LI-ANTHAWIRRIYARRA,
people of the sea: Yanyuwa
relations with their maritime
environment

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(Dip. Ed.)

A thesis submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in
the Faculty of Arts, Northern Territory University, Darwin.
1997
Abstract

All people, wherever they live, interpret the environment in which they find themselves. This thesis explores the way in which the Yanyuwa people of Borroloola in the South West Gulf of Carpentaria in the Northern Territory of Australia respond to the environment in which they live.

For the Yanyuwa their environment also includes the sea, which is for them country and a powerful source of their group identity. The Yanyuwa interpretation of their environment is not based purely upon the pragmatic use of that land and sea. History, spirituality, ritual, emotion, living and deceased people as well as other spiritual inhabitants are all part of the basis on which individual and group negotiation with the environment takes place.

The study of these responses to the environment is called - using the jargon of the western world - ethnoecology and ethnobiology. This thesis examines the western responses to these disciplines in regard to studies undertaken in other parts of the world. The number of Australian case studies is surprisingly small. There are two schools of thought which seek to view the way indigenous people relate to their environment. One response is to rely heavily on the cognitive and analytical skills of the people in regard to the way the environment is classified. The other response is to say that time and some of the factors enumerated above, such as history, spirituality and negotiation, are important keys in understanding the way people interpret and classify their environment. The thesis argues that it is this second response which allows for a clearer understanding of the total indigenous response to the environment. By seeking to undertake a more holistic study a valuable convergence of anthropology, ethnobiology and ethnoecology can in some part be achieved.

Following on from this, the thesis then examines in detail the Yanyuwa relationship with the maritime environment, with particular attention being placed upon the dugong and sea turtle, upon Yanyuwa involvement as predators upon these two species, and upon the historical factors which have influenced this relationship.
I hereby declare that the work herein, now submitted as a thesis for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, is the result of my own investigations, and all references to ideas and work of other researchers have been specifically acknowledged. I hereby certify that the work embodied in this thesis has not already been accepted in substance for any degree, and is not being currently submitted in candidature for any other degree.

Signed: [Signature]

Date: 30/4/97
... down into the tidal area where fetid mangroves appear to lean out over the water.... Dugongs rise and give a loud snort as they expel air to take in more. Queer noises come from the mangrove muddy flats: the clack, clack of the shellfish and the swish and the sigh of the wind in the crab holes. The sea lies ahead.

W.E (Bill) Harney

Note:
This thesis contains the names and images of deceased Yanyuwa men and women. While aware of, and sensitive to, the issues associated with the naming and showing of deceased people, I have sought approval from the appropriate family members and relevant jungkayi. Their consent has been given for the sake of “their memory.”
Acknowledgements

This project has had a long history, one in which a large number of people have shared. Some of these people are now dead. This thesis becomes, in part, their memorial.

I wish to thank Howard Morphy, Richard Baker, Bob Ellis, Jeff Stead, Tony Young and Ross Howie for the encouragement and suggestions given to me over the years that lead me to decide to undertake this thesis. Once started, the project benefited greatly from the assistance given by Helene Marsh, Tony Preen and the generous and unflagging support of my supervisor, Chris Healey.

Of course this thesis would not have been possible without the generous McArthur River Mines Scholarship, which has allowed me to spend three years editing and writing up 16 years of field work. It also enabled me to make a number of trips to Borroloola to check material as the thesis progressed.

This thesis is an attempt to repay the investment that the Yanyuwa people have made in the education of a person with “whitefella brains”, who has been privileged to spend time in their company and on their country. This thesis is not an attempt to speak on their behalf, that is something that they can do with much more eloquence than I with my keyboard.

There have been a core group of sea -island people who have helped, guided and chided me since 1980 when this research began. Don and Jemima Miller with their family, were the first people to introduce me to the salt water and island country. During the period 1980 to 1988, Don, a dugong hunter of excellence, took me on many journeys to the islands and patiently instructed me in the complexities of dugong and sea turtle Law. He assisted me greatly with my mapping trips and in explaining the complexities of the Spirit Ancestor narratives and their associated songs.

Don’s sister, Dinah Norman, is a wonderful Yanyuwa teacher. Her eloquent yet sometimes surprisingly simple use of Yanyuwa has been a powerful inspiration to me. It was Dinah together with Bella Charlie and Annie Karrakayn who were determined to get me to speak “like a man”.

Much of my research into the Yanyuwa past was undertaken with Old Tim Rakawurima and his wife Judy Marrngawi. Tim could remember a time with little or no intrusion from white people. He could remember the Macassans working on the islands. He was a tireless teacher of what he colourfully called “old buggar words”, or the archaic speech of the Yanyuwa. He taught me of the island country and its songs and ceremonies. From conversations with Tim I learned much about the Yanyuwa.
perceptions of the plants and animals that inhabit the Yanyuwa environment.

The son of Tim Rakawurrima was Johnson Timothy. He was a masterful teacher and his support for my documenting of his culture was unflagging. His depth of knowledge crossed an amazing breadth of subject areas. He was for me the true “maranja”, the dugong hunter of excellence. I travelled many times with Johnson, his wife Maureen and their family to the island country. In his own quiet manner Johnson taught me about the sea and the islands and explained carefully the Yanyuwa perceptions of that environment. He continually emphasised his teaching with the reminder that “the Law goes from island to island, always remember that”.

Other Yanyuwa, such as Eileen McDinny, Ida Ninganga, Amy Friday and Nora Jalirduma taught me much about the strength, dignity and generosity of Yanyuwa women. Their patient teachings covered kinship, song, hunting and language. They were tireless interpreters of language and culture.

Mussolini Harvey (OA) and his wife Roddy were patient teachers and keen supporters of this thesis. When they lived at Borroloola, they provided me with some wonderful and unforgettable hunting trips which illustrated, in a most profound manner, the knowledge that the Yanyuwa have of their environment.

Senior men such as Ron Rickett, Jerry Brown, Dinny McDinny, Isaac Walayungkuma, Pyro Dirdiyalma, Splinter Woody, Tyson Birribirrikama, Ginger Bunaja and Billy Miller have all given me valuable insights into the complexities of land ownership, song cycles and ceremonies.

I am grateful for the generosity of Steve Johnson and the hospitality shown to me while staying at his home on Vanderlin Island. His love of history and the islands make him an outstanding interpreter of the Yanyuwa environment and the history of that area.

There are other people of my own age, and younger, who have given me friendship as well as showing me what it means to be a younger Yanyuwa person during the enormous changes of the last decade. Amongst these people are Leonard, Jeffrey and Lanceton Norman, David Isaac, Patrick Henry, Wilton and Phillip Timothy, Leanne Norman, Rachel and Nancy McDinny, David and Archie Harvey, Elizabeth McCracken, Florette and Mavis Timothy, Graham Friday and Harold, Joanne, Brendon, Jonathan and Georgie Miller.

I am indebted to Jean Kirton, the Yanyuwa linguist, for her teaching and unfailing good humour in the face of my many, many questions and requests for explanations to some “new” Yanyuwa language nightmare.

Bob Ellis and David Cooper of the Aboriginal Sacred Sites Protection
Authority supported my research and gave me unqualified support. Likewise, David Ritchie, John Avery and Lesley Mearns of the Aboriginal Land Areas Protection Authority have always been willing to talk to me and discuss aspects of this thesis.

Yvonne Forrest, the Northern Land Council librarian, has provided me invaluable assistance in tracking down obscure papers and articles, keeping me up to date with newspaper clippings and always willing to put them in the post.

I received encouragement, advice and friendship from many linguists and anthropologists who have worked in the Northern Territory. Among these people are Nick Evans, Maggie Brady, Jim Wafer, Debbie Rose, Kingsley Palmer, Betty Meehan, Peter Sutton, David Nash, Kim Akerman, Jeff Stead and Jeannie Devitt.

Chris Anderson of the South Australia Museum provided me with access to the Yanyuwa material culture collection, and Ken Hale, of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology in the U.S.A., made available for me his Yanyuwa texts and field notes recorded in 1959.

The staff of the Anthropology and History departments at the Northern Territory University always welcomed me on my journeys there and were most supportive in their encouragement and criticisms. Amongst these people I am grateful to David Mearns and Patrick McConvell for insightful comments and to Ian Walters who encouraged me to undertake additional analysis of my material. Lyn Riddett was most encouraging in my attempts to use historical method, as was Micky Dewar.

To John Veeken I offer a special thanks, as he took my often wild diagrams, half hatched ideas, graphs and scribbles and turned them into the wonderfully legible pieces of work that are now in this thesis. My sister Ann-Maree and brother-in-law John Hewlett also provided technical assistance in the initial stages of this thesis that made the production of it much easier. Athol and Madge Nicholas and Ian and Wendy Wood have travelled the path of the thesis and have undertaken the copying and recopying of numerous drafts and ideas for presentation.

I am indebted to the proofing work undertaken by Mary Faeth Chenery of the La Trobe, Bendigo Campus. Her erudite comments and corrections have amended my sometimes "fractured English".

There are people who during the process of researching and writing a thesis who are just good to have around to provide an atmosphere of moral support which is so important. In particular, I would like to thank David Pugh, Julie U'Ren, Thomas, Leah, Hannah and Esther, Drew Lawson, Richard Baker and Beth Slatyer. A special thanks to Rabbi Kuschner, who has taught me much about the power of words.
I thank my parents for having the insight, when it was not common, to realise that the son of farmers did not necessarily have to be a farmer.

Finally, thanks to my own family, Nona, Yoshi, Mahla and Asher who have with much courage supported me as I undertook this task. They have provided me with an embarrassment of riches which sadly, I have sometimes taken for granted.
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Chapter 1.

Beginnings.

"All beginnings are hard."
Midrash.

1.1 Ethnobiology

This thesis is an examination of aspects of Yanyuwa ethnobiology, ethno-ecology and identity. Attention is given to the maritime environment of the south west Gulf of Carpentaria and Sir Edward Pellew Group of Islands (Map 1). Particular emphasis is given to the dugong and sea turtle.

A Yanyuwa perception of their environment is complex; this environment is a universe whose ecology consists of many diverse forms, which includes spiritual beings, all of which are able to interact with each other. The complexity of the environment is highlighted when any discussion with the Yanyuwa relating to life forms and geography takes place.

A brief example may assist in amplifying this concept. Often when travelling with Yanyuwa people I observed that they would constantly comment on the landscape and the living things that inhabit it. Sandbars which had moved because of recent floods, a newly established patch of mangroves, a dried freshwater well, the sighting of a large tiger shark or whale all became topics of conversations. Sometimes they were obliquely referred to as "might be something" (see also Povinelli 1993, 1995). These "somethings" were at times well defined, at times vague, but always leading to explanations of a natural world which was profoundly full of spirit and meaning, sometimes benign, full of potential danger and indescribable powers. This phrase, "might be something", is an oblique way of referring to something that may prove to be more than it first appears. Meehan (1975:27), in her work with the Gidjingali, also makes the point that the "appearance of new land, shifts in mangrove belts or in river channels are always noted and their causes keenly discussed."
The environment, then, may be described in a purely biological manner or in a way which involves both biology and spirit\(^1\), an approach which describes the way that indigenous people strive to understand and live within the environment in which they find themselves.

Ethnobiology, then, is at a juncture where anthropology and biology merge; however there is no one research discipline which could be classed as ethnobiological studies. Ethnobiology deals with the way that an indigenous group classifies natural phenomena and their own perceptions of environmental processes. Western scientists, generally speaking, perceive indigenous ecological knowledge as being but one part of the total amount of knowledge belonging to a people's culture. Ethnobiology, however, strives to find the links between the ecological information and other aspects of a peoples culture, such matters as religious and social proscriptions which may affect the way people relate to any given part of the environment.

Unfortunately, the ecological knowledge obtained from indigenous people is often presented by anthropologists in a number of quite limited forms, as in folk taxonomies, which provide the ethnobotanical and ethnozoological classifications of plants and animals and/or information associated with indigenous understandings of the systems of relationships involving plants, animals, spiritual and environmental factors. Lewis (1988) and Ridington (1982) also commented that little attention is paid to the technological knowledge which a group may possess. They consider attention to technology is important because ultimately technology has an impact on the way people access their environment. This point is of

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\(^1\) The term spirit is used in this thesis. I realise that the word “spirit” is a word open to many interpretations. The English word, “spiritual”, has its roots in Greek and Christian thought and implies a split between the secular material world and the realm of the spirit. It subtly suggests leaving this everyday material world in order to enter some other spiritual or holy domain. In the Yanyuwa context there is only one world, one environment, which is simultaneously material and spiritual. As Rose (1992:59) comments, it is a word which should be used with “trepidation”. Yanyuwa cosmology allows the term spirit to be used in many circumstances: the relationship of people to place and people to living things and sacred with the secular.
considerable interest to this thesis as the technology used by the Yanyuwa to
hunt dugong and sea turtle has changed considerably over the last one hundred
years, and it raises the question as to whether this change has lead to
improved take numbers.

I have attempted in this thesis to provide a wide-ranging discussion in
relation to Yanyuwa ecological information. I have tried to remain aware of
issues raised by Johannes (1981) and Ellen (1982) who discuss the paucity
of ethnobiological material on maritime environments, and who argue that
what does exist appears to be scattered and superficial. They have also
commented that in relation to maritime environments the anthropologists
have emphasised the people and the material culture while the biologists have
tended to emphasise the creatures and the plants. I attempt in this thesis to
redress these deficiencies, at least in regard to the Yanyuwa people in the
south west Gulf of Carpentaria.

This thesis is a result of seventeen years research with the Yanyuwa
people2. As a result of this I have had time to develop a proficiency in the
language which has allowed me to listen to complex conversations, to
participate in them and to frame questions and responses in ways which are
acceptable and conform to a Yanyuwa way of asking things. I am

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2 I arrived at Borroloola in 1980 as a primary school teacher. During this time I
travelled extensively with Yanyuwa people on informal trips to the sea and islands. In
1981 and 1982 I was the outstation resource teacher and travelled, in that capacity,
to the islands and along the river systems of the south west Gulf. During this period my
initial diary jottings of 1980 began to be developed into organised research
concentrating on language, site mapping, hunting and ecological and biological knowledge.
In 1983 I took up a position with the Northern Land Council as a research officer in the
Land Interest Register. In 1984 to 1989 I was a research officer with the Aboriginal
Sacred Sites Protection Authority. Both of these positions gave me ample scope to
continue my work with the Yanyuwa. During this time I also received a research grant
from the Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies where I
undertook extensive language recording. I received subsequent grants in 1991 and 1992
and prepared a Yanyuwa dictionary and cultural resource with Jean Kirton, the
Yanyuwa linguist. In 1991 to 1993 I was the senior anthropologist with the Northern
Land Council for the Borroloola 2 (Barranyi-Warnarrwarnarr) land claim (Bradley
reminded of the words of Leibniz (1949) who stated that "languages are the best mirrors of the human mind".

My fieldwork approach is to a great degree unassertive, and this has worked particularly well in determining how the Yanyuwa people perceive and classify their natural world. I have gathered a lot of information merely by listening and observing and asking for some amplification on details that they had raised.

As a result of this, and a number of journeys to zoos and museums where people spoke of the creatures and specimens on display (which they find in their own country) I conclude that Yanyuwa ethnoclassification is based on a number of variables which are context specific and relate directly to the reason why any number of things need to be classified. My fieldwork amongst the Yanyuwa suggests that "cultural knowledge" is also an important part of ethnobiological knowledge, and that any classification is more often than not diffuse and totally negotiated and constructed according to the experiences of everyday life, which may include the requests for information put to the Yanyuwa by such people as biologists, linguists, teachers and Yanyuwa children or Yanyuwa adults pursuing further education.

This is a very different approach to ethnobiological research than that undertaken by such researchers as Berlin (1976, 1978, 1992), Conklin (1954, 1962), Randall (1976, 1987) and Waddy (1988). Their work relies, in part, on the use of biological and botanical specimens removed from their environment, and informants being asked to classify those specimens; conclusions are then drawn from the way people have classified the given species. There is also a dependency based upon visual images of the species in question and the use of specific and quite leading questions to obtain information in relation to classification. Such approaches are highly formalist and rely heavily on the cognition of the informants. I have attempted to use aids such as photographs and specimen skins, but have found them to be most unreliable as assistance in establishing/identifying particular species and establishing any sense of classification.

Where there are strict and detailed biological hierarchies, these
usually refer to culturally important species, such as the dugong and sea turtle. I have also found in relation to ethnobiology that it is very easy to enquire in ways that demand answers to situations that the Yanyuwa may never before have had to contemplate, as Ellen (1978) also suggests in relation to his fieldwork amongst the Nuaiui. Here, he stated that a "static model of classification" fails to illustrate concepts of continual thought in relation to the "boundaries of categories" (1978:25).

The illustration below also provides evidence of this. During my initial detailed fieldwork into ethnobiology I asked an elderly knowledgeable woman, Annie Karrakayn, if the Yanyuwa had a term which may mean "all living things". She found the question difficult. I believe it made her reflect heavily upon the Yanyuwa language and the ways of expressing it, rather than offering an instant answer. As a result, Annie constructed what I believe now to be a new proposition, which was met with some heated debate by women older than Annie, presumably because her answer did not fit well with a typical ontological proposition. Annie had suggested that a suitable term would be *lhungkirri*, which literally means "having life". Her harshest critic, a much older woman, Ida Ninganga, felt that a better term would be *wurdalawiji*, meaning "being with spirit", and then added somewhat derisively that "old people never spoke that way anyway!". As a result of such an experience I am left wondering whether or not there is any need, want or desire, reason or even legitimacy in trying to elicit a term in Yanyuwa that would equate with the English "all living things". It is also questionable whether such investigator-introduced issues are worth pursuing. I therefore prefer to let ethnobiological categories of thought emerge in context, rather than through a process of formalised frameworks such as interviews, the removal of biological specimens from the environment and abstract classification techniques.

Another issue that I have often encountered when working with the Yanyuwa on ethnobiological classification is the insistence that many species be accorded a duality of place: firstly within the realm of spirit, and secondly in the secular view of the environment. While it was easy for me to see the differences between what is purely biological from what is purely
spiritual information, to make this separation in many instances would result in a loss of the Yanyuwa perception of that particular species and its place within the environment. Thus, for the Yanyuwa, whales, dolphins and large dugong can be just that, but they can also be yulangu, that is a creature that carries the potential characteristics of a rainbow serpent, while an Olive Python (a species of non-venomous snake) is seen to be a physical embodiment of an actual rainbow serpent, bujimala. As Bulmer and Healey (1993:44) have rightly stated, "for indigenous people, 'mystical beliefs' may be just as vital as 'practical knowledge' in regulating interactions with the environment". Such examples as these have highlighted for me, at least amongst the Yanyuwa, the degree of permeability which can exist between supposed category boundaries, an issue which ethnobiologists such as Waddy (1988) and Berlin (1992) do not take into consideration and thus present a very structured, rigid and formal view of ethnobiology. At its most basic, this formal, cold and rigid approach to ethnobiology as presented by Berlin and Waddy, for example, is without any sense of emotion and soul, something which I have found that the Yanyuwa do not lack!

The spirit beings which inhabit the Yanyuwa environment, some of which are harmless, others angry and cruel, are classified by the Yanyuwa. All spirit beings, the ngabaya, have their own specific names, their own place and function, such as the mangrove spirit, called ngarrimi, or the spirit with a massive penis coiled around its body, the jurdurrubanji, which are jealous and resent humans entering their country to hunt (see Nora Jalirduma in Bradley 1989 and McDinny in Bradley and Kirton 1992). Such spirits as the jambajambanyi and namurlanjayngku inhabit the mainland and islands and live their own lives only occasionally impacting upon the living. The spirits of the dead constantly interact with the living. It is upon the living that the obligations fall of burning country, nurturing the family and maintaining the sanctity of the sacred places, just as the deceased did when they were living. These spirits of the deceased live a life in the same way as the living. They hunt dugong, turtle, goanna, they sing and dance.

All of these spirits can be accounted for by using taxonomic conventions normally reserved for flora and fauna, as Ellen (1993:176)
comments in regard to the Nuaulu where they:

recognise spirit categories in much the same way as they
recognise categories of animal: indeed spirits are treated
as natural kinds, as equally significant parts of their
environment. Along with plants and animals, spirits inhabit the...
universe in every conceivable niche. As flora and fauna both
threaten and help them, spirits too have these basic
ambivalent characteristics. Accordingly dealings with
them are managed with a considerable degree of caution,
but sometimes also with curiosity.

These spirits animate the landscape, and the behaviour of the living
can impact upon all of them in a positive or negative manner. For example,
during a visit to a site on South West Island, a prone human skeleton was
found in a cave. There were no signs that it had ever been wrapped in paper
bark and bound with cord, as was the usual practice. The old men
immediately felt it was the body of a ngarrimi spirit which had died because
someone living had worn the wrong body mark during the ceremonies relating
to the country; this wrong action reverberated through the country and lead
to the death of one of its spiritual entities, thus depleting the land of some of
its power. A number of unsuccessful attempts to capture dugong in the
following weeks were attributed to the impact of this death upon the Yanyuwa
 cosmos.

This thesis will highlight the “spiritual” dimensions of ethnobiology
as well as the “mundane and practical”. This is being true to the Yanyuwa
data- but it is also much more applicable to the study of ethnobiology, than
has generally been acknowledged.

1.2 Nganji: Matters relating to “kin”.

The exploration of Yanyuwa ethnobiology has lead to a investigation of
what at first appearances seems to be a simple Yanyuwa word. The word is
nganji, which, when accompanied with pronominal prefixes, conveys the
meaning of kin or mate of established relationships. When unmarked with
pronominal prefixes the term means stranger or enemy, in much the same way that host and hostile in English are related to each other. However, the word is multivocal and is dependent on context for full meaning. One of the implicit meanings of nganji when accompanied with pronominal prefixes is that of a perceived co-dependency of those entities to which the term is applied. In most instances the dependency is often associated with a hunter-prey relationship, with the hunter always being kin to the hunted. Many animals, plants and people are described using this term. For example, dugong hunters are kin to the dugong, while the dugong is kin to the sea grass beds. The term is used extensively in relation to the coastal and seabirds; they are described generally by the Yanyuwa as being kin to the fish upon which they are said to feed. On a much more basic level the term can be used to describe similarity, such as two yams which share the same soil type, two similar colours or a group of relatives (see also Chase and von Sturmer 1980 and Nash 1981). The term can also be used to make a detailed reference to someone’s association with a particular place, or to a group of people who hold knowledge concerning a particular ceremony. The term nganji may be highlighting what the Yanyuwa perceive to be a mutual interest in each other’s development.

Humans engage in a “killing” dialogue with a number of animal populations, which they pursue, kill and feed upon. Humans are also provided with faculties which allow them to ponder the meanings of such bonds between themselves and the other species they observe. Such a view may provide one of the reasons why Yanyuwa hunters, both men and women, often express sorrow or pity when they are killing or butchering an animal.

The term nganji provides a key to explore one of the ways the Yanyuwa describe their relationship to the natural world. Nganji speaks of enduring relationships that exist within the environment that the Yanyuwa share with many species of plants and animals. In an environment where people describe animals being kin to each other, such as sea birds being kin to the fish, or hunters to dugong, there is also a belief that such relationships are beneficial to each other. If a hunter does not hunt a dugong then the dugong numbers will decrease, which will be bad for the Yanyuwa. If sea birds do not
hunt fish, then both the fish and bird will suffer. This aspect of Yanyuwa classification is also an implicit directive for action (putting classification into practice)- that is: preying upon the creatures so linked as kin.

Amidst such discussions people reflect also on a less intimate but no less important relationship between creatures. As Annie Karrakayn has commented concerning the seabirds, "they make me think about my country, my island, my mother, poor thing". What is being demonstrated in such a statement are the deep and enduring emotional links between people, country and many of the creatures which inhabit the area. This in itself is not unusual. It is spoken of continually in the media and in books and popular writings about indigenous peoples' relationships to their country, but when people make statements such as the one above, they are highlighting an evocative and emotional attachment of "things" to people. In this thesis I attempt to present a phenomenological rendering of the Yanyuwa environment, which moves away from a presentation of empirical data to one which expresses the true consciousness of the people, including their belief in the consciousness of their environment.

Such an exploration does give rise to the idea of indigenous people being "at one with the environment", rather than being separate, and in this there is nothing new. I have sought to take this idea further and give a richer substance to the notion of "being at one". The Yanyuwa people operate within an ecological system in which human agencies, special knowledge and power are significant components.

The Yanyuwa environment is enlivened by what may be glibly described as "magic". However, I consider this term to be quite constrictive when it is discussed in relation to Yanyuwa relationships to country. Yanyuwa "magic" embraces the interaction of particular Spirit Ancestor sites and beings, human song and chant, as well as acts of will and mystical relationships of natural species with natural events, such as the association of snakes with the wind, whales with waterspouts, or the need to kill dugong to sustain viable dugong populations.

Such ideas as these reveal an ecological process where human agencies are an integral part. This is further highlighted by a belief that land itself
can suffer when people die, that it can become less fruitful. This then suggests an all-embracing system of interaction between humans, mystical powers, health and vitality as necessary components of the environment. When seen in light of the above discussion, the term *nganji* is a powerful word which highlights a complex web of interrelationships that exist within the Yanyuwa rendering of their environment.

1.3 Why Dugong and Sea Turtle?

From my first contact with the Yanyuwa people I was aware of the importance of their association with the sea, dugong and sea turtle for their self-identity. Amongst the men conversations centred on boats, engines, past, present and future hunting trips, ideal locations to find suitable wood for a new harpoon, sharing of steel for the making of harpoon points, and the fat and meat quality of any dugong or sea turtle that had been taken recently.

The women would speak of similar things, of hunting trips that were being planned or had just been completed. They would dissect arguments about the distribution of dugong or sea turtle meat. They would speak with quiet pride of their sons, grandsons and nephews who were learning to hunt, and while I was working on genealogies they would go into great detail to tell me who amongst their ancestors were *maranja*, or a “dugong and sea turtle hunter of excellence”.

On subsequent hunting trips with the Yanyuwa this knowledge that the older men and women possessed in relation to the sea, dugong and sea turtle was continually demonstrated. This knowledge ranged from biological matters through to the religious, and I became increasingly aware that the way these creatures were treated while alive, and in death, in the minds of the Yanyuwa, has a profound effect upon the total environment, both land and sea.

In this thesis I demonstrate information showing that the dugong and sea turtle, the material culture associated with the hunting of these two creatures, and the maritime environment are crucial elements in maintaining and developing what the Yanyuwa call *Yanyuwangala* - the awareness of being Yanyuwa.
The actions and identity of such people as the li-maranja, “the dugong and sea turtle hunters of excellence”, I will argue, is dependent on a strong sense of the past, particular knowledge relating to the seasons, the sea and a much wider sense of land and the way in which the environment is maintained. To be a hunter of turtle and dugong is to be aware of the spiritual entities which inhabit the Yanyuwa environment, and have the ability to read the country and the sea; to be able to see oneself as an individual who still stands in relationship to the human ancestors, Spirit Ancestors and the land. For the Yanyuwa, the continuity of traditions associated with dugong and sea turtle hunting are dependent on the bringing together of all that which is the past into the present. Only then are the actions of the hunters, for example, given meaning and seen to be evidence of spirit and human values such as are embedded in the concept of Yanyuwangala.

1.4 The Yanyuwa: identity, negotiation and place.

The Yanyuwa describes themselves as being li-Anthawirriyarrwa, “those people whose spiritual and cultural origins are from the sea”; this phrase is generally glossed as “people of the sea”. It is a term which is widely used by Yanyuwa people of all ages, even those who may have had little or nothing to do with the sea. While people use the Yanyuwa or English phrase to emphasise their feelings of distinct identity as sea people as opposed to mainland or “scrub” people, it is not always easy to identify the feelings associated with this distinctiveness or the cultural practices, such as dugong and sea turtle hunting, which reinforce it and add to the concept of Yanyuwangala.

During the course of my fieldwork I began to understand that much of what was considered by the Yanyuwa to be appropriate behaviour towards their country and towards each other was observed without verbal communication. On a number of occasions when I attempted to verbalise the behaviour, or ask for an explanation of it I was simply told “it was the way” or “that’s the rule from old people”. Much of this behaviour is to do with more esoteric traditions relating to climatic control or why, for example, dugong meat or dugong hunting is so important, or why one must assume a
certain posture before eating dugong meat or turtle eggs. These are instances of what Bourdieu (1977, 1990) refers to as *habitus*. He defines *habitus* as a set of structured predispositions which are culturally ingrained in the individual and collective unconscious, and which enshrine certain beliefs and practices as taken for granted but which are seen to be right and proper.

An examination of the activities and rituals associated with the maritime environment, dugong, sea turtle and the men who hunted them, revealed that no one person possessed all information in regard to the specific culture that maritime hunting represented. Much of the knowledge indeed appeared to be fragmented, with each hunter possessing knowledge which may or may not be shared by other hunters. Hobart (1993) calls this phenomenon "segmentary", or the social "clustering of knowledge". Wafer (1989:45) describes succinctly this cultural characteristic statement. He writes:

A major characteristic of oral cultures is that different parts of their traditions are preserved in memories of different people, with the inevitable overlaps and gaps. It is not usually the case that any one individual has an overview of the whole tradition. In the case of overlap, it is quite common for different individuals to know different versions of the same part of the tradition, because of the way variations occur as the traditions are transmitted overtime and space.

If knowledge is fragmentary, the question then should be posed: at what point is there a place of unity; how do individuals socially cohere? Wafer (1989:45) suggests that one point of unity is ceremony and ritual which have their own formalised practices. Meinig (1986) reinforces this view commenting that ceremonial practices help to maintain social cohesion are a powerful way by which social cohesion, historical perspective and a sense of place.

Yanyuwa society maintains a foundation of what Evans-Pritchard (1937) calls "moral-force". In my fieldwork notes there are constant records and allusions to conflict between individuals and groups which have proceeded from various actions by people in relation to the control of environmental practices such as too much wind which stops maritime
hunting, or dust storms which are a hindrance to terrestrial game hunting. Such phenomenon however, would best be described as impersonal, as they affect not just the guilty party or individual but also everybody else.

I have recorded some of these instances in this thesis, and it may be seen that most of the examples provided revolve around an idea of infringements of local moral principles such as wrong burning of country or butchering a dugong in a non-prescribed manner. These lapses of moral practice, which by their occurrence are also making non-verbal claims, via disputed actions, to particular status or authority. Many of the responses then, of those who feel wronged are made not by way of open confrontation, though this happens; rather, covert assault is practised whereby environmental forces are manipulated to punish. Thus, the conclusion that can be drawn is that for the Yanyuwa, conceptions of the environmental and biological conditions for any given time involve an assessment of the moral order of the society at any one given time.

The environment and the Yanyuwa are constantly involved in processes of negotiation. The negotiation of an individual's or group's place within the environment and society has been explored extensively in the literature by Roheim (1945) Bailey (1969), Barth (1966), Stanner (1966), and Ortner (1973) and by Myers (1986), who explores the concepts involved in negotiation in considerable detail amongst his work with the Pintubi. In the Yanyuwa context some forms of negotiation are never explicitly stated, while other acts such as speaking to country, or the giving of selected cuts of meat are explicit statements of negotiation. The actions which are classed as negotiation are but one way of maintaining relationships between people, life forms and place, and as with the idea of moral force, processes of negotiation are embedded in Yanyuwa structures and in the way things are done.

One of my interests in the seventeen years I have worked with the Yanyuwa is the use of language as a way to negotiate a situation; or alternatively, to listen to silences as speech which can be just as effective in conveying meaning. By the use of language and instances of social speech, differing situations are given a foundation by which various forms of
I have often observed the recitation of Spirit Ancestor narratives. As Hiatt (1975, 1983) and Sutton (1988) have also observed, these narratives are not presented as charters by which to live ethical and moral lives, but rather, they are political tools which are used by people to demonstrate and affirm in public the way in which land is owned or held. The public narration of these stories, whether by general discussion, formal oratory or by song, is a demonstration of control and of acknowledged custodianship (see also Baines 1988). Morals and ethics do not play a part in such a situation. Such narratives can, however, give a powerful sense of identity to a group of people, and in the context of this thesis, the Dugong Hunter Spirit Ancestor narrative is a good example of this as it provides concepts of abiding principles to present day hunters.

In public, non-indigenous settings, such as land claims or other meetings where matters relating to sites, people, land and its sacred nature must be discussed openly, the relaying of Spirit Ancestor narratives can be used to inspire and give new insights to the assembled listeners; the retelling of the story can give strength to the assembled people. In situations that may hold a degree of threat, such as local town council meetings or with government departments, the use of such narratives can bring courage and cohesion to those people who must ultimately determine how the group is going to act. The use of such narratives helps situate people in relation to those who have come before and to their place within the present situation which is still being interpreted and worked out. There is a sense that such orations in public, and potentially threatening places, bring together the "old people", the deceased kin, who become invisible companions to the living; and consensus is first reached between the living and the dead, in front of others who are demanding answers from the assembled people.

There are other times, within their own space and in an environment under their control, where people will relate Spirit Ancestor narratives or important human episodes from the past. At early morning when all is quiet, in the evening when people are quietly reflecting on the day which is dissolving into sunset, people may speak. They will signal their
announcement to speak with preliminary remarks as to why the events about to be spoken need to be heard publicly, then the narrative will be told with the full art of the orator. The recital will be fully and carefully made, and then the speaker will conclude with the accepted words of ending, which describe from whom the story was obtained, who told the individual, and on what basis the speaker is allowed to repeat it. At such times when stories are well told, the audience will appear to meditate upon the words, occasionally offering one or two statements of agreement or support. In this way do speakers in non-threatening situations gather the people together and convey to them a shared sense of their collective historical and spiritual truths. This style of speaking is often an accompaniment to mourning behaviour, when people gather to mourn a recently deceased individual. On such occasions the oratory is related in a style intense in its grief, which powerfully affects the listeners, as they are forced to reflect on the life just lived.

People skilled in such oration will sometimes, when out camping, speak to the country and invoke images of how it once was. They create pictures of the past, which, through their words, they revitalise, and offer glimpses of this past for those who may no have known it. Such oratory creates a sense of well-being: it is the bringing of the past into the present and providing a distillation of a country that is good, which holds vast spiritual powers and a strong human presence. For young people such times may be rare, but when they occur they provide a sense of well-being which in times of great uncertainty is very important, as it gives to the young a sense of an “olden days world” (Sutton 1988), which is a great place in which to hunt, to live and which resonates with the power of the “old people” and Spirit Ancestors.

1.5 Present day issues.

One of the continuing questions being asked by the Yanyuwa at Borroloola is how the past can be used to reaffirm their identity in the present and future. An important part of the Yanyuwa identity is based upon their attachment to the sea and the traditions of hunting dugong and sea turtle. However, the contemporary experience also means constantly constructing
and negotiating their lives in response to each other and their wider community. Themes of which are eloquently discussed by such people as Williams (1982, 1986) in relation to land ownership and the recognition of that ownership in North East Arnhem Land. Likewise Bell (1983), in her work with women in central Australia, explores the use of ritual as a self affirming process but with wider implications in such external processes as land claims. Myers (1986) explores the life of the Pintubi and the way they draw on knowledge from the past to negotiate a position in the present. Rose (1992) discusses how the people of Yarralin use the narratives from the Dreaming to maintain continuity and place within their environment. Negotiations with the knowledge handed down from the past or of one's place in the environment are based upon the experiences of everyday life, and upon what the Yanyuwa see as being important traditions, where to use the words of Sturzenhofecker (1994:27), "tradition is used as an expression of identity and legitimacy." Such negotiations with tradition and the contemporary experience of living in an open town means looking at issues associated with language loss, western trends in education, and having country swallowed up in pastoral and mining leases and tourist enterprises, to give but a few examples. However, reactions to more extreme events in present day setting often involve bewilderment and pain. For example, what response is possible when sacred burial areas are violated in the most profound and disturbing manner by non-indigenous people, or when dugong are shot by persons unknown and left to float upon the sea? The Yanyuwa respond - they have their own interpretations which they will keep within their community; but they will respond publicly, and often at the same time having to ask for assistance from outside authorities. In these instances their own authority based upon a traditional law has limited strength. There are also issues associated with ethnobiological research where tradition and newer contemporary knowledge must also be addressed and negotiated by the Yanyuwa.

When I first began writing this thesis I was told by a number of biologists that as far as they were concerned traditional biological knowledge lacked broad temporal and spatial scales in relation to the wider national and
international knowledge of the species in question. I was told, for example, that the Yanyuwa have no idea of "what happens to turtles when they swim over the horizon" (pers comm Colin Limpus 1993). While this may be so, the negotiation of tradition allows for new information to be included, or excluded, and then the core of traditional biological knowledge does indeed become broader in terms of both temporal and spatial scales. An example will illustrate this. At the time this thesis was being written the Yanyuwa were discussing both indigenous and western biological ways of understanding the environment. After a Yanyuwa hunter had returned from workshops relating to green turtle in Queensland, he brought back with him knowledge which at that time was quite alien to the Yanyuwa knowledge concerning these creatures. However, after discussion in the community, and the taking of a few green turtles with tags showing they had come from north eastern Queensland, people began a process of absorbing the new knowledge in a way that did not contradict the old. As Mussolini Harvey, a senior Yanyuwa dugong and sea turtle hunter, commented:

Old people they never knew, they used to say that malurrba, (green turtle) belonged only on the islands, but now we know it goes a bloody long way to lay eggs, there's a few on the islands but mostly they go to Queensland and Indonesia, but still the Dreaming is there on the islands. we have the Law for that turtle...that other turtle, wirndiwirndi (flatback turtle) that's the one, biggest mob make a nest on the islands.

(Mussolini Harvey, field diary 1994) 

3 Entries from field diaries throughout this thesis come from two sources. Short statements from informants where written down as heard in the language that they were given; Kriol, Yanyuwa or Aboriginal English. The longer texts are from field tape recordings, the majority of which were in Yanyuwa, though there are a few in Kriol and Aboriginal English. A few of these statements were recorded after a particular event had occurred and I was interested in the content of the speech and I asked the speaker to reconstruct it for me on tape. The oration to country by Johnson Timothy in Chapter 7 and the comment by Ida Ninganga on her assessment of young dugong hunters in Chapter 12 are examples of these.
In the above example, Mussolini Harvey fuses both indigenous knowledge and the more recently acquired western biological knowledge into a framework of traditional Law. It makes little difference to him that the green turtle is known to travel great distances to lay eggs, information that his ancestors could never have known. The new knowledge passes into a general knowledge of law concerning sea turtles, information which he as a senior hunter of sea creatures is expected to know. Such an example of synthesis as illustrated here is not always the norm; there is other information, especially concerning dugong, which many Yanyuwa hunters do not accept and some of these issues will be discussed in this thesis.

The Yanyuwa do however possess knowledge in relation to dugong and sea turtle which does have considerable breadth and detail. Freeman (1985) believes that these indigenous observations are important, because they are usually based upon observed fact, but unlike western ways of recording biological knowledge, differences and deviations from what is considered normal are measured in a qualitative sense. So, for example, these observations: dugong become fewer after large floods, dugong are fatter in the cold season, sea turtle are fat just prior to mating, sea turtles eat porpita before mating, or there are relatively more young dugong in the wet season. All of this information is evidence of trends in population dynamics throughout the year. However, if hunters find or observe events which are not familiar to them, such as large black ulcerations in the stomach of a sea turtle, then collective community knowledge on such incidents becomes important, as there may be others who have observed the same thing at another time, or there may be mythological issues associated with the current unusual event. Knowledge acquired by Yanyuwa hunters over generations of observations and discussions often stands in contrast to the sometimes stark and attenuated data available from scientific studies in the same area. This thesis explores in some depth Yanyuwa knowledge concerning dugong and sea turtle and also discusses the impact that western biological research can have on a community.

Perhaps of greatest concern to modern biologists interested in dugong and sea turtle are the annual take numbers by indigenous hunters, a matter
which also raises issues associated with resource management of the species under consideration. This is an area that needs to be approached carefully; and as Healey rightly comments:

.....the concept of "management" of natural resources must be applied with great caution in traditionally orientated communities.
Traditional ecological knowledge is certainly the basis of much behaviour that results in human husbanding of resources, but the context and motivation for it are often rather different from that of modern western resource management. (Healey 1993:23)

In the Yanyuwa context this is a very important point; what at first may look like wise management of sea turtle eggs, for example, may have more to do with the good fortune of the nesting area being within the confines of a restricted area due to the presence of sacred objects. Such areas also change, and an area once off-limits to hunting can, after negotiation and appropriate ritual, be opened for hunting again. A Yanyuwa notion of a healthy dugong and sea turtle population is also seen to be dependent upon how often the creatures are hunted and how their remains are disposed of. Concepts of resource management in the Yanyuwa community have more to do with the maintenance and well being of the environment and the society in general. I endeavour to describe in this thesis the contemporary lives of a group of people who use the past as an important balance for the present, and for whom, despite enormous pressures resulting from rapid development in the area, a sense and concern for place is still an overriding concern.

People must still act in a responsible manner towards the land and the creatures which inhabit it. This thesis is a discussion of the concepts which lie beyond the term Yanyuwangala, the sense of being Yanyuwa, with a detailed analysis of the marine environment and the dugong and sea turtle. There is much in this thesis that the Yanyuwa will recognise, but there is something that they will not. The interpretations I put on their lives and existence are at best in some instances guesses; I am attempting to disclose images of a people that lie beyond what is at first visible, and explore the idea of a people
who together and alone seek to negotiate their lives in relation to the situations they find themselves in.

The Yanyuwa people live their lives in an open town under the constant scrutiny of a largely hostile or indifferent population when it comes to an understanding of Yanyuwangala. The Yanyuwa are still trying to deal with things which they see as abiding and crucial. There are tensions as the old and middle aged people attempt to stress the abiding nature of their concerns to the younger people, but knowledge is being transmitted, it is being remolded and adapted so that it has meaning and relevance to the young.

An important way that the Yanyuwa choose to negotiate their place in the environment is by way of what they term “power”. This is not personal political power, which of course exists, but rather spiritual power. I hope to demonstrate that by exploring the notion of spiritual power, it is possible to move beyond the more common, rather trite views of indigenous people being “at one with” or “part of the environment”. For it is by the use of power that the Yanyuwa assume a far greater managerial role, in relation to the environment, through actions and knowledge of specialist power workers and song people. This management of the environment is not just for the good of the environment at large, and the plants, animals, spirit beings and people it sustains, but it is in some contexts directed at a social end of harming or inconveniencing other people. Sometimes this is motivated by human passions which include such feelings as hate, envy, kindness and jealousy. Thus, a web of interrelationships is revealed, and it is these interwoven links between people and the environment which is the fabric I wish to explore.

This, however, can only be done if ethnoecological and ethnobiological knowledge is first rescued from the rather tedious empirical pursuits of systems of classification which are then seen as distinct and separate provinces of meaning. This thesis highlights that ethnobiological knowledge is an element of tradition and is, therefore, a part of everyday social processes. One of the major issues facing modern Yanyuwa people is who they are in the face of the loss of autonomy, loss of language and widespread social disruption, relocation, loss of access to once important tracts of land and the loss of good health. These are important issues because the notion of
Yanyuwangala, the essence of being Yanyuwa, includes access to and the negotiation of knowledge of the local environment. What in anthropology is known as ethnobiological knowledge is an integral and totally legitimate aspect of the Yanyuwa identity. Thus this thesis seeks to find a convergence between the very different theoretical traditions in anthropological studies of sociological processes and identity and the study of ethnobiological knowledge (see also Healey 1994 for similar sentiments). The changing face of the south west Gulf of Carpentaria has had a profound impact upon the way the Yanyuwa access their environment and the way in which indigenous systems of ethnobiological and ethnoecological knowledge are sustained.
Chapter 2.

Tradition: Negotiating the past and present.

"We call it Law; that's the way we keep going..."

(Pyro Dirdiyalma)

2.1 Introduction.

The Yanyuwa, when speaking of their human and Spirit Ancestors, speak of them "being in front"- they are li-ambi rriju, "those who are in the lead". To maintain one's place in the contemporary world one has to look forward to the old people, as the living are li-ngulakarringu, "those who come behind".

The term "in the lead" is being used in the sense where it is believed that the ancestors of the Yanyuwa have left behind for those who have come after them, those things which are important for survival. They have left the oral codes, the songs, the narratives, the societal structures and the visual codes, the body designs, the secular and sacred objects by which people may hold onto their sense of place in the world. Past and present are important. Into the present are transported those things which we may label as "traditions", and which the living are expected to maintain. On the surface the term: tradition seems to be an easy word to understand, but the term is a gloss for situations which are complex and defy an easy answer. Take, for example, the three illustrations below.

In the mid 1890's two men paddle a bark canoe; one paddles in the rear, the other squats in the front with a harpoon made from a young cyprus pine (Callitrus intratropica), a rope made from the spun fibres of the roots from a banyan tree (Ficus virens var. virens), a harpoon point made from a species of coastal hardwood (Pemphis acidula). The rope is attached to the prow of the bark canoe. All of these implements have been made by the two men. The hunter lunges from his squatting position and harpoons a dugong. Both men are naked except for plaited cane armlets on their upper arms.

The years progress, and it is now the 1940's. The son of the above old
man stands in the prow of a large dugout canoe, which is paddled from behind, while a mast and sail lie in the canoe. The harpoon is made from a young messmate sapling (*Eucalyptus tetradonta*), while the rope is a commercially made hemp rope, and is attached to a wooden float made from a local light wood (*Erythrina variegata var. orientalis*). The harpoon point is made from a straightened link of a hobble chain. The rope and harpoon point were obtained while working on a cattle station on the Barkly Tablelands during the dry season. The canoe was made by a well known canoe maker during the dry season. A part of the catch obtained using the canoe will be used to pay the maker. The hunter lunges at a dugong, falling into the water as he does so. Both men wear shorts made from heavy cotton.

Time has further progressed, it is now the mid 1980’s. A young man, the grandson of the first man, stands on the prow of an aluminium dinghy. He is dressed in a pair of Levi jeans, wears a singlet and peaked cap on his head. The boat is powered by an Evinrude 25 horsepower engine. Both the engine and boat were obtained through the Aboriginal Benefits Trust Fund, and the engine is maintained by the local outstation resource centre. The hunter standing on the prow of the boat holds a harpoon made from a messmate sapling; the point is made from a sharpened Toyota tappet rod; the harpoon rope is a red nylon rope purchased at one of the stores at Borroloola. The rope is attached to a commercially made plastic float, which was picked up on the beach. Suddenly the boat rapidly gains speed and the harpooner lunges and harpoons a dugong. What all of the above groups would share in common, however, is the demand that the dugong be butchered correctly and that obligations to kin are fulfilled, in that the correct relations receive the correct portion of meat.

If it was possible for a Yanyuwa person to observe all of the above three illustrations, he or she would say they are aspects of the one activity, they are derived from the one Law: one tradition, one Law which relates to activities associated with dugong hunting. Stanner (1979:333) calls it the "laws of their tradition", but equally it could be called the tradition of their law. As an observer, a non-Yanyuwa person would say that all of the above images represent hunters in pursuit of dugong, but we may be tempted to ask,
which is the most traditional, or are they all apart of the one tradition? Such a question as this is important in relation to this work. The Yanyuwa believe that such an activity as hunting dugong or sea turtle are all ultimately derived from the one tradition, the one Law, the one place, this being the Dugong Hunter Spirit Ancestors and the country they traversed.

The term "tradition" or "traditional" has long vexed researchers. The terms have been used in varied situations throughout Australia and elsewhere to describe the societies and practices of indigenous people. Because the terms are so wide in their meaning and interpretations, there are few, if any places within the literature where there is a shared response to the term.

Researchers such as Evans-Pritchard (1937, 1940) Anderson (1984); Baldwin (1984), Chase (1980), Berger and Luckman (1971), Kolig (1981), Nietschmann (1989), Hobsbawn and Ranger (1983) and Mearns (1994) have all discussed the term and in some detail; some such as Bernhard et al. (1984), question how much of tradition can be truly recorded when what a researcher records is affected by influences which are generated by the researcher/informant relationship. These influences take into account issues such as aids used for informant recall, the relationship between the researcher and informant and cultural factors such as language which may affect the research. The Cowlishaw (1986) also raises similar issues in relation to the researcher and the indigenous community. It not my intention to revise the arguments associated with the word tradition, but rather to discuss the term in relation to the contemporary Yanyuwa community and their concept of Yanyuwangala: the essence of being Yanyuwa.

In relation to the three illustrations provided above, it could be asked whether the term "traditional" refers to a pre-contact period where culture was presumed to be unchanging, or whether the term is applicable to indigenous people today. Indeed, Nietschmann (1989) asks the question, was an indigenous group more traditional in the year 500 than it was in the year 1200? He quotes Albert Wendt, who asks us to consider:

Is there such a creature as 'traditional culture'? If there is,
what period in the growth of a culture is to be called ‘traditional’? If ‘traditional cultures’ do exist in Oceania, to what extent are they colonial creations? What are authentic cultures? Should there be ONE sanctified/official/sacred interpretation of one’s culture? And who should do the interpreting? (1978:1).

Chase (1980:83) takes the argument further and suggests that indigenous communities should be looked at not in the sense of what is tradition; rather, it would be better to:

.....talk more productively of cultural continuities or discontinuities in various aspects of Aboriginal life. These continuities or discontinuities can consist of beliefs within the community.

The term tradition and traditional will be used throughout this thesis, as the concepts covered in the terms relate well to Yanyuwa concepts of family, land tenureship, hunting and ceremonial life. Because this thesis travels from a viewpoint of historical thought to the temporal experience, the concepts of “continuities” and “discontinuities” as mentioned by Chase become of fundamental importance. Tradition should be seen as a developing force, a force which will never gain a full voice because it ever continues to work, transform and create new voices, and yet at the same time, the knowledge of older voices will remain.

Before continuing on with this discussion it is important to spend some time in an attempt to define what is meant by tradition and the Yanyuwa concept of Law, which I am equating with tradition. From the outset I would argue that both tradition and Law demand bearers, and that the people who bear the tradition or Law represent a living bond between the past and present, as this is what the term tradition is derived from: the Latin, *tradere*, which literally means “to hand over”.

Essential then to this idea of tradition is the idea of passing something on. Another possible way of describing this, especially in relation to the Yanyuwa sense of the word, is to call it reception, that is a received tradition, from both Spirit Ancestors and human ancestors, as well as living
Tradition in this sense should not be viewed just as a process. It should also be seen as a thing: a teaching, a body of knowledge which has been handed down from generation to generation and which is considered by those who teach this body of knowledge, and those who receive it, to be normative. For the Yanyuwa, the content of their tradition is very broad. Firstly, it comprises laws, objects, songs and ways of acting which were first revealed by the Spirit Ancestors. Secondly, it is the interpretations on this revealed knowledge, the myths, legends, historical narratives, ethical and metaphysical teachings, rituals, practices and observances which amount to a whole way of life.

In Yanyuwa, such knowledge can be described as *Yanyuwangala*, or that knowledge which is essential to be Yanyuwa. In a shorthand manner it could be called Yanyuwa culture or even “Yanyuwaness”. Essential to the understanding of *Yanyuwangala* is the concept of *narnu-yuwa*, which can be glossed as Law.

There are, however, subtle variations in which the Yanyuwa term for Law may be used. The Yanyuwa root word for Law is *yuwa*. When it is used with the abstract prefix, *narnu-*, thus appearing as *narnu-yuwa*, it would seem to be referring to the dominant idea of continuity, that the body of Laws in question owe their authority to their having been handed down and accepted from generation to generation, that there is a sense of eternity about them.

When the term Law is used with the masculine prefix, *na-*, *na-yuwa*, it refers more to the idea that the Laws have a source, which has been revealed, passed on; and the Laws are therefore seen to have authority, which is binding on people. It is this same term which is used to describe European law.

Changes in the Law of course, do occur and these are introduced cautiously and must be justified by reference to tradition itself or to certain essential and definable principles, such as appealing to the knowledge of the way certain human ancestors behaved. Such times when change is perceived can be times of heated and protracted debate, as the known body of information is discussed and worked upon. Many of these debates take place during times
of ritual, or in environments where tradition is seen to play an important role, such as during the hunting and butchering of dugong or sea turtle. But, as Sutton (1988: 254) comments, such occasions are not about "innocent and differing memories", nor are they examples of "cultural breakdown" or decaying traditions. Rather "such debate often is systematically normal and, for the want of a better word, traditional". The Yanyuwa refer to such situations as "making things straight".

Tradition can never be seen to be static; its life is dependent on people who are in constant dialogue with each other, a dialogue which seeks to find a balance between the past and the present, and those people who will carry it into the future. Sissons (1984:323) makes the comment that societies where oral tradition is important work within two domains, the first being the "domain of living oral tradition", where people constantly talk about their place within their society and their actions in relation to perceived traditions which they are practising; and the second, the "domain of reminiscence", where people talk and discuss the way in which their deceased kin and ancestors may have undertaken certain activities that are called tradition.

In the Yanyuwa case, the "domain of reminiscence", for example, would include talking about hunting dugong from bark and dugout canoes, while the "domain of living oral tradition" is discussing the way dugong and sea turtle are hunted today, including what traditions are still important and must be followed.

For people such as the Yanyuwa, meaning is an encrustation of events, which may be of both the present and the past. Choices about what action should take place in certain circumstances will be directly related to an individual's understanding of the causes of the events. How much of the present is understood will be determined by the understanding of the past.

Mythological and historical narratives which record Yanyuwa history are directional. That is, they present a view of history which is both religious and predictive: there is a concern with establishing the right way of doing things for the future generations. Such a view of history means that the kinds of stories which are told are used to substantiate the validity of continuing
spiritual revelation and of people's relationship to this spiritual dimension. The older Yanyuwa people then manage to create a world whereby the transmission of knowledge and ancestral identity, the very origins of the people and the indigenous names of people and places, are seen to be an important part of what younger people should take on as their inheritance.

I contend that it is nearly impossible to isolate ever what may be termed "pure tradition" from the web of historical and temporal narratives and the individualistic interpretations of what Law, and the traditions associated with that Law are. This does not mean that the knowledge of the Spirit Ancestors, human ancestors and the traditions associated with them are inaccessible. Rather it means that for the Yanyuwa, what is being dealt with at any specific moment is the absolute Law, and no other is being encountered. Nothing more is being stated here than that Yanyuwa perceptions of the past and present traditions are a process of passing mind to mind and heart to heart, by which, to use a colourful expression by Yeats, "the words of a dead man are modified in the guts of the living in the constantly renewed task of imaginative appropriation which runs through all history" (Auden 1966:141).

A group of Yanyuwa men and women will check each other's comments against their own previous historical experiences. They will take from their own view of histories and the history of other individuals, those things that they are disposed to favour; and they will disagree with, and at times quarrel about, those things which they are disposed to dislike; and they will have no recollection of things which they are not disposed to notice or value at all. What we then call "tradition" continues - it is long winded, selective and a creative process in which actualities interact with intuition. Tradition is not a "storeroom" which transports its entire contents, belonging to a past era, into the present. What is taken from the "storeroom" is totally dependent upon those who will hand on the knowledge that comprises the "tradition".

The Yanyuwa people who undertake such activities as dugong hunting have their own surety as to the correctness of the particular activity in which they are involved. There is to these people a sense of order in what they do. In relation to such activities as the hunting of dugong and sea turtle, the
activity is regulated by a series of clearly understood Laws. The task of an outside observer, such as an anthropologist, is to describe the reality of such activities in their own terms, in a manner which reflects the structures inherent in the activity while at the same time keeping truthfully to the indigenous boundaries and definitions which are offered by the practitioners themselves. As Geertz (1972: 1-37) notes:

The culture of a people is an ensemble of texts, themselves ensembles, which the anthropologist strains to read over the shoulders of those to whom they properly belong.

For the Yanyuwa dugong and sea turtle hunting is an important “text”, as at its centre is the continuation of an exclusive set of practices and beliefs which give identity and meaning to the Yanyuwa people as a whole, and to those men who are acknowledged to be skilled in such an activity.

2.2 Tradition, continuity and identity.

A Yanyuwa notion of tradition or Law is based upon what we could call continuity. Even when new knowledge is added to this core of “tradition”, researchers such as Hobsbawn and Ranger (1983:2) have found that repetition is a defining characteristic of all traditions. For a small group such as the Yanyuwa the notion of repetition is an important concept in relation to their continued self identity and the continuity of their sense of place as it is ultimately of prime cosmological importance. However, as has been discussed above, the maintenance of any “tradition” cannot be viewed as a simple process. The maintenance of “traditions” or old ways of being and behaving for example, can be constrained by the dominant culture with which the minority culture must interact; and even the practices of so-called old traditions within a contemporary setting will introduce change. What tends then to happen is that a series of select traditions are maintained, as opposed to the full range of traditional practices that were once possible. Such a piecemeal approach to “tradition” may indeed seem far cry from the images of harmony and wholeness that the term tradition can invoke. Thus certain
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traditions become part of memory, and are recalled to describe what once happened in times long past.

Certain traditions become important only at certain times, or when it is conducive for it to happen. It is a situation “where... groups maintain their distinct identities in episodic sub-cultures, which carry over from the last time such things were enacted” (Salmond 1987:210). In the Borroloola of the 1990’s dugong and sea turtle hunting could be described as an “episodic sub-culture”. The Yanyuwa are no longer dependent on the skills of their hunters to bring back the large amounts of meat to be found in dugong and sea-turtle, but it is an important “tradition” which Yanyuwa people still pursue for a number of reasons. Such a culture as hunting dugong and sea turtle has little relevance to their lives back in Borroloola, an everyday life which consists of school, work, leisure time with peers and even within the family unit. Yet it is a culture which continues to flourish when people get together and decide to go and hunt, and then its significance is celebrated in their lives. Unlike large ceremonial gatherings, the hunting of dugong and sea turtle by men and of smaller terrestrial game by women is only reaffirmed by those people who are participating. Most other people may be unaware that such things are happening until they receive some of the meat derived from the activity, and then they become participants in the activities of these “traditional sub-cultures”.

Salmond argues a researcher sees what she calls the “anthropology of occasions”, which she describes as a view of society seen as a complex setting in which individuals “flow at intervals, staging and enacting a wide variety of scenes. As individuals move from one scene to another, their behaviour changes in patterned ways as they adapt to a new set of rules and take up different roles” (Salmond 1987: 211).

The way an individual behaves and the role undertaken in relation to the people around him or her change according to situation. Even the cosmology can change according to situation. Thus, in their general dealing with non-indigenous Australians, most Yanyuwa people present to these people a view of reality which belongs to the dominant majority culture. In the presence of a missionary, the dead will go to heaven, the country and the
sea are inanimate in the presence of the Town Clerk. Borroloola is governed by the Town Council and the Northern Territory is governed by a Government based in Darwin and history, for the most part, begins with Captain Cook. In situations where the Yanyuwa are in control and the majority, the dead go back to their country, the country and sea are animate, the land in the region of the south west Gulf of Carpentaria is divided into areas owned by patricians and history begins when the Spirit Ancestors began the Yanyuwa genesis. Thus it is situation which will determine for the Yanyuwa by which cosmology the world will be interpreted. Context determines what aspects of "tradition" are applicable.

In everyday life at Borroloola it is the European institutions and patterns of behaviour which are considered to be a natural part of things. English and not Yanyuwa is becoming the daily language, and values such as Yanyuwangala or narnu-Yuwa mingle with the contemporary enthusiasms such as videos, cassette tapes, football, gambling, pinball, beer, fast foods and rock music. The main social machinery of Borroloola is European, and those parts of it which are set apart for the Yanyuwa, Garrwa, Mara and Gudanji people, such as the Mabunji Outstation Resource Centre, Rrumburriya-Marlandarri Housing Association, Boonoo-Boonoo Womens Centre, Northern Land Council and the Mawuli-Wirriwangkuma Association are all structures built upon blueprints derived from non-indigenous sources.

The primary indigenous structures which still operate amongst the Yanyuwa are the descent system based upon the semi-moiety, patrician and matriclan, and the extended family. These structures are best evidenced away from Borroloola, on the surrounding outstations and when people visit the islands. Some descent group territories are now more or less symbolic, as in many places land associated with the groups has been sold and is owned by pastoral properties, mining companies and private individuals. The major "corporate property" which now remains is land that has been acquired under the Land Rights legislation, and the more esoteric knowledge associated with these areas of land such as body designs, sacred objects, songs and personal names, those things which are called the Law, culture or tradition associated with the land.
The outstations, coastal country and islands are the places where people go to live as Yanyuwa people, that is, in a fully Yanyuwa way. Activities such as hunting and fishing undertaken by the women, and dugong and sea turtle hunting undertaken by the men are often seen as a last outpost of secular traditional culture, even though it does have explicit and implicit links with the sacred - as it was once explained to me by Johnson Timothy, “You see, without this sea, this island country, this walya (dugong and sea turtle), we are nothing”.

On the islands, coastal country and outstations, few if any concessions are made to the European way; people can sing, wail, fight, hunt, dance, eat bush foods-Yanyuwa foods. Such an atmosphere is hampered in situations where the dominant group is non-Yanyuwa. On the other, hand there are some disadvantages, in that some young Yanyuwa people do not travel to these places with their families life in town is seen to be far more interesting. Among the Europeans of Borroloola who rarely, if ever, see this Yanyuwangala in action, and in its most natural context, on country away from town, there is a strong belief that “the Yanyuwa have lost it”. But the sense in which these Europeans talk about “Yanyuwa traditions having been lost” is in many ways a creation, a colonial creation, because the Europeans to the Yanyuwa mind have always been peripheral to the plot of Yanyuwa Law.

The Europeans speak of language and ways of being dying out; conversations concerning the Yanyuwa by the Europeans tend to begin with, “When I first came here I remember how they used to be...” There is a danger of trying to idealise the Yanyuwa into a basket of “the Yanyuwa as they were”. Such people believe that the concept of Yanyuwa Law or tradition is diluted or unauthentic. Evidence of this viewpoint was highlighted in 1984 when the Yanyuwa were requesting assistance with the protection of important burial caves on the islands, after they had been desecrated by tourists. A local shop owner at the time argued quite heatedly that the bones in the caves were of Macassan origin and that the Yanyuwa had nothing to do with them, and that the Yanyuwa were only saying they were their ancestors’ bones because they wanted to put a land claim over the islands.

The truth is that Yanyuwa ancestry, traditions and aspects of language
have proved to be irrepressible. There is a sense of continuity with an ancient past, and it is at times vigorous and resurgent. The Land Claim process over the islands in 1992 was a good example of this. The hearing of the "traditional evidence" took place on Centre Island, and it brought together two "traditions": one, a western legal tradition, and the other, an indigenous system of land ownership which also included religious traditions as a basis of ownership. While a land claim is meant to be classed as a "public hearing", the process is actually an adversarial system of justice, where the basic mode of operation is to make a clear case to counterbalance an opposing one. Such a hearing took place on Centre Island in 1992, and later in Borroloola in 1993. It became a contest between oral and literate forms of knowledge, where one group of people saw the archive has having more value than the oral "traditional" evidence. The difficulty in such situations is, how is it possible to give value to a way of life which at times can be subtle and close to the skin and which is largely invisible to most observers? What appeared to happen in the land claim situation was that the "traditions" of the Yanyuwa, the fine details of the Law, became distorted, whereby certain aspects were removed from their matrix in an attempt to make visible and understandable that which is usually complex, implicit and quite invisible. In such situations there are great difficulties and issues, as Clifford (1980:324) comments:

The ethical dilemmas are persistent, there are problems in
defining terms... deriving a legal standard flexible enough
to include the different social, political and cultural arrangements
of each indigenous group.

The land claim process is heavily dependent upon the word "tradition"; it is a word that can mean many different things to many different people (see also Rose (1996:35-53)). Because of the way the land claim process works it must be wondered if a neutral, balanced account of the facts can ever be achieved, as the situation from the outset is politically divided, and in such a situation it is very difficult for any one person to speak without bias. Thus,
any account of what is "tradition" or "traditional" will be affected by what part of the legal process which comprises the land claim the various actors play.

The teaching of young men to be hunters of dugong and sea turtle is another illustration of the irrepressible nature of the Yanyuwa in making sure that "traditions" are learned. Other information is also being acquired sometimes with the help of western forms of communication; for example, young men and women now learn the names of country and the Spirit Ancestor paths by listening to the older people but also by reading and making maps, oral history is recorded and the younger generations of Yanyuwa people read it, other information is encoded in rock and roll music.

The Yanyuwa have reached a point in time where they are free to evaluate what tradition offers, to assess its worth and the meanings that are transmitted and then to accept, modify or reject them as they choose. As Smolicz (1974:75-83) suggests:

Tradition is not inflexible. Like all cultural meanings, it can be both mastered and manipulated, before being incorporated into an individual's view of his life world.

In an indigenous society such as the Yanyuwa the knowledge that any one individual has in his or head becomes a symbol of the person's worth to the community. Such knowledge is entrusted to individuals to be passed on to the next generation. Some information the older people choose not to pass on, though it will be spoken of in general terms that such knowledge did once exist. An example of this is the many power songs once used to control the weather or harm individuals. Many are not being passed on, but the knowledge that they once existed and their reputed power is often a point of conversation. Tradition, then, strongly emphasises notions of continuity; but in contemporary times the societies to which many of the traditions belong are radically different from the source society from which the traditions arose. Therefore, many traditions must deal with considerable change if they are to survive; they must be reinterpreted if they are to survive. Such processes
are not written in "black and white" for all to see, they are complex, they are forever becoming; Swain (1993:178) makes this point clearly, we are "dealing with an inherently dynamic ontological fabric, constantly being made relevant to an everchanging world."

If we accept that tradition is by its very nature everchanging and ever being reinterpreted, it makes sense then to relegate the notion of the "traditional Aborigine" to academic fiction. To understand the traditions of the present demands a study of the traditions as they may have existed in the past. In such a community as Borroloola there are tensions as people strive to combine their present state of being with aspects of traditions based upon a belief that what has been handed down from the past has inherent value. At times these tensions are volatile.

In Borroloola there are often great difficulties in forging a link between the present and what has come from the past. There is a rising generation in the community who speak no Yanyuwa, have little experience with the full scope of the ceremonial traditions and seldom involve themselves in any other culturally significant experiences. They are indeed in danger of becoming a disinherited generation, who in periods of anger and sadness appear to bitterly resent their cultural losses, but can see no way to regain them.

An example of this concerns the learning of the song cycles used during the various Yanyuwa ceremonies. The older men and women are always telling the young men to learn them, and many of them try, but they always ask the older men for an explanation for what is being sung. Sometimes this occurs, but it is rare. The older men get carried away with the pleasure they receive in singing the songs and soon forget to tell the younger men, who do not understand the archaic Yanyuwa, what is being sung. The younger men lose interest and move away; the older men then tend to ridicule them; and thus the scene is set for argument and confrontation. For the younger men, there is no joy in singing words which have no meaning; for the older men there is no joy in singing the songs if they have to continually stop and translate the meanings.

At its most dramatic the increased violence and increase in substance
abuse are the more flagrant reflections of this crisis. There are Yanyuwa people who may fit partially into this group where violence and abuse are the norm, and into another group who are making their own decisions about their feelings of the traditions of their forebears. They are seeking their own balance between past and present time. Amongst this group are most of the younger generation of dugong and sea turtle hunters, who have wanted to learn these skills (see also Mearns (1994:266) who makes similar comments in regard to tradition and continuity).

The Borroloola of the 1990's presents a situation where there are two foci of identity: there are the "traditional" social obligations and skills, and the pressures of living in a modern town. They are the parameters between which everyday life hovers. A characteristic of this life is one in which there are shifting involvements. The issue is whether the dual foci of identity can continue to coexist. It is perhaps as Bullivant (1978:145) states: "the way of tradition, it would seem, is the way of tension."

I have attempted to describe in this chapter issues surrounding the concept of tradition. It is a word that carries many layers of meaning and understanding. Ultimately, tradition demands formulation so that transmission will take place. How it will be formulated depends upon individual choice, the time and place, and the location and reason for the transmission.

In journeying amongst the lives of the Yanyuwa people, and then attempting to commit a portrait of this journey to paper, there lie dangers. No matter how detailed the observations, it is difficult not to give the impression of stasis; in committing my observations to paper they then remain unchanged. For this reason it is important to give a sense of underlying structures, and a sense of setting in which the Yanyuwa move. The life of all people is dynamic, not an enclosed social organism, a static reality. All groups of people present us with fluid and shifting structures which consist of inter-related involvements, social obligations and activities. It is the sense of obligation to another which provides the dynamism of a society. The sense of obligation that people have toward each other and toward their sense of place, occurs unendingly, in almost all activities of the group and in
situations which are both formal and informal. Within this setting there moves that which is called tradition, which is in many ways a tool which people use to find ways to live with each other and their environment in one manner or another.

An exploration of the traditions that Yanyuwa have in relation to the environment they occupy, and to such creatures as the dugong and sea turtle comprise the bulk of this thesis. Issues relating to the retention or loss of certain traditions that have been raised in this chapter will be explored more fully in the following chapters. This thesis combines the research areas of anthropology and ethnobiology to explore the Yanyuwa perceptions of their traditions in relation to a marine environment. This presents two issues: firstly, within the field of ethnobiology there is still a dependency upon the construction of descriptive taxonomies (Ellen, 1982), and little substantial research that places the study of ethnobiology firmly within the parameters of the living community. Secondly, information on traditional marine source usage is scattered, often only given cursory examination and obtained in an indirect and superficial manner (Dye, 1993). The following chapter deals with issues surrounding indigenous maritime adaptations in Australia.
Chapter 3.

Aboriginal Maritime Adaptations: An Overview

3.1 Introduction.

In comparison with the amount of information that is available on other aspects of indigenous Australian society—kinship, local and social organisation, religion and material culture, for example—knowledge concerning traditional use of the sea and islands is relatively poor. In some cases, such as the Yanyuwa, and other Aboriginal groups who occupied the coastal areas of Northern Australia, they were not exclusively maritime people, since in past times, and also to some degree in contemporary times, they moved across large tracts of land that included coastline, off-shore islands and inland areas which were predominantly freshwater habitats. In addition, such Aboriginal groups as the Yanyuwa heavily exploited and still exploit the estuarine-mangrove and tidal environments. In the Yanyuwa case these areas extend many kilometres inland from the sea. However, the recorded knowledge of the economic activities of the Aboriginal groups who inhabit the coastal fringes of Northern Australia remains limited.

The lack of detailed knowledge about Aboriginal people having groups who may be considered major maritime cultures is surprising when the coastal regions of Australia offered some of the best and richest living areas for people on the whole of the Australian land mass. The coastal areas of Australia, generally speaking, are well watered and have abundant supplies of fish, shellfish, large sea animals such as dugong and sea turtle and, in some communities, the estuarine salt water crocodile. The sea and the coastal riverways provided major "highways" for easy access to other beach areas, island habitats and also inland areas. Historically, it would appear that the northern coastal areas of Australia were well populated; it has been estimated that there could have been, on average, as many as five to ten persons per square mile (Maddock, 1974). Early explorers and settlers first encountered and described Aboriginal people in coastal areas, while the
indigenous inhabitants of the more remote and arid Australian interior were often not encountered by explorers and settlers until very much later in the history of Australia. It is an unfortunate fact of Australian history that the indigenous coastal inhabitants of Australia bore the brunt of the violent excesses of the first wave of settlers, as well as suffering more than some of the inland groups from contact diseases such as influenza, measles and venereal disease. Many of the coastal cultures were among the first to disappear from the face of an old land that was being newly settled by people from Europe (Willey, 1979). The demand for new land for cattle station operations certainly affected the Aboriginal groups in the southwest Gulf of Carpentaria.

It is not known when Aboriginal people first arrived in Australia. It is generally agreed that it probably occurred between 40,000 and 60,000 years ago, although it should be remembered that this a Eurocentric view of history and that many indigenous Australians believe they never came from anywhere else. However, if we accept the general view of history, the first Aboriginal people travelled from the north or north west and arrived here by sea. These first Aboriginal people belonged to a maritime culture, and they had the capacity to travel considerable distances over the sea, in watercraft that would have had to have been secure enough to offer passage for men, women and children to reach the shore of Australia. At that time, however, the sea straits were probably narrower than they are today, but it would be readily admitted that these early sea travellers were courageous. Blainey (1975), Jones (1977) and White and O'Connell (1982) have discussed the routes that these early voyagers possibly took and that they were at that time considerably narrower than they are today. The widest gap that would have to have been crossed would have been about 160 kilometres. Mulvaney (1975) has indicated alternative routes via New Guinea, which at that time was a part of the greater Australian continent, but the seajourney required by this route was much longer.

The archaeological record may also assist in describing the cultures of northern Australia. A number of archaeologists have explored remains on
offshore islands, which indicate that Aboriginal people lived in these marine environments in times gone by. In particular, Beaton (1978) has studied the archaeology of the Great Barrier Reef. Glover (1984) has suggested that the source for stone tools found in the Perth basin is an area which is now covered by sea. In the Pilbara region of Western Australia, Lorblanchet has excavated shell middens and recorded rock art sites revealing details of maritime culture exceeding 6,000 years (Lorblanchet and Jones 1980). Work undertaken in Princess Charlotte Bay has established occupation from 5,000 years ago until the present (Minnegal 1984a & 1984b). ¹

In more recent times other Aboriginal adaptations took place, such as the developments of fish trapping techniques. In relatively recent historical times, their relationship with the Macassan traders from South East Asia meant that various changes to technology took place; one of the most important of these was the introduction of dugout canoes and iron which eventually replaced bark canoes and wooden harpoon points.

Information on the documented knowledge about indigenous usage of the marine environment can probably be best divided into a number of categories;

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¹ Little archaeological work has been done on the Sir Edward Pellew Islands. Some initial site recording work in this area was undertaken by Reay in the 1960's, McLaughlin during the years of 1975 to 1977, Haglund in 1975, Baker in the 1980's and some work by Bradley from 1981 until the present. There are many midden sites throughout the Pellews, but no serious excavations have been undertaken and no dating of samples. There are no published data on these sites except for four sites documented by Bradley (1991).

Most of these archaeological sites on the Pellew Islands with marine evidence are shell middens and mounds. Many of these have been found at, or very close to, the present littoral zone, which, because of the effects of weather such as cyclones are not well preserved. There are some others which are slightly further inland, in areas where there has been a fair degree of preservation. These sites include evidence for exploitation of a wide range of fish and shellfish, as well as dugong and turtles. Other sites on the Pellews indicating a long term human presence are marked by human skeletal remains and rock art sites. The motifs preserved in the rock art deal with both the marine and island environments.
1. Comments and observations by early explorers and settlers about Aboriginal people and their use of the sea.

2. Works by Researchers who have studied Aboriginal society, which are predominantly biased towards material culture, with little or no comment on the objects' position within the social or economic environment.

3. Accounts by trained anthropologists, of marine based cultures.

4. Recent literature concerning Aboriginal rights to the sea, their interest in it and their own perceived ownership of it. Most of this literature is a result of legal and political movements where Aboriginal people seek control and access to their areas of sea, and have sought support from organisations and researchers in helping them to state their claims.

3.2 Observations by Early European Explorers.

The first indigenous people encountered by European explorers inhabited the coastal fringe. Amongst the first to make comment was William Dampier in 1688, who wrote about the use of the maritime environment by indigenous people (Dampier in Willey 1979). The early explorers also noted other activities and material cultural items used by the Aboriginal people, Joseph Banks on board the *Endeavour* as it entered Botany Bay on the 29th April 1770 observed the use of canoes and fishing spears (Banks in Willey 1979).

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Footnote 1 cont....

Geologically the Sir Edward Pellew islands are not that old, and the original prehistoric inhabitants of this area of the Gulf would have been faced with dramatic changes to their environment at the end of the last ice age. Therefore the ancestors of the present day Yanyuwa people would have had a change in knowledge accumulation with the changing of the coastal, littoral and offshore environments taking place with the change in sea level, which took place between 8,000 and 6,000 years ago.
Other early observers concentrated more on the material culture of the people they observed. Sydney Parkinson, the ship's artist aboard the *Endeavour*, made some quite detailed drawings of various watercraft in his journals (Parkinson 1773).

From these early observations grew an awareness that various groups of Aboriginal people had differing ways of subsisting, which led David Collins to comment in 1798:

The natives who live in the woods and on the margins of rivers are compelled to seek a different subsistence [from those on the coast] and are driven to harder exercise of their abilities to procure it.

*(1975[1798]: 462)*

By the beginning of the nineteenth century when the pioneering settlement was relatively well established and people began to look to exploring the continent of Australia, more and more information was gathered by various individuals. When reviewed, it is possible to begin to build up an idea of the way Aboriginal people fished using nets as well as spears. It became apparent they had a variety of different watercraft at their disposal, including bark, dugout and outrigger canoes as well as rafts.

Matthew Flinders, who sailed the northern coasts of Australia between 1801 and 1803, also noted the use of canoes by Aboriginal people. He made general comments as well in regard to the use of the maritime environment and mentions, among other things, "turtle feasts" (Flinders 1814: 171).

Many of the early settlers accounts contain references to the Aboriginal people of the coastal areas. Most of them however, give little detail other than descriptive accounts of the material culture of the Aboriginal people living by their sea, their use of fish traps, and, in particular, their use of canoes.

### 3.3 Early ethnography: Domination of the canoe culture.

General information concerning Aboriginal use of the sea has remained
comparatively poor whilst information on canoes is quite extensive. Why the early observers and researchers made such detailed comments on the canoe is an interesting question. It may be that the exotic nature of bark and dugout canoes captured their imagination, or that of all the material culture items the indigenous Australians possessed, the canoes were one object which bore similarities to their own cultural experiences.

While Flinders made observations of watercraft and the remains of "turtle feasts", it was left to other writers to study such watercraft as canoes and to highlight differences in their construction and use. E.M. Curr, writing in 1883, noted details in canoe building as well as their use in hunting and fishing by coastal Aboriginal people. He was probably one of the first ethnographers to document accurately this aspect of indigenous material culture (Curr 1886).

Radcliffe-Brown, who is better known for his writings on social anthropology, also wrote an article on the rafts of western Australia (Radcliffe-Brown, 1916); while the Frobenius Expedition of 1938-9 documented a variety of watercraft, including dugout canoes, bark canoes and rafts (Lommel, 1952). Another significant writer on watercraft in Aboriginal Australia was J.R. Love, who described their use amongst the Warora in northern Australia in his classic work *Stone Age Bushman Today* (Love, 1936).

Watercraft such as log rafts are best documented from Western Australia, as described by Akerman, for example (1975, 1985), the watercraft of northern Australia however, falls into two main categories: dugout and bark canoes. Most of the bark canoes documented in the literature on Australian indigenous people, with the exception of the Yanyuwa, were made from a single piece of bark and gathered at the ends to form the prow and the stern (Spencer and Gillen 1912).

Much of the recorded use of bark canoes was for travel on the inland waterways, such as those practices well documented by Donald Thomson in the Arafura swamp of north east Arnhem Land. The canoes which Thomson recorded required constant repair and had to be caulked with grass and mud.
They were discarded at the end of the season. Thomson observed these canoes in Arnhem Land in the 1930's, and he recorded in detail their construction and their use in collecting magpie goose eggs (Thomson, 1939a). The people with whom he lived and worked also used dugout canoes; which they used to visit offshore islands and travel along the coast. Dugout canoes were of course more complex to build than the bark canoes, they were much heavier, but had the advantage of lasting for a longer period of time.

Writers such as Macknight (1972, 1976) and Baker (1988) have noted that dugout canoes of northern Australia had their origins in South East Asia, in particular, from the island of Celebes. It was from this location that the Macassans came to exploit the trepang, or beche-de-mer which was found in abundance in the shallow, warm seas of northern Australia. At the end of each gathering season the Macassans left their dugout canoes with the Aboriginal people who had served as part of their labour source.

When the Macassans no longer came to the shore of northern Australia, the Aboriginal people copied the design of these Asian dugout canoes using steel tools which they had acquired from the Macassans and from the more prevalent white explorers and settlers. Writers such as Macknight (1976), Thomson (1949), Warner (1969), Avery (1985) and Baker (1988, 1989a) all discuss the relationship of Aboriginal people with the Macassans in varying detail.

The indigenous people of Cape York used outrigger canoes (Thomson 1934), which were also constructed from hollowed out logs. The outrigger component of these canoes made the dugout canoe much more secure. It was an adaptation probably due to influences from the Torres Strait Islands and Papua New Guinea.

Despite the existing literature on how indigenous Australians utilise the marine environment there is little detail on economic, social and religious processes involved. The works listed above provided little or no detailed analysis, and therefore, are somewhat limited in their scope compared with the work of more contemporary anthropologists and researchers who have attempted to bring together the material cultural
items of the Aboriginal people of the coast with their way of life, beliefs, language, position and the importance that the objects play, or played, within their community. It should, however, be noted that such research as that mentioned above is useful in that it provides the beginnings upon which more research can be based and comparisons drawn, and at times may provide the only information on objects and behaviour that may long ago have ceased to have been constructed or enacted by various groups of people.

3.4 Research into coastal-maritime indigenous cultures.

Perhaps the first classic research to be undertaken in the northern coastal areas of Australia was by Lloyd Warner, documented in his book A Black Civilization (1969). This book describes his observations of the Murngin people, who are today better known as the Yolngu, of North East Arnhem Land. Warner studied a group who lived on the coast, but his interests were much more focused towards religion, ritual, social organisation, kinship and other social interaction. He only made general research into the areas of a marine based economy, making some mention of canoes, maritime hunting and the material culture associated with these activities. Warner did, however, research some of the details of social change and the influence of Macassan traders (Warner, 1969).

Donald Thomson worked in east Arnhem Land, particularly in the area around Blue Mud Bay, in 1935 and 1937. As with Warner, he also wrote of the effect of the Macassan traders on the indigenous ceremonial exchange cycle and trading routes in the region (Thomson, 1949). Thomson also spent some time at Cape York, where he documented in some detail dugong and fishing techniques as well as the culture of the coastal people in detail (Thomson, 1934a, 1934b, 1952, 1956). His note books at the Melbourne Museum, along with his massive collection of material culture items, are an invaluable insight into two of the maritime cultures of northern Australia. Rose (1961) undertook research in the 1950's on Groote Eylandt, writing in some detail concerning the effects on a traditional economy of the introduction of the dugout canoe.
Warner, Thomson and Rose stand out amongst the writers of this period, as they looked at the cultures they were studying as a whole, and observed and noted the way that the maritime aspects of the peoples' culture fitted with other aspects of their life. They did more than just simply describe the material culture items associated with the cultures they were studying.

In 1969 David Turner visited Groote Eylandt, by which time, the changes taking place because of modernisation of the island were quite obvious. In his book entitled *Tradition and Transformation* (1974), he describes the way that the island culture of the Anindilyakwa people had changed with the impact of mining, mission activity and other forms of modern technology, and how some of these things had replaced the older traditional institutions.

Despite these observations, little more has been done, on a wider scale, which begins to address the changes that have occurred, and are occurring, within the communities of Aboriginal people who have a maritime cultural base. Such things as the use of aluminium dinghies, modern nets, and new fishing techniques and the impact that these "new" material cultural "items" may have on the traditional economic systems, as well as contemporary social and political life in general, have not been well documented.

The changing patterns of maritime exploitation and the uses Aboriginal people make of the sea in contemporary times, in the context of their changing lifestyles and technologies, have not been addressed in detail. The effects of modern technologies and new ways of thinking on the populations of dugong, turtle and other floral and faunal communities have received only scant attention. The first person to really address any of these issues was Chase in his article, "Dugongs and the Australian Cultural System: Some Introductory Remarks" (1979). He makes the important comment that:

In the case of the exploitation of a "traditional" resource, the
actual behaviour of the capture is but one small part of a highly complex system of knowledge, beliefs and attitudes which relate the resources to a wider structure of people and environments. This often involves the mythological past and elements from it which still continue.

(Chase 1979:65)

The article by Chase was followed by another study by Marsh, Gardiner and Heinsohn, of dugong hunting in the Wellesley Islands amongst the Lardil people. The results of their study were published under the title, "Present-day Hunting and Distribution of Dugong in the Wellesley Islands (Queensland) - Implications for Conservation" (1981). In addition to these studies, Nietschmann (1983, 1985, 1989) has studied in considerable detail the relationship the people of the Torres Strait have to their island and maritime environment as well as to such creatures as the dugong and sea turtle. Likewise, Smith (1987) has explored the use of marine resources by indigenous people living on the east coast of Cape York Peninsula. Johannes (1985) has explored issues relating to marine conservation amongst indigenous people in Northern Australia. Baldwin (1984) also raise interesting issues in relation to the management of the dugong population in northern Queensland, an issue which the indigenous populations of the Northern Territory have had not yet to consider.

Research undertaken in the last few decades has not just concentrated on the notion of change in indigenous maritime communities, such as that undertaken by Turner (1974). Other researchers began to explore and develop interest in the Aboriginal perception of the sea, seeing it not only as an economic food basket, but also as an important part of the coastal peoples' spiritual lives, and examining the place in which the sea occupied in traditional belief systems. The perception of the sea is an aspect of Aboriginal religious life which has received little attention, as most researchers have tended to concentrate their studies on the land, and have not recognised that the sea can also be viewed as a "landscape" which is imbued with sites, named
localities, restrictions and recognised prime economic zones.

One of the first studies of this kind was undertaken by R.M. Berndt in 1970, reported in a monograph called *The Sacred Site: The Western Arnhem Land Example*. Berndt documented the spiritual beliefs Aboriginal people held about the sea, the straits, reefs and offshore islands. Although Berndt did not specifically address the issue of maritime cultures, he did introduce a new concept in the study of coastal people, presenting an aspect of Aboriginal religious belief that had remained largely undocumented. In 1976 Berndt published an account documenting the ownership of both islands and sea in north east Arnhem Land (Berndt 1976a). Berndt demonstrated how it was that Spirit Beings of the creative era traversed both the land and the sea, and in so doing established clan territories, sacred sites and social organisation of the local people.

R.M Berndt and C.H Berndt undertook other research in areas just inland from the northern coast; one of the resulting works, *Man.Land and Myth* (1970), is a study of the Gunwinggu people of western Arnhem Land. A later book by Berndt, the *Love songs of Arnhem Land* (1976b), includes many songs collected from people of the coastal regions of northern Australia, and gives valuable insights into the complex structures coastal people have developed to reflect a part of the environment which dominates their lives.

Other studies have contributed to the growth of knowledge about the coast people of northern Australia. Altman (1982) wrote of the riverine and estuarine Gunwinggu in western Arnhem Land and provided detailed data on marine species. Altman also discussed the significance in economic, social and cultural terms of the exploitation of marine species.

Jeffrey Heath, a linguist working in south east Arnhem Land, has produced a variety of texts in the local languages such as Yolngu-matha, Wandarrang, Nunggubuyu and Mara which contain a rich variety of references to the use of the sea (Heath 1978, 1980a, 1980b, 1981). Other linguistic work based on the languages of people associated with maritime cultures has been reported by Evans (1992) and Bradley and Kirton (1992). What these linguistic works highlight are the complex and detailed
languages that maritime cultures have to express the coastal-marine environment.

In recent times other researchers have added finer details concerning Aboriginal peoples' relationship with the marine environment, such as Chase (1978, 1980) and Chase and Sutton (1981), where the use of the maritime environment on Cape York is explored in considerable detail. One work in particular is that by Betty Meehan in *Shellbed to Shell Midden* (1982); this as well as some others (1977a, 1977b, 1977c) provides explorations in the utilisation of the maritime environment. It was Meehan in conjunction with Jones (Jones and Meehan 1977) who provided a modern study of watercraft in Arnhem Land. Anderson (1982) describes in some detail the maritime economic system in a northern Queensland community. Peterson (1973) and Meehan (1988) have studied camp site locations among coastal people. There have also been studies of seafood and diet undertaken by O'Dea and Sinclair (1982), carried out on the Kimberley coast in Western Australia. In addition, Crawford (1983) has written on Aboriginal exploitation of marine resources in the Admiralty Gulf area of the Kimberley. Ohshima (1983a, 1983b) has studied the ecological and cultural diversity in Torres Strait in a comparison of Australia and New Guinea cultures, as well as producing an account of land use and sea surface use amongst maritime people. Akerman has undertaken extensive research amongst the coastal communities of the Kimberley, and studies the material culture and exploitation of the marine environment (1985). Levitt (1981) has written a very detailed account of plant use amongst the people on Groote Eylandt; much of this relates to the coastal regions of this island and the ethnobotanical knowledge that the Anindilyakwa people possess in relation to their environment. Waddy (1988) provides a rich and detailed resource into classification of species on Groote Eylandt.

Other research, much of it unpublished, has been carried out in coastal-maritime communities. Fisher (1984) has looked at Aboriginal Customary Law, while Pope (1967) has analysed the material culture items collected by Roth from Cape York Peninsula, which are housed at the
Australian Museum in Sydney.

A number of other modern studies have been conducted which relate to coastal-maritime people, but as with the bulk of anthropological work done in Australia, it has tended to look at issues of religion, social organisation and land ownership and its many expressions rather than being specifically interested in maritime cultures for their own sake. Writers such as Williams (1982, 1986), Reid (1983), Keen (1985), Sutton (1978), von Sturmer (1978), Clunies Ross and Hiatt (1977), and Morphy (1977, 1983, 1984) have all provided important information on coastal people, but the main focus of all their research has not been on the maritime aspects of their culture.

Researchers such as Chase have commented on Aboriginal proprietary interests in the sea, and as such, the sea may be seen as part of a group's territorial estate. Chase (1980) documents ownership of the seas in the eastern area of Cape York, making interesting observation that the people he worked with had knowledge of the Barrier Reef, some thirty kilometres offshore, before they started working with luggers. Chase in conjunction with Sutton (1978) describes Aboriginal ownership of the seas in the region of the Cape Keerweer in Queensland.

