

THE AUSTRALIAN ABORIGINAL 'DREAMTIME'

**(Its History, Cosmogogenesis Cosmology
and Ontology)**

by

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DEDICATION

To Mrs Valerie Dean and Mr Clifford Dean
without who this would not have been possible.

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PROLOGUE

"Amidst all the bustle 'tis not reason, which carries the prize, but eloquence; and no man needs ever despair of gaining proselytes to the most extravagant hypothesis, who has art enough to represent it in any favourable colours."

At present the only information on the Aboriginal 'dreamtime' is interspersed throughout anthropological literature. This information ranges from being adequate, to being almost useless, from being detailed, to being vague. In some cases two ethnologies will contradict one another in important detail, in other cases anthropologists will draw conclusions where the Aborigines themselves give contradictory evidence. This thesis then is an attempt to bring the available information together in one work. The synthesizing of material highlights the fact that there is a wide range of variation amongst Aboriginal communities and anthropologists, in the way they conceptualise the 'dreamtime'. By not realising this variation, a false universality has been applied to the 'dreamtime', in regard to the finer metaphysical points; thus creating an order, or unity, [as if a consensus of opinion is held] about the 'dreamtime' within Aboriginal Australia.

In looking at the ethnologies, which deal with the 'dreamtime', it is apparent that the conclusions anthropologists draw are in fact dependent upon the questions asked, and how the anthropologist understands the answers. In most cases a different set of questions need to be asked in order to get a clearer picture of the 'dreamtime', and a different set of presuppositions need to be held in order to filter the answer. In some cases the Aboriginal cultures have disappeared, in others they have become Westernised. In both cases we may never know what they believed about the 'dreamtime'.

In regard to the answers given to the questions asked by certain anthropologists, certain consequences or conclusions can be drawn about 'Dreamtime' metaphysics when looking at the ethnographies of these anthropologists: R. and C. Berndt [Ooldea], R. Berndt [Wuradjeri, Murngin], D. Bell [Warrabri], E. Kolig [Fitzroy Aborigines], J. Meggitt [Wailbiri], C. Mountford [Tiwi], C. Mountford and R. Tonkinson [Jigalong], W.E.H. Stanner [Murinbata].

Thus, in these ethnographies a number of variations on 'Dreamtime' ontology appear. For some Aboriginal communities the 'Dreamtime' is: 1) a past reality [Tiwi, Wuradjeri, Jigalong], 2) at the same time a past reality and a concurrent reality with the present reality [Mardudjara, Murngin, Wailbiri, Ooldea, Warrabri]. For those communities where the 'Dreamtime' is at the same time a past reality and a concurrent reality with the present these are two variations: a) the concurrent reality is parallel with the present [Murngin, Wailbiri, Ooldea, Warrabri]. b) the concurrent reality is

within the present reality [Murinbata, Mardudjara]. These variations on 'Dreamtime' metaphysics makes the posing of universalistic claims about 'Dreamtime' metaphysics tenuous.

The inadequacy of certain universalistic claims in regard to 'Dreamtime' metaphysics is seen with regard to some of A.P. Elkin's claims. Elkin creates a false universality when he claims the 'Dreamtime' is "...the condition or ground of existence... in which the past ['Dreamtime'] underlies and is within the present"². This claim by Elkin [it will be seen (ch.4)] is only valid for the Murinbata and perhaps the Mardudjara, but not for the Jigalong, Fitzroy Aborigines, Wuradjeri, Murngin, Warrabri, Wailbiri, Ooldea and Tiwi, because for these groups the 'Dreamtime' is parallel to the present reality and not within it.

The above discussion points out: 1) the variability and complexity of 'Dreamtime' metaphysics and 2) the danger of for all-encompassing universalistic theories to explain 'Dreamtime' metaphysics. The demonstration of this complexity and variability of 'Dreamtime' metaphysics, within this thesis, is an attempt to prove W.E.H. Stanner's claim that the 'Dreamtime' is "...much more complex philosophically than we have so far realised."³

FOOTNOTES

FOOTNOTES

- 1 D. Hume A Treatise of Human Nature,
Penguin, 1985, p.41
- 2 A.P. Elkin 'Elements of Australian Aboriginal
Philosophy'
Oceania, Volume XI, no.2, 1969, p.93
- 3 W.E.H. Stanner 'Religion, Totemism and Symbolism',
in M. Charlesworth (ed), Religion in Aboriginal
Australia,
University of Queensland Press, 1989, p.146

¹ D. Hume A Treatise of Human Nature,
Penguin, 1985, p.41

² A.P. Elkin 'Elements of Australian Aboriginal
Philosophy'
Oceania, Volume XI, no.2, 1969, p.93

³ W.E.H. Stanner 'Religion, Totemism and Symbolism',
in M. Charlesworth (ed), Religion in Aboriginal
Australia,
University of Queensland Press, 1989, p.146

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

'[Religion] penetrates all facets of Aboriginal life and has little to fear from distinctions which are both abstract and disunitive and which we, with our philosophical education, often make.'¹

RELIGION

Throughout Aboriginal Australia before European contact there was no one religion. However, though there were different religions, certain similarities can be seen between them. Although there are certain apparent exceptions, in Victoria, New South Wales and Queensland, (i.e. the spirit beings Baiame, Bunjil, Darumulun and Nurelli)² the Aborigines, as Stanner said, have "no gods just or unjust to adjudicate the world"³. What the Aborigines have are ancestral spirits; spirits which are either human, flora or fauna [or hybrids of] in form; and which do not have personal relationships with the Aborigines, with the exception of "clever men"⁴. There is no prayer or priesthood in Aboriginal society. There is no sharp distinction between the sacred and the secular, since the spirit world and human world interpenetrate. All aspects of the Aboriginal environment are affected by the power of the spirits. The very land itself is a kind of 'church'; it is a kind of theophany where the land contains the essence of the Ancestors, and is the work of the Ancestors. The whole land is a religious sanctuary, with special regions throughout it which have acquired special sacred status. The Aborigines regard themselves, whether as individuals, groups, categories, sexes or genetic stock, to be in mystical communion, via the sacred places, with certain totemic beings. In this regard the whole life of the Aborigine is a 'religious experience'. They are intimately connected with their whole environment which is pervaded by the supernatural, the result being that their experience of the whole environment is charged with numinous ambience.

For the Aborigines the world was not created ex nihilo. Rather, the pre-existing ancestral spirits transformed a pre-existing world of things and conditions into the structures they are today. These structures are fixed once-and-for-all. They are immutable. This primordial period, called the 'Dreamtime', was the very foundation of life itself. In this period the ways of life, the law, the moral code were set down to be followed eternally. Because the structures that were laid down in the 'Dreamtime' are immutable, the 'Dreamtime' is "eternal"; the structures continue from the past to the present and into the future, i.e.: "the eternal 'Dreamtime'". The 'Dreamtime' the period of fashioning, organising and moulding an unordered world is the fount of the whole Aboriginal world view.

PRECEDENCE

The term 'Dreamtime' is an English term coined about 1896 by F. Gillen, and used by B. Spencer and F. Gillen in their work after 1899 to refer to the primordial period in the religious mythologies of the Northern Arunta (Ch(2)). Mulvaney and Calaby note, in their work So Much That is New, that in 1913 Malinowski said of Spencer and Gillen that "since the publication of their first volume, half of the total production in anthropological theory has been based upon their work, and nine-tenths affected or modified by it"⁵. Thus it is not surprising that when the term 'Dreamtime' first appeared in anthropological literature after 1932, the anthropologists who used the term also cite from the work of Spencer and Gillen (Ch.2).

Anthropologically, the term 'Dreamtime' is now used to refer to the theory of cosmogenesis of the Australian Aborigines. It should be noted that some Aboriginal communities have their own term to refer to this primordial period: alchera (Northern Arunta), meri (Dieri), djugur (Aluridja), bugari (Karadjeri), Ungud, lalun (Ungaringin) etc. Stanner in his 1953 article, The Dreaming, points out that "comparable terms from other tribes are often untranslatable"⁶. Many other groups on the other hand e.g. the Koko Daa, Oikand etc., apart from a special adjectival suffix, have no term for this period (Ch.3).

The term 'Dreamtime' arose because amongst the Northern Arunta, where the original coining was done, the word for dream and the creative period [alchera] are the same (Ch.2). Similarly, amongst the Karadjeri, Aluridja, Dieri, Ungaringin⁷ etc. the same word is used for dream and the primordial period. On the other hand amongst the Murinbata - speakers of the Daly River region and the Yidin and Dyirbal of North Queensland, the words for dream and the creative period are different⁸. Thus, N. Williams, in her book The Yolngu and Their Land, is incorrect when she states that "[as] far as I can determine, in the languages that have been sufficiently studied to allow us to be sure, Aborigines use different and usually unrelated terms for the dreaming that occurs during sleep and the belief [known] as the 'Dreamtime' or the 'Dreaming'"⁹.

VARIATION

The primordial period or 'Dreamtime' may be universal to Aboriginal Australia, but the cosmogonies, cosmologies and metaphysics underlying the various Aboriginal interpretations (Ch.4) of this period vary through the

communities. As Stanner stated, "[though the 'dreamtime'] is the common, but not universal way of referring to the time of the founding drama ... subtle (and probably important) variation occurred in different regions ... [and] many qualitative differences may occur within the continent"¹⁰. In some areas the concept of the primordial period is, as Stanner stated, "much more complex philosophically than we have so far realised"¹¹. In others it is prosaic (Ch.4). Nonetheless, irrespective of their variations, a full understanding of the Aboriginal world view and way of life is, as Stanner¹² says, only possible after the doctrines relating to and about the 'Dreamtime' are fully studied and understood. Elkin noted, in his 1961 article The Yabuduruwa, that a "full understanding by us, however has yet to be reached, and only intensive philosophical research in selected tribes will give this"¹³. Though he said this in 1961, his claim "that research must be undertaken quickly"¹⁴, is still valid.

The acquiring of the finer details regarding Aboriginal ideas about the 'Dreamtime' is hindered by the inherent secrecy of Aboriginal communities. U. McConnel in her work with the Wik Munkan of Northern Queensland, in the 1930s, made an observation which is still valid and relevant today - namely that "there were grades of secrecy [in this society] which were only gradually revealed to initiates, the more secret aspects being reserved for a riper stage of maturity"¹⁵. A Kundgu man revealed to McConnel that at the age of sixty "he had not yet been admitted to the secret inner circle of the totemic hierarchy"¹⁶. D. Biernoff noted that if anyone who has special knowledge or status breaks the laws of the tribe, then they are killed immediately¹⁷. Of this secret knowledge, Biernoff noted that the knowledge which was revealed to the initiate became more dangerous to

those without adequate ritual protection, for it transformed his understanding of the universe often in contradictory ways as compared with the previous level of initiation¹⁸. The Australian Law Reform Commission states that "today the white enquirer will still find a curtain being drawn once questions touch on these matters [secret/sacred]"¹⁹

AUTHORITY

Despite Aboriginal reticence about the 'Dreamtime' and questions of metaphysical interest (Ch4.), some general conclusions can be drawn about the primordial period. The 'Dreamtime' takes us to the source of the Aboriginal world view; it is the source of their philosophy of life and the authority and exemplar of their morality. The 'Dreamtime' lays down the Aborigines' cosmology, cosmogony and ontology. As already noted, the whole of the Aborigines' social life, religion and spirituality are so intertwined and interconnected with the 'Dreamtime' that a knowledge of these cannot be understood apart from and through knowledge of the 'Dreamtime' itself. In terms of a sacred repository, the 'Dreamtime' for the Aborigines is equivalent to the Torah of the Jews, the Qur'an of the Muslims and New Testament of the Christians, the Veda of the Hindus and the Zend Avesta of the Parsees. The 'Dreamtime' is the storehouse, the sacred authority for the whole of the Aborigines' world and behaviour.

