

*Traditional Morality as Expressed Through
the Medium of an Australian Aboriginal Religion*¹

THE PROBLEM

Aboriginal man has been variously conceptualized as being either moral or immoral, or a-moral. On one hand, in the abundant literature on these people it is often assumed, sometimes without empirical validation, that their ethical systems are highly developed and based on religion; that they are articulated in everyday action, ensuring fairly rigid adherence to what are regarded as correct or good ways of behaving and acting in relation to others; and that these are reinforced by religious sanctions. On the other hand, the converse view has been put forward: that morality is dependent on self-interest; that Aboriginal religion is not necessarily concerned with the interaction of man with man, but only of man with deity or with what these supernatural beings can provide for man when induced (through ritual or otherwise) to do so. Neither of these two extremes fits the actual situation.

In traditional Aboriginal Australia the boundaries between the sacred and the mundane are blurred. These are (or were) repetitive societies that place a tremendous emphasis on traditional precedent—specifically on what is believed to have transpired in the beginning, in the 'original' form of social living established by the major creative beings. Reference to this particular dimension, not limited by time, and often translated by the words 'Eternal Dreaming', underlines the Aborigines' traditional reliance on a body of knowledge and belief that is relevant not only to the past but also to the present and the future. Within this scheme is provision for change and individual interpretation, but change in terms of variation on a recognized theme and interpretation within a relatively closed system. The mythical beings are believed to have been responsible not only for creating the natural species, which included man, and much of the physiographic features of the country associated with them. Importantly also, in this context, they are believed to have established an Aboriginal way of life, its social institutions and its patterns of activity: in other words, they established a moral order,

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comprising a series of 'oughts' and 'ought nots', indicating what people should and should not do. But such injunctions are not necessarily explicitly articulated; they are usually recognized implicitly. There are certain exceptions, and the way the ethical system functions in any one Aboriginal society is in terms of both the 'good' and the 'bad' example. However, it is not expressed as simply as this.

Aboriginal religion was, and is, intimately associated with social living, especially in relation to the natural environment and its economic resources. The 'deities' were not only the creators but the stimulators of continuity: their power, released through human rituals, ensures the maintenance of the *status quo*. In one sense, they are independent of man. In another, they are bound to man by ties of familiarity and great intimacy. The gods are immortal: they are creatures of the Dreaming, of the eternal. They moved across the country, leaving possessions which are now enshrined as specific sites, meeting others of their own kind, creating, instituting—and finally being metamorphosed as stone, or in some other form, or disappearing into the territory of an adjacent group, going into the sky, into the ground or water. But in doing so, they left behind them tangible evidence of their presence on the earth and what they left was imbued with their spiritual charisma. The gods are also shape-changing. In many cases, they could be called totemic. They are closely identified with some of the natural species or elements, or are manifested through particular creatures or elements. In this sense, their spirits live on in the mundane world. If, for example, a specific spirit character is also a shape-changing goanna man, then *all* goanna today are a reflection of that spirit, all contain its essential Dreaming essence. The spirit character concerned is perpetuated in its continued presence on this earth, through them. This orientation is communicable to man. It emphasizes the essential unity of man with nature, where man is viewed as being for general purposes part of nature, not opposed to it; as having a close and personal interrelationship with his natural and physical surroundings.

Many Australian Aboriginal deities, not all (and the exceptions do not invalidate the rule), are *ancestral*, credited with having created the progenitors of contemporary man. (See R. M. Berndt 1952; Berndt and Berndt 1964:188.) Beliefs about such a direct linkage with the major mythical beings imply, also, the belief that man is not fundamentally dissimilar to them—that both share a common life force which is sacred. This is brought out most tellingly in dramatized ritual performances when postulants assume the guise of such beings and re-enact the mythic incidents. It is because of this quality, shared by man and his deities, that man is in a position to activate ritual and bring it to bear on essentially mundane situations. The assumption here is that ritual is a symbolic

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means of solving problems of everyday significance, whether these are directed toward initiation, the resolution of life crises, the maintenance of environmental fertility and/or the reaffirmation of socio-cultural identity, over and above wider and more abstract and not immediately recognized implications.

The connection between contemporary man and the spirit beings, then, is putatively ancestral. But in addition, much more directly, is the general belief that these mythic characters are manifested through and in man. (See Berndt and Berndt 1964:189 *et seq.*; R. M. Berndt n.d. *i.*) Through birth and/or conception, a person comes to possess the same spiritual quality as that of a particular spirit being, *in personal terms*. For instance, a woman eats some substance associated with a specific site: she vomits when normally she should not: she is thus made aware that a spirit has entered her, that she has conceived. The child she eventually bears has a direct affiliation with that particular spirit. The norm (where this is relevant) that a woman should give birth to, or conceive, children within the local group territory of her husband, ensures a patrilineal linkage from father to son through the generations. Variations on the theme serve to emphasize the general point. For example, a man (whose wife may not, up to that point, have realized she was pregnant) may injure or kill or disturb a local spirit at a particular site, one that is manifested in animal or some other form. As a result, the child born to his wife becomes a manifestation of it; or, the site-spirit 'turns into' the child, and evidence of the transaction is believed to be discernible on the child's body or in its character. If it had been in animal shape and he had killed it by spearing, the actual wound-mark may be identified on the child.

Between Aboriginal man and the non-empirical inhabitants of his world was a relationship not only of mutual interdependence but also of mutual identification. They are, however, conceptually divisible in specific mytho-ritual contexts. In myth, for instance, the characters are often portrayed as having an existence independent of man. This is deceptive, if only in that what they do (or some aspects of what they do) reflects or is reflected in traditional Aboriginal life. In ritual, the relationship between human and spirit beings is straightforward, whether this be expressed in social or in personal terms. In all cases, such characters are directly concerned with the affairs of man, and exhortation and supplication are not necessary to ensure their attention. They do not stand apart from man. But, through ritual performance, their sacred power is believed to be released and focused broadly for the benefit of man. In individual terms they are also deeply concerned in relationships between persons—usually, but not always, in a symbolic sense, and not explicitly in the pronouncement of moral precepts.

The contention I explore here is that, in mytho-ritual contexts, incidents are noted which can be evaluated as being either good or bad. The mythic characters themselves provide a pattern or blue-print for human behaviour, including interpersonal behaviour. Specific social actions do not necessarily bring condemnation and approbation, punishment and reward, in the myths themselves. It is sufficient that these human beings have before them a body of mythic information in which they believe, oriented in terms of a way of life that can be identified as being basically similar to their own, traditionally.

Supernatural punishment can (is believed to) follow if there is violation of the sacred code. Mostly, however, such threats are oblique and not framed in relation to specific spirit characters. Usually, if there is no intervention by a human agent who is acting in his capacity as a protector of the sacred heritage, the violator must be prepared to await the consequences—it is assumed that he is bound to suffer in some way. (See Berndt and Berndt 1964:285.) But because ritual and myth bear so centrally on social relations, including relations between the sexes, 'what these media have to say about the arrangement of social units, the rules governing behaviour between persons, the breaking of such rules or the means by which they are enforced, or the types of behaviour which are enjoined or deplored' (*ibid.*:249) is always important.

Morality and religion are not conceived of as being separate spheres of experience. However, it is also true to say that only acts against the spirit characters themselves in their varying manifestations and within the ritual context (or in emblem form), can be regarded as being really sure to incur their displeasure. In the majority of situations it is *taken for granted* that the majority of people will follow the socio-cultural patterns laid down in the creative era. But 'following a pattern' would seem to differ from the kind of response involved when particular moral precepts or values are enunciated, and sponsored by a being who is incensed by any infringement. Examples of this last were very rare in Aboriginal Australia. As Stanner (1965:217-18) says, '... the authority of spirits and other potencies . . . was only vaguely a moral-ethical authority'. I would agree with him here. However, as Stanner also notes, mythic beings acted also in ways which are not ordinarily acceptable as far as human beings are concerned. They are seen not simply as moral or a-moral, but as (in some cases) beyond the 'law', or beyond the range of conformity set for ordinary men (see Berndt and Berndt 1964:249, 280). They were law-makers, but also law-breakers. Stanner (*ibid.*:218) speaks of 'two faces, one well drawn and the other less so'. The former concerns those acts by spirit beings which are contrary to what are regarded as 'right', but in the myths themselves are not explicitly condemned (although they may be by implication). In discussion

that may follow the narration of myths, either in prose or in song form, someone may point out that 'this is what the spirits did, but we do otherwise!' Also, a myth itself may deal directly with the implications arising from wrong actions, in terms of their consequences. In the case of 'right' behaviour, as I have said, there is no need for underlining: this speaks for itself.

