



The Complexity of Social Organization in Arnhem Land

Author(s): A. P. Elkin

Source: *Southwestern Journal of Anthropology*, Vol. 6, No. 1 (Spring, 1950), pp. 1-20

Published by: [University of New Mexico](#)

Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3628686>

Accessed: 02/06/2014 02:28

Your use of the JSTOR archive indicates your acceptance of the Terms & Conditions of Use, available at
<http://www.jstor.org/page/info/about/policies/terms.jsp>

JSTOR is a not-for-profit service that helps scholars, researchers, and students discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content in a trusted digital archive. We use information technology and tools to increase productivity and facilitate new forms of scholarship. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.



University of New Mexico is collaborating with JSTOR to digitize, preserve and extend access to *Southwestern Journal of Anthropology*.

<http://www.jstor.org>

SOUTHWESTERN JOURNAL OF ANTHROPOLOGY

VOLUME 6



NUMBER 1



SPRING



1950



THE COMPLEXITY OF SOCIAL ORGANIZATION IN ARNHAM LAND

A. P. ELKIN

ABORIGINAL AUSTRALIA may be divided into several cultural areas, and these for certain purposes may be grouped into larger regions. Almost all have been influenced by their neighbors, and ultimately some of the traits have started from a north-coastal point, and possibly from beyond it.

The most complex region is Arnhem Land, using that term in its earlier sense to cover the roughly rhomboidal area north of the Fitzmaurice and Roper Rivers and washed by the Timor and Arafura Seas on the west and north respectively and by the Gulf of Carpentaria on the east.¹ This region consists of three culture sub-regions: I. the northwestern, II. the western (or Goulburn Island-Alligator-Liverpool Rivers) and III. the eastern (often referred to as Northeast Arnhem Land). Two border subregions could be added: IV. the southeastern (along the Roper River), and V. the southwestern (Fitzmaurice River-Port Keats). The inadequate information about the social organization of the Pine Creek natives suggests it was an intrusion of the main southern type like the Wadaman—VI on the map.

THE NORTHWESTERN SUB-REGION

The social organization of the northwestern corner of the region, from just north of the Daly River to Melville Island and the Coburg Peninsula, is marked by an absence of moieties and sections (or subsections), and by a use of terms

¹ In recent years, the term Arnhem Land has gradually been limited to the area north of the Roper and east of a line some sixty miles east of the Darwin-Katherine road, and consisting for the most part of an Aboriginal Reserve.

and a practice of marriage which would be highly irregular if these social divisions were functioning. In the Wagaitj, for example, a coastal tribe from the Daly River to Delissaville west of Darwin, only one term is applied to all males of the grandparents' generation and only one term to all the females of the same generation. Further, in addition to the normal marriages, a man may marry the

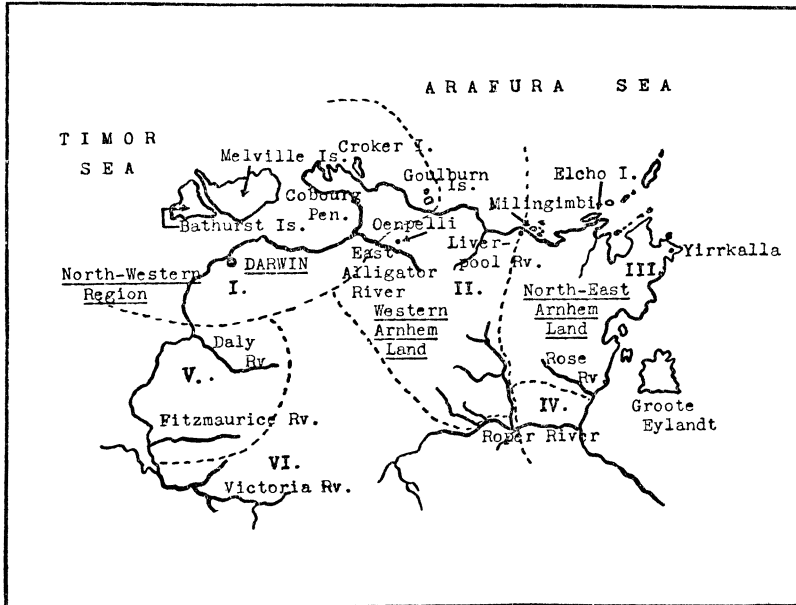


FIG. 1 Cultural sub-regions of Arnhem Land and vicinity, northern Australia.

Selected tribes in the several sub-regions:

- I. *The Northwestern:* Wagaitj, Tiwi (Melville and Bathurst Islands), Larakia, Iwaidja, Kakadu.
- II. *The Western:* Maung and Gunwinggu, overlapping with I; Nakara, Djauan.
- III. *The Northeastern:* Wulamba (Murngin-Balamumu). Rembaranga on the west and the Nungubuyu on the south are buffers and culture-transmitters to this sub-region.
- IV. *The Southeastern:* Wandaran, Ngalakan, and Mara. This sub-region extends to the Anyula along the Gulf coast.
- V. *The Southwestern:* Muluk-muluk, Murinbata, Nangiomeri.
- VI. *The Southern Intrusion:* Warrai, Djamindjung, Togoman, Wadaman.

daughter of his parallel-cousin's daughter or son; or he may marry the daughter of his mother's father's brother's son or daughter. That is, he may marry the daughter of a man or of the latter's sister. The kinship system and marriage

rules of other Daly River tribes are similar to the Wagaitj.² If, however, moieties or subsections were present and functioning, he could marry one of these, the other being in his own moiety or section. In Bathurst Island, too, a common marriage is with a sister's daughter's daughter (the sister not being "own" sister), who would be in a man's own moiety or section if there were such a division. The absence of sections (or subsections) also allows structurally what would be distortions if they were present. Thus, Bathurst Island genealogies record marriages between persons of succeeding generations, such as between a man and his "mother," that is, his father's wife or widow, not being his own mother, and between a man and his mother's brother's wife. These two marriages were also recorded for the Kakadu of the lower East Alligator River by Baldwin Spencer in 1912, amongst whom he failed to find moieties or subsections.³

