siblings.

Wik familial sphere within which power could be exercised, and that politics could not be analysed solely within the rubric of kinship. Ego-centred Wik networks were incorporated into wider regional structures through such factors as territoriality, language, co-operative economic activities over regions or subregions, ritual property including totems, and ritual participation.¹⁵² While the question of the relative permanence or otherwise of such structures is not addressed in major fashion by either writer, it is clear that more extensive forms of authority were involved than those located solely within the nuclear or extended family.

Von Sturmer observes that throughout the Wik region, certain individuals wielded authority at both familial and supra-familial levels. A *Kugu-Nganychara* 'big man' or 'field boss' could have two or more spheres of influence. One was the riverine 'company', whose affairs he conducted and organized.¹⁵³ The 'big man' became the pivotal member of a network embracing and defining the resident and exploiting population.¹⁵⁴ Furthermore, ties through kin could be used to legitimate his authority in other, wider spheres, even in distant ceremonies or the internal affairs of a remote estate. Sutton notes that among Cape Keerweer Wik, each 'clan' usually had a senior man or woman who was unambiguously the spokesperson for that clan's country, and that a 'regional boss' would normally come from the ranks of these clan leaders.¹⁵⁵ Chains of authority were relatively clear in external contexts such as organized ritual where each group had its own 'boss', or in camp life where 'camp bosses' could decide on such matters as residential access and movement.¹⁵⁶

Where Sutton however implies that Cape Keerweer clan or regional political leaders were not necessarily ritual bosses,¹⁵⁷ the *Kugu-Nganychara* 'big men' von Sturmer describes were also leaders of ceremony.¹⁵⁸ These and other apparent variations may well reflect differing cultural emphases and styles within the Wik region. Von Sturmer for instance notes that coastal *Kugu-Nganychara* were able to organize on a much wider scale than could inland people,¹⁵⁹ which implies *inter alia* differing forms and domains of leadership. They may also represent the differing field-work experiences of the researchers. Von Sturmer's view of *Kugu-Nganychara* for instance was arguably profoundly affected by his close personal association with one particular 'big man', an individual of outstanding intellect and ability who was a 'boss' in both ritual and mundane domains.

151. Sutton (1978:78-83)

152. Sutton (*op.cit.*:116-54); von Sturmer (1973:21; 1978:450, 269-70, *passim*)

153. von Sturmer (1978:246). Von Sturmer distinguishes between these "COMPANIES" based generally on a number of estates in the same riverine system, and lower order constituent "companies".

154. von Sturmer (*op.cit.*:450-1)

155. Sutton (*op.cit.*:60-61,160)

156. *ibid.*:164

157. Sutton (*op.cit.*:153-4,160-1). Sutton comments that ritual cult groups such as *Apalach* were very loose political confederacies outside ritual contexts, but still had regional political dimensions, "reflecting aerial power games" (*op.cit.*:142,153).

158. von Sturmer (*op.cit.*:445-53)

159. von Sturmer (*op.cit.*)

The very high degree of individuation and group segmentation which Sutton and von Sturmer observed being realized through autogenous cultural forms continued to be a distinctive feature of Wik into the 1980s and 1990s; increasingly however they were realized through changing symbolic and practical media. Ritual, language and territorial affiliations remained for older Wik as vehicles through which wider, regional political alliances were established, as von Sturmer and Sutton clearly demonstrate. As I have argued in Chapter 5 though, these symbolic media were largely of little more than emblematic significance to most younger Wik, socialized as they were almost entirely within the settlement context.

However, certain broad regionally based groupings continued to figure in political process within the contemporary Wik domain; these were 'topside' and 'bottomside' Wik, as well as *Wik Way* people, and to a lesser extent those from south of the Kendall River. The 'topside' Wik (*ngep kaaw*, from the east) were essentially those whose traditional lands of origin had been situated in the sclerophyll forest country inland of the coastal flood plains, between the Watson and Holroyd Rivers. They included people descended from *Wik Mungkan*, *Mungkanhu* (*Iiyany* or *Iiyanha*), and *Wik Ompom* speaking groups. 'Bottomside' Wik (*ngep kuuw*, from the west), demographically and politically dominant by the 1980s, were those whose traditional lands lay within the coastal floodplain region between the Archer/Love River complex and the Kendall River. They included speakers or descendants of speakers of *Wik Mungkan*,¹⁶⁰ *Wik Ngathan*, *Wik Ngatharr*, *Wik Ep*, *Wik Me'anh*, and *Wik Alkan*.¹⁶¹ Outside this topside/bottomside rubric lay people from south of the Kendall (collectively referred to as *Wik Nganychara*) and from between the Archer and Embley Rivers (both referred to and collectively identifying as *Wik Way* people).

The division between coastal and inland people had figured at many levels in the area - marriage relations,¹⁶² in physical stereotypes, initiation rituals,¹⁶³ ritual cult affiliations, and wider political relations for instance - and the massed spear fights that took place after cremations where blame was assigned for the cause of death were often structured on this basis.¹⁶⁴ This division continued to inform much of the large-scale conflict within Aurukun, as discussed in Chapter 4, and defined broad domains of sociality, economic and political co-operation. However, in the contemporary situation there were increasing links between individuals and groupings of topside and bottomside origin, including those through liaisons and long term relationships.¹⁶⁵ Furthermore, while such broad groupings had a certain political reality in particular contexts, there were no topside or bottomside leaders *per se*. *Wik*

160. Two clans, one in the southern Cape Keerweer area and one from immediately south of the Knox River, had *Wik Mungkan* as part of their corporate clan property. Their dialect was similar to that of the upper Knox and Kirke River *Mungkan* speakers, although with a number of lexical differences, but was quite different from the *Wik Iiyany* or *Mungkanhu* of inland groups which McConnel referred to as 'Munkan'.

161. *Wik Ep* and *Wik Me'anh* speaking clans were in fact essentially liminal, neither wholly bottomside nor topside, as were those speaking the related *Wik Keyenganh* from south of the Kendall River (Sutton, *pers.comm.*).

162. see Chapter 2

163. Sutton (*op.cit*:120)

164. See Sutton (*op.cit*:57)

Way people on the other hand formed a smaller and more solidary group, both within the Wik domain and *vis a vis* the wider world.¹⁶⁶

Apart from these broad regional associations, the forms which linked individuals and kindreds into potentially wider political domains were no longer so much *Apalach* or totemic and language affiliations and so forth; they were such contemporary institutions as the Church, the Company, the Shire, conjoint activities such as work and gambling within the township, the outstations, and on a broader scale regional and even national Aboriginal politics. I shall take two case studies here; contemporary work practices and the operations of Aurukun Community Incorporated ('the Company').

Contemporary work practices: Von Sturmer notes a very important form of regionalism among *Kugu-Nganychara* Wik, that based on economic activities. He argues that corporate structures based on co-operative economic activities were more enduring than those based on descent ideology,¹⁶⁷ and that the sharing of common activities and mutual interdependence for resources could set up regional or subregional patterns, such as those 'companies' based on riverine groupings.¹⁶⁸ Such regional groupings could not be explained simply in terms of kinship, or descent-group constructs such as 'clans'.¹⁶⁹ Other sets of broader ties based on economic activities had been instituted during the Mission era. For instance, work on the trochus boats in the Torres Straits, in the regional cattle industry and in that of Aurukun itself, had provided powerful ties of shared experience for those older Wik men who had been involved in them. These links were not only to other Wik, but to Aboriginal and to Torres Strait Islander people over a much wider region, and knowledge of them was maintained through a fund of stories.¹⁷⁰ Such ties could on occasion extend in contemporary times to offspring of the original workmates.

In Aurukun, 'work', organized as it was by the administering bodies on a township-wide basis, could conceivably have provided a parallel context in which similarly wider sets of ties could be established. Certainly, this occurred to some degree. Those for instance who worked for the Shire Council on the prestigious jobs of driving the trucks and operating heavy equipment, frequently sat and drank together in the canteen. Such relationships often cross-cut kinship and other ties. However, they were characteristically monodimensional (rarely extending beyond the canteen), and did not involve their wider domestic or kindred groups. This contrasted with the bush camps, and to a great extent the outstations, where it had been the commonalities of purpose in co-operative activities such as hunting and gathering foods and the relative boundedness of social interaction which (over and above kinship and other ideological representations of ties) had linked members of groupings

165. See the data on marriages and relationships presented in Appendix 2.

166. See discussion in Chapter 5.

167. von Sturmer (*op.cit*:246)

168. *ibid*:269-70

169. *ibid*:402

170. Many of the songs in 'Island style' dances referred to these times.

in practical activity which in part contributed to the realization and the reproduction of the group.

This was no longer the case for most residential units in the township. The focus of much of social life was now much more outside the social confines of residential units for both men and women than had been the case in the past. For the men, work (whether under C.D.E.P. or otherwise) took place in heterogeneous groups whose composition was mostly unrelated to village household or kindred structures, and whose nominal authority structures were based on White rather than Wik political modes.¹⁷¹ Crucially too, work in Aurukun was rarely directly to productive activity organized by Wik themselves towards both personal, domestic unit or wider familial sustenance. It was on the contrary almost always externally instigated, often 'make-work' in character, and with its material reward in the form of money flowing to the individual, seen as divorced from his domestic and kin links.¹⁷² The organization of contemporary work practices abstracted Wik from the matrix of kin and other relationships within which they were embedded, and thereby contributed to the process of increasing individuation.

The Company: To take another example, Aurukun Community Incorporated was structured so that its Board of Directors comprised Wik nominated from some twenty family and clan groupings.¹⁷³ Of course, the very name of the organization itself was predicated on the notion of a community of individuals with a community of interests, given legal standing.¹⁷⁴ On the other hand, as I have discussed above (and also in Chapter 3), in *Wik Mungkan*, *kampan* meant loosely 'family' or 'kindred'. Through semantic and cross-cultural slippage the White concept of a 'company' as a legally incorporated organization involved in the wider and impersonal market system, was transformed into the Wik *kampaniy*, a fluid association enmeshed in the Wik universe of personal relatedness, legitimated and understood largely through relations between kin.

Operations A.C.I. conducted, such as the store and (until its demise in the late 1980s) the cattle industry, were characterized by its White management and by Government funding instrumentalities such as the then Aboriginal Development Corporation¹⁷⁵ as enterprises for the benefit of the whole 'community'. The A.C.I. Manager in particular played a very active role in tightening the rules for the use of Company funds by individual Directors and their families, establishing formal meeting procedures, in educating Directors in financial management principles, and more generally attempting to balance the bureaucratically imposed need to be

171. See Taylor (1984:441-5) for a discussion of the conflicting White and Aboriginal understandings in work gangs at Edward River (Pormpuraaw) to the south of Aurukun.

172. This was less true of women's sources of cash income (except for those few in employment or under C.D.E.P.) since Government benefits to women were in general predicated on their status as household providers and nurturers of children.

173. in 1990, these groupings were changed somewhat to more truly reflect the complex structure of Aurukun (See Sutton 1990).

174. Smith (1989) challenges the "community" model of Commonwealth and State policy and service delivery, based as it is on the assumptions of Aboriginal democratic social organization and of Aboriginal residential communities being self-governing social units.

financially viable and that of meeting (as he saw it) the social needs of all Aurukun people.

At certain levels, A.C.I. was successful in what were in many ways incommensurate aims. It also did act as an important forum where interests that Wik held in common - such as opposition in 1989 and 1990 to oil and gas exploration on Aurukun lands¹⁷⁶ or having a well-stocked and reasonably priced store - could be expressed. It therefore arguably acted as a force counteracting the particularistic familial and individual interests which dominated the internal Wik political agenda. Yet, a constant tension and dynamic within its operations resulted from the resistance by White managerial staff to attempts by certain Directors at different times to assert individual and family interests over those of Wik at large, as represented at least by the Company. In one noteworthy case, a prominent Director took legal proceedings against the Company for using his outstation and clan estate as the centre of its cattle operations, claiming several thousand dollars in compensation.

For this Director and virtually all others, the cattle industry with its herds ranging over numerous traditional estates between the Archer and Kirke Rivers was not a 'community enterprise' at all, because there was not a community of interests in it. In fact, Directors from several outstation clan groupings persisted with the view that they should each have their own cattle brands registered, and that the Company should grant a small herd to each outstation that they could run in their own paddocks on their own lands, mustering with their own horses and equipment (which in most cases they did not in actuality have). Cattle and other such equipment, were for Wik less material capital for purchase and sale in the wider market system in the course of establishing economic viability, than forms of symbolic capital, used in the establishment and maintenance of territorial claims and in the struggle for individual and group prestige and status.¹⁷⁷ The essential reason that other Directors were persuaded by White management not to support the individual taking legal proceedings against the Company was not so much that they saw his claims as inimical to the cattle industry's commercial viability, nor even that they thought he had no right to make the claim; each other outstation group had in fact already negotiated small compensation agreements with the Company for the use of their lands by the cattle enterprise. Rather, had this man been successful in his very much larger claim, he would have achieved a major coup in the intense competition for status and prestige; they would no longer have all been *picham karrp*, literally 'shoulders together'.¹⁷⁸

Yet, the Company - like the Shire Council - arguably did provide a wider arena in which particular individuals could rise to prominence. If the Company was a

175. Subsequently amalgamated along with the Department of Aboriginal Affairs into the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission (ATSIC)

176. See Sutton, Martin et al (1990)

177. Martin (1984) discusses the use of the paraphernalia of the cattle industry as contemporary symbols of territoriality. Dale (1992) presents an extensive analysis of the operations of Aurukun Community Incorporated including the cattle industry, and the mismatch of understandings ('perspectives' as he terms them) between Wik and White.