If the 'Dreamtime' is like a book then the myths are like its scripture. C. Berndt noted that "myth was a storehouse of practical information, as well as precepts [they] covered all aspects of the local scene, from religious premises, ritual activities, and the nature and meaning of life, to ordinary matters"²⁰. What happened in

the dreamtime became the master plan for ritual, social behaviour, morality and religious views. Hiatt claims this "largely obviated the need for chiefs or headmen"²¹. What happened in the dreamtime has a sacred quality; though in some cases the religious repertoire is altered in the main, it is never disputed or compromised. The 'Dreamtime' provides the basis for all human imperatives, the kinship system, native geographical categories, the utilization of land and the sacred nature of the land itself. In the 'Dreamtime' the cultural heroes and Ancestors lived, these sometimes made natural features, and instituted the immutable rites, customs, tribal laws and morality. In his 1948 edition of The Australian Aborigines Elkin noted that "to say a custom is ... 'dreamtime' is to give it a final and unimpeachable authority"²².

CONFUSION

Currently, anthropologists use the term 'Dreamtime' and 'Dreaming' synonymously. Elkin noted, "that from 1927 onwards the Aborigines of the Southern, Central, North-Western and Northern regions of Australia referred to the past times, and everything associated with them, as their Dreaming"²³. Stanner likewise said that he prefers to call the 'Dreamtime' what many Aborigines now call in English 'The Dreaming' or just 'Dreaming'²⁴. However, it should be noted that 'Dreaming' refers to events that took place in the 'Dreamtime' and in this regard the 'Dreaming' is a separate element of the 'Dreamtime'. Elkin said the same in his 1932 article, The Secret Life of the Australian Aborigines, where he stated "a man's 'dreaming' is his share of the secret myths and rites of the historical traditions, of the old or eternal 'Dreamtime'"²⁵.

As I have already noted, reading such works as Elkin's Elements of Australian Aboriginal Philosophy²⁶ and Stanner's The Dreaming²⁷ (Ch.4) a false universality is created with regard to Aboriginal metaphysical ideas about the 'Dreamtime'. Throughout Aboriginal Australia, with regard to what took place in the 'Dreamtime', the time span of the primordial period and metaphysical concerns varied (Ch3,4). Unless one is cognisant of these variations, confusion will result in trying to apply the same ideas regarding the 'Dreamtime' throughout Aboriginal Australia. Some general conclusions can be made but when we come to examine the finer points of the 'Dreamtime', a large variation is seen. These variations occur between Aboriginal communities, and by the nature of the material itself, variations occur within communities (Ch.3). When these variations are taken into account it can then be seen that a false consensus and order has been given to ideas that are in fact often meaningless - full of contradictions and anomalies (Ch.4,5).

FOOTNOTES

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- ¹ E. A. Worms 'Religion' in Australian Aboriginal Studies, Oxford University Press, 1903, p.23
- ² A. W. Howitt The Native Tribes of South-East Australia, MacMillan, 1904, p.500
- ³ W. Stanner (ed) 'The Dreaming' in White Man Got No Dreaming, A.N.U Press, 1979, p.31
- ⁴ R. Berndt 'Wuradjeri Magic and Clever Men', Oceania, Volume XVII, No. 4 , 1947, p.346
- ⁵ D. J. Mulvaney and J. H. Calaby, So Much That is New, University of Melbourne Press, 1985, pp.395-396
- ⁶ W. Stanner op.cit. p.23
- ⁷ A.P. Elkin The Australian Aborigine, Angus and Robertson, 1948, p.48
- ⁸ N. Williams The Yolngu and Their Land, Australian Institute of Aboriginal Studies, 1986, p.237
- ⁹ *ibid.* p.25
- ¹⁰ W. Stanner 'Religion, Totemism and Symbolism' in Religion in Aboriginal Australia M. Charlesworth (ed) University of Queensland Press, 1989, p.146
- ¹¹ W. Stanner op.cit. p.24
- ¹² W. Stanner op.cit. p.146
- ¹³ A.P. Elkin 'The Yabuduruwa' , Oceania, Vol 31, 1961, p.204
- ¹⁴ *ibid.* p.200
- ¹⁵ U. McConnel 'Totemic Hero-cults in Cape York Peninsula North Queensland', Oceania, Vol VI, No. 4, 1936, p.461
- ¹⁶ *ibid.* p.461
- ¹⁷ D. Biernoff 'The Dreamtime no more', Current Affairs Bulletin, Vol 51, No. 9, 1975, p.18
- ¹⁸ *ibid.* p.18
- ¹⁹ Australian Law Reform Commission: 'Traditional Aboriginal Society and its Law' , in W.H. Edwards (ed) Traditional Aboriginal Society, MacMillan, 1987, p.190

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- ²⁰ C. Berndt 'Sickness and Health in Western Arnhem Land:
A Traditional Perspective',
in J. Reid (ed) Body Land and Spirit,
University of Queensland Press, 1983, pp.122-123
- ²¹ L. Hiatt 'Aboriginal Political Life',
in W.A. Edwards (ed) Traditional Aboriginal Society,
MacMillan, 1987, p.176
- ²² A.P. Elkin The Australian Aborigines,
Angus and Robertson, 1948 p.202
- ²³ A.P. Elkin The Australian Aborigines,
Angus and Robertson, 1974 , 4 ed., p.210
- ²⁴ W.E.H Stanner 'The Dreaming' in White Man Got No
Dreaming,
A.N.U Press, 1979, p.31
- ²⁵ A.P. Elkin 'The Secret Life of the Australian
Aborigines'
in Oceania,
Vol III, No. 2. 1932, p.129
- ²⁶ A.P. Elkin 'Element of Australian Aboriginal
Philosophy'
in Oceania,
Vol X, No. 2, 1969, p.85-98
- ²⁷ W.E.H. Stanner op.cit. pp.23-40

1

CHAPTER TWO

THE HISTORY

'Since they [the adherents to Tylor and Frazer] have the self imposed task of procuring fresh evidence in support of their master's theories they observe with prejudiced eyes...Their eyes seemed to be screened in a way which prevents them from perceiving any fact not provided for in their catechism, and in relating what they do see, their preconceived interpretation can no longer be distinguished from the facts themselves.'¹

THE BEGINNING

The term 'Dreamtime', as a term referring to a past ancestral period, first appears in literature in the 1896 Report of the Work of the Horn Scientific Expedition to Central Australia. In this work Spencer, in retelling the Itirkawara myth regarding Chamber's Pillar outside Alice Springs, notes that Francis Gillen used the term 'Dreamtime' when referring to the Alcheringa. The Itirkawara myth, Spencer explains, refers to the Alcheringa "or as Mr Gillen appropriately renders it, dream times".² Mulvaney, in his 1989 work *Encounter in Place*, claims that Gillen was not the first to use the term 'Dreamtime' but that "precedence in its use belongs to a German missionary at Hermannsburg [today named Nataria]";³ a Lutheran mission 120 kilometers south west of Alice Springs, in the heartland of the Western Arunta.

In their 1904 work *The Northern Tribes of Central Australia* Spencer and Gillen use the term 'Dreamtime' for the Arunta, Kaitsh, and Unmatjera term 'alcheringa'.

"[Alcheringa is the] name applied by the Arunta, Kaitsh and Unmatjera tribes to the far past, or dreamtimes, in which their mythic ancestors lived. The word Alcheri means dream."⁴

In this work the term 'Dreamtime' does not appear anywhere within the text, but only in the glossary to the work. Fifteen years after Gillen's death in 1912 *The Arunta* was published in 1927 with joint Spencer and (posthumous) Gillen authorship. In that work Spencer forgets his 1896 remark regarding the coining of the term 'Dreamtime' and explains that the term 'Dreamtime' was arrived at after hearing the term Alchera mentioned in connection with the Engwuru ceremony. "The word Alchera [he says] was always, and only used in reference to past times... In the ordinary language of today Alchera is also used for 'dream'... As indicating a past period of very vague and it seemed to us "dreamy nature" we adopted to express as nearly as possible the meaning of the word alcheringa... the term dreamtime".⁵ In their 1899 work, *The Native Tribes of Central Australia*, Spencer and Gillen only refer to the Alcheringa as the name signifying "the far distant past with which

the earliest traditions of the tribe [Arunta] deal".⁶ It should be noted that the first occurrence of the term Alchera/Altjira is not in the works of Spencer and Gillen, but in the 1891 article *The Aborigines of the Upper and Middle Fink River etc.* by the Reverend Louis Schulze [as Spencer and Gillen note themselves].⁷ In this work Schulze claims that a depression is placed in a grave facing towards the Tamaru Altjira [Altjira camp] of the person's mother.⁸

In their book *The Arunta*, Spencer and Gillen noted that Alcheringa is made up of the word Alchera, and the genitive suffix 'ringa' which means 'of' or belonging to.⁹ Thus Alcheringa means of, or belonging to Alchera. Spencer and Gillen go on to say that "the term Altjiranga mitjina is equivalent to [their]...term Alcheringa ancestors".¹⁰ Geza Roheim in his work *The Eternal Ones of the Dream* notes that Altjiranga mitjina is made up of two words Altjirangu and mitjina. Mitjina means eternal, and Aljiranga is the word Altjira and the ablative suffix 'nga' meaning 'from'.¹¹ Thus Altjiranga mitjina means 'the eternal from Altjira'. Roheim translates it as the "eternal ones from the dream".¹² Spencer and Gillen make a blunder therefore, when they say "the term altiranga mitjina is evidently compounded of Altjiranga and mitjina...Altjiranga again is clearly compounded of Altjira or Altjera and the suffix ringa which means "of" or "belonging to";¹³ i.e. they say the suffix is 'ringa' when it is the ablative 'nga'. Thus, by equating a genitive compound [Alcheringa] and an ablative compound [Altjiranga] they appear to be making a grammatical mistake, thus creating a confusion.

Spencer and Gillen similarly create a confusion, if not a complete false impression, by translating Alcheringa as 'Dreamtime'. In *The Arunta* Spencer and Gillen assert "the word Alchera was always and only used in reference to past times during which the ancestors...wandered over the country".¹⁴ Thus even though, as they claim, Alchera means 'dream' in the ordinary language of the Arunta,¹⁵ it appears from their own assertion that the Alchera and Alcheringa [as used by the Aborigines in their Engwura ceremony] relates to the times of the ancestors and not to dream. Spencer and Gillen, in noting what Alchera means in the ordinary language of the Arunta, imply that there is a special language apart from ordinary language. On this point Spencer and Gillen do not

elaborate, but it would seem that when the Aborigines use the term Alchera and Alcheringa in regard to the Engwura ceremony, they are using it in a sense which is different from that it has in ordinary language. Now though Spencer and Gillen are reticent on this point of a special language, it would seem that they have made a double error; 1) they have made an error in translating Alcheringa as 'Dreamtime', since from their own assertion it was used only in regard to past times; 2) they have made an error in translating Alcheringa as 'Dreamtime', since Alcheringa means 'of' or 'belonging to' Alchera. Mulvaney and Calaby state that in regard to Spencer and Gillen did not speak the Aranda language fluently "nor did they understand the complexities of the Aranda language...[also] their knowledge of grammatical structure was poor, which proved a serious inhibition when interpreting belief systems".¹⁶

THE CONTROVERSY

Spencer and Gillen's translation of Alcheringa as 'Dreamtime' instigated a controversy with the missionary Pastor C. Strehlow who lived for decades amongst the Aranda; and who as Roheim noted, "was an authority on their language".¹⁷ In Strehlow and Leonhardi's work of 1907 *Die Aranda und Loritja-stämme in Zentral Australien*, Strehlow argued [according to Spencer and Gillen] "that no linguistic derivation can be found for the word Altjira and that Altcheri (Altjira) does not mean dream... A dream Strehlow says, is not Altjira, but al tireringa and Strehlow adds that the word alcheringa which according to Spencer and Gillen means 'Dreamtime' is obviously a corruption of altjireringa".¹⁸ According to Roheim, Strehlow argued in *Die Aranda und Loritja-stämme in Zentral Australien* that the Aborigines connect the concept altjira "to something that has no beginning, erina itja arbmanakala, him not made".¹⁹