This area was formerly larger than at present. The subsection system had only reached the Murinbata tribe (of the coastal region between the Fitzmaurice and Port Keats) a few years before 1934 when a cross-cousin type of kinship system was becoming adjusted to it.⁴ The same appears to be the case also with the Maung of Croker Island and the Gunwinggu of the Alligator River district, for, in spite of the patent subsection marriage arrangement, a man may marry a "father's sister" who is or may be a mother's brother's wife (widow) or a wife's mother, but is not usually own father's sister; and genealogies show marriages with father's sister's daughter's daughter, and with mother's father's sister's daughter.⁵

2 W. E. H. Stanner, *The Daly River Tribes* (Oceania, vol. 3, no. 4, pp. 389-391). The Wagaitj material is based on my own fieldwork.

3 *Native Tribes of the Northern Territory*, pp. 47-52. W. L. Warner (*Kinship Morphology of Forty-One Australian Tribes*, *American Anthropologist*, vol. 35, no. 1, 1933, pp. 64-65) suggests that Spencer's cases were aberrant and make-shift arrangements, "probably due to the lack of a near younger brother of the husband of the woman." Recent fieldwork in the area by Mr and Mrs R. M. Berndt, however, shows that mother's brother's widow (father's sister) is definitely regarded as a possible wife. This is reflected in genealogies, the use of kinship terms between subsections, and in some subsection marriages, and will be discussed under the heading "Subsections and Kinship." If the Kakadu did not possess matrilineal phratries in 1912, marriage with father's widow would not have broken phratry exogamy; some cases of such infraction do occur, but they are irregular. If, however, this tribe did have phratries, as is most likely, the phratry of the father's widow whom the son married, need not have been the phratry of the son's mother, for usually a person could marry into either or both of two phratries. As will be seen, in eastern Arnhem Land, with patrilineal moieties, marriage with father's widow (not own mother) does occur.

4 W. E. H. Stanner, *Murinbata Kinship and Totemism* (Oceania, vol. 7, no. 2), pp. 197 ff.

5 I am indebted to Mr and Mrs Berndt for particulars of the social organization of these two tribes, amongst whom they worked in 1947 under the auspices of the Australian National Research Council.

Most of this area, however, presents another form of grouping which is rare elsewhere. This is the phratry. From Melville and Bathurst Islands to Oenpelli, where it has been well studied, it is an exogamous matrilineal social group with its own totem or totems. The number of phratries in a tribe is not immutable. Three were reported for the Melville and Bathurst Islands in 1929,⁶ but today there are five, one being admittedly of recent origin, while in the Alligator River district, there are four with a fifth in process of development. In each case, the phratries function as two pairs of "mates" with a third member being recognized by one of the pairs. The "mate" phratries do not intermarry but marry into the other set of mates. Thus, a man of one phratry may have wives of two phratries, and because of the direct matrilineal descent rule, his children may belong to these two phratries. In Melville and Bathurst Islands there is a locality and mythological basis behind the phratries, but this has not yet been proved for the Maung. Spencer, however, suggested that it might be so for the Iwaidja of Port Essington, who had three exogamous totemic phratraic groupings, two of which intermarried with the third, but not with each other.⁷

The Wagaitj tribe was divided into three named geographical groups, but there is no evidence yet to show that these were exogamous, or were phratries.

This area or sub-region has one other noteworthy feature: bilateral cross-cousin marriage was or is allowed, or, indeed, was the norm. The exceptions are the Murinbata, where, although the kinship system is of the bilateral cross-cousin marriage type, actual cross-cousin marriage was prohibited at the time of observation; and the overlapping Goulburn Island kinship system as recorded in 1947 by Mr and Mrs Berndt was of the Nyul-Nyul or Aranda type in which marriage is prohibited with cross-cousins, but is typical between their children. This is a curious kinship outlier in an area of cross-cousin marriage. It is a terminological adjustment to the subsection system, but alternative marriages with the cross-cousin subsection are recognized, and a smooth means of adjustment to the Gunwinggu cross-cousin system on the mainland opposite is in operation. Moreover, Dr W. L. Warner reported about 1927-29 that the kinship system and marriage of the Maung was of the bilateral cross-cousin type.⁸

To sum up, the northwestern sub-region, a coastal strip, is characterized by an absence of moieties and sub-sections; by a use of kinship terms and by marriages which would be a distortion of the social structure if such divisions

6 C. W. Hart, *The Tiwi of Melville and Bathurst Islands* (Oceania, vol. 1, no. 2, pp. 167-180).

7 Spencer, *op. cit.*, p. 46.

8 Warner, *Kinship Morphology of Forty-One North Australian Tribes*, p. 66, table of terms.

were functioning; by a basic norm of bilateral cross-cousin marriage, and in the northern part of the sub-region by exogamous matrilineal phratries of totemic significance, the number of which is not fixed, and which function in marriage in a kind of moiety order. Finally, the former northeastern part of this *sub-region* has been subjected to the diffusion of moieties and of subsections, which are features of the other two sub-regions. To these we now turn. The first is the Goulburn Island-Alligator and Liverpool Rivers districts, stretching south to the Djauan tribe of the upper Katherine River area.⁹ The second is far-eastern Arnhem Land.

The moiety system which prevails throughout these two sub-regions is primarily of ceremonial significance, the great ceremonies with their song cycles belonging to one or other of the two moieties. There are also, especially in the far-eastern sub-region, separate moiety homes of the dead. The clans, too, each with its own totems, are divided amongst the moieties.