178. This watchful monitoring of resources in the maintenance of equality is discussed in Chapter 1.

contemporary equivalent of a regional ritual cult, in this case linking all Wik in Aurukun through a set of symbolic and practical activities which gained them access to valued resources from the wider world, then its leading practitioners were the Directors and in particular the Chairman of the Board. Instead of a mastery of esoteric mythology, of songs, and of dances, leaders of this new cult required expertise in English, adroitness in the formalities of the meeting and talent in the rhetorical forms of organizational administration. The rewards for those achieving preeminence included money (through sitting fees and other payments which Directors awarded themselves), trips to Cairns and further afield, materiel and other support for their own outstations, and (for a few) housing in the township. Because all such material and symbolic forms were mediated through Whites, leadership in this new cult thus necessitated by its very nature the cultivation and maintenance of relationships with key Whites. Ultimately in fact, Wik leadership in all these interstitial domains was as dependent on its White constituency as on its Wik one, and for some Wik individuals maintaining legitimacy in these two domains with their conflicting demands was at immense personal cost.

Unlike the original regional bosses, leaders in these newer domains were not necessarily prominent in their own clan and family politics; in fact, they were often relatively junior and marginal. Of the twenty individuals who were elected to the various Shire Councils operating between 1981 and 1991 for example, only two or possibly three could be considered to have been bosses of regionally-based clan groupings, and perhaps another four to have been prominent within their more immediate kindreds.¹⁷⁹ Additionally, as argued previously (page 262), the various contemporary domains of political struggle (such as the Company) were disparate and fragmented, and achieved status in one particular sphere had little intrinsic connection to that in any other.

This needs to be qualified somewhat. Some men from clans which were for historical reasons relatively marginal in township politics in the late 1970s, played prominent roles in the establishment of outstations on or near their clan estates during that period. While even at the height of the move to re-establish on traditional lands the majority of Wik continued to live in the township itself,¹⁸⁰ those who lived on outstations were seen by Wik to be 'looking after' the traditional lands, involved in valued activities such as taking produce from the bush and sending it back to kin in the town - carrying on Wik 'culture' on behalf of their township-dwelling kin. Focal individuals around which outstations formed then were ideally placed to capitalize on this prestige within their kindreds and use their positions as springboards into township politics. At one stage certain such individuals were elected to the Shire Council on a platform of being 'outstation Councillors', and subsequently moved into new Council-allocated houses in the township. Having done so, the focus of their political interests shifted away from their outstations to the town. In another instance,

179. While the composition of the successive Shire Councils in terms of 'representing' the complex structure of Aurukun was very problematic, nonetheless power was not restricted to one or two major 'mobs' as Anderson (1989:75) reports for the Wujalwujal Council, and as had been the case in Aurukun up until the 1970s (Bos 1974).

a man prominent in the local Church was on successive Councils for a number of years, and one or two individuals were able to make the transition from prominence in the Company to being elected to the Shire Council.

Nonetheless, while individuals could indeed manipulate the material and symbolic resources within these fields to gain prominence within them, they were always confronted with the problem of translating this to legitimate power within the internal Wik domain. In essence, those who for structural and personal reasons were prominent within their own kindreds were able to capitalize upon this to gain influence in these interstitial domains, but the reverse was not the case. Bourdieu argues that the different forms of capital (symbolic, material, cultural etc) are mutually convertible, subject to strict laws of equivalence.¹⁸¹ In this case however, the conversions in a sense were possible in one direction only. This can only be understood in terms of the self-defining and self-justifying nature of the internal Wik domain, and the power of Wik *habitus* inculcated essentially within it to structure the practical reality of the world. The dominant reality for virtually all Wik was overwhelmingly that grounded in the internal domain, despite, as argued above, the new institutions potentially at least offering alternative representations of it.

The limitations of personal power

Wik could appear intensely pragmatic, preoccupied with personal status, immensely political, often manipulative, each person seeming to strive to maximize his or her sphere of influence.¹⁸² Yet, the ability of Wik to exert personal domination over others within the internal domain was limited by culturally constructed constraints on its exercise, as well as by the fact that Wik social forms were predominantly produced and reproduced in the interactions between persons, rather than mediated through impersonal institutions. I shall turn now to a brief discussion of these constraints.

Autonomy and domination

In Chapter 1, I discussed at length the omnipresent Wik stress on personal distinctiveness and autonomy, encapsulated in the rhetoric of *ngay-ngaya* and "nobody boss for me". In asserting "nobody boss for me", Wik were specifically rejecting overt attempts to curtail their autonomy in terms of an ability to act as they saw fit. At the same time, I argued that Wik perceived themselves not so much as absolute moral or psychobiological entities, but in terms of relationships to others (principally those of kinship) and, ultimately, to a known and personalized universe. I suggested

180. Populations on outstations were highly mobile and fluid, and even during the 1979 dry season when they were at their greatest, at no stage did they rise to more than some 40 percent of the total Aurukun Wik population.

181. Bourdieu (1977a:183)

182. von Sturmer (*op.cit*:449) makes similar observations.

that the resultant tension between autonomy and relatedness was a fundamental dynamic in virtually all Wik social process.¹⁸³

Relatedness itself was substantiated through, and culturally represented in terms of, the flows of intangible and particularly tangible goods between people (Chapter 5). Concomitantly, Wik unceasingly and watchfully monitored these transactions to ensure that they were equivalent (*ma' keelam*), and perceived imbalances in them potentially aroused considerable adverse comment and 'jealousy'. Wik egalitarianism consisted of this process of the realization of equivalence through social transactions being represented as comparable (even when they were not). This egalitarianism arose, I argued, not from a generally articulated model which posited all people as inherently equal, but rather from one articulated by each individual which asserted that he or she was equal to all others.

In asserting "nobody boss for me", Wik were assimilating the notion of 'boss' to that of overt control, which was rejected as infringing personal autonomy. Yet, the moral basis of legitimate authority was represented in terms of superordinates nurturing their subordinates; a 'boss' was a person who 'looked after' his or her subordinates and in return was owed public deference, respect and service. There was an essentially unresolved contradiction then in the very notion of 'boss'; he or she could control, but (at least potentially) their attempts to do so could be rejected. Thus, while 'bosses' could demand and receive services and resources from others, they had to do so in such a manner that the publicly (and personally) perceived autonomy of the subordinate was not compromised. It is against these arguments that the nature and extent of direct domination among Wik need to be placed, for its exercise could never be taken for granted, and power and status were themselves unceasingly contested.¹⁸⁴

The young men of the outstation on estate 14 wanted to use the outstation's tractor to return to Aurukun for a house opening for a woman of clan 14. Their request precipitated a major argument involving Ned who was the senior clan male and nominal outstation 'boss' and his wife Edith on the one hand, and Ned's younger (but mature) brother Walter on the other. Walter had been challenging Ned for the role of 'boss' of the outstation's day-to-day operations.

Ned: That diesel for work! I'm not going to town, I'm stopping here for work.

Edith (very directly, and with some anger): You people give too much cheek to Ned! You don't work here, you get your [C.D.E.P.] pay for nothing! You just sit around and play gamble and wait for your money! ... You only nuisance, you come out here and go back in.

Ned: I know station rule. Station rule [is] when boss away, his wife give orders.

183. von Sturmer (*op.cit*:398) offers similar comments. Arguably, of course, this tension is a feature of all societies, but it is the particular forms and manifestations of it amongst Wik that I have sought to examine.

184. Parallel arguments are advanced by von Sturmer (*op.cit*:445-6).

Walter: I bin on station too, I know station rule. When a boss wants his men to work, he doesn't just walk away, he tells them what to do.

Edith (talking directly to her brother-in-law Walter): You not small children, you grown up now. When you see Ned going off to work, you should go with him, not sit here and play cards all the time. I talk here for my husband. He might be quiet man, but not his children.

The argument went on for some time, with no apparent resolution, using the vehicle (so to speak) of the outstation tractor to talk of wider issues of authority;

Walter: I got to go for that opening. Well, she my sister, we main one.

Edith: People should stay in town instead of make nuisance travelling up and down all the time.

The solution to this dispute was quite direct: Early the next morning, Walter together with all but a handful of outstation residents commandeered the tractor and trailer, drove it some 50 kilometres to the landing on the south side of the Archer river, and abandoned it there.

In this instance Ned, while structurally the senior estate owner, did not have the necessary personal attributes to capitalize on his seniority and become a real 'boss'. In the absence of an effective leader capable of attracting and holding followers, this outstation group was unable to utilize its considerable demographic strength in either outstation or township politics.

The extent of personal power

I have previously argued that the various contemporary interstitial domains were disparate and fragmented, and that status in one could not necessarily be translated into that in another. Even within the internal Wik polity however, the conversion of personal power between the different domains was always problematic. This arose precisely from the highly segmented and particularistic nature of Wik society, and was as true of the contemporary situation within the township and on outstations as it had been of the one recorded by Thomson in the 1930s. While *kampan* kindred groups were the basic Wik political, social and economic units, by their very nature as relatively unbounded and fluid networks, they did not in general have unitary leaders as such. Even less were there leaders who had broad authority in multiple domains across the complex and fluid familial and other cleavages which were so marked among Wik. Rather, there were leaders or 'bosses' for the particular events or even long-term processes around which one or more linked *kampan* groups coalesced (such as a bush camp or an outstation, or in a fight or disputation). Authority within a *kampan* group therefore was not just bounded socially, but temporally and spatially as well, often confined to the particular event or class of events or processes.

In particular, while male power in the mundane sphere had originally been represented as arising from ritually inculcated male potency, Wik ritual bosses were not in general secular bosses. In this regard, my view of leadership among

contemporary Wik differs somewhat from that proffered by von Sturmer in writing of the *Kugu-Nganychara*. I have already noted on page 280 that in his portrayal, *Kugu-Nganychara* 'big men' who were focal points around which residential and exploiting populations formed, were also ritual leaders. This was not however the case for contemporary Wik, including those *Kugu-Nganychara* who lived in Aurukun. It could be argued that this had arisen because of the diminishing importance of ritual life in the settlement context. Alternatively, as noted previously, there could have been differing cultural emphases within the Wik region. Thus, Sutton reports a Cape Keerweer man who in the late 1970s was 'boss' for an outstation at which his own and a number of other kindred groups were living. He was not however 'boss' for the *Apalach* ritual cult which they shared in common, nor was he the only prominent Cape Keerweer player in inter-outstation politics, nor did he have authority within the familial domain of other groups at his outstation.¹⁸⁵

Equally, the current *Apalach* 'boss' who was from clan 12,¹⁸⁶ while a man of immense intellect and considerable knowledge of ritual, mythology, and of land and sites in the Cape Keerweer region and beyond, kept relatively aloof from the politics of his kindred, as well as those of the township. His own younger brother however, a man in late middle-age, had been an important figure in the latter stages of the Mission era, and had played a very prominent role in the public campaign against the attempted 'takeover' of Aurukun by the Queensland Government in 1978. This man was now a leading member of the Shire Council, and artfully positioned himself in the interstices between Wik and White political institutions as the interpreter and defender of Aboriginal culture and Law.

On one occasion, he ('Peter') took advantage of the absence of his older brother to attempt to convert the essentially secular basis for his own prestige and authority into the ritual domain;

There was to be a major house opening late one afternoon for a man whose mother was from clan 6. At a men's shade in the bush on the southern side of the township, preparations were being made for the ceremonies. Peter, with the assistance of his classificatory brother, carved and painted a *maany*, an 'image' of a totemic being whose 'story place' or *awa* was in his own estate. As he carved the object, he tried to persuade another older brother to sing the *Apalach* ritual cycle relating to this being, and exhorted the young men sitting in the shade to practice its dance. He formally presented the carving to various visitors to the shade, including young women of his own clan and that of the dead man, and recounted its significance and some public details of its mythology.

As the day wore on, Peter's voice became more and more hoarse with his constant exhortation and explanation. In the event, when it came time for the dancers to move out from the shade and perform *Apalach* in front of the house, Peter was unable to recruit others to his enterprise, and this particular cycle was not sung. He himself rationalized his failure to have the dance performed by reference to his temporary inability to sing because of his sore throat.

185. See Sutton (*op.cit.*:160)

186. Which was closely linked by ties of marriage and descent to clan 6.

What is noteworthy about this case is that Peter was acknowledged (by both Wik and White) as a figure of considerable authority and presence in township politics, as well as in the wider Aboriginal political arena; he made a powerful impact in southern forums on urban Aboriginal people and Whites alike as a knowledgeable 'traditional elder', arguing forcefully for the legitimacy of Aboriginal interests and Law. He was also a prominent and influential player in family politics within Aurukun. Nevertheless, he was unable to translate this essentially secular authority into the ritual domain within *Apalach* politics. The symbolic resources he brought to bear in the secular domain, in particular a relatively sophisticated command of English and of White social and political forms, and a carefully cultivated and imposing bearing and presence, could not be translated into those required in the ritual one despite his undoubted acumen and intelligence.

Peter suffered from several disadvantages in this regard. He had highly competent older brothers and sisters, and moreover had spent many years away from Aurukun in his younger years working on cattle stations. This meant that his adeptness in the wider secular system had been gained at the expense of a comprehensive knowledge of *Apalach* ritual and mythology and of his own sites and country, and (most probably) of his undergoing the deeper stages of initiation which could have given him the legitimacy he sought in the ritual domain. It was in fact a common feature among Wik for it to be junior male siblings who competed for status in the institutions established by White society, such as the Council, the Company, and the Church. It was rare that a junior sibling could establish a lasting pre-eminence in internal Wik politics, however talented and resourceful they were. Young men could, and mostly did, vigorously assert their own autonomy and independence, and (if for instance they were good hunters or fighters) act as focal points around which certain group actions coalesced. Nevertheless, in general it was not seen as appropriate or even possible that they become leaders of mobs.

Decisions and actions

I turn now to a brief consideration of the limitations placed on direct control of others that arose from the particular nature of the linkage between decisions that individuals or groups may have taken and their implementation.