Spencer and Gillen, though noting Strehlow's argument, still maintained that "there is evidently some very close connection between the word Altjira [alchera] and altjireringa 'to dream'".²⁰ They argued that it is evident that Strehlow himself realised this since in a letter written in 1901 [and quoted by Spencer and Gillen],²¹ Strehlow notes "in a remarkable way this word greatly resembles 'to dream' [altjirerama]. Verbs can be formed

in the present language from every substantive, adjective or word used adjectively by cutting off the ending ... and adding the word *erema* which means making ... To draw a conclusion from the rule given before *altjira* would signify 'dream'.²² Now though Spencer and Gillen take this derivation of Strehlow's to demonstrate his agreement with theirs in regard to the connection of 'dream' with the term *Alchera* and *Alcheringa*,²³ Strehlow goes on to argue in his letter that "to be sure, the Aranda do not draw this conclusion: for dream as an abstract they have no word".²⁴ It should be noted that, according to Pastor Strehlow, *altjira* means 'God', in which regard he states: "Yet it appears to follow from these words *altjira* [God] and *altjirerama* [to dream] that their God is more a dreamy Being to them although he possesses reality as has been said".²⁵

Roheim, in his 1945 work *The Eternal Ones of the Dream* agrees with Spencer and Gillen, in opposition to Pastor Strehlow, since he noted that, from the information he obtained in the field, "*Altira* = dream, *altjirerama* = to dream, *altjireringa* = dreaming".²⁶ Roheim goes on to say that "this is as near as [he] could get to Spencer and Gillen's *altjeringa*".²⁷ Roheim also states that, according to his Aboriginal interpreter Moses, *altjeringa* "must be a mistake for either *altjirerindja* or *altjiranga*".²⁸ This assertion as to the non-existence of the word *alcheringa* is in agreement with Strehlow's argument the "*alcheringa*...is obviously a corruption of *altjireringa*".²⁹ Roheim also agrees with Strehlow on a very important point which seems to undermine Spencer and Gillen's claim that *Alcheringa* refers to a past ancestral time. Strehlow maintains that of "a dreamtime as a period of time, moreover, the aborigines know nothing; the time is meant in which the *altjiranga mitjina* wandered on earth".³⁰ Roheim similarly notes: that "There was no name for any mythical period. The time when the ancestors wandered on earth was called *altjiranga nak ala*, i.e. "ancestor was," like *Ijuta* name i.e. "now is". Other expressions were noted as equivalents of *altjiranga nak ala*; these were *imanka naka*, "long time ago was," or *kutata nakala*, "eternally was".³¹ R and C Berndt in their 1946 review article [of Roheim's Book] *The Eternal Ones of the Dream*, criticised Roheim's title, *The Eternal Ones of the Dream* as being a too literal interpretation of the term "dreaming, dreamtime or eternal dreamtime".³² In their criticism of Roheim the Berndts would seem to be a little pedantic, since they have appeared to have missed Roheim's assertion that his translation of

altjiranga mitjina is based upon the explanations "of the old men [Aboriginal] Moses, Ranana and Jirramba".³³

Now the disagreements between Pastor Strehlow, and Spencer and Gillen may have resulted from the fact, as Elkin noted in his 1934 article *Cult-Totemism and Mythology in Northern South Australia*, that Spencer and Gillen's "information was obtained from a group of Northern Aranda, while Strehlow worked amongst the Western Aranda".³⁴ Of the Aranda Elkin stated that they were "a very large tribe inhabiting a great extent of territory and divided into at least four sub-tribes each with its own dialect, pride, and even differences in customs and belief".³⁵ Thus Strehlow, and Spencer and Gillen could equally be right. This has the consequence that the Northern Aranda have different beliefs regarding the ancestral period from the Western Aranda.

THE DISSEMINATION

With the publication of the Report of the Work of the Horn Scientific Expedition to Central Australia it took some time for the term 'Dreamtime' to disseminate into the world literature. As we have seen, it appears in Spencer and Gillen's 1904 work *The Northern Tribes of Central Australia*, and the 1907 work of Strehlow and Leonhardis, *Die Aranda and Loritja-stämme in Zentral Australien*. Lucien Levi-Bruhl seems to be the first author, apart from Pastor Strehlow, Leonhardi, and Spencer and Gillen to use the term Alcheringa. In his 1910 work *How Natives Think* Levi-Bruhl notes that the ancestors "lived in the fabulous age of the Alcheringa".³⁶ In 1912 Emile Durkheim in *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life* refers to the Alcheringa as a period in which "fabulous beings are thought to have lived".³⁷ It should be noted that both authors use and quote from *The Northern Tribes of Central Australia*, but both seem to be unaware of the term 'Dreamtime'. The first time the term 'Dreamtime' appears, outside the 1904 work of Spencer and Gillen and the 1907 work of Pastor Strehlow and Leonhardi, is in the 1923 work *Some Myths and Legends of the Australian Aborigines*, by W. E. Thomas.³⁸ In this work Thomas refers to the primordial period as 'the dream time'; and it is of some interest to note that Thomas uses the term 'Dreamtime' as two separate words i.e. 'dream time'. This usage of Thomas

follows exactly F. Gillen's original usage in the 1896 Report of the Work of the Horn Expedition to Central Australia. A. W. Howitt, in a 1901 manuscript [not published until 1939], refers to the Muk-Kurnai of the Kurnai of Gippsland as resembling the alcheringa ancestors of the Arunta.³⁹ And though he does not use the term 'Dreamtime', Howitt says the Kurnai "...recognise a primitive time [Mura-mura]⁴⁰ before man existed when the earth was inhabited by beings, the prototypes of...the existing natives."⁴¹

It is interesting to note that neither Alcheringa nor 'Dreamtime' appears in the works of J. G. Frazer. Spencer and Gillen were followers of Frazer and in their introduction to *The Native Tribes of Central Australia* Spencer noted "I need hardly say that *The Golden Bough* has been most useful to me...I send [Gillen] up endless questions and things to find out...he reads no-one else's work so as to keep him quite unprejudiced in the ways of theories".⁴² Frazer said of *The Native Tribes of Central Australia* that it was "a document of priceless value for the understanding of the evolution of human thought and society".⁴³ Thus it is surprising that in Frazer's 1922 abridged edition of *The Golden Bough* there is no mention of Alcheringa or 'Dreamtime'.

After the publication of Spencer and Gillen's *The Arunta* in 1927 there is a gap of five years before the term 'Dreamtime' again appears in the work of another author. In 1932 R. Piddington published a paper in the journal *Oceania* entitled *Totemic System of the Karadjeri Tribe*. Piddington makes a reference to *The Arunta*,⁴⁴ and goes on to say that "the term bugari like the word alchera among the Arunda possesses several meanings".⁴⁵ The meanings of the term bugari Piddington noted are 'dream',⁴⁶ "the totem of the individual",⁴⁷ and "the distant past when the world was created".⁴⁸ This distant past period Piddington refers to as the Bugari times or 'dreamtimes'.⁴⁹

In the journal *Oceania* in 1932, A.P. Elkin, in his article *The Secret Life of the Australian Aborigines*, makes his first reference to the 'Dreamtime'. In his 1931 article in *Oceania*, called *The Social Organisation of South Australian Tribes*, Elkin refers to the Aluridja term djugur as signifying: 'the long past', 'an individual's totem' and 'a dream totem'.⁵⁰ In this article Elkin cites *The Arunta*, but makes no mention of 'Dreamtime'. It is only in his

1932 article that the term 'Dreamtime' appears. In this article he now translates djugur as 'Dreamtime'⁵¹ and again cites *The Arunta*. This late appearance of the term 'Dreamtime' is surprising since Elkin asserts in his 1976 edition of *The Australian Aborigines* that in his 'field work from 1927 onwards...whatever the term [for past mythic times] is was [called] "dreaming" [by the natives]'⁵²

In regard to the term 'Dreaming', R. Berndt in his 1974 work *Australian Aboriginal Religion* states: "It is not clear from the literature...when the term Dreaming was introduced for this particular concept (i.e. Alcheringa). Elkin (in 1933)⁵³ articulated it in his discussion of Karadjeri totemism".⁵⁴ On the point of the first occurrence of the term 'Dreaming' however, Elkin uses it in his *The Secret Life of Australian Aborigines*,⁵⁵ Elkin states in *The Australian Aborigines* that Spencer [in *The Arunta*] noted that when the Aborigines referred to the past times in English they associated everything "with them as their Dreaming".⁵⁶ This seems to contradict W. Stanner's assertion in his 1976 article, *Some Aspects of Aboriginal Religion*, that, "having written much about 'The Dreaming' and in a sense having invented it, that is I was the first to write about it with a capital T and a capital D".⁵⁷ Stanner's first use of the term 'Dreamtime' is in his 1933-34 article *The Daly River Tribes: A Report of Field Work in Northern Australia*.⁵⁸ Thus after 1932 the term 'Dreamtime' becomes a common term in anthropological literature, and appears time and time again up to the present.

THE PRESENT

At an uncertain date the term 'Dreaming' began to be used as a synonym for the term 'Dreamtime' or what some anthropologists call the "Eternal Dreamtime". Stanner in his 1953 article *The Dreaming* states that he prefers to "call it what many Aborigines call it in English: *The Dreaming* or just *Dreaming*".⁵⁹ Now though Stanner states this in his 1953 article, he changes, in his 1965 article, *Religion Totemism and Symbolism*, from using the term 'The Dreaming' to the term 'Dreamtime'.⁶⁰ R. Berndt, in his 1987 article *The Dreaming*, states that though the term 'Dreamtime' is still used, "it has become more common to refer to the Dreaming".⁶¹ In this regard Berndt observes that the term has a

wider context of meaning as it is "often taken to include what is called "totemism"".62 Charlesworth in the 1989 edition of *Religion in Aboriginal Australia* says "the terms "Dreaming", "The Dreaming", "Dreamtime" have now been appropriated by the Aborigines themselves".63

The appropriation of the term 'the Dreaming' by the Aborigines brings about the phenomenon of different uses, or different meanings associated with the term. Stanner's Aboriginal informant, in his article *The Dreaming*, states that "white man got no dreaming, him go nother way".64 In contradistinction, Noel Wallace's Pitjantjatjara informant argues in regard to the Christian religious tradition: "that is white fella dreaming".65 This variation in the meaning of the term 'Dreaming' also has its counterpart in academic discourse. The simple designation of the term 'Dreamtime' denoting the ancestral past time by Spencer and Gillen, has by 1989, with the coining of the term 'the Dreaming', brought about the fact that the 'Dreaming' - now an element of the 'Dreamtime' - itself comes to have a plethora of uses and meanings.

In consequence, the term 'Dreaming' is at the present time plurivocal. In the first place Charlesworth notes "it is a narrative mythical account of the foundation and shaping of the entire world by the ancestor heroes who are uncreated and eternal".66 Second it refers to the fact that the essence or spiritual power of the ancestors is contained within the land at certain sacred places, and in certain species of fauna and flora.67 Third, the 'Dreaming' refers to the law - the moral and social codes that are based upon the founding drama.68 Fourth, the dreaming is an Aboriginal's set of rights and duties due to his being a member of a clan etc.69 Fifth, according to Elkin the 'Dreaming' is an Aborigine's share of the myths and rituals of his culture (Ch.1). Sixth, Stanner said the dreaming, "was a kind of ordering principle or logos ... as well as other things."70

In passing, the attempt by Radcliffe-Brown, in 1945 to coin a new term in place of the 'Dreamtime' should be noted. Radcliff-Brown proposed to call the 'Dreamtime' the "'World Dawn', and because the totemic ancestors are mythical and not ancestors [in the strict sense]...they should be called Dawn Beings".71 Anthropology has chosen to ignore these

terms of Radcliffe-Brown, so that in consequence they do not appear outside of his article, though Stanner in 1933-34 called the 'Dreamtime' 'dawn of the world'.⁷²

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CHAPTER THREE

COSMOGONIES

'[Field workers] do not go into the field with empty heads and without prejudice. They take with them what has been implanted in them. They go because of what has been implanted in them.'¹

VARIATION

Though an understanding of the 'Dreamtime' is essential to understanding of Aboriginal culture, Mountford in 1958 noted that "little research has been carried out on the creation stories of the Australian aborigines; Spencer and Gillen (1899, p382)² giving the most detailed account."³ The situation at the present time is still as Mountford said. There are a few ethnologies which give an adequate account of the primordial period, or 'Dreamtime', but there are vast areas of Queensland, New South Wales, Victoria, North Australia, North Western Australia, Central Australia and Tasmania, where there is only limited or no information. The early ethnologies, as contained in the journal *Oceania*, give in the main only sketchy information. At the present the acquiring of information about the 'Dreamtime' may be difficult for two reasons: 1) the inherent secrecy of Aboriginal societies (Ch.2) 2) the situation could be as P. Worsley reported in 1955, for the Wanindiljaugwa, "[the primordial period] is not spoken of today, nor consciously visualised as such. It is merely said that the activities of the totemic creatures took place "a long time ago".⁴

In looking at the ethnologies available on the 'Dreamtime' a large variation in ideas is seen. Throughout Aboriginal Australia there is a large diversity in regard to what actually happened in the 'Dreamtime' or primordial period. Though there is a general theme about the nature of the 'Dreamtime' (Ch.4) there are probably as many variations on them as there are variations in religion. These variations range from the Golden Age of the Northern Aranda,⁵ to the non idealised age of the Murinbata,⁶ from the period-that-ended of the Tiwi⁷ to the coexisting parallel reality (with our reality) of the Wailbiri.⁸ The agents of the transformation and restructuring of the pre-existing environment could be almost every living thing in the case of the Northern Aranda,⁹ whereas, in the case of the communities of Arnhem Land¹⁰ and South East Australia,¹¹ it is a creator or creators. In some cases the 'Dreamtime' ancestors transformed themselves into animals, as with the Murinbata;¹² in other cases the male and female ancestors transformed themselves into plants and animals as on Groote Eylandt and Melville Island; in other cases still the great ancestors

remain human, as with the Wawalik and Djanggawul sisters of Arnhem Land.¹³ The activities of the ancestors are seen in the 'Dreamtime' cosmogonies and cosmologies.