Avery (1985) worked with the Yanyuwa people, and, whilst acknowledging the importance of the sea and islands to these people, his research tended to concentrate on the intricacies of the kinship and subsection system. Likewise, Baker (1989a) in his research with the Yanyuwa people discusses in some detail the physical environment of Yanyuwa territory and discusses their pride in being sea people. He documents important human-geographical data about the Yanyuwa and their land, but his main area of research was documenting the complex issues that contributed to the Yanyuwa people leaving the islands and coastal regions to come and reside at Borroloola. Baker also provided some modern research into the use of dugout canoes (1988).

During the last twenty years there has been an increase in our knowledge of Australian indigenous cultures and societies, both of the people
who live in the interior regions of Australia and of those people who live on the coastal and island regions adjacent to the sea. However, no single work has focused on a maritime Aboriginal group culture, and attempted to understand the culture in terms of their relationship to the sea in such contexts as economy, ritual, society and environment. But having said this the question also has to be asked as to whether there are any totally maritime cultures. Most research indicates that while people may access the sea, and have important rights and obligations towards the maritime environment, there are times when the mainland and certain inland regions become important, as Trigger (1984) discusses in his work with people in the coastal areas of the Queensland-Northern Territory border. Likewise Jones (1980) provides valuable information in regard to the utilisation of the coastal savanna.

Coastal-maritime people were, and still are, at times forced back onto the mainland and inland areas due to seasonal changes and the desire for other foodstuffs. This is the case with the Yanyuwa people. What then has to be done, however, is to explore the balance between both these geographical areas, and to examine why, as in the case of the Yanyuwa, the sea, islands and coastal regions still provide the most important reference point for their existence and sense of their own history.

In more contemporary times the issues of indigenous groups having associations with the sea and territorial rights over it have been highlighted by legal frameworks such as the Land Rights Act (1976). This has meant that more detailed research has had to be undertaken in relation to the claims of indigenous people and their relationship with the coast and the sea.

3.5 Land Rights: The sea as "country".

In 1973 Justice Woodward undertook a Commission of Enquiry into the possibility of establishing Aboriginal Land Rights in the Northern Territory of Australia. Woodward took evidence from a large number of people, including a number of Aboriginal people living on settlements around the Northern Territory. After hearing about Aboriginal aspirations about
their lands and seas he came to an understanding that the notion of Aboriginal Land Rights may have to include the notion of Sea Rights. He wrote:

I accept that Aborigines make traditional claims to most, and probably all, off-shore islands. Their legends link those islands with the mainland because of the passage of mythical beings from one to the other. The effect of this is that the sea between also has significance. Certainly Aborigines generally regard estuaries, bays and waters immediately adjacent to the shoreline as being part of their land.

(Woodward, 1974)

It eventually transpired, however, that the Federal Land Rights legislation as it was passed in the Northern Territory in 1976 did not provide for ownership of the seas, but it did make provision for reciprocal legislation of the Northern Territory in relation to the making of laws, "regulating or prohibiting the entry of persons onto, or controlling fishing activities in, waters of the sea....within two kilometres of Aboriginal land". (Aboriginal Land Rights (N.T.) Act 1976, Section 73.1.d) The Northern Territory Aboriginal Land Act 1978 was enacted to fulfil this requirement. The complementary Act to the Land Rights Act was the Aboriginal Sacred Sites Protection Act (1979).

Researchers working under these Acts have had to change their focus. Some of these changes have meant, for example, that organisations such as the Aboriginal Land Areas Protection Authority, at the request from Aboriginal people, have had to delineate reefs, sand bars and mud banks as places of importance; sites in river mouths, on the sea bed or sea surface have been recorded, and in some instances they have been marked with specially signed buoys.

In such research, attention now had to be paid to the sea, the littoral zone, off-shore islands, reefs and marine resources, and the way Aboriginal people related to them. Studies began to be produced which examined Aboriginal uses of the seas, the territorial responsibilities over the sea, religious beliefs and their exploitation of the maritime environments, as all
these were now of importance. As a result, a growing body of research data now exists relating to Aboriginal peoples' relationships to the sea and coast. Unfortunately, most of it is unpublished and is securely housed in the offices of the Northern Land Council and the Aboriginal Land Areas Protection Authority.

The bulk of the material which has emerged from the Aboriginal Land Rights Act in the Northern Territory exists in the form of Land Claim books or Sea Closure Application books. Some of these works include Keen (1985), who undertook a review of the Sea Closure procedure in the Northern Territory, and Palmer (1984, 1985) discusses indigenous ownership of the sea and adjacent land in North East Arnhem Land and Groote Eylandt. Research undertaken by Avery and McLaughlin (1977), Brandl, Haritos, and Walsh, M. (1979), Bern and McLaughlin (1980), and Bradley (1992) has all been involved with areas of coastal country and adjacent seas and reefs.

The first sea closure under the Aboriginal Land Rights Act was at Milingimbi (Dreyfus and Dhulumburrrk, 1979), followed by an adjacent area known as Howard Island and Castlereagh Bay (Davis 1982). The work of the researchers provided a wealth of detailed data on Aboriginal use of, and associations with, the sea.

Other Sea Closure applications have been lodged: for Groote Eylandt, Croker Island in Western Arnhem Land and one for Bathurst and Melville Islands (Palmer 1984, Palmer and Brady 1984). None of these applications have yet been heard. Work is also being undertaken by Devitt and Peterson in relation to sea areas around Croker Island (pers.comm Nicolas Peterson and Jeannie Devitt 1996).

The interest in sea rights in the Northern Territory extended into Western Australia, and, Seaman, the Commissioner of the Aboriginal Land Inquiry, was asked to consider the extent to which water adjacent to Aboriginal land should be protected. He collected a considerable body of evidence from Aboriginal people which spoke of their attitudes towards, and interest in, the sea (Seaman 1984).

The Native Title Legislation, Native Title Act, 1993, or the "Mabo"
Legislation, introduced by the Federal Government in 1993 raises interesting questions for the future of indigenous peoples' relationship with the sea. Legally, it would appear that the question of native title to the sea is a complicated one. Most current opinion would have it that native title becomes progressively weaker the further one moves away from the coast. This is a question which will be ultimately answered by the courts. Such people as the Yanyuwa have always said that the sea, the "underwater country" such as the sea grass beds and reefs, do have owners, and that like the country on "dry land" they are owned and managed. It is for these reasons that many Yanyuwa people still have reservations about such activities as are being undertaken by McArthur River Mining at Bing Bong Station; there is a firm belief that activities of the mining company do not override the older indigenous forms of coastal and sea tenure. These questions and others will be the subject of future explorations into the relationship of indigenous people to the maritime environment (see also Stephenson (1993); Stephenson and Ratnapala (1995).

3.6 Concluding Comments.

The presentation in this chapter has attempted to review the status of the knowledge of Aboriginal use of the sea and coastal environment in both published and unpublished literature. It has also provided an overview of western perceptions of Aboriginal people associated with the coastal environments.

Early writings tend to reflect an enthocentric curiosity about a culture which was alien and distant. Some of the earlier observers regarded the Aboriginal people as relics of the Stone Age era. Later, more specific scientific enquiry moved away from such short sighted biases and attempts were made to understand the nature of Aboriginal kinship and religious organisation. However, until fairly recent times this research was still constrained by the traditional form of anthropology which concentrated on religion, totemism, social organisation, kinship and marriage. There have been few exceptions to this, but researchers such as Berndt
(1970), Peterson (1971), Sutton (1978), Chase (1979), and Meehan (1982) have given us a much broader understanding of Aboriginal spiritual and economic relationships to the land and sea which they occupy. Generally speaking, though, the coastal-sea domains have remained matters which have not been discussed in detail by anthropologists.

In recent years a shift has occurred in our understandings of the coastal-sea environments of the Aboriginal people of northern Australia. This has in part been a result of Aboriginal people demanding to be heard and of the development of legal processes which allow for Aboriginal people to be heard. Researchers and anthropologists now have to look at the marine environments as an extension of the land, an extension which can be owned and which has its own associated religious and economic traditions.

All of the early work which has been done on coastal northern Australia provides a valuable foundation from which to undertake new research into the sea and the way in which Aboriginal people have used it and are still using it. So far in the history of indigenous claims to land there has been no substantive case which has been totally associated with the investigation of customary marine tenure. It has always been a peripheral discussion, but, will in all probability—due to factors such as the Native Title Legislation—be a major focus for the next decade or so as indigenous groups who have relationships with the maritime environment explore their rights to it, in relation to western law structures. It is then that the research from the past will become increasingly important as people seek to use the records of the past to maintain the validity of the rights in the present.
Chapter 4.

The Yanyuwa people: language, place and history

We are people,
whose spirits are from the sea;
We are people who are
kin to the islands.
(Dinah Norman, Annie Karrakyn, Eileen Mcdinny)

4.1 Introduction.

The aim of this chapter is to document the historical presence of the Yanyuwa people in the Sir Edward Pellew Islands and the south west Gulf of Carpentaria in general. A brief summary is made of some of the main features of the Yanyuwa language, and a general discussion of Yanyuwa contact with the Macassan traders is included, followed by other events until the Second World War.

Discussion also includes early European exploration and their observations of the Yanyuwa presence on the landscape, as well as some Yanyuwa comment on the initial stages of white contact. Some of these contacts have had a profound effect on such activities as dugong and sea turtle hunting. The latter part of this chapter gives an overview of significant events in the lives of the Yanyuwa since the Second World War, including the pastoral industry, tourism, land claims and mining developments.

4.2 The Yanyuwa people and their language.

The Sir Edward Pellew Group of Islands, the Bing Bong area and the delta regions of the McArthur River and Wearyan River up to their tidal limits are identified as Yanyuwa country (see Map 2).

The term Yanyuwa is the name which the people use to refer to themselves, sometimes the term Anyuwa is used by older speakers of the language. As a group, the Yanyuwa often collectively call themselves; \textit{i-i-Anthawirriyarra}, which means "those people whose spiritual and cultural
Map 2. Approximate Linguistic Boundaries In The South West Gulf of Carpentaria.
heritage is associated with the sea".

There is an archaic term, once used by the Yanyuwa to describe themselves, which was *li-wunguwarra ki-wurrwu*, literally meaning, "the people who belong to the sand beach country". The term was specifically related to the islands and the special type of life that was developed there (pers.comm Tim Rakawurlma 1980 and Kirton 1991).

Despite the enormous changes which have had an impact upon the Yanyuwa people they still strongly identify with their marine and coastal origins. The country of the Yanyuwa is still a source of pride among all generations. People often discuss their ancestors’ exploits as well as their own throughout the islands, the sea and coastal regions of their country. In many respects the islands have become for the Yanyuwa a cultural reservoir, both for certain physical objects which are located there, and also as a source from which social strength and integrity can be drawn.

This relationship with the island and coastal country is also reflected within the Yanyuwa language. For instance, when people are fishing on the mainland and within the delta systems of the various creeks and rivers, the activity is described as *wardjangkayarra*, but immediately as one moves to the islands where fishing takes place off beaches or on reefs, the activity is described as *akarimantharra*. This word is described as being "island speech".

The term Yanyuwa¹ is used by the people to describe themselves, whilst the Garrwa people to the east and the Gudanji people to the south west use the term Yanyula. The Mara, Alawa and Nunggubuyu people to the north west and north know the Yanyuwa as the Wardirri.

The Yanyuwa know the Garrwa people as Arrwa and the Mara people as either Marra or Marranabala, while in past times the Alawa people were known as Larrwala. The term Gudanji is used by the Yanyuwa without any variation.

¹ Within the literature of the last one hundred years the term Yanyuwa has been recorded in many different ways as the following examples highlight: Yanula, Yanular, Anjula, Anula, Anyoola, Anyuwa, Yanyuwa, Ainula, Anuwa, Leeanuwa, Jaanjula, Waddirri and Wadere (Tindale 1974).
Historically, two other groups once existed as neighbours to the Yanyuwa people; they were the Wilangarra and Binbingka. The Wilangarra occupied territory to the west of Borroloola, which ran down to the coast in the area of present day Bing Bong Station and Rosie Creek.

Thus, the neighbours of the Wilangarra were the Mara people to the north and north-west, to the south the Binbingka and Gudanji and to the east the Yanyuwa. Today there are no Wilangarra people left. As a group they were decimated in the initial contact period (Avery 1985; Baker 1989a). Nobody exists with any knowledge of the language, which older Yanyuwa people say sounded akin to Yanyuwa. There is no written record of the language. The first reference to this group was made by Stratton (1892) and by Spencer and Gillen (1901, 1904).

With the demise of the Wilangarra early this century, the Yanyuwa occupied their lands in the vicinity of Bing Bong Station and some inland areas along the Batten Creek, while the Mara people occupied the area just south of Rosie Creek and to the north and west of this locality. Such “takeovers” were based upon a history of intermarriage, shared responsibilities in a number of ceremonies and rights of succession, being granted to the children of the Yanyuwa-Wilangarra unions.

The Binbingka people no longer exist as a group, although there are a number of people who had grandparents who were Binbingka. The Gudanji have taken responsibility for the Binbingka country along the headwaters of the Batten Creek while the Yanyuwa are now responsible for Binbingka country in the immediate area of Borroloola to the south and west. As a group the Binbingka were first mentioned by Stretton (1892), and Spencer and Gillen undertook a substantial amount of their “Borroloola fieldwork” with Binbingka informants (Spencer 1901; Spencer and Gillen 1904).

In relation to the mainland, the Yanyuwa see the south eastern limit of their country being somewhere in the vicinity of the tidal limit of the Wearyan River, the north eastern mainland limit being south of Vanderlin Island, and the western limit lies in the area of Bing Bong Station. The southern limit of their country being just south of the Borroloola township, and the western limit lies just above the contemporary Batten Creek.
crossing (see Map2).

Contemporary Yanyuwa people disagree with the map of Norman B. Tindale (1974) which shows Yanyuwa country stretching as far east as the Queensland border. This eastern country the Yanyuwa identify as being Garrwa country (Map 3).

Tindale (1974) also identifies the Wadere (sic) as a separate language group inhabiting land in the area of Rosie Creek and Nathan River. But this is in actual fact Mara country; as mentioned above, the term Wadere used by Tindale is a Mara term for the Yanyuwa.

Vanderlin Island is also shown on the map of Tindale to be the country of the Walu people. Over a period of 10 years I tried to find out who these people may be. All of the Yanyuwa people I have worked with have had no idea to whom this name is meant to refer. A similar term is also mentioned by Stretton in 1892, when he makes reference to "130 leewaloo" (sic) (Ii-Walu = the Walu people) living on Vanderlin island (Stretton, 1892:24). The only suggestion the present day Yanyuwa people can make, regarding this name is that it may represent the Yanyuwa pronoun alu, meaning “them” or “those others”. Whatever the source of the word, it is not one which is recognised by contemporary Yanyuwa speakers. To be fair to Tindale, however, it must be stated that he did no actual fieldwork in the area and relied on evidence and data collected by others.

4.3 Yanyuwa: the language.

Yanyuwa has been described in detail by Kirton (1967, 1970, 1971a, 1971b, 1976, 1978, 1987, 1988), Kirton and Timothy (1977, 1982), Kirton and Charlie (1978), Bradley (1988) and Bradley and Kirton (1992). It is enough to state here that Yanyuwa is a complex language having 16 noun classes (Table 1). As a result of this complexity a study of Yanyuwa nouns alone leads into a tapestry which highlights inter-relationships among the speakers, as well as describing the relationship that people and other living things have with the environment where they live.

Three other interesting feature of the language are island speech, male and female dialects, and detailed speech forms for describing location and
4.3.1 Island Speech:

Certain words are referred to as "island speech" or *wuka ki-anthawu*, "words for the sea". When the Yanyuwa are on the islands or travelling on the sea these are used to replace mainland terms. There are, no hard-and-fast rules about the use of these words, but when on the islands it is the preferred form of speech, and people will correct one another if they use an inappropriate term. One example is the word for 'fire' which is *buyuka* on the mainland and *buji* *buji* in island speech. Certain other words change during dugong and sea turtle hunting; these are discussed in Chapter 10.

4.3.2 Male and female speech forms:

A unique feature of the Yanyuwa language is its system of distinct dialects for male and female speakers. It is the prefixes of the language which are predominantly effected by the two dialects. The prefixes change the way that certain noun categories, pronouns, verbs and relators are pronounced. All of these differences, however, relate back to two noun classes, for Male and Masculine words. The men's dialect unites the two into a single Male-Masculine class, and, for the most part, it uses the male forms of the women's dialect to represent the combined class. There is no special name for these dialects, just *wuka liyi-nhanawawu*, "speech for the women" and *wuka liyi-wuluwu*, "speech for the men". The Yanyuwa themselves can offer no reason for the dialect differences, and they merely say, "It's just the way it is...no other reason". The anthropologist John Avery (1985:145-532) has hypothesised that the dialects derive from very rigid gender role differentiation with the islands and sea being the domain of the men and the mainland the domain of the women.

4.3.3 Location and direction.

In Yanyuwa the process of hearing the language trains the listener to be consciously aware of location, relative location and direction. Statements involving movement, or location must be accompanied by the necessary
### Table 1. Yanyuwa Noun Classes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Class</th>
<th>Identifying Prefix</th>
<th>Typical Category</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Class 1.</td>
<td><em>rra-</em></td>
<td>female</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Class 2.</td>
<td><em>nya-</em> (women's speech)</td>
<td>male</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Class 3.</td>
<td><em>rra-</em></td>
<td>feminine</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Class 4.</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>masculine</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Class 5.</td>
<td><em>ma-</em></td>
<td>food (non-meat)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Class 6.</td>
<td><em>na-</em></td>
<td>arboreal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Class 7.</td>
<td><em>naru-</em></td>
<td>abstract</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Class 8.</td>
<td>possessive:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>i.e. <em>nda-</em> (your), <em>nanda-</em> (her)</td>
<td>body parts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><em>niwa-</em> (his) etc.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Class 9.</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>familiar kinship</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Class 10.</td>
<td>complex pronominal</td>
<td>formal kinship</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Class 11.</td>
<td>prefixes</td>
<td>formal kinship</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Class 12.</td>
<td>- / <em>rrri-</em> (dual)/ <em>li-</em> (plural)</td>
<td>group kinship</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Class 13.</td>
<td>*rra- / <em>nya-</em> (depending on sex of speaker)</td>
<td>personal names</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Class 14.</td>
<td>*rra- , some ceremonies classed as feminine, others masculine</td>
<td>ceremony names</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Class 15.</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>place names</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Adapted from Kirton 1971.
locative or directional information. Even when the direction or location is obvious, a statement is incomplete until all the locative and/or directional information is included. For example, if a speaker says *ka-wingka ki-waliyangulu*, 'he went to the islands', this would be considered an incomplete utterance unless the directional *nguthundakarilu*, 'to the north' is added.

These statements can become quite complex. When watching a dugong coming towards a boat, it was described as 'on the east side of us, coming from the south', *akarramba kari-ngamala*. Thus, it could be said that the language is geared towards excessive specificity and a degree of redundancy.

Such detail means however, that when travelling to locations on the islands, for example, quite detailed descriptions can be given in regard to position of any given locality. An example is given below describing the place names on the east and north eastern coastline of South West Island.

In the north, on the west side, coming from Marani [mouth of the McArthur River], there is an island. on the south east side of the island is Wukarrala, then to the north Nganthaa, a little beach, then Wubinja, then Anthawarra, a big lagoon is there called Kandangabunawabija just in the south in the mangroves is Abuyi, a Mosquito Dreaming. From Anthawarra is Yulbarra, then a little way to the north Wukuri, changing westwards Wumanthala, then further west Mandawalangka and Minyadawiji, well waters are there, then northwards on the east side of the peninsula is Manankalamba, and then the peninsula all the way north is Liwarrangka, and then north again into the sea is the reef close by the peninsula, the reef is called Lilumuthumula.

*(Tim Rakawurlma, field diary 1984)*

Detail such as described above in Yanyuwanarratives often allows for detailed analysis of patterns of hunting and other data of potential value about the ecology of the dugong and sea turtle. Some of this is discussed in Chapters 8 through to 11.
4.4 The Macassan traders.

Until early this century the Pellew islands were visited annually by fishermen from Macassar, a major port now known as Ujung Pandang in the Indonesian island of Sulawesi. The term Macassan is now used to describe any person who came on the annual fleet of praus. They travelled to the northern shores of Australia for the purpose of collecting beche-de-mer or trepang (Macknight 1969, 1972, 1976; Baker 1989a and Mitchell 1994). There were until the late 1980's Yanyuwa men and women who still remembered the Macassans working throughout the Pellews. Yanyuwa men and women worked for the Macassans and traded the shell of the hawksbill turtle and shark fin in exchange for tobacco, steel axes, steel harpoon points and dugout canoes.

Evidence of Macassan activity on the Pellew islands is of two kinds. One is the presence of stone lines, which were constructed as fireplaces, onto which were placed the cauldrons or processing pots in which the trepang were boiled as part of the preserving process. The other, often found in conjunction with these stone lines, is the presence of large stands of tamarind trees (Tamarindus indica), nukurnu in Yanyuwa. Fragments of china, glassware and pottery can also occasionally be found at these sites. Macassan sites can be found on West Island, South West Island, Centre Island, North Island, Red Islet, Vanderlin Island and Little Vanderlin Island.

One of the first written records of the Macassan presence on the Pellew islands was made by Matthew Flinders as he mapped the coast line of Australia in 1802. He made the following description of a recently abandoned Macassan camp site in the Pellew islands in his book, Voyage to Terra Australis.

Indications of some foreign people having visited, this group were almost as numerous, and as widely extended as those left by the natives. Besides pieces of earthen jars and trees cut with axes, we found remnants of bamboo lattice work, palm leaves sewed with cotton thread into the form of such hats as are worn by the Chinese ...... A wooden anchor of one fluke, and three boat rudders of violet wood
were also found; but what puzzled me the most was a collection of stones piled together in a line resembling a low wall, with short lines running perpendicularly at the back, dividing the space behind into compartments. In each of these were the remains of a charcoal fire, and all the wood near at hand, had been cut down..... it was evident that these people were Asiatics, but of what particular nation, or what their business here, could not be ascertained. (Flinders, 1814. Vol.2. 172-173)

In the early 1890's, the Special Magistrate at Borroloola, W.G. Stretton, in a report to the Royal Society of South Australia makes a somewhat colourful remark in regard to the Yanyuwa:

The name of this tribe is Leeanuwa(sic).....The Malay cast of feature is very pronounced, and there are at the present time several half-castes. The face is much sharper than that of the usual native type; ...and his characteristic cunning and braggadocio has with these become more strongly developed than in the more inland tribes. (Stretton: 1892-93: 227-228)

During a voyage from Darwin to Borroloola, Alfred Searcy observed the Macassans in the Pellew islands and describes in a general way the appearance of the Macassans at work in the islands:

....we went on to the McArthur River, passing through the Pellew group of islands near the mouth. As we rounded one of the islands, we suddenly opened out a very charming picture. Four proas were at work, on the shore the usual smoke-houses, backed up by high hills covered with deep green foliage. Between us and the Malay vessels were a number of dredging canoes at work, all under sail.....The Malays call this place Deena Seede. (Searcy 1912: 120-121)

The impact of the Macassan culture on the Yanyuwa was not as pervasive as that which occurred in such places as North East Arnhem Land (see Berndt
1954, Macknight 1976 and Walker and Zorc 1981). The Yanyuwa language contains at least thirteen words which are of Macassan origin (Bradley and Kirton 1992) as well as at least five place names on the islands.

Most of the Macassan terms are still used regularly by Yanyuwa speakers, although some words in special circumstances. For example, the Macassan derived word a-libaliba for dugout canoe has become the avoidance dialect term for dugout canoe whilst the everyday term is a-muwarda.

There are also personal names in Yanyuwa which have been said to have been given to Yanyuwa men by the Macassans, such names as Burrayi, Babatharrija and Bungkawakayu. Of these names only the last can be positively identified as being Macassan in origin. The stem of the name is bungkawa which is a Macassan term meaning leader. In Yanyuwa it is used to refer to a Macassan man. All of these names have now entered into the general store of personal names. These names, as with the more traditional personal names, are now associated intimately with the islands and past human and spiritual ancestors.

The Macassan visits to the Pellew islands ended abruptly in 1907 due to legislation by the South Australian Government (Macknight 1976:125), in what was an era of increasing demand for a White Australia Policy. Baker (1989a:152) comments that for the Yanyuwa their perceptions of the Macassan times are "tinged with sadness and a view of a past golden era." Some of this view is based upon the respect which the Macassans showed for the Yanyuwa who worked for them and their respect for conventions based upon traditional Law, such as the way in which Yanyuwa women were treated, which was in sharp contrast to the way they would be treated by white settlers.

More importantly, in terms of economics, the Yanyuwa were provided with dugout canoes and steel harpoon points by these visitors from South East Asia which enabled them to carry out a much more effective utilisation of the islands and marine environment. The effect that such technology had on the Yanyuwa pursuit of dugong and sea turtle will be discussed further on in this work.
4.5 European exploration.

As Heeres (1899:vi) outlines, Abel Janzoon Tasman was probably the first European to have seen the Sir Edward Pellew islands as his ship, the Limmen and two other ships sailed through the Gulf of Carpentaria in 1644. Heeres makes mention of a number of other Dutch explorers who had passed through the area but had not seen the Pellews. Tasman, however, did see the Pellews, but from such a distance that he thought Cape Vanderlin, which he named, was an extension of the mainland.

Matthew Flinders sailed around, and named the Pellew islands the Pellew Group in 1802. He notes (1814:Vol.2:169) how he navigated the area with the aid of an "old Dutch chart", and makes reference to the mistake of Cape Vanderlin being considered part of the mainland (1814:170) speculating on whether this was because the Dutch had made only a cursory examination of the area or whether perhaps the landscape had been dramatically changed.

Flinders named many of the more prominent features of the islands and his journals also provide the first detailed account of an Aboriginal presence over the islands. He recognised the possibility of fixed inhabitants in the area. His observations of Aboriginal utilisation of local food resources and ceremonial objects correlate with present foraging practices and currently revered ritual objects. He discovered bark canoes on North Island (Flinders 1814:172) but considered them so well made he doubted they were of Aboriginal construction. He recorded that on Vanderlin Island:

There were foot marks of men, dogs and kangaroos (sic), and tracks of turtle near the shore; but none of the men nor the animals were seen. (1814:164).

He also noted what he called "Indians" paddling a canoe along the east side of Vanderlin Island and sighted "thirty-five of them looking at the ship" (1814:164).

Flinders commented that on most of the beaches and smaller islands there were turtle tracks, and it was here that the "remains of turtle feasts
were generally found" (1814:171). He also comments that, "there were traces of Indians on all the islands, both large and small, but the latter are visited only at times"(1814:171). In addition, Flinders felt that "these people seemed to be....desirous of avoiding communication....for we saw them only at a distance, from the ship"(1814:171).

On the mainland, the explorers Liechhardt (1867) and Gregory (1861) travelled close to Yanyuwa country, although much of the region they crossed was the country of other groups such as the Garrwa, Binbingka, Wilangarra and Mara. They saw Aboriginal people, and described their camps, signs of hunting, gathering activities and items of their material culture.

By the mid 1880's there was considerable European movement in the Borroloola area as many gold diggers used it as part of a route to the gold fields of Pine Creek and Halls Creek in Western Australia. It also became part of an overland route for droving cattle.

In 1884 the McArthur River Station was established (Holmes 1966:137), and the Borroloola township was named and surveyed in 1885 (Searcy 1909:128). The name Borroloola has no meaning that I have been able to discover. It is the name of a local small lagoon associated with the activities of the Kangaroo Spirit Ancestor. Using Yanyuwa orthography the name Borroloola would be written as Burrulula.

The establishment of the township resulted in even more cattle passing through the area, as the pastoral industries of the northern and western Australia were opened up and stocked from properties in Queensland. McMinn (n.d.), the customs officer at Borroloola in 1886, estimates that in a three month period fifteen hundred cattle with three hundred people passed through the area.

The cattle drovers passed through the Borroloola area because the McArthur River, like most Gulf rivers, is easiest to cross near its tidal limits. In most instances a rocky bar exists at this point allowing an easy crossing.

Further downstream, the rivers widen out and become mangrove-lined
and have numerous estuaries and salt arms which are inhabited by salt water crocodiles and occasional hammerhead and tiger sharks. Further upstream, the rivers of the Gulf country flow through steep-sided gorges which cut through rugged sandstone country.

The crossing in the McArthur River near Borroloola, called Warralunlgu by the Yanyuwa, and another more precarious one 20 kilometres downstream at Wardawardala (Blackfellows Crossing) were important Aboriginal pathways in the area before and after the contact period. Another crossing called Yamirri was located some 2 kilometres downstream on the McArthur from its junction with the Carrington Channel. This crossing enabled people to cross onto Kangaroo Island, and some informants say it was then possible to walk all the way to South West Island at very low tides.

The period 1880 to 1910 was one of turmoil and conflict as fighting between Europeans and Aboriginal people accelerated. It is a time called the “wild times” by the Aboriginal people of the Gulf country. Avery and McLaughlin (1977:3) and Baker (1989a:200-213) believe that in part much of the violence was due to organised attempts by the Aboriginal people to repel Europeans from the region. Certainly, the historical sources describe a time when cattle killing was rife and casualties were taken on both sides (Searcy 1909:169,173; Pike 1972:207-7; Borroloola Police Journals 1886-1910).

The term “wild times” is common all throughout the south western Gulf of Carpentaria and generally refers to a time from before European entry into the area and through the various phases of Aboriginal interaction with the Europeans. It is a period that varied according to place and circumstances. The term wild can refer to the people and times. Wild people were those Aboriginal people who had little or no knowledge of European ways. Older Yanyuwa people also used the term bujirinja derived from ‘bush ranger’ to describe such people. The white people are also described as being wild in that they shot Aboriginal people without question and then “quietened down” the survivors.

A general assessment can be made that the Yanyuwa were less affected
by this conflict than the inland groups such as the Garrwa, Gudanji, Wilangarra and Binbingka. Baker (1989 a: 213) comments that the isolation of the Sir Edward Pellew Group lessened the impact of the wild times on the Yanyuwa as here there was less demand from pastoralists for land. Those Yanyuwa who stayed on the islands had much less contact with Europeans than their mainland neighbours.

This is not to say that the Yanyuwa did not suffer from the conflict or participate in organised reprisals against the European settlers and travellers, as the two examples below illustrate. The first story tells of the massacre of a large number of Yanyuwa men on the mainland whilst participating in ceremonies. The locality is known as Kawurrungkuma on the McPherson Creek some twenty kilometres north west from the present day Wearyan River crossing.

They were gathered there, my grandfathers and father's brothers they were performing ceremonies, the a-Kunabibi ceremony. They were Yanyuwa speakers, there were many of the old rainmakers there such men as Mamudibarrku, Mamudiyatha, Mangayi, Narnuwungkuwungku they were there. From the south those men came on horseback and shot them, for no reason they shot them, all of them, they were all dead. They then burnt them all, they burnt them until there was nothing but ashes. They killed all the old rainmakers, all the men of the Wawukarriya country. That is how it was then, wild times.

(Pyro Dirdiyalma; field diary 1993)

This next story tells of an organised attack on a lugger which was moored close to the southern end of Vanderlin Island. It is one of the few stories that exist which tell of conflict between Yanyuwa people and Europeans on the islands.

Those white men they had been shooting on the islands, on Vanderlin island near Yulbarra. They had all run away my father and my aunty,
they had hidden themselves in a lagoon. Alright those whitemen went back to their boat and slept. At night my father, his name was Vanderlin Island Jack, he went with his brothers and fathers, by bark canoe. quietly they went to that lugger. My father knocked on the door, one came out, he hit him, he killed him with a stone axe. and then another came he hit him, he killed him. Again another came and in the same way he was killed. One more came out but the axe was slippery with blood. he did not hit him in a good manner, he ran into the boat and got a gun, he fired shots, my father and the others dived overboard and went back to the island.

(Tim Timothy Rakawurlma :field diary 1990)

There is also an account given by Searcy (1907, 283-84) which documents the death of a European man who was most likely killed by Yanyuwa people. The story begins with a man by the name of O'Donohue wanting to obtain a "young girl from one of the river tribes". He had been told it was illegal to do so and was also highly dangerous, but continued and went off in his ketch to meet a Yanyuwa man on the opposite side of the river. Searcy continues,

In spite of all warnings, he anchored and proceeded in the dinghy towards the bank. The black walked on, the master following in his boat, until they were lost to sight round a bend, and that was the last ever seen of him....A thorough search was made at the spot where the master had disappeared, but all to no purpose. The party could hear the blacks, but could not get in touch with them. The river was examined to the mouth, but not a black was to be seen, nor trace of the dinghy to be found.

For those Yanyuwa who remained on the islands and the lower mainland areas of the Gulf, contact with Europeans became an option. While other Yanyuwa people did travel to Borroloola and began to reside there, and began

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2 I am indebted to the late Jean Kirton and Johnson Timothy for assistance with this translation.
to be visited by their relatives who would travel upstream to exchanged dugong meat and live sea turtles in exchange for tobacco, steel knives and axes before travelling back down to the islands. The people who remained on the islands and coast would also at times trade with the crews of various luggers as they travelled upstream to Borroloola.

Spencer and Gillen (1901:97-100), who visited Borroloola in 1901, also noted that the marine based economy of the Yanyuwa made survival easier compared to the mainland groups who lost much of their land to the cattle stations. Spencer described them living,

...down by the salt water and don't have much to do with the inland natives...(They) are not unfriendly but very independent. There is such a supply of food here that they can do without what we have to give them easily in fact they feed just about as well as we do. (Spencer 1901:97)

Spencer then goes on to suggest he views the Yanyuwa as independent because they had access to the sea and could capture such creatures as fish and dugong (1901:97). It is highly likely that the marine based economy of the Yanyuwa did make life somewhat easier for them than the mainland groups such as the Garrwa and Gudanji whose country was being taken over by the pastoralists.

During their stay at Borroloola Spencer and Gillen made quite detailed observations of Yanyuwa kinship terms, ceremonies and Dreamings (Spencer and Gillen 1912). They also collected many items of material culture, including a very fine bark canoe which had been paddled from the islands and up the McArthur to Borroloola (Spencer and Gillen 1904: 679-682) and they took a number of fine portraits depicting Yanyuwa men and women (Vanderwal 1982: 112-119).

During the first few decades of this century the Yanyuwa maintained continual occupation of the Pellew islands. The Government geologist visited the islands in 1907, recording the presence of Aboriginal people and their utilisation of the marine environment (Brown 1908).
In 1923 the H.M.A.S. Geranium was in the Pellew islands undertaking survey work. The ship's Surgeon-Lieutenant, W.E.J. Paradice, also observed an Aboriginal presence over the islands and made comment of this in his report (1924).

Paradice recorded a number of Yanyuwa place names for Vanderlin Island and North Island, and these correlate with present day names and localities (Paradice 1924: 20). Of the Yanyuwa, Paradice comments:

All the blacks who happened to be on Vanderlin Island came over to the ship in their canoes on each of our visits, and they appeared quite friendly. On the other hand, the blacks on North Island followed the ship from place to place. This we would tell from their fires, but they never came out to the ship, nor even permitted themselves to be seen by us......

(Paradice 1923:7).

Paradice also suggested that:

The Group is inhabited by a more or less nomadic tribe, who wander from island to island, and at times make their way to McArthur River, as far as Borroloola." (1923:7)

It was during the 1920’s that full-time contact with white settlers and the English language occurred in three main areas. I mention these areas in order of importance as perceived by the Yanyuwa themselves in relation to where they first acquired English, or heard it regularly.

The first area was the Wearyan River at Manangoora, where Bill Harney (Snr), with Andy Anderson and Horace Foster established a small cattle run. They also employed Yanyuwa people to gather salt off the nearby salt pans so that it could be sold. The second area was on Vanderlin Island where Steve Johnson (snr) established a base for trepanging operations and where Yanyuwa people worked.

Contemporary Yanyuwa people speak of these people as "settling them down" and teaching them "proper white fella English"; it was, they stress "not pidgin". They relate with pride stories of their ancestors who could
"really bust-em up English" or "speak English right through". However, the first language for all these people at this time was Yanyuwa.

The third area of contact was at Borroloola itself. Yanyuwa people who frequented the Borroloola area had been exposed to English from late in the last century. It was from Borroloola that a number of Yanyuwa men went working, early this century, on luggers which plied the coast from Broome to Townsville and as far north as New Guinea. These men learnt English as well Pidgin, which they brought back with them to Borroloola.

An increased tendency of the Yanyuwa to integrate into more permanent and larger camps also characterised this period. Some European trepangers utilised the islands from 1910 onwards, attracting Yanyuwa people as a labour force (Commonwealth Papers 1910:44; Baker 1989a:198-200). One of these, Steve Johnson (Snr), mentioned above, established a permanent home on the south western tip of Vanderlin Island which served as a semi-permanent home for a number of Yanyuwa people who were employed in the trepanging industry. As Baker (1989a) comments:

...the contact the Yanyuwa had with the European trepangers is very closely linked in Yanyuwa views with the Macassan times.

European trepanging in the Sir Edward Pellew Group is seen by the Yanyuwa to be in many ways a direct continuation of traditions established by the Macassans....The European trepangers on the Pellews were seen to be filling a gap left by the cessation of the Macassan visits. Yanyuwa responses to such visitors were vastly different to those of mainland Aboriginal people to pastoralists.

(1989a:197-98)

One of the difficulties in recording information about the second period of trepanging over the islands is that the older Yanyuwa informants who were involved tended to collapse the Macassan and European phases of trepanging together. This probably reflects the continuity that the Yanyuwa felt with such an industry and their importance to it for both the Macassan and European "bosses".

At this time the Yanyuwa and other Aboriginal groups were attracted to
a number of small European camps established on or near Yanyuwa land on the mainland between the Wearyan and the Calvert Rivers in the 1920's. These were to become the pastoral stations Manangoora, Greenbank and Seven Emus (Avery 1985:168).

Interesting insights into the life of the Yanyuwa people at this time are provided in the written works of the Northern Territory identity Bill Harney, who gathered trepang over the islands and spent time at Borroloola, Manangoora and Seven Emus. His writings represent valuable first hand records of life in the Gulf area at this time. His works mention in some detail the names of well remembered Yanyuwa men and women, ceremonial practices, gathering and preparing the fruit of the cycad palm at Manangoora, stock work, trade cycles and some detailed accounts of hunting and cooking dugong (Harney 1946, 1957 and 1958).

While he was living at Manangoora on the Wearyan River he observed on a number of occasions Yanyuwa dugong hunters bringing dugong upstream to cook. He relates one of these times as follows:

Faint at first, I heard the noise from down the river. As I listened, an old blackman, sitting beneath the shelter of an outdoor fire-place, cocked his ear to the sound. Then it came again, and we knew it to be the droning noise made by a trumpet shell blown by an Aboriginal hunter...

"Dugong!" As he spoke, a large canoe under a full press of sail came along the backwash of the river to escape the current. A blackman... was standing erect in its stern. As we watched, he sounded the trumpet-shell once more, then waved the paddle, once... twice, and again the old man spoke, "Two Dugong"... I could see other canoes coming up from the sea, their white sails standing out against the dark green mangroves of the shore. (Harney, 1958:129)

Manangoora became a very attractive site for the Yanyuwa people. The area was of ritual and economic significance. This locality is some twelve kilometres inland on the west bank of the Wearyan River, and a feature of the area are large stands of cycad palms. The Yanyuwa people call this area **Mawirla Awara**, a word which conveys meanings of a place where there is
much food, and which allows large groups of people to come together to use it. The cycad palms themselves have great spiritual significance, as they are associated with the important Tiger Shark Spirit Ancestor (Bradley 1988a).

The area of Manangoora was of importance before the arrival of Europeans (see Bradley 1988a, 1989, 1992 and Baker 1989a). With the arrival of the Europeans and the establishment of a small cattle station and a salt processing camp in the 1920's, more Aboriginal people were attracted to the region.

Baker makes an important point in relation to the European presence at Manangoora and how it changed Aboriginal settlement and movement. He comments:

Whereas previously people had only gathered there seasonally, they now established a permanent residence...when the Yanyuwa recall their days at Manangoora they stress the seasonal round of movement that initially occurred from this base. People continued to visit the other "big places"...it is very significant, however, that those stressing the seasonal range from Manangoora are older individuals. With time people spent longer of each year at Manangoora and made fewer movements to other locations. The reminiscences of younger people stress the semi-permanent life style that developed here (Baker 1989a:303-4).

Another factor in the gradual movement of Yanyuwa to semi-permanent camps was the establishment of a Police Rationing Depot at Borroloola in 1910. This depot started initially to look after the elderly. With the elderly came their younger relatives and family, and, Baker argues that the commencement of rationing represents a turning point in the history of the Yanyuwa:

By coming into Borroloola to obtain rations the elders had commenced what was to become a spiral of dependence (1989a:222)

This "coming in" process was to have enormous impacts upon the Yanyuwa community, many of which are still resonating through the
community. The following sections provides some detail in relation to the "coming in".

4. 6 "War Time", the Second World War.

The Second World War signalled the beginning of a permanent migration of Yanyuwa people from the islands to the mainland and to such central localities such as Borroloola. During the War the Australian Army established bases at Borroloola and on South West Island, utilising the high hill on the island as an observation post. This hill is known in Yanyuwa as Wirdijila. The base camp on the island was on the central east coast of South West Island at a locality known as Anthawarra (Walker and Walker 1986).

Older Yanyuwa people, who were children at the time, speak of giving fish, dugong and sea turtle meat to the soldiers, who would in return give them tinned beef and biscuits. The following remarks by Johnson Timothy highlight these events.

We used to go to the army camp there on the island, and we would get tea, sugar, biscuits and tin beef from them, and in return we would give them bags of mud crabs, the neck meat from the sea turtle and belly meat from the dugong, the soldiers used to cook a stew.

(Johnson Timothy in Bradley 1989:182-88)

The "war years" represent probably the last time when there were large numbers of Yanyuwa people moving over all of the islands. During the war many Yanyuwa people underwent dramatic enforced relocation. They tell of how relatives would travel from the islands into Borroloola with dugong and sea turtle meat, and to pick up tobacco and then disappear for months to a year or so, and in some instances they were not seen again on their own land. These people on arrival in Borroloola had been "recruited" for station work on the Barkly Tablelands.

Such actions are mentioned by Syd Kyle Little, a Native Affairs Officer (16/12/1948:2 in Trigger 1992:55). In a letter he reports that Aboriginal people at Manangoora had claimed that "police had always taken young men
away in handcuffs for no apparent reason" and the white owner had told him that these “boys” were then “forwarded...on to drovers or cattle stations on the Barkly Tablelands for work.”

During the Second World War Bill Harney was employed by Native Affairs, and he made the following emotive statement in regard to such events:

The coastal and river natives of the Pellew Group of Islands and the Wearyan and McArthur Rivers were, a few years ago, a strong tribe of people who lived by the sea in canoes and were a peaceful lot. During the last four years, a systematic cleaning out of these people has been going on and on my recent patrol of the Barkly Tablelands I was amazed at the number of coastal people who were sent out of Borroloola by the local protectors there...When I see the housing conditions of these coastal natives in their new places...and think of running streams, clean huts that they once built in their tribal lands, I cannot understand why the local protectors force people away to the bleak tablelands....If ever a tribe felt the full weight of this war then that one is the Yanyula (sic) tribe, who not five years ago, lived together and are now scattered over four hundred miles of plains country, far from their tribal lands and old folks....

(Harney, 1944: 1-20)

A pattern of residence developed once the Yanyuwa became involved in the pastoral industry. Borroloola became a permanent base for the old and infirm. The pastoral workers spent the dry seasons working on stations such as Brunette Downs and Anthony’s Lagoon. Once the wet commenced, they were trucked back to Borroloola, greatly increasing its Aboriginal population. This was still occurring to some extent during the 1970's. It is worth noting, however, that the Yanyuwa did not forget about their country, and even while working on cattle stations far from the coast activities would take place which would assist the Yanyuwa to visit their country on their return from the stations. Jean Kirton, a long time missionary linguist at Borroloola, gives the following example:
80.

When they came back there, maybe two or three canoes would come back on the backs of the trucks....there were all kinds of good things associated with the coming of the wet season, all the relatives coming back and new canoes coming back with them. (cited by Baker, 1988: 182)

Likewise during evidence given to the Land Commissioner by the Yanyuwa in the 1992 Warnarrwarnarr-Barranyi (Borroloola 2) Land Claim, people continually spoke of their desire to go back to their country on return from the cattle stations. As Dinah Norman comments:

We came back - it was my father’s country and we used to come back all the time. Stay along island.

(Aboriginal Land Commissioner 16.11.1992:77)

Further on in the evidence, Annie Karrakayn spoke of her feelings while away working on the cattle stations:

....every time when I’m away...I’m thinking about this island...this is my country here...my spirit coming back to my land because all our grandfather’s country. My mimi, my mother’s father...Warnarrwarnarr (South West Island),too, is important for me for my father’s country. (Ibid: 92-103)

4.7 Significant events since World War Two.

In 1949 the Native Affairs Branch set up the Government ration depot at Borroloola to cater for the growing Aboriginal population. The Welfare Ordinance was introduced in 1953 and ration depots like Borroloola became training institutions. An increasing number of Yanyuwa began to live permanently at Borroloola as facilities such as schools, health clinics and mass feeding kitchens were established.

In 1960 the Welfare Branch moved the Yanyuwa people from Borroloola to a locality known as Dangana on the Robinson River. Government officials alleged that the Yanyuwa accepted this move ‘with good grace’ (Annual Report 1960-61:76). This was far from the truth. The people were
moved using the Welfare truck, and the move was justified on the ground of controlling white influence on Aborigines at Borroloola. It also represented an attempt by Welfare to have total control over the lives of the Yanyuwa people. The great irony and contradiction in this decision was that it was considered necessary to move the Yanyuwa away from white influence in a period when the official government policy was assimilation (see also Baker 1989a).

The Yanyuwa residence at Dangana was short-lived, as they objected strongly. Dangana was not in Yanyuwa country, it was Garrwa country, it was far from the coast and considered by the Yanyuwa to be “scrub country”. After a number of deaths, and in response to the situation the Yanyuwa found themselves in, they made a number of canoes which enabled them to paddle out to sea, by way of the Robinson River, out to the islands and eventually back up the McArthur River to Borroloola.

Throughout the period of Native Affairs and later Welfare, the move into Borroloola was not total. Family groups were still travelling over the islands and coastal country. In 1950 people moved *en masse* to Manangoora to attend a-Kunabibi rituals (Ted Evans pers. comm. 1986). In 1959 a-Kunabibi and Wambuyungu rituals were held at Wulkuwulku lagoon on Kangaroo Island (Steve Johnson with Johnson Timothy pers. comm. 1987).

The Kangaroo Island ceremonies were the last time that Yanyuwa ritual life was centred in the “bush”, and older Yanyuwa people now speak with a degree of emotion about this event, recalling amongst other things, the number of dugout canoes that lined the banks of the McArthur and Carrington Channel.

Many of the canoes belonged to Mara and Wandarrang people who had travelled by sea from the Roper River and the Limmen Bight. Since that time all ceremonies have been performed in the immediate Borroloola area.

In the 1960’s and the 1970’s the introduction of equal wages for

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3 After the failed attempt at relocation, a Yanyuwa spokesperson, Mussolini Harvey, made suggestions to try and have a Yanyuwa settlement established on their own country at Anthawarra on the central east coast of South West Island. Nothing eventuated from this suggestion (Mussolini Harvey pers.comm., 1988).
Aboriginal pastoral workers resulted in fewer Yanyuwa men being employed in the cattle industry. New technologies like the use of helicopters for mustering also reduced numbers. This resulted in an even larger population of Yanyuwa living at Borroloola.

The period beginning in the late 1930's onwards also represents a time of great internal change, with the small Yanyuwa community struggling to maintain self identity and carrying on those "traditions" which they saw as being of vital importance to their identity and integrity. All periods of stress, however, result in some form of casualty, not all of which are sudden. The gradual decline of Yanyuwa as a vibrant and strong language has been one of these casualties. The factors associated with Yanyuwa language decline are many and are covered in considerable detail in Kirton (1987) and Bradley and Kirton (1992).

Among other events which were to prove major disruptions in the lives of the Yanyuwa people was the Hong Kong Flu epidemic in 1969. In one month eight elderly people died. The Yanyuwa abandoned their camp on the east bank of the McArthur River and moved to the west bank, where they established semi-permanent camps. More deaths occurred, and these camps were also abandoned as people moved again (see McDinny in Bradley and Kirton 1992: 565-68).

In 1974 the community was affected by major floods and this led to further moves. It was during this time that Government funding was given for housing projects. The initial housing projects respected the traditional residency patterns of the Yanyuwa people. However, the initial dispersal caused by the flu and floods resulted in a breakdown of the solidarity that was much in evidence when the camp was on the east bank of the river.

In 1984 Cyclone Kathy devastated the township of Borroloola. Most of the dwellings belonging to the Aboriginal population were destroyed. When new homes were built by contractors, little consultation was held with the people about where they wanted to live. Houses were built with little regard for Yanyuwa residence patterns, and people moved in because of sheer need for shelter, often far from other family and kin. This lack of consultation broke up the Yanyuwa community more than any other event in their recent
history. Families that prior to the cyclone were living in close proximity, if not sharing the same place of residence, were broken up. Parents with young families moved, leaving their older family members and relatives within the main Yanyuwa living area. Residential dispersion has resulted in disrupting, among other things, the teaching of various traditions associated with the dugong and sea turtle and the normal and spontaneous use of the most basic Yanyuwa language.

Residential dispersion, and the unprecedented deaths of a large number of senior Yanyuwa men between 1984 and 1995, a number of them in their early middle age, resulted in a lack of community solidarity and authority which was once exercised jointly by the senior men and women. It has also resulted in a cessation of some important ceremonies, not because there is no one with the knowledge, but because the shortage of knowledgeable men makes their performance practically impossible. The death of these men has also resulted in a reduction in the number of young men being trained as skilled and knowledgeable hunters of dugong and sea turtle.

4.8 Land claims, mining and local Government.

One of the most significant events in the recent history of the Yanyuwa was the 1977 Borroloola Land Claim (Avery 1982, 1985). Because it was the first, it was contested from a number of quarters not directly interested in the land under claim. But there were powerful local interests opposing the claim. Not the least among these was Mount Isa Mines (MIM), which holds leases to one of the world's largest deposits of lead, silver and zinc ore, about 60 kilometres south west of Borroloola (Avery 1982, 1983).

The leases fall within the McArthur River Station pastoral lease which MIM acquired in 1976. This station has long been sought by the Gudanji people.

The land being claimed was the Sir Edward Pellew Group of Islands, the Borroloola Town Common and a small area of land on the Robinson River (Toohey 1978). The title to the Borroloola Common was handed over in 1981 and the titles to Vanderlin Island and West Island were handed over in 1986. This was after intensive consultations which resulted in allowing
Mount Isa Mines to have corridor through the Borroloola Common, to give access to what was to be a proposed port facility on Centre Island. Mount Isa Mines also handed over to the Yanyuwa people in 1980 the lease for the western area of Bing Bong Station. Behind this exchange between Mount Isa Mines and the Yanyuwa lay a decade of negotiations and frustrations.

Bing Bong Station has always figured very much in the identity of the Yanyuwa people. It provides the only land route to the sea. It also has lagoons and savannah grasslands favoured for hunting. The area also has a long history as an important place for the coming together of large groups of people for hunting and ceremonies. Both old and young contemporary Yanyuwa people value Bing Bong as an important place in terms of continuity with the past. Bing Bong had long been favoured by McArthur River Mine as a possible route for the transport of their ore body from McArthur River, something which now, of course, is an actuality. The political events of the the last twenty five years which surround Bing Bong, have shown that the Yanyuwa people are prepared to negotiate.

The Borroloola Land Claim, in which Yanyuwa, Mara, Garwia and Gudanjii people were involved, was the first of a series of land claims to be heard by the Aboriginal Land Commissioner under the *Aboriginal Land Rights Act (Northern Territory)* 1976. After the hearing, the report by then Aboriginal Land Commissioner, Justice Toohey, lay on the desk of the then Minister for Aboriginal Affairs, lan Viner. Mount Isa Mines then bought Bing Bong and Tawallah Stations. With their three pastoral leases, the company controlled most of the land on three sides of the Borroloola Town Common which was part of the land claimed. Bing Bong lies between the Common and the Sir Edward Pellew Islands which were also claimed by the Yanyuwa people in the first land claim.

At that time Mount Isa Mines was a foreign company, and all of these purchases required the approval of the Foreign Investment Review Board which operated under the Foreign Takeovers Act. One basis for preventing a foreign takeover under this Act was a conflict between domestic policy and the take over; land rights for Aboriginals was policy (Eames 1978:7).

The Aboriginal Land Fund Commission, which was under the control of
the Minister for Aboriginal Affairs, as well as the Department of Aboriginal Affairs, had been notified of the Aboriginal interest in acquiring Bing Bong and McArthur River pastoral leases before the mining company's take-over bid.

There was little doubt that the mining company's purpose in buying these stations included a desire to have control of the area. In particular, it wanted a basis for bargaining with the Aboriginal people in the event that the initial land claim was successful (Eames 1978:8).

The mining company's interest in the first land claim was that it wanted easements for a road, powerlines, a pipeline and, possibly, a railway line through the Borroloola Town Common and out to Centre Island in the Pellew Group (see Map 4). Mount Isa Mines at that time wanted Centre Island as a site for a port town and a power station. South West Island, which lies between Centre Island and the coast, was needed for easements.

The eventual result of this first claim was that the Aboriginal Land Commissioner disputed the traditional ownership of South West Island. The irony in this was that it was South West island which had been constantly visited by Yanyuwa people before, during and after the land claim. Though he found traditional ownership established for Centre Island and North Island he did not recommend they be granted to the claimants. (Toohey 1978:19-34)

To protect their vital interests in these islands and in Bing Bong Station in particular, the Yanyuwa people had to negotiate with Mount Isa Mines and the Northern Territory Government. All they had to bargain with were the rights to the land that the Aboriginal Land Commissioner recommended be granted to them. Those people who were not recognised traditional owners of successfully claimed land had no bargaining power at all.

After the Federal Government had allowed Mount Isa Mines to purchase Bing Bong Station, Yanyuwa people were deeply upset. Nero Timothy, said at the time:

...Yanyuwa people really belong to Bing Bong and we really care about what we heard on the news that the Mining got that place so people here
Map 4. Proposed And Actual Routes By McArthur River Mines For Transportation Of Ore.
they really worry about it and they still camping out there... Yanyuwa people meet here and and have big dance and even go and teach our children how to hunt, show them how to get turtle and dugong, kangaroo. So you see that really bad and we want to try and get away from town too because this town will be a mining centre and we know this town will bring a real lot of bad people with different stuff in here and then they'll ruin this place. Ruin our people’s lives and we can’t make any ceremonies here because this place will be a town. So this is why people worry out here at Borroloola. So looks like they can’t have any freedom, any freedom at all, so you see. And this is what we want you you to see, the point about this place Bing Bong. So I don’t know why the miners got hold of it, I don’t know for what reason. (Nero Timothy in Eames 1978: 6)

The Aboriginal evidence in the Borroloola Land Claim was given in a court room in front of largely hostile audience of local Europeans and Government and mining representatives. There was little effective use of translators. No evidence was given by female land owners. Though evidence was heard in a general way from one woman in relation to hunting and gathering, she was not a claimant. It was an ordeal of great magnitude for the Yanyuwa people. Don Miller, who was spokesperson for South West Island, and who participated in the land claim commented:

Too hard, you know, only understood half English... stand up talk, they talk big word English, like we don’t know, make a man feel silly. Didn’t talk to all the people, you know right mob for country, they got mixed up story that judge mob. Too much government and mining mob jealous for our country.

(Don Miller field diary, 1988).

Because the Borroloola Land Claim was the first to be held under the 1976 Act many of the procedures which later became normal practice in subsequent land claims had not been established. No visits were made to sites on the land under question, and the hearing setting was poorly adapted to allow Aboriginal witnesses to feel confident in giving their evidence.

As a result of failing to secure title for their land the Yanyuwa people
approached the Northern land Council for a repeat claim, which was lodged in 1979 (Howie 1994:9). This second land claim hearing took place on Centre Island in November 1992, and was held in conditions which were vastly different from the first land claim in regard to site visitations (Plate 1), the presentation of indigenous evidence and the respect given to the Yanyuwa people on whose country the claim hearing was being held. During this second claim the Yanyuwa were confident, and although they found the process exhausting, it united the community in a way that had not happened for a long time.

In his recommendations to the Minister for Aboriginal Affairs, regarding the outcome of this second claim, the Aboriginal Land Commissioner, Justice Peter Gray comments:

The three claimant groups are part of an extraordinarily strong and vital community...the claimants as a community, ensure that spiritual affiliations towards country are part of the reality of life.... There is a powerful adherence to the Dreamings and a determined identification with country through them....There is a large group of adults, both men and women, who have not yet attained senior status, but who have acquired a very impressive amount of knowledge related to the areas claimed and their spiritual significance.... Rituals with respect to the hunting, killing and cooking of dugong and turtle continue to be practised and to be handed on to the younger generation:....In essence, the claimants retain a considerable determination that their community will be united by Yanyuwa identity.... The claimants as a group continue to live in a way which maximises elements of traditional Aboriginal life in the area and maintains and strengthens their identity as Yanyuwa people and their spiritual associations with their traditional country.... In my view, the degree of traditional attachment of the claimants to the lands claimed is properly described as very strong. (Gray 1996: 47-56)

At the time of writing, the Minister for Aboriginal Affairs, Senator Herron, has not responded to the report by the Land Commissioner, and has
made no recommendations as to whether the report should be accepted or other negotiations need yet to take place.

Borroloola of the late 1980's and 1990's is an open town, with the Yanyuwa and other Aboriginal groups being exposed to enormous pressures. as the white population increases and its support services grow, many Aboriginal people are very concerned about keeping their family relationships secure in the face of situations such as chronic unemployment. The surrounding cattle stations employ fewer and fewer men, and the actual township of Borroloola does not provide many employment opportunities.

The 1970's represents a period when attempts were made to give Aboriginal people more control over their own futures. The Land Rights Act was one such attempt. as was the Aboriginal Councils and Associations Act 1976. Under the provisions of this act, Aboriginal community councils were funded to employ their own community advisors and other staff to carry out administrative duties and maintain services for the community. At Borroloola this meant that the community accountant, advisor and mechanic were generally speaking, Europeans, with the rest of the workforce being drawn from the Yanyuwa, Garrwa and Mara Aboriginal communities; they operated the municipal-like services for the township of Borroloola and the living areas of the Aboriginal population.

In 1985, the Aboriginal Community Council was sacked by the Northern Territory Government. In August of that year the Northern Territory Government grant of $40,000 was terminated, a non-Aboriginal Manager was appointed, and all existing contracts were relet to Europeans in the township. This action removed the Aboriginal Councils responsibilities and meant the loss of sixteen service jobs by Aboriginal people.

Martin Mowbray in his report entitled Black and White Councils and Local Government in the NT, commented on the "Borroloola sacking."

The Borroloola dismissal seems to have been carried out for the political convenience of the Government. The town is in the Chief Minister's electorate and is seen as having considerable commercial potential as a tourist centre. It is also close to the site
of a proposed large lead, silver and zinc mine. Influential Europeans had been agitating for transfer of municipal functions from the Aboriginal Council for some time. Events have left the Aboriginal population confused and alienated. (Mowbray 1986:43)

Local Government has since been introduced at Borroloola, with Aboriginal and European council members. Unfortunately, many of the Aboriginal people do not fully understand the working of this council and see it very much as an extension of European control over the township and the local area.

4.9 The 1990's. The mine, the seagrass beds and tourists.

It's just not Bing Bong anymore...
(Ross Friday 1994)

The mid 1990's have been a period of much change for the Yanyuwa. This is especially so in their relationship with Mount Isa Mines. During the 1980's and early 1990's the mining company reviewed its options for transporting ore. It was decided that a deep water port on Centre Island was no longer viable and that an alternative would be investigated to transport ore via Bing Bong to large ships at an off-shore anchorage via barges (see Map 4).

The prospect of heavy machinery such as trucks, earth moving equipment, dredges, barges and large ships have made the Yanyuwa people feel anxious that the marine resources, such as fish, dugong and sea turtle which they still hunt and which are so much a part of their social identity, will be threatened. As one senior woman told me:

I just sit and think you know, there's no happiness in this place Borroloola for that mine, what is going to happen? I think about that sea and the dugong, sea turtle, all the fish, sea bird, what is going to happen? Might be they will die, might be we will die? That's my thinking. I'm worried about this mine...that's my thinking. (Annie Karrakayn field diary, 1993)
Yanyuwa men and women express fear of the mine and its potential impact upon their society, their land and associated flora and fauna. At one level the Yanyuwa have been involved with political negotiations between various government bodies, miners and Aboriginal organisations. These talks have done little to lessen the concerns of the Yanyuwa, as it is ultimately the country and their role in managing it which is of fundamental importance. For example, when the then Federal Minister for Employment, Laurie Brereton, visited Borroloola in the early stages of the mine development to discuss employment opportunities, people did not want to talk about it. They were far more interested in what was going to happen to the environment and how the mine was going to safeguard against any spills of the ore concentrate. They were told by the Minister to keep their questions to his topic and not worry about the environment. Attempts were also made at this meeting by MIM employees and some local Europeans to try and stop the use of a translator to facilitate the exchange of information between mining personnel, the Government Minister and the local Aboriginal population. The Yanyuwa concern for the marine environment was also echoed by Marsh. She made the following comment:

Given the dietary importance of the dugong and the green turtle to the local Aboriginal people and the potentially serious effects of even a small lowering in the rate of change of dugong populations, the potential of heavy metal contamination of the study area as a result of the McArthur River project is of great concern. (Marsh 1993 np)

The negotiations between the mining company, Northern Land Council, the Federal and Northern Territory Governments and the Yanyuwa and Gudanji people are complex and worthy of independent study. However, some of the more important issues are summarised below.

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4 Professor Helene Marsh, Director of Environmental Studies at James Cook University and a known expert on dugong, she had given advice to McArthur River Mines during the preparation of the environmental impact statement.
The Northern Land Council had commissioned a report on behalf of the Mabunji Resource Centre and the Rrumburriya-Malarndarri Council Aboriginal Association at Borroloola. The final report found that many social issues had not been addressed during the preparation of the Environmental Impact Statement (Hollingsworth Dames and Moore 1992). Included amongst the issues were the securing of access for Aboriginal people to important cultural and ritual sites and areas of land and sea for traditional foraging trips, and that the company have effective social control over its employees.

The Mabo or Native Title Legislation became an issue when on the 21st of May 1993, the Northern Territory Government introduced a bill to amend its McArthur River Project Agreement Ratification Act of 1992. This was in response to the McArthur River Mining joint venture becoming nervous about the security of their titles and the concern of their bankers. The legislation which was introduced validated the leases and simply provided for compensation for any native title holders who may subsequently be found disadvantaged.

Professor Garth Nettheim commenting in the Aboriginal Law Bulletin (1993:15) noted that:

...the NT Bill clearly contemplates the extinguishment of native title in the interest of confirming the project mining leases.

The Northern Territory Act was supported by the Commonwealth Government. The Prime Minister of Australia, Paul Keating, in a letter to Marshall Perron, the Chief Minister of the Northern Territory, stated that

5 The Mabunji Aboriginal Resource Association provides services to the outstation communities in the Borroloola region. It is without doubt the most dynamic and important of the local organisations for the Aboriginal people at this time. Its role as a consultative body is also important. It is accessible and welcoming to Aboriginal people, and there is always a great deal of activity and interest in its activities.

6 The Rrumburriya-Malarndarri Council Aboriginal Corporation is a town-based organisation whose principal role is to provide housing support services to the town camps.
his government would be willing to assist the Northern Territory Government in the matter (Keating 1993), however, in response to the Northern Territory request that native title on the McArthur River Pastoral Lease and land required for access be extinguished, this was not supported by the Federal Government. The Prime Minister stated that if the Northern Territory extinguished Native Title in their legislation, the Federal Government would reserve the option of "remedial action" within the total wider Native Title context.

The subsequent Native Title Act now gives effect to the validations, providing for the suspension of the Native Title interest, compensation for its impairment, and for its revival at the cessation of the mine's activities.

The Northern Land Council, however, and the Federal Government felt that the above provisions were insufficient, and asked for more wide ranging settlement, which would take into consideration the contemporary situation in relation to land and economic advantage for the Yanyuwa and Gudanji people. They insisted that these negotiations take place between the Yanyuwa and Gudanji people, the mining company and the Territory and Federal Governments.

In November 1993 a deal was near completion. The Commonwealth purchased Bauhinia Downs Station for the Gudanji people who are the traditional owners of the station and the land around the actual mine site. The

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7 Generally speaking the Native Title Act 1993 is designed to achieve four main objectives. These are the recognition and protection of native title, the regulation of future dealings affecting native title, the establishment of a means to deal with native title claims such as the Tribunal and court processes, and the validation of past acts if they have been invalidated because of the existence of native title. There is also a provision for the establishment of a Land Fund to assist indigenous people to purchase land. The Act does remove some uncertainties that may exist in relation to some titles; however, it restricts the States and Territories in the management of land, waters and resources and the ability to grant licences, title and permits in the future. (See also Stephenson and Ratnapala 1993 and Stephenson 1995.) The main purpose of the Act was to recognise and protect native title whose existence had been discovered, and to validate certain past grants which that decision had rendered invalid, and to provide compensation where native title has been, or is in future, extinguished or otherwise affected, as in the case of McArthur River and Bing Bong Stations.
Commonwealth Government paid more than $1.7 million for the station which the Gudanji owners were then able to convert into Aboriginal land under the Land Rights Act, or they can seek the equivalent of native title under the Native Title Act. The deal also provided for the funding of a number of training initiatives and for assistance in providing employment and education at Borroloola. In return, the Aboriginal groups involved agreed to forgo any claims to compensation that they may have been entitled to arising from any native title interest (Toyne 1994). This upset the Yanyuwa people immensely, as they were having to forgo native title interest to their country on Bing Bong, due to the Gudanji people getting Bauhinia Downs Station, country to which the Yanyuwa have never had any attachment. At the time it caused deep resentment between Yanyuwa and Gudanji people.

The simple fact was that the needs of the Gudanji were not the requirements of the Yanyuwa, and despite their living together for many years, cultural and social divisions still remain. A major difference is that the Gudanji people are inland people while the Yanyuwa are a coastal maritime people.

The Northern Territory Government then offered Billengarah Station, adjacent to Bauhinia, to the Yanyuwa in return for their dropping of the claim over country on the Sir Edward Pellew Islands, in particular South West Island and Centre Island. The Yanyuwa rejected this offer, again primarily because Billengarah Station was not, and never had been, Yanyuwa country, but rather was Gudanji and Mara country. In addition to this, the station had to be run commercially and could not be converted into inalienable freehold.

In January 1994, after intensive negotiations with the Yanyuwa people, Mount Isa Mines awarded the contract to barge ore to a joint venture comprised of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commercial Development Corporation and Burns Philp Shipping. The Yanyuwa people, who are the traditional owners of the Bing Bong area, where the port is located, became the part owners in the barge company, under the umbrella
of their newly established Mawuli-Wirriwangkuma Association. It could be possible for the Yanyuwa to eventually own 50% of the barging business as they buy back the stake which is presently owned by the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commercial Development Corporation.

While the Yanyuwa may be able to see benefits in their commercial involvement, there is still much fear and uncertainty. The lure of money to a community which is socially and economically depressed is strong, but there is still fear and a lack of understanding about what all their negotiations and agreements really mean. And always there is the question, "what if?". "What if an accident happens, what will happen to the sea, the dugong, the sea turtles and fish?" There is in reality cold comfort in the possibility of financial rewards when the country has been irrevocably changed in ways that their ancestors or they themselves would never have imagined. The following statement from two senior traditional owners associated with the Bing Bong area indicates such concerns:

They have cut the ground completely and deeply; they have broken all the trees and wiped out completely the camps of the old people, they are totally gone. (Dinah Norman with Roddy Harvey, field diary 1994)

4.10 Tourism.

The Yanyuwa and other Aboriginal groups feel deeply the impact of the tourist industry, an industry that the European community at Borroloola has fostered and promoted with great enthusiasm.

The Yanyuwa describe the tourists as "closing up the country", and describe them as "strangers", or "new people" whose faces are not known. Once favoured camping and hunting places such as the Landing and Batten Point are no longer accessible. People are finding rubbish and "non-

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8 This association is comprised of Yanyuwa and Mara men and women who have traditional rights to the Bing Bong area. Under the agreement people will be trained to operate the barge loading facilities at Bing Bong. A part of the agreement requires that local non-indigenous mine employees will not "denigrate (local) culture in any circumstances" (The Australian, 25 January 1994)
desirable" fish species being left by the tourists on the islands and along the banks of the rivers in the region. Yanyuwa dugong hunters believe that the increase in tourist traffic on the sea around the islands has fragmented the large herds of dugong making them hard to find and capture. In some instances, Yanyuwa people have had their boats, engine and hunting equipment stolen.

The Yanyuwa also fear for many of their sacred sites, especially burial grounds and powerful Spirit Ancestor sites. The Yanyuwa believe that Cyclone Kathy which struck the area in 1984 was caused by tourists and fishermen visiting and disturbing dangerous sites on the Pellew Islands. Some Yanyuwa people even say they are afraid to travel to their land for fear of being shot at by tourists and fishermen (see also Baker 1989a). The feelings of the Yanyuwa people are well summed up by the following statements by two senior women:

> It is a mistake they (the tourists) should be asking the old people about the country. They (the tourists) are travelling freely; they are not asking the guardians for the country. (Thelma Douglas field diary, 1984)

and again,

> Those tourists have spoilt the country of my mother, they have broken the song cycle path in the north, they are shutting up the country. (Dinah Norman field diary, 1992).

These comments on tourism echo a Yanyuwa belief that humans animate the land for good or ill. Ignorant people, such as tourists, can harm its culturally conceptualized ecological processes. Yanyuwa views of their part in the environment are concerned with such ecological processes, rather than just a state of being. These matters will be discussed further in later chapters.

It is argued by many of the Europeans at Borroloola that the Yanyuwa no longer live on their land and that they only use their country for holidays. But the term “holiday” means different things for the Yanyuwa and
Europeans. Fishing, hunting, travelling and camping are all associated by Europeans as “holiday” activities, and, while the Yanyuwa use the term in this sense, they also interpret it as meaning an opportunity to go home to their “own country”. This is a time when sites can be visited, sacred objects housed and checked upon, food gathered and some taken back to relatives at Borroloola and sometimes further afield. In the Yanyuwa sense “holidays” are an important way of maintaining contact with traditional land; they provide times which are relatively free of stress to spend with family and other kin and are part of a vital educative process for their children.

4.11 Concluding comments.

The Yanyuwa have experienced European contact for many years, and until the Second World War, this contact was one in which the Yanyuwa had some choice and one which did not disrupt traditional modes of living to a great extent. After the war, with changes in Government policy regarding Aboriginal people, the Yanyuwa began to feel the full weight of various government organisations, which affected the way of life profoundly. The changes had an impact on where people could work and live, and on political autonomy; measures such as the Land Rights Act N.T (1976) and the Native Title Act (1993) have meant having to explain and justify what they had thought they already knew.

This chapter has attempted to draw together the many changes that the Yanyuwa people have experienced over the last hundred or so years in relation to European contact. The results of many of the various forms of contact are still having an impact upon Yanyuwa life. The knowledge of steel and dugout canoes brought by the Macassans changed forever the way the Yanyuwa people pursued such animals as the dugong and turtle and changed for ever the way they moved over the country.

The initial contacts with Europeans were at times bloody and violent, with blood being spilt on both sides, but the islands remained a relative haven for the Yanyuwa, as they were of little economic importance. Since the 1970’s, this has changed dramatically. The islands are now constantly visited by tourists, and demand from such people lead to land on Centre Island being
sold in 1985; land which was technically still under claim and not legally available for sale (Howie 1992, Gray 1996).

The Yanyuwa now find themselves in a world where political bargaining is a way of life, a skill which must be learnt if they are to retain their own integrity and the traditions of their forefathers and foremothers. Many of the issues discussed in this chapter will recur in subsequent discussions of the relationship of the Yanyuwa people to the sea, islands and animals. At the core of much of the political machinations of the last twenty years has been land. The following chapters deal with Yanyuwa perceptions of the total environment and what they consider to be important issues when looking at the land and sea.
Chapter 5.

The Island and Coastal Country to the North

I look across the expanse of the open sea:
The high waves in the north, are at last calm.
(Short Friday Babawurra)

5.1 Introduction.

It was Stanner (1965) who commented that within anthropological literature there had been far too much emphasis on the inland Central Australian arid zone, primarily because it was perceived that the Aboriginal people of such areas had been isolated for the longest period of time from European influence, and therefore their social patterns and economies were felt to be still among the most traditional in Australia. There have been few major studies undertaken where the resources and environments of the coastal people of northern Australia have been explored. Peterson (1971) provided us with the first detailed account of people and their relationship to the ecosystem they called home. Chase and Sutton (1987) rightly argue in relation to the coast that this imbalance must be set right, as the coastal regions of northern Australia represent some of the most diverse in Australia, as they encompass an area where the marine and the terrestrial environments come together. They make comment that:

The northern tropical coastline of Australia presents an area where Aboriginal hunter-gatherers operated within such habitats, and the complex patterns of plant communities, marine environments and animal life in these tropical areas provide opportunities for resource exploitation which can hardly be exceeded elsewhere on the Australian continent.* (Chase and Sutton 1987: 69)
The Sir Edward Pellew Islands and the immediate coastal regions provide an interesting balance between mainland, sea and islands. Baker (1989a) notes that the shallow nature of the sea in this area of the Gulf, the shape of the islands, and the complex maze of creeks and channels which make up the mouths of the rivers entering the gulf, all produce a great length of coastline for quite a small amount of land. This large area of shallow water and long coastline has enabled the Yanyuwa to develop an economy and traditions which focus heavily on the marine and nearby terrestrial resources.

5.2 The island and coastal geography.

The islands which comprise the archipelago of Sir Edward Pellew Group span out to the north and north east across the mouths of the McArthu River, Wearyan River and Carrington Channel. These islands range in size from approximately 264 square kilometres (Vanderlin Island) down to isolated rocks of a few square metres. Arnol (1983: 165-6) estimates that the group consists of eight large islands, more than fifty small sandy islets and approximately twenty reefs.

The main islands in the Sir Edward Pellew Group are West Island, South West Island, Black and White Craggy Islands, Centre Island, Skull Island, Watson Island, North Island and Vanderlin Island. The islands are generally of low relief with the coastline of the islands varying from rocky cliffs of sandstone to tidal mudflats with mangrove fringes, sweeping beaches of coral, white sand and shell grit to small sandy coves. Sand dunes have been formed on the eastern shore of the islands where the currents, wind and wave-driven sand have accumulated against the rocky shore lines and headlands.

All of the larger islands of the Pellew Group have ridges of dissected sandstone outcrops with steep slopes which run down into valleys, which are level and consist almost entirely of sand and salt pans. In the wet season these valleys are either swamps or lagoons. However, by the end of the dry season, the majority have evaporated. Vanderlin Island has a large permanent freshwater lake (Lake Eames-Walala), and many of the other islands also have permanent springs or soaks which when excavated provide fresh water.
These springs and soaks are located where the valleys funnel the water in to low depressions on the valley floors.

The dominant habitats on the islands are open eucalypt woodland, stunted monsoon forest, sandstone heath, salt marsh, dune communities, freshwater wetlands on Vanderlin Island, mangrove communities and sea grass meadows. Technically the sea grass meadows are not on the islands, but they do surround the southerly coastal regions of the islands, and are therefore an important aspect of the total maritime ecology. This is especially the case in relation to a Yanyuwa perception of this environment (Arnol 1983 et al, Ygoa-McKeown 1987 and Johnson and Kerle 1991).

South West Island is the island closest to the mainland and is separated from it by a very narrow salt water channel. It backs onto extensive mangrove forests which dominate the delta region of the McArthur River, Carrington Channel and Wearyan River. These mangrove forests are interspersed with salt marshes and mud flats. Behind the mangroves are found extensive tidal flats, samphire grasslands which graduate into land dominated by savannah grasslands, paperbark marshlands, riverine and lagoon paperbark forests which give way to mixed woodland, and open eucalypt forests.

The river systems flowing through this country are all tidal. For most of the year they are salty, or further upstream, brackish, and during the floods of the wet season they may be running with fresh water nearly all the way to the sea.

5.3 Climatic Patterns.

The climate of the region is dry monsoonal, with the islands receiving an average rainfall of just over 1000mm per year with inland areas such as Borroloola receiving somewhat less, at an average of 796mm per annum. Nearly all the rain falls during the wet season months between October and April. This is a consequence of thunderstorms, tropical cyclones and the north west monsoon (Arnol 1983:13-14). High temperatures prevail throughout the year, with wet season months having mean daily maxima in the mid to high 30's °C. Temperatures during the period of September to
April are high and regularly reach 40 °C. The humidity is extremely high and limits the extent and nature of human activity, including the most persistent hunters and diligent field researchers.

Occasionally, the weather in May, June and July can be cloudy and overcast, and heavy showers of rain can be experienced. This "winter rain", as it is called by the Yanyuwa, is considered a most unwelcome intrusion into the most favourable time of the year.

There are primarily two dominant wind systems, with the winds in the period from November to March coming predominantly from the west-north west and the winds between the period of April and October coming from the east-south-east.

From extensive records kept by the Bureau of Meteorology, a good general picture of wind patterns can be constructed for the south west Gulf of Carpentaria and in particular the Sir Edward Pellew Islands. Winds are an important factor in deciding if people will be able to hunt on the sea.

Generally the south easterly and easterly winds of the dry season begin to blow in March, when on average for that month, they blow for 24% of the time. By careful observation of weather patterns hunters still go out and search for dugong and turtle. During this period the mornings are the calmest, with winds in March blowing 25% of the time in the morning at speeds between 6-10 kmph. In the afternoons, this increases to winds blowing between 11-20 kmph 28% of the time. By April the percentage of the time that these winds are blowing at the above mentioned speeds for morning and afternoon increases to about 30% for morning and 35% for the afternoon. The figures then increase dramatically during the months of May, June and July when for 60% to 70% of the time the southerly and south easterly winds are blowing for 20% of the time above 20 kmph.

When these winds are blowing at their most intense, the shallow waters of the Gulf become very choppy and dirty as the water becomes clouded with sediment, thus reducing visibility through the water dramatically, and
making it virtually impossible to hunt for dugong and sea turtle. By August the winds tend to decrease, but occasionally there will be bouts of these southerly winds which can last to October and early November.

5.4 Landscape and weather: A Yanyuwa-centric view.

One of the objectives of this thesis is to explore the relationship between Yanyuwa people and their environment, observing how this relationship affects the pattern of Yanyuwa movement over their land, and the utilisation of resources that are found on it. Such a study of the Yanyuwa perception of their environment highlights a world where the Eurocentric perception of geography is quite limiting, and where the Yanyuwa view is detailed and alive with many more meanings and symbols. In particular, the weather patterns that exist over Yanyuwa country are an active part of an enlivened spiritual cosmos (see also Strelhow 1970).

My own first impression of Yanyuwa country, however, was one of scorched savannah grasslands, dense forbidding, mosquito filled mangrove forests, salt water rivers full of crocodiles, a sea which was also full of dangerous creatures and was fickle in terms of its tidal movements, and finally, a number of hot, rather barren islands that had some scenic value. It was only after having had intensive contact with this country, and when my communication skills had improved and my defences against the environment had dropped, that I began to perceive a landscape that was rich in both scientific and spiritual interpretation.

For the Yanyuwa their geographic landscape is a visible imprint and physical proof of the spiritual energies associated with their Spiritual Ancestors. These beings travelled across the landscape; they altered the landscape and left behind geographic features (not all of them spectacular or interesting). Such places mark episodes in the travel experiences of these beings.
Ancestors. When the Spirit Ancestors completed their travels they transformed themselves. Some became physical features such as rocks, hills, moon, stars and winds, whilst others became species of plants and animals.

Like the Yanyuwa people today, the Spirit Ancestors lived their lives by travelling and marking the landscape. The sharpest concentrations of the Spirit Ancestors' powers are found in such marks: places where they created a land form, left an object behind, raised trees or entered the ground. These are the powerful places, in contemporary language, the sacred sites, the places where the most important knowledge resides, the knowledge is still used by the Yanyuwa people to assist in the maintaining of the life-order which is derived from the events of what they call the *yijan* a word that generally translates into English as "Dreaming".

The power which the Spirit Ancestors give the land animates that land and all of its creatures. The country is seen to have a will, a life force of its own. The Yanyuwa people use words such as "dangerous", "sad", "happy", "hard" or "generous" to describe their land; it is a land which can know individuals or be ignorant towards them. The spirits of deceased kin return to this land, with which they were associated in life. There they continue to reside; that country is still their "home", where they continue to hunt and forage, the invisible companions of the living. To be aware of 'country' is also to be aware of this presence of deceased kin and associates.

So close is this link between humans and people that there are times when the country itself will move and respond to an individual's wishes. By the use of various songs a traveller on land or sea is sometimes said to be able to shorten the distances between the point of departure and eventual destination. Such power is not deemed unusual in Yanyuwa society and will be discussed at length in this chapter. I recorded such a song in 1992 whilst travelling in rough seas between Centre Island and Vanderlin Island in a small aluminium dinghy. We were heading east into a rising swell, and had travelled too far to turn back, destined for a locality known as Yukuyi [Clarkson Point] on the south west tip of Vanderlin Island. The old man I was travelling with said that he could not recall the song to stop the wind but he could bring the country closer to us. In English this power song would be rendered as
105.

follows.

Calling out to you, the place called Yukuyi:
Hurry! Come! You are near and coming closer.
Watching you, closely—Yukuyi, You are coming closer, and closer and closer.

(Johnson Timothy, field diary 1992)

Such an incident is just one of many which illustrate that for the Yanyuwa their environment is more that just earth, rocks, water and sky: it is an environment which is met “face-to-face” and is to be interacted with.

As well as having a spiritual view of their environment, the Yanyuwa also order their physical landscape in a manner which we would recognise, that is, divisions according to various land units, whereby the combination of vegetation, soils and topography provide distinct areas. The notion of distinctive land units recognised by Aboriginal people has also been explored by Jones (1980, 1985) in his research with the Gidjingali people of north coastal Arnhem Land, Williams (1982) with the Yoingu of North East Arnhem Land, and Chase (1980) and Chase and Sutton (1981) with Aboriginal people of Cape York Peninsula. Baker (1989a, 1993) also discusses, in a general way the notion of recognised land units amongst the Yanyuwa.

Such a sense of land units as discussed by the Gidjingali and the Yanyuwa people approximates a system developed by the CSIRO in 1953 (Christian et al 1953, 1954 and Speck et al. 1960). Briefly, it may be said that western biogeographers classify the land into units so as to reflect what they regard as objective ecological realities.

While the system of land units as devised by the Yanyuwa and the CSIRO may be broadly comparable I would suggest that their functions are somewhat different, deriving from the very different ways in which this knowledge is embedded within cultural structures and processes. That the Yanyuwa and the biogeographers end up with similar schemes is not that surprising, because both schemes relate to a commonly perceived “real” environment; but the Yanyuwa scheme is nonetheless richer and more animated in its conception.
The diagrams (Sections 1-10) included in this chapter represent the ten units into which the Yanyuwa divide their land. These units should not be seen as being distinct, but rather as an attempt to show a continuum of country with features that the Yanyuwa have names for. Not all land units in the Yanyuwa sense are of equal importance, however; and the Yanyuwa, reflecting as they do their coastal-maritime view of the world, would see the first seven as being a true reflection of their “proper” country. The illustrations are an attempt to give a cross-section of the environment the Yanyuwa call home and consider important, illustrating the ways in which they describe each of these units. The cross-section as presented here does represent a general line that begins north-west of Cape Vanderlin cuts across a north-south axis of Vanderlin Island, travels over the sea and crosses over the mainland heading south south west through what could be termed the mainland “heartland” of Yanyuwa country and then stops just to the south west of Borroloola near what the Yanyuwa consider to be their mainland limit (see map 5).

The Yanyuwa consider the sea to be a part of these geographic land units. The sea and tidal mud flats and coastal salt pans are often described as being “open country”, where one can see a great distance, whilst the mainland and the islands are sometimes described as “closed country” where one’s viewpoint is hindered by trees, hills and other geographical features. In the Yanyuwa language the sea is often further divided into antha, which usually refers to that sea which is familiar and often travelled on during hunting and fishing, whilst the large expanses of open sea and ocean are termed warlama­makamaka or malabubana. These two terms imply a sense of caution necessary when travelling in these areas. The term kunjurrkunjurr conveys the notions of sea that is so far away that people would be indeed rash to say they would travel there; it is unknown, dangerous, and not within the realms of normal human activity.

The known sea is further divided into the sea grass beds and the sea above them and can be seen as a unit; this is the “underwater country”, named and known. The term na-ngunantha is used to describe the home or “camp” of the dugong and sea turtle, and linguistically carries the same na-
Map 5. General Area Associated With Cross-Section of Yanyuwa Environment (Sections 1 to 10).

Key to Cross-Section of Yanyuwa Environment

- **a** = Section 1
- **b** = Section 2a & 2b
- **c** = Section 3
- **d** = Section 4 & 5
- **e** = Section 6 & 7
- **f** = Section 8, 9 & 10

**OTHER ENVIRONMENTAL DETAIL**

1. **Wandamanny** = fire burning for a long time (seen in the distance)
2. **Ruwandi** = smoke from Wandamanny (white and cloud-like)
3. **A rumu** = wave
4. **Nanda-rayal** = wave crest
5. **A budijbudji** = rough sea
6. **Na-wurdu** = trough
OTHER ENVIRONMENTAL DETAIL

1. Yurdurrtalalll = billowing dust
2. Jawalimbarrinj1 = heat haze
3. Buynala = whirwind
4. Makuirmunya = grass fire
5. Wumgarr = smoke
6. Muyu = season
7. Movement of species

ENVIRONMENTAL DETAIL

a. Wurnumirra = Saltwort
b. Ausillamunyapa = Coastal coolabah
c. Mawerrmbirra = Coastal scrub
d. Yarrlaluburra = coastal shrub

GEOGRAPHIC LAND UNIT

a. Minjana = Coastal coolabah
b. Wurumbur = Coastal scrub

Narnumayurruwanka = country with intermittent sandpans, saltbush & small raised "islets" of scrubby vegetation
Wurnumurra = country with plentiful food
Nurrumahyil = burnt country
sec. 9 & 10

1. Wajirrwtirrt = small horizontal clouds on the horizon
2. Ngayirwuru = midway between sky and earth
3. Arrra = "blue sky"
4. Menyenit = wavy, horizontal clouds

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1. Lamun = Ironwood tree
2. Marum = Coral tree
3. Yubatila = Bloodwood tree
4. Jambarji = Acacia sp.
5. Rantyi = Hardwood Acacia sp.
6. Ngayirr = Woolybun
7. Ma·ngakulunjurr = shrub w/ double root
8. Altalwakalwa = white beuy
9. Narrimu = Sotghum grass
10. Lhulhum = pebble strewn plateau country
11. Jubardji = black plum tree
12. Majum = Kapok tree
13. Mtjingu = boulder rock
14. Mamurrinja = Holl coolobah
15. Janyka = Rocky hill country
16. JanyltaJanyka = Rocky hill country
17. Janyka = Stone Hill
18. JanykaJanyka = Stone Hill

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OTHER ENVIRONMENTAL DETAIL

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ENVIRONMENTAL DETAIL

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GEOGRAPHIC LAND UNIT

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Yingkarra (inland country)
Juburubula (dry Country)
Namu-maya (mainland)
Namu-maya (mainland)
arboreal prefix which the Yanyuwa use for other types of "homes", whether human or animal, such as na-wungkala, a flying fox "camp", or na-alanji, a human "camp".

There is a tendency amongst some Yanyuwa people, especially those of the older generation, to say that the mainland begins at the extreme inland limit of the coastal salt pans and mud flats. The reasoning for this is that these areas also contain small sandy "islets" which are often covered in sparse vegetation.

During the period of the king tides in the later half of the year and tidal surges caused by cyclones, these flats are inundated, leaving the small islets standing dry, being quite isolated and surrounded by water. This landscape in Yanyuwa is classed as narnu-ruluruuluwanka (section number 5). Trigger (1987:72), in his work with the Ganggalida people to the east of Yanyuwa country, has also found a similar perception in that the mainland begins on the inland limit of the coastal salt pans and mudflats.

The Yanyuwa are at home in these lower "saltwater" coastal regions, and while they hunt in the inland "freshwater" limits of their country, they describe it as jibuburula which is usually translated as meaning 'dry country'. The word is based on the root jiburu which means unpleasant, unpalatable or even worn-out or broken; it is the country of the Garrwa and Gudanji people. The irony of the term "dry" in this context is that it is where the McArthur and Wearyan River systems are permanently fresh and not under the influence of the tides.

Such inland country is also called "scrub country", and people describe it as country where it is not possible to get a breeze on one's face. This thought is highlighted in the following song composed by Elma Brown a-Bunubunu. She had been away working on the cattle stations on the Barkly Tablelands, and on her return to the coast and islands she composed the following song.

I stand and feel the sea wind;
it refreshes my face; for too long
I have been a woman of the inland "scrub country".
Such people as the Garrwa and Gudanji see Yanyuwa country as being very distinct from the mainland. It is a country which fits the Yanyuwa people who are known as "salt water people", while the Garrwa and Gudanji are called the "fresh water people". Gudanji and Garrwa people will travel into this country, usually in the company of Yanyuwa people. These trips by the "mainlanders" usually only take place during the more pleasant times of the year such as the cool part of the dry season, and they do not bother with such country during the mosquito ridden, intensely humid pre-wet season period.