PHRATRIES AND MOIETIES IN WESTERN ARNHEM LAND

Two complications are present. In the Goulburn Island-Alligator and Liverpool Rivers district, this ritual dual organization seems to have been imposed on a phratry system similar, as has been stated, to that of the Coburg Peninsula and the rest of the northwest corner. Spencer (1911) was aware of the absence of the moiety organization, but did not notice any phratry system at Oenpelli, although it may have been there. Indeed, a new phratry is reported as of Kakadu tribal origin.¹⁰ At present there are four phratries with a fifth one recently introduced. Natural objects as well as human beings are divided amongst the phratries, each of which has also a principal totem, but it is of the social rather than the cult variety.

On top of this phratry organization has come the moiety system. In all eastern Arnhem Land this is patrilineal, reflecting the patrilineal and male emphasis of the cult-life. In the west, however, faced with the strong matrilineal nature of the phratries, it became matrilineal to prevent confusion. If the descent of the phratries had been indirect matrilineal, as with the four-section or with the subsection system, patrilineal moieties could have combined with them.

9 My own genealogical work amongst the Djauan shows that the kinship system is now mainly of the Aranda type, but the use of only two terms for males in the grand-parents' generation, and marriage between subsections related as cross-cousins, suggest that cross-cousin marriage may have once been the norm. Warner says that according to his informants, 1926-28, this was so, at least for the northern part of the tribe (*Kinship Morphology of Forty-One North Australian Tribes*, p. 45).

10 Report by Mrs Catherine Berndt.

Thus in the system

$$\begin{array}{ccc} \curvearrowright M & = & O \curvearrowright \\ \curvearrowleft N & = & P \curvearrowleft \end{array}$$

where the letters denote sections (not phratries), and where the mother-child relationship is indicated by the arrows, and marriage by $=$, it is clear that M-P and O-N are patrilineal father-child couples and could be patrilineal ceremonial moieties, especially as marriage between M and P or between O and N is highly irregular. In the Alligator-Liverpool district, however, where the letters indicate *phratries*, not sections, *each phratry is the mother-child cycle*; therefore, patrilineal descent grouping, moieties or other, would mean a division of each phratry, so that there would be two M's, two O's, and so on. Thus, a man of Mx (being the part of phratry M in moiety x) would marry a woman of Oy (the part of phratry O in moiety y), and their children would belong to Ox, being the other part of phratry O which is in moiety x, along with their father, Mx. Again a man of My (the part of phratry M in moiety y) marrying a woman of Ox (the part of phratry O in moiety x) would have children Mx, that is, in the part of phratry M which is in moiety x. So too with phratries N and P. Moreover, this is doubled because each phratry intermarries with two others. The following table shows the result (the sign $=$ denotes intermarrying groups; the capital letters denote phratries; x and y the moieties):

Patrilineal Moieties

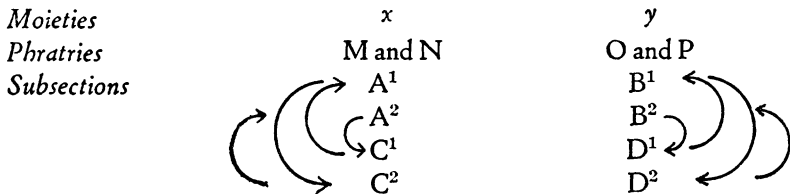
x		y		x		y
Mx	=	Oy		Nx	=	Oy
Ox	=	My		Ox	=	Ny
Mx	=	Py		Nx	=	Py
Px	=	My		Px	=	Ny

But as the phratry is the primary solidarity with matrilineal descent within each phratry, and as the moiety principle is a later ritual contrivance, the above theoretical division of each phratry did not occur. It would have caused a ritual division within each phratry. Instead, the moieties were adopted in matrilineal fashion, so that the solidarity of the phratries remained.

PHRATRIES AND SUBSECTIONS IN WESTERN ARNHEM LAND

This is true also of the adjustment to the phratries of the subsection system which spread comparatively recently from the south into Arnhem Land, though

not into the Daly River-Coburg Peninsula corner. The solidarity of the matrilineal phratries and of the matrilineal moieties has remained intact. Two matrilineal cycles, each of four subsections, have been correlated with the two moieties and, therefore, with the two phratries in each of these. But as each phratry is its own matrilineal line, a four subsection cycle becomes included in it; and further, the same four subsection cycle appears in each of the two phratries of a matrilineal moiety. To use symbols (the sign = denotes intermarriage; the arrow, mother-child relationship: thus A^1 marries B^1 , and the children belong to sub-section D^2):



The matrilineal cycle $A^1 C^2 A^2 C^1 A^1$ appears in both M and N phratries, and so too with the other cycle and phratries O and P.

The terms in the region are:

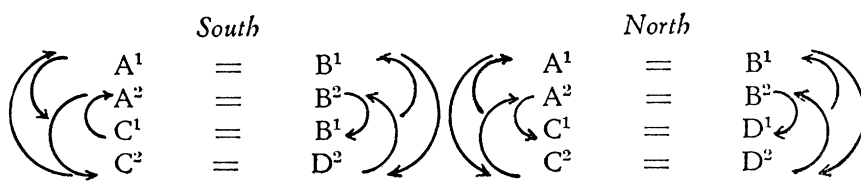
<i>Moieties</i>	nangaraitjgu	namadgu
<i>Phratries</i>	jariwurik jarijaring	jarigarngulk jariwurlga
<i>Subsections</i>		

The moiety and subsection terms in this western Arnhem Land region have been known for some years; the phratry organization was recorded by Mr R. M. and Mrs C. Berndt during field work in 1947 for the Australian National Research Council. I thank them for putting their well organized material at my disposal. They reported also a fifth or recently introduced phratry, coming from the Jiwadja-Kakadu area, outside the subsection and moiety region. It only turns up occasionally, but when it does it is regarded as of the Namadgu moiety and as including the mother-child subsections, nagangila and nagadjok, being half of the cycle of that moiety. Similarly, I learnt that a new phratry had

arisen in the Melville-Bathurst Island system. Thus, the number of phratries in a tribe is not fixed.