THE TIWI

The 'Dreamtime', or primordial period of the Tiwi of Melville and Bathurst island is called palaneri.¹⁴ The palaneri was divided into three distinct phases. In the first phase the earth was a dead, silent place. There was no light and there were no birds to sing over the flat and featureless land; the earth was without hills, valleys or trees; there was nothing with any form. Into this dark silent place, for no given reason, an old blind woman called Mudungkala arose out of the ground carrying three infants; no-one knows where she came from or whence she went after she had finished her creation. Holding her children Mudungkala crawled on her knees and made Dundas Strait, the northern shores of Melville island. She moored the island creating the Johnson and Lethbridge bays. Mudungkala crawled over the island forming features as she moved. On reaching Murupianga, Mudungkala decreed that there should be vegetation and animals. After this she moved southward, out of knowledge of the Tiwi.¹⁵

In the second phase, "the two daughters of Mudungkala, Wuriupranala and Muriangkala and their brother Purukupali established themselves in the new land".¹⁶ Purukupali brought the Pititpituis - pre-existent children [about whose origin the Tiwi do not know] - so that his sisters could become mothers. From the children produced, the totemic ancestors came. In the third phase, the Palaneri came to an end. In this period Tukimbini, the grandson of Murupiangkala, ordered all the mythical people to establish themselves in totemic places and upon doing so they transformed themselves into inanimate objects and animals.¹⁷ However before the transformations, Tukimbini taught the mythical people "the rules of behaviour and the laws of marriage and tribal relationships they must always obey".¹⁸

The Tiwi world is inhabited by a number of spirits. These include the the Mupuditis, "the spirits of the dead whose homes are the warriors totemic localities";¹⁹ the Pititpituis, the

pre-existent spirit children who, in contradiction with the first phase, "have always existed, even in the early creation times".²⁰ It is interesting to note that Mountford did not hear of any ritual which commemorated the myths of the 'Dreamtime';²¹ this is in marked contrast to, say, the Murinbata²² and the Aborigines of Ooldea.²³ In contrast to the creation stories of Arnhem Land and those of Central Australia the creation stories of the Tiwi, according to Mountford, are not as elaborate.²⁴

ARNHEM LAND

In Arnhem Land there are two distinct and separate creation myths. In the North-West there is the myth of the Gunwinggu people which tells of the ancestral women Waramurungundu. In the North-East of Arnhem Land there are the myth cycles of the Wawilak sisters, and the Djanggawul sisters, of the Murngin (Yolngu)²⁵ people.

The Gunwinggu have no name for the transformation period, but use a suffix to denote what would be translated in English as 'Dreaming'.²⁶ There are no accounts of the creation of the sky, sea or earth; they were just there.²⁷ Most mythical entities are not ancestral. Some are founding ancestors of certain natural species, either through mythical transformation or some quality inherent in them".²⁸ All the mythical characters helped in one way or another to prepare the land, i.e. to form natural resources, rocks, vegetation, watercourses etc..²⁹ The founding ancestor of all the mythical characters was the woman Waramurungdju. It should be noted that there are various versions of her myth.³⁰ Waramurungdju came from the North-West, from over the sea. When she reached land she made children, she taught them to speak, and where to live.³¹ In one version she tried to circumcise her children, but failed.³² In another version she travelled from west to east, and in another still she was in the company of the man Wuragag who left her on Melville Island.³³ Waramurungdju's children were swallowed by the rainbow snake Ngalud. Ngalud eventually vomitted their bones up, which turned into rocks where their spirit still resides.³⁴ The Gunwinggu call these objects djang i.e. "an object which contains some power or essence from the mythological era".³⁵ These djang are dispersed through the land in the form of hills, ridges, creeks and river gorges.³⁶ The Gunwinggu believe in

spirit children which they see in dreams.³⁷ Upon death the Gunwinggu believe their spirits to live on independently.³⁸

In North-East Arnhem Land the Murngin refer to the primordial period as Bamun,³⁹ and the totemic spirits of this period as Wongar.⁴⁰ North-East Arnhem Land, in contrast to the North-West, has a multiplicity of ancestors inhabiting the pre-existent earth:⁴¹ Djanggawul, Walwilak, Laintjung, Banaitja etc. The most important of these ancestors were the Walwilak sisters and the Djanggawul sisters, the latter being the more important.⁴² Though the Walwilak sisters introduced rituals and named plants, they are not strictly creators, since they did not populate the land they passed through.⁴³ The Djanggawul sisters, on the other hand, were creators, and it should be noted their myth exists in several versions.⁴⁴ The sisters rowed a canoe which brought them to a land they called Nu-pu-ra.⁴⁵ They set out walking, and as they walked they realised they had no husbands. They then hit their buttocks with wood to make themselves pregnant, upon which they gave birth to the ancestors of the people of Arnhem Land.⁴⁶ They then travelled the land leaving animals, plants and special sites "which serve as reminders of the physical presence in the area".⁴⁷ After introducing certain rituals, the sisters went "westward along the coast into the setting sun".⁴⁸ The Murngin have two beliefs regarding the soul. The Murngin say that after death the soul goes to one of two islands depending upon which moiety one belongs to.⁴⁹ In the other account the soul goes back to the site "with which the deceased person was closely associated during life".⁵⁰ N. Williams disagrees with Warner in regard to the two souls of the Murngin. Williams states that individuals "are not thought to have two spirits".⁵¹ H. Morphy, on the other hand, agrees with Warner.⁵²

Now whereas the female ancestors of Arnhem Land came from over the sea and were human in form, the ancestors of the Northern Aranda were a multiplicity of mixed, human and non-human identities which emerged from out of the ground. There are two accounts of the cosmogony of the Northern Aranda, one by Spencer and Gillen and the other by T.G.H. Strehlow. Their accounts differ on many points from each other.

NORTHERN ARANDA

According to Spencer and Gillen the Aranda term Alcheringa refers to the primordial period.⁵³ Strehlow, on the other hand, does not give a term to this period.⁵⁴ Spencer and Gillen note that the Alcheringa traditions have different versions amongst other tribes of Central Australia.⁵⁵ The Alcheringa period is divided into four phases. In the first phase the land was covered with salt water and in the western sky there dwelt two beings called Ungambikula - meaning "out of nothing" or "self-existing".⁵⁶ From their dwelling place they could see the foetus looking Inapertwa creatures.⁵⁷ These creatures were partly formed humans. Coming down from the sky the Ungambikula moulded the Inapertwa into men and women.⁵⁸ These Inapertwa creatures were in reality "stages in the transformation of various animals and plants into human beings".⁵⁹ These newly made creatures then belonged to the totem of which they were a transformation.⁶⁰ Having performed their task the Ungambikula transformed themselves into the Amungu-quiniaquinia lizards.⁶¹ In this period the Ungambikula also performed circumcision on most, though not all, of the new men.⁶² In the second phase of the Alcheringa the Ullakupera, or little hawk men, carried on the work of transforming the Inapertwa creatures.⁶³ They introduced stone knives and the class names of the Northern Aranda.⁶⁴ In the third phase the wildcat or Achilpa men introduced the initiation ceremonies of circumcision, sub-incision and the Engwura ceremony.⁶⁵ In the fourth phase the marriage system was changed and the classes were further divided into two.⁶⁶ Eventually the ancestors died and went into the ground,⁶⁷ but not before they transformed the landscape by their wanderings.⁶⁸

Now, though Strehlow notes that "there is no common system of religion which is embraced by the[Aranda] tribe as a whole",⁶⁹ his account of the creation stories is in marked contrast with Spencer and Gillen's. Strehlow does not claim there are four phases to the primordial formation period, instead he speaks of it as if there is only one. All human beings are considered to have originated from the original ancestors. The ancestors are said to have originated beneath the surface of the earth.⁷⁰ The time of the ancestors,

Strehlow claims, was a Golden Age - an age when the ancestors did not battle with the environment, and everything was in plenty.⁷¹ "In the beginning everything was resting in perpetual darkness".⁷² Into this darkness the ancestors awoke and from their bodies came the totemic ancestors.⁷³ Every cell in the body of the ancestor was a living animal or human.⁷⁴ The ancestors altered the landscape with their wanderings and actions. Wherever the ancestor wandered he left a trail of the potential life-cells behind, "which are only waiting for an opportunity to assume some visible, corporeal form".⁷⁵ The Northern Aranda [and all the Aranda people according to Strehlow],⁷⁶ believe in the simultaneous presence of the ancestor at each of his wanderings.⁷⁷ In this regard the landscape is, and contains, the essence of the ancestors; everything has sacred meaning for the Aranda.⁷⁸

While Spencer and Gillen maintain that the Northern Aranda believe in reincarnation,⁷⁹ Strehlow maintains they do not.⁸⁰ Instead Strehlow argues that death is final and ends all.⁸¹ The spirit after death, the Northern Aranda believe, goes north to the sea "from whence they returned only once or twice to revisit their graves",⁸² after this no-one knew what happened to it.⁸³ Strehlow made the point though that there is an account from the Ibalintja that fits closely with that of Spencer and Gillen's account of the soul going to Emily Cape where their tjuruna bodies were.⁸⁴ It is curious that since Strehlow denies reincarnation he should argue in one part that "a man who is the reincarnation of a bandicoot ancestor regards himself as a bandicoot".⁸⁵ According to Strehlow a woman becomes pregnant when she crosses over a track or path left by the ancestors - "life atoms that have radiated from them on their wanderings, have entered into the body of a woman, craving for reincarnation".⁸⁶ Spencer and Gillen on the other hand speak of spirit children.⁸⁷

While there is ample information regarding 'Dreamtime' ideas, for Arnhem Land and Central Australia, the situation for South Eastern Australia is very different. As R. Berndt said in 1974, "a lot of [the mytho-ritual] is unsystematically recorded and not well-coordinated".⁸⁸

SOUTH-EASTERN AUSTRALIA

Many of the tribes of South-Eastern Australia believed in what Howitt called, the 'All Father'.⁸⁹ This being went by the names Bunjil, Mungan-ngaua, Nureili, Nurrundere, Baiaime, and Daramulun;⁹⁰ and as the Berndts say, "not enough is known about the mythology and ritual associated with them".⁹¹ Daramulun according to Howitt, lived on the earth with his mother Ngalalbal. The earth was like stone and bare and it extended far out where the sea is now. There were no women or men but only reptiles, birds and animals. Daramulun placed the trees on the earth. A thrush called Kalooka caused a great flood to cover the earth and only a few humans survived to reach Mount Dromedary. Daramulun then went up into the sky where he watches over men. Daramulun is credited with teaching humans their laws and when a man dies his spirit Tulugul goes up into the sky to meet Daramulun.⁹² Howitt, in his 1904 manuscript, *Folklore and Legends of Some Victorian Tribes*, noted that apart from these supernatural anthropomorphic beings there were the Muk-Kurnai or alcheringa ancestors of the Kurnai.⁹³ These Muk-Kurnai, according to Howitt, lived in a "... primitive time ... when the earth was inhabited by [these] beings ... [who] if they did not create man, at least perfected him from some unformed and scarcely human creatures."⁹⁴ G. Roheim argues in his *Australian Totemism* that only the Kurnai of South-Eastern Victoria and the Wathi-wathi, Weki-weki, Laitu-laitu and the Kermin of the extreme South-West Victoria had an alcheringa [Dreamtime] belief.⁹⁵ Berndt shows on the other hand that the Wuradjeri of N.S.W. had a belief similar to the "dreamtime" which they called the nekaibu.