The Yanyuwa, however, see the coastal areas as being special, in terms of their geography, the food sources that are available, and as an environment that gives the Yanyuwa distinction from the other Aboriginal groups in the area. This coastal country sometimes moves people to high levels of emotion, as the following comment highlights in relation to the coastal samphire-saltwort country (section 4), which to non-Yanyuwa eyes appears quite alien and inhospitable.

The saltwort grows on the sand, it a country with a beautiful feel, it is close to the sea and we get shellfish, bakarla (Terebralia palustris), a-yaka (Telescopium telescopium) and a-wanduwandu (Neverita sp.), and we get wild honey from the mangroves, it is saltwater country and it is beautiful. (Bella Charlie, field diary 1989).

A balance between the island-sea country proper and the mainland plains-riverine environments is a feature of Yanyuwa existence. The areas are linked together by the river systems which provide the "highways" on which people travel between the two. This division of the Yanyuwa people's regions also means that resource exploitation can also be divided. Firstly there are those resources which are not particularly dependent on the seasons, though to obtain them may be dependent on seasonal factors; and, secondly, there are those resources which are dependent on season and are often localised to specific habitats. Such creatures as the dugong and sea turtle can be hunted all year through, though the seasonal variations may determine when this may occur and when they are at their peak of condition, while food
such as sea turtle eggs are locality and seasonally dependent.

Seasonal movements and resource availability mean that in the past, in the middle and late parts of the dry season the Yanyuwa people moved away from a dependency on the marine environment and moved to the mainland savannah grasslands in order to obtain goannas, blue tongue lizards and water lilies which are not found in large numbers on the islands, except for in a few localities. This is still occasionally the case in contemporary times, especially during school holiday periods when the islands and savannah country are more intensively used by small Yanyuwa family groups, especially those families which have a number of men who are recognised as skilful hunters of dugong and sea turtle. Such movements between the island and mainland environments are based on a detailed knowledge of the environment, and the knowledge of what resources are available at what time of the year, and when such items are going to be hard to obtain or in abundance. What becomes obvious through such utilisation of the environment is that each area, each unit of the landscape has its value. From a European perspective it may look like an alien, hostile wilderness, but to the Yanyuwa, at the right time of the year it becomes a bearer of plentiful food.

5.5 The seasons, winds and rain.

It is relatively easy for European people to explain to a stranger the differences between the wet and dry seasons of northern Australia; the distinctions are quite pronounced and dramatic. However, the Yanyuwa, while accepting the basic twofold distinction of wet and dry, recognise five seasons. In this they are not alone: Researchers have documented similar occurrences in other parts of Australia. Thomson (1949) and Davis (1989) both make note of six seasons in north east Arnhem Land; Chase (1980) notes six seasons for one part of Cape York while in another part of Cape York Anderson (1984) notes six; and Altman (1987) in his work in western Arnhem Land notes that amongst the Gunwinggu people there are six seasons recognised.

The Yanyuwa base their five seasons upon weather conditions, the direction and strength of winds, star constellations and changes in the avail
ability and condition of various plant and animal species. The use of resources is dependent on important knowledge of the weather and its many subtle patterns and changes. Table 2 provides a general description of the Yanyuwa seasonal cycle.

Probably the most dramatic of all Yanyuwa seasons is *lhabayi*, the wet season proper, with its lightning, thunder, torrential downpours and day following day of rain. These rains cause the river and creek systems to flood and the lagoons to overflow. The floods have the effect of allowing inland water systems to join the major rivers and the sea. This season can also be a time of threatening cyclones and intense storm wind activity, so travel on the sea is curtailed or undertaken with some care.

Towards the end of the wet season the rivers drop, revealing a deposit of yellow sand beaches along many of the banks. The Yanyuwa describe this as making things "like new", and such sand banks make for good camping during the cool dry season, *a-mardu*, which is heralded by the south/south-easterly winds. In the initial stages of this season there are a last few heavy showers; these are the "knock-em-down" rains that help to level the tall grass which has grown during the wet season.

It is in the later stages of this early dry season that hunting activities begin in earnest. The grass is burnt, and the burnt ground becomes the domain of the women, whose quarry is the blue tongue lizard and the large sand goannas. The smoke from these fires fills the horizon, with some fires burning for weeks at a time. The islands are burnt also, from shoreline to opposite shoreline; the debris left from the growth of the previous wet season is reduced to ashes² (see plates 2 and 3).

² It could be argued that such large scale fires are a relatively recent phenomenon. In contemporary times some of these fires have had a catastrophic effect on the island environment. In the past with more permanent occupation on the islands, such fires probably would not have occurred. The islands could not have coped with the large, intensive, and extensive burns to which they are sometimes subjected in contemporary times (Johnson and Kerle 1991). In the past, the islands would have been exposed to a similar fire regime as is still used on the mainland, where small patches of the landscape are burnt over a period.
Table 2. Yanyuwa Seasonal Calendar

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>JAN.</th>
<th>FEB.</th>
<th>MAR.</th>
<th>APR.</th>
<th>MAY.</th>
<th>JUN.</th>
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<td>SEASON:</td>
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<tr>
<td>&gt; lhабayi &gt; a-mardu &gt; ngadara &gt; na-yinarramba &gt; wunthurru &gt;</td>
<td>(wet season)</td>
<td>(cool dry season)</td>
<td>(hot dry season)</td>
<td>(pre-wet build up)</td>
<td>(first storms)</td>
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<tr>
<td>lhambji</td>
<td>a-mardu</td>
<td>yarlimbijarlimbi/awurrarum</td>
<td>(storm winds)</td>
<td>(cold season wind)</td>
<td>(north wind from off the sea)</td>
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<td>walungkamarra</td>
<td>langkurlangkuwarra</td>
<td>yunduyunduwarra</td>
<td>(cyclone)</td>
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<td>(hot north winds)</td>
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<td>mijirmijirr</td>
<td>burrumanmala</td>
<td>kurrumbirribirri</td>
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<td>milyiyula</td>
<td>mumnyi</td>
<td>a-wuna</td>
<td>(light persistent rain)</td>
<td>(winter rain)</td>
<td>(light fog/dew)</td>
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<td>a-wumalhu</td>
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<td>bujimala</td>
<td>a-buburma</td>
<td>bujimala</td>
<td>(rainbow serpent)</td>
<td>(black nosed python)</td>
<td>(rainbow serpent)</td>
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The mainland wild honey nests of "sugarbag" are rich, and the island wild honey is much sought after. In the initial stages of the dry season the seas are calm and the men seek dugong and sea turtles. The drier cool season reduces the intensity of the mosquitoes and sand flies. Camps are established on the beaches and fore dunes, and fish and crabs are a much sought after quarry caught using spears and hand lines.

Historically, this was an important time for the gathering of large groups of people on favoured island camping sites. One such place was Yungkurra or Jensen Point on Centre Island. The following narrative presents an evocative picture of the place during a dry season in the early 1940's.

We all came from Bing Bong by canoe, we travelled to Yungkurra, you know that place where the ramp is? The ramp for rolling up dugong and turtle; the old people made it. We gathered there; all the well known dugong hunters and their families. Every day those men would go hunting for dugong and sea turtle, they would come back with something. The country was thick with smoke from the ground ovens. We women would help gather wood, cook the meat; but we would also take canoes, maybe one, maybe two, and travel to Anthawarra to gather pandanus nuts and wild honey, or we would go to Makakula and get tern eggs. That place was a big place in the cold season, everyone would gather there. (Eileen Mcdinny, field diary 1992)

In the mid dry season the south winds intensify, the sea becomes rough, and the weather on the islands can be cold. Those families that have men who still hunt dugong and sea turtle carefully observe the sea, weather and cloud formations, while the women return to the mainland to hunt the various terrestrial reptiles and vegetable foods. The men often switch to kangaroo or cattle as a major source of meat when the weather on the sea turns inclement.

The end of the cold season and the beginning of the hot dry season, ngardara, is a transition time marked by fog. It is a time, according to the Yanyuwa, when the goannas, blue tongue lizards and snakes mate. As the
weather warms, the surface water of the lagoons begins to dry, and the focus of the women's hunting turns to the dried up lagoons in search of long necked turtles which dig themselves into the mud to hibernate. In the deeper lagoons lily corms and lily stalks are gathered.

The emphasis on travelling to the sea by the men to get dugong and sea turtle drops, and more emphasis is placed on riverine wallabies and fish by the men. The women become first and foremost the providers and preparers of store bought foods and gatherers of long necked turtles, goanna and shellfish. A close relationship between the men and women as gatherers becomes obvious and a most necessary feature. As Meehan (1980:17) suggests, “in tropical coastal areas women and men are equally important providers”; food provision becomes what she further suggests as “a system of varying responsibilities” (1980:15). Occasionally, the men will also kill a bullock if one can be found within close proximity to the camp.

Periodically they may journey to the sea, hopefully timing their travels so that the wind will have dropped by the time they get there often, though, they come back unsuccessful, declaring on their return that there was too much wind and too much “dust” (in the water).

The latter part of the dry season is hot, with strong north winds often accompanied by dust storms. Tall whirlwinds filled with dust and soot from the fires rise high into the air. Sea turtle eggs are sporadically gathered on the islands, and small shark and stingray are fat and ready for eating.

The days become hotter, and another transition time is recognised by the Yanyuwa. It is na-yinarramba, the initial stages of the encroaching wet season. Along the coast, water spouts can be a danger to those still travelling on the sea, and the Morning Glory cloud formation rolls from the east. This cloud formation—a particular feature of the southern Gulf of Carpentaria—is a long cigar-shaped cloud, seen usually in the morning, that rolls up out the east, preceeded by strong winds. Bell (1988) describes the phenomena in some detail. To see this cloud formation roll up out of the east and speed across the sky is an awe-inspiring sight.

Shortly after this, the late afternoons and evenings become times of great cloud formations, intense humidity and lightning displays at night time.
This is *wunthurru*, the time of the first storms. Rain is accompanied by strong winds blowing from the south. After a number of weeks the Yanyuwa say that the wet season has arrived again. It is a time of abundant fruits and berries which are eagerly gathered by the women and children.

5.6 Rainbow Serpent - Black Nosed Python

The Cold Season fogs are dangerous, it is the Black Nosed Python, she is fire, at another time there will be the rainbow serpent. (Ida Ninganga, field diary 1985).

The rest of this chapter will explore, firstly, the weather and what controls it, and secondly, how human beings can intervene, using magic, for good or for bad, and thus alter the intensity of weather patterns. According to Yanyuwa cosmology, the weather patterns are dominated by two creatures, the Black Nosed Python for the cold season months and the Rainbow Serpent for the wet season; this is referred in the statement above by Ida Ninganga. These two entities dominate the two major categories of the wet and dry season, with the five subdivisions of climate relating with the waxing and wanning in the power of the two entities. (see Table 2)

Rose (1992) has explored the nature of the weather as being an energy which is controlled by spiritual entities. She comments:

Each part of the cosmos has within it the potential to expand; each is potentially a runaway part, pushing and testing until it is stopped by others. But each part, as it becomes active triggers other parts which are interconnected to it and which stop the runaway process. Human beings have a responsibility to intervene where they consider intervention necessary and to leave things alone where they consider that necessary. Humans have the ability to adjust the system as well as to throw it out of kilter. But looking at the system without human intervention we see that each part is alive, and each part in communicating itself elicits responses which restore the balance. (Rose: 1992: 97)
The belief that humans can control natural events is dependent on a belief in what European thought we would call magic but which the Yanyuwa call *narnu-nyiri* or power songs. The power force within the songs is called *wirrimalaru*.

Within the Yanyuwa context of magical practices, magic is probably best defined as a set of practices which attempt to use mysterious forces which are inherent in the environment. The full mastery of any reality, in this instance, the environment, will always be beyond human understanding, so there will always be those people who will attempt to enhance their power and prestige by using forces that animate the land many of which are hidden to all but special people who possess particular knowledge and skill.

It may been seen from the example given previously of Yanyuwa magic or power in relation to making country come closer, and the examples to follow, that the concept of using forces in the land to enhance power and prestige applies well to the Yanyuwa. In the Yanyuwa context there is no such thing as a community magician: any older person, including men and women, is entitled to possess such knowledge. However, the ways individuals choose to use the knowledge differs according to the character of these individuals. The Yanyuwa don’t attempt to explain how such power works; it is enough that such power exists and has been sanctioned and passed down from previous generations.

The Rainbow Serpent is the major being associated with the wet season and with water and rain generally. The Rainbow Serpent in Yanyuwa is a male being associated also with cyclonic winds, water spouts and whirlpools. The symbol of the Rainbow Serpent is the arch of a rainbow through the sky, and a number of snake species are seen to be actual physical embodiments of the Rainbow Serpent. The Olive Python (*Liasis olivaceus*), Water Python (*Liasis fuscus*), Taipan (*Oxyuranus scutellatus*), and King Brown Snake (*Pseudechis australis*) as well as some other smaller python species, are all seen to have attributes of the Rainbow Serpent and therefore are potentially dangerous.

The Rainbow Serpent is usually, perceived however, to be more of a force which can be seen by viewing the weather patterns associated with it.
Paul Memmot (1982), in his work with the people of Mornington Island, has also found similar associations of the Rainbow Serpent with danger. Maddock (1972:113), comments that the Rainbow Serpent is associated with “destructive forces of nature, more especially those evinced in rain and water.”

It is Yanyuwa belief that to kill a snake associated with the Rainbow Serpent, or to enter a place where a Rainbow Serpent resides, is to court disaster. Some people have the power to control the Rainbow Serpent, but it does not always work, and it is best not to provoke the enormous powers of this creature at all. In addition to these associations with snakes, dugong, whales and dolphins are all seen to be the offspring of the Rainbow Serpent and therefore, as will be seen further on in this thesis, they deserve special respect.

The Yanyuwa perceive their basic climatic patterns to be a result of the rival powers of the Rainbow Serpent and Black Nosed Python (Aspidites melanocephalus). The Rainbow Serpent belongs to the patrimoieties which has the semi-moieties of Mambaliya-Wawukarriya and Rrumburriya, whilst the Black Nosed Python belongs to the patrimoieties which has the Wuyaliya and Wurdaliya semi-moieties.

To illustrate the perception of how the weather is seen as a quest for power between two opposing beings, I will begin with the pre-wet season period of na-yinarramba. This is when the power of the Rainbow Serpent begins to gain mastery over the dry season and the Black Nosed Python. The following statement of Nora Jalirduma gives a view of this beginning season. The Rainbow Serpent is still young— in Yanyuwa he is watha or immature.

The Rainbow Serpent is thundering at the beginning of the Wet Season, he is flashing (sheet lightning) at the beginning of the Wet Season there are many bush foods in abundance, one person cannot eat it. There are the Morning Glory Cloud formations, the tern is laying eggs on the sand as is the sea gull and the sea turtle. He is blowing wind from the south, it is not strong. (Nora Jalirduma field diary, 1988).

It is also at this time that the migratory birds such as the Torres
Strait pigeons return to the islands, and the flying foxes begin the nightly journeys to feast upon the blossoms and fruits of various trees. The Yanyuwa believe these animals are carried back to the country within the cloud formation of the Morning Glories. As it travels, the Yanyuwa say, the Morning Glory drops over the country the Torres Strait Pigeon, flying foxes and various parrot species that are associated with the Wet Season.

Shortly after the initial lightning displays at night and the build up of cloud formations, the first heavy cloudbursts from the south occur. This is wunthurru. The waters from these rains are considered to be dangerous to young children. This "new rain" is full of the potency of the renewed vigour of the Rainbow Serpent; to play or to bathe in this water is to bring on potential sickness. Adults are constantly haranguing children not to play in the water.

After a few more showers this fear diminishes, and the children enjoy many hours of fun in these waters. This rain is generally considered beneficial as it causes new growth and "greens up" the burnt-out dry season landscape.

The wet season now begins in earnest. The rains come from the east often accompanied by strong winds. The Rainbow Serpent is now considered to be in control, and certain activities cease or are pursued with care. For example, the rivers begin to flood, and in the brown swollen waters are many whirlpools, wari - these are signs that a Rainbow Serpent is present. Breast feeding women and newly initiated youths are to avoid such places lest the Rainbow Serpent smell the milk or blood and rise up. The arch of a rainbow through the sky at this time is said to be a Rainbow Serpent travelling from each newly replenished lagoon. These Rainbow Serpents are not Spirit Ancestor Rainbow Serpents; the Yanyuwa describe them as having a "real body" - that is, they are living entities. Men who hunt for dugong and turtle at this time must look out for waterspouts, said to be caused by the exhalation of breath, murrunya, from large dugong, dolphins and, particularly whales, which are said to be more common around the islands at this time.

With the onset of daily rains, or rain which falls for days at a time, the Rainbow Serpent is considered to be at the zenith of its power. It is
strong enough to bring about destruction in the form of cyclones. The power of the Rainbow Serpent at this time is well described by Nora Jalirduma.

In the Wet Season, the Rainbow Serpent is forming itself, it is blowing strongly, we are seeing it, it is nearly upon us, from the east it comes, black clouds from the east spread across the sky, there it is leaning over us, it is bending over, it will be hitting us, this strong powerful wind, it is roaring, it is blowing, it is looking for us.

There are certain old men and women who are said to be able to control the power of the Rainbow Serpent through the use of special power songs which when performed correctly, can obviate its power. Such songs have to be performed carefully, with attention to their correct tunes and words; if wrongly performed, the songs may rile the Rainbow Serpent even more.

The following translation is of a song used to stop a Rainbow Serpent coming over the sea onto the land. The song describes various attributes of the Rainbow Serpent with certain phrases aimed at stopping its progress.

You of the strong forehead, rising from the mud,
you of the big mouth, stop! dive down, bury yourself!
You of the strong tail like a dugong, dive down, bury yourself!
I sing your head, change direction.
You who licks and tastes the ground, you of the hitting and striking tail,

---

3 Since the advent of television and satellite viewing of weather patterns, the Yanyuwa are even more convinced that their view of cyclones as being Rainbow Serpents is correct. The images of a cyclone as spiralling moving masses with an eye confirms the Yanyuwa view. After Cyclone Kathy devastated the Sir Edward Pellew Islands in 1984, people would speak of places where the Rainbow Serpent had laid its back, bending over all the trees, or where it lashed its tail, destroying huge areas of vegetation. In Yanyuwa the words for cyclone are walungkarnarra and wirninykarra, these two words are synonymous with the words used to describe the Rainbow Serpent at the peak of its power.
you who dislikes us, I strike your head with a club,  
I cause you to tremble; You who spins around and around.  
Away, away!  (Dinny McDinny Nyilba, field diary 1984)

Certain of these "power songs" in Yanyuwa society are secret and sacred and are not for the public to hear. The song above, employed by both men and women, is sung in a soft undertone, often in the midst of people who are sheltering from the wind and rain. The following song is also one which is used to stop cyclones and storm winds, but it concentrates more on obviating the power in each part of the Rainbow Serpent's anatomy:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{Down with your head!} \\
\text{It will ache!} \\
\text{Down with your head!} \\
\text{Your tongue is enclosed in your jaw!} \\
\text{Your tail is broken!} \\
\text{You will not move!} \\
\text{Your ribs are broken!} \\
\text{You will not crawl!}
\end{align*}
\]

(Issaac Walayungkuma. field diary 1984)

Normally by April, the Yanyuwa believe the Rainbow Serpent has exhausted itself; the last vestiges of its power are represented by the gusty winds and heavy showers of the "knock-em-down" rains.

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4 Such cyclones as Kathy, in April 1984, and Sandy, which occurred in April 1985, which the Yanyuwa believe to be rather late in the wet season, were believed to be caused by strangers in their country visiting and disturbing sites associated with the Rainbow Serpent in the Pellew Islands. In past times, however, the Yanyuwa say that people would sing cyclones; they would sing the Rainbow Serpent by magically evoking the power of the small black water beetles which can be found on the tops of lagoons. The power of the beetle would be activated, and they would travel down to the Rainbow Serpent dwelling in the water and "tickie its ribs" and annoy it. It would then rise up and be angry enough to lash out across the country.
With the Rainbow Serpent's influence diminished, the Black Nose Python releases its breath, causing a steady stream of cool dry air from the south. The Black Nosed Python is associated with the tradition of fire: its black head was once a firestick; its glowing coppery colour represents warmth; its breath is initially cool but as the dry season continues, it becomes warm, too warm, and it begins to dry the water. It burns the ground causing dust storms and begins to make life unpleasant. It keeps burning the ground to such an extent that the Rainbow Serpent who is resting in the ground becomes burnt, and it rises into the air in the form of the tall, soot-filled twisters of the late dry season. The burnt Rainbow Serpent takes refuge in the sky and begins to gather clouds together in which it soothes itself and begins to rebuild its strength, before beginning the wet season again.

As with the Rainbow Serpent, there are people who believe they can use this power of the Black Nosed Python for either a positive or a negative effect. The breath of the Black Nosed Python is the name given to the cool dry season, *a-mardu*. It is also the name given to the dragonfly which heralds the onset of the dry season. The cool days are at first welcomed by people who have had enough of the humidity and rain, and associated restrictions on lifestyle, but as with anything, too much cold weather becomes unwelcome. Continuous periods of cold southerly or damp foggy mornings, followed by cold winds, are said to be the cause of such skin diseases as scabies and complaints such as the flu.

The transition from the cool dry season to the hot dry season is marked by fogs and heavy dews. In Yanyuwa tradition these fogs were once greatly feared. It was thought that the fogs took the spirits of the old people away causing them to die. There is probably some truth in this belief, in that before modern housing, sleeping out in the fog caused individuals to become damp and chilled and more prone to sicknesses such as heavy flu and colds. The fog is associated with the Black Nosed Python, and instead of coming from her mouth it comes from her anus, representing the time when the power of
the Black Nosed Python becomes more negative than positive, just as the power of the Rainbow Serpent eventually becomes more hated than liked. The Yanyuwa term for fog is a-wuna, which means "her anus", the anus of the feminine Black Nosed Python. The a-wuna fog is considered immature, a-watha, but is soon followed by the a-wumathu fog, which is considered a-wurrirri, or fully mature, and potentially dangerous - it is the thick, heavy fogs of the coastal regions and the potential stealer of souls.

As mentioned previously Yanyuwa believe that certain individuals have the power to control the weather, or more properly, to control the activities of the spiritual entities that are said to control the weather. Baker states:

Annie Karrakayn, who is said to have the power to 'sing up' the hot weather, ....told me during the pleasant cool weather of the dry season how she had been told by Tim Rakuwulma not to bring on the hot weather as he was enjoying the cool dry season weather. (Baker 1989:116)

Such a comment is typical of banter that exists between Yanyuwa men and women in relation to the powers that they may, or may not, be perceived as having. Within Yanyuwa society, everybody knows certain individuals who possess powers; of some other individuals nobody is sure, and from this uncertainty about them, those people derive a sense of power and prestige.

There are aspects of the weather that function independently from the main beings of the Rainbow Serpent and the Black Nosed Python, such as the cold weather rain and the gentle rain from the east towards the end of the wet season. A number of winds are associated with the islands and are Spirit Ancestors in their own right. To access the power of these Ancestors one also has to have knowledge of the site on the land where the Ancestor is located, as it is the country itself which must be stimulated if the desired weather is to be achieved. Some of the songs are jealously guarded, and people may pay the possessors of such songs large amounts (cash or kind) for them to be performed.
5.7 Island winds

When travelling on the sea, the Yanyuwa pay close attention to the winds. Journeys between islands are made only after the weather has been observed for a time and people have gained some knowledge of when the longest period of calm may be. Sometimes it appears that there is no calm, no respite from the winds, and then it is often surmised that someone has "sung" the wind.

Control over the winds is deemed to be very powerful and sought-after knowledge. The songs which can keep the winds captive, rather than turning them loose are the more desired - to be the keeper of calms as opposed to the maker of winds. The north winds are seen to be a Spirit Ancestor at three localities on the islands: two on Vanderlin Island and one on North Island (see Map 6). Each one of these north winds is said to be different and to cause differing effects on the environment and the people.

The North Wind Spirit Ancestor on North Island is said to dwell in a reef and is under the power of a Rainbow Serpent; to activate the power of this wind the Rainbow Serpent must be disturbed. This wind is dangerous and capable of making cyclones in the wet season, or immense winds in the dry season which make sea travel and marine based hunting impossible. It is called lhambi ji, which is translated as storm wind. Another North Wind Ancestor is located on the south western coast of Vanderlin Island and is said to come from the mouth of Coachwhip Ray (Himantura toshi), a-janngu, which is present as a Spirit Ancestor. This storm wind is called a-wurrarumu, which translates as "waves from the depths of the sea".

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5 This wind is called the 'smelly wind': it carries with it the smell of rotting sea weed and dead fish and, as one informant said, it "makes you want to leave country, makes you vomit, too much smell" (pers. comm Eileen McDinny, 1991). It is said to be the wind made by people who are jealous of other people being able to be on the islands and hunting dugong and sea turtle. Conversely, the dimburru (Table 2) wind is welcomed. This wind is said to carry moisture high up into the atmosphere, the breeze is cool and smells and feels of rain. It is said to make people feel happy and contented.
## Map 6. Sites On The Land Associated With Wind And Rain.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Site</th>
<th>Climatic Feature</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Malaliwunda</td>
<td>Winter Rain (mumnyi)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2a. Larlibangka</td>
<td>Wet Season Rain (mijirmijirr / milyiyula)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2b. Wawurranda</td>
<td>Wet Season Rain (mijirmijirr / milyiyula)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Warrijanjala</td>
<td>Storm Wind (lhambiji)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Muluwa</td>
<td>North Wind (yarlimbijarlimbi)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Wulunthurr</td>
<td>North Wind (a-wurrarumu)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Ruyuka</td>
<td>Cold Season Wind (a-mardu)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The third wind is associated with the northern most tip of Vanderlin Island, Muluwa, Cape Vanderlin. This wind is called *Yarlimbijjarlimbi* and is said to be so immensely powerful that it can affect the mainland. It is said to be the wind of the jealous people. When this wind blows, the normal verb for blowing wind, *warrmantharra*, is replaced with the verb *wayilulumantha rra* to mark its difference. It is said to be the "respectable word" for this kind of wind, because it is a "proper Dreaming". When this wind comes onto the mainland, during the hot dry season, and affects people's activities, it is named *langkulangkuwarra*. It is usually associated with flying dust whipped up off the clay and salt pans and the burnt off grass plains. These dust storms are called *kurrumbirribirri*, and such an event is again said to be the work of "jealous people" - as Annie Karrakayn explained as we sat in a bush camp while this kind of wind, carrying with it dust and soot, raged about us:

You know this wind is from that old lady, oid a-Wakabararra she's got the song for this wind, she's jealous, jealous for all us ladies when we go hunting, hunting mumdangu (long necked turtle), *wardaba* (goanna), *a-wayurr* (blue tongue lizard). She been do this wind, I got song too for this wind but I don't sing, I can't cruel people when they hunt...I can stop him too... I might try later. (Annie Karrakayn, field diary 1981)

Annie then went on to relate how if she gave the old woman in question some goanna or long necked turtles on her return, she might be appeased and no longer "sing" the wind.

As with many things in Yanyuwa society, certain plants and animals can be related to natural phenomena, and such is the case with the winds. While hunting for dugong and sea turtle, the sight of small swimmer crabs clinging to mangrove leaves is not uncommon. These crabs, called *a-mawurrungku*, are dangerous; to kill one is to release the power of the wind. The crab is called *nyiki-nganji* or a "kinsman or relation to the wind". Young men who are learning to hunt dugong and turtle are shown this crab and
warned of the dangers which surround it.

The relationship between people and land means that people are also associated with phenomena that exist across their country; and quite often people, especially deceased relatives, are described by stressing links to country or Spirit Ancestor. One way in which this can be done is by names which are associated with the Spirit Ancestors. In relation to wind being a Spirit Ancestor of his relatives, one old man makes this following comment:

\[My \text{ } rnarra \text{ (father's sister) her name been } a-Wayakuwayaku \text{ that's wind nakari } kari-nguthunda \text{ (from the north), my barnarna (father's brother) his name been } Lhambiji \text{ that's wind, strong wind bustim up everything...and my ngabuji (father's mother's sister) her name been } a-mardu \text{ that's cold weather wind from } kari-ngamala \text{ (from the south)}\]

(Tim Rakawurlma, field dairy 1986)

Some periods of heavy weather are now associated with the activities of tourists and fishermen who enter places that the Yanyuwa consider dangerous. Such intrusions disturb the delicate balance between active show of power and the slumber of the Spirit Ancestors, and this disturbance causes them to release their power. Activities such as tourism and fishing are one of the many pressures which now face the Yanyuwa and their environment, and one which will be addressed further on in this work.

5.8 Rain

That people exist in Yanyuwa society who can control the winds is taken as known fact. However, there are other forms of climate control about which there is no surety, and any claim of power over them can cause sullen silences, laughter or fierce debate. Whether or not there are individuals who have the power to sing rain is one of these.

Issues concerning the power to sing rain can cause heated discussion. There are two types of rain that can be “sung”. The first is what is some
times called "salt water rain", or winter rain, *murnnyi*; it is rain that falls along the coastal areas and over the islands in the dry season. It is usually unwelcome, and contemporary Yanyuwa people believe that it is only sung by people who for some strange reason wish to cause hardship. It is sung by:

...jealous bugger people, they are jealous for country, jealous for bush tucker, they just want to bugger up everybody else, just jealous people that's all. (Dinah Norman Marrngawi, field diary 1993).

That people can sing winter rain is not doubted. What tends to cause argument is the rain of the wet season—the rain that falls just before the onset of the wet, or the singing of torrential rain to cause large floods. Usually certain older men will claim responsibility, raising doubts, because in general opinion, all of the rain makers of renown have long since died.

In oral tradition various men are known in Yanyuwa history as being expert rain makers. The ability to sing rain was a valued one, and people would once pay such men for their services, in kind, with things such as dugong meat, boomerangs, hair string belts and clothes. This was particularly so when the Yanyuwa started to construct their own dugout canoes earlier this century. These canoes were usually made in the freshwater margins of the river systems such as the Wearyan and McArthur. When the canoes were nearing completion the canoe makers would request the singers of rain to cause heavy rain to fall upstream so as to float the canoes downstream where their final finishing touches could be made close to the main camp. At least half of the first dugong or sea turtle taken by hunters in the new canoes would be given to the rainmakers in payment for their services.

Large floods through the river systems were deemed necessary by the Yanyuwa so that rivers and the land flooded by the overflowing rivers were maintained in a healthy state. It was thought that the rainmakers, through their ability to make rain, assisted the flooding of the river systems. The following comment by Pluto Wurrumungumungku, highlights the perceived
value of the rainmakers:

Big flood waters don't come here anymore, only little floods are coming down, they can still sing the salt water winter rain but they cannot sing the rain that used to bring the floods, those that say they have sung the floods are liars. But a long time ago they would sing, those men who are now dead, they would sing rain, these men today are liars but a long time ago they would sing the rain the floods would come and drown all the country and carry fish and salt water crocodiles all the way to the sea.... These men today are liars, when the rain falls they mistakenly think that they have sung it. (Kirton 1967:42-44)

Even though it is acknowledged by the majority of Yanyuwa people that there are no more rain makers, and the country is worse off because of it, after the large 1992-93 floods there was an individual who said that he was responsible. On overhearing this remark, his brother came back with the stinging reply:

Look they have all died, those who used to sing the rain, the old men who were called Mamurriyatha, Mangayi, Bakurda, Kuwanungku and Wirriwirrangu they have all died, we who are their children have nothing, no song for rain, nothing, you can't sing rain, you are a liar.

(Pyro Dirdiyalma, field diary 1993).

The rain is a Spirit Ancestor for the Mambaliya-Wawukarriya semi-moiety. Ginger Bunaja relates in the statement below how the power of the songs associated with the making of rain would work:

The Rain Spirit Ancestor is at Wawurranda and Larrbangka, the old people my paternal ancestors would sing spring waters at those places, with power songs they would sing the bubbling springs, the rain would come up like a cloud and travel over the country and the rain would fall. The rain at these places is soft gentle rain not heavy hard rain. (field diary 1982)
In 1985 I visited the two sites of Wawurranda and Larlbangka, and found the "bubbling spring waters" dry. Only by digging into the bed of the water course, where they once were was any sign of water found (see Map 5). The year had been dry and the wet seasons of the previous years had not been good, and I attributed this factor to the springs being dry. No, said the men with me, they were dry because the old people, the rainmakers were all dead, their power was dead and the country of the Rain Spirit Ancestor was lamenting them; that was why there was no water at the localities. This statement reflects quite dramatically the profound relationship which is seen to exist between people, land, Spirit Ancestors and deceased human ancestors, a theme which will appear again and again throughout this thesis.

The Yanyuwa say that some rain on the islands can be a naturally occurring phenomenon, it can be caused by rough seas pounding against reefs and rocks, sending up fine smoke-like spray, *nanda-minymi*, into the sky, which becomes clouds and falls back to the ground. It is said that such rain can fall any time and that it is,

Just rain, no song no anything, just rain. *winarrku kangka a-rumu*
*nanda-minymi janda-yayunmanji* [it is merely because the waves are tossing their fine spray] (Tim Rakawurlma, field diary 1991)

5.9 The Seven Sisters (Pleiades)

There are other songs which are associated with the weather change in Yanyuwa tradition, though few if any of them are now performed. People speak of such songs as belonging to old people who knew how to "handle them" and possessed the strength to keep under control the powers that they could release. The songs are also seen to belong "to the bush", that is, to a style of life when people lived most of their time away from places such as Borroloola and more in touch with the seasonal changes of the year.

It is when people are camped away from Borroloola for extended peri
ods of time that discussion will sometimes take place on the weather and the ability of old people to interact and have some control over it. Whispered comments suggest that so-and-so still "has the song" and "can still do it".

One such example of this is in relation to the Pleiades star constellation. These stars are accounted great power by the Yanyuwa in that they have the ability to maintain the fecundity of the environment, and provide a marker of time for the Yanyuwa as the following statement highlights:

When it is the cold season, they are regenerating, the Seven Sisters are showing themselves from the east. (Bella Charlie, field diary 1982.)

The blue ringed octopus (Hapalochlaena lunulata), called in Yanyuwa, Li-jakarambirri, is the physical, earthly form of the Pleiades. It is said that during the day, the Pleiades sank into the sea, "to look for fish", and that the octopus was their body. The glowing blue rings on the body of a provoked octopus are the stars shining on its body. The site for the Pleiades Spirit Ancestor is to be found midstream in the Crooked River; and if one travels to the sea by that route, silence must be observed whilst travelling past the locality where the Pleiades live, otherwise they will rise up and pull the boat down into the water. 6

The power associated with the Pleiades is described below by Annie Karrakayn:

My father had song for them, for them stars, old people used to sing them, sing them yalibala [early morning] when it's cold season, alright they make everything good, make everything new, new grass, new tree, everything get strong, kid too, they used to get kid, sing that star, tap them knee same time, kid gets strong.

(Annie Karrakayn, field diary 1983).

6 The Yanyuwa have several names for the the Pleiades they are Li-jakarambirri, Li-malyarrala, Li-kayukayula, Nalu-wulwari and Li-malamalaya. All of the names except
136.

The words of the song for the Pleiades are still remembered, but the tune is not remembered with any accuracy. The words of the song translate as follows:

Regenerating, Pleiades rocking in the eastern sky,
Shining brightly, Regenerating,
The Pleiades that rock in the eastern sky:
They have been born.

(Annie Karrakayn with Johnson Timothy, field diary 1993)

So potent is the power of the regeneration caused by the Pleiades that during the cool dry season their "fat", na-ngiliny, may be seen floating over the sea. This "fat" is brown scum, which after periods of rough weather, accompanied by a northerly wind known as a-wurrarumu is often found on the sea and around the coasts of the island and the mainland. It is said that the Pleiades:

Throw the fat everywhere because that is their power, they make everything good, like new. (Johnson Timothy, field diary 1993).

The comment highlights the nature of "fat" in Yanyuwa society. Fat is in many ways just as important as the flesh. Every animal killed is checked for fat content, and there is often discussion and disappointment if the animals killed are seen to be "boney ones", that is, animals carrying little fat.

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footnote 6 cont...one include the human plural prefix li-, whilst the sole remaining name is prefixed with the possessive pronoun nalu-they. Generally in the Yanyuwa language any subject which has a number of diverse names is of considerable importance. The term, li-jakarambirri, means "Those ones in front, or who have come from before". One older woman described this name as being "like ancestors", but she could not give any other reasoning for this. Further research has not revealed anything else which would allow the Pleiades to be interpreted as such. The other names are untranslatable, as far as I am aware.
There are times when this lack of fat will be blamed on people performing negative sorcery.

Johnson Timothy also had said that the appearance of the Pleiades low in the eastern sky is the coldest time of the year and the time when dugong will be found closest to the shore, "nearly right up to the mangroves". He said that the dugong get cold and come up into the shallow water to get warm and that all proper dugong hunters know about this. These shallow water sightings may also be associated with the dugong's desire for specific species of sea grass and their rhizomes.

It would appear that for the Yanyuwa the Pleiades are an important indicator of seasonal change, showing that the coldest time of the year has arrived. Seeing the Pleiades on the eastern horizon indicates a certain passage of time, although nothing is ever clearly articulated in terms of devising actual calendars, it is enough that the event is observed and commented upon.

As with the songs for rain, the song to increase the regenerating and strengthening power of the world associated with the Pleiades, is no longer sung. The old people and a number of middle aged Yanyuwa people remember the song being sung, and remember the words. However, the song and the power

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Other cultures also use the Pleiades in a similar way. Johannes (1981) in his work amongst the people of Palau indicates that the Pleiades are also an important indicator for making a traditional calendar, and Aveni (1977), in work with the Sherente people of Brazil, describes how they use the Pleiades to mark off the seasons. In terms of literature dealing with other Australian Aboriginal perceptions of the Pleiades, the Yanyuwa may well be unique. Researchers such as White (1975:128-30), Mountford (1937), Tindale (1936,1959), Robinson (1966, 91-93), Kaberry (1939: 12) and Berndt(1989:44,221,281) all offer information on the Pleiades, but the constellation is seen as once having been human, either male or female and the greater number of stories associated with them deal with men and women encountering each other and being involved in violent and erotic activities, perceptions which are vastly distant from the Yanyuwa concept of a regenerating power over the environment.
associated with it is said to belong to the old people who are now dead. Because of this many present day Yanyuwa people believe the environment to be diminished in appearance and fecundity.

Amongst the neighbouring groups to the Yanyuwa, the Mara to the west and the Garrwa to the east, I have not been able to find similar interpretations similar to those the Yanyuwa give the Pleiades. The Mara call them Nyinyi, and they dwell in the sea between the mouth of the Limmen River and Maria Island. The Garrwa call the Pleiades Jabulama which has some associations with a potent Shooting Star Spirit Ancestor.

5.10 Conclusion
This chapter has provided a geographic overview of Yanyuwa territory. The Yanyuwa have divisions based upon perceived land units, as do western scientists. However, Yanyuwa divisions of the land into units are not always the same, as those of western tradition.

The Yanyuwa, for example, perceive different forms of land base categories due to the nature of exploitation over their environment. A Yanyuwa notion of environment includes sea as country, because it contains the "home" or "camps" of the sea animals which they hunt, as well as the sea grass meadows upon which the dugong and sea turtle feed. The environment which the Yanyuwa people move through is balanced between the sea-island and the mainland-riverine systems and, according to seasonal availability and the climate, parts of these environments will be more favoured than others during various parts of the year.

Whilst the land features that exist in Yanyuwa country are relatively stable, and in Yanyuwa thought, basically unalterable by humans, there are localities upon the land which are seen to be the centres of spiritual power which are based upon the activities of their Spirit Ancestors. Because of this power the land is seen to be alive and subject to human control. One example of this is the singing of country to draw it nearer to the traveller. The land
scape for the Yanyuwa is much more than soil, rocks, trees and water. As Bennit (1976:62) comments;

We are lead to questions concerning the degree to which consciousness of ecosystemic and perhaps other material factors enter into...regulatory operations, and to what extent they are deliberate and purposeful.

Weather patterns such as wind and rain are seen to be as much spiritual events as natural ones, and ones which certain men and women believe they can influence. Such interventions may be of benefit or may make life difficult for people. This belief that the natural world, its various energies, plants and animals can be influenced by human agencies is one that will be returned to at various times throughout this thesis.
Chapter 6.

Holding the Land and Sea.

You gotta run the country by the rule; Jungkayi and Ngimarringki they're the rule...it's the only way. (Mussolini Harvey, field diary 1985)

6.1 Introduction

This chapter is a discussion of the way in which the Yanyuwa organise themselves in relation to their country. Its aim is to analyse the interrelationships between the social system and land tenure. To do this, the following elements of social organisation are examined.¹

(i) Kinship and semi-moiety system

(ii) jungkayi - people related to country through maternal descent.

(ii) ngimarringki - people related to country through country by paternal descent.

6.2 Kinship

The Yanyuwa system of kinship is characterised by four terminological lines of descent which are distinguished at a grandparental level. Thus, an individual may be perceived as being descended from each and all four distinct patrilineages of his or her father's father, mother's father, father's mother's (brother) and mother's mother's (brother). Each of these lines of descent has a set of rights and responsibilities with the ownership of land, rituals and ceremonies.

¹ There is within the literature a substantial amount of information concerning land tenureship in the northern parts of Australia. There are many issues associated with indigenous political relationships to the land which go far beyond the extent of this chapter, but which have been covered by other researchers; among these are Peterson, Keen and Sansom (1977), Peterson and Langton (1983), Hiatt (1984) and Avery (1985).
Yanyuwa kinship is classificatory and it can potentially extend to the whole social universe. Each of the four lines of descent can be matched to a moiety and semi-moiety.

A subsection system which divides the society into sixteen named categories also operates in the indigenous community at Borroloola. Amongst the Yanyuwa the system is a relatively recent innovation. Avery (1985) discusses the apparent movement of the subsection system from the Barkly Tablelands and associates its acceptance by the Yanyuwa, in part, to a number of major cult ceremonies which have moved around the Northern Territory. McConvell (1985) also provides a more general discussion of the expansion of subsections in Northern Australia. As a system it has little relevance to the system of Yanyuwa land tenure and is therefore not discussed in detail. Avery comments,

...the semi-moiety organisation is particularly relevant to the local scene whereas the subsection system, at least at Borroloola, provides the terms upon which local community organisation can be integrated with society on the larger regional scale (Avery 1985:201).

It would appear that the subsection system was adopted by the Yanyuwa when they went to work on the cattle stations of the Barkly Tablelands, as the terms were used by the Aboriginal people of this area, and they became a way of establishing relationships with each other. Reay explains the differences between semi-moieties and subsections thus:

To put it in kinship idiom, the four semi-moieties are the four different lines of descent - through the father's father, the father's mother's brother, the mother's father and mother's mother's brother. A man is in the same semi-moiety as his father, his father's father, his son and son's son. The subsection system, on the other hand, distinguished between alternate generations by allotting father and son to different subsections. A man is in the same subsection as his father's father and his son's son, but his father and his son are in another subsection. (Reay 1962. 95-6)
When the Yanyuwa used subsection terms they equated four sets of subsection couples to the four named semi-moieties. Each semi-moiety then consisted of the subsections which coupled together to form "an uninterrupted line of patrilineal descent" (Reay 1962:95). For example, Bulanyi and Balyarrinji are the two male terms for the Mambaliya-Wawukarriya semi-moiety, the children of Bulanyi are Balyarrinji (male) and Nulyarrima (female), the children of Balyarrinji are Bulanyi and Nulanyma, and so on.

6.3 The semi-moiety system

The semi-moiety system divides most people, land, plants, animals and phenomena into four named types, Wurdaliya, Wuyaliya, Rrumburriya and Mambaliya-Wawukarriya. Thus all plants and animals, Dreamings-Spirit Ancestors, natural phenomena such as rain, lightning, winds, fire, etc., are classified into one of these four types. So are the people, the land and sea and not just particular physical features of the latter two. All land and sea within Yanyuwa territory belongs to one of the four semi-moieties.

Recruitment of people to semi-moieties is patrilineal, in that a person belongs to the same semi-moiety as his or her father. The children of a marriage belong to the semi-moiety of the father, but have important rights and responsibilities to the semi-moiety of their mother. Marriage should be exogamous, whereby partners are found in the opposite semi-moiety.

The semi-moieties are grouped into two unnamed patrimoieties (see Figure 1.) The semi-moiety system, like that of the more common section and subsection systems, serves in the first instance as a shorthand code for more specific relationships. Within the semi-moiety, an individual can locate persons of more than one kinship relationship and kin type to himself or herself. For instance, a man is in the same semi-moiety as his father, father's sister, father's brother, father's father, father's father's sister, his sister, daughter's son and son's son. In another semi-moiety will be found this person's mother's mother, mother's mother's brother etc. The other two semi-moieties will contain other kin types and relations. The semi-moieties mirror the lines of descent discussed earlier. For instance,
from an individual's point of view, his father's father's line is contained in his semi-moiety, his mother's mother's brother's line in another semi-moiety but in the same patrimoiety. The other semi-moieties contain the mother's fathers and father's mother's (brother) lines of descent.

Figure 11: The Semi-moiety System

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Yanyuwa People</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Moiety A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Semi-moiety</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mambaliya - Wawukarriya</td>
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As Avery and McLaughlin (1977:6) point out, part of the usefulness of the semi-moiety system is "that it provides a set of terms which can be used to describe the general principles of social organisation". Thus, people will make very general statements like, "Wurdaliya marries Mambaliya-Wawukarriya ", even though actual marriage arrangements may be based on more fine grained kinship relationships.²

Semi-moieties are categories which codify relationships of importance in ritual activity. The semi-moiety also provides a framework for inter-group alignment. Thus, much ritual is organised on a semi-moiety basis. Each semi-moiety is described as owning a set of rituals, designs and sacred objects.

Semi-moiety categories have a pivotal role in land ownership. All land and sea has semi-moiety classification. If a Yanyuwa individual is asked who owns a particular portion of land or sea, the answer is almost inevitably a semi-moiety category. This is because, in a broad sense, all people

² This thesis does not deal in depth with issues such as marriage and kinship. Reay (1962) and Avery (1985) provide much detail on these matters.
belonging to one semi-moiety are perceived as owning all land and sea with the same semi-moiety category. Whilst semi-moiety categories are used to express general notions of land ownership, there are within each semi-moiety a number of smaller patrilineal clans, or patricians. It is these patricians, along with people recruited from their mother’s father, who make up the core people responsible for certain tracts of land and sea.

One semi-moiety, Mambaliya-Wawukarriya, has a double name. The Yanyuwa say that the two names exist because, unlike the three other semi-moiety groups the Mambaliya-Wawukarriya does not have any island country, although they do have coastal country as well as reefs and small areas of sea grass beds which they speak of as being under their control. The coastal members of this group are called Wawukarriya, whilst members whose country is inland identify as Mambaliya. Within the group’s daily social interaction they speak of each other as being “one mob together”, but during ritual performances and detailed discussion about their country, various patricians within each of the two groups become responsible for certain tracts of land.

The division between Wawukarriya and Mambaliya is further highlighted by the patricians within the semi-moiety and the various areas of land with which they are associated. In some ways the Mambaliya-Wawukarriya semi-moiety is a reflection of Yanyuwa society, with a division between fresh water /mainland and saltwater/island. In terms of past technologies and Spirit Ancestors, the Wawukarriya group were also associated with coastal savannah plains, mangroves, fishing nets, fish traps and pelagic fish while the Mambaliya group were more associated with open messmate forests, freshwater creek and lagoon fishing using certain species of bark to stun fish and raking shallow pools with leaves.

6.4 Spirit Ancestors and Law.
The primary foundations of all life systems for the Yanyuwa people are the Spirit Ancestors, which are in Kriol commonly called “Dreamings”, or in Yanyuwa, yijan. The Yanyuwa concepts involved in the term Dreaming or yijan are quite complex, and can be used to describe the Spirit Ancestors who
were creative beings who rose up from the earth, or travelled from distant places, and created and changed geographical features and placed different plants and animals on the earth, and also created a charter which is the Law for existence. The term *yijan* can also be used to describe a creative act, such as the Dugong Hunter Dreaming breaking a rock, or a body design which is still worn in ceremonies. *Yijan* is the period when all creative acts occurred. It is also the way in which relationships have been constructed between humans, and between humans and the environment. Dreaming-Spirit Ancestors or *yijan* are the source, the spring from which all possible relationships between human beings and the environment have originated.

I have chosen in this thesis not to use the word “Dreaming” unless it is used in a direct quotation from a Yanyuwa speaker. Swain (1993:20-25) discusses in some detail the origins of the use of terms Dreaming and Dreamtime, and highlights just how confusing they can be. Rather, I have chosen to use the term “Spirit Ancestor”, as this is how I believe the Yanyuwa relate to the concepts which are embodied in the elusive term Dreaming. For example, quite often when in the field people will view certain species of plants and animals or natural phenomena and call them by a kinship term, which corresponds to the four primary lines of descent used within the semi-moiety system. Thus, on viewing a brolga, *kurdarrku* (*Grus Rubicundis*), for example, people from each of the semi-moieties would relate to it in differing referential ways. A *Mambaliya-Wawukarriya* person would call it *ja-murimuri* or “my most senior paternal grandfather”, a *Wuyaliya* person could call the same being *ja-yakurra*, “my Ancestral mother”, a *Wurdaliya* person could call it *ja-ngabuji*, “my most senior father’s mother” and a *Rrumburriya* person would call it *ja-wukuku*, “my most senior mother’s mother’s brother.

The Yanyuwa people state that their lives, society and land are held by what they classify as the Law or the Way, which in Yanyuwa is called *narnu-*

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*3 This notion of Dreaming is not related to the idea of the dreaming processes which take place during sleep. In Yanyuwa that process during sleep is called *almirrmantharra*.*
Yuwa. This Law is inextricably linked to the Spirit Ancestors and their past actions. It is these Spirit Ancestors' power or spiritual force, wirrimalaru, which provides the link between the past and the present and, in doing so, give the Yanyuwa the reasons for their very existence. The Law is the reason why things are as they are, or are done in a particular fashion. In response to my questions as to why a dugong is cut up in a prescribed way, the answer was, "That's the Law", and another question as to why certain dugong live by themselves, "That's their Law, Law for themselves that's all". The Law is the charter by which all beings in the environments are regulated.

As Johnson Timothy has commented concerning his perception of the way the Yanyuwa people hold the islands of the Sir Edward Pellew Group, "Law goes from island to island, Law to Law" (field diary, 1992). That is, each island has its own particular Law, and no part of the land and sea is without Law. In such a statement the term Law can include all of the Spirit Ancestors associated with the islands, the names given to each locality, the food resources that can be found and the various rules and ways of acting when one visits these islands.

The Yanyuwa draw their Law from the traditions of the past creative period during which the Spirit Ancestors set out the forms of Law, and established the natural order and shape of the landscape, whilst leaving, as they did this, their creative potency. At some point in time, most of the Spirit Ancestors changed into a number of forms. Some became life forms or phenomena as we know them today, such as certain species, celestial bodies, winds and tides. Others transformed themselves into rocks, trees and water courses, and their power became localised at certain sites.

The Yanyuwa believe that these Spirit Ancestors and their power still exist in the land. They also believe that their power is still active and that through ceremony, song and certain forms of ritual action, they can be contacted. It is because of this that the country is said to be able to "hear", that a rock can make certain things happen, and places when visited can be described as being happy, sad, generous or ungenerous.
6.5 Songs and names

In addition to the localities which mark places where Spirit Ancestors ended their journeys or left items of importance, all of the islands, sea and mainland are crisscrossed with the tracks or paths of these Spirit Ancestors, and these tracks are marked with places where the Spirit Ancestors danced, ate, fought, slept, urinated and so on. All of these places are seen to be repositories of power and the consciousness of the Spirit Ancestors. Other Spirit Ancestors did not travel. They remained in one place, but they interacted with the travelling Spirit Ancestors. Thus the whole landscape is seen as a vast network of meaning.

The Yanyuwa speak of these travelling Spirit Ancestors who *wandayarra a-yabaia* or “follow the road”. These roads are the routes which the Spirit Ancestors took as they crossed over land and sea. The Yanyuwa often refer to these roads by the name of the major Spirit Ancestor which travelled along it. So, for example, there are roads of the Tiger Shark, Groper and Dugong Hunters. In actual fact, there can be a range of Spirit Ancestors associated with the road of a single main character and its activities.

These roads are also the song cycles, *kujika*, which are sung during ceremonial performances. The song cycles for the travelling Spirit Ancestors follow a particular road and have offshoots which diverge from the main road to bring into the song all the stationary Spirit Ancestors which may be associated with a particular tract of land. Both the songs and the creatures can be called *kujika*, as they play a creative role. The Spirit Ancestors and their songs are inseparable from each other and from the sites which they created through the action of singing. Thus, the Spirit Ancestors are the creators, the singers of songs, which sang the Yanyuwa environment into being.

These song cycles, the Yanyuwa state, come directly from the Spirit Ancestors; everything they did is recorded in these songs: the names of country, fauna, flora, events and names of people and places are all recorded. As one man explained when talking of the song cycle for the Dugong Hunter Spirit Ancestors,
147.

They name the country from start to finish, right from Vanderlin Island up to the Limmen Bight, all the names of places they named, are sung in that song, the ceremony song... every time them Dugong Hunters used to have a rest they used to call the name of that place, every little place, they call that name of country...they sang that place and they sang themselves, they sang that rope, dugong rope, or like when they found something like a yam, or when they saw fish, or white-bellied sea eagle they would sing it...they sing it, like hunting, finding the country and naming the country all the way along.

(Wylo McKinnon, field diary 1992)

Some of these kujika consist of over five hundred verses, which are all sung in order. These songs represent a detailed account of ritual and economic resources which are located over the country, as well as the names for other things, such as the various cuts which are required to butcher a dugong or sea turtle, or the breath of a sea turtle as she labours on the sand in prior to nesting.

These songs, when described in Yanyuwa and by both men and women, are always spoken of in the present tense. They are sometimes described as running (wulumantharra), or moving (wingkayarra) or flowing (wujbantharra) through the country. The singers only have to know the song and they can tap into it, and flow with it, and give voice to that which is always on or in the country.

As the Spirit Ancestors travelled, they were responsible for naming the country; all of the 600 recorded names over the islands and coastal region of Yanyuwa country were placed there by the Spirit Ancestors. As they travelled along their “roads”, they called out the names of localities on their path, but they also looked in other directions and called out the names of other places that they could see. In some instances their voices echoed off rocks and hills and named places far from their actual path (Map 7 details South West Island, its place names and the path of the Groper Spirit Ancestor which surrounds the northern and western coastline of the island.)
Map 7. Named Sites And Localities
On South West Island.
At many of these named locations the Spirit Ancestors also left behind repositories of personal names, *wunyingu* or "bush names", which are now the names of present day individuals. The names of people and of land are inextricably bound together. Therefore a person can say:

> My "bushname" from my country is Rijirrngu, that's the fin of the Groper when she got to that place Alawuyawiji, she sang her body, my name comes from there.

*(Billy Miller, field diary 1991)*

As this example illustrates, names can be derived from the Spirit Ancestors themselves; they can be alternative names for the Spirit Ancestors, body parts or actions. Indeed, some of the names are just names, but hallowed because they are derived from the Spirit Ancestors.

Yanyuwa personal names are bound to the Spirit Ancestors in a profound way, as are place names. The actions of these original Ancestors did not take place in some far locale, rather in the areas where people are now exercising control. The activities which occurred in the time of the Spirit Ancestors are seen as a link between people and their country. The link is two-fold, in that people carry with them a personal name related to the country and therefore the Spirit Ancestor, and that this link was achieved by the actual naming and granting of country by the Spirit Ancestors. The names given to people also maintain and continue links to both the living and the dead, so the naming of people is not done in an arbitrary manner. The giving of a name relates a person to deceased people who once carried that name, and, in a sense, the person carrying that name becomes spiritually linked to all the other people who have ever been given that name. Therefore, names, like the Spirit Ancestors, are continuing and are seen as a very important link to the past as well as a way of maintaining the present.

Nancy Williams also records the importance of names amongst the Yolngu people of North East Arnhem Land, and discusses concepts which are very similar to the Yanyuwa. She states:
Names are used to indicate at any given time the membership of a group, the structure of a group, the structure of members' relations to each other and to a defined area of land....They (names) also provide a basis for maintaining continuity in ownership of land through time.... (They are) expressions of the jural basis for claim of continuous ownership of land by successors, "the same people" through time.  
(Williams 1986:73)

It is in this sense that the Yanyuwa perceive their names. Names give individuals important identity, and groups jealously control their stock of personal names. These names are derived from song cycles and names of Spirit Ancestors, and can also be the name of a specific place on the land, within a particular group's land.

6.6 *Ngalki* ; an imbued essence.

The Yanyuwa, when talking of the Spirit Ancestors, conceptualise them as having human-like traits, but at the same time carrying aspects of the species or phenomena they represent. Some Spirit Ancestors are seen as being always human-like, such as the Dugong Hunters.

It has been seen that the Spirit Ancestors were the originators of the social systems such as the semi-moiety system and that they also named the country and left behind names for people who would occupy the land. The Spirit Ancestors were also imbued with a classifying agent which divided all things to the various semi-moieties. This agent with which they were imbued is called *ngalki*.

*Ngalki* is a very complex word which is best described as essence or a quality that identifies and gives distinction to its owner or owners (see Kirton and Timothy 1977). The *ngalki* of a flower, for example, is its smell or perfume; of food, its taste; a song's *ngalki* is its tune; and an animal's *ngalki*, its smell. The *ngalkingalki* of a person is the voice, and the *ngalki* of a person can refer to both the individual's social or semi-moiety group and the sweat from the armpits and his/her own distinctive odour. People, country, natural phenomena, plants and animals, material culture items and...
ritual objects all carry a *ngalki* which places them within the Yanyuwa semi-moiety system (see Table 3).

The following table is a selection of some of the semi-moiety classifications given by the Yanyuwa to various objects, phenomena and species. In regard to dugong and sea turtle and associated technology, there are a number of issues raised. Firstly, the only dugong classified is the lone male dugong, and the hunting equipment is apportioned to three groups. It is possible to see a pattern of both dugong and turtle being apportioned to both patrimoieties, but I cannot ascertain if this is coincidental or meant to be. Other items not included in this table are the bark canoe, which is associated with all groups, and more abstract items such as dugong hunting camps, also associated with all groups. Seagrass is divided amongst three of the groups. Issues raised by this classification will be discussed in relation to other beliefs associated with dugong and sea turtle later in this thesis.

Older Yanyuwa people have no hesitation in classifying species and phenomena into the semi-moiety categories. The major Spirit Ancestors are easily placed, while other decisions are made by referring to song cycles and the activities of the Spirit Ancestors. There appear to be no set rules associated with such classification, or no rule which anyone has ever been able to articulate, and the knowledge of such classification is acquired over a long period of time.

The Yanyuwa, however, appear to believe that such classification is rational, even when some things do appear to be obscure and quite anomalous. People will describe obscure classifications in terms of relationships that one thing has to another. For example, the species of seagrass, *Enhalus acoroides*, is *Rrumburriya*, because the majority of big reefs are in *Rrumburriya* territory, while the dominant seagrass of the large seagrass beds (*Syringodium isoetifolium*) is *Wuyaliya*, “sometimes a little bit” *Wurdaliya* because, firstly, seagrass is in their country, and secondly, the lone male dugong, which is *Wuyaliya*, travels these seagrass beds.
Table 3: Examples of material objects, phenomena and species associated with the semi-moieties

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>RRUMBURRIYA</th>
<th>MAMBALIYA-WAWUKARRIYA</th>
<th>WUYALIYA</th>
<th>WURDALIYA</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>harpoon &amp; harpoon rope</td>
<td>scoop net/fish trap</td>
<td>bailer shell</td>
<td>conch shell</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>dugong &amp; dugong hunters</td>
<td>loggerhead turtle</td>
<td>lone male dugong</td>
<td>harpoon point</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>north wind</td>
<td>rain of the wet season</td>
<td>cold south wind</td>
<td>shooting star</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>waves/ salt water</td>
<td>brolga</td>
<td>Pleiades (7 Sisters)</td>
<td>green turtle</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>tiger shark</td>
<td>olive python</td>
<td>groper</td>
<td>hawksbill turtle</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>hammerhead shark</td>
<td>wedge tailed eagle</td>
<td>sand goanna</td>
<td>flat back turtle</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>red flying fox</td>
<td>black flying fox</td>
<td>dingo</td>
<td>mosquito</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>cycad palm</td>
<td>long necked turtle</td>
<td>sandfly</td>
<td>spirit man</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>salt water crocodile</td>
<td>rainbow serpent</td>
<td>mangroves</td>
<td>pelican</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
There appears to be no incorporation of Macassan or other exotic items into this system. The dugout canoe, for example, is not given a *ngalki* classification. The only exception I have been able to find are the steel harpoon points which replaced the wooden points. Most people agree that the steel points should still be regarded as *Wurdaliya*, because the wooden ones are classified as such. However, a now deceased *Rrumburiya* man argued quite strongly that they should be *Rrumburiya* because Macassans gave the steel to *Rrumburiya* people first. It would appear that this was an individual argument, and today the steel points are held to be *Wurdaliya*.

### 6.7 Spirit conception

The Spirit Ancestors were responsible for the classification of the world. They named the land and gave distinction to the various phenomena, flora, fauna and material objects which help make up the totality of the Yanyuwa environment. In conjunction with these activities, many Spirit Ancestors, as they travelled, left their eyes, *na-mi*, at various localities. These eyes became transformed into freshwater wells or soaks called *mabin* or *rawurrki*. Nearly all freshwater wells within Yanyuwa country are related to actions of the Spirit Ancestors. An analogy can be seen between fresh water wells and the eye, in that an eye is filled with a clear water-like fluid.

These wells and soaks, along with most of Yanyuwa country, have names, but they have a significance far beyond providing reliable water. They are also the home of *adirri* or “spirit children”. These spirit children, who were named with personal names and left by the Spirit Ancestors, are believed to enter women to begin the process of pregnancy. The spirits of deceased people, after due ceremonial actions, are returned to their country and to these wells.

Someone who is associated with a tract of country by virtue of his/her spirit child coming from that locality is described as *wurranganji*. This term translates as “a relation/kin who has come from the depths of the water.”

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*The term *ardirri* is composed of two morphemes *ardu* -child, and *rrii* an intransitive verb marker. Although the resultant term is a noun, I feel that the term *ardirri* highlights the ever present potentiality for a spirit child to become a child.*
This statement indicates that the spirit child or adirri has come from the waters of a well within a given tract of land. The term is also an example of the use of the stem nganji, 'kin', a term which will be discussed in some detail later, in relation to humans, plants, animals and their relationships to each other and to the environment.

During visits to country people often point out a well, a lagoon or a stretch of sea or river on their country and make statements such as, wabarrangu karna-ngabu baji ngalangarna adirri, or "long ago I bathed there when I was a spirit child". This is a reference to the belief that as a spirit child the individual lived within the waters of the well or lagoon.

The Yanyuwa believe that the intervention of the adirri is an important element in the continuation of their identity as a social group whose culture is bound to the landscape. The spirit children impregnate women. The connection between spirit children and women is realised through either a dream or an unusual happening. The relative who dreams of the spirit child is then able to inform the mother of the na-ngalki awara or "country of origin or essence" of the child and sometimes even its sex and appearance.

The locality at which conception is first realised, or what adirri may relate to an individual in a dream regarding its place and origin, indicates to the father and other relatives the Spirit Ancestor responsible for the adirri conception. Because of the way the Yanyuwa people formerly travelled, and to some extent still do travel, over a large range, conception may occur on land that an individual does not belong to patrilineally, such as the case today with nearly all children of Yanyuwa descent being both physically conceived and spiritually conceived at Borroloola. In such instances what becomes important is the giving of a name from the country that through patrilineal descent the child would belong to, and the issues of spirit child conception are not discussed or deemed important. Occasionally, children are still spiritually conceived on country with which they are not associated, and then other factors are dealt with, as described below.
6.8 “Countries”/ Estates

For the Yanyuwa it is the Spirit Ancestors who gave them the right to say they belong to a particular group and associated tracts of land. Each land holding group (the composition of which is explained below) is associated with a particular area of land and sea; the particular areas are spoken of by the Yanyuwa as as being the “countries” of particular families and individuals.

These areas of land, sea, reefs and sea grass beds, or estates, have the same semi-moiety association as the land holding group associated with it (Map 8). The Spirit Ancestors which gave meaning to this area (or areas) of land and sea have the same semi-moiety classification as the patriclan and the land.

The estates are not necessarily contiguous. They can consist of a number of areas separated from each other by land or sea associated with another land holding group (see Map 8). In some instances on the islands where two islands of the same semi-moiety are next to each other, the islands are described as being *nyingkarra* or “brothers together” (see Map 9). For example, the area of Wulibirra, Red Bluff, on the central east coast of North Island and Muluwa, Cape Vanderlin are described in this fashion.

Muluwa and Wulibirra are two brothers (*nyingkarra*), they stand continually looking at each other, Muluwa from the east and Wulibirra from the east. Muluwa is the big brother and Wulibirra is the little brother.

(Johnson Timothy, field diary 1991)

This example represents the only time that personal kinship terms are used to describe land in relationship terms. It is an interesting use of metaphor, but I also believe it represents an example of the idea that, for the Yanyuwa, land is not an inanimate object, but rather possesses the ability to feel and hear. It is therefore quite normal for a personal kin term to be used.

There are perceived to be boundaries between estates of patriclans or different semi-moieties. On the islands, because of the definite geographical
borders the coastlines provide, it is relatively easy to distinguish the boundaries where the country of one semi-moiety begins and another finishes. Such boundaries are often described in terms of Spirit Ancestor activity, where they stopped, or turned to travel in another direction, or even in some instances where the song of one Spirit Ancestor power was halted or “blocked” by the song of another. Dinah Norman explains this concept in relation to the Wuyaliya Dingo Spirit Ancestor on the mainland and Wuyaliya Jabiru Spirit Ancestor on the islands.

The Dingo came from the south, singing his kujika, he got to the mouth of the Crooked River, Wunguntha we call it, he sang his song out onto the sea, he wanted to take it to South West island, he sang it out onto the sea, but it would not travel to that island, the kujika just kept going round and around in one place, the reason being was the kujika of the Jabiru on the island was too strong, the song of the Jabiru blocked the song of the Dingo, the kujika of the Jabiru was saying, “Dingo you return to the south to the mainland, you will remain on the mainland, while I belong here, one who is from the sea and islands.

(Dinah Norman, field diary 1991)

Such an event as described above is one of the most common ways in which the Yanyuwa describe the reasons for boundaries, that is in relation to song and whose song was the more powerful. Some of these estates are given a name which encompasses a total area; some are not. However, all estates contain named sites and localities, and in the case of the islands, many of them have single names. In the case of Vanderlin Island there are actually a number of named sub-estates; the general boundaries of these sub-estates have little in common with the broader semi-moiety boundaries over the islands (see map 10).

Estates of the same semi-moiety are linked through the actions of the Spirit Ancestors’ powers, often by virtue of the paths they travelled, and sometimes because the Spirit Ancestors sang out to areas associated with the same semi-moiety or threw objects onto the country. Relationships amongst the various Yanyuwa families which comprise the semi-moieties and
Map 8. Semi-moiety Areas Over The Sir Edward Pellew Islands And Coastal Mainland.
Wur. = Wurdaliya  Wuy. = Wuyaliya
Rru. = Rrumburriya
Mam. = Mambaliya-Wawukarriya

Map 10. Sub-Estates on Vanderlin Island
patricians are articulated in terms of links to sites and country, and the spiritual and secular structures of the local society are built on these foundations. Within this area of the Gulf of Carpentaria there are similar spiritual and social structures operating in such communities as Ngukurr on the Roper River and Numbulwar on the Rose River. Because of this, members of different communities are able to include each other in their common spiritual and social framework by reference to common Spirit Ancestors travelling along paths which are articulated in song and ceremony. The _Rumburriya_ patricians on the Sir Edward Pellew Islands are associated with the Dugong Hunter Spirit Ancestors which travel into the Limmen Bight and the country of the Mara people. Thus, a unity is established between the Yanyuwa people who hold the beginnings of the Dugong Hunter Spirit Ancestors’ journey, and the Mara people who hold the final section of their path. The unity between the Yanyuwa and Mara people associated with the Dugong Hunter Spirit Ancestors is expressed through kin at an everyday social level and spiritually through the various ceremonies in which the Dugong Hunter Spirit Ancestors are celebrated.

Likewise the Groper Spirit Ancestor of the _Wuyaliya_ patrician begins its travels in Queensland, travels to South West Island and then onto Numbulwar and the Roper River in south eastern Arnhem Land. In such an instance, the Groper represents a common Spirit Ancestor for a large group of people from a number of different language groups. Such a Spirit Ancestor as the Groper serves as one way of binding different communities together. In these communities there are individuals who believe they possess a common substance or point of origin with people in the other communities. These people believe that the Groper is a common paternal ancestor for all of them and that they are a part of the substance or _ngalki_ of the original Spirit Ancestor Groper. Such relationships are actualised through shared song cycles, rituals and expressions of kinship.

6.9 The patrician

Some of the patricians within the semi-moieties are named, others are not. For example within the _Wuyaliya_ semi-moietie there are three patricians
which have responsibilities over various parts of their estate. One of these patricians is responsible for South West Island and the northern half of Kangaroo Island. This group call themselves, likilinganji-Wiliwarrngu, translated as "Those people who are kin to the island wild honey". This honey is a unique feature of South West Island, and as a Spirit Ancestor its presence is felt to pervade the whole area. One of the other Wuyaliya patricians exercises rights over the southern portion of Kangaroo Island and the delta region of the McArthur River; these people call themselves likilinganji-Kirlakanku, which translates as "The people who are kin to the mangrove forests". Mangroves and the associated tidal environments are a feature of this estate.

Some patrician names are obscure, and their meanings relate to activities performed by the various Spirit Ancestors associated with the group. The coastal Wawukarriya group call themselves likilinganji-Kumbarkanyakulaki, which means, "Those people who are kin to the Brolga who ascended into the air, circling and dropping feather down over the land."

The members of a patrician call their land ja-murimuri awara or "country of my senior paternal grandfather". At other times people will say they are jibiya to such and such a place. Jibiya conveys the meaning of being closely associated with or belonging to a certain tract of land.

The Spirit Ancestors associated with a particular estate are also described using this term jibiya, as are the various living things and some geographic features associated with the estate. For example, the Lone Male Dugong Spirit Ancestor of the Wuyaliya patrician associated with its resting place called Wunguntha on the Crooked River is described in the following manner: nya-mangaji jiyamirrama jibiya bajii, jibiya Wunguntha 'that Lone Male Dugong, he belongs there, he is associated with Wunguntha'. People belonging to this Wuyaliya patrician would describe themselves in a similar manner. An elderly woman associated with the Lone Male Dugong said of herself, "Ngarna a-jibiya wayka, a-jibiya Wunguntha ngarna" - I belong downstream, I am associated with Wunguntha.

On some occasions, people are described according to the Spirit Ancestors of the estate they are associated with, which are seen as an
essential feature of their personal and group identity. Thus, they would be characterised as being a "proper Shark", or "proper Groper". Such statements refer to the central nature of the individual. These types of statements become especially prevalent during times of ceremonial performance and non-indigenous investigations into land ownership, when people are stressing their links to their country and Spirit Ancestors.

The topographical features of the estates are interpreted as signs of the Spirit Ancestors' movements over and activities on the land. They are also taken as evidence that ultimately joins the Spirit Ancestors to the land. The same can be said for the members of the patriclan. By use of bodymarks, ritual objects, ritual movements and songs, and by foraging and hunting over the land and sea, the patriclan members demonstrate that they belong to the land and are related to the Spirit Ancestors. It becomes the duty and obligation of an individual, as a direct descendant of these Spirit Ancestors, to continue the traditions that were first established, just as it is the duty of those who follow the present day Yanyuwa to continue the rituals and to preserve the sites which hold the sacred knowledge.

6.10 Ngimarringki and Jungkayi

The Yanyuwa perceive that for every tract of land there are two principal sub-groups. These are the ngimarringki, those people whose fathers come from the country, and the jungkayi, those people whose mothers come from the same country (see also discussion by Morphy and Morphy (1984). The significance of that division is that the wants, needs, and responsibilities in relation to the land and ritual are apportioned between those who are either jungkayi or ngimarringki. The divisions, distributions and responsibilities are subject to conditions of age and sex.

The ngimarringki role is paternally transmitted and comes to a person from his or her father, while the role of the jungkayi is transmitted from the mother's father. The effect of this system is that people are both ngimarringki for one area and jungkayi for another.

There are also those people who, by merit of age, status and/or knowledge may hold extra-territorial responsibilities and authority. Such
people can include ritual leaders, traditional healers, second generation jungkayi, whose rights are found through their father's mother, people admitted through the establishment of company and "one water" relationships and also nominated guardians of special knowledge in relation to ritual sites and sacred objects.

Members of the same semi-moiety and patriclan will use the term ngimarringki to describe their responsibility to a given tract of land, as in the expression, for example; yiwa barra ngimarringki ki-awarawu na-wini Wadirrila; 'He is ngimarringki for that place named Wadirrila'. Ngimarringki is a term which expresses in a general descriptive way the relationship a person has to land, Spirit Ancestors and ceremony. Like many Yanyuwa words, this term is polysemous and meaning is dependent upon the context. In Aboriginal English and Kriol this term is often translated as owner or boss, and, as with the indigenous term, these two terms are open to many levels of understanding.

In its broader sense all individuals of the same semi-moiety can be described as ngimarringki for all estates, Spirit Ancestors and ceremonies of their semi-moiety. For example, in general day-to-day conversation all the various Wuyaliya patricians can describe themselves as ngimarringki for South West Island.

It is during times of ritual performance or discussion of ritual that the more specific nature and usage of the term ngimarringki is seen. At such times it is the people classed as ngimarringki who perform dances and sing song cycles based on the Spirit Ancestors within the land of their patriclan. So, for example, during the Wambuyungu rituals associated with the Wuyaliya estate on South West Island, it is the men from the patrician belonging to this land who take responsibility for such Spirit Ancestors as the Groper, Jabiru, Wild Honey and Black Bream.

There is no hard and fast rule which can be applied to the usage of the term ngimarringki. Its particular meaning at any one time is determined by context and situation; that is, the time and place when the term is being used allows the hearer to determine whether it is being used in all inclusive or exclusive form. The term jibiya is a much more specific term denoting
There is also another specific term, *wirriyarra*, which is today considered an archaic term, but which older Yanyuwa people use when stressing the relationship of people to place and Spirit Ancestor.

Patricians of the same semi-moiety have a common broad spiritual affiliation to a number of estates within their semi-moiety, and the term *ngimarringki* can be used to describe them. However, the primary spiritual responsibility for each estate belongs to those people who have inherited the land from Spirit Ancestors and human ancestors within their own patrician, and it is when discussing these particular people that the term *wirriyarra* is used. The term *wirriyarra* conveys the concepts of spiritually belonging to a particular place; it conveys the notions of a source, of an individual’s origins on the land. An example of its use is; *yinda wirriyarra, kinyamba-ngka yijan, yinda nyinku-nganji ki-awarawu*; “You are from your own country, originating from your own Spirit Ancestor, you are kin to that country”.

In past times, before the Yanyuwa moved *en masse* to Borroloola, the term *wirriyarra* was used to describe certain individuals within a patrician. Various lineages, *li-bibilarra*, which comprised the patrician were given responsibility over portions of a patrician’s estate. Some of these portions, or sub-estates, were named, some were not. An individual and his children were then described as being *wirriyarra* over a certain area of their estate. In contemporary times it is an issue of land ownership which is seen to have little relevance. It is now seen to belong to an era when people lived and moved over their land for lengthy periods of time. Old people describe situations where all of the islands were divided into these smaller units or sub-estates. The most clearly remembered were over Vanderlin Island (see Map 10), which was once divided into five regions, with individual members from the patrician taking responsibilities for each area. All of the sub-estates bordered on on Lake Eames, Walala, one of the most important sites on the island.

A person became associated with these smaller sub-estates by either direct descent from one’s father or by being spiritually conceived on that area of land. A person associated with one of these smaller sub-estates had
primary responsibility for the sites and Spirit Ancestors associated with the area. This responsibility was best expressed through ceremonial performance. A person also had responsibility, at a more limited level, over the economic resources of the area, whereby people wishing to access favoured resources such as bird or sea turtle eggs would first have to obtain permission from the members of the group responsible for the land.

With people moving to live full-time at Borroloola, such a fine-grained system of relating to country fell into abeyance, primarily because, once away from their country people describe their relationship to it in a more general way. A system has developed where all members of a patrician have equivalent rights over the total area of land. In addition, the removal of people to work on the cattle stations for long periods of time also meant that this level of intimacy as expressed through the concepts embodied in wirriyarra also lessened. It would appear that it was a system that worked best when people were actually living and moving through the country all of the time.

Such a system of sub-estates as described above also means that the jungkayi, (see below) or the children of the women of the patrician, also had responsibilities for quite specific areas of their mother’s country. There is, however, an irony in the relationship between the ngimmarringki and their Spirit Ancestors. The ngimmarringki see themselves as direct paternal descendants of the Spirit Ancestors, from the land itself in the form of a spirit child. The ngimmarringki have names from the Spirit Ancestors, which again highlights their closeness; but from birth the ngimmarringki are separated from their Spirit Ancestors and can only gain access to them with the assistance of the jungkayi, the maternal kin of the ngimmarringki. As with the term ngimmarringki, the term jungkayi is context specific but in Aboriginal English and Kriol the terms such as policeman, boss, manager, worker and guardian are used. Without the jungkayi the ngimmarringki are in a helpless situation in regard to their relationship with their Spirit Ancestors. It is only through death that the ngimmaringki are reunited with their original Ancestors, and this is achieved through funeral ceremonies, during which both ngimmarringki and jungkayi have important roles.
There are certain ngimarringki who appear to take key roles in the spiritual matters of all the patricians within a semi-moiety, but this must be seen as a general responsibility which is best observed during times of ceremony, or other specific ritual-social events.

6.11 Relationship to Mother’s Father and Mother’s Country

The relationship of an individual to his or her mother’s father’s country and mother’s Spirit Ancestors and country is one of high emotional feeling. There are times when it appears that this feeling rises above that an individual has for his or her father’s Spirit Ancestors and country. This is especially so during rituals or when sites belonging to an individual’s mother’s father or mother are visited. A person’s mother’s Spirit Ancestors are often called “my milk” in Kriol, because it is the mother’s Spirit Ancestors which are described as having “grown up” people, by virtue of the

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5 There are a number of ceremonies which the Yanyuwa still perform and a number which are no longer performed but still have relevance to men and women who are knowledgeable about them, because there are sites on the landscape associated with these ceremonies. Briefly, the ceremonies known by the Yanyuwa are as follows.

**Kundawira** - ceremony associated with the Dugong Hunter, White-bellied Sea Eagle and Leatherback Turtle Spirit Ancestors. Sacred memorial stones where painted during the course of the ceremony. Rrumburriya are ngimarringki.

**Bambarruku** - ceremony associated with the Dingo Spirit Ancestor. Wuyaliya people are ngimarringki.

**Wambuyungu** - ceremony with a shared ngimarringki-ship between Wuyaliya and Wurdaliya semi-moieties. An age grading ceremony. Important Spirit Ancestors such as the Groper, Jabiru, Goanna, Black Bream, Barracouda, Beach-stone Curlew, Osprey, Green Turtle, Pelican, Spirit Men and Wild Honey are celebrated in this ceremony.

**a-Kunabibi** - ceremony with shared ngimarringki-ship between Rrumburriya and Mambaliya-Wawukarriya semi-moieties. After circumcision this is the primary age-grading ceremony. Important Spirit Ancestors such as the Travelling Women, Stranger Rainbow Serpent, Brolga, Wave, Fly, Dugong Hunters, Crow, White-bellied Sea Eagle, Wedge-Tailed Eagle, Galah, Echidna, Possum and Sea Snake are celebrated in this ceremony.

**a-Milkathatha** - ceremony during which bones are placed in a hollow log coffin. The Wuyaliya people are ngimarringki. The land of South West Island and the Groper Spirit Ancestor are celebrated in this ceremony.

**Jangalangala** - ceremony during which bones are placed in a hollow log coffin. The Wurdaliya people are ngimarringki. The land of West Island and the Sea Turtle Spirit Ancestor are celebrated in this ceremony.

**Yilayi** - ceremony during which bones are placed in a hollow log coffin. The Mambaliya-Wawukarriya people are ngimarringki. The country associated the Spotted Nightjar and Crow Spirit Ancestors are celebrated in this ceremony. cont..
people having been nursed by their mother as an infant. People generally refer to the country of their mother's father by simply saying "my mother's country". Such a simple statement belies the complexity of this relationship.

One of the key words which the Yanyuwa people use when discussing the Spirit Ancestors, actual species, ceremony or land associated with their mother's patriclan is yakurra. This is a specific term used to describe the spiritual wealth and land associated with one's mother's country. It is best translated as "Spirit Ancestor mother".

In its broadest sense the term jungkayi applies to those people who stand in a child's relationship to all the estates and Spirit Ancestors of his or her mother's father's and mother's semi-moieties. As with ngimarringki the jungkayi often use the term jibiya to stress their relationship to a particular Spirit Ancestor entity associated with their mother: nya-mangaji mujbayi ja-yakurra nya-ngatha jibiya Ralnguwa - 'That Cabbage Palm Dreaming is my Spirit Ancestor mother, she is associated with Ralnguwa'.

Footnote 5 cont: Kunumbu ceremony during which bones are placed in a hollow log coffin. The Rrumburriya people are ngimarringki. The country associated with the Hill Kangaroo and Tiger Shark are celebrated in this ceremony.

Wulubuwa-memorial ceremony performed by Wuyaliya and Wurdaliya ngimarringki.

The Dingo, Water Lily and Goanna Fat are primary Spirit Ancestors associated with this ceremony.

Yalkawarru-initial funeral ceremonies performed by Wuyaliya and Wurdaliya ngimarringki to return the spirits of deceased kin back to country. The Spirit Man and Antilopine Kangaroo are the primary Spirit Ancestors involved.

Kulyukulyu-initial funeral ceremonies performed by Mambaliya-Wawukarriya and Rrumburriya ngimarringki to return spirits of the deceased kin back to country. The Brolga and Salmon-tailed Catfish are the primary Spirit Ancestors involved.

a-Marndiwa-circumcision rituals. The semi-moieties responsible for this ceremony are dependant on the semi-moieties of the initiates involved. For example Wuyaliya initiates, then Wuyaliya semi-moieties involved in singing their song cycles. Performers in this ceremony wear the body designs from their mother's country.

Note: All ceremonies have important roles for women. No one ceremony is totally dependant on men alone. In ceremonies such as Wambuyungu, a-Kunabibi, Yalkawarru, Kulyukulyu and a-Marndiwa women have their own very set and specific rituals.
Such statements as these also stress the speaker's relationship to a particular place associated with his or her mother.

*Jungkayi* call the Spirit Ancestors of the *ngimarringki* "mother" but the *ngimarringki* do not call their own Spirit Ancestors "father". If the *ngimarringki* do need to address their own Spirit Ancestor, they use a term which means "most senior paternal grandfather", *ja-murimuri*, a more formal and respectful term. The *jungkayi* have a different and more intimate association which is expressed by their use of the term "mother". What the use of such kin terms highlights is that the *jungkayi* and the *ngimarringki* have kin relationships to the same Spirit Ancestors. Their shared intimacy in relation to these Spirit Ancestors is based on contrasting values, which are shown in the reciprocal dependancy which the *ngimarringki* and *jungkayi* have to each other in order to activate the power of the Spirit Ancestors, or when issues surrounding the use of natural resources need to be discussed.

This dependancy is illustrated most powerfully during times of ceremony, and during discussions in relation to areas of land over which the *ngimarringki* have control. There are times when the *ngimarringki* appear to resent the control that the *jungkayi* have over certain aspects of the land and rituals belonging to the *ngimarringki*. Sometimes *ngimarringki* will be heard to say that the *jungkayi* are "too hard", a Kriol expression which covers such concepts as uncaring, strict, abusive, severe or harsh. Another common term used to describe the *jungkayi* in Kriol is that they are "too cranky", by which the *ngimarringki* mean that the *jungkayi* can be argumentative, ill-natured and disputatious. While the *ngimarringki* may use such terms to describe the *jungkayi*, they do also admit their need for their *jungkayi* if they are to perform ceremonies and play an active role in relation to the land of their fathers and to assist in the education of their youth.

In its most extreme form the *jungkayi* make a show of their power to control the *ngimarringki* by their rights to punish, to treat the *ngimarringki* roughly, to fine them and in extreme cases arrange for the use of sorcery to kill or harm *ngimarringki* who may have erred during the performance of their duties towards ceremony, land or kin. *Jungkayi,*
therefore, see their role as one in which they ease the tension between the men and women of their mother's patrician and associated Spirit Ancestors, sites and ceremonies. It is in these circumstances that the nature of the jungkayi as facilitators, performing tasks for the ngimarringki which they are unable to perform, becomes quite clear. Only the jungkayi can bring about the conditions which enable the ngimarringki to have access to their Spirit Ancestors. At such times when the ngimarringki do have access to their Spirit Ancestors, it is the role of the jungkayi to mediate the link between the two, to prevent the association becoming too great and therefore potentially dangerous for the ngimarringki.

There are three main areas where the jungkayi demonstrate spiritual responsibility towards land and sites. These are site visitation, performance of ceremony and mediation between secular and sacred worlds, and as general educators and advisors.

Jungkayi must accompany ngimarringki when the ngimarringki's sites are being visited. They walk ahead of the ngimarringki, talking and explaining to the spiritual inhabitants of the land why they have entered the area.

Areas where human burials are found on the islands are thought to be places where the spirits of the deceased concentrate. The Yanyuwa believe that the spirits of the dead people behave in a similar way to the living: they hunt dugong and sea turtle and forage over the country as invisible companions to the living, but both are said to be aware of each other. The spirits are often referred to casually as the "old people", and are more keenly felt in sacred places, in burial sites and areas where Spirit Ancestors are said to reside - areas to which people do not normally go. This is why entry into such places must be announced by a jungkayi, as they are considered the only people who can successfully mediate between the spirits of living and deceased paternal kin.

In potentially very dangerous places even the power of the jungkayi is somewhat diminished. There are parts of the environment that they find difficult to approach, and this especially so where sites are associated with predominantly negative power. If such power were to be activated, it is
thought to work against the general well being of all life forms and established ecology of the land.

In general, most major places where Spirit Ancestors are said to reside are not normally visited. Sites associated with potential danger are very rarely visited, even the *jungkayi* are loathe to do so because of potential danger. The *jungkayi*, however, can normally enter these areas without seeking permission from the *ngimarringki*. This is especially the case in relation to areas where sacred objects, such as hollow log coffins, are stored. *Jungkayi* can, however, allow the *ngimarringki* to enter and gather natural resources at some of these places. These areas may include canoetree sites, ochre deposits, spear shaft tree sites, some areas where specific bush foods are found, and any Spirit Ancestor sites associated with the increase of plant foods, such as cycad nuts, yams and plums.

The *ngimarringki* cannot carry out their ritual responsibilities without *jungkayi*. *Jungkayi* can withdraw support, thus making access to the Spirit Ancestors, associated rituals and sacred objects dangerous, if not impossible. They are also seen in the role of “policeman”, people who are authorised to give orders and punish those who do not conform to the dictates of the Law.

It is the spiritual power, *wirrimalaru*, of the Spirit Ancestors that must be maintained at a safe level during times of ritual performance so as to not endanger anybody. This is one of the roles of the *jungkayi*. They mediate and ease transition of people between the secular and sacred spheres of the Yanyuwa world. It is in this position that the *jungkayi* play an extremely vital role in their relationship with *ngimarringki*. They make the ceremony grounds, paint the body designs, make ritual objects, assist with the singing of the song cycles and generally make sure that ritual is correctly carried out by the *ngimarringki*. It is the *jungkayi* who ‘open the door’ for the *ngimarringki* to the sacred sphere of the Spirit Ancestors, and make sure that the *ngimarringki* do not become forever enfolded within the power and essence of the Spirit Ancestors, which could lead to premature aging and even death.

*The jungkayi* see to it that the *ngimarringki* are diligent and act in
the correct manner when a ceremony has started. Once a ceremony has begun, the ngimarringki are required to see it through to the end, to provide food and other payments to sustain the jungkayi, and generally to ensure the smooth and correct running of the ceremony. If these requirements are not met, the jungkayi can punish the offending ngimarringki.

A person's influence over his mother's and mother's father's country is not entirely derived from the position of the jungkayi as a worker, guardian, manager or policeman. The women of the various patricians have important interests in their father's country and associated Spirit Ancestors. They have little first hand control over the ritual of their Spirit Ancestors. However, their advice on many matters is sought, listened to, and in many instances acted upon.

It is important, however, that it is primarily the women who provide children with their first knowledge of the jungkayi-ngimarringki relationship and its associations with land, natural species, Spirit Ancestors and ceremonies. The senior women from the various semi-moieties have a strong knowledge of their Spirit Ancestors, associated sites and land. They also have complementary roles to play in the ceremonies which are performed by the Yanyuwa. These roles are seen to be absolutely necessary by both men and women alike.

