

## CHAPTER FIVE

### Reaching across difference: the Burarra people of central Arnhem Land

#### 5.1 Introduction

In this chapter I introduce my mostly Burarra-speaking interlocutors of Fish Camp and Lee Point who have moved from their homelands near the Blyth River in central Arnhem Land (see Map 2). I examine the past and present relationship between Aboriginal language groups of the Liverpool and Blyth River regions of Arnhem Land and the settlement at Maningrida, established by the Federal Government in 1957. I suggest that the Aboriginal homelands, or outstation movement, which began in Arnhem Land, parallels the resistance of the Burarra fringe camps in Darwin as a reaction against state control of Aboriginal lives. I give examples which suggest that resistance by the Burarra people in Darwin fringe camps is an attempt at engagement, or ‘reaching across difference’, which belongs to a tradition demonstrated since White settlement at Port Darwin. Finally, I construct a model of this process by adapting the Yolngu concept of *ganma* to an urban metaphor of merging traffic.

The town of Maningrida, on the west bank of the mouth of the Liverpool River, derives its name from a local place-name meaning ‘the place where the Dreaming changes shape’ (Carew et al 1996a). In per capita terms, Maningrida is perhaps the most multilingual community in the world (Carew et al 1996b), with most people speaking or understanding four or more of the fifteen languages from the region: Ndjebbana, Eastern Kunwinjku, Kune, Rembarrnga, Dangbon/Dalabon, Nakkara, Gurrgoni, Djinang, Wurlaki, Ganalpingu, Gupapuyngu, Kunbarlang, Gun-nartpa,

Burarra and English (Carew et al 1996b). Burarra is the common language of Maningrida (Glasgow 1985:7). The Burarra language group is also described by Benn (1994:iii) as 'a federation of Aboriginal people, concentrated on the Blyth River, living mainly along the coast between Maningrida and Cape Stewart'.

While referring to the language used for most internal communications as 'Burarra', the people at Fish Camp acknowledge the differences between Anbarra speakers (a sub-community of Gidjingali [Meehan 1982:12; Hamilton 1981:3; Corn 2001]), other close dialects of the Blyth River region and the Gun-nartpa dialect of the Cadell River region (see Glasgow 1985:7; Hamilton 1981:3; Green 1987:1).<sup>1</sup> According to Glasgow (1985:7): 'The Burarra and Gun-nartpa people ... number approximately 600, making up the predominant part of the Burarra Language Family'.<sup>2</sup> Hiatt and Hiatt (1966:1) note that: "'Burara" is a term originally used in eastern Arnhem Land for two groups who knew themselves as "Gidjingali" and "Gunadba"'. Hamilton (1981:3) observed that by 1981 Burarra was the inclusive name for all the groups of the Blyth River region and the term Gidjingali was 'never used'. This coincides with my observations in Darwin.

Many of the Fish Camp people claim Djunawunya as their clan estate, four kilometres west of the Blyth River mouth, which has been described in detail by Hiatt (1982; see also Meehan 1982:14), celebrated in the popular song 'Sunset Bay' (Wild Water 1996)<sup>3</sup> and shown in the film *Waiting for Harry* (McKenzie 1980).<sup>4</sup> Kopanga, on the coast, was the nearest outstation (see Meehan and Jones 1980) until the shift inland to Je-bena in about 1985, forty-four kilometres from Maningrida, where water is reliable and the road to Maningrida is open all year (Carew and Handelsmann 1996b).

In 1958 the Djunawunya landowners identified themselves as Anbarra speakers (Hiatt 1982:21) who comprised almost half of the total Gidjingali

population of 600. However, Hiatt (p.21) recounts how groups circulated for rituals and to exploit resources. Hiatt (p.15) claims, 'access and benefit [of resources] are normally accorded to a wide network of tribesmen over and above the actual owners' in the interests of 'an over-riding ethic of hospitality and open-handedness'. Hiatt's (p.15) observation, that 'degrees of open-handedness bear a rough correspondence to degrees of relatedness', differs from Sansom's descriptions of 'performative kinship' and a service economy, but corresponds with the ethic of sharing in the fringe camps where the membership is drawn from related, though wide-ranging groups.

Carew et al (1996b) describe linkages and overlapping between Burarra-speakers, the Yolngu dialects to the east, 'the Nakkara' ('sometimes included with the Gijingarliya [Gidjingali] group') between Maningrida and the Blyth River, and the 'Ndjebbana-speaking Kunibidji' [Gunavidji] people who are the traditional owners of the Maningrida town area. These connections are often reflected in the mixed gatherings at Fish Camp with residents comfortably switching in and out of the above languages.

In the fringe camps where I did my fieldwork between 1996 and 2001, the members of the groups converse amongst themselves mostly in their native languages, with English as a second, third or fourth language.<sup>5</sup> In contrast, Sansom (1980a:11) likens the fringe camp to 'Babel' where people 'ethnically unlike, will speak in different ways and so have different words for things. They therefore cannot share properly in understandings'. He then asks: 'If ethnicity does not serve as a basis for association, what else can?' (Sansom 1980a:12). One response to the mixed nature of the 'Wallaby Cross' mob is the adoption of 'Aboriginal English', or Kriol, as the 'prime camp language' (Sansom 1980a:29). However, unlike 'Wallaby Cross', where 'the distinctiveness of rough camp English is that its very roughness makes it English that is unwhite' (Sansom 1980a:31),<sup>6</sup> Kriol was rarely used at Fish

Camp and Lee Point and there was never a demand that 'Aboriginal English' be used as a common language.

Almost all of the Aboriginal people who were associated with the Fish Camp community at some time during my fieldwork originate from the central coastal region of Arnhem Land, which was declared an Aboriginal Reserve in 1948 (see Map 2). In comparison, the people of 'Wallaby Cross' came from a hinterland of fragmented Aboriginal Reserves, alienated land and cattle stations, which has a long history of contact (see Sutton and Palmer 1980:17; Sansom 1980a:iii). In Arnhem Land, Aboriginal land ownership is comparatively secure and social organisation is relatively intact. My interlocutors always explain their relationship to each other in kinship terms, such as 'I call Dulcie grannie', or use more specific Burarra titles such as *mununa* (mother's mother - see Hiatt 1965:48), *galikali* (spouse) as well as the sixteen subsection names recorded by Hiatt (1965:49) and Glasgow (1985:925).

The majority of the regular Aboriginal users of the camps at Fish Camp and Lee Point are members of the Gidjingali clans of the Blyth River region discussed by Hiatt (1965, 1982, 1986b), Meehan (1982:16), Hamilton (1981), Bagshaw (1982:50, 1994) and Meehan and Jones (1986). The Gidjingali people, who generally refer to themselves as An-barra or Burarra, are also predominant in camps at Palmerston and around the Darwin suburb of Tiwi. I suspect that the movement of people from the Blyth River region to Darwin has been partly because their homelands are located between the Aboriginal towns of Maningrida and Milingimbi. With no regular direct road service, access to services and goods is mostly through the traditional lands of rival clans.

Bob Bunduwabi came from Yilan, to the east of Blyth River, and had close ties to the Yolgnu people from northeastern Arnhem Land. His niece, Dulcie,

had a Nakara father and An-barra mother with close family extending into the Maung, and as far west as the Gundjehmi dialect groups. Her partner was a Djinang speaker from the Ramingining area and a renowned singerman who often returned for funerals and other ceremonies in the region. His family connections extended to Barunga, south of Katherine, where Kriol is more widely used. When groups from this region came to visit, the tensions at Fish Camp were noticeably increased. Although some men from the extended family group had lived with women from Central Australia, these languages are not as well understood and visitors with affinal connections through these relationships seldom stayed long in the camp. Fish Camp therefore accommodated a group who were closely related, spoke closely related dialects and came from adjoining estates, predominantly the areas described by Hiatt (1965,1982), Meehan (1982) and Meehan and Jones (1980).

The two main exceptions were the husbands of two women in the core group. Apart from the Djinang man, there was a 71-year-old man married to an elderly Burarra woman who had been a patient at the leprosarium. The man was of mixed descent but identified as a Larrakia. He looked after his wife by shopping and fishing with his cast net. He drowned while on a night fishing excursion near the camp in 1998 (see *NT News*, November 21). While these men were accepted, tension was created during one week when a single urban Aboriginal woman evicted from her home sought refuge in the camp. With no kinship ties, and unaware of the expected behaviour towards kin, this woman offended a male relative of the camp doyen and had to seek my protection. She moved out soon afterwards.

Heppell and Wigley (1981:52) note that 'residents of the [town] camps maintain traditional ties with traditional country', giving the camp life a familiarity for its residents despite the geographical separation from country. Although many of the campers have a long association with the Darwin area

and claim rights to space in Darwin, as I discuss in Chapter Seven,<sup>7</sup> my fieldwork also suggests that they maintain many traditional connections to specific sites and land-tenure systems in Arnhem Land described by Hiatt (1965, 1982, 1984), Bagshaw (1994:122) and Sutton (1995c:13-17). These ethnographic descriptions of Burarra social systems, values and beliefs appear apposite, even in the fringe camps where I did most of my fieldwork. As Merlan (1991:271) notes, 'the town camp and rural settlement situations exhibit commonalties which are not as strongly associated or fully shared with house-in-town living'.

The Fish Camp group is typical of the mixed 'residential aggregates' model that Sutton (1999a:26) derives from his thorough analysis of Hiatt's (1965:24) descriptions of Gidjingali social groups, called 'communities' in Hiatt's text.<sup>8</sup> In another Northern Territory Aboriginal town camp, Doohan (1992:79) noted: 'I have not experienced a situation where Aboriginal people without some immediate kin ties at Aputula would take up residence there'. Similarly, those who camped at Fish Camp from August 1996 to January 1998 for periods of between two weeks and six months, with numbers peaking at twenty-five between September and October 1997, were almost all from central Arnhem Land.

My experience confirms the observation by Heppell and Wigley (1981:64):

The town camp provides a recognised order and ready community to which visitors can attach themselves. They can be sure of obtaining shelter among kin with whom they have an established set of reciprocal obligations, and can be reasonably certain that everyone else living in the camp, if not immediate kin, are members of the same tribal group and therefore, linked by historical ties of amity.