Daramulun was associated with the Wuradjeri tribe, who believed that all totemic beings went to a place beyond the sky called Wantangangura.⁹⁶ In Wantangangura Daramulun "is seated in a kneeling position with a quartz crystal extending from each shoulder to the sky above".⁹⁷ The Wuradjeri referred to the ancestral times as maratal, or Kalwaki, but they also had a term for the primordial period which was before the martal; they referred to

this time as nekaibu - "the beginning of all".⁹⁸ In regard to the creation ideas of other tribes very little information is available, as Berndt said.

The All Father, according to Howitt, was found extended all over Victoria, New South Wales and up towards the tribes inhabiting the Darling River, and along the Queensland coast.⁹⁹ The anthropological material for Queensland "is scattered and limited".¹⁰⁰ The research done on North Queensland, apart from the work of U. McConnel, L. Sharp and D. Thomson in the 1930s, remained in 1974 [and still remains] unpublished.¹⁰¹

NORTHERN QUEENSLAND

L. Sharp does not give much detail on the cosmogonies of the hundred and eleven tribes he discusses in regard to Northern Queensland. For the Olkol type tribes, Sharp noted that they do not have any name for the ancestral times though some, like the Olkand and Koko Dava, have a special adjectival suffix to distinguish the ancestral from the present.¹⁰² The Ngatjan and related tribes, like the Wuradjeri, place an older time called naki between the ancestral and present period.¹⁰³ The Tjongandji use a prefix to distinguish people or totem relating to the ancestral time from the present.¹⁰⁴ According to the east-central tribes belonging to the Olkol group the ancestral time came to an end when the ancestors changed themselves into birds, animals and other entities.¹⁰⁵ The tribes belonging to the Yir-Yoront group, such as the Wik Munkan and Yir-Yoront, have no special name for the ancestral period.¹⁰⁶ For the Yir-Yoront the ancestral times came to a definite end where the old was replaced by the new.¹⁰⁷ Their ancestors created the topographical features of the country, they established sacred sites and introduced totems.¹⁰⁸ Though the primordial period finished the ancestors "continue their existence as spirits into the present and future to the special benefit of the clan".¹⁰⁹ The different clans trace their lineage back to the ancestral times.¹¹⁰ The Yir-Yoront individual is not considered to be a reincarnated ancestor, since they have no soul stuff in common.¹¹¹ The Yir-Yoront believe in spirit children, but when a person dies his soul has a distinct kind of existence, which is separate from that lived by the ancestral spirits.¹¹²

McConnel gives a Wiknatara account of the primordial period in her 1936 publication. In this account two male brothers came travelling out of the north-east, they wandered over the land inventing spears and creating the "tidal rivers and the sea".¹¹³ According to McConnel the heroes [ancestors] of the northern tribes seemed to be more humanly active, and wandered further than the heroes of the Wik Munkan.¹¹⁴ The Wik Munkan heroes, unlike the northern heroes, went down more "unexpectedly and suddenly into their respective "story-places", auwa".¹¹⁵ For the Wik Munkan the ancestors, Pulwaiga, went down into totemic centers, the auwa;¹¹⁶ the totemic heroes still live at the bottom of the auwa.¹¹⁷ These Pulwaiga were pre-existent,¹¹⁸ and they express the characteristics of the totem object to which they transformed themselves in the auwa.¹¹⁹ For the northern tribes, when the ancestors were about to leave the world they shared out their ground before they dispersed "to look for a place to settle".¹²⁰ Like the Pulwaiga they take on the characteristics of the objects they transformed into. McConnel does not mention spirit children, but noted that the spirit of the dead goes back to its auwa, where it is transformed into the relevant totem species; "in order to participate in the perpetuation of the species by mating and reproducing they performed the same function as the Pulwaiga".¹²¹ Sharp claimed that there are no reincarnation beliefs in the area,¹²² and "beliefs regarding spirit children and conception appear in varied forms throughout the area".¹²³

If the material regarding the 'Dreamtime' is limited for Northern Queensland, the material for North-West Australia is even more limited. R. Berndt, speaking of the North of Australia, notes that "modern anthropological material is sparse for some of these areas...".¹²⁴ W. Arndt, writing in 1965 noted that very little mythology has been reported for the Ord-Victoria region.¹²⁵ Elkins' 1933-34 'Studies in Australian Totemism' contains little information.¹²⁶

NORTH-WEST AUSTRALIA

P. Kaberry speaking of the Wolmeri, Lunga and Djapu tribes,¹²⁷ noted that they refer to the primordial period as narungani, which she says could be translated as 'Dreaming' in English.¹²⁸ In this age were the pre-existent totemic ancestors who had the qualities of

man and animal.¹²⁹ These ancestors had superhuman skills, and created the hills, rivers and left their footprints in solid slabs of rock.¹³⁰ In the narungani there also lived animals which possessed superhuman powers.¹³¹ The ancestors created the marriage laws, rainmaking corroborees, initiation and certain other customs.¹³² The ancestors also stood in a kinship relationship with each other and "had sub-section names bestowed on them by the rainbow serpent".¹³³

Once the ancestors completed their task they changed into reptiles, animals stones and birds.¹³⁴ The transformed stones are called gunin, and bear witness to the previous existence of the ancestor.¹³⁵ In this area there is a belief in spirit children. These children are thought to inhabit certain pools throughout the country, and that they were placed there by the rainbow serpent.¹³⁶ These spirit children are believed to incarnate themselves into birds, fish or other animals.¹³⁷ From these incarnations the child is implanted then into a woman whose husband has killed the animal.¹³⁸ Kaberry noted that ideas of the narungani "determine and control [the individual's] behaviour".¹³⁹ W. Arndt, in speaking of the myths of the Ord-Victoria regions, noted that many ancestors were snakes.¹⁴⁰ One such snake was Kunukban.¹⁴¹ Kunukban "came from an island called Puruyununkunian far out in the Timor Sea".¹⁴² Kunukban and Kurukura taught the laws to the people¹⁴³ and when they had finished Kunukban entered Beetaloo lagoon on Newcastle Creek, never to be seen again.¹⁴⁴ Arndt says that Kunukban belonged to the 'wild-time'.¹⁴⁵ In this time also lived the supreme spirit Ekarlarwun, a being who was greatly feared and who was considered an evil force.¹⁴⁶ Lesser spirits who were considered good remained on earth, others moved between the sky and earth.¹⁴⁷ The perpetual struggle between people and the spirits resulted in the "deeds of the human ancestors who now exist in the form of animals".¹⁴⁸

Just as the 'Dreamtime' cosmogonies have marked regional variations, so do the 'Dreamtime' cosmologies. These cosmologies are, in the main narratives, mainly in regard to the moral order. This order involves the marriage rules, the kinship system and the mundane details of secular behaviour and everyday activities.

COSMOLOGY

It is important to realise that the primordial period or 'Dreamtime' involved both cosmogonical and cosmological aspects. Stanner, writing in 1965 made the point that the 'Dreamtime' myths were "more cosmological than cosmogonical, that is they have less to do with the setting up of the world than...with the instituting of a moral-rational order".¹⁴⁹ Whether this view of Stanner is correct or not, is irrelevant for our present purpose. What is important is the fact that the moral order was laid down in the 'Dreamtime' and is immutable. The values and beliefs that ordered mundane or secular behaviour derived their source and authority from the 'Dreamtime'. The essence of the Aboriginal moral system was assent to and unquestioning acceptance of the 'Dreamtime' order which supported it. In many cases though, the guide to the correct behaviour was in the negative sense. This resulted from the fact that 'Dreamtime' ancestors were like the Greek and Celtic gods, in that, as Strehlow said of the Aranda ancestors, "most...indeed are utterly lacking in even the most elementary conceptions of morals and virtues".¹⁵⁰ The Berndts likewise noted that creation myths of the Gunwinggu are "rich in illustrations of bad and good behaviour".¹⁵¹ In the same way as Aboriginal cosmogonical views varied, so did their cosmologies. This can be seen in the way the Gunwinggu, Wailbiri and Murngin deal with incest.

Warner noted that amongst the Murngin that the incest rules are very rigid.¹⁵² This may be so, but the rigidity of the rules in part is not derived from the explicit behaviour of the main 'Dreamtime' ancestors. In the myths of the Wawilak and Djangawul sisters, these ancestors indulge in incestuous acts throughout their wanderings.¹⁵³ Apart from one allusion to a younger sister turning to stone, in the Djangawul myth, there is no direct punishment given to the sisters; in fact their acts remain unpunished. Meggitt said that in Arnhem Land myths, "incest is a prerogative of [the] dreaming people".¹⁵⁴ However, if there is no direct punishment given out to the Wawilak and Djangawul sisters, there is punishment inflicted upon humans for incest. The current form and existence of the men's

rituals resulted from the act of incest by the Wawilak sisters.¹⁵⁵ In the case of the Gunwinggu, the situation is different.

The Gunwinggu abhor incest as much as the Murngin, but in the case of the Gunwinggu ancestors any breach of the incest taboo results in direct punishment. In this way, as distinct from the Murngin, incest is an individual act, an act that merely injures the specific 'Dreamtime' ancestor; as the Berndts said, "wrong=-doing [is] followed by punishment".¹⁵⁶ "In almost every case where a narrative sequence is spelt out or implied the final climax follows...some action that is defined as wrong".¹⁵⁷ The Gunwinggu, when they listen to such tales, in the main find them entertaining and in some cases "also erotic stimulation".¹⁵⁸ The Wailbiri like the Gunwinggu, ancestors are directly punished for any breach of the incest taboo. Throughout the myths incest is considered wrong and any transgression is punished with direct consequences for the culprit.¹⁵⁹

Thus in the main the cosmologies differ in three important ways. In the case of the Murngin, incest behaviour is taught in the negative sense, since the ancestors are beyond the law. In the case of the Gunwinggu and Wailbiri incest is dealt with in the positive sense, since the ancestors are responsible under the law. In the case of the Wailbiri and Gunwinggu there are two conflicting responses to incest, for the Wailbiri this is abhorrence, for the Gunwinggu it is stimulation.

Hence Aboriginal 'Dreamtime' cosmogonies and cosmologies differ in marked ways from each other. There is no one set of ideas, though there is a common theme running through them (Ch.1). The different cosmogonies have marked consequences in regard to the metaphysical nature of the 'Dreamtime'. In consequence, different Aboriginal communities may have different 'ontological' perceptions of reality. These issues have direct bearing upon the mystical and psychic lives of the Aborigines.

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CHAPTER FOUR

METAPHYSICS

'In recent years, there is plenty of evidence of 'facts' being ignored or undervalued for a variety of reasons. Too many general statements are made without considering the empirical basis, and also, in the Australian situation, without taking account of the variability of traditional Aboriginal living.'¹

MYSTAGOGY

In Chapter Three we saw that the cosmogonies and cosmologies of the 'Dreamtime' are derived from myths. In a similar way the metaphysics of the 'Dreamtime' in the main are derived from myths, as well. Hiatt in *Australian Aboriginal Mythology* made the observation that the interpretation of Aboriginal myths revolves around "four separate, though not incompatible ideas about the nature of the subject matter"² These ideas are: 1) Myth as history - chronicling some real event.³ 2) Myth as charter - "they invest the social order with necessity by linking it causally to an apocryphal past"⁴ 4) Myth as dream - applying psychoanalytic theory.⁵ 3) Myth as ontology - explanation about the nature of reality.⁶ In dealing with the metaphysics of the 'Dreamtime' we view myth as ontology.