In Aboriginal religion there is certainly no 'intellectual detachment', no codification of principles and no 'challenge that would have forced morals and beliefs to find anatomies' (Stanner 1965:218). But to my mind these are not essential features of a religious ethical system; and they are obviously not considered essential in Aboriginal terms because, despite this lack, the ideological system of belief (manifested as it is through myth) seems to have been entirely adequate. It provides a stable setting against which actual behaviour can be measured, and it also indicates the limits of both 'rightness' and 'wrongness'—recognizing the frailty of human character. It is true that, viewed superficially 'this made the moral aspect of the religion rather amorphous' (Stanner *ibid.*:218). But this has two facets. The more important (i) is that relating to myth. To quote Stanner again (*ibid.*:218-19): 'Many myths reveal a mounting of incidents to a crisis or culmination that exhibits a cluster of meanings with a distinct moral quality.' This is certainly the case with a large number of Aboriginal myths—but not necessarily those of a sacred nature, or those which have, for instance, direct ritual implications. As far as these last are concerned, a particularly long cycle may be made up of a series of crises which in themselves have *ethical* (but not necessarily *moral*) overtones and undertones. A particular mythic crisis occurs when a statement is made evaluating an action on the part of the characters concerned, as being *immoral* or *a-moral*. It is, as it were, as if an immoral act must occur *in order to demonstrate what can be categorized as being moral*. For instance, a mythic being commits incest and may consequently be killed; no further reference is necessary to emphasize the moral injuncture concerned. There are two legs to this. The first is the one already noted—both direct and positive in its negativity. In the second, action of a sort traditionally viewed as immoral brings about a result which is for the common good. For instance, through an incestuous union, the human progenitors of the local Aboriginal people come into being; through treachery, a malignant spirit is killed; a mythic being is killed to enable his sacred emblems to be made available to man; and so on. These are 'immoral' acts, but their consequences are considered to be good. Other actions performed by mythic beings are *beyond* ethical question; they are presented without reference to their implications, whether these be good or bad. In such cases, they are non-moral: it is simply, as noted, that the mythic

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characters concerned are beyond the law to which ordinary man is subject. In ritual, as an example of this, there is a difference between what is regarded as moral or immoral in secular life and its meaning in sacred life. Ritual licence, for instance, may include sexual intercourse between ordinarily prohibited kin or affines; ritualized swearing between kin who normally treat one another with constraint; symbolic use of menstrual blood, which men usually regard with abhorrence; and so on. Such non-mundane acts enhance the sacredness of the occasion, over and above their symbolic intentions. In passing, Meggitt (1966:23) mentions that contemporary Wailbri men, as custodians of the myths, see the behaviour of Dreaming mythic women, for example, as being immoral by present-day standards and 'openly deplore such behaviour when recounting the myths'. Strehlow (1947:38), for the Aranda, speaks of the older versions of myths being toned down by narrators today. And this is of common occurrence.

The other facet (ii) is religious ritual. It is true that, as Stanner (1965:219) says, in specific cases 'the myths . . . may have served as the implicit moral "theory" of the rites'. This should be regarded in two senses, as Stanner implies. One is the sense of mythic re-enactment within the context of ritual, with varying recognition of symbolic allusion, perpetuating a traditional scheme which is regarded as being of direct benefit to man, over and above the *practical* implications of specific rituals—that is, what they are designed to accomplish. The Dreaming, with its expression through myth and ritual, among other things, is believed to be possessed of a moral rightness of its own. As Stanner has put it (*ibid.*:220), it 'was said to, and to all appearances did, weigh on the present with over-mastering authority'. In the second sense, is initiation through ritual in broad terms—not solely the initiation of youths or their involvement in physical operations (that is, in disciplinary terms), but revelatory rites which are correlated with increasing knowledge and participation by adults. Such progression could be regarded also as paralleling moral development. This is, of course, more obvious in regard to the initiation of young men, where in many cases specific injunctions are articulated—often with mythic connotations—stipulating what to do and what not to do in particular circumstances, both ritual and mundane.

THE DINGARI AS A MORAL SYSTEM

In the present study my concern is with myth as the most likely source of moral statements. Their translation into action is, of course, another matter and it is one which will be considered only indirectly in this context.

In brief, my contention is that morality and religion are not really separable here—they belong together within the same sphere of experience; and, on the treatment of moral issues in Aboriginal mythology, that 'right' and 'wrong' actions are a part of ordinary living: that the results speak for themselves, and that these do not necessarily need to be spelt out as a series of moral admonitions or maxims (as is the case in the eastern Highlands of New Guinea: see R. M. Berndt 1962).

The material I am using comes from the north-western sector of the Western Desert of Australia. The 'tribes' are the Walmadjeri, Gugadja, Mandjildjara, Wonggadjunggu and Ngadi, representatives of which now live at Balgo Pallottine mission station on the northern fringe of the Desert. These people have come out of the Desert in recent years but retain close ties with their own territories. They have been subjected to fairly intensive alien contact, but may still be described as traditionally oriented. The mythology, and the land that is intimately associated with it, along with ritual, continue to be significant to them. (For a summarized statement, an overall view of Desert socio-cultural life from the perspective of Balgo, see R. M. Berndt n.d. *i*, where additional references are provided.)²

The *dingari*, a mytho-ritual complex or tradition which is secret-sacred, is by far the most important of its kind throughout this region. It is associated with many mythical characters. The primary ones are the Ganabuda, also known as the Gadjeri, the Old Woman or Mother: but there may be a group of Ganabuda or Gadjeri, and they may have male counterparts. The *dingari* ritual group, as they are collectively called, travel across the country, moving from one site to the next; they may be a group of men followed by women, or vice versa, accompanied by novices; and the presence of the Ganabuda or Gadjeri is usually implied if not expressly stated. The *dingari* initiate young men and perform rites, and meet various other characters in the course of their journey.

The Ganabuda *dingari* I shall consider here, in summary, has a particular Desert flavour. In one sense, it is reflective of this socio-cultural situation and therefore has unique characteristics (that is, unique to this region). In another sense, it is not bounded by Desert cultural limitations; in both structure and content it may be identified with eastern and north-eastern myths and rites which are also known under the general label of Gadjeri, and there are connections even further afield. The *dingari* of the Walmadjeri-Gugadja (to name but two of the dominant 'tribal' dialect-units concerned with our example) is made up of an accretion of myths that are not necessarily woven into an integrated pattern of mythic knowledge. Their neighbours to the east, the Wailbri (Walbiri), also have the Gadjeri (Gadjari). In

their case, it is the myth of the two Mamandabari men 'whose exploits provide the rationale of the Gadjari rituals' (Meggitt 1966:4). The full myth (as set out by Meggitt *ibid.*:5-22, along with a description and analysis of the ritual) contains no reference to the Gadjari Mother. However, in the Wave Hill-Birrundudu areas, north of the Wailbri, the Gadjari (or Fertility Mother) and her two daughters (the Mangamanga) are much in evidence. (See C. H. Berndt 1950; my own material on this, from that area, is still unpublished.)

The Gadjari has, additionally, many linkages with the Kunapipi cult (see R. M. Berndt 1951), which is widely distributed throughout Arnhem Land and in other parts of the Northern Territory. Closely associated with this is the myth of the Old Woman, Mutjingga, connected with the rite of Punj (among the Murinbata of Pt Keats, Northern Territory: see Stanner 1960:260-2). Stanner's interpretation rests on what he considers to be a 'persistent suggestion' of a mythic 'immemorial misdirection' in human affairs—a 'Wrongful turning of life', as he puts it, and through the killing of Mutjingga, 'men are committed to its consequences'. The content of the myth lends itself to other, different interpretations. I shall not, however, pursue that possibility here. Stanner (*ibid.*:265-6) makes a connection between 'suffering' and 'good', in order to underline the moral side of the mythology he discusses. (It will be noted that in my framework 'suffering' can be and is equated with evil, and regarded as immoral.) Stanner observes, too, that there is no concept of a 'Golden Age': Strehlow (1947:38-42), on the other hand, in an early work, mentions the concept of a 'Golden Age', but at the same time emphasizes the absence of moral and ethical values in Aranda myths.