My record of residence over time (Figure 3) indicates a shifting population of more than 150 'countrymen' (and women) who associated with Fish Camp for varied lengths of time. However, in a submission for housing assistance, Simmering (1999; see Appendix II) states that Fish Camp had a core group of twelve who identified twenty-seven others who the group wished to accommodate on visits 'of weeks, months or longer' (see also Appendix III).<sup>9</sup> Ages ranged from three to older than eighty, although children were rarely present. As Doohan (1992:75) found at an Aboriginal camp near Finke, it is possible for an individual to identify with more than one location.

In Chapter Three I gave some first impressions of the camp. Although I lived in the camp from May 1997 to January 1998 and visited regularly in other months, the language barrier I describe above precludes a comprehensive ethnographic analysis of life in a fringe camp. In addition, I maintain that the 'classifying practices' of the hegemonic power noted by Asad (1993:17), Abu-Lughod (1990:47), Kapferer (1995:88) and other analysts of resistance are a reasonable cause for 'ethnographic refusal' in studies of resistance amongst subaltern groups like the fringe dwellers.<sup>10</sup> As I have cited, authorities know little about the campers. Scott (1990:xi, 1985:321) notes that 'sequestered settings', 'offstage' and 'removed from institutional circuits' are sites where resistance may be fostered. I suggest that anonymity remains the fringe dwellers' strongest defence. However, for the benefit of the reader unfamiliar with Darwin Aboriginal fringe camps, the following section gives descriptions of everyday life in one such 'sequestered setting' during my fieldwork before the camp was closed in 1999.

## **5.2 Some observations of life at Fish Camp: 1996-8**

During the dry season, the shelters at Fish Camp were used only for storage. People shifted their 'sit-down' camp into the shade of the surrounding trees as the sun warmed, and continued dragging tarpaulins and mattresses around with the shade as it shifted throughout the day. The tents were used

as a windbreak during the colder nights when heavier logs were gathered in the evening for the night fires. Sleepers laid their bedding close to, and around the two or three hearths, depending on the numbers and family groupings in the camp. If there was no alcohol to be consumed and no visitors to entertain everyone settled down when darkness set in. Apart from the half dozen dogs, who barked fiercely if anything or anyone approached, there was usually little apparent concern for physical barriers or other protection for the exposed sleepers.

When there was alcohol being shared, the group would stay up by the fires until very late at night, singing and dancing to the clap-sticks and *ngorla* (didgeridoo) kept at the camp, or sharing stories in a relaxed mixed-gender circle sitting on the earth (I discuss drinking at Fish Camp in Chapter Eight).<sup>11</sup> At times of less abundance, the camp was often kept awake by domestic arguments, fuelled by alcohol, which were highly repetitive night after night. These arguments were usually over failure to reciprocate, accusations of sexual unfaithfulness, allegations of talk behind the back of the accuser or disputes over who was the most important representative of the camp. These internal tensions are fuelled by alcohol and controlled within boundaries of kinship and do not motivate the forms of resistance described in this thesis.<sup>12</sup> In a 'miler' week or on a Sunday when people have no cash or the convenient liquor outlets are closed, silence reigns and people rest, go fishing or gathering bush foods and recuperate.<sup>13</sup>

Temperatures during the dry season nights fall to as low as 16 degrees Celsius. Foam mattresses were dragged closer to the fires for warmth, and it was not uncommon for bedding to smoulder or for sleepers to suffer bad burns. Couples and single women slept around their own fire apart from the single men and women. Occasionally, if too many single men were drinking and the spouses were not present, the single women, mostly middle-aged, brought their blankets to my hearth for protection or removed themselves

altogether for the night. Early in the morning the fires were stoked to boil tea and cook whatever food was available for a light breakfast. If there was a major drinking session continuing, people would be woken at first light to continue the celebrating and to share what alcohol had been saved as a 'reviver' until the liquor outlets opened for business.

Sometimes a man, but more usually women, gathered firewood in the late afternoon for themselves and the pensioners. The fittest, younger men were often slow to help. At Fish Camp, the firewood was mostly dry mangrove timber that was plentiful in the tidal regions of the Kulaluk lease. In the wet season, there was no attempt to keep wood dry, but fires could be started even on all but the wettest days. In the dry season, mangrove wood burns relatively quickly, leaving a fine ash that built up after a few nights until it was eventually shovelled to the side of the cleared sleeping and activity area. When a larger log of black wattle or similar better-quality wood was burnt, it was allowed to smoulder continuously until it was consumed. Occasionally a vehicle might help bring wood from more distant areas for the fires that are a distinctive feature of the fringe camps. Pieces of arc mesh or similar metal scraps were used as grills for cooking, or pots were perilously balanced on the burning logs (see Plate 4). Sparks flying, these burning branches were sometimes wielded as weapons, more in spectacular threat at night than in blows, although the scattered coals did create havoc with clothing and bedding.

Arguing at night, noted by Tonkinson (1992:150), or shouting across the camp from where people lay could be vitriolic but cleared the air of pent up grievances. Sometimes, in the darkness, 'wires were crossed' with humorous results. One old man who was also rather deaf, while arguing with his partner in English shouted racist remarks at her that were understood by others to be insulting responses to a shouted complaint from across the camp from another couple, which the old man had not heard. As I lay listening, the

man continued insulting his wife, which was interpreted as further insulting replies to the complaints from the other side of the camp, inflaming an already noisy dispute. Usually no mention was made of these night arguments the next day although they could ignite again on another night. One night I recorded on tape a particularly loud and insulting tirade in Burarra, and the responses from across the camp which caused great amusement when it was replayed the next morning, and many times thereafter.

With no vehicle, and several disabled pensioners, Fish Camp was reliant on taxis and 'minibuses' for trips to the bank and shops. Fares are negotiable on the minibuses, which can take up to thirteen people at a reasonable charge, making this form of transport indispensable to fringe dwellers, particularly for ceremonial gatherings and for protests. Unfortunately, at thirty dollars for the round journey to the shops, the fares took a sizeable proportion of the pensioner income on pension day. There were also friends who came to take pensioners shopping, or to the bank to collect debts. None at the camp had a drivers licence, so I sometimes drove a hired a vehicle which was paid for by contributions from the camp. In later months, the White activist friends began helping with shopping and excursions.

Fish Camp was rich in utensils, cooking pots and fishing gear compared to other camps and even to many Aboriginal homes. However, this was not always immediately evident because cups, spoons, saucepans and plates lay scattered about on the ground or hidden until they were needed. Occasionally there would be a clean up and washed utensils would be stacked together but mostly they were retrieved and washed when needed. Old cardboard made useful plates for meat or shellfish or as a firelighter or fan. Empty plastic bottles of all shapes and sizes were used to share out the wine that arrived in four litre casks called 'suitcases' or 'yellow boxes'. Once used, the 'plastic', as the wine containers were called, was cast aside without

the top and not used again. There was little attempt to put aside the bottles for the next drinking session or to wash and keep them for later use. At Fish Camp the used drinking bottles were raked into the piles of litter and put in bins that were removed weekly by the Keep Australia Beautiful utility, one of the few services provided to the camp.

When money is short, groups went crabbing, fishing with lines in the nearby creek or gathering food in the mangrove swamps, including worms from dead trees, shellfish called 'longbums' (*telescopium telescopium*) from the mud flats, periwinkles (*nerita lineata*) clinging to mangrove trees and small oysters from the rocks (see Plate 10). Wild honey, yams and berries were also collected from the surrounding monsoon forest. The camp usually had at least one cast-net that was used to catch smaller fish in shallow water. Friends and family might bring a wallaby, geese in season, long neck turtle or seafood from a hunting trip out of town. An urban Aboriginal entrepreneur usually drove into camp on pay weeks with saltwater turtle meat, offering the campers the cheaper, less saleable parts that made a popular soup. However, most 'bush tucker' came from shops that specialised in this type of food, including kangaroo tails, fish, shellfish and live crabs. It was also quite common for groups from the camp to spend a day out of town hunting or fishing when transport was available.

Multi-pronged spears were made in camp for hunting stingray during the dry season. A wading hunter hurls the spear at the stingrays that fed on the seabed and remained plentiful in the tidal shallows around Darwin. After removing the liver, the stingray meat was cooked on the open fire or in pots, then rinsed and mashed with the liver into stringy but tasty 'fish cakes'. Spears might be hidden in various locations but rarely remained for long in the possession of the maker - they were always in demand and often broken, not returned, or to prevent their use in fights they were so well-hidden that

their whereabouts was sometimes forgotten (see also Day 1994:106). Knives and axes were also hidden or given to me to keep when tensions were high.

Although large card schools for gambling were held at other Darwin outdoors locations, card games were not popular at Fish Camp. Occasionally there would be a short round of cards with small stakes but generally money tied up in a card game was seen as money that could be redistributed amongst kin in more immediate ways. The silent concentration of a card game also contrasted with the more usual rowdy sociability of the camp. However, in quiet moments cards were popular for a solitary game of patience.

Numbers peaked at Fish Camp from August to September in 1997, but this was not statistically significant, because over the year the camp became more established as the campaign for a permanent living area became more widely known. For example, there were only five people living at the camp in January 1997 during the wettest period while in January 1998 up to eighteen people were using the camp regularly and more visiting after the death in the hospital of Dulcie's sister from Maningrida (see Plate 15).

Some people, most notably couples, would stay for months while others used the camp as convenient overnight accommodation or a place for recreation. Only Dulcie stayed on through the entire time of my fieldwork with her partner and two brothers being almost continuous companions. Most others returned to Arnhem Land centres after moving from the camp, although a large number of 'drifters' shifted back and forwards between Fish Camp, other 'long grass' camps, and alternative accommodation in the city.

Significant ceremonies were organised at Fish Camp (see Plates 13-15). The largest was on July 15, 1997, to jointly cleanse the relatives and friends of two kin who had died in Darwin. After consultations with relatives who did not

live at Fish Camp, a truckload of beach sand was delivered and spread over the red dust to construct a dance area around a sand sculpture formed to represent the fish totem of one of the deceased (Plate 13). Two circles, about a metre in circumference in the central oblong area, were formed to hold water and fire. All those close to the deceased later gathered around the former to be washed with water tipped from a bucket. In the latter circle a smoky fire was made, from which men wafted smoke with green leafy branches over and around all participants, including many non-Aboriginal friends. After the ceremony, attended by almost fifty people, the hosts paid dancers and singers and everybody was fed and joined in the drinking without incident. To minimise expense, the ceremony was shortened to a single afternoon.