The idea that myths are an ontology is an idea put forward by M. Eliade in a series of publications since 1944.⁷ Eliade maintained that non-literate societies lacked metaphysical concepts and as such "[they] expressed their ideas about the nature of reality through myth, rite and symbol."⁸ Stanner, in his article *The Dreaming*, in a way agreed with Eliade. He claimed that when it comes to question the nature of reality, Aboriginal "tales are... a kind of answer to such questions so far as they have been asked at all."⁹ Whereas, according to Stanner, the European has a philosophy of reality, Aboriginal "...mythology, ritual and art..express an intuitive, visionary and poetic understanding of the same ultimates."¹⁰ Elkin likewise, in 1938¹¹ and again in 1974, claimed that Aboriginal philosophising is "expressed in rites, myths, conduct and in beliefs about themselves."¹² The idea that myths are a form of ontology is part of the intellectualist tradition in anthropology,¹³ which for the present purpose will be ignored.

In discussing Aboriginal metaphysics of the the 'Dreamtime', it is important not to make two mistakes: 1) To ascribe to the Aborigines ideas they do not hold 2) To make a logical system out of what is in fact contradictory; due to the 'prelogical' nature of Aboriginal

thought itself (Ch.5). In regard to point 2), Elkin himself made the point that the Aborigine "might even hold contradictory and incomplete theories, as we often do..."¹⁴ With regard to point: 1) If we assume that metaphysical ideas are logical when they are not, then we ascribe to the Aborigines ideas they do not hold. If on the other hand the metaphysical ideas are logical, but due to the inherent secrecy of Aboriginal society (Ch.1) they appear to be illogical, then we shall not know what the true ideas are and we will be left with the idea of a prelogical mentality which - "does not bind itself down...to avoiding contradictions."¹⁵

To simplify matters the metaphysical conclusions of individual ethnographers will be used, and from these it will be seen that there are contradictions and regional variations in regard to metaphysical ideas about the 'Dreamtime'. This chapter will not be concerned with variations within Aboriginal communities (Ch.5), but will instead concentrate upon variations between communities. Consequently, it will be seen that no one universal metaphysics about the 'Dreamtime' is held by all Aboriginal communities.

PRELOGICALITY

Elkin in *Elements of Australian Philosophy*¹⁶ and Stanner in *The Dreaming*¹⁷ ascribe to the Australian Aborigines, a philosophical frame of mind. Both authors deny that this philosophical frame of mind is 'prelogical';¹⁸ as Stanner said, "the presupposition about prelogicality, illogicality and non-rationality is merely absurd."¹⁹ In regard to philosophising Stanner contradicts himself in his article *Cosmos and Society Made Correlative*, when he says "there were no philosophers to stand aside and make life an object of contemplation"²⁰ Likewise with respect to the denial of prelogicality, Stanner noted in *The Design-Plan of a Riteless Myth* that myths [in the case of the Murinbata] were full of contradictions, ambiguities and paradoxes.²¹ (Ch.5). Elkin similarly commented upon the possibility of Aborigines holding partial and contradictory theories.²² In *The Australian Aborigine* he does not base his philosophical view upon the 'Aboriginal philosopher', but after stating "I shall take his place",²³ proceeds to give his ideas of the philosophy. However, regardless of what Elkin and Stanner say regarding prelogicality, certain Aboriginal communities do seem to have prelogical views regarding

the 'Dreamtime'. In Chapter Three we saw that for the Tiwi, Arunta, Wuradjeri etc., according to their ethnographers, the primordial period or 'Dreamtime' came to a definite end. On the other hand the Wailbiri, Mardudjara, the Aboriginal groups of Warrabiri in the Northern Territory, and the Aboriginal groups of Ooldea in Western Australia say the 'Dreamtime' is at the same time a past primordial period and a concurrent reality with the present. This is like saying that though 'Genesis' came to an end it also coexists concurrently with the present.

Meggitt, in *The Desert People*, noted that all Wailbiri/Wailbri totems originated in the 'Dreamtime'.²⁴ In this period these totemic creatures wandered over the Wailbiri territory leaving tracks and other such marks of their presence.²⁵ According to Meggitt these totemic beings "...either departed from the Wailbiri territory or vanished into the earth within it during the dreamtime..."²⁶ The wanderings of the totemic beings Meggitt claimed "...occurred in the long-past dreamtime."²⁷ Thus it is obvious that Meggitt is saying the 'Dreamtime' is a past event, an historical past preceding the present. But, though Meggitt claims this, he goes on to state that though the 'Dreamtime' is a past epoch it is also "...an epoch [which is also a category of existence] that not only preceded the historical past and present but also continues parallel with them."²⁸ The result of this parallel concurrent reality is that "...by performing the appropriate rituals and songs, living men can actually "become" these [totemic] beings for a short time and so participate briefly in the 'Dreamtime'."²⁹ Capell, in *The Wailbiri Through Their own Eyes*, likewise noted that for the Wailbiri the 'Dreamtime' was a concurrent reality. In describing the making of a medicine man, Capell noted that a snake came out of the 'Dreamtime' to find the doctor or medicine man: as the latter stated, "de snake come-along-to-him finds him, from the Dreaming ['Dreamtime'] a snake comes (and) finds the doctor."³⁰ In this regard, the 'Dreamtime' is at the same time a past reality that ended and a reality that still exists in parallel with the present.

Tonkinson in *The Mardudjara Aborigines* noted also that the Mardudjara hold similar ideas [to the Wailbiri] in regard to the 'Dreamtime' being at the same time a past reality, and a present reality. Tonkinson claimed that there is an "...absence of any special

beginning of the 'Dreamtime' era [as well] any definite end."³¹ According to Tonkinson certain spirits act as intermediaries "...between 'Dreamtime' and human orders."³² For the Aborigines, Tonkinson noted that the 'Dreamtime' "...still exists, as a reality that is at the same time 'out there'..."³³ The Aborigines through visions, during dance, trance and dreams can tap into the 'Dreamtime'.³⁴ Now though the Mardudjara see the 'Dreamtime' as a present reality, they also consider it as a past reality. When bad things happen in myths or things go unpunished the Mardudjara will state "that what has happened belongs only to the 'Dreamtime'."³⁵ Tonkinson, in quoting a myth about Wirun the eaglehawk-man and an emu mother, states that "...Wirun desisted, and at the end of the 'Dreamtime' the eggs and emu mother turned to stone."³⁶ In these regards the Mardudjara are obviously saying the 'Dreamtime' is a past reality. Thus it would appear that the Mardudjara, like the Wailbiri, hold opposing points of view simultaneously, i.e. the dreamtime both ended and did not end. In this regard the 'Dreamtime' is both a past reality, that ended, and a concurrent reality with the present, i.e. that is still happening within the present reality.

Diane Bell in *Daughters of the Dreaming* notes that in the jukurrpa or 'Dreamtime' the people of the Warrabri believe the "...all-encompassing law which binds people, flora, fauna and natural phenomena into one enormous interfunctioning world"³⁷ was established. At one level Bell says "...the jukurrpa is an era shrouded in the mist of time..."³⁸ At another level she believes the "...women enjoyed direct access to the jukurrpa..."³⁹ Bell maintains that according to the Warrabri community "...the jukurrpa is only two generations behind the present generation, moving concurrently with the present..."⁴⁰ Though Bell is documenting opposing ideas, as in the case of the Wailbiri and Mardudjara, she is also offering a slightly different viewpoint. Where the 'Dreamtime' is also a concurrent reality for the Wailbiri and Mardudjara, in the case of the Warrabri the 'Dreamtime' is displaced and existing two generations back: but in the case with the Wailbiri and Mardudjara it is not displaced at all. Thus where the Wailbiri, Mardudjara and Warrabri have variations on 'Dreamtime' metaphysics when compared to some of the communities of Chapter Three, the Warrabri is a variation on those communities which

regard the 'Dreamtime' as being a past reality that ended, as well as a concurrent reality with the present reality.

Another variation on the holding of simultaneously opposing ideas about the 'Dreamtime' are the views of the peoples of Ooldea. R. and C. Berndt, in describing a subincision rite, noted that the "...rite is "law" and part of the tjukubi ['Dreamtime'] ritual, being in the far-away 'Dreamtime'."41 Similarly, in discussing the religious and moral aspects of Ooldea society, the Berndts claimed that according to the Ooldea people "what was done in the past ['Dreamtime'] was the correct way of life..."42 Though the 'Dreamtime' is a past reality that ended, the Berndts claimed apropos the power of magic "that this power exists independently of [the practitioner] and has its source in the ancestral times."43 Similarly, in the initiation of a sorcerer, the Berndts noted that "there are no fires anywhere, but a mystic smoke arises... this smoke from a non-existent source has its origin in the tjukubi times ['Dreamtime']..."44 Thus if we are to take the Berndts literally the 'Dreamtime' is at once a past time or reality and a concurrent reality with the present; concurrent in such a way that things from this past time can be transported into the present.

Another variation on the 'Dreamtime' being a past reality concurrent with the present reality, are the ideas of the Murngin of North-Eastern Arnhem Land. Where the Ooldea people regard the 'Dreamtime' as a past reality concurrent with the present reality, the Murngin have the same view but with a slight variation. According to R. Berndt, in his article *A Wongurin-Mandzikai Song Cycle of The Moon-Bone*, the Murngin regard the totemic beings as "...characters of the historic past..."45 who are still performing their acts in the past, now. Berndt noted that with respect to the 'Dreamtime', "there the moon is living as a totemic being...there the Dugong and the moon are quarrelling, and they are fighting; all these events are actually happening, in the present as in the past."46 The 'Dreamtime' is a past time in which events just keep recurring over and over again in parallel with the present. The past ('Dreamtime') is a reoccurring event happening at the same time as the present.

From the above it can be seen that though the Mardudjara, Wailbiri, Warrabi, Ooldea and the Murngin regard the 'Dreamtime' as being a past reality concurrent with the present

reality, there are three sets of 'prelogical' variations on 'Dreamtime' ontology. The first set is made up of the Murngin. The Murngin regard the 'Dreamtime' as being a past reality concurrent with the present reality, but in this past reality the same events keep happening over and over again in parallel with the present reality. The second set contains the Mardudjara. The Mardudjara believe, at the same time, that the 'Dreamtime' ended but did not end. This means that though the past is concurrent with the present reality, unlike the Murngin where the past is parallel with the present, the Mardudjara regard the 'Dreamtime' as still happening i.e.: the 'Dreamtime' is still happening in the present. The third set is made up of the Wailbiri and the Ooldea and Warrabi people. These groups believe the past reality ('Dreamtime') is concurrent with the present reality, but unlike the Mardudjara and like the Murngin, the past reality is parallel with (but not existing in) the present reality.

As there are three sets of prelogical variations on 'Dreamtime' ontology, there are also variations on the variations. In the third set there are two sets of variations. In the first subset are the Wailbiri and the Ooldea people. For this subset material objects can be transported from the past parallel reality into the present reality. In the second subset are the Warrabi people. For this subset, unlike the Ooldea people and Wailbiri, the past parallel reality is displaced two generations behind the present reality.

Thus it can be seen, from the above, there are variations between communities in regard to 'Dreamtime' ontology. Also, it can be seen, there are variations on the variations of 'Dreamtime' ontology.

It would seem that some of the prelogicality of the ideas delineated above would dissolve if in some cases the 'Dreamtime' were not a 'past reality, but instead a state or place. The idea that the 'Dreamtime' is a place, in some cases, is put forward by Elkin. In *The Secret Life of the Australian Aborigines* he translates the Aboriginal term dzugur as 'Dreamtime', but adds that "...however dzugur must not merely be thought of as past time but as present and future, and a state as well as a period..."⁴⁷ In another way the prelogicality would disappear if the Aboriginal term, which translates as 'Dreamtime', was plurivocal, i.e. if the term meant 'primordial period' and also something like 'place of the spirits', 'supernatural realm' etc..