The spread of the subsections into these regions brought other problems. For example, as we have noted, south of the Daly, where the process was observed amongst the Murinbata, the natives were not sure how to correlate the subsections with their kinship. So too, in the northeastern corner, Yirrkalla, the older natives are not yet resigned to it; it is a complication they could do without.¹¹ Further, in the whole area, it has to be correlated with the practice of marriage with mother's brother's daughter, and in some tribes with father's sister's daughter also. This has tested the ingenuity of the tribes, but they have successfully worked out a correlation. Elsewhere, the functional value of the system was to reflect and uphold the prohibition of marriage between cross-cousins, by separating them in a special subsection from the second-cousins who were the ideal marriage type. As descent was always indirect matrilineal, and provided that the marriages were of the regular type, and not of an alternate type sometimes allowed, a man and his son's son belonged to the one subsection. If, however, as in Arnhem Land, a man could marry his cross-cousin, or into the latter's subsection, and if this were consistently done, four marriages in the patrilineal line would have to be run before a man's descendant came back into his own subsection, namely, a man and his son's son's son's son. Amongst the Rembaranga, in the interior of Arnhem Land, I have found so far that this may be shortened by one step or by two steps, by men marrying into the appropriate alternate subsection. The lengthening of the patrilineal cycle is also the case in the Oenpelli district, western Arnhem Land, as it was also amongst the Nangioimeri and the Murinbata, between Port Keats and the Fitzmaurice River on the southwest of Arnhem Land.

The following tables, in which the now accepted symbols are used instead of the native terms, show the difference in the descent lines as working on the one hand in the region south of the Roper and Victoria Rivers, in which the marriage norm is between the *children* of cross-cousins, and on the other hand in the cross-cousin marriage region to the north.



11 Information from R. M. and C. Berndt. For the Murinbata, see below.

The succession of arrows at the sides shows the matrilineal descent lines. The patrilineal lines depend on whether the man marries into the subsection with which his own subsection intermarries according to the norm, or whether he marries into the usually allowed alternate intermarrying subsection. Put broadly, A's marry B's, and C's marry D's, but A's and B's do not marry with D's and C's, because this would mean marriage between succeeding generations, which becomes irregular when the subsection system is functioning. Normally, too, A¹ marries B¹, with B² as the alternative, and so on.

Granted adherence to the norm, in the south the patrilineal descent line is typically A¹-D²-A¹, but in the north is A¹-D²-A²-D¹-A¹.¹²

The distribution of the subsection system, together with the variations in the names used for the eight groups, suggests that it was developed in the southeast of the Kimberley Division and spread fanlike southwest, southeast, east, and northeast. The Aborigines of Arnhem Land, amongst whom we have seen the system spreading, have regarded it as a complete scheme of eight intermarrying and descent groups, with an ideal pattern or norm, which they learnt as a formula, names and all.¹³ This occurred at intertribal meetings or through less formal contact. Thus, they can recite that A¹ marries B¹ and the children of a B¹ woman belong to D², and so on, using, of course, the actual names of the subsections or their attempts to say them.

Then comes the problem: if the local tribe has practised marriage with mother's brother's daughter or a woman classified with her, she would, in the case of a man of A¹, belong to B¹; but if the tribe prohibited marriage with father's sister's daughter, how could that be expressed in the system, for she too would belong to B¹, because her mother would be of the same relationship type and in the same subsection as the mother of mother's brother's daughter? Again, what is the use of the subsection B², if the tribe has not hitherto distinguished in terminology between mother's brother's daughter and mother's mother's brother's daughter's daughter, either of whom was eligible as a wife? Or how correlate

12 A. P. Elkin, *Marriage and Descent in East Arnhem Land* (Oceania, vol. 3, no. 4, pp. 412-416; and appended note by W. E. H. Stanner, pp. 416-417).

Significantly, informants in the northeast, when explaining how marriages with mother's brother's daughter are arranged from generation to generation in one lineage, without any reference to subsections, use four kinship terms for a man and his descendants in the direct male line: katu, son; gudara, son's son; and bapa, son's son's son; the next, son's son's son's son, being wauwa, brother, and therefore being identified with Ego, and probably in his own subsection, if such a division be used (analysis of material obtained by Mr R. M. Berndt).

13 In some parts it was also definitely associated with totemism, that is, each subsection had one or more natural species classified with it. The importance of this aspect, however, has not been determined.

the subsection marriage pattern with marriage with mother's brother's widow, with "daughter," or with cross-cousin's daughter and other cross-generation marriages as in northern parts of Arnhem Land, or how use it when marriage had hitherto been arranged chiefly on principles of moiety and clan exogamy with kinship playing a very small prohibitory or preferential function, as in far north-east Arnhem Land?

I have examined the carefully recorded genealogical material obtained by Mr and Mrs Berndt and discussed the problem with them. The upshot is that the Aborigines in this corner, are living a "double life." They marry according to the old rules of moiety and clan exogamy, the kinship terms expressing the behavior relationships prevailing at any one time. With no sections or other generation level device, the marriage can be between persons of succeeding genealogical levels. Therefore, a "sister's" daughter or a "father's sister" may become a wife, or a man takes as a wife, at first not actual, but only in custodianship, a girl who is betrothed to his son. He had called her son's wife, but now she is wife, while the son who is waiting for her calls her "mother." Later on, if she does not become too much attached to his father, or else after his father's death, the son will take her to wife and call her wife.¹⁴

Obviously, a formalized eight group system will seem incompatible with such possibilities of marriage and such changes of terms. But the system comes, and does so as a system. For example, a man of ngaritj knows that according to the pattern he should marry a woman of balang subsection, whose children will be bangardi. He knows that balang includes both his own cross-cousin as well as children of his parents' cross-cousins (who in the southern system belong to separate, but marriageable subsections), and as he also knows that a kela includes the same types of relations, he accepts the principle that he can also marry into that subsection and so have koidjak children.