Stanner comes closer to the core of the significance of myths (*ibid.*:266) when he writes that they 'are a sort of statement about whole reality, a declaration about the penalties of private will, and by implication a thesis on the spoiling of possible unity'; 'they deal less with origins as such than with the instituting of relevances—the beginnings of a moral system . . .'; 'the myths rationalize and justify *familiar* entities, forms and relations'. It is this view which is closer to the content and symbolism of the *dingari*. Mythology inspires and contemporary ritual sustains a way of life sanctified by the Dreaming, where good and bad are accepted conditions of living. There is no 'fall from grace', no mythic beings possessed of an innate goodness to be emulated by Aboriginal man, beings ready to punish the transgressor and reward the person who adheres to ideal norms. Mythic beings were both good and bad, and badness was a necessary corollary of goodness.

The *dingari* is linked with similar cults in other parts of Aboriginal Australia. As far as we can tell, it spread into the Kimberleys of Western

Australia and west to La Grange (Petri 1968:188-9), and also down into the Western Desert. However, as Meggitt notes (*ibid.*:23), the Wailbri 'have grafted elements of an imported Gadjari cult on to a typical indigenous hero myth and in doing so have dropped the Mother concept from the former'. The Walmadjeri-Gugadja have integrated the introduced Gadjeri with indigenous myth forms, while at the same time not adopting many essential features of the northern versions. They have retained the Gadjeri as Mother, but not so directly as in the north.

The following examples are presented in summary, omitting many references to actual sites which the mythic beings pass through or are associated with. Most versions actually include much detail. Additionally, the myth is generally presented as a series of songs which *in toto* make up a cycle, although each song may require further explanation. There are also numerous versions. Those presented here were collected during fieldwork at Balgo in 1958 and 1960 and belong to the Desert tradition.³ They are arranged as a series of myth-sections (I to X), all related to the *dingari*; for convenience of reference each is divided into parts.

Myth-Section I

1. Ganabuda women with *dingari* men move across the country in the vicinity of Lake White, with a pre-circumcisional novice. They possess secret-sacred ritual boards (called *darugu*);⁴ they erect some of them on a hill, and their power causes fire to issue from the apex of each board. The fire spreads across the country and forces the Ganabuda to seek protection in a pit, but some are burnt to death. Eventually, they continue on their way, with their long *darugu*.

2. They go into the ground at Wilgungara and come out at Djawul-djawul. A mythic lizard man, Gadadjilga ('spiky head'), emerges. Through the aid of love magic, he is able to have sexual intercourse with one of the Ganabuda: however, she is related to him as a *jumari*, an avoidance relationship. This is considered *wadji* (wrong), and punishable. He is eventually killed by the other Ganabuda. (A detailed rendering of this section of the myth up to this point is contained in R. M. Berndt n.d. i.) To kill Gadadjilga, the Ganabuda hit his testes with sharpened digging sticks and finally cut his penis, which was elongated, and which he had caused to travel underground and come among them. (This is quite a common theme in Desert mythology: see Berndt and Berndt 1964:208-9, on the Julana-Njirana myth. The *dingari* myth reiterates that Gadadjilga was the 'wrong' man for the girl he seduced: also, that he was an old man with grey hair—too old for any of the Ganabuda, among whom were, 'genealogically', potential spouses from his point of view.)

3. Leaving here, they go from site to site; they cut and make *darugu*, dance, meet another group of Ganabuda, and collect food. At Gunjin, they are frightened by a man named Mungamadju; some enter this place, but others continue on.

4. (At this juncture, emphasis is placed on the ritual activities of the women: the older women make *darugu*, while the young girls hunt and so are able to compensate those who show them the sacred objects. This situation is paralleled in contemporary ritual life as far as the men are concerned.) The young girls are the Mangamanga (or Mungamunga: see C. H. Berndt 1950:18; R. M. Berndt 1951:13).

5. In the myth, the Mangamanga travel ahead of the older women, who come behind carrying the heavy *darugu*. In one instance, they look back but cannot see these older women; they wait and then search for them, but without avail: they have disappeared.

6. They continue, however, and meet another group of Ganabuda; the routine sequence of events is repeated. Eventually, at Jandeia, they perform special dancing using a sacred *wedi* (*widi*) pole and finally 'go in' there, where they remain.

Myth-Section II

1. The Ganabuda travel across the country, hunting (near Lake White); they kill animals by throwing sacred *darugu* at them.

2. They are watched by a man named Djalaburu, who is astonished to find that they possess *darugu* and swing bullroarers while the men have no sacred objects. In his country (Wailbri-Woneiga), it is the other way about.

3. In the night, Djalaburu steals power (*maia*) from under the armpits of the women.

4. In the morning, the women find they have lost their power and cannot use the *darugu*.

5. The men change places with the women, taking over the *darugu*. In return, the women receive digging sticks and wooden dishes, and Djalaburu explains the situation to them, giving them a firestick. (A more detailed version of this section is contained in Berndt and Berndt 1964:224.)

Myth-Section III

1. An old man, Djangimanda, is with a large *dingari* group of young men. He tells them to go ahead and he will follow with the sacred *darugu*.

2. Instead he 'tricks them': he covers all the camp fires, except for a piece of lighted wood he takes for himself. He then collects some of the

darugu, tying them together with *ngaljibi* fibre, placing them on his head and shoulders and suspending them from his waistband; some he holds in his hands.

3. The power of the *darugu* enables him to fly away with these boards, leaving no opportunity for the others to follow him. He comes down at Gulei, on the Canning Stock Route, and enters the ground, where he remains.

4. The *dingari* go in the opposite direction (east), hunting and performing ritual as they travel from place to place.

5. (Details are given of each place where they camp.) At one, they frighten a man, Gurgul (night owl), who is making a boomerang. At another, they make waterholes by standing their *darugu* upright in the ground. At still another, they perform the *nanggaru* hole ritual. (See R. M. Berndt 1951: e.g. 17 *et seq.* concerning the significance of this in the Kunapipi.) Novices go inside this, and firesticks are thrown over it and them.

6. Eventually they come to Ruldu where, in anger at not finding Djangimanda, the *dingari* begin to quarrel among themselves over the *darugu*. One man, Guninga, puts his foot on a *darugu*, deliberately breaking it. The extreme seriousness of this action immediately results in a cessation of fighting: their differences of opinion are resolved and they become friends again.

7. They continue on their travels. Finally, at Jaran, they hold a big ritual. Next day they are so tired that they can hardly walk: and the country is hilly and they find it impossible to climb. In desperation, they all enter Bargunbargun rockhole, in Wailbri country.

Myth-Section IV

1. *Dingari* men begin their travels at Warawara, on the Canning Stock Route. They make *darugu* boards. A euro (kangaroo) is frightened by the feathers attached to a *darugu*. They perform ritual and make stone flake blades for spears.

2. They meet two old men who possess a large number of *darugu*; the *dingari* kill them with one of their own *darugu*, using it as a throwing stick; after hitting them it continues for some distance and finally falls, forming a mountain ridge.

3. The *dingari* follow it and meet Lon (the kingfisher man), who is a *dingari* leader. (Lon is important in Petri's versions: *ibid.*: 188-9.)

4. They continue travelling, coming back to their old home: they sing, make *darugu*, use *darugu* for grinding grass seeds, and finally mount their *darugu* and fly through the sky to Ngalgildjara soak. (A more detailed version of this section appears in R. M. Berndt, n.d. *i.*)

5. They then continue to Garalja soak, where they meet an old man, Djilgamada (echidna). While the *dingari* are out hunting, he steals some of their *darugu*.

6. They discover the theft and follow Djilgamada's tracks, but he dives down into Bulgalilji soak with all the boards, to hide from them. In the dark, they miss him and continue on to Jugu where they camp in a *ganala* (ritual trench: see R. M. Berndt 1951:e.g. 43, 58 *et seq.*, in relation to the Kunapipi).

7. Djilgamada follows the *dingari*, and during the night teases them by throwing stones and hitting them, but runs away at dawn.

8. They follow Djilgamada, but cannot find him. Tired, they rest in the evening, cooking and eating possum. Then they light one of their *darugu*, using it as a torch in order to follow the old man; but he has a similar torch. Eventually they camp at Lindabaru. Here, in the night Djilgamada comes stealthily up and knocks them over with a *darugu*. (He also makes a bush fire. He teases them 'all the way along': and this is why novices today are teased in the relevant rituals.)