DREAM

The possibility of the term 'Dreamtime' being plurivocal, leads us into possible variations upon the metaphysics of the 'Dreamtime'. Stanner, in his article *Sacramentalism, Rite And Myth*, noted that the Murinbata used the term 'Dreamtime' to refer to their totems, totem-sites and also "...the marvels in the indefinitely remote past ['Dreamtime']"⁴⁸ Stanner claimed that the term 'Dreamtime' was used causatively in the sense of "...referring everything to the Dreaming as ground and source..."⁴⁹ The Murinbata had no term for the mythical past ['Dreamtime'] but instead used two words to refer to it, *kadurer* "...which has the sense of human but marvellous persons of an indefinitely remote past..."⁵⁰ and *da mundak* "...past time..."⁵¹ Stanner goes on to explain what the 'Dreaming' is and indicates that it is plurivocal in meaning.

In his article *Cosmos and Society Made Correlative* Stanner noted that the term "Dreaming" referred to time when the transformation [*demninio*] "...of all the entities now recognised as totems..."⁵² took place. Now this "Dreaming" ['Dreamtime'] is still with us, since "the Dreaming that was, still is: *demninio* still happens."⁵³ In other words the term 'Dreaming' refers to the initial transformation ['Dreamtime'] but because this transformation is still happening the 'Dreaming' is a present event. Thus the term 'Dreaming', is a plurivocal term referring to a past event [*demninio*] and an ongoing event [*demninio*]; the initial creation ['Dreamtime'] and the ongoing creation. This example of Murinbata metaphysics of the 'Dreaming' ['Dreamtime'] accords well with Elkin's claim that the 'Dreamtime' is "...the ever-present, unseen, ground of being - of existence."⁵⁴ but this claim does not fit well with the metaphysics of the above communities; since for these communities the 'Dreamtime' is not an ongoing creation of entities.

Stanner claimed that the Murinbata use of the term 'Dreamtime' "...is an attempt, by metaphor based on analogy, to convey the mystical quality of the relation as being like the reaction of dream-life to waking-life."⁵⁵ Elkin claimed that dreams to the Aborigine are as real to him as is his waking life,⁵⁶ and like dreams, the 'Dreamtime' "manifests the

characteristics of our own experience of dreaming, namely that the limitations of space and time are non-existent..."⁵⁷ Stanner claimed, in his article *The Dreaming*, the Aborigine actually makes contact with the 'Dreaming' ['Dreamtime'] through dreams; "...by the act of dreaming.. the Aboriginal mind makes contact... with whatever mystery it is that connects *The Dreaming* and the here-and-now."⁵⁸ Though this claim of Stanner's will be shown not to have universal application later on in this chapter, the Murinbata, like the Mardudjara, do on occasion contact the 'Dreamtime' through dreams.

In Murinbata society certain men who have a mystical ability "...draw special powers from the existent Dreaming."⁵⁹ These men contact the 'Dreaming' "...not by thought (bemkanin) which is "like a dream in the head", but by dream (nin) itself."⁶⁰ These mystical dreams allow the dreamer to "...cross all divisions of time, space and category that demnino ['Dreamtime' transformation] put into the radical unity of the beginning."⁶¹ The direct contacting of the 'Dreamtime' is limited to men of a mystical ability, as the Murinbata consider ordinary individuals to be too limited.⁶²

Though the Murinbata and Mardudjara contact the 'Dreamtime' ['Dreaming'] through dreams, the Jigalong, of North-Western and Western Australia, and the Fitzroy Aborigines of the southern Kimberleys view dreams differently. Where Elkin's universalistic claim, that "...the Dreaming [is] the condition or ground of existence...in which the past [dreamtime] underlies and is within the present".⁶³ is applicable to the Murinbata, it is not applicable to the Jigalong and the Fitzroy Aborigines, since it will be shown the 'Dreamtime' is not within the present. Similarly Stanner's claim that Aborigines contact the 'Dreamtime' through dreams will equally be shown to be not applicable universally.

The Jigalong Aborigines divide rituals into two main types: 1) The mangundjanu "from the ancestral beings"⁶⁴ are viewed as originating during the creative period the djugudani or 'Dreamtime'.⁶⁵ These mangundjanu rituals are believed "to have been passed down through countless generations to the present day. 2) The budundjaridjanu "from the dream spirits"⁶⁶ are considered to be rituals of recent origin and "based on the experiences of Aboriginal men whose dream spirits are said to have left them during the hours of

sleep."⁶⁷ Mountford and Tonkinson noted that the Aborigines believed unquestioningly in the reality of these dream journeys.⁶⁸ In these dream journeys the Aborigines encounter "...spirit beings, ancestral heroes or some creature in totemic form"⁶⁹ who may teach the dreamer dances, new songs or rituals.⁷⁰

Thus it can be seen that for the Jigalong Aborigines a dream is a way into a supernatural realm, a realm which is inhabited by ancestral spirits and spirit beings. In this regard the djugudani or 'Dreamtime' is obviously seen as a distant and separate state, a state which existed countless generations ago. However, the altering of religious rituals though the medium of dreams is not restricted to the Jigalong Aborigines.

Charlesworth, in speaking of innovation in individual Aborigines' beliefs noted that, "In dreams, rituals may be revealed to individual Aborigines, both men and women, by the powers of the Dreaming who always remain present and active and concerned with human affairs."⁷¹ Now these innovations must fit into the present religious structure, since as Charlesworth claims "...these is no place in the Aboriginal scheme of things for religious heretics, or schismatics or 'reformers'".⁷² However, where the Jigalong Aborigines can add new elements to the existing religious corpus, through the medium of dreams, the Fitzroy Aborigines consider it inconceivable that additions can be made through dreams.

The sacred religious traditions of the Fitzroy Aborigines "...are seen as parts of an immutable heritage [coming] down to man from the creative beginning - the Dreamtime."⁷³ These traditions, according to the Fitzroy Aborigines must not be altered in the least, they are ngara nggani djangga, from the 'Dreamtime'.⁷⁴ Kolig noted that the dreaming of new corroborees which is practiced among "Aborigines of the Coastal Kimberleys is alien to most Fitzroy Aborigines."⁷⁵ The lack and the non-acceptance of innovation among the Fitzroy Aborigines is due to the fact that they distinguish between traditions as uenggirdjeingga "from dream", and those which are 'Dreamtime' traditions.⁷⁶

Thus it can be seen that the Jigalong Aborigines view dreams differently than the Fitzroy Aborigines. These two separate variations on dream interpretation undermine Stanner's

universalistic claim about dreams being a window into the 'Dreamtime' for though his claim is correct for the Murinbata and Mardudjara it is not so for a number of Aborigines. Elkin's claim that the 'Dreamtime' underlines and is within the present is correct for the Murinbata and Mardudjara, but not for the Jigalong, Fitzroy Aborigines, Wuradjeri, Tiwi and perhaps the Murngin, Ooldea, Warrabri, and Wailbiri. Elkin's universalistic claim is only valid for the Mardudjara, if we ignore one half of their contradictory views. As we saw, these groups simultaneously say the 'Dreamtime' ended and still exists. Thus it is only by ignoring their claim that the 'Dreamtime' ended and accepting their view that it is still exists, that Elkin's claim that the 'Dreamtime' is within the present is valid. If we accept their claim that it ended then Elkin's claim is not valid. If we accept both claims simultaneously the situation then becomes meaningless.

In conclusion, this chapter has shown that there are wide variations on 'Dreamtime' metaphysics through Aboriginal Australia. Some Aboriginal communities view the 'Dreamtime' as a past reality, others still, view the 'Dreamtime' in what appears to be a prelogical manner; namely the simultaneous holding of the ideas that the 'Dreamtime' is both a past and present reality. For those communities which hold the latter there is wide variation upon the finer points of the 'Dreamtime' metaphysics. When it comes to putting forward universalistic claims, it was shown that these claims are not as universal as they appears. This is because Aboriginal Australia is rich in diverse viewpoints, due to the fact that there are a multiplicity of religious outlooks and world views. The awareness of variation in the metaphysics opens up the possibility for a comparative analysis and comparison of Aboriginal 'Dreamtime' views. This comparative work may find regional clusters of shared meaning within Aboriginal Australia. Because 'Dreamtime' ideas underpin Aboriginal religion, a comparative analysis of 'Dreamtime' metaphysics may help to delineate religious patterns throughout Aboriginal Australia. Again, analysis of 'Dreamtime' ideas take us into and gives access to one side of Aboriginal religion which is at the moment little understood, namely the psychic, mystical and occultic aspects.

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CHAPTER FIVE

EPILOGUE

(Comments, Doubts and Opinions)

'...in every field of anthropological study a going beyond the facts of observation - a "guessing" about them - is intrinsic to the act of study and is not even theoretically separate from it.'¹

THE FUTURE

At the present time there are no detailed studies of the 'Dreamtime'. The works which discuss the 'Dreamtime' mostly present the discussion in a sketchy and parochial manner. Again, these works though deal with ideas from a particular culture and tend to take that culture's ideas and universalise them. This thesis shows the invalidity of these universalistic claims, by demonstrating the complexity and variability of 'Dreamtime' ideas. The 'Dreamtime' is the fount of the Aborigines' world view and as such a penetrating study of the 'Dreamtime' will unlock hidden dimensions with regard to Aboriginal religion, metaphysics and mysticism. It is hoped that this thesis has helped future 'Dreamtime' analysis by clarifying a number of points and highlighting a number of issues.

When it comes to the metaphysics and ontology of the 'Dreamtime', Chapter Four demonstrates that there are a multiplicity of Aboriginal views. Some Aboriginal communities regard dreams as a being a channel or window through which the dreamer can contact the 'Dreamtime'; other communities consider that dreams allow the dreamer to

contact only a supernatural realm - a realm which ancestral beings and spirits inhabit. Though all communities regard the 'Dreamtime' as being eternal, in the sense that the structure laid down in the primordial period continues unaltered into the present and future, they disagree on the ontology of the 'Dreamtime'. Some communities regard the 'Dreamtime' as being a past historic period, a period similar to the Genesis of the Old Testament. On the other hand some communities regard the 'Dreamtime' as being eternal in the sense that the past ('Dreamtime') is concurrent with the present. Those communities which regard the 'Dreamtime' as concurrent with the present have subtle variations between themselves regarding 'Dreamtime' ontology. Some communities regard the 'Dreamtime' as being two generations behind the present, but concurrent with the present. Others regard the 'Dreamtime' as a past period to which the same events occur over and over again, in parallel with the present. For some again the past is a period from which objects can be transformed or sent into the present. For some the 'Dreamtime' is considered to be a temporal period, for others it is a state or place. For others again the 'Dreamtime' is happening now in the present.

The regional variability of 'Dreamtime' metaphysics opens up the possibility of a comparative philosophical analysis. This analysis will take the researcher into a hidden dimension of Aboriginal thought, namely the mystical and occultic. A comparative analysis may be able to throw light upon religious patterns throughout Aboriginal Australia, by discerning if there are clusters to 'Dreamtime' metaphysics. Such a study would have to deal with Aboriginal cosmogonies and cosmologies with regard to the 'Dreamtime'.

In Chapter Three it was shown there are as many cosmogonies and cosmologies as there are Aboriginal religions. In the North Queensland region and Arnhem Land, 'Dreamtime' cosmogonies seem to deal with the arrival of ancestors from the sea, or further from the North. These ancestors are in the main female, and the myths seem to lay down the foundations of fertility rites. Many of these ancestors did not emerge in situ, as they do in the desert, but travelled long distances to get where they were going. In the desert region the creator beings emerged from the ground, and where the creators of the North were

human, the creators of the desert were plant, animal or human. On Melville and Bathurst islands the creators were human but in the end changed to non-human totems. In Arnhem Land, on the other hand, the creators were human and remained human.