It appears to be significant that these totemic rituals can be relocated from Arnhem Land to Darwin. It is not a new phenomenon, and has been witnessed by observers since earliest settlement, as the historical evidence suggests later in this chapter. Sansom also observed the ceremonial importance of Knuckeyes Lagoon, including the post-burial 'rag burning' rituals (see Sansom 1995; Plate 2) in which I have been a participant at Kulaluk and Railway Dam. In addition, Coulehan (1995a:273-4) noted the smoking of houses and other rituals amongst Yolngu residents of Darwin. At the camps, people can gather to perform similar rites that, I suggest, are important for the religious life and mental health of Aboriginal people in towns. In my experience, these rites are also commonly open to non-Aboriginal people.<sup>14</sup> Participants can still locate earlier sites used for rites of passage, such as initiation, around suburban Darwin, which adds significance to otherwise vacant areas.

While there were many drinkers not living in the fringe camp who could be called 'humbugs', as Coulehan (1995a:277) describes those living in the 'long grass' who do not reciprocate with kin, most of the residents and associates of Fish Camp attempted to fulfil ceremonial obligations in their homelands

or in town. A more common example was gathering for the ceremonial departure of a 'coffin plane' when a body was flown back to Arnhem Land for burial (see Coulehan 1995a:276). On one occasion I drove nine people from Fish Camp on an eight hour journey overland to Maningrida where Blyth River people were preparing for a *mamurrng* exchange ceremony (see Corn 2001:25-6), during which they would sing the much-in-demand *diyama*, or stripy cockle (*tapes hiantina*) song which I also recorded at Fish Camp.<sup>15</sup> Considering that Maningrida is only a fifty-minute flight from Darwin and people are in almost daily telephone communication, such occasions suggested that location is no longer fixed. The drive from Fish Camp to the Arnhem Land homelands juxtaposed town and homeland sites in a way not possible when people walked overland to Darwin in the 1950s.

### 5.3 Early contact

Trading between Aborigines along the north coast and visitors from islands further north has been documented by researchers (Berndt and Berndt 1954; Hiatt 1965:5; Macknight 1976; Meehan 1982:17; Poignant 1996:30). Reports of the regular visits to the north coast by Macassan trepanger fleets were incentives for British attempts to establish outposts and settlements at Fort Dundas in 1824, Raffles Bay in 1827 and Port Essington from 1839 to 1849 (Poignant 1996:30-31). With the successful establishment of Port Darwin from 1869, Macassan traders were regulated, while Japanese and Australian pearlers and trepangers continued to operate along the Arnhem Land coast (Poignant 1996:34).

By 1885, Arnhem Land was divided into eleven pastoral leases (Trudgen 2000:18; Cole 1979:80). Using oral history and other references, Trudgen (pp.12-42) recounts a 'first pastoral war' of attacks and reprisals between cattlemen and Aboriginal people of the area which is now northeastern Arnhem Land (pp.18-20). This conflict was followed by a 'second war' against the Eastern and African Cold Storage Company leaseholders (pp.20-

28) which led to closure of the last pastoral leases, but left a number of Djinan clans either scattered or at 'the point of extinction' (p.25).

Trudgen (2000:28-38) describes a 'third war' and a 'fourth war' against crocodile hunters, buffalo shooters and Japanese crews occurring in the post-pastoral period in northeast Arnhem Land, as the loss of trading networks which existed in Maccassan times forced Aborigines to move off their estates into missions to survive (p.38). Although Hiatt (1986b:6) claims that there was no recorded violence in the central Arnhem Land area, conflict between Aboriginal groups and Japanese crews escalated in the 1930s. The publicised deaths of Japanese trepangers, two White adventurers and a White police officer and the subsequent trial of Aboriginal men in 1933 raised public awareness of these incidents (Dewar 1992). Sympathetic media coverage prevented the type of punitive expeditions conducted elsewhere, particularly in earlier decades. Dewar (1992:6) suggests: 'Perhaps it was [the] long experience of dealing with Macassan people which made the interaction of the Europeans and Yolngu less on the outsiders' terms in Arnhem Land than it was in other places in Australia'. The greater national public scrutiny of settler activity by the 1930s was also a likely factor that prevented reprisals.

#### **5.4 The Reserves**

Baldwin Spencer had recommended in 1911 that reserves be set-aside for Aborigines (Dewar 1992:23). By 1929, J W Bleakley's report for the Commonwealth, *The Aborigines and half castes of Central Australia and North Australia*, recommended the formation of a reserve with assimilationist aims of protection and supervision of Aborigines under the care of missions (Dewar 1992:23). The sometimes-violent attempts to operate cattle stations in Arnhem Land had been abandoned in the 1890s and in 1908 (Dewar 1992:9), leaving the area free for the 79,900 square kilometre Arnhem Land Aboriginal Reserve to be proclaimed in April 1931 (Dewar 1992:3). Mission leases had already been established at Oenpelli in 1925, South Goulburn

Island in 1916, Milingimbi in 1918 and Elcho Island in 1921. Yirrkala mission followed in 1935 (Hiatt 1965:7; Poignant 1996:27).

In 1939, the anthropologist Donald Thomson (cited in Dewar 1992:81) recommended that:

Rigid segregation in Arnhem Land Reserve and protection from all outside contact with its destructive and disintegrating results, alone would preserve this population as a stable, self-respecting [sic], self-supporting, primitive community.

The Northern Territory Chief Protector of Aborigines in 1937, Cecil Cook, and the general community believed that the missions had failed as administrators of Aboriginal communities (Dewar 1992:23). Dewar (1992:24) quotes Cook:

the finished product of the Mission School taught to appreciate and need the legitimate amenities of white civilization is left without the opportunity of enjoying them except by migrating from the Reserve to centres of settlement.

Baldwin Spencer had earlier stressed the need for reserves to keep Aborigines out of major urban centres. His argument was an important factor leading to the creation of the first reserves in the 1890s (Dewar 1992:24), in conjunction with laws restricting Aboriginal movement in towns. As Protector of Aborigines, Baldwin Spencer also established the Darwin Kahlin Compound in 1911, primarily for the local Larrakia people and associated hinterland groups (Wells 1995a:22; 2000). According to Read (1995:276):

In the regulation of the lives of Aboriginal town dwellers ... Spencer's recommendations illustrated a long-standing tension between laws to protect Aborigines from Whites and laws to protect Whites from Aborigines ... Spencer believed that in Darwin and Alice Springs it was the rights of the Whites which must be protected ... Spencer's concern for the welfare of traditional Aborigines in remote areas, but for the welfare of Whites in the towns, set a precedent which arguably still remains entrenched in Northern Territory legislation.

Jackson (1996a:8) believes town reserves were commonly built on land of little economic value. She indicates that the confining of Aborigines met some resistance from campers in Broome. The WA Commissioner of Native Affairs reported in 1955: 'The adult natives are most reluctant to leave their "homes" by the sea or mangroves which are very convenient to them' (Jackson 1996a:8).

Although by 1913 in Darwin it was reported to the Protector that, 'most of the camps in town have been broken up, and the Aboriginals removed to the Compound at Kahlin' (Wells 1995a:22), years later Harney (1957:70-75) recounts an early morning 'muster' of the camps to remove the 'down and outs' to a waiting ship where '[t]heir names were recorded so that the Director of Native Affairs could commit them to an aboriginal reserve'. Presumably these were the unemployed Aboriginal campers. Harney (1957:17) writes: 'I often met a native I had known in his tribal lands under some name that linked him to his country, to discover that he had dropped the old name and now called himself after the store or White people he worked for'. Wells (1995a:27) notes that in 1941, after many Aboriginal town campers had been repatriated, the demand for Aboriginal domestic labour greatly exceeded supply. This shortage, which had also occurred in the past (Wells 1995a:23), continued to subvert the policy of discouraging Aboriginal movement into Darwin (Wells 2000:64).

### 5.5 The 'drift' to Darwin.

Numerous reports cited in Brandl et al (1979), Povinelli (1993a) and Wells (1995a; 1995b; 2000) express the official concern over the movement of Aboriginal people into Darwin and their interaction with the town population. Wells (2000:74) describes early attempts to 'keep Aboriginal peoples and Aboriginal lifestyles well outside the Darwin town boundaries'. In her conclusion, Wells (p.74) suggests that:

Aboriginal resistance to such authoritarianism is evident in the persistence of town camps and the need for authorities to continually rework legislation in an effort to effect greater control over a seemingly recalcitrant Aboriginal population.

An official head-count in 1955 claimed there were twenty-five Aborigines from the Liverpool River region and ninety from the Blyth River living around Darwin (Poignant 1996:40), amongst a total of 155 from the two regions living in Territory centres of White settlement (Hiatt 1965:10). According to Hiatt (p.10), 'The Native Affairs Branch on several occasions sent boatloads back to the Liverpool River, but many of the passengers set out on the 200-mile [320 kilometre] return journey as soon as they had visited their aged relatives'.

Poignant (1996:40) refers to the government records known as 'repatriation files' which reveal personal histories of repeated visits to Darwin, including Frank Gurrmanamana, a Gidjingali elder who regularly visited the fringe camps during my fieldwork.<sup>16</sup> Harney (1957:17-20) describes a population of 400 'homogeneous people from all tribes' living in the Darwin camps in 1940. Further migration occurred when World War II increased opportunities and expectations. Cole (1980:53) says that in 1947 about 100 people from the Liverpool River (Maningrida) began 'drifting into Darwin with the idea of

settling permanently close to the source of Western goods and services'. According to Hiatt (1965:10), at a time when drinking alcohol was illegal for Aborigines, 'the Darwin crime registers record a steady increase in the number of Liverpool-Blyth River men charged with offences of this kind from 1948 to 1955'. Hiatt says forty-eight from this region appeared in court in 1955.