This means that our ngaritj man's choice is limited to certain women in two subsections, that is, to half of what it was before the introduction of the subsection system when moiety exogamy defined the limitation. Possibly the degree of polygyny practised might make the observance of such increased restriction somewhat difficult.¹⁵ So, in spite of the new system, ngaritj looks around the camps, and according to the old custom, which is still fundamental, he sees many more women whom he does or could call wife. They are not in his moiety or

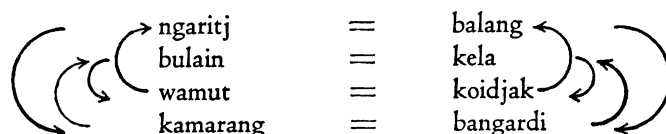
¹⁴ Similar liaisons and marriages were noted by W. L. Warner, *A Black Civilization*, pp. 72-83.

¹⁵ The average number of wives per middle-aged married man was and is over three ($3\frac{1}{2}$) (Warner, *op. cit.*, p. 77).

local totemic clan, nor in his linguistic sub-grouping which is important in his social life. Apart from that, whatever be their genealogical relationship to him, they could become his wives, if the necessary agreements with their people can be made, or if they were successfully taken. Further, he does marry one or more of them, probably with little thought of conforming to the new subsection scheme. Rather, it must be manipulated to conform to his action, and to his moiety and clan organization.

For example, the ngaritj man might marry a woman who is genealogically a classificatory mother, and the subsection of her mother (bulain) determines her subsection as wamut. According to the subsection pattern, this is a wrong marriage, but in the present stage of adjustment, it is not necessarily a matter of prohibiting or dissolving the marriage, but rather of altering subsections. So, the wamut woman might be regarded as kela, the alternate intermarrying subsection for a ngaritj man; his children by her will then be in koidjak, a subsection of his own moiety, and of course he calls her wife. This rearrangement of the subsections and kinship terms is accepted generally. The woman's subsection by descent, and her genealogical relationship to the ngaritj man are well known: they are "outside" terms. In addition, her new subsection and kinship position are recognized; they are "inside" terms. In a few cases of marriage which are irregular according to the subsection scheme, the woman's subsection might not be altered, but the man's children by her are put in the subsection to which they would have belonged had he married according to norm. This, of course, keeps his children in his own moiety, which is important for ritual. It does not mean that the child of a man of a certain subsection must belong to another definite subsection, but rather that his wife is regarded as of the child's correct mother subsection. He could have regarded her as belonging to the alternate subsection into which in this region he could marry, for his child would still belong to his own moiety, though to another subsection. Thus, our ngaritj man could make the children of his wamut wife either bangardi or koidjak, according as he considered his wife balang or kela. In either case they would be in his patrilineal moiety, yiritja, into which, as we shall see, the subsections ngaritj, bulain, koidjak, and bangardi have been grouped.

The following table shows the arrangement of the subsections of this area



according to the introduced norm of marriage and descent. There are special terms for the group of females in each subsection, but to simplify matters, they have been omitted.¹⁶

Many cases of adjustment or alteration of subsection affiliation could be quoted. The interesting point is that such adjustment is not considered wrong or untoward, except by a few very modern individuals, who have accepted the theoretical implications of the new system for kinship classification and marriage. It is symptomatic of the present state of the diffusion process. I have no doubt that in time marriages and kinship would be regularized in conformity with the subsection system; it might even lead to a lessening of the high degree of polygyny which prevails amongst the older men, but this process will now be aided by missionary influence. Such regularizing would reduce the possible choice of wives from all four subsections of the opposite moiety to two of them, thus halving it.

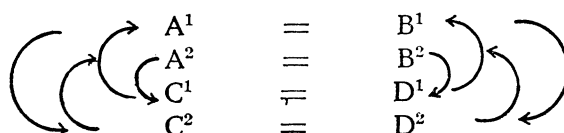
Whether or not it would result in the complete prohibition of cross-cousin marriage is doubtful. So far, this has not occurred in the Rembaranga tribe on the west of these northeastern Arnhem-landers, nor amongst the Gunwinggu of western Arnhem Land (Oenpelli district), nor completely amongst the Maung of Goulburn Island, in spite of the kinship system of the latter being now of the type usually correlated with the prohibition of own cross-cousin marriage.

In neither of these western Arnhem Land tribes are kinship and marriage yet adjusted fully to the subsection system. When the latter spread there is not known, but it was between 1911 when Baldwin Spencer worked there and 1926 when W. L. Warner recorded the social organization. Thus: Maung informants made it clear that there are three types of subsection marriage in vogue; two of these are normal, namely into the regular and into the alternative intermarrying subsection, e.g. A¹ with B¹, and A¹ with B²; the third is between succeeding generations and is into a daughter subsection. The statements recorded by Mrs Berndt are A² with d²; C² with b¹, B¹ with c¹, and C¹ with b¹ (the husband's subsection is mentioned first in each case).

16 The norm is for ngariti to marry balang, his cross-cousin subsection, and alternatively into kela, where he would also find cross-cousins if his mother's brother (wamut) had married into his alternate wife subsection, that is bangardi, instead of koidjak. He might also find mother's mother's brother's daughter's daughters in both these subsections; they would be in balang if his mother's mother's brother, bulain, married into his preferred subsection, kela, but kela, if he married into balang, his alternate intermarrying subsection.