When it comes to Aboriginal 'Dreamtime' cosmology there are subtle variations in community accounts. The theme of a lecherous or incestuous seducer is common within Aboriginal mythology. When it comes to deriving moral exemplars from the cosmologies, different communities go about it in different ways. For some the cosmology demonstrates that an incestuous act has repercussions for the individual culprit. In other cosmologies, though incest is taboo, it is a prerogative of 'Dreamtime' ancestors, with no immediate repercussions or consequences for the culprit; in these cosmologies it would appear that the ancestors are above the law.

An analysis of 'Dreamtime' cosmologies will throw light upon the question of sin within Aboriginal communities. The analysis will also bring out the fact that some communities derive their moral code in a positive manner from the 'Dreamtime' cosmology, while others do so in a negative way. This fact will open up the questions of how important 'Dreamtime' moral codes are for a community, and how a community interprets the 'Dreamtime' laws. The analysis of 'Dreamtime' cosmogonies will also throw light upon the above questions but will also open up the field for an analysis of ritual both in an historical and present sense. Analysis of 'Dreamtime' cosmogonies may also help in the plotting of religious movements throughout Aboriginal Australia and the way communities sanction or account for new rituals, songs, myths and dances.

In Chapter Two it was shown that after its initial use in 1896 the use of the term 'Dreamtime' met with some controversy centred around the problem of translating Aboriginal terms into English. After this controversial start the term 'Dreamtime' finally made its way into anthropological literature after 1932. After that date a number of terms began to appear as synonyms of the term 'Dreamtime'. At the present time, terms such as 'Dreaming', 'The Dreaming', though used as synonyms for 'Dreamtime', also have a plethora of other meanings. An historical analysis of the use of the term 'Dreamtime' may

throw light upon the reasons why the term was picked up and used by the anthropological community. The anthropological use of the term 'Dreamtime' poses some philosophical questions in regard to anthropological mythopea, the inadequacy of language, and the intrinsic meaninglessness of man's belief systems.

MYTHOPEA

In his 1953 article, *The Dreaming*, Stanner argued that 'the dreaming' demonstrates that "the black fella shares with us two abilities which have made human history what it is."² These abilities, according to Stanner, are firstly "...the metaphysical gift...the ability to transcend oneself to make acts of imagination so that one can stand 'outside' or away from 'oneself', and turn the universe, oneself and one's fellows, into objects of contemplation"; and secondly the "ability to make sense out of human experience and to find some 'principle' in the whole human situation."³ Stanner maintained that the Aboriginal tales "are based upon visionary and intuitive insights into mysteries";⁴ insights which give an understanding of the ultimates which "European...philosophical literatures...expresses."⁵ In this regard Stanner implies the Aborigine is a Plato, Kant, Spinoza, Hegel etc..

The above is pure mythicising idealisation on the part of Stanner. What Stanner in fact does in this 1953 article is to create the philosophical version of the 'noble savage'. The myths are no more "a philosophy in the garb of an oral literature"⁶ for the Aborigine, then the stories of the garden of Eden, and the tower of Babel are philosophical tales for the common 'white fella'. In this 1953 article Stanner forgot, as Levy-Bruhl noted, "collective representations force themselves upon the individual, that is, they are to him an article of faith, not the product of reason."⁷ Stanner noted in his 1960 article *Sacramentalism, Rite and Myth*, that when it comes to the meanings of the myths the Aborigine answers, "it is a thing we do not understand."⁸ Stanner, in his 1963 article *Cosmos and Society Made Correlative*, in fact agrees with Levy-Bruhl when he stated "there was a strong impulse to conserve and act upon received tradition, that has proved its truth by continuity from the storied past."⁹ Regarding these stories Stanner comments on the "difficulty of obtaining

univocal versions of the myths",¹⁰ and points out that they "...are full of ambiguity, paradox, antinomy and other such obscurities..."¹¹ In a 1961 article, *The Design-Plan of a Riteless Myth*, Stanner made the point that these myths are not the result of a philosophical outlook, rather the principle which produces the myths "is one of artistic appositeness, not of conceptual rationality."¹²

Now at least two consequences result from the lack of univocal versions of the myths, and inconsistencies within the myths. The first is the possibility of a misconstrued order, a false unity given by anthropologists in regard to Aboriginal ideas about the 'Dreaming'. The second is that the ambiguities, paradoxes, and obscurities within the myths point to three possibilities:

- 1) they indicate a 'prelogical' mentality.
- 2) the inconsistencies are only apparent; they don't exist within the Aboriginal world view, but only appear as inconsistencies to us when viewed, in terms of our world view. In this regard the 'prelogical mentality' is an illusion.
- 3) the above two points indicate the inability of English thought forms and language to translate and interpret other belief systems.

LANGUAGE

All cultures, through their languages, characterise reality under different categorisations. This would imply that they thus have different ontologies. If different languages carve up and make sense of reality through their concepts and categories, to be able to translate from one system to another it must be assumed there is a congruence of meaning between the concepts and categories within the two languages. In translating Aboriginal ideas regarding the 'Dreaming' anthropologists assume, as axiomatic, that the English language is a privileged medium through which a more correct interpretation can be made. This

section will look at Stanner's analysis of the myths and rites of the Murinbata and take them to be representative of Aboriginal Australia as a whole. Of this analysis both Maddock and Elkin¹³ have said that it is "the most penetrating modern vision and analysis."¹⁴

In his article, *Symbolism and the Higher Rites*, Stanner claimed that the 'build of the dreaming' is constructed in part through and by the linguistic classes or categories of the Murinbata. Of these classes Stanner noted that they are existential classes "i.e.. as existential or ontological conceptions which divide all significant entities in the world into classes which are mutually exclusive."¹⁵ Now, though Stanner maintained, "that the classes give us only part of the furniture of the Aboriginal mind",¹⁶ he asserted that "any attempt to understand the Aboriginal philosophy of life and religion must take the classes into primary account."¹⁷ Stanner went on to say that "it is hard - and for my own part I would say impossible - to equate or delimit or satisfy any of the classes by empirical fact as we grasp it ...[in consequence] the classes [are] like the myth and rites which they subserve, belong to the same order of reality as poetry, art and music."¹⁸ Poetry, art and music according to Stanner objectify the emotions, and in the words of G. O. James [whom Stanner uses to support his argument] give an apprehension of truth of reality transcending...empirical reason and comological and eschatological speculation."¹⁹

The above arguments of Stanner, point to the impossibility of understanding the Murinbata's conception of the 'Dreaming' within our language. In the first place, the impossibility of grasping the empirical facts which the classes signify means by implication the impossibility of understanding their philosophy of life, religion and ontology. In the second place, if the classes are like poetry and signify an apprehension of reality beyond empirical reason, then, by default, the understanding of the 'Dreaming' religion and philosophy of life, must also transcend empirical reason and speculation. Stanner himself points to this impossibility of understanding the religion through language when he notes that the symbolism of the Aborigines "conditions the capacity to express

clear conceptions in words and sentences so that for the most part they remain beyond the symbolism of language."20

Now if the Murinbata are representative of other Aboriginal cultures, then their cultural ideas regarding religion and the 'Dreaming' are equally opaque to our understanding. This inability to grasp their conceptions results from the fact that Aboriginal languages are as different as Hindi is from English, which in turn is different from German. In this regard a Yolngu speaker from Arnhem Land cannot understand a Pintupi speaker from Central Australia. The inability to understand the Murinbata ideas of the 'Dreaming', and the dissimilarity between Aboriginal languages points to a misconstructured order, a false unity among Aborigines ideas regarding the 'Dreaming'. This misconstructured order has its source in the intrinsic meaninglessness of man's belief systems.

MEANINGLESSNESS

The possibility of coherent, systematic and rational elucidation of the Aboriginal 'Dreamtime' or dreaming is an illusion. Any elucidation that gives an ordered, logical and contradiction free account is incorrect. The fallacy which scholars have fallen into in their examination of the 'Dreamtime' is the fallacy of imposing order, meaningfulness, and logical consistency by reference to own our conceptual systems.

Scholars seek to discover a logical order - an order which is not inconsistent - in world views; but this attempt, and the order which is said to have been discovered, are often illusory. World views are in fact full of ambiguity, obscurities and contradictions, and scholars who seek to bring order to them, in fact mythicise and misrepresent ideational reality. Levi-Bruhl argues that "... the rational unity of the thinking being, which is taken

for granted by most philosophers, is a desideratum, not a fact ... our mental activity is both rational and irrational [t]he prelogical and the mystic are coexistent with the logical."²¹ In a similar manner Bronowski points out that Godel, Turing and Tarski demonstrate the inability of all formal axiomatic systems to create deductive, unambiguous and complete descriptions of reality without internal contradictions.²² Thought negates thought, says Camus in *The Myth of Sisyphus*,²³ reality is in fact 'absurd' i.e. it is meaningless. Meaningless in the sense that it is made up of contradictory ideas and beliefs. (This meaninglessness can be seen in the Christian God who is at the same time supposed both transcendent, and immanent to its creation.) Thus, any logical inquiry into cultural reality will discover that this reality is in fact illogical, meaningless.

Thus if we are to give an explanation of the 'Dreamtime' from the Aboriginal perspective this will not be a logically consistent elucidation, but will be an elucidation which contains contradictory and ambiguous ideas and beliefs. Stanner said that, in regard, to Murinbata myths there are gaps, variations and contradictions [which] do not allow one to say that in any rigorous sense, the myths constitute a "system" of belief."²⁴ This demonstrates that Aboriginal beliefs have neither a unity nor are consistent. Among the Murinbata themselves Stanner had no difficulty in getting them to admit that their traditions "left much unclear [and that] the conflicts were evidently of little interest to them."²⁵ Inquiry into these conflicts, Stanner noted, "could bring few such matters to clarity, as a European demands it."²⁶ Stanner likewise claims that it is impossible to phrase questions unambiguously in the Aboriginal vernacular,²⁷ and that the Aborigines themselves "cannot phrase the rationalistic-type questions in their own tongue."²⁸

When it came to asking his Aboriginal informant, about what the men thought why something occurred, he simply said "it is no good asking the old men which this, why that? All they say is like this , 'your dreaming there' and they point."²⁹

FOOTNOTES

- 1 W. E. H. Stanner 'Symbolism and the Higher Rites',
Oceania, Volume XXXI, no. 2, 1961, p.113
- 2 W. Stanner (ed) 'The Dreaming' in White Man Got No Dreaming,
A.N.U Press, 1979, p.31
- 3 *ibid.* p.31
- 4 *ibid.* p.30
- 5 *ibid.* p.24
- 6 *ibid.* p.29
- 7 L. Levy-Bruhl How Natives Think,
George, Allen and Unwin, 1926, p.25
- 8 W. E. H. Stanner 'Sacramentalism, Rite and Myth',
in Oceania, Volume XXX, no. 4, 1960, p.263
- 9 W. E. H. Stanner 'Cosmos and Society Made Correlative'
in Oceania, Volume XXXIII, no. 4, 1963, p.254
- 10 *ibid.* 257

- 11 W.E.H. Stanner
'The Design-Plan of a Riteless Myth',
in Oceania, Volume XXXI, no. 4, 1961, 251
- 12 ibid. p.251
- 13 A. P. Elkin 'The Yabuduruwa'
in Oceania, Volume XXXI, no ?, 1961, p.203
- 14 K. Maddock 'History of Study', in Australian Religions,
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- 15 W. E. H. Stanner 'Symbolism and the Higher Rites',
Oceania, Volume XXXI, no. 2, 1961, p.113
- 16 ibid. p.118
- 17 ibid. p.118
- 18 ibid. p.117
- 19 ibid. p.117
- 20 ibid. p.118
- 21 Levi-Bruhl op.cit. p.386
- 22 J. Bronowski 'The Logic of the Mind'
American Science, Volume 54, no. 1, 1966, pp.1-14

- 23 A. Camus *The Myth of Sisyphus*,
Penguin, 1981, p.48
- 24 W. E. H. Stanner 'Sacramentalism, Rite and Myth'
in *Oceania*, Volume XXX, no. 4, 1960, p.265
- 25 W. E. H. Stanner 'Cosmos and Society Made Correlative',
in *Oceania*, Volume XXXIII, no. 4, 1963, p.260
- 26 *ibid.* p.261
- 27 W. E. H. Stanner *op.cit.* p.263
- 28 *ibid.* p.263
- 29 *ibid.* p.263

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