9. The *dingari* dance at Bilbiga and paint the youths with arm-vein blood; they stand up their *darugu* in a row. As a result, there is a big creek here, made by their dancing feet.

10. They follow Djilgamada. At Burudu they circumcise novices.

11. They continue in their search for Djilgamada, and see his fire in the distance.

12. Another travelling group of Ganu lizard men come upon Djilgamada: they put stone flakes inside him and sticks all over his body 'because he stole all the *darugu*'.

13. In the morning, Djilgamada leaves the camp, still holding his *darugu*; he is sick, and drags them along the ground.

14. The *dingari* easily track and encircle him. Djilgamada, however, is cunning: he goes under the ground and comes up some distance away, in Wailbri country.

15. The others follow him again and throw spears and *darugu* at him: these stick into his body. But he is still relatively strong and continues on. Eventually he falls, at Wirilji-wirilji. They drag him along the ground and throw more spears at him. But he evades them and goes into a rockhole there, making it larger so that all of his attackers fall into it too and are unable to escape.

Myth-Section V

1. A *dingari* group comes from Ganingara (Kaningara), on the Canning Stock Route: they possess a large number of unincised *darugu* (which they incise later: see paragraph 8). They move across the country.

2. As they fly over Gudal riding on their *darugu*, they see an old man, also named Gudal, who is afraid of them.

3. They land at Djindidjindi, searching for water. Garangalgu (turkey man) brings it to them.

4. They are hungry and seek food, but without success. They pierce their arms for blood (to drink). They hear a noise; at first, they believe it is the sound of their own arm blood flowing, and they staunch this to listen. It is a man named Buradjidin, who is snoring in a cave at Jalbilbungu. At night they surround the cave and try to spear him, but he runs away. They follow, and kill him at Gwial. They had intended to eat him, but his flesh is too salty: they leave his body there.

5. They continue on their travels, swinging bullroarers, painting the bodies of novices, and so on, until they come to Ladada, named after Lightning, who made a creek here by striking the ground; the *dingari* are afraid of him.

6. Continuing, they throw their *darugu* like spears, following them to where they fall. Lightning strikes again and frightens them: they seek shelter in a cave. They can find no water. They swing their bullroarers, but one breaks into pieces—they weep over this calamity.

7. They continue, dancing along (as in contemporary ritual). At Djarudjaru one man, Galan, tries to chew wild tobacco leaves; others copy him, but all burn their mouths, and they are sick.

8. At Widjindi, the *dingari* exchange *darugu*, recounting the myths and the waterhole routes symbolized by the incised lines on the surface of these boards. They are instructing the younger men, who in turn should compensate them with meat and other food they have caught. No food, however, has been obtained.

9. They throw a large *darugu* into the sky, where it travels by itself; they follow it to Djilmanda, where it has fallen, making a soak.

10. They continue to Winbubula. An old woman named Badara (a Gadjeri) makes four holes for novices, in which they are ritually smoked: the holes become rockholes. (A similar ritual of smoking novices is carried out today.)

11. They burn *darugu*, using them as torches so they can travel at night. They stand *darugu* upright in the ground, and as a result they 'find water': the *darugu* make soaks.

12. While they are sleeping here, a woman named Wonadjura comes for water. In the morning, the *dingari* notice her tracks and those of other women. The women have seen the *darugu*. The young men go after them and kill them all, putting their bodies in trees at Gwibiljaru.

13. They continue on, making wells and soaks with their *darugu*, and performing ritual. Again they search for water, but find none—in this case, their *darugu* are of no avail. They do, however, find sand

dampened after rain, and cover themselves with it to obtain its moisture.

14. Eventually they come to Manggi. Here they make a *ganala* trench (symbolizing the Gadjeri womb). The Gadjeri Mother is here: men enter her belly. As she walks along, her footprints form rows of water-holes (at Rubudjunga). From time to time she permits the men to go out for hunting, but they always return to her. They perform ritual: they enter the *nanggaru*, and fire is thrown over them.

15. They come to Jugul and, mounting their *darugu*, fly to Gulgan where they perform ritual.

16. At Ilgalidja, they hunt with *darugu*. After killing a kangaroo rat, the *darugu* passes through it and falls to the ground, making a waterhole; ducks and pelicans appear on its water.

17. They continue travelling, hunting and performing ritual; they swing bullroarers and ride their *darugu* through the sky. (It is explained, in this part of the myth, that the *darugu* they use is/are really the Gadjeri.)

18. At Widjinbi, they meet an old man named Bindin (a small water bird); he is a *dingari* leader. With him, they fly to Imbirwanu and prepare for ritual and for the initiation of young men (that is, the showing of *darugu* to them).

19. Eventually they come to Wonggu, in Wailbri country. Here they meet a group of women, the mothers of the youths who have been initiated into the *dingari*; it is a long time since they have seen their sons. There is a ritual presentation, and Bindin finally 'hunts them away'. The men continue on their travels.

20. Finally, two young men become ill at Galiaga (in Wailbri-Woneiga country), and die. The others mourn their death and 'sing themselves'—they clasp one another, forming a heap, and die. All of their *darugu* turn to stone.

Myth-Section VI

1. The *dingari* men sit together on a hill segregated from the women (the Ganabuda), who assemble on low flat ground, at Wilgin (Lake White). The men are ritually within the Mother (Gadjeri). (In a commentary on this, it is said that previously it was the 'law' to keep the young men and women apart from one another; two old men looked after the women.)

2. One man goes hunting and spears a kangaroo. However, it is not immediately killed and drags the protruding spear shaft along the ground; the hunter follows and kills it, then returns to the other men.

3. One of the old men attached to the women collects some of this meat, which he takes to the women. When dividing this, they find a broken piece of the spear point which had killed the animal. Before this,

the women had no idea that men were living nearby. They talk among themselves and agree that there must be some young men among them.

4. The women make a large ground-seed cake and give this to the old men, asking them to pass it on to the other men. (This is the present-day *mididi* ritual feast.)

5. The men come down from the Mother and meet the young women for the first time. They have intercourse.

6. In anger, the old men make a bush fire, hoping to kill both the men and the women; the fire burns the men, but the women escape by diving into a lake. The old men leave this place, one of them going to Gulul.

7. The women emerge from the lake to find all of the young men dead. They follow the tracks of one of the old men and find him digging a hole, his testes hanging down. They have obtained *darugu* from their 'husbands'. First they pinch his testes. Then dancing round him, they spear him with *darugu*, killing him, and bury him in the hole he has dug. (The *bandiri* dancing used in this section of the ritual refers to that episode.)

8. The women continue travelling, walking at night rather than during the day because it is so hot. At Gunanganu, they meet Gaanga (the crow man); he has intercourse with two women who are his *jumari* (a tabued relative) and *gabali* ('mother's mother') respectively. They are young girls, and since his penis is abnormally large, he injures them. The other women kill him with their *darugu*.

9. Later, the two girls die at Gunagari.

10. Continuing, they meet another Gaanga, who is digging a hole. When he sees the Ganabuda, he disappears into it. They stand around him, calling to him to come out—but he remains there, turning into a snake.

11. They continue to Bangur, where they find another Gaanga who is making a hairbelt: they grab this and scatter its hanks of hair. Gaanga is angry, but his anger turns to fear when the women run after him; they beat him with their *darugu* until he dies.

12. They go on to Lirinmanu, where they enter the ground. (Comment made at this point: these women did not like men; they became embittered after all the young men were burnt.)

Myth-Section VII

(Several sections relate to the adventures of the Ganabuda women at Wilgin. Then the myth continues.)

1. Two Ganabuda leave Wilgin, crawling all the way along—they

are tired. They drag themselves from place to place. As they push their hair back from their faces, bush potatoes fall from it.

2. When they urinate or prod the ground with their digging sticks, springs gush forth; in the former case they are salty; in the latter, fresh.

3. They come to Darbaibanda, where they hear a *darbai* malignant man-eating spirit singing outside his cave. The Ganabuda are frightened and throw stones to keep him away.

4. Finally they enter Gabulula, a sandhill in the middle of this dry lake.

Myth-Section VIII

1. The Ganabuda are sorry because the young men have been burnt (see Myth-Section VI, 6).

2. They spread out across the country as they leave Wilgin, dancing from place to place, hunting with their *darugu*.

3. At Bundaldjining, they cut the hymens of two young girls. (This is equivalent to subincision: see Berndt and Berndt 1945:216-18.) These two girls 'turn into' stone (their spirits are left here, but they do not die).