In 1951, at the Berrimah camp, important exchange ceremonies were held, with senior Arnhem Land ceremonial leaders present (Poignant 1996:40-1). Harney (1957:17) describes 'a complete [new] tribal life, with its laws and rituals' which he claims included trafficking in drugs and alcohol and acting as 'employment agencies' (p.17). He notes: 'Their tribal life had been transferred from the trees and lagoons to the streets and houses of this northern town', where '[c]ertain localities in Darwin were the domain of distinct groups of natives' (p.17). Hiatt (1965:148-154) records the emergence of Aboriginal leaders who had lived in Darwin and drew upon their experience as brokers to gain authority in their home communities. One man, Harry, who had worked in Darwin for many years and made the journey from central Arnhem Land several times, returned to announce 'that he represented the government and that his job was to look after everyone in the area' (Hiatt 1965:149). In 1946 a government patrol officer, Kyle-Little, was surprised how many Aborigines around the Liverpool River had visited Darwin and the Air Force stations during the war. He claims 'a trip there was almost equivalent to a Muslim pilgrimage to Mecca' (Kyle-Little 1993:90). During his expedition, Kyle-Little (p.90) believes his acceptance amongst the Liverpool River people was aided by the coincidence of meeting one man who had worked for his father and knew his mother in Darwin.

Kyle-Little (1993:156) reported to the Native Affairs Branch that:

The [second world]war has brought about big changes in the native economic life and has tended to accelerate contact with our culture. Natives throughout the Arnhem Land reserve - many of whom worked with the Services during the war - now desire to participate in our economic and social life, and unless the latter activities are advanced and some attractions made in the reserve, the Native Affairs Branch will be unable to cope with the already ever-increasing drift of natives from the reserve to Darwin and other settlements along the north-south highway.

### **5.6 Maningrida 1957-1999**

As a result of Kyle-Little's patrol and report, in 1949 he and a junior patrol officer, Jack Doolan, were assigned to begin a trading post at the Liverpool River 'to encourage the inhabitants of the area to hunt crocodiles and barter the skins for goods' (Kyle-Little 1993:159). Doolan (1989:1) says a site was chosen which 'was not covered by the influence of the existing Missions'. He notes that the idea of a trading station resulted from 'the considerable problem of Aboriginal people drifting into Darwin and other towns following the 1939-45 War' (p.1):

Government departments, and in particular, the Native Affairs Branch, were at their wits' end trying to cope with the problem of totally unsophisticated Arnhem Land people suddenly descending in fairly large numbers on Darwin, where the existing facilities for housing and feeding them were totally inadequate (Doolan 1989:1).

A trading post may have appealed to the government as an economic option. Native Affairs after the war was 'a quite poverty-stricken little Branch' (Doolan 1989:2). Also, the Aborigines outside of the influence of the missions could trade for goods 'which were now enticing them into the "fleshpots" of Darwin' (p.2). Doolan adds that Kyle-Little's suggested remedy would not

have been considered seriously by the administration 'if the problems caused by the drift of Aborigines from Arnhem Land had not been so immediate and fairly desperate'.

Doolan and Kyle-Little's attempt to create a trading station was abandoned despite fears expressed in the patrol officer's 1949 report that: 'If [the Native Affairs] Branch abandons the project, I visualise the natives again drifting to Darwin' (Kyle-Little 1993:231). Doolan (1989:16) says a change in administration and 'an unsympathetic director' were the causes of the failure, and 'nothing was done' until 1957 when the idea of a trading station was replaced by a government Welfare Branch settlement at Maningrida. In contrast to the original plans, Benn (1994:125) claims that government settlements tended to increase state control and diminish Aboriginal self-reliance.

In an interview with a senior NT welfare officer, Benn (1994:115) was told that a primary concern of the post-war period was the number of Aboriginal people coming into Darwin with leprosy. Ingrid Drysdale established a hospital at Maningrida settlement where her husband was the first superintendent from 1957 to 1961. Drysdale (1974:78) writes:

Arnhemlanders were best left alone to make up their own minds whether they wanted to continue leading their tribal lives or come in to civilisation. However, the situation was not as simple as that, for it became increasingly difficult to ignore the fact that leprosy and many other diseases were spreading unchecked in the reserve area.

Hiatt (1965:9) blames the 'shortage in staff and funds' for the failure to reopen the trading station after Doolan and Kyle-Little had been recalled to Darwin for the 1949-50 wet season. In 1955 the government sent Sweeney 'to carry out a census in the Liverpool and report on the causes of migration [to

Darwin]' (Hiatt 1965:10). A second attempt to begin a settlement in 1957 aimed to leave Aborigines 'in their tribal areas with a minimum disruption, initially, of their tribal patterns. The function of the settlement at this early stage was primarily to provide trading and medical services for the area as a whole' (cited in Hiatt 1965:10). However, the trading post quickly became secondary to the growing settlement's function as a service centre (Altman 1987:4). In Hiatt's opinion the concept of encouraging people to remain self-reliant was never realized. When he travelled on foot from Maningrida to the Blyth River in 1958 he met only a few people still living in the bush (Hiatt 1965:11).<sup>17</sup> Despite its failings, the settlement initially reduced the migration to Darwin.

### **5.7 Maningrida and assimilation**

Bagshaw (1977:9) notes that Maningrida was established at the height of the assimilation policy aimed at including Aborigines in a single Australian community. In 1951 an all-states conference on Aboriginal Affairs agreed that the policy should be extended to include all Aborigines, 'irrespective of individual degrees of acculturation'. Large government settlements operated both as an 'anti-urbanisation measure' and as 'a "transitional" situation, part of the "assimilation" process', claims Rowley (1972b:121, 122) in his extended criticism of the politics of institutions.<sup>18</sup> Altman (1987:4) agrees that: 'Maningrida was now viewed as a potential instrument for government policy, particularly as it was the only government settlement in Arnhem Land'. By 1971, over 1,100 Aborigines and 200 Whites lived at Maningrida (Altman 1987:4). According to Bagshaw (1977:11):

Different perhaps to the 'out of sight, out of mind' segregation policy, assimilation was designed to achieve essentially the same purpose: the removal of a problematic minority from the collective Australian conscience in the shortest possible time.

However, Drysdale (1993) portrays a happier scene where urgent medical services and a hospital were begun amongst a grateful people. A school was begun by Betty Meehan (Drysdale 1993:159-161), which Meehan (1982:19) later concedes was one of the factors inevitably contributing towards the development of a township. Coulehan (1994:70) points out a fundamental contradiction in this shift (see also Rowley 1972b:32; Beckett 1988:10):

Whilst the assimilation policy shifted the rationale of the Aboriginal Reserves from places of protection to places of tutelage, where Aboriginal people might be prepared to take their place within the wider community at some unspecified time in the future, it was recognised that isolation from and disparity between settlement and wider society contexts was in large measure inimical to the goal of assimilation.

As the town grew, Meehan (1982:19) states:

Anyone visiting Maningrida at the end of the 1960s would have been overwhelmed by the feeling that all the Aborigines were there to stay - that their past, their traditional life, was slowly but surely disappearing, and that it would eventually be replaced by a 'poor white' culture.<sup>19</sup>

### **5.8 The outstation movement**

Meehan also witnessed the return to traditional lands in the outstation movement. She attributes this move in part to the 1972 government legislative support for land rights, the tensions caused by the concentration of language groups in one place, the problems of the Maningrida beer club since 1969, deaths blamed on sorcery, the inadequate diet of shop food, and the tensions of a large sedentary population where 'old grievances were aired instead of being diffused by naturally occurring barriers such as

beaches and large stands of forest' (Meehan 1982:20).<sup>20</sup> On the outstations, Aborigines 'for the first time in many decades, are making important decisions about the way they wish to live' (Meehan 1982:21). Rowley (1986:27) describes the movement as a form of de-colonisation, with Aborigines 'voting with their feet' (Rowley 1986:151).

According to Gillespie (1982:4) 'there had always been a few small groups of Aboriginal people who remained most of the time on their country away from Maningrida'. Meehan (Meehan and Jones 1980:133; Meehan 1982:19) says those who remained on their estates 'were few in number' in the late 1960s and also when she visited the area in reconnaissance for later fieldwork with Rhys Jones (Hiatt 1970). Other commentators have described the social tensions, problems with alcohol and petrol sniffing and disillusionment with self-determination at Maningrida that contributed to the movement to homelands (Bagshaw 1977; Gillespie 1982; McLeod 1982; Benn 1994; Burns 1995, 1996; Burns et al 1995).

By the time Meehan returned to the Blyth River in 1972, about one third of the Aboriginal population of Maningrida had returned to their own estates (Meehan and Jones 1980:133; Meehan 1982:19). Gillespie (1982:5) attributes the formal recognition of this movement to a meeting held during a large ceremonial gathering of An-barra people at Kopanga at the mouth of the Blyth River that was witnessed by Rhys Jones (*Maningrida Mirage* October 6, 1972). According to Gillespie (1982:5), who was working at Maningrida at the time, the presence of Meehan and Rhys Jones for a year in the field (see Meehan 1982) was 'crucial' in focusing Aboriginal aspirations:

The Blyth River example was also an inspiration to many other Aboriginal groups who wanted to leave the tension of Maningrida and re-occupy their lands but were worried about the amount of

support they could expect. The minute some support was offered the Aboriginal people voted with their feet.

Coombs (1994:160) found the NT Administration in Darwin in 1968 strongly opposed Aborigines returning to homelands because it was contrary to the assimilation policy, weakened administration control and was 'likely to make health and education programs ineffective'. However, the Maningrida Superintendent John Hunter 'cajoled' financial support for the 'outstations', as they were known. Meehan and Jones (1980:133) also acknowledge the sympathetic attitude of John Hunter towards Aboriginal aspirations in the first years of the movement back to homelands. Superintendent Hunter's belief that Maningrida must 'decentralise or perish' by growing its own produce in suitable watered locations such as Cadell Gardens, begun in 1966, motivated his support for the establishment of outstations (Benn 1994:161).<sup>21</sup> Until 1972, 'Officially, support was discouraged' (Gillespie 1982:5). In late 1972, the election of a Labor government in Canberra and its 'willingness to support Aboriginal decisions gave added impetus to decentralisation' (Altman 1987:5).