I have argued that the omnipresent stress on personal autonomy was one of the factors that limited the ability of one individual or group to directly control another. Wik groups themselves were fluid associations, usually recruited from kindreds, which coalesced around conjoint actions and their subsequent representations, rather than being corporate and perduring bodies. Furthermore, like truth and orthodoxy, such representations of social process were themselves contextual, mutable, and potentially at least contested. This applied equally to 'decisions', in the sense of a determination arrived at or a proposal for subsequent action:

A bush airstrip was being cleared several kilometres from the outstation on estate 21. There were at this time (in late 1978) three major kindred groups living there. One had as its 'boss' Dan, the senior male estate owner, but focussed around his close classificatory father who had grown

up in the area.¹⁸⁷ The other major grouping focussed around Jim, an elderly man (and a relatively distant classificatory father of the clan boss) who was from south of the Kendall River in terms of original estate affiliation, but who also had ties of long residence with this estate. The 'working men' for this outstation were all classificatory brothers.

Dan's kindred, including the women and children, spent several arduous hours each day on the strip; the men clearing vine thickets and large trees and digging out the stumps, the women collecting branches and detritus and burning them, and preparing tea and damper for the men. Jim and his group on the other hand (with the exception of one son) spent each day down at the landing, fishing and relaxing. This caused considerable ill feeling; "They gonna be the first one use that strip for grog," was a frequent disparaging remark. After several weeks, Dan brought the matter into the open by calling a public meeting. Without directly attacking the other group, he stressed that the airstrip was for all the outstation, they would all need it if someone got sick or to travel in to and out of town.

In response Mervyn, Jim's eldest son, stood up in the centre of the assembled meeting and made an impassioned speech. He stressed his siblingship with Dan, the collective interests of all the brothers in building up their outstation, and emphasized that it was necessary for all to work together, not depend on just a few. He ended with a rhetorical flourish; "OK, we all 'gree eh? All gotta work on the strip?"

However, work patterns continued precisely as they had before, and the strip was finished with virtually no input from Jim's group.

Part of the explanation for the failure of Dan to persuade Mervyn and his kin to work on the strip undoubtedly lay in the estrangement and competition between the two kindreds, and in particular the two old men who were their foci, and also in the fact that while he was structurally the estate (and thus the outstation) boss, Dan was a relatively mild mannered man and not an effective leader. Furthermore, he was structurally subordinate to both Jim and Mervyn in terms of their kinship relations.¹⁸⁸ However, this still does not explain why Mervyn's apparent public affirmation of the need for cooperative action did not lead to such action.

In another instance, this time without the overt discord which was involved the above example, I observed in the Aurukun village in 1981 a meeting of some 15 men from clans in the Knox River region, which was characterized by a high degree of fragmentation in terms of political, linguistic and ritual affiliations. Over two days they discussed a joint mustering project they were proposing to undertake on their lands; who was to provide the saddles, who the horses, which men would actually work, who would be 'boss', where fences and yards would be built, what areas could be mustered in common and what 'blocked' to outsiders and so forth. No mustering ever eventuated, and no fences or yards were ever built, although one man did receive an Aboriginal Development Commission loan of several thousand dollars to purchase saddles. A partial explanation lies in recognizing the use of the paraphernalia of the cattle industry - barbed wire, saddles, horses and so on - as contemporary legitimating

187. See Figure 6.1 page 271.

188. Jim was *pinya* (FB+) for Dan, and thus Mervyn was *wunya* (B+).

symbols of territorial claims and as forms of symbolic capital in the intense individual and inter-clan politicking.¹⁸⁹

The question still remains however as to what roles such relatively public gatherings played. Bern sees public village meetings in an Arnhem land settlement as central to the construction of an Aboriginal polity there; they affirmed and reinforced community ideology and interests, while at the same time they asserted autonomy from the external (but objectively dominant) society.¹⁹⁰ He further argues that the ability of the village meetings to carry out their decisions, even in domains of relative autonomy, was hampered by a lack of sanctions.¹⁹¹ However, the failure to implement the decisions made by the Knox River men cannot I believe be adequately explained by the lack of sanctions, although it was true that the older men could not compel the younger ones to work. Nor can it be explained simply by the lack of logistic support offered by the White administration - although this too may have been a partial factor. The answer lies in part in redefining the notions of purposes which 'public' meetings of this type served, and of the nature of public utterances generally in a society with such a high stress on personal autonomy.

It is imperative in this regard to re-emphasize the fundamental role of language in the production and reproduction of social life; that is, in Brenneis and Myers' terms to recognize speech as 'constitutive social activity'.¹⁹² It is further necessary to note, following Skinner, that in explaining social actions (including speech) there is a need to situate them in the wider sets of encompassing conventions in the particular society.¹⁹³ Accordingly, the whole genre of public speech acts which could potentially be seen as leading to some sort of action (perhaps flowing from a decision taken at a meeting) and their 'political' aspects (in the wider sense) have to be placed in the context of political discourse in general in this society. Brenneis and Myers note;

... the goal of political discourse may be neither a decision nor coercion but rather the sustaining of an appearance of autonomy while at the same time *constituting or reconstituting a polity*. They seem largely the product of negotiating acceptable interpretations, both of the event and of the relationship of the parties.¹⁹⁴ (emphasis added)

They comment on the extent in egalitarian societies to which the construction of a polity, however ephemerally, is an achievement which the analyst can not take for granted¹⁹⁵ and that it is essential in looking at the 'political' to consider people's relationship to the sources of social value and to the processes that sustain it.¹⁹⁶

189. See Chapter 5 and also Martin (1984)

190. Bern (1977)

191. *ibid*:103

192. Brenneis and Myers (1984:6)

193. Skinner (1972)

194. Brenneis and Myers (*op.cit*:14)

195. *ibid*:11

196. *ibid*:4

In the case of the Knox River people, they perceived their interests and status being threatened by nearby groups who had in fact successfully mustered cattle, and by plans of the Company cattle manager to extend mustering to area in which their own clan estates lay. The meeting then, even though no action arose from it in the sense of carrying out the decisions made there, emphasized group solidarity in opposition to other groups and to particularistic interests within it. It was a forum where a polity, if ephemeral, was constructed and certain valued social forms affirmed; among these were the expressed desire to be involved in the prestigious activity of cattle mustering,¹⁹⁷ the importance of 'work' and an appearance of purposefulness as justifying one's place in the new order, and the necessity for co-operation among members of the various Knox clans and within the loose regional confederacy linking them. In so doing I suggest *it served its purposes for the participants*. Paine argues that the rhetorical exchange may have no necessary validity beyond the exchange itself,¹⁹⁸ but in fact if we go beyond his behavioural perspective, the meeting served (in part) to reproduce the structures of relations in a society where there was "... an important concern of autonomous actors ... to keep their options open".¹⁹⁹

Such factors were true not just of the fluid groupings within the internal Wik domain, but also of those bodies interstitial between it and the wider one, such as the Company and particularly the Shire Council, for while they were largely created and structured to meet the demands of the bureaucratic state, Wik involved in them nevertheless drew upon their own cultural repertoires in operating within them. The Shire Council, for example, operated within a complex legislative and administrative framework established by the *Local Government (Aboriginal Lands) Act 1978*, and the mainstream *Local Government Act 1939-90* to which it referred. Meeting procedures, the language used (almost exclusively English), the formal decision-making processes,²⁰⁰ the physical structure and location of Council meetings themselves,²⁰¹ and indeed much of the subject matter brought forward for their deliberations, were based on the forms and imperatives of the bureaucratic culture of the wider state.²⁰² Furthermore, within this wider system, bodies such as local councils have authority in specific domains which is both legitimated through legislation and so forth, and delegated up by their constituents. However, while Wik voted in the Aurukun Shire Council, it could not be assumed that they therefore surrendered their autonomy and

197. Cattle mustering and the use and control of the associated paraphernalia were for this generation of Wik highly prestigious male activities.

198. Paine (1981:17)

199. Brenneis and Myers (*op.cit*:17)

200. With formal movers and seconders of motions, and the decision being taken by majority vote.

201. The Council met in air conditioned chambers, in a highly formalized arrangement under the crossed flags of Queensland and Australia on each side of a photograph of the Queen. The Chairperson and Deputy Chairperson together with the Shire Clerk sat at the head of the tables, arranged in a 'Tee', with the remaining Councillors seated along its stem. Each Councillor would have in front of them a glass of water, a clean fresh note pad, and a sharp pencil, placed there by staff. The formal symbolism of the room and its physical and social structuring, and its physical and symbolic isolation from the Wik domain, were entirely colonial.

202. Martin (1990) and Sutton (1990) discuss this matter.

their right to dissent from its actions or ignore them,²⁰³ most particularly in areas which Wik considered to be their own business - such as alcohol consumption.

Additionally, White administrators, working from within their own cultural frameworks, assumed that once a decision had been formally taken at a Council meeting and minuted, it represented the views of the Council, and that there would be a commitment to implement it. Indeed, where such decisions concerned more procedural matters, this was often the case. However on many occasions, despite apparently having agreed to follow a particular course, the Council failed to act upon it. One such arena of decision making concerned alcohol, in particular the sale of sly grog. As indicated in the discussion in Chapters 3 and 4, even after the opening of the beer canteen a flourishing trade in sly grog amounting to thousands of dollars a week continued. Councils over the years discussed the issue of this trade and the consequent problems on many occasions, and frequently made decisions to ban or to limit access to alcohol for the community. These all ultimately failed, despite impassioned rhetoric within the meetings by Councillors about the damage being caused to the community, about the hungry children, and about the necessity to drink 'proper way' rather than fighting.

The argument could be advanced (extending Bern's above) that the reason for the failure to carry out these decisions lay in the lack of sanctions applicable to the new secular realm at the juncture of the two systems. As evidence for this, it could be suggested, Councillors usually attempted to place the onus for actually enforcing their decisions on to Europeans - the Shire Clerk, the police and so forth.²⁰⁴ Of equal importance however, was that in the very process of arriving at the decision, Wik Councillors were constructing a political artifact of the moment which maintained their relationships with and discharged their duties and obligations as they saw it to the Whites present. At the same time, they well recognized the rights of themselves as individuals and of other Wik to exercise autonomy in ignoring or avoiding the decisions taken. By seeking to place the onus for enforcement onto outsiders, the Councillors were not simply attempting to avoid personal responsibility for their decisions, which is how many of the Whites who were associated with Aurukun portrayed it, but seeking to place the ultimate responsibility for certain classes of actions onto an external agent, in a process which had deep resonances in Wik ontology.

203. Sullivan (1988:7) also makes this point in a suggestive discussion in relation to Aboriginal interstitial organizations.

204. It could also be argued that Councillors knew that White officials expected action to flow from their decisions, and therefore they quite reasonably asked the Whites to carry them out.

Conclusions: fluidity in social process

In their studies of other systems of thought and practice, the western social sciences have been continually confronted with the need to develop theoretical concepts which are not irretrievably mired in the Western social and political environment itself, but at the same time are not merely what Bourdieu terms 'complicitous description'.²⁰⁵ Of particular concern to my argument here, models of social and political organization have often been predicated on order rather than disorder being 'natural', on conflict being seen as aberrant and its resolution a socially valued end, and on fission or dissolution in social groupings being seen as outcomes of adverse pressures. 'Society' itself has been treated often as organic, with major changes in its structures potentially at least destructive of it. More generally, it has been groups themselves as corporate entities and their structures which are the analytically prior units, rather than the principles of their formation.²⁰⁶

But, for Wik themselves it was the individual rather than the group which was emphasized. It was conflict, schism, differentiation and mobility which were accorded high social value, rather than harmony, cohesion, homogeneity and permanency. Accordingly, the study of Wik collectivities (whether hearth groups or households, families, or 'mobs') cannot assume their self-evidence and 'naturalness'. Acceptance of this has potentially profound implications for how Wik 'society' is to be understood; not as a unitary or coherent system of groups and categories, but as one of emergent forms, of classes of contexts, and of styles of action.²⁰⁷

This is of particular importance when considering the nature of residence and other groupings in the contemporary township. Sutton and (most particularly) von Sturmer have seriously questioned whether the constructs of 'tribe' and 'clan' as used by early ethnographers were indeed the basic units of Wik social and political action. Their replacement however with other, albeit smaller, units such as 'household', 'hearth group', or even 'mob' would merely perpetuate precisely the same methodological errors; unless that is these too are seen not as the analytically prior units but as realizations, as emergent, fluid and contextual forms. Households, fight mobs, economic units (such as a hunting party), groups involved in political action - these were simultaneous realizations, not separate phenomena.

In particular, the analyst could be seduced by the spatial order imposed on the Aurukun township by the bureaucratic state. Here were the rows of three and four bedroom houses, the grid layout of streets, the designated park areas, the municipal and other facilities paralleling those of any small country town. Yet, while Wik

205. Bourdieu (1977a)

206. Most particularly in relation to the study of Aboriginal societies, the structural-functionalist school of Radcliffe-Brown (e.g. 1930) has left a legacy which is difficult to surmount, in its concentration on units such as 'tribe', 'clan', 'family' and so forth.

207. Following Harrison (1985:125), writing of the *Avatip* of New Guinea. See also Sansom (1981:258).

social life was not unaffected by this imposition,²⁰⁸ it refused to be contained by it. Houses may have had (more or less) solid walls, but the flow of social process washed through and around them almost as if they were not there. Rather than their structures forming the bounds of the basic societal units, as is the case for instance for Australian middle-suburbia, Wik houses were more nodal points around which collectivities of varying degrees of permanence formed - for shelter, for social intercourse, for cooking, and so forth. It is against this high degree of mobility and fluidity in residence group composition, and against the previous discussion on *kampan* kindred groups (page 267ff) that the analysis of Wik political and social forms needs to be placed. In this regard, the work of Sansom on Darwin Aboriginal fringe camp dwellers is suggestive. He argues that for these people;

... social continuity does not vest in 'the arrangement of persons in relation to one another'.²⁰⁹ It vests instead in a conceptual order, in the repetitive invocation and employment of styles for doing business and rules for the provision, control and management of warranted social knowledge over time. Continuity ... is in the perdurance of cultural forms of and for action.²¹⁰

What Sansom (following the fringe dwellers themselves) calls 'mobs' were not fixed corporate entities but loose and fluid aggregations of individuals, based both on their current conjoint actions and on their collective representations of the outcomes of past joint actions. Mobs were then the "sums of human and verbal parts", aggregations of both persons and of the collective representations of past actions to which they conjointly subscribed.²¹¹ These objectifications expressing the outcomes of political actions - "given words" or "warrant statements" as Sansom calls them - were not however immutable and eternally true, but through the processes of "structural amnesia"²¹² were themselves subject to reinterpretation and supersession in the flux of social action.²¹³ Furthermore, while such "given words" were a currency in the sense that they were held as objectified mob property, they were not the depersonalized money stuff of the wider market-based economy. Rather, they were socially validated creations of recognized, identified individuals and mobs. As such, their value was not fixed against some external standard, but against the needs and exigencies of the moment. It was this fluidity then which, in Sansom's analysis, underlay that in social process in general, and in particular that in group aggregation and dissolution.