It can be seen, then, that the Yanyuwa believe the jungkayi to be indispensable in a number of areas of spiritual responsibility. The ngimarringki require the presence of the jungkayi in performance of ceremony and also in visiting sites. The jungkayi are descendants of both the human and spiritual ancestors of the land associated with the ngimarringki, and in this instance the jungkayi call the Spirit Ancestors mother. The jungkayi also have rights to forage over the land of the ngimarringki, and in some instances can restrict the entry of ngimarringki onto certain areas of land and sea.

Today, as Yanyuwa people become involved increasingly in dealing with various Government and other institutional bodies, the jungkayi are often asked to speak on behalf of the ngimarringki. The jungkayi are seen to be "backing up" the ngimarringki lending support and assistance to the
6.12 Conclusion.
While the issues discussed in this chapter are complex, they do function continually at a day-to-day level, and such relationships as the ngimarringki and jungkayi are often the rationale behind seemingly simple procedures such as having a hair cut, the killing of sea turtle or distribution of meat, or behind a heated argument between a son and his mother. A knowledge of the jungkayi and ngimarringki relationship is of fundamental importance to the historical and contemporary usage of land and its resources throughout the Sir Edward Pellew Group of Islands and associated mainland. Essentially, it can be seen through the semi-moiety and patriclan estates, and the interdependence of ngimarringki and jungkayi, that land and resource "management" is not a "simple" matter of patrilineal relationships, but a complex matter of many varied relationships. Indeed, at times it is almost as if the patri-estates are in fact "managed" by "owner" matrikin.

The relationship between these two groups is the basis of the Yanyuwa expression, manhantharra awara, "holding or embracing the country". In discussing the ways in which the land and sea are used and how animals are hunted and butchered, the details provided in this chapter will be seen to have continuing and important relevance.
Chapter 7

Sea, Island and Mainland

The real voyage of discovery consists not in seeking new landscape but in having new eyes.

(Marcel Proust)

7.1 A journey to the far islands

In 1983 I travelled with Johnson Timothy and his family to Skull Island in the Pellews. In Yanyuwa this place is known as Wurdalnguwa, an island which is associated with the Rrumburriya semi-moieties and which belongs to Johnson’s patrician. Johnson had not been to this island for at least twenty years - it lies far to the north and away from the major seagrass beds where Johnson usually hunted.

On arrival at the island, Johnson refused to allow anyone to get out of the boat, roundly scolding the younger members of our party as they attempted to do so, and saying to them comments such as, “You don’t know this place, this country doesn’t know you!”. On mooring the boat, Johnson began walking up and down the beach in the vicinity of the boat calling out.

Yes I stand here, I have come back. I have not been here for a long time, hear me I am a kinsman of this country, my name is Babarramila, my senior paternal grandparents were people who were men named Rakawurima, Walala, Walundumantha, Babajukuwa, Jamandarra, Narnungawurruwuru and Dinthali, and the women who were my senior aunts, they were named a-Muluwamara, a-Malarndirri, a-Wunjimalaku and a-Jawathama, do not be ignorant towards me. Yes, I stand here, I who know the song cycle which is running here, I am kin to the Dugong Hunter Spirit Ancestors which came here from the east and continued on into the west, I have not forgotten. Here with me stand my sons, my grandchildren and my brother do not be ignorant towards them. I can name this place, I can call the names of this place. Wurdalnguwa, Mawilawila, Ranjiya, Nabujangka yes and further more there is Liwurula,
Mandarriyangurra and Rrumbulangurra. I am feeling subdued. I have not been here for a long time, not since I was young. I am standing here your kinsman, I have returned when I an old man, I am happy.¹

(Johnson Timothy, field diary 1983)

Such orations as this are not unusual when people return to country they have not been to for a long time; it is a process by which people seek to enter into the country. The term *barningalngandayarra*, "do not be ignorant towards" is often repeated. If the "old people", the spirits of the deceased on the country, choose to ignore the living, then the living kin will not get any of the resources that may be found on the country. This form of oration covers three main areas of a person's relationship to country or sea. Firstly, the person stresses his relationship to the place in question; secondly, he demonstrates a knowledge of kin who were associated with that place; and, finally, he then shows that he can call the names of the sea or country he is about to enter.

The recalling of the names of kin is not so much the calling of a formal genealogy; rather it is a demonstration of the ancestral links to the country. It is in part a transmission of knowledge to those people who are listening, and a call to the spirits of the deceased acknowledging their presence. An oration such as Johnson made is also an address which speaks of the legitimacy of the individual's attachment to country.

Oratory such as performed by Johnson are rhetorical statements of an individual's position in relation to significant others, such as the spirits of the dead, which give one privileged rights to land, associated sites and resources which are located there. The orations to country are, broadly speaking, the presentation of self and the negotiation with others of one's self-identity. An individual who presents himself to country, and to other relatives, in the way that Johnson did does not mean he is beyond dispute. Such orations are the topic of camp discussion where they will be evaluated.

¹ Johnson's oration as presented here is a reconstruction of his words based upon a conversation I had with him later on that same evening.
against the status of the individual involved. However, in the case of Johnson, his long familiarity with the island country, his ceremonial status and respect within the community meant that his oration would only ever be seen in a favourable light and not considered to be an audacious affront.

The names by which deceased kin were known are still carried by living kin, and the names of the land are important elements in giving the country resonance and meaning. The recitation of such names allows for individuals to actualise their identification to a place. Such actions are part of a system which also imbues country with immense value for people. The knowledge that deceased kin are always present on the country provides for people an avenue for remembrance and celebration of their lives, and also enables an acknowledgment of the care they provided while living and the potentiality to care now that they have become a part of the environment.

On establishing our camp on a beach, Johnson would not let his family move around too much except to go to the toilet and for the children to play around on the shoreline within the vicinity of the camp. Some people tried fishing and were unsuccessful, Johnson told them that they had tried too soon, that the country was still “not too sure about us”. Johnson then began to set fire to the country along the beach front. He had obtained permission to do so from the jungkayi for the country before leaving Borroloola. These fires lit along the fore dunes soon enveloped the camp and the island in smoke. The fires were quite large because of the dense vegetation on the island; it had been some years since the country had been burnt. Johnson had earlier said that the old people had shut the country up because no one had visited it.

That night we slept in close proximity to each other, in contrast to camps on well known areas which are usually quite spread out. As the night progressed Johnson could be heard still talking and singing. He spoke of his

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2. The use of the names of deceased kin in public orations, such as presented by Johnson, is one of the few times the taboo against using dead people's names can be broken. However, it is only ever done by senior men and women sure of their authority to use them. The names of the deceased, are however, still used by the living, thus the relationship between the living and dead and the attachment of both living and dead to various tracts of country are highlighted.
journeys to the island when he was a boy in the company of his father; he sang verses from the Dugong Hunter Spirit Ancestor song cycle which crosses the island; and still the fires continued to burn.

The next day as we sat in the early morning, smoke-shrouded light, people talked eagerly about what they hoped to do. The day soon warmed, and children played along the beach and in the shallows and were soon far off in the distance. Nobody made any attempt to stop them. Johnson commented that it was good for country to have children on it making lots of noise, it helped "lift the place up". The children returned later with shirts full of flat backed turtle eggs which they had found. The women fished from the rocky shoreline and brought in many species of fish. Johnson was well pleased, and during the cooking and eating of fish and turtle eggs, he and his family spoke of the richness of the land and how the "old people" knew them; they were not being hard or cheeky; they were being well disposed towards the living and allowing the resources on the land to be used.

Later that afternoon I accompanied Johnson to a rocky headland on the island. There, located in a small cliff face, was a cave containing a number of old hollow log coffins, some human skeletal remains wrapped in paperbark and a number of important objects associated with the Dugong Hunter Spirit Ancestor rituals. Johnson had obtained permission from the relevant jungkayi before being allowed to visit this place. The jungkayi back at Borroloola had agreed, because the burials were old, the sacred designs on the hollow log coffins and the stones had all but worn off. Such a place is known as warruki, which is translated as being a "little bit free". It is one where senior men, both ngimarringki and jungkayi, may enter, as opposed to burial areas which are still classed as kurdukurdu, which is translated

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3 The concepts involved in such a term as kurdukurdu can be applied to places, to times such as during the performance of certain ceremonies, to objects and to procedures. It is often conceived as a physical force which can pass from one object to another and have potentially dangerous power. The term does not always mean absolute restriction as long as specific procedures are followed, such as speaking to the country and burning country, for example. Access can be obtained, but only if the correct individuals have negotiated the access. Disregard for such procedures,....
as secret and sacred, where no person but relevant *jungkayi* may enter, and *ngimaringki* may only enter after being invited to do so. At these places, the sacred designs present on the log coffins are still fresh and visible; they are "strong"—the link between the deceased person interred within the coffin and the Spirit Ancestors is still intimate. There is also a spiritual power or force in the designs and the objects which emanates directly from the symbols of Spirit Ancestors represented on the coffin.

A *warruki* place represents a location where the strong line of distinction between sacred and secular is no longer clear. It is known and acknowledged that objects of value are present at a place, but those same objects are no longer powerful enough to threaten people. In a *warruki* area people may gather foodstuffs from the land and sea and share it with family.

In a *kurdukurdu* area only the correct *jungkayi* may eat of the food gathered in such an area; food, too, is felt to become imbued with the spiritual power associated with *kurdukurdu*, such as fish and crabs when caught by professional fishermen and crabbers or by amateurs in or near such areas. This sort of food has always been of concern to Yanyuwa men and women (see Bradley 1992:84).

As Johnson came close to the cave and looked in he said to me, "Here are the old people, my paternal kin". He then began to speak to them, saying how it was all right for him to visit the cave as "they", the "old people", had been there a long time. He once again stressed his links with the country and the cave by mentioning both Spirit Ancestor and human ancestor links. He also spoke of the richness of the country and how he would return.

After two days on the island we packed our swags and other gear and began to board the boat. As we did so everybody began to sing out their farewells to the country with long drawn out, high-pitched salutations of

Footnote 3 contin: whether intentional or otherwise, is seen as a desecration which may lead to disastrous results. Such procedures or rules are addressed to the whole community and not to just a single person or group of individuals (see also Biernoff 1977 for a detailed discussion of issues surrounding restrictions on land).
“Bawujiiiiiiii! ” (farewell). On nearing the expansive sea grass beds near the McArthur River mouth, Johnson began to look for a dugong or a sea turtle which could be harpooned and taken back to relatives at Borroloola. We saw evidence of their feeding, and sighted both dugong and turtle in the distance, but he was not successful. He commented afterwards that we had not been successful because the “old people were jealous and being hard”, by which I took to mean that they had allowed Johnson and his family to share in much of the wealth of the land and sea, but they still could hold back from their living kin those things that they most desired, namely, a dugong or a sea turtle.

7.2 The negotiation and relatedness of space

The narrative provided above illustrates an emotional relationship with country; it also illustrates a Yanyuwa perception of ecological relations whereby humans have an effect on the country only to the extent that they are emotionally engaged with it. Thus, any account of Yanyuwa ethnoecology must go beyond specifying ecological processes and examine the subjective and emotional interactions with the concrete and (in our “scientific” observer terms) the “imagined” phenomena.

The narrative also speaks of the notion of negotiation which I wish to pursue. It speaks of the idea of the lived experience in dealing with ‘country’ as an animated landscape, in which such things as the spirits of the dead are present and ways are found to relate to them so that humans and deceased kin can co-exist in the one environment.

Within the literature the processes which I describe as negotiation have also been discussed by Trigger (1982,1989), Myers (1986), Williams (1986) and Rose (1992). Not all of the above-mentioned authors have used the word negotiation as I have, but the processes that they describe when visiting country with indigenous people are very similar, as Rose (1992: 89) comments:

Jessie and Allan called out to country, the Dreamings, and the dead people. They had walked this country with their parents when they were children.....On our 1985 trip the dead people walked with us;
they watched and listened, as did the country...For her and her
brother, remembrance, dead bodies, responsibilities, country,...and
other Dreamings fused.

I wish, however, to explore the concept of negotiation and present
the idea that negotiation in relationship to country is an important ecological
tool. An English interpretation of the word negotiation would include the
thought of arranging or causing to bring about a desired outcome. However,
there is no word in Yanyuwa which means negotiation as I am using it; rather
the Yanyuwa would describe the processes of negotiation as being the Law, the
Yanyuwa way of dealing with country and kin.

The concepts associated with negotiating are often simply called as
Yanyuwangala, and are firmly embedded within the Yanyuwa way of doing
things. It is rare that the process of negotiation is explicitly stated as such.
Rather, the Yanyuwa would describe all that I am incorporating into the word
negotiation by some of the following expressions: wukanyinjawu ki-awarawu
- speaking to country, manhantharra awara - holding or embracing the land,
wandyarra na-yuwa - following the Law, anykarrinjarra ki-awarawu -
listening to country, marakamantharra awara - making the country safe,
yabirrinjarra awara - making the country good. It should be noted that the
term awara which I am translating here as country can also mean sea.

Thus, I wish to discuss in some detail the processes by which the
Yanyuwa manage their environment, the way in which they negotiate their
way through country, a country which is alive with other meanings, a
country which is “enchanted”, and at times needs careful responses as has
been illustrated in the narrative of Johnson's journey to the islands. In the
previous chapter I discussed the way in which jungkayi for particular
country mediated or negotiated access to special places, such as a log coffin
burial area or a place where an ambivalent Spirit Ancestor resides. These
elements are more the exception than the rule, but they do highlight the
more explicit forms of this process. In this chapter I wish to explore the
more social, day-to-day responses to place (as illustrated by Johnson and his
family) and to seek to make the implicit somewhat more explicit, to bring forth the idea that the negotiation of space for the Yanyuwa can be analogous to the ecological management of the landscape. Within this chapter I will explore the following areas:

(i) a "double world" where humans and deceased kin and other spirits co-exist.
(ii) The use of fire to achieve balance between the living and the dead and at the same time sustain the land.
(iii) use and correct disposal of resources as a way of sustaining ecological balance.
(iv) Species reproduction/maintenance whereby human agencies increase or decrease various species.
(v) The use of song and iconic representations in sustaining the environment.

I have listed these as individual elements, but more often than not more than one are incorporated into the knowledge concerning the management of land and sea and the way these are felt to respond to human activity.

7.3 A double world - the living and the dead

“They are there, listening, watching, hunting, singing...just like we.”
(Mussolini Harvey, field diary 1992)

When a person dies, a part of the spiritual essence of the individual returns to the country and joins a community which has its parallels to the living Yanyuwa community. This spirit is usually called by the term "ngawulu", which means shadow or reflection. In Aboriginal English this spiritual component is called the “shade” or “shadow”. 4

4 The shades of the dead are sometimes more generally called "ngabaya" which is a general term for any spirit, and commonly "li-ngabangaku", which means the deceased people. In Aboriginal English they are referred to as the “old people” which is derived from the Yanyuwa "li-wankala" meaning the same. They are also sometimes referred to as “debil-debil/devil-devil” which is a local Kriol term.
In relation to the spirits of the deceased kin being on the country, two Yanyuwa women have stated:

They will go back to the country, they will be warm there, the country will take them back, in our land where people speak Yanyuwa ...they go back and we who are still alive know they are there....The spirits are there we know this with a feeling that is intense. They are there on this country. You know that is why I don’t have to cry much, because I know they are there on the country, they will always be there, they cannot go anywhere else, there is nowhere else to go.

(Dinah Norman with Eileen McIninn, field diary 1993)

The spirits of the deceased are said to be especially felt on the islands. The islands are described as being “strong country”, a country that has not been weakened by the continual imposition of non-indigenous culture. The islands are where the “old people” raised the present generation of senior Yanyuwa men and women. Generally speaking, however, these spirits of the deceased are all over the country. The “shades” of once living people continue to hunt and to travel across the country, they sing and dance ceremonies and fun dances and watch the activities of their living relatives. These spirits are said to be jealous of their living kin, and can if they choose cause their living kin harm and hardship. Conversely they can assist the living, appearing in dreams and assisting their living relatives with the retention of information such as place names and song cycle verses.

On the islands their presence as a living force in the environment is attested to in the form of art work found in rock shelters. Some of this art is in the form of obvious representations, such as sea turtles, dugong, stingray and fish. Other representations are esoteric, and people do no know what they mean (see plates 4, 5 & 6).

People have often told me that this art work will change, and that images will be touched up by these spirits of deceased kin. When art work is seen to be fading, or the stone is flaking away with an image on it, it is said that this loss is due to the spirits being sad. They are sad that nobody is using the country or that all the senior people associated with the country
have died and the subsequent generations of people have not bothered to visit the country.

There are times when the inhabitants of this spirit world and the country itself are seen to be one and the same. In speaking about country and these deceased kin, people interchange the terms for country and for these spirits, so that a person can talk about how the country has become poor, and then say the spirits of the deceased are jealous or cheeky. Both of these comments mean the same thing.

Likewise, people will speak of the country or of the spirits of the deceased being easily offended. People are careful to behave in particular ways when they feel the boundaries between the living and the deceased kin are an everyday reality. One of the ways in which people will respond to such a reality, which may at the time be affecting the outcome of what would normally be a commonplace activity is to speak to the country, to speak to the deceased kin, as Mussolini Harvey describes in the following passage. It is also a good example of speaking to country being a synonym for negotiating a place within the environment.

...people used to talk and we are still talking today to some of them islands...especially islands, the islands that's the proper Yanyuwa country, strong country, you have to be strong to go there, Yanyuwa language properly there...especially on the island, you can't see dugong, you can't see turtle you sit there for hours and hours, you can see a mob of weed, dirt, but you can't see dugong or sea turtle, well then you gotta start talking to them old people, the spirit, then you see one turtle come, dugong sometimes, you gotta go for him, and you gotta make sure you get it that first one...miss it you won't get the next one...if you don't talk to country you can't get it, you can't see anything...another thing, you go straight in (onto the sea) and you take stranger bloke with you into the island you'll never get no dugong or turtle not one.... plenty there alright but you won't see him, you won't get him... if you go with someone who belongs to country you'll see turtles and dugong everywhere, soon as you take strangers there you can't see.... (Mussolini Harvey, field diary 1988)
Within the Yanyuwa community such stories are common, from both the old and the young people, as all ages feel and experience the influence of the deceased kin. Talking to country may involve long speeches in high oratory; it may consist of a simple statement which says no more than, "Here I am"; senior men and women may do no more than shout to announce their presence. This is especially so if people are still often in touch with the locality. There are times when nothing is said because the people are always moving through the country. When people have not visited country for a long time, or the actions of the deceased kin are felt to be working against the living, speaking to the country becomes one way in which a consensus is reached between the living and the dead. This is especially so if the speech is in the form of oratory. An order is created whereby the speaker draws on the past, from the Spirit Ancestors to deceased kin, to help in identifying that person within the locality. It also states by what authority the person is coming to the country and in what way the person is related. This authority is conveyed by the calling of place names and the names of people who were once associated with the country. The use of names provides a key by which understanding is given to the event as it unfolds, but the names are also echoes from the past and links with the present generation, and are important for the negotiation of entry to place which this form of speaking represents.

In his comments Mussolini Harvey speaks of the islands being a "strong" place, and of the necessity to peak Yanyuwa if one wishes to negotiate a worthwhile entry into that environment. In relation to the islands and the sea, if an individual is going to speak Yanyuwa, it is important that he speaks properly. As discussed in the section on Yanyuwa language, moving to the islands and sea from the mainland requires a change in dialect where a number of speech forms used on the mainland are replaced by special terms which are used on the islands.

Even country which is well known and used regularly can "shut itself up". In 1989 a senior ngimarringki for Kangaroo Island, in the delta of the McArthur River, died tragically on the island. As a result of this person's death no one visited the island for nearly three years, after which some people gradually returned for day trips, but only after the jungkayi had
burnt the country. In 1993 the younger brother of the deceased man and his immediate family returned to live on the island. They went into the country carefully taking *jungkayi* with them; they were careful with the resources they gathered, taking cautious notice of any thing which to them seemed unusual. The lack of goannason the islands, and the large number of riverine wallaby skeletons found were attributed to the death of the individual. The “old people” were considered to be sad and mourning for their kinsman and therefore not yet ready to allow people to have full access to the country, even to the extent of hiding a number of well known productive lagoons from living kin.

People had searched for these lagoons and had not found them. Eventually the senior sister of the deceased man was asked to come back to the island and stay with the family. This she reluctantly agreed to do, saying it was because of her deceased brother that the country was “shutting their eyes”. She returned to the island, and for some time stood alone mourning, with her other family members sitting quietly and grieving with her. She then spoke out aloud, addressing the country and the “old people”. She invoked the good relationship that she had enjoyed with the country before her brother’s death; she spoke of how her father had died on the country and it had not “shut itself up”. She spoke of how her sons and her daughter (the *jungkayi*), the deceased man’s niece and nephews, were well and standing with her. She then called out the names of the lagoons that they wanted to visit, and she called out the names of the savannah grasslands which they would cross to get to the lagoons.

After this she took her relatives and she located the lagoons for them. She stayed with them and, over the next few days, many long necked turtles were gathered from these lagoons. Such negotiations as the one described above are painful; they involve recalling the pain and emptiness of deceased kin within the context of both that person’s relationship to kin and also to country. On the occasion described above it was felt that full access to country had been achieved once more, and as such, the procedures undertaken by the woman provided a valuable lesson to the younger people, one which was discussed quietly for some time after.
7.4 Other spirits: Spiritual entities within the environment

That ngarrimi he'll come out like a blanket, or maybe got a whip; no good all together, too bloody dangerous.

(Jerry Brown Ngarnawakajarra, field diary 1988)

From an early age children are taught about the presence of the "old people" on the country, and of the necessity to follow certain ways of behaviour if one wishes to obtain food from the country, or to have a time free from interference from unwanted occurrences. For example, the burning of a bed-roll from a wind-blown coal was directly attributed to children playing "spirits" during the previous night; the spirits had become angered and burnt one of the children's bed-rolls.

Other spirits exist on the landscape which are not the spirits of the deceased kin; these are spiritual entities which have always inhabited the landscape. They have characteristics which are not human, but at the same time they are not Spirit Ancestors either. They are beings which inhabit the landscape, and, as with the spirits of deceased kin, they can impact upon living people, usually in a manner which is harmful. These spirits are both male and female. They live and hunt over country. They were known in past times to have stolen both elderly and also young humans, and turned them into spirits, and in some instances even to have taken mortals as marriage partners. As with spirits of deceased kin, these spirits are also called by the generic term of ngabaya, but they also have their own names which are listed below.

**Female Spirits:**

*a-marlangkarna* - spirit which inhabits the coast and islands, seen at night and said to resemble a fish net.

*a-kurrinya* - spirit of the savannah grasslands which hunts for goannas and other food sources gathered by Yanyuwa women. She is dangerous. A number of stories are told where this spirit has tried to kill, cook and eat people.
Male Spirits:

jurdurrubanji - human-like spirit with a penis like a harpoon rope which it wears wrapped around the neck and torso.

baribari - shooting star spirits, but can also appear as small human-like figures. They can cause sickness and even death. They can possess terrestrial animals and humans and cause them to act in an irrational and dangerous manner.

jambajambanyi - harmless spirits which inhabit ant beds and the black soil plains. At their worst they may steal possessions from humans.

namurlanjanyngku - human-like spirits which live only on Vanderlin Island, in the rock shelters and caves at a locality known as Kamangdarringabaya. Evidence of their existence is seen in the large number of red ochre hand prints and hand stencils in the area. They are hunters of dugong and sea turtle and will remove harpoon points from creatures harpooned by Yanyuwa hunters. Their behaviour is, in some aspects, very similar to that of the "old people", the spirits of deceased kin.

ngarrimi - sometimes called the mangrove spirit. It is said to inhabit the dense mangrove forests of the lower river systems and islands. It can appear as a giant shining light, or as a small, foul smelling, hairy human-like creature.

The spirits listed above are like the "old people" in that they are jealous of their country and all that it contains. They will, if need be, hurt people, even kill them, if they see human intrusion into their territory as offensive and undesirable. (See Nora Jalirduma in Bradley 1989:156-157; Eileen Mc Dinny in Bradley and Kirton 1992:568-69.)

These spirits can be very malevolent towards humans, but the actions of humans can also kill these spirits. They can be killed directly by use of a gun, a car or a spear. They can also be killed unintentionally by the actions of people who would normally wish no harm to the creatures, as is illustrated in the following example: an unidentifiable human skeleton

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5 Mussolini Harvey tells of how many spirits were disturbed when McAthur River Mine began blasting rocks as they constructed the road from the mine site to Bing Bong. He
was said to be the remains of a *ngarrimi* spirit killed because somebody associated with the country in question had worn a body design to which he had no right. Such an action affected the country in a way that caused the spiritual entity to die. Cyclones and wild fires are also said to kill these beings. Cyclone Kathy in 1984, along with the increased development in the Gulf area during the 1980's and 1990's, is said to have killed many of these spirit beings. While people generally fear interaction with these spirit beings, they are perceived as being a part of the total make-up of the Yanyuwa environment, a part which the Yanyuwa deal with in the normal course of events. Correct behaviour on country such as not being wasteful, not taking too much of one kind of food, and the correct disposal of food remains and fires at night are all ways to avoid contact with these beings.

7.5 Fire: Emotion and politics

You gotta burn, you don't burn then country will get poor, it will shut itself up...no good for anybody then. (Don Miller, field diary 1983)

When people use speech or various prescribed ways of behaving to negotiate their place within the environment, the observer can listen and see that the individual in question is seeking for a balance between him and his unseen but present companions. By far the most dramatic and visual of all the ways in which the Yanyuwa interact with their environment is by the use of fire. The physical impact that fire has on the environment is obvious; it leaves a blackened land (*warrman*) over which people will hunt.

The biological results achieved by burning are well documented (Jones 1969 & 1975, Latz and Griffin 1978, Latz 1982, Johnson and Kerle 1991). These researchers have highlighted that in ideal

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Footnote 5 continues: relates how many people saw small spirit children darting across the roads. Then on subsequent nights old men and women spirits were seen walking with heads bowed, hands clasped behind their backs and dressed in sack cloth. They were searching for new homes amongst the rocks in the distant hills. Mussolini added sadly at the end of the story that he guessed many spirits had been killed by the "dynamite" and that it was "really sad for the country"
circumstances the burning by indigenous people usually results in a patchwork pattern of burnt and unburnt areas over the country, which means that fires lit in the late dry season have fire breaks of already burnt ground around them. The unburnt areas of land also provide havens for small reptiles and mammals who are escaping from the burning country. However, the literature on the indigenous use of fire contains little which speaks of the the personal and the group response to the burning of country except in passing, and where such comments are made, they relate in a more general way to the biological factors associated with the burning of country as I hope to illustrate below.

Any account of fire as a tool in Yanyuwa ethnoecological practices must go beyond what is observable. Fire has a real ecological effect for good or for ill. However, for the Yanyuwa, fire has good ecological effect only if it is done properly and with proper emotional relations and respect for spiritual power. Thus, subjectivity is a critical dimension of analysis in ecological anthropology and ethnoscience. I relate these comments back to the introduction where I stated that the inadequacy of much of the existing literature on the ethnoscience is that it concentrates too much on the practical and mundane at the expense of the mystical and sacred.

In this section I wish to explore some responses beyond the ecological which are associated with the use of fire by the Yanyuwa people. I wish to move beyond the use of fire as a tool by which people care for country, and seek to explore some of the responses associated with the burning of country, as people observe smoke rising in the distance, or as they seek to prepare for the coming burning season. In some instances the responses are quite evocative, while at other times, depending upon circumstances, the responses to the burning of country and burned ground are highly charged with political argument and accusation.

During times when I have been travelling over the coastal and mainland country of the Yanyuwa people, my travelling companions socially animate the country by recalling past events which occurred on that country. Once when we camped on Kangaroo Island, smoke was observed rising from the islands which lay to the north. One of the elderly women present spoke in
raptured and passionate tones concerning the view. She stood up, and looking north to the billowing smoke, she exclaimed, partly to us, and partly as her own personal commentary:

Oh, all of the islands, they would once be burning, from north, south and east and west, they would be burning, the smoke would be rising upwards for days. Oh, it was good, you could see the smoke rising from here and also from Borroloola, you knew where all the families were, it was really good, in the times when the old people were alive.

(Ida Ninganga, field diary 1986)

Smoke provides people a way of seeing that the land is still being cared for; it tells people that there are others who are moving over the landscape maintaining the integrity of the environment and of the people associated with it.

Jones (1975:25) comments about a similar response in his work with the Gidjingali of the northern coast of Arnhem Land:

...far to the southeast, the horizon would sometimes fill with smoke haze, and people would point to it and remark that Djinang men or even the further Ritarrngu were moving across their countries.

In 1992 the sight of burning country on the islands managed to draw people's attention, and arouse a purely emotional response. The following comment came during the concluding moments of a land claim held over the Sir Edward Pellew Islands, where the Yanyuwa had travelled and burnt the country as they went from island to island. On the final day, as people were leaving the islands, a woman stood up in the boat in which she was travelling, and with the assistance of two other women the following statement was exclaimed to the others travelling with them.

Look all around, this is Yanyuwa country, these islands and this sea it is Yanyuwa country. Look! All of you, look to the distance, look north, look east, look west, the islands are burning, this is how it should be,
189.

this is how it was when the old people were alive, look this country
is burning it has been lifted up, we have embraced it again.
(Dinah Norman, with Annie Karrakayn and Bella Charlie, field diary 1992)

The following song also highlights an emotional response to fire. It was composed by Harriet Johnson Mambalwarrka after her husband had left her on Vanderlin Island while he went to the nearby mainland.

Oh, I wish that I were a bird, and I would fly,
And maybe see you, at the grass fire,
Burning there in the south.

The three examples given above highlight that for the Yanyuwa, the often taken for granted fire, smoke and burning of country can arouse emotion, can set memories in motion, memories of the past and of long dead people. But at the same time, it also provides an important symbol of continuity, that the country can be, and is still being burnt.

Burning of country is an important way of demonstrating a continuity with the people who have died, their ancestors, or *li-wankala*, "the old people". Indeed, it is said by the contemporary old people that before the coming of the white people, the spirits of the deceased kin would set fire to the country themselves for hunting, and up until quite recently, country that was burnt was left for several days so that the spirits of the deceased could hunt first. The spirits of the deceased are considered "cheeky": they are cantankerous, they can respond to the living in ways which are not always benign. At times people still come across country that is burnt and has no identifiable owner or burner. The majority of these "discoveries" are attributed to the "old people".

Country that has not been burnt for a long time is described as being "shut up". Visually this can be seen by the increase in the understorey vegetation, and, on the islands, by the increase of choking vine thickets. It is the old people that close up the country. They close up the country because they are angered by the living people who have been remiss in their
responsibility towards the burning of the country. In 1993 I took an old man to country which had known heavy usage by Yanyuwa people until the early 1980's. On his return to the place and observing the "scrub" he said how:

No bloody good all together, "old people" been shut up this place, one time really open...really nice... no good, no fire, "old people" too hard, this place nothing now, finished all together.

( Jerry Brown Ngarnawakajarra, field diary 1992)

In contemporary times tourists, pastoralists and other non-indigenous people who own country, are also described as "shutting up country", not just because the Yanyuwa cannot fulfil their obligations towards their country, but the country is described as getting poor because the old people have "shut it up". Thus, new land uses are seen to be altering the landscape in radical ways, and the burning of country by people who are not Yanyuwa is seen to be wrong. The country may be burnt, but the people who are burning it are seen to lack the sensibilities required to do it in a manner which will not offend the spirits which inhabit the landscape and the living people responsible for the country. As one Yanyuwa man has commented:

This is the most important thing, to burn the country, to burn the bone of the animals we catch on the country...to make the smoke come up, so we smell it and they smell it. (Mussolini Harvey, field diary 1993).

The use of the pronoun "they" in this comment relates to the spirits of the deceased. The sense of smell would appear to be important to the Yanyuwa in regard to the burning of country. In Yanyuwa the term for smell is wurungkayarra, an intransitive verb. It is the object under discussion which offers its smell, not the observer smelling it. Country that is burning well offers a pleasing scent to the people and to the spirits of the deceased. If the country is burning but burns offensive matter such as garbage left on country by tourists or other travellers across Yanyuwa country, and the
resulting smell is offensive, then the country may indeed “close in on itself”- the country shuts itself up so that people will not find any food on it. Another example was when a fire that had been burning wellreached the wreck of a car and the air began to fill with the acrid smell of burning rubber from the tyres. People became concerned that the “country was smelling”, and the “old people” would not like it. A number of women who had planned to go hunting that day decided it would be useless because they would not get anything as the country would have shut itself up because of the smell.

Another important issue which Mussolini Harvey comments on is the burning of bones of animals that have been captured. For the fecundity of the country and for the various species of flora and fauna gathered by the Yanyuwa to remain, it is necessary to burn the bones in the fire they were cooked in. The bones of fish, goanna, blue tongue, birds, dugong and sea turtles must be burnt. If they are not burnt then the particular species will either become poor in fat content, be hard to hunt or will not be found. The last two consequences are said to be the result of the actions of deceased kin who will drive them away. There is also a strong belief that leaving bones about with traces of meat will attract ants; the ants will carry off the meat into their underground nests resulting in the the particular species diminishing in the ways described above. One of the important things to be drawn from this is that actions of humans do not just affect the animals and plants which live on the land; the creatures of the sea, such as the dugong, turtle and fish will also suffer if humans do not treat their remains in ways which are considered appropriate and respectful.6 This is a further demonstration of the concept that sea is considered to be country, and that the actions of humans on the land can affect the relationship that people have with the actual marine environment.

6 For similar attitudes towards the disposal of dead among the Cree of north east Canada, see Tanner 1979. The Cree believe that improper disposal of animal remains angers spiritual Keepers of Game, who will frustrate efforts of hunting parties. Among the Cree, proper signs of respect are sometimes highly elaborate, and vary according to the animals species killed.
Even at death, the issues associated with the burning of country become important. It is said that one part of a person's spirit leaves the body and travels to the spirit land in the east, a place known as Jingkula.

As the spirit of the deceased comes closer to the spirit land it is approached by a number of crows with long sharp digging stick who intend to kill the spirit by piercing it many times. These crows call out to the spirit, "Go away from here, when you were alive you called us the eaters of faeces, and you chased us from your camp!". As the crows get closer, the "followers of the fires over country", the hawks and falcons come forward with their fighting sticks shouting out, they fight off the crows calling out, "Leave that spirit, when it was a living person, it burnt the country for us, it enabled us to eat.

(Dinah Norman and Annie Karrkayn, field diary 1985)

The hawks and falcons thus enable the entry of the spirit into the spirit world. Even at death, then, the obligations incumbent on people to burn country become a focus.

Burning country is visual evidence that an area of land is being used, or is most likely soon to be by a group of hunters. If country is seen to be burning, and the owner of the fire is not known, people will endeavour to find out who has lit the fire. If an owner cannot be immediately ascertained, then people will pursue the event until an owner is found, and if found, the lighter of the fire will be challenged, either in relation to that individual's right to burn the country, or to use the resources that may be gathered off the burnt ground, as Annie Karrakayn comments:

\[ Jungkayi \] that's the one has to say yes to burn, he has to do it or give permission to do it...otherwise big argument. (field diary 1992)

Towards the end of the wet season, people begin to turn their thoughts towards the burning country. As soon as the tall spear grass can be burnt people begin to approach the people who are \[ Jungkayi \] for the country they wish to burn. These people have the right to burn country, or give
permission to others to burn the country for them. The rights to burn country and to receive a share of what has been gathered off the burnt country are still jealously guarded. If a jungkayi cannot travel to the land of his or her mother, he or she will often ask those who are travelling there to burn the country for him or her to “make it good”. This is especially in relation to some of the more northerly islands that are less frequently visited.

Smoke from country that is burning tells the observer that everything is good, the people on that land are well and doing what is required of them. Country that is not burning, especially where it is known that people are present, is not good. It means that something may be wrong and people should go and visit. Such a view is so different from our own culture where smoke seen in the distance or the lighting of fire is seen as a signal of distress.

The infringement of manners as to who can hunt on burnt country or who has the right to burn country can still arouse arguments and fierce passion. Postures of feigned or real anger still occur, challenges to people who have hunted on land—using digging sticks and crowbars as weapons—do at times happen. People who have not been associated with the burning of country must be invited to hunt on the country. The burning of country requires method, not just in relation to when and how the country will be burnt, but also in relation to who will hunt and gather.

Some country is burnt and left; it is not hunted over. This is especially in relation to sites where Spirit Ancestors may reside or to places where there are hollow log coffin burials. The country is burnt and left. It is at such places that the presence of the “old people” is most powerfully felt; the country is burnt for the spirits of the dead. If such country is to be hunted on, only the most senior male jungkayi may do it, and only he may eat the food. On other country a widower or widow may not light country that belonged to his or her spouse, as the country is said not to burn well because it is too sad, or it will shut up the country and not allow any food resources to be found.

It is important to note that burning country is not just fire, smoke and blackened vegetation. Firing country involves people who have ways of
interpreting their place within the environment where they live, on the country they call home. Their relationship with fire at its most basic is as a tool, but fire is also related to events associated with the past and the future, events which, to the outsider, may be considered not very important.

7.6 “The country is shutting up now”

The phrase reproduced above was spoken by an elderly and senior ngimarringki for the country where the Borroloola township is located. For the Yanyuwa country, that is “shutting up” is closed in a way that precludes them from being able to respond to it in the manner which has been discussed above, and because of this, there is both sadness and anger.

There is a perception among the Yanyuwa today that the sanctity of the land is being abused. This is especially so on country which is now enclosed in pastoral and mining properties, or within the boundaries of a town, or on land whose use has changed rapidly because of an influx of tourists. In many instances, rubbish is dumped, undesirable fish species are left in large numbers, their carcasses rot and the smell invades the country, cattle muddy the lagoons, and if there is overstocking, the land becomes barren and devoid of grass and trees. Even the sea is not immune: the sea grass beds are torn up by the boats of tourists as they travel over the sea, the nets of professional fishermen catch dugong which are more often than not left to rot. They are rarely given to the Yanyuwa to butcher, which would then enable them to distribute the meat. In recent years, so called 'undesirable' fish species have been dumped on important sites and beer cans have been rammed into the open ends of hollow log burial coffins. To such issues the Yanyuwa have little response except sadness and frustration that there is so little they can do. The following comment highlights these issues well:

We are watching the many strangers that are travelling to the north (the islands). Maybe they travel for fishing but they make trouble over our country. They catch the dugong in nets, this is bad and they leave them like they were some type of rubbish; in the same way they leave the fish. Others they travel to the country which is sacred and
take photographs these people are bad, they act in a bad way, they have no respect for anything these type of people. They do not come and talk to us, they go this way and that, they do not come to know us, they are ignorant. We are still carrying the Law for the island country like our ancestors. We are continually thinking of our ancestors.

(Don Miller in Bradley 1988a:75)

Some country becomes closed because people die too quickly, before they can fully educate their family members as how to best they should respond to the land. Such country becomes sad. It is weak. The waterholes are said to dry up in sadness at the death of the owners. Special trees may also die, even the marks of the Spirit Ancestors are said to be fading. If such country is to be revivified, it must be done slowly, with short visits followed by longer ones until the country knows that there are people who care for it. There is country, however, where nobody now goes or can go, and this country is lost; it has folded in on itself so completely that no amount of human response to it will help it gain its original power. It becomes land and sea, then, which in a sense is beyond negotiation.

7.7 Increase and decrease: Rituals to sustain country

If I was a crab I'd flog the guts out of it.

(Steve Johnson, field diary 1988; in relation to a crab increase site)

This section attempts to provide an overview of an element of Yanyuwa ethno-ecology which is embodied in various sites where the reproduction of species can be achieved through relatively simple ritual. For the older generation of Yanyuwa people such sites represent a continual reality, while for the younger generation of Yanyuwa people there is a degree of ambivalence:- not total denial, but rather, they are non-committal about the assistance that such places and related ritual have in their view of the environment.

Practices to achieve increase and decrease are relatively common-
place, and in the literature, researchers such as Kimber (1976), Goodale (1982), Gott (1982), Hynes and Chase (1982) and Hercus (1994) all attest to such practices. Latz (1982) makes the important observation that indigenous people are not aiming at an uncontrolled increase, but rather they are aiming at maintaining the levels of their resources within their country. Rose (1996:53) describes increase rituals as being "rituals of well being" because the rituals are aimed at promoting life, but not to promote it promiscuously.

Throughout the Pellew islands and the coastal margins of the southwest Gulf of Carpentaria there are a number of sites where the fecundity of the Spirit Ancestors is embodied in particular features of the landscape. The presence of the residual power of the Spirit Ancestor animates the place where it is dwelling, and thus allows for the normally dormant power to be communicated with (see Map 11).

As has been discussed in the previous chapter, such places are seen to be responsible for human fertility by way of ardirri or spirit children, but these places also harbour a reproductive energy which can be tapped by ritual and thus cause various species to be maintained. Not all places where a Spirit Ancestor resides or has left a mark on the landscape can be used for the purpose of increase or maintenance; it is usually only those sites associated with economically important species, such as water lilies, wild honey, cycad fruit, dugong, crabs, turtles and various fish species, although it should also be noted that creatures such as the mosquito, louse and sand fly also have sites whereby species can be increased.

Contemporary Yanyuwa people relate to these sites either with an emphatic belief in their power to maintain species, or with a dubious agnostic response. It is necessary to engage in some historical reconstruction as to the importance of these sites in past times. In undertaking this reconstruction it is possible to see why only a small proportion of the total number of these sites is still seen to be of importance to the contemporary Yanyuwa community. These sites are in some way symbolic of a process of negotiation which is occurring, firstly, between the younger and the older members of the community in relation to aspects of tradition, and what is, or
**Map 11. Increase And Decrease Sites Over The Sir Edward Pellew Islands And Coastal Margins.**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Site Number and Name</th>
<th>Species</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Nguwangkila</td>
<td>Salt water crocodile</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Wulunjaama</td>
<td>Goanna</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Wunuwunala</td>
<td>Dingo</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Wubunjawa</td>
<td>Brogga</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Manankurra</td>
<td>Cycad fruit</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Lunumda</td>
<td>Yam species</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Wubandamara  / Li-kirdila</td>
<td>Lone male dugong / sandfly</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Manuwaminta</td>
<td>Stingray species</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. Janka</td>
<td>Rock cod species</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. Namaru</td>
<td>Red flying fox</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11. Munggara</td>
<td>Marjine glove</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12. Uwbankarta</td>
<td>Barracuda</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13. Kundi</td>
<td>Mangrove wild honey</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14. Wunwurr / Ngangkarrila</td>
<td>Black nosed python / Mucus and flu</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15. Mulukamurrwi</td>
<td>Island wild honey</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16. Nyamarranguru</td>
<td>Groper</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17. Rnowarabarrarrila Mandamila</td>
<td>Black bream / Red plum species</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18. Lwinthi</td>
<td>Green turtle</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19. Ryinbirr</td>
<td>Turtle eggs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20. Lmiyimyila</td>
<td>Yam species / fly</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21. Minyadawiji</td>
<td>Jabiru</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22. Anthawarra</td>
<td>Mosquito</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23. Yungkura</td>
<td>Louse</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24. Rahyuwa</td>
<td>Cabbage palm</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25. Wurdangua</td>
<td>Pandanus nuts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26. Liwayakelungu</td>
<td>Green turtle</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>27. Araiwi</td>
<td>Meat and fat of the green turtle</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>28. Wabwira</td>
<td>Black flying fox</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>29. Wambuwa</td>
<td>Green plum species</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30. Nungkawathungka</td>
<td>Mud crabs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>31. Wuthangka</td>
<td>Tam eggs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>32. Wubukabukala</td>
<td>Oysters</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>33. Wulinthurr</td>
<td>Stingray species</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>34. Mili</td>
<td>Spanish mackerel</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
will be, maintained. Secondly, they represent an area where the younger
generation of Yanyuwa people have to negotiate their own relationship to such
sites, and to define their importance in a landscape for which they will one
day have responsibility. The following comment in relation to a dugong
increase centre highlights this. A young man who once visited this place
with his father recalled to me a few days later:

My old man took me to that Dugong Dreaming place, you know the one,
he made me hit that stone, that dugong. I hit it and he made me call out
the name of every little place, every place where dugong are.... I don't
know where half them place,all this way (indicates with his hand)
Bing Bong, McArthur way....

I asked him why he did it and not his father:

Dad wanted me to do it, I don't know, you just do it because old people
do it, you got to keep it up I suppose, give it a go, might be something in it,
I don't know. first time for me you know.

(Ralph Hammer, field diary 1987)

In past times, it is highly likely that the control of increase sites and
associated knowledge was of considerably more interest than it is now. There
was once a degree of prestige attached to having the authority and the
knowledge to perform the necessary rituals at the particular site. People are
now no longer economically dependent on the resources associated with the
various increase sites, and the knowledge concerning most of them brings
little kudos to those people who possess the necessary knowledge. In the
pre-contact period up until probably the 1950's, just prior to full time
settlement at Borroloola, the knowledge and associated actions concerning the
maintenance of species appears to have been much more impressive. Those
individuals who were called upon to perform such rites had a degree of
prestige and negotiating power which they used with individuals in the
community who were seeking the rituals to be performed, as the following
quote highlights:
They would be asking my brother, his name was Jayungurri, they would ask him,"Make the cycad nuts come out in abundance, so next year there will be more, make it so there will be much food so we will not starve". He would say, "Mmm. Alright but you will get a sea turtle for me". They would say yes to that. Then he would get a stick, a small one, he would put his sweat from under his armpit on it, he would strike a cycad nut kernel and then he would throw it into the palm fronds, one here, another over there, yet another further away, all the way like that. When he threw the kernel he would call out in the following manner, "Cycad kernel! Cycad kernel! Increase! Multiply!" That was it, he would come back and they would give him the turtle, maybe kangaroo, alright they would wait and next year there would be too many cycad nuts, nobody would go hungry... Nobody does that today, I can do it if I want to. (Ida Ninganga, field diary 1988)

The final comment, "....if I want to" is of interest, as it reflects the contemporary setting in relation to increase sites. The above speaker could indeed perform the rituals, but she had no need to. The Yanyuwa community is no longer dependent on the fruit of the cycad palm; the speaker had no way of getting to the site to perform the rituals; and why perform rituals when there is no need to? I believe the speaker is actually saying she has no need to perform the rituals, although she does have the knowledge; there were no longer any kudos in her power.

The process of increasing species is usually not too complicated. In most instances the rituals are simple; sometimes no words are required, usually the wiping of an increase stone, for example, with green foliage, or by being struck with a small stone is all that is required. What is important is that it is the sons and daughters of the women of the country where the site is located who perform the rituals. It is these people, the jungkayi, who are the people who are most capable of stirring the Spirit Ancestor located at the site to release its dormant energy and fecundity.

It is worth noting here that some forms of increase are quite practical and are still quite often performed. A common practice amongst the senior women is the transference of large water lily corms (ma-rnayi) from
lagoons where they are perceived to be of good quality to lagoons where the quality of the water lily corms is seen to be inferior. For example, in 1985 women gathered a large number of corms from a lagoon called Malaliwunda on Bing Bong Station and took them and placed them in the mud of two lagoons, one on Kangaroo Island called Wulkuwulku, and another lagoon on the mainland just to the south of Kangaroo Island, called Wulalamba. I asked at the time if the corms could be put in any lagoon. The initial response was it did not matter in which lagoon they were placed. On overhearing this comment a senior woman spoke up and emphatically said that the lagoons and water lily corms had to be nyiki-nganjji; they had to be kin to each other, that is, they had to share the same semi-moiety category. In this instance, the water lily corms were taken from a Wuyaliya lagoon and placed into two other Wuyaliya lagoons.

Older Yanyuwa men and women often talk emotionally about the increase/maintenance sites located on their country, of their annual use in their youth, and how they should go and activate the power located at them. But they rarely do, primarily because there is no need to. Food is now not hard to get and people no longer feel that they are totally reliant on the spiritual powers of the landscape and sea to obtain their food.

An important site which is still spoken about with a degree of awe by all people, and one which is still activated by the jungkayi at relatively regular intervals is the resting place of the Dugong Spirit Ancestor at Wunubarryi or Mount Young in the Limmen Bight. The site is located just to the southeast of the Limmen River mouth. Technically, this site is located in the country of the Mara people, but its power is said to populate all the major sea grass beds in the region with dugong, and through intermarriage, a number of Yanyuwa people also have association with the site. At times Mara and Yanyuwa men will travel to the site and perform the necessary rituals.

Lying on a sandridge just to the northeast of the hill which comprises Mount Young, Wunubarryi, are a number of quartzite outcrops (Map 12). These outcrops represent a metamorphosed dugong herd and an isolated dolphin which were stranded on dry land by a receding king tide, during the
Map 12. Wunubarryi (Mt. Young), Showing Details Of Dugong Increase Site.

- young bull dugong
- old bull dugong
- dolphin
- cow dugong
- desecrated cow dugong
- hammer stones used in increase rituals
- desecrated cow dugong
- cow dugong
time when the Spirit Ancestors were still active upon the earth.\footnote{It is interesting to note that a similar occurrence happened in 1984 during Cyclone Kathy when large numbers of dugong and sea turtle were stranded after a storm surge carried them up to eight kilometres inland in the vicinity of the McArthur River delta area (see Marsh 1984, Limpus and Reed 1985, Marsh et al. 1986).}

Some of the quartzite outcrops look remarkably like semi-submerged dugong with back and snout out of the water. Seven of the outcrops represent females and the other two are males. Scattered around, in close proximity to the “female” dugong, are smaller hammer stones which are used in the rituals to increase the number of dugong. When somebody wishes to perform the rituals of maintenance, they select a “cow dugong” stone, brush the “dugong” down with green branches, select a hammer stone and then begin either to strike or to rub the “back” of the dugong with the stone. As they do this they call out names of the major sea grass beds and reefs where they wish the dugong to increase. Such a recitation was given when the senior \textit{jungkayi} for the area, Tommy Nawurrungu visited the site in 1985 (see plate 7).

\begin{quote}
Yes, I am here \textit{jungkayi} for you dugong, listen to me, come out from here and go. Yes go! Go from here! Arise up and go to the sea grass! To Walkanjawalkarri and Manukulungku, Munuli, yes and eastwards to Kaluwangarra and Ngurrwuirrirla, Wijwijila and Rrawali, yes and then onto Babalungku, Aburri, Wurrwuwiji, Wuthuwuthari, Wumarndu, Warriwiyla, Wuburrnyarrangka and Mangurrungurrurru, yes and arise and go to Kuluwurra, Wuthanda, Wanakurla, Wudambuwa, Liwujujulhuwa, Lidambuwa, yes and Warrkungka, Lukuthkuthila, Libankuwa, Maruwanmaia, Bulubuluwiji. Yes go, I am here \textit{jungkayi} you dugong are my mother Go! Go! I am telling you.
\end{quote}

\begin{quote}
(Tommy Nawurrungu, field diary 1985)
\end{quote}

Apart from the prodigious memory highlighted in the calling of the names of so many of the major sea grass beds and reefs in the correct sequence, the above translation also represents the most complex of the
increase rituals that I have recorded. The old man's knowledge is clearly demonstrated. I believe that such correct recitation is evidence of the importance placed upon the dugong and the sea grass beds where they feed, and also of the importance of Wunubarryi (Mount Young) in the minds of the Yanyuwa and Mara peoples. See Map 13, which shows the location of some of the mentioned sea grass beds and reefs.

Some of the "female dugong" have quite deep grooves and depressions in their "backs", suggesting that the rites of increase are of some antiquity. The site is first mentioned by Spencer and Gillen, where they comment:

...close down by the sea a number of smaller white stones which can be seen at low tide, represent a mob of dugong. Numbers of dugong now emanate from these rocks without the help of natives, but if they so desire to bring them out, the dugong men can do so by 'singing' and throwing sticks at the rocks. (Spencer and Gillen 1908: 313)

The place being described in the above quotation is undoubtedly Wunubarryi. Spencer and Gillen, however, did not visit the area, and were only told of its presence by Yanyuwa and Mara informants based at Borroloola.

In 1976 this Dugong Spirit Ancestor-increase site was desecrated (McLaughlin 1978). The owners of the Nathan River Station, where Wunubarryi is located, dug out two of the "female" dugong while constructing a four wheel drive track through the area. The Yanyuwa and Mara people were extremely upset over this incident and consider that the dugong population in the area of the Sir Edward Pellew Group suffered because of this desecration. At that time, appropriate rituals took place at Wunubarryi in an attempt to restore the perceived loss, as was the case after Cyclone Kathy in 1984 when dugong were swept ashore in a storm surge. A number of men were quick to travel to the site and perform the rituals.

Strelhow (1947) comments in relation to increase sites generally that each of these places (such dugong stones, for example) contains an
Map 13: Sea Grass Beds and Reefs Known and Named by Yanyuwa Hunters of Dugong and Sea Turtle.

1. Kaluwangara
2. Ngurrunjinya
3. Wirriyola
4. Rrawali
5. Babakungku
6. Ableu
7. Wunnuw
8. Wuthumuthan
9. Wunwadoru
10. Liwintha
11. Mahtandula
12. Warlainyula
13. Wubumiyarangka
14. Mangurunguru
15. Wilirra
16. Likairakuwa
17. Wurunyinthangkuwa
18. Mundkurwanagama
19. Lemumuhumula
20. Wurunhurunku
21. Wimanda
22. Ngubunja
23. Murrinda
24. Muludinta
25. Lenginda
26. Kuluwura
27. Wuhandha
28. Watakurra
29. Wudanduwa
30. Liwujuluwuwa
31. Lajtbakwa
32. Warakungka
33. Likulhikulhila
34. Ljaphakwa
35. Maruwanmala
36. Bulubuluwu
37. Waliwa
38. Rawunja
39. Linyalayaranga
40. Abum
41. Wuru’MjO
42. Wulhuwathari
43. Wumarndu
44. Liwinlha
45. Talhandurla
46. Warriwiyala
47. Wuburrnyarangka
48. It.Aangurrungurru
49. Wdirra
50. Wuthanda
51. Wanakurla
52. Wimanda
53. Ngulban
54. Murrdila
55. Muludra
56. Urmgonda
57. Kuluwurra
58. Wuthanda
59. Watakurra
60. Liwujuluwuwa
61. Lajtbakwa
62. Warakungka
63. Likulhikulhila
64. Ljaphakwa
65. Maruwanmala
66. Bulubuluwu
67. Waliwa
68. Rawunja
69. Linyalayaranga
70. Abum
71. Wuru’MjO
72. Wulhuwathari
73. Wumarndu
74. Liwinlha
75. Talhandurla
76. Warriwiyala
77. Wuburrnyarangka
78. It.Aangurrungurru
79. Wdirra
80. Wuthanda
81. Wanakurla
82. Liwujuluwuwa
83. Lajtbakwa
84. Warakungka
85. Likulhikulhila
86. Ljaphakwa
87. Maruwanmala
88. Bulubuluwu
89. Waliwa
90. Rawunja
91. Linyalayaranga
92. Abum
93. Wuru’MjO
94. Wulhuwathari
95. Wumarndu
96. Liwinlha
97. Talhandurla
98. Warriwiyala
99. Wuburrnyarangka
100. It.Aangurrungurru
101. Wdirra
102. Wuthanda
103. Wanakurla
104. Liwujuluwuwa
105. Lajtbakwa
106. Warakungka
107. Likulhikulhila
108. Ljaphakwa
109. Maruwanmala
110. Bulubuluwu
111. Waliwa
112. Rawunja
113. Linyalayaranga
114. Abum
115. Wuru’MjO
116. Wulhuwathari
117. Wumarndu
118. Liwinlha
119. Talhandurla
120. Warriwiyala
endless potentiality for the increase of the particular species.

...the dust that flies from the rock and is scattered
on the ground will stir into life... (Strehlow 1947:17)

Every fragment of rock that comes off a dugong stone, for example is a potential dugong. These increase sites are biological reservoirs of dugong energy from which species arise. It is also from these places that human spirits will arise. Those people who call the dugong their most senior paternal grandfather (ja-murimuri) have had their origins at this place. Thus, these places of increase demonstrate the immutable link between animal species and human beings: that both humans and natural species do indeed share a common descent and thus are seen to have a mutual concern for each other's destiny.

The site which is associated with the Lone Male Dugong Spirit Ancestor, the jiyamirrama, can be both an increase site for this particular dugong, or conversely, it can also be used for decrease. The immediate question that arises is why would people want to decrease what is obviously an important food source?

A core theme of this thesis deals with processes of negotiation by which a group of people hope to sustain and live amicably within their environment. Given that the human character is filled with many passions, there will be those people who for power, in anger or sheer "bloody mindedness" will seek to cause disharmony and threaten the community with hardship and disaster. A site such as the one associated with Lone Male Dugong on the Wearyan River represents such a balance between human emotion. Used correctly by the jungkayi, when the mangrove trees representing the rib bones of the dugong are gently brushed with leaves, this ritual will cause the solitary male dugong to remain abundant and healthy. However, if the trees are struck with a stone in anger, and the 'rib bones' are bruised and the bark is broken, then the creatures will decrease. As will be discussed in the next chapter, in Yanyuwa philosophy these lone male dugong have a very important role in relation to the fertility of the sea grass.
It is said by a number of Yanyuwa men that even senior *ngimarringki* for this site could cause decrease by singing alone. No Yanyuwa person I have worked with over the past decade has been able to tell me of a time when he could remember the site being used to decrease dugong, but all were emphatic that in times before them, when the "old people were really hard" they did it, and that it would still be possible to do it—but the contemporary "old people" are "easy, kind, they don't like to hurt people". Two old men, a senior *ngimarringki* and a senior *jungkayi* for the site under discussion, did offer this hypothetical discussion as to why someone might be moved to hit or sing the "dugong rib bone tree".

I am telling you this, maybe that man he wore the wrong body design, maybe he wore the design of the lone male dugong and he had no right to do so, alright that man who owns that design and the senior *jungkayi* for that design they would become angry, they might say, "Come let us strike the trees, the rib bones, let us make people feel badly because they were ill mannered, they wore a body design they was not theirs". Again here is another story, maybe they went to the sea and harpooned a lone male dugong and butchered it without regard for the Law, the *ngimarringki* and *jungkayi* for that dugong would feel badly they might throw the meat to the dogs they might say, "You men who have harpooned this dugong, have no Law for the sea, you belong on the mainland, we will strike the country of this dugong and you will see none, you will go and hunt at night and you will hear nothing, they will go from this place". That is the way they might talk.

(Jerry Brown Ngarnawakajarra with Tyson Birribirrikama. field diary 1993)

It would appear that in the contemporary environment places that have a duality of purpose are best left alone. Places such as the lone male dugong site, and other centres of dubious worth such as the sand fly, mosquito and louse are still avoided by all Yanyuwa people, and great care is taken when travelling and camping takes place near these sites. I should also add that there is never any suggestion that such dangerous increase or decrease centres should not exist. They have a right to be there on the landscape—
are just “another Dreaming”- but there are certain restrictions placed upon them which are for the benefit of all.

The sea turtle, both the green turtle (*malurrba*) and the flat back turtle (*wirndiwrndi*), are associated with maintenance sites at three places on far northerly parts of the Sir Edward Pellew Islands. In the times that I have been working over the islands, I have never seen anybody use them, but a number of now deceased people have told me of times when they or their ancestors had used them (plate 8).

One of these sites is to be found on a small island lying off the northwest tip of West Island. In English it is often called Little West Island; in Yanyuwa it is called Riiinbirr (see Map 11). On the southern edge of this island are a number of small outcrops of conglomerate rock; the larger portions of the matrix embedded rock are spherical in shape and resemble turtle eggs. The site is associated with nesting turtles in the era of the Spirit Ancestors. It is said that in past times *jungkayi* would visit the site, scrape back the sand that partly buries the “nests” and brush them with green foliage, instructing the turtles to lay eggs on well known rookery sites.

Another site is found on the northern tip of North Island on Ross Point, known in Yanyuwa as Aralwiji (see Map 11). At this site various rock formations represent portions of meat and fat that are removed from the turtle during butchering. As with the previous site, people who were in a *jungkayi* relationship to the site could brush the “pieces of meat” with green foliage and thus encourage turtles to remain healthy with plentiful supplies of fat and meat. Yet another site is found on Watson Island, on the northwest coast at a locality known as Liwayidbulungu (see Map 11). There are a number of rock formations representing sea turtles, which if struck with either green foliage or small stones it is said to increase sea turtles generally.

Ona number of occasions I have visited these areas with Yanyuwa men and asked them why they no longer perform the maintenance rites. The answers have usually been rather noncommittal, or a statement that discusses how the knowledge to perform the necessary rites has died with the “old people” and that they do not have the power to perform them. Such a
statement highlights that one cannot just presume to have a relationship with the country, there are certain things that an individual must learn. No one will deny a person's right to speak for a particular area of land, but people will challenge an individual's right to perform various actions upon the landscape. In addition, to this most people are careful about performing rituals which they have not first observed and participated in under the tutelage of older, more experienced and knowledgeable people. Where there is the potential for increase there is also, if the rituals are performed wrongly, the potential for decrease.

I have also been told that, unlike the dugong, there has never been any serious threat to the sea turtle population, that "you can see plenty of turtle all the time". I must add here that this, of course, is a Yanyuwa centric view of the sea turtle population and does not take into account world wide trends in relation to the exploitation of marine turtles (Limpus 1980, Limpus and Fleay 1983).

Comments, similar to those above were once said to me of the mud crab (ninga) increase site in Victoria Bay on Vanderlin Island, called Nyungkawathungka (see Map 11). At this site stands a large stone monolith which represents a male crab (yula). In front of it are a number of smaller stones representing both female (a-wanthirl) and juvenile crabs (kadikadi).

This site in the early 1980's was considered approachable, but the rituals of increase associated with it could not be performed because it was said they were not known (plate 9).

On a subsequent visit in 1987 a senior ngimarringki approached the site, and without any hesitation hammered it with a stone he had found at the base of the large "male" crab. He told me afterwards that his father's brother had told him what to do and that he could now perform the simple rites associated with the reproduction of crabs. Then he added rather wryly, by suggesting that the number of professional crabbers had increased so dramatically in the area, that he should pay more attention to the site, otherwise there would be no crabs for the Yanyuwa people! The same individual has told me he has visited the site several times since 1987 and performed the rituals. It is also important to note that by the time the
individual concerned felt ready to strike the 'crab' rock, he had moved back to live on Vanderlin Island, and thus spent some time moving back through the land and negotiating his relationship with it. (Wylo McKinnon, field diary 1992).

There are two issues raised in the above comments concerning the ability to maintain species. One is the fact that senior people may have died before being able to pass on necessary information to the relevant individuals; that is, contemporary senior Yanyuwa men who needed to be taught such things were often away working on the cattle stations when the knowledgeable people with the information to pass on were in their middle to old age, living at Borroloola but still occasionally travelling to the islands. Thus, external influences were responsible for maritime knowledge not being passed on. The second factor is the dislocation from country experienced since being resident at Borroloola. With the advent of aluminium dinghies and outboard motors, travel to the islands has never been easier, but it is also expensive; journeys to the most northern regions of the islands are not very common and are usually undertaken for very specific purposes. Thus, people's sense of real belonging with some of the country to the far north becomes a little diminished, although the relevant mythological knowledge and human history of these areas will be still spoken of.

A country where the intensity of feeling has diminished involves processes of negotiation which at times people feel they are still able to work through. At other times, because of the external forces associated with a place, whether it be spiritual in terms of "old people", the presence of Spirit Ancestors or alternative land use by the European population, people do not feel as if they are free to reenter into communication with that landscape in question. These are difficult questions for the Yanyuwa people, and the reality is that no firm rule exists for negotiating with such places. Some individuals will, others won't, and discussions amongst the Yanyuwa and their responses to people's attempts to reengage in communication with country are always a source of interest and debate.
210.

7.8 Song, dance and design: Ceremony as a sustaining ideal

The spiritual fulfilment of a man depends on how he is able to project himself into the spiritual world as he performs.

(Sam Gill)

One of the remarkable features of the indigenous community at Borroloola is that, regardless of the enormous pressures being exerted from outside influences, the performance of ceremonies and all of the ritual they contain has been regular and ongoing. It is not my intention to describe the various ceremonies that are performed by the Yanyuwa and their neighbours; rather, I wish to comment on the use of song, dance or ritual action and body design as a way in which people maintain a communication with the environment, and how it serves as a more esoteric form of an ongoing negotiation between human beings, other living beings, and the environment.

In the previous chapter the importance of song cycles or kujika was discussed as being an act of creation, an action by which the Spirit Ancestors brought their known environment into being. It is enough to say here that the act of singing these songs by men, and at times by women, is a way by which they wish to keep the harmony of their environment constant. In contemporary Borroloola this is not easy. The activities of non-indigenous people are sometimes seen to bring discord to the paths which these songs follow. Songs well sung are still thought to breathe life, or to "make fresh" the networks that exist between Spirit Ancestors, human beings and the environment. There is a belief that a country that no longer has song is powerfully diminished, that a part of its vitality is no longer present, and the loss of these songs to future generations is one of the gravest concerns which occupy the thoughts of the men and women who are still holding them.

These song cycles, the kujika, which relate the journeys and experiences of the Spirit Ancestors, are rich in imagery. They are sung from the viewpoint of the observer, and from the viewpoint of the Spirit Ancestor itself. The verses below are given as an example. They are taken from the
song cycle of the Dingo Spirit Ancestor, and the verses are associated with the site of Wunguntha at the mouth of the Crooked River. The Dingo comes upon a camp of spirit beings who are hunters of dugong.

1. Smoke rising, from the campfire, the campfire of the old man, He who is seated upon the sand, he who has many possessions; Ropes and harpoons.

2. Bark canoe, on the steep sided riverbank, high prowed bark canoe, upon the black saline mud of Wunguntha.

3. Children playing, boisterous noisy children, Leaving footprints in the black saline mud.

4. Well worn pathways, follow the river, well worn pathways on the bank.

5. Strong is the tidal current, relentlessly pulling, ever downstream.

6. Swirling tidal currents, fast flowing waters, collapsing the bank, fast flowing waters of the high tide.

7. In the depths of the river, deep in the waters, ever downstream runs the current.

8. White mangroves, mangrove lined river, dense mangroves running down to the sea.

9. Yes, he runs quickly, the lone male dugong, lone male dugong belonging to one place.

10. Breaking the surface, the lone male dugong, the nostrils breaks the surface he takes a breath.

11. Strong rib bones, strong back bone, of the lone male dugong, alone on the sea grass beds, on his own country.

12. There in the north, in the sea is his stomach, there in the north, in the sea are his intestines. The stomach and intestines of the Lone Male Dugong.
These song verses are taken from a song which contains some 350 verses. The song does not speak of any great mystical or creative experience. This is a public but sacred song cycle. It speaks of what people know, of their country, campfires, people waiting to hunt, the black saline mud of the lower river and salt flats, that even present day children are wont to play in, of the tides and currents and of a special type of dugong. The English translations cannot convey the special vocabulary which exists to describe the various body parts of the dugong, which in the original Yanyuwa conveys an extra sense of resonance, nor does it tell us the special term for the black mud (a-rinja), a term which is used for no other type of mud, and again, which for the Yanyuwa carries many implicit meanings. An English translation at its best allows us a glimpse of the subject matter, and from that we may be able to surmise some of the importance that this song has to the people who own it.

The song cycles also contain information of once common past events, of material culture items which are no longer made or used such as bark canoes, wooden harpoon points or spun acacia bark harpoon ropes. Thus, the songs are also repositories of a way of life which has long gone.

These songs are sung during relevant ceremonies, and certain verses are sung during the performance of individual rituals within the ceremony. During these ceremonies in which the individual rituals associated with the flora and fauna of the environment are performed, the dancers wear designs which are the iconic representation of these species. Some of them are very figurative; others are highly abstract. Such designs called barruwa in Yanyuwa, are considered to be spiritually alive; they contain 208 what the Yanyuwa call wirrimalaru, a spiritual force which emanates from them, and this emanation is directly associated with the Spirit Ancestors.

The designs are thought of as being those which the original Spirit Ancestors wore when they first instituted their rituals. In the contemporary

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8 None of the song cycles I have recorded contains any reference to material culture items from other sources such as dugout canoes or steel harpoon points.
setting, these designs are painted onto the bodies of human beings to convey, or transform, the power of the Spirit Ancestors into the human social setting so that the inherent power can be brought to bear on the physical world. Thus, an individual who wears such a design is considered to become enfolded within the power of the Spirit Ancestor, and the ultimate aim of performing any ritual wearing such a design is to be able to move through the choreography of the ritual without thinking, to be "danced" by the power of the Spirit Ancestor that the individual has had painted on his body.

These spiritually alive designs are a statement about the land, specific sites and the Spirit Ancestors associated with the land. A body design is also a public display of personal and group ownership and association with the various Spirit Ancestors.

Thus, the performers in a ritual represent the animals, birds, insects, plants, spirit beings and other phenomena that the Yanyuwa see and experience in everyday life and which they address by certain kinship terms. Through the use of body designs and rituals, the consciousness, the being of the Spirit Ancestor is strengthened, and the continuity of the natural species and the health of the country are preserved as well as the spirits of deceased kinspeople returned to their country.

One Spirit Ancestor can have a number of different designs associated with it, which usually highlights what is considered important about that creature. The body designs shown in Figure 12 highlight this. These designs are worn during the performance of sacred ceremonies such as a-Kunabibi, Wambuyungu and a-Milkathatha, but they can also be worn by the relevant jungkayi during the a-Marndiwa circumcision rituals where they are publicly seen by women and children.

There are many such designs used in ceremonial performances which are held to express the relationship of people to the environment. At a general level, people will sometimes say that when they wear a body design they are "holding the country", or "carrying the country". The use of designs allows an iconic representation of the land and particular species to be shown away from its true location. There is a sense that during the performance of these rituals when body designs are worn, that the country is brought into being
Figure 12. Various Body Designs Representing Sea Turtle And Dugong
on the ceremony ground, usually at Borroloola.

The use of ritual, song and body design is in one respect another way in which people sustain their relationship to the country. The use of such esoteric knowledge is a powerful way to affirm in a group situation the relationship that individuals within the group can have with country. Meining suggests that ceremony is also a form of history in that there are various understandings concerning the land and past events embedded in the ceremonies, and that because they are inextricably linked to land, they are a form of indigenous geography which provides for "a special way of looking at the world" (Meining 1986:XV).

If the use of body designs, song and ceremony lapse, then a very special indigenous way of understanding history becomes less important and less coherent. When rituals are no longer performed and the designs associated with them not used, then a very specific form of loss takes place in relation to the sites to which the esoteric and biological knowledge is cooected. While such things are used, their effect upon the landscape is considered beneficial. There is never a visible result, however, which an individual can see and say that it is a direct result of ritual performance. Rather, the rituals assist in the maintaining of human relationships; to perform rituals makes people feel as if they have achieved, and gives them confidence to move through the environment they live in, knowing that they are doing what is best for it. There are times when Yanyuwa people will sit quietly, or tell other people to sit quietly and "listen to country". This is a process of quiet observation and introspection where an individual will quietly absorb all that country is, in terms of its economic, historic and spiritual wealth. People now say, "It is too hard to listen to country properly anymore". There are too many other movements on the country—tourists, travellers, pastoralists and the sad untimely deaths of kin all cloud the process of listening. A common complaint said by the older Yanyuwa people against the young people is that they no longer have the time to listen to country, or, in their own words, "Can't you sit still and listen to country just for a while?"
Concluding Comments.

A Yanyuwa approach to the environment is not simple. It is based firmly upon both esoteric and mystical knowledge practical knowledge, such as through the use of fire. Ultimately, the practical too has profound significance. The Yanyuwa call the islands, the mainland and sea by the term awara or country. All of their country can respond in ways to which the Yanyuwa must have a response; not to respond risks country closing itself up. Events associated with the mainland or the islands can affect what happens in the sea. The land and the water are firmly bound together in a relationship which demonstrates that for the Yanyuwa, the ecology of their environment is dependent upon both practical and more esoteric knowledge. Speech, fire, rites of increase and song may not seem particularly important to an outside observer, but to the internal workings of an indigenous community, they are very important.

All of the processes which make up the acts of negotiation and relatedness can be seen to be a part of an ecology of internal relations where no event occurs which stands alone. Events such as the burning of country or speaking to the spirits of the deceased are a synthesis of relationships to other events. No event occurs which is not ultimately related to many others.

The following chapter seeks to explore the processes of negotiation and interrelatedness further by discussing firstly the sea, then the “underwater-country” of the Yanyuwa, and the relationship between it, the dugong and sea turtles that live there and the people who travel across the top of it.

Such a concept is echoed by the anthropologist Gregory Bateson (1985:492):

The first requirement for ecological stability is a balance...Always, in any living (i.e., ecological) system, every increasing imbalance will generate its own limiting factors as side effects of the increasing imbalance. (1985:492)

Through their own rituals and sense of negotiation it is this requirement of “balance” the Yanyuwa are hoping to achieve.
Chapter 8

Underwater Country, Sea Grass, Dugong and Turtles:

The difference between landscape and landscape is small, but there is a great difference in the beholders. (Ralph Emerson)

8.1 The way of the sea

The previous chapter discussed in detail the way in which people gain access and intimacy with the land and the sea. It is clear that actions which take place on the land are seen to profoundly affect the relationship that individuals have with the sea and many of those things which inhabit it. This chapter discusses the Yanyuwa relationship with the sea in relation to the sea being a Spirit Ancestor entity, the associated tides and currents, through to a discussion of the sea grass beds and reefs and the dugong and sea turtle which feed upon them.

It is the sea more than any other geographical feature which the Yanyuwa use as a metaphor for their existence and their identity. The most common of these terms is li-Anthawirriyarra, which means "those people whose spiritual and cultural heritage comes from the sea", but which in everyday speech is rendered in English as "the people of the sea". Another term li-Arnindawangu, means, "those people who come from the coastal and sea country"; and li-Karinguthundangu means "those people from the north", which is a shorthand reference to the sea and islands. Perhaps one of the most explicit references to this association with the sea is expressed in the phrase nganu li-Yanyuwa kaninyambu-ngka ki-anthaa, meaning "we Yanyuwa people have our origins. (or we originated), in the sea". Young Yanyuwa people who do not speak Yanyuwa will describe themselves as "saltwater people", or as an "island man or woman", and then often derisively add that they are not fresh water mainland people. The strength of this attachment to the sea has meant that Yanyuwa descendants who may have had little or no association with the sea and islands will proudly proclaim
themselves as "belonging to the saltwater country of the Gulf

The sea, as with nearly all other geographical features and phenomena in the Yanyuwa environment; is a Spirit Ancestor. The sea, which is masculine, belongs to the Rrumburriya semi-moiety, while the waves are feminine and are also associated with the Rrumburriya semi-moiety. Both the spiritual essences of the waves and the sea are said to be located on Cape Vanderlin or Muluwa. The tidal patterns of the sea are associated with an area of beach of the central east coast of Vanderlin Island called Wabuwa; this locality is associated with the activities of the Dugong Hunter Spirit Ancestors. The waves are associated with the activity of a sea snake called, in Yanyuwa, a-wirninybirniny (Lampemis hardwickii). The waves, a-rumu, which the snake creates, are feminine, as are the crests of the waves, nanda-wuku, literally "her back", or the sea spray nanda-rayal, "her sputum", nanda-minymi, "her condensation from the mouth", which is the fine sea spray which results from waves pounding on the rocks. The sea snake is described as being ranku-nganji rru-rumungku, or as "one which is a kin to the waves and sea".

Similarly, many of the currents found around the islands are associated with the residual power of various Spirit Ancestors. These currents are generally called wayikuku, while the term arrayalya is applied to a point where two tidal streams come together. The presence of two currents coming together is often evidenced by the existence of flows of tidal rubbish known in Yanyuwa as janjirlkirri. The strong tidal current which can be experienced in the Addison Channel between North and Vanderlin Islands and The Gutter between Centre and Vanderlin Islands are directly attributed to the activities of the Rainbow Serpent and the Two Initiated Men (Bradley 1992). The currents in the vicinity of Watson Island are associated with Sea Turtle Spirit Ancestor and the currents experienced in the area between Black and White Craggy Islands are associated with the continuing power of the Dugong Hunter Spirit Ancestors.

The tidal patterns in the area of the Sir Edward Pellew Islands are complex (Hollingsworth Dames and Moore 1992), a factor which the Yanyuwa understand well. Simply explained, within the area of the islands
and the McArthur River, two high and two low tides may occur each 2.4 hours. The pattern is such that there is usually an extreme high water followed by an extreme lower low water, then a moderate high water followed by a moderate low water. In Yanyuwa a low tide is called mangkuru or ngaruwa, while the high tide is called ngakan. The second lesser high tide in the tidal sequence is known as ralundu and is described as mirndilingundayarra or “giving calmness to the sea”. A turning tide is called jalababa, while a neap tide is termed wurrumu. If the second high tide occurs early in the morning making it an ideal time to hunt dugong, then that tide is still called ralundu, but it also has the specific term nyinyinyi. The currents and eddies associated with tidal movements are described using the verb rrantha rra which is related to the verb for “pulling”.

There is a detailed understanding of the relationship between the moon and the tides. This is especially so in relation to the first and third quarters of the moon and the high water neap tides. This information is important in relation to the hunting of dugong and turtle and for fishing.

As with many other Spirit Ancestor entities, knowledgeable people can use the spiritual power associated with the sea and tides for either negative or positive purposes. People can “sing” the sea snake and cause waves to form, or cause the sea to become calm. Likewise, knowledgeable people can “sing” the tide, as Jemima Miller Wuwarlu describes:

The old men and women can sing people, they can sing them to the sea, as the tide goes out people become dry, they are tired, listless, not well, then later as the tide comes back up they are refreshed, they feel happy again. Such people have songs which make the sea theirs.

(Jemima Miller, field diary 1994)

Such songs are sung by “jealous” people who are envious of people getting dugong, sea turtle and other seafoods, or by angry relatives who have been left out of hunting trips or journeys to other places on the islands. In 1992 during the process of the land claim on the Pellew Islands, a number of people said they felt very tired and worn out. They did not put it down to the
intensity of the land claim process in which they were involved, but rather, they said, someone had sung the tide and it had made them weak. When I inquired as to why someone would sing the tide on them, the reply was universally that other people on the mainland were jealous that they, the Yanyuwa sea people, still knew their country, and were fighting to get it back.

The sea, as with the land, is not beyond contact, for there are those who know how it can be used to the detriment or betterment of others. The sea is still seen to be a mysterious place, but this is not to say it is feared. It is respected, and people will choose the right time to travel over the sea. It is common, when people are about to embark on a journey across a stretch of sea, or after having completed a journey, to recall previous journeys or speak of their ancestors who had completed the same journey in dugout and bark canoes.

The Yanyuwa are well aware that a life centred on the sea is far riskier than one based totally upon the mainland, and in the past there was a higher mortality rate associated with the sea. A number of stories are still told of drownings by overturned canoes, and of bark and dugout canoes that literally fell apart mid-journey (see Timothy (jnr) in: Bradley 1989:182, Timothy (snr) in: Bradley 1991:88). A number of log coffin and bone bundle burials on the islands contain the remains of people who died because of accidents at sea. In addition to this, a number of special memorial stones over the islands symbolically represent people whose bodies were never recovered. However, having said this, the Yanyuwa people's association with the sea has conferred on them certain unique benefits in terms of food sources, technology and ceremonies, and has given the Yanyuwa a very powerful status in relation to other language groups in the area of the Gulf. They are not, as they often put it, "scrub dwellers of the mainland".

The seas around the islands can become rough quite suddenly; squalls can hit without much warning. There are sharks, jellyfish, and stone fish as well as dugong, sea turtle and fish. Yanyuwa people respond to all this with great care, sometimes by the use of magic or "power" and just as importantly, with great familiarity. For all the hardship that the sea can
provide, it is still a familiar place. People accept the complex tides and currents and the, at times, unpredictable nature of the sea. I am still constantly amazed when setting off with Yanyuwa people to visit the sea and the islands how ill prepared for mishap we are. No life jackets, a few tools, no emergency flares; just our fuel, a sometimes cantankerous engine, swags, basic food and water supplies, ropes, harpoon, floats, fishing lines and people who are eagerly awaiting arrival at the destination. Of course, this is my interpretation. At all times, the Yanyuwa people I have travelled with are assured of their knowledge of the environment in which they are travelling; they do not take unnecessary risks, and ultimately they are always confident that the land and sea will look after them. Even when two people were involved in an incident where their dinghy capsized in rough weather when it hit a sand bar, the occupants were not overly concerned. It happened to the old people, and therefore it will happen to them, and as an added aside, maybe "something" caused it to happen- an angry Spirit or human ancestor could just as well have done it. The dangers that the sea can provide for travellers are not spoken of as such. They are not even called risks, rather they are described simply as, "that's just the kind of life we have on the sea" (pers. comm. Johnson Timothy 1982).

Such an acceptance of the dangers that the sea can provide is also expressed in this song which was composed after two women were caught in a westerly squall while paddling a dugout canoe. The song composed after the event tells of how the two women felt during the experience.

We may yet be able, to cross westwards,
But we may be thrown eastwards, by these waves.

( Suzanne Jujana and Darby Muluwamara)

The sea has represented for generations of Yanyuwa people a point of unity with the natural environment. It embodies for these people a place of origin. It provides metaphors by which they can describe themselves. It is important to note that they do not often call themselves island people, they are "sea or salt water people". The reason for such self description
becomes obvious when one travels with the Yanyuwa people to the relatively shallow areas of sea, under which grows the sea grass that the dugong and sea turtle feed on. The rest of this chapter discusses the relationship people have with the sea grass beds and reefs and the dugong and the sea turtle which can be found there.

8.2 Sea grass: "That's the weed, the proper food for dugong and turtle".

The places where the sea grass grows it's all got a name, name of country, name for that grass we know it because our fathers and grandfathers told us. (Wylo McKinnon, field diary 1994)

The sea and underwater country of the Yanyuwa is, as with the mainland, often called by the term awara. It is a word which conveys a large number of meanings, such as earth, ground, place, country, camp, sea, reefs and sandbars. The term highlights the Yanyuwa concept that the sea and the underwater country are known places, that they are named. As such, it is perfectly reasonable to ask for the name of a stretch of sea, reef, sandbar or sea grass bed. Often the sea grass beds, for example, are seen to be an extension of the mainland and carry the same name as a section of the coast. In other cases the sea grass beds and the reefs have their own names by which they and the surrounding area of sea are known.

The actual term for the sea grass beds is na-ngunantha. Linguistically, the term is prefixed with the class 6 “na-" arboreal prefix which is used to denote the homes or camps of humans and other animals. Thus this term highlights the idea that the sea grass beds are the "home" or "camp" of the dugong and sea turtles. A more common term used for describing the sea grass beds is ki-maramanda, which means "the place with the sea grass".

Because these sea grass beds and reefs are seen to be country which is identifiable by name and therefore known, it is owned. The underwater country has semi-moiety association, and thus, it too is intertwined within the complex social workings of the jungkayi-ngimarringki system, which
in some respects is an expression of material, territorial and economic rights. The majority of the major seagrass beds which follow the coast are associated with the Wurdaliya and Wuyaliya semi-moieties, with a small area being Mambaliya-Wawukarriya. The reef areas are associated with the Wurdaliya, Wuyaliya and Rrumburriya semi-moieties. There is some significance in which groups have control over what sea grass beds, significance which has more to do with a spiritual ordering of the environment than an economic one; these will be discussed further below.

Some of the sea grass beds and reefs are important sites due to the activities of the Spirit Ancestors, and many of them have song cycles travelling over them which are still sung during ceremonial performance. For example, in the Rrumburriya song cycle which travels from the mainland locality of Manankurra on the Wearyan River to Walala, Lake Eames on Vanderlin Island, the song verses associated with the sea grass beds off the mouth of the Wearyan River tell of herds of dugong, different “kinds” of dugong and of their behaviour when they are pursued by spirit being hunters. Three examples are given below:

Cow dugong coming together
bringing in their calves,
cow dugong gathering,
they travel with their calves.

Taking the harpoon rope,
the young bull thrashes,
the rope slackens,
as the young bull dugong tires.

Striking the water with his tail,
the harpooned young bull,
Thrashing the water,
the flukes of the young bull

(Tim Rakawurima, field diary 1982 and
Johnson Timothy and Wylo McKinnon, field diary 1992)

Another example can be found in the name of an area of underwater country to the northwest of the Wearyan River mouth. A translation of the name provides an indication of its importance. The seagrass bed is known as Bulubuluwiji, which can be translated as either the “place of lungs” or the
"place of breathing". The site name is associated with the activities of the Lone Male Dugong Spirit Ancestor.

The Yanyuwa names given to the sea grass are also celebrated in these song cycles. Western scientific research has shown that the underwater country of the Yanyuwa is rich in varying sea grass species (Poiner et al. 1987).¹

In Yanyuwa the term *maraman* is used to describe all sea grass species. A distinction is then made between those sea grasses that they perceive to belong to the major sea grass beds which follow the coastline and some of which are exposed at low tide. The sea grasses which are found in this locality, which also represents the most favoured hunting areas, are called by the term *ma-thanngu*. This term would encompass at least the following species: *Syringodium isoetifolium* (by far the most common species in the area), *Halodule unineiris*, *Halophila ovalis* (small), *Halophila spinulosa*, *Halophila ovalis* (large). The Yanyuwa then make a distinction between the sea grasses which are found on inshore and on offshore reefs. The sea grasses found on reefs are said to be the "proper" food for sea turtles, though it is acknowledged that dugong will eat them also. The term *na-wirralbirral* is used for inshore sea grasses; this term is given to the species known as *Cymodocea rotundata*.

However, any other sea grass which is found on these inshore reefs is also given the above description of *na-wirralbirral*. The term *na-julangal* is used for those species of sea grass which are found on offshore reefs, and the term is best associated with the species known as *Cymodocea surrulata* and *Thelassia hemprichii* and quite often *Halophila spinulosa* which is also categorised by another term when found on the major sea grass beds.

Linguistically, there is also a change in the prefixes attached to the

¹ I am indebted for the assistance given to me by Dr. Ian Poiner in identifying the various species of sea grass which are to be found in the south west Gulf of Carpentaria. Professor Helene Marsh, Dr. Tony Preen and Dr. Colin Limpus have given me valuable insights in regard to the dugong, sea turtle and sea grass relationship. See also Marsh et al. (1982).
Yanyuwa terms for sea grass, which highlight the Yanyuwa perceptions of their categorisation of sea grass. The sea grass species which are associated with the major sea grass beds of the coast, *ma-lhanngu*, carries the Yanyuwa “*ma*” class 5 non-meat vegetable food prefix, while the other two categories, *na-wirralbirral* and *na-julangal* carry the “*na*” class 8 possessive prefix which is usually translated as “its”. The “it” in this instance is referring to the reefs. In women’s speech this prefix would appear as “*ni*”. Thus, the sea grasses are seen to be possessed by the reefs on which they are said to be found. The Yanyuwa state that dugong and sea turtle also feed upon algae which they find upon the reefs. This information concurs with what is known of dugong and sea turtle feeding habits (Marsh et.al 1982, Lanyon et.al. 1989), though the Yanyuwa hunters believe the sea turtle feeds on algae more often than does the dugong. In Yanyuwas such algae is known as *miyafmiyaf*. Yanyuwa hunters also believe that dugong, in particular, seek out this algae when they are not well. According the Marsh (pers. comm. 1996), this could indeed be so, but it could also be starvation food, when the sea grass beds have been severely traumatised, such as occurred in 1985 when Cyclone Sandy severely damaged the sea grass beds in the area of the Pellew islands. In such circumstances whole herds of dugong could be seen seeking this algae.

One species of seagrass, *Enhalus acoroides*, is classed on its own. It is the largest species of seagrass in the area and is often called ‘tape grass’ in local English. In Yanyuwa this species is commonly called *ma-warladaji*, although older Yanyuwa speakers would sometimes refer to it as *ma-barnayurrwarlu*, saying that this was its “big name” or important name. This sea grass is sometimes described as being *ma-wurrrama* or the “sea grass of authority”. Unlike other species of seagrass, *Enhalus acoroides* is associated with a specific site, and is seen to be an actual Spirit Ancestor. This sea grass is associated with a reef which lies between Steep Cut Rock and Daisy Islet on the east coast of Vanderlin Island. The reef is called Mungkumalhannungungka, which is actually an irregular ablative form of the term *ma-lhanngu* and can thus be translated as “being with sea grass”. This species of sea grass is associated with the activities of the
Dugong Hunter Spirit Ancestors.

Yanyuwa dugong hunters tell how this species of sea grass had all but disappeared from the area, and it is only within the last three or four years that they have begun to see an observable increase in this species throughout the region (pers. comm. Steve Johnson and Wylo McKinnon 1994).

The Yanyuwa perceive that there is a close relationship existing between the varying sea grasses and the dugong and sea turtle as, for example, the expression *walya nyiki-nganji ki-maramanngku*, or "the dugong and sea turtle are kin to the sea grass" (pers. comm. Charlie Miller 1980). As discussed previously, the term *nganji* is often used to describe relationships between species where a co-dependancy is perceived. It is said by the Yanyuwa, obviously enough, that without the sea grass there would be no sea turtles, in particular, green turtles, or dugong; but likewise it is said that without the dugong and sea turtle, there would be no sea grass, as their feeding upon it keeps it healthy. And also, as will be discussed later, the death of dugong and sea turtles is seen to be important to the maintenance of the sea grass beds.

In relation to dugong feeding on sea grass as a part of maintaining the productivity of the sea grass, it should be mentioned that dugong when feeding often pull up the whole plant and eat it—they do not just graze the top of the plant. Heinsohn (1979:92) suggested that "the destructive feeding may help to maintain a diversity of species in sea grass communities by producing a large number of seral stages". This has been confirmed (Professor Helene Marsh and Dr. Tony Preen pers. comm. 1996) and further illustrates the relationship of the dugong to the sea grass beds.