The increased funding by the new government led to an increase in the European population (Gillespie 1982:5), which has been an ongoing cause of conflict at Maningrida (Bagshaw 1977:52; Gillespie 1982:6; Benn 1994:212; Day 1997b).<sup>22</sup> When Hunter tried to reduce the number of White staff in the community in 1974 he was transferred, despite an Aboriginal sit-in at the Department of Aboriginal Affairs in Darwin to demand his return (*NT News* July 2, 1974). Coupled with a sixfold increase in government spending from 1963 to 1973, the White staff had grown until Aboriginal leaders complained, 'Too many Balandas' (*NT News* July 11, 1974). According to the newspaper, the Minister for Aboriginal Affairs replied, 'Well you're the boss, you can sack 'em'. The *NT News* also reported the superintendent's comments (July 11, 1974):

'Too many Europeans, too many European concepts ... a big line of brick houses all in a row. Mow down the bush ... the same story'. The superintendent said of many white workers at Maningrida, '[H]e's going to have traditional Australian attitudes to Aboriginals, which means they're way down there somewhere and he's just not going to relate to them at all'.

Glen Bagshaw, the manager of the Progress Association at the time, claimed in the same article that the Aboriginal people believed they were being overwhelmed. According to Benn (1994:212), Glen Bagshaw believed: 'Maningrida has always suffered the burden of a surfeit of Europeans, prohibiting a climate of Aboriginal participation at a meaningful level'. Another member of the family, Geoffrey Bagshaw (1977:71), claims that the outstation movement is indicative of:

a fundamental dissatisfaction with the institutional nature of life in the Maningrida community' [and] a firmly held collective desire on the part of Aborigines to return to an environment in which the normative genealogical proscriptions regulating traditional social relations can again become effective.

Coombs (1994:29) believed that Aboriginal people wished to moderate the rate of change caused by these increased pressures and to 're-establish a physical, social and spiritual environment in which traditional elements will be once more dominant'. Dissatisfaction with living conditions, employment relations, and intergroup hostilities coupled with the threat of mining in Arnhem Land and increasing awareness of land rights are other factors listed by Altman (1987:5). Meehan and Jones (1980:135) also note the effect of the Woodward Land Rights Commission which 'added grit to the determination' of those talking about returning to their estates and sacred

sites (see Moon 1992:27). Holmes (1999:295-308) gives a first-hand account of the raised expectations of Aborigines who gave submissions to the Aboriginal Land Rights Commission at Maningrida in June 1973.

Gray (1977:116) mentions the tension between language groups caused by the increased authority of the local land-owning group as land rights was enacted (see also Trudgen [2000:40, 46]). Hiatt (1965:151-154) discusses the rivalry between the Gunavidji landowners in the settlement and the Nkara and Burarra people from further east.<sup>23</sup> Before land rights became a reality a Burarra man told him in Darwin, 'The [Burarra] own that country now' (Hiatt 1965:153). However, the Land Rights Act in 1976 emboldened the traditional owners, who asserted their prior rights to the town site. Although the town council, which began in 1975, allocated positions in proportion to the size of the nine main groups (Bagshaw 1977:26), a Gunavidji clan leader stated:

We Gunavidji don't like the Council. We should decide what happens to Maningrida, not the Councillors or the men from Canberra. This is our country not theirs ... it's ours, we belong here (Bagshaw 1977:39).

Altman (1987:11) describes assimilation as 'the state's least benevolent and most destructive intervention' because of its 'Eurocentric bias'. However, Benn (1994:207) claims that the new policy of self-determination, after a change in government, was a 'very traumatic' transition for Maningrida people. Giving examples of the effects, Peterson (1998:109) claims: 'The radical change in the nature of life in remote communities that took place between 1968 and 1977 has not been adequately registered or examined'. More recently, Trudgen (2000:43-65), in a chapter headed 'A crisis in living: into the self-determination era', describes the effects of the changes he observed at an Arnhem Land mission during this period. Unlike the missions at Milingimbi and Elcho Island, Maningrida did not have the advantage of

the continuity fostered by the relationship between the church and the community social structure (Benn 1994:207). In Trudgen's view (Trudgen 2000), the changes delivered little more than a continuing 'nightmare' (p.59) and 'confusion and disillusionment' (p.44). However, Meehan observed positive outcomes that she attributes to the outstation movement:

[I]n terms of purpose, of self-confidence, of dignity and even of that elusive quality happiness, the Aborigines of central Arnhem Land are today different people to those dependent, institutionalised inmates of 15 years ago (Meehan and Jones 1980:146).

Bagshaw (1977:41) saw the outstation movement at Maningrida as 'a wholly Aboriginal inspired programme of community decentralization, created as a largely unforeseen initiative to the Commonwealth Government's self-determination policy'. Benn (1994:19) stresses that the people did not wish to return to the past, and the homelands movement should not be interpreted as purely reactive.

Meehan and Jones (1980:135) describe the outstations as experiments in a new lifestyle 'with a largely traditional structure into which some elements of European technology and culture have been incorporated where they are seen to be useful and desirable'. Their study of diet in an An-barra camp confirms that the gathering of fresh bush foods produced a much higher standard of living than at Maningrida. On their income, by comparison, 'They would not survive outside the ranks of the destitute in places such as Darwin' (Meehan and Jones 1980:139). However, despite their deprivations, my observations suggest that the fringe camps share many of the advantages of the outstations.

Coulehan (1995a:77) stresses that although urban migration is in apparent opposition to the movement to clan lands, the movement shares the desire

for self-determination. She states: 'At much the same time as the "walk off" from pastoral properties and the "homelands movement" was underway, Aborigines were also moving into urban fringe camps'. Although the fringe camp residents share a desire for self-determination, I suggest that the homelands movement could be described as an act of 'desistance', to distinguish it from the resistance engendered by the move to fringe camps.

Orlove (1991:30, cited by Korovkin 2000:20) introduces a concept of 'desistance', whereby indigenous peasants achieve relative cultural and political autonomy by closure, or limiting their interaction with imposing systems. Korovkin (p.20) gives examples where hidden acts of 'desistance', or resistance through the creation of an insulating distance, become the basis of subsequent organised political action. I find that Korovkin's term is useful to distinguish the movement to the homelands from the more passive closed Aboriginal domain described by Trigger (1992). In the fringe camps, as I will argue in Chapter Eight, a closed domain is not so evident. Instead, I suggest, outstation 'desistance' is transformed in the urban camps by their relocation onto contested land and into the forefront of Aboriginal resistance to dispossession. This process occurs in spite of the campers' embracing some of the attractions of Australian society in the towns.

Homelands 'desistance' is compromised by a dependence on links to the outside world. Gerritsen (1982:68) claims: 'To fully understand the outstation movement, we have also to analyse the outstations within the totality of the politics of Aboriginal villages'. As Altman (1987:5) notes, there are 'important linkages and interdependencies' between the movement and the towns. Examples of the need for cash, supplies, mechanics, funding, vehicles, medical services and communications on Maningrida-associated outstations are given by Gray (1977:118), Bagshaw (1982), Bond (1982), Gerritsen (1982), Meehan and Jones (1980:144; 1986), Burns (1995:21) and Danaja and Carew (1995). Where the connection to country is expressed in art forms, a network

of traders and the Arts and Culture Centre exist to market the works (see Moon 1992:27; Carew et al 1996a). The needs of the homelands provide jobs in Maningrida, where institutions like the Bawinanga Aboriginal Corporation organise supplies and services. People from the homelands also move to and fro, with most spending longer periods in Maningrida during the rainy months. In contrast to most outstations on the homelands, the fringe camps have no electricity, vehicles, water supply or even buildings. Unlike Maningrida homes, the campers have no television, lighting, showers or stoves. I argue that this is a price they are willing to pay in their aggressive resistance to state controls, while making contact with the settler society on their own terms.

### **5.9 Unrest amongst Darwin Aborigines in the 1950s**

It is significant that in the early 1950s Darwin Aborigines were resisting Welfare Department controls and wage exploitation (see Rowley 1972b:292-3; Wells 1995b). Resistance included strikes and protests, leading to arrests of Aboriginal leaders from the Berrimah Reserve (Rowley 1972b:293; McGinness 1991:59). The protests continued into the 1960s when 'several hundred Aborigines marched for equal wages through the streets of Darwin' (Bandler 1989:18). Frank Hardy (1968:50) describes a gathering of more than two hundred Aborigines under trees beside the Rapid Creek Beach in suburban Darwin in 1966 to re-form the NT Council for Aboriginal Rights that had begun campaigning for citizenship in 1961.<sup>24</sup>

Media reports of the Aboriginal strikes did not distinguish a group known today as 'itinerants'. Although Aborigines came from many parts of the Territory, those living in Darwin were referred to simply as 'town natives'. In the first of four reports from Darwin, headed 'Darwin's dark harvest', Gordon Williams writes in the *Argus* (March 13, 1951) that despite 'the irreclaimable, the illiterate, and the hopeless' amongst 'Darwin's lost generation of aborigines':

[Employers] would resent any suggestion that all Darwin's town natives should be sent to bush settlements away from the doubtful benefits of white civilization.

'I can imagine the shriek that would go up from senior public servants and business men if that became policy,' one Territorian said.

Williams described the town Aborigines as 'hewers and drawers', paid two pounds a week, who were striking for citizenship rights and a trebling of their wages (*Argus* March 9, 1951). He visited camps a few miles from Darwin with 'natives living in conditions of such squalor, filth and abasement as defy open description'. Writing of the strikes under the heading, 'Darwin: town of discontent' (*Argus* March 9, 1951), Williams claims: 'Until a few months ago many aborigines were living in virtual squalor and in relative deprivation in the Berrimah compound [where the strikes began], a few miles from Darwin'. Williams hoped the move back to Bagot Reserve after the strikes was an indication of better things in a town where Aborigines were confined to the compounds after sundown.