Where Sansom's analysis arguably errs for the fringe-dwellers, and would certainly do so if applied directly to Wik, is that social value did not derive solely from "the events of participation from sharing in experience and assigning worth to time spent with consociates in co-experience", nor were "given words" the major

208. For example, conflict was exacerbated by the mismatch between the locations of housing allocated to families and Wik's own regional and kindred-based social groupings, as discussed in Chapter 4.

209. Radcliffe-Brown (1952:10)

210. Sansom (1981:279; 1980)

211. Sansom (1980:40)

212. See discussion in Appendix 3.

213. Sansom (1980:27)

form of objectified mob property.²¹⁴ For Wik, symbolic capital lay also in such autogenous forms as ritual property, affiliations with land, in language, and most importantly in the relations of kinship. These forms were instantiated through the formation of groups, and in turn reproduced through it.

Wik groups were, like those of the Darwin fringe-dwellers, fluid and contextual associations. Like the Wik polity itself, they were always an achievement, never to be dismissed lightly.²¹⁵ Yet, in their very formation and indeed in their dissolution, Wik 'society', as a style of life, was being produced and reproduced.

214. Sansom (1981:277)

215. As Myers (1986) notes of the *Pintupi* polity.

Conclusion

This thesis has sought to provide a critical account of Wik people living in Aurukun over the period between the mid 1970s and the early 1990s. It is an account centred upon the flux of mundane Wik life, its forms, contexts and processes, and upon the meanings and understandings which informed them. It is set in a period of dramatic, and indeed traumatic, change for Wik. The imposition of Local Government in 1978 saw a rapid acceleration in Aurukun's transition from a relatively closed system under the Mission to one ever more exposed to the institutional, material and symbolic forms of the dominant society. This transition was manifested not only in the imposed governing structure of the Shire Council and the plethora of organizations and agencies which provided services within Aurukun, and indeed just as importantly serviced the needs and priorities of the bureaucratic state. It was also evidenced in such phenomena as the opening up of communications to the outside world, the ever-increasing tide of public servants and other outsiders visiting Aurukun, the direct exposure of Wik to the mass media, both as object and subject, and perhaps most critically of all, the introduction of cash and of alcohol as unprecedentedly powerful symbolic and material resources.

Yet, despite this massive and cumulative penetration of the forms and institutions of the wider state, Wik continued to stamp a distinctive mould on a domain which was carved out both spatially and socially. This domain was indeed marked by obvious differences in racial origin, the use of language, particular cultural practices such as rituals, relative material wealth, and so forth. More profoundly however, it was a domain established through a particular *style of life* which arose from the historically located conjuncture between Wik dispositions, understandings, and practices and the objective circumstances in which they lived their lives.

In this thesis I have examined a number of different dimensions to this style of life. These included the all-pervasive emphasis on personal autonomy and the assertive equalitarianism which were such pronounced features among Wik; this autonomy existed nonetheless in tension with its dialectically entailed correlate of relatedness, defined notably through relations of kinship. This dialectic, I have suggested, provided a fundamental dynamic to Wik life at all levels - as it arguably does for all societies, but what I have attempted to explore is its particular character for Wik. Material resources and especially cash offered new possibilities for Wik individuals to establish a degree of autonomy through their accumulation - although of course they compromised Wik autonomy collectively from the state. However, the particular construction of relatedness in terms of the flows of resources, material as well as symbolic, together with the forceful emphasis on equality, meant that there was intense pressure to distribute them. For Wik, despite the availability of cash and consumer goods on a hitherto unprecedented scale, wealth continued to lie in social and symbolic forms of capital, especially people, and ultimately what was

accumulated, managed and contested in a domain characterized by a performative sociality were not material resources as such but social relationships.

The Wik domain was also one characterized by very high levels of conflict, interpersonal violence, and alcohol consumption. While the relative scale of these practices was far greater than in equivalent areas of remote White Australia, what effectively distinguished Wik fighting and drinking, like gambling, was their essentially collective nature, through which they constituted a structural opposition to the values of the dominant society. Furthermore, conflict, violence, and large-scale alcohol consumption by Wik did not arise in any simple causal sense from dispossession and alienation, I have argued. Wik themselves saw competition and conflict as intrinsic to the human condition, and portrayed contemporary fighting as a continuing expression of their particular ways of doing things. The expression of anger and aggression, while rendered more problematic and difficult to contain in the contemporary settlement, related to such matters as the high stress on personal autonomy and on how individuals and collectivities could appropriately act upon the world in order to achieve their ends or redress wrongs done them. The potency of alcohol in particular, lay ultimately in the powerful resonances between drunken behaviour and core cultural themes concerning the expression of emotions and the tension between autonomy and relatedness. Alcohol consumption established a quasi-ritualized domain in which Wik could establish a power of sorts over others that they could not do in mundane life, and at the same time assert a degree of autonomy from the demands and obligations of the relationships in which they were enmeshed.

The Wik domain was additionally distinguished by a high degree of fluidity and contingency in the composition of residential, economic, social and other groupings. The history of Aurukun as a post-colonial settlement could be seen in terms of attempts by the Mission and more recent secular regimes to alter the legitimate definitions of social and geographic space. The spatial layout of the township, the allocation of houses to family units, and the nature of the housing itself, reflected the attempted imposition of a spatial order derived from that of the dominant society, just as earlier Mission controls over sexuality and marriage, the introduction of cash incomes to individuals predicated upon their status as defined by the welfare state, and the imposition of structures such as the Shire Council and Aurukun Community Incorporated, were all attempts to reformulate Wik definitions of social and political space. Wik however could not be contained by these material and ideological structures. The constantly ebbing and flowing currents of Wik social life acted to subvert these designations of public and private spaces and their appropriate uses. Similarly, the Wik assimilation of the Australian dollar in which it became the subject of contingent social calculation in the unremitting instantiation of personal relationships, acted to subvert its potential to objectify and impersonalize them. This fluidity of structure and process extended to Wik political forms. Within the Wik domain, relations of domination and subordination were essentially created in and through direct interactions between persons, rather than being mediated through objective institutions such as a legislature or bureaucracy. In such circumstances, not only political groupings but orthodoxy and legitimacy themselves were contingent and embedded in the flux of social life.

Yet, while there were strong continuities with the past, Wik social forms and processes were undergoing changes of profound significance. For many older Wik, it was clear that the reality of contemporary life in the township was being interpreted in terms of the world of the MacKenzie era, and of the bush where they had grown up and spent extensive periods. While now living in most cases virtually permanently within Aurukun, these people were still conducting interminable (and often internecine) politicking over the legitimacy of claims to traditional sites and estates and over knowledge of site-based mythology, could often speak several dialects or languages, and in many cases could recount with quite astounding clarity and detail events that had occurred out bush half a century before. For younger Wik however, who had grown up virtually exclusively in Aurukun or other settlements nearby with minimal or no extended periods out bush, it was the township itself with its social flux, dynamics and imperatives which provided the dominant focus through which social reality was interpreted.

For these younger Wik, access to critical symbolic and material resources, most particularly cash, was not controlled by senior generations or through membership of groups such as the clans and ritual associations that had been the original sources of social value, but rather arose from an individual's status as defined by the welfare state. While its subsequent redistribution, like that of alcohol, was mediated through relationships such as those of kinship, nonetheless such contemporary resources played fundamental roles in facilitating the ability of Wik to exercise autonomy increasingly separated from its correlate of connectedness. With senior generations no longer controlling the primary sources of social value, there was a rupturing of the autogenous modes of social reproduction; increasingly, younger Wik could carve out their own domains of meaningful practices and understandings separately from or even in opposition to older Wik. This transition from a society characterized by *doxa* to one of heterodoxy or even dissent, was paralleled by increasing individualism among Wik, and by the replacement of autogenous corporate forms into which people were born by more voluntaristic ones. At the same time as this individuation was taking place, new collective forms based on membership of the 'community' were arising. In particular, despite the complex internal differentiations and divisions, Wik used a reified set of practices posited as 'culture' to distinguish themselves collectively from the dominant society, and from other Aboriginal people.

From the *Pul-uchan* to Rambo

In the period up to the late 1970s, Aurukun's geographic isolation had enabled the Mission to maintain a fairly complete control of access by outsiders to the Wik, and of the flow of externally derived cultural forms and ideas, although of course the men who worked on cattle stations and trochus boats brought back a whole range of new ideas and practices derived from their experiences, the 'Island dancing' adapted for mortuary rituals from the Torres Straits being a case in point. The penetration of modern popular mass culture had been minimal up until the end of the Mission period in 1978. When I first went to Aurukun in the mid-1970s, films were shown at the outdoor picture theatre once or twice a week. These events were major points in the social calendar, with a large proportion of the adults, children, dogs and even staff

turning up for the occasion to jeer (in the case of the Wik) the Indians and commiserate with the hapless scalped settlers in the westerns, the most popular genre. Country and western music reigned as the supreme introduced musical form amongst young and old, with radio cassette players being highly valued consumer goods, and the occasional country and western travelling shows that came through in the dry seasons attracted huge interest.

With the advent of the cash economy and the concomitant opening up of communications with Aurukun, more and more Wik spent extensive periods in centres such as Weipa and Cairns. While undoubtedly they were exposed there to elements of the wider mass Australian culture, their involvement with it was almost always peripheral, curtailed both by an imposed exclusion and by their own cultural 'filtering' of ideas and practices. Within Aurukun itself however, there were major changes occurring. In 1984, television was introduced, with Aurukun initially receiving the Australian Broadcasting Commission's Sydney service through a transponder leased from an Indonesian satellite. By 1986 it had been funded for the equipment to link it into the nationwide Aussat system, and thus had facilities for both the Queensland ABC and north Queensland regional commercial television, as well as ABC FM radio. By February 1986, 49 (or 41%) of village houses had a television set, and 24 (or 20%) had video recorders, although the attrition rate in these as in other consumer goods was very high.¹ For those households who had one, the television set was on most of the day, but for much of it as a kind of background white noise (so to speak) to the discourse and activities of everyday life rather than playing a central role in sociality. Some Wik would certainly watch the news or current affairs programs on occasion, and certain matters aroused widespread comment. In 1988 for example, the executions in a Malaysian prison of two Australians convicted of drug offences occasioned great sympathy and interest amongst the Wik, who referred to them as "our boys". For most Wik however it was action dramas that stimulated interest. For children, cartoons, particularly those centring around the modern genre of science fiction robotic heroes such as Voltron and He Man were highly popular.

What really aroused an enthusiastic response however and had a high penetration into the village were videos. While only a minority of houses had video recorders, those who had television sets would often borrow recorders from kin. In all but a very few households too there was a constant ebb and flow of both adults and children, looking for food, money, alcohol or tobacco, gossiping, drinking, playing cards, and in the case of children and teenagers particularly, looking for stimulation and excitement. When videos were watched then, it was as a part of the fluid and superficially open character of so much of Wik social life, and they were rarely watched just by those living in the house, but by a whole range of kin. In fact, some Wik displayed their largesse by holding virtually nightly semi-public video shows outside their houses, with the machines set up on the verandah or on a table, and large groups of children and teenagers (and on occasion not a few adults) sitting and intently watching from the shadows.

1. Source: D.F. Martin, census, February 1986.

The advent of videos put an end to the open air film showings of the latter Mission days. These had to a great extent been censored by Mission and school authorities. Videos on the other hand could be hired by the Wik from many sources. Some came from within Aurukun itself, from the A.C.I. store and from staff members who ran a small private video rental business, while others came from Cairns video hire shops and included many soft-porn movies with restricted viewing classifications. In keeping with Wik views of the socialization of children, there were few domains of life from which they were excluded; pornographic videos were no exception. The most popular however, which resonated strongly with important themes in the contemporary Wik world, were action videos such as those of Superman, the Kung-fu exponents Bruce Lee and Ninja, and Rambo, the inarticulate, macho and violent American popular culture hero. The worlds of these culture heroes were ones where action rather than intellectual constructions had primacy. They were worlds where gratuitous violence had become a consummate art form, where the substance of maleness was in its style - in its dress, its poses, its deadly physical skills. They were worlds where male potency was realized through the untrammelled expression of individual machismo and aggression which had value in and of themselves and could be individually gained, rather than this potency being referred to complex and subtle intellectual constructions to which access was socially controlled.

The original complex and rich Wik intellectual worlds, where landscape, language, myth, ritual, the structures of social relations and the very nature of the individual, had been seen as the creations of the *Pul-uchan* and other Culture Heroes, existed only in an attenuated form, and even then mainly in the minds of a small core of older people. Christianity was of peripheral concern to most adult Wik, even if they professed a nominal adherence to it, and of even less consequence to younger ones. These worlds had ceased to inform much of social practice, increasingly referred to as it was only to pragmatic and immediate considerations, nor did they provide, for young Wik males in particular, sources of symbolic value in the establishment of a socially legitimated identity. Wik, as in the past, continued to live life with immense zest, humour, and a forthright commitment to their own way of life, despite its increasingly problematic nature. Nonetheless, rather than senior men, or the missionaries, mediating access to the sources of symbolic value, Wik children as they matured created and defined their own worlds of meaning and of value. These were worlds where, for the young males at least, violence, machismo, anarchic self-aggrandisement and a high degree of nihilism were dominant features of life. Rambo and his ilk, as they swaggered and slaughtered their ways across the video screens of Aurukun, had become the new Culture Heroes.