4. They continue on, hunting. At Jamabundubundu, a man named Gadadjilga smells the women; he creeps up stealthily, planning to have intercourse with them. However, when they hear him they run away, because his penis is too large. He follows them.

5. At Djuwandu he comes upon the women sleeping; he has intercourse with two, who in consequence are seriously injured and die.

6. The women run away; he follows them. Eventually they all go into the ground at Djalwa-djalwa.

Myth-Section IX

1. The *dingari* move across the country. Among them is Dangidjara. At Jumari, he has intercourse with a tabued 'mother-in-law' (*jumari*), named Magindi. He goes out hunting and brings meat back to her. Eventually, Magindi bears a son.

2. Dangidjara continues on to Nundjil. There, while he sleeps, some ants bite his testes and penis, which detach themselves from him and run away.

3. He goes in search of his genitals, but they have set off in the opposite direction. He calls out for them to return, but they refuse to do so.

4. He travels from place to place looking for them and at last, at Lungulurul, he finds them.

5. He goes on to Mandangunda, where the Mangamanga (see above)

are living. They are searching for him: but he dives down into a hole and comes out at Djindara. He teases them, and runs away to Njiringgi. The Mangamanga follow him.

6. They find him at Gunawiri. Again he escapes. He puts his *darugu* in a tree there; they are now stone. Standing on one leg, he gathers up all the *dingari* men and, with them, enters a hole.

Myth-Section X

1. *Dingari* move across the country. Among them is Wirangula. Ants bite his testes. He hunts for euro, but is unable to find any. He puts spinifex grass around the holes in which the euro are hiding, and lights it to smoke them out. The smoke, however, temporarily blinds him.

2. He continues, and regains his sight at Madjud. He sees a kangaroo rat: having no weapon, he pulls off his pubic fringe and throws it at the creature, but misses.

3. At Naberi-naberi he meets a husband (Jilbril) and wife. He is jealous; he sneaks up to the man and breaks his neck with a firestick, and then has intercourse with the woman. He is cold and goes back for a firestick; while he is away, the woman escapes.

4. Wirangula goes on to Rilana soak, which he enters, and there he remains.

These ten sections are not sequentially arranged. I have preferred to present them in the order in which I recorded them. Also, as I have noted, they are considerably compressed and do not mention all the actual sites through which these mythic characters passed. Since, in this context, I am emphasizing moral values, I have not set out details relevant to hunting or to ritual, or to the creation of the landscape. The myths themselves are dense with meaning, especially regarding the relationship of these characters to the land, fertility and ritual symbolism. This applies particularly to the *darugu*: there are many different kinds; various parts of the *dingari* ritual are described; and the mythological associations of each site are noted. All that I have presented here are clusters of events which, at one level, speak for themselves: that is, as they are told, they provide us with a glimpse of aspects of behaviour which require no further explanation. They are highlights which can readily be identified and reveal the 'character' of the main mythic beings: but they do other things as well. (See later.)

THE OVERALL CONCEPTION OF THE DINGARI

I have called the *dingari* a moral system. First, let us think of it as a system, or perhaps more precisely as a design. The foregoing myth-sections

are only excerpts from, portions of, the total patterning of the *dingari*. All Desert myths are territorially anchored and are therefore in the possession of those people who claim particular stretches of country. It is only through obtaining myth-sections from a number of representatives of these 'countries' that a broader picture can be ascertained. Mostly, the really great Desert myths are fragmented. Also, they are meandering in style, often almost elusive: in them is a compulsive and vitally necessary mobility, of characters wandering from site to site, disappearing, 'turning into' something else, and usually reappearing. Further, many of them are almost prosaic (although this is not true for the song versions), with their reiteration of routine happening and ritual act. However, their structure is consistent.

The mythic setting, the décor, is familiar to listeners: it is commonplace, and so are the great majority of the activities of the characters. Against this backdrop, contrasts are provided in the form of incidents which disturb the smooth-flowing course of events—and it is these which interest us particularly. The *dingari* complex is not a story *per se* and should not be evaluated as such; it is not meant to be a tale, even though some, including Aborigines themselves, may regard it in that way. The plot element is incidental to the overall conception, or intent. It is, rather, as I have already suggested, a statement about Desert living. At the level of reality, these people take their life very much for granted. At the level of reflection in myth, they are able to stand back from it and consider it as it is, or was. These are two interrelated levels of perception. Before considering the implications of this, we can look briefly at the content of the myth itself.

The *dingari* contains two orientations, each made up of a number of ingredients. Together, they form what can be called the ethical universe of these people, using the term ethical in a broad sense to cover the whole field of conduct—moral as well as immoral. Tentatively, we can conceptualize this in Figure 1.

Around a central core focusing on social relations are two concentric circles with arrows leading clockwise and anti-clockwise; a diagonal line divides them, forming two interdependent spheres which I have designated 'moral' and 'immoral'.⁵ The outer circle includes a *sine qua non* of Desert life—relatively constant movement across limited stretches of territory in the quest for food. For the most part, this is an arduous business. While the seasons remain good, and people are able to move about and collaborate actively and 'normally', they can achieve reasonable satisfaction. But through drought and consistently bad hunting, illness or accident, the situation can change radically. It can bring hunger, thirst, exhaustion and finally tragedy, because these people live so close to the land and rely utterly on its natural

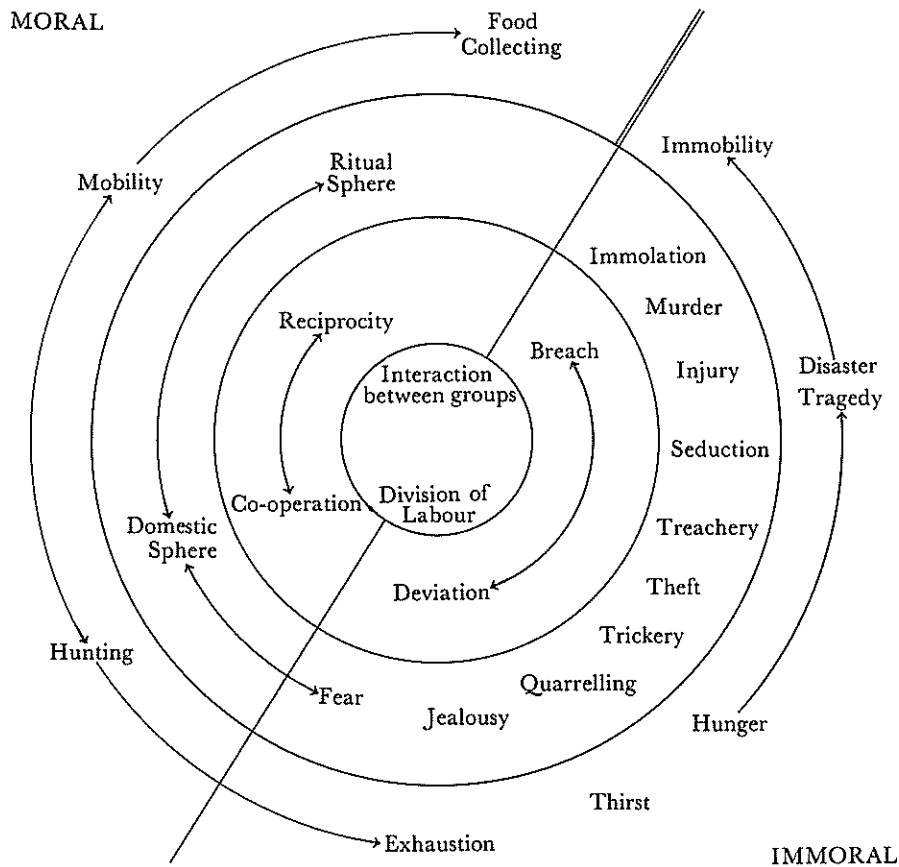


Fig. 1 Ethical universe of Desert people

resources: they are absolutely dependent for survival on nature, and on their own limited skills. Under these circumstances, the 'moral' can change to the 'immoral', as part of the condition of living.