Screened by a strictly enforced entry permit requirement for non-Aboriginal visitors, Aboriginal people on the reserves were protected from the leftist influence blamed for the strikes. Symbolically, the desert Aboriginal settlement of Haast Bluff was used by the government to banish a leader of the strike named Nadpur, or Fred Waters (*Sydney Morning Herald* February 15, 1951; Rowley 1972b:293; McGinness 1991:59). In Darwin, the involvement of a mixed group of Aboriginal workers in organised urban protests was an indicator of a growing participation in Darwin affairs by Aboriginal people from all parts of the Northern Territory. However, as Hamilton (1995:193) states in defence of Rowley's trilogy (1972a, 1972b, 1972c), the anthropological literature prior to 1972 seldom considered such issues.

Stanner (1979:48) believed the 'search for stimulants', including tea, tobacco and alcohol, motivated Aboriginal people to migrate to centres of European settlement. 'They went because they wanted to, and stay because they want to' (Stanner 1979:49; see also Sansom 1980b:11). The move was costly in lives, but Stanner (1979:49) did not meet any who wanted to return to the bush amongst the Aborigines who survived this voluntary movement. According to Stanner, unlike epidemic, genocide and dispossession, the Aboriginal 'zest for life' is seldom understood as a motivation for migration towards centres of population:

[The arrival of Europeans] was sufficient to unsettle Aborigines still long distances away. The repercussions spread, evidently with great rapidity, along the network of structural interconnexions. Eventually, for every Aborigine who had Europeans thrust upon him, at least one other had sought them out. More would have gone to European centres sooner had it not been that their way was often barred by hostile Aborigines (Stanner 1979:48).

Stanner (1969:56) interprets further implications in the voluntary movement of Aborigines into towns and cattle stations:

an offer, and an appeal; an implicit offer of some sort of union of lives with us, and an implicit appeal for a new identity within the union. Usually they ended in a fringe-camp or an institution, but just being there was a continued appeal. The trouble was that they made their offer on a hard market and their appeal at times when no one saw or heard very clearly.<sup>25</sup>

### **5.10 The An-barra *rom* exchange ceremony**

In contrast to the 'hard market' of the towns, Poignant (1996) documents her photographer husband's contact with people from the Liverpool and Blyth

River region in 1952. Axel Poignant took about 2500 photographs during six-weeks at Nagalarramba opposite the present site of Maningrida at the mouth of the Liverpool River, with three Christian Aboriginal companions from Goulburn Island Mission (Poignant 1996:4). Their camp attracted at least seventy Aborigines, including groups from eighty kilometres east (Poignant 1996:20). Two well-known residents of Darwin fringe camps in 1997 are pictured as young boys in the book (see Poignant 1996:150). During my fieldwork, Burarra, Nakara and Gunavidji residents of Fish Camp also recognised many of their kin in Axel Poignant's photographs.

According to Poignant (1996:21), such a gathering was not unusual. The *rom* exchange ceremony that followed is often performed to make and consolidate friendly relations (Hiatt 1986:13; Meehan and Jones 1986:25; Poignant 1996:21). For a number of generations, noted performers of the popular *Jambich*, or wild honey songs, have come from the An-barra people, one of whom sang at Nagalarramba in 1952 (Poignant 1996:66). Poignant (1996:60) discusses the significance of the ceremony performed for the photographer:

I believe that the Burarra's explicit statement that they were making a presentation of the Rom because Axel had come to photograph the people was based on an understanding of the narrative potential of photography. They and their neighbours recognised that the photographs and films they saw conveyed messages about the balanda world, and perhaps they saw Axel as a potential messenger.

This interpretation coincides with the sentiments expressed by Frank Gurrmanamana in the final scenes of Hiatt's film of a ceremony at Djunawunya (McKenzie 1980).<sup>26</sup> Poignant notes that 'going to the pictures' was one of the attractions of Darwin for Arnhem Landers, although some Aborigines at Nagalarramba expressed fear of the cameras. She cites Peter

Sutton's finding that Aboriginal people at Aurukun believe that being on film is a positive assertion of identity (Poignant 1996:60). Certainly, most of the fringe dwellers during my research experience viewed the media, particularly video, as a means to project their message and assert their position in relation to the town and other Aboriginal groups (see also Simmering 1997, 1998, 2000b).

A *rom* ceremony binds givers and receivers, like the *mamurrung* exchange rituals between Aboriginal groups, which I witnessed people from Fish Camp preparing at Maningrida in 1998. Altmann (1987:202) says, because trade goods used in exchange ceremonies are not the scarce items which skilfully-crafted artefacts once were, the goods which are exchanged now symbolise 'social invisibles' more than trade. Similarly, performances of the An-barra *jambich rom* in Canberra in 1982 and 1995 were transformed into 'a ritual of diplomacy' (Hiatt 1986:10; Wild 1986:xi; Poignant 1996:68; Meehan 1997:25).<sup>27</sup> Wild (1986:xiii) claims the Gidjingali extended the ritual to the whole nation:

After two hundred years of colonisation Australia as a nation has not yet reached a satisfactory accord with its indigenous people. It has been a history in which diplomacy has been rare. 'Rom in Canberra' was a diplomatic initiative by one Aboriginal group to the people of Australia through the mediation of the Institute of Aboriginal Studies.

A computer, which was a gift from the Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies in exchange for the *rom* ceremony performed in Canberra in January 1995, enabled Maningrida organisations to prepare comprehensive internet home pages (Carew et al 1996b).<sup>28</sup> On the Maningrida home pages, Peter Danaja and Margaret Carew (1995) compare the internet with Aboriginal methods of communicating by fire, sign language, letterstick and by interpreting nature's signs.<sup>29</sup> In a later chapter, I

describe how the fringe dwellers similarly used ceremonies at the Darwin camp as a diplomatic initiative to involve non-Aboriginal townspeople (see Plates 13 and 14). If finances were available, people from the camp were eager to travel to southern capitals to seek support. They also helped Stella Simmering construct a Fish Camp home page and an experimental site on 'bush tucker' on the internet.<sup>30</sup> However, these attempts at articulation with the wider society have yet to bring material change for the fringe dwellers. Interviews in the following section suggest some reasons for the failure of the fringe dwellers to find space in Darwin.

### 5.11 The Burarra in Darwin

In 1973 Aboriginal men and women who were walking overland to Darwin in increasing numbers were praised in the local newsletter, the *Maningrida Mirage*, as demonstrating their 'courage and integrity' (Benn 1994:181). A non-Aboriginal activist, Stella Simmering, who has assisted the Fish Camp people compile their case for housing in Darwin, records the stories of several who came overland to Darwin (Simmering 2000a). One elderly woman told Stella:

Me and my husband, five days to Darwin, we were walking all the way on the beach and King River, we couldn't swim across, we came through... where that creek?... South Alligator, and we swam across, and we came Shady Camp, they used to live there, all the Burarra people.

Another man, aged fifty-six, told Stella how he walked from his Blyth River homeland to Pine Creek with his brother:

[N]o road, no motorcar, no nothing... we didn't have any clothes, only ngarndam (loin cloth), no shirt all the way... At Pine Creek we got the transport half way to Darwin... There at a camp close to Coomalie

Creek but further up to Batchelor way my people were camping there, relation mob, three grandfathers... We were there a long time, Berrimah [compound], big billabong, two billabong, still there.

Other stories Stella has recorded come from the pensioner who was institutionalised at the East Arm Leprosarium and Johnny Balaiya, a sixty-four-year-old Burarra man who had been the doyen of the old 'Pipeline Camp' at Palmerston, near Darwin, since being evicted from Lee Point in 1996 (see also Simmering 2000b). He told Stella that he worked as a ticket collector in the Star Cinema in his first years after walking to Darwin as a young man.

In late July, 2001, I visited Johnny Balaiya's camp near Palmerston with Bob, Stella Simmering and a White lawyer from the Darwin Community Legal Service. Johnny was concerned that he had been give one month's notice to move from his camp. On this day another Burarra man, Bob Bunba, joined him. Bob had been camping on vacant land around Darwin's northern suburbs for about three years after he and his wife were evicted from their unit in Palmerston. He is Dulcie Malimara's brother. In July 2001 he was living with a group of about ten men and women, mostly from central Arnhem Land, at a camp known as 'Leanyer Lake'. The camp, which was hidden amongst eucalypt trees and cycad palms, had no facilities.

Shortly after we arrived with Bob to visit Johnny Balaiya, an ABC film unit drove into the camp to film a segment showing a census collector gathering information for the national census. As the filming was finishing, Bob spontaneously stood up and began a speech on issues that affected him. There was no alcohol in the camp that afternoon. The television crew listened as Bob began his tirade, but did not film or take notes. However, after they had gone Stella used her video camera to record some of Bob's views.<sup>31</sup> In the following chapters I describe how the actions that Bob Bunba and his wife

found intolerable led to an open expression of anger by homeless Burarra people a few weeks later. The following transcript, which is taken from that video recording, suggests some answers to Esman's (1989:223) question, 'What is the threshold beyond which [tactics of everyday resistance] become confrontational...':

Bob (standing): Long as we born in the fire and this ground. I'm telling you, my mother been put me this one (picks up handful of soil). My mother, she was put me in the dirt. I was born in the bushes. We can sleep any way we like. Before Captain Cook, he was around the world.

Johnny (sitting on a tarpaulin): Long time, before the White man come. I was eight years old and I see Captain Cook. I say, 'Who this one?' and we run. This is a big boat ... [Johnny gives his account of the first contact with White people]

Bob (sitting in front of Johnny): How come the City Council they push us - that's wrong. When they see your fire they tip it up water, when we cook something...

Stella (behind camera): And what else they doing?

Bob: They take it out that saucepan. Everyday they come there, everywhere.

Johnny: One day they come here. I said, 'Hey don't do that again. You not from this country here. You're from long way. We're the Black people this country'.

Lawyer: They give you a paper?

Bob: They put my name. And they think I'm going to pay fifty dollars. But no. I can't give fifty dollars from me, no!

Lawyer: How many paper you get?

Bob: I start from Daisy Yarmirr back way [illegal camp]. They gave it to me a lot of paper [infringement notices]. I said this your paper, you watch, I cut 'im off [tearing motion]. I put in fire. They used to come

early in the morning. Six o'clock they wake us up, 'Wakey, wakey!' What's that mean, 'Wakey, wakey?' Try tell me...

Lawyer: They come last week?