It should be noted that in the adjustment of subsections to cross-cousin marriage, mother's brother's daughter and mother's mother's brother's daughter's daughter are in the same subsection, and not in separate ones as is the functional effect in tribes where cross-cousin marriage is prohibited and the kinship terms express this fact (*Vide* A. P. Elkin, *The Australian Aborigines*, 1948, pp. 60-64).

The significance of these marriages, which are not regarded as basically wrong, will be made clearer by repeating the table of subsection symbols:



In marrying a woman of d^2 , a man of A^2 is marrying a woman in the subsection of his father's sister and one classified with her. This follows because his mother belongs to c^2 and his father, according to the normal intermarrying rule, belongs to D^2 , to which therefore his father's sister also belongs. The same is true of the marriages of C^2 with b^1 and B^1 with c^1 . The only difference with the fourth case is that the mother of C^1 , that is a^2 , married a man from her alternate intermarrying subsection, B^1 , so that b^1 is father's sister to C^1 . The Gunwinggu also allow this marriage with the "father's sister"; for example, D^1 marries a^2 . The father's sister is not the sister of one's own father, but may be mother's brother's widow.

The same marriage is reflected in the use of some kinship terms between members of subsections. Thus, a Maung man of A^2 calls B^2 either wife, which is normal and obvious, or father's sister: the latter results from the marriage of B^2 into his father's sister's subsection C^2 (his mother's being D^2), and therefore having children of A^2 . This occurs also amongst the Gunwinggu.

So too, with the use of one term, ngawin, for father's sister's son (and the son of mother's brother, her husband) and own son; if a man marries a "father's sister," his and her son are the same.

Such cross-generation marriage cannot be correlated with the subsection system, but these tribes are prepared to ignore this, for the marriage recognizes the exogamy of both the matrilineal moiety and phratry, expresses the custom that either phratry of one moiety may marry into either or both of the phratries of the other moiety, and leaves the children in their correct moiety and phratry according to matrilineal descent.¹⁷ Thus, this marriage with the "father's sister" is continuation of the pre-subsection custom.

A similar state of initial confusion was evident in the Murinbata tribe in 1934. There were patrilineal moieties and the kinship system was of the cross-cousin marriage or Kariara type, though own cross-cousin marriage was prohibited: a person's *own* cross-cousin was classified with mother and mother's brother. The

¹⁷ Reference back to the tables of moieties, phratries, and subsections will make this clear.

subsection system had been recently introduced from the south, and with it some kinship terms, for example, a term for own cross-cousins who should not be married; thus, the term for mother need not be used in two subsections and for members of succeeding generations as was the case when no generation level device had to be observed. Likewise, new terms for wife's father and wife's mother's brother were being used. The Murinbata, however, like the Arnhem-landers were not distinguishing the cross-cousin type of relations who could not be married from the second cross-cousin type who were eligible in marriage, by putting them in two separate subsections. However, the new formula of marriage and descent is learnt parrot-fashion and seems authoritative, and though the Murinbata do not recognize any superiority of preference in $A^1 = B^1$ marriage to $A^1 = B^2$ and so on, they feel that the children of women by B^1 and B^2 should be D^2 and D^1 respectively, according to the southern arrangement of the subsections. But some marriages which are irregular by the new subsection system, though not necessarily wrong by the older custom, cause much argument: the formal pattern would put the man's children from his wife outside his own moiety, and this is maintained by some; others, however, insist that no irregular marriage should prevent his children belonging to his own moiety. It is probable that the combined influence of the prior patrilineal moieties and of the recent indirect matrilineal subsections will minimize the number of cross-generation marriages or marriages between distant brothers and sisters; and further, because own cross-cousin marriage is prohibited, the introduction of new terms will turn the kinship system into one of typically Aranda type, with four named lines of descent.

In the meantime, however, the Murinbata (and the related Nangimeri) were adjusting the subsection system to the cross-cousin type of kinship system in the same way as in northern Arnhem Land: they were lengthening (normally doubling) the line of subsections by which a man's descendants in the male line "return" to his own subsection.¹⁸

18 W. E. Stanner, *Murinbata Kinship and Totemism* (Oceania, vol. 8, no. 2, pp. 197-214).

I have omitted the Wandilyaka of Groote Eylandt from this discussion, for their social organization has not yet been adequately studied. The few genealogies and other information which I possess suggest that the kinship system was correlated only with moieties, and so allowed cross-generation marriages; indeed, it was possibly much like the Ungarinyin system (Elkin, *The Australian Aborigines*, pp. 67-70). In recent years, it has been complicated and modified by the diffusion of the matrilineal cross-cousin system of the Nungubuyu from the mainland of eastern Arnhem Land. I do not think it had an Aranda system as Warner maintained (*Kinship Morphology*, p. 68, footnote).

The tribes at the mouth of the Roper, like the Wandaran and Mara, possess the Aranda type of kinship with semi-moieties.