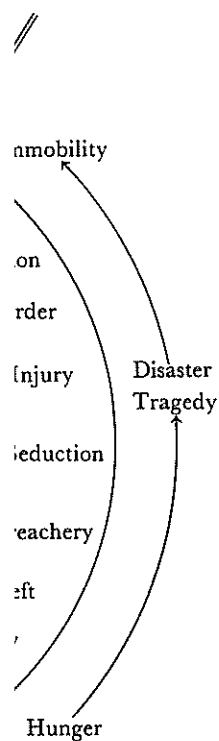
Within the middle circle are the two primary spheres for the channelling of human social activity: the 'domestic' (directly relevant to family and other interpersonal relations), and the 'ritual'. Each sphere is characterized by co-operation and reciprocity—dependence on others in the course of social living. These are the spheres of 'moral' behaviour in the conventional meaning of the term: the area of good, proper, morally right behaviour, in which conformity with moral rules is expected to be at its maximum. However, social living involves breaches of the peace, behavioural deviation and so forth. Fear, jealousy, quarrelling, trickery, theft, treachery, seduction, injury, murder and immolation

infiltrate the moral orientation. These immoral acts are highlighted in the *dingari*. They are, of course, subject to various forms of control, which are often indifferently applied; they are, however, 'wrong' in the same way as are drought, accident, and so on: they too can turn to tragedy and disaster; they, too, are 'immoral'. Because, in this situation, the social dimension in the broadest sense embraces the total environment, natural and 'supernatural' (or non-empirical), we can logically extend the use of the term 'moral' (or 'immoral') to this wider range of phenomena and events, not limiting it to purely inter-human affairs. What I am saying here is that the *dingari*, as a total ethical system, covers both the moral and the immoral *viewed as the natural condition of man*, as an accepted constant of Desert living. It is true that one is virtually outside his control and the other more or less within his control; but both involve common expectations—moral, and immoral.

I said before that in this context I was not attempting to deal with *dingari* symbolism. Of course, by identifying the elements that make up a 'moral' universe for man and his deities, I am touching very closely indeed on the *dingari*'s basic symbolism. To repeat, the *dingari* is a religious myth. Among other things, what it has to say, both directly and indirectly, is recognized as having especial significance and calling for especial concentration of effort and activity in the ritual sphere. It is concerned, specifically, with maintaining a sequence of events, including social actions and ideas, that have critical relevance to everyday life: and, more broadly, with sustaining the *complete* ethical universe created and established once and for all in the Eternal Dreaming by the mythical characters of the *dingari* and other important cycles—and this includes sustaining the immoral with the moral, as necessary conditions of life.

The two primary symbolic patterns, as recurring themes, concern: (i) relations between men and women; and (ii) secret-sacred and secular (or mundane) life. These are seen as two complementaries (to think in Lévi-Strauss's terms: see R. M. Berndt n.d. *ii*). The first includes the symbolism of women's original possession of the sacred *darugu* (e.g. Myth-Section II) and men's use of trickery to take over their power; and antagonism between the sexes (e.g. Myth-Sections VI, IX, 5). In the second, we have the Gadjeri Mother (e.g. Myth-Section V, 14): postulants and novices enter her womb for ritual (see R. M. Berndt 1951; 1952) but leave it for hunting. Wherever the *nanggaru* and *ganala* trenches or pit are mentioned, this implies the Gadjeri's womb; and the *darugu* are variously interpreted as being the body of the Mother or of phallic man himself. I am *not* saying that, at this level, these interdependent features are conceptualized as symbolizing the moral and the immoral—because this would be to fall into the quagmire

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of dead or moribund controversy on the issue of the sacred-profane dichotomy. But it is true that these are seen as contrasts: woman is the source of life, as expressed in the conception of the Gadjeri—as was the case in the beginning when she possessed the keys to the sacred, which are in fact the keys to life; and as she is now, as the ritual protector of man, symbolized as she is in the Gadjeri. But she is also a major source of dissension, and possible death. I do not want to over-emphasize this, because the Gadjeri, Ganabuda or Mangamanga (or Mungamunga) are often relegated to the background. One hears much more about the *dingari* and other spirit beings, especially in the Desert; after all, the Gadjeri has, as far as we can tell, come into the Desert and been integrated into and adapted to the local socio-cultural environment.

I have already commented on the relationship between the *dingari* myth and its expression through ritual. Table 1 demonstrates this.

TABLE 1
RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN DINGARI MYTH AND RITUAL

	<i>dingari</i> myth	<i>dingari</i> ritual
I, 1	novice travels with <i>dingari</i> use of <i>darugu</i> fire spreads across country; Ganabuda seek protection in pit	pilgrimage of novices to sacred sites <i>darugu</i> used in variety of ways ritual re-enactment; use of <i>nanggaru</i> . Novices sit in shallow trench (<i>nanggaru</i>) while firebrands are thrown over them*
I, 2	the Gadadjilga incident	re-enacted by postulants*
I, 3	Ganabuda make <i>darugu</i>	cult leaders make <i>darugu</i>
I, 4	Mangamanga appear young girls 'pay' Ganabuda with meat for ritual knowledge	re-enacted in ritual* similar situation regarding men performing <i>dingari</i> , who expect such gifts from those they initiate
I, 6	women perform special dancing using <i>wedi</i> pole	complementary <i>dingari</i> ritual by women in main camp or separated from men*
III, 1-3	Djangimanda incident	re-enacted in ritual*
III, 5	<i>dingari</i> perform <i>nanggaru</i> rite	re-enacted*
IV, 6	<i>dingari</i> camp in <i>ganala</i>	<i>ganala</i> trench used in ritual*
IV, 5, 8, 12-15	Djilgamada sequence	re-enacted*

* Items distinctive to the *dingari*

	<i>dingari</i> myth	<i>dingari</i> ritual
	IV, 8 Djlgamada knocks <i>dingari</i> with <i>darugu</i>	<i>dingari</i> novices teased in same way*
	IV, 9 <i>dingari</i> anoint youth with arm blood	also done in ritual
	IV, 10 <i>dingari</i> circumcise	also relevant to section of contemporary <i>dingari</i>
	V, 4 drink blood to quench thirst	ritual drinking of blood
	V, 5, 6 swing bullroarers	also feature of <i>dingari</i> ritual
	V, 7 special form of <i>dingari</i> dancing	also performed in ritual*
	V, 8 ritual exchange of <i>darugu</i>	also feature of this ritual as form of instruction
	V, 10 Badara makes four holes for novices, and smokes them	ritual smoking of novices in depressions*
	V, 12 killing of women	sanction used in relation to uninitiated who see or seek to see secret-sacred ritual and objects of initiated men
	V, 14 <i>dingari</i> make a <i>ganala</i>	see above*
	appearance of Gadjeri Mother	ritual ground symbolizes the Mother: men enter and leave her*
	throwing of fire	see above*
	V, 18 initiation of young men	see above
	V, 19 meeting the mothers, and 'hunting them away'	women see novices as they come down from the secret-sacred ground: ritual presentation, and ritual 'hunting away', with wailing*
	V, 20 death of <i>dingari</i>	ritual re-enactment*
	VI, 1 sexual division	maintained in <i>dingari</i> ritual
	VI, 4 women make ground-seed bread for young men	<i>mididi</i> ritual feast in <i>dingari</i> : prepared by specific women*
	VI, 7 women dance around old man they kill	<i>bandiri</i> dancing by women as complementary to men's: held near secret-sacred ground*
	VI, 8, 10, 11 Gaanga incident	re-enacted in ritual*
	VII, 1-3 Ganabuda women crawl along from place to place	postulants crawl on ritual ground*
	VIII, 3 Ganabuda cut hymens of two young girls	ritual hymen-cutting performed in secret, away from men: regarded as complementary adjunct of the <i>dingari</i> , and equivalent to subincision. Rarely carried out*

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I have made no attempt to provide a framework of *dingari* ritual arranged sequentially, since my main emphasis is on myth. In ritual performance only sections of the myth are dramatized, and not the total myth. Those items marked with an asterisk are distinctive to the *dingari*. A structural analysis of these two dimensions, myth and ritual, would be rewarding: but here it is necessary simply to repeat that the basic ethical pattern I have been speaking of is upheld and reinforced by ritual action which has direct relevance to everyday life.

Ritual has to do with maintaining the state of affairs which, men affirm, has continued to exist since it was instituted by the major mythical beings. It is also the way through which contact can be made with these beings, to ensure that the power (*maia*) they possess is brought to bear on social living. This is relevant, primarily, in two ways: one is natural increase and fructification of the countryside, maintaining and sustaining the material things of life; the other is spiritual renewal or stimulation. Indeed, within the ritual sphere men particularly, and women also, are brought close to the essence of things. Human and spirit beings are not distinctly separate entities. In this view, man is the contemporary manifestation of these sacred characters. He does not have to urge the release of this power, this *maia*, by supplication or exhortation: it is transmitted to him through ritual performance, by his identification with those characters themselves. And he emerges from the ritual ground, symbolized by the Mother, as a new man.