Bob: Always. How come I carry me gear? Look at that. I was camped at my sister's place in the top and they came and tell me, 'Get your gear and go'. I was carrying all my gear, mattress everything, me and my wife. Why that? All the White people. I try find out that kind.

Lawyer: And they take you to court?

Bob: No I can't go to court. I might put in court. What they doing, to [to] us mob, all Black people. Not you [referring to visitors] but you know? [stands] How come they come and see us they say, 'What you doing here? Get your gear and go'. And we pack up and take another place. And after that they see us and they say, 'Ah, you're here Bob' [points down].

[I say] 'Yeah, but I'm staying here - I might see Legal Aid'.

'No, just go right now.'

Well I carry all the gear, myself and my wife [mimes carrying swag on his back]. Well, I carry, carry all the gear. Come back and get another one [acts out returning for another load]. Come back get another, get 'im, hide it, you know ... Well I carry to another place and they come and see me. Why is that? So I want to make sure what they doing, all the [Darwin] City Council. They want money, or what? I want to try ask you.

Lawyer: Government they make this law. Bad law.

Bob: Bad law? But this our country [stamps on the ground]. Nobody tell us [what to do] like Black people. No! Old man, my old man, he know, he's working for me too [points to me]. Even you, mum [Stella]. No matter where I go, I'm still there. I can sleep in the bushes, my mother in the bush and my father. But White people they get smart. You too smart you mob. every people, my people too and they say, 'Ah, we'll get that mob. How come they get all the bag, all the gear

and they take in Berrimah [points towards the police station]? And we come and look, 'Hey where that my gear?' Nothing. And I make fire and sleep with my trousers, no blanket.

Bob then described how he and his wife contacted a White friend he calls his 'boss' who had worked at Maningrida and who helped them get their gear back from the police station. He continued:

Bob: Long as we can stay in the bushes -we a Blackfella, you are white, you are different. But us mob, how they doing like that? And they say, 'Get out! Go somewhere else'. That not right, long as we born in this ground ... All the city council mob, you know, they working, that not their business. We can camp anytime, long as we bush...

Johnny [interrupts]: I'm a black man, I can sleep anywhere. On the grass, that's all right. I don't swearing. I don't kill a man. No, I'm not a killer, no! I'm not a dog. I can sit down - quietly. That's not funny [to Stella]. That's true story what I'm talking. I tell a policeman too when he come here too. I say, 'Hey, that not your fuckin' country' [describes incident with police]. Four times they kick out.<sup>32</sup>

Bob: Like, we like stop in the bushes, we don't like to stop in the town. Like when we get a house, all the young boys and young girls, they break everything. I was get three times house in Palmerston, and they [Housing Commission] kick me out, me and my wife, and I said, 'No more'.

In the newsletter *Kujuk* (September 2001:3), published by a small group of Aboriginal and White supporters of fringe dwellers, another camper expresses opposition that appears to be more than simply a reaction to the treatment that the campers receive. Mark Winter Norris is quoted:

This land is for black people. My family was here, [world war one, world war two], my dad, my mum, they was here before too, long time ago. Those are our people, that is, white people they come here, must be gold or something, you know what I mean. This black people area in Darwin before that, not white people, no, no way in the world. This world will be coming, black and white, where they share one another, and the Larrakia people ... Night patrol, they tell us stand up with one leg. We not long bird, Jabiru... They talk, like 'stand up, one leg up', they hate us. They shouldn't be, they shouldn't do like that to black people, this black people area, Darwin.<sup>33</sup>

### **5.12 Resistance as engagement**

The preceding sections of this chapter suggest some reasons for the Burarra movement to Darwin. These include problems associated with the town Maningrida and a wish to engage with the society, services and goods in Darwin. The strong language of the above lengthy quotes suggests that the move often leads to resistance in a reaction to the lack of recognition of the campers' perceived rights. My research suggests that these examples, and other examples of Burarra resistance in Darwin which I give in later chapters, are an attempt to engage with the invading society rather than retreat solely into a closed Aboriginal domain, which they can more easily do inside Arnhem Land. This process appears to have features in common with Penan resistance, as interpreted by Brosius (1999:2).

Examples of the Penan struggle against logging of their forests, discussed by Brosius (1999), include the use of letters, maps, videotapes and blockades. In what he describes as 'a minor intervention into how we think about the phenomenon of resistance', Brosius (p.2) states:

The arguments that Penan are putting forth should be viewed not exclusively as acts of resistance, but simultaneously as efforts of

*engagement*. In making their arguments to loggers, civil servants, environmentalists, or others, Penan are attempting to speak across difference, to *familiarize* themselves, to frame their arguments in ways that they hope will be recognizable to outsiders.

The Penan protest 'because they believe this is their only recourse: they declare that they do it as a last resort, and then only to the extent necessary to be heard' (Brosius1999:34). Similarly, the anger that Bob Bunba, Johnny Balaiya and others express their to their White friends, sometimes on camera, suggests that their resistance results from unreciprocated forms of 'engagement' with forces that refuse to acknowledge the Aboriginal campers' rights to space in town, in contrast to their visitors, who they apologetically exclude from their invective. In the next section, I suggest a metaphor for this process.

### **5.13 *Ganma* and merging**

The Yolngu people, accustomed to centuries of trade with northern seafarers, describe the meeting of cultures in the metaphor of *ganma* (see Marika 1999:7; Yunupingu 1994a, 1994b:118), which describes the turbulence and foam where the fresh water meets the sea in a tidal river mouth (McConvell 1991:17).

In the same ways, balance of Yolngu life is achieved through ebb and flow of competing interests, through [the] elaborate kinship system ... in the same ways, balance between black and white in Australia can be achieved (Yunupingu 1994b:118).

Like the sea and the river, the two cultures remain distinct identities, 'where each remains distinct and neither overwhelms the other' (Coulehan 1995a:27-8). Coulehan adds that more commonly, the Yolngu express this aspiration as 'two ways, both ways'. In the field of education, the metaphor arose from

Aboriginal people combining ideas from the two cultures in a two-way flow that benefits the interacting systems (McConvell 1991:21). Both sides learn from each other instead of knowledge coming only from the balanda (White) side (Wunungmurra cited in McConvell 1991:23). However, in the interpretation by Harris (1991:24) of the two-ways concept, 'Aborigines restrict outside access to their own domain to allow for a cohesive group cultural base, but they have unrestricted access to the Western domain'.

Harris asserts, in response to McConvell (1991), that Aboriginal and Western culture are 'fundamentally opposed and antithetical'. He believes the two societies 'articulate very poorly' (Harris 1991:21) because they have different worldviews. However, the cultural separation of the Aboriginal domain is not isolation from the world, but an 'offensive/aggressive/progressive strategy' for cultural survival (Harris 1991:23). In a criticism of 'two ways, two laws', Robinson (1994:124-5) claims that the formulae 'reflects increasingly complex interdependence', rather than 'unproblematic, realistic delineations of obvious social boundaries'.

Coulehan (1995a:27) contrasts 'two-ways, both-ways' with the 'more divisive, dichotomous perspective' of relations between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people argued by Trigger (1986, 1988a, 1992), Morris (1985, 1988, 1989) and Cowlshaw (1988a, 1988b, 1993). Williams (1987) also describes how Yolngu people of northeast Arnhem Land balance clan and government laws to settle disputes. Although Coulehan (1995a:21) gives many examples of the articulation of systems of governance, she admits:

The two systems of nurturant powers, namely Yolngu governance by kinship and ceremony and welfare government by monies and services, seek to care for and to realign Yolngu in terms of their respective solidarities and norms and values. The difficulty is that the one does not fully recognise or acknowledge the legitimacy of the

other system and so the Yolngu familial form of governance and state agencies of government are all too often acting at cross purposes (Coulehan 1995a:19).

In the next chapter, I discuss what Kapferer (1995:80) has called a state discourse of 'egalitarian individualism' which disadvantages Aborigines, in which 'the bureaucratic process [is] a disembodiment and fragmentation (and reduction) of human beings who otherwise live their worlds as larger and more fluid embodied totalities' (p.84). In his observations made at a town meeting between Aborigines and Whites, Kapferer (p.76) claims that 'Whites, in their expressions of opposition to the State, confirm their thorough membership of it'. In contrast, the silence of Aborigines may confirm 'the subordinating violence of old regimes' (p.77) and the validity of non-Aboriginal values (p.78). Kapferer's analysis of 'discourses over identity' (p.69) suggests a racial hierarchy in Australian towns.

In similar circumstances in Darwin, I give examples from my fieldwork in the following chapters which suggest that, although Coulehan (1995a) attests that forms of the 'two-ways, both-ways' concept also apply to Yolngu families in Darwin, the metaphor of *ganma* is generally not appropriate in the urban situation where cultures meet in a field of asymmetrical power, unlike in areas of northeast Arnhem Land where Aborigines are the majority and have some control over the imposing socio-economic system. In Darwin, the attempts made to find space by Aboriginal fringe dwellers are rejected by the public and government authorities, as later chapters show. In contrast to the natural forces of river meeting sea in the metaphor of *ganma*, where there is a turbulent but reciprocal meeting, I suggest that a metaphor of merging traffic is more appropriate to the attempted articulation of Aboriginal fringe dwellers with the asymmetric power of the dominant urban society.

Aboriginal people in Darwin fringe camps seek to engage with the urban environment. According to their interpretation of 'the road rules', they move from their domain on Aboriginal land, in a process that I compare with the merging of traffic where two parallel lanes meet. As in the metaphor of *gamna*, the merging entities retain their separate identities. However, unless vehicles in separate lanes have a common understanding of the speed, direction and give-way rules of the traffic code, they cannot merge easily.

If the lanes do not merge, controls such as traffic lights can avoid a collision course. Another possibility is through the confusion of a traffic jam, where the rules are suspended and merging takes place in disorder.<sup>34</sup> More usually, there is a collision course, where the less familiar, more hesitant user is forced off the road by the more assertive or dominant traffic stream. I argue that this metaphor of merging city traffic better captures the asymmetrical conflict that occurs between fringe dwellers and the town than does the more harmonious environmental Yolngu metaphor of *ganma*.<sup>35</sup>

In Chapter Eight I discuss forms of merging in the alliances made between the fringe dwellers and Darwin activists and alternative lifestylers. I suggest these processes belong to a long history of independent Burarra moves to articulate with the invading society. In the next chapter I give an example of a 'collision course', with tragic results, when the state failed to 'give way' to attempts by people from Fish Camp to 'merge', as they claimed what they perceived to be their rights to an area of vacant bush in the urban scene.