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Appendix 1

Clans and estates

The following table presents the contemporary family names, focal sites, and area in which the traditional estate lies, for those clans mentioned in the text of this thesis. The information is drawn from Sutton, Martin et al (1990).

Table A1.1 Clans referred to in thesis text

CLAN	SURNAME(S)	FOCAL SITE	ESTATE AREA
2	Peinkinna		top of Love River
4	Pambegan	Uthuk awany	Big Lake, near Wathanhiin
5	Wikmunea	Kenycharrang	middle Kirke River
6	Wolmby, Peemuggina	Aayk	Cape Keerweer
8	Walmbeng, Namponan	Warpang	Cape Keerweer
	Karntin		
9	Comprabar,		southern Cape Keerweer
	Pootchemunka (A)		
11	(Wik Piith)	Yu'-angk	Cape Keerweer
12	Yunkaporta (A)	Um-thunhth	Cape Keerweer
13	Marbendinar	Thinhtaw-awng	east of Cape Keerweer
14	Pootchemunka (B)	Titree	upper Kirke River
15	Landis, Gothachalkenin	Thaangkunh-nhiin	Knox River
	Eundatumweakin		
16	Marpoondin	Am	Knox River
17	Pamtoonda	Konkooth	Knox River
18	Koomeeta, Pamulkan	Ocham-thee'an	Knox River
	Tybingoompa		
20	Yunkaporta (B)	Piithal	Knox River
21	Korkaktain	Kuchenteypanh	lower Kendall River
29	Taisman	Tha'-achamp	top of Love River
31	Wolla	Oony-aw	inland from Kenycharrang
33	Pambegan	Mukiy	Small Archer River
35	Ngakyunkwokka, Bell	Wankaniyang	Titree
	Kawangka		
40	Peinyekka		upper Kendall River
42	Wolmby (some)		Lower Kendall River
60-	Owokran, Chevathun,		"Wik Way" people
68	Kerindun, Matthew		

Appendix 2

Changes in Marriage Patterns

In this Appendix, I expand upon the arguments in Chapter 2 relating to changes in Wik marriage patterns, turning first to briefly examine the role the Mission had played in this. Gender-segregated dormitories had been established from well before the arrival of the MacKenzies in 1925, specifically in order to facilitate the evangelizing and schooling of children brought in by their parents from the bush, and also to enable the Mission to exercise control over marriage arrangements for teenaged girls.¹ Like many missionaries throughout remote Australia, the MacKenzies had viewed traditional Aboriginal arranged marriage practices as exploitative of women, and of young girls in particular. Geraldine MacKenzie claims that while elderly women may have been respected and cared for;

... as a wife, as an object of sex, a woman's lot was very different. She was her husband's property to sell, exchange or lend.²

This view had existed in some tension with another, which saw young Wik women as inherently promiscuous, potentially unrestrained in the expression of their sexuality, which was to be channelled through Christian marriage. Of course, the missionary concern was not only with the specific control of post-puberty sexuality and of resulting offspring for the purposes of education and evangelization; a wider aim was the inculcation of economic modes of thought and practice based on the domestic family unit as it was represented in conventional western Christian ideology.

Most young Wik who had come in from the bush lived from puberty in separate dormitories at the northern end of the settlement, with the Mission complex, church and staff housing standing symbolically between them and the village. The Mission itself had taken over many of the responsibilities of parents and other kin for children; this was given symbolic recognition in Bill MacKenzie being referred to by Wik (children and adults) as *Piipa* (father), and his wife Geraldine as Mother.³ There had been however a strong stress by the Mission on encouraging self-reliance, and parents had been expected to bring in hunted and gathered produce for their children in the dormitory in exchange for goods such as flour, tobacco and lengths of calico cloth.⁴ Young men had left the dormitory to work, usually on cattle stations or on the trochus

1. MacKenzie (1981:199,201)

2. *ibid*:200)

3. God was referred to as *Piip* God, or *Piip in-keny*, 'Father on high'. MacKenzie thus was not only the father of the mission in a secular sense, but embodied the Christian God.

boats in the Torres Straits while girls had left to be married when they were 18 or 19. Whereas the MacKenzie's had had a major influence on marriage arrangements (not least in insisting that the pair be of an age), close kin together with the Mission elders and Councillors had by all accounts been involved.⁵ Thus, even if there had been a diminution in the importance of the wider political and economic relations originally established through marriages, none-the-less interests external to the particular individuals had been involved in their establishment.

With the MacKenzie's departure in late 1965, a new and more liberal régime was instituted, and one of the first moves of the new Superintendent John Gillanders was to abolish the dormitories. The Wik continued to get married during the following decade, but as shown in Table A2.1 below, after 1970 the numbers choosing to formally marry rapidly dwindled until, by the 1980s, no Wik at all were formally marrying.

Table A2.1 Numbers of formal marriages

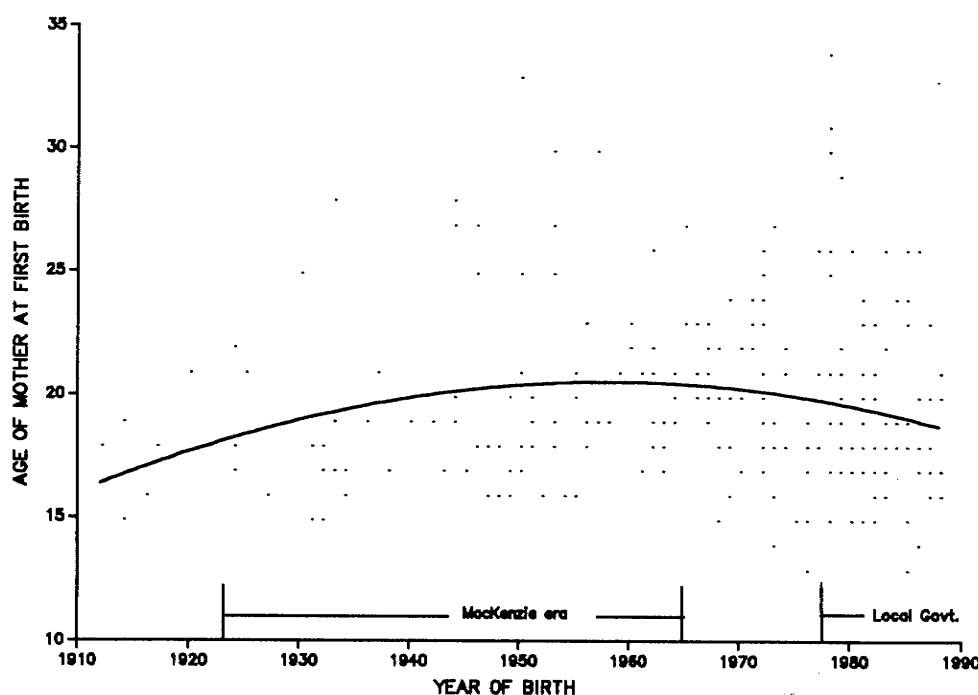
Years	Marriages recorded
1941-45	13
1946-50	19
1951-55	9
1956-60	23
1961-65	15
1966-70	14
1971-75	5
1976-80	2
1980 +	0

Source: Aurukun Mission card index

Formally established marriages may not have been a feature of Aurukun by the 1980s, but never-the-less, young Wik continued of course to form relationships, and also to bear children in ever increasing numbers. Young Wik followed their own inclinations in establishing sexual relationships, whether more permanent in nature or temporary *maarrich* or lovers' ones. Sexual partners for young Wik were usually near their own age, but interestingly there seemed to be more liaisons between younger men and relatively more mature women than the reverse. As in the past, Wik women continued to exercise a fair degree of autonomy in their choice of lovers. Sexual affairs (*maarrich*) outside marriage had always been a feature of Wik life, evidenced through stories of lovers' escapades and of the conflicts and even killings arising from them, and in the genealogies I collected where in a number of cases

4. This was no doubt making a virtue out of necessity, given the severe financial constraints under which the Mission operated. A degree of self-sufficiency utilizing bush foods (in addition to those produced in the gardens and so forth) was thus essential in purely economic terms alone.
5. see e.g. MacKenzie (*op.cit*:203), who claims that if any kin dissented from a proposed Mission marriage, it would not take place.

individuals were noted as being *maarrich.am*, resulting from a lovers' relationship.⁶ There had been instances too in the past where these relationships between lovers had eventually been accepted by respective kin as legitimate, usually after punishment of the offending man, for instance by being speared through the leg by the woman's kin - physical injury being exchanged as it were for insult to male symbolic interests in their kinswoman's sexuality. In other cases, the woman herself had been punished or even speared to death by her own male kin. Contemporary long-term relationships between young Wik were almost all initiated by this pattern of elopement, with often large scale disputes and fights erupting between kin of the couple once knowledge of the liaison became public. In most cases, the period of dispute and fighting ended in at least tacit acceptance of the relationship, especially once a child had resulted from it. In some instances however - particularly those where the kin relationship between the couple was 'wrong head' or improper or even incestuous according to kinship norms - disputes would continue to flare for long periods of time, and such relationships were always a potential point of schism between the young men on each side.



Source: Computer analysis of birth records, Aurukun Mission personal card index and D.F. Martin, census records, 1986-88, Curve calculated from regression analysis, is a polynomial of the form $y = A_0 + A_1x + A_2x^2 + A_3x^3$

Figure A2.1 Ages of Wik women at birth of first child

A complementary picture is painted by Figure A2.1, which shows the ages at which Wik women had their first live birth. There are necessarily fewer data for the first part of this century than for the latter, since the former were derived from

6. Also referred to in Sutton (1978:160); D. von Sturmer [Smith] (1980:171); Taylor (1984)

incomplete Mission family records. The broad trend however is suggestive. It shows the average age of first live birth to have been round 18 at the time of the establishment of Aurukun in 1904, with a gradual increase to just under 21 by the end of the MacKenzie era and the cessation of the segregated dormitories. This increase can be attributed very largely to the control of marriage and sexual relationships exercised through the dormitory system under the MacKenzies, since if anything it would be expected that the age at menarche would have decreased somewhat in the Mission régime with its quite reasonable diet. From this time, the average age of Wik women at first birth showed a marked decrease, back to around 19 or so. The minimum age at which women were bearing children also decreased, demonstrating the increasing independence of Wik teenagers. As one middle-aged woman, married by MacKenzie when she left the dormitory in 1963, jokingly said to me; "Gillander's time, Satan bin walk in." The younger ages at which women were starting to bear children was also manifested in the demography of Aurukun, which showed a very high proportion of young Wik; 48% were aged 19 and under in 1988, compared with the national Australian figure of 31% for the same year.⁷

Changes in patterns of endogamy

The greater individuation evident in so much of Wik social process can be shown for marriage patterns by a comparison of statistics collected by Sutton and by myself. Sutton examined marriage trends in the coastal floodplain region south of Aurukun, using essentially his own genealogical data collected during his field work in 1976/77. He found a broad tendency to regional clusters in marriages determined by two parameters, the inland/coastal dichotomy and ritual cult affiliation.⁸ There were no marriages whatsoever after 1978 involving Wik from the region considered by Sutton. However, I would argue that by examining the nominal *Apalach* clan membership of the genitors and mothers of children born post-1978, figures of comparable significance to those of Sutton on marriages can be obtained. Children whose genitors were not assigned or known were eliminated from the count, as were second and subsequent offspring from a given union, so that what are being assessed are unions involving Wik of *Apalach* clans which had resulted in at least one offspring. The sample sizes of Sutton and myself, fortuitously, were comparable for each of the extant clans.

The results, detailed in Table A2.2 below, are suggestive. In all cases, the percentage of unions which were endogamous - that is, unions within *Apalach* affiliated clans, not of course within any particular clan - were significantly lower post-1978 than those examined by Sutton. On average, of the marriages for these clans examined by Sutton, just under 72% were between Wik who were both from *Apalach* clans, whereas for the post-1978 unions only 43% of those resulting in offspring involved both genitor and mother being from *Apalach* clans.

7. Source: Australian Bureau of Statistics, estimated resident population, June 1988.

8. Sutton (1978:106-15)

Table A2.2 *Apalach* ritual group endogamy

<i>Apalach</i> clan	Sample size		Endogamous relations	
	Marriages pre-1978 ^b	Children born 1978-88 ^a	Marriages pre-1978 ^c	Children born 1978-88 ^a
4	13	11	61.5%	55%
6	35	28	71.4%	32%
12	15	22	77.1% ^d	50%
15	12	11	75.0%	45%
18	12	8	75.0%	25%
20	12	9	66.0%	56%
Average			71.7%	43%

Source: D.F. Martin, Aurukun census, 1986, 1987, 1988

- a Children of unions involving males or females from the given clan. Only first children of a union in this period were considered, since a number of couples had two or more offspring.
b Extant marriages and those from genealogies collected by Sutton (Sutton 1978:113)
c Percent marriages within *Apalach* (Sutton 1978:113)
d Sutton's figure here must be arithmetically incorrect, given that his sample size is 15

Variations within the *Apalach* clans were particularly interesting. Clans 18 and 20 (from the Knox River area between Cape Keerweer and the Kendall River) were relatively small, marginal within *Apalach* itself,⁹ and were also politically marginal in terms of settlement politics. It might be expected that this marginality would be reflected in a more rapid attenuation of pre-existing patterns of relationships between clans, but while this was true of clan 18 for whom 75% of all unions were with women from non-*Apalach* groups, clan 20 had maintained the highest rate of endogamous relationships of all. Senior males from clans 4, 6 and 12 by the late 1980s as previously mentioned formed a fairly solidary unit within the Shire Council and within settlement politics in general. Younger Wik from all three clans showed a greater tendency to take partners from non-*Apalach* ones than had their preceding generations, particularly striking being clan 6, 68% of whose post-1978 unions were with non-*Apalach* partners as opposed to just under 29% previously. Mature men from this clan were politically prominent in the Shire Council and the Company, in the establishment of outstations in the late 1970s, and in the local church, and several had travelled nationally and in one case internationally to speak for Aboriginal land rights.