At the same time, all myth-inspired ritual is an area of formal instruction. It involves teachers (the big men, men of experience and knowledge) and learners (the novices, young men, or those undergoing particular stages of the ritual, as onlookers, active participants and so forth). In this context, learning refers to the *total* ethical system, including the moral and the immoral.

There are, as we have seen, two dimensions of the immoral. The one that immediately concerns us here is the sphere of human social relations. Table 2 sets out the main *dingari* incidents which can be categorized as immoral in this sense, and how each situation is resolved, along with comments.

I have categorized what can be distinguished as basic crimes—that is, those considered to be immoral. In the first bracket (A), theft, no direct punishment is involved except in Myth-Section IV, 5-8, 10-15, where all the *dingari* suffer as a result. The three cases under this heading concern theft of sacred objects, along with trickery used to obtain them. In real-life situations, sacred objects are rarely stolen, and I have recorded no examples—except in the case of those removed

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by Europeans without the authority of the local custodians. If such objects had been stolen, the crime would have been regarded very seriously indeed—so much so that it could be conceived of as an irretrievable loss, likely to bring disaster to the group as a whole and not solely to the thief. To some extent, this situation is mirrored in the culminating results of Myth-Section V, 6, or more specifically of Myth-Section III, 6. What would happen is really open to conjecture.

In C, seduction, three incidents involve four women in incestuous unions; two other cases involve three women, and in their case incest is not relevant. In ordinary life there is strong condemnation of incestuous intercourse; and in the myth, death is the result in two cases, with death and/or injury of the females concerned. What the myth is saying is that only a man with abnormal genitalia (and, by implication, an abnormal sexual appetite) could contemplate entering into an incestuous relationship, and that if he does put his desire into action only tragedy can ensue. In the third case, even though the culprit escapes the avenging Mangamanga, he suffers the temporary loss of his penis and testes. In the other two cases, where the women do not stand in a sexually tabu relationship to their seducer, he escapes punishment: but it is shown that such promiscuous behaviour can bring disaster—injury and death for two women, and the murder of the other's husband.

In the cases of murder (D), and this is also relevant to C, the situations differ, and seem to be dependent on circumstances which in, for example, IV, 2, are not entirely clear. In V, 4, is the example of intended cannibalism. (Cases of cannibalism are mentioned in Desert myths and stories, but I have recorded no actual incidents—except one to the effect that east from Jabuna, two starving Europeans on camels shot two Aborigines for this purpose, cut up their flesh, cooked and ate some, and salted down the rest. This enabled them to return to Hall's Creek. It is said that this happened some years ago, when a man now living at Balgo met them on the way into Hall's Creek and was able to see what they were carrying.) In the example noted in V, 4, the breaking of the bullroarer could be interpreted as portending disaster as a direct result of this killing, as indeed was borne out in the concatenation of events leading to the immolation of all those involved. The violation of the sacred objects by women (who were killed in consequence) follows sequentially in building up the theme of disaster. In Myth-Section VI, although a mass killing occurs, and one old man is killed as a result, it is really the breaking of the religious law which could be said to bring about the succession of further immoral acts. The youths are in fact enticed down from the Mother by the food prepared by the women: they have not completed their *dingari* initiation

(to p. 243)

TABLE 2
DINGARI INCIDENTS SEEN IN MORAL-IMMORAL TERMS

Reference	Immoral Acts	Resolution	Comment
A. <i>Theft</i> II, 2-5	Djalaburu steals ritual power from Ganabuda women	men take over the ritual position of women	women are compensated for the theft, and the situation explained to them
III, 1-3	Djangimanda steals sacred boards	escapes without his followers finding him	is aided by power of <i>darugu</i>
IV, 5-8, 10-15	Djilgamada steals <i>darugu</i> and aggravates the situation by teasing the <i>dingari</i>	is followed by <i>dingari</i> ; eventually aided by Ganu men, who weaken Djilgamada, leaving him to be dealt with by the <i>dingari</i> , who spear him	evades final punishment by disappearing into a rockhole and causing all the <i>dingari</i> to fall in too
B. <i>Quarrel</i> III, 6	<i>dingari</i> quarrel over <i>darugu</i>	Guninga deliberately breaks one	breaking the <i>darugu</i> resolves the quarrel. In real life, such an act would be tantamount to attempted destruction of spirit being and subject to supernatural sanctions. Note, however, that <i>darugu</i> are used for a variety of mundane purposes in the myth, including use as firewood or as a torch, as a spear in hunting, etc.

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C. <i>Seduction</i> I, 2	Gadadjilga seduces a tabued relative	punished by death: abnormally long penis cut	specifically stated that Gadadjilga's action was wrong; but statement modified by saying he was too old for the women, implying he would probably have been acceptable if younger. Although the act is regarded as incestuous, no reference is made in the myth to the girl's death
VI, 8, 9	Gaanga seduces two women, one a tabued relative and the other a classificatory mother's mother	Gaanga is killed by the Ganabuda; the two girls die through injury from Gaanga's abnormally long penis	punishment of Gaanga and death of the girls because this was regarded as incestuous
VIII, 4-6	Gadadjilga (see I, 2) seduces two women	the two women die, injured by his abnormally long penis	Gadadjilga disappears with the Ganabuda; no punishment; no reference to incest
IX, 1-4	Dangdjara copulates with tabued mother-in-law, lives with her and has a son	implied punishment: loses his testes and penis, but these eventually return to him	the Mangamanga follow him; he teases them but finally escapes. This case was regarded as incestuous
C, D. <i>Seduction and Murder</i> X	Wirangula kills husband of woman he seduces	woman afterward escapes	no actual punishment implied; relationship between Wirangula and the female is not one of avoidance
D. <i>Murder</i> IV, 2	<i>dingari</i> kill two old men who possess a number of <i>darugu</i>	no reasons given	—
V, 4	<i>dingari</i> kill Buradjidin	in hunger; but flesh inedible	an attempted resolution—but unsuccessful

Reference	Immoral Acts	Resolution	Comment
D. <i>Murder</i> (cont.) V, 12	women supposedly see <i>darrigu</i> and are killed	no further action involved	normally regarded as punishment for women who see secret-sacred emblems, etc., guarded by men
VI, 6, 7	old men kill by fire youths who have copulated with Ganabuda women	one old man escapes; the other is followed and killed	youths are punished for associating with females before their <i>dingari</i> initiation is completed. An old man is killed by women who are angry at being deprived of the young men and so came to hate all men
VI, 11	a third Gaanga is killed, beaten to death with <i>darrigu</i>	—	explanation as above: the women have become embittered after losing the young men
E. <i>Other</i> V, 6	bullroarer broken	—	sorrow expressed; symbolic prediction of final disaster which befalls the <i>dingari</i>
V, 20	death of two young men; immolation of the rest	—	disaster and tragedy have dogged this particular <i>dingari</i> group. Hunger and thirst lead to the killing of Buradjidin; a bullroarer is broken; the women see the sacred <i>darrigu</i> accidentally in their search for water. In one sense, the <i>dingari</i> are punished for this act. But it also underlines the influence of the environment on the moral life of man
VI, 10	a second Gaanga is attacked	escapes attentions of women	—

and are therefore too young to marry or to have sexual intercourse—they must therefore be punished. Novices are warned at initiation to beware of women, not to be promiscuous: ritual should, in the myth, have strengthened them to withstand the overtures of the women, who in turn are punished in their own way—by the lustful Gaanga, and through becoming embittered against all men.

CONCLUSION

It is clear that in these mythic examples, in the majority of cases, wrong action can lead to punishment, disaster and tragedy. In other words, the mythical characters are subject to more or less the same processes of social control as those relevant to contemporary human beings; they are not to be regarded as being entirely beyond the law, although they are endowed with power which makes them more than human in particular circumstances. This is not the place to discuss their superhuman qualities. What is striking, however, is their close approximation to man. This cannot be said of all mythic characters in Aboriginal Australia. But in the Western Desert the physical, social and cultural environments of mythic man virtually coincide with those relevant to traditional and present-day non-acculturated Aboriginal man, and this is true too as far as their psychological make-up is concerned. Perhaps I should make this clearer. I have already said that myth is more than a direct statement. It is palpably false to assume that in myth we have a view of the world as it is, or as it was. I have already demonstrated that the *dingari* reveals a concern with basic issues of social living mostly couched, symbolically, in terms of relations between the sexes and relations between the sacred and the non-sacred, between materialism and spirituality. Further, there is underlined a preoccupation with the vicissitudes of Desert living, an endeavour to cope with an essentially unpredictable environment, *by making it ritually predictable*.