8.3 Dugong: (*Dugong dugon*) "He's got a lot of different names, different kind."

The dugong and sea turtle they are sea creatures of authority, they belonged to our ancestors and they belong to us...they are like the fruit of the cycad food as it too is a food of authority.

(Nora Jalirduma, field diary 1988)
Within the Yanyuwa classification of the environment, the dugong, the green sea turtle and the fruit of the cycad palm (*Cycas angulata*) are all classed as being food sources of *wurrrama* or authority. They were in past times considered to be those food sources which were essential for the physical as well as the spiritual survival of the Yanyuwa people. At the present time, the cycad palm fruit is rarely gathered and processed, although when people speak of it their voices will still resonate with a degree of emotion, highlighting the importance that this food source has in the historical view of the Yanyuwa environment and their place in it. (See Bradley 1988a: 1-29; McDinny in: Bradley 1989: 215-235).

The dugong and sea turtle are still important. They represent for the Yanyuwa an important focus which demonstrates a continuity with the past, and in times which are rapidly changing, an affirmation of the ability to be able to maintain the links with the past. This is demonstrated not only by the hunting of these creatures, but also in other knowledge associated with them, which seeks to explain the behaviour of these animals and their place within the marine environment (see Husar 1978, Marsh et al. 1984c for general information regarding the dugong).

Yanyuwa men and women say that all living things have their own Law, their own culture, their own way of being, which can be observed and interpreted by human beings. An obvious example of this is the brolga (*Grus rubicunda*). It appears to the Yanyuwa as a creature which has a strong Law: its red head, elegant dimensions, its trumpeting calls and spectacular dancing displays are evidence that the brolga (*kurdarrku*) is a highly developed creature in relation to the possession of its own culture or Law (*narnu-yuwa*). Many of the activities undertaken by the brolga, for example, are repeated by human actors in the various ceremonies which are performed by the Yanyuwa.

The sense that the various species have their own culture is also evidenced in that they have their own favoured food sources and localities and that they behave in certain ways. Because of the strong links between people, living things and sites on the landscape, it is also felt that all life forms such as animals, plants, insects, fish and birds have the ability to make
perceptions about the environment they live in. They can evaluate a given situation within themselves, and ultimately, they are seen to be totally conscious and responsible beings. Furthermore, just as human beings observe and interpret the actions of other living things, it is also felt that living things observe and interpret the actions of human beings. As such, they too are part of the established Law which began when their own Spirit Ancestors first moved on the landscape. Thus, the Dugong Spirit Ancestor not only provides a basis by which human beings can try to understand dugong, but the original Dugong Ancestor is also seen to provide the reasons why dugong behave like dugong. In this instance, the term Law is being used to describe the various habits of other species, and the word Law is being used as a paradigm for the biological traits which each species possesses.

Thus, the understanding of animals and other species having Law means that actions such as mating, giving birth to young, the laying and hatching of eggs, feeding habits, growth and eventual death are seen to be elements which express the eternity of the order which is simply called the Law. Such processes as alluded to above are a continual restatement about how things were in the very beginning, and how it is hoped they always will be. However, the contemporary world shows that outside influences can dramatically change the perceptions of this Law. For example, professional fishermen set nets which run over the sea grass beds, dugong get caught in them and drown. The question, ‘Why don’t the dugong learn about nets?’ could be posed. The knowledge of nets, however, is not a part of dugong Law, it is a part of human Law. Humans, therefore, have to act on behalf of the dugong to try and preserve them. This should not be seen as just good environmental or ecological sense, rather, it is the way that kin should treat each other—because of a shared genesis, dugong and Yanyuwa people are relatives.

Introduced species such as the cane toad (Bufo marinus) have no Law; they are seen to be "strangers" which have come from another place. The destruction that their first appearance wrought on the species of reptiles that the Yanyuwa women, in particular, hunted, caused much grief and confusion. Because it is a stranger in the environment, many of the older Yanyuwa people attributed the cane toad with powers far beyond its capabilities. The
The fact that it has poison is well known, and when it first arrived in the area in large numbers, people were worried that it could even poison the lagoon and creek systems from which they would have normally drawn water.

Likewise, the activities of tourists, miners and other unknowledgable people all worry the Yanyuwa in regard to their relationship with the other species which inhabit the environment. For example, the destruction or damage of sites associated with a particular animal or plant species may cause that animal to disappear or to become very hard to hunt. Over-exploitation of a species may also result in an imbalance to an environment that is sustained by a Law which says that the intelligence and consciousness of animals are not the same as those of people. It cannot be the same, but still, it is not all that different, because animals are also seen to be intelligent.

Ultimately, however, humans become the interpreters of the given environment. This is not to say that other living things don’t interpret, but human language is the only language we, as humans, can understand; therefore it is the only way we can interpret any given situation. It was once said by elderly Yanyuwa men and women that certain individuals were capable of understanding speech of other living things, but this is a skill which no longer exists. Now only human speech remains to describe the living things which inhabit the world. The names that things are called are important and are ultimately bound up within the concepts of any creature’s particular Law, as Annie Karrakayn highlights:

All things got a name, that’s their own name for themselves, they’ve had that name from the start, and that’s the only name we know how to use, you’ve got big names and little names, some things got more than one name... but everything has a name. (Annie Karrakayn, field diary 1994)

As with the country, the ability to call the name of something is to begin to understand and know it. Not to know the names is to stand in considerable ignorance. The Yanyuwa possess many names for the dugong and sea turtle, and the knowing of these names is the beginning of coming to understand the culture or Law of these creatures.
A general principle of Yanyuwa ethno-classification is a division between what are considered coastal-marine and island species as opposed to inland-mainland species. This categorisation is not rigid, and depending on circumstances, some creatures and plant species will move between the maritime environment and the mainland. Usually such examples have more to do with individual perception of the species involved, and in group discussion such differences in opinion can be the source of lively debate. Thus, any species seen to be associated with the sea, islands and coast are called wurralngu, a term meaning literally "being for depths of the sea"; by extension, however, the term is also used to describe any creature which is perceived to belong to the marine and island environment. Yanyuwa people, too, are included in this category.

Dugong and sea turtle are of course labelled as wurralngu, but are more commonly referred to as walya. This term walya has no direct English translation, but it is generally translated as "dugong and sea turtle". The basis for such a category is probably twofold: firstly they are the only creatures in the sea which feed extensively on sea grass; secondly, they represent the largest marine animals hunted and are culturally significant.

A number of younger Yanyuwa people have suggested that the term is used because when they go hunting they do not usually know what they are going to get, so it is easier to say that they are going to hunt walya. In common everyday Yanyuwa, this is the most common meaning given to the term. In archaic Yanyuwa, the term walya was further highlighted by the inclusion of two adjectives, long and short. Thus, jumanykarra walya or "long walya" meant dugong, and wukulkuthu walya meant "short walya" which was used for turtle; these two terms are very rarely used today.

The general term for dugong is waliki; this term when prefixed with "li-" or "a-", thus appearing as li-waliki or a-waliki, is used to describe a herd of dugong. The use of these two prefixes is an indication of how the Yanyuwa perceive the dugong. The prefix "li-" is used to describe plural, but it is normally only reserved for use on human subjects and sometimes on animals such as dogs, especially if they are pets. Thus the prefix indicates that a degree of intimacy exists between the animal and
The prefix "a-" is a feminine prefix normally used to mark that the subject under discussion is female. The prefix also usually denotes the singular, but within archaic Yanyuwa, singular prefix forms are often used to describe plural (pers comm. Jean Kirton 1985). The reason why the feminine prefix is used to describe a large number of dugong is because the Yanyuwa believe that most dugong herds predominantly consist of females with calves, single females, one or two lead bulls and a few young subordinate males. Smith (1987) also provides evidence in his research for the dominance of female dugong within a herd.

Another example of this perceived familiarity between dugong and humans is seen in the term li-milkamilarra. This word is normally reserved to describe a group of human mothers and their children, but it is also used to describe a group of dugong cows and calves. The term is also used by the Yanyuwa to highlight their perception that dugong are gregarious and highly social animals and that females and young dominate any given herd.

The Yanyuwa believe the dugong to be a highly social animal, living in family groups, and that each herd of dugong is related to each other. The use of this plural prefix is one way in which the Yanyuwa highlight the intimacy which exists among dugong, but also between people and dugong. Amongst western biologists (Heinsohn 1978, Anderson and Birtles 1978, Marsh et al. 1978, Anderson 1979), there is much debate based on observation and supposition as to whether dugong are social animals or an example of an animal that gathers in herds because they all share the same food source. Questions have also been raised by these researchers as to whether dugong can communicate with each other.

The difficulty in discussing dugong with the Yanyuwa is the sense that dugong are not just dugong, but rather, there are types or kinds of "dugongness". It is rare amongst those people who still speak Yanyuwa as a first language, or for those Yanyuwa who know how to use the special vocabulary associated with dugong, to hear the term waliki (dugong) used as the dominant noun. If this word is used, another statement will follow which will tell the hearer what "kind" of dugong is being talked about. A
hunter, or somebody distributing dugong meat, for example will, not just say it is dugong, but rather it is a particular type of dugong. A receiver of meat, or a person hearing that a dugong has been harpooned will enquire, “What kind of dugong is it?”. The answer is always a specific term which can be applied to the kinds of dugong that the Yanyuwa know. Even when out hunting, skilled hunters and observers of dugong can tell from the actions of the various dugong—how they surface, how they roll, dive and move—what kinds of dugong they are looking at (see also Marsh et al. 1981 for similar observations from Mornington Island).

In 1980 when I first began to document information relating to the Yanyuwa marine environment, both men and women were at pains to make sure I put down and understood the different kinds of dugong that existed. It was something which I found very complicated and difficult to follow. It appeared to me at the time to be as complex as the kinship system which the Yanyuwa use. For the Yanyuwa, however, there is little confusion, there is rarely any debate amongst people as to what classification a dugong should be given.

From a linguistic viewpoint, many of the terms given to the kinds of dugong, could at first be seen as adjectives, as they appear to be describing the dugong, but they are used as if they were nouns. For example, the lone male dugong is called *jiyamirrama*. The first time I formally recorded information about it was in the following form, and in this instance, I also include the original Yanyuwa with an interlinear translation:

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Nya-mangaji jiyamirrama jiwinji yiwalumba
that specific one lone male dugong he is being by himself
ja-wulumanji yiwalumba arrkula awara nyinkungu
he is running by himself one place it is for him
kalngi barra jiwinji wukuwarrumanthamara.
truly now he is being the one who desires to be on his own place
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Free translation:

That lone male dugong he is always alone, he runs by himself,

truly he has one place/country which is for him, he is the one that desires
to be on his own country. (Johnson Timothy, field notes 1992)

It is possible that the existence of these special nouns for dugong reflects an aspect of an indigenous system of classification which shows a complex conceptual hierarchy. Indeed, the classification of dugong (and sea turtle) is far more complex in specific terms than in any other part of the Yanyuwa folk biological system.

I believe that in such instances the use of indigenous language becomes very important, as it is the use of language which allows for a fuller comprehension of ecological knowledge. This ecological knowledge also contains information which relates to other social structures and systems of beliefs, all of which are important when viewing a Yanyuwa perception of their environment. As Wilkins (1993:71) comments:

To gain a proper perspective on the linguistic reflections of cultural knowledge, one must go beyond the mere study of words and their purely referential semantic aspects, and one must expect important conceptual knowledge to be encoded in a number of distinct places in the overall grammar of a language. Importantly, "grammar" here does not mean merely "morpho-syntax", but is intended in its broadest sense to include a description of all aspects of language and language use...

The following information gives the names of the different "kinds" of dugong and details important characteristics which the Yanyuwa associate with them. When a Yanyuwa person uses such names, all of the associated information which is provided below is in fact implicit, and thus part of a wider sphere of information which is used to determine the nature and significance of the knowledge associated with dugong.

It will be noted that there are recurrent references to dugong behaving "like" humans. The dugong stands alone in being described in such detail using human metaphors. Other animals may be described like this but to a much lesser extent, with the exception perhaps, of the domesticated dog.
8.4 Male Dugong

*bungkurl*:- This dugong is described by the Yanyuwa as a "stranger that comes from the north", with the Torres Strait region usually being referred to as a possible source. They are not commonly seen, and if seen, are not hunted. I have never seen one, but people have told me they are unusually short and somewhat "barrel-shaped" and in poor condition. A number of younger hunters call them "dwarf dugong". They are also described as being much darker than other dugong. Colour descriptions range from between dark brown to black.

*jiyamirrama* : - Lone male dugong, sometimes described as a very old male, and sometimes as a male of reproductive age onwards which has been driven away from the herd by the dominant bull. This dugong is unique within Yanyuwa semi-moiety classification in that it is a Wuyaliya Spirit Ancestor, while all other dugong are associated with the patri-moiety that contains the Rrumburriya semi-moiety, and also the Mara Murrungun semi-moiety and the site of Wunubarryi. The lone male dugong is associated with the sites of Wunguntha on the lower Crooked River; the site of Liwujujuhluwa at the mouth of the Crooked River which is associated with the stomach and intestines; the site of Bulubuluwiji at the mouth of the Wearyan River which is where its lungs and breathing habits are of significance; and the small island in the Wearyan River called Wubandamara which is where the rib bones of this creature are important. Its significance is further highlighted in that it has two alternative terms which are wanarraba and jiwarnarrila.

These dugong are said to be territorial in that they occupy a specific sea grass area and rarely move away from it. The Yanyuwa describe the behaviour of this dugong with a special intransitive verb,

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2 According to Marsh (pers. comm 1996) such dugong do exist. What causes the “dwarfism” is not known; it may be food/trauma related. It is highly likely that the Yanyuwa are correct in assuming that this kind of dugong does come from the Torres Strait. The Torres Strait contains the largest number of dugong in Australia.
wukuwarrumantharra, which is best translated as "belonging only to one place". These dugong, more than any of the others, are seen to have a close and complex relationship with the sea grass beds. Older Yanyuwa people would describe these dugong using the following phrase: jiyamirrama kumbu-ngka baji ki-maramanda yiwa wirriyarra, which means, "the lone male dugong he originated there on the sea grass beds, he is spiritually associated with that place". In everyday Yanyuwa, the perceived territorial nature of these dugong is simply described as jibiya baji or "a countryman or inhabitant of that place".

There is a sense that the presence of lone male dugong over the various sea grass beds makes them responsible for the well being of the sea grass beds. While other dugong may move off an area, the lone male will stay and maintain the relationship between the dugong and the sea grass, and understandable behaviour, if we remember that this relationship is described as one where the dugong is considered to be kin to the sea grass.

This protective role does not mean that they are not hunted; if they can be captured, they will be, because another male will always take its place. Having said this, however, certain lone males become well known, from the regular sightings and the recognition of markings on the back. Some people are loathe to hunt them.

It is possible that the lone male dugong is of the Wuyaliya semi-moiety because all the major coastal sea grass beds in the area of the Pellew Islands are Wuyaliya, and Wurdaliya which is the semi-moiety found in the same patrimoiety as Wuyaliya. It should be noted that this is a supposition on my behalf and has never been stated by the Yanyuwa. Such an idea, however, does have some basis in the comments which the Yanyuwa do make about the nature of the lone male dugong, as have been related above.

Indigenous people in the Torres Strait also acknowledge the presence of lone or solitary males (Nietschmann and Nietschmann 1981). Marsh (et al. 1984) comments that at least some of these dugong maybe post-reproductive.

wiriji:- This is a term given to any very large, presumably old male and sometimes to presumably no longer productive females. They often have
very mottled hides, sometimes near to white on the back, are heavily scarred, and are said to be foul-smelling, though I have not been able to confirm this latter comment by personal observation. They are not hunted as their meat is said to be unpalatable, but also because these dugong are considered to be "half-rainbow serpents".

In Yanyuwa belief, all dugong, dolphins and whales are considered to be the offspring of the potentially destructive rainbow serpent, whose most visible form is seen in a cyclonic depression. In Yanyuwa, the term bujimala is used for an actual rainbow serpent, while the term yulangu is used for any creature that can potentially manifest itself as a rainbow serpent. All dugong can do this, but the wiriji is considered to have crossed a line because of its presumed age and size where its basic "dugongness" and "rainbowness" are virtually indistinguishable. It is possible that some of these dugong could be at least 70 years old (Marsh 1991:47).

jawaruwaru:- A young male which still lives within the herd. It is often described as a "teenager" in English or a "young steer" by those men who have spent time working on cattle stations. It is said to be weaned, but because of its youth, stays within the herd because it is no threat to the dominant bull.

mayili:- A young male still within the herd, but living on the fringes. It is sometimes referred to as a "traveller", as it is said to travel between the various herds which inhabit the south west Gulf. This travelling between herds is equated with the way young human males will sometimes travel or congregate together as they look for girlfriends, and hopefully, sexual partners. These dugong will have just erupting or erupted tusks. It is from these young males that some challengers to the dominant bull's authority will arise. In some populations a young male with just erupted tusks could range in age between 12 to 14 years of age (Marsh 1979:53)

rangkarrku:- The dominant bull of a herd. Some people say there is only one of them, while others say there are two or three other bulls in a subordinate position which follow him. People give the term rangkarangkarrku for the other male followers of the bull. People describe this dugong as being "just like a man", that is, it is very clever. It is the
dominant male's task to lead the herd safely. As the tide begins to rise, this
dugong will travel alone and very quietly onto the sea grass beds and make
sure it is safe. If all is clear, he will slap the surface of the water with his
tail, and the other male followers will lead the cows and calves onto the sea
grass. If danger is sensed or the tide begins to change, the dominant male
will again slap the water and round up the herd and drive them out into
deep water. This dominant male is also sometimes called *wirumanthangu*
or *wirumanthammara*, both meaning "the one which whistles". The dugong
is said to communicate with the rest of the herd by whistling (see also
Solomon 1992:12,34,45). A mature bull such as the *rangkarrku* could
possibly be in the vicinity of 34 years of age (Marsh 1979:53).

The following text, recorded by Jean Kirton in 1967 with an old
Yanyuwa dugong hunter called Pluto Wurrumungkumungku, highlights the
Yanyuwa perceptions of this dugong:

And that dominant male we can hear it from a long way away, it is
there whistling in the water, it is there when we are hunting, and we
can hear it in the depths of the sea it is talking, in the depths of the sea
along the coast. When he is moving in the depths of the sea we do not see
it, we can only hear it. He is bearing with him many dugong, he is
bearing them with him and we can hear him whistling. We acknowledge
that dominant male, we call out to him, we call out, "Yes you are there",
he is bearing with him many females and calves. He is rounding them up,
he is going eastwards and westwards rounding them up, he is talking to
them, he is just like a bull rounding up his cows, like a bull he is talking
to his cows. He is in the depths of the water, he is moving down inside
the water. He is feeding himself as he comes from the north, he is coming.
He is bearing with him many dugong he will take them to the shallow
water and they will feed themselves, he is continually rounding up

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3 Age can generally be determined by the sectioning of tusks and the counting of growth
layers (Marsh 1979:181-194).
The concept of acknowledging the dominant male is closely related to the idea that dugong are like humans. By acknowledging the dominant dugong, humans are saying that they understand and accept the authority of that dugong to lead the herd, that as with humans, dugong have a classification whereby each individual dugong knows and understands its place.

8.5 Female Dugong

a-wurduwu: This a young cow, often called "a teenager" a "young woman" or a heifer; it is not yet ready to breed. The Yanyuwa term actually translates as "having a womb". These young cows are also said to travel among the various herds of dugong. The Yanyuwa equate this moving around with concepts which are embodied in the term wunji. This term can be translated as eloping, or running away with a lover or running away with the intent to find or meet a lover. These dugong are sometimes called by the term a-wurrumbarra which is the same term given to adolescent girls who are showing the first observable signs of physical maturity.

a-kulhaku/hawiji: A young cow, pregnant with its presumed first or second calf. The term literally means, "being with child". The stem of the word kulhaku/hawiji is a human kinship term used by women for their children. The unborn dugong calf is called nyanki-ardu - "her child". It is the only example when the stem ardu meaning human child is used for the offspring of an animal, and is another indication of the Yanyuwa perception that dugong are very similar to humans. Hunters of dugong say they can tell a pregnant dugong by the way it dives sharply in the water after having taken a breath. It was said by older Yanyuwa men and women who I worked with that a cow dugong on the birth of its young will bury it in the mud until it gets strong enough to travel with its mother. It is a story still discussed by the older Yanyuwa hunters, but they give the impression that it is information...
that belonged to the old people which they do not necessarily have to accept as correct. Once old enough to travel, the calf is described as being carried *nungkanda-wukungka* or "with her (the mother's) back", and a number of older hunters speak of baby dugong swimming beneath their mothers for protection. This they call *nungkanda-wurdula*, or "with her (the mother's) stomach". A cow dugong such as described above would probably have to be at least nine years of age, the minimum age at which reproduction has been recorded (Marsh 1979:53).

*ayarra*: Cow with a small calf. The calf is called *ngumba*. The term *ayarra* is also a term used to describe a human mother and child or a child with its mother's sister. If a large number of cows with small calves is seen, then the term is changed to *li-alayarra*, which has the same meaning as the above, but it indicates plural.

*a-ngarninybala*: Cow with a large calf. The calf is said to be somewhat independent of its mother, so she is said to talk to it so as to keep in contact with it. The root of this term is *ngarniny*, which is the root of the verb to reply or answer. There has been some debate amongst western biologists as to whether dugong do communicate with each other. The Yanyuwa cite evidence of the "whistlers", but also believe that dugong have their own language. Nair and Mohan (1977) have reported chirping sounds coming from dugong and conclude that sound communication is perhaps important as a social behaviour amongst dugong.

*a-mirramba*: A non-lactating cow with a large calf still in her company. Yanyuwa men insist that from observation in the water they can

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Yanyuwa people traditionally do not reckon dugong age in years. Rather, observation of tusk eruption, body size, scarring, skin colour, pregnancy and meat quality are all used to describe age and maturity. Amongst older Yanyuwa people, dugong are described according to human terms, i.e., old man, old woman, boy, adolescent girl or boy. Those men who worked on the cattle stations use a vocabulary related to this industry to describe dugong i.e. bull, dry cow, young heifer, steer, "poddy calf". It is this vocabulary which the young Yanyuwa hunters also use.
determine this kind of dugong, saying they rely on the size of the accompanying calf. I have also noted that they check the mammary glands of such a dugong during the butchering process, which may indicate also that confirmation of a particular dugong kind or type can occur once the dugong is out of the water. This term is also given to women of the Yanyuwa Rrumburriya semi-moiety or the Mara Murrungun semi-moiety as a personal name associated with the Dugong Spirit Ancestor located at Wunubarryi (Mount Young).

*a-lhum urraw iji:* A pregnant cow with a large calf still following her. The stem of this word *humu* - is probably related to the verb to “pull or drag along”. Yanyuwa hunters say that the calf is reluctant to leave its mother so she is forced to take it or “drag” it along with her. The same verb stem is used to relate to the specific action of pulling a harpooned dugong alongside the boat.

*a-bayawiji:* A mature cow dugong which is not pregnant and has no calves with her.

*a-banthamu:* A mature cow dugong which is considered to be past reproduction. They often have small tusks erupted through the gum. A dugong such as this could be 50 or more years old (Marsh 1979:53).

8.6 Other terms relating predominantly to the actions of dugong

*nhabarl:* Yanyuwa avoidance dialect word for dugong, used by inland groups such as the Gudanji and Wambaya people as a general term for dugong and turtle.

*yiwaji:* Archaic Yanyuwa word for dugong.

*kirrimantharra:* Two dugong such as a cow and calf surfacing to breathe at the same time. A personal name *Kirrikathu* is derived from this term and can be given to male members of the Yanyuwa Rrumburriya semi-moiety or the Mara Murrungun semi-moiety.

*mukulinjayarra:* Dugong surfacing to take a breath, the same term is given to a dugong who is seen feeding on the floating sea grass which gathers on the water’s surface.
walijburrungkayarra: The action of a dugong turning swiftly away if it senses danger or when in contests with other males during mating.

wirlbungkayarra: Term given when dugong leap nearly bodily from the water, especially during mating contests or sometimes when surprised during hunting or after they have been harpooned. The same term is used to describe the leaping of dolphins and breaching of whales.

wakumantharra: The flogging of a dugong tail on the water to give warning and also used to describe the action of male dugong as they chase a female during mating, and often to the actual process of mating.

8.7 Other indigenous information relating to the dugong.

The understanding of the different kinds of dugong is the beginning of knowing about dugong. Older Yanyuwa men and women still go to great pains to try and teach their sons, daughters and other young relatives these special terms. Young men, when they have been successful in hunting a dugong, are always asked, "What kind of dugong is it?" If they are unable to respond with the correct term they are often severely reprimanded and told that such names are important. Such times usually end with the older people listing off the different kinds of dugong and asking the young hunter to identify what kind of dugong it is that he has harpooned. The inquest usually ends in one of two ways: the hunter is able to give the correct term and all is well, or the hunter angrily leaves, uttering comments about how these older people who are seen to be harassing him will eventually eat the meat of the dugong with no name. Such situations do not occur in relation to other animals with the exception of the sea turtle, and ultimately, such behaviour is related to the importance that the dugong has for the Yanyuwa. I have noticed, however, in the last two years that such interrogations have become less common. As long as the hunter can describe in detail what kind of dugong he has captured, all is well, and the older people will usually complete the hunter's description with the appropriate Yanyuwa term.

All Yanyuwa people, regardless of age, acknowledge that the dugong is incredibly keen of hearing. The term the Yanyuwa use for this is lingi, which means somebody of high intelligence or of keen hearing. In Yanyuwa,
both these ideas are related. In a society where oral communication is the way one learns, good hearing is essential in gaining knowledge.

It is said, however, that dugong have poor eyesight due to an incident which occurred in the era of the Spirit Ancestors when the dugong, still in human form, had an accident with the seeds of the kurrajong tree (*Brachychiton diversifolious*), in which the fine prickles covering the seeds became lodged in his eyes.\(^5\)

Such a story as briefly recounted above is considered to be a "just so story", primarily for entertainment, but it also warns people about potential danger of the seeds of the kurrajong tree and provides an explanation as to why the dugong is said to have poor sight. Such a story is rarely related to a specific site, though people will sometimes say it happened around Wunubarryi (Mount Young). Of far more importance to the senior members of the Yanyuwa community is the fact that male dugong are considered to be "proper men" or *nguwibi*, that is their penises indicate to the knowledgeable, that the dugong has been through both the ritual operations of circumcision and subincision.

There is no story that tells how this happened; it is just known, and the Yanyuwa say that the visual signs on the penis of the dugong testify to the fact (Marsh et al. 1989: 726). Being *nguwibi* or a "proper man" in Yanyuwa society means being accorded great respect, and likewise for the dugong. However, much of the respect shown towards the dugong is shown during the hunting and butchering process. The belief and the ability to show that the dugong has the marks of such ritual operations is another reason why the dugong is seen as having close affinity to humans.

As with many other animals that the Yanyuwa have knowledge of, dugong are described as animals that undertake *muyu*, a term which could perhaps be equated with migration, but which the Yanyuwa describe as the idea that animals move from place to place in their time, or at the right season. Yanyuwa hunters and other people who know about dugong believe that

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\(^5\) A full account of this story can be found in Appendix 1.
they travel from the west, from the Limmen Bight. This is because Wunubarryi or Mount Young represents the place of origin for these species. The dugong then move eastwards and through the Pellew islands and during the dry season they gather in various groups over the islands. These groups the Yanyuwa refer to as family groups or *lalungali-malarngu*. Once again, human kinship terms are used to describe the dugong. During the cold season these groups will gather in large numbers as, on the high tide, they come close to the shore to eat the roots or rhizomes of the sea grass, such as *Syringodium isoetisolium*. The Yanyuwa also say that they come near to the coast because it is the cold season—they get cold in the deep water and the shallow water allows the sun to warm their backs.

Dugong feeding is also associated with a range of sounds which are audible to people, such as hunters who are in close proximity to the herd. Sounds such as coughs, whistles, hiccupping and breathing all confirm for the Yanyuwa that dugong are "just like we", or human-like. Dugongs also on occasion seem to spy-hop, that is, they bring their whole head out of the water and appear to look around. Yanyuwa hunters believe these dugong to be older males or females, and they are watching the activity of the hunters.

One of the strangest behaviours which Yanyuwa people observe and comment upon is when dugong eat floating sea grass that gathers, at times, in quite thick swathes on the surface of the sea. It is believed that this only occurs when the dugong are travelling back out to deeper water on the turning of the tide. The dugong rise to the surface, with their head out of the water, snout seemingly pulled back, mouth open and swim through the floating sea grass and eat it. This, it is said, is a last quick meal before the tide turns again and the dugong can come back onto the sea grass beds. I have never observed this behaviour, but many of the older hunters I worked with would speak of it.

As the weather increases in heat and humidity, approximately from August to November, the dugong are said to gather to mate and to give birth. Yanyuwa men and women I have worked with over the past decade have all spoken of a specific area where dugong will congregate for mating and the giving birth of their young. This area is often called "the nursery" or
“baby area” in English. It is located to the east of the McArthur River mouth and includes the mouth and abutting sea grass beds of the Dugong Creek called Wuthanda in Yanyuwa, and the mouths of the next two creeks called Wanakurla and Wudambuwa (see Map 13). It is, of course, acknowledged that dugong will give birth and mate in other areas, but the above mentioned localities are considered by the Yanyuwa to be most favoured by dugong. Some people speak of this area also extending across to the area of sea in the vicinity of the Wearyan River mouth.

From my own observations in this area, I have observed both birthing and mating taking place. I witnessed my first birth in December 1980. It was towards sundown, and we observed a dugong in quite shallow water, probably no more than a metre. The dugong made no attempt to move, and it was then that one of the men in the boat noticed that a dugong calf was half protruding from the vagina of the dugong. The adult dugong gave a flick of her tail and the calf was born. The cow appeared to offer assistance to her calf to get it to breathe. We moved quietly away from the area, as the men did not want to disturb it. For all the men in the boat this was the first time they had seen the birth of a dugong although on our return to Borroloola, many of the very old men spoke of having seen dugong being born. I was asked if I had observed the cow burying her baby in the mud. When I replied in the negative, the old man laughed and told me I should have waited to see that, because that was the proper Law for dugong (Tim Rakawurlma, field diary 1981).

The second birth was observed late in the afternoon in October 1982. The cow was in the same locality as the previous sighting I had made, although this time she appeared to be accompanied by two other dugong. The men said they were both older females. These females milled around in close proximity, but appeared to have nothing to do with the actual birth. Again the water was reasonably shallow. The water was on this occasion quite turgid so visibility was not good, but it could be seen that the cow was lying to her side. After a few minutes watching, the cow righted herself and a small calf appeared next to her. The above sightings are also consistent with dugong reproductive activity in other parts of northern Australia (Marsh et al.)
In Yanyuwa there is a term, *marrantharl*, which means the young of certain animals which are helpless and require constant attention if they are to survive. Such animals as pups, joeys, chicks and human babies are called by this term; baby dugong, however, are not. Because they swim almost immediately, dive and surface, suckle milk and move off with their mother, they are not deemed helpless. The Yanyuwa believe the bond between the cow dugong and calf is very strong.

Yanyuwa people state that dugong give birth every year, and this is one area of major disagreement with western biologists, as dugong are considered by the latter to be slow reproducers, with a cow bearing a single calf every 3.5 years, after a gestation of about 13 months (Marsh 1991:47). Yanyuwa hunters see the yearly arrival of young calves in the areas they hunt as evidence of rapid increase. This is one of the major areas of contention between western scientific knowledge and Yanyuwa biological knowledge.

Dugong mating appears to take place in the late dry season. Their behaviour at this time is both wild, erratic and seemingly "passionate", with many male dugong pursuing single females (see Anderson 1981, Preen 1991, Dr. Tony Preen pers.comm 1992). Yanyuwa hunters will at times speak quite lewdly about dugong mating habits and compare it with groups of young men who are all trying to gain the attentions and favours of one woman; then they will also appear to be quite embarrassed about such behaviour and not speak of it. Typically, mating behaviour is associated with the smacking of tails on the water's surface and explosive splashes made by the rushing of male dugong as they pursue the female. At times there may be only one or two males engaged in such behaviour, while at other times there may be ten or perhaps more. The Yanyuwa describe these excited clusters of males around a single female as fights, they fight for the possession of the female. They say that the dominant males which lead the herd have to fight off the young males who have just become sexually mature. If the old male loses, he is forced to leave and becomes a lone male. It is during such mating behaviour that males will use their tusks, and the long parallel scars found on the backs of dugong.
are the result of such encounters during mating. Eventually one male will win out, and it is that male which will mate with the female. However, even while only one dugong will be actually mating, a number of other dugong may still be clinging to the cow with their flippers, and the Yanyuwa say that they will in turn mate with the female. At the same time, other dugong may still be milling about.

It is during the birthing time that dugong are most likely to be attacked by predators. The Yanyuwa say that such creatures as the tiger shark, ngurdungurdu, hammerhead shark, warriyangalayawu, false killer whale, kunakabubu and saltwater crocodile, mardumbarra, prey on dugong, and that creatures such as the stonefish, wulwu, and a number of species of sting ray can accidentally kill dugong if they are disturbed while the animals are feeding.

Older Yanyuwa hunters often spoke of observing hammerhead and tiger sharks pursing dugong, sometimes being successful, sometimes not. From my own experience, I have witnessed a hammerhead shark maul and kill a young dugong. The incident took place just east of the McArthur River. A Yanyuwa hunter had sighted the dorsal fin of the shark, and he had instructed the engine to be shut; everyone in the boat sat quite still watching the shark. The shark propelled itself quickly, and we could observe that it was bearing in on a young calf, which was alone, and moving slowly. The calf did not seem to move away, or respond to the approaching shark, and very rapidly, the shark had taken the snout of the dugong and rolled with it. There was a substantial amount of blood in the water, and the shark thrashed violently as it mauled the dugong. The hunters decided to leave the area and return back to camp. Such an incident was interpreted as an indication that perhaps some mishap may have befallen a family member. Fortunately, this was not the case. However, in 1985 the witnessing of a tiger shark mauling a large dugong corresponded with the death of a senior male associated with the Tiger Shark Spirit Ancestor.

On another occasion in the mid 1980's, a tiger shark attacked and tore the flesh from the head of a large dead dugong, which had been buoyed by hunters while they went off to capture another dugong. The second dugong they
captured that day had a small sting ray barb lodged in its large upper lip. It had obviously been there for some time as it appeared to be quite badly infected.

A number of local professional fishermen and crabbers have told me of tiger sharks that they have captured having dugong remains inside of them and in one instance, a small dugong calf. This shark was caught in the period of August and September (pers. comm. Philip Barret 1982), which coincides with the general trend of birthing in the area.

It is believed that all mating and birthing is completed by the onset of the wet season proper, which is considered to be the time when the rivers begin to flood and carry large deposits of sediment out to sea; with big floods, the water can still taste reasonably fresh quite some way out to sea. At this time it is felt the dugong disperse and head to deeper water and feed off deeper sea grass beds and off the reefs. The following quote given by an old hunter explains this Yanyuwa perception:

Alright it is raining, it is continually raining and the floodwaters come, the quick flowing floodwaters which have a powerful current, they come and the banks of the rivers collapse, the dirt is carried and the water becomes dirty. The floodwaters carry the dirt. The water leaves the mouth of the rivers and is taken out to sea. The dugong are there in the sea, they are there on the sea grass beds, that is their place, they come close into the shore and then they taste this fresh water which is the floodwaters, it is bitter to them, they taste it and do not like it. It burns their mouths, they leave they do not like this water which has come from upstream, from the mainland, they depart and go deep into the depths of the sea, they dwell on the reefs and wait, continually they wait there until the floods finish.

(Tyson Birribirrikama, field diary 1993)

Aerial research undertaken by Baylis and Freeland (1989:141-149) in the Pellew Islands shows dugong travelling further north during the wet season and being away from the more inshore sea grass beds.

If the floods are big and last for a considerable period of time, then the
silt that they carry will be deposited over the sea grass beds, which means a decrease in the available food for dugong. If this happens, as it did during the 1974 wet season, the dugong get what the Yanyuwa call *na-wardiwungu*, literally “bad fat”. In local English it is called “watery fat”. The dugong become very poor in condition, and hunters speak of finding dugong with well pronounced back bone, ribs showing through their hide and some dugong even having necks! Such occurrences have happened elsewhere in northern Australian waters (pers. comm. Professor Helene Marsh 1986 and Dr. Tony Preen 1992 and in Smith 1987). The Yanyuwa see such an event as a direct result of the floods, although in past times when this happened, various rain makers would be accused. Fights would break out as the rainmakers were accused of causing the dugong to suffer and make them unavailable for hunting (Don Miller with Mussolini Harvey and Johnson Timothy, field diary 1981).

It needs to be stated that the association between weather and dugong population health is not always evident; for example a cyclone may damage the sea grass beds upon which the dugong feeds, but it may not be until sometime after the cyclone that hunters begin to notice a drop in the dugong population, which have dispersed to other feeding grounds. They therefore may attribute the diminishing number of dugong to other reasons, such as has been alluded to above.

Another wet season occurrence are tropical cyclones. The most devastating in recent history were Cyclone Kathy in 1984, and Cyclone Sandy in 1985. Cyclone Kathy was responsible for severe disruption to the dugong and sea turtle populations, while Cyclone Sandy had a disastrous impact upon the sea grass beds, wiping out large areas of the dominant species, *Syringodium isoetisolum* (Professor Helene Marsh and Tony Preen pers. comm 1996.)

The tidal surge associated with Cyclone Cathy carried an estimated 50 dugong and 200 turtles on the saline coastal flats (Marsh 1984, Marsh et al. 1986). At this time the oldest Yanyuwa person alive was at least 90 years of age. He could recall previous cyclones, where canoes had been hurled inland, frightened groups of people on the islands had hidden in caves, and at least one family had tied itself together with a dugong harpoon rope. He could
not, however, recall a time when dugong and turtle were stranded inland, although he gave many examples where storm driven seas had all but destroyed the nests of turtles over the islands (pers.comm Tim Rakawurlma 1984). 6

There are other issues associated with the Yanyuwa and the dugong, which are of importance, but they relate more to contemporary incidents related to "outside" factors. Such things as the deaths of dugong in nets, outside perceptions of Yanyuwa capture numbers, conflict between Yanyuwa ideas of dugong management and western biological models will be discussed further in this thesis.

8.8 Sea turtles: "He's just like a dugong, he's got a lot of different names".

Silence, a stirring of wind,
Bringing, the Flat Backed Turtle up to nest.

(Jack Baju)

As with dugong, the only true way to understand the Law or culture of the sea turtle is to understand and know the many names which are given to them. Within the Pellew Islands the following species of turtle can be found.

6 Two small pods of false killer whales were also stranded, one small pod on South West Island and another on West Island. The Yanyuwa at this time felt much sorrow for the dugong, sea turtle and whales and were grateful for those people who helped rescue some of them and put them back in the sea. The only grievance that was levelled against the rescuers was that the meat from the recently dead dugong was not brought back for the community to distribute and eat, even though they had been cut up by the biologists (pers. comm Don Miller and Graham Friday). A short time after this event a number of men visited the dugong increase site of Wunubarryi and performed the necessary rituals with dugong maintenance.
The Yanyuwa speak of the high intelligence of the dugong as it has keen hearing, but they consider its vision to be poor. The sea turtle, however, is considered to have excellent vision above and below water, while the Yanyuwa attribute it with poor auditory skills. A song cycle verse from the Wurdaliya semi-moiety speaks of the turtle's "wide round eyes; eyes like a round upper grindstone".

The green turtle is the most commonly seen and the most often hunted, while it is the eggs of the flatback turtle which are most commonly gathered. Unlike the dugong, the Yanyuwa do not consider the sea turtle to be an animal that is a truly social being; they consider that the only reason sea turtles come together is because of the food they need to eat. This comment really only relates to the green turtle, which is predominantly a sea grass and algae feeder. The fact that the females lay their eggs and then leaves them is another indicator of their anti-communal behaviour. During conversations about the habits of turtles, one older man exclaimed with some exasperation, "That even mardumbarra (salt water crocodile) look after their eggs"

(Nero Timothy, field diary 1981). The point is that something as potentially dangerous and vicious as a saltwater crocodile still has some concern for its young, but not the sea turtle. Another older man commented in a derisive tone that the only time sea turtles like each other was when "that boy one look about for girl turtle, big mob boy like that one girl" (Tim Rakawurlma, field diary 1989) a reference either to seeing two or three males pursuing a single female, or to more than one male resting on top of the single male that is mating. However, the above comments are considered to be the Way of the turtle; it is their Law, their culture, which only turtles will ever really understand, and which the Yanyuwa people can only explain from their
observations and the Law which they possess in relation to this creature. There is no perceived close relationship at a general level with the turtle as there is with the dugong, although of course it is a major Spirit Ancestor for the Wurdaliya semi-moieity. However, like the dugong, the sea turtle has an extensive vocabulary associated with it, which does highlight that the Yanyuwa have a complex conceptual classification for the species of turtle which exist in the area of the Pellew Islands.

The terms given to the sea turtle, as with the dugong, I originally thought to be adjectives, but on further analysis of the way they were used in speech it became obvious that they were considered as nouns, and that, as with the dugong, the Yanyuwa were talking about "kinds" of sea turtle. This is especially in relation to the green turtle. The classification of turtles and the use of specific terms are, after the dugong, the most complex in Yanyuwa folk biology.

As with the dugong, Yanyuwa men and women were at pains to make sure I put down and understood the different kinds of sea turtle that existed. I have, however, found the sea turtle classification easier to follow because it relies more on the particular species and obviously observable differences.

It has been mentioned above how a general term for sea turtle is either *walya*, a term shared with the dugong, or *wukulkuthu walya*, meaning "short *walya*". The most common term to describe any species of sea turtle or any "kind" of sea turtle is *wundanyuka*, or *yundanyuka*, which is a Mara language loan. The rest of the terms are given below:

*liyarnbi*: Olive Ridley. This term was recorded from a single sighting off the west coast of West Island. The hunters I was travelling with were most insistent that it was neither a flatback, loggerhead, hawksbill nor green turtle. They gave the above term for the turtle, saying that it was sometimes seen around the islands, but it really liked to inhabit deep water. They added that the "old people" would sometimes capture it, but its flesh was inferior to that of the green turtle or even the flatback. When I asked how they were so sure it was a *liyarnbi*, they gave the roundness and colour of the shell as the prime indicators. This recording was made in 1981; further questioning about this species has resulted in similar information as
provided above. No one has been able to confirm whether or not this species nests on the islands, and older men and women were reluctant to give it a semi-moiety classification, although most agreed it was probably Wurdaliya as that is what most other sea turtles were.

*limarrwurrrirri* - Loggerhead turtle. This turtle is occasionally seen around reefs and sometimes even around the mouths of the rivers which flow into the Gulf. The Yanyuwa say that it was occasionally hunted, but only the oldest of the hunters, those over 50, could ever remember one being taken. The Yanyuwa say that this turtle eats such things as crabs, trepang, shellfish and sometimes seagrass, but only the seagrass from the reefs. I have only ever seen one captured, but it was released as soon as it was brought close enough to the boat to give a reliable identification. No one has been able to confirm for me whether this species nests on the islands. The fact that this turtle has no separate terms for the male and female of the species suggests that it doesn't, or that the Yanyuwa are not familiar enough with the species to be able to confirm or deny it.

It is noted that the term for loggerhead is composed of the stem *wurrriri* which can mean mature, well developed or very big. This turtle is the only species not associated with the Wurdaliya semi-moiety; instead, it is considered a Spirit Ancestor of the Mambaliya-Wawukarriya semi-moiety. A site associated with this species called Kawurriwibi is located on the western side of Sharkers Point or Jarrka which is to the northeast of the mouth of the Crooked River (see Map 11). The loggerhead turtle has the alternative name of *kalumaluwardma*. Why this turtle has a different semi-moiety classification than other species has never been explained - it is "just the way it is". However, one old man suggested that because its head was so big and that it was often seen far out to sea, floating on the surface, it may be a "little bit like a rainbow". Another more surprising view put forth by this informant was that, unlike other sea turtles, the loggerhead made nests for its eggs under water. He stated in relation to this that when submerged, these turtles made a lot of "dust" with their flippers, and this was the turtle in the process of making a nest. Such an activity, this informant concluded, was another factor in making this turtle species
"rainbow"-like (Ginger Bunaja, field diary 1982). The Rainbow Serpent is a being which is predominantly associated with the Mambaliya-Wawukarriya semi-moiety, and the patrimoiety which also includes the aforementioned group, and the Rrumburriya semi-moiety.

The loggerhead is also associated with the important, but no longer performed, Kundawira rituals. A part of this ceremony involved the decoration of smooth, wave washed stones, to commemorate deceased individuals. The ceremony is shared by the Rrumburriya and Mambaliya-Wawukarriya semi-moieties. The Dugong Hunter Spirit Ancestors established the Law of erecting these stones for the Rrumburriya semi-moiety, while the Loggerhead Turtle Spirit Ancestor was responsible for doing this for the Mambaliya-Wawukarriya semi-moiety.

The term, limarrwurrrri, is also used for a turtle which I can only assume to be a leatherback. It is always described as being huge, not very often seen, and "just too big" to be hunted. Steve Johnson of Vanderlin Island has told me that very rarely a leatherback turtle may be seen near the northern most reefs of the Pellews or near the sand bars at the mouth of Fat Fellow Creek to the south of Vanderlin Island. It is also sometimes seen just off the beaches in the area of sea running east away from the Pellew Islands towards the mouth of the Robinson and Calvert Rivers. There have also been some reports of this turtle species having been seen in the Bing Bong area, where the turtle was described as being "big as the boat with a head like a bucket" (Mussolini Harvey, field diary 1982).

karrubu:-Hawksbill turtle.
a-ngurrin:-female Hawksbill
yibariwuna:-male Hawksbill

The first and foremost feature which the Yanyuwa mention in relation to the hawksbill turtle is that it is wardingalki, or one whose "essence is bad". The Yanyuwa consider this turtle to be poisonous, a feature which other indigenous groups around the world and various biologists have noted (Bustard 1972, Ronquillo and Caces-Borja 1963, Silas and Fernando 1984,
Limpus 1987).

The Yanyuwa attribute the poisonous nature of this turtle’s flesh to two factors. Firstly, that during the time when the Hawksbill Turtle Spirit Ancestor was on the earth, it ate a poisonous species of yam, called *karrubu*, the same term used for this turtle, and the yam imbued its flesh. Secondly, people state that one of the favoured foods of this turtle species is jellyfish, and the poison from these creatures becomes stored in the flesh tissue of the turtle. In relation to this poison or toxin, Limpus (1987:191) comments:

> The toxin responsible has been named chelonitoxin but it has not been isolated or studied. Good clinical studies of the effect of the toxin are also lacking. It is assumed to be a neurotoxin. While the apparent central neurological effects in the life threatening stages of severe turtle poisoning are reminiscent of ciguatera, the pronounced interaction with the upper gastro-intestinal tract during earlier stages is not. It cannot be assumed that the same toxin is involved in turtle and ciguatera poisoning.

The Yanyuwa call the toxin contained in this turtle species *narnuwulyurrwulyurr*, which literally translates as “that which is like a severely irritated or infected eyeball”. The older Yanyuwa men and women spoke of the toxin being located throughout the turtle within certain parts of the muscle, and that these had to be cut out during the butchering if the meat was to be rendered safe for eating. The gall bladder was also considered to be very dangerous. This turtle, unlike other species, was butchered raw, the meat was removed from the bones and then cooked. Cooking this turtle before butchering was said to make the toxin spread all through the flesh of the creature. Unfortunately, the men who had the knowledge in relation to butchering this turtle and the removing of the toxic portions were all too old to hunt when I came to Borroloola in 1980, and the still active hunters left this turtle species alone as they said the old people had not passed onto them the knowledge needed to butcher the turtle safely and render it safe to eat.

From conversations I had with the older Yanyuwa men and women, only the old men and occasionally old women were allowed to eat the meat
from this turtle. There is one story which relates the death of a family from eating the flesh of this turtle. No actual historic time can be given to the events related in the story, only that it happened, *wabarrangu ambuliyalu* or a long, long time ago.

They were there far to north at that place called Mungkuwarumbiliyirarra (beach area on the central north coast of West Island), they were there and they were hungry, they found that hawksbill turtle she had come to lay eggs, they took the eggs and the turtle. They cut that turtle up but they were ignorant, they did not know how to cut it, they cooked it and ate it and they became sick. Their stomachs were aching, the pain rolled down and they then vomited blood, they vomited over and over again, and then the children died and also their parents, they died, only one old lady her name was Mambalwarra the grandmother for the old lady called Warrngayiji was alive and she ran from that place, southwards and eastwards she ran all the way to Yathangka (beach on the central east coast of West Island), she met other people there and she told them they had eaten the hawksbill turtle and only she was left alive. Later they went to that place and there were only bones left, the bones of those who had died, they died because of that turtle. They gathered the bones together and wrapped them in paper bark. Truly that hawksbill turtle is dangerous it has flesh which desires to kill people, if you should see one leave it alone”

(Old Tim Rakawurima and Judy Marrngawi, field diary1989)

In 1989 during a visit to Mungkuwarumbiliyiarara, many weathered and broken human bone fragments were found being exposed in a sand dune at this locality, and may lend some credence to this story.

In the period before white contact, however, the hawksbill turtle was captured for purposes other than for eating. The Macassan traders had long come to the area of the Sir Edward Pellew Islands for the purpose of gathering trepang. The Yanyuwa people had established a trading and working relationship with these visitors from Asia. One of the goods which the Yanyuwa traded was the shell of the hawksbill turtle. In return for the shell, the Yanyuwa received steel axes and harpoon points, cloth, rope and
The turtle is sometimes seen over the northern areas of the Pellew Islands, and on one occasion we saw one resting on a floating lump of sea weed. The fact that the Yanyuwa have a term for both male and female of the species is an indication that it may nest on the islands. The older Yanyuwa people did indeed state this. They said that on the northern-most beaches, a few hawksbills come ashore to nest; and that unlike other marine turtles, they move very quickly, often nest amongst the vegetation at the top of the fore dunes and at night can be heard moving about. One old man described this turtle in Yanyuwa as a wulumanthamara, or "one which desired to be a runner" (pers. comm. Jean Kirton with Banjo Dinthali 1980).

The eggs of the turtle are described as being small and round and good to eat. I have never seen one of these turtles harpooned, nor have I seen one nesting on any of the beaches, although in November 1988 I was present when a nest was excavated which people said were the eggs of a hawksbill. This nest was located in the small bay between Ross Point and Cape Pellew on North Island.

Generally speaking, it is the older men and women who speak about this turtle with any degree of authority. Most of the younger men I have spoken to, in an age group from mid 40's downwards, have seen one or two of them in their life, while others have never seen one. Those that are seen are usually as a result of harpooning, they are released immediately.

wirndi / dihali: Flatback turtle
akarninja: female Flatback turtle
jardiwangarni: male Flatback turtle

In 1986 Johnson Timothy and I found one of these trade parcels on South West Island. Lodged in a crevice within a deep rock shelter was a paperbark bundle bound tightly with string. It contained about twenty pieces of hawksbill turtle shell. For some reason it had never been handed over to Macassans.
The Yanyuwa say that the flatback turtle is an eater of trepang, crabs and some species of sea grass which grow on reefs. The meat content of their diet, say the Yanyuwa, makes their meat “stringy”, greasy and not very palatable, and that they “taste like fish”. A song composed in the 1930’s by an old man called Jack Baju speaks of the flat back turtle in the following manner:

The flat back turtle has poor meat;  
no fat, and barnacles rest on its shell.

The eggs of this species are still gathered and savoured, although I would suggest they are not gathered in the numbers that they once were, due to a number of factors which will be discussed below.

According to Limpus (pers. comm 1985), the flatback is probably the only endemic species in the Pellew Islands; that is, the great majority of this species breed and lay their eggs on the islands. Confirmation of this can be seen in the number of flatback turtles which can be found nesting over the islands, and that the only hatchlings and smaller immature turtles seen in the sea around the Pellews belong to this species. The majority of the flat back turtles nest on the smaller islands such as Pearce Island, Urquhart Island, Observation Island, Watson Island, and Skull Island as well as other beaches on all other islands including a beach on the north western tip of South West Island. I mention this beach in particular as it is really the most southerly beach in the Pellews where a nesting turtle has been sighted. A beach area on the north west coast of West Island known as Maabayn is still often visited to gather eggs of this turtle. See Map 14 showing major sea turtle rookeries acknowledged by the Yanyuwa in the Sir Edward Pellew Islands.8

8 Two points need to be made about this map. Firstly, it does not show beaches where single and occasional nesting takes place. There are many small beaches on the
Map 14. Known Turtle Rookery Sites On The Islands

Note: Those marked with an asterisk (*) are known for their heavy seasonal concentrations of nesting turtles. Other sites may be frequently used but not by heavy numbers of turtles.

1. Mamadthamburu
2. Rilimbir
3. Maabay
4. Yathangka
5. Wulkawakawa
6. Limiyimyila
7. Wardanila
8. Wurumburamba
9. Maraninianga
10. Jalabuwaja
11. Wubula
12. Liwurla
13. Amurrurrungku
14. Wiyibi
15. Limalurubala
16. Ngarminyra
17. Wuydumbul
18. Wiliriku
19. Yathalamba
20. Warrmanthala
21. Wudunhu
22. Nyangarra
23. Nqarra
24. Mandatharramba
25. Ngawulunda
26. Wunma
27. Mamarra / Dabarta
28. Wiyinda
29. Rarangkilwunyarra
30. Wanajarra
31. Nguwangka
32. Ajamanhamabinja
33. Akarrunda
34. Wabuwa
35. Wibinda
36. Karruwa / Bunguntha
The older Yanyuwa people with whom I have worked have always understood that it was the flatback which was the dominant nesting turtle on the islands, and they spoke of journeys in bark and dugout canoes to visit quite remote and distant islands to gather eggs. These older people also spoke of the speed at which this turtle travels once on the beach and especially after the eggs had been laid. From such conversations, it also became apparent that they rarely took these nesting turtles for a food source, much preferring the eggs. The main nesting period for the flatback, based upon sightings and egg collection, is during the late dry season, although I have observed, and have also been told, that nesting for this species can occur all year round.

It is also only the older people who have spoken of harpooning and eating these turtles, and they have only spoken of doing so in the more northerly regions of the islands. Most of the people under the age of 50 with whom I have spoken have never seen an adult flatback and are not familiar with the Yanyuwa terms for this species. One or two younger men have harpooned a flat back, but on the advice of older hunters they have released them, though two were brought back to camp in the 1980's to "show" people, and they were cooked and eaten. Hatchlings are sometimes caught in the sea by children who immediately call them green turtles. I have never been present in a boat when a flat back has been harpooned and my only sightings of them have occurred when they were nesting, seeing an individual turtle floating on the surface of the sea, as if it were basking; and, on one occasion, a mating pair was seen in the vicinity of a small islet of the northwest coast of West Island.

Older Yanyuwa men with whom I worked in the early 1980's also spoke of the flat back turtle being a favoured food of large hammerhead and

Footnote 8 cont:- northern parts of the islands where infrequent or random nesting occurs such as on the small beaches on the central west coast of Vanderlin Island. Secondly, the list of place names which covers the coastal part of the map does not obscure any rookery sites as the areas involved are covered with dense mangrove forsets and salt pans.
tiger sharks. On further questioning in relation to these comments, I found that it related more to the attack of females after they had come off the beaches from nesting. These older people spoke of seeing sharks swimming parallel to the length of the beaches waiting for the turtle. One of these older men also spoke of witnessing a turtle returning to the water and being taken by a salt water crocodile. I have no reason to doubt these stories as I have seen a number of green turtles with healed scars on front flippers or back flippers missing from what were most likely the result of shark attacks.

In relation to sea turtle injuries, another interesting observation, was the capture of a large male green turtle in 1985, with a shell length in excess of 1 metre. A sting ray barb some 18 centimetres long was found embedded through the leg near the hip socket region of the turtle and had penetrated right through the shell without breaking. The wound looked relatively fresh as there was no sign of tissue decay or infection near the protruding barb. It was assumed by the Yanyuwa people present that the turtle had disturbed a large ray while feeding.

malurrba / kudabi : Green turtle
a-tharra : female Green turtle
a-wandangumara : very large female Green turtle
warrikuliyangu / warrijkundayangu : male Green turtle
ngululurru : young male Green turtle
bankiba : very large male Green turtle

For the Yanyuwa the green turtle is the species with which they are most familiar. It is the most commonly-seen turtle species around the islands, and in hunting takes I have recorded during a period from 1980 to 1993, 98% of the turtles taken were of this species, the remaining 2% represents very rare flat back captures (see also Johannes and MacFarlane 1991 for similar observation in the Torres Strait).

The following terms also relate to green turtles, but they have more to do with whether the turtle is considered suitable for eating:
lijaliyangulyanda: green turtle which is not big enough to eat, of a size where perhaps two men could easily carry it.

ngajilingaji: young green turtle with a lot of pale, yellow colouring, not eaten.

wurrukijbulungu: immature green turtle, where sex cannot yet be distinguished. They are captured. This term, when used, invokes in people the care that must be taken when cooking the turtle. They say that a green turtle with such a classification has a thin shell which could easily be burnt through.

ngarrangarra: large green turtle which when caught is felt to be low in fat content. This is usually ascertained by feeling the area near the neck and shell of the turtle, or in the region where the flipper joins the body. If the hunter feels the turtle is not fat enough it will be released. The term ngarrangarra literally means “angry because one is in poor spirits or health”, it is commonly translated as “cheeky”.

a-wathawayi: female turtle that when butchered is found to contain unlayed eggs or egg follicles. These are considered a delicacy by the Yanyuwa.

wunakathangu: large sea turtles in very poor condition, which on chering are found to have ulcerations in the stomach. On two occasions I have seen large female turtles captured which have been in terribly poor condition. On one occasion, the shell of the turtle was so brittle that the harpoon broke right through the shell and tore through the turtle’s lung. When these turtles were butchered prior to cooking, they were found to contain little sea grass in their stomachs and intestines. What sea grass was present was in slurry form, as opposed to the tightly packed mass usually encountered. The normal rich yellow fat lining the intestinal membranes and the green fat lining the shell were barely present. On opening the stomachs of the turtles, large black ulcerations were found. On both occasions the turtles were not eaten but were burnt along with all the internal organs. The Yanyuwa hunters were not surprised by these ulcerations, saying that the old people often spoke about them and said they were caused by the poison from jellyfish. The term wunakathangu is also a name which can be given to
male members of the Wurdaliya semi-moiety for whom the green turtle is a major Spirit Ancestor. A ritual song cycle verse also speaks of a turtle having these ulcerations:

Male green turtle, with black stomach ulcerations at the mouth of the creek, swimming slowly (as if ill) at low tide.

(Old Tim Rakawurlma and Jerry Brown Ngarnawakajarra, field diary 1985)

The green turtle is the most commonly seen, primarily because its main food source is sea grass. It therefore inhabits the sea grass beds which follow the coast of the gulf, an area most frequented by Yanyuwa hunters. However, it is because of this that younger Yanyuwa people are apt to class all sea turtle nests as the nests of the green turtle. In fact, some people have taken the term *jardiwangarni*, which is the term for a male flatback turtle, and now use it for any nesting turtle: The term *jardiwangarni* is also the most often used when discussing flatback turtles.

From my own observations and from conversations with the Yanyuwa people, a few green turtles do nest on the Pellew Islands. They appear predominantly to use the northern most areas, including the large beach area on the northwest coast of West Island, Pearce and Urquhart Islands and beaches on North Island and Vanderlin Island. One of the small bays which lies between Ross Point and Cape Pellew on North Island has the Yanyuwa name of Limalurrbala, which literally translates as "the place of many green turtles". It could be, however, that this name relates to the significance the site has in relation to the Green Turtle Spirit Ancestor, rather than marking a place where green turtle actually congregate for nesting.

Limpus in Marsh et al. (1986) believes that green turtle probably do not nest in large numbers over the Pellews. From conversations I have had with older Yanyuwa men and women, this would also appear to be the case. They did state, however, that they are seen and it was these female green turtles that they often flipped over onto their backs and then butchered. Turtles taken by this method are called either *ngangkarrungu* or
Older Yanyuwa women spoke of doing this during turtle egg gathering expeditions, and then going back to inform the men that they had captured a turtle for them to butcher. From additional conversations, it appears that it was only in rare instances when this was done to flat-back turtles after they had completed laying their eggs.

The greater percentage of green turtles taken by Yanyuwa hunters are large females with an average size being from 80 cm to 1 metre for the length of the carapace, with a few larger specimens. The majority of these turtles are taken from the major sea grass bed areas around the southern area of West Island, the mouth of the Davies and Carrington Channels and the mouths of the McArthur, Crooked and Wearyan Rivers. It is also noted that after Cyclone Kathy in 1984 the majority of sea turtles stranded by the storm surge were large female green turtles, approximately 93% (Limpu in Marsh et.al. 1986:23-24).

Large male turtles, that is, those with the obvious long tails, are rarely taken on the major sea grass beds. The capture rates for male turtles increases only if hunters travel to the more northern areas of the islands. One place in particular is the northern coast line of Black Craggy Island in the vicinity of Gilbert Island. Nearly all turtles taken from this area over the last 13 years have been large males. It is only in this area that any observations of green turtle mating has been made in recent years. It is therefore highly likely a mating congregation, where male turtles wait for females to swim past either on their way to the sea grass beds to the south, or as they leave them. I am unable to comment on other areas of the islands, but even the Yanyuwa hunters are surprised by the number of male turtles which are continually taken in the area of Black Craggy Islet.

Other vocabulary associated with the sea turtles is given below.

rrri-bankuja - mating sea turtles. It is noted that the prefix rrri- marks duality and is usually reserved for use with humans. It is probably used in this instance to mark the importance of the sexual act. The female turtle when mating is called na-wiyaji.
li-wirnkuja: large numbers of nesting turtles on a beach. Again it is noted that the use of the plural marking prefix li-, normally reserved for use on human subjects and dugong, is used here for turtles. Again, it is probably giving emphasis to the act of nesting.

wurlmamantharra: a verb used to describe the action of a female turtle which comes ashore, begins to do a nest, leaves it, then moves elsewhere and lays her eggs, usually because the nest collapses during excavation. The root of this verb is "wurlma-" which means to "wander all over the place". It is also used to describe a turtle which comes ashore and then returns to the sea without laying her eggs. The Yanyuwa believe this to be due to the sand being too dry, a similar observation being made by Bustard in relation to green turtles (1972:53). Such turtles, say the Yanyuwa, will return perhaps three or four times before successfully laying their eggs.

Another reason given for the turtles returning to the sea without laying is that the turtle knows that it is going to miss the tide. The Yanyuwa acknowledge that the turtle has an intimate knowledge of the tides and usually knows when is the best time to come ashore so that it can return to the water during the dark hours or at least by dawn. I have been told by a number of old men that the bladder (rra-ngawu) of the turtle is like a "clock", which keeps the turtle in touch with tidal movements and how long the turtle had spent underwater. They could, not however, elaborate on this comment. I make note that the word for bladder has as its root the word ngawu, which means "cloud", it has then been marked with a feminine marker.

On the northern beaches of the Pellews it is common to find nesting turtles in the morning or sometimes well into the day. I have also witnessed a number of flatback turtles come ashore before sundown at low tide. This was on beaches which did not have a particularly deep shore access, such as on South West Island, the mid-eastern beaches on West Island, and the southern beaches on Black Craggy and White Craggy Islets.

Yanyuwa terms for sea turtle eggs and hatchlings are listed below.

a-wathawaya: unlaid eggs or egg follicles
**na-munga** :- nest  
**wujbi** :- egg  
**makulijji** :- fresh eggs, no sign of embryo  
**wulungumiika** :- egg containing a partly developed embryo  
**wulungu** :- egg with a fully developed embryo. Older people considered such eggs to be a delicacy.  
**yabarlarla** :- turtle hatchling  
**ruju / rujrru** :- small immature turtles seen at sea, bigger than hatchlings. In the area of the Gulf under study, the only hatchlings which I have observed, or have seen children bring back with them from hunting trips or trips to the islands, have been flatbacks.

During the late, hot part of the dry season, the waters around the islands become filled with thousands of small, “twenty cent” size disc-like creatures with bright purple filament-like tentacles around their edges. In Yanyuwa these creatures are called *wurdiyi*; they are a species of hydroid called *porpita* (pers.comm Phil Alderslade 1993, Saville-Kent 1972:203, Grzimek 1974:196). The Yanyuwa say that turtles eat the *porpita* by the hundreds and that it makes them fat and healthy prior to mating and laying eggs. Yanyuwa hunters describe turtles at this time as having so much fat that they are nearly inedible.

There is much which the Yanyuwa do not know about the sea turtle, and this they readily admit. When the turtle hatchlings enter the sea, they are rarely seen again, with the exception of some flatback hatchlings. Where they go, the Yanyuwa do not know—they describe the apparent disappearance of hatchlings as being that part of turtle Law which only turtles know. In recent years, some Yanyuwa men have been involved in programs designed to educate people about western scientific knowledge regarding the sea turtle. These people have brought new knowledge concerning the sea turtle back into the community. This information includes the fact that most of the green turtles found in the area of the Pellew islands were actually hatched from nests as far away as the Great Barrier Reef and perhaps even Indonesia. When such knowledge was first told to the older Yanyuwa hunters,
they were skeptical, but the capture of green turtles with tags from Raine Island, which is some 1044 kilometres away (Limpus in Marsh et. al. 1986:16), illustrated most powerfully to these old men and women that the green turtles did not just belong to the islands, and, therefore were not just under the control of the Yanyuwa. Such information was in reality easily accepted, and made people more aware of other issues affecting sea turtles, such as feral animals on the islands, which might disturb nests, and the activities of prawn trawlers and other professional fishing and crabbing people around the islands. This information was more readily accepted than similar information regarding the dugong and, on this matter further discussion will take place. A point which can be made here, however, is that for the Yanyuwa people generally, what is more important is that the ecology of the islands and sea, which is maintained by the Law, be sustained.

8.9 The sea turtle as a Spirit Ancestor

They would sing the path of that sea turtle for the bones of the dead, when they put them in a log coffin. (Tim Rakawurlma, field diary 1985)

The song of the Sea Turtle Spirit Ancestor is no longer sung, as the last knowledgeable men of the owning Wurdaliya semi-moieties died tragically before they had a chance to teach the song fully to their sons and nephews, but the path that this song once followed is still remembered. The sense of the numinous that the Sea Turtle Spirit Ancestors left on the country and the sea they traversed is still there, and is still capable of producing a sense of awe and wonder, even fear, in those people that speak of this creature as being their ja-murimuri or “most senior paternal grandfather”.

The Sea Turtle Spirit Ancestor is spoken of as being either the green turtle or the flatback. It does not seem really to matter; both species were once sung in the song associated with them. What seems to be more important is that the song and now the surviving narrative of the sea turtle provides the ongoing sense of “turtleness” for the people related to it and the associated country and sea.
The surviving narrative is complex but is however significant, it provides (Map 15) for the Wurdaliya people and their matrikin who are related to this narrative it is their genesis: it is the reason for why they are who they are, and why their country is where it is. The narrative in itself does not speak of detailed biological information; rather it speaks of country and sea. It speaks of places where the spirit of the sea turtle is located and ever present; and once, when the narrative was still sung, it provided the conduit by which the spirits of deceased Wurdaliya kin could be returned to their country and the place of the Ancestral Sea Turtles.

When the narrative was told by older Yanyuwa men and women, they felt that the story was sad. The continual harassment of the turtles by a flock of ospreys was perceived to be cruel and perhaps unnecessary, although they would also add that ospreys and white-bellied sea eagles will still eat small turtles and hatchlings.

When the narrative was related by a number of senior men they would accompany their narration with verses from the song cycle which they remembered. Songs associated with the physical anatomy of the turtle, the laying of eggs, mating turtles and even the act of breathing and eating of sea grass were included in the song.

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9. The Sea Turtle myth narrative is recounted in full in Appendix 1.

10. The song of the sea turtle was originally sung as the bones of deceased Wurdaliya kin were interred into hollow log coffins, the outside of which were decorated with sea turtle and osprey motifs. The song is in some ways perhaps symbolically associated with the processes associated with death. In past times the body was placed on a funeral platform until the flesh and other tissues had decayed away and only the bones were left. The narrative of the sea turtle also speaks of the falling away of body parts and flesh until only the shell and hollow log coffin is left. In the instance of the narrative and the song, it is the osprey which is symbolic of the natural elements, insects and birds which usually assist in the decomposition of the body. Thus, the song at one level conveys the story of death, decomposition and eventual placement of the remains in a hollow log coffin. On completion of the hollow log coffins for Wurdaliya, sea turtle people, they were taken and deposited in rock shelters on the rugged northern coast of West Island and northeast Vanderlin Island.
Map 15. Paths Undertaken By Sea Turtle Spirit Ancestors.

Key:
- Attacking Ospreys
- Lone Sea Turtle from mainland
- Sea Turtles from the west
- Carrying log collars
- Flying Sea Turtles to the south
- Turtles continually harassed by Ospreys
- Sites associated with sea turtle mythology

1. Wilirri
2. Walangkurra
3. Yuwarrangka
4. Mamadihamburru
5. Mindarra
6. Ludarra
7. Ailrn
8. Maabayn
9. Riymbirr
10. Wuwayinda
11. Aburri
12. Babalungku
13. Rrawali
14. Wurkurra
15. Mungkuwarumbilyirrana
16. Libaladala
17. Ngarawulamba
18. Mungkuraminya
19. Liwayribulungu
20. Wunakakalijulakindu
21. Wirimblingya / Wunjurr
22. Ruwawulurru
23. Wyyibi
24. Araiwi
25. Limalurbala
26. Mungungalanya / Murrungka
27. Liwintha
28. Maithandura

Mananeora
8.10 Concluding Comments

The knowledge which the Yanyuwa people have in relation to the sea, sea grass, dugong and sea turtles can all be seen as processes by which the Yanyuwa negotiate with the natural world. For the Yanyuwa, a name is not just a name. A name gives a resonance to the object or being which can speak of knowledge of a practical and spiritual nature. This is made evident in the way that older Yanyuwa people demand to know from younger hunters what kind of dugong or turtle has been seen or killed.

In some respects, the power of naming in Yanyuwa is somewhat akin to the Hebrew word *davar*, which means both “thing” as well as “word”. It is words, which are used to name the world, which create, characterise and sustain reality, a reality which the Yanyuwa express through language, language and the words of the language which have been passed on from the Spirit Ancestors and the human ancestors. Thus, a name represents an entity’s nature and life force. It is the channel by which the inner nature of the subject can be expressed.

The spirituality of the Yanyuwa environment and the more secular knowledge associated with it, begin with words through which land, sea and all that it contains are interpreted. Words such as the types and kinds of dugong and sea turtles are part of the process of a Yanyuwa interpretation of the environment. The words relating to the sea, sea grass, dugong and sea turtle are discussed over and over again. In Yanyuwa, a number of single words speak of “kinds” of dugong, while western biologists speak of one species.

To know the names of the kinds of dugong, seaturtles and the sea grass which they feed upon is the beginning of understanding the Law or the Way of these things. The ability to name and describe the kinds of dugong, and sea turtle that live in the waters around the islands, is only but a part of the knowledge that one is thought to need if one is to be classed as a *maranja*, or a dugong and sea turtle hunter of excellence.
Chapter 9

Hunters in the Marine Environment:

Our hair is strong, tightly coiled and heavily oiled;
For we are inhabitants of the sea country:
We are dugong and sea turtle hunters of excellence.

(Jack Baju 'Akarrunda')

9.1 Li-maramaranja: Dugong and sea turtle hunters of excellence.

The above song is still sung by older Yanyuwa men and women. It was composed in the mid 1920's when a visitor from one of the linguistic groups neighbouring the Yanyuwa suggested that the closest relative of the Yanyuwa people was the black saline mud of the sea country, and that this mud could always be seen clinging to the bodies of Yanyuwa people. In response Jack Baju composed this song; it is bold and boastful and speaks of meanings and understandings for the Yanyuwa people that words alone cannot convey.

The song is important for both Yanyuwa men and women. The key words in the Yanyuwa original are li-wurralngu which literally means "the people, all people, who are inhabitants of the sea" and li-maramaranja, which is best translated as meaning "those people who are dugong and sea turtle hunters of excellence" (plate 10).

The second term is one which is usually reserved for the name for the group of Spirit Ancestors of the island Rumburriya semi-moiety. However, in the song Jack Baju has composed, it describes living, human hunters, as he is stressing the importance and centrality of this activity to the Yanyuwa people, and, expressing it as a means by which they truly demonstrate their self-perceived uniqueness.

So strong is this bond between sea, dugong, sea turtle and being Yanyuwa that one elderly man once commented to me and a gathering of Yanyuwa men and women that:
The old people spoke Yanyuwa, they were always talking Yanyuwa, we are here speaking Yanyuwa because we are dugong and sea turtle hunters excellence, we are those people who desire to harpoon them.

(Tim Rakawurima, field diary 1984)

For this old man and the assembled men and women who added their own self-affirming comments, the fact that they speak Yanyuwa is also intimately associated with the activity of hunting sea turtle and dugong and the terms maranja and li-maramaranja.

Maranja and the group term li-maramanja are terms not used just for someone who is able to kill a dugong and sea turtle, although in the contemporary sense, it is more often becoming so. Rather, it is and was reserved for those people who also knew the Law associated with the sea, the seagrass, dugong and turtles as well as knowing the spiritual significance of the activity.

To become a maranja involved training, an apprenticeship, and finally, after some time, the term would be awarded to an individual who showed that he had absorbed all of the teachings associated with the activity and could demonstrate the knowledge in all its areas, from hunting, butchering, and distribution of meat to also knowing the more esoteric spiritual matters associated with the way of dugong and sea turtle hunting. Thus, in the past, and to some extent today, the training of young men to become hunters, and of young men and women to understand the Law associated with hunting, butchering, cooking and distribution involves quite strict procedural steps. There are certain rituals which are designed not just to increase the efficiency and discipline of the hunt but also to create respect for the roles played by the individuals involved in the actual hunt, and by members in the community waiting for the return of the hunters.

1 Linguistically, the term li-maramaranja uses a duplication of the initial part of the word -mara-. Yanyuwa duplicates parts of nouns and sometimes parts of verbs to stress importance or repetition of the activity or subject. In everyday speech, a skilled dugong and sea turtle hunter is called a maranja while a group of hunters are called li-maranja.

*In the speech of women, a skilled hunter is called nya-maranja.
Over the last hundred years, or perhaps more, the activity of hunting dugong and sea turtle has changed dramatically; new technology such as aluminium dinghies have replaced bark and dugout canoes, steel harpoon points, nylon and hemp ropes, and polystyrene floats have all changed the visible aspects of hunting. But other things have changed too. The time spent hunting, the necessity to hunt, and who is available to hunt have all had an impact upon Yanyuwa dugong and sea turtle hunting. In the following chapters these things will be addressed. This chapter is primarily concerned with the religious, social and philosophical issues associated with Yanyuwa dugong and sea turtle hunting, as well as with a relatively detailed discussion on technology over the last one hundred years.

9.2 Mythic history: Dugong Hunter Spirit Ancestors.

Some factors associated with the activity of hunting have been relatively stable. They are the more esoteric things, and they continue to have an importance for the Yanyuwa. They are part of the means by which the continuity from past hunters to contemporary hunters is preserved. One of the important ways this continuity is achieved is by the Spirit Ancestor narrative of the *li-Maramaranja*, which the Yanyuwa simply call the Dugong Hunters, but which, as mentioned above, could be translated as the “dugong and sea turtle hunters of excellence”.

The narrative^2^ and song of the Dugong Hunter Spirit Ancestors are associated with the island Rrumburriya semi-moiety, and the path of these Spirit Ancestors crosses the breadth of the Pellew Islands from Vanderlin Island in the east to West Island in the west. All of the other semi-moieties have groups of spirit beings on their own country which are sung in their song cycles and which are also designated as dugong and sea turtle hunters. They are not creative beings in the sense that the Dugong Hunter Spirit Ancestors are; rather, they are spirit beings who were sighted by other Spirit Ancestors as they journeyed.

For example, in the Wuyaliya song cycle associated with the Groper

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^2^ The Dugong Hunter Spirit Ancestors narrative can be found in Appendix 1.
Spirit Ancestor, groups of spirit being dugong hunters are encountered on the northwest tip of South West Island at a locality known as Mawarndarbarndar. In the Wuyaliya song cycle associated with the Dingo Spirit Ancestor, spirit being dugong hunters are found at the mouth of the Crooked River. The Sea Turtle Spirit Ancestor of the Wurdaliya semi-moiety sings of spirit being dugong hunters at Mamadthamburru, or Crocodile Point, on the southwestern tip of West Island; and the Rock Cod Spirit Ancestor of the Mambaliya-Wawukarriya semi-moiety sings of dugong hunting spirit beings on Sharkers Point or Jarrka. It can be seen from Map16a that while there is a major Dugong Hunter Spirit Ancestor which crosses the islands, each semi-moiety has associated with it various tracts of their country where spirit beings were engaged in dugong and sea turtle hunting. Thus in a sense, these spirit beings and the Dugong Hunter Spirit Ancestors infuse the entire geography of the islands and the sea with that activity which the Yanyuwa see as of prime importance. Many of these locations, mentioned in the song cycles as having dugong and sea turtle hunting spirit beings, are now favoured as overnight or base camps from which contemporary hunters depart to hunt dugong or sea turtle.

The narrative of the Spirit Ancestor Dugong Hunters may be viewed, like many similar narratives, as just a list of named places through which they passed, or it may be interpreted as an act of creation, the effects of which are still resonating within the Yanyuwa environment, still capable of having a profound impact on the Yanyuwa community in contemporary times. One of the most important factors about the narrative is that the Dugong Hunter Spirit Ancestors, in many respects, represent the immediate and material reality of the present day Yanyuwa dugong and sea turtle hunters. They travel in boats, they carry harpoons and ropes; they pursue dugong and turtle; and it is at this level that the narrative provides very common ground with a contemporary reality. The switch from Spirit Ancestor times to the everyday contemporary situation is not great.

The appeal of this Spirit Ancestor narrative to contemporary Yanyuwa people is that it does not deal with fish, birds, wind or insects being a Spirit Ancestor; instead, the Dugong Hunters are seen as a group of men hunting,
and although they perform some rather amazing feats on this journey, they are at all times primarily human. As some Yanyuwa people have commented that this narrative, more than any of the other Spirit Ancestor narratives, is "like real history" (Don Miller with Johnson Timothy, field diary 1985).

The journey of the Spirit Ancestor Dugong Hunters, their "mythic" journey, is the true reality; and the present and historical moments of hunting dugong and sea turtle achieve their full meaning and reality because of the repetition, recitation and reenactment of what occurred in the time of these Dugong Hunter Spirit Ancestors. It does not take set ritual performance and song to re-create the actions of these Spirit Ancestors; the mere fact of being in a boat, standing with a harpoon, turning the dugong to face the sea before butchering, or cooking dugong flesh are all re-creations of the Dugong Hunters' reality. It should be added that there are actual religious ritual actions also associated with the Dugong Hunters, but on a day-to-day secular level, historical and present Yanyuwa hunters and cookers of dugong and sea turtle have experienced, and are experiencing, the "true time" (Yerushalmi 1954, Eliade 1965) of the original activities and archetypes associated with the Spirit Ancestor Dugong Hunters.

In such a "mythic" conception of time, everything continually recurs in the lifetime of those Yanyuwa people who pursue the hunting of dugong and sea turtle. The narrative and the song of the Dugong Hunters can be seen as a metahistorical story that can happen over and over again. A Yanyuwa person who hunts dugong or visits the sites scattered over the Pellew Islands associated with these Spirit Ancestors thus encounters the "myth" directly; and human history, which cannot be repeated, is replaced with the primary reality of dugong and sea turtle hunting and of being a Yanyuwa "saltwater person". Finally, the humanity of the Dugong Hunter Spirit Ancestors means that there are no real surprises, no actions that cannot be repeated. What has been, is now, and will hopefully, be the future. The people who undertake the actual activities of hunting will change, but the essentials of the drama recounted in the narrative will always remain the same. Thus, things will end in the way they began, with people travelling in boats, being aware of the tide, carrying their harpoons and ropes in the hope they will achieve the aim
of all such hunters, a dugong or sea turtle.

The account of the Dugong Hunters’ journey appears to follow a very linear path across the islands, from east to west (see Maps 16a and 16b). The Yanyuwa tellers of this story speak of a group of people travelling in bark canoes over a much wider path and area. It is useful to keep this in mind especially as the narrative nears the conclusion. I have included in the re-telling of the narrative a number of song cycle verses to try to maintain, at least, a little of the original way in which the narrative was recounted. On the many times that I have heard it, the men recounting the journey of the Dugong Hunters would often sing appropriate verses from the song cycle associated with narrative. There is a sense that the narrative and the song cycle are interleaved elements which have their origins in one text. Ultimately, the song cycle is seen to be the full text, while the spoken text is but a commentary.

As with the song cycle of the Sea Turtle Spirit Ancestor, the song of the Dugong Hunters is no longer sung. Its singing was also associated with the placement of the bones of Rrumburriya kin into hollow log coffins during appropriate mortuary rituals, a practice which is no longer performed. Some of the verses associated with the Dugong Hunters, however, are still preserved within the a-Kunabibi rituals and the a-Marndiwa circumcision rituals.

At its most basic, the narrative, which describes the journey of the Dugong Hunters, emphasises why Yanyuwa people are different from mainlanders. Yanyuwa people are not hunters of kangaroo and emu, although they sometimes do that, but their own self perception and other people’s perception of them is as hunters of dugong and sea turtle and of a people who are ecologically, economically and technologically distinct. There are still great contrasts between the life and economics of the Yanyuwa people who inhabit the coastal mangrove country, the saline flats, islands and sea, as opposed to those, who Tindale calls “the scrub covered upland dwellers” (Tindale 1974:121-122), a sentiment which the Yanyuwa would with no doubt agree.
Map 16a. Path Of The Dugong Hunter Spirit Ancestors Over The Pellew Islands And The Localities Of Camps Associated With Dugong Hunter Spirit Beings.

△ Spirit Being Camping Places
△ Sites On The Path Of The Dugong Hunter Spirit Ancestors

7. Limangkar  24. Yenjini  41. Murndurwuiambra
8. Nungkayindarra  25. Wunhakalijulakinda  42. Ramisyimi
10. Kulangkala  27. Wurkkandingu  44. Liwarungkalija
13. Warda  30. Wirrinyulayuwa  47. Wulkawulkawa
15. Wukuntha  32. Winalamba  49. Yalhannga
16. Wiyinda  33. Walalamba  50. Limiyiniybi
17. Dabaria  34. Wudangaramba  51. Kalawangarra

continued on Map 16b.
Map 16b. Path Of The Dugong Hunter Spirit Ancestors From The Pellev Islands To Beatrice Island (Yumukuni) To Mt. Young (Wunubarryi).

Key: Successful Dugong Hunters
Dugong Hunters to Kulumbiri (eventually unsuccessful)

▲ Sites on the path of the Dugong Hunter Spirit Ancestors

from previous map 16a

51. Kaluwangarra
52. Warrawarda
53. Munuli
54. Riyanku
55. Larradbarimbil
56. Walkanji
57. Ngawakuwaku
58. Wunbarryi
59. Kurndandawawulu - eventual resting place of Tide Spirit Ancestor
60. Wirrimakuwarr - eventual resting place of mullet nets thrown by unsuccessful hunters.
9.3 Linking the past with the present

The Dugong Hunters instituted a ceremony associated with islands called Kundawira. It is a ceremony no longer performed. Its last performance was in the 1930's (Johnson Timothy and Bruce Joy, field diary 1992). In this ceremony objects such as the rope and harpoon became objects of great veneration. The ceremony is described by contemporary Yanyuwa men as being similar to the Maadayin rituals of North East Arnhem Land (Bradley 1987).

The ceremony served as a way of commemorating dead relatives. During the ceremony, smooth, elliptical wave washed-stones ranging in height from 30 to 80 centimetres were obtained from the islands and were decorated with the Spirit Ancestor designs of the deceased individual. These stones, called wurlurlu, usually only commemorated men, and on many occasions, only those individuals who were maranja, dugong and sea turtle hunters of excellence. There were also times when these stones were used to symbolise an individual whose body could not be retrieved because it was lost at sea. On completion of the ceremony, the stones were taken and placed on the paternal or maternal country of the individual who was being commemorated. These stones, which the Spirit Ancestor Dugong Hunters carried and which can still be found over the islands stored in caves or standing in secluded areas, are similar in value and prestige to the sacred stones of the Arrente (Strelhow 1947).

Today there are still Yanyuwa men who control the access to such places, many of them being on the path followed by the Dugong Hunters, and there is prestige associated with this role. When visiting these places, many of the stones are highlighted to the viewer with comments that they represent Yanyuwa dugong and sea turtle hunters.

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3 One of the first recorded desecrations of a sacred site in the Northern Territory was on the Pelieu Islands. In 1802, Matthew Flinders, on finding two of these stones on North Island, moved them and dug under them, thinking a burial was located underneath (Flinders 1814:164-176). These two memorial stones can still be seen at the location visited by Flinders.
It has been said by some older Yanyuwa dugong hunters, and by Avery (1985), who discusses the issue in some detail, that in past times, the prowess of Yanyuwa hunters and their ability to get the much desired flesh of sea turtle and dugong was one way by which Yanyuwa men could obtain wives from the mainland groups such as the Garrwa and Gudanji. In essence, the Dugong Hunters presents us with a narrative that is masculine to the extreme; and if Avery's arguments are correct, the skills of Yanyuwa dugong hunters which are covered in the Spirit Ancestor narrative and the historical narrative, provide keys for understanding the complex issues of obtaining wives, of economic relationships between saltwater and mainland people, and of the equation that meat can equal wives and power. Most of these issues now belong to a past era. However, the relationship between "saltwater" Yanyuwa people and the mainland people is still at times complex, and the desire to taste the flesh of dugong and sea turtle is one that all people, saltwater or mainland will claim still to have.

There is a degree of amazement from mainland language groups such as the Garrwa, Gudanji and Wambaya that the Yanyuwa actually do travel to the sea and capture dugong and sea turtle, as is evidenced in the following statement from a Garrwa woman. Additions in brackets are mine.

When I first saw that sea, I been reckon it was a big river, "No", those old people said, they said it was sea, I been really frighten you know, I been kid yet. Well I never been know that wal'ya (dugong or sea turtle), I never been see it. You know when I been first look that round one wal'ya (sea turtle)? When I been married woman, when I been have kid, and that 'nether one that long one wal'ya (dugong) I never been look 'till I been go to Numbuiwar for Kunabibi (in 1986), that's where I been look, not long back you know I been grey, got a grey hair. But how? hey? How they do it? Catch that animal lang a sea? I don't know I never been look..... but I been eat that meat, good one too, too much fat.

(Eileen Rory, field diary 1993)

There are still people who express disbelief and wonder at the ability of Yanyuwa hunters to travel to the sea and bring back a turtle or a dugong.
Visiting family from Queensland, Tennant Creek, Darwin and Alice Springs are always taken and shown these creatures if they are in the community. Young children are shown the creatures, with much emphasis being given to what relation the hunter stands in regard to the children. The meat and various internal organs of the turtle and the dugong are thrust upon the people, with urgings to taste the meat that comes from the "sea country". Such times are a source of quiet pride for both the hunter and his family.

Pride is also derived from the knowledge that an individual's ancestors were also once hunters of dugong and sea turtle, that they were people who were classed as maranja. Such men taught many of the contemporary hunters, and the skills and knowledge of these old people reach, at times, nearly superhuman qualities. Any discussion about these men will at sometime undoubtedly have comments about their skills as dugong and sea turtle hunters and to whom they passed on their skills. Such comments are not simply the proud comments of individual living hunters; rather, they should be seen as a means by which contemporary hunters give understanding to how they come to have the knowledge that entitles them to be called a maranja. The names of people with whom an individual has hunted and the location of places where he hunted with them are an important way of placing living people within a framework of past events and past lives so that the present day reality can be fully understood. In this way a consensus is reached between the present day senior hunters, their dead teachers and those people who are still being taught the skills which are associated with the hunting of dugong and sea turtle. The following comment illustrates such a statement:

I never knew my grandfather, his name was Vanderlin Island Jack, he was a maranja, and he taught my father, Old Tim and his brothers Banjo and Leo, he taught them to hunt dugong and sea turtle they were all proper maranja, and my father taught me to kill dugong and sea turtle... when I was about 14 he stood me up in the canoe, I learnt in canoe times, not with a dinghy. I learnt from a canoe and I know about dinghies too. I have taught my sons, they know how to hunt, and I have taught my wife's family,
they are Garrwa but I have taught them to hunt dugong and sea turtle because they grew up with me, they know...some Garrwa people used to learn in the old days. (Johnson Timothy, field diary 1992)

The above statement is but one example of the way Yanyuwa men will stress the source of their knowledge and skill as a maranja. Such comments also seek to highlight that as a maranja he, too, has passed on his skill to others and thus has ensured that the activity of dugong and sea turtle hunting will continue for future generations. What is also important is that it is unusual for men to call themselves by the term maranja: other people can and do, but for an individual to do so of himself is considered to be an act of pride and vanity.