This has to be understood as arising from two interrelated factors, I suggest; the first involved the breakdown of the original system whereby marriages had reflected and maintained political and economic relations between wider groupings, and its replacement by relationships determined by individual choice. The second related to the diminishing role of women's sexuality and productive capacities as crucial items of symbolic capital in the exchanges between men; concomitantly with the attenuation of clan membership as a meaningful constituting element of practical mundane

9. *ibid*:114

settlement life, new and highly valued forms of material and symbolic capital such as money, alcohol and consumer goods were forming the bases on which power was constructed.

Sutton also notes a general tendency to regional endogamy, with coastal men having largely obtained their wives from within the coastal flood plain region; some 87% (129) of the 148 recorded cases he studied had involved men taking wives from other coastal clans.¹⁰ The equivalent percentage had significantly decreased in contemporary Aurukun; of children born post-1978 whose genitors were nominally at least from coastal clans (numbers 1 to 27), only 69% had mothers from another of these clans. However, it should also be noted that Wik of at least nominal coastal clan affiliation dominated demographically, with some 65% of the total Wik population coming from this region as indicated in Table A2.3. Any existing tendency then to regional endogamy in the choice of marriage or sexual partners had become quite attenuated by the 1980s.

Table A2.3 Contemporary regional endogamy

Region	Percent total population	Children born 1978-88	Both parents from region	Marriages pre-1978 ^d
Inland ^a	19%	26	19%	-
Coastal ^b	65%	87	69%	87%
Other ^c	16%	36	-	-

Source: D.F. Martin, Aurukun census, 1988

a Those whose genitors were from clans 28-55

b Those whose genitors were from clans 1-27. To maintain consistency with Sutton's figures, clan 14 has been classified as coastal. In fact, while the western portion of their estate extended into the floodplain zone, their ritual and political focus was towards other inland clans rather than to the west.

c a disparate set, including northern (*Wik Way*) and southern (*Wik Nganycharra*) peoples.

d Figure from Sutton (1978:115), who records that up to that year only 13% of marriages by coastal men had been outside the region.

Both Sutton, in the case of Cape Keerweer Wik, and Taylor, in writing of the *Kuuk Thaayorre* and other Edward River peoples to the south, argue that the preference was for marriage between classificatory cross-cousins from proximate estates.¹¹ Of course, over a period of time this would in general have resulted in individuals from these inter-marrying neighbouring groups being closely genealogically related. In contemporary Aurukun, the stated proximity or otherwise of nominal clan estates was rarely a direct factor in the reactions of Wik to relationships of their younger kin, with rather the distance or otherwise of genealogical connectedness being emphasized. In fact, Taylor argues in the case of Edward River people, that clans (as patrilineal descent groups) were not involved in bestowal arrangements there at all, but specific individuals such as the parents and

10. *ibid*:115

mother's brothers drawn from the respective kindreds, with the actual negotiations being carried out by the mothers.¹²

The people of the Edward River reserve conceptualized marriages not in terms of exchanges between units constituted as lineal groups, but as alliances formed as a result of the decisions made by particular genealogically defined decision-makers.¹³

This (*contra* McKnight) would appear to have been the case for Wik as well.¹⁴ These particular kindred groups then were the real units involved in decisions about marriage, not patrilineal clans as such. The patterns of ritual group and regional endogamy detailed by Sutton, and by myself have admittedly been discussed in terms of clans. However, this is not at all incompatible with the unit of marriage arrangements having been kindred groups who would have included people (such as M and MB-) from other than the patrilineal clan, since by definition clans would have been exogamous units.

As in the past the children of classificatory aunts and uncles - rather than 'full-blood' or actual first cross-cousins - continued to be *maarrich* and longer-term partners for young Wik.¹⁵ I have not as yet statistically analysed my data on these contemporarily established longer-term relationships to find the relative proportion which could be considered to conform to this 'norm'. In any case, Wik often strategically emphasized certain kin links to their partners and suppressed or discounted others in order to achieve the 'right-head' (*koochan*) result. I asked one young man what kin relationship he was to his girlfriend Janet;

If I call [determine the kin relation] through Janet's father, I am her uncle, because he and I are [classificatory cross] cousins. If I call through her mother, Janet and I are cousins, because her mother is [classificatory] younger sister for my father.

It was my strong impression however that significant numbers of contemporary relationships - almost certainly the majority - were not classified by the families or the partners themselves as normative cross-cousin marriages. "Can't be help it," I was told by younger Wik, "we new generation now." Adjustments and elisions in the kinship system with 'wrong-head' relationships allowed at least the semblance of orthodoxy to be maintained in the face of challenges to it, although in the cases of technically incestuous relationships between close kin this was often just not possible.¹⁶

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11. Sutton (1978:106,112); Taylor (1984:176-7). The preference for cross-cousin marriage among Wik has been discussed by Needham (1962b:259, 1963b:44, 1965); McKnight (1971:178); Scheffler (1978:152); Sutton (1978:106); D. von Sturmer [Smith] (1980:127).
 12. Taylor (*op.cit*:175-6,179,188)
 13. *ibid*:176.
 14. McKnight (1971:162)
 15. For most Wik groups, the cross-cousins deemed to be suitable marriage or sexual partners were second or more distant cousins. However, Wik from clans 5 and 14 continued to have consistently high number of inter-relationships between actual first cousins, including (man speaking) FZD and MB+D (see Scheffler 1978:152).
 16. See example in Chapter 2.

Appendix 3

Orality and Contextuality

In the first chapter, I referred (without elaboration) to the direct and immediate way in which Wik social forms, relations, and even representations of orthodoxy were generated. I suggested that this occurred in the essential absence of overarching formal political institutions and codified bodies of law, and of bodies of specialists charged with the interpretation and maintenance of orthodoxy. I wish to return to this theme now, arguing in more detail that these features are intimately bound up with the existence of orality as a basic mode of social practice for the Wik, and that this was intimately connected with the means of objectifying social capital available to them and thus with the mechanisms of the generation and the reproduction of social forms.

Language is of course fundamental to all human sociality as well as to individuals' interior and subjective lives. Through language, a fundamental "medium of practical activity",¹ human actions are given collectively and socially legitimated value and have subjective meanings assigned to them. For, while the processes of thought may not be identical with those of speech, it is through language in large part that we are able to objectify social activity collectively and subjectivize it individually. However, the two dialectically related processes - subjectivization and objectification - have radically different potentials when the language available to societies is of both written and oral forms.

Language and the objectification of social forms

Goody and Watt refer to the "reflexive potentialities of writing";² they argue that because it objectifies words and makes it possible to scrutinize them out of the flux of mundane life in which oral discourse is of necessity situated, writing increases the awareness of individual personality and encourages private thought and the increased individuation of personal experience.³ It is noteworthy here that in his work on "restricted" and "elaborated" speech codes, Bernstein argues that for those using predominantly an elaborated code, self-concept becomes verbally differentiated

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1. Giddens (1976:20,155)
 2. Goody (1986:37)
 3. Goody and Watt (1968:62)

and thus the object of specialized perceptual activity.⁴ Literacy, it could be argued, is an intimate (although not necessary) aspect of an elaborated code. In terms of the argument being advanced here then, it is no accident that the concept of "restricted code" was developed for the relatively less educated, and therefore less literate, English working class.

Stock, in his study of the effects of the reintroduction of literacy in the Eleventh and Twelfth centuries, argues that texts emerged as reference points for rendering meaning to mundane activities and relations and also shaped the manner in which broader issues were understood and explained. He talks of "unprecedented perceptual and cognitive possibilities ... a new technology of the mind"⁵ and argues that orality and literacy (in the form here of texts) established two contrasting ways of understanding the world;

... reality could be understood as a series of relationships, such as outer versus inner, independent object as opposed to reflecting subject, or abstract sets of rules in contrast to coherent texture of facts and meanings. Experience in other words became separable, if not always separated, from ratiocination about it;⁶

Texts increasingly mediated between thought and action, he argues, and gave structure to dimensions of life which previously had been perceived as unstructured.⁷ These effects on the ways in which people interpreted and modelled reality inevitably gave form to the nature of social relations and fed back into the processes of social change themselves.⁸ Writing abstracted the products of thought from its processes,⁹ and allowed people to view cultural continuity as being preserved in the form of records, and to accumulate cultural products in the form of reiterated and reinterpreted experience.¹⁰

Literacy and writing thus have major implications for the mechanisms by which societies reproduce themselves; modes of organization and administration, of the preservation and transmission of knowledge in the form of 'cultural capital', of representations of temporality and history, and crucially of domination itself, are all profoundly affected by the availability of writing to a society. It is not necessary to postulate a direct monocausal connection between literacy and certain social forms, nor to attribute them to the absence of literacy,¹¹ for of course the lack of a feature can of itself have no causal efficacy. Rather, literacy and writing offer the potential for certain social mechanisms which are not available to wholly oral cultures. These possibilities are not confined to (for instance) the mere recording of commercial transactions as was the case for certain early scripts. While both written and spoken forms of language abstract from and objectify the processes of social practice, writing

4. Bernstein (1975)

5. Stock (1983:10)

6. *ibid*:531

7. *ibid*:455,456

8. *ibid*:456,531

9. *ibid*:85

10. *ibid*:531. See also Bourdieu (1977a:186)

renders the results of these processes in a more durable and accumulable form. This amongst other consequences allows for a new form of social practice (most often of specialists) - the further elaboration of discourse on these written representations of social practices in situations temporally and spatially separated from them. These discourses, highly developed for instance in the western social sciences, of course themselves feed recursively into the very practices they seek to represent.¹² They also allow the representations of practices to be decontextualized, divorced from the "matrix of particularities"¹³ in which the practices are embedded and from the persons who produce them.¹⁴

This is no mere matter of the particular intellectual adornments of a society, because abstraction in the form of writing allows crucially for new forms of the objectification, preservation and accumulation of cultural resources.¹⁵ This is not to argue that in wholly oral societies there are no mechanisms for the preservation of cultural resources; the nature of the various forms of social capital for the Wik and the processes in their accumulation and consumption forms an important part of this thesis. There are important consequences nonetheless. Goody and Watt argue that in oral cultures, "... the whole content of the social tradition, apart from material inheritances, is held in memory",¹⁶ while acknowledging the importance in cultural transmission of mnemonic devices such as formalized ritual utterances. In predominantly oral societies, by a process they refer to as "structural amnesia"¹⁷ the past is assimilated to the contingencies and needs of the present.¹⁸ Proffering a rather engaging faecal analogy to the process of selective forgetting, Goody and Watt suggest that like biological organisms, oral societies are essentially homeostatic, engaged in a continuing process of "social digestion and elimination" of extraneous materials. Thus, for example, genealogies are recast and myths reformulated in accordance with the dictates of the present.¹⁹ This process of course occurs also in literate societies (in which, it must be noted, orality is still a dominant mode of social practice and of social reproduction). Even in the recasting of the events of history to suit national ideologies, as for example with Japanese revisions of text books relating to their occupation of China or the attempts to redress the omission from Australian texts of the full dimensions of the history of colonial occupation of this country by Europeans, the power of writing to objectify is explicitly recognized.

Significantly, these processes of creating national ideologies are referred to as the rewriting of history, for in Goody and Watt's argument, with writing comes the

11. *contra* Goody (1986:167)

12. See Stock above. See also, e.g. Giddens (1976:159)

13. Goody (*loc.cit.*)

14. Goody and Watt (*op.cit.*); See also Bourdieu (1977a:187)

15. Bourdieu (1977a:184-86)

16. Goody and Watt (*op.cit.*:30)

17. *ibid*:57

18. See Sutton (1978:139) in this regard on the "active opposition to remembering" among the Cape Keerweer Wik.

19. Goody and Watt (*op.cit.*:31). Sutton (1978:139) gives evidence of similar processes for the Wik.

transition from myth to history.²⁰ These recastings however are more likely to incur scepticism, criticism and debate in literate societies, precisely because the products of writing (depending on its distribution within a given society) are available for scrutiny to a wider range of people. Orality however by its very nature both encourages and facilitates the recasting of the past to be consistent with the present, since the objectifications of social processes according to Goody and Watt are held essentially within human minds. Bourdieu however recognizes that it is more than just memory involved; in his terms, these objectifications are maintained in an incorporated and embodied state as systems of dispositions and perceptions. In the absence of writing, according to Bourdieu, 'cultural capital' can only be preserved and accumulated in this embodied form.²¹

Because the written word has permanency and a certain autonomy, Goody and Watt propose, it allows for the possibility of a conception of truth, the Platonic episteme, as being separable from mere current opinion, doxa.²² It encourages universalized and explicit statements of what otherwise are implicit norms,²³ and allows them to be subject to scrutiny, successive elaborations and criticism like other written products. Crucially, written norms or rules generalize and consolidate;

... in their very nature written statements of the law, of norms, of rules, have had to be abstracted from particular situations in order to be addressed to a universal audience out there, rather than delivered face-to-face to a specific group of people at a particular time and place.²⁴

This of course has major implications for both the concept and practice of 'law' in a given society. Just as myth is transformed to history with the advent of writing, so is custom hierarchically distinguished from law, argues Goody: "To codify custom is to set it down in writing before proclaiming it as law."²⁵ 'Law' itself becomes an analytically separable domain of social practices, a semi-autonomous body of written codes, interpreted and implemented by specialists. Furthermore, and significantly in terms of understanding Wik political processes I suggest, codified law necessarily embodies notions of the common good and is inherently established with reference to some sort of broadly recognized legitimate political constituency - the nation state for example - with the jural means to enforce it. Writing thus necessarily affects the modes of application of 'law' as well as conceptions of it. 'Law', and thus modes of social control, redress, adjudication of disputes and so forth, become as noted referred to specialists to interpret and to implement rather than lying in the hands of the population at large. Howe, in a study of the adoption of writing by Cuna Amerindians, noted increased formality and routinization of political procedures, and

20. Goody and Watt (*op.cit*:34). In this regard, it is noteworthy that Aboriginal people of the Lake Eyre basin of South Australia refer to their site-based myths as 'histories' (See also Sutton 1988:19).