MOIETIES AND SUBSECTIONS

There is one interesting difference with regard to subsection arrangement in western and northeastern Arnhem Land. In the latter, the subsections, though indirectly matrilineal in descent as always, and indeed because of this fact, have been correlated easily with the moiety system, which there is patrilineal. The latter did not have to give way to matrilineal phratries, but only to be correlated with localized patrilineal groups. Those moieties are widely known as *dua* and *yiritja*, and in spite of variations in the names of the subsections in the east and south of Arnhem Land, their equation is always clear and their division amongst the two moieties consistent. But in the Goulburn Island-Alligator-Liverpool district, with its matrilineal phratry basis, the correlation is different. A comparison of the tables with the subsections arranged in moieties shows this:

Western Arnhem Land

<i>Matrilineal moiety</i>	nangaraitjgu		namadgu
<i>Subsections</i>	nangaritj	=	nawalgaitj (nawaitj)
	nabulan	=	na (ga) ngila
	nawamut	=	nagadjok
	nagamarang	=	nabangari

Northeastern Arnhem Land

<i>Patrilineal moiety</i>	yiritja		dua
<i>Subsections</i>	ngaritj	=	balang (or waitban)
	bulain	=	kela (or kangila)
	koidjak	=	wamut
	bangardi	=	kamarang

The Oenpelli men equate nangaraitjgu to yiritja and namadgu to dua. This means that whereas four of the equivalent subsections in either district remain in the same (or equivalent) moiety, the other four change moieties. In other words, a wamut man is nangaraitjgu (or yiritja) at Oenpelli, but dua (or namadgu) amongst the Rembaranga and other tribes.

[Between the writing and printing of this article I made my fourth visit to southern and south-central Arnhem Land, August, 1949. I observed that the

Djauan had now adopted the eastern Arnhem Land moiety terms in their ritual organization—probably the result of the mixing of tribes in marriage, in rituals, and in employment. In 1947, moiety terms were not used. The northern Djauan, however, use the matrilineal moiety organization and terms of *western* Arnhem Land.

More interesting still is the regular use by the Ngalgpun, the northeastern neighbors of the Djauan, and also by the Rembaranga and their northeastern neighbors, the Djinba, of both the patrilineal ritual organization, *dua* and *yiritja*, and also a social moiety organization of *rewandji* and *madawara*, the equivalents respectively of *nangaraitjgu* and *namadgu*. Their subsection terms are those of northeastern Arnhem Land, and the equivalent of the two sets of moieties is as given above. Each person belongs to two moieties; thus, a *kamarang* is *dua* and *madawara* (*namadgu*), and so too in the case of a *wamut*. A *ngaritj* and a *bulain*, however, while being *madawara*, are *yiritja*, not *dua*. So too, while *balang* and *kela* are *dua* and *rewandji*, *koidjak* and *bangardi*, while being *rewandji*, are *yiritja*, not *dua*.

In all subsection systems, with normal rules of marriage and descent, even when there are no named moieties, we can theoretically distinguish the operation of both the patrilineal and matrilineal principles of descent, the latter being fundamental. In central Arnhem Land, however, these principles are overtly recognized and are functioning in social and ritual life. This reflects the position of the Rembaranga, and its "company" on the northeast (the Djinba) and on the southwest (the Ngalgpun), as buffers and middlemen between eastern and western Arnhem Land.]

LOCAL ORGANIZATION

As we have seen, the three elements in western Arnhem Land—the moieties, phratries, and subsections—are matrilineal. There is, however, another factor, which is patrilineal. Great credit is due to Mr and Mrs Berndt for detecting it. The *namanamaitj*, as it is called, was the original small patrilineal, patrilocal, exogamous, land-owning group, the members of which shared in a common inheritance of personal names. Since the days of Macassan contact, a feature of coastal Arnhem Land history, displacement of tribal groups has been in process; some matrilocal marriage has occurred, and individuals have grown up regarding their mother's language as their proper language, and the tribe speaking this as their own tribe. Amidst this change and confusion the Aborigine has maintained the *namanamaitj* line—this is, the link with his original local country in the male line, and the preservation of its exogamy. In all cases recorded, with one exception,

no man had married into his own namanamaitj, nor that of his mother (or mother's brother), while his own mother's and his wife's mother's namanamaitj are different.

One simplifying feature of social organization in western Arnhem Land is that each tribe is a social and linguistic unit, and the moieties, phratries, and subsections are subdivisions within it. In northeast Arnhem Land, however, the set-up is more complicated and more fluid. Exogamous patrilineal moieties and clans are straight-forward, if they be subdivisions of some known total social and linguistic unit. But that is not the case in this sub-region. The whole of the territory is divided amongst a number of patrilineal clans, each with its own totems, sacred symbols, ceremonies, and waterholes, some of the last being sacred "wells." Each clan, however, includes a number of sub-groups of differing linguistic affiliation. Sometimes the differences are only what the natives describe as "heavy" and "light" tongue. In some cases the differences are definitely dialectic. A clan, therefore, is not a linguistic unit.

On the other hand, while a linguistic group is a unit in speech, it is not so in locality, nor in clan affiliation, for it is usually spoken by parts of more than one clan. There is, however, a bond or alliance between linguistic sub-groups of one clan, and each language group marries preferably into certain language groups of the opposite moiety. This criss-crossing of local clans and linguistic units lessens the solidarity of the clan, a process which is also served by the frequent attachment of a person to the "language" of his mother and mother's brother, a tongue which belongs to a clan, or part of a clan, of the moiety to which his own (and his father's) clan does not belong. And this in spite of the fact that the linguistic group (mata), like the clan (mala), is patrilineal.

Another factor adding to the complexity is that a clan may obtain a piece of country in the territory of another clan, even of the opposite moiety. Moreover, the traditional home territory of one clan is sometimes situated elsewhere than it is today. This may explain why the linguistic group is felt to be more important than the clan.¹⁹

The local organization in many tribes is not the clearcut patrilineal patrilocal

19 A brief discussion is given by Warner (*A Black Civilization*, pp. 36-39), with a list of clans and languages, with totems, as collected at Millingimbi (pp. 39-51). The complete analysis must await the publication of the detailed material collected by Mr and Mrs Berndt from the Yirrkalla side. Warner's use of the term Murgin to denote the whole people has been criticized by Mr Webb (*Tribal Organization in Eastern Arnhem Land*, Oceania, vol. 3, no. 4, p. 410) on the grounds that it is the name of a clan of one moiety. Mr and Mrs Berndt say that these people from Blue Mud Bay west to the Goyder and up to and around the coast regard themselves as the Wulamba.

exogamous group occupying a definite territory which some textbooks imply. Actually it is not an easy subject to study in the field if tribal life be still fairly strong, especially in a region where life is economically easy and there is much coming and going.