The comment concerning Garrwa dugong and sea turtle hunters is interesting: the expression “some Garrwa people used to learn” is a common phrase used by Yanyuwa hunters. It is rare that they are ever given the term maranja; rather, it is usually said that they knew how to harpoon a dugong or turtle. In relation to much of the other knowledge that a true maranja possesses, they knew little of it. One old Yanyuwa hunter commented:

The speakers of Garrwa they would be ignorant. They were ignorant in matters concerning the sea. We would take them, we would show them fish, birds, dugong and sea turtle and we would give them the names of these things. We would say to them, “Say the word like this”, we would call out the names of all the things that belonged to the sea. Some of them would learn, they would take the words and speak them. Some would stay with us and we would give them knowledge and they would spear a dugong and sea turtle. But many Garriwa people did not, they remained ignorant about the sea and the country of we Yanyuwa speakers. (Tim Rakawurlma, field diary 1989)

The Garrwa term for a person who is skilled in the hunting of dugong and sea turtle is mardbingkarra. 4 The old Garriwa man

4 This term is probably cognate to the Mara malbinkarri = dugong hunter of excellence.
who gave me this term said that only a few Garrwa men ever became proper dugong and turtle hunters, and then usually because they lived with Yanyuwa people; often taking Yanyuwa women as wives (Jerry Charlie, field diary 1982).

A comment of note given by Johnson Timothy in his statement above concerns the learning of hunting skills in dugout canoes. The common expression used of this period is "canoe times". In contemporary times, people who learnt to hunt from dugout canoes are considered the last of the "proper" true maranja, for two reasons; firstly, the majority of men who taught these people from dugout canoes would also have known, or at least been present, when hunting from messmate bark canoes took place; and secondly, the use of canoes also required great physical strength and stamina. The physical stature of these "canoe time" hunters is still often commented upon by older Yanyuwa men and women, and is reflected in photographs taken by Spencer and Gillen in 1901 while at Borroloola (Spencer and Gillen 1904:69). The change in boat technology has also altered the way in which the hunting of dugong and sea turtle is approached, but the skills associated with old technology are still discussed and spoken about with a matter-of-factness by the older generation, and with a sense of awe by the younger generation of Yanyuwa men, women and children. The following section details the changes in technology which the Yanyuwa have experienced within the last century. While the next chapter will detail actual hunting and butchering practices, it will be seen that although outside appearances may have changed quite dramatically, many of the other details associated with the hunting of dugong and sea turtle have not.

9.4 From bark canoe to aluminium dinghy

That bark canoe generation they're all finished now, and our generation been grow up with dugout canoe and dinghy, this new generation only know dinghy. (Johnson Timothy, field diary 1988)

For the Yanyuwa people the bark canoe has become an object of
material culture now associated with the long past. It was replaced by the
dugout canoe, and in comparatively recent times, by the aluminium dinghy.
However, written historical sources and the oral tradition of the Yanyuwa
people provide interesting insights into the use of these earlier water craft.

For the present Yanyuwa people, the bark canoe is associated with the
"old people". Only a few of the oldest Yanyuwa men and women still alive
ever saw them being constructed, let alone paddled or rode in one. It would
appear that bark canoes have not been used as the sole means of water
transport for at least 100 years, the major reason for this being the
Yanyuwa people's interaction with the Macassan traders from south-east
Asia.

The Macassans visited the Pellew Islands to collect trepang. They
brought dugout canoes which played a valuable role in the trepang industry,
as they were used for travelling to areas where trepang could be gathered in
abundance, and were used to transport the gathered trepang back to base
camps on various beaches throughout the islands. At the end of the
trepanging season, these dugout canoes were left behind. They were left,
firstly, it would appear, because their praus were too laden with dried and
processed trepang; secondly, these canoes became a form of payment to the
Yanyuwa people for work undertaken, and for goods traded, such as trochus
and hawksbill turtle shell.

The dugout canoes were far superior to bark canoes as they were more
durable, could take a lot more wear and tear, were able to carry more people,
and were generally much more seaworthy. With the cessation of visits by the
Macassans early this century the Yanyuwa people did not revert to bark
canoes, but rather began to construct their own dugout canoes. Bark canoes
were still constructed, and for a time both dugout and bark canoes were used,
as Baker (1988:180) comments: "Bark canoes remained in use in the area
after the Macassans introduced dugout canoes, presumably because of ease of
construction".

In Yanyuwa bark canoes are called na-wulka. This is the most common
term used, but, technically, it is a generic term. The large sea going bark
canoes, with their definite prow, stern and secure bracing were called na-
riyarrku or na-mirrinyungu. These were the canoes of the dugong and sea turtle hunters. A simpler, smaller bark canoe was made for use on lagoons, fresh water river and creek systems and the calmer reaches of the salt water river systems. These canoes were called na-rnajin (see Figure 13).

The bark canoe is, apart from the log and paperbark rafts, wukungu, the traditional watercraft of the Yanyuwa people. Compared with other forms of similar water craft constructed in indigenous Australia, the bark canoes of the Yanyuwa people were probably among the most sophisticated in their construction (Bell 1956, Davidson 1935, Hornell 1940, Thomson 1939, 1952, 1957).

Representations of three bark canoes can be found in a rock shelter on Vanderlin Island at a site known as Yungkurriji on the central west coast. (see Figure 13). The paintings, according to some older men and women, represent the art work of spirit beings, while other people associate the work with long deceased kin.

The first documented account of Yanyuwa bark canoes was made by Matthew Flinders in 1802 as he was charting the Sir Edward Pellew Islands. Flinders found the remains of two bark canoes on North Island and commented that they were far superior to anything he had seen of previous Aboriginal technology. He described the canoes as "clinker built boats".

Two canoes found...were formed of strips of bark sewed together....
their breadth was about two feet. I cannot be certain that these canoes were the fabrication of the natives. (Flinders 1814:171)

In 1901 Spencer and Gillen obtained an excellent example of a bark canoe from the Yanyuwa people at Borroloola. This canoe is now housed at the Victorian Museum in Melbourne. The canoe is approximately four metres long, is made from several pieces of bark and it has elaborate internal bracing. This canoe "had just brought six men across the Pellew Islands in the Gulf of Carpentaria to the mouth of the McArthur and then up the river 50 miles to Borroloola" (Spencer and Gillen 1912:483). The Yanyuwa owners of the canoes seemed to put a high price on it, as it cost Spencer and
Figure 13. Illustrations of Bark Canoes (*na-wulka*) Used By The Yanyuwa In Past Times.

*na-najin* = river / swamp / lagoon going bark canoe

*na-riyariku / na-irirnyingu* = sea going bark canoe

Representations of bark canoes from a rock shelter on Vanderlin Island.
Gillen six tomahawks, and six butcher knives, six pocket knives, one for each man who had travelled in the canoe. They also paid four watermelons and two pounds of tobacco. Spencer spent some time describing the canoe that he and Gillen obtained. In his diaries he described the craft as “very decent canoes” (Spencer 1901:84). In a later work Spencer gives the following description of the bark canoe:

In this canoe there were seven pieces (of bark). One of them stretched from bow to stern forming the whole of one side, the other was made of two pieces. These three pieces formed the main body of the boat and were sewn together along the bow, stern and keel lines. There was thus an indication of a keel but no projecting ridge. At each end, and one side a small strip was added so as to form the pointed, upward turned bow and stern. To strengthen each bulwark a thin branch of mangrove was lashed securely to the bark. To prevent the sides from collapsing outwards, nine ties of rope passed across from side to side. Two of them serving to pinch in the extreme ends of the bow and stern. To prevent the sides from collapsing inwards, three sticks were arranged at the level of each of the cross ties, one passing across from side to side immediately under the rope, the other to slanting down and crossing one and another, their lower ends serving to keep in place sheets of bark that formed a kind of false dry bottom, and also add additional strength to the sides where the sticks press against them. There is never any attempt at caulking, but the sewing is so efficient that very little water soaks through. (Spencer 1928:570)

Because of the abundance of materials from which bark canoes could be made and the relative ease of construction, the bark canoes of the Yanyuwa people could be treated in a relatively disposable manner. For example, in 1907, the Northern Territory Government geologist H.Y.L. Brown paid a visit to the south west Gulf of Carpentaria and mentioned:

Three blacks in a bark canoe came out to the steamer, and as the canoe was stove in against the side of the vessel they let it float away and remained on board. (Brown 1908 n.p.)
In 1923 W.E.J. Paradice, a Surgeon-Lieutenant in the Navy, conducted a survey of the Sir Edward Pellew Islands on the HMAS Geranium. In his report to the Australian Government, he commented:

They handle canoe with skill. Most of the canoes are dug out of solid logs but one very fine canoe -20 feet long- was made of a large sheet of bark.

(Paradice 1924:7)

While European accounts of these bark canoes speak of fine craftsmanship, Yanyuwa people with whom I worked in the early 1980's and could remember travelling in bark canoes were not so enamoured by them. The first comment comes from Tim Rakawurima, who during his lifetime witnessed the construction and use of bark canoes. He saw their decline in favour of dugout canoes, and he himself became a skilful maker and user of the latter. In his old age, he saw the decline of the dugout canoe in favour of aluminium dinghies, a water craft with which he never really became familiar, always stating that for economical reasons and for effective dugong and sea turtle hunting, the dugout canoe was best. His comments given below cover three main areas: a general statement concerning bark canoes, their use and his knowledge of them; the danger inherent in their frailty and his concluding comments which tell of his favouring dugout canoes as a new and welcome technology.

The bark canoe belongs to the past times. It is for the old people, they paddled them, and I also when I was young and without whiskers. They made the canoe using sheets of messmate bark (Eucalyptus tetradonta). They would cut two, three or many sheets if they were making a large one for dugong and sea turtle. They would take one or two days and then it would be completed. I know about bark canoes, these other people here, they are ignorant. I grew up on the islands with my father and my paternal grandfather, I grew up with them and they were very knowledgeable men concerning bark canoes. A long time ago they made a bark canoe there at Yulbarra (Ulbara Point), it is a place of many messmate trees. I paddled that canoe and I speared a sea turtle. That
bark canoe was bad, truly I am telling you it is bad. I paddled that bark canoe, I paddled it to Yulbarra, from Yukuyi which is in the east. We were there in the canoe, my mother and my little brother, the canoe was old and it burst open, it burst open because the rope on the gunwales came off when a wave swept over it. The bark canoe sank, it sank down into the depths of the sea. My mother, me and my little brother, we swam, but he, my little brother whose name was Babajukuwa drowned, he died the poor thing. It is for that reason I feel badly, the bark canoe is very bad. And another thing I will tell you, early in the morning that one which desires to bite is coming, it is a mad one, it is dangerous, it is the hammerhead shark, it comes and bites that bark canoe. The dugout canoe is the best one. My father and I made them and I taught my sons. But all of these people here are ignorant when it comes to bark canoes, they belong to the past times.  

The second comment is given by Don Miller who was of the generation when dugout canoes dominated water transport, until the advent of aluminium dinghies. For this speaker, bark canoes belong to a period long past, and he goes as far as to comment that he finds it hard to believe that the old people could use bark canoes without the assistance of spiritual powers.

Concerning bark canoes I am ignorant. Alright my father and my father's father they were knowledgeable about bark canoes but not me. Truly they were brave men and they knew many kinds of power songs. They would sing these power songs to calm down the sea and stop the wind when it was blowing. The body of the canoe it would be imbued with power songs. It is for this reason that they were strong. I only know about dugout canoes, I have paddled them, I grew up with them, not with bark canoes, maybe I am thinking to myself that bark canoes are bad, they are dangerous. (Don Miller 1991:88)

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5 I am indebted to the late Jean Kirton, Bella Charlie and Johnson Timothy for their assistance in translating this text.
The life expectancy of a bark canoe was not great - two or three months on average. Whenever the canoes were not in use, they were taken from the water and allowed to dry out. As they dried, a certain amount of shrinkage took place, and this necessitated the rope ties crossing from gunwale to gunwale to be continually adjusted. The drying out also caused the stitching to contract, which retightened the seams and improved the watertightness of the craft.

The bark canoes could not be fitted with sails but thick leafy branches were held instead. A person would sit in the front of the canoe and hold them aloft to catch the wind.

One of the biggest disadvantages the Yanyuwa saw with the bark canoes was the fact that, once full of water, they sank. A dugout canoe would stay afloat and, once righted, needed only to be bailed out. There were few, if any, second chances with a bark canoe, as Dinny McDinny points out.

If that bark canoe sink he gone for good, you can't get 'im back, you gotta swim, no matter right langa (in the) middle water, you gotta swim, you can't get 'im back, he finished. Alright wooden canoe...that's the good one. Bail him out, keep going. (Dinny McDinny 1991:89)

The hunting of dugong and sea turtle would appear to have been a perilous occupation from such frail craft as the bark canoe. The Yanyuwa people are of course adamant that their ancestors did it. They argue that, if their ancestors did not hunt from bark canoes, where did they learn the skills that they have passed on to the present generation? Another additional comment sometimes given is that it was in bark canoes that the Spirit Ancestor Dugong Hunters travelled, and thus the canoe is also sanctioned by Law.

From oral accounts, it appears that harpooned dugong were first allowed to tow the canoe until they were tired. The canoe was then brought as close as possible to the dugong, but still far enough away to avoid receiving a smash from the tail flukes. One of the hunters would then dive overboard, follow the rope and on reaching the now exhausted dugong would thrust his
fingers into the dugong's nostrils, or try and plug them with paperbark. The hunter stayed with the dugong until it suffocated. If the base camp was not too far away the dugong was towed back for butchering. If the camp were some distance away and it was near to, or low tide, a reef or sand bar would be located and the dugong butchered and the meat loaded into the canoe.

Sea turtles when harpooned were brought close to the canoe. With some effort the canoe was paddled to water shallow enough for someone to stand and the turtle was lifted into the canoe. A number of men and women have said that in the days of bark canoes only small turtles were harpooned and the bigger turtles were captured when they came ashore to nest. While there is no other evidence for this, it would make sense as the turtles which are taken today are all quite large, on average 80 centimetres to 1 metre length shells; a turtle this size is very heavy and would most likely not fit into a bark canoe, judging on the examples left in existence.

Unlike the dugout canoe and aluminium dinghy, where the hunter is able to stand to harpoon the dugong or sea turtle, the bark canoe required the hunter to thrust his harpoon from a sitting or kneeling position. In the early 1980's a few of the older Yanyuwa hunters still used this position.

With the demise in the use of the bark canoe, the dugout canoe rose into prominence. In Yanyuwa the dugout canoe is called a-muwarda; the origin of this word is unknown. The Yanyuwa avoidance term for dugout canoe is a-libaliba, a term borrowed from the Macassan traders, as are some of the other terms relating to sails and rigging on these canoes (figure 14 and plate 11).

The first European account of the Yanyuwa possessing dugout canoes comes in 1893 from a locally based magistrate at Borroloola by the name. He notes that:

...the Vanderlin tribe are expert canoeists, and are possessed of some very fine canoes, made out of solid trees, which have been left behind by the Malays. (Stretton 1893:228)

According to Baker (1988,) this was in the period before the Yanyuwa
Figure 14. Illustration of a Dugout Canoe (a-muwarda) With Rigging And Sail.

A  a-muwarda/a-libaliba  =  dugout canoe
B  a-nmi/a-mayawajawa  =  paddle
C  na-amayi  =  harpoon rests
D  baiyarrar  =  mast
E  watha  =  spar
F  bawa  =  sail
G  ma-bayibayi/ma-yibayiba  =  rope for controlling sail
began to make their own dugout canoes and were still able to obtain them from the Macassan traders. With the cessation of that trade in 1906-1907 (Macknight 1976:126), the Yanyuwa began to make their own canoes. They also traded for some dugout canoes which had been made in Numbulwar on the Rose River in southeast Arnhem Land. By the 1930's and 40's, the Yanyuwa had established themselves as expert dugout canoe makers, and their use of, and skill in handling, this craft added greatly to their sense of being "salt water" people. Long journeys could be undertaken using these craft and older Yanyuwa men and women give accounts of travelling by dugout canoe to Roper River, Numbulwar (250 kilometres to the northwest) and Mount Young (100 kilometres north west in 1959) to attend ceremonies. Baker (1988:183) mentions an instance where Yanyuwa men sailed to Burketown (a distance of 400 kilometres each way) looking for tobacco.

The dugout canoe provided for the Yanyuwa a means by which they could fully exploit their country, and travel around the islands. From oral sources, such travel would appear to have become much more frequent, with larger groups of people being involved. It is not surprising then to hear that actual births took place in dugout canoes. It appears that this was by no means unusual and that a number of advanced pregnant woman gave birth in canoes, with labour probably being stimulated by heavy bouts of paddling.

It should be briefly mentioned here that women were also quite adept at using dugout canoes, and probably bark canoes beforehand. They often accompanied men on foraging trips to the more distant northerly islands on sea bird and sea turtle egg gathering trips, and on many occasions went without men in canoes to gather resources. At times they paddled for men when out hunting dugong and sea turtle. Many Yanyuwa women speak of trips in dugout canoes they made as groups of women, or with husbands. Thus, at least in this instance, the theory put forward by Hamilton (1980), that men have on most occasions been the beneficiaries of changes in hunting and foraging technology has to be reconsidered, at least in part, as Yanyuwa women are most insistent that they could and did use dugout canoes. The following statement concerns activities undertaken by Yanyuwa women using a dugout canoe:
We would go in the dugout canoes, we would go to the small islands such as Makukula (Payne Island) where the tern is making a nest on the ground amongst the stones. We would also go and get the eggs of the egret, where its nest is in the trees; when the cool wind blows on the sea and the tide is going out and it is shallow we would go and taking the canoes and gather the eggs of this bird. Furthermore we would gather the shellfish in enormous numbers and fill the canoes and take them back to the camp. 

(Bella Charlie, field diary 1988)

One of the great advantages of the dugout canoe was that it could be fitted with a proper sail, and by careful use of sea breezes, long and short journeys became much easier, as Steve Johnson recounts:

They sailed them when the wind was favourable, they never paddled because they wanted to. Most of them waited for the wind to come the right way before they even started. Probably sit there for a week waiting for favourable weather....unless they were in a hurry there is no way they'd paddle against it. But if they were out there and got caught, some of them old fellas could paddle for days without getting off that paddle.

(Baker 1988: 183)

The paddles used with both bark and dugout canoes were made from the wood of the cyprus pine (Callitris intratropica), a wood that does not waterlog and is not attacked by borers or white ants because of its high resin content. In Yanyuwa these paddles are called either a-rimi or a-mayawajawa.

The a-mayawajawa form of paddle was the longer of the two, and its blade was also usually longer and broader. It was used to lift and turn large pieces of dugong meat when being placed in the ground oven or being taken out. The avoidance speech term for paddle is a-yanginymanthangu. ⁶

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⁶ Canoe paddles could also make fearsome weapons, and accounts are told by the Yanyuwa of men and women using them in duelling situations, or grabbing them as a means of defence and offence when nothing else was available.
Dugout canoes were also named, and the names of many of the dugout canoes used by the Yanyuwa can still be remembered. Canoes were usually named after the locality from where the tree was obtained, but sometimes they were also named after an important Spirit Ancestor associated with the patrician of the owner. The names are prefixed with the Yanyuwa feminine class marker "a-" or "rra-" and usually are suffixed with "-mara", which can indicate that the noun which is the subject is closely associated with a particular locality of Spirit Ancestor. A number of examples are given below.

- *Yulmunjimara* - The canoe associated with the Hammerhead Spirit Ancestor
  
a-*Jikanjimara* - The canoe which came from the place called Jikanji
  
a-*Kurdanjimara* - The canoe which was made on Gudanji country.
  
a-*Bayamarlkurra* - The canoe associated with the Tiger Shark Spirit Ancestor
  
a-*Kalwanyimara* - The canoe which came from near the lagoon called Kalwanyi.
  
a-*Bububunumara* - The canoe which came from the place called Bunubunu and is also associated with the File Snake Spirit Ancestor.

Dugout canoes were bigger and more stable than the bark canoes. Some of these dugout canoes reached large sizes; Spencer describes a canoe which came up the McArthur River to Borroloola:

> A big canoe has come up the river from the coast with about 20 natives in it. It is quite unlike the bark canoe and is simply a great log hollowed out and shaped into a boat. It is quite 30 feet long. This particular boat was made by the Malays who come all down the coast every year in their Prahus in quest of toitorse (sic) shell [and] beche de mer which they barter for with the blacks. (Spencer 1901:110)

The largest canoe made in living memory was called the "Butterfly".
Steve Johnson measured this canoe at 27 feet (8.23m). It was classed by the Yanyuwa as being a "four turtle canoe", that is, four good sized turtles could be fitted into the hull. Other canoes were employed by the Native Welfare Branch at Borroloola to carry supplies off the cargo ships from a locality on the McArthur River known as the Landing, some 30 km downstream from Borroloola. Photographs in the possession of Steve Johnson of some of these canoes being prepared to travel back upstream to Borroloola show three forty four gallon drums in them (see Baker 1988:184).

Because dugout canoes were much stronger than bark canoes, changes in the way dugong and sea turtle could be hunted were developed. Dugong could be brought right up against the canoe, which meant the hunters did not have to swim out to the creature to drown it, although amongst the older hunters this still remained the more common practice. Turtle could also be lifted straight into the boat without fear of collapsing the sides. In the case of large turtles or small dugong, the canoe might even be filled with water and the animal floated in. The canoe would then be bailed out and the catch paddled back to camp.

When the Yanyuwa were resident at the Malarndarri camp on the east side of the McArthur River, they also used canoes to gather firewood, to bring back loads of paperbark and cyprus pine logs for their shelters, and even the bodies of deceased kin could be paddled to the graveyard.

Dugout canoes were also often equipped with small hearths. Small fires were kept burning or smouldering on a base which could be a large stone, a sheet of tin, or a clay or mud basin formed into the hold of the canoe near the prow. Such hearths were used for cooking crabs and fish as people travelled; they kept people warm as they travelled at night, and often provided a means of keeping firesticks alight when groups of canoes were travelling together at night or through fog. The only danger with such a convenience was that it had to be carefully watched so it did not set fire to the canoe, something which did happen on a few occasions.

As big and as solid as they were, the lifespan of a dugout canoe was between two and three years. The biggest problem were torado worms or rdingirdingi. During periods when the canoes were not in use they would be
beached and their hulls exposed to the sunshine to try and kill the worms. Others smeared their canoes with red ochre, while others obtained pitch from Steve Johnson’s father, who was a ship builder. But from all accounts, none of this worked very effectively. Some cracks and holes were repaired with tin patches, and other cracks were caulked with the pounded bark of the *ma-wunjurrwunjurr* tree (*Terminalia carpentariae*). Some old dugout canoes, like the bark canoes before them, literally sank mid-journey, as Johnson Timothy relates in the following story of his childhood.

...we were paddling our canoe eastwards when a wave washed over us from the north, the canoe sank, it split apart, the hull split, then another wave washed over us, the canoe sank completely it did not rise back up, we all jumped out even my old grandmother, the sea was shallow at that place. My father hit his mother on the back yelling, “Jump! Quickly old woman jump!”, she did this because she stayed there in that canoe. That canoe sank, it did not float up, it was old. All kinds of things that belonged to us were in that canoe, they went into the depths of the sea. We all swam and we came to a reef in shallow water, my mother who had been carrying my little brother put him down there. My father’s brother who was following us in another canoe was running along the beach, he was crying for us, “Are you alright?”. My father was carrying my other little brother he thought he was dead, he thought he had drowned but he hadn’t. He felt my little brother move and he cried out, “My son, my son he is alive he is moving around”. My father’s mother was there crying for us all, she cried out, “We are all here alive I thought we had all drowned”, we ran to her and grabbed her and dragged her to where we had all gathered.

(Johnson Timothy 1989:183-188)

Dugout canoes lasted much longer than their bark counterparts, but eventually they had to be replaced. The demand for canoes was always high, and there grew within the Yanyuwa community a group of men who became highly regarded for their expertise in the construction of dugout canoes. Their services were sought, and agreements would be made as to what form
of payment would take place. Usually it would consist of food as the work on the canoe progressed, and later, after launching, parts of each catch of dugong and sea turtle for a set period of time. Negotiations also had to take place between the jungkayi and ngimarringki for the country where the tree was located, and the would-be canoe owner, before construction could begin. The jungkayi and ngimarringki would also receive payment, usually in the form of dugong and sea turtle meat.

Dugout canoes were usually made from the wood of either the paperbark tree, *Melaleuca* species, or the “Leichhardt pine”, (*Nauclea orientalis*). Both species have their benefits and their disadvantages. The wood of the Leichhardt pine is soft, and it was a relatively easy job to make a canoe. However, because the wood was so soft, the lifespan of such a canoe was not long. A canoe made from the wood of a *Melaleuca* species lasted for a longer period of time, but the wood is hard, making the job of construction much harder and longer. However, both species were used in abundance, and today along the upper brackish and freshwater margins of the McArthur River, it is difficult to find any really large examples of these two species from which it would be possible to make a canoe, due to the number which were cut down and used during the dugout canoe times. At a number of locations over Yanyuwa country, half finished canoes can also be found still in situ. This was usually because halfway through the manufacturing process the tree was found to be unsuitable, and on one or two occasions, because the person leading the making of the canoe died on the site (Isaac Walayungkuma, field diary 1993).

The late 1960’s saw a decline in the number of canoes being made, due primarily to the age of the expert canoe makers and that many of the most suitable trees were now located far from Borroloola. In 1969 large floods carried away most of the canoe fleet from their moorings near the camp at Malarndarri. This was also associated with a severe Hong Kong flu epidemic which led to many deaths and to the near abandonment of this camp. Most people moved over to the western bank of the McArthur River, thus reducing
the people's dependency on such watercraft. It was also the beginning of the period when people were starting to use aluminium dinghies. However, at this period there were only a few dinghies in use. This led to a dramatic drop in the hunting of dugong and sea turtle, about which more will be said below.

Occasionally, the wrecks of old canoes and paddles can be seen caught in the mangroves, half buried in the sand on the beaches or on riverbanks. This is especially so after the wet season floods. Such wrecks are viewed with interest by the older and younger Yanyuwa people. Ownership is often given to such canoe wrecks and people are reluctant to have them moved or handled. Such canoes belong to the "old people", and it is better that they be left alone. There has been some concern in recent years that European residents of Borroloola have sought to obtain these canoes for the local museum or for their gardens, without adequately consulting Yanyuwa community members. Relics of the past, such as canoe wrecks, fall into the same category as stone tools, grindstones, and middens; thus, to disturb and take such things demands a negotiation with the unseen but present spirits of the deceased, and about these things the European population knows little or nothing.

The aluminium dinghy is now the sole form of watercraft used by the Yanyuwa (plate 12). All of the younger Yanyuwa dugong and sea turtle hunters have learned the skill using this kind of watercraft. As strong and as durable as they are, older Yanyuwa people can still find fault with them. Firstly, they are noisy; it is not just the engine that makes noise, but even with the engine turned off there is no way to drift silently through a herd of dugong. The lapping of water makes noises that the dugout and bark canoes did not make, dropping a harpoon point onto the metal hull of the boat or stumbling with one's stance - all cause noises which Yanyuwa hunters

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7 The last dugout canoes made to be used were in 1977, when an elderly Yanyuwa man commissioned a number of old Mara canoe making experts to make two canoes, one of which was used on the McArthur River until early 1980. Another smaller canoe was made by a Yanyuwa woman in 1988; it is in the National Museum in Canberra. The last large canoe was made in 1987. It was specifically made for the Australian Maritime Museum in Sydney (see Baker 1988).
believe profoundly affects the quality of hunting. Instead of stealth which was the hallmark of a true maranja in the days of bark and dugout canoes, younger hunters are more likely to embark on hair-raising chases to try and capture their prey, though it should be noted that this is not always the case. Outboard engines are not cheap to run; fuel, oil and continual maintenance are expensive. If the engine breaks down, the time it takes to fix it can depend on whether there is the mechanical expertise at Borroloola to fix it, or whether the engine or parts have to be sent to Darwin; and this often has more to do with unknown people within a bureaucracy than it has to do with the hunter or person who owns the engine. Johnson Timothy sums up the issues associated with contemporary boat ownership and the desire to hunt dugong and sea turtle very well in the statement below:

It was really good in the old days, living out in the bush, on the islands doing what you wanted to do...when you live in Borroloola you have a lot of problems. You've got to have money in the pocket to buy food, to buy petrol for the boat, when I was young never had to worry, just get in the canoe and go, get a dugong, turtle, fish...no money, it cost nothing. This time, got to have a boat, engine, got to pay...petrol, oil, box of tucker you just can't go, you have to wait 'till you got everything...got the money to do it...canoe times you just used to go, this time aluminium dinghy time you can't, you got to make sure you got the money.

(Johnson Timothy, field diary 1987)

Economic constraints on dugong and sea turtle hunting in contemporary times are a practical reality which all dugong hunters and their families face each time they decide to travel to the islands. It is expensive, but people will go to great lengths to do it. There are a number of reasons for this, but two major reasons: one associated with the continuance and maintenance of an important part of Yanyuwangala, or the Yanyuwa way of being, while the second is as basic as the desire to eat the flesh of dugong and sea turtle.
The harpoon rope is tangled,
The harpoon rope which had been coiled,
The harpoon rope belonging to the canoe named Jikanji.

(Maggie Bukundumara and Judy Marrngawi)

The canoe or dinghy may be a very valuable piece of equipment to the dugong hunter, but it is the rope which is the symbol of the dugong hunter. It was rope which the Dugong Hunter Spirit Ancestors uncoiled out behind them as they travelled; it was their rope which created a number of small islets and reefs; and it was rope which at a number of locations through which the Dugong Hunters travelled became important sites. In the no longer performed, but still discussed Kundawira rituals, where the Dugong Hunters are an important symbol, rope takes on a sacred quality. The body design still used by Rumbarriya men in the contemporary rituals associated with the Dugong Hunters represents coiled rope. Rope is the symbol par excellence of the dugong hunter, as one maranja stated:

You can't be a proper dugong hunter unless you got a rope.

(Don Miller, field diary 1986)

In Yanyuwa the ropes to which the harpoon points are attached for the hunting of dugong and sea turtle are called ma-ngarduku. In avoidance speech they are called ma-ngurruwai, and the terms ma-yinymathu and ma-yingkarra are called archaic terms.

The first record of the skill which the Yanyuwa people possessed in the making of rope came from Stretton in 1893, where he says:

...they are very clever at making rope, which they use for dugong fishing. The rope is made from the bark of the Currajong tree, a species of Brachychiton, which these natives call 'Myaddo' [ma-yatha].

(Stretton 1893:249)
Harpoon ropes were hand made, usually from the inner bark of three tree species. They were the banyan tree, *ma-wurruru* (*Ficus virens* var. *virens*), the ‘wattle’ tree, *ma-kawurra* (*Acacia torulosa*) or the kurrajong, *ma-murndarra* (*Brachychiton diversifolius*). The soft inner lining of the bark of these three species is obtained and shredded, making sure that the bark collected is long and supple; it cannot be allowed to get too dry. In Yanyuwa, rope making is called *rangkiyarra*.

In 1901 Spencer and Gillen took a number of portraits of a Yanyuwa rope maker spinning a rope (Spencer 1928: Fig. 410). The rope impressed Spencer by its appearance, its strength and the relative ease of manufacture. He commented that:

> It is astonishing how rapidly and easily an expert,... will make great lengths of string, of varying thicknesses according to the purpose for which it is intended to be used. (ibid: 572)

Hand spun ropes were between 10 to 20 metres in length and were well cared for. After use they would be unrolled and strung between bushes or trees, and when dry they would be carefully coiled up. If the ropes were not to be used for some time, they would be very carefully bundled and often wrapped in a paperbark or cloth covering.

Hemp ropes were obtained by the Yanyuwa from European residents at Borroloola early this century. Dugong meat was often traded with European store owners at Borroloola to obtain such articles as ropes and knives (Tim Rakawurlma and Johnson Timothy, field diary 1988). With the advent of commercially made rope, there was a decline in the manufacture of rope spun from bark fibres, although within the last decade a few excellent examples have been made by Yanyuwa women for the tourist trade and at the special request of some interested Europeans.

Today commercially made nylon and hemp ropes are used, and although rope is easy to obtain, ropes are still prized possessions. In contemporary Yanyuwa society it is still rare for a known *maranja* to lend his ropes or other hunting equipment to anybody. It is rope which is primarily the
symbol of status for a dugong hunter, which is well illustrated in the following example.

An elderly Yanyuwa maranja who was past being able to hunt dugong and turtle was once given a good length of commercially made nylon rope as payment for some information he had provided. The individual who gave the rope thought that the old man would pass the rope on to his sons who were still active hunters of dugong and sea turtle; both were known maranja. However, the old man refused to part with the rope. In conversations he would often talk of the good rope he had in his possession and the fact that he was a good dugong hunter. He would also comment that many people, including his sons, had asked for the rope but he would not give it to them, because it was his rope and he would not share it. He would state emphatically that this was the rule for dugong hunters. Such items as ropes and harpoons were the “private” possession of the hunters. Sadly, it was only when this old man died that his sons, with the permission of the relevant jungkayi, received the much coveted rope.

The value placed on ropes in the past was primarily due to the time it took to make them. The ability to spin a harpoon rope was one of the first signs that a young man was on the way to becoming a maranja. Today the value of ropes derives from them being quite expensive to buy, but also they are still an important symbol of being a hunter, of being a maranja.

Along with ropes, harpoon points have also undergone change over the last century. Harpoon points were originally made from hardwood usually from na-wubulu (Pemphis acidula) or from the mangrove, arndiny (Lumnitzera racemosa). In Yanyuwa harpoon points are generally called na-malbi with the avoidance term being na-wulukayangu, and an older archaic term na-akurru meaning a bundle of harpoon points. The wooden harpoon points consisted of two types, a long straight point approximately 15 centimetres long; this was used for dugong. The second form of harpoon point was a little shorter, was hooked with one or two barbs and was called by the term na-ngalhinbi, which literally means “having hooks/barbs”. This harpoon point was reserved for sea turtles. The wooden points could not penetrate the hard shell of the turtle so a hunter had to aim for flippers or
the soft neck area behind the shell. While all hunters agree that the replacement of wooden harpoon points with steel has been most beneficial (see also Thomson 1934, 1956), a number of older hunters stated that the wooden point for sea turtles was better, primarily because if a turtle were harpooned in the front flipper, it could not swim in a straight line away from the canoe, but rather it tended to go around in circles which aided in its eventual capture (Tyson Birribirrikama and Tim Rakawurlma, field diary 1985).

The first steel for harpoon points was obtained from the Macassans, and it quickly superseded the wooden harpoon points. During the mid parts of this century when the cattle industry was an important part of the Yanyuwa people’s lives, harpoon points were made from straightened and sharpened links of hobble chain. In the last decade the tappet rods from Toyota engines have been a favoured source of steel for harpoon points. Steel harpoon points are about the same length as the original wooden points, with longer points being favoured for dugong. Because the material to make the points can at times be hard to obtain, they are valued items and are kept tightly tied together usually amongst the dugong hunter’s most personal possessions. In Aboriginal English, steel harpoon points are often called “nails”, and relates to a period when heavy iron six inch nails were sometimes used as harpoon points.

Harpoon points are made so that they rest firmly in a socket carved into the thickest end of the harpoon; this socket is called na-wuthula, na-balalarra or, more commonly na-mulu (“its mouth”). To assist in holding the metal harpoon point in the harpoon shaft, the ends are bound with cloth and string, while with the wooden harpoon points, the ends were carved so that they resembled a small cork (see Figure 15).

The harpoon point is attached to the rope by way of the nu-ngawu which is a small loop made at the end of the rope through which the harpoon point is passed. The bound end of the harpoon point is pushed firmly against the loop and then both are tied together with string. The end of the ropes are attached to a wooden float called a mawarl.

There is some debate as to whether the float is actually an indigenous
Figure 15. Harpoon, Ropes, Floats And Points Used By Yanyuwa Hunters.

A ratharr, ridindi, yirakungka = harpoon
B ma-ngarduku = harpoon rope
C nu-ngawu = loop in harpoon rope
D na-maib = harpoon points (steel)
E na-wuthula = socket for harpoon
F1 na-ngaihinbi = barbed wooden harpoon points (for sea turtle - archaic)
F2 na-wulukayangu = non-barbed wooden harpoon point (for dugong - archaic)
G na-walangkarramba = first harpoon rope
H na-nyitriwangu = second harpoon rope
I mawarl = light wooden float
J mawarl = plastic commercial float
Yanyuwa item of material culture. Older Yanyuwa hunters were adamant that it was not, saying that in past times the rope was attached to the prow of the canoe, and dugong and turtles pulled the canoes so that it would be tired out. Tim Rakawurima, an elderly and highly respected authority in relation to dugong and turtle hunting, had the following to say:

In past times hunters of dugong and turtle merely held the rope, maybe it would be tied to the canoe. In past times we did not use a float, it has only come recently from the west, from such people as the Mara and Nunggubuyu. (Tim Rakawurima, field diary 1988)

These floats are now commonplace and are considered to be amongst the inventory of possessions carried by the Dugong Hunter Spirit Ancestors. The float is made from a light piece of wood and is usually about 60-70 centimetres in length and about 20 centimetres in diameter. The float is thrown out when a dugong or sea turtle is harpooned, to mark the course of the harpooned animal, and it is also useful in tiring the animal out. Present day hunters say it is better than holding the rope or having the rope tied to the boat, because a fleeing, harpooned animal, when it makes the rope go taut, would most likely also pull out the harpoon point. Yanyuwa hunters now usually use commercially made floats which they have found on the beaches around the islands. These floats are generally made from polystyrene foam and have their origins from prawn trawlers and barramundi fishing boats.

Two harpoon ropes are attached to the float. It is considered Law that the dugong and sea turtle are harpooned twice. The first harpoon point and rope used is called na-walangkarramba or na-walangkarrangu, and the second is called na-nyirriwa or na-nyirriwangu.

The harpoon, with its detachable point, was in the Kundawira ceremony used as a sacred symbol, venerated because of its association with the Dugong Hunter Spirit Ancestors. In Yanyuwa these harpoons are called na-ridiridi, ratharr, rajarr or yirlakungka. The harpoons are made from young messmate saplings, budanja (Eucalyptus tetradonta), and are anywhere from three to five metres in length. As with the floats, there is
debate that the manufacture of harpoons from messmate trees is not indigenous to the Yanyuwa. Again, Tim Rakawurlma has this comment:

Furthermore I am telling you all this messmate harpoon is new, we never made them we only used the wood from the cyprus pine. It was only from this tree that my father made them and he taught me, this messmate harpoon is new, it has not long come here.

(Tim Rakawurlma, field diary 1988)

The cyprus pine referred to by the above speaker is called in Yanyuwa wakuwaku (*Callitris intratropica*). It was also said that sometimes harpoons were made from the mangrove species *ma-warnambarra* (*Ceriops tagal var. australis*).

The harpoons today are all made from messmate saplings. The harpoons are sometimes rubbed with red ochre, painted with commercial paint and are rarely allowed to lie on the ground. Usually they stand upright resting in a tree with the heavy end downwards. On the beaches of the islands they are sometimes laid down on the shore line, and then the end of the harpoon is always buried in the sand. This, the Yanyuwa say, prevents the harpoon from becoming warped.

The thick end of the harpoon where the harpoon point socket is located is usually bound with string to prevent it from splitting, and in contemporary times, a sleeve of polythene pipe or steel is often used. Some hunters put a small disc of metal at the base of the socket where the harpoon point rests to stop the blunt end of the harpoon point from becoming stuck in the wood. I have also seen one cent and five cent coins being used for this purpose.

In past times, harpoon rests were attached to dugout canoes by inserting small forked branches near the prow and near the stern; the harpoon rested in these forks. Such harpoon rests were called in Yanyuwa *na-amayi*. No such rest is ever attached to aluminium dinghies.
310.

9.6 Concluding comments:
Spiritual and historical knowledge combine with a more practical knowledge in relation to technology, to account for one part of the background which is deemed necessary if an individual is to be counted as a true maranja. The relationship between the hunter and his quarry and the knowledge of how to hunt, where to hunt, and the Laws of hunting, butchering, cooking, distribution and eating are also important factors in the education of any would-be hunter of dugong and sea turtle. The Dugong Hunter Spirit Ancestors provide a firm and tangible foundation for the activity of dugong and sea turtle hunting and one which is often discussed; but, ultimately, it is the learning and practice which develops the skills so that one may earn the title of maranja, a dugong and sea turtle hunter of excellence. It is these issues which will be addressed in the next chapter.
Chapter 10.

Experts make things look easy

The hunters of dugong and sea turtle, they have coiled their ropes:
They are searching, for dugong and sea turtle:
At what place will they harpoon it?

(Annie Karrakayn, Eileen McDinny and Dinah Norman)

10.1 Hunting, butchering, cooking and eating.

The above song was composed in 1992 during the land claim which was held on Centre Island. Every evening after the conclusion of the "traditional evidence" sessions, a number of hunters would leave in their dinghies and travel to the nearby sea grass beds in the vicinity of the McArthur River mouth and hunt for dugong and sea turtle. The women and children did what generations of Yanyuwa women and children have done before - they waited and wondered. Would the hunters be successful? Who will harpoon it? At what place would they harpoon and butcher their catch? Such questions are asked every time a boat goes out, and the answers can only be given when the boat returns.

A successful sea turtle or dugong hunt provides sufficient meat which can be distributed to large numbers of people, although the Yanyuwa say that a sea turtle provides meat for all the close family, while a dugong provides meat for "everybody". It is not only the Yanyuwa that desire such meat; it is a desired meat source by the neighbours of the Yanyuwa also.

While I have not been in position to weigh the sea turtle and dugong take by the Yanyuwa, Nietschman (1976:633-634) provides details he collected from indigenous hunters in the Cape York area. It is useful comparative data, as the hunting methods employed by the hunters observed by Nietschmann are similar to those employed by the Yanyuwa.

In a sample of 54 green turtles weights ranged between 52 kg and 205 kg, with an average weight of 131.1 kg. At least 50% of the total body
Nietschmann concluded that on the basis of such figures, a single turtle can be expected to yield, on average, 65.6kg of meat, with a potential yield of 102.5 kg of meat. Dugong taken by the same group of hunters ranged between the weights of 159 kg and 351 kg, with an average weight of 254.8 kg. At least 35% of the total body weight of the dugong was usable as fat and meat. Therefore, by extrapolating from the data of Nietschmann, a single dugong could yield as much as 122.9 kg of edible meat, with the average yield being approximately 89.2 kg.

Both the meat and the fat of the dugong are rich in energy and protein as Table 4, taken from Miller (et.al 1993:203-205), illustrates, when compared with other commonly taken bush foods such as goanna, mud crab and water lily. When the above figures are translated into the everyday life of the Yanyuwa people and their neighbours, it is not hard to realise why people wait with anticipation for the return of the hunters.

It is during the prehunting preparations, actual hunting, butchering, cooking and distribution, that the Law, and the Yanyuwangala associated with the activity of dugong and sea turtle hunting, become apparent. Much of the information provided in the previous chapters remains hidden knowledge to the untrained observer, but during the times when men and women are actually involved with the Law relating to dugong and sea turtle, certain activities are observable. Even then, some of the reasons why some activities are being performed remain known only to the knowledgeable hunters and older women. Why, for example, is the dugong faced towards the sea before the first knife cut? Why does a hunter avoid the burning or heating of string, paperbark or beeswax and abstain from eating greasy foods before going hunting? Why do women go out of their way to obtain specific types of wood for cooking? There are explanations for such actions; and in this chapter an exploration will be made of the training of Yanyuwa men to become maranja as well as the training of Yanyuwa women to become knowledgeable members of a community which still takes pride in belonging to a people for whom the hunting of dugong and sea turtle is remains an important part of their group identity.

It will also be seen that successful hunting and the continuation of
Table 4. Energy, Protein and Fat Content Of Dugong and Sea Turtle In Comparison to the Sand Goanna, Mud Crab And Water Lily (from Miller et al 1993)

Proximate constituents per 100g; edible portion (raw) unless otherwise stated.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Taxonomic name</th>
<th>Common name</th>
<th>Part</th>
<th>Energy</th>
<th>Protein</th>
<th>Fat</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Dugong dugon 1</td>
<td>Dugong flesh</td>
<td>595</td>
<td>27.6</td>
<td>3.4</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dugong dugon 2</td>
<td>Dugong flesh</td>
<td>452</td>
<td>20.7</td>
<td>2.7</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dugong average</td>
<td></td>
<td>524</td>
<td>24.2</td>
<td>3.1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Natator depressa</td>
<td>Flatback turtle soup</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>1.9</td>
<td>-</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Natator depressa</td>
<td>Flatback turtle intestine</td>
<td>432</td>
<td>18.1</td>
<td>2.7</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Natator depressa</td>
<td>Flatback turtle fat</td>
<td>1595</td>
<td>52.9</td>
<td>40.0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Natator depressa 1a</td>
<td>Flatback turtle flesh(cooked)</td>
<td>479</td>
<td>25.4</td>
<td>0.2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Natator depressa 2a</td>
<td>Flatback turtle flesh(cooked)</td>
<td>494</td>
<td>25.4</td>
<td>1.5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Natator depressa 3a</td>
<td>Flatback turtle flesh(cooked)</td>
<td>445</td>
<td>24.5</td>
<td>0.5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Flatback turtle average</td>
<td>flesh(cooked)</td>
<td>473</td>
<td>25.1</td>
<td>0.7</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Varanus gouldii</td>
<td>Gould’s Sand Goanna flesh(cooked)</td>
<td>ND</td>
<td>32.1</td>
<td>1.6</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scylla serrata</td>
<td>Mud crab fat</td>
<td>739</td>
<td>5.6</td>
<td>11.6</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scylla serrata</td>
<td>Mud crab1 flesh</td>
<td>449</td>
<td>21.9</td>
<td>1.3</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scylla serrata</td>
<td>Mud crab2 flesh</td>
<td>295</td>
<td>14.1</td>
<td>0.8</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mud crab average</td>
<td></td>
<td>372</td>
<td>18.0</td>
<td>1.1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nymphaea sp.</td>
<td>Water lily stalk</td>
<td>77</td>
<td>0.1</td>
<td>0.1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nymphaea sp.</td>
<td>Water lily seed</td>
<td>330</td>
<td>1.3</td>
<td>0.5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nymphaea sp.</td>
<td>Water lily root</td>
<td>867</td>
<td>3.1</td>
<td>0.3</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

NOTE: No data given for Chelonia mydas, Green Turtle. Such an omission probably reflects a bias in the study areas towards coastal Arnhem Land, Bathurst and Melville Islands where Flatback turtle takes are the more commonly taken turtle target species.
hunting are associated with processes of negotiation between the human hunters and other participants, such as the unseen, but ever present spirit world. It is an environment where the dugong and sea turtle taken during the hunting process must be afforded respect if the natural order of the Yanyuwa cosmology is to retain its balance.

10.2 "If we don't hunt that dugong and turtle they'll get poor". On being a maranja.

The above quote by Mussolini Harvey provides the philosophical core on which the hunting of dugong and sea turtle is based. It has already been seen that the Yanyuwa perceive the dugong and sea turtle to be kin, nganji, to the seagrass; the term nganji is being used to describe a relationship where each of the different species involved in the kin relationship is seen to be mutually dependent upon the other. Likewise, dugong hunters are described as being likili-nganji ki-walyawu, that is, they are "kin to the dugong and sea turtle".

It was Mussolini Harvey who first provided me with this concept; he highlighted it with the following story;

If you want to catch dugong, sea turtle you have to keep on hunting, keep it up, you have to cook it and eat it.... After that flu [1969] and we moved over to this side [west] of the river we never went out for dugong, we shifted from Malamdarri camp to this side and we never went hunting....We stayed there for five or six years never been go hunting and get a dugong and all them other things from the sea...well dugong and sea turtle went poor and then when we started again getting a dugong and turtle and cooking it they came back more and more...dugong and turtle more and more came back, that's because we went back into the country again, the "old people" saw that...when we got that dugong we cut it up properly, it went back to the sea grass, the spirit you know and when we ate that dugong we put all the bones back in the fire, burnt everything that's the proper way... if you want to keep that dugong, turtle too, if you want to keep it up you have to get it, cook it and eat it and put the bone back proper way, you can't throw the bones any
where outside ants come along take that bone meat take it to the nest
and bury it that will finish that dugong off, you gotta burn the bone, burn
the shell that's the proper way...you don't do that that dugong it'll just
get poor and poor turtle too. (Mussolini Harvey, field diary 1987)

This comment by Mussolini Harvey provides a glimpse into a view of
the environment that is very finely tuned to an intimate relationship between
humans and other living things; the control of the fecundity of a species such
as the turtle or dugong is not beyond human management. The equation that is
being presented says that humans must hunt to survive, the animals must be
hunted to survive: If the humans do not dispose of the waste products of the
dead animals correctly, that is, by fire, then they and the animals they hunt
will suffer. It is a system of unobliging principles which Tanner (1979)
also discusses in his work with the Mistassini Cree.

The training of would-be hunters involves always being aware of the
place one occupies in the marine environment where dugong and sea turtle
dwell, and also the terrestrial environment where the dugong and sea turtle
are cooked, for ultimately what happens on the land will affect the sea. Thus,
the hunter is part of a cyclical process that is based on the premise that if
you do the right thing for the land and sea, then it, in turn will do the right
thing for you.

The learning of such knowledge begins early. Young boys clamber to be
first in the boat so they can go with their adult male relatives. On some
occasions, the older relatives make a point of taking these young boys with
them so they can "see and learn". Informal observation at this age is the
beginning of instruction into the way of the maranja. It is not always easy;
long hot days, even cold nights, in a boat with little food or water is tiring.
To fall asleep in the boat will make the turtles and dugong sleep; to make too
much noise will offend the sensibilities of the dugong, sea turtle and the 'old
people', so the dugong and the turtle will go away. Therefore the children are
kept awake. Sometimes, if it all becomes too much, they are dropped off on a
beach to await the return of the boat. However, come the next time, they will
clamber to be in the boat because there is excitement when a dugong or sea
turtle is harpooned. There is that sense of childlike boastfulness to be able to tell their peers back at Borroloola or on the beaches waiting that they were in the boat that caught a dugong, and that in some small way they, too, had played a valuable role in the success of the catch.

When a boy reaches the age of ten to thirteen years, approximately the time of his initiation through the a-Marndiwa circumcision rituals, his period of carefree observation is finished. The training of young men as hunters then becomes the responsibility of his mother's brother (kardirdi) or mother's father (mimi). Men who stand in a jungkayi, "guardian" relationship to the boy will teach him how to hunt. This is usually done in full consultation with the boy's father, and the boy's mother or mother's mother (kukurdi). Sometimes the initial request that the boy begin to learn comes from these women; at other times, they may argue strongly that the boy is yet still too young, immature and not physically strong enough to learn. It is normal for such requests from the women to be listened to. Physical strength is an important factor in being a hunter of dugong and turtle, not just because dugong and sea turtle are big animals in themselves, but also because strength is needed to thrust with the harpoon to make sure the harpoon point is firmly lodged into the animals. Generally, physical strength is seen to be an important factor for any would-be maranja. Older Yanyuwa men say that they no longer hunt because they have got weak, they have lost their strength. As Steve Johnson has commented:

Dugong and sea turtle hunting is bloody hard work, with all that paddling, pulling in, dragging, rolling, cutting up, digging the oven, carrying the firewood and then carrying the meat again.

(Steve Johnson, field diary 1992)

There is also the factor that dugong and sea turtle hunting does involve some interaction with, or the need to be constantly aware of, the "old people", and that both the dugong and the sea turtle are seen to be Spiritual Ancestors. In this sense, physical strength is equated with the ability to be able to encounter these spiritual forces and yet remain healthy and largely
Maturity is also seen as an important factor, especially by the older people. In a conversation with American linguist Jeffrey Heath, Tim Rakawurlma made the following comment:

When they have whiskers, new beard they can go hunting, young boys with no whiskers are mad, they drive the dugong and sea turtle away.
When they have whiskers let them go they can be a maranja, before this time they are mad.

(Tim Rakawurlma: Heath 1975)

Boys and young men often learn from their own fathers also. This is especially so if the man is recognised as a maranja, but in his absence, it is the responsibility of the boys' male matrikin. This is still the case today, and most contemporary active hunters have learned the skills needed to hunt dugong and turtle from their own fathers and fathers' brothers as well as from their mothers' brothers and mothers' fathers.

A young man just starting to learn the skills associated with dugong and sea turtle hunting is called manji, a word which relates in some ways to the English term "ignorant". The Yanyuwa term, however, does not imply any derogatory sense. In Yanyuwa the term would best mean "one who is ignorant but has the potential to learn". They are also called jawina which is best translated as "subordinate one"; the young man is subordinate to the authority, skills and knowledge of the older hunters.

In Yanyuwa there are two words for learning or training. One is used to describe the giver of knowledge, in this instance, the expert maranja; the term is mirdanmantharra. The root of this word is mirdan or knowledgeable, so the term, which is a verb, can mean "making actual or revealing the knowledge", in the sense that it is demonstrated to the learner. A learner in Yanyuwa is said to wirringundayarra himself, (the second term), which has connotations of "giving oneself up to the knowledge being presented".

It is the young man who now stands at the prow of the boat holding the
harpoon. Standing behind him will be the male relative who is his teacher. Usually he holds the boy by the waist or by the shoulders and whispers into his ear about what he is seeing, what he should be seeing, telling him to be constantly aware of the rope near his feet, or making sure he checks that the harpoon point is still lodged firmly in its socket. He may also ask him questions about what the tide is doing. Sometimes during the initial trips the young hunter will tire and he will then stand behind the older relative and observe him.

Sea turtles are the first quarry of any would-be maranja, and predominantly those sea turtle which inhabit the large sea grass beds. The sea turtles which inhabit the reefs are considered harder to catch, and additional skills are thought to be needed if they are to be hunted. It is usual that the first turtle to be harpooned is brought close to the boat and the harpoon points are then removed. This action is related to the fact that the “old people” are there on the “country”, watching this new would-be maranja. They are said to be jealous of him and do not wish him to capture the turtles which they too are said to hunt. The pulling out of the harpoon points can be done in an ostentatious manner, and then the boy is asked to try again because the one he had harpooned was “just for practice”, or that it must be let go so the old people will give the new hunter lots of dugong and sea turtle in his life as a hunter. However, sometimes the instructor removes the harpoon points surreptitiously, and then makes comments about how the turtle has got away, and it must be the “jealous old people who have done this”. The boy is told to be careful not to do something wrong that will offend these “old people”, otherwise he will never get anything.

The next turtle that the boy harpoons is taken back to camp where the female relatives and younger relatives will greet the boy with loud acclaim, and while this happens the young hunter remains passive. In contemporary times the turtle is cooked, butchered and distributed among his relatives. In past times, however, the turtle and the boy were treated much differently.

In past times the turtle would be cooked and butchered by the young hunter’s older male relatives. When the turtle was butchered only the neck and the large pectoral muscles of the turtle and the intestines were given to
the boy and close relatives. The green fat lining the shell, the lungs and the hip portion of the turtle were taken by the older men and cooked once more in a special ground oven contained within a curvilinear ridge of sand some three or four metres in diameter (see Bradley and Kirton 1992:232). This was usually done some distance from the camping place, usually out of sight from the main group of people, such as women and children, for whom the meat was totally forbidden. Such an area was called a na-marnda, and was sacred. The meat cooked within the area was called kurdukurdu, secret and sacred, or perhaps in this instance, holy would be a better word, because it had been made sacred by the way it was cooked. The men in this group would include senior ngimarringki for the sea turtle, senior paternal kin for the young hunter, and senior jungkayi for the sea turtle and the young man.

The meat left for the young hunter and others was called lhamarnda or free, non-sacred. The main reason for such an action was primarily that it was the way of showing that a young man had moved into a new domain, a new area of his life, which was surrounded with new ways of being and behaving. He was being instructed in this way of being by older, experienced men who were maranja, a title that he too could hope to earn. In many respects such behaviour could be equated with a public form of initiation which was associated with hunting.

The taking of the turtle meat by his instructor, to be cooked and eaten by older men, was his payment. The meat taken to be cooked and eaten within the confines of a na-marnda includes the fattest and most favoured parts of the turtle. Fat (na-mayngul, na-wungu) is a substance which is rich in meaning for the Yanyuwa. Fat is that part of an animal which speaks of its condition and its general way of being; a fat animal means that the animal is at peace with its environment and that the Yanyuwa hunters are fulfilling the obligations incumbent upon them in relation to the observation of hunting, cooking, butchering and disposal rules. If an animal lacks fat content, when it should normally be fat, people will ask why. Usually the response is associated with the actions of humans, although in some instances, the relationship between abnormal natural occurrences such as cyclones and the poor health of animals is acknowledged.
Other rituals were also observed with this first turtle caught by the young hunter. When the turtle was being cooked, great care was taken not to burn through the shell. If this were to happen, it would result in the young hunter’s shoulders becoming weak. It would be the “old people” who would see to this. This is something that still is observed with great care in contemporary times. Not only does the burning through of the shell affect a young hunter, but it also means that the precious “soup” or mathulmathul which accumulates in the shell during cooking will be wasted. Such a waste is seen to reflect badly on the person cooking the turtle.

In the past, the instructor of the young hunter would take a small portion of the meat during the butchering process and wipe it under his own armpits. He would then wipe the meat under the young hunter’s armpits and and on his lips. The young hunter would then eat it. This action is called in Yanyuwa ngalkingundayarra, which literally means the “giving of essence”, and the eating of the meat is called ngalkiwunjayarra, meaning the “swallowing of the essence”. Symbolically, it gave the young hunter some of the strength and character of his instructor, and it also confirmed that the young hunter was worth teaching, and that in time he, too, would become a maranja.

This first turtle was cooked with care to make sure that none of the bones were broken and that all the bones and waste parts of the turtle were burnt in the ground oven. Broken bones during the cooking process would also be associated with bad health and a general wasting of the body for the young hunter; the wrong disposal of waste body parts would be associated with a depletion in the number of turtles.

The young hunter would be expected to harpoon three or four more turtles. He would be taught to hunt turtles from off reefs, and on what is called lhulukarra awara or “clear sea”, where it is considered turtles are hard to hunt because the turtle can clearly see the hunters. These turtles would be cooked in the manner described above. Before the young hunter could move on to a dugong, he would also be expected to know how to butcher a turtle correctly, and to know the names of the various parts of the turtle and the various cuts of meat.
As well as demonstrating these skills, the young hunter would also be expected to make his own ropes, harpoon and points. In contemporary times, a harpoon might be made for a young hunter by a close male relative.

After the young hunter had shown his skill at hunting turtle, he would then be considered fit to hunt a dugong. Once again his instructor would stand with him, instructing him on the habits of dugong and their movements. When a dugong was harpooned, unlike the sea turtle, the harpoon points were rarely removed, although some hunters have told me that it was still sometimes done. When the dugong was taken back to camp all the meat except the intestines, tail and that portion of the backbone free from ribs was reserved for the old men, and again it would be cooked in a *na-marnda* situation. This would happen for three or four dugong takes; then, after another dugong taken by the young hunter had been eaten and the waste matter disposed of correctly, the young hunter's instructor would take some cooked dugong fat, mix it with red ochre and smear it over the young hunter's forearms.

After this, the young hunter was considered free to hunt with whom he chose; he could distribute the meat himself. He was considered to be nearly a *maranja*, he was still a "little bit manji" or ignorant, but only experience would teach him the things he still needed to know. By the time the young hunter reached his mid-twenties, he would be considered a full *maranja*.

The smearing of forearms with red ochre is also used by the Yanyuwa to free people from restrictions which they have incurred because of the death of a close relative. The Yanyuwa describe the ochering of forearms as making people free to give what they want to their families. Thus, in past times at least, the link between an initiation ritual and the more social

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1 In past times up until the mid-1950's most Yanyuwa men would have reached this stage of training. From this period until the present, fewer and fewer Yanyuwa men reach this stage. There are many reasons for this, and they are treated more fully in Chapters 11 and 12.
“initiation” into the ways of being a maranja would appear to be quite close.

When a young hunter became a married man, and he was to go hunting for the first time since having a wife, he would first warm his body with hands warmed by a fire. He would then bind his upper arms with string or preferably with the plaited cane armlets called ma-rilkarra. These armlets, made from ‘supplejack’ (Flagella indica), are associated with the activities of the Dugong Hunter Spirit Ancestors and are an actual Spirit Ancestor on Murunda or Gilbert Island, just to the north of Black Craggy Island. Both these actions were considered to mark his new status as a married man, but also to renew his strength, some of which is felt to diminish when first married. Warming the body before going hunting is still a practice undertaken by hunters of dugong and sea turtle and is considered to have protective properties against spiritual dangers that may be encountered while hunting, as well as helping to return any vigour which he may have lost in his new role as a married man.

Many of the rituals described above are now no longer observed when a young man harpoons his first turtle or dugong. That the Laws once existed is still well known, and most of the middle aged hunters were taught when such actions were still in force. These Laws are still talked about; young hunters today are told about them, but they are no longer performed. No real reason is given for why this is now the case. I once asked Annie Karrakayn why, and she suggested it was because, “the world just moves too fast this time... just no time for things this time” (field diary 1987). This comment came after a turtle and dugong had been brought into a “bush camp” by a group of young hunters at Bing Bong, and Annie, with a number of other men and women, was describing to me what would have happened in the past. There could be a degree of truth in this comment. Linguistically, from Yanyuwa texts collected by Jean Kirton and by myself, changes can be seen in the narrative styles which describe such activities as hunting, cooking, butchering and eating dugong and sea turtle. In the texts collected by Kirton, the men who spoke of these activities in the 1960’s, who were middle aged to elderly, gave leisurely accounts. In these texts, there is a sense of timelessness about the activities, a sense of an era when there was plenty of time to do what
needed to be done. It was the period of dugout canoes, of sails and paddles. Conversely, the texts I have collected are quite blunt, and the events happen rapidly. There is a very much matter-of-fact approach taken to the hunting and other activities. Most of the texts start at Borroloola and end at Borroloola, and the time scale may be one or two days, whereas in the texts of Kirton, their time scale may be weeks or even months.

In the times of dugout canoes, men and their families travelled in groups, and there was more time to hunt and fulfil the activities that were considered important. In contemporary times, all travel is by aluminium dinghy. Usually the boat leaves from Borroloola with just the minimum prerequisite crew. The animal is butchered and often cooked away from Borroloola, and then when it comes back to the community it is distributed. At other times, a boat will leave from river or island camps, but the composition of the camping group will all be close family.

The ritual actions described above in relation to young hunters required public affirmation from a cross section of the Yanyuwa community if they were to be most effective. In contemporary times, the very way of hunting precludes this. However, the Laws which relate to the relationship between the Yanyuwa, dugong, sea turtle and “old people”, are those which are still followed, and firmly adhered to by men and women.

There are many rules or Laws which the maranja follow even before they leave the camp. Many of these Laws are still in practice, and all contemporary hunters of dugong and sea turtle are familiar with most of

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2 If a canoe were carrying a person who was in the process of making a hollow log burial coffin, or the log coffin was being carried to a locality on the islands, and a dugong or turtle was harpooned, only the most senior men involved with the manufacture of the coffin could eat the animal. However, if the holes created by the harpoon points were smeared with red ochre, the animal became available for anyone to eat. In the past, and up until the present, animals harpooned within sectors of sea surrounding burial areas on the islands can only be eaten by the most senior men for the area involved.
them. Like any set of Laws based upon spiritual factors and which are maintained by oral tradition, there are degrees of individual observance. It is important to stress that they do still exist, are performed, and that they are being passed on to the new hunters. The following section of this chapter deals with activities which are undertaken on any hunt.

10.3 “Dugong hunters they must follow the Law”: Rules of the hunt.

The dugong is lingi, keen of hearing and highly intelligent. Both the dugong and the sea turtle live in the sea, a region which the Yanyuwa know well but respect. There are other things in the sea that can harm and are better not to be seen or encountered. Thus, preparations for hunting begin at the campsite on rising from sleep. Such activities as the cutting or breaking of sticks for firewood is forbidden if there are people preparing to go hunting; it is felt that the dugong will hear the noise and travel away into deeper water so as to avoid the hunters.

Such items as string or beeswax are not burnt or heated, as it would be bad luck, and something bad might happen. Burning string is to devalue an item that in past times was a very valuable commodity and one which dugong hunters valued. If any “old people” saw this happening they might “do something”, or make bad luck. The burning of beeswax gives off a strong smell which may attract sharks. In a similar manner those men going hunting will not handle greasy food in case the grease gets on the harpoon points making them slippery and liable to come out of an animal if harpooned. As well, the scent of the grease on the hunters’ hands might attract sharks. Most hunters before getting in a boat will rub their hands in sand in an attempt to make sure that their hands are free of grease. All of these restrictions are associated with dugong and sea turtle hunters as well as with their wives and children. 3 To break any of these rules is called wardimalyurr, which would

3 In past times the hunters of dugong, in particular, would take the small leaves from any species of melaleuca, blow heavily on them in imitation of the exhaling breath of.
best translate as “behaving badly by having no respect for the sea”. When the hunters leave their camp and travel on to the sea and islands, much of the mainland based protocol is suspended. On the islands and the sea there is a different dialect to be spoken; certain nouns and verbs have special forms which may be used only on the sea and the islands.

An example of this island dialect is the term for “late afternoon”. On the mainland the term is *ngabungabula*. On the sea, if one has harpooned a sea turtle or is looking for a turtle, the term *wukurlakurla* is used for “late afternoon”; while the term *ngubathurra* is used if the hunters have harpooned a dugong or are looking for dugong. These are terms still used by the older generation of Yanyuwa hunters but rarely by younger men.

There is also a range of special vocabulary which relates specifically to the activities of the hunters. Certain avoidance relationships between brothers-in-law (*rnabirnabi / nhanawarra*), for example, are also suspended on the islands, and they may hunt together. This, say the Yanyuwa, is so that meat from the catch can be given to each other by the brother-in-law pair. The meat can also be taken and easily given to each other’s mothers-in-law (*yuwarni*), a relationship of complete avoidance.

Hunters usually know beforehand what they would like to catch. Some hunters have preferences and will make all attempts to go and get their

Footnote 3 cont: Dugong, put their underarm sweat on them and then put them in their ears. This was said to make the dugong deaf to the hunter’s movements. Other hunters would bathe in the water of the river or sea before leaving to hunt. This was said to get rid of any sign of the hunters’ terrestrial origins - they would smell only of salt water. Other hunters would pour water into their ears, and as with the melaleuca leaves, it was considered to make the dugong deaf, and at the same time make the hunter much more alert.

4 Peterson (1971, 1978) discusses issues in relation to group size and fluidity of group size in hunter-gatherer societies, and, amongst other things, mentions in-laws co-residing and co-hunting.
desired meat source. Sometimes special requests are made to the hunter for him to try to get a turtle, for example. Other hunters say they try to get whatever they can, or that they like to alternate their types of meat. There is in Yanyuwa a specific word for this, *mulukurrinjaarra* which means "wanting to vary the type of meat". Of course, hunters desire to go for what animal they consider will be in peak condition, or considered to be fat. During the late dry season for example, sea turtles are desired because they are known to be fat. The yellow flowers of the acacia tree, *ma-kawurrka*, also indicate this, while the red flowers of the messmate tree, *budanja*, indicate that dugong are fat. Certain areas of the islands are also known for providing the wants of the hunters, for example, the area of sea at the mouth of the Carrington and Davies Channel and between the west coast of South West Island and the east coast of West Island are favoured areas for hunting turtle. The mouths of the McArthur, Crooked and Wearyan Rivers are favoured for dugong, as is the western coast of West Island. Weather patterns such as wind and tides also have important bearings on where people will hunt.

When the hunters reach the area they wish to hunt over, they scan the water for evidence of dugong or sea turtles feeding. Such indicators as disturbed sediment, *manginy*, caused by dugong ripping up plants as they feed, the excreta of either animal, *ma-wurna*, and floating sea grass which has been disturbed or bitten off, but not swallowed, by both animals, indicate animals are feeding. If such signs are seen, then hunters will look for signs of actual animals as they surface to breath. At night hunters listen for the sound of a turtle or dugong exhaling and inhaling breath. The exhaled breath of a dugong is called *mambul*. If the hunters are camping on the islands for a while, they sometimes investigate the seagrass beds at low tide and look for signs of fresh dugong feeding trails, *ngirarra*. If found, they will visit the area again at high tide. All of the signs are visible and meaningful tracks to a *maranja*.

If signs are seen that indicate that animals are in close proximity, the driver of the boat (*wungkayi*/*wuliyi*) will cut the engine and allow the boat to float with the tide. The hunter will then stand in the prow of the canoe (an
action called *barrayba*), and search for animals and decide on the best way to approach the hunt. Factors such as the tide, the time of day and the number of animals present will all be taken into account. When the boat engine has been cut, great care is made by the hunter not to make any extra noise. As one hunter told me, "even a toe nail scratching on a tin boat will make the dugong go away" (Don Miller, field diary 1981). Even the edging of a paddle in a way that leaves a noisy wake is considered to drive animals away. The making of accidental noises during a hunt is called *mukulumantharra*.

After the hunter has surveyed the area for a while, he may decide to move the boat. If, for example, the tide is still coming in, and dugong are coming with it, the boat will be taken further out to sea and the hunters will then follow the dugong in. While hunting dugong, it is preferable for the boat to drift downwind from the feeding dugong so that noise of the boat does not carry. Having said this, though, it should be noted that Yanyuwa hunters are also well aware that sound travels underwater and will alert the dugong. Sounds travelling underwater are described in Yanyuwa as *malalawurrinjarra*, which is often translated as echo, but is probably more accurately something akin to the English concept of resounding. If the tide is changing and dugong are heading back out to deeper water, the hunters will usually position the boat in a way that it will be in the vicinity of the largest part of the herd, travel across the herd in a horizontal or diagonal line, in relation to the flow of the tide and movement of the dugong, and hope to harpoon one that comes close to the boat. If the hunters are after sea turtle, they will remain in an area where they have seen a number surface and travel slowly over the area hoping to harpoon one as it surfaces, or try to come up behind a turtle that is feeding or resting and catch it unawares.

Once the hunter has determined his course of action, he will, using hand signs, instruct the driver of the boat what to do. The hunter will then take the harpoon and, standing up, he will test the depth of the water with the harpoon. As long as the water is not over the depth of the harpoon they will hunt; otherwise, the water is considered too deep and animals become hard to track unless the water is very clear. The action of a hunter standing with his harpoon in a boat is called *kaburrarrantharra*. Once the harpoon point has
been secured in the harpoon the search for a suitable animal begins. The action of the hunter searching is called *rikarrantharra*. The placing of the harpoon point in the harpoon socket is called *milkamanhantharra* which actually translates as “being held like a hip joint”, a reference to the presumed similarity of a hip socket joint and the way the harpoon point fits into the socket of the harpoon.

The most favourable animal to harpoon is one which is slow moving, *buyijijiwu*, and hopefully unaware of the hunter. The task of the driver of the boat is crucial to the success of the hunt. He has to interpret the hand signals of the hunter and manoeuvre him within range to harpoon the animal. The driver has to take into account, for example, whether the person with the harpoon is left or right handed - a right handed harpooner will want the dugong or sea turtle on the left of the boat for a most effective thrust with the harpoon, while a left handed hunter will want the animal to his right. This can be difficult, and often results in a speedy chase, as they have to keep pace with a dugong which can swim at speeds of up to 10-12 knots for short periods (Marsh et. al 1981). Sea turtles are also capable of short bursts of speed.

In shallow water, a dugong can be tracked by the wake that is caused by the upward and downward movement of the tail, which produces a series of flat circles on the surface of the water. Dugong are also capable of quickly changing direction as an evasive action if they are not too tired. The driver of the boat makes every attempt to keep the animals heading into shallow water, because if it is able to get into deep water or even the channel of a river or creek system, it will be lost from the hunter’s view.

Sea turtles are tracked by sight, but Yanyuwa hunters also say that

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5. A tap on the head indicates a turtle; a tap on the ear a dugong. Fingers to the mouth signals a feeding animal; the middle finger placed over the top of the index signals a cow and calf diving together. Other hand signals and movements of the harpoon are used to indicate direction of travel of the animals, speed and direction required of the boat and when utter quietness is required.
turtles try to evade hunters by swimming away in a straight line and then often doubling back and, in doing so, hoping to confuse the hunter. Therefore, hunters try to estimate where the turtle will come up. Smaller turtles will usually try to head straight for deeper water, so the hunters try to be in front of them. A sea turtle found resting, or feeding on sea grass, or seemingly floating half way between the bottom of the sea and the surface are most favoured for the attempt at harpooning. A sea turtle in this position is called wanjarra.

Older hunters are usually slow, stealthy and patient about the way they hunt. They try to use methods which they mastered when they were still using dugout canoes. Sometimes they work. The biggest difficulty which is encountered, however, is that aluminium dinghies are very hard to paddle with any degree of speed and quietness. Younger hunters in a boat with older hunters are, at times, obviously frustrated by this, especially if they feel too many near misses have occurred. With younger hunters speed has replaced stealth, and hunting in these circumstances often involves hair-raising rides until the animal is exhausted and can be harpooned. Even though it may defy the older conventions of hunting, there is still skill in this method. Hunters have to able to stand up while the chase is on, keep the harpoon in a striking position and usually be able to harpoon the animal while the boat is travelling at some speed. However, this being said, both older and younger hunters in contemporary times will use a mixture of old and new forms of hunting techniques.

10.4 Harpooning a dugong

When a dugong is harpooned, it usually flees away from the boat, the rope in the boat uncoiling at a rapid rate. Care must be taken to make sure the rope does not tangle, otherwise it may get caught on a part of the boat, or in the limbs of someone in the boat, causing injury. The action of a dugong or sea turtle taking the rope at this initial stage of the hunt is termed wajayarra. Often the dugong will become entangled in the rope, rdayantharra, which will weaken it further, and in some instances, it will drown itself. The hunter will bend low over the rope, holding it, an action
called *mukurrmukurr*, and feel for an easing of tension of the rope, and the feeling that the animal is about to rise. If he feels the dugong is still too strong he will let it take a breath, submerge again and wait until the dugong is weakening, *lhawandamantharra*. It is then brought close to the boat, by pulling on the rope, to be harpooned again.

It is important that the harpoon point is placed in the animal so that the embedded part of the point is angling towards the rear of the animal, or at least vertically upright. If the point is lodged so that it is facing forward and putting strain on the rope, it usually results in the harpoon point being pulled out.

An ideal location to place the first harpoon in a dugong is either near the tail, or the head, or neck. A dugong which is harpooned in the head can often be killed outright. This is the perfect shot which is seldom attained. A harpoon point near the tail hinders the locomotion of the dugong's powerful flukes. More commonly, the dugong is harpooned in the area of the back, with the second harpoon point being more accurately placed (plate 13). After a dugong has been harpooned twice, it is pulled alongside the boat, an action which is called *lhungkayarra*. Then, amid much splashing and flailing about of the dugong's flukes, a noose is placed below the flukes on the tail stock and pulled tight.

There is a degree of risk in such an activity, as the flukes of dugong can knock an individual unconscious or bruise his face. One occasion, a slap from the flukes caused a hunter to release his grip on the tail. Unknown to him, the harpoon ropes, still attached to the points in the dugong, had become tangled around his arm. When he was forced to release his hold on the dugong's tail, the dugong attempted to swim off, taking the arm and the rest of the hunter with it. The end result was a severely dislocated shoulder, elbow and wrist. Older Yanyuwa dugong hunters are full of such stories of the danger of hunting. Take, for example, this story of a hunter who went out alone:

It was cold season, early in the morning and a thick fog covered the sea.
The sea was calm and I sat there amongst a herd of dugong. I harpooned
one, a young cow, she sped off taking the rope, but the rope caught me, it became entangled around my calf, I was pulled overboard and under the water. I got the rope off and came to the surface, I did not know where I was, the fog was too thick, I was there alone in the midst of the sea, I thought I might drown. I called out again and again but there was no reply. Then I heard my dog it had been in the canoe with me, I called out and he answered, I swam to the bark of my dog and found my canoe. I rested and then waited for the fog to go, I then searched for the dugong with my rope and float. I found it, I harpooned that dugong again and I took it back to the land. I will tell you that in past times dugong hunters died, they drowned, or their limbs were broken completely when ropes became entangled or when the tail of a dugong hits out at the hunters.

(Tyson Birribirrikama, field diary 1993)

After the noose has been put in place the animal is turned around so its stomach is facing outwards. Its tail is braced against the gunwale, forcing the head underwater and thus drowning it. From the moment a dugong is harpooned until it drowns, no talking takes place. It is believed that to talk while a dugong is being harpooned and then drowned is a sign of great disrespect, and if someone talks, especially while a dugong is being pulled alongside a boat, the "old people" who also hunt dugong and are jealous will come and remove the harpoon points. The only noise allowed during hunting is the thumping of the floor or side of the boat, as the sudden noise is said to cause dugong to surface. This is especially so if the dugong has been harpooned, and people want it to surface so it can be harpooned again.

Generally speaking, Yanyuwa dugong hunters will try to harpoon any dugong they can get close enough to, although some hunters are selective and try to avoid a cow and calf pair or a cow which is heavily pregnant. Some of the more experienced hunters say they can tell the difference between the way a pregnant cow and a non-pregnant or male dugong dives after surfacing; a pregnant cow is said to dive quicker and at a sharper angle. Large old bulls and cow dugong are avoided as not only because their flesh is said to be tough and quite rancid, but also because they are the offspring of the Rainbow Serpent. In local Aboriginal English they are called "half-breed rainbows".
If such a dugong is harpooned, it can be killed only with the assistance of special power songs called *nyiri*. These songs are said to weaken the animal and eventually break its back, causing it to head towards land. A number of such songs exist and are associated with specific sites on the landscape. When discussing these songs, Yanyuwa hunters will compare the songs and which one they consider to be the most effective in the subduing of these "half-breeds" rainbow dugong. If such a song is to be used, the hunter will fill his mouth with sea water and spray it over the rope and then chant the song. A translation of one of these songs appears below. This song is associated with a site called Maruwanmala on the west bank of the Wearyan River mouth and is owned by the Wuyaliya semi-moiety:

You with the spirit of the Rainbow Serpent,
Your back is broken, truly it is cracked.

(Johnson Timothy and Isaac Walayungkuma, field diary 1985)

It is said that such a dugong, if not controlled, will tow the boat to the mouth of its father, the Rainbow Serpent, and dive into the mouth, taking boat and crew with it. The following story speaks of such an incident:

At the mouth of the McArthur River I harpooned the dugong, it went north, it kept going it did not weaken, it was strong it struck its tail onto the water many times, but it did not weaken northwards ever northwards it went. I sang the dugong with power songs, over and over I sang it, it was without effect, truly this dugong was the child of the rainbow serpent, I sang again, but nothing happened. The dugong dived once more, it went down, down into the midst of the sea, the prow of the canoe started to go down, I pulled on that rope, I pulled on it and I pulled, I got some of the rope I sang out to my wife, she was paddling, "A knife, give me a knife!". I cut the rope. The dugong was gone, we were far out to sea, it had towed us far to the north, the rope was covered in mud for it had been into the mouth of the Rainbow Serpent.

(Tyson Birribirrikama, field diary 1993)
If in the normal course of events, one of these large old dugong is harpooned, attempts are made to remove the harpoon from the animals by repeated tugs on the rope. If this is not successful, the rope is cut. These large dugong are seen to be both spiritually powerful and physically very strong, and trying to kill one by drowning would be a very hazardous task. Those men who have been successful in the killing of these dugong put it down to the power of the songs which they have been taught.

Related to the perceived kinship between dugong and Rainbow Serpent is the belief that if too much time is spent trying to obtain a dugong, the weather will get rough, and a wind will begin to blow, gently at first and then becoming stronger. This is a wind being sent by the Rainbow Serpent who has grown tired of his kin, the dugong, being stalked. The wind is said to be caused by the dugong's tail via some power of the Rainbow Serpent. The only way that this wind can be avoided, besides leaving the area, is to harpoon a dugong close to the tail and make sure that it is eventually killed. Such actions associated with spiritual beliefs are another example of the processes of negotiation with the unseen spiritual reality which Yanyuwa people have to deal with.

When a dugong is drowned, it is tied alongside the boat. A rope is tied around the tail which is fixed to the back of the boat, and a harpoon point is passed through the dugong's nostrils and to this another rope is attached which is tied to the front of the boat. Sometimes, the dugong is simply towed. The towing or bearing a dugong back to land is called lhumantharra.

During times when groups of Yanyuwa people are camped on the islands, they will often hunt dugong at night. The dugong is located by listening for the sounds of dugong surfacing to breath. The dugong are followed through the water by the glow of their phosphorescent backs and wake, called balirrka. As this method of hunting is considerably more dangerous, there is very careful preparation of the hunting equipment before setting out, and usually only experienced hunters go on such expeditions. One of the most detailed accounts by Europeans of a Yanyuwa dugong hunt comes from a description by W.E. Harney, who spent some time with the Yanyuwa in the Pellew Islands during the 1920's. In his book North of 23 Degrees he
335.

mentions night time hunting by Yanyuwa dugong hunters:

This place is the home of the dugong...that feeds on the sea grass growing upon the floor of the shallow banks in this locality...Often I went out with them to hunt for dugong. Night was the best time, for then their path could easily be followed by the phosphorescent wake they left behind. A native would stand up in the stem of the craft, a wooden canoe, and direct the paddling native with the point of his harpoon. The canoe would glide noiselessly over the water, the men at the paddles feathering their paddles to eliminate the splash. Up would come the huge sea cow to fill its lungs with air; then bang! in would go the six inch nail with a long rope attached to the head.  

(Harney 1946: 161-162)

10.5 Harpooning a sea turtle.

Sea turtle are hunted in a similar fashion to dugong. Since the advent of steel harpoon points, sea turtle are harpooned in the shell. Shorter harpoon points are used for sea turtles. A harpooned sea turtle, after having initially travelled straight away from the boat, may often swing back and come underneath the boat, causing some anxiety and confusion as the boat is got out of the way to enable the hunter to harpoon the turtle a second time. Many times if the hunter is confident that the first harpoon point is firmly lodged in the shell of the turtle, he will pull on the rope until the turtle is just visible through the water. He will then harpoon the turtle with a steady vertical thrust, thus ensuring that the second harpoon point securely finds its mark.

When a turtle has been harpooned twice, it is pulled alongside the boat and the two front flippers are grabbed so that the turtle is hanging vertically in the water with its head above the surface (plate 14). This is to ensure that the turtle does not drown. If the sea turtle drowns, it will not be taken back for cooking and butchering, as a drowned sea turtle is said to “go bad very quickly” and the “meat goes black”. If a sea turtle drowns, it is believed that the “old people” will make it very hard for anyone to capture a turtle for a long time to come. If a turtle dies, hunters are somewhat ashamed and term the
event as *wardingala*, bad manners or a lack of respect in relation to the creature and the sensibilities of the “old people”. Fortunately, this happens very rarely and nearly all turtles make it back to the hunters’ camp alive. Of the many turtle I have seen harpooned around the Pellews only three drowned.

Once the hunters have the front flippers of the turtle, a rope is secured firmly around them near the point at which the flippers join onto the body. The turtle is then usually pulled into the boat. If the turtle is very large and a butchering site is not too far away the turtle will be carried tied to the side of the boat. If some distance has to be covered, a relatively shallow locality is found and someone gets in the water and while he lifts, the others pull the turtle into the boat. The harpoon points are then removed, and the holes left by the points are stuffed with paper, cloth or plastic, to stop any blood coming out.

There are times when hunters are camped close by to areas of reef where sea turtles are to found. Such places as the reefs named Yinijini and Wurkandinguj just to the north of Cape Vanderlin, Babalungku and Aburri off the northern west coast of West Island, and the reefs named Lirringinda, Muludirra, Murrdirla and Ngulban, all found off the southeast tip of Centre Island, are examples of a few such places (see Map 13). Hunting turtles on a reef has a special term in Yanyuwa, *kurlukurlumantharra*, and is said to require different skills. The turtle that dwell on reefs are said to behave in ways which are different from those on the major sea grass beds. It is believed that turtles on reefs have the ability to stay under water longer. This, the Yanyuwa say, is because reefs are favourite areas for turtles to

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6 In past times, when large canoes were common, a dugout canoe might be sunk and the sea turtle moved into position and then the canoe bailed out so that it was secured in the canoe. Johnson Timothy often spoke of times, as a small boy, when he was with his father and father’s brother, and they did this. To stop Johnson from drowning and floating away his father gave him the harpoon rope float, and he floated around on it with the other end of the rope firmly fixed to the canoe.
sleep, so they are often on the bottom resting. The water over reef areas is usually relatively clear, so turtles can see approaching hunters well in advance. It is rare that hunters will hunt for turtle at night, over the sea grass beds; however, on reefs it is a relatively common activity. As with the dugong, the turtles’ shells glow as a result of natural phosphorescence.

The water over the reefs is often deeper than that which covers the sea grass beds, and hunters say that special longer harpoons are needed to hunt over reef country. It is considered that one of the only ways turtles can be brought to the surface for any length of time on the reefs is to “swear” at them, that is, to stand up in the boat and abuse the turtles as the move about below the water. One of the more common forms of this “swearing” is as follows:

*Oy! Rabirabimulu, lhangamajirr aningungkaaaa!*

[Hey Turtle! You deep throated long winded object! Can’t you breathe and see some fresh country?] (Johnson Timothy, field diary 1992)

While the above may not seem like very vociferous swearing, in the original Yanyuwa, the words used carry nuances of rudeness and heavy insults. Such behaviour is in complete contradiction to all the usual laws which are followed while hunting dugong and sea turtle, and it is for this reason that it is thought to work and cause the turtles to rise and see who is breaking the Laws associated with the sea country. Such swearing will only work once, and if a turtle is not harpooned soon after it has taken place, it is felt, there will be none taken.

Once the catch has been secured, it is taken back to the land for butchering. In past times when the canoe was still some kilometres fromm the camp a large conch shell would be sounded to announce to the people waiting that the hunt had been successful. There were certain signals used for dugong or sea turtle and each hunter had his own particular sound which people knew. Don Miller, for example, said that his father would blow one long blast for a turtle and three short blasts for a dugong (field diary 1983).
Since the advent of the outboard engine and the noise they make, the use of the conch shell has been abandoned. The noise of a boat can also be heard for some distance, especially in the still of the night, and some men and women believe they can tell by the labouring noise made by the engine whether the hunters have been successful or not. This is not a foolproof method, which people will readily admit. People speak with a degree of emotion about the noise of the conch shell and of hearing it travel across the sea or up the river. The conch was used to signal the people waiting to prepare the ground ovens for the cooking. Because of the signal given people knew what animal had been taken, so they knew what wood to get and what kind of ground oven to prepare. However, if the hunters were coming back late at night, there was a chance that the noise of the conch was not always heard; and hunters returned to the camp to find nothing ready, a fact that this song alludes to, after such an incident occurred at the McArthur River mouth, a place called Marani in Yanyuwa:

The conch shell called out
from Marani;
it was not heard.

(Peter Jangurringurri)

In past times, and still today, when hunters are returning to a beach camp across the sea, a hunter will often stand up and wave his paddle to alert people waiting that the hunt has been successful.

Once the hunters return to land, the animal has to be butchered and cooked; and as with hunting there are Laws for how this must be done. The Laws ultimately underlie the Yanyuwa people's relationship with these two animals, and also to their relationship with the ever watching "old people" and the general welfare of their country.

10. 6 "Dugong and turtle meat they all got a name, every little piece, that's the Law".

The butchering of a dugong or sea turtle is called in Yanyuwa
ngakamantharra. It is a word which is usually translated as “cutting up a
dugong or turtle”, but the term is full of implicit meanings which relate
firstly, to the special way these animals must be butchered. Secondly, the
term carries meanings of a meat source which must be shared with family
and the community, a meat which has a degree of specialness about it which
precludes its being all kept by the hunter. The Laws associated with
butchering dugong and turtle are still strongly enforced, and older men and
women will watch carefully if younger people are doing this task alone,
advising them and naming the pieces of meat and bone which they are
removing. Sometimes the task is seen not to be done in the prescribed
manner, and one phrase is said, not loudly-usually it said in a manner as if
the speaker of the words were commenting to himself. The phrase is
wardiwi j ankawangu, meaning “You are filled with badness, you are a
mainland dweller.”

In the past such words were “fighting words”, the insult attacks the
very essence of a Yanyuwa person’s sense of being that they are “people of
the sea”. Such a comment is also especially galling for a would-be hunter of
dugong and turtle, or a person who perceives himself as having reached
maranja status. In the past, physical fights would occur, and a story is told
about how the people became so involved in the fight that dogs came and ate
the meat of the turtle which was being butchered when the comment was
made!

Today the comment is just as insulting, but usually the would-be
butcher, throws down the knife and storms off muttering under his breath.
Then attempts are made to appease the person, and get him back to the task,
with explanatory comments about the Laws that exist concerning the cutting
up of such animals as dugong and sea turtle and that, after all, he was not
doing too badly, and others have done much worse. Such attempts are not
always successful.

Older men will butcher animals in silence, sure of what they are
doing. Often women will sit nearby, telling the children what the butcher is
doing and calling the names of the meat, internal organs and bone. If a group
of old men are together, they will sing the appropriate song cycle verses
associated with the meat, offal and bone of the dugong and turtle and talk of what part of the islands and the sea the verses come from. Thus, even a seemingly secular and practical task becomes imbued with the resonance of the Spirit Ancestors and the secular and spiritual merge into one.