21. Bourdieu (1977a:186,187)

22. Goody and Watt (1968:53); Goody (1986:152). Bourdieu similarly contrasts doxa, in talking of the 'doxic mode of adherence' where the social world is seen as natural and self-evident, with orthodoxy and heterodoxy.

23. Goody (1986:166). See also Howe (1979:11)

24. Goody (*op.cit*:12-13)

increased secularization and individuation.²⁶ He also contends that writing reinforces the notion of a collective commitment to clear-cut decisions, which can be referred to as precedent.²⁷

Writing, I have been arguing, is one means of objectifying social capital, albeit a crucial one. Its historical development and its use however are necessarily and intimately connected with other objectifying mechanisms, of which money is of profound significance in the contemporary world political economy, in which Australia, and ultimately the Wik, are inextricably enmeshed. Stock notes the parallels between writing as a fundamental mode of objectifying thought and money as one of objectifying material concerns, and suggests that they had a congruent historical development in medieval Europe. He talks, in terms which find a strong resonance with Bourdieu's concepts, of a "disinterested market of ideas" with "analogous principles" governing the rebirth of literacy and the monetization of exchange.²⁸ It is significant then that Basil Sansom, in writing of the Aboriginal fringe dwellers of the Darwin hinterland, should speak of their resisting the "monetization of the mind".²⁹ He was the first ethnographer of Aboriginal Australians to identify the fundamental importance of orality to modes of social reproduction. In the fringe camps, there were no formalized and reproducing hierarchies, an almost complete dearth of significant property interests,³⁰ and no perduring corporate organizations. In this situation, there were significant questions to be raised concerning the mechanisms by which social forms were produced and reproduced. Sansom argues that "... the crux of difference between propertied and unpropertied peoples concerns the provision of stores of value."³¹ For the fringe dwellers, he argues, "... wealth is contained in words, not things",³² and it is words which bear the burden of social reproduction. For oral forms to contribute to social reproduction, suggests Sansom, they must, like banknotes, be backed. 'Words' then in his analysis were not merely the unsupported sayings of individuals, but "social determinations",³³ legitimated and collectively attested objectifications abstracted from the flux of mundane life.

Of course, all human collectivities, not just Darwin fringe dwellers, "... use words in order to create and establish social forms."³⁴ The strength in Sansom's analysis however lies in his recognition of the central role of orality in the constitution

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- 25. Goody (*op.cit*:129). For the Wik, I suggest, there was no such differentiation between custom and law.
 - 26. Howe (*op.cit*:6,8)
 - 27. *ibid*:11
 - 28. Stock (*op.cit*:85-7). See also Goody (1986:176), Bourdieu (1977a:186)
 - 29. Sansom (1988:159)
 - 30. Although Sansom's ethnography provides evidence of the allocation and contesting of space within fringe camps, and also of a range of interests in the hinterland from which the fringe dwellers were drawn.
 - 31. Sansom (*op.cit*:21)
 - 32. Sansom (1980:20)
 - 33. *ibid*:21
 - 34. *ibid*:4

and reproduction of Aboriginal social forms, and in his demonstration of the nexus between it and processes such as group formation.

'Wik' as cultural artifact

There were a number of separate, if linked, semantic domains encompassed by the term *wik*. In a manner similar to the Aboriginal fringe dwellers described by Sansom, Wik viewed speech "... both as created object and as a property held in possession."³⁵ Language and dialect, as indicated in chapter 5, had been an important form of ritual property, 'left' clans by the Creator Heroes. In this sense, then, *wik* meaning 'language' was seen as an object of corporate symbolic property. *Wik*, most commonly in its respect form *nguungk*, also however referred to totems, as Sutton details.³⁶ Thus, *wik thaypanant aaka* referred to the country of those whose principal totem was the Taipan snake.³⁷ In a similar vein, a senior man from clan 6 in detailing clan territories for me, referred to clan 12 as *nguungk thuulk* - those whose principal totem was brolga, and whose language (a coastal dialect of *Mungkan*) could equally be referred to as *wik* or *nguungk thuulk*. "This *nguungk* is *wik*, totem come between," he explained to me.

In the more limited sense then of 'culture' as the Wik themselves used the term (see chapters 1 and 5), referring to dance, language, totems and so forth, *wik* could be seen as a 'cultural' artifact, an object of social value created by external powers through the 'history of origins'.³⁸ However, this emic representation of 'culture' as immutable, 'left' by the Creator Heroes, existed in some degree of tension with the analytic notion of culture more broadly defined as the modes of practices, perceptions and representations of a group arising through praxis. In this sense, 'culture' can be seen as being subsumed by culture. There was an analogous tension between usages by Wik themselves of the term *wik* as 'cultural' artifact - referring to languages and totems - and *wik* as talk, cultural artifact in the sense of verbal abstraction from and objectification of the processes of social life.

Even in this sense of *wik* as speech, there was a differentiation between what was merely private, non-validated, and individual discourse and what were more collective verbal representations abstracted from the processes of social flux. Thus, in referring to the act of speaking as such, *wik thawan* was used.³⁹ Even if an individual spoke forcefully in a public forum such as a meeting, his or her words were, as yet, just that - words - to be listened to but as yet carrying no necessary wider social validity. Speakers would often preface such remarks by disclaiming,

35. *ibid*:24

36. Sutton (1978:137-8). Sutton gives the Wik Ngathan equivalent as *ngoongk*. It may be the case that I have incorrectly heard this term; alternatively, it is possible that there were in fact similar but distinct lexical items in the two languages. In Kilham et al (1986), it is rendered as *nguungk*.

37. Sutton (*loc.cit.*)

38. See Chapter 5.

39. *thaw* here meant talking or speaking, and *wik* equivalently talk or speech.

"*Ngaya yaa'an thawang niyant*" or "I gammon talk for youfella"⁴⁰ with the connotation that, as yet, this was only personal opinion and carried no consensual weight. The processes of developing agreed, validated and collective representations of past actions or plans for future ones, were more usually termed *wik yumpān*. *Yumpān* carried the sense of constructing or fabricating an object, such as a spear.⁴¹ "*Ngampa wik kan yumpampa!*" - let's make plans - thus had the strong connotation of fashioning some kind of object, rather than mere discussion or talking. This sense of *wik* as almost tangible object was carried in other *Mungkan* terms. For example, as with its direct English equivalent, to break one's word - made by definition in the presence of others who were therefore witnesses to the averral - was *wik pipan*, and strong, forceful talk *wik thayan*, with *thayan* carrying the connotation of being powerful, hard and unyielding.⁴²

It was this latter meaning of *wik* as social artifact which most closely corresponded to Sansom's "given words", social artifacts which were collective and legitimated verbal representations of social process. These determinations could indeed be arrived at in the course of larger-scale gatherings or formal meetings. However, such public events tended rather to ratify already existing representations than to institute new ones. It was more fundamentally during the flux of social intercourse that consensual versions of truth and legitimacy were arrived at for the Wik. The recounting of events within family groups while sitting round the hearth, discussions at the shade on the southern side of the village where men manufactured handcrafts (both physical and social artifacts thus being constructed), the seeking out and sharing of information between women companionably visiting one another - these were the forums where legitimated versions were arrived at. 'Gossip' this may have been, but to term it as such and proceed no further with its analysis would tend to trivialize what was one of the fundamental processes in the constitution and reproduction of social forms in an oral society such as that of the Wik.

Deborah was visiting her cousin Minnie; they sat on a blanket under the mango trees in front of Minnie's house discussing the big fight after canteen closing time a few nights before, in which their respective sons had been involved. Deborah's son Donald had been badly beaten up by his cousins Dave and Peter in the course of the fight. As well as Donald and his older brother Albert, Minnie's oldest son Jim had been amongst those opposing Dave and Peter. Minnie and Deborah shared information on what they had seen, filling in and corroborating details, assigning innocence and blame, building up a composite, legitimated picture of what had happened.

As discussed above, it is fundamental to Sansom's analysis that 'given words' are contextual and mutable. However, his account concentrates on the establishment of single, publicly legitimated versions of 'happenings' in the fringe camp, which are

40. *Ngay* 1st pers. singular; *niiyant* 3rd pers. plur. ref. *Yaa'an* (or *yaan* for inland *Mungkan* speakers), rendered in Aboriginal English as gammon, carried the connotation of 'to no overt purpose' or 'for no particular reason'.

41. In English, to fabricate an account of events (as opposed to fabricating a material object) is to falsify its representation. Nonetheless, I use the term advisedly, since it connotes the contingent relationship between event and representations of it.

42. It also meant axe, arguably in the same semantic domain.

'owned' by a mob and not commented on or challenged by others. It was rare however that such solidary versions of events existed across the full range of familial, clan, work and other interactional groupings within which Wik sociality took place in Aurukun.

It was certainly true that if they did not have direct interests in an event (even if they had been observers), Wik would in general not volunteer information on it in public. Thus, when I had earlier asked Minnie about the fight, she prefaced her account to me by disclaiming any knowledge of how it had started; she knew only what had transpired from the time when she had got there to find Jim (her son) fighting. However, once groups of people with common interests in the event had discussed matters amongst themselves, collective versions of happenings would emerge. As will be shortly discussed, such versions were usually contested, most particularly when they concerned matters essentially internal to Wik social and political life.

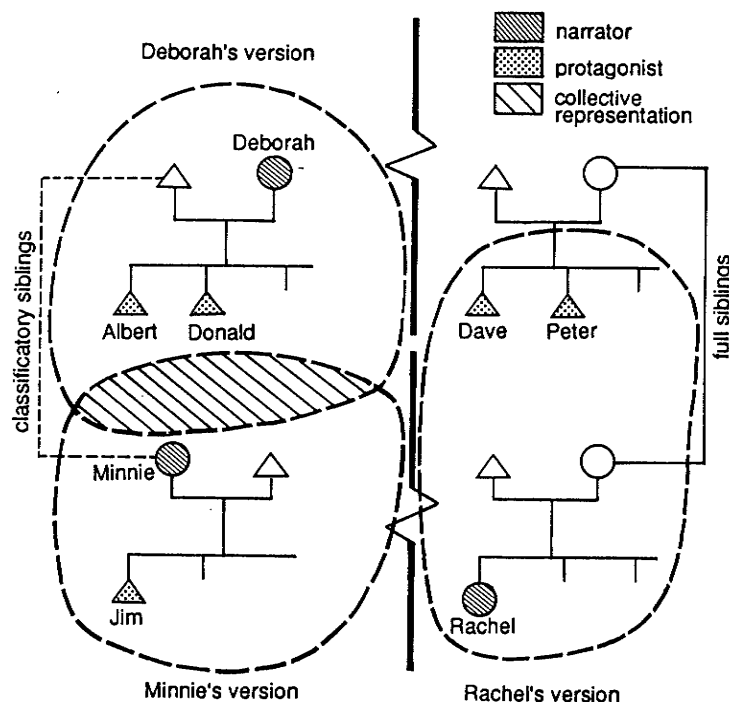


Figure A3.1 The creation of a social artifact (a)

Implicitly recognizing the crucial role of *wik* as social artifact here, those who had seen an event and had been instrumental in the creation of collective representations of it, would claim to be a '*wikness*'.⁴³ A *wikness* was not merely an observer, but the carrier of a legitimated version of events on which they had a right

43. The term *wikness* rather than witness was not used by all Wik, but from my observations a substantial number, particularly middle-aged and older people, used the former.

to speak.⁴⁴ Thus, the standard English connotation of the witness as a person who testifies to the objective truth of what they know or see as an individual of the occurrence in question, was transmuted to the *wikness*, someone who could affirm the legitimacy of a collective verbal representation of that event.⁴⁵ People's accounts however were still particularistic, and established from the perspective of their own mobs or families. So, while Deborah and Minnie were in essential agreement, each corroborating and contributing to the other's account, Deborah's version was from her sons' perspective, and Minnie's from her son's and his cousin brothers'. Moreover, there were always other, conflicting, representations of events;

Rachel, classificatory sister for Dave and Peter, arrived a little later. While neither close kin nor particularly close mate of either Minnie or Deborah, relations were amicable between all three. Rachel gave her account of the fight. It was not really Dave's fault, she said, everyone seemed to want to pick a fight with him to test their own fighting prowess. Really, it was Peter who got him into all the fighting on that night. Furthermore, how could Peter have done the damage he was supposed to have when he was blind drunk? Poor Dave had to go camping out bush just to get away from all the trouble.