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**Endnotes:**

<sup>1</sup> A resurgence of a distinct identity for the people to the west of the Blyth River mouth is suggested by a recently released CD titled, 'An-barra clan', sung by the Letterstick Band (1999; see Corn forthcoming). The CD includes original compositions and adaptations of clan songs, in particular *Diyama* (see Hiatt and Hiatt 1966; Corn 1999a:2). Meehan (1982:13) notes: 'The Gidjingali are divided into four loosely knit communities called Anbarra, Matai, Marawuraba and Gula' (Glasgow [1985:7] uses the spelling, 'An-barra').

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<sup>2</sup> Glasgow (1985:7) adds that the two other dialects belonging to the Burarra Language Family are Gurrgoni, to the west, and Yanyangu, to the east. People from both these language areas lived at Fish Camp and Lee Point during my fieldwork.

<sup>3</sup> The song is written and sung by Dulcie Malimara's son, Paul McKenzie. The CD cover notes describe Sunset Bay as 'Dulcie's home - Djuna-winya on the north coast of Arnhem Land' (Wild Water 1996; see also Corn forthcoming).

<sup>4</sup> See also the forthcoming CD-Rom 'People of the Rivermouth'. Kim McKenzie (2001) states that the disk:

centres on a remarkable body of work created by Frank Gurrmanamana of the Anbarra people of north-central Arnhem Land. In 1960 Gurrmanamana dictated to anthropologist Les Hiatt a sequence of imagined scenarios as a way of explaining Anbarra kinship and the responsibilities that accompany relationships... The project has been able to draw on some forty years of scholarship undertaken in a range of disciplines with Gurrmanamana and his family.

<sup>5</sup> I do not speak any Aboriginal languages.

<sup>6</sup> As I have described, Sansom (1980-82:6) elsewhere draws a distinction between 'that pidgin' for 'organizin for business' and traditional language, or 'lingo', reserved for 'High Culture'.

<sup>7</sup> In her study of a town camp community in Pine Creek, south of Darwin, Jacqueline Wolfe (1987:57) stresses that many Aborigines camping in the town have a long association with the area. She continues: 'They are not newcomers nor transients'.

<sup>8</sup> Sutton (1999a:24) notes that, as an assemblage of people from different descent groups, the 'community' is not a generalised model for land ownership. He adds (p.24) that this does not mean that the members of the community have no rights to the land where they live.

<sup>9</sup> In noting the 'substantial residential stability' at Aputula camp, near Finke in Central Australia, Doohan (1992:73) states: 'A number of researchers have also noted the existence of a "residential core" at other Central Australian Aboriginal communities'.

<sup>10</sup> Arguing for 'thick' ethnography examining the 'ambiguity of resistance' amongst 'internally divided' subaltern groups, Ortner (1995:175) believes that the 'ethnographic thinness' of many studies of resistance is caused by 'a failure of nerve' to examine internal politics of subaltern groups and the 'crisis of representation' in anthropology (p.190).

<sup>11</sup> Chairs were also popular when they were available. When I purchased four steel-legged plastic chairs, they were constantly being 'borrowed' from my area (see Plate 15).

<sup>12</sup> In his analysis, Robinson (1994:142) states unequivocally: 'the "oppositional culture" apparently directed outwards in destructive or self-destructive acts, offending or overt protest, is to be explained in terms of the resolution and externalization, through an often complex series of displacements, of group-internal tensions and oppositions'.

<sup>13</sup> Sansom (1980a:232) also observed the alternating of 'miler' weeks and weeks of plenty at Knuckeys Lagoon. Sansom (1980a:241) was told the term comes from a losing phase in a game of cards. In the 1990s, only hotels sold takeaway liquor on Sundays, at higher prices than the stores.

<sup>14</sup> An exception occurred in February 1996, when I was asked to leave the Kulaluk village while visiting because a 'young girl' ritual was about to begin, which men should not see.

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<sup>15</sup> Harry Mulumbuk, the husband of Dulcie's sister and father of her nephew at Fish Camp, claimed to have received the song in a dream (see Corn 2001:17). Harry, of the film 'Waiting for Harry' (McKenzie 1980), was the traditional owner of the Gopanga, or Kopanga area near the Blyth River mouth (see Hiatt 1965:19).

<sup>16</sup> Frank became a close friend and 'main collaborator' of the anthropologist, Les Hiatt (see Hiatt 1982:16; McKenzie 1980; Meehan 1997:25).

<sup>17</sup> During Hiatt's twenty months fieldwork in 1958-60, the Gidjingali were the largest group at Maningrida, comprising 46 percent of the 480 Aboriginal population (Hiatt 1965:13).

<sup>18</sup> Rowse (1993:27-53) argues that the criticism by Rowley and others of the oppressive and soul-destroying nature of institutions is based on ideals 'complicit with the deeper assumptions of assimilationist liberalism: their underlying belief that Aboriginal people would evolve towards bourgeois modernity'.

<sup>19</sup> It is noticeable in large Aboriginal communities today that many of the young appear to have adopted the 'home boy' fashions originating from a poor Black urban culture in the United States.

<sup>20</sup> Meehan and Jones (1980:134) were told there was 'too much trouble' in Maningrida and people were vulnerable to sorcery that they believed had caused many deaths. These explanations were also commonly expressed to me in 1997 as the main reason for moving to Darwin.

<sup>21</sup> According to Carew et al (1996c), 'after several years of no maintenance', the market gardens at the Cadell River outstation, also known as Gochan Jiny-jirra, were reverting to bush in 1996.

<sup>22</sup> Altman (1987:6), who analyses an outstation economy, stated that: 'White Australians still hold most of the managerial and skilled technical positions [at Maningrida] and they are the key brokers in external economic relations'.

<sup>23</sup> See also Coombs (1994:160) for an account of the tensions at Yirrkala between the landowners and other residents of that northeast Arnhem Land community in the late 1960s.

<sup>24</sup> See 'The Abo vote', *Bulletin* (September 15, 1962, p. 8).

<sup>25</sup> My argument is that a 'hard market' exists for Aboriginal fringe dwellers in the Northern Territory to the present day.

<sup>26</sup> Frank told Poignant (1996:13) that he missed the *rom* ceremony for Axel in 1952 because he was in Darwin. Poignant (p.13) notes that the film *Waiting for Harry* shows the memorial rites for the principal An-barra owner of the *jambich rom* performed at Nagalarramba.

<sup>27</sup> Another Rom ceremony was performed by An-barra people of the Burarra language group at AIATSIS on September 17, 2001. An information pamphlet accompanying the invitations to members stated: 'This is the third Rom performed in Canberra that continues and reaffirms the relationship between AIATSIS and the Anbarra people' (AIATSIS 2001).

<sup>28</sup> 'Maningrida on the internet' was a theme of the Fulbright Symposium, 'Indigenous cultures in an interconnected world', held in Darwin in July 1997 (see Jordan 2000). In an article contrasting computer technology with the lack of services at Maningrida, Danija says few Maningrida people have used the internet service (*Weekend Australian* August 2-3, 1997,

p.1). The Maningrida home page prepared for the Bawinanga Aboriginal Corporation in 1995 was redesigned in 1999 (Jordan 2000:85). Jordan (2000:86) states:

The original Web site contained details about out-stations serviced by the Bawinanga Aboriginal Corporation, including their phone numbers, potentially facilitating direct access to the community by people who would fail to pass the scrutiny that is part of the process of getting a permit to visit Arnhem Land... The new site contains much less personal detail, offering only the kind of information that is already publicly available.

<sup>29</sup>In November/December 2000, sons of Harry, in *Waiting for Harry*, toured Southwestern WA with their An-Barra Letterstick Band. They told the *Australian* (November 23, 2000, p.5): 'We come to share our culture' (see Corn forthcoming).

<sup>30</sup> <[www.geocities.com/rainforest/canopy/6905](http://www.geocities.com/rainforest/canopy/6905)> and <[www.nxtnt.net/jichicha](http://www.nxtnt.net/jichicha)> In August 2001, Stella and others created a 'Long grass' website with a photograph gallery, sections on the separate camps and individuals in them and articles on fringe dwellers in Darwin. See <<http://longgrass.tripod.com>> <<http://dustyjackets.ozbyte.com.au/longgrass/default.htm>>

<sup>31</sup> On August 15, 2001, Stella won awards for both the best documentary and the most popular film in the 'Fist full of films' Darwin fringe festival short film competition. Titled 'I'm a Black man', the video (entry #22) included sections of the above video, a protest held on August 3 that year and scenes of Johnny's camp moving to make way for construction works.

<sup>32</sup> See Illustration 5; *NT News* June 5, 2001, p.4; *Delirra* August 2001, p.12.

<sup>33</sup> The practice of Night Patrol officers demanding that fringe dwellers stand on one leg to test their sobriety was also reported as a complaint by Aboriginal people in the February *Analysis of interviews with itinerants in Darwin* (AERC 2001). The report quotes one man: 'Night Patrol have got an attitude, cheeky feller. They make you stand on one leg, if lose balance, you go in. But I got a gammy knee. I'm not a broлга'. For many of the campers, being forced to stand on one leg offends religious beliefs. Bob is reported in *Kujuk* (September 2001:4):

Eric, he always just comes and wakes us up. And how come he says, 'one leg up', why's that? That's my dreaming. Broлга. I'm saying myself, that's broлга, that's mine. And all the night patrol tell me, 'Hey get up, come on get up,' like that. And I come. That's my broлга, fucking idiots, they can get fucked. That's my dreaming...

<sup>34</sup> In addition to the dichotomy of two domains, Harris (1991:25) suggests there is a third domain, which is a space of compromise, not truly representative of either group, where interaction can take place.

<sup>35</sup> Another Yolngu metaphor, *garma*, represents an open forum where people can share ideas and work at reaching agreement. *Garma* is the ceremony area, an open place for participation and enjoyment, where connections are negotiated (Marika 1999:7).