10.7 Butchering dugong

When a dugong is brought ashore, it is rolled up to a suitable location and then it is orientated so that its head is facing towards sea (plate 15). Even if a dugong is being cut up far inland, at Borroloola, for example, the head of the dugong will be faced north, back towards the sea. For the Yanyuwa this is an act of singular importance, and is called ki-maramangngku, which literally means "being for the sea grass". It is said that the spirit of the dugong will leave on the first knife cut and return to the sea grass beds, and thus the fecundity of the sea grass and the dugong is assured. I once asked what would happen if someone forgot to orientate the dugong in this way; I was informed rather bluntly by one woman overhearing the remark that "We don't forget". While her husband said that it would mean the end of the dugong and sea grass. This action is the most obvious example illustrating the concept of nganji, of the kin relationship which is said to exist between the sea grass and dugong, and hunter and dugong. The Yanyuwa term clearly speaks of why it is done and tells the listener that it is for the benefit of the sea grass. However, younger Yanyuwa men and women who don't speak the language, while seeing the action as being important, say that it is done so that the spirit of the animal can go back to the sea, because that is where it comes from. While there is a similarity in the sentiment, the original explicit meaning which speaks of mutual relationships between flora and fauna, and humans and dugong becomes blurred, if not lost. It is but one example where the loss of language can also mean a change in the way actions may be interpreted. In highlighting this I mean no disrespect to the younger Yanyuwa hunters, as I know they believe with full integrity the value of orienting the dugong so that its spirit may be released.

There are two methods by which a dugong may be butchered. For a detailed illustration of one such method see Figures 16-20. One method is
Figures 16 - 17. Illustrations Showing The Butchering Of Dugong With Yanyuwa Terms For Body Parts, Internal Organs, Knife Cuts And Terms Given To Cuts Of Meat.

Figure 16.

1, 2, 3, 4 refers to the order of knife cuts during butchering.

A na-thimbiji = upper gum
B na-mi/wangu = snout
C wulka = back of the skull
D na-yirimbi = flukes
E na-mamda = flipper
F na-waji = "armpit"
G na-rawulurr = jaw
H na-wulaya = head
I na-lirmundurr = back / dorsal ridge

Figure 17.

Holes left in the hide due to the removal of flippers.

F na-yalat
G na-maru
H na-jamuka = chin
J Line of original cut along the back.

Figure 18.

A  *rra-mayngul*  
   = layer of creamy white fat
B  *na-widin*  
   = liver
C  *warrka / rimi / ninkukilwarkuru*  
   = large intestine
D  *wilawila*  
   = stomach
E  *warrka / murajuju*  
   = small intestine
F  *na-yinji*  
   = lungs
G  *na-wurdula*  
   = heart

Figure 19.

A  *a-wumumu*  
   = kidneys
B  *na-minji*  
   = fat and meat contains genital organs and reproductive organs and rudimentary pelvic bones

Figure 20.

A  *kururu*  
   = backbone
B  *lubala*  
   = backbone with no ribs
C  *a-mairanbangu*  
   = short ribs
D  *a-larturr*  
   = long ribs
called *yingkurra*; this involves either skinning the main body of the dugong and then removing the meat in slabs, or removing the meat in slabs with the hide still attached. If the meat is removed with hide, *yanjurr*, still attached, the meat portions are called *wurnngarr*, or smoke. I have not been able to find out why this is the case. The removal of the hide of the dugong is still often done, especially if the meat is to be carried a long distance before arriving at camp, or if the meat is to be salted down.7

The hide of a dugong is thick and heavy and is, in many respects, unwanted weight, even in the days of aluminium dinghies and outboard engines. It was even more important in the days of bark or dugout canoes, where issues associated with weight were of primary importance. The *yingkurra* method of butchering is by far the most commonly used method.

The most favoured butchering method of the old people is called *munbul* or *arndijalangu*. This method involves removing the hide in its entirety, excluding the head and the tail, but in such a way that a layer of meat 10-15 centimetres thick is left on the inside of the hide. This method of butchering is usually only done on the islands and coastal regions, when the dugong can be cooked close to the point of capture, as the hide with flesh attached is very heavy (plate 16).

The *munbul* method of butchering a dugong is often described as being the "proper old way for the old people", and older people often speak with some emotion when a dugong is cooked in this manner:

7 According to Steve Johnson (field diary 1987), the salting of dugong meat has only been practised since the 1920’s when people such as Horace Foster, Bill Harney senior and Andy Anderson settled in the Manangoora area on the Wearyan River. A large salt pan in the area is seasonally inundated, and after evaporation large quantities of salt can be removed. The three men mentioned above gathered this salt using a Yanyuwa and Garrwa work force. They bagged the salt and sold it. They also taught Yanyuwa and Garrwa people how to salt preserve bullock beef, a method which they transferred to dugong meat, but not to the meat of the sea turtle, as it is considered too moist.
Today that dugong was butchered in the way of my forefathers, we cut it \textit{munbul}, it really made me remember the old people, when a dugong is up like that and cooked the meat is sweet. That other way, this \textit{yingkurra} I do not like it, it makes a dugong like a bullock and that is badness.

(Ida Ninganga, field diary 1986)

After the hide has been removed in the \textit{munbul} method, or the pieces of meat with or without the hide in the \textit{yingkurra} method, the head and tail are removed. The flippers are removed first when the \textit{munbul} method is employed, and are taken off with the pieces of meat that contain the shoulder blade when the \textit{yingkurra} method is employed.

The dugong is then cut along the belly following the line of the rib cage, and a layer of milky white fat, \textit{rra-mayngul}, is removed; this reveals the intestines and other internal organs. The intestines in Yanyuwa are called by the general term of \textit{warrka}, which is derived from the verb, "to drag". This term explains how the intestines are removed. The thirty or so metres of intestines are dragged out and the small intestine, \textit{muraaju}, is removed and cut into smaller lengths of about 25 centimetres, which are washed and cooked, either by boiling or by being placed in a ground oven with the rest of the meat. The large intestine, \textit{rimi} or \textit{rirrkukiwalkarru}, is thrown away, as are the lungs, heart and liver. Some people take the stomach, \textit{wilawila}, while other people consider it unfit for eating. The kidneys, \textit{rra-wumumu}, are eaten by some people and by others they are discarded.

If a dugong is found to be pregnant, and the fetus (\textit{nyanki-ardu}) is of a reasonable size, the uterus, \textit{na-walkrirri}, is cut open, the fetus removed and cooked. It is usually reserved for senior men, although occasionally older women will be offered it. If children happen to be around when an unborn dugong is removed, they often take it and play 'babies' with it, until such time as it is needed for cooking. Often if a cow dugong that has a calf following her is harpooned, hunters will try to obtain the calf as well. Yanyuwa hunters believe the calf will stay around the area where its mother was killed, thus making it an easy target. The flesh of a young calf is described as being good for old people as it is soft and has what the Yanyuwa call
Layer upon layer of fat, often simply called “double fat”, a term which describes the thick layers of fat between the muscle layers on the belly section of the calf.

The genitals of the dugong are usually removed in a large piece of meat and fat called *ma-minji*. In male dugong the penis will be removed before the meat is cooked. The now empty rib cage and back bone of the dugong is all that is left. The lumbar back bone *lubala*, and some of the shorter rear ribs, *a-mardanbangu* are removed, and then the rib cage, *a-larlurr*, is split in half along one side of the back bone, *kurruru*, usually using an axe. However, if it is the first dugong caught by a young hunter, the rib cage will be forced apart as far as possible and a knife will be used to separate the ribs from the back bone. At other times, the entire rib cage and back bone will be cooked intact, and separated after cooking. This is because of the belief that broken bones in the first dugong of a young hunter will result in poor health for the individual.

When the butchering is complete, the meat will be taken to the ground oven. This oven, *rabarr*, is some half a metre deep, one to two metres in length and about the same in width. During the butchering process other people will have gathered the wood, fist sized stones or pieces of ant bed. The ground oven pit will have been filled with wood, the stone or broken ant bed pieces where thrown onto the wood and the wood set alight.

The most favoured wood for cooking dugong meat is either the acacia, called in Yanyuwa, *ma-kawurrka*, or the river coolibah, *ma-warlan* (*Eucalyptus microheca*) and beefwood, *barlbaji* (*Hakea arborescens*). Some people will go as far as saying that these are the only species which may be used for the cooking of dugong meat, and the three species plus one unidentified species called *ma-marrbirnbi* are often classed as *ki-walyawu*, “being for dugong and sea turtle”. People will walk or travel in boats or by car quite long distances to get these species to cook dugong. Older men and women have also commented that if wood of these species is not used, then dugong will get poor and hard to catch. This is said to be because the living made commitments to the “old people” while these people were still alive, that they would “follow the Law”, and if this is not followed, the “old people”
When the wood has burnt down to hot coals, the stones and pieces of ant bed are removed, green branches of white mangrove, *ma-wanjarrngu* (*Acicennia marina*), or tea tree, *wulban* (*Melaleuca acaciodes*), are laid on the coals. This is said to impart a good flavour to the meat, as well as protecting it a little from coming into contact with the coals. The head is then laid in the oven at one end and the tail is laid at the other. In between the head and the tail will be placed the flippers, and larger portions of meat. Over this will be placed the two halves of the rib cage, convex side down. Over and around the ribs will be placed the intestines, kidneys, stomach, and finally the layer of milky white fat. The oven is then covered in damp paperbark, or sheets of tin, damp cardboard and in one case an old car bonnet, then it will be covered completely with dirt, with care being taken to seal off any area where smoke may still be seen coming out. The meat is then left to cook for several hours (plates 17-20).

If the dugong has been butchered using the *munbul* method, that is, the hide removed in one piece with meat remaining on the underside, a clear circular area is made some two metres in diameter. On this cleared area are placed branches of the above mentioned tree species which are then set alight. When the fire has reduced the branches to coals, they are spread out over the cleared area and then the hide is laid meat side down on top of them. Coals collected from the fire are then spread over the top of the hide. The hide and meat is left to cook until the coals have cooled down. The hide is then brushed down and hit with a branch or short sticks to get the ashes off before being cut up into specific easily carried portions (plates 17-24 and figure 17).

When the meat is removed from the ground oven, the first observation that will be made is whether the meat is *yilbi*, moist, or medium rare, or whether it is *ruku*, dry or well done. People do not like meat that is cooked too much. The first sign that people have if the meat is too well cooked will be the white rib bones where most of the meat has come off. Such overcooking is usually blamed on too many stones or pieces of ant bed.

The meat is then distributed, a process in Yanyuwa called...
wangkamantharra. This word is reserved for the distribution of turtle and dugong meat, and, as with the word for butchering, it implies that the meat of these animals is special and must be shared. The portion that each person receives is usually based upon the relationship of the people to the hunter, and sometimes by people's relationship to the dugong as a Spirit Ancestor. It is not viewed favourably if the hunter does not distribute the meat in a fair manner, disregards the Law, or keeps too much for himself. In past times such actions were enough to incite heated argument and even physical violence. Today people will still argue, and offended people will often talk quietly about the meanness of the person concerned in relation to how much meat they are entitled to, based on their relationship to the hunter, or because of other reasons based upon past and present social histories of family and individual relationships. While open disputes are not common, they at times do flare up into a public affair, and then attempts are made at speedy resolution. Such disputes usually occur if dugong and sea turtle have not been a dietary component for some time. Altman (1987:146-149) discusses similar conflicts relating to the sharing of food in north central Arnhem Land.

In the division of meat the hunter usually receives some of the much desired fat, belly meat, the head, a few rib-bones and, sometimes, the portion of meat which contains the shoulder blade. The driver of the boat receives the tail. This is based upon a relationship between the driver of the boat and that part of the dugong by which it propels itself. He will also receive a shoulder, some ribs, and some intestines. The mother of the hunter usually waits until her son gives her meat; it is usually some belly meat, rib bones, kidneys and intestines. If a woman's brother participated in the hunt, she is forbidden to eat the rib-bones and backbone, so she is given a large portion of the intestines and belly meat. The hunter's sister's sons and daughters are not allowed to eat any of the meat from the tail stock or the tail. I have not been able to find out the reasons for these restrictions, only that that is the Law. Menstruating women and newly initiated young men may not eat any of the flesh at all. This is due to the presence of blood, a substance which the Rainbow Serpent can smell clearly; and as the dugong is kin to this
creature, there is a large risk of provoking the Rainbow Serpent if people in these categories were to eat the dugong.

A large portion of meat is also set aside for the hunter’s mother-in-law. This is done through a second person because of the strong avoidance taboo which exists between son-in-law and mother-in-law. The presentation is on-going payment in return for the man being allowed to have as a wife the daughter of this woman.

When the meat has been distributed, individuals will distribute their share of the catch to other relatives so that everyone “gets a taste”. Some portions of meat are cooked again, such as the head and shoulder portions. In the case of the head, the jaw is removed, and from this is taken the tongue, which is cooked. The meat is removed from the skull in one piece, cut in half so the fat and meat in the huge lip is exposed, and it is cooked again in a small ground oven or sometimes boiled. The flippers are split in half and either cooked in a small ground oven or boiled. The tongue, head meat and flippers are considered to be the prerogative of elderly people.

Any meat and bone scraps that are eaten at the site of the ground oven are thrown back into it, as are the sticks used to lift the meat out, the cooking stones and the material used to cover the ground oven, and it is all burnt. As mentioned by Mussolini Harvey at the beginning of this chapter, this is an important action, and if done, will ensure that dugong remain healthy and numerous. The bones and meat scraps carried away from the ground oven are not usually so carefully treated. Some are given to dogs; the head is often thrown into a river or sea, if it is nearby, but generally speaking the bones of the dugong brought back into the camp will be put in rubbish bins or find themselves part of the contemporary, short lived middens which build up in the vicinity of homes due to constant raking of the immediate home area. Some hunters have a ground oven which is part of their home environment, so scraps are disposed of properly. Memmot (1979) also discusses correct disposal of bone and other waste material amongst the Lardil of Mornington Island, but does not associate this with matters relating to the ecological maintenance of the environment.

In past times, and amongst some of the older people today, there was
also a special way the dugong meat had to be consumed. To eat the meat of the
dugong an individual took his portion, and sitting cross legged, the meat was
put straight in front of him. The meat was then taken in both hands and eaten.
It was considered improper to eat the flesh of the dugong if it were to the side
of a person, as is explained below:

You know old people, my own father been really strict about that
dugong meat, you have to eat it properly not just anywhere. You have to
sit one place, cross legged you know and pick up that beef from straight
in front, that's the proper way; this day you see people eat it anyway,
but old people used to teach us proper way, too much Law that dugong, got
to do everything right way.

(Bella Charlie field diary 1991)

The fat of the dugong is often rendered down in small quantities and
used to rub into the hair. It is said to make the hair strong and healthy. Older
people will rub their limbs with it as it is said to keep their bodies free from
pain, and warm in the cold season.

10.8 Butchering sea turtle

Sea turtles are dragged ashore onto the beach. Sometimes after a
journey by car or in the back of a towed boat, they arrive alive at
Borroloola. The turtle is taken to the butchering site and faced towards the
sea. A man will be sought who stands in primary jungkayi role to the
animal, or a man who is a second generation jungkayi, na-mankarraninja, will
be sought to kill the turtle. This is done by striking the front of the
turtle’s head with the back side of an axe, hammer or large stone so that
frontal plates and bone are smashed. A long thin stick or piece of heavy wire
is thrust into this wound and the brains and spinal cord are “mangled”. As
the person strikes the head of the turtle they often call out their relationship
term to the animal, so in the case of a jungkayi, he may call out, “
Marningarna jungkayi yinda nya-ngatha ja-yakurral ” (I am here a
jungkayi you are my Spirit Ancestor mother!). If no such person can be
found the hunter or driver of the boat, regardless of the relationship to the turtle, will kill it.

In recent times some people of Aboriginal-European descent in the Borroloola area have used .22 rifles to kill the turtle. This has highly offended both older and younger Yanyuwa men and women who call it cruel and not the proper way. After observing such an incident, a middle aged woman commented to me:

With a rifle, that is not the Law, that is truly bad, it shows no respect for the Laws of the coast and sea country. I was really sad when I saw that rifle kill that turtle, it is cruel, it is really bad. The turtle has a big Law, lot of song and ceremony. You know in my own way of thinking maybe something will happen it was really wrong. Old people never did that kind of thing, they knew the Law.

(Jemima Miller. field diary 1992)

Because the people involved in this incident were distant relations, the Yanyuwa people present made no attempt to stop the killing of the turtle by the rifle. On one other occasion where a turtle was about to be killed with a rifle by Aboriginal people from Queensland and not related to the Yanyuwa, Johnson Timothy intervened and stopped them, saying that such a method was cruel and an insult to Yanyuwa people. If they wished to catch turtle from Yanyuwa country, they should at least learn to kill it and butcher it in a way that belongs the country of the Yanyuwa people, he said, and that a continuation of such a practice may well lead to a depletion of the sea turtles in the sea. This possibility was also alluded to in the comments given above, when Jemima Miller spoke of that fact that “maybe something will happen.”

The turtle is allowed to bleed through the wound for a few minutes. It is then flipped over onto its back. A large incision is made along the region where the neck and plastron join. Two cuts are then made diagonally down from the left and right sides of this first horizontal cut, down to about the jawline of the turtle, this causing a roughly triangular flap of meat which also contains a part of the oesophagus, yalajala, and trachea,
ngundurrngundurr, of the turtle. It is cut off near the jaw line. The removal of this piece of meat allows access into the turtle’s abdominal region. This cut is called in Yanyuwa ngundawamantharra, which would literally translate as “necking the turtle”, but technically it refers to the cuts that are made which allow for the removal of a large part of the underside of the turtle’s neck (see Figure 21).

The person butchering the turtle then reaches into the abdominal region of the turtle and pulls out the heart, na-ngawulu, (which is not eaten), the liver, na-manyi or na-widiri (which is a delicacy and usually boiled), the bladder, rra-ngawu, and then, with much effort, the stomach, ma-mulka, the large intestine, wunakaka, and the small intestine ma-karriyalu, are removed (see figure 22 and plate 25). The intestines are cut into 25 centimetre lengths, split in half and washed of their undigested sea grass and excrement. The stomach is also cut in half and cleaned. These are then either boiled or placed within a ground oven. The lungs, na-yinji remain in the turtle.

After the removal of these organs has been completed, the turtle is lifted up from behind and the accumulated blood is allowed to drain out through the hole made in the neck region. The turtle is then laid down on its back again, and plugs of paperbark or paper are placed within the bronchii, ngundurrngundurr, of the turtle. The reason given for this practice is so that the living turtles in the sea do not become either short of breath or poor in their fat content.

A shallow depression in the ground is then made - about one metre long, on half metre in width and 10 centimetres deep. Into this depression the wood is piled. Wood considered suitable for cooking sea turtles includes the same species as those used in cooking the dugong. Mixed with the wood are fist-sized cooking stones or pieces of ant bed. When the fire has died down, the stones are removed and placed within the turtle in the cavity left after the intestines, stomach and other organs were removed. The hole in the neck is then sealed with damp paperbark or cardboard. The turtle is then dragged and placed on its back onto the depression which is filled with hot coals. Wood is then piled on top of the turtle and set alight (see figure 23). Unlike the
Figure 21. *Ngunduwamantharra*, Initial Butchering Procedure Of A Sea Turtle.

- Angunduwa = throat
- Yalajala = oesophagus
- Ngundurmungurr = trachea

Figure 22. Removal Of Liver, Intestines And Stomach From A Sea Turtle.

- Malmulka = stomach
- Na-widii = liver
- Mankanyalu = small intestine
- Wunakaka = large intestine

Figure 23. Initial Cooking Of The Sea Turtle.
dugong, the cooking process of the sea turtle is watched carefully to make sure that the carapace and the plastron are not burnt through. If the carapace is burnt through, then the *mathulmathul* “soup” which is comprised of blood, meat particles and juices would drain away. This soup is much desired by both young and old Yanyuwa people. If it is seen that the fire or coals are too hot in a particular place, then sand will be thrown on them. When the fire and the coals have died down, the turtle is pulled out of the depression, brushed down with green branches and allowed to cool down.

The butchering of the sea turtle is somewhat complex, and figures 24 to 28 illustrate the process in a far clearer manner than words. As with the dugong, some of the turtle meat is still somewhat raw and requires further cooking. Before recooking, any meat which contains bones is filleted, *warnnyinmantharra*; a small ground oven is made, acacia branches laid on top of the hot coals, and the meat is then recooked (plate 26). Sometimes, however, such meat is cut up into small pieces and cooked into a curry and rice stew. The badly singed front and rear flippers of the turtle are desired by older men and women, who will cut them in half and eat the small amount of fat and meat contained in them. At other times, the flippers will be thrown to the dogs. Once the turtle has been butchered, the shell, scrap meat and bones are burnt for the same reasons as the remains of dugong are burnt, that is to ensure the good health of the sea turtles and the environment generally.

It is rare that the above procedure is not followed. Occasionally a turtle will be butchered raw, but this is very rare and is more often than not associated with a request to a Yanyuwa hunter by a European person desirous of the shell, which in the course of normal Yanyuwa practice becomes burnt. Some Yanyuwa hunters will oblige the request for a cost ($50-$80), but it is not common. People like the turtle cooked in the shell because of the juice, *na-ngilili*. The moist, juicy meat of the sea turtle is savoured with great relish. Certain parts of the sea turtle flesh cannot be eaten without fat. For example, the flesh from the hip region of the turtle, known as *wundamutha*, must be mixed with green fat, *na-rurrurru*, from the inside of the shell. It is considered to be the ‘Law of dugong hunting people’.
Figure 24. Initial Butchering Of The Sea Turtle After Cooking.

A na-mamda
  = flippers

Figure 25. Removal Of The Plastron Of The Sea Turtle During Butchering.

A na-wirlibiri
B na-milimili
C na-rukumu
D na-ngabala
Figure 26. Removal Of Pectoral Muscles, Tail And Meat And Fat From The Hip Region.

- A na-wulaya = head
- B na-murrgu = neck
- C na-wulthula = meat from chest
- D na-lakalaka = meat from between pectoral muscles
- E na-yalait = pectoral muscles with shoulder bones and humerus
- F na-narmgu = tail with some fat
- G na-murrgu = fat and meat from hips
- H na-durmmungu = a layer of meat attached to pectoral muscles and shell

Figure 27. Removal Of Lungs And Greater Portion Of Meat And Fat From Hips.

- A ngundurrgundurr = bronchi
- B na-yirrji = lungs
- C na-nurru = green fat lining the shell
- D thuwayngul = fat and meat from hips
- E wumdamutha = fat from hips

Figure 28. Removal Of Hips And "Soup".

- A na-yirmgi / na-buyurr = shell
- B mathulmathul = 'soup' (meat juices, meat particles, fat and blood)
- C rabarr = cooking stones
- D ma-yajbarra = upper hip bones
- E ma-ravurr = lower hip bones
Young children seen picking at the flesh from this region are often told to leave it alone if they can't eat it mixed with the fat. The stringy meat from the shoulders is also often mixed with this green fat. The intestines when cooked have their inside layer peeled off and then rolled up and eaten.

In the distribution of turtle meat, the driver of the boat receives the green and yellow fatty parts of the hip regions, some intestines and a little of the front shoulder meat. The hunter gets the green fat lining the shell, the lungs, which are considered a delicacy, and some of the shoulder meat. The liver is usually shared between both the hunter and the driver. The hunter's mothers and sisters are not allowed to eat the intestines of the turtle, so the stomach is reserved for them. A hunter will also try to save the lungs for his mother and her mother. As with the dugong, some of the most savoury portions are kept for the hunter's mother-in-law. The flesh of the sea turtle does not go as far as the dugong and quite often, by the time the meat and other organs are distributed, people will in reality only have had a small portion to eat.

With the advent of refrigerated storage, some Yanyuwa families have the facility to store large amounts of dugong and turtle meat, and while it has become common practice, there is among the older people especially a degree of disgruntlement, as it has led to some abuse of the complex rules regarding distribution of meat. This development which is resented amongst the older people, who once would have received their due portion:

Freezer, freezer, they freeze him that wa'ya [dugong and turtle] whole lot. That's the narnu-wardi [badness], not like old people- everybody got something, selfish bugger people this day, no idea, karawathawathamu [swear word]. I don't like it, I'll tell you that myself, that wa'ya [dugong and sea turtle] got a Law for everybody.

(Ida Ninganga, field diary 1987)

While there is a degree of truth in the above comment as people have come to regard refrigeration as commonplace, the flesh of the dugong and the sea turtle is still shared out, and the incidents of meat not being shared out are
becoming rare and rarer. As Johnson Timothy explains:

People used to talk no good that freezer, but it's good, always got some dugong or turtle to eat. I still give people meat, sometimes fresh meat, sometimes frozen, but they are still happy to get it, I can't keep all that meat, that's not the way, dugong and turtle meat got a rule, Law, you know, people got a right to have it.

(Johnson Timothy, field diary 1992)

Other issues in relation to the distribution of meat stem from the fact that some younger people have not learned the full scope of the Law associated with dugong and turtle, and can thus easily offend older people:

You know what, he brought up head [of a dugong] for me, that's not the way, no idea, true, old people, my father never been like that I can't take head, never even been cooked, yakayaka [insane] true. I been chuck that head to the dog, I never touch him, no Law, not allow.....

(Annie Karrakayn, field diary 1986)

Such incidents as mentioned above are relatively rare. It is usual for older people to guide the actions of younger hunters so that offence is not given and the Law and the Yanyuwangala of dugong and sea turtle hunting remain.

10.9 Gathering sea turtle eggs.

Sea turtle eggs are still gathered and there are certain procedures which must also be followed. The nests of sea turtles, na-munga, can be found nearly all year round on the islands. This is especially true of the eggs of the flatback turtle, which is the dominant nesting species on the islands. A few nests belonging to the green turtle and the hawksbill are also occasionally found. Old men and women with whom I first worked when I went to Borroloola were quite adept at denoting species from track size as well as egg and clutch size. In contemporary times, nearly all nests are wrongly attributed to the green turtle. This is because it is this turtle species that is
most often captured, so the assumption is made that this is the turtle that lays the eggs.

In past times, the collection of eggs was much more important than it is now. In contemporary times, the collection of eggs is mostly based upon chance, as opposed to a trip which is organised to gather eggs, although on very rare occasions this is still the case.

There are over the Pellew Islands certain small islands and beach areas on the larger islands which are noted for the large numbers of sea turtles which come ashore to lay eggs. Most of these beaches and islands are far to the north (see Map 14). Although the most southerly beaches known are Wurrumburramba on the northwest coast of South West Island and Jalabuwaja or Harney Island where a number of flatback turtles nest.

In the past, people - both men and women - would also take the opportunity to capture a number of sea turtles as they came ashore to lay their eggs. They would usually be cooked at the same location. This observation was made by Flinders when he was travelling around the islands:

Turtle tracks were observed on most beaches, but more especially on the smaller islands, where remains of turtle feasts were generally found.

(Flinders 1814:171)

It was much easier to get turtles in this manner than by harpooning them, although having said this, the well known turtle rookeries on the islands were surrounded with special restrictions. For example, the beaches on Watson Island, Liwayidbulungu, were governed in such a way that if people went there to gather eggs, that is all they could do; they could not get any turtles, fish, or plant foods. If, however, they went there and got a nesting turtle, they could take it as well as fish and plant foods, but they were not allowed to get eggs. Similar rules existed on some of the other islands, such as a few beaches on West Island. Usually such rules seem to be associated with places where the sea turtle is an important Spirit Ancestor. Other more general rules are that children cannot play on large rookery beaches by digging in the sand. This is said to be offensive to the sea turtles as the
children are said to be "mocking" their nesting behaviour. If children do dig and play on these beaches, it is said that they will get sores around the outside and inside of their mouths.

The two islands farthest north in the Pellews, Pearce Islet, Ngarninyirra, and Urquhart Islet, Wuydkumbul, are shrouded in very heavy rules of access. These two islands are said to be guarded by an actual Rainbow Serpent which can physically manifest itself (see Bradley 1992). In the past, and even today, only fully grown adult men may approach these islands. In the past, it was only the adult men who had been through sub- incision rituals, the secondary act of initiation. On these two islands enormous numbers of turtles come to nest each year, but none of them can be killed, nor can any other living thing such as birds, snakes or lizards, for to do so would cause the Rainbow Serpent to rise up, tip the islands over and send a flood of such calamitous proportions that it would flood the islands and the adjacent mainland.

On this island only turtle eggs can be gathered. In the past, the economic use of these islands by senior Yanyuwa men on behalf of their families was so great that they were divided into areas whereby each semi-moiety group had access to a certain portion of the islands. Today these islands are rarely visited, because they are far to the north and, generally speaking, contemporary Yanyuwa men are not as confident as their forefathers about negotiating their own presence on these islands. Other remote islands such as those on the northeast coast of Vanderlin island have not been visited for the gathering of turtle eggs for many, many years. Other beaches such as the large beach, Wilarrku which adjoins Red Bluff, Wulibirra, on the central east coast on North Island are of restricted access, and only senior jungkayi for the area may gather eggs there. This is due to the presence of a nearby burial area which contains hollow log burial coffins and sacred Kundawira stones. Now that the practice of hollow log burials has ceased, this beach area is visited only occasionally by men checking the area. Even on these occasions, it is rare in contemporary times for the senior jungkayi to gather the eggs because they say they are wary of the "old people". The spirits of the deceased are said to be more keenly felt in such a
place. *Jungkayi* for such areas will also say that because only they can eat the eggs, they feel too sorry for their other relatives, so it is better the eggs are just left alone. The same sentiments are expressed in relation to other places such as Liwarrangka on South West Island, Skull Island, Wurdalnguwa, Riyinbirr, "Little West Island", Ngawulunda and Riyinbinda near Cape Vanderlin and Rarangkilawunyarrar, Nungkalumulangka and Alulu at Three Hummock Point on the northeast coast of Vanderlin Island.

It would be wrong to presume that such taboo, "no-go" areas are a purposeful form of species resource management. Firstly, certain people are still allowed to gather the resources which are found in such areas; secondly, the reason the areas have become places of restricted access has more to do with spiritual beliefs, or because of the presence of objects which are highly sacred, and not because the Yanyuwa want some areas to be free from hunting. Ironically, however, since the cessation of hollow log burials, such places in some respects have become "safe havens". Places where log coffins were deposited and where they can still be seen, continue to be considered secret and sacred. The senior *jungkayi* who visit these places to check on the burial places have rarely been involved in the making of such coffins, and while confident in entering the area and checking the places, they are not so confident about accessing the resources, primarily because of a sense that such objects and the places where they are housed are really for the "old people". Restrictions on foraging are not just confined to the terrestrial environment; areas of sea, sea grass beds, sand bars and reefs are often involved, thus making the taking of fish, crabs, turtle or dugong in such an area an offence.

When people are travelling through the islands, those travelling in the boats, or walking along beaches will always keep their eyes open for signs of turtle nests, usually indicated from a distance by turtle tracks. If seen, they will be investigated. A long sharp stick is obtained, or sometimes a woman's digging stick, and this is thrust into the nest. The person doing this feels for a relative ease of entry into the sand or a sudden drop as the digging stick enters the actual nest chamber, or on pulling the stick out looks at it closely for signs of moisture which will have come from broken eggs. In past times,
special sticks were made for testing nests for the presence of eggs and were carried by men and women. They were called *na-wariwari* while the action of digging out a turtle nest is called *walmantharra* (see plate 27).

The nests are usually dug out by hand, and on reaching the nest the eggs are removed, usually all of them. If it is only a small family group travelling, the older people present will say that one nest will be enough unless they know they are going back into Borroloola where the eggs will be eaten by other relatives. Wasting turtle eggs is said to result in sea turtles becoming difficult to catch and poor in their fat content.

The eggs are carried in whatever is available - shirts, wind cheaters, buckets or a carrying bundle made by laying a “bed” of *marranyamarranyor wanki wanki* grass ( *Spinifex longifolius*) which grows on the islands. Onto the bed of this grass the eggs are placed. When they have all been placed onto the bed, more grass is placed on top and then the whole bundle is tied around with the sanddune vine *ma-murnda* (*Ipomoea pes-caprae ssp. brasiliensis*), thus making a relatively strong and safe bundle for carrying the eggs.

In the past, eggs of all stages of development were taken, and older people speak of eating eggs with half or nearly developed turtles in them. Special terms were given to the eggs, as are related in Chapter 8. Before the advent of metal receptacles suitable for boiling, the eggs were cooked using a method known as *rambijanjii*. This method is also used for shellfish and small school fish. An area of sand is cleared and onto this are placed many small twigs and a few sizable sticks. They are set alight, and when burnt down to hot coals, some small mangrove branches or tea tree branches are placed over the coals. The turtle eggs are then placed on this and then they are covered with more leafy foliage and then paperbark and sand covers all of this. They are left from 30 to 60 minutes. The most common method used by contemporary Yanyuwa is to boil them for 15 to 30 minutes, make a small split in the shell, sprinkle with salt, and then eat them. Some older people will eat the eggs raw. In the past, as with dugong meat, there was a proscribed way of eating turtle eggs. The person was required to sit cross legged in front of the eggs he wished to consume, and pick up the eggs with both hands. It was considered bad manners to eat the eggs when they were
picked up from the side.

10.10 Concluding comments

Throughout the discussions centred on hunting and dugong, I have made remarks about the importance of dugong and sea turtle meat. Within the mythological charter of the Dugong Hunter Spirit Ancestors, the meat was important and desired by those people who would not be able to hunt it. The meat became a powerful social and political symbol. The meat of the dugong and the sea turtle is called wurrama, or "having authority", in the same way that a ceremony has authority. It is this quite abstract quality alone which I believe will cause people to come and partake or participate in the meat or the hunting, apart from any desire for the meat. While it may be argued that people will come wherever meat is present, there are also other factors at work. Partly it is that the butchering, cooking, distribution and eating of these creatures reaffirms the past activities of the "old people". There is, in a sense, something which is undefinable about the relationship; it was always like this, and, hopefully, it will continue to be as such. Even such places as a dugong hunter's camp at Borroloola, in a near-urban centre, becomes a modern day re-creation of camps on the islands and the coast, where for a short while, amongst the stresses of contemporary living, the talk centres on dugong and sea turtle, on their Law, on their being. The talk is in Yanyuwa, knowledge is passed on, skills are observed and learned, the knowledge and names of people of past times are brought forward and people enjoy each other's company by the sharing of a powerful symbol of Yanyuwa identity. Such contemporary gatherings are also a point whereby the social systems associated with human relations and obligations can be reproduced easily, as the differences in status between people become obvious. Thus, the fully recognised maranja is present, as are those he may be training. People, particularly the young and the older hunters, in such situations are separated through generation and by power. There is also the sense whereby the knowledgeable women have power over those younger women who are learning about dugong and sea turtle, and who are being taught the processes of cooking and distribution, and with this, social obligations.
The presence of the dugong or the sea turtle also, for that moment, momentarily binds all people together, because the symbolic power of the sea creature is that it links all people involved to the past, present and, hopefully, the future.

The Yanyuwa can articulate many of these practices that still exist in relation to the dugong and the sea turtle, stating that it is the Law and therefore it must be followed. It could perhaps be possible to explain them either in spiritual or rational terms but THIS would ultimately be pure conjecture. It is enough for the Yanyuwa that such practices are prescribed by Law.

There are indigenous practices which are directly related to the sustaining of the dugong and sea turtle populations. They are processes of negotiation by which the Yanyuwa seek to maintain an ecological order as well as a finely balanced spiritual order; the Yanyuwa believe it is predation as opposed to avoidance of hunting by which the sea turtle and dugong are sustained.

The sea turtle and the dugong are accorded a great deal of respect, before, during and after hunting. Any lack of respect to these beasts even in death will have an impact upon the Yanyuwa environment. There are other reasons for the respect. One is that all Yanyuwa individuals can relate to the dugong and the sea turtle as relatives; they are often addressed as kin and are worthy of respect.

For the Yanyuwa, dugong and sea turtle are not just kin who happen to swim in the sea and eat sea grass; there is something more fundamentally important than this. The Laws of the hunt, the way they are killed and butchered, with all the minute rules, names and regulations, are a way of creating an atmosphere where people come to realise that they are not dealing with a helpless unprotected object, with an animate automatic product of biological evolution, but rather that the dugong and the sea turtle are creatures with living souls which the Yanyuwa can relate to and that they are ultimately worthy of profound respect. However, because the activity is in the Yanyuwa way of things relatively commonplace, there is a sense where the rituals, practices and procedures associated with dugong and sea turtle
hunting and the Yanyuwa relationship to these creatures appears, at times, to be an ongoing balancing between commonality and timelessness.
Chapter 11

Yanyuwa Hunting Dynamics: Past and Present

They departed, eastwards;
Carrying two harpoons;
They returned - with neither dugong or sea turtle.

(Eileen McDinny, Dinah Norman, Jemima Miller)

11.1 Introduction

The last chapters have explored the Yanyuwa view of themselves and dugong and the sea turtle, as well as the spiritual and historical factors which have influenced the way in which they hunt, and the material culture items used while hunting. Discussions have also centred on the fact that certain activities are no longer performed in relation to the hunting of these marine creatures, and in relation to the training of young hunters. Comment has been made on some of the reasons why these activities may have ceased. Generally speaking, however, it could be said that the influence of what we may term “tradition” is strong. Continuity with tradition or Law is seen to be important.

The past is important as a way by which the present undertaking of this activity is still gauged. Areas of the river delta systems, coastline and islands are still embedded within Yanyuwa memory as being important dugong hunter camping areas, and continuity with the past is maintained by the continued use of at least some of these places (Map17).

This chapter seeks to explore the the Yanyuwa perception of dugong and sea turtle hunting, both from the past and the present, and to document what changes have occurred within the social fabric of the Yanyuwa community in relation to the activities of hunting dugong and sea turtle. In doing so, avenues are opened whereby such factors as the social impacts of material culture change can be looked at in relation to the present day Yanyuwa community. Take numbers can be discussed as well as patterns of hunting in regard to seasons and favoured hunting areas, and how Yanyuwa people react when such
Map 17. Localities Used As Base Camps
By Yanyuwa Hunters.

- = Past Use
O = Past and contemporary use

1. Mawuli
2. Wurtuwayi
3. Walangkura
4. Mamadjamummaru (Crocodyl Point)
5. Ludara
6. Yatharla
7. Limiymyila (Black Craggy Island)
8. Mawandumbarndar1
9. Wurrumburamba
10. Wathangka
11. Ngarrhaha
12. Anthawara
13. Yungkurra (Jensen Point)
14. Winanda
15. Yukuyi (Clarkson Point)
16. Maiwarrinthala
17. Marrauna (Manangoora)
18. Lurruwayi
19. Jarrika (Sharker Point)
20. Wurunthu
21. Jawurma (The Landing)
22. Luuka (Batten Point)
23. Wunyala
24. Lhuhundala
25. Yaren
26. Abalawiyi
27. Yemanda
28. Wurrwinkarra
29. Rabuntru (McArthur Mouth)
30. Manangoora
factors are deemed to be of interest to the outside western scientific world, or when outside influences such as tourists, mines or professional fishermen impact upon the sea grass beds and dugong and sea turtle populations.

The southwest Gulf of Carpentaria has and is undergoing rapid, dramatic and widespread change, and the question will be raised as to whether this has impacted upon the number of skilful hunters of dugong and sea turtle. It is an important question, as it relates to the number of animals that are being hunted and how this may relate to any proposals to establish a plan of ecological management over the sea and islands.

This chapter is an exploration of Yanyuwa dugong and sea turtle hunting and will involve the documentation of kill rates over the last decade and past kill rates which have varied over time. This will involve the extrapolation of information from present kill rates into the past. Such an undertaking involves reviewing population changes based on genealogies, historical data on settlement patterns and population movements such as were associated with the pastoral industry, government welfare and education services. Other factors such as the changing pattern of land use in the Gulf of Carpentaria, oral testimony and the use of butchering sites are all important aids in such an analysis.

Within the literature many models are presented relating to the importance of the predator-prey relationship in the natural world. Research by Slobodkin (1961), Schaller (1967, 1972) and Mech (1970) and Begon (1990) offer just a few. The relationship between the predator and prey concerns issues associated with the culling of sick, wounded or unhealthy individuals, and thus the prey population and the predator adjust and adapt in response to the persistent selection pressures and their survival needs. However, the relationship between man and his prey is a cultural one which can incorporate ideas of ecological balance and spirituality. The "traditional" hunter such as the Yanyuwa also explores the subjective, or internal experiences involved. The hunter attempts, within the context of spiritual values and practices of culture, to come to terms psychologically with the impact his killing, cooking and eating may have on the total environment.

It is rare that a human hunter will wish to hunt an animal that is not
healthy, or to use the Yanyuwa idiom "not fat". The relationship is therefore
different, in that human hunters pursue quarry that is healthy and will shun
any creature that is perceived to be ill or in some other way exhibiting be-
\2\2haviour which is considered abnormal (see also Smith 1987 and Johannes
and MacFarlane 1991 for similar discussions).

While biologists have studied in depth the relationship between the
predator and the prey in the natural world, the same cannot be said for the
study of indigenous or "tribal" hunters and their impact upon the prey
species. While much literature exists dealing with the way people hunt and
why they hunt, little analysis may be found which highlights the trends in
take numbers, for example; and what does exist relies on rather limited
baseline data. In more recent years there have been some exceptions with
studies by Freeman (1976, 1986) in relation to the Inuit and caribou ex-
\2\2ploitation, Meehan (1975,1982) who provides a detailed account of shell
\2\2fish gathering by the Anbarra of north east Arnhem Land, Nietschmann
(1987) who studied sea turtle hunting amongst the Miskito of Nicaragua,
Healey (1986) who studied the predation rate of the bird of paradise in the
highlands of New Guinea and Smith (1987) who studied dugong and sea turtle
predation amongst two indigenous communities on the east coast of the Cape
York Peninsula. My own research amongst the Yanyuwa has also had to rely
on a shallow database of information in relation to species predation, but I
also provide figures for the previous decade which gives a good indication of
present kill rates.

11.2 An overview of past hunting patterns

"We would travel, from Manangoora to Bing Bong, all the way, just
hunting dugong" (Annie Karrakayn)

There is a risk, in trying to reconstruct the past, of freezing the re-
\2\2construction forever as the only truth, and thus it becomes the exclusive
view of the past, when in reality many other views are possible. However, it
is important to attempt one potential reconstruction based upon information
given by the Yanyuwa themselves.

Mussolini Harvey offers one summary of the way people moved around the islands and coastal regions when he was a child. This narrative is similar in many ways to the way other older Yanyuwa people speak when discussing their childhood on the islands. While it is brief and open to many questions, he does raise a number of important factors which will be discussed in this chapter.

They would move right around South West Island, through it, alright maybe two or three times then they would say, "Let's go to Centre Island", but maybe some would go to West Island, and go two or three times around that one. There would be little trips, little trips in between to Manangoora, Kangaroo Island and Borroloola. But they would always go back to their own place, their country. Alright, then in the early dry time everyone would gather up at Bing Bong and at Yungkurra (Jensen Point on Centre Island). All the families would be there hunting dugong, then that south wind would come up, too rough everybody would go then go where they wanted to. All the way like that them old people; my time too.

(Mussolini Harvey field notes, 1993)

It is easy to imagine people moving around the islands, accessing the marine resources of the beaches and fringing mangrove forests, gathering shellfish, crabs, stingrays and fish, but Mussolini uses a very important word, which is "through". While the beaches were important for camping and provided ready access to important maritime food sources, people, predominantly women, did travel to the interior parts of the islands, gathering vegetable foods such as yams, cabbage palm pith, goannas, wild honey and goannas, which were important supplements to the diet.

Eventoday, it is the women who are more knowledgeable about the interior parts of the islands, and while the men have trouble remembering place names in these parts of the islands and important food resource localities, it is not so with the women. I highlight these factors because it is easy to view the interior of the islands as having little worth, but for the Yanyuwa, plentiful food was to be found there. This has also been my own ob
servation on the many trips I have made to the islands. One of the biggest changes, however, that all people have made in relation to present hunting off the islands is that men very rarely hunt fish with fishing spears, preferring to spend the greater part of their time hunting dugong and sea turtle, while fishing is left to women and children using hand lines. One of the dominant reasons for this is that a great many of the trips to the islands are of limited time, and there is a certain degree of pressure to obtain turtle or dugong so that meat can be taken back to the community. It is only when people are staying on the islands for any length of time that men will go and hunt fish using the pronged fishing spears.

The oral traditions of the Yanyuwa speak of large groups of people moving over the islands, of many canoes travelling the islands hunting dugong and sea turtle, and this indeed may have been fact. But as with trying to ask how many dugong there once were in the sea, ascertaining the truth of such enquiries is fraught with difficulty. So is the question as to how many dugong or turtle the Yanyuwa once hunted. Once again the western writings in this matter are silent; Flinders (1814) mentions turtle feasts on the islands, Spencer (1901) tells of dugong and sea turtle being brought up to Borroloola, as does Harney (1946, 1958). Questions given to older Yanyuwa men concerning take numbers were answered in a style that was meant to impress me with the skill and daring of the past generations of Yanyuwa hunters added to this was a high degree of nostalgia and the need to prove respectability by showing that they were indeed good hunters. The following is a good example:

We were there on the beaches, on the beaches on the islands which are to the north, we were there on the islands eating dugong and sea turtle, we were there eating dugong and sea turtle, that is all we were doing, we were merely there eating meat of the dugong and the sea turtle.

There were many of us there, many men, many men who were dugong hunters of excellence, we were there harpooning sea turtles and dugong in canoes we were there harpooning dugong and sea turtle. Then we would return to the mainland and we carried with us many dugong and many sea turtles, we carried them in our canoes to the
mainland, we were there carrying many dugong and sea turtle for others to eat, those others who desired the meat.

(Tommy Peter Jaalarri, field diary 1984)

The reality is that such a quote tells us nothing about take numbers. The above text was told in the easy going relaxed style of informal Yanyuwa. It is an account that is one person's reconstruction of events that took place in the speaker's youth in the early 1920's. It is in some ways a utopian view of the past constructed by an old man who can no longer hunt and is permanently based within an urban environment. It is a narration which to demonstrate the prowess of Yanyuwa hunters. Other enquiries into take numbers are just as futile. Take, for example, the following responses to the question, "How many dugong or turtle do you reckon the old people killed each year?"

Oh! Too many, just go and get one, never miss, just too many I can't give you a number. (Tommy Nawurrungu, field dairy1986)

Hundreds I reckon, yeh hundreds, turtle and dugong; they were always out there doing it, not like us today we just go sometimes. Those old people they got hundreds but a lot of dugong in them days, not like today.

(Mussolini Harvey, field diary1994)

The above responses were fairly standard responses from older people - some older people even suggested that thousands were killed! Other researchers such as Smith 1987 and Marsh pers. comm. 1996, have also found similar comments to be common in their field work amongst people who have a tradition of dugong hunting.

Johnson Timothy gave a much different response, to the question of dugong numbers, which reflects the impact that seasonal change had on the way people hunted and moved over the sea.

Early dry season we would all gather up at Yungkurra, sometimes Bing Bong- find out first where the big herds were, then we would go and
everyone would gather up and hunt dugong, we would hunt many dugong and sea turtle too...I can’t tell you how many, I can’t give you a number but many dugong and turtle were harpooned, we went along like that until that south wind would blow, it gets hard to hunt then, sometimes we would go out at night when it was calm, but the water gets dirty then. Alright we would leave Yungkurra and all the families would travel their own way, go to their own country; like my father would go to his country Vanderlin, some would go to Manangoora, Wulkuwulku (on Kangaroo Island), just family groups, didn’t hunt much turtle or dugong then, too rough when that wind was blowing, sometime we would try, might get one, but mostly we had fish and the women would get goanna, yams and sugar bag (wild honey) all that kind of thing, the men would have a rest, go for kangaroo. Another thing was (fresh) water at Yungkurra and Bing Bong people would make that water go down quickly, but when just family travelling the water would be alright. When that south winds settles down we would hunt again, lot of turtle then, because they were fat, and a small family couldn’t eat all a dugong, so save the dugong for a lot of people. Alright build-up time go north, up along Muluwa (Cape Vanderlin) way, Mabayn (north west West Island) get the turtle egg then, get some turtles too if we feel like it, but mostly go for egg, that’s the way it when I was a kid, that’s the kind of life I knew, we still here doing it, follow that season, looking at the flower - tell us when the dugong fat, when the turtle fat we know what to hunt. (Johnson Timothy, field diary 1994)

Even though Johnson could not give an accurate number to the number of dugong or turtle that may have been hunted, it may be surmised that the number might have been quite high. Living on the islands or coast fulltime, a large number of able bodied hunters and families to feed would put a fair degree of pressure on valuable food sources such as dugong, sea turtle and also fresh water. 

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1 By reconstructing genealogies of people involved in this period, and gleaning additional information from various people’s accounts, and the use of some Welfare Department records it is possible to estimate that perhaps between 100 to 200 men, women and children could have camped at the Yungkurra and Bing Bong localities at their peak.
Today more dugong and turtle are taken when people are camping close by to the sea grass beds, of which more will be said below.

Johnson's comments are important as he puts the hunting of dugong and sea turtle into valuable perspective in terms of a seasonal cycle of events, some of which still influence Yanyuwa hunters today. The discussion of the strong southerly, and southeasterly winds is still an important factor in deciding whether people will hunt.

In the past people were fairly fluid in their movements, travelling to places on the mainland or up the river systems. There were any number of reasons, such as visiting relatives and taking marine foods such as dugong and sea turtle meat to them, attending ceremonies, or going to the mainland to access other favoured food resources such as the fruit of the cycad palm at Manangoora, or perhaps to access the drying lagoons on the savannah grasslands in the dry season, to hunt for long necked turtles or the larger species of goanna, which are found on the mainland, but not on the islands. In contemporary times when family groups are on the islands, women will often take a boat and head back upstream to hunt over the savannah grasslands, or camps will be made on the plains and men will travel down to the sea, maybe camping one or two days and then return with their catch. It is possible, then, to begin to build up a picture of much movement.

In terms of a historical reconstruction of hunting dugong and sea turtle, however, two important points raised by Mussolini are the mention of Bing Bong and Yungkurra (Jensen Point) on Centre Island. Old people with whom I worked in the 1980's and the present "old people" have consistently spoken of social networks which existed between the coast, islands and the mainland. They describe large movements of dugong and sea turtle hunters with their families in their canoes, gathering at the above mentioned localities during the early dry season (March and April), when the last of the heavy rains have ceased, the semi-permanent wells are full, and the fresh water springs are running abundantly and the seas are, for the greater period of time, calm, which allows for lengthy periods of time when hunting could take place. It is the time before the strong southeasterly winds of the mid dry season (May to July). These gatherings occurred for economic reasons. It is
rare that people speak of large ceremonies happening at this time; rather, it was for dugong that people gathered together. 2

Yanyuwa people describe the area of Bing Bong, particularly the localities known as Mawuli and Wurruwiji, and the area of Yungkurra on Centre Island as being “capital places, like Darwin or Sydney”- areas where people came from many places to reside, and to hunt dugong and sea turtle, sharing in the plentiful meat and other marine resources which are abundant and rich in the early dry season (see also Baker 1989a for his discussion on "big places"). Such localities are called in Yanyuwa wirriwangkuma; it is a complex word with no single equivalent word in English. It conveys the notion of a place where people are free to gather and reside, and for the time of that gathering they are free to use the resources of that place. It is not a common word, and one which is applied only to a small number of localities, all of them on or near the coast and the islands. The term seems to be used for those places which are well known for their accessibility to sea grass beds and dugong and sea turtle. Annie Karrakany describes the word using Bing Bong and Yungkurra as reference points.

Those two places, Bing Bong and Yungkurra on Centre Island, that’s the two big places for people to gather to hunt; hunt dugong and sea turtle. Alright, after the wet season, all the families would gather together; We Yanyuwa would come from everywhere, from Borroloola, Manangoora, Kangaroo Island, and Mara people would come in from the west from Limmen Bight, Wunubarri (Mt.Young) even some Garawa people would come from Rocky (on the Foesche) and sometimes a few Gudanji people; all come in, all the families, come in without restrictions, come for the dugong and sea turtle....... that’s the wirriwangkuma country, it is for everybody, like mother’s mother’s family , mother’s father’s family, father’s mother’s family and father’s father’s family

2 There are exceptions; some circumcision and Kundawira ceremonies were performed at on Centre Island, and a-Kunabibi and a-Milkathatha ceremonies were performed on South West Island.
all the family were free, free to come in, it was the dugong meat that used to cause them to gather together.

(Annie Karrakayn, field diary 1993)

Here Annie Karrakayn makes a number of important points. Firstly, she indicates that it was not the Yanyuwa alone who gathered at these places, although they most likely were the majority. Secondly, her comments highlight the social meaning of the term *wirrmangkuma*, as she names the four primary lines of descent which comprise the Yanyuwa kinship and semi-moiety system as a way of describing how all people could come to the locality. Thirdly, she emphasises that the people could come in “free”, without restrictions, that is, there were no ritual restrictions as are to be found when people come into a place where ceremonies are to be held. The last comment by Annie is interesting when she says that it was the dugong meat that attracted people to the localities. What is being emphasised is that people will come to a place where there is abundant dugong meat. It is meat par excellence and eagerly sought. People will speak of such times when there was “dugong meat everyday”, or where “one never starved for dugong meat”.

Today when the southerly and southeasterly winds blow, men will stop hunting dugong and sea turtle, or attempt very early morning hunts, or, until the late 1980's, they would occasionally hunt at night. Island beach and coastal camps may be moved onto suitable inland areas, weekend camps on the islands will stop, and people will establish what they call their dry season camps along the river systems and at various large fresh water lagoons on the savannah grasslands. The emphasis on travelling to the sea by the men to get dugong or sea turtle drops, and more emphasis is placed on kangaroos, wallabies and fish by the men; and the women become first and foremost the providers and preparers of store-bought foods and the gatherers of long necked turtles, goanna and shellfish (see also Meehan 1982). An illustration of such a camp is provided below and provides an interesting glimpse into issues which affect present day hunters.

In June 1985, while camped at a locality called Wudalwanga, which is an extensive savannah area one kilometre upstream from the junction of the
McArthur and Carrington Channels, men went down to the sea, five days running, over a period of one week - a round trip each time of about 50 kilometres to the McArthur River mouth and back. This figure excludes the journey on the sea. On all five days they returned without any dugong or turtle. The sea was too dirty and too rough. I had estimated that each trip to the sea had cost at least $60.00, which came to a total figure of $300. Most of the fuel had been booked down at the local stores back at Borroloola. Thus, today, not only the weather, but also financial considerations have to be taken into account. By the end of the first week, there was no fuel left to run the boat, and the only car was being used sparingly to get water and take the women hunting, as enough fuel had to be conserved to get people back to Borroloola some forty kilometres away. Such scenes as described above are today commonplace, and the financial factor was one which in past times, when dugout canoes were the only form of transport, was virtually non-existent.

During the months of May, June and July hunting was, and still is, severely influenced by the wind patterns. Old people speak of being caught in strong winds in dugout canoes, and of the effort involved in getting back to camp under paddle and sail. Often people do not often bother to attempt the journey down the river to the sea knowing that winds and a dirty sea will hamper hunting; however, if people are camped on the islands, they are more likely to attempt hunting in the very early morning or in the evening or night if the tidal patterns are correct. I have spent some very uncomfortable times in boats during this period of strong easterly, south-easterly winds and have seen the futility of trying to hunt from a boat that is ploughing through heavy chop and presents an unstable platform from which to search the sea or attempt to harpoon a creature, a situation which is compounded by minimal visibility through the water.

In past times after the southerly winds had ceased, the emphasis moved from dugong to sea turtle. Johnson Timothy puts this down to a number factors: firstly, due to the drying winds of the previous months, no reserves of large bodies of fresh water were left on the coastal margins of the islands where large groups of people could gather; furthermore at this time, sea turtles are considered fat.
Thus, in the later part of the dry season, sea turtle are favoured because they are fat; they are ready for mating, and many females are captured which contain unlaid eggs, or ripe egg follicles which are a much desired delicacy. It is at this time that the sea becomes full of the wurdiyi or porpita with their bright purple filaments, which the Yanyuwa say all turtles eat prior to mating and egg laying as it makes them very fat. Today people will often seek out sea turtles over dugong during this period because of fat and egg content, although dugong, if seen, will be hunted. At its most basic, hunting for dugong or sea turtle will always be somewhat opportunistic, and a hunter takes what presents itself to be hunted. But there are amongst the Yanyuwa certain degrees of preference either by the hunter or by the hunter acting on the suggestion of an older hunter or favoured relative, and they will travel to the sea with a very particular quarry in mind. Generally speaking, people who really want sea turtle to eat will travel to the western side of South West Island, as this is an area known for its number of sea turtle. Those who want dugong will go towards the area of Bing Bong, the McArthur River mouth, Dugong Creek and Crooked River mouth (see Map 13). The reality is that both species are likely to be encountered in various numbers, but there are areas better known for a particular species. In my own experience the abovementioned locations are generally correct in relation to desired target species.

In the 1930's and early 1940's, relatively large numbers of Yanyuwa people were still moving around the islands, accessing all of the available sea grass beds and also the sea turtle rookery sites. From the 1950's onwards, this began to change rapidly, until today only small areas of the available sea grass beds are constantly hunted over, and the gathering of sea turtle eggs or sea turtle actually in the process of nesting, as a seasonal event, is now rare, although a number of nests each year will be opened and the eggs taken. But these are on the rookeries on islands which lie closest to the coast line, such as Black Craggy Islet and the central east coast of West Island.
11.3 Dugong and sea turtle exploitation sites

In the minds of the Yanyuwa such places as Mawuli and Wurruwiji, on the present day Bing Bong area, and Yungkurra on Centre Island are still important places. While they are no longer places where people gather in large numbers for extended periods of time, the places are still talked of and visited on day and overnight hunting trips, and dugong and sea turtle are still cooked there. There are many other places over the islands and on the coastal areas which were important base camps for the hunting of dugong and sea turtle. Map 17 shows localities which were once utilised by the Yanyuwa as base camps and those which are still frequently used. The older camps located on the salt flats found amongst the mangroves of the McArthur River delta are marked by large mounds of kurruyurru (Andara species) shells. Places such as Wurruwiji and Mawuli on the Bing Bong coast show little sign of their former importance due to the lowlying nature of the country. It is easily inundated by large tides created by cyclonic activity, and in recent times the construction of the barge facilities for the mine have altered the landscape in a profound manner. The same can be said for a number of important beach camps on the islands. However, the locality of Yungkurra on Centre Island and a number of other sites on the islands still reveal use of sites and their association with the hunting, butchering and cooking and even eating of dugong.

The sites which still reveal evidence of having been exploitation sites share in common such things as charcoal, bone fragments, stones which show evidence of having been affected by heat, depressions in the ground or sand which contains bone fragments. Such deposits may also reveal evidence of the number of people at these sites, their relationship to each other and the

3 Meehan discusses the importance of areas chosen by hunters and gatherers for resting and or cooking of prey. While her research is based upon coastal "dinnertime camps", the information is of relevance to the Yanyuwa and their coastal occupation of dinner sites. Importantly, she states that "...camps are part of a complex foraging strategy, not an isolated random event" (1977:171).
source from which the meat was obtained. It is worth noting work undertaken by Peterson (1971: 238-48) where he discusses the problems inherent in analysing sites in the hope of drawing reliable ethnographic information. In relation to the sites being discussed below, only one of them has had no recent recorded human use.

Minnegal (1984b) identifies four types of dugong butchering sites in Queensland's Princess Charlotte Bay region. Her site categories have direct relevance to the Yanyuwa.

1. Initial butchering sites - where dugong were removed from the water and cut into a number of large segments to facilitate transport back to the camp.

2. Primary, and primarily, dugong consumption sites - where large parcels of dugong meat were taken to be further butchered, cooked and consumed.

3. Base Camps - where individuals took any remnants of dugong meat left over from the initial feasts. (Minnegal 1984b: 15)

Maps 18, 19, 20 and 21 illustrate the categories which Minnegal (1984a and b) discusses. All of these sites, with the exception of that in Map 19, are still used, or have been used in comparatively recent times, by the Yanyuwa as base camps for the exploitation of dugong and sea turtle and the cooking and distribution of meat. Each diagram is accompanied by a description of the site elements and a description of the area given by Yanyuwa dugong hunters.

The Yungkurra site (Map 18) has already been mentioned above, and up until the mid 1980's it was still a favoured locality for a basecamp from which to access the nearby sea grass beds. Briefly, the primary reason the site has declined in importance has been because of the the death of a large number of senior men, in the 1980's, who were active dugong hunters and had constantly used the site since they were young men. Contemporary Yanyuwa hunters are still reluctant to use the site, saying that the place is "too sad" and, that there are "too many memories".

A unique feature of the site is a cleared "causeway" some six metres in length. This feature seems to be of great age and was constructed by clear
The Yungkura site. a. Area of foredune littered with charcoal, stones used in ground ovens, and bone fragments. b. 'Causeway' - area cleared of stone to facilitate the landing and butchering of dugong and sea-turtle.
ing a pathway through the mangroves of the intertidal zone, and then further clearing this area and that above the level of the high tide down to bedrock by removing stones and rocks, which were thrown to either side. The end result is an obvious cleared pathway or causeway which made the processes of rolling a dugong or dragging a sea turtle to the butchering or cooking site much easier. The cleared area was also used for the beaching of dugout canoes and aluminium dinghies, as the rocky nature of the area can make safe mooring difficult, especially if the sea is rough. The causeway also provides ease of access to the sea for people when washing the offal removed from the creatures prior to cooking.

The foredune area at the end of the causeway is littered with bone fragments of turtle and dugong as well as with cooking stones and charcoal from the ground ovens, used during the cooking process. Depressions can still be seen in a number of areas which indicated older ground ovens and heavy concentrations of charcoal and bone fragments can be found mixed with the sand. As mentioned above, no cooking or butchering has taken place at the site in recent years, as sea turtles are loaded directly into boats for the return journey to Borroloola, and dugong are usually butchered in the vicinity of the McArthur River mouth. A senior deceased land owner associated with the Yungkurra area, Tim Rakawurlma, made the following comment in relation to the site:

The old people long before me threw the stones and the south, and in doing so they made a road. The road is for dugong and sea turtle and maybe when the wind was strong and the waves big it was for canoes. I cut dugong up at that place as did my father and my sons, they still use that place. Perhaps they were really clever those old people to do such a thing, would you think that? (Tim Rakawurlma, field notes 1984)

A similar causeway such as the one found at Yungkurra on Centre Island can be found at Mawarndarlnbarndarl on the northwest coast of South West Island. At this site the causeway has been cleared through quite a thick belt of mangroves and all the stones have been cleared off the exposed mud
and sand at low tide. This site also has access to a foredune area which shows evidence of having been in continual use as a place at which dugong and sea turtle have been butchered and cooked. This site on South West Island is still in constant use as a place for cooking turtle or butchering dugong before returning upstream to Borroloola, and is still used as a camping place for longer periods of time.

Rumanguwa (map 19) is located on a hillside on North Island about one kilometre from the coast. The site is some distance from any of the major areas where dugong and sea turtle are found. The site consists of a semi-permanent fresh water lagoon, the northwestern corner of which has a large and relatively bare sand ridge upon which evidence of past occupation can be found. On the northeastern end of the ridge, the partial skeletal remains of a dugong were found after heavy rain; Cyclone Kathy, had washed the area bare of grass and surface sand in 1984. The skeletal remains consisted of a head, a shoulder and some ribs. Also in evidence were charcoal and cooking stones. Johnson Timothy, a senior land owner for the island, was quite pensive about the site and offered the following reconstruction of it.

This might be where my old grandfather Lithi camped, he was boss for this country. I reckon just him and his family were here; you see there is only a little bit of dugong bone here. This dugong was killed somewhere else and the meat was given to the family, all the water around this country is too deep to hunt dugong. Old Lithi must have been given the head, shoulder and a few ribs, just enough for his mob. It was a long way to carry the meat but the old people used to use big string bags, *a-birndawarra*, to carry that meat, hanging on poles or on their heads...

This place makes me think hard for the old people. That grindstone there they must have ground up *ma-kurdirdi*, pandanus nuts, or smashed up dugong meat to make it soft for old people or young children. See those rib bones [b3] over in that little cave maybe a dog or kid went away by himself to eat. Old people they make me think.

(Johnson Timothy field diary 1984)

Much of Johnson's speculation can be supported. The site is some 25 to
Map 19

The Rumannguwa site: a: Grindstone. b: Dugong skull, shoulder blade, ribs. b': Ribs and rib fragments. b': Ribs. c: Ground oven, cooking stones and charcoal. c': Charcoal.
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30 kilometres away from the nearest areas where dugong can be found in large numbers and can be successfully hunted (see Map 13). It is possible that the old people responsible for leaving the remains shared in a dugong capture elsewhere and then took what meat they could carry back with them. The use of large string bags for the carrying of meat is quite often mentioned by the Yanyuwa, and today, large plastic garbage bags, hessian bags and plastic boxes are used for the same purpose. The use of a grindstone to pound cooked dugong meat would appear to have been a common practice, as it is often spoken of by older people. The dugong meat was overcooked so it was quite dry. It was then pounded with a grindstone to a mush-like consistency and mixed with water to form a “broth”. It was especially made for children who were just beginning to take solids or older people with severe dental damage or tooth loss.

The site of Nganthaa (Map 20) is still considered to be a favoured base camp from which to hunt dugong and sea turtle. This site is in very close proximity to the major sea grass beds around the McArthur River delta. The site described here was recorded in 1980 after a fire cleared the area of undergrowth, but it was destroyed by the high tides caused by Cyclone Kathy. The site is still used, but it is very rare for any cooking to take place there as the meat is usually loaded into boats and taken back to Borroloola, or to other centres. Rather, this site is used as an overnight camping place so that hunters can begin hunting early in the morning. The site as it was found in 1980 was described in the following way:

This camp here, these dugong bones belong to the camp of my father, really my father’s brother, old Babawurra. We camped here in the early cold season. My father he harpooned the dugong and cut it up on the reef at low tide, he was “old people” they didn’t worry about sharks. We cooked that dugong here and stayed here for a while. Later we got a turtle and a dugong and we took them back to Borroloola, that sea turtle went back alive and the dugong meat we cooked really well and some we salted. That ground oven over there we used the same one all the time when we campe here. Those rabarr (stones used in cooking) are probably from the old people. That first casuarina tree (b2), that’s where
Map 20

The Ngathaa site. a: Ground oven, cooking stones and charcoal. b': Numerous rib fragments. b': Skull and shoulder blade. b': Rib-bones, lumbar vertebrae. b': Jaw, shoulder blade, humerus. b': Rib-bones, some fragments of vertebrae.
old Babawurra camped with his wife, that's why he had head and shoulder part, that other tree (b3) only ribs and some lubala (part of backbone without ribs) that was where Billy and Graham camped, they were only single boys then. That other camp (b4), that was where my aunty was camping, sister for that old man, that's why no rib-bone is there and I camped here at this end tree (b5) with my wife and Douglas and his wife. We were paddlers we got tail and ribs. You see those broken up ribs in the ground oven, that's the Law they go in there, some of that other bone we burnt on our own fire.

(Don Miller, field diary 1980)

The site of Walangkurra (Map 21) is the area around the boat ramp at Mule Creek on Bing Bong Station. It is one of the nearest mainland sites to the sea, and, more importantly, is very close to the major seagrass beds lying to the south, east and west of West Island. This site was documented one day after people who had been camped there for a week had left to return to Borroloola in 1985. The scattered dugong bones, half burnt and charred in the campfires shows a continual belief in the practice of burning unwanted and unusable remains from dugong and turtle kills, in order that the balance of living creatures, the spirit world and humans continues to be harmonious. The position of the bones also indicates residence patterns and kinship ties and reflects the continued importance placed on the proper distribution of meat according to kinship rules. For example, camp (c6) had been occupied by a senior jungkayi for the dugong, hence the presence of the head; the head is considered the most sacred part of any animal. The hunter’s sister’s camp (c1), reflects the Law under which the sisters of the hunter are not permitted to eat the meat from the rib bones of the dugong. Four ground ovens are present in the area, (b1) was used for the cooking of two turtles, which had been captured early in the week, and contained the charred remains of the shells, head and flippers; (b3) represents a smaller ground oven made by a group of women, who had filleted the meat from the shoulder blades of the sea turtle and after its initial cooking, then cooked it again with some of the intestines. The ground oven (b2) was where the dugong had been cooked. The oven contained a large number of ribs, as people had opened the oven towards sundown.
Map 21 The Walangkurra site, on the Mule Creek - Bing Bong Pastoral Lease. a: Butchering area for dugong and sea-turtle. b1: Ground oven for sea-turtle containing burnt up shell and flippers. b2: Ground oven for dugong containing rib-bones and ground oven stones. b3: Secondary ground oven for sea-turtle meat; also contains pelvic bones of the sea-turtle. c1: Hunter's sister's camp; shoulder blades and humerus. c2: Hunter's mother's camp; jaw bone and lumbar vertebrae. c3: Boat driver's camp; rib-bones and small vertebrae from tail. c4: Hunter's camp; rib-bones and lumbar vertebrae. c5: Hunter's cousin's camp; jungsayi for dugong; head and rib-bones.
and had gathered around it talking and eating as the meat was distributed. Another smaller ground oven was located under the shade of the tree at (c6); it was here that the head of the dugong was cooked.

The final site (Map22) is from the Yanyuwa community living area at Borroloola and was sketched in 1992. It shows the home of Johnson Timothy, who until his death in 1994 was amongst the most senior and authoritative dugong hunters in the late 1980’s and early 1990’s. Because of the size of his family and the number of men, including his sons, he had trained to hunt dugong and sea turtle. Johnson made many overnight or day trips to the islands, bringing back live sea turtles and butchered dugong for cooking at Borroloola. The camp highlights how his living area was in many respects the symbol of continuity in regards to the hunting of dugong and sea turtle. The symbols of the hunter were always present in the form of the boats and harpoons resting in the tree. The charred shells and other skeletal remains and ground ovens showing constant use were a source of quiet pride for his family. The ridges of debris which surround the camp, which are formed by the constant daily sweeping and raking of the area, contain skeletal remains from the turtle and dugong, large portions of bone lie further away, having been dragged there, out of the ovens by the pet dog.4

11.4 How Many Dugong? How Many Hunters?
This thesis has provided a view of Yanyuwa ethno-ecological processes; some of this information, however, needs to be analysed alongside western scientific knowledge, and this is especially so in relation to dugong numbers. The Yanyuwa belief that killing of target species is required to maintain population levels is not altogether at odds with the western biological theory in regard to keeping a sustainable population of the target species.

4. It is interesting to note that what western observers may consider garbage is for the Yanyuwa positively evaluated, as signs of a past positively valued activity; garbage, therefore, can be interpreted as a sign of display.
Map 22. Urban Site At Burroloula.

1. Home of Johnson and Maurine Tinnity
2. Home of Philip Tinnity (Johnson's son)
3. Home of John and Jolvlson's brother-in-law
4. Ancestral site
5. Shade trees

a. Boar
b. Harpoon tip pointing against tree
c. Fuel pots: rapa, flake tool box, water container
d. Outside cooking in a karahing dugout and sea turtle remains
e. Shallow cooking depression for cooking sea turtles and assorted cooking wares
f. Deep ground oven for cooking digging and smoking charr and abs. cooking pocos
g. Sheatted and sagging cation for smoking ground meat
h. Charred sea turtle shell
i. Charred digging stick and back bone
j. Charred digging stick and back bone
k. Ridge of swept-up living debris, containing much charcoal and bone material
l. Sea turtle butchering area and firebolten area for digging and sea turtle meat
Thus, a relatively consistent reduction in the numbers of the dugong by hunters, assists in the maintenance of a maximum breeding population (Professor Helene Marsh pers. comm 1995). However, any discussion of past and present dugong and sea turtle hunting by the Yanyuwa must provide an overview of the estimated number of dugong in this area of the Gulf and the numbers of dugong and sea turtle which the Yanyuwa people capture, and the factors that may influence take numbers.5

The difficult issue of addressing whether or not it is possible to reconstruct past take numbers must be reviewed and, finally, in light of available information, the question must be asked what does it mean for the future of the dugong and seaturtle populations in the area of the Sir Edward Pellew Islands and the maintenance of hunting these two creatures by the Yanyuwa as an important “traditional” activity? In relation to dugong and seaturtle take numbers, such issues as societal and technological change become very important.

The actual number of dugong and sea turtle present in the southwest Gulf of Carpentaria are based on best available estimates derived from aerial surveys (Bayliss and Freeland 1989, Marsh pers. comm 1993, Preen pers. comm 1994 and Limpus pers. comm 1994). The results of an aerial survey undertaken in the dry season of 1984 estimated that the dugong population in the area of the Sir Edward Pellew Islands at approximately 1,224 with a standard error (s.e) of 420. A similar survey undertaken over the same area in the Wet season of 1985 estimated a dugong population of approximately 1,252 with a standard error of 490 (Bayliss and Freeland 1989:148). According the Marsh (pers. comm 1996) these estimates must be regarded as minimum numbers because the mathematical correction factors used to correct for the proportion of unsighted dugong and those under

5 I have chosen not to analyse sea turtle take numbers in any great detail. There are two reasons for this. Firstly, the Yanyuwa talk more often of dugong takes as opposed to sea turtle takes, indicating the bias towards the importance of this animal. Secondly, there are other variables with sea turtles of which one cannot get a clear picture, such as the number that were once taken on beaches when turtle came ashore to nest and a general lack of oral testimony that speaks of the importance of turtle hunting.
the water is conservative however, these researchers believe the Yanyuwa take rates (see below) from this population of dugong are sustainable (Elliot 1981:32-37, pers. comm Dr. Tony Preen 1995). It also needs to be mentioned that while conceptually simple, the actual task of trying to estimate the abundance of any animal, especially marine creatures, is "a nightmare" (pers. comm Helene Marsh 1996).

Within this area of Australia there are no written historical records which give any indication of dugong and sea turtle numbers. Authors such as Stretton (1893), Spencer and Gillen (1912), Paradice (1923) and Harney (1946) mention their presence and that the indigenous population hunted them, but other than these scant references, the record on population numbers is silent. In addition, no detailed archeological work has been undertaken on the islands which may provide evidence of dugong and sea turtle hunting in the past. Even if it were to be undertaken it could be somewhat misleading, as the biggest middens left on the islands are those which are found in rock shelters which were used primarily by the Yanyuwa during the wet season, the dry season beach camp debris having long ago been destroyed by the elements (Baker 1989a).

I have, however, speculated in earlier chapters, and in the initial stages of this chapter, that rock painting sites and some midden sites, combined with oral testimony, provide evidence which suggests that dugong and sea turtle have been hunted for a long period of time. Early European accounts also speak of "turtle feasts" and observations of people hunting dugong and sea turtle. The introduction of dugout canoes and steel harpoon points over the last one hundred years most likely lead to an increase in the take numbers of the target species. However, I have also made brief comment, and will argue later in this thesis, that the introduction of aluminium dinghies and outboard engines since the late 1970's has not necessarily seen a dramatic increase in take numbers because of the economic considerations which must be taken into account when using such equipment.

Bertram (1981:1) raises the issue that anthropologists, while describing local "cultures" and material artifacts in some detail, fail to give proper detail of the animals that are being hunted by the people who are being
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studied. He uses as an example Donald Thomson, who wrote of “The Dugong Hunters of Cape York” (1934). Thomson described in great detail their specialised culture in relation to dugong hunting, but gives no indication of the dugong population at the time of his study. Bertram also makes comment that around the world where dugong are to be found there are “traditions of immense numbers of dugong”. My initial research into dugong herd sizes in past times confirmed that for the Yanyuwa such a tradition also exists. One of the first people of whom I inquired regarding the dugong population in the early parts of this century commented

Oh! Too many dugong you know, just too many, never miss, get one every time, not like this time.

(Tim Rakawulma, field diary 1989)

Similarly, when I asked Mussolini Harvey this question, his response was just as unequivocal. He suggested that when he was a young hunter that;

That there were millions of dugong, when I was a kid, turtle too.

(Mussolini Harvey, field diary 1985)

It is noted that these questions were asked in the early eighties. In contemporary times, such a question is regarded with some suspicion, as they are believed to be the questions that “people who want to stop us hunting ask”. Such people fit into the domains of biologists and government workers who may for some reason wish to stop the hunting of dugong and sea turtle or bring in permits or some other form of hunting control.

What all Yanyuwa people agree on is that in the past there were very large numbers of dugong and sea turtle and that over the years their numbers have declined. Such a statement from the Yanyuwa men and women can only ever be hearsay evidence, and it is possible that with many things, the past was a golden period and nothing has been as good ever since. There are a number of key reasons that the Yanyuwa give for the perceived decline. These reasons are listed below, after which more detailed discussion will be given.
on the points raised.

1. Too many old men who were maranja have died, the country is "sad", and the effects of these deaths have an impact throughout the entire ecology, thus affecting the dugong and turtle population. Related to this belief is that there are, in present times, too few hunters of dugong and sea turtle. Thus, the population of dugong and sea turtle is suffering because there is not enough hunting, and implicitly tied to this concept, is that the Yanyuwa people also get weak because they are not hunting.

When a Yanyuwa person dies, it is said that the environment, the "country", feels the effects. Ritual activity is undertaken so that the balance and order of things are restored. However, sometimes the events surrounding the death are so dramatic and traumatic that it is felt that the land, including the sea, and all they contain will never recover. During the period from 1980 to 1994, 16 senior, middle aged, still active dugong hunters died suddenly and without any warning. Such deaths are interpreted as being the result of sorcery. The number of deaths and the men involved are said to have caused the country to be "sad". Such people normally should not die. They left behind them young families and took with them much knowledge. There are those Yanyuwa who speak of such tragic deaths as having had a profound effect upon the land and all life forms. Wells dry up, certain animals become hard to find. Another result of such men dying is that, firstly, there are not as many people hunting, an activity which is seen to have direct correlation to the strength and numbers of the target species. Secondly, when such important people die, they leave without completing the important tasks of training the youth who will be the future generation of maranja, Yanyuwa dugong and sea turtle hunters of excellence. This last factor will be discussed below.

2. Climatic factors also have effects upon the environment and the creatures which inhabit it. In the instance of the dugong and sea turtle they can be affected by long sustained periods of floods, which deposit large quantities of sediment on the sea grass beds. These deposits cause sea grass death and dugong and sea turtle starvation. Cyclonic activity such as occurred when Cyclone Kathy (1984) moved through the area also had a profound impact
upon the dugong and sea turtle populations as they were thrown dugong up onto the tidal flats, where large numbers presumably perished (see Marsh et al 1986). In 1985 Cyclone Sandy moved through the area and caused massive destruction to the sea grass beds.

A western view of the weather is that it is a proximate agent, but the Yanyuwa view is that wrong actions of ignorant people ultimately cause environmental catastrophes which reduce dugong and sea turtle numbers. As related in Chapter 5, ecological relations are given a moral value, and are related to the social domain.

The Yanyuwa believe they operate within an environment where certain aspects of the environment can be controlled. Most of the techniques associated with such control belong to a secretive world, where some knowledge is passed on and some is not. For example, the songs to cause or stop rain are no longer known. As a result, it is thought that rain becomes a "wild card": too much can fall or too little, and there is nothing the Yanyuwa can do about it. Cyclones, on the other hand, are still sometimes controllable. However, some cyclones — and Kathy was one such cyclone — cannot be controlled because they appeared due to other forces over which the Yanyuwa had little control. The two main causes given for Cyclone Kathy are, first, the entry of unknown people onto dangerous Rainbow Serpent places, which caused the Serpent to unleash its wrath; and second, that some non-Yanyuwa circumcision initiates, who were initiated at Borroloola, did not follow the Laws relating to post-circumcision, again releasing the anger of the Rainbow Serpent. The Rainbow Serpent is said to be kin to the dugong; and after the results of Cyclone Kathy when dugong were stranded on land because of a storm surge, one old Yanyuwa man commented;

That Rainbow Serpent (cyclone) was mad, without care he carried his children (the dugong), and threw them far onto the mainland, they died there the poor things.

(Tim Rakawurlma, field diary 1984)

Thus, the weather, too, can be seen by the Yanyuwa to cause decrease
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in population numbers. Increasingly amongst the younger Yanyuwa people
they feel that there is little they can do; they do not have the power that the
"old people" have.

3. Too many strangers on the country, people which the Yanyuwa de-
scribe as "having no faces". These are the tourists, pastoralists, miners and
any other people who have no clear and perceptible role in relation to the
Yanyuwa view of their environment. Such people can be responsible for the
"old people", the spirits of the deceased, closing up country. Included in this
is the view that the sea, too, is country; thus, the dugong and sea turtle popu-
lation can be affected. Also related to this point are the following:

(a) Damage to and intrusion onto sites of significance which are asso-
ciated with the resting places of Dugong and Sea Turtle Spirit Ancestors. As
with the example of Rainbow Serpent sites, the entry of ignorant people to
important sites is felt to affect profoundly the order of the life forms associ-
cated with the site. For the Yanyuwa, the clearest example of such entry and
damage was the desecration of the Dugong Spirit Ancestor site at Wunubarryi
(Mount Young). Although the site is still visited and used by the correct peo-
ple, the damage done to the site was so severe that it is still said to affect the
dugong population. Sea Turtle Spirit Ancestor sites are often visited by peo-
ple who are completely unaware of the significance of the place to Yanyuwa
people, and while people do not speak of observing any depletion in the num-
ber of sea turtles around the Sir Edward Pellew Islands, there is a fear that
as more and more people travel to such places, there may indeed be an impact
upon the turtle population.

Such people have also been responsible for taking over once well used
Yanyuwa camping places. One of the best known of these was the Landing
which, until 1985, was one the most favoured camping places for the
Yanyuwa as it provided a valuable locality close enough to the sea for men to
make daily hunting trips if need be, and it was close to a number of large sa-
vannah areas favoured by the women for the hunting of goanna and other game
(see Map 17). This site in the early 1980's began to be used by tourists,
fishermen and the local Borroloola Fishing Club, and by 1986 it became so
popular with non-Aboriginal travellers and locals that the Yanyuwa no
longer used the area. Today it is the site of a very large boat ramp and camping area for tourists. This is a classic example of the "strangers who have no faces closing up the country" (Bella Charlie, field diary 1992)

(b) The capture of dugong and sea turtle in the nets of professional fishermen's nets and the shooting of dugong and some sea turtle.

Of all present day events which have affected the Yanyuwa and the dugong population, it is the taking of dugong in nets and allowing them to die, which causes much anger and sadness (plate 28). With the increased use of the islands as a fishing and tourist destination, signs are becoming more and more evident that the dugong, and perhaps the sea turtle population, will become threatened as development increases. The details provided below are only those that I have observed, or those which the Yanyuwa have recently told me of. In November 1983, while travelling to the islands via the Car­rington Channel, two dead dugong were found on the mud flats. Both had been shot with high powered rifles. Another four dugong, all killed with high powered gun wounds, were found during the next three days. These six dugong represented nearly half the number of dugong, on average, taken by Yanyuwa hunters in any one year. In April of 1984, a dismembered dugong carcass was found on South West Island. Attempts had been made to cover the butchered remains with stones. The method employed to butcher the dugong, and the amount of what the Yanyuwa would call waste, did not correlate with the methods proscribed by Yanyuwa "tradition". Early one morning in 1985, a barramundi net was found in the vicinity of the McArthur River mouth which had ten drowned dugong in it. In 1994, a "bait net" set by a local professional crabber held a drowned cow and calf.

In 1995 over thirty dugong were killed in the vicinity of the McArthur River mouth causing much distress in the Yanyuwa community, and it raised many issues in relations to western protection of the species and respect for indigenous hunting rights (see also Northern Territory News July 11, 12, 13, 14, 17, 23 and 26, 1995). Samuel Evans, a Yanyuwa dugong hunter said during an interview concerning these deaths:

Dugong are very important to all the tribes that live along the southwest
Gulf of Carpentaria; ...how would they like it if we went and killed a bullock in their paddock or something...even one cow or one bullock in the paddock they'd be screaming, they'd push us through and get us into jail. This is the same thing, those dugong that died they're more or less in our property, in the sea, where we hunt. what we gotta do? How we gonna find meat in the sea? (Australian Broadcasting Commission. Radio National, Earth Beat July 29th. 1996)

Yanyuwa people also give many other details concerning the number of dugong they have found dead in nets or showing signs of death by gunshots. There are also stories told of dead turtle being washed ashore, most of them green turtles, showing signs of bullet wounds or other forms of mutilation such as missing flippers which have been removed using a knife or axe. There are also many other accounts which can be given of fish species such as giant gropers, large sharks and crocodile which have been treated in a similar manner.

(c) The boats of the "strangers" moving over the sea grass beds ripping up the sea grass and scattering the herds.

The Yanyuwa firmly believe that dugong herd numbers have been reduced by the increased number of boats which now cross the sea around the islands. They believe that the dugong have become "shy", that the once large herds have been fragmented, and that the dugong are fearful of rejoining together again into a large herd. The damage to the sea grass beds by boat engines, is at times quite pronounced, especially in the areas near river and creek mouths. It is felt that the number of boats in the area also make dugong and turtle harder to hunt, because as soon as they hear a boat they will move off into deeper water. As Pyro Dirdiyalma has commented:

Just boat all the time now, that dugong is really shy. he just take off, you got no chance this day, too many boat... that dugong he hears too much, too clever. (field diary 1992).

While it may be argued that there are biological reasons for the dugong being found in smaller herds- such as, for example, the ready availability of
favoured sea grass species like *Halodule* and *Halophila* species which would affect dugong grazing patterns by causing them to spread out (pers. comm. Professor Helene Marsh 1994) - the Yanyuwa are convinced that, it has more to do with tourist and fishermen activity.

(d). The mine port site at Bing Bong. While, at the time of writing this thesis, the port has not caused any known depletion of dugong or sea turtle, some Yanyuwa believe it has the potential to do so, and fear the possibility of any "accident". The results possible of an accident are often discussed.

Although the Yanyuwa are involved in the McArthur River Mine as partners in the barge facility at Bing Bong under the Mawuli-Wirriwangkuma Association, they are still fearful of any potential ore spill, and the effects it may have on the environment. While I have made mention of people's reaction to the mine earlier in this thesis, the following quote from Annie Karrakayn is typical of many of the scenarios which they create when discussing the mine privately amongst themselves.

What will happen? What will we do? If that barge capsizes what will happen? That dirt, dirt from the mine will enter the water, the sea, it will be carried by the tide, by the currents, it will cover the sea grass, the sea grass which is the food of the dugong and sea turtle. You know what will happen then? The dugong and sea turtle will eat the sea grass, they will eat their own food, they will get sick and then die. The fish too, the sharks and stingray, they will die too. That is what will happen, and where will we Yanyuwa people be? We will be crying, crying for all the creatures of the sea and crying for ourselves because we will never hunt again, that is what I have decided. (Annie Karrakayn field diary 1993)

Such discussions amongst the Yanyuwa are commonplace, knowing that, by being part of the mine's development and working, they could also be a part of a potential disaster to the maritime environment. They also realise that to such questions and involvement in activities such as mining there are no easy answers. Developments like the mine, tourism and professional fishing activities are a constant source of amazement to the Yanyuwa, as they perceive from their own historical perspective that these are being "short-
term" exploitation projects which unfortunately may have long-term or permanent environmental consequences. All these leave the Yanyuwa bewildered as to the short term temporal frameworks which non-indigenous people work within. They also know it is they, the Yanyuwa, more than anyone else, who must live with the consequences (see also discussion by Feit 1994: 439 in relation to similar sentiments amongst the Waswanipi Cree in Quebec).

Having discussed the Yanyuwa perceptions of why they believe the dugong and sea turtle populations to be declining, there are now several questions which need to be considered: what were take numbers in the past, what are they today, and what factors have influenced, and continue to influence, take numbers?

By a careful use of genealogical records, informal and formal discussion about these records and the use of the the Department of Aboriginal Affairs register (1957)\(^6\), it is possible to draw up information (Table 5) which shows the approximate number of able bodied, knowledgeable and active dugong hunters over a 70 year period.\(^7\)

\(^6\) This register of 235 pages with some 60 entries per page is a record of many Aboriginal people over the Northern Territory during the years 1953-55. It was drawn up by the field officers working for the Department of Aboriginal Affairs when all Aboriginal people, by legislation, were to be made protected wards of the Commonwealth of Australia. The document lists Aboriginal people by known European name (if any), tribal personal name, group, tribe, sex, year of birth and sub-district. The register then divides the Northern Territory into general areas such as Borroloola, Barkly Tablelands, etc. People are listed under these headings and then the sub-district which for the Yanyuwa often equates with a cattle station name.

\(^7\) The figures compare favourably with early accounts of the Yanyuwa population over the period. The father of Steve Johnson (Steve Johnson snr.), estimated that in the 1920's there were approximately 300 Yanyuwa people living full time over the islands, 80 at Manangoora and another 60 at Borroloola.
Table 5. Yanyuwa *Maranja By Patrician Estates.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Semi-moiety and general patrician estate:</th>
<th>Number of Dugong and Sea Turtle Hunters</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>c.1920</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wuyaliya</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South West Island</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kangaroo Island &amp; Crooked River</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wearyan River (West Bank)</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wurdallya</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>West Island / Bing Bong</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vanderlin Island (East Coast)</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rrumburriya</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Islands: (Vanderlin, North, Centre and other small islands)</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Manangoora</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Borroloola</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mambaliya / Wawukarriya</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coastal</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Riverine / Inland</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Number of Hunters</td>
<td>114</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Dugong and sea turtle hunter of excellence.
Table 6. Approximate Dugong Takes Over A 70 Year Period.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Number of men classed as &quot;maranja&quot;</th>
<th>Approximate number of vessels available for use in hunting</th>
<th>Average number of men per vessel</th>
<th>Number of hunters between 25 years and 45 years</th>
<th>Average number of dugong (t) per hunter per year</th>
<th>Number of dugong taken by hunters during active hunting life (t) 20 years</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| c.1920| 114                               | 25<sup>a</sup>                                           | 4.6                           | 45                                            | (t) 10 dugong  
Total: 450                                     | 200                                                      |
| c.1950| 67                                | 10<sup>a</sup>                                           | 6.7                           | 15                                            | (t) 7 dugong  
Total: 135                                     | 140                                                      |
| c.1970| 29                                | 3<sup>b</sup>                                            | 9.6                           | 12                                            | (t) 4 dugong  
Total: 48                                          | 80                                                      |
| 1994  | 28                                | 2<sup>b</sup>                                            | 14                            | 7                                             | (t) 2 dugong  
Total: 14                                          | 40                                                      |

* Dugong and sea turtle hunter of excellence.

a - dugout canoes

b - aluminium dinghies
The totals provided by Table 5 can then be applied to a possible reconstruction of dugong takes over the same 70 year period (Table 6). Dugong and sea turtle hunting is of course totally dependent upon the ownership of water craft, or having access to one except where turtles are taken on the beach. The figures given for the number of vessels for the 1920’s, 1950’s and 1970’s were arrived at by discussion with Yanyuwa people and other observers such as Steve Johnson (snr. and jnr.). The 1994 figure was accurate at the time of recording.