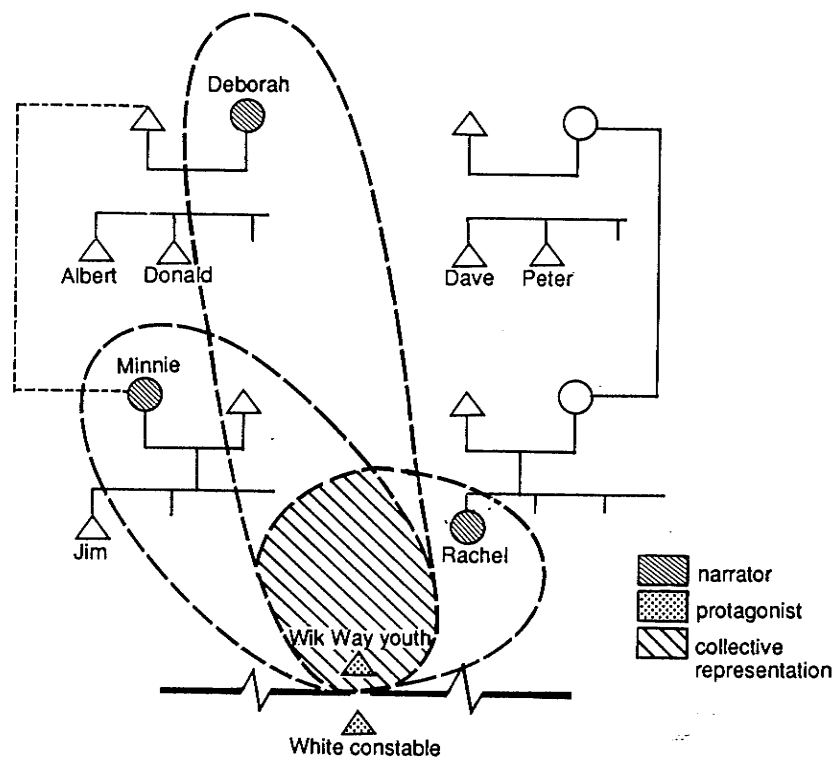


Figure A3.2 The creation of a social artifact (b)

44. See Sansom (1980:79-86) on 'witnessing' among Darwin fringe dwellers.

45. Herein lies one basis for the supposed unreliability of Aboriginal witnesses in western-style courts, I suggest.

Both Minnie and Deborah sat silently during Rachel's recital, not actively disagreeing with her, but not contributing to a joint approved account of events either. While open and vehement disagreement as to the legitimate interpretations of events was an intrinsic feature of Wik conflict and fighting, in this instance by maintaining silence, Minnie and Deborah could maintain amicable relations with Rachel while at the same time preserving their own autonomous views. Silence itself, as I shall later discuss, was an important means through which both autonomy and relatedness could be preserved in situations of potential conflict of interest.

Subsequently in the course of the same conversation in fact, Rachel and Minnie both contributed to a version of events surrounding the bashing of a young *Wik Way* (northern Wik) man by a White constable. He was not a close kinsman of either, but at this level there was the assertion of a commonality of interests against an outsider, even though neither had been present.

The contextualization of orthodoxy

In the instance just described, it was not simply that interpretations of the factual events of the fight itself differed between Rachel and Minnie (and of course their respective kin), but that the interpretations of the life histories of the individual protagonists, of their prior and subsequent relationships, and of the place of the fight in the flow of other similar events in the township were also subject to differing interpretations. This leads me to an important point. What was of fundamental importance to understanding social process more generally among the Wik was that *pace* Sansom, the legitimacy and veracity of representations of social reality was always contested, even within mobs. This applied at all levels of Wik society, whether at the mundane or the nominally axiomatic; differing versions of the exploits of the *Pul-uchan* Creator Heroes among Cape Keerweer Wik for instance have been previously mentioned as reflecting *inter alia* areal power games.⁴⁶ This I suggest was another concomitant of the central place of orality as a mode of Wik social practice. Truth itself tends to be contextualized in oral societies, suggest Goody and Watt, embedded in the social flux of particularities.⁴⁷

This is in large part related to the intrinsic nature of orality itself, but for Wik it was also intimately connected to notions concerning private and public social space, and the legitimacy of rights to and control over information. In Chapter 2 I discussed the maintenance of public and private space in the domain of ritual and esoteric knowledge as well as in the spatial one. Mundane and secular knowledge too was also a basic form of symbolic property for Wik, subject to restrictions, and the subject of constant struggle over its legitimate definitions. The nature of particular concepts of 'public' and 'private' domains of knowledge of course is necessarily related to those of knowledge itself and of its control, dissemination and legitimacy. In an

46. Chapter 5. See also Sutton (1978:142,153).

environment where virtually all facets of life were under constant and intense scrutiny by others, there was little of a private or intimate nature that was not subject to observation, comment and interpretation by Wik. Family and social life in general was not lived within the confines of suburban houses or of clubs and hotels as with mainstream Australian culture, but in full view of others, in geographic space which may not have been public in terms of free and untrammelled access to all, but was nonetheless open to scrutiny.

The power of words

In a society where people as a matter of course had been multilingual, the use by an individual in a given social context of a particular dialect or form of speech (such as avoidance terminology) reflected in large part contextual asymmetries of power, as Sutton clearly shows in his sociolinguistic analysis of the Cape Keerweer Wik.⁴⁸ By the time of my fieldwork within Aurukun however, the majority of the original languages and dialects of the area were seldom if ever used publicly; some like *Wik Me'anh* and *Ayangenych* had very few speakers, and others, like *Wik Paach*, had none. The language that Sutton studied, *Wik Ngathan*, had more extant speakers in the late 1970s and the 1980s than any other apart from *Wik Mungkan* (itself however having had different regionalized dialects). Even though Sutton had observed a resurgence in the use of *Ngathan*,⁴⁹ paralleling the increasing dominance of associated clans in outstation and township politics over this period, its use by most younger speakers was still occasional and in relatively restricted contexts, and the majority of those whose nominal language it was were not totally fluent in it.⁵⁰ *Wik Mungkan* and non-standard forms of English had become established as the *linguae francae* during the Mission period.⁵¹ *Wik Mungkan* itself was undergoing a continuing process of standardization and simplification,⁵² with dialectic and lexical differences disappearing (such as those between coastal speakers and the Archer River clans) and increasing numbers of English loan words and phrases being incorporated, even where direct *Mungkan* equivalents existed.

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47. Goody and Watt (1968:53); Goody (1986:152). Bourdieu similarly contrasts *doxa*, in talking of the 'doxic mode of adherence' where the social world is seen as natural and self-evident, with orthodoxy and heterodoxy.
 48. Sutton (1978:186ff; 1982)
 49. Sutton (1978) and *pers. comm.* June 1989.
 50. See Chapter 5. Interestingly, given the political nature of language usage and the dominance of men in politics, my impression was that most younger speakers of *Wik Ngathan* were men.
 51. See also Sutton (1982:189)
 52. The *Wik Mungkan* studied and recorded by the Summer Institute of Linguistics (e.g. in the Dictionary and Source Book of the Wik-Mungkan Language, Kilham et al, 1986) was predominantly (although not exclusively) what I term "Mission *Wik Mungkan*" as spoken by Wik women who were products of the dormitory system.

Nonetheless, despite the diminution of the content of linguistic differentiation through the generations, the form of this social practice continued, realized as it was through sets of reproduced attitudes and dispositions. Young men in their late teens and twenties involved in fights for instance, and who spoke only *Mungkan* and English with any fluency, frequently referred to themselves emblematically by, amongst other things, their nominal language affiliation; "Me, I'm *Wik Ngathan* bastard, I'm frighten' from no *Mungkan* bastard!" On several occasions I asked for *Mungkan* lexical information from a middle-aged woman from Cape Keerweer who spoke it fluently as her primary language, but whose nominal affiliation was to *Ngathan*. She was the product of the Mission dormitories and had only a relatively minimal passive understanding of it. Her responses were frequently prefaced by "*Than yaaka wanttak thawantan!*" - "I wonder what they say?"; that is, although she spoke *Mungkan*, it was not hers in an existential sense but belonged to (unspecified) others. Thus, while the actual knowledge of their nominal language or dialect was increasingly attenuated through the generations, it was still frequently used as one index of differentiation from other Wik, a means of encoding difference abstracted from the mass of commonalities objectively existing.

In conflicts, it was common to hear an opponent being disparaged as "*thaa'* English *ke'anang*" - unable to speak (good) English. Those Wik who were less sophisticated or knowledgeable about western cultural forms, for instance children who rarely went to school and spoke little English, were often referred to as 'myalls' by other Wik.⁵³ Yet the Wik denigrated English at many levels; while their various dialects were referred to by the Wik as 'language', and while a French resident of Aurukun similarly was said to speak his own 'language', White Australians did not have 'language' in the same sense, just as they were often said not to have 'culture'.⁵⁴ English accordingly was seen as relatively unmarked in symbolic terms in most contexts. For instance, many English lexical forms were used in situations where avoidance language (*nguungk wonk thon*)⁵⁵ would originally have been appropriate, so that to take one example one could talk to one's *kaal* (MB-) and address him as 'uncle' directly without causing offence. In the late 1980s, almost no White staff (even the teachers supposedly engaged in the bilingual program in the early school years) had more than a cursory knowledge of *Wik Mungkan*, or indeed of the particular forms of non-standard English used by Wik. Thus, English was essentially the sole language of communication between Wik and White. However, it was not only used by Wik as a *lingua franca*, a utilitarian tool for facilitating communication amongst themselves and between them and Whites. Those Wik who were involved in the intense politics of such organizations as the Shire Council and the Company (A.C.I.) themselves adopted many of the usages of the White Australian bureaucratic and political culture in meetings - addressing each other as Mr W... or Mrs K... or as Mr Chairman for instance, rather than using the appropriate kin address term. Similarly, in Church services taken by the ordained Wik minister and by lay

53. Myall is a term taken from the *Dharuk* language of the Sydney area, meaning 'stranger', and used by settlers of 'uncivilized' Aborigines.

54. See discussion in Chapter 5 on this question.

preachers, and in the prayer said in English by the minister at the beginning of each Council meeting, there was the use of highly formal and stylized religious rhetoric. English here was seen to have power, I suggest, because the quasi-ritual context in which it was being used was one which had been introduced from the outside, English speaking society. Bourdieu's arguments are suggestive here.⁵⁶ He proposes that through what he terms a 'practical logic', an agent's dispositions, perceptions and actions are organized in quite diverse domains of social life by a relatively small number of generative principles. That is, this logic, grounded in praxis, is the source of a degree of coherence in the *habitus* and thus in the practices it generates - a coherence arising however only because it is an approximate logic, "owing its practical efficacy to the fact that it makes connections based on ... *overall resemblance*."⁵⁷

Shire Council meetings were replete with the symbolism of the modern bureaucratic state: the layout of the tables and the formalized seating arrangements; the picture of the Queen and the crossed Australian and Queensland flags at the head of the table; the glasses of water and the small notepads and pencils set out in front of each Wik councillor; the formal rhetoric used by the White Shire Clerk and in return by the Wik councillors. The arrangements of the Council meeting were determined by White Council staff. The church services however were usually run completely by Wik Christians - the ordained Uniting Church minister and the Elders and lay parishioners. Here too, however, there was also a major concentration on formalized accoutrements - vestments for the minister for example - on highly formalized religious language in prayers, and on hymns emphasizing the power of God and full of Calvinist melancholy.

So, when my latest breath
Shall rend the veil in twain,
By death I shall escape from death,
And life eternal gain.
Knowing as I am known,
How shall I love that word,
And oft repeat before the throne,
'For ever with the Lord!'⁵⁸

It is interesting here that the content of the hymns, prayers, and the sermons consisting as they mostly did of formalized clichés and emphasizing a mournful concern with sin, with God's judgement and mercy, and with the future spiritual life rather than the present 'vale of tears', in many ways stood in stark contrast to the Wik's own ritual and emphasis on the immediacies and pragmatic considerations of the present. The formalism, the drab and mournful solemnity which was so much a part of Wik Christian ritual, had little part in their own practices - ritual or otherwise

55. *nguungk*; the respect term for language (i.e. the avoidance equivalent of *wik*): *wonk*; side; *thon*; other. Wik refer to this avoidance vocabulary by its literal translation 'side talk'; see also Thomson (1935), Sutton (1978).

56. Bourdieu (1977a:109-114)

57. *ibid*:111

- even in the case of mortuary ceremonies. A staff member who had worked in Aurukun over several years had portrayed many of the older generations of Wik as being "saturated with Presbyterianism".⁵⁹ While this was to a degree true, the 'saturation' arose in my view from an almost complete appropriation of the Presbyterian forms of religious rhetoric, ritual practices and proscriptions inculcated by the missionaries, and their formulaic use in the relevant ritualized contexts, rather than through the adoption by the Wik at a fundamental level of the belief systems of western Christianity aimed for by the mission.

Ritual had provided the primary source of 'symbolic power', the power to define reality.⁶⁰ It had been through the knowledge of ritual too that the Wik had attempted to causally intervene in many domains of life; through site-based increase rituals to ensure the reproduction of animal and plant species, or the propagation of phenomena such as diarrhoea; through formalized incantations to the *wuut mangk* (the spirits of the dead) to control the weather and other natural phenomena; through hunting and love magic and through sorcery and healing rituals to influence other sentient beings' wills; through the giving of 'underarm smell' (*aawalang thee'an*, rubbing with axillary sweat) by senior site owners to newcomers to guard against sickness caused through ritual infringement or by the *wuut mangk*. The ability to gain access to this power, referred ultimately as it had been to a transcendent realm established by the Creator Heroes, was dependent on legitimated knowledge - which as noted was restricted in various ways - whose public expression was through ritualized action and the formulaic application of the appropriate words. The 'illocutionary force'⁶¹ of these words and actions then lay in their perceived ability to instantiate this transcendent power in contemporary mundane life.⁶²

Using a 'practical logic' then, the Wik rendered separate domains of contemporary practices in the settlement situation - like traditional ritual, Christian church services and Council meetings - as *practically* (in both senses of the word) homologous. Underlying this homology between the various fields were Wik understandings and perceptions of the nature of power being sought, of the means used to gain access to it, and of the mechanisms of its use in causal intervention in mundane life.

58. Hymn 583, verse 4, used in Aurukun for a funeral service 26/9/86, from *The Church Hymnary*, Revised Edition. As used by the Church of Scotland and the Presbyterian Church of Australia. London: Oxford University Press. 1927.

59. K. Hinchley, *pers. comm.* 1986

60. Bourdieu (1979:82,83); see discussion in Chapter 6

61. Austin (1962)

62. See parallel comments by e.g. Stanner (1979), and Sutton (1988:14-16). %STANNE79%