At the same time, myth is a reflection of reality, and in this context the reflection is not over-distorted. It is as if Desert life were encapsulated in the myth. What it contains is a guide for action. Shorn of their magical and superhuman qualities, the mythic beings could well be taken for human characters. It is possible to argue, on the basis of Aboriginal epistemology, that they are no more or no less than human, and the same can be said of man. Because myths of this kind, like their ritual expressions, belong to the Dreaming, they are part of the sacred-past-in-the-present. Moreover, a direct relationship exists between Aboriginal man and the mythic characters who are manifested through contemporary man by virtue of conception and cult 'totemism' (see R. M. Berndt 1969, n.d. *i, ii*). An indestructible essence or life force

VI, 10 a second Gaanga is attacked

escapes attentions of women

VI, 10

continues, it is believed, uninterruptedly from the beginning of time, and is present today in two ways—one, in the continued spiritual existence of the mythic beings at specific sites or elsewhere, and in their animal, bird, etc. guise through the natural species, for instance, or in certain natural phenomena; and, two, in man himself, each person being affiliated with a particular Dreaming spirit. 'Affiliation' is the wrong word here, because it is, rather, that each individual is a contemporary representation of the relevant spirit being. Man is identified through the myths, and identifies himself within them: indeed, his character as a person is derived from this source.

This means that the mythic spirits (like their human counterparts) have a direct concern in issues relevant to the welfare of man: and this means, too, in moral issues. The religious system of the *dingari* is also a system of morality, and this is one of its primary functions. This is not conceived of in terms of divine punishment for the wrongdoer, nor is there stipulation of sin where 'offences against ethical rules cause the displeasure of supernatural beings' (C. von Fürer-Haimendorf). Rather, the conception of sin is irrelevant in this context: supernatural sanctions may be imposed, aided by human agents, only where there are specific ritual infringements. The interest of the mythic beings is not, however, limited to this. What we have is a statement of the total life situation, in which these mythic characters demonstrate by their own actions that there is both good and bad within it; that they are part of the inevitable and irreversible framework of existence, and that wrongdoing will almost certainly precipitate its own disastrous results. That they themselves, as mythic beings, as supernatural creatures, were not exempt from these conditions and did in fact suffer as a result of wrong action, is amply borne out in the *dingari*. As Stanner has remarked (1965:218), '. . . myths contain much of the "human-all-too-human" character of man'; and from an Aboriginal point of view it is unreasonable to expect the personality of man and that of his spirits to diverge appreciably.

In this respect, then, we perceive a pattern laid down in the Dreaming, by spirit beings, for men to follow; a series of incidents in which they themselves are actors, as are men; a range of possibilities from which Aboriginal man may select, according to circumstances, in due (but not necessarily full) awareness of what that choice will involve. I would not say, however, that this is consciously carried out: people do not pause to reason out the implications of their actions, any more than did the spirit beings themselves. Nevertheless, the *dingari* system as a pattern of living is an accepted part of their ideology, an ideology embracing both that which is conceived of as being good and that which is conceived of as being bad—in the recognition that

reality is a mixture of both, that there is no morality without immorality. In fact, it is not the good which is emphasized in the *dingari*, but the evil. The good is accepted—it is the norm or custom, if one wishes to use such words: it requires no specific highlighting and is taken for granted. On the other hand, evil does require particular attention to be paid to it. It is true that, as I have said, it is a necessary condition of social and physical living: this is not denied. But it is also true that it must be controlled. Wrong actions not only make those that are good more desirable; they sharpen realization of inherent dangers. As we have seen, the continuum of the moral-immoral does not concern only human social relations: it also has a much wider relevance in Aboriginal terms. Living so close to nature means inevitably that there are times of plenty and times of hunger: and these last may be times of tragedy and disaster. The spirits themselves were in many cases creative, they were possessed of superhuman powers, they wielded the water-producing *darugu*, they were responsible for the increase of the natural species, among other things—but they were also vulnerable. How much more so is man? And this is one lesson the myth purports to teach.

NOTES

1. This paper was originally presented at the VIIIth International Congress of Anthropological and Ethnological Sciences held in Japan in September 1968, in a symposium on 'Religion and Morality' organized by Professor C. von Fürer-Haimendorf of the University of London.

2. Fieldwork in this region was carried out in 1958 and 1960 at the old Balgo Hills settlement, in 1962 at Hall's Creek, and in 1969 at the new Balgo (Ngarili) settlement and at Hall's Creek. During this last period, also, full song cycles of the *dingari* were obtained, but this material is not used in this contribution. Professor Helmut Petri of the University of Cologne has been studying the *dingari* complex from the perspective of La Grange mission station near Broome, where he has carried out fieldwork. See Petri, in Nevermann, Worms and Petri 1968, where further references are provided concerning his work. In this study I am not making cross-references to his work, and am referring only selectively to others. R. Tonkinson, too, has material on the *dingari* from the Jigalong area (see Tonkinson 1966), as has Dr R. A. Gould for the Warburton Range area (1966). I have also collected *dingari* data from the Warburtons in 1957, and at Birrindudu in 1944-45.

3. The bulk of this material is retained for detailed treatment.

4. The word *darugu* can be translated generally as meaning secret-sacred, set-apart, tabu, or dangerous and is used in a religious sense for any thing or any person within that context. In this paper it usually refers to sacred objects, particularly incised wooden boards of varying size—some as long as 12 feet, some as small as 1-2 inches. There are different categories of boards within this general heading, each with specific names.

5. I am not discussing in this context the Aboriginal equivalents of these words which are usually translated as 'good' or 'not good' (or bad). In one sense, I follow

Durkheim (1949:398) when he says, 'Everything which is a source of solidarity is moral, everything which forces man to take account of other men is moral, everything which forces him to regulate his conduct through something other than the striving of his ego is moral . . . [This] . . . consists in a state of dependence.' What Durkheim is saying is that morality is based on interpersonal and intergroup interaction in terms of reciprocity and co-operation, and it is this which is expressed in the diagram to this paper. To spell this out: co-operation and interaction are essential in the domestic and ritual spheres, and in all aspects relevant to maintaining the social order in terms of obtaining food and ensuring, by spiritual intervention, that its supply is continued. This is a *three-sided* discourse between man-man, man-god, man-natural environment (natural species), in which interaction between the three is considered paramount. Thus:

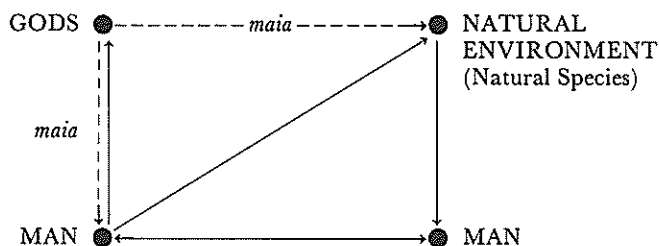


Fig. 2

Interaction is between gods and man, gods and environment (through species) via *maia* (power). The social world is expanded to include this three-dimensional world.

However, this could well be put in Radcliffe-Brown's terms (1952:166) when he says: 'The cosmos is ruled by law.' In other words, a pattern is involved. Or, again, 'For him [the Aboriginal] men and women ought to observe the rules of behaviour that were fixed for all time by the events of the World Dawn [that is, Dreaming], and similarly the rain ought to fall in its proper season, plants should grow and produce fruit or seed, and animals should bear young. *But there are irregularities in human society and in nature.*' (Italics mine.) The point I am making here is one that Radcliffe-Brown did not follow up. It is the 'breaking down' of the three-dimensional interaction that brings about an immoral state. To take this further: it is the rupture in social relations which is categorized as being immoral, and social relations are three-fold—existing between man and man; between man and his deities; between man and his environment and that which is within it and is directly relevant to his well-being.

The 'irregularities in human society and in nature' constitute part of the total system and are written into it as part of the condition of social living. A total ethical system, within the context of the Aboriginal society reviewed here, embraces what is regarded as both moral and immoral, and these are seen in *social* terms.

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