Not all of the vessels were in use all at the same time solely for the hunting of dugong and sea turtle. Some would have been travelling the river systems as people moved to new mainland foraging areas; some may have not been in use due to recent death of the owner; others may have needed repair and a sea journey would have been too great a risk; and during times of ceremony, nearly all water craft would have been in use to take people to the place where it was being performed.

The average number of men per vessel equates well with oral tradition, genealogical records and known factors such as fathers and sons sharing a vessel for hunting, or the sharing of a water craft by brother and siblings. The numbers in the 1970’s and for 1994 indicate a much more inclusive group of male relatives which may include brothers, sons (actual and classificatory), male cousins, brothers-in-law and sons-in-law. The low number of vessels also is indicative of the difficulty in obtaining boats from Aboriginal organisations or from a private purchase.

I have chosen the age limit between the ages of 25 and 45 years as they represent the peak period of a hunter’s life. There are, of course, exceptions to this, but even in the contemporary environment a hunter is not considered to have achieved maranja status until he is in his mid-twenties. The final column in Table 6 represent the total number of dugong a hunter may capture in an active hunting life.

The number of dugong hunted is more open to some guesswork and is more problematic, as the oral sources about take numbers for the earlier periods provide no clear guides. I have based the early figures on informa
tion provided from informal conversations about dugong hunting from both men and women. The observations of Steve Johnson's father were invaluable for the 1920's figure, as were his son's observations for the 1950 period. The information for the 1970's period was again derived from informal conversations with the Yanyuwa, from ex-Welfare Officers such as Ted Evans and the Yanyuwa missionary linguist Jean Kirton. The 1994 figures are based totally on my own observations.

Given any deficiencies because of guesswork, Tables 5 and 6 still illustrate dramatically the decline in Yanyuwa population numbers and in the number of dugong and sea turtles being hunted. The historical factors relating to such a dramatic decline over the 70 year period will be discussed further in the next chapter.

From the information provided on Tables 5 and 6, I have then estimated the number of dugong that were taken over a twelve month period. Figures 29 and 30 show an estimate for the 1920's period and the 1950's. These figures were constructed after extensive periods of conversation with many elderly people to try and get a clear picture of the events which influenced people's lives during the periods under question. Each of the bars has a letter of the alphabet which corresponds to information provided below. It should also be noticed that the activities of the Yanyuwa do not equate with strict calendar months. The total number of dugong taken corresponds to the figures given for the years listed in Table 6.

Supplementary information provided in relation to Figure 29:
A. Small groups of people hunting. Dugong in deeper water and on the reefs due to floods.
B. Wambuyungu and Kundawira rituals held at Kangaroo Island. Large gathering of Yanyuwa, Mara and some Garrwa people.
C. Disperse to Bing Bong and/or Yungkurra on Centre Island to hunt dugong and sea turtle.
D. Families disperse as southeast winds increase. Some remain on the islands while others travel to the coastal mainland.
E. Smaller groups moving over the country as the available surface water
Figure 29. 1920's: Reconstruction Of Dugong Take Numbers Based On Seasonal And Ritual Calendar.

Figure 30. 1950's: Reconstruction Of Dugong Take Numbers Based On Seasonal, Ritual And Cattle Industry Calendar.
recedes. Southeast winds still dominate.

**F,G,H.** Dominate winds are still southeasterly. People hunt on the coastal mainland; burning off, fishtraps. Hunting of dugong and turtle at night or early in the morning.

**I.** Winds begin to ease. Travel to the islands in small groups.

**J.** a-Kunabibi and delayed funeral rites held upstream from Manangoora on the Wearyan River; ample fresh water. Gathering of Yanyuwa, Garrwa, Mara and some Gudanji people.

**K.** Turtle eggs on the islands, large tides, dugong close into the shore.

**L.** Cycad harvest at Manangoora; large gatherings of Yanyuwa and Garrwa people.

**M.** Circumcision rituals. Gathering of Yanyuwa, Garrwa, Mara and some Gudanji. Held on the coastal mainland west of Manangoora.

Supplementary information provided in relation to Figure 30:

**A.** Small family groups. Men back from the stations arrive at Borroloola and then move to the islands and Manangoora.

**B.** a-Kunabibi and circumcision rituals held at Manangoora.

**C,D.** Small family groups move over the islands and then back to Borroloola. Men go back to the stations.

**E,F,G,H,I.** Old men and family with adolescent sons make a few journeys from Borroloola and Manangoora to the sea. South easterly winds hamper a lot of hunting at this time but night hunting still pursued.

**J.** Men coming back from the stations and travel to the coast and the islands.

**K.** Wambuyungu and a-Kunabibi rituals held at Kangaroo Island. A number of men remain on the stations over the lay-off period.

**L.** Small groups to Manangoora, Borroloola and to the islands.

Some of issues discussed above exert an influence upon the number of dugong and sea turtle that the Yanyuwa kill annually. Influences ranging from ceremonial performance at Borroloola, weather, deaths, breakdowns, financial constraints, the desire to hunt and available man-power - all combine to have an impact upon take numbers. The graph in Figure 31 gives the
Figure 31. Yanyuwa Dugong And Sea Turtle Takes
From 1980 To 1993.

Average Take: 12 Dugong, 26 Green Turtle

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Dugong</th>
<th>Green Turtle</th>
<th>Flat Back Turtle</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1980</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1981</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1982</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1983</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1984</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1985</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1986</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1987</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1988</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1989</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1990</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1991</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1992</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1993</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 32. Yanyuwa Dugong And Sea Turtle Takes
For 1981.

13 Dugong, 15 Sea Turtle

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Month</th>
<th>Dugong</th>
<th>Sea Turtle</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Jan</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feb</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mar</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Apr</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>May</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jun</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jul</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aug</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sep</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
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<tr>
<td>Oct</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nov</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dec</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 33. Yanyuwa Dugong And Sea Turtle Takes
For 1982.

12 Dugong, 26 Sea Turtle

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Month</th>
<th>Dugong</th>
<th>Sea Turtle</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Jan</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feb</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mar</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Apr</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>May</td>
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<td>1</td>
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<tr>
<td>Jun</td>
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<td>0</td>
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<td>Jul</td>
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<td>0</td>
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<tr>
<td>Aug</td>
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<td>0</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sep</td>
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<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oct</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nov</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dec</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
take numbers I have recorded from the main Yanyuwa hunters at Borroloola from 1980 to 1993.

Even though the Yanyuwa have at times been concerned about my listing of take numbers, they have always been willing to keep records for me or let me know of takes by letter and telephone, and also to allow me to write down take numbers during actual hunting trips or during conversations in relation to hunting. I believe the numbers to be relatively accurate, although if they were in need of any adjustment, they would probably be slightly higher than shown, but no more than 15% on each species and year. The additions arise because there are some people of Yanyuwa descent, not associated with the main hunting families who occasionally travel to the sea and capture a turtle or dugong, and with whom I have little contact. The graph as it stands represents takes from those Yanyuwa families who have since 1980 always been the dominant families hunting dugong and sea turtle and travelling to the islands on a regular basis.

From the beginning of my journeys to the islands in 1980 I had a personal interest in take numbers, and when the Yanyuwa realised I was keeping a tally, they grew interested in it. The record was a source of many conversations and light-hearted banter between the various hunters. Some men told me that their fathers and grandfathers had also kept tallies by nicking a notch in the top of their harpoon for every dugong and turtle captured, while others would notch the gunwales near the prow of a dugout canoe. One young hunter began to get the tallies of dugong and turtle takes from his father's boat and filed a groove into the gunwales as his own record.

In June 1987, Mussolini Harvey wrote letters to the Chief Minister of the Northern Territory using the take number records presented here to demonstrate the issues related to non-indigenous killing of dugong and sea turtles...

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8 I have arrived at this percentage figure after discussing take numbers with the families involved and how many they would take in any given year. These families also felt that the dugong numbers had dropped from past times and stated they were careful not to take too many. (Lenin Anderson, Steve Johnson field diary 1994).
turtle; and from that time until the present, the numbers have again been of personal interest to the Yanyuwa. They were last used in 1995 when over 30 dugong were killed by professional fishermen, to illustrate that the number killed went far beyond the average Yanyuwa take number.

When I arrived at Borroloola in 1980, there were four main families still travelling to the islands and hunting regularly. The men associated with these families were all employed by the local council, had their own boats, engines and access to vehicles, either their own, or they would make arrangements to use the council vehicles to take their families to their camping places, while their boats would travel down the river. During 1980, 1981 and 1982, large groups of people camped at Bing Bong during the weekends of the early dry season, and then during the weekends of the late dry season the camps were moved to The Landing and onto Kangaroo Island, which enabled women to hunt in the dry lagoons for long necked turtle and burn the savannah grasslands in their pursuit for goanna and blue tongue lizards. Members of these four families still constitute the most active hunters at the time of writing this thesis.

The flat back turtle takes have been included, as their capture was unusual and of interest to all the community. The flatback caught in 1981 was harpooned by a group of adolescents, who went hunting while camping on South West Island. An older hunter who was with them decided to bring the flatback back to the camp, as he rightly believed that few people would ever have seen one. The second flatback was caught in 1988 by a senior hunter who said he mistook it for a green turtle. It was taken back to camp and cooked more for reasons of wanting to show his family, than for his inability to harpoon a more favoured green turtle.

I show the 1981 and 1982 record in more detail, as during this period I was frequently on the sea and travelling with the various families, both in my role as a provider of outstation education and as an interested traveller during holidays and weekends.

The monthly breakdown of sea turtle and dugong and sea turtle for 1981 and 1982 are shown above on Figures 32 and 33. What is obvious at a glance are the low numbers taken in the months from May to August when...
the southeasterly and southerly winds are strongest. The increase in take numbers in March and April 1981 was due to the performance of the lengthy and elaborate a-Kunabibi ceremonies at Borroloola and the demand from the older men to have “proper beef for business (ceremony)”, the proper “beef” or meat being dugong and sea turtle. The senior jungkayi for the ceremony would instruct junior jungkayi and senior ngimarringki to go hunting and bring the food back. On their return to Borroloola, the meat was firstly apportioned between the women’s ceremony ground and that of the men. Of the meat taken to the men’s ceremony ground a greater proportion of it was cooked in the sacred na-mamnda enclosure which meant only senior jungkayi and ngimarringki could eat it. Some of the intestines and meat from shoulders and tail stock were generally distributed while head, rib bones and belly meat was eaten under restricted circumstances. The other figures on the two graphs represent the monthly takes, and fluctuations in take numbers are due to any number of the variables mentioned above.

All of the sea turtles taken during the 1981-1982 period, with the single exception of a flatback, were female green turtles. The dominant dugong takes during 1981 were eight young bulls, one pregnant cow with a well developed fetus, three young cows and one old cow with large erupted tusks. The 1982 breakdown of dugong takes were represented by seven young bulls, three young cows, one cow with a male calf and one female calf; I use general translations of indigenous terms in the above descriptions of dugong types. In my figures I have included a cow and a calf as one take.

This chapter has covered two important issues: firstly, it has shown the impact the Yanyuwa have had on the dugong population and has given the information on the dugong population provided by researchers such as Elliot (1981), Bayliss and Freeland (1989), including information by Marsh et al. (1984) on the slow reproductive rate and sexual maturity of the dugong. What is apparent is that Yanyuwa hunting at the levels indicated in this chapter are sustainable, and as mentioned above, a number of researchers such as Marsh and Preen agree with this conclusion. It is the

---

10 Marsh (1985) comments that the maximum longevity of a dugong observed is 73...
incidental and illegal catches which pose the greatest threats to the dugong population. This is especially so in the area of the Sir Edward Pellew Islands, which are an attractive area for commercial fishing crabbing and recreational fishing. This chapter has also illustrated that a considerable decline has occurred in Yanyuwa hunting in recent decades - a circumstance which is accounted for in the next chapter.

Footnote 10 cont: years. Females have their first calves at a minimum age of 9 to 10 years, and sometimes not until the age of 15 to 17 years. A single calf is usually born and suckles for up to at least 18 months. There are no reliable data on age-specific fecundity or mortality, and there is no evidence of a marked decline in fecundity with age in females. However, some males may become post-reproductive (Marsh et al. 1984). Marsh (1985a) suggests that even with the most optimistic combination of life history parameters, a low mortality rate and no predation by man, a dugong population is unlikely to increase at more than five percent per year. This means that there needs to be at least 200 dugong in a population to harvest five females per year without causing the population to decline. I make note that the estimated dugong population for the area of the Sir Edward Pellew Group of Islands is many times the number given above for a population of dugong to be able to sustain itself.
Chapter 12

The Dugong Hunter Becomes a Cowboy

".....too fast, the world just moves too fast!"
(Annie Karrakayn 1992)

12.1 The future of the past

When anthropology is combined with the discipline of history, a true picture of the lives of any given people can be reasonably and accurately presented. In discussing the decline of dugong and sea turtle, a historical perspective is of vital importance. Essentially, this decline can be associated with the growing influence of the pastoral industry in the lives of the Yanyuwa.

From the late 1920's and 1930's there had always been some Yanyuwa people who were involved in stock work (Reay 1962, Avery and McLaughlin 1977, Baker 1989a), but it was not until during and after the Second World War that large numbers of Yanyuwa men and women became involved in the cattle industry and were sent great distances to work. The Barkly Tablelands and parts of north and central western Queensland became places where a great many Yanyuwa people found themselves. While many Yanyuwa women and men spoke and still speak of this period of their lives as a 'golden era' (Baker 1989a), there were those who felt, even at that time, that it could do nothing but harm the Yanyuwa (Harney 1944:1-20).

Prior to and during the Second World War, the Yanyuwa were still travelling over their country, as Steve Johnson comments:

You know when I was young you could travel over the islands, up the rivers and on every beach, on every river bend, on every bare spot there would be a sign where they (the Yanyuwa) had been all the way up, wind breaks, boughshades, camp fires, bush fires, and then in the 1950s it all started to ease off and it got to the point in the 1960's when there was virtually nothing. (Steve Johnson field diary 1988)
The immediate question is, what happened in the 1950s that led to a sudden reduction in the signs of people moving over the country? The simple answer is the cattle industry and its need for Aboriginal people as an integral part of the workforce. Most of the able-bodied young and middle-aged Yanyuwa men and women left the Borroloola area to work on cattle stations. The literature in relation to the importance of the cattle industry to Aboriginal society of the times cannot be underestimated and is dealt with by a number of researchers, notably, Doolan (1977), Peterson et al. (1978), McConvell and Hagen (1981), Berndt (1987), McGrath (1987), Baker (1989a), Riddett (1990) and Rose (1992).

By reviewing the records of the Commonwealth Welfare Ordinance (1957) dating from 1953-55, it is possible to get a reasonable picture of where many of the Yanyuwa men and women were employed. While such data are somewhat raw, the source can provide some useful information, especially when combined with discussions with contemporary Yanyuwa people. By drawing up detailed genealogies, it is possible to gain a view of which of the men working on the cattle stations were well known maranja, and which of them would still be learning this skill. The Welfare Ordinance is divided into broad geographical districts and sub-districts. Two which are of prime importance in regard to this study are the Barkly Tablelands and Borroloola sub-districts.

During the period between 1953-55 there were approximately 44 Yanyuwa men and women (Welfare Ordinance 1957: 53-69) working on the Tablelands. Of this figure, according to present Yanyuwa accounts, 21 of them were skilled and well-known hunters of dugong and sea turtle. In the Borroloola district at this time, approximately 77 Yanyuwa people were resident (1957: 95-100), of which 19 men, acknowledged maranja, were away on local cattle stations such as Manangoora, McArthur River and Seven Emus. The great majority of the residents left at Borroloola were young children and old men and women who were cared for by the handing out of welfare rations. There was also a similar small group of elderly people at Manangoora on the Wearyan River (Evans 1950:5).

Working on cattle stations occupied the greater part of the year, with
people returning home to Borroloola during the wet season, whereupon people gathered together to travel down to the islands to hunt and also to perform important ceremonies at Borroloola while large numbers of people where present. At other times very few able bodied people were available to paddle canoes down to the islands to hunt as they were away working. Of the old men left at Borroloola and at Manangoora, some were in their late middle age, while others were far too elderly even to consider travelling down to the islands. Again, Steve Johnson comments on the predicament the Yanyuwa found themselves in;

It got to the stage where the old fellas would paddle out every now and then, there was no young people to paddle them out, they were all away and only when they got back from the stations would they get to the sea. There was no one left at Borroloola to make canoes so you had old men and old canoes so no one did much hunting until the wet season came and all the young men would come home.

(Steve Johnson, field diary 1992)

A few men in this period did occasionally paddle out to the islands to hunt, and these were predominantly middle aged to older men who had young adolescent sons who were considered too young to work on the cattle stations, but were big enough to assist with the physical labour of paddling a canoe and with the hunting, butchering, and cooking of dugong and sea turtle. One of these men was Tim Rakawurlma, who had one adolescent son still with him, his other three sons at this time being scattered over the Tablelands. Ted Evans, who was a Welfare Officer at Borroloola during this period, in a report dated 10 March 1950 records the following during one of his patrols:

Away again. 6:30 am on the turn of the tide. Made good progress although the wind was against us. Met aborigine Tim YAGAWOOLMA (sic) with family in canoe near Black Rock on their way to mouth of McArtour River to hunt dugong.

(Evans: 1950:3)
From his writings it is clear that Ted Evans was well aware of the predicament of the Yanyuwa. After a patrol to Manangoora just after the wet season in the same March patrol, he writes of the plight of older Yanyuwa men and women who, without the assistance of the younger men, could not hunt.

...to Manangoora. At the time of my visit they appeared well and happy but they had the youth of the tribe about them for some months previous and they had doubtlessly been receiving bounteous supplies of natural foods during that time. But from now on the young men commence to drift out to work on the stations and it is during the dry time that the maintenance of the old people becomes a problem....

(Evans 1950:5)

The last line of this comment is couched in the Welfare language of the time reflecting the perceived need to bring people together to a central depot, such as at Borroloola, where people could receive food handouts. While it may be argued that these old people could turn to more terrestrial game to support themselves or to fish, there was still the desire to travel to the islands and to live off the abundance that the sea offered. The age of these men and women and the absence of young able bodied men who could take them to the islands and the sea made it virtually impossible for this to be achieved. Occasionally, younger Yanyuwa men working on the Manangoora or Seven Emus cattle stations would get some time off, and they would travel to the Wearyan River mouth and hunt for dugong and sea turtle with one or two of the older men.

There were a few occasions during the late 1950's and early 1960's when the Welfare officers at Borroloola allowed the old Yanyuwa men and women to travel down stream to The Landing, near the junction of the McArthur River and Carrington Channel. While they were camping there, Welfare still provided rations for the people, and being closer to the sea, the older men made a number of trips out to the islands and hunted dugong and sea turtle. But generally speaking, the trips to the islands to hunt became fewer.
and fewer (Steve Johnson, Johnson Timothy and Mussolini Harvey, field diary 1992).

During the period of the late 1950s, hunting of dugong and sea turtle, or visiting the islands, except some concentrated journeys during the wet season, and a few in the dry season, was uncommon. The knowledge of the sea, islands, dugong and sea turtle, however, was kept alive on the vastness of the windblown Tablelands. The Yanyuwa men and women far from their country, and the older people at Borroloola and Manangoora, residing away from their desires, did not abandon the islands and the sea - they kept it alive by thinking about it, by telling stories and singing songs associated with it. When the wet season came, the thoughts, discussions and songs once again became reality.

This situation continued well into the 1960’s, and Jean Kirton, a Summer Institute of Linguistics linguist who was working at Borroloola on the Yanyuwa language during the 1960’s, made the following comment:

At that time, during the dry season the Malarndarri camp consisted mostly of the older folk, like Banjo, Tim, Judy, old Muluwa, Peter, Friday, Sam, Donagan and old Pharaoh, also women with young children whose husbands were away working; they had a few canoes and every now and then some of them might go down to the sea, but not very often, because at that time a turtle or a dugong in the camp would cause quite a lot of excitement because it had become a rare event, it continued on like that right into the early seventies, there were just not the young men around who had the skills and could go to the sea. The old people though would always talk about the sea, they would give me the names of the country and all the animals, fish, birds and plants that lived out here, at that time however, I must confess I had little idea about what they were talking about.

(Jean Kirton, field diary 1992)

It was during the late 1960s and early 1970s that the number of dugong and sea turtle hunted diminished, and trips to the islands became infrequent. The old canoes had finally rotted and those that were left were unseaworthy. Others had been carried away by floods, and the old canoe
makers were too old to make any more. Two canoes were made in the mid-1970s, but they were never used extensively for trips to the sea, primarily because they were too small and really only good for river crossings (pers. comm. Dehne McLaughlin 1984).

The Yanyuwa men who worked on stock camps had insufficient funds to purchase aluminium dinghies, nor had access to places where they could be bought, so trips to the sea were few and far between. One old Yanyuwa man, Old Simon Wululubunalhanu had given to him by Steve Johnson, his nephew, a clinker built dinghy which Steve had built on Vanderlin Island (pers. comm Steve Johnson and Tom Simon 1992). Old Simon, his family and other men rowed this dinghy from Borroloola to the seagrass beds at the mouth of the McArthur River, in the Bing Bong area, and those between South West Island and West Island. The only person at this time who would have been regularly hunting a small number of dugong and sea turtle would have been Steve Johnson and his brothers on Vanderlin Island, and one older Yanyuwa man, Tyson Birribirrikama, who refused to move into Borroloola and maintained a degree of independence on his own country at Sharkers Point (Jarrka), to the northeast of the Crooked River mouth.

During the early seventies, however, there were some changes; a local Aboriginal Community Council was established that employed Yanyuwa men who had been previously been away working on the cattle stations. The majority of these men were those who were married, had children and felt they needed to live close by to health and educational facilities which were established at Borroloola. These men became responsible for the day-to-day running of the local Aboriginal community and were in receipt of wages which enabled a number of Yanyuwa men to purchase new aluminium dinghies, with small engines, or second hand boats and engines from local white people at Borroloola.

Yanyuwa men and their families thus began to journey back down to the sea for weekend trips and school holidays. During school holidays, large camps of people were established at Bing Bong and on South West Island. It was a return to the islands and the sea and the hunting of dugong and sea turtle, but it was nothing like the era before, during, and just after the
Second World War.

Young single men or newly married couples still travelled to work on the cattle stations. These were young men who would have been in training to hunt by the older men. Most of them would have been able to capture a dugong or sea turtle, but they were not learning the more profound esoteric and ecological knowledge associated with the sea turtle, dugong, islands and maritime environment.

For those men who were hunters living at Borroloola, there could never be a return to the days of their youth; their lives were constrained by their employment, the need to be close to school so that their children could be educated, and financial limits. Fuel and the maintenance and upkeep of engines were expensive and ongoing. Repairs were fraught with lengthy time delays as parts were obtained from Darwin and Katherine, and the availability of mechanics was not always assured. Steve Johnson also became a part-time mechanic servicing the engines belonging to the Yanyuwa people (pers. comm Steve Johnson 1992).

Despite all of these factors, there began in the mid-seventies and continued through to the eighties a relatively steady stream of men with their families travelling to the islands. It was in this period that that group of Yanyuwa men, now in their mid-thirties, learned the art of hunting from their fathers and grandfathers. They did not travel to the cattle stations until they were older than their own fathers would have been when they first began working on the stations. Some young men have never been to work on the stations, so their skills at hunting have become quite well developed, although— as with the group of men still working on the cattle stations at this period— their knowledge of the ritual, spiritual and ethno-ecology of the islands, dugong and sea turtle is not as great as that of their parents or grandparents. This is partly due to the fact that this generation of hunters was speaking English and Kriol as their first language.¹

¹ The period between the mid-1970s and the 1980s also saw an increase in ceremonial performance. Such ceremonies as a-Kunabibi, Wambuyungu, Kulyukulyu, Yalkawarru, a-Mikathatha, a-Marndiwa and Wulubuwa were performed at regular intervals.
12.2 Present day issues and maritime hunting

In 1981 semi-permanent outstations were established at Mamadthamburru (Crocodile Point) on West Island and Yamirri on Kangaroo Island. However, both outstations were affected by activities at Borroloola; issues such as finances, health services, funerals, ceremonies and the need to attend meetings at Borroloola affected residence on these outstations, and were sometimes a source of frustrations for those people trying to live back on their country, as the following comment illustrates:

Meeting, meeting, that meeting has to follow you from Borroloola right to here, to the bush; Government say they want you back on your country, we come back, we get school, but everything else is there back up at Borroloola, what kind of idea is that?

(Don Miller, field diary 1981)

At the same time as these coastal outstations were being established, other inland outstations were also being established at such places as Wardawardala, some 30 kilometres downstream from Borroloola, Wandangula, some 13 kilometres east of Borroloola and Minyalini, twenty kilometres west of Borroloola. The men who were instrumental in establishing these outstations were all descended from fathers and grandfathers who had been renowned dugong hunters, but their sons and grandsons established inland outstations in the hope of running small but sustainable “cattle stations” in an attempt to recreate the “golden era” of the station days. Thus, there are men, trained by their fathers and grandfathers in the art of hunting dugong and sea turtle, who rarely travel to the sea and

Footnote 1 cont: intervals. Two reasons may explain this: firstly many senior men and women were no longer working on the cattle stations. Secondly, the availability of boats made it possible for people to re-establish links and educate their children about it. The ceremonies were not being performed in isolation from the country, a factor also discussed by Kolig (1981) and Toyne and Vachon (1984).
who have not passed on their skills to their sons, so profound was the effect of the "cattle station" era on these men. The men still, however, boast proudly that their fathers and grandfathers were "number one dugong hunters", while their children speak of their father as being "a number one stockman". Such factors as this have meant that in contemporary times the number of young men who could have been trained as hunters has decreased. Other reasons affect the decline of hunters and hunting and I will discuss them below.

The outstations that were established on the islands and the delta systems of the McArthur River, because of their distance from Borroloola, were always- and continue to be - semi-permanent places of residence. In the early 1980's, educational services were provided to these outstations because the majority of the children were of primary school age, but by the mid-1980's and early 1990's, these children had to travel to Darwin for high school, and the lure of Borroloola and peer group pressure caused young adolescents to be disgruntled with outstation life (see also Johannes 1981, Baker 1989a). The outstations then consisted of young preschool children, newly married childless couples, or couples with very young children, and older people such as grandparents. However, despite these factors, the journeys to the islands and the sea to hunt continued, and there was a growing familiarity with the coastal country by these young people. Whether or not they would like to admit it, there developed a fierce pride and determination in being Yanyuwa, sea people and the descendants of "mighty men" who were dugong and sea turtle hunters of excellence.

In May 1987, a boat left from Yamirri on Kangaroo Island with four young men; the oldest person on board was 20, the youngest, 15. It was a very special time for those families who were there:

They know now, they are knowledgeable people concerning the sea, dugong and turtle. There are no old people in that boat, only the young, they now they are learning to become true maranja, not for many years has such a thing happened, I am crying for my son and his cousins who are with him they have gone alone to hunt, there are no old men
This group of young men returned at sunset. They had brought back a dugong, the praise and adulation given to this group of young men was great, and the depth of emotion felt by the older Yanyuwa men and women was profound, with much proclaiming that the young men involved were at last maranja. However, as with all things, there were those who, while happy for these young men, refused to believe it was a renaissance of the old days of the fully fledged and well trained maranja.

One of these, a senior woman who had spent all of her early life on the islands, commented quite sharply to me and to her daughter, whose son it was that had harpooned the dugong:

Listen to me, these young men, they can harpoon a dugong maybe a turtle, they can do that and that is good, but they are not maranja, no I will say that, they are not maranja, they do not have the knowledge, can they call out the name of the country there to the north on the sea? Can they call the names for the dugong and sea turtle? Can they call the names of the meat when they butcher it? They have no power songs for the wind, they have no song for the dugong which is imbued with the power of a rainbow serpent. They have none of these things, the old people, the old men who were maranja were knowledgeable concerning these things but these young people are not they can get the dugong and sea turtle but they are not maranja.....

(Ida Ninganga, field dairy 1987)

This comment was dismissed by the assembled people quietly, as the words of a cranky old woman. Life at Borroloola, the demands of modern education and of financial constraints mean that young people such as those mentioned above will never be able to gain the knowledge and skills that their fathers, grandfathers and forefathers possessed. But having been in a boat with these young men hunting, I need to say that they are skilled, they can hunt, and in the butchering, cooking and distribution practices, there is little difference from the methods employed by the older people. The difference is in other
knowledge; dugong and turtles are just that, there are no longer types of
dugong, although the generic term for dugong and sea turtle, walya is still
often used. Sea grass is the food of dugong and sea turtles, and the detailed
relationships which exist between dugong, hunter, sea turtle and sea grass,
according to the old people, are not spoken of. The spirits of dugong and sea
turtle return to the sea grass because that is where the animals come from.
The extension of this detailed knowledge into a philosophy which speaks of kin
and spiritual relationships is no longer spoken of as it was and is by the older
generation of Yanyuwa speakers.

However, the spirits of the “old people” still do exist, and their
presence is an accepted and expected reality of life. Therefore, those actions
such as the burning of unwanted scraps, bone and shell are still followed. In
1993 I was taught a very valuable lesson by a Yanyuwa man, Graham Friday,
who is the same age as I. We were discussing my research and the number of
years I had been in the area and of the old people who had died and what we
remembered about them. As he flicked through my field diary he commented
on various entries. He said to me, without anger, but just as a statement of
fact:

You know its good you put this stuff down, put it there for the
record, but just because you got an interest in the old days, old Law and
old people, doesn't mean I have to.

(Graham Friday, field diary 1993)

It was a valuable lesson and echoes a comment by Johannes
(1981:148) where he makes reference to the fact that just because western
people find the information useful does not mean that the young of the
community will be motivated to learn it.

The point is valid and needs always to be taken into account. However,
it would be wrong to assume that the younger Yanyuwa men and women are
ignorant. They know many things about their environment and the knowledge
which they need to gain access to their country. The most telling piece of
evidence to support this was the Warnarrwarnarr-Barranyi (Borroloola 2)
Land Claim held in 1992. The amount of evidence given by young people, which is on transcript (Aboriginal Land Commissioner 1992), certainly proves beyond doubt that the younger generation of Yanyuwa people are anything but ignorant in relation to their country, kin and other "traditional practices".

In addition to this, if an occasion arises where the old knowledge is seen to be of use, people will seek it out and use it. Thus, a young Yanyuwa hunter who was doing training with the Northern Territory Conservation Commission got in touch with me and asked to be sent information which he knew his father had given to me. He wished to use the information in an assignment he had been set. Much of the older knowledge is now selectively chosen by the younger people in terms of its use to them at any given time. In part there is a good reason for this, because the amount of knowledge which the older people possess was gained over a lifetime of extensive movement and hunting over the marine environment, a span of time which the younger people cannot hope to attain due to a world which has dramatically changed since the time of their parents and grandparents. Knowing, however, that some information has been recorded, they call on it as they see fit and when the need arises.

In recent times there are three main factors which have led to loss of certain knowledge and the continued training of young people. The first factor is related directly to the continuing influences from the "cattle station" days. Some Yanyuwa men and women married people from the Tablelands. Their

2 This is an important issue for present day anthropologists, ethnographers and other researchers working with indigenous people. Members of any given indigenous community may choose to use the information gathered by the researcher in ways they, nor she could not have predicted. Thus the "authority of the ethnographic record" is brought into question. These are issues which are discussed by Clifford (1980,1988) and Burch (1994) in some detail. Conversely, researchers must show some sensitivity in the way they use recorded information. A well known issue is the debate over the control of Strelhow's collection of Arrente sacred material. Some aspects of this debate are discussed by McNally (1981).
spouses are or were associated with the Garrwa, Alawa, Binbingka, Gudanji, Wambaya, Wakaya, and Warramungu people. As a rule, these people have stayed on the country of their spouses; their children visit Borroloola rarely, or for very specific occasions such as funerals, school holidays and, for those young boys of Yanyuwa descent, for their circumcision rituals. The time that these people stay at Borroloola is never very long and effectively precludes them from learning any of the skills needed to hunt dugong and sea turtle. For these young people, home is where they have grown up, and, while they acknowledge their Yanyuwa kin and country, their homes are such places as Brunette Downs, Elliot, Tennant Creek, Doomadgee, Bourketown, Mount Isa, Darwin and Katherine. History in this instance has played a vital role in reducing the number of Yanyuwa men who will become hunters and the number of women who also have important knowledge relating to dugong and sea turtle. In some regards, the issue discussed above is an amplification of the Yanyuwa outstations which have been established inland away from the coastal regions.

Another factor affecting the continuation of skill and knowledge acquisition, as well as hunting skills in more contemporary times, has been young men marrying women whom they first met while at residential schools in Darwin. Many of these women have come from inland areas such as Katherine, Yarralin and Bulman. The Yanyuwa men establish their relationships with these women in adult life by living on the country of their wives' people. Any children born of these relationships usually grow up with a much stronger attachment to their mother's country and kin, and the father is no longer taught or practices hunting on the sea, and does not pass the knowledge onto his sons and daughters in a practical way, although through oral "traditions", the children will become aware of such things.

The second factor concerning hunting and traditional knowledge decline has been alluded to above, and that is the untimely deaths of a large number of skilled and very knowledgeable senior and middle aged men over the last decade, probably from complications associated with undiagnosed rheumatic fever in their youth (pers. comm Dr. Peter Fitzpatrick 1993). The impact that these deaths have had upon the Yanyuwa community in
general, and on the passing on of knowledge in relation to dugong and sea turtle hunting in particular, cannot be underestimated. A number of the deaths of these men occurred when their sons were just being taught how to hunt, or were at an age when they would start to be taught. If there were no male relatives to continue or to start the teaching of these young men, then they would never acquire the necessary skills, as has happened in a number of instances. Other men have died taking with them an enormous amount of ritual and spiritual information without having passed it on to succeeding generations of hunters. When the death of a senior maranja occurs, there is also a halt to being able to access certain parts of the country and sea until the jungkayi have effectively dealt with it by smoking or other ritual means. As well, items such as boats and engines are put out of use until the jungkayi agree that they can be used again, which may be from one to six months. Thus, when Johnson Timothy died in 1994, all access to the Wuyaliya and Rrumburriya land on the islands, the delta area of the McArthur River was stopped until the jungkayi could perform the necessary actions in relation to this country. However, because Johnson was such a senior man in relation to the all of the above-mentioned areas, such actions might not be performed for at least 12 months. To disregard such community decisions would be seen as a violent act of disrespect and would also disturb the sanctity of the spirit world of "old people" to which Johnson and others now belong.

When the restrictions are released, the first people to visit the areas above should be Johnson's wife and his sons; if they hunt dugong and sea turtle and are successful, then all is well; if not, people will see it as a rebuff from the old people that the time is not yet right. Jungkayi, however, can hunt on the area, but even they, out of respect, will wait for a few months. If the jungkayi are successful, they can distribute the meat as they see fit, even to close relatives of the deceased person.

The deaths of such senior men as Johnson stun the community, and leave great gaps in leadership and power structures. At the level of dugong and sea turtle hunting, young men will suffer. Younger Yanyuwa people often comment that hunting trips undertaken with older men are always more
successful and enjoyable. The reason for this is that the older hunters are more skilful and the younger hunters will gain reputations if such men train them. The older men are a repository of stories and knowledge which are a part of the educational process. The stories that an older hunter imparts are not just to do with matters related to the Spirit Ancestors or the "old people". There are also stories about past hunts, about sending other men out and telling them where to hunt, and of the success of that hunt based upon the information he gave, and of the number that he has killed. Both the skills an older hunter imparts and the stories and knowledge he passes on, demonstrate the position of power he has over the younger hunters, one which the younger hunters are prepared to accept. If, as has happened at Borroloola, too many of these older, expert hunters die, a weakness appears in the structure of imparting skills and knowledge which could have disastrous effects on the community generally at Borroloola.

In recent years, the effects of substance abuse, chronic unemployment and other social issues associated with an indigenous community undergoing rapid social change have also taken their toll upon those men who are hunters of dugong and sea turtle. A number of young men have died as a direct result of substance abuse. Most of these men were hunters or had been trained to do so. Most young men who come from families where the older senior male members of that family are hunters, marnaja, have been taught the skills by which to hunt before they reach the age where peer group pressure increase to the point where they are induced into the oppressive and depressive cycle of substance abuse. While substance abuse, mainly in the form of beer, is a chronic issue at Borroloola, there are a number of young men and older men who, if given the choice, will travel to the sea and hunt as opposed to staying at Borroloola to drink. A number of these young men are skilful hunters, and as with their older relatives, the enjoyment of the hunt

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3 Similar observations in relation to the social dynamics of hunting between older and younger hunters have also been made by Feit (1986,1994), among the Cree of northern Canada.
and the journey to the islands goes far beyond just a desire for meat. The issues associated with substance abuse and other social trends at Borroloola are worthy of a separate study and go far beyond the scope of this thesis. I make mention of it reluctantly only because it has had an influence upon a community who, despite some enormous odds, is rightly proud of its heritage.

The sketch genealogies (figures 34 and 35) of patrilines from two patricians illustrate many of the issues which are discussed above. It can be seen that when looking at the older levels of the genealogies there were a far greater number of hunters than there are today. The more recent levels of the genealogies show fewer hunters, those who are able and want to hunt, and those who can hunt and for various reasons only do so occasionally. Because these issues are important in building a sense of past and present images of the Yanyuwa hunting community, it is necessary to include them; but they are also sensitive issues, so I have chosen not to name individuals. It is possible for readers to gain a sense of what has happened and what is happening, without having identify actual individuals.

12.3 No boat, no dugong; no car, no goanna.

It is the dream of most Yanyuwa families to own a boat and a car so that they can travel to the country of their father and their mother, move over it and perhaps live semi-permanently upon it. The reality is that this is usually far from the case. Families who have a car or boat at their disposal are generally speaking those people who still like to get away from Borroloola on the weekends and during school holidays. Until the late 1980's this group also contained those men whose greatest satisfaction in life was to hunt dugong and turtle, and those women who desired above most other things to fish and hunt goanna and long necked turtle.

During the late 1970's and early 1980's, key Yanyuwa families had senior men employed at the Aboriginal Community Council. Thus, certain families were always assured of regular wages and such bonuses as holiday pay, which allowed for relatively regular journeys to the sea. A mechanic
Figure 34. Island Wuyaliya Patrician Indicating Status Of Individuals In Relation To Dugong And Sea Turtle Hunting.

**Code:**
- △ Active Hunters.
- ◇ Deceased senior hunters.
- ▽ Too old to hunt.
- ★ Sporadic hunters.
- † Untimely deaths (between 15 - 45 years)
  - Those marked with e were hunters.
- ☆ Lives at Borroloola. Has begun training
- ▼ Lives at Borroloola. Never / not yet taught to hunt.
- ▾ Lives away from Borroloola.
  - Taught to hunt.
- ∧ Lives away from Borroloola.
  - Never taught to hunt.

**Note:** Children under 13 years of age are not shown.

Broken line indicates generation of men who were heavily involved with the cattle industry during the 1940's, 1950's and 1960's.
Figure 35. Island Rumburriya Patriclan Indicating Status Of Individuals In Relation To Dugong And Sea Turtle Hunting.

**Code:**
- Active Hunters
- Deceased senior hunters.
- Too old to hunt
- Sporadic hunters.
- Untimely deaths (between 15 - 45 years) Those marked with o were hunters.
- Lives at Borroloola. Has begun training.
- Lives at Borroloola. Never/not yet taught to hunt.
- Lives away from Borroloola. Taught to hunt.
- Lives away from Borroloola. Never taught to hunt.

*Note: Children under 13 years of age are not shown.*

Broken line indicates generation of men who were heavily involved with the cattle industry during the 1940's, 1950's and 1960's.
employed by the local Council was in constant demand to repair and service outboard engines for sea journeys. At this time in the Aboriginal Community at Borroloola, and, still to some extent today, cars, boats and engines were constantly purchased from various families, payment was in the form of cash, such as a total pay packet, a tax return, a good win “on the cards” or even, sometimes, with part cash and part barter in, for example, dugong and sea turtle meat. In her work in Central Australia, Devitt (1988) documents similar occurrences in relation to vehicle ownership.

With the sacking of the Council in 1985, all of these people became dependent on pension and unemployment benefits. Ready cash to travel to the sea became scarce. The desires to get out of Borroloola were so strong that husbands, wives and entire families pooled their cheques or entered into the “book down” system where goods are purchased in advance of having the income to pay for them. Such a system leads to a constant spiral of indebtedness to local store owners at Borroloola. Some people may “run” one or two books at different shops. This practice has the disastrous consequence that people are chained to a system of “hire purchase” for survival and for hunting trips to the islands. For example, to run a boat from Borroloola to the islands and back again, for fuel and oil alone, cost between $100- $150 on 1993 prices.

In the early 1980’s the Mabunji Outstation Resource Centre had been established at Borroloola, with its major aim being to assist the smooth running of what was then the relatively fledgling outstation movement at Borroloola. As with many Aboriginal organisations structured along European lines of management, it became an organisation full of intrigue, politics and mistrust. But with the sacking of the council, it became the only place that could assist people in the obtaining and servicing of their boats and engines. However, even today, many of the engines in need of repair are sent to Darwin, and lengthy delays are common in the repair of engines. As a result of this, there are within the indigenous community at Borroloola men who are acknowledged “camp mechanics”, who spend long hours over long periods of time maintaining engines of boats and motor vehicles for themselves and others. Apart from the Outstation Resource Centre and these
local "camp mechanics", there are a few local commercial mechanics at Borroloola who, while very good, are often too expensive to be used often by Yanyuwa people. The basic rule at Borroloola is to try the local camp mechanic first for assistance, but if he is unable to assist, such as in cases of major mechanical faults, other avenues are then attempted.

The Outstation Resource Centre has one very important function and that is to prepare and submit requests by various local Aboriginal people to the Aboriginal Benefits Trust Fund, for items to assist them in their desires to move over their country and live on their outstations. Such items as water pumps, saddles, solar panels, cars and boats are amongst some of the items that can be obtained through a process which, in many respects, is a "luck-of-the-draw". Men and women put in requests for what they think they need, for example, a boat. Usually it is under the name of a local outstation associated with their patrician, and if there is no outstation, the name of a major site within their patrilineal or matrilineal estate is used. These requests are then put through selection criteria by the members of the Aboriginal Benefits Trust Fund. Most of the boats and engines that are now operating at Borroloola have been achieved through this process. There is a condition on the receipt of a vehicle or a boat through this fund that the owners cannot sell the item to make a profit. Sales of boats and vehicles have occurred in the Yanyuwa community, and, generally speaking, it is frowned upon. Such people are described as being "greedy for money" and not really "caring about their country". However, people get a lot of use out of their vehicles and boats. Some people at Borroloola are still using boats they obtained 10 years ago, although they may have had a number of engines during this time. Cars last a considerably shorter time, with three years being an average length of time before needing major mechanical work.

Access to a vehicle determines whether Yanyuwa people will be able to travel to the sea or not. Women as well as men can own boats at Borroloola, although, generally speaking, a male relative such as a husband nephew, or a son, will have effective control of the boat. However, because a woman can own it by "whitefella law", she does have a strong influence over how the boat will be used. There has never been a cultural proscription against
women using or owning boats, and this was also the case in the times of the
dugout canoes. It is, however, rare for a woman to own and drive a car
regularly. Women paddled, and today drive, for men when hunting dugong and
sea turtle. They are also accorded those pieces of meat which are theirs
according to Law during the butchering of the turtle or dugong. It is becoming
increasingly more common for women to handle boats and to drive them long
distances over sea and river systems. For example, during a camping trip to
South West Island in 1987, when there was enough dugong meat in the camp,
the boat was used constantly by women for fishing expeditions to other
islands or reefs and to other parts of the island to hunt for wild honey and
goanna.

On an instance in 1984 on Kangaroo Island, the boat had broken down
and could only be used by paddling, which, because of the difficulty in
paddling an aluminium dinghy, effectively stopped its being used for long
distances. The women, however, were not to be deterred. They removed the
engine, cut a large hole in the front bench-seat, cut a number of saplings and
made a sail similar to that once used on dugout canoes. They then spent a
number of days sailing to areas where they wished to hunt for goanna. Since
then, a number of men have emulated the women when out hunting dugong and
sea turtle, especially if a good wind is blowing and there is a shortage of
petrol or the engine has broken down.

There is an expectation amongst all Yanyuwa people that if long term
trips to the islands are being planned, women and children will be a part of
the group that go. Yanyuwa women will react strongly against any attempt
against enforced sexual separation. As the men plan where to go, the women
will also make plans about where they will go, and where they can be dropped
off while the men go and hunt. The only time women will say nothing about a
trip is when a few men go for the day or for an overnight trip to the sea and
return on the same or following day.

I have never recorded any detailed stories about women harpooning
dugong or sea turtles. This is not to say it may not have happened, but when I
have asked such a question, women and men look at me with strange looks and
give a simple "no"—although I was told very briefly by an elderly man how
his wife speared a small turtle once, because they were alone and he was very sick. But even he would not elaborate on the matter (Tyson Birribirrikama, field diary 1986). It seems that such an occurrence would be considered highly unusual; thus, this makes the hunting of the dugong and sea turtle a very masculine affair. But it does not deny that women also have their own knowledge which complements that known by the men. Women, for example, will watch carefully during the butchering of an animal and guide and instruct younger men. They will suggest good localities to hunt based upon seasonal factors, and have their own repository of stories about the hunting skills of their own fathers and grandfathers. They are also knowledgeable in relation to the "old people", and Spirit Ancestor narratives. Where necessary because able bodied men are not around, they will drive boats while hunting and, they also have the same visual acuity as the men in their ability to follow submerged turtle or dugong through the water, and are increasingly assisting with butchering and cooking. They are also equally adept at gathering firewood, preparing ground ovens, cooking and distributing meat, and importantly gathering other bush foods which provide the constant source of food if the men are not successful.  

12.4 What would a whitefella know?
Prior to the mid 1970's the Yanyuwa had had very little experience with the world of anthropological and other scientific research. With the exception of a little work undertaken by Stretton in 1893, Spencer and Gillen briefly in 1901 and Reay in the 1960's there had been little recorded and little published. The first researcher to arrive for a lengthy period of time was Jean Kirton, who arrived in 1963 and stayed to 1988. Denhe McLaughlin (1977) and John Avery (1985) worked extensively at Borroloola during the mid to late 1970's, followed by Richard Baker

4 See also Hiatt (1978) and Meehan (1977a, 1977b, 1982) for valuable discussions in relation to the significant role of women as hunters and gatherers of food in a coastal community.
and myself (1988, 1990, 1991, 1993) from the early 1980's until the present. The last decade of research has involved the Yanyuwa people to a far greater degree than before, partly because they are being asked to participate and partly because they demand to participate. Generally speaking, most of the research has dealt with the community and its social history with little regard being paid to how the Yanyuwa people perceive themselves within their own environment, with the exception of Baker (1989) who discusses this as a prelude to his detailed discussion of Yanyuwa demographic movement.

From my experience, it was when my research moved down onto the islands and the sea that people became very interested in what I was writing down. This interest manifested itself in wanting to demonstrate repeatedly their own pride in their maritime traditions, and by their desire to have me understand the extent of their knowledge as well as the range of contemporary practice and skill. I have always had an interest in marine mammals and large sea creatures such as sea turtles. From my reading before coming to Borroloola in 1980, I had some idea of the basic biology of dugong and sea turtles and their vulnerability as species. This engendered some surprise in the Yanyuwa, as the great majority of non-indigenous people they meet know little about such things.

However, such knowledge did not always assist me. Firstly, it was "white fella" knowledge from a book, and how, I was asked, could that compete with knowledge kept in one's head that had been handed down from generation to generation? It was a good point, and it was obvious from the outset that the Yanyuwa did possess a wide range of knowledge in relation to the sea and the creatures that inhabit it. After I had been out to the sea and the islands on a number of trips, witnessed hunting and observed butchering and cooking and had eaten some of the flesh of the dugong and the sea turtle, I was informed that I "was really getting to know about dugong and turtle".

Pratt (1994) discusses feelings engendered within a Nunivak community of Alaska, when the so-called experts do not ask the extent of traditional knowledge.
The knowledge I had gained from books and journals looked at these creatures from a very broad global and national perspective, whilst the Yanyuwa view, although interested in other places where these creatures existed, was temporally and geographically confined to the areas they believed were under their influence, namely the Sir Edward Pellew Islands and surrounding sea.

People were quite happy for me to put down information about the environment and the sea animals as well as the other items I was recording such as place name mapping, language and hunting techniques. I was also keeping a tally of dugong and turtle takes which always provided interesting comment and light-hearted banter amongst the hunters, and in quiet moments in the camp I was often asked to bring out the book with the numbers in it. Some men and family members became quite insistent about putting down the figures, and often checked them for accuracy.

However, a change occurred towards my keeping of take numbers in July 1985 when two Yanyuwa hunters, Johnson Timothy and Graham Friday, and I attended a conference in Townsville on “Traditional Knowledge of the Maritime Environment in Northern Australia”. The conference was a gathering of indigenous people from various coastal communities around northern Australia, biologists, anthropologists and other people with knowledge and expertise in the area. While Johnson and Graham enjoyed the conference and shared their knowledge (Gray and Zahn 1986:49-50), they became aware of undercurrents of concern and differences between indigenous communities and biologists in relation to such issues as take numbers, species management and the requirement for permits to hunt dugong in northern Queensland (see Baldwin 1985, Smith 1987, Marsh, Smith and Kelly 1984).

On a number of occasions during this time in Townsville, Johnson and Graham both asked me if I thought that a permit system or other forms of restrictions might be introduced to the islands. To this I had no answer. They then asked me what I did with the figures of their own take numbers and whether I had ever given them to any of “these scientist blokes” -because if I had, they might try and stop them hunting. At that time I was able to say that
the figures I had now been collecting for five years had only been shared with Dr. Helene Marsh, whom Graham had met during the sea turtle and dugong rescue after Cyclone Kathy in 1984, and whom Johnson had met during the course of the conference. They expressed some alarm, but after being told by Helene and I during a tour of her laboratory at the James Cook University and being told that professional fishermen take probably were of greater concern in the area of the islands, they were much relieved. But they did ask me not to give the numbers to too many people because, “who knows what might happen”.

On their return to Borroloola, it was obvious that my take number data was still of concern, as on a trip to the island in August it was raised by a number of hunters, but I was able to assure them that the biologists or “scientist blokes” were not really worried by their take numbers, as they were sustainable at the present time, given the local dugong and sea turtle populations.

I have related this story because the issue goes beyond just take numbers. The conference made Johnson and Graham realise, as did the dugong and sea turtle rescue operation in 1984, that there were many other people, who were interested in dugong and sea turtle, and these people held a variety of opinions in relation to them.

The basic questions for the Yanyuwa during the 1980’s until the present have been, what do the “scientists” want the knowledge for, and what will they do with it? Fortunately, during the last fifteen years, Yanyuwa people have been involved with some of the research, such as turtle research with Dr. Colin Limpus and various aerial surveys in relation to dugong numbers undertaken by the Northern Territory.

Conservation Commission (Bayliss and Freeland 1989) studies and recent work undertaken by Dr. Tony Preen in relation to dugong numbers, seagrass and travel rates have raised some concerns. While in all of these cases Yanyuwa people have been involved to some extent people still ask two main questions: firstly, “What are they going to do with the information?”, which can be taken to mean, “Are they going to use the gathered information in support of our Law or against it?” secondly, the question is asked “Why
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don't they have a meeting with all the Yanyuwa people before they start and
after they finish?" The messages behind these questions was brought home to
me powerfully in November 1994.

A number of senior Yanyuwa women and I were sitting under a tree
outside one of the local stores at Borroloola talking quietly about anything
that seemed to be important. As we sat there, we were approached by Dr. Tony
Preen, who was working at that time on research concerning the radio
tracking of dugong. His research team had used a local Yanyuwa-Mara man,
and this man had told me he had enjoyed working on the research. The senior
women knew little about the research, and during the informal meeting with
Tony Preen, they found out what he had been doing. Later in the camp, the
women in the company of other senior Yanyuwa men and women talked about
the research they had heard about. They expressed concern about the lack of
formal meeting or contact about the research, but there was also much
interest in what they had heard about the research. There was much laughter
about how the "young girl dugong" was tracked as far as Mornington Island,
as she must have been looking for her boyfriend, they surmised. There was
satisfaction that a lone male dugong had not moved far, thus confirming that
they, the Yanyuwa, had been right all along about such a dugong, but there
was also a degree of awe, tinged with what I can only describe as a form of
melancholy, which was best expressed by Annie Karrakayn:

We Yanyuwa people always knew the dugong moved, moved from one place
to another eating the sea grass and moving in their own time, this we
all know and understand. Today this young man, this Tony has told us
that dugong travels far from the islands, they travel a great distance into
the east, the old people and us we did not know this, we always thought
they were our dugong belonging to the islands, our country and now we
have been told they travel far away from it, I don't know what to think....

(Annie Karrakayn, field diary 1994)

The comment by Annie is important and many people agreed with what
she said. It is a statement which highlights a degree of confusion. Biologists
have argued that while ethnobiology can provide valuable information for the biologists, generally speaking, it tends to lack a sense of broad temporal and spatial detail. For example, the Yanyuwa have always believed that the dugong lives permanently in the seas around the islands. They believed that they did travel from one place to another, but not on the scale that the satellite tracking program revealed. Thus, they are confronted with a problem: For many hundreds of years the Yanyuwa have believed that the dugong was an animal to which they are related by varying degrees of kinship, such as mothers, paternal grandfather and maternal grandfather. Its fecundity, behaviour and spiritual potency was, to some extent, able to be influenced by human agencies under their control at Wunubarryi (Mt. Young), but western scientific research suggests that this may not be the case. Dugong may indeed travel great distances from one place to another, and perhaps may not be all related to each other as the Yanyuwa believe. These older Yanyuwa people have to work out ways of absorbing this knowledge without risking the validity of their own indigenous knowledge. One way of doing this has been by putting cultural interpretations on the biological findings thus far. A female dugong travelling a long distance is like a human woman travelling a great distance after her "boyfriend", an activity known in Yanyuwa as wunji and, about which there was much ribald joking. One of the issues that the Yanyuwa discussion about western research has highlighted for me is that for the Yanyuwa, the dugong appears to have always been more important than the turtle.

After attending some sea turtle research sessions with Dr. Colin Limpus, Graham Friday returned with much information about the movement of sea turtles, nesting rates and tagging programs. None of the information was met with any degree of alarm, and the comment by Mussolini Harvey in the introduction of this thesis, highlights this. The two views of knowledge, indigenous and western scientific, were blended together very rapidly. However, with the dugong, this has not generally been the case. The dugong represents for the Yanyuwa a potent symbol of continuity with the past, more so than the turtle. This is never explicitly stated, but implicit understandings are often given in the language that is used to describe dugong
activity, the song cycles, rituals, sites and the general emotion which is used for these creatures. For example, after his return from Townsville Johnson Timothy refused to accept much of the biological knowledge that Dr. Helene Marsh had told him. Information such as low breeding rates and the dugong's general overall vulnerability as a species was quickly disregarded, while information regarding dugong lifespan was met with no surprise because, he said, “the Yanyuwa people always knew about such matters”. In relation to sea turtles however, Johnson was more than willing to accept and understand what Dr. Colin Limpus told him.

The dugong appears to be a nearly sacrosanct creature, and Johnson was joined by other senior men in his disdain for western biological information in relation to dugong. After the results of a number of aerial surveys became known in the Yanyuwa community, these older men would comment disdainfully that, “we could have told them they would find dugong there; it’s their time to beat that place”. Another incident which highlighted a more conservative approach to the dugong occurred when I asked if I could remove the tusks from a number of heads to send to Townsville so that ages of the animals captured could be determined (see Marsh 1981). One old man said I was “bloody mad”, and if I were to remove the teeth “anything might happen”; “everything might go wrong”, he said, indicating that what he saw as an act of disrespect of the dugong could have far-reaching ramifications for the rest of the environment. Even Johnson Timothy, who had been told of the age-recording process firsthand and had seen examples and expressed some interest in the process at Townsville, was most reluctant to allow tusks to be removed. He felt it was “cruelling the dugong”, which is another way of saying that he felt he would be being disrespectful if he allowed such a thing to happen. As a result of these kinds of attitudes, I soon gave up any hope of gathering teeth for age analysis; once again, the idea that all living things throughout the Yanyuwa cosmos are interrelated was made very clear.

Younger men and women, while interested in what may be being said by western science about the dugong and the sea turtle, at the present time pay little obvious attention to it. I believe that while the younger generation of Yanyuwa people can, and sometimes do, express interest in a western
biological view of the dugong and the sea turtle, they find that, on occasions, the information contrasts so radically with what the older men and women are telling them that to accept it totally and actively would be seen as a betrayal of trust in the older men who have taught them to hunt, and in the men and women who have imparted their knowledge concerning the two species. Thus, younger hunters will still present the dugong and the sea turtle as social beings who are intimately connected to both people and place. To assert that western knowledge may be better or more correct is to challenge the whole authority of the "tradition", in that western knowledge in relation to the islands, sea, dugong and sea turtle does not, as yet, give power or prestige, but indigenous knowledge still does.

Both the dugong and the sea turtle are part of an immensely powerful and continuing "tradition". I believe that if such communities were contacted before research takes place and kept informed during the research, if Yanyuwa assistants were employed and given basic training and skill acquisition in western scientific method, and, if people are informed of the results after the research, there could possibly be a greater acceptance of what the "scientists" are wanting to do. Such a relationship would also allow younger Yanyuwa men and women to renegotiate a relationship with the islands and sea, something which, at times, is difficult to do in the present day circumstances.

Despite the ravages that the last fifty years have had upon the Yanyuwa community, there is still a strong sense that the coastal regions, islands, sea and all of the diverse biology are inextricably linked to them, and at its most basic, the Yanyuwa perceive it as good manners for people to ask if scientists and others want to work over their country. The islands abound in special places, some of which are benign and others dangerous. The plants and animals species also have varying degrees of significance, which must be respected for the well being of all. As Jemima Miller aptly put after the discussion concerning the radio tracking of dugong:

We've got an interest, we got feelings for that country, for that dugong and sea turtle, we gotta have feeling because that's our country and
There is a general fear amongst the Yanyuwa hunters and their families that the government may one day wish to impose forms of restrictions on the hunting that takes place. It would appear at the moment that Yanyuwa take numbers are sustainable in view of the estimated populations of dugong and sea turtle in the area (pers. comm Dr. Helene Marsh and Dr. Colin Limpus, and Chapter 11). Any thought of introducing restrictions or studies into take numbers by Yanyuwa hunters must be very carefully thought out over a long period of time, with clear and positive reasons as to why such restrictions or studies should be introduced. On many occasions the actions and words of biologists, personnel from various government organisations and conservationists have angered, confused and alienated the Yanyuwa. For the Yanyuwa the dugong and sea turtle are not just a biological resource; the relationship is one which is complex, to say the least. This relationship is one which is associated with all members of the community, not just those men who hunt them, and any discussions in relation to these creatures should take place with the whole community not just the men who hunt them. All Yanyuwa men, women and children have an interest in these animals.

This section, then, raises a number of important questions about the relationship between folk and scientific knowledge, and the potential validity of the former, through self-confirming systems of argument. There are many issues associated with the relevance of ethnobiology to science, and some of these have been discussed in full by people such as Johanness (1981), Bulmer and Healey (1993), Pratt (1994) and Ellen (1979). It is Hunn (1993:13) who spells out quite clearly the value of traditional ecological knowledge:

Traditional Ecological Knowledge contrasts with Modern Scientific

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6 Relevant to this comment is the analysis undertaken by Evans-Pritchard (1937) in relation to the stability of Azande witchcraft and beliefs.
knowledge, better known as Science with a capital "S". I... argue that traditional ecological knowledge is a valuable source of information relevant to natural resource conservation and the preservation of ecological integrity in many parts of the world today. Systems of traditional ecological knowledge provide insight into human-environment relationships, i.e., human ecology, that modern science does not, and perhaps cannot, provide.

While the issue of the value of a relationship between science and the ethnosciences is still open for much debate, there is also the issue of the relevance of scientific knowledge for folk knowledge. This is the other side of the argument, and it has received scant attention, primarily because there is a tendency to “romanticise” folk knowledge by confining it conceptually into a timeless “traditional” setting. In Chapter 2 and elsewhere throughout this thesis I have argued against accepting a static view of tradition. The knowledge that ethnobiology provides must be examined in its wider social and political economic contexts. Both Ellen (1979) and Healey (1993, 1994) espouse a similar conviction in relation to “tradition” and the value of ethnobiology and ethnoecology.

A meaningful interrelationship between ethnoecology, ethnobiology and science is only possible when tradition is seen as a fluid and transforming agent with no real end, and when it is recognised that proper analysis of any given environment must take into account both the subjective meaning and the emotional context of the lived experience as well as the historical and politico-economic context within which people are operating. Crucial to this analysis, however, is the place of negotiation, a concept which I have argued is central to any understanding of an ethno-ecological or ethno-biological account, accounts which must include the many ways by which people will negotiate with the knowledge they have, or with their place within their society and environment. Ultimately, the way people negotiate their way through their environment and their relationship with any researcher will dictate the quality of the material which is recorded.
12.5 Conclusion

History shows that the number of men hunting dugong and sea turtle has decreased dramatically. One of the major reasons for this was the disruption caused by the cattle industry and the need for that industry to have cheap labour, which was found in indigenous people. Regardless of this impact, and of the tragic deaths of senior men, the Yanyuwa have continued to hunt. Through the hunting and the skills involved in it, and through the various Laws which are associated with the butchering, cooking and distribution of meat, it is evident that both practically and intellectually, the "tradition" is still strong. A continuity with the past is clearly demonstrable through the actions of the present hunters, but at the same time, the history of the Yanyuwa people has shown that there has not been any marked aversion to material culture change and some innovation.

Any long term plans for the ecological management of the seas and the islands which comprise the Sir Edward Pellew Group of Islands, must take the factors described in this thesis - factors such as negotiation, a complex relationship with country based on kinship and spiritual connections, the challenges of integrating western scientific knowledge with indigenous knowledge, and so forth - into account. The islands and the sea present what Freeman (1988:153) calls a "human environment", which requires a holistic approach to any form of management. He says in relation to the management of such environments, where indigenous people feel they have had continual and ongoing rights:

In so far as we are speaking of management of the human environment, such an understanding must encompass not only biological and physical parameters, but also variables associated with the cultural and institutional environments. Thus the way people perceive their environment, and the manner in which various institutional arrangements pattern or constrain behaviour, assume significance.

The islands and the sea are already experiencing a number of competing land-based disputes, from such agents as tourists, fishermen,
government bodies such as the Lands Department, the Conservation Commission, and the mine port site at Bing Bong. In relation to many of these developments, the wishes of the indigenous and "institutional arrangements" which affect them have had little attention given to them: In some places, any suggestion of involving Yanyuwa people as a consideration when discussing the islands and the coastal country causes anger and open hostility. Yet they have proved that they will not go away; they will continue to demand to be heard.

Johannes and Lewis (1989:107) rightly comment that indigenous ecological knowledge can be of assistance in gaining a rapid overview of any given environmental system; but before such information is really useful in terms of assisting in the development of conservation strategies, for example, it must be combined with other forms of scientific research. However, I believe that indigenous ecological knowledge alone is not enough to consider in the process of evaluating conservation strategies. The history of the people in that place must also be examined; the indigenous political structures which function on the given land and sea must also be viewed, and, above all, even after much of the field work and information has been gathered there must be constant and ongoing dialogue with the people who call the particular environment a part of their home.

This thesis has presented an exploration of the way the Yanyuwa people manage to call the Sir Edward Pellew Islands and the surrounding seas a familiar place. The rights of access to this land and sea and the resources which are located on and in this "country" almost always involve some form of negotiation. Much of the negotiation which takes place could indeed be called a religious duty (Williams 1986), while other forms of negotiation involve people bringing their own personal or group claims to public notice, such as is discussed in great detail by Myers (1986) with his work on the Pintubi. These claims include, for example kin ties and obligations, responsibility towards country, shared Spirit Ancestor paths, songs and other religious and ritual responsibilities. Importantly the rights to such forms of negotiation must ultimately be seen as part of an individual's birthright, a birthright which contains land, sea and symbols which are both tangible and intangible.
The Yanyuwa, despite enormous contemporary pressures, are still a distinctly indigenous people who reflect a view of the environment which is different from mainstream society. However, as a community, they are finding it difficult to maintain or restore those things which may be classed as "traditional ways". As a group they are depressed and psychologically overwhelmed by the fast rate of change that has occurred in the region, notably at Borroloola township, Bing Bong Station and areas of the McArthur River such as the Landing, and parts of the islands such as Camp Beach on Centre Island. Developments in these places have effectively precluded any form of indigenous management practices.

However journeys to the islands, visitation to important sites, the hunting, cooking, distribution and eating of dugong and sea turtle continue as a way to maintain indigenous relationships. These practices represent a process by which new ties can be joined, a system of paying back debts and expressing thanks and a way to allow for a "Yanyuwa-ness" to exist where, in other places, it may not be possible to do so.

In a community where change over the last decade has been rapid and cultural loss tragic and immeasurable, the islands and the sea - with the dugong, sea turtle and strong memories and reminders of the "old people" - are one place where the Yanyuwa feel they can be who they want to be without threat. Hunting is not just meat; it is more. It is a process tied together with visions of the Spirit Ancestors, of the long human past and the contemporary experience. It is, at its most basic, also an enjoyable as well as a serious undertaking. The numbers of dugong and sea turtle taken are not great, and any proposal to project a western-style management plan on these islands must be done in full consultation with both the men and the women of the Yanyuwa community. Not all knowledge has died or will die with the "old people", not all "traditions" are lost. They can be remembered, reclaimed, and, even generations later, they can be caught up in a strong wave of cultural resurgence of Yanyuwa identity, made to symbolise a possible future.

Ultimately, the islands and the sea must be seen by outsiders as more than just a place of occasional visitation. These islands and sea are still seen
as a sacred trust, an ancestral home. The Yanyuwa people's associations with the land, the sea, dugong and the sea turtle have been nurtured over hundreds of years. In the last 100 years there have been dispossession and loss, repossession, presence and absence, reality and memory.

To be sure, some Yanyuwa have survived without their islands, sea, dugong and sea turtle, and, the land can be said to have survived without the Yanyuwa, but the relationship has, at its most basic, always been permanent. History has forged an indissoluble bond between land and people.

I have spoken of some of the issues which surround the word "tradition" and that ultimately in a contemporary situation such as found at Borroloola, tradition for the Yanyuwa is "an expression of identity and legitimacy" (Sturzenhofecker 1994:27), but as Bullivant (1978) states, it is not without "tension". In relation to the tradition of maritime hunting, it has, because of the many historical circumstances discussed within the thesis, become what Salmond (1975) calls an "episodic subculture" in terms of its actual practice, yet I have also demonstrated that at a social level, the activity and other related issues are an important factor in giving a sense of identity to the Yanyuwa.

On a wider scale I believe that the information presented in this thesis presents an argument that ethnobiological knowledge is much more than just a matter of a lived experience within a given environment. Ethnobiological knowledge also has much to do with the apprehension of self, or the tension inherent in just living. This thesis has attempted to push beyond the preoccupations with taxonomic structures and the over burdened debates on utilitarian versus intellectual basis of classifications, as expounded by Berlin (1972,1976,1978,1992), Hunn (1977,1990), Hays (1976,1982) and Waddy (1988).

I have moved away from the "plastic models" of ethno-biology and ethno-ecology as undertaken by the cited researchers, and see studies in these fields as being much more dynamic and holistic. In my view Ellen (1979: 6) succinctly sums up some of the issues in the following comment:

...Berlin et al. make empirical generalizations about certain types
and assume that variability is according to a limited number of well-understood criteria along a parallel axis.

This thesis has presented the hypothesis that ethnobiological studies are also about other dimensions of human existence, specifically, that the ordering or classifying of the environment is also intimately associated with attachment to place, ancestors and present day people. Although this knowledge does, of course, have emotional dimensions, it is also contested, and is therefore a part of the negotiations which individuals are constrained to engage in perpetually. Such negotiations include the legitimacy of claims to privileged knowledge, connections to places and people, to the past, the present and the future. Life, then, is about much more than pragmatics, or even the often alluded to mystical/religious conceptions.

On a practical level, the empirical contribution of this thesis cannot afford to be overlooked. I have recorded a wide range of information which has relevance to a group of people who see themselves as being intimately associated with the coast and sea. Tragically, some of this information is in danger of being lost, but this thesis goes some way towards providing, via Yanyuwa ethnography, an understanding of indigenous maritime adaptations, as well as contributing to the study of Yanyuwa ethnography as a whole.

I have dealt with the ecology of exploitation of potentially endangered species, thus contributing to aspects of human ecology. Within this thesis I have provided data on such matters as a reconstruction of historic kill rates based on sound historical research, as well as providing take rates which encompass a time scale from 1980 through to 1994; for any northern maritime community I believe this to be unique. People are being given an opportunity to assess my data and place their own interpretations upon it. In short, this thesis has attempted to stand not just on the beach and look at boats as they travel out to sea, but to stand in the boat, observe and then travel back to the beach.

I have also provided an in-depth study of some aspects of ethnoecology and ethnobiology, and from the outset have made it quite clear that my position is one where the Yanyuwa relationship with the total environment
must involve the relationship between the supernatural and the biological, noting as does Bulmer (1979) that a concept such as spirituality is a "slippery term", but nonetheless important. The involvement of people in the environment in which they find themselves is the very beginning of any understanding of the indigenous forms of negotiation; and because this involvement is based a large number of variables such as age, status and interest, any attempt at classification of this environment should be based upon these and other variables.

It is highly probable that the coming decades will be for some indigenous Australians a time of looking at their relationship to the coast and sea, in much the same way that the Maori of New Zealand have been exploring their sea rights (Haughey 1966, Levine 1987, Sharp 1991). There are very few detailed Australian ethnographic studies which have done this; as a general rule, the indigenous relationship with the sea in the Australian context has been either neglected, poorly conceptualised or locked away securely in organisations such as Land Councils.

This thesis is important as a detailed anthropological document, but it has value in terms of explaining maritime relationships which may become of issue when viewed in the light of such Government legislation as the Native Title Act. This thesis leads one to believe that in the Yanyuwa context the maritime and terrestrial environments are intimately linked and must be viewed as a whole.

I have discussed in this thesis the idea that the sea is like land - it can be named and known, and it is a spiritual entity as well, accruing its own oral histories which people engage when speaking of their "sea country", in the same way that people engage with "land country". Ultimately, both land and sea are related, neither can exist without the other; and the actions of people on the land and sea can profoundly affect the whole environment. Thus, a continuous process of negotiation occurs in which the total environment is viewed as a whole. Such concepts of negotiation and relatedness contrast quite remarkably with the recorded "rule" and "norms" which can be found in the ethnographic descriptions of other groups. In this regard, Myers (1986) provides a valuable insight, as he, too, sees the processes of negotiation as
being fundamental to the way a dynamic group of people operate.

The dynamics for any group of people include history, spirituality, activity and journeys, as well as the sense of spiritual and human presence which for the Yanyuwa have become entwined. In the midst of these dynamics, for the Yanyuwa, the islands, sea, dugong and sea turtle, in particular, of all sea creatures, remain still a focus of dreams and aspirations, of a continuity with the past and hope for the future.
2. Smoke on the horizon, from a fire on Mathandurla (West Island).

3. Burning off at Manankurra (Manangoora)
5. Sea Turtle painting, Yungkurriji. Vanderlin Island.
6. Sea Turtle rock painting, Marliyi, Vanderlin Island.
7. Tommy Nawurrungu striking dugong maintenance stone, Wunubarryi (Mount Young).
   Photo: Dehne McLaughlin.
8. Sea Turtle maintenance site Araiwiji (Ross Point), North Island.
Stone Formations L to R: Large pectoral muscles, small piece of chest meat sacred to the turtle, fat and meat from hip area, flipper s of the sea turtle.

10. Li-maramaranja (Dugong Hunters of excellence), Ron Rickett and Mussolini Harvey with dugong, harpoon rope and canoe paddles. Vanderlin Island 1950s.  
Photo: Steve Johnson.

Photo: Steve Johnson.

13. Don Miller harpooning a dugong for a second time. Wuthanda (Dugong Creek) Photo: Ludo Kuipers.
14. Preparing to pull aboard a sea turtle at Liwintha.

15. "ki·maramangku", the dugong turned back to face the sea. Johnson Timothy with dugong he harpooned at night. At Walangkurra (Mule Creek), Bing Bong.
16. Johnson Timothy preparing to spread coals prior to cooking dugong hide. At Jawuma (The Landing), McArthur River.

17. Johnson Timothy, Leonard Norman, Leonard Charlie, Daryl Thompson and Russel Thompson carrying the hide to the spread out coals
18. Dugong hide spread out, flesh down on the hot coals.

19. Piling wood on top of the dugong hide prior to lighting.
20. Johnson Timothy striking the dcooked hide with a stick to remove ashes and coal.

21. Dugong head and tail in ground oven.
22. Maureen Timothy placing hot stones around the dugong flesh in the ground oven at Jwauma (The Landing), McArthur River.

23. Rib cage sections placed over the top of the meat in the ground oven.
24. Damien Thompson, Maureen Timothy and Amy Friday sealing the ground oven with paperbark and sand.

25. Johnson Timothy gutting a sea turtle at Mawarndarlarndarli, South West Island.

27, Wylo McKinnon, Philip Timothy and Martin Stewart gathering sea turtle eggs at Karruwa/Bunguntha, Little Vanderlin Island.
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Appendix 1.

Myth narratives
associated with information
provided within the body of the thesis

1. The dugong, kurrajong seeds and the dolphin
   (Associated with Chapter 8)

2. A journey of sea turtles
   (Associated with Map 15, Chapter 8)

3. The Dugong Hunters' journey
   (Associated with Map 16a and 16b, Chapter 9)
Appendix 1. Myth narratives

1. The dugong, kurrajong seeds and the dolphin, told by Don and Jemima Miller.

The dugong once lived on the land with his family. One day his mother collected a large number of seeds from the kurrajong (Brachychiton diversifolius) tree. These seeds are covered in tiny prickles, and his mother repeatedly warned him not to touch them. She then went away to gather more food, leaving her son in the camp. He was left alone and he grew hungry. Eventually he stole off with the kurrajong seeds and hid behind a sand dune. When he picked the fruit up, the tiny prickles became stuck in his hands. He began to cry, and as the tears fell down he wiped his eyes with his hand, filling his eyes with the sharp prickles, he was now crying out in great pain and rolled all over the beach. He rolled and rolled until he went into the sea; he was still crying out. Eventually, a dolphin heard him and came and tried to take the prickles out which by that time had caused the eyes of the boy to swell. Also a number of the prickles had become implanted in his cheeks and lips. The dolphin could not take them out so told the boy that he would have to stay in the sea forever; so the boy became a dugong.

1.2 Myth narrative of the sea turtle

The following narrative is based upon a number of accounts given by Old McCracken, Rita Anthawarramara, Steve Johnson, Tom Simon, Tim Rakawurlma, Judy Marrngawi, Ida Ninganga and Johnson Timothy.

A Journey of Sea Turtles:
At Wilarri on Bing Bong Station near the source of Mule Creek lived a long necked turtle and a sea turtle. They had argued about which one of them should live in the lagoon which is present at that place. Eventually, it was decided that the one who could most successfully hide in the lagoon would live
The sea turtle went first. It tried to hide its bulk by covering itself with mud and water lily stalks, but as soon as the long necked turtle uncovered its eyes, it saw the bulk of the sea turtle.

The long necked turtle then hid itself, deep within the mud of the lagoon. The sea turtle searched and searched for the long necked turtle but to no avail. Eventually, the long necked turtle appeared, and it told the sea turtle that it must leave and travel to the sea, as only the sea would be able to hide its bulk.

The sea turtle left Wilarri and travelled north to the sea, making Mule Creek as it did so. It passed through Walangkurra (Mule Creek boat ramp) and then came out to the sea at Yuwarrangka (Mule Creek mouth). It travelled north and came to West Island and named the place Mamadthamburru (Crocodile Point). It then followed the west coast of the island north, passing through Mindarra, Ludarra, Arian and then Mabaayn. On arrival at Maabayn, it looked across to the west and saw a large group of sea turtles coming from the west. They had arisen out of the sea at a reef called Babalungku. They were singing, and they then came onto another nearby reef called Aburri. The lone sea turtle went across to this reef and met with the sea turtles, and they stayed there for some times singing. Some of these turtles were carrying sacred hollow log coffins.

The singing of the sea turtles disturbed a group of sea ospreys which were resident at Rrawali (the mouth of the Pine Creek). They decided to investigate the singing, and by the time they reached the area, the female turtles had come ashore on the small islets of Wuwayinda and Riyinbirri. At Riyinbirri, the ospreys attacked the nesting female turtles, tearing at them with their claws and beaks.

The turtles scrambled back into the water, disturbing their nests and scattering their eggs over the surface of the beach. The male turtles and a number of females who had not come ashore to lay quickly submerged and travelled southwards, back along the west coast of the island. They eventually resurfaced on two large reefs on the southern coast of West Island called Liwintha and Mathandurla.

The other turtles, still being harassed by the ospreys, crossed over to
the northern shore of West Island and passed on to Maabayn. The ospreys rested from their harassment of the turtles at this locality, and the turtles moved through Wurlkurra where they began to dance their rituals associated with the Wambuyungu and a-Milkathatha rituals. They came to Mungkuwarumbiliyirarra where once again they were harassed by the ospreys. The turtles fled to Libaladala and then to Ngarawulambia. They entered back into the sea and came to a reef which they named Mungkuraminya. They dived down into the water to avoid the ospreys who hovered above them. Some of the turtles remained at this place, and their backs can be seen at low tide.

The other turtles swam eastwards underwater hoping to avoid the ospreys. These turtles finally came ashore at Liwayidbulungu on the north west coast of Watson Island. At this locality the turtles were viciously attacked, and a number of them were killed by the ospreys. Large rocks at this locality now represent the bodies of these turtles. A number of the turtles got away, including one which had been mortally wounded. The ospreys finally killed this turtle at Wunakakaliulakinda (north east coast of Watson island). They dragged the intestines from this turtle and left them scattered on the shore. The place name literally means "the intestines of the sea turtles are with the ospreys".

The few remaining turtles crossed over to North Island at Wirimbilingaya (Webe Point), and then they travelled north passing through Wunjurr, Ruwawalurr and Wiyibi. On coming to Aralwiji (Ross Point), the ospreys again attacked the turtles. They killed all but one and threw pieces of the bodies along the point. The large shoulder muscles and hip portions of the turtles were left there, as were the lungs. At this point the ospreys gave up their pursuit and the sole sea turtle still carrying a hollow log coffin and still singing, passed to Limalurrbala (beach area between Ross Point and Cape Pellew). The name literally means "the place of many green turtles". She nested once more at this beach, finished the song and was once more attacked by the ospreys, who ate her and flung the shell and the hollow log coffin into the sea. Her shell with the hollow log coffin resting on her back can still be seen at the place called Murrunga, or it is sometimes
1.3. Myth narrative of the Dugong Hunter Spirit Ancestors

The following arrangement of this myth is due to the efforts of the following people: Tim Rakawurlma, Leo Yulungurri, Johnson Timothy, Wylo McKinnon, Leo Finlay, Steve Johnson, Annie Karrakayn, Dinah Norman, Don Miller, Charlie Miller, Ron Rickett, Ida Ninganga, Tommy Nawurrungu, Mack Manguji and Mussolini Harvey.

The Dugong Hunters' Journey.

They came from the east in their bark canoes, they were Dugong Hunters. They had come from Warnnguluyu - it is there in the east somewhere in the midst of the sea. In their canoes they carried harpoon ropes and as they travelled, they played these ropes out behind them:

- Long dugong harpoon rope,
- long ropes for crossing the island country

They crossed over the reef Mungkumalharnngungka, and here they left sea grass, the tall sea grass called *ma-warladaji* or *ma-barnayurruwarlu* (*Enhalus* species). They then moved on to Wubukabukala (Steep Cut Rock) on the central east coast of Vanderlin Island. At this place they gathered oysters, and while doing so, they broke a large part of the rock off, so they placed the fragments in their canoes and carried it with them. They then moved onto Wabuwa on the east coast of Vanderlin Island, and here they encountered the Tide Spirit Ancestor. It hailed the Dugong Hunters as kin and decided to travel with the hunters; it travelled before them. The tide sang of the Dugong Hunters:

- Oh! Dugong Hunters
- strong in name,
- standing, holding the dugong harpoon.
506.
The Dugong Hunters sang the Tide Spirit Ancestor:

Tidal current,
swirling and pulling,
changing direction,
strong flowing tide.

The Dugong Hunters then crossed over Munuwala Island where they met with two Spotted Eagle Ray Spirit Ancestors, and then they passed over the small islet of Wurdula and then came to Wambarra where one of the hunters left behind his conch shell which is still there:

Conch shell;
deep sounding and,
long winded
is the conch shell.

They then passed over the small islets and reefs called Lirnangkarr, Nungkayindarra and Liyarranginda; these were created by the rope of the Dugong Hunters.

A number of older hunters decided they could not travel any more, and they moved onto Vanderlin Island where they can still be seen inland off the east coast. They passed through Akarrunda and came to Kulangkala where they are still there sitting and talking.

Ever northwards they travelled, following the coast of the Vanderlin Island, giving names to the country they passed through such as Ngarnibinja, Wardi, Makanya, Wukuntha, Wiyinda, Dabarla, Mamarla, Mangirri, Wunma, Riyanbinda and then Ngawulunda where they left a spring. They came to Muluwa (Cape Vanderlin) and here they rested. While there the Tiger Shark Spirit Ancestor, carrying a bundle of cycad fruit, sighted them and sang:

Here at Muluwa (Cape Vanderlin)
I see them standing,
the Dugong Hunters who are strong in name,
In silence they stand,
the land is silent and breathless,
they stand with their ropes.

It was at Muluwa that one of the older brothers of the Dugong Hunters decided he could no longer travel; he was near blind and was thirsty. His name was Ngangangayu. His brothers sang of him as they boarded their canoes and paddled away.

Our older brother,
the Dugong Hunter called Ngangangayu;
the one who thirsts stays behind.

On leaving Cape Vanderlin, they decided to head for North Island, and they passed over the reef Yinijini. Then one of the younger brothers observed the White-bellied Sea Eagle Spirit and Flying Fox Spirit Ancestors at Wulibirra (Red Bluff) on North Island, so the reef he was standing on at the time was called Wunhakalijulakinda (literally: "the younger brother (saw) the country was with flying things" (white-bellied sea eagle and flying fox). They sang the white-bellied sea eagle:

With white chest feathers gleaming,
the Sea Eagle calls out into the wind.

The Dugong Hunters then moved on to another reef called Wulkaninguwa where they repaired their bark canoes. They sang their canoes:

High prowd bark canoe,
which gives itself to the waves,
keel of the bark canoe drying in the sun.
The Dugong Hunters came ashore on North Island at Mungkungarrangarrala, then travelled north for a short way to Rrumburrula they then turned west and climbed up the high hill Wirdinyjawulaya (literally: big or senior head), North Hill; they descended down the hill to the west coast of North Island. At Yirrinybinda (literally: "the place having shredded feather body decorations"), they performed the sacred Kundawira rituals; they carried the completed memorial stone associated with this ritual to Winalamba where it became transformed into a large bloodwood tree. They also met with a Crow Spirit Ancestor at this locality. They then passed through Walalamba and Wudangarramba before passing over the narrow sea strait they called Mandarriyangurra, they then came onto Skull Island at Rrumbulangurra; they passed over Mawilawila where one of the hunters left the stomach of a dugong (wilawila). They then passed through Liwurula before coming to Wurdalnguwa. At this locality they left pandanus nuts and yams:

Leaving the ma-wujku yam, while the Dugong Hunters travel they are placing the yam down.

They left the island, and crossing the open sea, they came to Wadirrila (White Craggy Islet). During this crossing, two hunters called Jurruji and Jurrunga harpooned a turtle, and they brought their canoes ashore on the southern beach. Jurruji decided he would make a fire, while Jurrunga went to draw water from a deep hole which is located on the island. While doing this, he fell down the hole, smearing the side of the hole with red ochre. He called out, and his companion Jurruji came with a harpoon rope which he threw down the hole. He tried to pull Jurrunga up, but he too ended up in the hole. Together they sang out, and the other group of hunters heard them, they, too, came with a rope which they threw down into the hole and tried to pull them out, but they, too, were unsuccessful. The two hunters remain there today. The movement of the Dugong Hunters created a pathway between the hole and beach on the southern side of the island. The bark canoe which
belonged to Jurrriji and Jurrunga can still be seen. The other Dugong Hunters sang of their brothers they left behind in the hole.

At Wadirrila (White Craggy Islet) they remain,
Yanyuwa Dugong Hunters:
The sea spray rises from the hole as if it were smoke.

The Dugong Hunters came to Murndurrwarlawarla reef and then came to Limiyimiyla (Black Craggy Island: the name literally means, “the place with bush flies”). They met with the Bush Fly Spirit Ancestor at Rramiyimiyi (literally: bush fly) before moving onto Murunda Island where they took off their decorative plaited cane armlets and left them there. They then passed on to Liwarungkalinja (Gilbert Island). They came back on to Black Craggy Island and passed through a lagoon called Wirrinyinmanthanguwa; they also left yams here. They went back to Limiyimiyla, and by placing their eyes onto the ground, they created a well.

They then went to the western tip of the island, Wulkawulkawa and left coiled harpoon ropes which became transformed into kurrajong trees:

Coiled dugong harpoon rope;
coiling the twined kurrajong harpoon rope.

They again set to sea, and between Black Craggy Island and West Island, one of their company decided to stay on a reef they named Likarrakuwa. The rest of the hunters then came ashore on the central east coast of West Island. The beach where they landed they called Yathangka (literally: “place of string”) where they left coils of fine string used to lace their bark canoes. They also left one of their female travelling companions—her name was Malarndirri.

They crossed over West Island in silence, as it was Wurdaliya country not Rrumburriya. They came out on the central western shore at a place
called Lumiinybiji, where they had created a creek by dragging their harpoons behind them. At this point the Dugong Hunters rested, and then one of them spoke up and said, “Come let us compete against each other, let the Tide Spirit Ancestor travel before us and drown the land we see. Let us race in two groups—one will travel south to the coast and another will ride the open sea. The group who kills the first dugong will remain hunters of dugong and sea turtle forever, while those others will become the hunters and eaters of kangaroo and emu.”

Before embarking on the competition, the Dugong Hunters travelled as a group and came to Kaluwangarra (literally: “they coiled their ropes”), which is just south of the Rosie Creek mouth. They left a rope there which is now a large reef. They then came to Warrawarda (the mouth of the Rosie Creek) where they left the stones which they had carried from the east coast of Vanderlin Island. These stones had been used for the sharpening of their wooden harpoon points.

At Warrawarda the Tide Spirit Ancestor sang itself and caused itself spread out over the land. The coast was now changed—one group of hunters followed this new coastline which now lay far to the southwest over the country of Kulumbirri. The other group of hunters travelled on to the island of Yumunkuni (Beatrice Island). They landed at Riyarrku (literally: sea going bark canoe) where they dragged their canoes onto the beach, leaving a keel mark on the rock. Two hunters went to Larradbarimbul on the island and fell down a deep hole, where they remain.

The Tide Spirit Ancestor, who was still causing the tide to rise, travelled far over the inland and came to Kulumbirri some 100 kilometres inland to watch the competition between the two groups of hunters.

A number of hunters went hunting, leaving from Walkanji and Ngawakuwaku on Beatrice Island, they travelled around the island and towards the southern side of it they came upon a herd of dugong. They harpooned one, and the rest of the herd travelled south to the Wunubarryi (Mount Young) area. As soon as the dugong was dead the Tide Spirit Ancestor caused itself to recede to the coastline’s present level, and it travelled with the receding tide from Kulumbirri to Yumunkuni (Beatrice Island) where it
located itself at Kurndandawawulu. The dugongs at Wunubarryi (Mount Young) became stranded because of the receding tide and became the Dugong Spirit Ancestor. The Dugong Hunters who had travelled on the high tide far to the south became stranded inland. They were now to be mainland hunters of kangaroo and emu. Their bark canoe became wrecked at Kulumbirri. In this canoe they found nets they had used for capturing mullet. They threw the net to the successful Dugong Hunters at Yumunkuni (Beatrice Island). The nets landed at Wirrimakuwarra (literally: "the mullet net is here"), where it still remains in the form a rocky outcrop. The Dugong Hunters at Beatrice Island threw the unsuccessful hunters some dugong meat, and though they were hunters of kangaroo and emu, they accepted the meat as they would always desire it, as do all mainland people today.

The Dugong Hunters then left Yumunkuni (Beatrice Island) and travelled to Wunubarryi (Mount Young) where they created a fresh water well. They then transformed themselves in paperbark trees which can still be seen surrounding the well.