Melville and Bathurst Islanders seem to conform to the textbook definition until we realize that a man can easily change his local group or horde by residence or initiation, or both. He will henceforth be regarded as a member of the local group into which he transferred, and into which he may marry, so that for practical purposes marriage is endogamous.²⁰ As already stated, the Wagaitj tribe consists of three named groups each with its own country, but there is no evidence of the exogamy of these groups. Likewise, Dr Stanner could not find confirmation in the Daly River region of the textbook description of local organization. The hordes were not exogamous, the boundaries fluid, and there was much intermingling. Amongst the Murinbata at Port Keats, too, he concluded that the hordes were aggregates of contiguous local totemic clans, which centered around totemic sites, but were not exogamous, though the clans were.²¹

CONCLUSION

The picture we get from the foregoing is one of change, diffusion, complexity, and some perplexity, as well as of variation according to regions. This would be seen again if we surveyed the ritual life of the region: there is diffusion of circumcision and, much more slowly, of subincision, both from the southwest; of some "fertility-mother" cults eastwards from the Coburg Peninsula area, and the great Kunapipi ("mother-fertility") cult north from the Victoria and Roper River districts; concepts of "earth-mothers" and cult-heroes as the source of natural species in the non-moiety, uncircumcised sub-region in the northwest; and a variety in burial rituals, the most interesting of which is the final "burial" of the bones in a log coffin which is practised around the coast from the Liverpool River east and south to the Roper River up which it has spread—it has also recently spread west to Goulburn Island.

This region, then, has not been culturally static, at least not for a considerable time. Confining ourselves to social organization, we see that cross-cousin marriage was formerly allowed over most, if not all of the region, and indeed was a preferred type in much of it. In the northwestern corner—a sub-region—an absence

20 C. W. M. Hart, *The Tiwi of Melville and Bathurst Islands* (Oceania, vol. 1, no. 2, pp. 173-176).

21 W. E. H. Stanner, *The Daly River Tribes* (Oceania, vol. 3, no. 4, pp. 403-405) and *Murinbata Kinship and Totemism* (Oceania, vol. 7, no. 2, pp. 188-190).

of moieties and of generation-level devices allows other types of marriage which would be regarded as highly irregular, or indeed, impossible in regions with sections or subsections. Without these devices, however, they are within the limits of normality or regularity. Matrilineal phratries, which may increase in number, function in the northern part of this sub-region.

This sub-region overlaps, because of the phratry organization, with the Alligator-Liverpool Rivers sub-region, which is strongly matrilineal. Named moieties were established there before the subsection system spread to it, a system which so far has to be accommodated to the prevailing kinship and phratry, or moiety, and marriage custom, and not vice versa.

This accommodation of the subsections to established kinship, moiety, and marriage practices is still obvious in the eastern patrilineal sub-region, where there was no generation-level mechanism. In neither of these sub-regions is the breaking of the subsection norm regarded as a serious matter. Subsections add difficulty here as they do amongst the Murinbata in the southwest corner of the region.

A survey of the region suggests that moiety exogamy and descent are much more important than the subsection pattern; and that more basic still is clan or phratry exogamy and descent, be this patrilineal, as in eastern Arnhem Land and also south of the Daly River, or matrilineal as in the western sub-region; but whether local exogamy was as fundamental or more so, is uncertain and will depend on what is meant by locality in each case. This may be the total food-gathering territory of a group, or a much smaller locality which is really a sacred place connected with their own spirits or with the ancestral heroes of the group. It may have been the case in eastern Arnhem Land, though even in this patrilineal, patrilocal sub-region, the local organization was far from stable. In the Alligator or western sub-region, the *namanamaitj* suggests that exogamy of a small patrilineal group was formerly important, but the area concerned was probably very small, and not a total hunting region. This was the case, as far as Dr Stanner could determine, in the Daly River area. In the northwest corner, there are fairly large local divisions, but exogamy is not necessarily a feature of them.

Thus, in this good food-gathering region with a comparatively thick population and many tribes or linguistic groups, in which a family or an enlarged conjoint family could live on a small area, there was much meeting and mixing of such groups, with fluidity of boundaries, and even changes of clan countries.

The picture is different in the arid and semi-arid regions where enlarged family groups or local clans require a much greater hunting area, and consequently are separated much more and for longer periods from other groups. In such a situa-

tion, marriage is really into an outside group—one comparatively far off, only met on special visits and on ceremonial occasions.

Finally, in addition to the three main sub-regions—the northwest corner, the west, and the east, to which a fourth, the Fitzmaurice-Port Keats area should be added—there is the Roper River sub-region in which either the subsection or else the semi-moiety system is completely in the ascendant, along with an Aranda type of kinship system, and a high degree of conformity to the marriage norm. Apparently, the subsection system, in spite of causing initial confusion, eventually wins its way in a tribe, and establishes conformity to its pattern of marriage and descent, especially as it allows for an alternate marriage. Eventually too, it tends to increase the number of kinship terms, dividing them into eight groups, and to establish marriage between the children of cross-cousins, own or classificatory, as the preferred type.

The practical value of the system at intertribal gatherings in the conduct of both social and ceremonial affairs is realized. Prestige is also involved: once the system has been introduced to a tribe, its members like to show that they can make it work. Perhaps, too, the very pattern of the system with its cycles and lines appeals to the native mind. This will be studied further in the field.

UNIVERSITY OF SYDNEY
SYDNEY, AUSTRALIA